

# The Awan Congressional Scandal

Group of IT aides hired by 44 House Democrats gained unauthorized access to congressional servers

Congressional data belonging to at least 44 House Democrats has been put at risk by a group of IT aides. Imran Awan, a Pakistani national and naturalized American citizen, has worked for Congress since 2000. Several of his family members, including his brother Abid Awan and his wife Hina Alvi Awan, were added to the congressional payroll after Imran hit the pay cap—making as much as a congressman. The individuals were hired as IT aides

and paid up to \$160,000 a year, despite having little to no IT experience. In total, six IT workers connected to Imran joined the payroll. In September 2016, the House Office of Inspector General briefed House leadership that the Awans had had frequent unauthorized access to congressional servers, including those of 15 members they were not employed by. They also made excessive logons to the Democratic Caucus server, on average

27 times per day, which according to the IG report could have been used to “store documents taken from other offices or evidence of other illicit activity.” Two computers used by the Awans had Dropbox installed on them, which is prohibited under House rules. “While file sharing sites, such as Dropbox, have legitimate business purposes, use of such sites is also a classic method for insiders to exfiltrate data from an organization,” the IG report states.

The IG report also states that thousands of files, many of which had the hallmarks of containing sensitive material, were found in the Dropbox account. It is unclear whether the files left Congress. However, the material the IT aides had access to would be of great interest to groups, businesses, and foreign intelligence agencies. In February 2017, four months after the IG sounded the alarm bell, the IT aides had their access to congressional servers revoked.

TIMELINE

**1997**



Imran Awan arrives in the United States from Pakistan under the diversity lottery program.

**2000**



Imran Awan begins working as an IT contractor in Congress for InterAmerica.

**2004**



Imran Awan gains American citizenship.

**2005**



Imran Awan becomes a direct employee of Rep. Xavier Becerra [D-Calif.], Rep. Gregory Meeks [D-N.Y.], and three other House Democrats.

**2007**



Abid Awan hits the pay cap. Imran Awan's wife, Hina Alvi Awan, joins the payroll.

**2009**



Abid Awan opens a car dealership, Cars International A. He reportedly takes out a loan of \$100,000 from Ali al-Attar, an Iraqi political figure of Iranian heritage, who is wanted by the IRS and FBI on unrelated tax fraud charges.

**2011**



Abid Awan's wife, Natalia Sova, is added to the House payroll.

**2012**



Abid Awan files for bankruptcy, discharging \$1.1 million in debts.

**2013**



Rao Abbas is added to the House payroll as IT administrator. Bankruptcy documents show Abid Awan owed him money. Abbas's most recent job was working at McDonald's.

**2014**



Imran's brother Jamal Awan joins the payroll at age 20 and is soon making as much as a congressman.

**2015**



Police reports show that between October 2015 and July 2016, two women of Pakistani origin call the police about Imran Awan. One of the women is bloodied when police arrived on the scene.

**2016**



Rep. Kyrsten Sinema [D-Ariz.] fires Jamal Awan for “incompetence,” while other House Democrats keep the IT staffers on their payroll.

**2016 (Cont.)**



WikiLeaks begins publishing stolen DNC emails. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz [D-Fla.] resigns as its chair. The emails show Imran Awan had her password.

**2016 (Cont.)**



The Committee on House Administration (CHA) and House leadership receive a briefing by the Office of Inspector General. The briefing reveals that the Awans were logging in to servers of 15 House members they didn't work for.

**2016 (Cont.)**



It also reveals that between October 2015 and April 2016, the Awans made excessive logons to a Democratic Caucus server and three of its workstations.

**2016 (Cont.)**



The main server was accessed 5,735 times during the time period, an average of 27 times per day.

**2016 (Cont.)**



The inspector general considers this unusual since computers in offices in which they worked were accessed less than 60 times in total.

**2016 (Cont.)**



The briefing also says that the IT workers took steps to conceal their activity.

**2016 (Cont.)**



A server belonging to the House Democratic Caucus is physically stolen after the inspector general's report names it as evidence in a hacking probe, three senior government officials tell The Daily Caller.

**2017**



Imran Awan travels to Pakistan despite an ongoing investigation by Capitol Police.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Imran Awan and Hina Alvi Awan hurriedly move out of their residence and rent it out to a Marine. Imran reportedly threatens to sue the Marine if he doesn't return IT equipment he forgot in the house. The Marine determines that the equipment is government property, and the FBI and Capitol Police collect it.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Hina Alvi Awan goes to Pakistan with her children—without notifying their schools—and is found with \$12,400 in cash and with many of her possessions, some of which were in cardboard boxes.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz [D-Fl.] adds Hina Alvi to her payroll in addition to Imran, despite the ongoing investigation.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Imran Awan leaves a laptop with the username “RepDWS” in a decommissioned phone booth in a House building around midnight, along with a letter to prosecutors.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Paul Irving, the House sergeant at arms, bans the IT workers from the House network.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Wasserman Schultz tells the Capitol Police chief that there will be “consequences” if he doesn't return the laptop to her, notwithstanding its status as evidence. She repeatedly implies it is “a member's.” She hires an outside lawyer to block prosecutors from looking at it.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Most of the 44 congressmen who entrusted their data to the Awans fire them.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Imran Awan tries to leave the country and is arrested by the FBI at the airport. The charges involve fraud in obtaining the money that was wired to Pakistan on Jan. 18, 2017. Prosecutors say Imran was carrying a phone on him whose contents had just been wiped, and a laptop with only one notable file on it, a résumé.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Imran Awan leaves a laptop with the user-name “RepDWS” in a decommissioned phone booth in a House building around midnight, along with a letter to prosecutors.

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**2018**



The court date, postponed five times, is now set for this May.



**2017 (Cont.)**



A House official tells The Daily Caller that the reason the Awans haven't been charged with Capitol Hill crimes is that members refuse to press charges.

**2017 (Cont.)**



Imran Awan and Hina Alvi Awan are indicted for bank fraud for the retirement scheme and for getting a second mortgage by stating it would be reinvested in upgrades for the house, but instead sending it overseas. Imran is made to wear a GPS monitoring device. He and his wife are co-defendants.

**2017 (Cont.)**



The Awans' lawyers accuse House members and staff of participating in cooking the books, saying that members “expect” IT staff like the Awans to “adjust the pricing” of equipment that is purchased. In response to questions about the high salaries the Awans received without having IT backgrounds, one of their lawyers says they got “on-the-job training.”

**2017 (Cont.)**



Lawyer Chris Gowen says he feels “very strongly” that the “RepDWS” laptop should not be used as evidence, citing attorney-client privilege. There are months of delays as prosecutors discuss the point.

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