Experts Address Internet Policy At State of the Net Conference

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As a national organization with a powerhouse of amazing women across the United States, we must equip ourselves with the necessary knowledge on technology and telecommunications policy in order to effectively advocate our interests to our elected representatives. Tech and telecom are becoming increasingly pervasive in our everyday lives. General Motors is cutting 15,000 jobs to shift the company's focus toward costly, emerging technologies such as autonomous and fully electric vehicles; tech firms are incorporating artificial intelligence into all facets of business and government; and dangerous cyberattacks and data breaches are happening more frequently than ever. Thus, it is imperative that we are aware of the impact, often disproportionately, that technology issues, such as these, have on women of African descent, their families and communities.

On Tuesday, January 29, 2019, several panels of technology and telecommunications experts convened at the State of the Net Conference on Internet Policy at the Newseum in downtown Washington, D.C. In addition to keynote addresses from congressional members and agency commissioners, the Conference provided in-depth discourse on important topics, including the future of work, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity.

The National Council of Negro Women, Inc. attended the State of the Net Conference in order to better understand how industry players are addressing consumer concerns and how Members of Congress make decisions on tech and telecom policy. Ultimately, Congressional members rely heavily on their staff to be "experts" in this area. However, there are fewer House staff and fewer legislative support agency personnel. According to

Daniel Schuman, Policy Director of Demand Progress, House personal office, committee, and leadership staff numbers are at 87% of their 1979 levels. What does this mean? It means that with less staff to advise representatives, it is up to constituents to ensure that our political leadership is fully aware of the impact of their policymaking in this space. Thus, we must become the experts.

Remember, where you live matters in how you understand technology and telecommunications policy. Lorelei Kelly of Resilient Democracy made a stark comparison between how constituents in California and how constituents in Washington, D.C. interpret different tech terminology. In California, a "hacker" is viewed as an artist; in Washington, a "hacker" is viewed as a criminal. In California, "disruption" is a strategy for business innovation; in Washington, "disruption" is a threat to national security. In California, a "carrier" is a company like T-Mobile or AT&T; in Washington, a "carrier" is a U.S. Navy aircraft in the middle of the ocean. Thus, how we view technology depends on what state, or even what district, we live in.

We encourage you to find out who your congressional members are, if you haven't already. Be encouraged to volunteer your expertise to your political leaders. Reach out to their office and ask them what their stance is on critical issues, such as algorithmic discrimination, net neutrality, and data security. Then share that information with us! We can begin building a database of information that we can use to cross-fertilize in pushing policy toward advancing our mission. Should you have any questions, NCNW will always be a resource!