Ivanka Trump Speaks at CES About an Evolving Workforce in the US

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LAS VEGAS—Ivanka Trump, an adviser to her father, President Donald Trump, appeared onstage at CES today to discuss jobs, after the White House failed to make an appearance last year amid the longest shutdown in the nation's history.

Trump addressed her efforts to encourage a more modern workforce during her father's time in the White House, which credits her with creating the National Council for the American Worker.

"It's an incredibly exciting time to be in the workforce," Trump said.

Trump appeared as part of a panel discussion with Gary Shapiro, CEO of CES. Trump made note of several brands that have committed to the council's "Pledge to America's Workers" to hire or train more employees.

Trump specifically called out Marc Benioff, founder and co-CEO of Salesforce, who was in the audience, for taking on the challenge. Trump also divulged details about helping people of varying ages and skill sets enter the workforce.

The roughly 45-minute discussion in a ballroom at the Venetian, which was full and remained mostly polite, was only interrupted by the sound of camera shutters and applause for a bill that passed at the end of 2018 to grant 12 weeks of paid parental leave to federal employees.

It is not clear how Trump found her way onto the CES agenda—whether the Consumer Tech Association, which puts on the show, or the White House made the request.

Asked to provide context on the circumstances of Trump's appearance, a CTA official provided an unsigned statement from an outside firm retained by the CTA ahead of the discussion.

"CTA invites officials from every White House—both Republicans and Democrats—to participate in and speak at CES," the statement read.

A discussion featuring White House officials isn't unprecedented, but last year, Trump, along with representatives from the Federal Trade Commission, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Communications Commission were expected to appear at CES but scrapped those plans during the government shutdown. Under President Obama, U.S. chief technology officer Megan Smith, among other White House and federal officials, appeared at CES in 2016 to discuss tech programs spearheaded by the administration.

CTA's decision for Trump to appear at CES wasn't without controversy. After it was announced, some took to Twitter and called for a boycott of the tech show. Ahead of Trump's appearance, Shapiro told the BBC he did not regret the decision, declining to say whether it was CTA's idea for her to appear. CTA also defended her appearance in a statement ahead of the discussion.

"Policy discussions are a critical part of CES, and we will host almost 200 policymakers from around the world," CTA said in the statement.

Shapiro's personal politics have made headlines in the past. During President Trump's 2016 campaign, Shapiro wrote in a Medium post that he should drop out over comments he made about immigrants and attacks on Sens. John McCain and Lindsey Graham.

“I will not hold meetings at or visit any Trump property or even watch any Trump TV show until he drops out of the presidential race and apologizes to those he slandered,” Shapiro wrote at the time.

But Shapiro changed his viewpoint about a month after Trump was elected president.

“What we’ve already learned with Mr. Trump is that you have to understand that when he speaks, if you take him too literally, you’re going to miss the points he’s trying to make,” Shapiro told Inc. “And the point he’s trying to make is that he wants to do what’s best for this country.”

At the end of the discussion today, Shapiro thanked Trump for her “passion on the issue,” which he called “contagious.”

“If we can’t come together on this, we can’t come together on anything,” Trump said to applause.

Editor’s note: Sara Jerde is reporting at CES 2020 as part of a program sponsored by the CTA.

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