

Ivanka Trump's appearance at CES tech show draws criticism

January 8 2020, by Tali Arbel, Barbara Ortutay and Joseph Pisani



Ivanka Trump, the daughter and senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump, answers a question as she is interviewed at the Consumer Technology Association event during the CES tech show Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2020, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

The nation's largest consumer electronics show hosted Ivanka Trump as

a keynote speaker—a choice that drew scorn from many women in technology.

Ivanka Trump spoke for nearly 40 minutes on stage Tuesday with Gary Shapiro, president of CES organizer Consumer Technology Association. She highlighted the work the administration has done with tech companies to retrain their workers for new skills.

There was no mention of the pushback about her appearance at the show. The hall was full, and she was met with applause. Organizers declined to say how many people were in the audience.

The annual CES tech gathering in Las Vegas has long taken criticism over diversity issues. In recent years, CES organizers have invited more women to speak and sought to curb some of the show's more sexist aspects, such as scantily clad "booth babes" hired to draw attention of the mostly male attendees.

But for critics and activists who have long pushed for broader recognition of the less-heralded women who found startups and take on difficult technical challenges, the inclusion of President Donald Trump's daughter, who is also a White House adviser, sent the wrong message.

"Ivanka is not a woman in tech," tweeted Brianna Wu, a video game developer who is running for Congress in Massachusetts as a Democrat. "She's not a CEO. She has no background. It's a lazy attempt to emulate diversity, but like all emulation it's not quite the real thing."



Ivanka Trump, right, the daughter and senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump, listens to Gary Shapiro, left, CEO of the Consumer Technology Association, ask a question during the Consumer Technology Association Keynote during the CES tech show Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2020, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

Shapiro told The Associated Press, ahead of the talk, that Ivanka Trump is fighting for workers at a time when robots are filling warehouses and factories and self-driving vehicles are worrying truck drivers.

"We've had politicians speak before, cabinet secretaries and others who've come in," Shapiro said.

Ivanka Trump has worked on skills-training initiatives at the White

House. Companies including Google have joined that effort. She used her appearance to talk about the changing nature of jobs.

"People need to be thinking about investing in their workforce so that they can enable those people to do their same job using different equipment tomorrow," she said.

Many people who tweeted the hashtag #BoycottCES on Tuesday in protest of Trump's appearance also took issue with the administration's border detention policies and various actions of the president himself.



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The technology industry has especially important issues pending with the U.S. government, including antitrust investigations into Facebook and Google, the trade war with China, immigration, election security and misinformation on social media.

Government officials have long made regular appearances at CES. This year, for instance, the speaker roster includes both Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao and Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette. Other female speakers include Meg Whitman of video streaming startup Quibi and Linda Yaccarino, chairman of advertising and partnerships for NBCUniversal.

Ivanka Trump is "taking this slot at this conference where women have been saying for so long, 'Hey, we are being overlooked,'" said Rachel Sklar, a tech commentator and founder of a professional network for women. "The whole category of women being overlooked are still being overlooked."



Ivanka Trump, the daughter and senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump, answers a question as she is interviewed at the Consumer Technology Association Keynote during the CES tech show Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2020, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)



Ivanka Trump, right, the daughter and senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump, answers a question as she is interviewed by Gary Shapiro, left, CEO of the Consumer Technology Association, during the CES tech show Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2020, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)



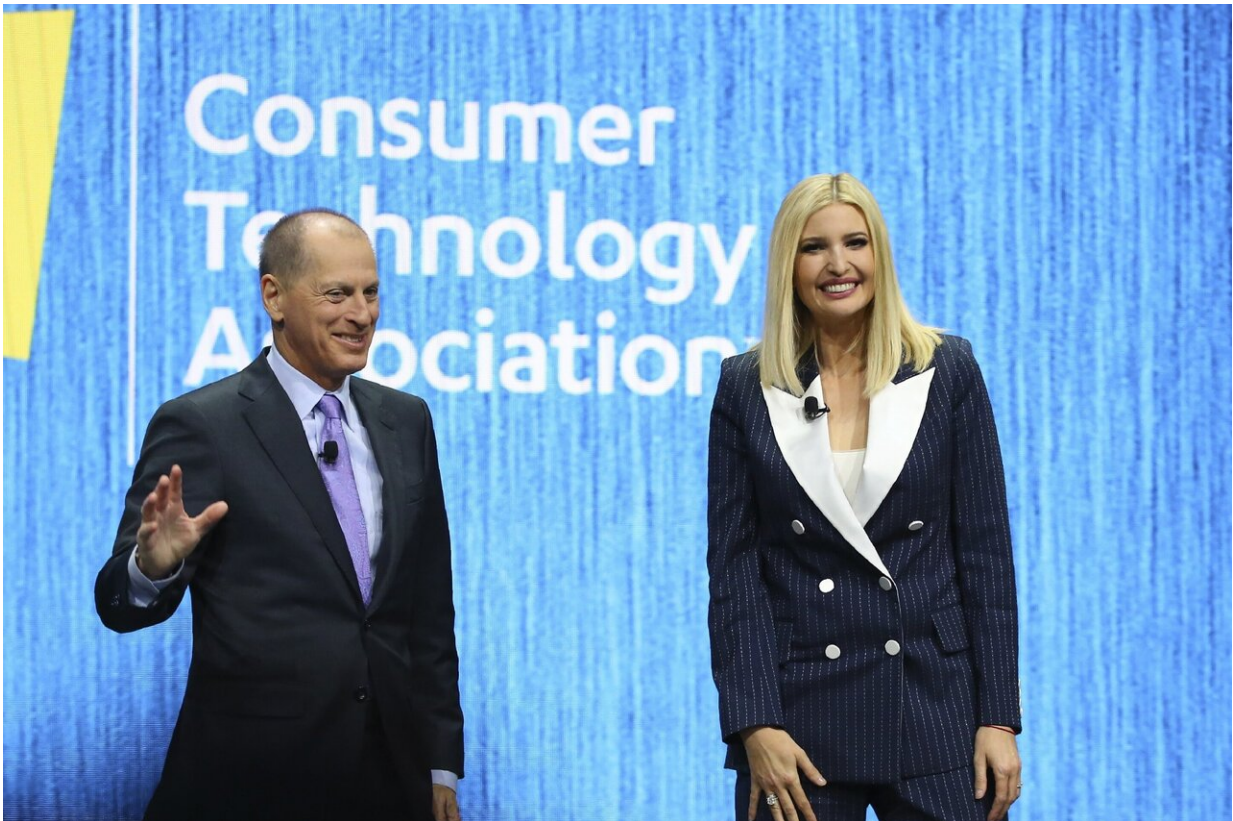
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Ivanka Trump, right, the daughter and senior adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump, smiles at the crowd after being interviewed by Gary Shapiro, left, CEO of the Consumer Technology Association, during the CES tech show Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2020, in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin)

"Clearly they are not putting much effort into finding women in tech who can speak," said Carolina Milanesi, an analyst with Creative Strategies, who is at CES.

Last year, CES caused an uproar when it revoked an innovation award presented to a female-led sex device company. CES reversed its decision and has allowed sex tech into the show for a one-year trial. Conference organizers also brought in an official "equality partner," The Female Quotient, to help ensure gender diversity.

"Was there nobody else available? Seriously?" asked Ti Chang, co-founder of the wearable vibrator company Crave. Chang said Trump's experience running a clothing brand is a bad fit for CES and its focus on innovation and technology.

"I don't understand," she said. "I would love to know what their rationale was."

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