

Black Women Get the Job Done



NY Rep. Yvette Clarke speaks to Black Women's Roundtable during a briefing on Capitol Hill
PHOTO CREDIT: Paulette Singleton

Washington, DC – Over 300 Black women from ten states traveled to the US Capitol last week to urge representatives to pass policies and programs that empower Black and underserved families, especially single mothers and the working-poor. Issues the women addressed as they visited the offices of their congressional leaders included: public education, gun violence and the creation of jobs with livable wages.

The women met with Rep. Hank Johnson (D-GA), Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), Rep. John Conyers (D-MI), and others as part of the second annual Black Women's Roundtable (BWR) Women of Power Summit. The meetings with leaders were followed by a congressional briefing featuring Rep. Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI) FCC Commissioner Mignon Clyburn, and others.

"It's good to see a filled room," Rep. Clarke said. "We must make sure that our faces are a part of the debate and dialogue. We are known for doing what we have to do to keep it moving. Women owned businesses are creating jobs. They train and employ those who have been shunned by society."

Rep. Moore applauded President Obama's signing of an expanded Violence Against Women Act. "Violence against women is a pandemic disease. As Vice President Joe Biden would say, this is a big deal."

Melanie L. Campbell, convener of Black Women's Roundtable, addressed the purpose of visits. "As my mentor, Dr. Dorothy I. Height often said, Black women get the job done. We see the

problems tearing at the fabric of our community every day so we knew that we needed to kick off our conference up here on Capitol Hill to let our legislators know that we have an agenda and we intend to make sure our voices are heard.”

President and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP), Campbell continued, “I’m looking in the audience at women of power who turned out thousands of people to the polls. Salandra Benton in Florida, Helen Butler in Georgia, Faye Anderson in Pennsylvania, Tracy Sturdivant in Michigan. In 2012 Black women were the highest vote for President Obama and the margin of victory for many right here in the U. S. Congress. We are here to make sure our elected officials know what we want.”

Many of the participants in the BWR Summit played significant roles in registering and mobilizing more than a million voters in national and local elections since the Unity Voter Empowerment Campaign started over a decade ago.

“Our folks in Alabama can’t afford to make a mud pie,” said Shelia Tyson, convener of Alabama Black Women’s Roundtable. “We came here on a song and a prayer to let these lawmakers know that our people are hurting. They’re loosing jobs and homes. We’ve got hospitals closing. We can’t keep watching dissention and lengthy filibusters in DC. Black families need help now or we need to elect new leaders.”

While the women were visiting lawmakers, the group had a separate youth track touring the Capitol. Carlottia Scott, chief operating officer of NCBCP and former Capitol Hill staffer said, “BWR is focused on mentoring. It is important that we make sure our young people understand our history, the opportunities in leadership, and how to have an impact on public policy.”

After the Capitol Hill briefing BWR delegates and the youth delegation rushed off to the White House where they received a

public policy briefing from Tina Tchen, assistant to President Obama and chief of staff for First Lady Michelle Obama; Latifa Lyles, acting director of the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor; and Marie C. Johns, deputy administrator, U.S. Small Business Administration.

Held at the National Education Association National Headquarters, day two of the summit, Civic Engagement and Global Empowerment Day, allowed the women to come together to map out a strategy based on feedback from meeting with Congress and the Administration.

The day started with a faith and social justice prayer breakfast headlined by Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, U.S. Ambassador-At-Large for International Religious Freedom, U. S. State Department. Rep. Shelia Jackson Lee (D-TX) stopped in to bring greetings and Susan L. Taylor, founder and CEO, National CARES Mentoring Movement, was the keynote speaker for the luncheon.

Dr. Gail Christopher, W. K. Kellogg Foundation; Elizabeth Powell, American Postal Workers Union; Dr. Lorretta Johnson, American Federation of Teachers; Becky Pringle, National Education Association; Judith Browne-Dianis, Advancement Project; Diane Babineaux, International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers; Dr. Judith Moore, Sisters Saving Ourselves Now; Rev. Marcia Dyson, Women's Global Initiative, Dr. Julianne Malveaux, economist; Felicia Davis, UNCF Building Green Initiative; Lori George Billingsley, Coca-Cola Refreshments; and Clayola Brown, A. Philip Randolph Institute; were among the distinguished speakers and awardees. [Click here for a full list.](#)