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***“The Chisholm Effect: Black Women in American Politics 2018” Shows the Continued Gains of Black Women and Momentum Going Into the Midterms and 2020***

**ATLANTA (Feb. 24, 2018)** – Today [Higher Heights Leadership Fund](#) and the [Center for American Women and Politics](#) (CAWP) at Rutgers University released, [“The Chisholm Effect: Black Women in American Politics 2018.”](#) The report was released during the [2018 Power Rising Conference](#) in Atlanta, a conference of Black women from across country that have assembled, to develop strategic, actionable ways to build and maximize their economic and political power.

Headlines over the past few months have highlighted the increase in women’s candidacies for political office nationwide, with many questioning whether 2018 will be another “Year of the Woman” in American politics. In order to assess women’s political advancement this year, it’s important to take stock of women’s representation ahead of this fall’s election. This update outlines the status of Black women in American politics at the start of 2018.

Despite Black women’s proven commitment to civic engagement and activism, Black women remain underrepresented as both candidates and officeholders, most starkly at the statewide executive level. As of February 19, 2018, Black women are 3.6% of members of Congress, 3.7% of state legislators nationwide, and less than one percent of statewide elected executive officials. Five Black women serve as mayors in the nation’s top 100 most populous cities.

Here is a look at some of the gains made by Black women over the last year:

- Only two states held statewide executive elections in 2017. In New Jersey, Sheila Oliver (D) was elected Lieutenant Governor. She is the first woman of color to serve in statewide elected executive office in New Jersey, and the first Democratic Black woman Lieutenant Governor elected nationwide.
- According to data from TargetSmart, Black women turned out to vote at the highest rate of all race/gender groups in Alabama’s special U.S. Senate election in 2017; 48.2% of Black women voted, compared to 41.3% of white men, 39.6% of Black men, and 36.9% of white women. According to the exit poll, 98% of Black women voted for Democrat Doug Jones, contributing significantly to his success on Election Day.

- In 2017, three of the nation's 100 largest cities elected or appointed Black women as mayors for the first time. Vi Alexander Lyles was elected mayor of Charlotte, NC ; Latoya Cantrell was elected as the first woman mayor of New Orleans, and London Breed was appointed acting mayor of San Francisco after the death of Mayor Ed Lee in December 2017; in January 2018, she was replaced. In December 2017, Keisha Lance Bottoms was elected as the second Black woman mayor of Atlanta, GA.
- In the past year, state legislative elections in New Jersey and Virginia, as well as special elections and appointments, have yielded a net increase of 10 Black women state legislators nationwide.

In the report's foreword, Sen. Kamala Harris, currently the only Black woman in the U.S. Senate and just the second Black woman senator, summarizes the building momentum of Black women's political power.

"The gains we are seeing today are a direct result of Black women's brilliant strategy, tireless work and bravery in the face of conditions that are often unfair and sometimes dangerous. This determined push forward finds us at a moment when Black women are central to a strategy for potential progressive gains in 2018," said Harris.

The report honors the late Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to U.S. Congress, by highlighting that Black women continue to make important political gains, fueled by the same determination and commitment to progress that are central to Chisholm's legacy.

"50 years since the election of Shirley Chisholm, her legacy reminds us of the possibilities that exist for Black women to run, win and lead," said Glynda Carr, co-founder of Higher Heights. "The 2018 status update provides a snapshot of the gains Black women have made at the polls and on the ballot, and demonstrates the need to invest in the next generation of Black women leaders who in the spirit of Chisholm seek to provide 'Unbought and Unbossed' leadership at all levels."

The update also looks forward to the 2018 election as a ripe opportunity to harness and expand Black women's political power, both as voters and candidates.

"Black women are poised to continue to make gains in political leadership in the 2018 election," said Kelly Dittmar, CAWP scholar and the report's author. "To best evaluate and celebrate those gains, we need to know where we started. That's why our organizations are committed to raising awareness about Black women's political power and identifying opportunities to expand it."

Higher Heights and CAWP previously collaborated on a 2015 report, [Voices, Votes, Leadership: The Status of Black Women in American Politics](#), which explored the barriers and opportunities that exist to harness Black women's power at the ballot box and on the ballot; as well as "[Black](#)

[Women in American Politics: A 2017 Status Update](#)", which report provides a synopsis of how Black Women made electoral strides in the 2016 Election.

**About Higher Heights Leadership Fund:**

*Higher Heights is the only organization dedicated solely to harnessing Black women's political power and leadership potential to overcome barriers to political participation and increase Black women's participation in civic processes. Higher Heights Leadership Fund, a 501(c)(3), is investing in a long-term strategy to expand and support Black women's leadership pipeline at all levels and strengthen their civic participation beyond just Election Day. Learn more at <http://www.higherheightsleadershipfund.org/>.*

**About the Center for American Women in Politics:**

*The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women's political participation. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's participation in politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. For additional information, please visit <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>.*

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