

(March 7, 2006) Congressman Lipinski Supports H.Res. 681, Supporting the Goals of National Engineers

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Supporting the Goals and Ideals of National Engineers Week

Mr. LIPINSKI . Madam Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 681, supporting the goals and ideals of National Engineers Week. Engineers have helped make our country great, from their service in the American Revolution to developing key modern industries such as aerospace and energy. I would like to honor and recognize the more than 2 million engineers in the United States and the contributions that they have made to our country.

Engineers combine imagination and creativity with math and science training to solve problems. Engineers in the past have helped us to build boats to cross the seas, railroads to take us West, and the Internet to communicate with the world. Today, we need the innovative capabilities of engineers to confront the new challenges before us. Engineers will help America develop energy independence, find solutions to confront global climate change, and make our Nation more secure.

But there is a growing concern that America is falling behind other countries when it comes to engineering. U.S. students continue to score below international averages on math and science tests. In 2004, China graduated more than six times the number of engineers that graduated in the United States. The National Academy of Sciences recently released a report entitled, "Rising Above the Gathering Storm," which raised questions about America's future technological competitiveness. This report, echoed by President Bush in his State of the Union address, emphasized the need for government to take a number of actions, including addressing the potential shortage of engineers. We must act quickly to take up this challenge. We cannot afford to let our future falter, and that future requires that we continue to lead the world in technological innovation. This innovation is supplied by engineers.

National Engineers Week seeks to raise public awareness about engineers' contributions to our society and our quality of life and has inspired future engineers for more than 50 years. Founded by the National Society of Professional Engineers, and including more than 100 society, government, and business sponsors and affiliates, including Boeing, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, the American Society of Civil Engineers, National Engineers Week draws upon local and regional experts to promote high levels of math, science and technology literacy. Annually, it reaches thousands of parents, teachers and students in communities across the country. From national and regional engineering competitions, such as the Future City Competition, to events such as Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day, this week helps inspire the next generation of engineers and scientists.

The Future City Competition is a great example of how National Engineers Week has touched students across the country. The competition encourages seventh and eighth grade students to use problem-solving skills, teamwork, research and presentation skills, practical math and science applications, and computer skills to present their vision of a city of the future.

The team from St. Barnabas Catholic School in Chicago recently won first place in the regional competition. This team included several students who come from my district. These students then went on to the national competition. At the national competition, they also won an award for their work in aerospace engineering.

These students had a great opportunity to learn more about the many factors that go into building a city. They then applied this knowledge to a real problem. Working with teachers and mentor engineers, they solved problems ranging from energy supply to waste removal to transportation needs. These students are the ones we will rely on in coming years to help us address these challenges in the real world.

If we are going to produce more American engineers, one step that we need to do is to improve our STEM education, that is, science, technology, engineering and math education, but we must also do more to inspire our children to become interested in engineering.

When I was a kid growing up in Chicago, I was fascinated by the way things worked, as most kids are. I had a physics teacher in high school at St. Ignatius. His name was Father Fergus. He took this fascination that I had and got me interested in engineering, just as I hope that the events of National Engineers Week will do for more children.

I went on to earn a bachelor's of science degree in mechanical engineering at Northwestern and a master's degree in engineering-economic systems from Stanford University. I am one of only nine Members of this body who has an engineering degree, but people come up to me often and ask me how does the training as an engineer help you. Certainly it helps in understanding science and technology issues, math and science education, and transportation and manufacturing issues.

But engineering is more than that. Simply put, engineering is problem solving. Training as an engineer teaches you how to analyze a problem and how to put the steps together to solve that problem, no matter what the problem may be. It helps teach the type of analytical and innovative thinking that has made America a world leader technologically, militarily and economically. We must do everything we can to encourage and inspire future engineers so that America continues to be a leader in this increasingly competitive world.

Finally, I would like to thank the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. Inglis) for his involvement with the National Engineers Week resolution. I would especially like to thank the engineers who have contributed so much to America, to honor them for their commitment to their continuing work for the betterment of our society.

I ask my colleagues to pass H. Res. 681 in deserved recognition.