(January 30, 2007) Honoring America's Engineers

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Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.Res. 59, 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 two million engineers in the United States and the contributions that they have made to our country.

Engineers are at the forefront of human advances because engineers combine imagination and creativity with math and science training to solve problems. Engineers aren't just builders as they are sometimes envisioned, they are problem solvers. This is one the first things I was taught when I was a graduate student at Stanford University in the Department of Engineering-Economic Systems. Engineering is problem solving.

Engineers in the past helped us build boats to cross the seas, railroads to take us west, and the internet to communicate with the world. We need the innovative capabilities of engineers to confront the new challenges before us today. Engineers will help Americans develop energy independence, find solutions to confront global climate change, and make our nation more secure.

I have a unique perspective as one of only a handful of engineers in Congress. Besides my Master's degree from Stanford in Engineering-Economic Systems, I earned a Bachelor's degree from Northwestern University in Mechanical Engineering. I have seen that America is falling behind other countries in engineering. U.S. students continue to score below international averages on math and science tests. It has been reported that in 2004 China graduated more than six times the number of engineers than graduated in the U.S. On a recent tour of Northern Illinois University's College of Engineering and Engineering Technology I again heard how few Americans are getting engineering degrees, especially graduate degrees. It is great that America has such top universities that we are attracting some of the brightest minds from around the world to study here, but we are beginning to lose more and more of those students when they graduate and go back home. This is harmful to America's future.

The National Academy of Sciences recently released a report entitled Rising Above the Gathering Storm that raised questions about America's future technological competitiveness. This report, echoed by the President in his State of the Union address last year, emphasized the need for government to take a number of actions, including addressing the potential for a shortage of good engineers. We must act quickly to take up this challenge. We cannot let another year go

by. We cannot afford to let our economic future falter, and that future requires continuing technological innovation supplied by our nation's engineers.

National Engineers Week seeks to raise public awareness about engineers' contributions to 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, and 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.

If we are going to produce more American engineers, one needed step is to improve 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 in learning how things work, as most children are. I remember Father Fergus who taught me physics in high school at St Ignatius, taking this childhood fascination and getting me interested in engineering, just as we hope the events of National Engineers Week will do. We must do everything we can to encourage and inspire future engineers so that America continues as a world leader in this increasingly competitive world.

I would like to thank the Gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Inglis, for his involvement with the National Engineers Week resolution.

And I would especially like to thank the engineers that have contributed so much to America, and to honor them for their commitment to continue working to better our society.

I ask my colleagues to support H.Res. 59 in deserved recognition.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.