1. Federal STEM Policy this Month by Della B. Cronin, Principal, Washington Partners, LLC

Truth be told, the big story this month in Washington, DC is all about snow—its arrival, its stay and the city’s ability to deal with it. The snow kept Congress out of town even more than usual and left federal government workers either working from home or not at all. That preoccupation came after President Obama delivered his last State of the Union address. His remarks once again addressed STEM education.

The speech was one that largely touted what President Obama and his Administration would consider their achievements. Among them, improved high school graduation rates; dropping crime and incarceration rates; better employment rates; and dramatically increased health care coverage. The President also outlined a number of specific policy concepts, such as the need to provide education and training to ensure every American is afforded an opportunity to participate in the American economy. He acknowledged the passage of the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act as an “important start.” Obama touted other education gains - including “boosted graduates in fields like engineering,” while calling for more “hands on” computer and math classes that can prepare students for jobs. Specifically, President Obama said he wants students to learn how to "write computer code.” (Building on these comments, STEM education insiders expect the White House to unveil a computer science-focused initiative shortly.)

He asked his audience a number of thematic questions, including,” How do we reignite that spirit of innovation to meet our biggest challenges?” He noted that during the country’s space race in the 1960s, “We didn’t argue about the science, or shrink our research and development budget. We built a space program almost overnight. And 12 years later, we were walking on the moon.” More details of specific policy proposals will be revealed when the White House delivers its FY 2017 budget proposal to Congress on February 9. Of course, it is unlikely any new, expensive ideas will get any traction with Republican appropriators.

Over at the Department of Education, the agency continues to scramble to provide guidance to the community on implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act. With one comment period closed, two public meetings concluded and a number of letters issued, a plan seems to be coming together. Stay tuned. On all fronts—snow and otherwise.
2. STEM Tidbits

NEW EDUCATION SECRETARY SCREENS STEM MOVIE WITH ADVOCATES

On Thursday, January 28, the Department of Education (ED) held a screening of the film *Codegirl* along with a panel discussion featuring remarks from Acting Secretary of Education, John B. King Jr. The film, which follows high school girls from around the world who are participating in the “Technovation Challenge,” adds depth to the already burgeoning movement of addressing the gender gap in STEM fields, particularly computer science. The “Technovation Challenge” specifically encourages girls to identify a problem in their community, develop a mobile application (“app”) to help solve the problem, and build and pitch a business plan for their app to the tech community for a $10,000 prize. The focus on app development is both relevant and lucrative for the young women, as the app market is estimated to be valued at $77 Billion by the year 2017. Within the market, over 80% of the developers are male, thus the challenge aims to change that by empowering girls worldwide to develop apps from rural Moldova to urban Brazil to suburban Massachusetts. The film and the competition both highlighted a focus on using computer science and coding to solve community problems and do civic good. Acting Secretary King echoed this sentiment in his remarks saying that computer science inherently uses other skills like collaboration and problem-solving, and can be “leveraged to advance our democracy.” Panelists, which included team members from the finalist teams in the competition, spoke about how they went from knowing very little to knowing a lot about different aspects of app development – whether it was coding or market aesthetics – and praised the competition’s focus on illuminating the power of computer science for young girls around the world. Lisa Gelobter, Chief Digital Service Officer for ED, delivered closing remarks for the discussion by saying that girls do not need to strive to be like boys, but instead they should be themselves and bring their creativity and their passion to the coding and computer science world in their own way because it will improve the industry as a whole. For more information about the movie, please go here.

PRESIDENT OBAMA SIGNS OFF ON STEM WITH FINAL SOTU

Earlier this month President Obama delivered his final State of the Union (SOTU) address. Signaling both the beginning of the year and the beginning of the end of his presidency, the President gave a hopeful address that focused on creating a united future. He praised bipartisan achievements such as passage of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* and touted successes that all Americans should be able to support such as an increase in preschool slots, all-time high rates of high school graduation and more college graduates attaining engineering degrees. Furthermore, he stated, “In the coming years, we should build on that progress, by providing Pre-K for all, offering every student the hands-on computer science and math classes that make them job-ready on day one, and we should recruit and support more great teachers for our kids.” In that spirit, Obama also boldly challenged the country to be the first to find a cure for cancer, and asked Vice President Joe Biden to take a leadership role in that work – cancer research is personal for both, as untimely deaths due to cancer have affected both of their families. While he didn’t dwell on anyone subject, STEM included, Obama made clear that he envisions a future where science and math are foundational skills for moving America forward. To read his speech in full, go here.

STEM COALITION OUTLINES PRIORITIES FOR 2016

Considering that the House and Senate have only 71 and 101 scheduled respective legislative days this year, it is probably a good time to reach out directly to Presidential candidates to get some messages heard. In that vein, the STEM Education Coalition last week published their
“Recommendations on STEM Education Prepared for the 2016 Presidential Candidates”. The memo is a comprehensive set of broad principles to help contenders stake out positions on what matters most to the STEM educators and STEM employers in this country. Outlined at the top are familiar topics such as broadening the pipeline for more diversity, approaching solutions in a bipartisan way that spans across government agencies, and federal funding to spur partnerships and innovation. However the memo also goes more in depth to suggest specific actions for next administration such as appointing a STEM education coordinator at the White House and convening a summit with national stakeholders during the first 100 days in office to set a broad federal STEM agenda. To read the policy recommendations in full, go here.

3. Announcements, News, and other Notable Updates

Can STEM be Education's Disruptive Innovation?
Education Week (Jan. 28, 2016)

Homeland Security Granted Extension on STEM OPT Program
National Law Review (Jan. 25, 2016)

Education Behemoth Pearson to Cut 4,000 Employees, 10 Percent of Workforce
Marketplace K-12 (Jan. 21, 2016)

Open Education Resources to Get a Huge Boost from ESSA
Education Week (Jan. 20, 2016)

4. Upcoming Deadlines

Last Call for William L. Fisher Congressional Geoscience Fellowship
(Due Feb. 1, 2016)

Final Call from ED for Experimental Dual Enrollment Sites (STEM Emphasis)
(Due Feb. 1, 2016)

CCSSO and JP Morgan Chase $75M for New Skills for Youth Grant
(Due March 2, 2016)

Nominations for PAEMST Open
(Close April 1, 2016)

5. About WPLLC

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