

FORUM

INSPIRE Act will help women advance in STEM careers



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Science, technology, engineering and math are fields vital to the ongoing success and prosperity of our country. Not to mention individuals who work in these fields are often times more financially stable and have a better chance of retaining stability in the face of national or global times of economic hardship. However, despite all of this, job vacancies in STEM fields go unfilled every year in our country. Making sure these careers are being

considered and pursued by our young people should be a national priority.

Throughout time, our country has made remarkable advancements in the STEM fields and we have many women scientists to thank for their significant contributions along the way. However, today women account for only a small percentage of the STEM workforce in this country.

Last month, President Donald Trump signed the Inspiring the Next Space Pioneers, Innovators, Researchers, and Explorers (INSPIRE) Women Act, a bill that directs NASA to encourage young women to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math. As a father to a 13-year-old daughter, I was proud to

co-sponsor this legislation.

We aren't the only ones who recognize the importance of this matter. Last month, General Electric promised to employ 20,000 women in technical roles within its company by the year 2020.

The company recently released a commercial promoting its initiative where 86-year-old Millie Dresselhaus, the first woman to earn the U.S. National Medal of Science in Engineering, was being treated as a celebrity. Young girls were rushing to take selfies with her, she was on talk shows and on the covers of magazines. And the commercial begged the question of what if we treated the outstanding accomplishments of women such as Millie Dresselhaus with the same attention and

adoration as we do the actions of celebrities?

If you were to ask any young woman today if she knew who Kim Kardashian is, chances are the answer would be yes. If you were to ask her if she knew who Millie Dresselhaus is, sadly, the odds of her knowing would diminish greatly.

Like many of our young people on the Mississippi Coast, my daughter has had the privilege of growing up with Stennis Space Center in her backyard. Whether it's watching an engine test or visiting the Infinity Space Museum, she's enjoyed the educational and interactive opportunities. The goal of the INSPIRE Act is to expose the world of science, technology, engineering and math to young women across our nation and pave the way for them to pursue and have successful careers in the STEM fields.

This is an important initiative that I hope families, communities and schools in South Mis-



COURTESY STEVEN PALAZZO

Congressman Steven Palazzo's daughter, Aubrey, meets astronaut Jeanette Epps at Stennis Space Center.

issippi will join us in supporting. If you were to ask yourself today whose footsteps do you want your daughter to follow in, would the answer be Kim

Kardashian or Millie Dresselhaus?

Rep. Steven Palazzo represents the 4th Congressional District.