White House Visit

By Harini J.

Team 1816 was invited to the White House to speak about STEM legislation in the new administration. We spoke to Meredith Drosback, now acting as director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy. Previously, Ms. Drosback was the Science Division Staff Director in the OSTP. Alongside FIRST Teams 27, 1718, 2137, and 1676, students gave a presentation about what FIRST is, the personal impact FIRST has on students, and the importance of fully funding Title IV, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Title IV, Part A provides specific funding for school districts nationally to, among other activities, encourage after-school, mentored STEM engagement activities such as the full-range of FIRST K-12 programs. We also had an opportunity to ask Ms. Drosback what we, as members of the FIRST community, could do to help advance STEM legislation in the new executive administration. She shared with us the following information: it is essential that we stay in contact with government officials as STEM experts. Often, when government officials need information regarding STEM, they reach out to their trusted contacts - like us - for information. Overall, our meeting with her was both enjoyable and fruitful.

Team 1816 on Capitol Hill: Advocating to Elected Officials

By Simone V.

Team 1816 on June 24th travelled to Washington, D.C to speak with Minnesota Senators and Members of Congress at the annual FIRST National Advocacy Conference. The conference was originally founded by Steve Hyer from FIRST Team 27 - RUSH, who wanted the NAC to serve as a way for FIRST teams to connect with their elected officials and advocate for funding for after-school STEM activities like FIRST Robotics.

The Green Machine held meetings with Minnesota senators Al...
Franken and Amy Klobuchar, as well as representatives Erik Paulsen and Keith Ellison. The main focus of the meetings was that the team ask the representatives and senators to support the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), specifically Title IV, part A, which gives states funding for after-school activities. Such activities could include STEM-based programs, like FIRST Robotics.

“[The ESSA] is not a partisan issue,” said Senator Franken during the meeting with Minnesota FIRST Team 1816, 2502 - Talon and 3130 - ERRORS, “It’s something that just makes sense.” According to the U.S Department of Education, the ESSA “advances equity by upholding critical protections for America’s disadvantaged and high-need students.” By advocating for the ESSA, FIRST Robotics hopes to bring STEM to underprivileged schools and students across the United States.

Senator Franken has worked hard to promote STEM-based programs; he wrote Title IV Part A in 2015 and played a key part in having it signed into law by then-president Barack Obama. When asked about the ESSA’s potential in Minnesota, Franken said “Minnesota has some real strengths [regarding STEM].”

In addition to meeting with Franken, Team 1816 spoke with Senator Amy Klobuchar. The Senator made it clear that her office supported the ESSA; she added that “[recruiting] more people into science, technology, engineering, and math is vital.”

Klobuchar was one of the first senate members to have a bill passed under President Trump; the bill supports women in STEM, something that she “is a strong advocate for.” The team is grateful to have had the opportunity to meet directly with both Minnesota senators, and hopes to have garnered support of the ESSA Title IV, Part A. The team would like to thank Senators Franken and Klobuchar for their willingness to support STEM in our schools.

For more information about the National Advocacy Conference, click here.

Author’s note: Team 1816 met with staffers of representatives Ellison and Paulson and received reassurance that the representatives were in support of the ESSA and Title IV, Part A. The team stays in contact with the representatives’ offices, and plans to visit each year during the NAC.