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The Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee considered two House bills promoting women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields on September 21, 2016. The bills considered include the Inspiring Next Space Pioneers, Innovators, Researchers, and Explorers Act (INSPIRE) (H.R. 4755) and the Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act (H.R. 4742). The two bills were passed in the House simultaneously on March 22, 2016, and were approved by the Senate committee during the markup session. The next step will be consideration by the full Senate.

According to a 2011 report by the Department of Commerce, women hold less than 25 percent of STEM jobs in the U.S. The INSPIRE Act, introduced by Rep. Barbara Comstock (R-VA), serves to encourage and support young students, particularly women, in STEM career endeavors. The bill also refers to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) GIRLS and NASA BOYS programs as exemplary efforts to open science careers to young students. In addition, Section 4 of the bill outlines a plan to institute a program involving current and retired scientists engaging with K-12 female STEM students. The Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act asserts that “technology and commercialization ventures are successful when women are in top management positions,” and calls upon the National Science Foundation (NSF) to, “support women in STEM disciplines,” as outlined in its 2011-2016 Strategic Plan.

Specific new programs that will be introduced as a result of these bills are yet to be established, but the INSPIRE Act requires NASA to develop a plan for the future of these proposed programs.

Sources: Congress.gov, Department of Commerce, Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee
