

District, Merkley, Intel Discuss the Importance of STEM Education

Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley unveils proposed education legislation while teacher Don Domes, student Savannah Loberger, and Intel representative Morgan Anderson say the time is now to increase funding for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)

On Friday, August 26, Senator Jeff Merkley visited Hillsboro High School to unveil his proposed legislation, which aims to increase student access to courses in STEM education subjects and provide additional resources to recruit, train, and support teachers of these subjects.

“Standing here in the heart of the Silicon Forest with all this science and technology surrounding us is a key reminder of the importance of STEM education in our global economy,” said Merkley.

That sentiment is a familiar one to Hills technology and engineering teacher Don Domes, a long time advocate for STEM opportunities for students.

“America graduates less than 8% of the engineers in the world,” Don notes. If we don’t design it here, what is the chance we will build it here? If we don’t build some things here, what will happen to our infrastructure and our economy?”

Don feels the key is to expose students to the STEM fields early on, and provide them with hands-on experiences that open their eyes to the exciting possibilities those disciplines can unlock for them.

One of Don’s students, Savannah Loberger—an incoming junior, provided just such an opportunity for 37 girls this summer. Her camp was called “Girls Get IT”—with “IT” being an acronym for innovative technology—and focused on a variety of STEM topics, from computer-assisted design to circuits to robot programming.

The camp was wonderful, but the reach was small due to the constraints of money and resources—two things that a nationwide focus on STEM could help alleviate.

“I have often said ‘follow the money’ and you will see what is truly important,” Don explains. “Athletics is the model for effective high school programs that develop excellence and push students to excel. We need that same model of coaching and competitions for STEM topics.”

Intel government affairs manager Morgan Anderson reinforced the call to action for additional focus on STEM and pushed the urgency, noting that the majority of engineers Intel hires have their PhD. That type of commitment to specialized education—through undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate school—requires drive and passion that needs to be cultivated from an early age.