

Young scientists impress the president with their inventive projects

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President Barack Obama poses with Girl Scouts from Tulsa, Oklahoma, during the White House Science Fair, Monday, March 23, 2015, at the White House in Washington. The Girl Scouts, including (from left) Emily Bergenroth, Alicia Cutter, Karissa Cheng, Addy O'Neal and Emery Dodson, used Lego pieces and designed a battery-powered page turner to help people who are paralyzed or have arthritis. Photo: AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

WASHINGTON — Lots of kids build things out of Legos. Not all kids get to show off their work to the president.

The White House Science Fair took place on Monday. Young scientists and inventors from all over the country came to Washington, D.C. There were 35 winners showing off 12 different projects.

President Obama was on hand to look over what the young scientists had come up with. The fair included a tiny machine that can fix the curve of a person's spine, carbon-dioxide powered batteries, and a tool for protecting information online.

Brainstorming With Legos

One device, built out of Legos, automatically flipped the pages of a book. It could allow patients who are unable to move their hands to read. As he watched a demonstration of the machine, Obama seemed impressed. The five inventors were just six years old.

"How did you figure this out?" Obama asked.

"We had a brainstorming session," one replied. A brainstorming session is when a group sits down to come up with new ideas.

The White House Science Fair shines a spotlight on science, technology, engineering, and math. In a speech at the fair, Obama encouraged students to study these subjects in school.

Obama has been interested in this topic for years. In 2009, he launched "Educate to Innovate," an effort to encourage the study of science, technology, engineering and math.

Making Science Popular

Obama feels that it is important to make science and math popular with everyone. Also, he wants to make sure everyone has a fair chance at becoming a scientist or mathematician.

Historically, most mathematicians and scientists have been white men. Other groups have not had as many opportunities to study math and science. On Monday, Obama encouraged girls and children of color to enter these fields as well.

He also announced \$240 million in new spending. About \$150 million will help young scientists who are just starting out. Another \$90 million will give science and math opportunities to girls and children of color.

There were other announcements as well. More than 100 colleges and universities have committed to training 20,000 new engineers. Also, a group of companies have promised to bring math and science programs to 1.5 million more students this year.

On Monday, he was impressed by all of the science projects, but none seemed to delight Obama more than the Lego page-turning machine. He pointed out that it was turning the pages a little too quickly, though. A reader might only have time to read three sentences before the page turns.

One of the device's inventors explained to the president that the machine was a prototype. A prototype is the first model of an invention. It is a work-in-progress.

"Amazing"

Obama said the fair is one of the most fun events held each year at the White House. "Every year I walk out smarter than when I walked in," Obama said.

A scientist who works for Obama named John Holdren joined the president at the fair. "Amazing," he said, as he examined the students' work. "These kids are so much more advanced than when I was in school."

Obama spoke to Anvita Gupta, a 17-year-old from Arizona, who had come up with a mathematical way of teaching computers to find other uses for medications.

Later on, Obama addressed students and scientists in the White House. "It's not enough for our country just to be proud of you," he said. "We've got to support you."