STUDENTS REACT TO EDUCATION REMARKS
IN STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

President Obama delivered his second State of the Union speech on Jan. 25, and education played a major part in it. James Stage and Matthew Linn, both students at the University School of Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., were asked by PBS to write their reactions to the president’s education proposals. The information below can be found at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org).

With education reform looming in Congress, the White House invited three brilliant high school students to the State of the Union this year, and they all embody the science-based, innovative society that Obama outlined in his address. The first aspires to be an automotive engineer, the second developed solar cars, and the third invented a photodynamic therapy to treat cancer patients (and she’s only sixteen)! In his address Obama demanded smarter, more dedicated students that can lead America’s cutting-edge innovation. He also envisioned a new breed of Americans that cares more about winning the Science Fair than the Super Bowl. Thankfully, these three kids demonstrate that the US can produce students that will continue American leadership in the 21st century.

When it comes to education policy, however, Obama’s challenge to the nation is to make students like these the norm, not the rare exception. To fulfill this goal, the President outlined various steps: replacing No Child Left Behind, ensuring more teenagers go to college, and increasing respect for teachers. Nothing here is new or revolutionary. Unfortunately, America’s educational progress will remain stagnant until politicians approach the issue with revolutionary ideas. For a president that wants to make education his top priority, Obama brings nothing fresh or exciting to the discussion. He wants the U.S. to reach for the No. 1 spot in global education rankings, but how does he expect to make that giant leap? Based on his State of the Union remarks, Obama believes that American students need an attitude adjustment. He wants kids to turn off the television, to listen to teachers, to do their homework, and to go to college. It sounds simple, but it’s not, and Obama gives no concrete path toward his vision. Of course, Obama can easily persuade the public that education needs reform. After all, who doesn’t want America’s students to be the world’s best? But until Obama tells the public precisely how he will reform education, people will remain skeptical. Instead of rhetoric, Obama needs a plan that will give every student the opportunity to become a clean energy developing, cancer curing science fair winner.

Matthew Linn is a junior at University School of Nova Southeastern University. Matthew was the 2010 Florida Forensic League State Champion for International Extemporaneous Speaking – a current events commentary event. This year Matthew was in finals at the Yale University Invitational for Extemporaneous Speaking and is the Public Speaking Captain for the Speech and Debate team.
“This is our generation’s Sputnik moment,” President Obama told Congress in his State of the Union speech. The president outlined many goals and set forward some impressive ideas on what changes we must make to our education system, but failed to provide a means to achieve these goals. He also outlined the challenge that faces our country, that of an educational system that cannot compete with the rest of the world. The United States needs some kind of reform to the education system; this is what the president made clear. After the re-write of No Child Left Behind, teachers have been given new responsibilities but no authority figure exists to enforce these obligations. Raising standards for teachers and creating reachable goals for students to aim for is the first step that the president must take to meet his goal. While this sounds straightforward, the real push has to come from Congress to review No Child Left Behind again and to erase the premise of a school being “a failure.” This change can increase funding and stop the use of an outdated and obsolete punishment system, thus giving students actual incentives to pursue a college degree, the new tools that some of their parents and the rest of their families might not have had. Combining this with higher standards for schools to meet will help us compete internationally, which we have not been able to do in the past. In his speech, President Obama gave us a cursory glance into the bipartisan effort that we will need to push this through. Reforming this system may not be a perfect fix but it is a step in the right direction, and a step that we must take.

James Stage is a senior at University School of Nova Southeastern University. James is the President of his school’s speech and Debate team as well as a qualifier to the Tournament of Champions (’10, ’11) and an elimination round participant at the 2010 National Forensic League National Tournament for Public Forum Debate.