

In just a few days, Senator Barack Obama will become America's 44th President. Just as he has shown great creativity and determination in his approaches to solving the challenges facing our nation, President-Elect Obama has also been a bold innovator in the way he has engaged with the public over the internet. Following the exciting trail blazed by our next President, I decided to allocate inauguration tickets to constituents as part of an online dialogue.

I designed two programs to engage with constituents:

### **Program 1: Why do you want to come to the Inauguration?**

In the first program, I asked constituents to post a note on my Facebook page about why they wanted to come to the inauguration. You can read [summaries of the ticket recipients' submissions](#) on my Facebook page.

### **Program 2: Educational Reform Proposals**

Solutions to improve educational equity in America was the focus of the first program. Children in America today receive vastly unequal educational experiences and opportunities due to substantial differences in funding between schools. I asked constituents to submit an innovative idea to reform America's education system. The constituents who submitted the following proposals received a pair of tickets to the Inauguration.

#### ***Leveraging educational technology to level the playing field***

**Barbara Hibino** (San Jose), a constituent who founded an education company, suggested leveraging new technologies by developing high-tech education resources on a national level and making them available to every school in the Nation. Barbara's recommendations included providing access to ongoing assessments for students and teachers to monitor progress and compare student learning outcomes among colleagues. There are many potential educational and fiscal benefits to creating national education resources, which is why I introduced the [Enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Act](#) to establish a body to develop voluntary Science, Technology, Engineering and Math standards, resources, and assessments to assistance teachers across the country.

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### ***Attracting high quality teachers***

**Genevieve Lau** (Los Gatos), an Assistant Principal at Dartmouth Middle School, identified that teachers are the resources most inequitably distributed in our schools.&nbsp;She recommends attracting higher quality teachers by increasing pay and creating incentives for teaching in challenging schools.&nbsp;Genevieve also provides an extensive discussion about how to improve teacher quality by investing in teachers through training, professional collaborative learning communities and structuring schools based on a team approach.

### ***Challenging the college legacy system***

**Sameer Lalwani** (Milpitas), a PhD Student at MIT, is critical of the barriers for first generation students created by college legacy system stating that “legacy preferences are advantages accorded to applicants who had a parent, a grand-parent or sometimes even a sibling attended that school. Legacy preferences are highly regressive practices that reward applicants neither for merit nor need but god fortune. If the purpose of education is to provide more opportunity to more people enabling greater social mobility, legacy preferences work towards the opposite effect by crowding worthy candidates out.”

As you read through the submissions, you will likely be as inspired as I was by the ideas, stories and even a [rap video](#) .

Originally, I had planned on granting a pair of tickets to the most deserving entry from each of the two programs. As the creativity and thoughtfulness of these submissions from my Silicon Valley constituents became evident, I realized it would be impossible to choose just one entry from each program. In the end, I provided tickets to 10 constituents who submitted entries.

## **Legislation Inspired by the Program**

The quality of the entries makes it clear how much can be gained by using the internet to harness the insights and creativity of the American public. So thoughtful and inspiring were the constituents’ recommendations that I crafted legislation to further the development of these

ideas.

The legislation would create an “Educational Innovation Board” as part of the economic stimulus package. The board would award \$10 million in grants for innovative designs or ideas to help improve the nation’s schools across five categories. More information about the legislation will be posted on my [blog](#) shortly, so check back soon!