GAO Report on DOD Technology Transition Program

The GAO recently published the results of the first of potentially several reports on the DOD S&T program, generally, as directed in the conference report accompanying the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act. Their stated objectives for the study, Defense Technology Development: Technology Transition Programs Support Military Users, but Opportunities Exist to Improve Measurement of Outcomes, were to “(1) determine what DOD programs are dedicated to facilitating technology transition, (2) assess the outcomes of these transition programs, and (3) identify practices among the programs that may facilitate technology transition.” The GAO “identified 20 technology transition programs--managed by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the military departments—that provide structured mechanisms and funding to facilitate technology transition.” They found that “[A]ll of the programs … reviewed are consistent in providing opportunities to transition technologies from the science and technology (S&T) environment to a user, such as a weapon system acquisition program or the warfighter in the field. To help speed the delivery of technologies to users, most transition programs target fairly mature technologies, which are suitable for final stages of development and demonstration. Collectively, the programs GAO reviewed obligated about $7.9 billion in Department of Defense (DOD) research, development, test, and evaluation funding for fiscal years 2010 through 2012 to support technology transition.”

They further stated that “[M]ost programs that GAO assessed track whether their projects were completed and successfully transitioned to intended users. On average, programs reported a historical transition rate of over 70 percent for projects. The vast majority of these projects resulted in technologies transitioning to acquisition programs or directly to the warfighter. However, about one-quarter of the projects transitioned to other organizations, such as test and evaluation centers, for further development. Prior GAO work found that tracking technology transitions and the impact of those transitions, such as cost savings or deployment of the technology in a product, provides key feedback that can inform the management of programs. For the most part, transition programs that GAO reviewed do not track projects beyond transition, which limits their ability to know and report final outcomes for transitioned technologies and the associated benefits realized from those technologies.”

Finally, GAO recommended, “that DOD require programs to track and measure project outcomes to document transition results and benefits from transition, as well as assess programs to identify opportunities for more widespread use of existing transition management tools. DOD generally concurred with these recommendations and stated that it will initiate actions to address potential opportunities for improvement identified in the report.” (Original Sources: GAO web site)
House Judiciary Committee Hearings

Hearing on Patent Assertion Entities (aka Patent Trolls)
The House Committee on the Judiciary (Subc. on Courts, IP and the Internet): recently held a hearing titled “Abusive Patent Litigation: The Impact on American Innovation & Jobs, and Potential Solutions”. In his opening statement, Chairman Goodlatte states, “[A]busive patent litigation is a drag on our economy. Everyone from independent inventors, to start-ups, to mid and large sized businesses face this constant threat. The tens of billions of dollars spent on settlements and litigation expenses associated with abusive patent suits represent truly wasted capital – wasted capital that could have been used to create new jobs, fund R&D, and create new innovations and technologies that would ‘promote the progress of science and useful arts.’ Non-practicing entities (NPEs) are those that hold patents but do not practice or produce an actual product based on those patents. The term NPE covers everything from universities to high technology companies that focus on R&D but monetize their research through legitimate licensing. But within that universe there are a specific subset of entities - PAEs – which often times acquire weak or poorly-granted patents, and proceed to send blanket demand letters or file numerous patent infringement lawsuits against American businesses with the hopes of securing a quick payday. … We need to work on reforms to discourage frivolous patent litigation and keep U.S. patent laws up to date.” Access a webcast of the hearing and witness written testimony at the above link. See related articles on Patently-O blog here and here. (Original Sources: House Judiciary Cmte. web site, Patently-O blog).

Hearing on Immigration Reform (highlight H-1B and related visas)
The House Committee on the Judiciary (Subc. on Courts, IP and the Internet): also recently held a hearing titled “Hearing on Enhancing American Competitiveness through Skilled Immigration”. In his opening statement, Chairman Goodlatte states, “[T]he contributions of highly-skilled and educated immigrants to the United States are well-documented. Seventy-six percent of the patents awarded to our top patent-producing universities had at least one foreign-born inventor. … A [recent] study … found that an additional 100 immigrants with advanced STEM degrees from U.S. universities is associated with an additional 262 jobs for natives. … The United States has the most generous legal immigration system in the world – providing permanent residence to over a million immigrants a year. Yet, how many of those immigrants do we select on the basis of the education and skills they can bring to America? Only 12% -- barely more than one out of 10 … Given the outstanding track record of immigrants in founding some of our most successful companies, how many immigrants do we select on the basis of their entrepreneurial talents? Less than 1% … Does any of this make sense, given the intense international economic competition that America faces? … In this new Congress, we can rechart our nation’s course anew. We should look at all aspects of high-skilled immigration policy. We can look for ways to improve our temporary visa programs for skilled workers – such as H-1B and L visas. We can look for ways to improve our temporary visa program for entrepreneurs – the E-2 program. … And we can seek to help the United States retain more of the foreign students who graduate from our universities.” A webcast of the hearing and witness written testimony can be found on the link above. See H-1B visa-related articles in The Hill paper here, in Computerworld here, and in the NY Times here (may require subscription). (Original Sources: House Cmte web site, The Hill online, Computerworld web site, NYT online).
GAO Report on Govt Assistance to Entrepreneurs

In August 2012, GAO reported: information “on 52 programs at the Departments of Commerce (Commerce), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Agriculture (USDA), and the Small Business Administration (SBA) that support entrepreneurs [combined these programs spent an estimated $2 billion in 2011].” The current study, *Entrepreneurial Assistance: Opportunities Exist to Improve Programs' Collaboration, Data-Tracking, and Performance Management*, is a follow-on to that initial report. This new report “is based on information on these 52 programs [and specifically] discusses (1) the extent of overlap, fragmentation, and duplication and their effects on entrepreneurs, as well as agencies’ actions to address them; and (2) the extent to which agencies collect information necessary to track program activities and whether these programs have met their performance goals and have been evaluated.” In general, the two main findings of the report are, “[F]ederal programs that support entrepreneurs are fragmented and overlap based on the type of assistance they are authorized to offer, such as financial (grants and loans) and technical (training and counseling), and the type of entrepreneur they are authorized to serve; [and that] [A]gencies do not track program information on entrepreneurial assistance activities for many programs, a practice that is not consistent with government standards for internal controls.” See the report for more details. (Original Sources: GAO web site)

University Tech Transfer and Experiential Learning
(Supporting of Social Entrepreneurs)

Researchers at Middle Tennessee State University and Slippery Rock University: have published an article proposing “a new technology transfer office (TTO) model that links experienced social entrepreneurs and experiential learning activities for students with university technology portfolios.” From an SSTI summary of the article, “[I]n addition to providing experiential learning opportunities, a proven learning experience to create better educated and skilled graduates, the authors also believe the model will be effective at:

- Better utilizing university resources;
- Providing new goods and services to underserved populations; and,
- Fostering new companies and service organizations.

Long-term, the authors project their model will enable TTOs to increase the commercialization of their patent portfolio or at least better market opportunities to potential licensees at an extremely low cost by using graduate and undergraduate students. In return, students learn valuable skills as they apply their education to real-world projects (e.g., prototyping, market research and market testing). … The authors contend that university TTOs should adopt this model based upon the scientific evidence to support the role of experiential learning in the educational outcomes of students and its economic potential for the university and other regional stakeholders.” (Original Sources: SSTI web site, Clute Institute web site)
Note: The DC Dispatch is a periodic update of selected items of interest to the FLC and technology transfer community -- i.e., current legislation, trends, reports, policy and other developments potentially affecting technology transfer or related activities -- designed to keep the community informed of relevant issues on a timely basis. Information is gleaned directly from a variety of sources (newsletters, email alerts, web sites, direct participation at events from the FLC DC Representative’s office, etc.) -- with original sources, contacts and links provided.