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## **Over 100 Groups Urge Congress to Support Obama's Energy Education Initiative**

A group of over 100 universities, professional associations, and student groups joined the Breakthrough Institute yesterday in submitting a letter urging the U.S. Senate to fully support the Obama administration's national energy education initiative. The initiative, named "RE-ENERGYSE" (REgaining our ENERGY Science and Engineering Edge), would produce thousands of highly-skilled U.S. energy workers and develop new energy education programs at American universities and K-12 schools.

The Senate is poised to reject the proposal in its FY2010 Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill by cutting the RE-ENERGYSE program's funding to \$0 from the \$115 million requested in President Obama's FY2010 budget. Mr. Obama announced the initiative in a speech to the National Academy of Sciences in April, stating, "The nation that leads the world in 21st century clean energy will be the nation that leads in the 21st century global economy... [RE-ENERGYSE] will prepare a generation of Americans to meet this generational challenge."

According to the Department of Energy, the program would develop between 5,000 and 8,500 highly educated scientists, engineers, and other professionals to enter the clean energy field by 2015, which would rise to 10,000 -17,000 professionals by 2020. The Technical Training and K-12 Education subprogram would create between 200 to 300 community college and other training programs to prepare thousands of technically skilled workers for clean energy jobs.

The letter, which was distributed to every Senate office on Tuesday, urged lawmakers to fund RE-ENERGYSE at the full \$115 million request. "America is in danger of losing its global competitiveness and the [global] clean energy race without substantial new investments in STEM education," wrote the signatories, which included 53 colleges and universities and dozens of student and youth groups. "RE-ENERGYSE... will train America's future energy workforce, accelerate our transition to a prosperous clean energy economy, and ensure that we lead the world's burgeoning clean technology industries."

"The issues of energy and climate change are inspiring the interest of students on university campuses across the country," said Robert Berdahl, president of the Association of American Universities. "RE-ENERGYSE is the kind of program we need to capture that enthusiasm... Just

as NASA inspired students to take an interest in science and space, the Department of Energy should develop and support new education programs aimed at encouraging and supporting students in energy-related fields.”

“Young people across America need Congress to act today and help prepare our generation to confront the nation's energy challenges,” said Jessy Tolkan, Executive Director of the Energy Action Coalition, a coalition of 50 youth organizations.

Teryn Norris, Director of Breakthrough Generation and a Junior at Stanford University stated: “If the U.S. had responded to the Soviet launch of Sputnik the way Congress is responding to today’s national energy challenge America would not only have lost the space race, we would have been left behind in the technologies and industries that fueled a half-century of economic progress.”

“Students across the nation are passionate about studying and confronting our energy challenge, but the educational resources are nonexistent or critically underfunded,” said Marc Perkins, President of the Johns Hopkins University student government.

Nineteen year old Kelsea Norris, a student at the University of Georgia and Chair of the Sierra Student Coalition, echoed that sentiment: "So many young people like me are willing to devote their time and energy to solving this energy crisis... What we need is the education and training to do it, but our high schools, colleges, and universities aren't offering that to us."

The letter supporting RE-ENERGYSE comes on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary week of the Apollo 11 moon landing and as Asian competitors are launching major investment projects in clean energy. Last summer, Norris and his student colleagues at Breakthrough Generation proposed an initiative similar to RE-ENERGYSE, a National Energy Education Act, modeled after the National Defense Education Act of 1958 that helped train young scientists and engineers to win the space race. “The question our Congress faces today,” said Norris, “is this: will they rise to this challenge and invest in a new generation to win the global clean energy race?”

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*The full text of the letter and list of signatories, as well as background information on the RE-ENERGYSE program can be found at:*

[http://thebreakthrough.org/blog/2009/07/over\\_100\\_groups\\_urge\\_congress.shtml](http://thebreakthrough.org/blog/2009/07/over_100_groups_urge_congress.shtml)