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New House Bill Invests Millions in University Nuclear Science and Engineering Programs

WASHINGTON, D.C., Feb. 26, 2004—The Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) welcomed the introduction in Congress yesterday of legislation that supports university nuclear science and engineering programs with more than \$180 million in federal spending over the next four years. The Department of Energy University Nuclear Science, Engineering and Health Physics Act (H.R. 3828) was introduced by Illinois Rep. Judy Biggert, a member of the committees on Science and Education & the Workforce.



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In addition to funding research and training programs, the legislation calls on the Energy Department to develop a graduate and undergraduate fellowship program to attract new students, and to assist universities in recruiting and retaining new faculty.

“Congresswoman Biggert is taking an important step to retain U.S. leadership in nuclear technologies that benefit all Americans,” said NEI Executive Vice President Angelina Howard. “We encourage Congress to rally behind this important legislation to keep our nation’s nuclear infrastructure stocked with the brightest minds and most capable people.”

The legislation warns that “universities are finding it increasingly difficult to fund the operational costs of their research and training reactors.” The number of university reactors operating nationwide has fallen to 27, a 50 percent reduction since 1980, while the number of four-year degree programs has decreased to about 25.

Speaking today at NEI’s Nuclear Energy R&D Summit, Biggert said H.R. 3828 focuses on four components to ensure a future for nuclear technology: students, faculty, facilities and research. All must be addressed if nuclear technology and science are to flourish in the decades ahead, she said.

“Now more than ever nuclear scientists are needed for more than just operating nuclear plants. We need the expertise to educate and train the next generation of scientists, engineers and health physicists,” Biggert said.

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Rep. Biggert Introduces Nuclear Science Bill

Page 2 of 2

The legislation authorizes total spending of \$183.7 million over four years for research and fellowship programs, starting at \$35.2 million in fiscal year 2005 and rising to \$54.9 million in fiscal 2008. The largest investment, \$62.6 million, would go to the Nuclear Engineering Education Research and Nuclear Health Physics Program. The second-largest investment, \$51 million, would go toward the Innovations in Nuclear Infrastructure and Education Program.

On the recruitment side, \$15.2 million would go to the Junior Faculty Research Initiation Grant Program, with another \$12.5 million authorized for graduate and undergraduate fellowships.

“The nuclear energy industry’s long-term success depends on a new generation of highly trained nuclear engineers entering the field,” Howard said. “Congresswoman Biggert rightly recognizes that the government too needs talented new scientists and engineers so that the Energy Department, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the university research that these agencies use can continue at the highest levels of excellence.”

University reactors operate in the states of Arizona, California, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin.

Nuclear power plants operating in 31 states provide electricity to one of every five U.S. homes and businesses. They help keep the air clean by producing electricity without emitting pollution-causing gases into the atmosphere.

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