

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 28, 2006

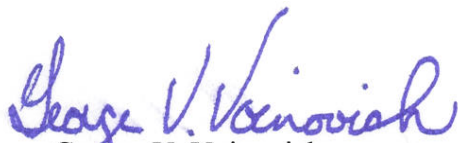
Dear Colleague:

We invite you to join us in signing the attached letter in support of funding for the Department of Energy's University Reactor Fuel Assistance and Support Program in the Fiscal Year 2007 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill. The President's FY2007 budget eliminates funding for this important program, and we are requesting that funding be restored to the FY2006 level of \$27 million.

In order to support the existing needs and planned expansion of nuclear power in this country, we need more scientists and engineers. The University Reactor Fuel Assistance and Support Program provides basic research and infrastructure support that is critical to helping universities sustain enrollment of graduate students and recruit top-notch undergraduates in fields related to nuclear energy production. Eliminating this program is certain to diminish nuclear engineering faculty support and graduate programs, significantly impacting the pool of qualified nuclear trained professionals available to both the government and industry.

We are deeply concerned that the elimination of this program puts university nuclear engineering educational programs at risk. We hope that you will join us in requesting that funding for this important program be restored to the FY2006 level of \$27 million. Please contact Brian Mormino at (202) 224-8098 or Jon Epstein at (202) 224-5521 with any questions.

Sincerely,


George V. Voinovich


Jeff Bingaman

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Pete Domenici
Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Domenici and Ranking Member Reid:

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2007 Department of Energy (DOE) budget, we request that you support university nuclear science and engineering and restore funding for the University Reactor Fuel Assistance and Support Program to the FY2006 level of \$27 million in the Energy and Water Appropriations Bill. The President's FY2007 budget proposes to eliminate funding for this vital program.

While a large portion of our existing nuclear scientists and engineers approach retirement, their workload is increasing. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission recently testified before the Environment and Public Works Committee that they expect to receive at least eleven applications for new plant construction between 2007 and 2009. Funded within the DOE Office of Nuclear Energy Science and Technology, the University Reactor Fuel Assistance and Support Program provides important support for university programs that produce the critical expertise our nation needs in these areas. The program has been an important factor in providing:

- Scholarships for undergraduate and fellowships for graduate students;
- Research funding for graduate students and faculty in basic research in nuclear science and engineering via the Nuclear Engineering Educational Research program (NEER); and
- Infrastructure support for the university research and training reactors (URTRs) via the Innovations in Nuclear Infrastructure and Education program (INIE) and URTR fuel assistance.

Federal support has been critical in stemming the tide of nuclear engineering department closures and URTR shutdowns. The Nuclear Energy Research Advisory Committee (NERAC) report on Nuclear Science and Engineering programs (NERAC Blue Ribbon Panel Report, 2000) highlighted the near-crisis status. The report noted that over the previous two decades, both the number of URTRs and nuclear science and engineering programs had decreased significantly. Support for student aid, infrastructure, and basic research through this program's funding has been a catalyst for the reversal of downward trends in nuclear engineering educational programs and URTRs. DOE funding has also leveraged substantial additional support by industry through the Department's Matching Grant program and other financial donations.

This support is vital to the nation's nuclear engineering departments and programs in their efforts to sustain enrollment of graduate students and recruit top-notch undergraduates in fields related to nuclear energy production. Funding for the nation's only program for nuclear engineering faculty and graduate programs should not be eliminated when the need for nuclear technical competence to meet our national security, energy, environmental, and economic needs is increasing. We must have more "human capital" to lead the national laboratories, utilities, private companies, government, and universities, to help guarantee our national security and secure future energy sources, and to enhance scientific, medical, and industrial applications of nuclear science and technology.

The Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Clean Air, Climate Change, and Nuclear Safety recently held an oversight hearing of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The NRC Commissioners testified that they believe the Administration's proposal to eliminate this program will have a significant impact on the pool of qualified nuclear trained professionals available both to the NRC as well as to the nuclear industry at a time when this country desperately needs more nuclear scientists and engineers.

Given the anticipated growth of nuclear power in this country and increased need for expertise, we urge you to restore funding for the University Reactor Fuel Assistance and Support Program to \$27 million in the FY2007 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill. We are very appreciative of your leadership and grateful for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,
