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Media Contacts:

Sarah Hawkins

212-446-1890

Shawkins@sloanepc.com

John Neurohr

Center for American Progress Action Fund

202-481-8182

Jneurohr@americanprogressaction.org

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, T. Boone Pickens and John Podesta Release Letter to President Barack Obama Urging Action on Clean-Energy Infrastructure

Center for American Progress Action Fund Issues Policy Paper "Wired for Progress 2.0: Building a National Clean -Energy Smart Grid"

Builds on February 23, 2009 National Clean Energy Project Summit

Washington, DC, Wednesday, April 1, 2009 – Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), energy executive T. Boone Pickens and Center for American Progress Action Fund president and CEO John Podesta, released today a letter to United States President Barack Obama, thanking him for his leadership to date on clean energy and urging him to, “recommit your efforts to rapidly build the infrastructure for a new energy economy – using all the policy and leadership tools at your disposal.” The letter was accompanied by a policy research paper, written by Bracken Hendricks and published by the Center for American Progress Action Fund, entitled “*Wired for Progress 2.0: Building a National Clean-Energy Smart Grid.*” Both documents were released at a press conference in Washington, DC, which featured Senator Reid and Messrs. Pickens and Podesta.

Senator Reid, Mr. Pickens and Mr. Podesta indicated in their letter that they came from differing areas of responsibility, political views and experience, but were united behind a common goal of ensuring that the nation meets its energy challenges which, “begins with rewiring the electricity grid to facilitate large-scale use of renewable energy, dramatic gains in energy efficiency, and the move to clean domestic transportation fuels to reduce the economic, environmental and national security risks posed by our ever-increasing foreign oil dependence.”

Commenting on the letter and the research paper Senator Reid said, “Investing in renewable energy is investing in jobs. Developing this industry is the key to economic and energy security for Nevada and the Nation. There has been a lot of talk over the past few years about the importance of developing our nation’s clean energy resources, but as we learned during the National Clean Energy Summit in Las Vegas last summer, transmission remains one of our biggest obstacles. I am encouraged that the Obama administration is aware of the challenge and hope that this report -- the product of February’s National Clean Energy Project -- will provide the President’s team with the support necessary to move forward on our shared goals.”

Mr. Pickens said, “Building the infrastructure and the smart grid that will be able to distribute power from the wind and solar corridors to rest of the nation are essential to delivering on the promise of clean and renewable energy. This will create jobs, revitalize our economy and make our nation safer and more secure. Along with this effort on clean energy infrastructure, we need to focus on energy conservation and efficiency and sharpen our efforts to reduce our dependence on foreign oil by using our vast domestic natural gas resources in fleet transportation. I am encouraged by the progress we are making on clean energy infrastructure and more focused than ever on getting off foreign oil.”

“During this time of economic downturn, we need to reinvest in the basic infrastructure of our economy,” said John D. Podesta, president and CEO of the Center for American Progress Action Fund. “Today there is no more fundamental economic challenge than solving global warming in a way that creates good jobs and drives new growth and competitiveness.

Rebuilding our electricity infrastructure around our renewable resources is smart economic policy and smart energy policy. This issue is this generation’s interstate highway system -- it is a national problem requiring a national solution -- and the federal government must act quickly to get it done.”

The Center for American Progress Action Fund originally offered the discussion draft of “*Wired for Progress*” at the National Clean Energy Project Summit on February 23, 2009 at the Newseum in Washington, DC and the final policy paper, “*Wired for Progress 2.0: Building a National Clean-Energy Smart Grid*,” offers a framework for compromise to build support for rewiring the nation’s electricity grid was released today. The National Clean Energy Project was moderated by United Nations Foundation President and former U.S. Senator Tim Wirth and participants included Senator Reid, Mr. Pickens, Mr. Podesta, Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar, Secretary of Energy Stephen Chu, President Bill Clinton, and Vice President Al Gore along with other leaders from congressional and state leadership, business, labor, and advocacy. The event focused on the challenge of capturing this energy opportunity and helped refine and advance the policy agenda to build political will in support of a clean, reliable and intelligent energy infrastructure for the 21st century.

The policy paper was the product of extensive outreach to stakeholders undertaken by the Center for American Progress Action Fund in collaboration with the UN Foundation’s Energy Future Coalition. Among the elements in the policy paper, were four key principles to guide the nation’s efforts including:

- First, a national clean energy smart-grid must be well planned, building on existing efforts, giving states and communities a strong voice in the process, and designing national electricity network to our renewable energy resources.

- Second, this sustainable grid infrastructure must actually get built. This will require stronger authorities to permit and site these lines, with serious environmental review and local engagement, but with an equal commitment to see projects through to completion.
- Third, costs must be shared broadly so that no single state or groups of rate-payers are left to carry these investments alone. Moving to a clean energy infrastructure is a national problem that will require a national solution and shared commitment to investment.
- Fourth, this new grid must be built for the purpose of transitioning to low carbon energy – It must be green. A more secure and resilient grid is important in its own right, but if we rebuild the grid without emphasizing this goal, there is a danger that we could unintentionally increase the rate of global warming. Instead, we must seek assurance that a more robust transmission system contributes to building a low-carbon economy.

About the National Clean Energy Project

Today's event was convened by the Center for American Progress Action Fund. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid was Honorary Chair. The forum grew out of the National Clean Energy Summit convened in 2008 by Sen. Reid, the Center for American Progress Action Fund, and the University Nevada Las Vegas. Today's forum focused on modernizing and expanding the electricity grid, integrating energy efficiency and distributed generation into operation and regulation, rapidly increasing transmission capacity for renewable energy and reducing our nation's dependence on foreign oil by using clean domestic alternative transportation fuels.

A video of the event and other information available at: www.nationalcleanenergyproject.org

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