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Virginia Clean Energy Innovation Bank Invests in Future of Nuclear Workforce with Grant to George Mason University

RICHMOND, VA—The Virginia Clean Energy Innovation Bank—powered by the Virginia Department of Energy (Virginia Energy)—has announced a strategic investment in Virginia's nuclear energy workforce development, with the approval of a grant to George Mason University (GMU) for the installation of a Small Modular Reactor (SMR) Control Room Simulator.

The state-of-the-art SMR simulator, known as the Energy Exploration (E2) Center, was developed by NuScale Power and will enable students, professionals, and future energy leaders to gain hands-on experience with a critical aspect of the state's growing nuclear energy infrastructure.

"This investment is part of a growing portfolio of projects showing that Virginia is setting the pace for energy innovation across the nation," **said Governor Glenn Youngkin.** "With the world's first commercial fusion reactor being built in Chesterfield, investments in new SMRs by Dominion and AEP, and now, a cutting-edge educational environment to train the next generation of nuclear engineers and technicians—Virginia's energy future isn't just bright, it's also reliable, affordable, and increasingly clean."

GMU was a natural partner for this project, having been instrumental in advancing Virginia's SMR development efforts and publishing SMR curriculum for the Commonwealth. The university will house the simulator in the new Fuse building on its Mason Square campus in Arlington and cover annual licensing fees to sustain operations. The installation will be completed in spring 2025.

"George Mason University is proud to play a leading role in Virginia's clean energy future by educating and training the workforce of tomorrow," said **Liza Wilson Durant, PhD, Associate Provost for Strategic Initiatives and Community Engagement** and a professor and associate dean at the College of Engineering and Computing. "Through cutting-edge research and hands-on learning opportunities, we're preparing our students to become the next generation of energy professionals who will drive innovation across the Commonwealth."

The SMR simulator will replicate the actual working environment of an SMR plant, providing extensive training opportunities, including a 12-unit, 4-operator workstation control room configuration and a comprehensive set of malfunction scenarios, accident analysis events, and operational training. This tool will be essential in ensuring Virginia's workforce is equipped to meet the growing energy demands of the future.

"A reliable, advanced energy sector is critical to sustaining our position as the nation's best state for business," said **Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Caren Merrick. "**By supporting cutting-edge technologies like SMRs, we're ensuring a resilient power supply while also creating high-quality jobs, attracting new industries, and strengthening Virginia's competitive edge in the global economy**."**

This grant is made possible through the Virginia Clean Energy Innovation Bank (VCEIB), a program created within Virginia Energy in 2024 to accelerate the deployment of clean power generation and energy infrastructure across the Commonwealth. VCEIB serves as a hub for mobilizing public and private capital to bridge critical financing gaps in

the clean energy sector, prioritizing projects that strengthen Virginia's energy grid such as advanced nuclear, grid modernization, carbon capture technologies, and beyond.

"Virginia's energy demand is growing faster than any time since World War II. To meet this unprecedented demand, we need unprecedented solutions," said **Virginia Energy Director Glenn Davis**. "That's why we created the Energy Bank. Its unique financing structure helps us identify committed public and private partners, invest in a wide range of innovative clean energy solutions like this SMR simulator at GMU, and ensure that our grid has what it needs to keep Virginia's economy moving forward."

When the simulator opens later this year, it will offer opportunities for public education and engagement, helping Virginians better understand the benefits of Small Modular Reactors and the role of nuclear power in achieving a clean, reliable, and affordable energy future.

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