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UCSB Institute for Energy Efficiency's Summit Focuses on a Sustainable Future

Some of the best and brightest minds in the field of energy efficiency gathered in Santa Barbara Wednesday morning to share ideas and discuss the newest developments in what has become a mutual goal for science, technology, industry, and public policy at the UC Santa Barbara Summit on Energy Efficiency.

"We've seen a lot of progress in our country in becoming energy efficient and we're in a much better position than we were five years ago," said John Bowers, founding director of the campus's Institute for Energy Efficiency (IEE), in his introduction to the two-day summit. "Our goal is a future where energy is used efficiently and waste is minimized; a future where conflicts over scarce energy resources do not dominate the political climate; and a future in which we live in equilibrium with the natural resources of our planet and ensure that they are available for subsequent generations."

With the theme "Materials for a Sustainable Energy Future," the 2013 summit covers the close relationship between the science of sustainability and the technology and engineering necessary to make it happen. A series of moderated panel discussions between scientists, engineers, and experts in industry, explore topics such as critical materials for energy technologies, energy efficient information and communications technology, electrochemical energy storage technology, and perspectives from the

utilities in transitioning toward clean energy.

Meanwhile, Steven Chu, 1997 Nobel Prize winner in physics, former United States Secretary of Energy and the first scientist to head the U.S. Department of Energy, gave in his opening keynote address a brief overview of recent innovations in materials science with respect to energy efficiency and generation. He also participated in a brief chat with Jeff Henley, chairman of the Oracle Corporation, whose recent $50 million gift to UCSB, is expected to propel engineering and energy efficiency research on the campus.

"I certainly think that the best way to obtain results is to put more [money] into research –– universities, startup companies, big companies –– and little into development," Chu said, commenting on the notion that investments, subsidies, and donations are better spent on basic research. The serious companies, he said, would be more likely to spend their own money on the development side of the project.

In response to a question on the economic and political reality of achieving sustainability, Chu noted that "there is a chance" that master limited partnerships –– tax structures available mostly to fossil fuel technology companies –– could be made available to renewable energy companies, to level the economic playing field between traditional and new fuel sources.

Panel discussions on the second day of the summit will include topics such as electrochemical energy storage technologies, high efficiency power electronics, and doubling energy productivity by 2030.

The 2013 UC Santa Barbara Summit on Energy Efficiency is taking place Wednesday, May 1, and Thursday, May 2, at Fess Parker's Doubletree. Sponsors include Southern California Edison, Corning, Stradling Attorneys at Law, Yardi, and transphorm.

[RETURN TO TOP] † Top image: UCSB alumnus Jeff Henley, left, the co-chair of the Campaign for UC Santa Barbara, discusses energy efficiency issues with Steven Chu, former U.S. Secretary of Energy, during the first day of the Institute for Energy Efficiency's Summit.

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