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Gov. Henry Proposes Bioenergy Center to Make Oklahoma Global Leader in Biofuels Research

Oklahoma City – As part of growing efforts nationwide to reduce the United States' crippling dependence on foreign oil, Gov. Brad Henry announced today an ambitious proposal to create a world-class Oklahoma Bioenergy Center to focus on research, development and education. If approved by the Legislature, the OBC would pool top researchers from throughout Oklahoma as well as across the nation.

“With 60 percent of the nation’s oil supply coming from foreign countries, many of which are openly hostile to the U.S., the need for renewable energy is clearly a matter of national security,” the Governor said. “Not only would the Oklahoma Bioenergy Center play a vital role in reducing America’s dependence on foreign oil, but it would be a great boon for Oklahoma in a number of ways. This institute would help diversify our state’s economy, protect our environment, create high-paying jobs and contribute to a revitalization of rural Oklahoma.”

Gov. Henry said Oklahoma is ideally suited to have a leading role in biofuels and bioenergy research. The state produces many of the most promising energy crops, such as switchgrass and other native grasses, and Oklahoma boasts a long and venerable tradition in energy and agriculture. The University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University and the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation would be founding consortium members and integral to the mission of the OBC.

Biofuels research supported by the OBC would include development of feedstocks (primarily cellulosic biomass), collection and transportation, conversion technologies and distribution. Because the center would provide a particular boost for the state’s rural and agricultural economy, it would also feature an education component to help interested farmers and ranchers make the transition to energy crops and adopt best management practices.

The Governor announced the initiative this afternoon at a news conference at the state Capitol. He was joined by Oklahoma Energy Secretary David Fleischaker, Environment Secretary Miles Tolbert and Agriculture Secretary Terry Peach.

Gov. Henry said the Bioenergy Center could be funded with \$40 million over a four-year

period.

“It is important that we move forward now,” he said. “In President Bush’s State of the Union address, he spoke at length about a new federal emphasis on biofuels. By creating the OBC, Oklahoma will be at the forefront of the push for renewable energy as private industry and the federal government make significant investments in such research and development efforts.”

Coupled with the state’s oil and gas industry, Gov. Henry said, the OBC would make Oklahoma a leader in the energy arena.

“A thriving oil and gas industry certainly does not nullify our need to pursue other sources of energy,” the Governor said. “In fact, more and more oil companies today are making the necessary investments in alternative energy. Aside from the concerns stemming from our dependence on foreign oil, the fact is that oil continues to get harder and harder to find and more expensive to produce. The emerging economic powers of China and India only mean more intense competition for the oil that does exist.

“It only makes sense that we will need every arrow in our quiver to face the challenges of energy production and usage in the 21st century and beyond. With the Oklahoma Bioenergy Center, Oklahoma can make a tremendous contribution to the challenges ahead.”

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