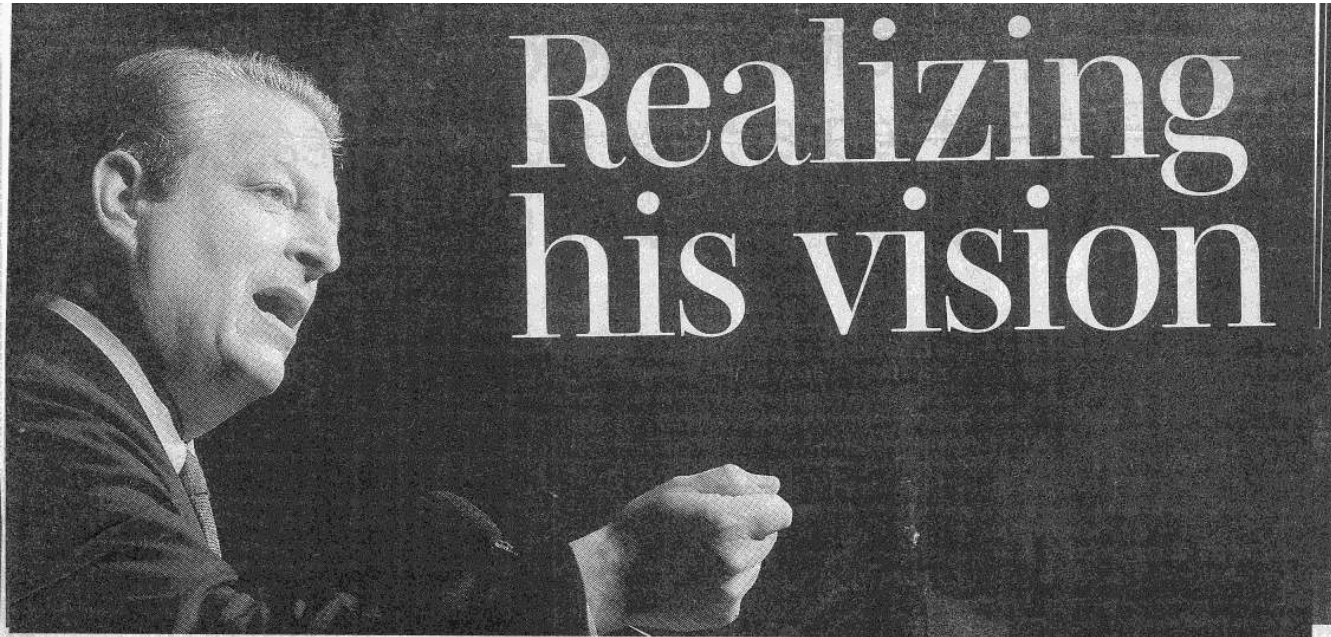


THE SUN

Realizing his vision

Former Vice President Al Gore calls for a clean energy future during a July 17 speech in Washington: "Our dangerous overreliance on carbon-based fuels is at the core of all three of these challenges — the economic, environmental and national security crises."

TIM SLOAN [AFP/GETTY IMAGES].

BY TERYN NORRIS AND JESSE JENKINS

Al Gore's ambitious call for 100 percent domestic clean energy within 10 years strongly evoked President John F. Kennedy's "moon shot" speech. But a better starting point on the road map for today's clean energy transformation may be where the space race began: *Sputnik*.

Fifty years ago, in the wake of the launch of *Sputnik*, the federal government authorized the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958. The legislation provided billions of dollars to inspire and train a new generation of young innovators to confront the Soviet challenge. It was a critical first step toward developing the human capital necessary to put a man on the moon and invent the technologies that catapulted our world into the Information Age.

Today, we face a new *Sputnik* moment as we confront the defining challenge of our time: energy. The United States is in an energy crisis. Energy prices are rapidly escalating, foreign energy dependency is increasing, and global warming continues unabated, presenting grave threats to vital national interests. As Mr. Gore's speech noted, "Our dangerous overreliance on carbon-based fuels is at the core of all three of these challenges — the economic, environmental and national security crises." The key to solving these crises is the rapid development and deployment of new, affordable, clean energy technologies and infrastructure.

The energy industry employs more than 1 million Americans and serves as the foundation of our modern economy, but nearly half of our energy work force is expected to retire over the next decade. The energy crisis worsens each day, yet American universities are graduating fewer students each year in the crucial fields of mathematics, science and engineering. We cannot allow these trends to continue.

Just as the NDEA was a critical first step toward winning the space race, overcoming the American energy crisis will require new, large-scale public investments in our nation's educational infrastructure. These investments will equip a new generation of Americans with the highest-caliber intellectual and human capital and inspire them to tackle energy as their genera-

tional undertaking. The time is now for a National Energy Education Act.

It is imperative that we transform our nation's universities and colleges into multidisciplinary hubs of energy innovation that will churn out top-notch young professionals and real-world energy solutions. We must also ensure that our vocational and technical colleges are equipped to prepare tomorrow's work force for their critical role in building a new energy economy.

A National Energy Education Act could be administered through the Department of Energy and National Science Foundation to provide support in a variety of areas, including grants to expand national laboratories to focus on the energy sciences; undergraduate financial aid and loan forgiveness for students willing to enter energy-related fields; energy efficiency-related service-learning opportunities; and new work force development programs at our community and technical colleges.

America's clean energy transformation will not occur overnight, nor will

it occur over 10 years. The *Apollo* project is a powerful and inspiring metaphor, but ultimately it is inadequate to describe the scale of transformation necessary to overcome the energy challenge. Transforming our nation's entire energy economy — let alone the global energy economy — will require a level of expertise, innovation and generational effort unlike any before, and it will take a lifetime to achieve.

Our generation is ready. We have seen an overwhelming hunger for a new inspirational vision and purpose for our nation. We simply need our government to embrace this new *Sputnik* moment and provide the leadership and resources necessary to confront the energy challenge.

New public investments in energy education will once again pave the way for a broader national undertaking — for a national clean energy transformation and the revolutionary developments in clean energy technology and infrastructure that will catapult America into a new era of prosperity and security.

Teryn Norris and Jesse Jenkins are co-directors of Breakthrough Generation, a youth-led organization working to inspire America to invest and innovate toward a clean energy future.

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