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Bill Gates visit to Idaho validates innovation role for national laboratories

IDAHO FALLS — Privately funded research utilizing government owned facilities validates the important role national laboratories have in advancing innovation. Bill Gates, American business magnate and chair of the nuclear reactor startup company TerraPower, LLC, and his staff toured the Materials and Fuels Complex at Idaho National Laboratory. TerraPower has engaged Idaho National Laboratory to support certain aspects of design for Terrapower's traveling wave reactor, and the visit focused on demonstrating the lab's expertise and capabilities. During his visit on Wednesday of this week, he proclaimed the studies conducted by scientists and engineers as "incredibly important."

When addressing employees after his tour Gates said, "Getting to visit INL was really enlightening. It was amazing to see reactor fuel analysis and how it can be conducted safely in a hot cell environment."

"TerraPower has many cooperative projects and there are lots of partnerships, but our work with INL is singularly important," said Gates. TerraPower has gained attention for both its traveling wave reactor design and the financial backing of clean technology investors. Several Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADAs) established over the past few years enable the company to receive technical insight from the nation's nuclear energy laboratory and use its vast capabilities.

"We enjoyed showing off our experienced researchers and one-of-a-kind capabilities for Mr. Gates," said Laboratory Director John Grossenbacher. "His interest in nuclear energy and INL's contributions helps the industry's future and reinforces the value of DOE's national laboratory complex."

CRADAs and other agreements exemplify how INL helps advance industrial development by sharing its expertise with both start-ups and established energy companies. The formal agreements signed with TerraPower are part of a long DOE tradition to make national lab capabilities available to businesses developing new technologies.

"The lab's rich history of nuclear energy research has established capabilities and created a wealth of information that will help TerraPower as it moves forward." said Doug Toomer, INL's director of industry programs for Nuclear Science and Technology.

One of INL's primary missions is to help develop nuclear fuels with significantly improved performance. As a result, the lab has extensive expertise in nuclear fuel behavior and design. The CRADAs between INL and TerraPower take advantage of this expertise and cover a number of areas from sharing data and analyses gleaned from operation of the Experimental Breeder Reactor-II, to fabrication and irradiation of advanced nuclear fuel rods followed by post-irradiation examination.

"When a private company, such as TerraPower, shows interest in what INL does and formalizes a partnership to utilize our expertise and unique infrastructure, we know that we are doing a great job and making a meaningful impact on nuclear energy development, " said Kemal Pasamehmetoglu, INL's associate laboratory director for Nuclear Science and Technology.

Such INL support is available and used by a number of companies in the nuclear energy industry, including other nuclear start-ups such as NuScale Power, and veteran companies such as Babcock & Wilcox, Westinghouse and General Electric. CRADAs and Work for Others agreements are just two of the mechanisms that enable private industry to access the expertise, facilities and capabilities that exist in the DOE's national laboratory complex.

TerraPower is a nuclear energy technology company, headquartered in Bellevue, Wash. It is a privately funded company with the mission to advance scalable, sustainable, low-carbon and cost-competitive energy solutions. TerraPower's traveling wave reactor is a central project that presents new innovation opportunities in the fields of engineering, physics and computer science. Since the company's inception in 2007, it has grown to nearly 70 full-time professionals who engage diverse technical consultants and partners to responsibly improve options for global access to clean, secure and affordable electricity. Visit TerraPower at www.terrapower.com.

INL is one of the DOE's 10 multiprogram national laboratories. The laboratory performs work in each of DOE's strategic goal areas: energy, national security, science and environment. INL is the nation's leading center for nuclear energy research and development. Day-to-day management and operation of the laboratory is the responsibility of Battelle Energy Alliance.

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