

ENERGY AND MINERAL SCHOOLS REINVESTMENT ACT

Background and Need for EMSRA

Without an adequate workforce, the basic building blocks of the economy – energy and minerals cannot be domestically produced. Workforce availability has become a significant problem for the domestic petroleum and mining industries. Industry reports worker shortages at all levels of operations – including skilled miners, rig workers and engineers and geologists.

At a Resources subcommittee hearing in the 108th Congress, witnesses from both the petroleum and mining industry confirmed the lack of readily available personnel. The domestic petroleum and mining industries pay some of the highest wages and salaries to hard working men and women who are qualified. The Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission's Petroleum Professionals Blue Ribbon Task Force called on all levels of government and industry to take steps to address the professional worker shortage.

Enrollments in domestic petroleum and mining programs have been in sharp decline for the last two decades and many of the formerly active schools of petroleum and mining engineering have been closed - the industries looking for qualified people to fill these jobs are often forced to turn to foreign schools to fill their vacancies. Industry and professional society reports have repeatedly warned that not enough students are graduating from these programs schools to replace the large number of active engineers and geologists who will be eligible to retire in the next 10 years.

Economic pressures and demands for cost savings placed on the University Systems have forced school leaders to scrutinize high cost programs, often leading to the closure of petroleum and mining despite the obvious need for their continued existence – the nation is now down to 17 petroleum schools (from 34 in 1983) and 12 mining schools (from 25 in 1983). Federal funding of studies and research in petroleum and mining has been under attack by OMB and the death of the old Federal Bureau of Mines killed all funding for mining schools under the Mining and Mineral Resource Institutes Act of 1984.

What EMSRA does

It repeals the currently unfunded and inoperative Mining & Mineral Resource Institutes Act of 1984 which vested the Secretary of the Interior with responsibility for the program. It makes it national policy to preserve and foster the human capital necessary for National economic, energy and minerals security. The Act declares that petroleum and mining schools and applied geology and geophysics schools which produce the human capital are national assets which will be assisted with Federal funds and creates funding to maintain and encourage the growth of the energy and minerals workforce to meet the national needs.

EMSRA focuses on the exploration and production of energy and mineral resources and increasing the amount of resources available for the domestic economy. Like the repealed 1984 Act, EMSRA continues to keep the Secretary of the Interior in charge, but the process also creates a strong voice for the states and industry.

Funds go to support existing programs at Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)-accredited petroleum and mining schools, applied geology and geophysics programs, and to individuals for degrees in petroleum & mining engineering, petroleum/mining geology & geophysics and mineral economics. All schools accepting the funds have a duty to increase the number of undergraduates enrolled in the supported programs and to produce more engineers, geologists and geophysicists for the petroleum and mining industries. All students receiving a scholarship have a duty to complete a degree program in energy and mineral resource geosciences or engineering.