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January 21, 2011

The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Jon Jarvis
Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Chu, Secretary Salazar and Director Jarvis,

My office has been informed that the Department of Energy's Solar Decathlon will not take place on the National Mall this year or perhaps ever again because of a decision by the National Park Service. I am writing to ask you to reconsider that decision.

America's clean energy future depends on the youthful ambition, innovation, and hard work that will be on display by the hundreds of students competing in this year's Solar Decathlon. Universities from around the globe will be here to display homes they built powered solely by the sun. Given these students' efforts to create the sustainable homes of the future, I can think of no gathering more deserving of the use of the Mall than this event.

Moving this event from the Mall sends the wrong message. Secretary Salazar, you have spoken of your eagerness to be involved in crafting an "energy moon shot." Secretary Chu, you have recently called upon America to recognize that China's recent gains in clean energy industries should serve as a new "Sputnik moment" for America to reclaim its clean energy leadership. The students who have worked for two years toward this year's Solar Decathlon have listened and responded to these calls to arms. These students deserve to showcase their talents at our country's center stage and to be part of the great history of the Mall.

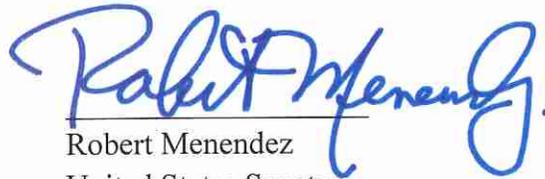
Over a year ago I issued a challenge to the universities of New Jersey to participate in this event. I am proud that, in response to my challenge, two teams from New Jersey have been selected to compete this year. Rutgers and the New Jersey Institute of Technology are collaborating on one project and the Stevens Institute of Technology and Parsons School of

Design, are collaborating on another. I am excited to know that this competition has served as a vehicle for such collaborations, and I am very eager to see the innovative homes these teams produce. However, if the event is moved, I do not know how I will explain to them why the Mall – which has been made available for softball games and to Glenn Beck, Jon Stewart, and Stephen Colbert for recent rallies -- was not available to them.

I've always understood the National Mall to be the meeting place for the American people. The National Mall is the place where Martin Luther King Jr. shared his dream, where we celebrated our nation's bicentennial, where the Million Man March took place, and where the AIDS quilt was displayed. It was even where we most recently celebrated President Obama's historic inauguration. I simply can't understand what its purpose will be, if not to provide a place for events of national significance. And I believe innovation is a critical issue for our nation, so we should be spotlighting events like the Solar Decathlon on our nation's center stage, the National Mall.

For these reasons, I am respectfully asking you to reconsider your decision and ensure that the Solar Decathlon can take place on the Mall, now and in the future, just as these students had envisioned.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator