

ASU announces new Global Institute for the Future of Energy

\$50M gift from Bob Zorich launches institute designed to serve as a vanguard for energy education and innovation

By Marshall Terrill , ASU News
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The idea had been tugging at him for years. Whenever Bob Zorich read headlines about energy policy or listened to debates that felt more like shouting matches than discussions, the same thought returned: People don't really understand energy.

It wasn't their fault, he knew. For generations, the subject had been siloed or glossed over, reducing something as fundamental as power and fuel to a few scattered lessons. The result was predictable — a public underprepared to wrestle with the choices that would shape society's global energy future.

And so, Zorich has decided to fund the creation of the [Global Institute for the Future of Energy](#) at Arizona State University with a \$50 million gift. The new initiative, a collaboration between the [Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory](#) and [Thunderbird School of Global Management at ASU](#), was launched in Houston on Tuesday during a panel event featuring Zorich, ASU leadership and industry experts.

The collaboration between the two ASU units will provide the institute with the energy expertise of the Global Futures Laboratory and the global education leadership of Thunderbird, and the vast international networks of both units.

"ASU has long been a pioneer in building bold, pragmatic solutions for the future. With an enrollment exceeding 194,000 students annually across its in-person campuses and online, ASU continues to fulfill its charter," said Zorich, managing partner and founder of Texas-based [EnCap Investments](#) and an alumnus of Thunderbird.

"President Michael Crow has taken a visionary and action-oriented approach to positioning the university as a leading center for research, educational excellence and global influence. For these reasons, I was excited to fund the formation of this energy institute at ASU because of the university's unique ability to scale and reach a global audience."

Zorich and Crow believe the institute will lead the way in energy education and innovation, helping people and organizations navigate and better understand complex energy issues. The institute will expand access to energy information and develop practical solutions that advance global energy systems while supporting human flourishing.

Zorich earned a master's degree in international management in 1974 from the American Graduate School of International Management (now Thunderbird). A steadfast advocate for the university, he has long supported its mission and ongoing commitment to high-quality education access at scale and to energy innovation.

Crow sees the new institute as vital to advancing the U.S. and the world's energy systems and everything that relies on it, from national security to economic development.

"Energy is central to nearly every facet of our daily lives, and we have to prepare now for an evolving energy future," Crow said. "With the rapid growth of AI and other fast-moving innovations, we have a responsibility to ready the next generation of energy leaders and solutions. Bob Zorich's visionary investment will empower our global understanding of energy, our vital literacy and how we can work together to develop the best paths forward."

In addition to providing seed money for the new institute, Zorich's gift will endow a chair, who will also serve as the director of the institute, to lead its work and create fellowships and scholarships to broaden access and opportunity.

Additionally, a portion of the gift will be allocated to sponsor "Energy Switch," a point-counterpoint show on Arizona PBS that is produced by Switch Energy Alliance. The show brings together renowned experts from government, nongovernmental organizations, academia and industry with different perspectives on important energy topics.

"Transforming our energy systems is not a choice, it is a necessity. But it is also one of the greatest opportunities of our time," said Peter Schlosser, vice president and vice provost of global futures and director of the Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory. "If we align our decisions, incentives and values with the realities of the need for a transition of the energy system, we create not only a sustainable future but a foundation for energy system economic prosperity."

The institute will focus on recruiting a new chair and core staff, and on developing curriculum for K-12, undergraduates, graduates, executives and the public, as well as public engagement opportunities.

In its second year, the institute will launch a fellowship and executive-in-residence program, bringing industry leaders directly into research, teaching and community engagement. It will also roll out a dynamic lineup of public programs — from a global energy conference and public lectures to online talks, hackathons and summer camps — sparking conversations and innovation in Arizona and beyond.

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Bob Zorich

Managing partner and founder of Texas-based EnCap Investments, Thunderbird alumnus and ASU donor

The challenge

The world faces a silent energy crisis. Nearly 7 billion people in developing nations are striving for more power to improve daily life, while 1 billion in developed nations keep expanding their technological reach. The result: Today's energy systems are straining under unprecedented pressure.

Zorich decided he couldn't sit on the sideline any longer. He wanted to change the way the world learned about energy.

"People really don't know where energy comes from, and 50 years ago when I started in this business, I was one of those people," Zorich said. "I knew there was a hole in the side of a car where I placed the gasoline nozzle, and that's what I knew. I had no idea the importance of energy."

His search for the right home led him back to a familiar place. More than half a century earlier, he had walked the halls of Thunderbird. Since then, the school had been folded into Arizona State University, a learning institution that had undergone its own transformation. Under Crow, ASU had become a global force, welcoming nearly 200,000 students each year, measuring success not by exclusion, but by inclusion and achievement.

That spirit of bold pragmatism resonated with Zorich. If he wanted to spark a movement in energy education, this was the soil where it could grow.

"Bob Zorich's visionary gift reflects the very spirit of Thunderbird — bringing together innovation, global perspective and practical impact to solve humanity's most pressing challenges," said Charla Griffy-Brown, director general and dean of Thunderbird School of Global Management. "Energy is the foundation of every economy, community and society, and this institute will prepare learners of all ages to engage with this challenge in thoughtful, pragmatic and transformative ways. We are honored to partner with Bob in creating a global hub that empowers the next generation of leaders."

Changing Futures campaign

This gift supports ASU's [Changing Futures campaign](#), a global effort to create lasting impact.

Zorich's vision has been clear from the start: The institute will not preach ideology but instead would arm learners — from curious kindergartners to seasoned professionals — with a practical understanding of energy, including its complexities, trade-offs and the global importance of energy systems. They will learn its history, explore its density and costs, weigh its technological advantages and grapple with the realities of access and effectiveness.

"There's a difference between affordable energy and aspirational energy. How do we gain energy abundance going into the future?" Zorich said. "The institute will look at what makes sense, what's cost-effective and what creates the best answer for the most people."

The institute is partnering with a trusted foundation for content development and distribution: "Switch Energy," known for its energy-inclusive approach. But this is only the beginning. The institute will be transdisciplinary, weaving together economics, science, policy and technology. It will also be global, reaching beyond Arizona's borders to classrooms and communities worldwide. And most importantly, it will be learner-centered, designed to spark curiosity rather than dictate conclusions.

For Zorich, the institute is more than an academic initiative. It is a personal mission, a legacy. He believes the choices humanity makes about energy will shape global societies for generations. And he is determined that those choices be guided not by rhetoric, but by understanding.

"This is an opportunity to have a global impact on the future of energy, and ASU is uniquely positioned for that," Zorich said. "I think anyone who has a conscience wants to make the world a better place. And if you can do that, why wouldn't you do that?"

What others are saying

Patrick McDermott, chief global advancement officer of the ASU Foundation: "Bob Zorich's generosity is more than a gift — it's a catalyst for transformation. His commitment empowers Arizona State University to lead the way in energy education and innovation, expanding access and opportunity for learners and communities worldwide. Bob's vision and partnership inspire us to think boldly and act collaboratively, ensuring that ASU remains at the forefront of global impact and positive change."

Scott Woelfel, Arizona PBS general manager: "The gift's sponsorship of 'Energy Switch' allows Arizona PBS to present this vitally important program to viewers all across the country, providing the thoughtful and in-depth analysis of an issue that people have come to trust and expect from their local PBS station. As energy becomes an even more important consideration for the nation, 'Energy Switch' can help drive informed conversations in numerous communities."

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Main image



Photo by Chris Goulet/Arizona State University

Text image(s)



Bob Zorich