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Sent by Email

AI Strike Team & Advisory Committee
AI Horizons Summit Planning Committee
6425 Living Place
Pittsburgh, PA 15206

To the AI Strike Team and AI Horizons Summit Planning Committee,

The 15 below signed organizations are reaching out during the week of this year's AI Horizons Summit to highlight the need for clean alternative energy options for any AI growth in our region and the importance of giving local renewable energy leaders a seat at the table.

The AI Strike Team has placed a public emphasis on natural gas as one of Pittsburgh's top four competitive strengths in AI industry development. However, the Strike Team also has the opportunity to power the "AI revolution" with revolutionary clean energy technologies such as solar, wind, nuclear, geothermal, and hydropower. Rooftop solar has great potential to be installed on data centers and other large box buildings to maximize the use of space and the production of energy. Incorporating these alternatives into data center design could slightly reduce the need for fracked gas and demonstrate long-term sustainable thinking. Additionally, the Joint State Government Committee just released a staff study on Unearthing the Potential of Geothermal Energy Systems in Pennsylvania, which notes the energy demands of AI data centers and estimates that there are approximately 700 GWs of thermal resources within 13,000 feet of the surface available for cooling solutions.¹ Data shows that available underground heat could provide more than a thousand times the energy that Pennsylvanians consume every year.

We know that an exclusive emphasis on natural gas in the AI industry will lead to expanded fracking in our region, and we are concerned with how a gas-powered data center buildout may impact the health and environment of Southwestern PA communities. Many of our organizations work alongside residents who have experienced significant health problems, disturbances, and stress from oil and gas operations close to their homes. This region has borne the burden of industrial pollution for the past century, and we do not want to see this burden increase. Two gas fired power plants have already been proposed to support data centers in Upper Burrell and Homer City, with the Homer City site projected to be the largest gas power plant in the nation.

¹ DeWalt, Bryan, et al. "Unearthing the Potential of Geothermal Energy Systems in Pennsylvania." *Joint State Government Commission, General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. 2025.
<https://www.jsg.legis.state.pa.us/resources/documents/ftp/publications/2025-08-18%20Geo%20HR185%20Web.pdf>

The negative environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing operations are numerous and far-reaching. In Pennsylvania, communities have reported instances of air, water, soil, light, and noise pollution from well sites. “According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the oil and gas industry is the largest source of volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions in the United States.”² These contaminants may remain long after drilling has ceased: in Pennsylvania, researchers found elevated levels of VOC emissions up to five years after drilling.³ Contamination of our natural resources extends to groundwater and surface water, as researchers have also linked systemic increases in drinking water contaminants to the presence of oil and gas development sites. Strain on our communities’ resources, such as additional requirements for water and energy resources to power data centers, should also be taken into account: “[a] single data center can consume up to 5 million gallons of drinking water per day, enough to supply thousands of households or farms.”⁴ The water drain of a local data center buildout, in addition to the large amounts of water that new gas plants would use, could put strain on our water supply, especially for small utilities and in times of drought.

There are reliability and growth issues with expanded gas operations as well. Gas-fired generation accounted for 70% of unplanned outages in PJM Interconnection’s grid during Winter Storm Elliott in 2022.⁵ Meanwhile, according to some estimates, backlogs at turbine manufacturers and rising supply costs mean that building new gas power plants may take close to a decade and cost 2.5 times more than just a few years ago.⁶ Luckily, renewable technologies are quickly advancing to fill the gap. In March 2025, fossil fuels accounted for less than half of U.S. electricity generation for the first time, driven by record-high wind and solar output.⁷ Most of the projects sitting in PJM’s queue are solar, wind, and battery.

We ask you to consider data about the deleterious environmental and economic impacts of fracked gas in your work. For southwestern Pennsylvanians, fossil fuel industries following a “boom-and-bust” cycle have caused significant harm. It is crucial to account for residents’ health, safety, and well-being when planning the future of AI development in our region. We also implore you to consider the scientific urgency of addressing the climate crisis, which

² Black, Katie Jo, et. al. “Economic, Environmental, and Health Impacts of the Fracking Boom.” *Annu. Rev. Resour. Econ.* 2021. 13:311–34.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Olson, Eric. “Data centers draining resources in water-stressed communities”. *Univ. of Tulsa*. July 19, 2024. <https://utulsa.edu/news/data-centers-draining-resources-in-water-stressed-communities/>

⁵ Howland, Ethan. “Gas-fired generation accounted for 70% of unplanned outages in Winter Storm Elliott.” *Utility Dive*. July 18, 2023.

<https://www.utilitydive.com/news/pjm-winter-storm-elliott-report-gas-generation/688217/>

⁶ Anderson, Jared. “US gas-fired turbine wait times as much as seven years; costs up sharply.” *S&P Global*. May 20, 2025.

<https://www.spglobal.com/commodity-insights/en/news-research/latest-news/electric-power/052025-us-gas-fired-turbine-wait-times-as-much-as-seven-years-costs-up-sharply>

⁷ “Fossil fuels fall below 50% of US electricity for the first month on record.” *Ember*. April 4, 2025. <https://ember-energy.org/latest-updates/fossil-fuels-fall-below-50-of-us-electricity-for-the-first-month-on-record/>

demands that we transition away from fossil fuels as quickly as possible. We need to lead our region into the future – not repeat the energy past.

Therefore, we urge the AI Horizons Summit Planning Committee to promote discussion through plenaries on diversifying energy sources for AI and considering community impacts in future summit events. We know that this year's summit features some renewable energy-focused speakers, which is encouraging, but there is room for greater inclusion of both renewable energy speakers and community representatives. AI Horizons can foster true innovation by connecting renewable energy leaders, who are creating some of the fastest growing and least expensive energy on the market, with AI developers.

In closing, we are eager to share information and start a dialogue about this issue. Thank you for taking the time to consider the importance of a greater emphasis on renewable energy futures in your work. Ultimately, we both want Southwestern Pennsylvania to thrive for generations to come. We hope to foster a meaningful interchange between the AI Strike Team and Pennsylvania nonprofits in the future.

Signed,

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