Michigan to Get Battery Research Facilities

HOLLAND, Mich. (AP) — Michigan was selected for two new advanced battery research facilities as part of a five-year, up to $120 million partnership involving the U.S. Department of Energy, officials announced Friday.

U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow joined other officials including Energy Secretary Steven Chu to announce the project. She said in a release that one facility is planned for the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and the other at Michigan State University's Bioeconomy Institute in the southwestern Michigan city of Holland. Both are part of Argonne National Laboratory's Joint Center for Energy Storage Research.

The University of Michigan said it's expected to get $7 million and its portion will involve about a dozen researchers. Details about the Michigan State facility weren't available Friday afternoon.

Companies involved in the project include Midland-based Dow Chemical and Milwaukee-based Johnson Controls Inc. Johnson Controls announced last month it would buy the automotive business of battery maker A123 Systems Inc., which filed for bankruptcy protection, including its two Michigan factories.

Stabenow said in the release that the centers are "further cementing Michigan's global leadership role in the advanced battery industry."

"These new hubs will bring together Michigan's innovative businesses and universities from across the state to create more breakthroughs in advanced battery technologies right here in Michigan," she said.

Some people have been critical of the government's big investments in the technology, including the $249 million federal grant awarded to A123 Systems three years ago. The company's bankruptcy filing stoked Republican criticism of President Barack Obama's support for "green" energy companies and A123 became an issue in the presidential campaign.

Chu said in a release Friday that "tremendous advances" have come in the past few years.

"There are very good reasons to believe that advanced battery technologies can and will play an increasingly valuable role in strengthening America's energy and economic security ... upgrading our aging power grid and allowing us to take greater advantage of intermittent energy sources like wind and solar."

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