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STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN LARSON ON THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C.- ♦In the face of 8.4 million Americans out of work and three million jobs lost in the last three years, our most pressing domestic concern is the state of our economy. Tax relief aimed at the middle class, investing in the nation♦s infrastructure, education, and job-retraining programs are healthy steps in the right direction towards mending our economy. Making tax cuts aimed at the very wealthiest Americans permanent while the needs of the nation continue to go unmet and the deficit spins out of control at half a trillion dollars is just wrong-headed policy.

♦With respect to Iraq, I continue to support our troops serving overseas while opposing the policies of preemption and unilateralism that led us to this quagmire that has no clear exit strategy. Involving the international community using international forces to help establish the Iraqi government is the best way to bring about stability and bring U.S. troops home as quickly as possible. The administration♦s inability to gain the support of America♦s allies in this situation points to the fact this war was poorly planned and ill conceived. It is unfortunate that the administration's focus continues to be on controlling Iraq♦s economic resources rather than on allowing greater international involvement.

♦We also have an obligation to America♦s seniors and their healthcare that has yet to be fulfilled. The President recently signed legislation into law that purports to address prescription drug costs, but in reality is nothing more than a Medicare privatization plan masquerading as drug relief. The success of the law as it now stands depends on the unlikely prospect of private plans materializing, and even then it would not take effect until 2006. I will continue to work to enact legislation that would allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies to secure lower prescription drug costs for seniors, as the Department of Veterans Affairs does currently and this law specifically prohibits. This approach would reduce the outrageous cost of prescription drugs for Americans, and would not

cost taxpayers any significant amount.

◆Rather than focusing on the moon and Mars, however laudable those goals, Congress and the President must concentrate on our needs and obligations here on Earth,◆ said Larson.

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