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LARSON STATEMENT ON THE PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) gave the following statement on President Bush's inaugural address this afternoon.

◆Regardless of where one falls on the political spectrum, this is always a meaningful day,◆ said Larson. ◆While I obviously hoped that someone else would be taking the oath of office this afternoon, every presidential inauguration reminds us of the peaceful, constitutional flow of power in the United States and that is a source of great pride. The president sounded several hopeful themes in his speech and I applaud his call for public service and the healing divisions in our nation.

◆I echo the praise that the president had for our troops who have done a tremendous job under the most difficult of circumstances. However, despite his broad language and platitudes, he and his administration must face facts when it comes to our situation Iraq. While our troops have followed their orders and performed remarkably, the administration◆s unrealistic pre-war predictions and impossibly poor planning have rendered their foreign policy a failure.

◆It is long past the time for his administration to level with our troops and their families about the length of their deployments. The United States needs to build a clear path forward out of Iraq. We must establish a time certain for our troops to leave and ensure that international coalition troops take their place, which will require us to work with our allies. This will allow us to refocus our efforts on fighting al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. This effort needs to be matched with a real plan for energy independence and a humanitarian policy to stifle the growth of radicalism due to poverty and hunger in the world, which breeds generations of terrorists. This will truly expand freedom and help end tyranny across the globe, as the president said he wished to do.

◆The president alluded to a plan to partially privatize Social Security. While changes will certainly have to be made to the system over time, as Congress has done in the past when the situation called for it, the threats to Social Security's longevity are being wildly exaggerated. I cannot support a plan that calls for pouring money into private accounts. This will drain funds from the Social Security system, tie millions of retirements to the ups and downs of the financial markets and in the end could mean dramatically reduced benefits for retirees.

◆Despite the positive words in his speech, we have many difficult realities to face at home and abroad over the next four years. The president's massive tax cuts for the wealthy means we have the biggest deficits in the nation's history and are facing serious budget cuts to our most important priorities. The president and the Congress have a great deal of work ahead of us. I will continue working hard to protect the best interests of my constituents and the nation and I look forward to finding common ground wherever possible as we address the major issues facing the nation.◆

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