

LARSON PROPOSES PLAN TO CURB NATION'S RELIANCE ON FOSSIL FUEL Promotes Use of Fuel Cell Technology

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 30, 2000

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Promotes Use of Fuel Cell Technology WASHINGTON - In response to the country's ongoing energy crisis, Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today announced a four-point plan, called the Energy Independence Act of 2000. The proposed legislation is aimed at eliminating the country's dependence on fossil fuels, and bolstering the economy by investing in fuel cell technology research.

"We have been complacent," said Larson who chaired the Energy and Public Utilities Committee in the Connecticut State Senate before being elected to Congress. "Until last winter, in the midst of our strong economy, we had forgotten the hard lessons learned in the 1970s about the volatility of our reliance on fossil fuels. It is time to take aggressive action to change that," said Larson.

Although Larson has sponsored legislation in Congress to release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) and worked to pass legislation creating a Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve, he is convinced this is not enough to address the problem.

"The response from Congress and from the Department of Energy has not been sufficient to address the needs of Americans who are being forced to choose between putting food on their tables or gas in their cars. We are going to continue on this cycle until we wean ourselves off of our dependency on foreign oil. To do that we need a fundamental shift in the way we think about energy production," Larson stated today.

The United States currently imports approximately \$5 billion in foreign oil each month. Although oil companies have been blaming OPEC for the high price of gas at the pump, according to the testimony delivered before the House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday (June 28) by Public Citizen (a non-profit research organization), the first quarter profits of most of the world's major private oil companies have shown increases in some cases by over 400 percent compared to first quarter earnings just a year ago. Many analysts expect even larger profits for the oil companies from the 2nd quarter, which ends June 30.

"Continued reliance on foreign energy sources is simply unreliable and technologically unnecessary," Larson said. "With just a fraction of that kind of revenue invested in alternative, 'green' energy sources, we could make the United States self-sufficient with regard to energy by 2010."

For example, the Department of Defense has installed new fuel cell generators at 30 facilities in 17 different states, including one submarine base in Groton, Connecticut. The Groton fuel cell is connected to the base energy plant and has been operational since 1997. The Department of Defense estimates energy bill savings generated by the use of this fuel cell at approximately \$98,000 per year, and estimates a total cost savings of over \$3 million for the entire fleet of DOD fuel cells. The South County Hospital in Rhode Island estimates that its fuel cell generator will reduce its energy bills by \$60,000 to \$90,000 per year.

A report issued by the Department of Defense in 1998 to the Congressional Defense Committees on the Utilization and Demonstration of Fuel Cells states that fuel cells "offer[s] an attractive alternative for power generation, due to its ultrahigh energy-conversion efficiency and extremely low environmental emission." However, the report goes on to note "it has been estimated that a 50 percent reduction in capital cost will be required to make fuel cell technology economically viable for broad use."

Larson's new four-point plan is as follows:

- All proceeds determined to be derived from oil price manipulation through federal investigations shall be used to foster research in fuel cell development and manufacturing processes, and to strengthen the Federal Trade Commission's monitoring and enforcement programs to crack down on continued price manipulation.

- A \$1 billion dollar federal initiative will be created to direct programs such as advanced research and development in fuel cell technology, marketplace rebates for fuel cell investments, the integration of fuel cell generators for federal facilities and for fleets of government and government subsidized vehicles, and tax incentives to stimulate market development.

- The creation of an Energy Division within the White House's Office of Science and Technology (OSTP) to focus on the development of more progressive energy policy suitable for the 21st Century.

- The creation of a Fuel Cell Advisory Board within OSTP to foster the development and competitiveness of United States-based fuel cell programs, and to develop a strategic plan to ensure the United States is energy self-sufficient by 2010.

"Fuel cells are the energy source of the future," Larson stated. "They furnished power for the Gemini and Apollo spacecraft, and still provide electricity and water for the space shuttle with great success. It is time to mature this technology for use in the commercial market."

Fuel cells generate heat and electricity by facilitating a chemical reaction between hydrogen and oxygen. Since the fuel cell relies on chemistry and not combustion, emissions from this type of a system are much smaller than emissions from the cleanest fuel combustion processes, and instead of emitting dangerous hydrocarbons like combustion energy sources the only emission from fuel cells is water vapor.

Larson's plan is also aimed at fostering economic growth and creating new job markets. "The European and Asian markets are starting to pull ahead of us in developing fuel cell technology that is applicable for every day uses such as automobiles. The development of this technology could be as economically profound as the recent boom in the Information Technology sector," Larson stated, "and the United States should be in the lead of this 'green energy' technological revolution."

Larson intends to draft the proposed bill during the July District Work Period (July 3-7), and will introduce the legislation after Congress reconvenes on July 10.

Congressman Larson is serving his first term in Congress, and is a member of the House Science Subcommittee on Basic Research, and the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Research and Development.

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