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LARSON URGES STATE TO ASSERT LEADERSHIP IN FUEL CELL DEVELOPMENT

HARTFORD, CT ♦ U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) urged state lawmakers Friday to seize leadership in the development and use of fuel cell technology.

Larson, co-chair of the House Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Coalition, spoke of the economic and environmental pay off that the state would enjoy by leading the nation in the transition to a hydrogen economy at a forum on the economic potential of the state's fuel cell industry called by state President Pro Tem Donald E. Williams Jr.

The state legislature, in partnership with Gov. M. Jodi Rell, can make Connecticut a model that other states will emulate. Connecticut, he said, is already well positioned to take the lead because of the state's concentration of leading fuel cell companies. Connecticut is home to six fuel cell manufacturers whose reach extends across the globe. In fact, Connecticut's fuel cell industry is a world leader, accounting for more jobs than any where else. About 1,000 jobs in Connecticut are related to hydrogen and fuel cell technology.

♦ There is no question in my mind that we have to make the transition from a

petro economy to a hydrogen economy," Larson said. "A sense of urgency has to be driven home at every single level. The state legislative bodies in so many respects are going to be the entities that lead the way, that come up with the breakthroughs, that are able to think boldly and take us into the future. Connecticut will be the first in this area I am convinced."

Other states and nations are competing to be the first to widely commercialize fuel cells. Ohio, California and New York are among the states that are aggressively funding fuel cell initiatives. Larson noted that Connecticut investment and initiative will help ensure that Connecticut retains its dominant fuel cell sector.

"Governor Schwarzenegger has proposed a hydrogen highway from British Columbia to Baja, California," Larson added. "That's a bold initiative. We should be bolder. We can do it right here in the state of Connecticut. We can become the model and lead the way. We have the resources, the critical mass of skilled employees and the people with the technological aptitude to make it happen.... We need an Apollo Project for the country whose aim and goal is energy independence and whose focus should be making hydrogen the primary vehicle in which we get there. It is fully within our reach and our capability."

Connecticut can help the fuel cell industry push forward by using fuel cells for heating and cooling state buildings, for use in fleet vehicles and for use in bus transportation. It can also be more aggressive in promoting the technology through demonstration products. Increased state support, he added, will help Connecticut leverage available federal funds. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 authorized \$3.3 billion in federal funding for critical hydrogen and fuel research, development, demonstration projects and market transition activities from FY 2006 to FY 2010. Federal initiatives also include tax credits for fuel cell installation.

Connecticut could distinguish itself in the area of fuel cell development as it has with stem cell research. If nurtured, fuel cell technology can be Connecticut's leading export of the 21st century, he said.

It is important to look at what fuel cell technology means directly in terms of jobs, the impact on the economy and the environment, a reliable and stable energy source and a foreign policy that makes sense, Larson said.

National security considerations that relate to America's increasingly costly dependence on foreign oil have implications for states and local communities as well, Larson added. As the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 demonstrated, the burden of first response in a national emergency - natural or manmade - falls upon state and local governments, he said.

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