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LARSON RECOGNIZES FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF SEPTEMBER 11

WASHINGTON ♦ U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) today released the following statement recognizing the fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks on America:

♦Five years ago, on a clear September morning, our country was attacked by an enemy full of hatred and with no regard for human life. Thousands of American lives were lost as the World Trade Center towers collapsed, the Pentagon smoldered, and a plane crashed into the fields of Pennsylvania. However, heroes were born in the selfless firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical workers who rushed into burning buildings to save the lives of their fellow Americans. America did not crumble in fear that day; it banded together in solidarity. I will always remember standing on the steps of the Capitol that evening as Democratic and Republican lawmakers stood together as Americans, without party labels, and spontaneously began singing ♦God Bless America.♦

♦In the past five years, we♦ve done much to honor those who lost their lives and loved ones on that day. The most important thing we can do to honor them is to make America safer while protecting the liberties that make our nation what it is. We have come a long way in the five years since 9/11, but our nation is still not as safe as it can and should be. Today is not only a chance to look back at where we♦ve been the past five years but an opportunity to look forward at the difficult challenges ahead of us.

♦Today, the Democratic Caucus listened to presentations from former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and General Wesley Clark, the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. This distinguished trio of foreign policy experts offered a stark picture of American foreign policy and homeland security.

◆ Later in the day, the House debated a resolution, H.Res. 994, recognizing the fifth anniversary of September 11. The resolution honored the heroes of that day and expressed sorrow for those who lost their lives and their loved ones. It commended Congress for its actions in protecting America since that time by passing such legislation as the PATRIOT Act. But, as we learned today from America's foremost security and foreign policy experts, Congress has much more work to do.

◆ Currently, only 20 of the 9/11 Commission's 41 bipartisan recommendations to strengthen our nation's homeland security have been fully enacted. As a report from the Homeland Security Committee Democrats demonstrates, Congress made little progress on key recommendations, including improving first responder communications interoperability, government information sharing, and improving aviation passenger and cargo screening.

◆ Key gaps remain in our homeland security. Today, most of the cargo coming into our ports and loading on our aircraft go unscreened for threats. Our borders remain porous, with a shortage of Border Patrol agents to oversee the border. Funding for our first responders, who serve on the front lines homeland security, continues to decline.

◆ After we were attacked, there was near unanimous agreement both in Congress and among the American people over the need to take on the perpetrators of 9/11: Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and the Taliban. Yet, today our search for bin Laden has grown ◆ stone cold ◆ and the Taliban is regaining strength all over Afghanistan.

◆ Instead of accomplishing the mission in Afghanistan, the Administration led us into war in Iraq. We abandoned Afghanistan to embark on a war that has eroded our standing in the world, stretched our military to the breaking point, and left our troops in the middle of a growing sectarian violence and an occupation with no end in sight.

◆ As Dr. Brzezinski simply stated, ◆ This is not a matter of right or wrong policy, it's a matter of smart or stupid policy. ◆ We need to work together to enact smart policies and provide real security for Americans. That is the most important thing we can do to memorialize the victims and the heroes of September 11. ◆

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