"A HOUSE REPUBLICAN ENERGY STRATEGY"
Honorable Norman F. Lent

Mr. Speaker, it is simply unconscionable that one full year after Operation Desert Storm and almost one full year since President Bush submitted his national energy strategy, the House has yet to consider, much less pass, a comprehensive energy bill.

President Bush had the foresight in July of 1989, long before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait put energy back on the front page, to instruct his Administration to develop a new national energy strategy. I was honored to meet with the President on February 20, 1991 to discuss the release of the National Energy Strategy later that day and how to proceed with the legislative component of that strategy as soon as possible.

I am very proud of the fact that Republican members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee were the first in both parties in either House of Congress to develop an energy plan when we introduced H.R. 5735 in September of 1990. Around that same time, House Republican Leader Bob Michel named a House Republican Energy Task Force comprised of Members from across the ideological and geographic spectrums from committees with energy jurisdiction. The creation of the task force underscored the priority House Republicans place on crafting a new energy policy.

By contrast, in 1990 H.R. 5735 was referred by the Speaker to no fewer than seven committees. Last year, H.R. 1301, the President's National Energy Strategy Act, was referred to nine committees. Not a single one of those committees, chaired by the Majority Party, has yet to report such a bill, while House Republicans have made energy a priority.

On March 21, 1991, on behalf of the Leader's Task Force, I introduced H.R. 1543, the Comprehensive Energy Policy Act. The bill represents House Republican efforts to develop a comprehensive and balanced energy package in a timely fashion. This bill was co-sponsored by the entire House Republican Leadership, the ranking Republican members of key House committees with energy jurisdiction, and dozens of other Republican Members. Our bill accepted virtually all of the President's National Energy Strategy, and added over three dozen new provisions authored by Republicans.

When I announced the introduction of the bill at a hearing, I presented it to my Democrat colleagues with the challenge that we had a comprehensive energy plan and asked where their plan was to match it. We also wrote to the Speaker to set a schedule for Committee and Floor action. We are still waiting for an answer.
The lack of coordination among the House Committees with energy jurisdiction has crippled us in our efforts to enact comprehensive energy legislation. The fact of the matter is that a sound energy policy is important to the development of a growing economy. We simply cannot afford to leave our economy hostage to future political developments in overseas oil markets, yet that is precisely what will happen if Congressional inaction and indecision on energy policy continues.

The irony is that the Office of Technology Assessment informed the Congress as recently as last October that we could be dependent on imported oil for almost three-quarters of our oil demand in the next twenty years, unless corrective measures are taken. The economic and geopolitical implications of that dire forecast are profound. This demonstrates the compelling need to send a satisfactory energy package to the President before the end of the year.

While House Republicans have put such a package forward, as the Minority we do not yet control agenda. We can only hope that our efforts in working with our Majority Party colleagues will bear fruit. We are pleased that much of H.R. 1543 was incorporated in the bill approved last October by the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy and Power. That is the good news. Unfortunately, there is not much time left in this Congress to enact an energy bill, unless we move quickly in the full Energy and Commerce Committee and the other committees of jurisdiction.

Our goal must be comprehensive energy policy, one that emphasized both supplying and conserving energy as well as using it more efficiently. Republican or Democrat, we Americans must share a common interest in a sound energy policy.

As we saw in Operation Desert Storm, military action in part due to the strategic importance of oil is not out of the question. Armed conflict and economic shocks due to energy disruptions are preventable if the United States and other countries move forward on this issue. House Republicans have taken the lead in the energy area and stand ready, willing and able to work to bring an energy bill to the Floor at the earliest opportunity. If Republicans were in control of the Congress, a new national energy policy would already be the law of the land.