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Big Thinking On Oil Problems

U.S. Rep. John B. Larson may have been prescient when he called for an Apollo-like mission to solve "our nation's energy problem" just one week before Hurricane Katrina damaged a sizable portion of America's oil-refining capacity.

Mr. Larson, who represents the 1st Congressional District, which includes much of Greater Hartford, said he planned to urge Congress to embrace a shift away from oil toward alternative fuels and technology. Americans who saw prices at the pump soar as high as \$5 a gallon last week are likely to be far more receptive to the congressman's urgent message now.

More than 10 percent of all of the world's crude oil is used for a single purpose: filling vehicle fuel tanks in America. Conservation is crucial, both in the short and long term.

Every vehicle owner can help by driving within the speed limit — speeding burns more gasoline — as well as by taking fewer trips, car-

pooling and turning to mass transit whenever possible.

The calamity along the Gulf Coast presents a chance to spur the production of more fuel-efficient vehicles, develop more convenient mass transit and boost job creation along mass-transit corridors to lessen the need for long commuter rides.

Although such a shift likely will take years, it will not happen without leadership from the White House and Congress.

In the short term, Rep. Larson has proposed a federal tax on excess oil-company profits. That's an idea that should be considered, although it's not a long-term solution to the problem of galloping gasoline consumption.

As an indication of the seriousness of the hurricane-induced crisis, even the American Petroleum Institute and the Petroleum Marketers of America are urging immediate conservation.

Is the message registering?