

OTHER OPINION



Mired In Foreign Oil

More than 200 years ago, President George Washington first warned the nation about the dangers of foreign entanglements. Never have the first president's words resonated so clearly as when it comes to our nation's continued dependence on the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries for our energy needs.

OPEC has come to treat the United States like an addict continually in need of a fix. And because of this petroleum dependency, we are immersed in the foreign policy entanglements of the Middle East and

there is the opportunity within the government's infrastructure to easily begin a widespread integration of this technology, meaning that the federal government can take a leadership role by buying fuel cells to power government facilities, including federal housing and federal fleets of vehicles. Third, fuel cell development will create highly skilled, high-paying jobs in an emerging field poised for long-term economic growth.

Given the significant amount of existing federal assistance to states and municipalities for public transportation, the federal government can play an important role in helping communities integrate this new technology into meeting clean-air requirements and as part of planning future transportation programs, such as the Hartford circulator and the Hartford-New Britain busway.

It is an approach championed by Sen. Christopher J. Dodd and me. We need look no further than here in Connecticut to find successful pilot programs. An excellent example is the partnership between UTC Fuel Cells and the town of South Windsor to install a fuel cell in the high school. Nationally, UTC fuel cells are used to power a post office, banks and hospitals, and there are 29 fuel cells at Department of Defense facilities. These 29 fuel cells have eliminated an estimated 20,000 tons of carbon dioxide and other pollutants harmful to the environment and human beings.

Our dependency was never more apparent than in 2000, when America imported 11 million barrels of oil per day at an average \$30 per barrel, sending more than \$120 billion to foreign oil producers while low-income families here made the choice between heating their homes and feeding their families. Last year, the United States spent another \$90 billion importing foreign oil — money better invested here at home.

With fuel cells, we have the ability to end this dependence and generate vigorous economic expansion at home. Kicking the foreign-oil addiction means independence from environmentally destructive energy sources and the opportunity to free ourselves from foreign policy entanglements tied to oil.

JOHN B. LARSON

Central Asia. These entanglements that Washington warned against were personified by the horrific events of Sept. 11 and their aftermath.

It is time for this nation to extricate itself from this petroleum addiction, or it will continue to cloud our thinking on foreign policy, stifle our economy and make us further dependent on an energy policy that endangers our environment.

The crisis demands a focused and comprehensive answer, and the solution is right here in our backyard. It is called fuel cells.

Appearing recently on NBC's "Meet the Press," House Democratic leader Richard Gephardt said that America needs a "Manhattan Project on fuel cells." It is a project he sees as economically feasible, energy-efficient and environmentally sound, and the foreign policy benefits are obvious. The first Manhattan Project utilized the talents of the best and brightest scientists in the world to harness the atom; a second can be aimed at harnessing the power of hydrogen for fuel cells. Surely, if we could put a man on the moon in 10 years, we can develop a plan that would make the United States energy-independent in the same period.

Developing the immense potential of fuel cell technology will require a sizable, sustained commitment on the part of federal, state and local governments in partnership with private industry and academia. We simply cannot afford to push fuel cells to the back burner each time the price of gasoline falls. It is no coincidence that every time alternative energy solutions arise, the price of oil drops.

Government must take the lead for several reasons. First, it will provide for our homeland security in both economic and military terms by eliminating our reliance on foreign energy sources. Second,

John B. Larson, D-East Hartford, is the U.S. House representative from Connecticut's 1st District.