

Congressman John B. Larson

June 28, 2010

Education and Labor Workforce Protections Subcommittee hearing on *Examining the Tragic Explosion at the Kleen Energy Power Plant in Middletown, Connecticut*

Opening Statement

I would first like to thank the Education and Labor Workforce Protections Subcommittee for holding this proceeding and my colleagues from the Congressional delegation for being in attendance.

The tragedy that occurred here in Middletown, CT was felt across the nation. However, the hardest hit, were those families who lost their loved ones on that terrible day in February. I want to especially acknowledge the courage of Jodi Thomas for being here today to testify. Your act of bravery in being here to not only talk about your wonderful husband, Ron, but to discuss ways to prevent this type of accident from ever occurring again is truly remarkable and admirable. I also understand that the family of Raymond Dobratz is in attendance. I would like to express my deepest condolences to you and my appreciation for your courage to be here for this important hearing. To all of the victims and families who were either killed or injured in the explosion, I offer my sincere regrets and sympathy.

I would also like to thank the other members of the panel from Connecticut for being here, including Chief Badamo, Mayor Giuliano, and Judge Nevas, as well as John Bresland from the Chemical Safety Board and Dr. Glenn Corbett.

In the aftermath of all that took place we learned that there were fundamental problems and gaps in regulation that directly led to this disaster. As the testimony from our witnesses will reveal, no agency was tasked with regulating the “gas blow” procedure that has been determined to be the cause of the explosion. In addition, there are no specific codes or regulations that would have applied to the process of cleaning natural gas piping at the Kleen Energy Power Plant. Even more concerning is that similar explosions have occurred across the country in the past several years, including in North Carolina in 2009. Despite these repeated occurrences there has not been a clear solution established to address these safety gaps once and for all.

While we await the findings of the OSHA investigation that is scheduled to be completed by the end of July, it is clear that urgent action needs to be taken. The Chemical Safety Board has made recommendations for additional regulatory action by OSHA, a change in the National Fuel Gas Code, and further legislative action by the State of Connecticut. I look forward to working with the subcommittee, my colleagues from the Connecticut delegation, and the regulatory agencies to make sure that this type of disaster never occurs again.

While we can never undo the tragic events of February, we can honor the memory of the fallen by guaranteeing that we have the regulations and standards in place to ensure that every worker is protected. I look forward to hearing the testimony and recommendations made here today and thank you all once again for attending today's critically important hearing.