

## (August 12, 2007) U.S. Rep. takes the alternate (energy) route

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By Guy Tridgell

U.S. Rep. Daniel Lipinski remembers the gas lines when he was growing up in Chicago in the 1970s.

It's a memory he mentions often when discussing the environment -- one of the congressman's pet causes.

As vice chairman of the Science and Technology Committee, Lipinski worked on crafting a new energy bill that cleared the House on Aug. 4. It's the first such bill since Democrats assumed a majority in Congress.

The legislation demands that utilities start producing 15 percent of electricity from renewable sources, such as wind and solar power. It also repeals \$16 billion in tax breaks for the petroleum companies.

Eventually, the bill could include higher Corporate Average Fuel Economy regulations. More commonly known as CAFE standards, they determine the average miles per gallon that vehicles sold in the United States must achieve. The current average for cars must exceed 27.5 miles per gallon, while the light truck average must exceed 20.7 miles per gallon.

Lipinski was in town last week to tout a prototype General Motors car powered by hydrogen. He took a few moments after a test drive to discuss the energy bill with Daily Southtown reporter Guy Tridgell.

Q: What should people expect in this energy bill?

A: Two years ago, so much of the energy bill was tax breaks for the oil companies. It really was focused on getting more oil. We repealed most of that. This bill is much more broad. There is more focus on alternative energy and energy efficiency.

Q: What will the bill mean for people in your district?

A: For Illinois, it will help with the research of ethanol. It also helps put tax incentives in place to put ethanol at more gas stations.

One thing that is not getting a lot of publicity is the emphasis on trying to create green jobs. They are the new green-collar jobs. Solar-panel manufacturing is one thing that could be happening here. In the Chicago area, you still have a lot of construction. We could be building green buildings.

Q: Should drivers expect to see new CAFE standards to improve the mileage of the vehicles they buy?

A: The decision was to go ahead and leave CAFE standards out of the House bill. When a conference committee meets to iron out the differences in bills between the House and the Senate, I think there will be some new CAFE standards.

There is no question we need to raise the CAFE standards. It's unfortunate the American auto companies for the past 20 to 30 years have not been moving forward with new technology to improve efficiency. They are behind some of the foreign companies when it comes to using alternative energy.

Q: Why the interest in the environment?

A: When I am sitting in traffic, driving everyday, I think about all the cars around me and all these emissions coming from

their tailpipes. We could have gotten away from that. I always talk about growing up in the 1970s. There was so much environmental consciousness at that time. The gas crisis was going on. People were really interested in alternative energy, especially solar energy. That just went away. Thirty years later, we are coming back to that.

Q: Do you think people are ready to conserve energy if it means helping the environment?

A: I'm hopeful that's the case.

In the 1970s, Jimmy Carter asked people to turn down their thermostats in the winter. I'm not sure how far that got us saving energy. It won't happen through government mandates, but through popular culture. Al Gore has become much bigger in the public's consciousness just through his movie. I expect to see more things like that.