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## Garage Innovators May Provide Key To New Energy Technologies

May 17, 2006, As energy prices continue to climb, consumers are taking steps to save energy where they can. Many are considering new purchases, such as energy-saving appliances or hybrid vehicles that may cost more initially but save money over the long run.

New energy technologies like these don't just spring up overnight; they are the result of years of research by some of our nation's brightest minds. And some of the most innovative energy research is not taking place in fancy labs, but in garages across the country.

As Ranking Member of the House Science Committee, I invited one of Middle Tennessee's garage innovators to testify at a recent hearing of the Energy Subcommittee. Dr. Cliff Ricketts, a professor of Agricultural Education and Acting Director of Middle Tennessee State University's School of Agribusiness and Agriscience, told my colleagues and me about his work with plug-in hybrid vehicles.

Dr. Ricketts was one of six expert energy witnesses from across the country. He has conducted alternative fuel and advanced vehicle research since 1978 and has run engines off ethanol from corn, methane from cow manure, soybean oil, hydrogen from water, and now has a solar/electric truck. Dr. Ricketts held the land speed record for hydrogen vehicles at the Bonneville Salt Flats for 15 years.

Dr. Ricketts currently has a system in place using a 10kw solar unit to generate electricity to go into the Murfreesboro Electric Grid Lines within the Tennessee Valley Authority to bank energy for later use in charging his electric/hybrid truck or generating hydrogen from water to run his internal combustion engine car.

As Dr. Ricketts likes to say, the only things he needs to run his vehicles are the sun and water. His innovative work shows us what is possible in this field, as well as the obstacles we need to overcome as we search for gasoline alternatives.

We must explore every avenue of research and new technology if the U.S. plans to remain a leader in innovation. Making sure that conventional and plug-in hybrid vehicles, alternative fuels and other options are accessible is part of that job. High energy prices are hurting consumers, but tools like these could speed relief.

Plug-in hybrid vehicles and other energy innovations have the potential to drastically reduce U.S. dependence on foreign energy sources, as well as provide environmental and economic benefits.

I am working to address the challenges of converting these new energy technologies for commercial use. I have introduced bipartisan legislation that establishes an agency within the U.S. Department of Energy modeled after the Department of Defense's successful Defense

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Advanced Research Projects Agency, which was responsible for creating revolutionary technologies like unmanned and stealth aircraft and the Internet.

The bill would promote research and development at industry, university and federal labs and provide incentives to bridge the gap between laboratory research and practical applications. It funds out-of-the-box research projects with the goal of boosting energy security and finding viable energy alternatives.

Dr. Ricketts and others like him already are busy developing the next generation of energy technology. Now, we must make sure these innovations can find a way from their garages to yours.

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