Ithaca, NY - Just one week after Big Oil recorded the largest quarter profits in U.S. history and fresh off an intense debate in Congress involving multiple pieces of legislation to help lower gas prices and the cost of home heating oil, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today highlighted recent congressional action on gas prices, corrected false information being spread by the oil industry and its allies, and outlined a plan to end President Bush and Vice President Cheney's relationship with Big Oil. The Bush-Cheney energy plan is now 95 percent complete, according to the administration's own Energy Secretary, and the result has been a more than 400 percent increase in the price of oil since they took office.

"The American public are suffering greatly from the Bush-Cheney marriage to the oil industry," Hinchey said. "Vice President Cheney met secretly with top oil industry executives to develop U.S. energy policy and the results have been disastrous for the American people who are now paying $4 for a gallon of gas and facing an estimated 41 percent increase from last year in the cost to heat their home during the winter. The only thing green about the Bush-Cheney energy policy are the greenbacks that are overflowing in the wallets of Big Oil executives. The Democratic-led Congress is fighting aggressively to pass common-sense pieces of legislation that effectively tackle the problem of high oil prices in a comprehensive way. While we have passed some important pieces of legislation, many of the measures we've passed in the House have been blocked by the president and his allies in the Senate who want to line the pockets of their close friends in the oil industry."

Hinchey laid out a long list of recent measures that he helped pass as part of the Democratic majority in the House in order to help lower gas prices, make America more secure, create green jobs, and reduce global warming.

Enacted into Law

· Energy Independence and Security Act in 2007 – Landmark energy law to increase vehicle fuel efficiency for the first time in more than 3 decades, to 35 miles per gallon in 2020, projected to save $1,000 per vehicle each year; to expand the use of American]grown biofuels, and to combat oil market manipulation. Signed into law on December 19, 2007. Hinchey is pushing for the passage of a separate bill he authored that would increase the minimum fuel efficiency to 40 miles per gallon by 2016.

· Recovery Rebates and Economic Stimulus for the American People Act -- Provided checks to 130 million American families of up to $600 per adult and $1,800 for a family of four struggling with record gas prices and an economy on the brink of recession. Signed into law on February 13, 2008.

· Strategic Petroleum Reserve Fill Suspension and Consumer Protection Act – Temporarily suspended the filling of the Reserve to put more oil on the market to fight rising gas prices. After initial presidential opposition, it was signed into law on May 19, 2008.

Passed by the House

· Renewable Energy and Job Creation Act – Extends and expands tax incentives for renewable energy, including incentives for plug‐in vehicles, retains and creates hundreds of thousands of green jobs, spurs American innovation and business investment, and cuts taxes for millions of Americans. President Bush has threatened a veto.

· Saving Energy Through Public Transportation Act – Reduces transit fares for commuter rail and buses and expands service through grants to transit agencies.

· Energy Markets Anti-Manipulation and Integrity Restoration Act -- Takes steps to further close the "Enron‐like London Loophole" to curb excessive speculation in the energy futures markets, which experts say is one factor driving up the price of oil.

· The Gas Price Relief for Consumers Act – Combats record gas prices by authorizing lawsuits against oil cartel members for price fixing, and creating an Antitrust Task Force to crack down on anticompetitive behavior or market manipulation. President Bush has threatened a veto.

· Energy Price Gouging Prevention Act – Provides immediate relief to consumers by giving the Federal Trade Commission the authority to investigate and punish those who artificially inflate the price of energy. President Bush has threatened a veto.

Obstructed in the House by Big Oil's allies

· Drill Responsibly in Leased Lands (DRILL) Act – Mandates annual lease sales in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska. It has more oil than the Arctic Wildlife Refuge, and the oil can be brought to market sooner. Requires the Bush administration to facilitate completion of the oil pipeline infrastructure into the Reserve, and to facilitate the construction of the Alaska Natural Gas Pipeline, and bans export of Alaskan oil outside the U.S. It also incorporates "Use It Or Lose It" legislation, which compels oil companies to start drilling on the 68 million acres of federal land they've leased but haven't touched, or face losing the ability to obtain new leases.

Requires Presidential Action

· Draw Down a Portion of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) – Deploying a small portion of the government's emergency oil supply is one of the only actions that could immediately reduce oil prices. President Bush previously deployed the SPR and the price of oil dropped 9 percent. President Clinton did and the price of oil dropped 19 percent. The first President Bush did and the price of oil dropped 33 percent. The SPR is now at a historically high level.

The debate in Congress continues just days after oil companies reported a whopping $44 billion in second quarter profits – 42 percent more than last year. This year, profits for the top five oil companies are projected to top $160 billion – far exceeding last year's record of $123 billion. Since 2001, the major oil companies have amassed close to $600 billion in profits. Unfortunately, Big Oil has failed to invest almost any of these profits in increased production, refining capacity, or new, clean renewable energy technology. In 2007, ExxonMobil used 70 percent of their earnings to buy back stocks and pay dividends, instead of making real investments in exploration, new production or for renewable energy.   In fact, they spent only $10 million on renewable energy. Over the last three years, Shell has bought back $18 billion in stock – 30 times what the company spent on investments in renewable technologies.

Hinchey took time to clarify and refute confusing news reports and rhetoric from the oil industry's public relations campaign spearheaded by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and their allies in the Congress. The congressman made clear that he and other House Democrats support increased domestic drilling and that he and his colleagues have worked to encourage oil companies to begin drilling on the 68 million acres of federal land they've already leased, but haven't even begun to drill. The congressman pointed out that an estimated 80 percent of oil and gas resources on federal lands both onshore and underlying federal waters offshore in the Outer Continental Shelf are available for development.

The amount of oil and gas in these reserves is equal to 107 billion barrels of oil and 658 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The amount of oil which could be produced from these reserves is 10 times the amount that could be produced from opening up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and represents over 14 years of current U.S. oil consumption (7.5 billion barrels per year). The amount of natural gas which could be produced from these areas represents over 30 years of current U.S. gas consumption (21.8 trillion cubic feet of natural gas per year). Hinchey argued that the production of these energy resources on lands already leased by oil and gas companies would provide the country with additional time to develop alternatives to oil and gas and reduce our dependency on energy imports. The congressman further stated that these acres should be drilled on first before any additional land is considered for leases.

Those 68 million acres of leased but stockpiled federal oil and gas lands -- twice the size of New York -- could produce an estimated additional 4.8 million barrels of oil and 44.7 billion cubic feet of natural gas each day. That alone would nearly double total U.S. oil production and increase natural gas production by 75 percent and cut U.S. oil imports by one-third.

Hinchey, who is a member of the House Natural Resources Committee and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, helped author a measure in the House that would mandate that oil companies use those 68 million acres or give them up to other oil corporations who actually want to drill on that land and increase domestic production. Hinchey said the major oil corporations that currently are just sitting on those 68 million acres are doing so until the price of oil climbs to $200 or $300 per barrel so that they can enjoy even greater profits at the expense of the American people.

Hinchey said that increased domestic oil and natural gas drilling are important, especially for national security purposes, but that they are only part of a wide-ranging, well-balanced energy plan. The Bush administration’s own Energy Department said that opening up any additional acreage that's not already been made available to oil and gas production would no have an impact on prices before 2030 and that impact would be “insignificant.”

As further evidence that increased drilling, while important, will not lower prices at the pump, Hinchey noted that the Bush administration leased and permitted more acreage for drilling than any other presidential administration, yet the price of gas at the pump has quadrupled since Bush has been in office. As of July 8 the U.S. had 1,928 drilling rigs on and offshore.

"The U.S. must increase its domestic oil production so that we're not so dependent upon foreign regimes for our oil supply, but it's clear that domestic drilling alone will not reduce oil prices," Hinchey said. "The Bush administration has leased more land for drilling than any other administration, yet the price of oil continues to soar because it's a global commodity. At best, the U.S. sits on just 2-3 percent of all the oil reserves in the world, yet consumes nearly 25 percent of all the oil in the world. The math just doesn't add up. We cannot drill our way out of this mess. The only solution is to dramatically increase our efficiency so that we adequately address the demand side of the "supply and demand" equation by reducing the amount of oil we consume as a nation while investing in dramatic, unprecedented fashion in renewable energy and energy efficiency."

While the U.S. is in the middle of its peak driving season and Americans are suffering at the gas pump, Hinchey said that action is desperately needed now, before winter hits, to help fend off dramatic increases in the cost of home heating oil. The Energy Information Administration (EIA) predicts that the cost of heating oil will go up more that 41 percent from last year. Hinchey signed a letter asking the president to release $120 million available from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) contingency fund in order to help those most in need pay for their home heating oil.

"No one should ever have to choose between putting food on the table, pay for health care, or heating their home during the coldest winter months," Hinchey said. "We have an obligation as Americans to help our fellow neighbors who are unable to pay for the extremely high cost of home heating oil. This is just another example of why we need a comprehensive energy policy that would drop the cost of home heating oil and eventually enable us to heat all homes with renewable sources of energy."

Hinchey is also a cosponsor of The Warm in Winter and Cool in Summer Act, which would nearly double funding for LIHEAP. The congressman also signed onto a letter to Speaker Pelosi and members of the Democratic and Republican leadership in the House in support of a future economic stimulus package, or other appropriate legislative vehicle, that would restore LIHEAP to its fully authorized level of $5.1 billion. Hinchey is also a cosponsor of a bill that would amend the Energy Policy and Conservation Act to allow the U.S. Secretary of Energy to release heating oil from the Northeast Home Heating Oil Reserve if the price of heating oil remains above $4 per gallon.

Hinchey and his Democratic colleagues in the House improved vehicle, lighting, and appliance standards in 2007 and they passed energy tax credits to help families afford plug-in hybrid cars. Despite President Bush’s opposition, Hinchey said Democrats will continue to fight for funding for low-income Americans to weatherize their homes.

Recently, Big Oil's allies in Congress said their plan would “promote new and expanding energy technologies," but their actions tell a different story. President Bush and his allies in Congress continue to block legislation that would repeal unnecessary tax breaks for Big Oil -- the most profitable industry in U.S. history, which clearly does not need tax subsidies -- and move them to renewable energy. President Bush's allies in Congress blocked the tax incentives for renewable energy and energy efficiency four times. Funding for energy technology research has been woefully inadequate under President Bush – around a third the level seen during the energy crisis in the late 1970s – underscoring the low priority this administration has given to investing in new technologies to solve the energy and climate crisis.

"President Bush and his allies in Congress are one trick ponies when it comes to energy policy. Their answer to everything is drill, drill, and drill some more when the fact of the matter is drilling will not do a thing to lower gas prices," Hinchey said. "The amount of U.S. land available for drilling has skyrocketed during the Bush administration, but that hasn't done a single thing to keep gas prices in check. This country is in desperate need of a well-balanced energy policy that incorporates domestic drilling, but aggressively invests in renewable energy, which is our true way out of this energy crisis."

Hinchey said that he is continuing to work on legislation in the House with his colleagues to extend and expand tax incentives for renewable energy, retain and create hundreds of thousands of green jobs and spur American innovation and business investment. Hinchey and his fellow Democrats will continue to push for a Renewable Electricity Standard that would require 15-20 percent of all electricity to come from renewable sources by 2020.

Hinchey also discussed plans for dramatic investments in solar energy and other renewable sources of power in order to eventually phase out oil and other fossil fuels as sources of energy in the long-term. Last year, Hinchey helped organize and create The Solar Energy Consortium (TSEC) in upstate New York, which is a new industry-driven, non-profit organization that provides leadership, organization, resources, and support for the establishment of a major solar energy industry cluster in New York. TSEC is the first organization of its kind for the photovoltaic industry, encompassing research and development, manufacturing facilities, industry promotion and market development. Earlier this year, TSEC partnered with its first major manufacturing partner, Prism Solar Technologies, which plans to bring more than 400 new jobs to Ulster County within 4-5 years. TSEC has also partnered with six research universities throughout New York to work on the research needed to improve solar technology.

In order to advance TSEC, Hinchey helped secure $1.476 million in federal funds to help bring companies such as Prism Solar Technologies into the consortium. The congressman also secured final approval of $3.2 million for C9 Corporation to conduct solar research and development in conjunction with TSEC. Additionally, Hinchey helped convince Empire State

Development to contribute a $1.5 million grant to attract solar energy companies to TSEC. Subsequently, the recently approved New York State budget includes $6.5 million for TSEC. Ulster County has also committed $200,000 to the consortium.

Hinchey said the U.S. needs to move beyond simply investing seed money in renewable energy research and development and to instead devote the vast majority of its energy funding in solar, wind, and other clean sources of energy in order to completely transition away from oil.