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Lieberman: Oil need a security risk

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WASHINGTON — Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., on Wednesday joined a bipartisan group of lawmakers trying to curtail America's appetite for oil by getting automakers to switch from making gas guzzlers to more fuel efficient models.

"Failure to act, we fear, will make America like a pitiful giant, tied down and subject to the whims of small [oil-producing] countries," said Lieberman, who described U.S. dependence on foreign oil as a national security risk.

The country now uses a little over 20 million barrels of oil a day, mostly for transportation, and nearly two-thirds of it imported.

Relying on a handful of Arab nations to supply the nation's oil poses a national security threat, Lieberman said.

"If we rely on oil from a number of small countries we can be brought to our knees," he said.

Using technology available today, Lieberman said it is possible to cut oil consumption by 10 million barrels per day by 2031.

The plan would rely on tax breaks and other incentives to encourage construction of hybrid or electric vehicles and promote the use of ethanol and other alternative fuels that can be produced from crops grown in the United States.

Lieberman estimated the cost of the legislation at \$6 billion over five years.

Lieberman has gathered at least seven co-sponsors for the bill, including four Republicans. "We think this bill will move forward and we can get something done," said Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan.

Congress has struggled with energy issues in the past. It took more than three years of debate for President Bush to get a national energy policy adopted into law. That legislation was approved only three months ago and focused heavily on boosting energy production in the United States.

Lieberman said the lawmakers plan to avoid the hot-button issues that derailed previous energy bills. The legislation would not mandate higher fuel economy standards for automobiles nor would it endorse drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve.

"My thought is we will get very broad bipartisan support," Brownback said.

Under the legislation:

? Half of new cars built in 2016 would have to use alternative fuels, be hybrids or fuel cell vehicles.

? A quarter of the federal and state government fleets would have to be advanced diesels, hybrids or plug-in hybrids by 2016.

? Manufacturers would get retooling tax credits for advanced diesels and hybrids.

? And, a tire efficiency program would be established for light duty vehicles.