

WASHINGTON - The should be moving much faster to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, and one potential solution may lie in the muggy confines of the Lied Jungle at Omaha 's Henry Doorly Zoo.

Hydrogen fuel cell technology provides power and heats water at the jungle, Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., said Tuesday at a congressional hearing.

Terry is pushing a proposal that would have the federal government do more to promote the development and use of such technology.

Hydrogen fuel cells produce power through a chemical process without the large emissions that come from combustion or the dangerous waste that results from nuclear reactions.

Terry was one of more than 20 lawmakers on the witness list for the hearing by a House Ways and Means subcommittee, which is working on a package of tax measures aimed at energy independence.

Terry's proposal would extend existing tax credits for the purchase of hydrogen fuel cell equipment and would create new tax credits for using it.

The new tax credits would cover 30 percent of the cost of producing hydrogen, up to \$1,500 a year. The measure also would push for the use of the technology in new federal buildings.

The zoo's hydrogen fuel cell is part of a pilot project by the Omaha Public Power District that started in 2001. The utility wants to learn from the experience and is looking at more widespread uses of the devices.

So far, the fuel cell has exceeded expectations for efficiency and reliability, said OPPD spokesman Mike Jones.

First National Bank of Omaha has been using the technology to power its data processing operations since 1999 and is happy with the results, said Brenda

Dooley, president of First National Bank's buildings division. No moving parts and no combustion mean fewer maintenance problems, she said.

Both OPPD and First National said the only downside is cost. It costs about 15 cents to produce a kilowatt hour through hydrogen fuel cells, compared with as little as 2 cents a kilowatt hour from coal-fired power, Jones said.

The extra cost is worth it to First National, Dooley said, because the technology is more reliable for data processing. "For us to be down an hour is costly."

Terry said he hopes the cost will come down as the technology progresses. In the meantime, he said, the federal government can help move the ball forward with the tax credits and other efforts.

