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Ron Johnson says he is happy to be ridiculed over EMP concerns

By DARIUS DIXON

Senate Homeland Security Chairman Ron Johnson said this afternoon that he's happy to use his committee as a vehicle to hammer on threats to the electric grid posed by natural and man-made electromagnetic disruption.

"These are very real threats that we're not addressing right now," the Wisconsin Republican said at an event organized on Capitol Hill by the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs to discuss EMP threats. Utilities, Johnson said, are "regulated enough but this is a threat that they've gotta recognize that this is a threat."

Johnson offered up his panel to press the issue with more hearings, noting how a severe solar storm or a small nuclear weapon detonated in the atmosphere could fry large sections of the grid. The White House released a strategy for solar storms recently. Johnson's also "happy" to propose legislation on the subject and he won't get hung up looking for how to pay for it either.

"As a fiscal conservative, I could care less how we're going to pay for it. I'm not gonna even look for a pay-for," Johnson said, adding that "we'll pick up the whole tab. I don't require cost-sharing."

He added: "I'm happy to act as a general contractor. I'm happy to put up with the scorn and the ridicule, being accused of being Chicken Little."

The stakes, Johnson said, were clear in his mind. "We're going to be looking at Mad Max, right? ... If we don't have electricity, everything shuts down."