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BIPARTISAN HOUSE GROUP CALLS ON EPATO ISSUE STRONGER MERCURY RULE

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In a [letter to Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) Administrator Michael O. Leavitt, a bipartisan group of 180 members of the U.S. House of Representatives today challenged the agency to go back to the drawing board in the coming months and to issue a final rule that better protects Americans from the health and environmental dangers caused by [airborne mercury emissions](#)

"We urge you to meet the requirements of federal law and to act decisively in addressing the urgent threat that mercury pollution poses to our nation's public health," the letter stated.

The bipartisan letter effort was led by U.S. Reps. Jim Cooper (D-TN) and Tom Allen (D-ME), as well as Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Betty McCollum (D-MN), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Hilda Solis (D-CA) and Henry Waxman (D-CA). More than twenty Republicans also signed the letter.

"Democrats and Republicans in Congress agree - the current proposal by the Bush Administration to control mercury pollution is actually a threat to public health. The proposal falls short of meeting the standards on mercury emissions mandated in the law. Illinois ranks sixth among states where continued mercury pollution poses the greatest danger to public health and to the environment. The Bush Administration's proposal requires only a 50%-70% reduction by 2018, allowing power plants to continue to emit more mercury and placing the health of millions of children at risk," said Schakowsky, a member of the Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials.

The lawmakers sent their letter in response to proposed regulations by the EPA that would reduce mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants by only 29% by 2010, with additional reductions by 2018. The Administration's proposed rules have been met with widespread public and Congressional criticism for failing to adequately address the risks posed by mercury pollution. Because of strong opposition to the proposal, the EPA has

since extended the time available for public comment.□ Reportedly more than 500,000 public comments have been submitted, the largest response in EPA history.

House members expressed the hope that the EPA would use the extended comment period to strengthen its mercury rule.□ They warned that they "remain concerned.that the final regulations will nevertheless fail to satisfy the mandates of the Clean Air Act's hazardous air pollutants provisions."

The letter further said, "We are disappointed by the EPA's continuing failure to take into account both its own analyses and the potential presented by existing technology" that would make larger mercury reductions possible.□ In particular the letter urges the EPA to consider the recommendations of its stakeholder advisory group and to conduct "a thorough review of existing technologies to reduce mercury emissions by the maximum extent available."

Earlier this week, 470 sportsmen's groups from 34 states joined a letter circulated by the National Wildlife Federation calling on EPA to consider the impact of mercury on children, wildlife and the sportfishing economy before finalizing its mercury rule.□ "These letters are a call to action," said National Wildlife Federation President and CEO, Larry Schweiger.□ "The 1.1 million hunters and anglers represented by these sportsmen's groups want clean lakes and streams now.□ They want a strong mercury rule that protects the future of fishing for generations to come."

Charles Gauvin, President of Trout Unlimited, the nation's largest trout and salmon conservation organization and one of the organizations that co-signed the NWF letter, stated that "America's lakes and rivers have unacceptable levels of mercury which are impairing people's ability to partake in one of our country's great pastimes.□ The strong bipartisan support represented by this letter is a testament to the strength of the American people's feelings that this is a significant issue."

The House letter was signed by members representing thirty-eight states, including members from the 9 states that are hit hardest by mercury pollution:□ Michigan, Maryland, Florida, Illinois, South Carolina, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas and Tennessee.