

## House Members Challenge Bush on Plan

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By JOHN HEILPRIN

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) - Almost a third of the House members urged President Bush in a letter Monday not to weaken controls on mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants.

The 138 signers from the East and Midwest, where regional air quality and drifting pollution from power plants has long been a major worry, included 14 Republicans and Rep. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt.

"Mercury emissions jeopardize the environment and public health, especially the health of young children," the House members wrote.

The first hearing is Tuesday, in the House Energy and Commerce energy and air quality subcommittee, on proposed legislation to implement the president's "Clear Skies" initiative for reducing mercury, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide pollution from coal-burning power plants.

Spearheading the letter-writing to the president were Illinois Reps. Jan **Schakowsky**, a Democrat, and Mark Kirk, a Republican, House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., and Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine.

The Environmental Protection Agency has been regulating mercury dumped in water and air from municipal waste and medical waste incinerators since the late 1990s. It is writing regulations for mercury emitted from coal-fired power plants for implementation in 2007. As proposed, Bush's "Clear Skies" law would phase-in reductions beginning in 2010.

Administration officials have argued that, because the regulations being written probably will be challenged in court, differences in the timetable for actual reductions would not be that great. Industry has asked for more time to meet standards now being written.

Environmentalists who supported the lawmakers' letter said mercury contamination from power plants is a growing public health threat. They cited 43 states that now have warnings against consuming too much fish, compared with 27 states with such warnings 10 years ago.

Fish absorb mercury, a metal that accumulates in bodies as it travels up the food chain, and can damage development of the growing brains of fetuses and young children.