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Don't stop the fight against mercury pollution: Republican and Democrat to Trump EPA

The mercury rule has protected Americans from dangerous pollution. Changing it threatens gains that include cleaner air and edible seafood.

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As former governors, we know that cleaner air means better health, a better economy and better jobs for the residents of our states.

Today, thanks to the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards, children and families are breathing cleaner air and our waters and streams are less polluted. The mercury rule, which limits mercury emissions from coal- and oil-fired power plants, has resulted in 90% less mercury in the air than a decade ago. But now, the Environmental Protection Agency is moving forward with a proposal that asserts it is no longer “appropriate and necessary” to protect the public from our country’s largest sources of mercury and air toxic emissions.

States once warned against eating fish

This move could lead to the undoing of the mercury rule, which is why we’re urging EPA not to go through with it.

Before the rule was proposed, half the man-made mercury in America came from coal-fired power plants, and as much as 70% of the mercury pollution in our waterways came from those nearby coal plants. At that time, the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee was one of the most polluted national parks in America, and Delaware warned the public against eating fish due to high levels of mercury.

In fact, by the time the mercury rule was finalized in 2012, every state — including Tennessee and Delaware — had some type of fish consumption advisory for mercury. Add up all the advisories and, nationally, there were more fish consumption advisories for mercury than all other pollutants combined.

Now, the 11 million people who visit the Smokies every year can see more than 90 miles from Clingman’s Dome, the park’s highest peak, on the clearest days. Even on the haziest days, visibility has improved to more than 30 miles.

Paris withdrawal: Trump officially turns his back on climate crisis and our own children

The millions of people who enjoy Delaware's five-star beaches and the rivers, streams and ponds throughout the state can also enjoy seafood without fearing high levels of mercury in their meal. In fact, across the country, there have been fewer warnings that say, "Don't eat the fish because of mercury contamination."

Mercury rule has protected Americans

Clean air also means our states are open for business. Eight years ago, every one of Tennessee's major metropolitan areas was struggling to meet clean air standards, which made it difficult for new companies to get permits to build in the state or for existing industries to expand.

At the end of "America's tailpipe," downwind states like Delaware are still struggling to protect communities from pollution. Harmful emissions from upwind states account for nearly 94% of air pollution in the First State, so Delaware truly does rely on commonsense safeguards like the mercury rule to meet its own clean air standards.

Air quality in the balance: Donald Trump pollutes America with California scheming

Today, every utility in the country has fully complied with the mercury rule. Changing the rule after billions of dollars have already been spent means that utilities will have less certainty about federal regulations, and it will be more difficult to maintain steady electricity prices for American families in the future.

The gains we have made over the past decade to protect children and families from dangerous mercury pollution should not be lost. The mercury rule has been a success, and changing it just doesn't make sense.

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