

Congressman Rothman: Fighting for Clean Air in New Jersey

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By Congressman Steve Rothman

Clean air should be a priority that we all can agree on, but some in Washington, D.C. are playing dangerous games with public health. Today, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Upton-Inhofe bill, an extreme measure that will eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) authority to address carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, fluorinated gases and other harmful emissions. This legislation, which I opposed, reverses EPA's scientific finding that these pollutants are harmful to public health and the environment. The bill means that even with strong state-level environmental regulations New Jersey will suffer. Since the movement of air pollution isn't restricted by state borders, wind currents from neighboring states will push harmful pollution into the air that we breathe here at home.

As a father and a strong advocate for the environment, I am proud of New Jersey's leadership in keeping our air clean. In New Jersey, we've implemented laws to reduce toxic emissions and mercury pollution from power plants, increase clean energy from solar power, and speed up production of off-shore wind along the Atlantic seaboard. These regulations improve the quality of the air we breathe, but we should still be doing more and New Jersey cannot do it alone. Federal regulation of dangerous pollutants is necessary to make sure that states with tough emissions standards aren't unfairly subject to dirty air from neighboring states that have lenient emission laws. Some in Washington, D.C. may want to secure an extreme ideological "victory" by undermining the EPA, but the families, children, and elderly in New Jersey cannot afford the consequences of the Upton-Inhofe bill.

For many New Jerseyans, the impact of this bill could be deadly. For example, in the Ninth Congressional District — which includes sections of Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties — there are an estimated 80,000 people, including nearly 20,000 children, who live with asthma. Lower air quality standards will lead to more pollutants in our air and raise the risk of life-threatening asthma attacks. In fact, the National Institute of Health estimates that 5,000 asthma-related deaths occur each year in the United States. And those who suffer from asthma are just one group who will face drastic consequences from the Upton-Inhofe bill. Fully enforcing the Clean Air Act and a strong EPA will improve the lives of countless Americans (including New Jerseyans) — especially those who already have compromised health.

The Upton-Inhofe bill is harmful to New Jersey and our entire nation. Specifically, this legislation would weaken the Clean Air Act, overturn the Supreme Court ruling that gave the EPA authority to regulate dangerous air pollutants, and derail efforts to move toward energy independence by reducing emissions from cars and trucks. It is for these reasons and many others that health advocacy and environmental groups — from the American Lung Association and the Union of Concerned Scientists to Environment New Jersey and the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America — oppose this harmful legislation. In opposition to the Clean Air Act and the EPA, and supporting the Upton-Inhofe bill, are groups like big oil companies and billion-dollar corporations with vested interests in avoiding the costs of cleaning up the environmental messes they make. I and many of my constituents and people throughout our state choose to stand with those who want to keep New Jersey's air clean, not those who put profit over public health.

There is a clear path forward to keeping our air clean in New Jersey. With the strengthening of the Clean Air Act in 1970,

our country took a stand for the quality of our health, our air and our future. The EPA is planning to update the Clean Air Act to implement long-overdue federal limits on soot, smog, mercury, and carbon pollution. This solution makes sense – the Clean Air Act has proven to be one of the greatest tools we have to cost-effectively protect the health of Americans and our environment. We must stand up against efforts to weaken the Clean Air Act and work with the EPA to implement strong limits on pollution to protect the air we all breathe in New Jersey and throughout our country.

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