

Like so many of you today, I am here to articulate my support for the state Department of Environmental Protection's proposal regarding mercury pollutants. I fully advocate the plan to reduce Pennsylvania's mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants by 90% by 2015. However, I am disappointed that this change will not occur by 2008, a completely feasible goal by the Environmental Protection Agency's own estimates. Yet, even though the DEP's current proposal is not the most progressive with respect to its time frame, it still suggests a drastic improvement for our state, especially when taken in consideration with the weak federal clean air regulations. It would be a grave error for our state's leaders to choose against using the available technology to reduce mercury pollution since it would represent a deliberate apathy towards the safety of our children and the sanctity of our wildlife. Their refusal to act concretely on this issue could perhaps be attributed to tax and consumer cost increases they believe will occur with the passing of such a proposal. Yet, experts have said that such an improvement in pollution control technologies will pose no great costs to the individual person. Indeed, the National Wildlife Federation has estimated that forcing coal-fired power-plants to utilize mercury-reducing technology would at most cost each household the equivalent of a cup of coffee per month.

Given the risks mercury poses to Pennsylvania's wildlife and its children's health, it would seem obvious for our state's leaders to support the DEP's proposal, especially since the plan is accompanied by such negligible costs. However, it is also very possible that the enormous sums of money wielded by coal and energy lobbyists have acted as enticing influences on our state's legislators, preventing them from doing what is best for us. To this I would say, perhaps these special-interest groups can afford best lobbyists, but here in this room today, we have a wealth of opinions and passion that no money can buy. In conclusion, I urge the DEP the push forward with this proposal and for Pennsylvania's leaders to keep our best interests at heart when considering it.

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