

## Johnson: Members Must Ensure Clean Air for America

- \* By Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson
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It's a sad day in this country when your elected officials come between clean air and the American people. But that is exactly what is happening.

Rep. John Carter (R) is spearheading an effort to kill important air rules that would drastically reduce the amount of mercury and other air pollution originating from cement plants.

In Carter's and my home state of Texas, there are 10 cement plants, which emitted 225 pounds of mercury in 2009. That may not seem like a large figure, but it takes only one-seventieth of a teaspoon of mercury to contaminate a 25-acre lake and render the fish in that lake unsafe to eat. So why is Carter pushing for an effort to undo these important air protections that would slash the air pollution that we Texans and other Americans breathe? It's because he's standing in line with dirty polluters who put big business and profits ahead of American people. This must stop.

As elected leaders, it is our job to ensure our constituents are protected and that the laws of the land, like the Clean Air Act, are followed. On Sept. 9, 2010, the Environmental Protection Agency announced air protections for more than 100 cement plants across the country, requiring these facilities to install controls that would slash up to 16,600 pounds of mercury per year. We must let the EPA do its job.

Contrary to popular opinion, clean air cuts partisan lines. On Nov. 15, 1990, it was Republican President George H. W. Bush who signed Clean Air Act amendments, making the law what it is today. These amendments focused on reducing smog and eliminating emissions from industrial sources, such as cement kilns.

Yes, I am a Congresswoman but I am also a nurse, mother and grandmother so I know all too well that our children are particularly sensitive to unchecked emissions of mercury and other air toxins. Mercury is a dangerous chemical that impairs a child's ability to learn, write, walk, talk and read. Mercury especially is a concern for women of childbearing age, unborn babies and young children because studies have found that high levels of exposure damage the developing nervous system. Cement kilns also pump lead, arsenic and dioxins into the air, which can cause cancer, birth defects and other catastrophic health impacts. It's clear to me that these protections must be kept in place.

These air rules also would prevent 2,500 premature deaths, 1,000 emergency room visits, 1,500 heart attacks and 17,000 cases of aggravated asthma. That's a cost-benefit worth the price of industry compliance.

Carter and his allies are standing behind false and inflated claims of job loss and industry collapse when, in truth, the EPA estimates that the rules could net as many as 1,300 new jobs and would prevent 130,000 missed work days.

As the ranking member on the House Science, Space and Technology Committee and the most senior Texan on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I know American innovation and technology can bolster our economy, while making our air cleaner and our communities healthier.

If Carter is successful, communities in Texas and beyond will be stripped of the air protections they deserve. I know I'm not alone in recognizing the need for strong safeguards against industrial polluters. Protecting our citizens from air pollution isn't just the law, it's a long-held bipartisan tradition under the Clean Air Act. For these reasons I cannot allow a colleague to pursue a legislative agenda that will cost lives and leave entire communities vulnerable to mercury and other air pollution. Stand with me and say no to dirty polluters and their allies.

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