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## Unhealthy Air

By JIM JEFFORDS

**W**ASHINGTON It is already too late for the United States to lead the world in the fight against global warming. President Bush saw to that last year, when he abandoned his promise to make power plants reduce the amount of carbon dioxide they send into the air.

But if the president won't lead the world, then the business community, the American people and their elected representatives in Congress must lead the president.

This month President Bush gave up all pretense of moving forward in the effort to clean up the oldest and dirtiest power plants. First he denigrated the climate action report released by his own administration. That report follows the National Academy of Sciences and the vast majority of scientists by stating that global warming is real and poses a significant threat. Then his administration announced possibly the biggest rollback of the Clean Air Act in history, proposing wholesale weakening of the "new source review" provision that requires old power plants to install modern pollution controls when they are renovated.

Pollution from power plants causes a variety of problems. Three in particular are health-threatening: mercury contamination linked to birth defects, ozone smog that triggers asthma attacks and fine particulate soot that can actually lead to death. In addition, these plants emit the chemicals that cause acid rain and haze in our parks, as well as large amounts of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas.

On Thursday, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, of which I am chairman, voted to set strong limits on the three major health-threatening types of power-plant pollution and to put a cap, for the first time in American history, on the release of carbon dioxide from power plants.

The administration's climate action report projects that American emissions of carbon dioxide will rise by 43 percent by 2020. Yet its climate policy does little or nothing to control or reduce this increase.

This is a problem with a solution. The technology to clean up these plants already exists; some of it has been around for decades. What has been missing is the political will either to tell the owners to install this technology or to

create a market to encourage that investment.

America is on the verge of a boom in power-plant construction, and that gives us a rare opportunity. Including carbon dioxide reductions in a comprehensive cleanup plan now is the most efficient and least costly way to address the threat of global warming. The power industry realizes that the question on carbon dioxide is not whether it will be regulated, but when.

Dealing with global warming is too important to leave solely to Washington. Several states, including New York, New Hampshire and Massachusetts, are acting on their own to limit power-plant emissions. But Washington has a crucial role. The scientific consensus has never been stronger. A broad and growing coalition of public health and environmental organizations and several utility companies agree that we must act now. I hope that at some point President Bush will follow this lead.

*Jim Jeffords, independent of Vermont, is the chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.*

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