

**I want to thank the members of the panel for joining us today to wrestle with an issue that's not just an environmental issue, but which is as real and present a health care crisis as you'll find in numerous communities across our country.**

**When fathers across America take their kids fishing but can't risk cooking the catch for dinner**

**because of the risk of mercury contamination, that's a health care issue. When expectant mothers can't trust the tuna fish sandwich they are eating because it might some day lead to seizures in their child, we have a public health problem on our hands. When teachers are seeing increases in learning disabilities around mercury hotspots, we have an education and a public health issue staring us in the face.**

**And what's most troubling is,  
Washington's not being honest  
about it.**

**In this city, it's almost become  
standard-fare for honesty to be  
sacrificed for political expediency.  
We saw it when the President's  
budget left out literally trillions in  
spending. We saw it when a  
Medicare actuary was forced to  
fudge the numbers and lie to  
Congress to keep his job. We saw  
the falsified numbers in Iraq on**

**everything from the cost of the war to the number of trained Iraqi troops. We saw the fake newscasts produced by the Bush Administration and funded with your tax dollars.**

**But now, with our children's health on the line, we are reading headlines like "New EPA Mercury Rule Omits Conflicting Data." That's the nice way of saying that the agency in charge of environmental protection buried a**

**study that proves proposed mercury regulations don't do enough to keep our children safe from the risk of cerebral palsy, seizures, or learning disabilities. Consider some of the facts on mercury:**

- **The US EPA identified Mercury as the toxic of greatest concern among all other air toxics released by power plants.**

- **A January 2003 report from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention concluded that one in six women of childbearing age have mercury in their blood above the level that would pose a risk to a developing fetus.**
- **In adults, mercury exposure can cause irreversible damage to the brain and cardiovascular system.**

- **At least 44 states have issued warnings urging residents to avoid or limit their consumption of mercury-laden fish caught in local waters, and the federal government has recommended that children and women of childbearing age eat no more than two meals of low-mercury fish per week and avoid eating certain fish altogether.**

**The dangers of mercury exposure are undeniable. Every year more than 600,000 babies are born with dangerously high levels of mercury in their blood. We live with this every day in New England. The Merrimack River Valley in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and the Penobscot River area in Maine have been classified as “bio-hotspots” due to dangerously high levels of mercury.**



**Still, year after year strong mercury rules fail in Washington under pressure from corporate interests. Why? Not because the risks of mercury poisoning aren't real. No, lobbyists for the big industries just say they can't afford to make changes.**

**But the study commissioned by the Administration actually made it clear we can't afford not to. The report estimates health benefits of nearly \$5 billion from reducing**

**mercury emissions to a safe level of 15 tons. This health benefits analysis, the key to sound rulemaking, should have sounded alarm bells at the EPA and throughout the Bush White House. The need for change was clear. But the fact that the report was not even considered only raises more questions about what other information has been disregarded by this Administration.**

**The mercury issue, like so many others, shows not only a dangerous lack of candor and honesty by our government, but that in making public policy to protect the health of our kids, Washington has lost its sense of right and wrong. It's wrong to keep information from the people. It's wrong to make decisions while ignoring important data. It's wrong to give industry a free pass when our children will pay the price.**

**The Harvard report was not a rogue study. It was commissioned by the EPA and financed by your tax dollars. This Administration just didn't like the results, so they hid it away. Taxpayers' dollars were well spent, because the study helps confirm that mercury pollution can and must be controlled better to protect the health of our children. At a minimum we should demand that**

**the Harvard data be given a fair hearing.**

**It's time for the EPA to come clean, halt implementation of inadequate mercury rules and rewrite them based on this groundbreaking research that should have been taken into account all along. That's the least Washington can do to protect the health of our children.**