Congressional Record
United States of America
PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 109th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2005

Senate

Disapproving a Rule Promulgated by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency

Let me be clear: Similar to everybody else, I want to minimize fuel switching which could drive up the cost of natural gas even further. I, too, want coal to continue to be the backbone of our electricity-generating sector. Adopting a strong mercury rule is not inconsistent with either of those goals. It is consistent with protecting the health of pregnant women and children, among the most vulnerable members of our society.

The fears about the impacts of a strong mercury rule on coal and natural gas are unfounded. I am not aware of credible evidence that shows that powerplants will switch from coal to natural gas in order to comply with a more stringent mercury rule. The Energy Information Administration tried to say that fuel switching will occur. But listen to some of the assumptions they adopted to reach that conclusion.

First, they had to assume that natural gas prices would fall to $3.50 per thousand cubic feet 5 years from now in order to show that it would make economic sense for powerplants to switch from coal to natural gas. Let me tell you how much natural gas cost last week: $12. The week before Katrina hit, it was $9.50. I don't think there is any way natural gas prices are going to be $3.50 5 years from now. I hope I am wrong, but the odds are I am not.

Second, the Energy Information Administration had to assume that technology to control mercury does not exist. It does exist. There are already powerplants in the Northeast that have been reducing their mercury pollution by more than 80 percent for the last 5 years. Last month, Colorado-based ADA-Environmental Solutions was awarded another contract to install new mercury control technologies on two new powerplants being built in the Midwest.

The technology has been developed. The technology is being implemented. We can do better than the Bush rule. We can do better than that and we should. We have an obligation to our constituents, and we can do it in a way that balances our needs to preserve coal

and to protect the most vulnerable among us.