



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

Liz Krueger Denounces Midnight Changes From Bush Administration Hiding the Health Risks of Mercury in Certain Fish

LIZ KRUEGER December 18, 2008

New York—State Senator Liz Krueger sent letters to the Commissioners of the State Department of Health and the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to express her extreme concern regarding proposed changes to U.S Food and Drug Administration recommendations regarding fish consumption for pregnant women and children, and to urge City and State health officials to ensure New Yorkers continue to receive accurate information regarding the dangers presented by mercury in fish.

The new recommendations were exposed by a recent Washington Post story that explained the Food and Drug Administration is urging the government to amend its advisory that women and children should limit how much fish they eat, saying that the benefits of seafood outweigh the health risks and that most people should eat more fish, even if it contains mercury. This finding has been vigorously opposed by the Environmental Protection Agency and environmental health experts.

"Even in its final hours the Bush administration cannot spare us and go quietly into the night, instead they will leave the nation with yet another ill conceived and detrimental policy for the next President to clean-up," said Senator Krueger.

The dangers of mercury exposure are well established. Based on the evidence of the risks posed by mercury, in 2004 the FDA and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a joint advisory that women and young children should eat no more than 12 ounces of all seafood a week and should restrict their consumption of albacore tuna to 6 ounces per week. The warning added that women and children should not eat any shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish because of their high mercury levels. Women of childbearing years, pregnant women, nursing mothers, infants and children can be harmed by the mercury in fish which can cause birth defects and severe disabilities in children.

"The fish industry lobbied heavily against this initial warning, and has continued to pressure the FDA and EPA to modify the recommendation," said Senator Krueger. "I am concerned that this pressure has compromised the scientific studies that have been relied on to support this change."

The EPA described the FDA's documentation justifying the new recommendation as "scientifically flawed and inadequate," and finding that "the scientific, statistical and methodological limitations of this work are too great for it to serve as a tool for governmental decision-making regarding the risks of methylmercury in seafood – or for characterizing and communicating these risks to the public."

"With years of science and studies linking the harmful effects of mercury on children, I find it unfathomable that the FDA is actually planning on recommending eating more mercury laden fish to pregnant women," stated Senator Krueger. "This shows a blatant disregard for the public's health and welfare."

In the hopes of stemming the potential fall-out from the FDA's proposed recommendations Senator Krueger sent a letter to the New York State and City Health Commissioners calling on them to take the necessary precautions to protect New York's women and children.

In her letter Senator Krueger explained, "I am hopeful that the EPA's opposition to changing the recommendations regarding fish consumption for pregnant women will ensure that these changes do not go forward. However, should the Bush administration implement this new recommendation in its final days, it will be critical for state and local health departments to ensure that women continue to have accurate information regarding the dangers of mercury exposure. I therefore urge you to ensure that the State and City's Department's of Health are prepared to address this important public health issue."