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House of Representatives

WE MUST PROTECT OUR BORDER COMMUNITIES FROM DIRTY AIR AND UNFAIR SANCTIONS!

**HON. BOB FILNER
OF CALIFORNIA**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MR. FILNER: Mr. Speaker, we all know that pollution knows no boundaries. As much as we wish they could, the Border Patrol is not able to stop air pollution from coming over our international borders.

Right now, communities on our international border are being bombarded with pollutants from our neighboring countries. It is making air quality along the border even worse and leaves those communities with no recourse.

I introduced a bill, H.R. 4774, to provide Federal assistance to combat air pollution at the border, to ensure that our communities are not unfairly penalized.

Imperial County in my Southern California district, which takes up much of the U.S. Mexico border in the State, is severely impacted by air pollution because it sits in the middle of an air basin that straddles the international border with Mexico.

Mexico simply does not have the same strict air quality standards as does the United States. Imperial County has not met national and State air quality standards as a result, so any air

pollution created in the international air basin has serious consequences for the health of my community's citizens.

I have deep concerns about a recent Federal Court ruling regarding the air quality of Imperial County and the subsequent actions on the part of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Imperial County has demonstrated to EPA that the county would have only moderate pollution were it not for serious air pollution from Mexicali, Mexico. EPA agreed. However, outside groups took EPA to court and they ruled in turn that Imperial County's air pollution should indeed be classified as serious.

This is a devastating ruling for Imperial County. Unemployment averages 20 to 30 percent. The ability to attract new employment opportunities will be greatly hindered. Economic development will be halted. Agricultural activities will not be able to begin.

The chaos and expense to Imperial County will not address the real cause of non-attainment: cross-border pollutants.

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Imperial County has an asthma rate that is off the charts, the worst in the state, probably the worst in the nation. Asthma-related hospitalization rates are five to six times greater than the overall rate in California. This statistic is a statistic that I and many others in our community are fighting to change, but we cannot change it if we are not pushed to work with our neighbor to the south.

For that reason, I introduced the bill H.R. 4774, the FAIR Air Act, fair meaning the Foreign Air Impact Regulation, which will compel the United States at the Federal level to work more closely with our neighbors in trying to reduce air pollution. This bill says that if pollution from another country causes non-attainment of pollution regulations, EPA and the Secretary of State should work together to lower it; do not put it on the backs of the farmers and the working people in Imperial County.

My bill would direct the Secretary of State to negotiate with his or her counterparts in the foreign country to develop a plan to improve air quality. It requires EPA to deliver a report to Congress that lays out the agreed-upon bi-

national steps with bi-national funding to back it up, those steps to improve the air quality in the region; and directs the EPA to take action to help the region implement the plan; and, finally, delays EPA's authority to move border air quality regions to a higher pollution non-attainment status until the previous items have been completed.

We simply cannot put this international problem on the backs of those who simply happen to live along the border. There truly needs to be a bi-national cooperative solution. We live in the same air shed, and we are interested in good neighborly relations.

I am fighting to help our bi-national communities come into compliance with air quality standards with help from both sets of governments. It is only with cooperation and working together to achieve a common goal that we can indeed reduce air pollution and keep the children in Imperial County from suffering from asthma.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4774, the FAIR Air Act, will help to achieve that purpose. I urge my colleagues to support that bill.