

Washington DC—Today Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) joined with Congressional Democrats and environmental organizations to commemorate Earth Day by calling on the Bush administration to halt its assault on the environment and to urge the Federal government to be an environmental leader.

“The single most important step that we could take this Earth Day would be for the Federal government to model the environmental behavior that we expect from the rest of America,” said Blumenauer.

“The Department of Defense is the largest manager of infrastructure in the world, as well as the largest creator of Superfund sites in the United States,” noted Blumenauer.

“Millions of acres of formerly used Defense sites are contaminated with military toxins and unexploded ordnance, and toxic perchlorate has shown up in many communities’ drinking water. Yet this week the Pentagon is urging Congress to grant it wide exemptions from Superfund laws, as well as the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.

“The Bush administration is taking us in the wrong direction by making significant, far-reaching changes to landmark environmental laws. I am overwhelmed not only by the depth and breadth of these changes, but also by the administration’s attempts to do most of it under the public’s radar screen,” said Blumenauer.

For example, Blumenauer noted that through regulation changes, the administration is weakening clean air enforcement rules for the oldest and dirtiest power plants- which the American Lung Association has labeled “the most harmful and unlawful air pollution initiative ever undertaken by the Federal Government.” In addition, the administration has offered up weak new rules on toxic mercury that were written in part by industry lobbyists. The administration also refuses to reauthorize the Superfund Trust Fund and reinstate the “polluter pays” principle, despite the fact that the Trust fund is now empty, shifting the costs to the American taxpayer.

“Instead of weakening environmental laws that have protected the environment and public

health for generations,” Blumenauer argued, “there are simple steps that we can take today to make our communities safer, healthier, and more economically secure. One commonsense step would be to increase automobile fuel efficiency standards. The American public understands that simply improving our standards to the same level that American car companies already have to meet to compete on the European and Japanese markets could save more gasoline than what we import from the Middle East.

“Earth Day is a reminder of our responsibility to protect our environment for generations to come,” said Blumenauer. “I will continue to work with my colleagues in Congress to keep our air and water clean, protect our public lands, and stop the Bush administration from turning over control of our public lands to the polluters so that, in the future, Earth Day can be a true celebration.”