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Congress of the United States
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT, LABOR & PENSIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE PROTECTIONS

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

UNITED STATES HOUSE SCIENCE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY
CHAIR

April 29, 2019

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington DC 20460

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

I am writing today to express my deep concern regarding the lack of national recycling and waste management infrastructure in the United States. The trash buildup in the U.S. and around the world following China's January 2018 ban on certain types of solid waste has drawn attention to how ill-prepared the U.S. is to handle the recyclable waste that we produce. As raw materials become scarcer and more expensive, a national recycling strategy would preserve our natural resources while driving economic growth to build American leadership in sustainable global innovation.

Recycling drives job creation in the collection and processing of materials, manufacturing new products from recycled materials, and remanufacturing. The International Trade Commission estimates that remanufacturing alone has already added over 180,000 jobs in the U.S., with an enormous potential for growth.

Another benefit of a national recycling system is reducing U.S. reliance on foreign imports of material used in domestic manufacturing. For example, rare earth elements are used for many commercial applications including electronic devices, automobiles, and national security applications, yet the U.S. relies almost entirely on imports from China for these finite resources. Rare earth elements and other critical minerals are also incredibly expensive, and a national recycling strategy will allow manufacturers to create good-as-new products at a lower cost.

The onus of waste management in the U.S. has historically fallen on state and local governments. As waste management companies are no longer able to sell recyclables to China, they are driving up their pricing to recoup costs. In many cases, U.S. cities are being forced to cut longstanding recycling programs and are instead incinerating recyclables or leaving them in landfills, releasing harmful dioxins, methane and other dangerous emissions. For example, the

Detroit Incinerator, the largest municipal solid waste incinerator in Michigan, has exceeded emissions limits more than 750 times since 2013.

The latest data from the EPA shows that in one year, recycling, composting, combustion with energy recovery and landfilling prevented over 181.5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent of greenhouse gas emissions, which is comparable to the annual emissions from over 38.8 million passenger vehicles.

We know the enormous environmental and economic benefits of recycling, and we know that there is a great need for action at the federal level. I am requesting detailed responses to the below questions.

- Why has data on the generation, recycling, composting, energy recovery and landfilling of materials and products in the United States not been updated since 2015?
- What steps, if any, is the Environmental Protection Agency taking to build out the national recycling infrastructure of the United States?
- How is the EPA working to mitigate the ongoing impacts of China's plastic ban and the resulting market costs for U.S. cities and states?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working with you to improve our nation's recycling infrastructure and to ensure the United States can best utilize our resources to remain competitive and maintain our natural beauty.

Sincerely,

Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress