

Opening Statement of Republican Leader John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Hearing
“Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Reform: Addressing America’s Plastic Waste Crisis”

March 4, 2020

As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chairman Tonko, for this opportunity to speak about today’s hearing on recycling and waste management, including plastics.

For the last 12 years, Chairman Pallone and I have served as co-chairs of the House Recycling Caucus. It has been a great opportunity to learn more about the benefits of recycling as well as the challenges faced by the larger recycling industry.

Recycling is an issue that I believe makes great sense from both an environmental and an economic perspective. We’ve heard a lot about the demise of recycling in America after China ended imports of recyclables from the U.S. The recycling industry, however, remains extremely important to the U.S. economy.

Additionally, recycling conserves our natural resources and permits obsolete, previously used, surplus, and byproduct materials to be processed into specific commodities that are used to manufacture new products. In 2018 alone, more than 120 million metric tons of scrap material was processed in the United States for reuse; generating \$109.78 billion in economic activity and directly employing \$164,000 Americans.

Is recycling perfect? No.

Are some recycling sectors better positioned than others? Yes.

Are global markets and individual commodity prices determinative on whether certain items are recycled and the quality of those products? Of course.

Is there room for improved education, infrastructure, and research? Certainly.

These are all worthy subjects that I hope we can get to today.

Unfortunately, I am worried about a few undercurrents that appeared in the testimony. There are ideas there that I cannot support, and would encourage others not to support as well.

The first is getting the Federal government involved in dictating the terms of how local governments should collect and manage discarded solid waste. The Solid Waste Disposal Act has a well-established delineation of authorities between the Federal government and the States: the Federal government takes the lead on hazardous waste management and states and local governments are primary on solid waste. I do not support dismantling that wall between the two and injecting the Federal government into setting curbside collection requirements and recycling standards for discarded items that not hazardous.

The second bothersome item for me in some of the written testimony was a desire to place new Federal costs on the manufacturing of non-hazardous items and Federal mandates on the material content and design of those items. This kind of policy strangles innovation and initiative on the business end and ultimately shifts costs to consumers in the form of higher taxes or increases in consumer goods prices.

The last bothersome thing I found in the testimony was the view that we need to reduce manufacturing in the United States – whether from virgin materials or entirely out of recycled ones. This sentiment included agriculture, timber, and mining – important industries in “flyover country” and rural areas across this

country. These types of industries are essential to keeping us a strong nation with a high standard of living.

We all want a clean environment, but we cannot fund it in a competitive global marketplace if American ingenuity consciously recedes into a place where our manufacturing sector has the GDP of a third-world country. At a minimum, items break down and you need to replace them.

On the subject of plastics, there is a good deal that we need to learn about the plastics issue and what is happening today and, in the future. I hope we will explore solutions to both marine debris and mitigating greenhouse gases released from landfills or manufacturing plants. I know some people think it would be easier to ban plastic, but I do not believe that it is a good policy to ban materials just because you don't like them. We should explore whether banning plastic would actually exacerbate problems Congress thinks it is solving with a ban as well as what other risk trade-offs occur from taking such an action.

That said, I join Chairman Tonko in welcoming our witnesses here today and thank them for their time and expertise.

I yield back the balance of my time.