



Chair Chellie Pingree
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Efforts to Address Marine Plastic Pollution Through Recycling Hearing
March 18, 2021

As Prepared

Good morning, this hearing will now come to order.
As this hearing is fully virtual, we must address a few housekeeping matters.

I would like to welcome everyone to the first Interior and Environment subcommittee hearing of the 117th Congress, and my first as Chair of the subcommittee. We have several new members joining the subcommittee this year. Mr. Harder, Ms. Lee, and Mr. Cartwright, welcome to the subcommittee. And, Ms. Kaptur, we're happy to have you back.

Mr. Joyce, I am especially looking forward to working with you and your staff this Congress.

I am pleased that our subcommittee's first oversight hearing this Congress will be focusing on marine plastic pollution, recycling, and the steps currently underway to move us towards a circular economy. Coming from Maine, I am dedicated to protecting our natural resources and coastal ecosystems and have had a long-standing interest in addressing our waste challenges and improving our sustainability.

This hearing builds upon work this subcommittee did last Congress. In September 2019, we held a hearing on marine debris and its impacts on ecosystems and species, then in February 2020, we held a hearing on ways to strengthen community recycling programs.

Some of the key takeaways for me from those hearings were that the marine plastic pollution crisis has many parallels to the climate crisis. The problem is global in scope, growing worse each year, and has increasingly devastating consequences. Addressing it will require a coordinated response by governments, the private sector, and non-governmental stakeholders. There are enormous economic opportunities and environmental benefits to moving to a circular economy, but it will take a sustained commitment of effort and resources to get there. Many of the tools we need are available to us today, and we are making progress, which we will hear about today. However, unless we substantially increase our ambition and scale, the problem will only grow as pollution growth outpaces our solutions. Finally, the federal government has a key role to play in this regard, both domestically and internationally.

The bottom line is that the status quo is simply untenable, and the American people are expecting us to take action.

I would now like to welcome our panelists:

- Dr. Winnie Lau, Senior Manager, Preventing Ocean Plastics, here on behalf of the Pew Charitable Trusts;
- Ginger Spencer, who is the Director of Public Works for the City of Phoenix, Arizona; and
- Nicole Collier, who is Senior Director for Corporate Affairs, at Nestlé USA.

Our panelists will discuss some of their work researching strategies to reduce marine plastics, the successes and challenges that they have faced working in their communities to improve recycling rates by the public, and some of the investments the private sector is undertaking to reduce packaging and increase the recyclability of their products.

COVID has created new challenges that we have all had to navigate, and I hope our witnesses will also discuss how the pandemic has impacted their efforts, and what they have done to stay on track.

Finally, I hope to hear about what more the federal government can be doing to support their efforts, and what else we should be doing to increase circularity and sustainability.

We know we all need to work together to address the plastic pollution problem and it will be instructive to learn about progress in sustainable packaging that will help with waste management, reduce sources of this pollution, and are a creative solution to address the global trash problem.

Before hearing the opening statements from our panel, I would like to yield to our Ranking Member, Mr. Joyce, for any opening remarks he would like to make.