

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 12, 2019

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

We are writing to express our serious concerns about the state of recycling in the United States and to better understand how the Department of Commerce is actively managing the economic and trade impacts of China's "National Sword" policy. Since the policy was enacted in January 2018, China has sharply reduced the import of foreign recycled materials to address national environmental concerns but also to shed the country's reputation as the world's recycler.

For more than three decades the United States and many other countries have relied on China to accept most of our recyclables, leading to a weak domestic recycling industry. At peak export, the United States had relied on China to accept almost 70 percent of all U.S. recycled goods, and by 2017 China had grown to accept nearly two-thirds of all global plastic waste. Today it imports about one percent of all global recyclable plastics.

However, China's decision offers an opportunity to create a competitive and profitable U.S. recycling industry. We should capitalize on this new market dynamic and support an industry that promotes local job creation and economic growth while averting an environmental crisis. It is vital that we improve our recycling infrastructure to prevent the rapid decline of recycling programs across the country and reduce the amount of recyclable waste piling up in US landfills.

The Department of Commerce is already mandated under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) to encourage greater commercialization of proven recycling technology as well as stimulate the development of markets for recycled materials in the United States. In 2006, the Government Accountability Office reported that Commerce was falling short of meeting its requirements under RCRA. Considering China's "National Sword" policy, we are troubled by the lack of mention of recycling as a priority for the Department of Commerce, which is equipped to respond to this growing threat.

The Department of Commerce must play a key role in fostering an environment that promotes and encourages recycling, while harnessing and encouraging innovative recycling technologies. Commerce can position the U.S. as a global leader by encouraging and demonstrating our innovative and economically viable approaches to recycling and should make this a priority.

Understanding these concerns and our immediate and future needs, please provide answers to the following questions in the context of what actions have been taken directly in response to China's "National Sword" policy:

1. Is Commerce working with federal, state, and local stakeholders to comprehensively address the recycling crisis and develop a viable national strategy in response to China's "National Sword" policy?
2. Has Commerce developed a national strategy to identify new geographical locations of existing or potential markets for recycled materials as mandated under RCRA? If not, is a plan currently being developed?
3. Has Commerce reported on or taken steps to identify the economic and technical barriers that exist to process recycled materials in the United States, encourage greater commercialization of proven recycling technology, and develop a robust market that promotes the sale of recyclable waste and recycled goods?
4. How is Commerce increasing international trade in recycled and recyclable materials as part of its general trade promotion responsibilities?

The Department of Commerce has an important role to play in developing solutions to our most pressing economic challenges, and Congress seeks assurances from the department today that it will manage this crisis as required under RCRA.

Sincerely,



MARK TAKANO HALEY M. STEVENS DEB HAALAND

Member of Congress

Member of Congress

Member of Congress



RAÚL M. GRIJALVA
Member of Congress



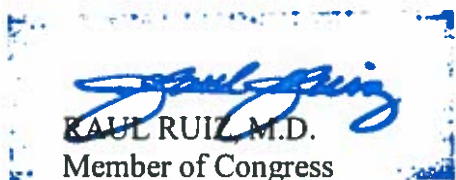
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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



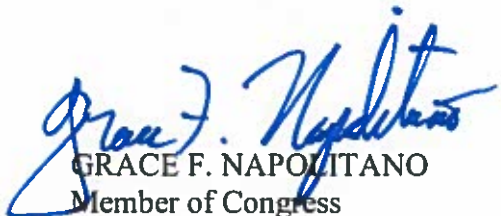
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Member of Congress



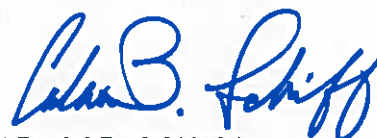
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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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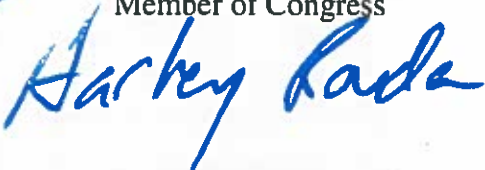
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Member of Congress



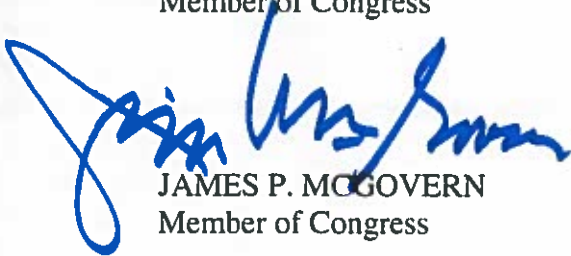
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Member of Congress



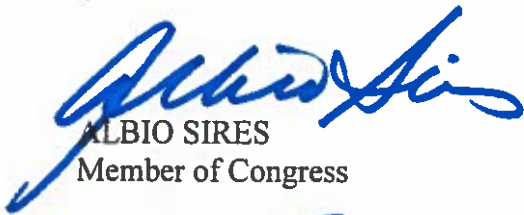
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Member of Congress


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Member of Congress


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