

Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Carper
“Recycling Electronics: A Common Sense Solution for Enhancing Government Efficiency
and Protecting Our Environment”
February 27, 2014

As prepared for delivery:

Good afternoon. I'd like to thank today's witnesses and guests for joining us to talk about how properly recycling electronics can preserve our environment, contribute to economic development, and help our government become more efficient. This is an issue that is of great interest to me, and should be to anyone who owns a home or a business.

The Consumer Electronics Association estimates that Americans own 28 electronics per household. If I were a betting man, I would bet that everyone in the room has at least one electronic device with them today, and countless more at home and at the office. You've probably asked yourself, what am I supposed to do with this device once I'm done with it?

Throughout my life, recycling has always been a top priority for me, and it's something that I have strived to encourage both through my personal efforts but also as a public official. You could say it is a true passion of mine. I am a proponent of recycling because it helps us preserve our limited resources and reduce our landfill input; all while creating good-paying, American jobs.

Along with Sen. John Boozman, I serve as co-chair of the Senate Recycling Caucus. We are committed to raising awareness of the many benefits of recycling. Most Americans are familiar with traditional municipal recycling efforts that encourage individuals to recycle paper and other household goods. But there's more to recycling than just tin cans and milk jugs.

Today's hearing will specifically take a look at electronics recycling, and how the federal government can help lead the way when it comes to expanding good practices that will save resources and cut down on potentially dangerous materials piling up in our landfills.

The federal government is the nation's largest purchaser of electronics and subsequently the largest disposer of such devices. This provides our government with the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that it recycles electronics in the safest, smartest way possible.

I believe the challenges and opportunities presented by electronics recycling draws a parallel to President Clinton's 1993 executive order requiring the U.S. government to purchase recycled paper. By harnessing the power of market forces through the Federal government's increased demand for recycled paper, this executive order in turn helped lower the price of recycled paper for everyone else.

In the case of electronics recycling, the Obama Administration's creation of the National Strategy for Electronics Stewardship is a great first step. The National Strategy seeks to leverage the purchasing power of the federal government to support responsible purchasing, management, and recycling of electronics within the federal government.

Today, witnesses from the public and private sector will help us examine how the government can lead by example when it comes to electronics recycling. Our witnesses will also discuss how the government can improve and increase electronics recycling across the country and look at the promise and challenges in increasing electronics recycling efforts in the United States.

We will also hear from the U.S. Postal Service about what it is doing to help in this effort. I'm particularly interested in hearing how the Postal Service can use its unique distribution network to make more money in this area.

I often say, anything I can do, I know I can do better. Recycling electronics is a perfect example. Our environment benefits from avoiding volumes of landfill waste, and American jobs are created as the demand for recycling opportunities increase. That's what I like to call a win-win.

I look forward to an informative discussion today of an issue that will undoubtedly only grow in significance as we continue to increasingly rely on electronic gadgets and need to dispose of older electronic equipment. Thank you again to our witnesses for being here today and I look forward to hearing your testimony.

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