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Re: Call for Doubling Strength of America's Best Regional Climate and Clean Air Program

Dear Chair:

546 health professionals, businesses, academics, elected officials, conservation, consumer and environmental groups and community leaders from nine states in the Northeast called on their Governors to strengthen the nation's best regional climate and clean air program, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

The signers, including the mayor of Worcester, Massachusetts; the head of the Institute for Environment and Society at Brown University; the Vice President of Independence Solar and the owner of Maine's Austin Street Brewery sent a letter to the governors asking them to "deliver clean air and a safe, healthy climate for us all." Specifically, the letter calls for governors to "double the strength of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative" to head off the worst effects of climate change.

We're on the right track, but we need to do much more. From Maryland to Maine, we can make America's best regional climate and clean air program twice as effective.

Over the last decade, the program helped cut emissions from power plants in half. In addition to cutting climate pollution, the RGGI program has created significant benefits for the region, including:

Cleaner air. In its first six years, the program prevented 600 premature deaths, 9,000 asthma attacks, and 43,000 lost work days.

More local clean energy. In the first decade, the program generated more than \$2.5 billion for clean energy and energy efficiency. The demand for clean energy is so high that Solar City is building a "GigaFactory" in Buffalo to manufacture solar panels. When operational in 2017, this factory will be the largest solar panel factory in the Western Hemisphere. The company expects to create 3,000 new jobs in Buffalo.

The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative has delivered important health and economic benefits for communities in the Northeast. Strengthening RGGI's targets will help even more families benefit from lower energy bills and cleaner air.

Over the next few months, officials from the nine participating states will evaluate options for improving the program as part of a review process established when the program was launched.

The letter also notes that the need to reduce pollution to protect our climate is only growing more urgent. In January, NASA announced that 2016 was the hottest year on record for our planet, breaking records last set in 2015 and 2014.

On average, power plant pollution in the region have been falling by almost 5 percent per year since 2005. In 2016, pollution went down by 4.8 percent.

Governors should keep up that pace by lowering the limit on pollution by 5 percent per year through 2030 and address loopholes that undermine the program. That would double the strength of the cap, which currently requires emissions cuts of 2.5 percent per year.

The good news is that these nine states have been leading the charge to protect our health and environment and shift to clean energy. Now it's time to build on that success and make America's best regional climate program twice as good.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring these remarks to your attention.

Yours sincerely,  
Robert E. Rutkowski

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