New Nationwide Bottle Bill Proposal Would Result in a Projected 80% Beverage Container Recycling Rate

CRI Reports Benefits of the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act Unveiled Today

CULVER CITY, CA, FEB. 11, 2020 – Landmark legislation introduced today that would create a national beverage container deposit system would, if passed, likely increase the U.S. recycling rate for bottles and cans from the current 33% to 80%, according to the Container Recycling Institute (CRI). The nonprofit recycling authority said this means that more than 190 billion of the 250 billion bottles and cans sold annually would be captured – almost 2.5 times the 80 billion recycled in 2017.

To support the development of the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act of 2020 (U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., and U.S. Rep. Alan Lowenthal, D-Calif.), CRI provided its expertise on container deposit laws (aka bottle bills), which enable consumers to return empty bottles and cans to a recycling location and get back the 5¢, 10¢ or 15¢ deposits they paid upon purchase. (The Udall-Lowenthal bill also would implement several other measures to tackle the rapidly growing crisis caused by plastic waste.)

Currently, only 10 U.S. states have bottle bills. The average recycling rate for bottles and cans on deposit in these states is 66%, a stark contrast to the average 23% recycling rate for beverage containers without deposits.

“A national bottle bill would introduce the most effective beverage container recycling system available throughout the nation, while bringing much-needed modernization to the process,” CRI President Susan Collins said. “The 10 existing deposit laws, while very valuable, are all independently designed and operated, with inconsistencies in deposit amounts and types of beverages covered. The 40 non-deposit states have a myriad of recycling programs with varying degrees of effectiveness, but overall they have very poor beverage container recycling results.”

CRI calculated the 80% recycling rate estimate for a nationwide bottle bill based on a 10¢ deposit (the minimum amount in the proposed legislation) for all containers excluding dairy. Oregon’s program has an 81% redemption rate and Michigan’s rate is 89%. Collins noted that an 80% redemption rate would provide significant benefits, including:

- Reducing the amount of greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to removing 2 million cars off our roads (because fewer new bottles and cans would need to be made from virgin materials that increase energy use and carbon emissions);
- Recovering 9.2 million additional tons of materials worth $1.4 billion, thus boosting the economy;
- Supporting 90,000 jobs nationwide in the recycling industry; and
- Dramatically lessening litter and harmful marine debris, and reducing cleanup costs along our roadways, rivers, beaches, parks and fields.

She added, “For the sake of our climate, our oceans and our future generations, we must do more to collect high-quality recyclable bottles and cans that can be used to produce new products. A national container deposit-refund law can make that happen.”
The nonprofit Container Recycling Institute is a leading authority on the economic and environmental impacts of used beverage containers and other consumer product packaging. Its mission is to make North America a global model for the collection and quality recycling of packaging materials.

### A Decade of Plastic Waste

- Since 2010, consumers in the United States have wasted – meaning failed to recycle – 800 billion plastic bottles, with a weight of 25 million tons.
- If you laid all of these plastic bottles end-to-end, they would stretch to the moon and back more than 200 times.
- If the bottles had been recycled instead, the energy saved would have powered for one year the homes of 11 million Americans, which equals the population of Texas.