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Congress of the United States
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COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

HOUSE PERMANENT SELECT
COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE (U.S.
HELSINKI COMMISSION)

September 15, 2025

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

I am deeply concerned about the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposal to rescind the 2009 Endangerment Finding and what that will mean for Tennesseans, particularly for the health and safety of my constituents. I respectfully request that you withdraw the present proposal in the interest of EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment.

The Endangerment Finding requires the EPA to protect people from the pollution that causes climate change and its impacts. Denying the danger cannot change the facts: pollution from fossil fuels is heating our planet, making extreme weather disasters more severe, and costing us all—especially the most vulnerable.

It is well-documented how climate change fuels extreme weather. Rising global temperatures due to climate change contribute to stronger hurricanes, more intense wildfires, and more extreme heat, among other impacts.¹ The threats have never been more dire or clearer to communities across the country, including those in Tennessee.

¹ Extreme Weather and Climate Change, NASA. <https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/extreme-weather/>

Flooding disasters are increasingly a concern for Tennessee residents, as sudden rainstorms and extreme weather happen more frequently due to climate change. In August 2021, flash floods in Waverly that brought more than 20 inches of rainfall in less than 24 hours killed 20 people and destroyed local communities and roadways.² Extreme rainfall in the Great Smoky Mountains, the most visited national park, leads to landslides and flooding that washes out trails and roads, puts visitors at increased risk of danger, and closes multiple sections of the park.³ Nearly a year after Hurricane Helene hit the United States, a portion of Interstate 40 along the Tennessee/North Carolina border is still being repaired from the associated flooding, causing delays for travelers and interstate commerce.

These extreme weather events lead to costly and devastating effects on local communities across the region. Last year, Tennessee residents experienced eight extreme weather events that each caused \$1 billion or more in damages to Tennessee and neighboring states, totaling over \$106.5 billion, and led to at least 423 lives lost.⁴

While Tennessee residents will face an increased risk of flash flooding, higher temperatures and drought are expected to also affect key industries across the state and residents' health. By the end of the century, western Tennessee is expected to have up to thirty more days with temperatures above 95 degrees, and residents are already feeling the impact of dangerous heat.⁵ With shrinking hospital capacity across the state, vulnerable populations are at an increased risk of health concerns due to rising temperatures.⁶ Droughts have also become more common, and between June 2024 and February 2025, more than half of the state faced continuous drought.⁷ Research from the University of Tennessee found that this increase in droughts impacted farmers' overall crop productions in the past year.⁸ Droughts are also expected to decrease the amount of electricity produced by the TVA as hydroelectric dams dry up, which provides 15 percent of the state's electricity.⁹

² Eggers, C. "Tennessee Has Seen 100+ 'Billion-dollar Disasters' since 1980. NOAA Will No Longer Document Them." WPLN, May 13, 2025. <https://wpln.org/post/tennessee-has-seen-100-billion-dollar-disasters-since-1980-noaa-will-no-longer-document-them/>

³ Climate Change Connections: Tennessee (Great Smoky Mountains), EPA 2025.

<https://www.epa.gov/climateimpacts/climate-change-connections-tennessee-great-smoky-mountains>

⁴ NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters (2025). <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/state-summary/TN>

⁵ "What Climate Changes Means for Tennessee." U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2016.

<https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-09/documents/climate-change-tn.pdf>

⁶ Stephenson, S. "Report: Hospital capacity limits leaves half of TN counties more vulnerable to extreme heat," Tennessee Lookout, Oct. 11, 2024. <https://tennesseelookout.com/2024/10/11/report-hospital-capacity-limits-half-of-tn-counties-more-vulnerable-to-extreme-heat/>

⁷ Eggers, C. "Swaths of Tennessee Recover from Drought Following Recent Rains and Snow." WPLN, Feb. 25, 2025. <https://wpln.org/post/swaths-of-tennessee-recover-from-drought-following-recent-rains-and-snow/>

⁸ "Tennessee Experiences Challenging Year for Crop Production," University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, Dec. 9, 2024. <https://utianews.tennessee.edu/tennessee-experiences-challenging-year-for-crop-production/>

⁹ Ibid. 6.

By eliminating the Endangerment Finding, the administration aims to undermine other protections against climate pollution: clean car and truck standards, power plant rules, oil and gas rules, landfill rules, and more. It means giving polluters a free pass to pollute at the expense of families across the country. It means my constituents will face more climate chaos and more pollution, especially in communities already overburdened by pollution, more health harms, and higher costs.

I urge you to uphold the mission of the EPA by maintaining the Endangerment Finding and demonstrate your intent to protect the health and welfare of Tennesseans and communities in all parts of the country.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Cohen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" and last name "Cohen" clearly distinguishable.

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress