

# Senate Committee OKs Bills on Whales, Marine Debris

By Wes Wolfe November 14, 2019



*Image by Uko Gorter*

During a busy day on Capitol Hill the U.S. Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee approved nearly two dozen bills, including legislation that would lead to significant steps to protect North Atlantic right whales and work to combat marine debris pollution. U.S. Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J. and one of the candidates for president, introduced S. 2453, the SAVE Right Whales Act, in September with U.S. Sens. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Tom Carper, D-Del. U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., introduced the substitute bill that passed the committee Wednesday.

“The North Atlantic right whale was named the official Georgia state marine mammal when I served as minority leader in the Georgia State House, and I am proud that my state’s coast is still home to one of the few known calving grounds for this magnificent animal,” Isakson said in a statement in September. “I’m glad to introduce the Scientific Assistance for Very Endangered Right Whales Act to help learn about how we can better protect this important animal whose numbers continue to dwindle.”

The legislation drew widespread support from environmental organizations.

Natural Resources Defense Council deputy director Nora Apter wrote Sunday, “If the SAVE Right Whales Act becomes law, it would establish a new grant program to fund projects between states, members of the fishing and shipping industries, and nongovernmental organizations to reduce the impacts of human activities on right whales.

“Specifically, it would authorize \$5 million annually over 10 years in new funding to develop, test and implement innovative technologies and other strategies to reduce the two main causes of North Atlantic right whale deaths: entanglement with fishing gear and vessel collisions. The sooner Congress enacts this legislation, the better our chance of ensuring right whales survive and rebound for the continued benefit of our ocean ecosystems, and for future generations to enjoy.”

The U.S. House Natural Resources Committee reported the companion bill, H.R. 1568, Oct. 18 as amended — it passed the committee 23-13 in May — and it presently awaits a vote by the full House. H.R. 1568 is co-sponsored by U.S. Reps. Buddy Carter, R-1, Hank Johnson, D-4 and John Lewis, D-5, among others.

The Senate committee also passed S. 1982, Save Our Seas 2.0, Enhancing the Domestic Marine Debris Response Act. U.S. Sen. David Perdue, R-Ga., signed on as a co-sponsor Oct. 15.

“The growing amount of plastic in the world’s oceans is extremely concerning,” Perdue said in a statement Nov. 5. “Our bipartisan bill will accelerate the removal of plastic waste from the ocean and help prevent future marine debris. This is a global problem, and the world needs the United States to lead a solution.”

U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., filed and then withdrew an amendment to the bill in order to make a statement and announce he planned to file a stronger bill, because he said this one doesn’t go far enough.

“America and the world have a serious problem with plastic pollution,” Udall said. “The United States alone discards about 30 million tons of plastic each year. Globally, about eight million tons of plastic escape into the oceans from coastal nations. That’s the equivalent of setting five garbage bags full of trash on every foot of coastline around the world.

“But, the plastic crisis goes far beyond our oceans. Plastic pollution is everywhere — in our rivers, our landscapes, our neighborhoods. Microplastics are even found in the rainwater above 10,000 feet in the Rocky Mountains. The new research has found human beings are ingesting about a credit card’s worth of plastic each week.”

Udall’s new legislation would include a 10-cent beverage container deposit — he said states with deposits see considerably more recycling than states that do not, and presently, nationally, much of what could be recycled is not.

U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, is the lead sponsor of S. 1982 and took issue with Udall’s characterization of the bill.

“But I do strongly disagree with his statement that this bill does little — to the contrary, this is one of the most comprehensive attempts to address this global crisis of our oceans of any legislation ever passed in the Congress,” Sullivan said. “It doesn’t solve everything, no bill solves everything, but it’s an important step forward.

“And, Mr. Chairman, if you don’t want to take my word for it, this was the lead editorial in the Sunday Washington Post a couple weeks ago, about my legislation that Sen. (Sheldon) Whitehouse (D-Ohio) is a lead co-sponsor, Sen. (Bob) Menendez (D-N.J.) is a lead co-sponsor, and as you saw today — Sens. (Brian) Schatz (D-Hawaii), Blumenthal, (Ted) Cruz (R-Texas). But, they go in-depth about this legislation and they end by saying, ‘It is a start, no doubt, but it merits quick and ringing approval.’ That’s from the Washington Post. I’d like to submit that for the record.”

The Senate committee meeting can be seen in its entirety at [commerce.senate.gov/2019/11/executive-session](https://commerce.senate.gov/2019/11/executive-session).

[https://thebrunswicknews.com/news/local\\_news/senate-committee-oks-bills-on-whales-marine-debris/article\\_f38e8798-5a45-527c-b1d4-d83b14f25e5e.html](https://thebrunswicknews.com/news/local_news/senate-committee-oks-bills-on-whales-marine-debris/article_f38e8798-5a45-527c-b1d4-d83b14f25e5e.html)