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September 3, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write to express my strong opposition to the waste-to-energy incinerator proposed by Energy Answer Arecibo LLC in the Cambalache Ward of Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Currently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service (RUS) is considering whether or not to provide financing for this project.

Burning garbage emits mercury, lead, dioxins and a variety of other toxic substances into the air. Waste incinerator systems also produce toxic ash and other residues that will also need to be disposed of in the environment. These pollutants will impact the health of plant workers and the people that live nearby and will contaminate the land and water and negatively impact fish and wildlife in the area. This is not the alternative energy project that the "Island of Enchantment" needs.

I also write to express my dissatisfaction so far with the vetting process underway and the poor USDA/RUS outreach to the local community of Arecibo. As you know, on August 7, 2015 a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with regard to the incinerator was noticed in the Federal Register. The EIS and its appendices are lengthy and highly technical in nature. Despite this, the public was given only 45 days to respond. In addition, a public hearing on the EIS was held on August 20th by RUS in Arecibo. I was deeply disappointed to hear that, given that the people of Arecibo speak Spanish and the RUS representatives speak English, there was no Spanish/English translation available during the hearing. The short comment period combined with the inability of RUS to actually communicate with the local community has caused understandable anxiety and distrust of the process throughout Puerto Rico.

To give residents a legitimate and sincere chance to understand and weigh in on the Energy Answer project, I request that RUS grant an extension of at least an additional 45 days to submit written comments.

Finally, like I did in April earlier this year, I would like to request a meeting with you to discuss in more depth Energy Answer Arecibo's proposed incinerator. To schedule a meeting please contact Julissa Santoy in my office at 202-225-8203.

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Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Luis V. Gutierrez
Member of Congress