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EPA Announces Baton Rouge Catholic High School Student Among 2021 President's Environmental Youth Awards Winners

DALLAS - (Aug. 13, 2021) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in partnership with the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), is pleased to announce Steffek Taylor Rainey of Baton Rouge's Catholic High School is among the 2021 recipients of the President's Environmental Youth Award (PEYA). Steffek is being recognized for developing a reusable water bottle to reduce ocean-bound plastic waste.

"This past school year has been one of the most challenging for our nation, yet students and teachers across the country remained dedicated to tackling the most pressing environmental challenges we face - from climate change to environmental justice," said **EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan**. "I'm so proud of the remarkable youth and educators we're honoring today, and their work to make a difference in their communities. By working hand in hand, we can create a more sustainable, more equitable world."

"It is humbling and inspiring to see the impact these educators and students are having on their communities and our planet," said **White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory**. "I congratulate the awardees and the schools they represent for applying their creativity, leadership, and passion to solving the environmental problems of our time, from confronting the climate crisis and conserving our lands and waters to pursuing environmental justice for all. These remarkable educators and students are leading the way toward a more equitable, sustainable and healthy future."

"Steffek's project shows how vision, ingenuity and persistence can help find solutions for the biggest environmental challenges we're facing," said **Acting Regional Administrator David Gray**. "Reducing plastic waste is vital to protecting ocean water quality and marine life, and we appreciate Steffek's work toward achieving this goal. Congratulations to Steffek on his President's Environmental Youth Award."

Recognizing that 40% of all plastic waste in the Gulf of Mexico originates from the Mississippi River, which runs through his hometown of Baton Rouge, Steffek saw the connections between his use of single-use plastics and pollution. Using Louisiana State University Innovation Park, he researched and developed a reusable bottle that includes storage compartments to house reusable silverware and a straw. Steffek estimates that each person who uses the bottles consistently could save 55 pounds of plastic waste from being disposed of per year. While the bottle is in the pre-manufacturing stage, he has performed environmental advocacy work with state legislators, the Louisiana Department of Education, the Louisiana Governor Policy Advisor, and a large food company. Louisiana State University has also expressed interest in purchasing the bottles for its incoming class, which Steffek predicts could save 426,250 pounds of plastic from polluting the environment annually.

The PEYA was established by the Environmental Education Act of 1970 and recognizes outstanding community-level environmental projects by K-12 youth that promote awareness of natural resources and encourages positive community involvement. Each year, PEYA honors a variety of local projects

developed by students, school classes, summer camp attendees and youth organizations to promote engagement in environmental stewardship and protection.

EPA also recognized 15 educators for their leadership and commitment to environmental education and environmental stewardship with the Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators (PIAEE). This year, five educators received the 2021 PIAEE, and 10 educators were recognized with an honorable mention distinction. Winning educators demonstrated leadership by integrating environmental education into multiple subjects and using topics such as climate change, a healthy school environment, environmentally friendly agriculture practices, human contributions to ocean litter, STEM education, and recycling or school gardens.

Additionally, 32 students who worked as a team or individually on 16 projects received the President's Environmental Youth Award; 14 students received honorable mentions. Their stewardship projects, conducted in 2020, display a commitment to participating in creative sustainability efforts, restoring native habitats, and installing renewable energy projects.

To read about the winning projects in detail, visit: www.epa.gov/education/presidents-environmental-youth-award-peya-winners and www.epa.gov/education/presidential-innovation-award-environmental-educators

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