

## **Her Voice: Bag ban is no way to protect the environment**

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by By Gloria Allen / For the Tracy Press

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There are a lot of opinions when it comes to Assembly Bill 1998, a piece of legislation that aims to ban bags at grocery stores. In fact, I've heard many irresponsible, heavy-handed comments about plastic bags and litter. Factually challenged arguments are clouding the real issue at hand — why are lawmakers worrying about grocery bags right now?

AB 1998 is simply a hidden tax that we'll all have to pay at the grocery store when we run in to pick up dinner.

I worked in the grocery industry for more than 20 years. While I care about the environment, I don't see how taxing and banning shopping bags is the answer.

At a time when California is in a budget crisis, I'm dismayed that our state lawmakers are considering funding a "bag police." Bag police don't keep our streets safe.

William Jespersen wrote earlier this month about the 14 law enforcement jobs lost at the San Joaquin County district attorney's offices. Stockton has experienced a massive increase in the number of homicides over the past year alone. This is unacceptable.

The state budget crisis has hurt all of us. Public safety jobs are being cut, school budgets slashed, essential services chopped — with no end in sight. There are real problems affecting residents across the state. But instead, lawmakers are wasting time and money on legislation that would tell us how to bag our own groceries — and cut more than 500 jobs in the process.

There are now more than 15,000 recycling bins at stores across our nation. More than 832 million pounds of bags and wraps were recycled in 2008, a 28 percent increase since 2005.

We all want to protect our environment, but this bill threatens to dismantle California's growing and thriving recycling program and does not spend one penny to combat litter.

Today, thanks to legislation passed in 2007, recycling bins currently found in stores collect more than just plastic grocery bags. They accept plastic dry cleaning bags, plastic bags used to deliver the newspaper, plastic wraps from bread, paper towels, cases of soda and other products. California recyclers and other companies then turn these products into long-lasting decking products, city park benches and recycled plastic bags and wraps. That sounds like an environmentally friendly solution to me.

No matter which way you cut it, the only winner here is the grocery industry. It will collect more money from shoppers during one of the greatest recessions in recent memory. Reducing grocers' overhead and generating funds to their bottom line makes for their good financials at the shoppers' expense.

We can all solve the “paper vs. plastic” question by just taking the time to recycle our bags. We don’t need a new law or a new state bureaucracy to do what is right. Now, maybe our elected officials can get on with solving the major issues facing our state.

- *Editor’s note: Assembly Bill 1998 would ban plastic bags in certain grocery stores and would require a 5 cent charge for take-out paper bags.*

- *Gloria Allen is a member of the Stockton chapter of the NAACP, a Stockton Unified School District trustee and secretary and treasurer of the California Coalition of Black School Board Members. She has lived in the community for more than 30 years, is a retired Safeway employee of 20 years and works part-time at Sara Lee. Allen is married with two children and four grandchildren.*

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