



The Conversation: Ban would punish consumers, retailers

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Should California ban plastic bags at supermarkets, or would the proposal to charge a nickel for paper bags constitute a new tax on groceries? To comment on this issue, please use our forum.

We all care about the environment and want to prevent litter, but hidden taxes and banning shopping bags aren't the answer.

Our representatives in Sacramento should be finding solutions to urgent problems – a huge budget deficit, rampant home foreclosures, millions of people without jobs. Instead, some lawmakers are wasting time and money on legislation that would tell us how to bag our own groceries.

Assembly Bill 1998 sounds simple enough: Punish Californians who don't bring enough reusable bags when shopping by charging us for each grocery bag. This ostensibly would help combat litter.

In reality, AB 1998 would create a "bag police," impose the equivalent of a new \$1 billion grocery tax on all of us, put Californians out of work, dismantle growing recycling programs – and not spend one penny combating litter.

The state budget crisis has impacted all of us. Public safety jobs are being cut, school budgets are being slashed, essential services are being chopped – and there's no end in sight.

Yet some lawmakers are suggesting that now is the time to establish a new government program that would spend \$1.5 million to police grocery bags. Business owners large and small – who should be focused on creating jobs – would be subject to another layer of government bureaucracy and punitive fines up to \$10,000 for handing out a bag. Is this an essential government service?

Many Californians are struggling to pay the mortgage, keep or find a job and pay the bills. Yet AB 1998 would force Californians to pay at least 5 cents (the bill

says it could go higher) for each bag we accept when we shop for food. That could equal an additional \$1 billion in our grocery bills when simply paying for food is a struggle. Working and non-working Californians can't afford another hidden tax – and raising costs on our food bills during tough times is simply wrong.

Speaking of working Californians, this bill would produce fewer of them. AB 1998 would destroy at least 500 jobs in California when unemployment is crushing families across the state. We need incentives to create jobs – not bans and higher costs to destroy them.

AB 1998 repeals recycling programs that actually help reduce litter. AB 1998 would dismantle the statewide plastic bag recycling infrastructure that our lawmakers voted to establish only four years ago.

That groundbreaking law requires large grocers to take back plastic bags and, in effect, provide recycling bins for plastic dry-cleaning bags, plastic bags used to deliver *The Bee* and other newspapers, and plastic wraps from bread, paper towels, cases of soda and other products. Recyclers then turn these products into long-lasting decking products, city park benches and recycled plastic bags and wraps.

These recycling programs are working, in California and across the country. Plastic bag recycling programs haven't been around long, but they are growing rapidly. Already the recycling rate has doubled and the Environmental Protection Agency estimates about 13 percent of these plastic bags and wraps are recycled. This growth is due in part to California's recycling law. 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. Plastic bag recycling in Los Angeles County grew 62 percent from 2007 to 2009.

AB 1998 would devastate the primary method to recycle dozens of recyclable products that often are not collected in curbside programs. Lawmakers should encourage these recycling programs, not repeal laws that are working.

We need jobs. We need teachers and police. We need a state budget. Lawmakers should focus on these urgent problems facing Californians, not "paper or plastic?"