

# Give Recycling a Chance: California shouldn't ban plastic bags

By Tim Shestek

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The author of a recent Forum piece ("Unemployment takes a toll," July 11) wrote: "Congress must continue to give the unemployed the safety net to survive until the economy turns around. It also needs to develop jobs programs that help put people back to work, get people spending and get the economy growing again."

This also applies to our state Legislature.

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 -- the latest data reveal a staggering 12.2 percent unemployment rate in Solano County.

Despite these daunting issues, the state Senate may soon decide whether to pass a bill that would punish Californians who don't bring enough reusable bags when shopping. AB 1998 would ban grocery stores from giving out plastic bags and require customers to pay at least five cents -- maybe more -- for each paper bag.

The end result is a nearly \$1 billion hidden grocery tax, when simply paying for food is a struggle for many, and a new needless state bureaucracy at a cost of \$1.5 million to implement this program.

Furthermore, passage of this bill could result in the elimination of jobs for nearly 500 California workers who make bags. Right now we need to create jobs, not destroy them; we need to help taxpayers keep every nickel and dime, not nickel and dime them while they're shopping for food.

There's a better way to reduce litter and disposal of plastic bags, and that is through recycling programs.

Just four years ago, California created a statewide plastic bag recycling infrastructure by requiring large grocers to take back plastic bags. This simple action also provided shoppers a convenient place to bring plastic dry-cleaning bags, newspaper bags and other product wraps. These recycled plastics can be made into products like durable decks, city park benches and recycled plastic bags.

Recycling programs work - in California and across the country. Plastic bag recycling programs are growing rapidly. There are now more than 15,000 recycling bins for plastic bags at stores across our nation.

More than 832 million pounds of bags and wraps were recycled in 2008, a 28 percent increase since 2005.

AB 1998 would dismantle this convenient consumer recycling infrastructure in California.

As you consider this issue, keep in mind that this year, the Vacaville Police Department has to cut nearly \$1 million from its budget. A budget cut of this size takes uniforms off the streets. But fear not -- AB 1998 will create its own force of "bag police." They won't keep our streets safe, but they'll be sure to fine any mom and pop store giving out grocery store bags -- up to \$10,000. It's just another layer of misguided government bureaucracy.

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

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