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## The unintended consequences of a plastic bag ban

**Jobs would be in jeopardy, and more consumers would switch to environmentally unfriendly paper bags.**

Peter M. Grande

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The Times' editorial board and others who support banning plastic bags are entitled to their own opinions, but not their own facts. Before the California Legislature makes any decision on this issue, let's carefully consider what the economic and scientific facts are.

As the president of a plastic bag manufacturer in Los Angeles County, I know all about this issue. We make all sorts of plastic bags — reusable, recycled content and compostable. And we do it right here in the Los Angeles area. We're proud of who we are, what we do and how we do it. And we are not afraid of having a legitimate debate on this issue, because we have the facts on our side.

Simply put, the phrase "Ban the bag" is a sound bite, not a solution. It's a proposal that will make legislators feel good rather than do good. In fact, it will do much harm.

Here are the facts. First, the ban will have an immediate impact. I disagree with those who say that banning plastic bags won't be effective. I believe it will be effective — at killing jobs. At my factory alone, 200 people will lose good-paying jobs almost immediately. This comes at a time when our state budget is running a \$19-billion deficit and when our state economy has an unemployment rate higher than 12%. Obviously, this is not the time to be pursuing regulatory policies that will kill jobs and hurt our economy.

Second, this ban will not only be bad for the economy, it will be bad for the environment. Studies demonstrate that plastic bags leave a lighter footprint on the earth than paper bags. Yet the proposed law would promote more paper bags and harm our ability to recycle. Ironically, stores and consumers shifted to plastic bags was because of environmental concerns about using paper bags. Now, in a complete reversal, we are on the verge of passing a law that will greatly increase the use of paper bags, thus destroying trees and increasing emissions of greenhouse gases, the leading cause of global warming. Is that smart environmental policy?

The goal of the bill may be to reduce first-use bags, but the net effect is simply a replacement of plastic bags with paper bags. And that's bad news for anyone who cares about the environment. An Environmental Impact Report by Los Angeles County acknowledges that if plastic bags are banned, 85% of consumers would switch to paper bags instead of reusable bags. We have seen this to be true in places where plastic bags have been eliminated, including San Francisco, Whole Foods and Trader Joe's. And what would this switch to paper bags mean for global warming? According to the figures in the report, 85% of Californians switching to paper bags

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would be the equivalent greenhouse gas emissions of between 250,000 and 550,000 more cars on the road every year. That's because life-cycle analysis calculates that paper bags result in more than three times the greenhouse emissions as plastic bags.

I'm saddened to see lawmakers ignore the facts and rush ahead with bad legislation. If first-use bag reduction were the real goal, why not simply prohibit grocery stores from giving away free bags of any kind to consumers? The answer is politics as usual. Our lawmakers must know that with the minimum fee for a paper bag set at a nickel, consumers would simply pay it. A bill that bans plastic bags and charges consumers a nickel for paper bags will yield only one result: a return to paper and an even more expensive environmental problem in the future.

The fact is, we all oppose the excessive use of packaging, including plastic bags. And we should all do our part by reusing or recycling bags and by not taking more bags than we need at the store. That's the right way to curb plastic bag use. The wrong way is with a piece of legislation that ignores the facts and stirs fears. Any solution to this issue must be grounded in reality and deal with the fact that a ban on plastic bags will lead to job losses and more paper bags that will negatively affect the environment.

Let's not ban the bag; let's bag the ban.

*Peter M. Grande is president and CEO of Vernon-based Command Packaging.*

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