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YourNews
Tim Shestek: We need jobs, not bag tax that nickel-and-dimes us

Posted July 27, 2010 at midnight

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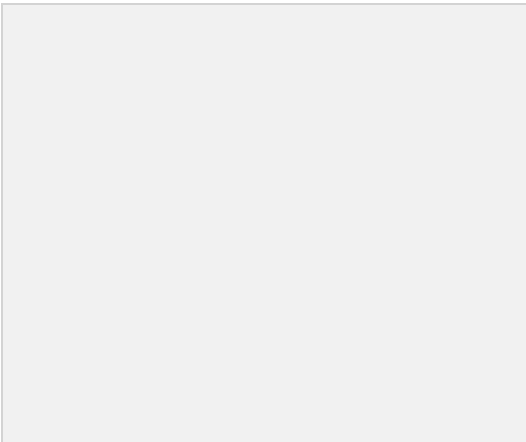
In Shasta County, the recession coupled with the state budget crisis has been nothing short of devastating, and the citizens of Shasta County are bearing the brunt of it.

Unemployment in Shasta County is still 16.4 percent, a staggering four percentage points higher than the state's already high 12 percent rate. Public safety jobs are being cut, school budgets slashed, essential services chopped — with no end in sight.

Yet instead of addressing these important issues, the California state Senate is considering whether to pass a bill that would regulate what kind of bags Californians use when they shop and require shoppers to pay for some of them. AB 1998 would ban stores from giving out plastic bags and require customers to pay at least five cents — maybe more — for each paper bag. The end result will be a nearly \$1 billion hidden grocery tax, when simply paying for food is a struggle for many, and a new state bureaucracy we don't need — at a cost of \$1.5 million. Furthermore, passage of this bill could result in the elimination of stable manufacturing 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 that is through recycling programs. Just four years ago, California created a statewide plastic bag recycling infrastructure by requiring large grocers and pharmacies 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. When recycled, these plastics can be made into useful products like durable decks, city park benches and recycled plastic bags.

These recycling programs are working — in California and across the country. Plastic



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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 and successful consumer recycling infrastructure in California.

As you consider this issue, keep in mind that earlier this year, the Redding Police Department narrowly avoided laying off three police officers, which Police Chief Peter Hansen called a "temporary postponement." At the end of the day, that means fewer officers on the streets. Instead, 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 expensive government bureaucracy we don't need.

Redding needs jobs. We need teachers and police. We need a state budget, not legislation that punishes our citizens. Lawmakers should focus on these urgent problems facing Californians, not "paper or plastic?"

Tim Shestek is a spokesman for the American Chemistry Council.

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Poll

The state of California is moving toward banning single-use plastic bags at grocery stores. What do you think?

Good. Encouraging the use of reusable bags -- or recycled paper bags -- will cut litter and improve the environment.

What a waste of time. Doesn't California have real problems to deal with?

"Single use"? I use plastic bags to carry my lunch, pick up after my dog, and for many other tasks. Why mess with a good thing?

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