CA. ASSEMBLY VOTES FOR BILLION DOLLAR CONSUMER “TAX” ON BAGS

Measure Would Cripple Recycling, Add To Waste, Greenhouse Gases, Job Loses

ARLINGTON, VA (June 2, 2010) – The California Assembly today approved a bill by a single vote (AB 1998) that would cost consumers as much as $1 billion in new charges on grocery bags – essentially a new tax – that also threatens increases in solid waste, greenhouse gas emissions and job losses in the state.

The bill, which would outlaw the use of free, recyclable plastic bags at grocery stores and require a customer charge on each and every paper bag, would devastate successful statewide recycling programs for dozens of recyclable products, such as plastic dry-cleaning bags, newspaper delivery bags, consumer product wraps and retail bags.

Opposed by a broad coalition of employer, nonprofit-service and manufacturing groups, the bill would put at risk thousands of stable and well-paying jobs in California. AB 1998 now heads to the Senate.

“The last thing Californians need is something that acts just like a $1 billion tax added to their grocery bills – but that’s what this legislation does,” said Tim Shestek of the American Chemistry Council in Sacramento, an organization that represents plastic bag makers. “Here we are cutting back on schools, police and health care, so it’s hard to imagine California creating a new million-dollar bureaucracy to monitor how people take home their groceries.”

Shestek expressed dismay over the bill’s threat to rapidly dismantle the state’s successful and growing plastic bag recycling programs. “It was only a short four years ago that the legislature voted for a statewide plastic bag recycling infrastructure,” he said. “Millions of bags and other plastic film and wraps are being recycled across the state. AB 1998 would cripple these programs and actually result in more waste going to landfills.

“Why would California pass a law encouraging plastic bag recycling and then dismantle the program when it shows success?” Shestek continued. “Why crush the supply of this valuable material when California recyclers are demanding all they can get? Common sense hopefully will prevail in the Senate, and this bill will be rejected.”

Shestek noted that switching from plastic bags back to the paper bags allowed under the bill actually would increase impacts to the environment. A recent study shows that San Francisco's switch to paper bags significantly increased energy use, greenhouse gas emissions and solid waste and did not reduce litter.

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