

Chicago's plastic bag ban is a step back in clean-city efforts

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May 14, 2014

Recently, the Chicago City Council took a major step back in efforts to both support our economy and protect the environment. Over the objections of 10 aldermen, the City Council passed a ban on plastic bags that effectively amounts to a tax on Chicago's working families and businesses. Moreover, the ban is premised on environmental arguments that have little to no basis in fact.

All in all, this is deeply flawed legislation. Chicago should abandon this mistake and instead opt for a comprehensive and effective recycling program.

The problem here is that paper bags are much more expensive than plastic bags, and many of the businesses we have heard from on this legislation are concerned by the added costs that switching to paper will impose. These businesses will have to absorb the large losses that a switch will cause, thereby sacrificing their ability to grow and employ more Chicagoans. We know from businesses elsewhere that the costs of adjusting to this kind of legislation ban total as much as \$1 million.

If they choose not to absorb the loss, they will be forced to pass the cost on to working families at checkout. Adding costs to grocery bills is a serious mistake, especially when many Chicago families struggle to put food on the table as it is. But the economic impacts of this legislation on working families do not stop there, because 3,000 people in Illinois — many right here in Chicago — make their living in the plastic bag industry. If Chicago leads Illinois down this misguided path, many of these hardworking people will surely lose their jobs.

These costs will all be for nothing, because this legislation will do nothing to actually help the environment. Chicago's own study acknowledged that plastic bags are a minuscule percentage (0.8 percent) of the city's total waste stream, and studies continue to show that plastic bags are traditionally less than 1 percent of litter in cities like Chicago. Singling out one product will do absolutely nothing to reduce Chicago's litter or waste in a meaningful way.

WE NEED A STRATEGY

If we want to truly affect the environment, we need to begin with a comprehensive environmental strategy. This requires promoting recycling so that so many of the blue carts in our neighborhoods don't continue to go unused or misused. We need to invest in making our transit stations safer and more usable so that we can truly reduce the number of drivers on our roads. These sorts of plans would strengthen our economies as well as our environments by making being a good steward of our environment a positive relationship rather than one more punitive step.

Chicago is known for creating reasonable and sound approaches to policy problems. We wholeheartedly agree with the goal of making Chicago the cleanest city in the United States and believe that the way to do that is to make serious investments in a comprehensive recycling solution. Recycling solves the waste and litter problem for plastic bags and other products, and would employ plenty of people in an environmentally sustainable sector of the manufacturing economy.

Recycling is the kind of solution that Chicago should be known for and that we can all rally around: It is serious, reasonable and effective. In contrast, the ban we just passed is an embarrassing and harmful mistake. Chicago can do better.

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