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Checkout Bag Tax Act

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Position Statement:

The Iowa Youth Congress supports legislation that implements a tax on single-use plastic bags.

Amend Iowa Code Section 331.301, subsection 6 c. (1) and Iowa Code Section 364.3, subsection 3 c. (1) to remove the preemptive ban on any Iowa counties and cities from taxing or banning single-use plastic bags.

Position:

It is the position of the Iowa Youth Congress that the Iowa legislature should pass legislation enforcing a five-cent tax on single-use plastic bags to stymie environmental degradation and leverage all revenue -projected \$44.5 million within ten years of its enactment- to support Iowa's education and environmental conservation efforts.

Current Situation:

Every year, approximately 8 million metric tons of plastic enter Earth's oceans (Le Guern). The United States collectively uses 12 million barrels of oil a year to meet plastic bag demand, discarding 100 billion plastic bags annually (Rood). The production, consumption, disposal, and waste of single-use plastic bags only contributes to the various environmental crises our world faces. Plastic bags can take over 400 years to degrade (Kilen). Additionally, the longevity of plastic bags enables just one plastic bag to harm and kill many animals (Rood).

Iowa's contribution to the problem is large: over 550 million plastic bags were used in the grocery industry alone in Iowa in 2018 (Danielson). Project AWARE is an organization that partners with the University of Iowa to pick up trash along the Boone River; the pounds of plastic they picked up more than doubled from 2014 to 2017 when they hauled in 3,440 pounds (Kilen). According to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 40 tons of materials were collected from the Des Moines River in 2016, 4.3 tons of which were composed of plastic bags ("A River through Time"). The various crises our world faces seem distant from Iowa, however, the Mississippi River - which borders Iowa - is one of the largest sources of microplastic ocean debris. Forty tons of polyethylene, the material used to make plastic, enter the Mississippi River Watershed annually (Conkle et al.). Consequently, plastic bag production, consumption, disposal, and waste in Iowa directly contribute to the worldwide crisis.



Rationale:

As of September 2018, 349 cities in the U.S. banned or taxed single-use plastic grocery bags (Nace), and by August 2019, the number increased to over 400 (Zeitlin). In suit with cities across the nation, Iowa City, Dubuque, and Marshall County were in the process of adding a ban or tax on disposable grocery bags prior to Governor Branstad’s signing of the preemptive ban (HF 295 from 2017) on banning or taxing single-use grocery bags (Rood). According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, states that have successfully enacted similar tax legislation (“SPP”, reference fact sheet, 3).

Iowa should tax single-use plastic bags because such legislation effectively decreases both single-use bag wastage and consumption. Several countries, including Denmark, Ireland, and Wales, levied taxes on consumers who used plastic bags, and they effectively reduced plastic bag use by over 90% (Rood). City officials in Washington, D.C. report that plastic bag usage has dropped about 60% since their fee took effect in 2009 (Grace and Powers). Many other numbers show taxes reduce plastic bag use across cities and states (see the fact sheet, 4).

Recommended Action:

Many cities, states, and countries are taxing single-use plastic bags to prevent environmental degradation, showing that taxes effectively raise large revenues to fund important programs, and taxes effectively stymie the wastage and consumption of single-use plastic bags. (See fact sheet, 1)

In addition to participating in the ongoing environmental reforms of our world and nation, Iowa should tax single-use plastic bags because such legislation has earned significant revenue for other states which have been used for worthy causes. Washington, D.C. directs revenue to a D.C. Department of Energy and Environment fund (Grace and Powers). Colorado directs revenue to a housing development grant fund that expands the supply of affordable housing across the state (“Affordable Housing Plastic”). Taxes across the State of Illinois will earn a projected \$23 million from retaining just five cents of their seven-cent tax per bag (Berg). Iowa will raise a projected \$44.5 million in revenues within ten years of this bill’s enactment. Therefore, it is the position of the Iowa Youth Congress that the Iowa legislature should pass legislation enforcing a five-cent tax on single-use plastic bags and leverage all revenue to Iowa’s general revenue fund.

Exemption:

The tax imposed under this Act does not apply to the retail sale or use of plastic bags used to carry items purchased under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or similar governmental food assistance program.



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