Position Statement

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports legislation which bans restaurants from providing single-use plastic straws to customers unless directly requested.

Position

It is the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council that Iowa implements legislation which bans restaurants from automatically offering single-use plastic straws to customers and only providing them upon request.

Rationale

Although the new national trend appropriately named, "#stopsucking", which aims to decrease the amount of plastic straws used in everyday life is acquiring attention, it is not acquiring enough from Iowa's legislative body. It’s troubling because almost all of the plastic ever made is still in existence today because of the fact that while plastic is degradable, it is not biodegradable. The fundamental difference between the two is that when plastic degrades, it breaks down into small enough pieces that it’s invisible to the human eye. It will appear to have disappeared, while still being present for hundreds of years. On the contrary, when biodegradability is referenced, the item is naturally broken down and recycled into new organic molecules [3]. Something that doesn’t occur with plastic items. It can take up to 200
years or more for plastic straws to decompose [3]. Which means the plastic used today will be around for at least two generations.

Various cities across the United States have implemented the ban on single-use plastic straws including Seattle [4]. It is the first major U.S. city to ban plastic straws and other utensils in the city’s bars and restaurants [4]. In addition to Seattle, California has also implemented this, but they have chosen to ban restaurants from offering single-use plastic straws automatically. Restaurants are to wait until the customer themselves have specifically asked for a straw [1]. Some companies have decided to take the initiative and plan to ban plastic straws by a specific deadline. Disney has pledged to accomplish this by mid-2019 in all of its nationwide resorts which would reduce Disney’s plastic straw usage by 175 million straws annually [2]. Other countries are also getting involved such as Britain, Scotland, India, and Taiwan who have made plans to decrease their usage of single-use plastics over the next decade [5].

The issue of plastic straws has concerned Iowans as well. At this moment, 1,998 people have signed a petition created by Katie Patterson which encourages restaurants in Des Moines to only offer plastic straws upon request. St. Kilda has already implemented this and the owner claims they have used about a tenth of the straws as they did before [6].

Without the implementation of this bill, Iowa will lag behind in terms of impactful and beneficial environmental decisions when compared to the many companies, countries, and states who have made a substantial effort to dampen their plastic use for the bettering of our youth and for the bettering of our environment. Although we may not feel the immediate effects of our overabundant plastic usage, it is without a doubt that future young Iowans will, and they will be left to find a solution to a problem that may be infeasible.

**Recommended Action**

In order to better protect our environment for future generations, Iowa’s legislators should create a bill which bans single-use plastics from being automatically offered at restaurants unless they are directly requested by the customer. If not followed, the restaurants are required to pay a small fee of $30 every time they offer a straw to a customer. This issue is more than the current national—and global—trend, but instead it is a movement that will lead to the improvement of the lives of our posterity.

Regards,

Appropriations and Government Committee
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council
Sources