

Local and state governments are just like the federal government. They want to keep their largesse ways and not face the demand for austerity and good fiscal management. When times get tight they seek to get into your pockets via obscene taxation on any and everything they can find. There is no regard for the underserved or populations that can least afford damaging taxation for the sake of keeping massive governmental infrastructures.

Many cities and counties are slipping taxes on cell phones like they are luxury items. The truth is cell phones are security items, family management tools and access to the Internet. Black citizens use cell phones as their number one vehicle to the Internet. So when they start slapping taxes on your child's phone and you are on a limited fixed income or assistance it becomes terribly damaging. They are doing this with reckless abandon and that is why we are pushing for a federal bill that will declare cell phones interstate commerce and prohibit any further local taxes for at least ten years.

Let's say you purchase a download through the Internet. You live in Philadelphia and you buy it from a firm in Seattle, Washington. The server used in this transaction is located in St. Louis. What may happen is a triple tax on this transaction. You may pay Philadelphia/Pennsylvania sales tax, Seattle/Washington sales tax and a St. Louis/Missouri sales tax all on one transaction. It is becoming crazy and somehow we must bring good management and governance in this new age of doing business.

Now comes taxing grocery bags. Washington, DC started this under the last mayor. My wife and I no longer shop in DC. We shop in Montgomery County, Maryland. However, the Montgomery County Council has just decided to implement their own five-cent grocery bag tax. Shall we now cross the Potomac River into Virginia? Better yet let's start getting a handle on this one.

The stated goals of the tax are to raise revenue and curb the use of grocery bags. The bags, the county says, are an environmental hazard. Instead, county officials say they want to encourage Montgomery County shoppers to use reusable bags.

Unfortunately, the measure misses the mark. What bag taxes like these result in isn't very "green" at all. And, what might be affordable for one of America's most affluent counties certainly wouldn't be affordable for working class communities, let alone the entire state.

Eliminating free grocery bags at the checkout means consumers must search for alternatives – presumably reusable plastic or cloth bags. Both options weigh more and take more energy to produce, contributing to greater emissions, not less.

As alternatives, plastic reusables and cloth bags must be used repeatedly over time before their environmental impacts are less than that of plastic. If they aren't reused to that extent, we only succeed in introducing more waste into our landfills. To illustrate, it would take 7.5 years of using the same cloth bag (393 uses, assuming one grocery trip per week) before it's a better option than a plastic bag reused three times, like to carry lunch and then line a garbage can.

And since so many people (nine out of ten according to market surveys) reuse plastic grocery bags, without them, consumers would naturally replace plastic grocery bags with other, heavier gauge plastics, for household uses. After Ireland implemented its bag tax, consumption of purchased plastic trash bags increased by 400 percent. So, if the goal is to promote less waste in our landfills and use fewer plastics, bans and taxes don't achieve those outcomes.

Bag taxes also skirt the real issue of litter. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says plastic grocery bags make up less than 0.5 percent of the litter stream. Junk food wrappers, cigarette butts and paper, all make up bigger portions of litter, but plastic bags make for an easy target because they are visible, white, and often can get blown around. In effect, getting rid of plastic bags is negligible in cleaning up litter. Addressing litter requires more than just banning a product, it requires a change in habits, more recycling, and greater education.

A tax on grocery bags is regressive. A growing number of Americans rely on government assistance for food, and taxes like this hurt these groups the most. In a time of rising gas prices, and with the rising cost of commodities driving up our grocery bills, the added financial burden at the check-out for a cause that has an arguable impact on improving the environment just doesn't make sense.

Though well-intended, a bag tax does more harm than help. Non-recyclable reusables are no better for the environment. The worst part is that the tax ends up hurting those that can least afford it. Fight this increased taxation effort whenever and wherever it comes up.

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