

CAPITOL ALERT OCTOBER 17, 2016 6:00 AM

AM Alert: Plastic bags' environmental impact debated

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A large pile of washed-up trash, including old plastic bags, sits alongside the Los Angeles River in Long Beach, Calif. on Sept. 2, 2014. **JOSH MORGAN**, - AP

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When members of the California Ocean Protection Council weigh a resolution today to support banning single-use plastic bags, a policy that was signed into law more than two years ago but which must survive a Nov. 8 referendum to proceed, it will be another volley in the battle over voter perception. Proponents say they're fighting for the environment while critics, led by the plastic bag industry, say it's all about the money.

The resolution that goes before the state entity today spells out plastic hazards that include 8 million tons of plastic flowing into oceans each year, harming animals who ingest it (a favorite prop of bag opponents is a massive inflatable sea turtle) and generating much of the trash reclaimed in coastal cleanup efforts. That would align the council with Proposition 67 supporters who include an array of environmental groups and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which has cut supportive ads starring an albatross and your grandparents. It's hard to imagine the resolution not passing today given the panel's environmental bona fides. Members include California Natural Resources Secretary **John Laird**, who signed the argument for Proposition 67, and Sen. **Fran Pavley**, D-Agoura Hills, the Legislature's most prominent enviro.

In the official Proposition 67 rebuttal voters will read, detractors don't dispute the environmental degradation. "WE ALL WANT TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT," their missive blares. Instead they decry Proposition 67 as a "sweetheart special interest deal" that levies a new "bag tax" on consumers while failing to send any money to the environment, a reference to the minimum ten cent fee that helped win the politically crucial support of the **California Grocers Association** when the Legislature passed the ban back in 2014. Plastic companies do not appear on the list of opponents who signed the rebuttal. Similarly, the official justification for Proposition 65, a measure supported by the plastic industry that would redirect bag fee revenue, stresses the need to spend money for the environment rather than "profits for corporate grocery chains."

Pro-bag banners denounce Proposition 65 as an attempt to confuse voters and undercut Proposition 67 – thus protecting plastic industry profits – under the guise of environmental stewardship. So far plastic companies have spent at least $2.9 million to advance Proposition 65 and fight Proposition 67. Supporters of the ban passed by the Legislature have less money to work with, though the grocery industry has kicked in at least $480,000.

Will the environmentalists' exhortations be enough to overcome that financial disadvantage and sway voters? We'll learn soon enough.

NOVEMBER BALLOT MEASURES

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Proposition #	Description	Funds raised (Since Jan. 1, 2015)
55	Extends for 12 years a version of the temporary tax increases approved by voters in 2012. Supported by teachers unions, health interests, others. Opposition campaign has yet to emerge.	Support $54.2m Oppose $3k
61	Imposes drug price controls. Sponsored by Los Angeles-based AIDS Healthcare Foundation. Drug industry giving heavily to defeat it.	Support $14.5m Oppose $86.9m
56	Imposes new taxes on tobacco products. Effort funded by doctors, unions, dentists, and others. Tobacco industry pouring millions into opposition campaign.	Support $26.3m Oppose $66.3m
64	Legalizes recreational marijuana use. Major backing from tech mogul Sean Parker. Law enforcement groups opposed.	Support $15.1m Oppose $1.12m
66	Measure to streamline the death penalty process. Supported by former NFL player Kermit Alexander.	Support $4.28m Oppose $1.21m

Click here to go to The Money Trail.

BY THE NUMBERS: 15 billion, or **400** per person, is the amount of single-use plastic carryout bags provided to Californians each year, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office.

VIDEO OF THE DAY: Watch raucous protesters shut down a Sacramento City Council meeting.

WAR OF DRUGS: Speaking of the perception game: both supporters and opponents of controlling prescription drug prices via Proposition 61 have tried to put forward supporters most likely to inspire public sympathy.For pharmaceutical industry critics of the measure, that means ads starring veterans. For backers, that means retirees. Arguing that high drug prices disproportionately hurt senior citizens, Proposition 61 proponents will hold an 11 a.m. press conference on the Capitol's north steps featuring representatives of AARP California, California Alliance of Retired Americans and California State Retirees.

GROWING GREEN: What's America's fastest growing industry? According to Americans for Safe Access, it's cannabis, which is why the pro-medical marijuana organization is hosting a training in Sacramento this week to help workers thrive in the burgeoning sector. ASA's focus is on medical pot, which has been legal in California for two decades, but their point about the weed industry's growth points to a larger truth underlying the Proposition 64 legalization campaign: some of the donors to the Proposition 64 campaign could make some serious coin if California voters give another big boost to the pot industry.

Meanwhile, advocates will gather in San Francisco at 11 a.m. to promote Proposition 64 with Lt. Gov. **Gavin Newsom**, the campaign's public face. The event's location at the headquarters of the American Civil Liberties Union reflects how Newsom and allies have framed the campaign as a social justice measure to end a prohibition that has disproportionately hurt the poor and minorities.

LEGAL LANGUAGE: Walk into a California court and you could hear one of the more than 200 languages and dialects that echo through the halls of justice, a point that Sacramento Supreme Court Chief Justice **Tani Cantil-Sakauye** has noted in arguing for more foreign language resources. More money for court staff can be hard to come by, though, demonstrated most recently by Gov. Jerry Brown vetoing a bill to give court reporters a raise. Today a special task force on language guidance will meet in San Francisco to discuss progress, including recommending legislation to have court interpreters in small claims cases. From 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 455 Golden Gate Avenue.

CELEBRATIONS: Happy birthday to Sen. **Ed Hernandez**, D-West Covina, who turns 59 today.

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