

MATTHEW HOY JANUARY 21, 2017 7:16 PM

No halfway measures in SLO's war on plastic



Columnist Matthew Hoy **David Middlecamp** - dmiddlecamp@thetribunenews.com



BY MATTHEW HOY

Having solved all the really pressing problems in San Luis Obispo, the City Council is considering a ban on the sale of plastic beverage bottles in city facilities and at city-sponsored events.

As *The Tribune* reported Jan. 4, "more than 13 million plastic bottles were bought in the city in the fiscal year 2015-16, and 41 percent of those were recycled, indicating that the rest ended up in a landfill or as litter. Countywide, 52 percent of plastic bottles were recycled."

Who'd have thought that the eco-conscious denizens of the Happiest City in America would recycle plastic bottles at a significantly lower rate than its poorer, more benighted suburbs?

The council has wisely chosen to ignore the fact that the number of recycling centers in San Luis Obispo County has declined in the past couple of years and that only nine sites remain in the county — none in Atascadero, Morro Bay, Los Osos, Cayucos or Pismo Beach. That the limited number of locations might affect the recycling rate is a red herring that every right-thinking citizen should ignore.

Concerns that visitors — ignorant of the city's enlightened policy — attending events such as the popular Downtown SLO Farmers Market on Thursday nights will find themselves forced to cup their hands beneath city-sponsored bottle refill stations for a few sips of precious Central Coast tap water are also ridiculous.

The City Council is following in the footsteps of its enlightened betters in San Francisco, who instituted a similar ban in 2014. Next up: An advertising campaign to persuade Silicon Valley entrepreneurs to relocate to San Luis Obispo. Slogan: "Just like San Francisco, with marginally cheaper housing prices."

The editorial board of this newspaper, so middle of the road that it endorsed the Democratic opponent of state teachers' union-backed extremist Republican Jordan Cunningham in last year's state Assembly race, has also lauded the plastic bottle ban.

The ban is a good start, but the City Council shouldn't limit its ban to just beverage bottles or city facilities and events. Plastic is plastic wherever it's found, and when it comes to saving Mother Earth from evil, petroleum-based products, extremism is no vice.

It is not enough to follow in the tepid footsteps of the moral cowards in San Francisco. The city should take the same bold stand it took on Styrofoam containers and that the county took on single-use plastic bags at grocery stores.

The City Council should ban all single-use or disposable plastic containers, wrappers and products, of any type, holding anything, in the city limits.

How is a plastic bottle containing soda or water really any different from a gallon milk jug? Or maple syrup? Or coffee creamer?

The city would ban farmers market vendors from selling beverages in plastic bottles but would allow them to provide plastic utensils with food? Where is the consistency in that? Millions of years of evolution have provided humans with built-in utensils called fingers and hands. We should insist that people use them.

Plastic sandwich bags? Is there anything wrong with wax paper?

A handful of forward-thinking chipmakers already package their chips in mostly paper bags, is there any reason why others cannot follow suit?

And if we're really concerned about the plastic filling up our landfills and poisoning Gaia, we really need to tackle the innumerable plastic wrappers that are used on Hot Pockets and all varieties of microwavable burritos consumed en masse by area high school and college students. I suspect the number of these wrappers currently recycled is very close to zero.

When it comes to its war on plastic, the City Council should not satisfy itself with halfway measures. If the city's residents and visitors need to be inconvenienced to save the planet, then so be it. Ban all plastics.

Conservative columnist Matthew Hoy is a former reporter, editor and page designer. His column appears in The Tribune every other Sunday, in rotation with liberal columnist Tom Fulks. Read Hoy's blog at Hoystory.com. Follow him on Twitter @Hoystory.

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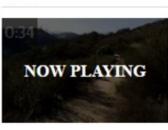
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Congrats, Mr Hoy. You can take almost any issue and turn it into a mindless, snarky denigrating attack on SLO and the people who live here. How about you pledge to recycle all the plastic wrappers from candy bars, burritos and Hot Pockets you likely consume and we wouldn't have to worry about plastic bottles.
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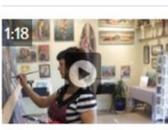
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ABOUT MATTHEW HOY



Matthew Hoy, a conservative, is a San Diego-area native and 1994 graduate of Cal Poly's journalism program. He spent 15 years at various newspapers along the West Coast, including The Lompoc Record, The Daily World in Aberdeen, Wash., The North County Times in Escondido and The San Diego Union-Tribune. For 15 years, Hoy has written a blog on politics and the media, Hoystory.com. Hoy's column will be published in The Tribune every other week, in rotation with liberal columnist Tom Fulks.

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