



CAPITOL HALL — REPORT —



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Bags, Business and Basic Liberties in Texas, Part One

While we all generally favor local control, some local governments have let their misguided environmental views cloud their judgment. This has resulted in regulations that run counter to the principles of freedom, liberty, and free enterprise.

For years, Texas has been synonymous with economic growth and business success. We've created jobs month after month because the Texas model of minimal government, reasonable regulation, and free enterprise works. But in March—for the first time in 53 months—we lost jobs, proving that any good model must be continually refined and improved. If Texas is to remain a leader in the future for having high-quality jobs, we have to work harder to maintain our business-friendly environment and to remove the remaining obstacles to commerce.

Accordingly, we must actively contest any potential new hurdles — even regulations limited to the counties and cities, like the various ordinances across the state that ban or tax plastic grocery bags. Regulations on plastic bags are a perfect example of needless, government intrusion that threatens to erode the Texas model. These overtures of token environmentalism may sound good on paper, but fail miserably in real world application. They create a landscape of regulatory mayhem, hamstringing businesses, jeopardize local jobs, and tarnish the pro-growth policies on which Texas thrives — without even making a dent in litter and pollution rates.

Bans and fees on grocery bags are ineffective and burdensome, and there are plenty of facts to prove it. Across the state, there have been 12 local bag ordinances since 2009. Businesses and consumers are finding themselves in a complex maze of economic regulations that create both confusion and unnecessary costs.

The first people to feel the negative effects are our local entrepreneurs and business owners. These individuals bear the brunt of plastic bag regulations that mandate counting and maintaining records or threaten fines and penalties. In Seattle, for example, following the city's ban on plastic bags, business expenditures rose for nearly 40 percent of retailers, who reported increased costs for carryout bags of between 40 and 200 percent.

Additionally, bans and taxes push consumers to areas unaffected by these ordinances, slashing sales at stores within the ban area. Between those losses and the compliance costs, you have a potent recipe for a shrinking bottom line.

