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Geography 1125

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\*I will be contacting Congressman Jody Hice via email with the proposition of a state-wide ban of plastic bags at grocery stores in Georgia. Jordan Hice is a representative of Georgia's 10th congressional district, which is the district that Athens, Georgia is located in.\*

#### Resource Report

Dear Congressman Hice,

My name is Lily D'Ambrosio, and I am a first-year student at the University of Georgia. I relocated to the state of Georgia from Southern California this past fall, and have thoroughly relished my experience in the South thus far. There were quite a few societal elements of California that I was willing to leave behind in exchange for the fantastic culture in Georgia. However, since coming here, I have realized that there are actually a few components that I miss more than I expected I would- things that I believe that their implementation in Georgia could benefit the overall welfare of this state. In particular, I am writing to you to discuss the role of plastic grocery bags in Georgia. In 2016, California implemented a state-wide ban on plastic grocery bags, charging a small fee of ten cents per plastic bag. I take pride in belonging to a state that leads that nation in its environmental movements, and I believe that nothing but good things could arise if Georgia follows suit.

In following suit, I believe that Georgia would gain from the implementation of a plastic bag ban. Our society reinforces the "out of sight, out of mind" mentality in that when you discard

of an item in the trash, you no longer have to worry about it. Contrary to this erroneous mindset, these plastic bags, post-disposal, still pose extreme ruinous effects on the environment. This is because plastic bags do not biodegrade, they photodegrade (Representatives Chase, Campbell, Hasegawa, Dunn, and Wood, 2008)- also known as breaking further into minute pieces. These photodegraded pieces of plastic often migrate to the feeding grounds of livestock, such as cows (Cheruku 2016). Furthermore, chemicals found in these plastic bags often seep into soil, affecting the health of plants. The many chemicals that are contained in these plastic bags, namely polyethylene (The Blastic Project, 2016-2018), is lethal for both plants and animals. This should be a concern for Georgia, a state that brings in \$73 billion in revenue from agriculture (Georgia Farm Bureau, 2016). In addition, the decomposition of single-use plastic bags in Georgia's outdoors also slowly devastates Georgia's aesthetic purposes. Although this may initially sound superficial, Georgia brings in \$13 billion with tourism- which would soon be discontinued with the destruction of the environment, as people will likely not want to waste their vacation days and money in an unsightly location. On the other hand, arguments against the plastic bag ban suggest that plastic alternatives are not necessarily better. Paper bags, for example, take up more space and take longer to degrade. While this is true, paper does not release the toxic chemicals that are ruining the health of ecosystems. The world would benefit the most from people switching to reusable bags, which I believe is possible through the methods I am about to discuss.

America was founded on the principles of democracy. For better or for worse, nature has become subjected to political debate. I thus believe that the future of plastic bags should become a part of this conversation in Georgia, as it is a relatively unimportant focus at the moment. One

of the main critiques of this political economy is that it is anthropocentric- meaning that humans view themselves as superior to other species. This mindset is a likely reason that the environment is often placed upon the backburner of political conversations, as we live in a capitalistic, anthropocentric society- the focus is on the individual with essential disregard to anything that does not ensure revenue. However, if we just slightly alter the pattern of our anthropocentric mindset, it can be used for good instead of evil. For example, we must remember that we inhabit a relatively small rock, in the vastness of space and the universe, that happens to be the only habitat that promises human survival. If we remember this, our human centric minds will be focused on the survival of our planet and species in the long run instead of short term profit. The preservation of humankind, with this adjusted mentality, makes the implementation of a small fee on plastic grocery bags seem trivial in the grand scheme of life. Of course you cannot pass the bill abruptly without consequences and disapproval from the public, as the public will not immediately think of the plastic bag ban from this perspective. This leads into my next point.

In 2019, there is a growing shift toward a biocentric and ecocentric mentality- the viewpoint that humans, the environment, and other species are essentially equal. There is thus no better time to push for the plastic bag ban. Take a look around- people are starting to recognize the value of our environment. This is reflected through the increasingly common switches that people are making: people are ditching plastic straws for reusable ones, ditching gas-hungry cars for hybrids, and yes- people are slowly but surely ditching their plastic grocery bags for reusable ones. Many documentaries have been released concerning environmental issues, social media advocates have utilized their platforms to push for environmental change, etc. This is due to heightened awareness of environmental ethics, namely because of an increased amount of

educational programs through various platforms that are demanding attention to environmental issues. However, something that is less “trendy” but is equally, if not more, important is political action and voting. In the 2018 midterm elections, 57% of citizens in the state of Georgia casted a vote (Prabhu 2018). First, to ensure even higher voter turnout, you must combat voter suppression that took course during the 2018 midterm elections, as 53,000 Georgian individuals who signed up to vote were not added to Georgia’s state of active voters (Niesse 2018). Second, I believe that you must begin to implement environmental curriculum in public schools in order for Georgia citizens to understand the consequences of harming the environment before they are legally capable of voting. A significant factor in California’s role as the nation’s environmental trendsetter is because the local schools implement curriculum that relates to the environment (Hertsgaard 2012). This is grooming young future voters to keep environmentally conscious choices in the back of their mind when they are eventually able to vote. Thus, this would lead to an explanation as to why California once again lead the way as one of the first states to ban plastic grocery bags. These Californian children have been groomed to possess an ethical approach when dealing with the environment, controlling capitalistic impulses, and keeping in mind the big picture: the well being of our planet.

How exactly do I think you should begin to approach this? Identify the underlying values of the state of Georgia. I believe that it would be in our best interest to utilize the universal trait of anthropocentrism in combination with Georgia’s unique values. For example, since agriculture is an extremely common practice in Georgia, I suggest implementing programs in schools, social media, and television that explain how environmental degradation would harm Georgia's political and agricultural economy. Most importantly, I believe that the plastic bag ban will make

the state of Georgia a happier place, curing and possibly halting immense environmental harm and repercussions. At the end of the day, happiness is our main goal.

I hope you consider my proposition. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

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