

VILLAGE VIEW

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When Governor King, as one of his first "services" to the people of the Commonwealth, vetoed the bottle bill a lot of us became more discouraged than angry. After years of grassroots work to pass a bill in the hope of reducing litter, costs to clean up after slobos who toss trash indiscriminately, and waste of useable material, proponents of bottle-bills were disheartened. With one stroke of his pen, King wiped it all away.

Massachusetts is not alone in losing the battle for bottle bills. Voters in 32 states have rejected various forms of this legislation. State representatives and senators believe the bills failed because the public fears the law will eliminate jobs and boost prices of the goods involved, and has been persuaded mandatory recycling programs are a better solution.

A few glimmers of hope remain, however, as evidenced by the 85% majority in Maine who voted to retain their two-year-old law. Reduced roadside litter and improved appearance of the countryside is credited with the overwhelming vote against repeal.

Arguments for killing such bills range from the rational to the ridiculous. Continental Can claims bottle bills waste energy by forcing consumers to make extra trips to stores to return bottles and cans. Does it not occur to them people make at least weekly trips, empty-handed, to stores to replenish supplies? Is it not evident much longer trips to disposal areas are required to recycle bottles and cans?

Reynolds Aluminum stands out as the pioneer among can companies with the foresight and willingness to encourage recycling; it is now paying 23 cents a pound for used aluminum. Reynolds deserves commendation and consumer support for its efforts.

The United States isn't the only country facing litter problems. In far-distant Johannesburg, South Africa, a city of about 800,000 people, plans to spotlight litter are being implemented. The City Fathers are letting rubbish pile up on the streets. "The public must know they are paying for this mess," declares the city anti-litter officer. He believes angry phone calls and letters will soon swamp City Hall, and says that's just what the City Council is hoping for.

Supporting Johannesburg's anti-litter battle are the city's engineering and health departments; their employees, the trash collectors and street sweepers, will be instructed to let trash collect in the streets and overflow from litter bins. "We will leave the refuse until residents are very aware of the smell," says the anti-litter officer.

To supplement the drive to make people more conscious of the mess they make, films and slide shows are presented in schools; slogan, art and essay competitions are being organized; and an anti-litter march by school children will be conducted.

South African product manufacturers are urged to be more responsible about packaging and to use less unnecessary wrappings. Littering fines for discarding even a match or a cigarette could result in a \$60 fine; in spite of this, only six people were fined last year. Authorities say the reason for such a small number is, "It's difficult to surprise people littering."

Johannesburg's cost of picking up litter is \$4.27 million a year. Trash collected from the city's streets, annually, would fill a three-story building the size of a football field.

Comparing Cape Cod to Johannesburg is difficult because the Cape has only about a fourth the population as the South African city; furthermore, the city's population is condensed in a smaller land area. Comparing it to the city of Boston is more realistic. While I have no statistics on the quantity of rubbish that city generates in a year, I'm certain the annual dumpage would exceed that collected in Johannesburg. I'll bet Boston collects that much trash, or more, each month.

Imposing a no-trash-clean-up plan on people of Cape Cod would probably have little effect. The shock-value would be lost for it would take months for enough litter to accumulate to make an impression on most residents. As time passed, the majority would become inured to the sight. It would have much greater impact in Boston.

In fact, it often seems road-side cleaning operations in Cape Cod towns are delayed in the hope citizens will be offended and make public outcry; if this is the case, the hope is a vain one. People aren't concerned enough to pick up after themselves, let alone someone else.

The wire fencing separating the Main Street sidewalk and Zayre's parking lot in Hyannis is a case in point. Its entire length is plastered with litter. Another eye-sore is the Cape Town Mall parking lot. And nearly as bad are the country-lanes criss-crossing the Cape; their borders apparently are dumping-ground for anyone too lazy, too thoughtless, too inconsiderate to dispose properly of his trash.

Would mandatory recycling centers be a solution? A recent article in Parade, the Sunday newspaper supplement, highlighted the city of Davis, California, where citizens have taken responsibility not only for reducing litter, but for cutting energy-consumption more than 35 percent.

The will to cooperate exists among thousands of Cape residents. This was clearly demonstrated several years ago when a few dedicated workers organized volunteers to operate recycling centers at convenient in-village locations. The program was remarkably successful as long as it lasted; had local governments given the support it deserved, recycling would have been incorporated into town programs throughout the Cape.

In most towns, however, selectmen and public works departments turned their backs on the projects, despite positive response from citizens. Barnstable officials were no exception. In time, volunteers ran out of steam. Token cooperation was forthcoming when Barnstable Town Meeting funded the glass recycling bins at the dump.

There's still there; much of the time there's a van available for recycling newspapers and magazines, as well. People are still packing papers into grocery bags and stacking them in the van; people are still bringing glass to the bins. There's little publicity, these days; interest seems to have dried up and died since King killed the bottle bill. The die-hards (like me), though, continue to make those trips, even at the cost of gasoline. And that's certainly a waste of energy!

If we, the customers of private sanitary services, demanded it, refuse collectors could probably be prevailed upon to carry glass to the bins, bundled papers to the van, as well as trash to the dump. It would necessitate cooperation by householders in proper separation and preparation of bundles, of course. It might entail a slight increase in rates. Those increases would offset what we now spend for gasoline, transporting our own glass and papers.

Arguments that it can't be done "because" may be countered with arguments that it can be done "if"; after all, it's already being done by other people in other places. If they can, then we can, here.

All it takes is the will. And the determination to override those with the "won't" to accomplish it. Let's revive recycling and anti-litter fervor, particularly now when waste, once again, is seen as dangerous to our national security, and conservation is finally being recognized as an economic necessity.