Reduce, Reuse, but don't recycle.
Episode 72

Throw the yogurt container in the trash. This seems almost blasphemous. The state's, maybe even the country's, dogma of recycling has us feeling guilty when we actually throw trash into the trash. But, with changes in China's policies in early 2019 and the overwhelming glut of plastic, cans, and paper, those items are being stored as massive bales or giant squares of crushed aluminum cans and just sitting, waiting for Godot, perhaps, at recycling or processing centers. With market prices for those cans and bottles and paper falling, the stock-pile of recycled trash increases and incentives to do something with those bales of trash wane.

Few things seem as dangerous as someone in a position of elected authority with an idea how to use your money and implement the force of government to "solve" –I air quoted that word-a problem.

The issue is recycling and it starts with a poor pitch to address a problem as well as an inability to comprehend alternative solutions which is a

restatement of Fredrick Bastiat's seen and unseen idea. Let's take them in order, the seen, what appears to be an abundance of stuff, and the unseen, the consequences of government action.

On my version of the a neighborhood social media app one user posted a headline with the rather amazing claim that every 90 days the quantity of aluminum cans thrown into landfills can build the nation's commercial air fleet.

That's amazing. And it's wrong.

Even after a lot of concessions, the number of commercial planes in the US, the size of each plane and therefore the weight the math gets wiggly fast. But, as I posted in response to this, suppose a 737 is average and suppose number of commercial planes is 7000. That quantity of planes would require some 980 million pounds of aluminum. In kilograms that's 444 million,520 thousand ,522.6, or 444 billion ,520 million ,522 thousand ,600 grams. Each can is approximately 14 grams so, that's a lot of cans. That's a lot of horse pucky.

I was offered a link to read which boasted the standard line of acceptable thinking that reads like good state propaganda that recycling is good "Garbage thrown in recycling bins is causing a crisis for recycling in the U.S." This was followed with the usual misinformation about all the benefits of recyclcing for industry and manufacturers and the economic benefits of recycling.

Economics, then, is really what it comes down to. Since recycling has mostly been monopolized by state governments, in some cases with bottle and can deposits, and no private enterprise to compete with the state for picking up the recycling, there is no actual information about the economics of recycling since there is no market pricing in place. And, since the state does not need to show a profit, the true costs may never be know. We're told the cans and bottles are a resource, but how do we know?

So, here's where it gets interesting. Those cans? Turns out, airliners are not made from the same kind of aluminum. Those cans? From the LewRockewell.com site article entitled "Recycling Movement Fails," Michael Shedlock writes, "Used

cans are piling up at scrapyards because U.S. aluminum companies are turning fewer of them into new metal, another indication of the economic challenges facing recycling."

Recycling. An idea so grand it was forced by nearly every state. One point proponents almost demand it recycling pays for itself. Except it doesn't. If the cans and bottles and paper hold such value, why are the citizens either taxed for pick up or directly billed? If the trash has such great value, why can't it pay for the pickups?

Alana Semuels, writing for "TheAtlantic.com" writes in her piece "Is This The End of Recycling?" "Waste-management companies across the country are telling towns, cities, and counties that there is no longer a market for their recycling. These municipalities have two choices: pay much higher rates to get rid of recycling, or throw it all away."

That's a tough spot. Waste that is really trash. No one really wants the recyclables and there's no profit for manufacturers to use the used plastic and cans so what to do about the massive amount of plastic.

Let me point out the obvious- there is a lot of plastic. I don't drink soda but some of the condiments are in plastic. We produce a lot of glass and aluminum beverage containers. I take those cans which hold an interest free loan of a dime each to the state's expensive building and place them in the expensive machine which sorts them into glass, plastic and aluminum. I scan the computer ticket and get my loan back. Of the glass which did not have a deposit, I, and everyone else in my situation, drives our vehicle burning carbon to dump the glass into a huge metal bin which will be hauled off by trucks made by carbon and buring carbon fuel to someplace where it will not be recycled. Maybe. But if it is it has to be sorted and washed and some discarded and that takes more construction of facilities, at taxpayer expense, and staff and before you know it, it is a very expensive operation. Expensive to the taxpayer and, ostensibly, to the environment they claim we are saving.

But, back to the plastic. There is a lot. The plan proposed by the person in that neighborhood app is ERP-Extended Producer Responsibility-and has

been or is planned in a few US states and other countries.

The quick version is companies which produce products which end up as waste, tires or mattresses or mercury thermostats or plastic bottles as is the plan according to my neighborhood app, the company pays a fee to have that bottle returned to the plant. That keeps it out of the landfill, which will have to be another show.

It ought not be difficult to see a few issues here. First, the government, as in California and I'll post the link on today's show notes page, culinarylibertarian.com/72, has an outline of what agencies the state is to create, what they are to do and how they might enforce non-compliance. More state and more thuggery for your soda bottle. But wait…there's more.

Companies which bottle drinks do not have the machinery to recycle those bottles. Are they to be forced by the state to comply? At what cost? What is the burden on the little company? Are they to be put out of business since the major companies can at least afford to comply. What if they don't comply? Fines? Jail? Out of business?

How does an entire business going out of business help the people?

I conceded that gets up to, or maybe jumps right in to hyperbole.

Let's try this

This is from the legislation proposed by Tom Udall D-NM and Adam Lowenthal, D CA.

For the first time in decades, federal legislators will soon consider legislation that would require manufacturers to manage and finance end-of-life recycling programs for product packaging. The bill would reflect proliferating extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws in U.S. states and municipalities, as well as abroad. An outline of the planned legislation was published by Sen. Tom Udall (D-NM) and Rep. Adam Lowenthal (D-Calif.) in July, and comments will be accepted until August 21, 2019. The legislation is expected to be introduced in the fall.

Outline of Planned Legislation

The outline states that the key components of the legislation will include:

- **Requiring product manufacturers to design, manage, and finance end-of-life management for the packaging of their products.** The outline does not specify what types of packaging would be included in, or excluded from, the legislation. However, the outline mentions the following as potentially in scope: food containers, packets, and wrappers; drink containers, cups, and lids; tobacco products with filters; wet wipes; and lightweight plastic bags.
- **Imposing national deposit requirements on beverage containers.** The legislation would cover glass, plastic, and aluminum, and would require major beverage manufacturers to operate reverse vending systems.
- **Imposing a carryout bag fee. The legislation would require vendors** to impose a fee when providing consumers with non-reusable paper and plastic bags.
- **Banning styrofoam.** The legislation would ban the use of styrofoam in food packaging, disposable coolers, and shipping packaging.
- **Imposing labeling requirements for plastic. Plastic products would be required** to bear labels indicating the presence of

plastic and how the product should be disposed of.

- **Setting recyclability and recycled content thresholds. The legislation would require** that plastic bottles, packaging, and certain other products be 100% recyclable and contain significant recycled content.

Success seems marginal at best and success will be paid for by consumers. It hasn't come up, but there is a wild inequity in this fee system for the poor will pay a higher percentage of their income to make the politicians feel good.

The downstream affects are at least easily guessed. Less revenue due to fewer sales means fewer jobs. But the big question that seems unanswered is how, exactly, does paying more for a soda solve the container problem? It seems only trading one carbon use for another. The increase in trucking to transport used containers seems at least a net neutral but maybe net negative if noise pollution is added to the mix.

Unintended consequences should be the governments middle name. No good deed goes

unpunished or the invisible foot of government on the throat of the citizenry. All colorful metaphors and, as it happens, pretty apt. Centralized governmental power doesn't achieve the goals intended. It costs money and wastes resources, which everyone will agree are scarce, and the government has no incentive to be efficient.

Private enterprise does have incentive to be efficient but when the government get's involved, those incentives are at least thwarted in a sea of regulation paperwork or flat out stopped. You may not innovate: you must follow the rules.

Innovation happens. New solutions to the plastic problem may be in the works. I have no idea, but I expect someone who can is devising hemp plastic. Or seaweed plastic or something which will hold the raspberries and then go in the compost bin.

Or, the young student from Oregon who found a bacteria which feeds on the hydrocarbons in the plastics in those soda bottles. I'll put the link on the show notes page. She concedes the time when they consume what is discarded is some way off, but this is a bright light in innovation.

Before I get too far from the premise which was Extender Producer Responsibility is a bad idea, let's recap.

No competition for recyclables. Expensive in money and resources to make the trucks and the transportation costs are not paid for by the items carted around.

Top down state thuggery of force, fines and more beurocracy is not an effective solution for the state pays no penalty for being wrong or inefficient.

I'm going to stop here. This has grown into two episodes and I prefer to make the econ part, which is my refutation to the claim the EPR is a good choice, a separate episode.

I will close with this. Reduce and reuse is a great idea. Conservation isn't a bad word. It can mean first conserving your cash. Don't like plastic soda bottles in bulk, buy a SodaStream device. My daughter has one and she can make any flavored carbonated water she prefers. I like it for we add no sugar to the water. I like it for there is no interest free loan to the state. It comes with two reusable bottles and you get soda on demand.

That's innovation solving a few problems and with the other innovations of the hand held flash light, calculator, email device and phone, you can go on-line and get one now. You can change what goes to the trash by preferring alternative solutions to current problems and that's going to be a large part of the econ part.