

## OPINION

**Behind the Green Door | Opulence not paying off**

BY CHRIS BRATT



Chris Bratt

Over the past few months many Jackson and Josephine County residents (including me) have become frustrated. China has decided to stop accepting most of our recyclable goods (garbage), and our local disposal companies are now searching the world for other unlikely customers. In the meantime, solid waste is clogging local landfills. Our reliance on China to dispose of our recyclable materials is not paying off for the Chinese, local recyclers, or our communities.

Little did we realize that the complex recycling scheme we created here in southern Oregon was doomed from the start. We have found that relying on another nation halfway around the world to continue buying our throwaway materials, often full of contaminants, is costly, undependable, and unwanted. Although all of us have become compliant consumers, helping create these waste-pollution problems, we have taken little responsibility to fix these problems. What people buy really matters. Failure to reduce the

amount of garbage we produce is our fault too.

In the old days, when I was a young boy in San Francisco, waste problems were easily overcome. They hadn't created the general pollution crisis we are experiencing today. Our population was smaller then, and we recycled almost everything to help the World War II efforts. We gathered scrap metal, saved bacon grease, cleaned and crushed tin cans, and rationed important items that were in short supply. Ragpickers drove their wagons around the city streets calling out "Rags, bottles, sacks" and bought everything people wished to get rid of. I learned that recycling can happen when a collective effort is made.

But we don't need a war to educate ourselves about sorting garbage. Just new policies, technologies, and corporate and community responsibility are required to spread awareness and resilience for maintaining an unpolluted environment. In a like manner, latter-day San Franciscans have become our country's leading trash converters.

Presently, 80 percent of that city's garbage is being diverted from landfills through recycling and composting. (By comparison, New York and Chicago divert just 15 percent.) Besides passing laws that ban plastic bags and Styrofoam and mandating that all residences and businesses compost their waste, they are moving toward a zero-waste program. That means that absolutely nothing will be going to the dump or the incinerator by the year 2020.

For the average city resident, a zero-waste program also means keeping waste from becoming waste in the first place. San Francisco is experimenting with hiring and deploying pairs of outreach workers to go door-to-door to educate residents about different colored-bin sorting, take-back programs (they have a free large-item removal service), and individual responsibility.

This program is the first of its kind in trash monitoring and neighborhood outreach. In addition, San Francisco was the first city in the nation to establish a large-scale food collection composting program where the finished product is ground, screened, and marketed to local farmers as a nutrient-rich compost. San Francisco's Zero-Waste program benefits the economy, as composting and recycling save residents and businesses money and create green jobs (the refuse collector Recology alone has 1,050

employees in San Francisco).

This is the kind of large-scale garbage reduction, collection, recycling, and composting program that needs to be emulated here in southern Oregon. The three individual trash-collecting companies we have locally need to come together to build a joint facility that can do all the necessary sorting, recycling, and composting if we want to achieve any of these zero-waste goals or even come close.

It's obvious we need a huge social, economic, and technological investment to solve the extensive garbage problems we have created locally and worldwide. Visualize the five patches of floating plastic in the ocean that cover 40 percent of the ocean's surface. Two of those patches are twice the size of the state of Texas (*The Week* magazine, July 27, 2018). Think about our warming planet fueled by excess carbon waste and the bankrupt solutions proposed for our nuclear and pesticide waste products.

We're going to need more than Chinese buyers and better recycling equipment to reverse the plastic and other pollution damage we have caused here and abroad. It's going to require global cooperation and strategy for solutions.

Any ideas? Let me know.

Chris Bratt • 541-846-6988

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Smart meters

To Whom it May Concern:

In your recent publication (Winter 2018) you published a Letter to the Editor regarding the use of smart meters. Karen Affriseo has expressed her opinion and that's fine. But she is certainly in the minority on the issue.

First off, I have to wonder about people in this day and age who do not have microwave ovens or cell phones. My guess is that I am a bit older than she, and I have had both of the aforementioned items since their inception. I do not have cancer or any other malady and have benefited immensely from both items. I wonder if Karen Affriseo has a TV. Talk about microwaves—TV likely has more harmful emissions than the other two combined. I have no basis for stating that other than my own guess, just as Karen Affriseo has no basis for her pontification on how the power company is going to get rich at our expense. Pacific Power has one of the lowest KWH rates in the west. Check the rates charged by Pacific Gas and Electric in California.

Karen states that we are already paying for meter readers in our bills. Well, the last time I checked, labor costs money. She also states that Pacific Power

can do as they please and we have no say in it. Not true. Pacific Power's rate structure is monitored by the Oregon Public Utilities Commission, which she certainly has the right to go to with her problems with our power company.

I have had a smart meter at my residence for the past 15 years, and I'm still alive. How can this be, you ask? When I fenced my property and installed an electric-operated gate, I did not want Pacific Power to have access to my property, so they installed a smart meter that has to be read from the street.

Finally, thanks to a few who oppose smart meters, our county commissioners thought they could simply get Pacific Power to remove the monthly meter reading charges by enacting a county ordinance against the fee. What a joke! If you read news outside of the *Applegater*, you must be aware that we (as a county) are being sued by the Oregon PUC for the actions taken by our commissioners. Karen closes her letter by stating that "it would be far more cost-effective for the county to ban smart meters altogether." Wow...and what did that action get us? How about a lawsuit!

Bruce Fallon  
Grants Pass, Oregon

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