

HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

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“English was a fiend. Every vowel, a villain. Every consonant, a dragon. That was my family’s perspective, anyway. They were the ones struggling with the language when they immigrated, trying to pass night school while conquering the American Dream.”

EXCERPT FROM
VICTORIA KOROTCHENKO
2019 SN&R COLLEGE ESSAY FIRST PLACE WINNER



FIRST PLACE PRIZE **\$2,000**

SECOND PLACE PRIZE **\$1,000**

THIRD PLACE PRIZE **\$500**

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THE RULES: High-school seniors graduating in 2020 are eligible. Only one entry allowed per student, and you must live in the Sacramento region to apply. No SN&R employees or their relatives may enter.

THE DETAILS: Essays must be no longer than 650 words. Send your essay as a Word document or place it in the body of your email to: collegeessay@newsreview.com, with the subject line “College Essay Contest.”

DEADLINE: THURSDAY, APRIL 23 AT 5 P.M.



Cleaning up plastic pollution

BY JEFF VONKAENEL / jeffv@newsreview.com

Human beings can do some dumb things.

For example, making plastic utensils and packages that are only used once and then take hundreds or thousands of years to decompose. In landfills, plastic may be with us forever.

But this November, there is a chance to bring a little rationality to the world. Last week, the proponents of the California Recycling and Plastic Pollution Reduction Act of 2020 announced that they have collected more than one-fourth of the needed 623,000 valid signatures to qualify for the Nov. 3 ballot.

On Feb. 20, I had coffee with Nick Lapis, director of advocacy for Californians Against Waste. He told me that given the money raised and how well the signature drive is going, he expects the initiative to qualify for the ballot.

The driving force behind this measure—which would add as much as a 1-cent tax on single-use plastic packaging and foodware and which is expected to raise several billion dollars a year—is Recology CEO Mike Sangiacomo. Frustrated that the plastic industry and the Legislature were not doing enough to address this growing problem, Sangiacomo announced at the 2019 California Resource Recovery Association conference that he was going to contribute \$1 million to support an initiative.

I was at the conference. Sangiacomo’s announcement was one of the highlights. Single-use, non-recyclable plastic is not only an environmental disaster, it is also expensive for the garbage haulers. It is one of the reasons that our garbage bill keeps going up.

This initiative would have CalRecycle oversee a program requiring producers of single-use plastic to transition over time to reusable, recyclable or combustible products. By 2030, the goal would be to reduce single-use plastics by at least 25%. Polystyrene, which includes Styrofoam, would be banned for use by food vendors.

Polystyrene cannot be recycled if it has touched food products.

The initiative’s tax on producers would fund numerous programs, including local government efforts to clean up plastic pollution; expansion of recycling and composting infrastructure; developing markets for plastic, glass, fiber and organic waste recycling; and education and outreach campaigns. Disadvantaged communities that have suffered from a disproportionate amount of pollution will receive more funding for programs.

As you might expect, there is considerable opposition to the initiative from the plastics industry. In a statement last November, when the ballot measure was first proposed, the American Chemistry Council said it is “unnecessary and could divert resources and energy away from realizing a true circular economy in California.”

Of course, the reason this initiative is needed is because the plastic industry went into overdrive last year to defeat legislation that would have reduced single-use products. The circular economy that the plastic industry actually hopes for is that it makes money selling plastic products, some of that money is given to political campaigns and then those elected officials make sure that no laws are passed that prevent the industry from making money selling plastic products. This has been their plan for the last half century.

Based upon initial polling numbers, Lapis said he’s confident that if the initiative qualifies for the ballot it will pass. While plastic products may last for centuries, the plastic industry’s credibility is decomposing at a very rapid rate. □

Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review.