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The Elephant in the Room

As is it currently stands, I am registered Republican. While this party mostly lines up with my views politically, there is one sore thumb that sticks out and it’s not their green one (I want to make this a pun please it would be so gouda). In the last fifty years, we as Republicans have persistently and childishly ignored the ramifications of our actions as humans when it comes to the environment. One notable example in recent history is when Republicans in the House of Representatives in 2011 voted “nearly two hundred separate times to block, delay, or weaken the common sense safeguards...to protect our...lands, and airs” (Dean 11). House Republicans argued that they were “standing up for jobs” (Dean 11). As noble as that may sound, they don’t actually care about individuals working. Their bigger concern are “the corporate polluters that thrive by avoiding the costs of the pollution they create.” (Dean 11). This further shows that Republicans make it a priority to destroy anything that has to protect the environment.

If one delves into the past, this seems quite an odd deviance for the Republican Party. In the early twenty-first century, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities. This gave the president “discretion to ‘declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic and scientific interest... to be National Monuments.’”(NPS). The fact that a bill like this could pass through is quite remarkable as it takes both parties to allow it. The problem that we as Americans face is that we do not need to revel about the past as it should be a standard that every politician must be adhered to. While the political field is tumultuous, there are things that can be done de facto style at home and research by scientists around the world.

In a study conducted by Spanish in 2013, it was estimated that there is “between 7,000 to 35,000 tons” of plastic floating on the ocean’s surface (Cózar). Most of the debris pools around “the central areas of the North Atlantic and Pacific Oceans” and there is also evidence that there is an accumulation in “all five subtropical ocean gyres” (Cózar). Efforts are being made to quell the problem however. A recent invention dubbed the “SeaBin” is a self contained unit that passively intakes water and filters it. Debris such as oil, wrappers and plastic bottles are then detained in the unit and get cleaned out. The plastic harnessed then is used to create more SeaBins and the cycle continues.

One of the big concerns for most Republicans is cost and jobs. Methods of waste containment such as the SeaBin are a brilliant idea as it addresses both issues as it is low cost and low maintenance. There is no need to worry if jobs will be lost as humans will do all of the work on site. No robots are necessary for this operation. As for cost, they are cheap as they are made from a trash source which does not have a price tag and it pays for itself because they are created from the things they capture. Farms of these can be deployed deep in the Pacific Ocean and harvest incoming contaminants. Energy efficient waste treatment and distribution sites can be built next to these farms to allow an effective way of disposing of plastic.

As cool as the aforementioned idea is, there is a geographic disconnect to the average American. One might wonder “Great, but what can I do here at home?”. The answer is actually quite simple; do not allow that trash around you to end up in the ocean. This can be accomplished by simply choosing to pick up that stray grocery bag or attending a beach cleanup event at your local beach. Here at Cal State Fullerton there are trash cans that are constructed from reclaimed milk jugs in the community. It fulfills the same purpose as the SeaBin but in our local community.

Although these ideas will be productive, some may argue that melting down plastics to be reused release chemicals into our atmosphere. This is unfortunately true as a study conducted in the mid-2000’s in Japan concluded that “...[T]VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) and more oxygenated organic compounds considered to be hazardous to human health” when melted down (Yamashita). While this is a setback proclaimed by many naysayers, there is another way to combat the growing plastic epidemic is in the form of bacteria. In a recent study conducted in China, a group of scientists isolated two different bacteria from the Indian meal moth’s gut. These specimen were able to do noticeable damage to the polyethylene films, to the effect of “pits and cavities (0.3–0.4 μm in depth)” (Yang).

For some people, this would be a lackluster method of dealing with our plastic crisis. Some may argue that this would do more harm than good as it would completely eliminate the plastic and cannot be used for further use. While it does do this, the bacteria sheds light on some important components for things going forward as well as fighting the problem in the current moment. If there is someway to incorporate the biodegradable attributes of the bacteria into plastics that would be used for short term use, it could greatly affect the environment. Such use cases would include wrappers for various food products, grocery bags, and non reloadable gift cards. We would not have to worry about it being a problem as it would have a built in killswitch.

For decades, plastic’s dense polymer chains were thought to be nonbiodegradable as they were made of inorganic materials and compound structures. In

With simple efforts put forth by individuals around the country, there would be no need for any interventions. Many House Republicans do not enjoy spending copious amounts of revenue on issues that do not have an immediate impact. This is where we allow the work to be done by the population, having them pass down the knowledge through word of mouth. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Marketing, this form of communication is the “most effective way of gaining awareness” (Doyle). Unlike constant advertisement that might be passively dismissed, conversations regarding the matter would be more difficult to evade and the audience may receive the message.

In grade school, we all heard the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle song and memo, but never really understood what it all meant. Sure, everything sounds nice when we sing a song and the school proclaims that we have been taught about conservation and nothing is ever said about it again. Education, however, can only get someone so far. This is a grass root movement meaning that something is done locally and generally instilled at a young age. The more time exposed to this information will yield a person more inclined to partake and it primarily starts at home. Children usually take after their parents and build on the values that were taught to them.