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Case Selection

Gainesville, Florida Ban on Plastic Straws

As of April 30th, 2019, Florida’s local governments have prohibited local governments from enacting bans on plastic straws. In March, a bill was passed for cities and local governments to decide if they wanted to ban the straws, but this was overturned. In a mostly Republican vote, the Florida Senate passed HB 771, which prohibits county and city government from enforcing regulations on plastic straws for the next five years. The bill that was passed will also require that cities or counties will need to provide “data and conclusions” to support passing a straw law. Some cities, before this bill was passed, have already adopted straw regulations including Miami Beach in 2012. Regardless if the locals support a straw ban, the city officials will not be in a position to enforce the ban on restaurants according to the Florida Senate. The debate of this issues is giving back power to cities and counties to make their own decisions on whether they can or cannot ban straws if they so choose to. This ban also takes away power from the residents because they will not be able to voice their concerns to their local governments effectively, since their local governments will not be able to pass any laws or policy changes.

The major environmental implications in implementing a straw ban in Florida are increasingly being found to be positive. Several videos of sea turtles, birds, and other marine mammals are surfacing which is generating a lot of publicity for conservation action. Over 8.8 million tons of plastic are spilling into the ocean every year, and plastic straws are a small percentage of that, but that is still millions new of straws in the ocean every year. Environmentalists are pushing for more countries to ban straws, especially in Asian countries.

For my case selection my focus will be on how the City of Gainesville is reacting to the straw ban, ban. Restaurants in Gainesville can elect to not present a straw with every drink, but there is no mandate or enforcement for all restaurants to follow this. As the University of Florida supports the research of many biologists and conservationists, it is safe to say that there is a strong population of residents that are interested in having the straw ban enforced. My research on this case will interview city officials and residents of Gainesville to record their viewpoints and their opinions on the straw ban. From these interviews I will have a clear understanding of how this ban is affecting the residents and local government.