

Oversight Hearing:
“A Sea of Problems: Impacts of Plastic Pollution on Oceans and Wildlife.”
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife (WOW)
House Natural Resources Committee
October 29, 2019
Ted Danson Reply to QFR from Rep. Velazquez

Question from Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez:

In my district, the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy reported that over 75% of the waste discovered in their cleanup project was single-use plastics — particularly straws and plastic bottles. As you mentioned in your testimony, recycling alone will not address the worsening plastic crisis. We need timely action from both consumers and producers. Throughout your time working on this front, what corporations or industries have been the most unresponsive to advocates’ request to start using sustainable alternatives to single-use plastic?

Answer:

Solving the plastic pollution crisis will require efforts from all companies and industries producing unnecessary single-use plastic, but some industries have played a larger role in the problem than others. The 2018 International Coastal Cleanup found that the most commonly collected plastic items included plastic grocery bags, plastic straws, plastic stirrers, plastic lids, plastic takeout containers, foam takeout containers, plastic beverage bottles and plastic bottle caps. Plastic bottles were among the top three most common plastic items found in Break Free from Plastic’s global cleanup this past September.

The responsibility for curbing the amount of plastic beverage bottles and plastic bottle caps ending up in our waterways should fall on the companies producing these products, but unfortunately, we’re not seeing significant progress. If you go to your average supermarket or lunch counter wanting a beverage or a salad, you’ll often find your only choices have a plastic package. Four decades of the industry knowing about the plastic pollution problem hasn’t changed that. Beverage companies continue to tout their recycling commitments as a solution to the problem rather than switching to more sustainable packaging. Some of these companies even make vague promises to reduce their use of virgin plastic that lack quantifiable goals, making it impossible for us to hold them accountable.

Similarly, it is no surprise that plastic bags, straws, stirrers, lids and takeout containers are ending up in our oceans when they’re so readily available at retailers and restaurants. These are single-use items that these companies could choose to avoid, but we haven’t seen enough take the initiative to stop using these items or swap them out for less harmful alternatives. Policies like plastic bag, straw and polystyrene bans that have passed in cities, counties and states around the country are effective in driving widespread change around these items.

Companies have the power to greatly reduce the amount of plastic flowing into our oceans by quitting their reliance on plastic packaging and giving consumers plastic-free choices. We need to demand that change now and implement policies that support it.