You are a Pro–Plastic Bag Advocate

Your Background and Biography
You like to win arguments, and you are not afraid of difficult cases. You are an experienced lawyer, and as a Washington lobbyist, you were a bulldog of an advocate. In recent years you have taken on one of the least-sympathetic causes imaginable: the defense of the single-use plastic shopping bag. As the target of numerous “ban the bag” initiatives in the United States and around the world, the plastic grocery bag has become a veritable symbol of what is wrong with modern humanity’s relationship with the environment. This characterization is completely unfair.

Some people, especially the environmental activists you encounter on the job, assume that you’re a stereotypical “sleazy lawyer” interested only in money. Granted, the plastics industry does support your advocacy, but that doesn’t mean your facts are any less correct and your cause any less righteous. In fact, you think of yourself as a fellow activist in common cause with the environmentalists. After all, you spearheaded a successful campaign against food manufacturers who were deliberately marketing candy and unhealthy foods to children, and you led campaigns to clean up and reduce litter in your hometown of Austin, Texas. These causes were worthy enough to generate admiration and support from the environmentalists. Now your cause is the defense of the plastic bag, and you’re disappointed but not surprised that the response to your pro-plastic advocacy has been icy.

So it’s a good thing you like a tough fight because you’re about to have one. The anti-plastic activists are taking their case to a prominent federal hearing to argue that plastics—and especially plastic bags—are an environmental evil that should be banned forever. While you know that these activists have good intentions and genuine passion, you enjoy using scientific reason, facts, and honed debating skills to take them down. These bags are inexpensive to manufacture, supremely efficient at doing what they are designed to do, and remarkable pieces of modern technology: each plastic bag is able to carry up to two thousand times its own weight. Despite the fact that they are exemplars of scientific progress and efficient design, plastic bags are an unfortunate public-relations disaster; even people who are indifferent to all other environmental concerns care enough about this issue to want to ban plastic bags.

Now the Environmental Protection Agency is holding public hearings on the new regulation, and it’s showtime. The upcoming hearing will be a very important forum for your position. If the conversation becomes an anti-plastic tirade, you and your client could suffer lasting damage. You want to make sure that the conversation stays calm, focused on the facts, and under your control. This is going to be your big moment, and your expectations for yourself are high.
Your Mission

Your goal at this hearing is to convince the Regulators to include the Industry Group’s recommendations in their final regulation. To make this argument effectively, you must

• Complete the assigned readings listed at the bottom of this page;
• Work closely with the other members of your group to develop clear answers to the Regulators’ questions;
• Make use of as much specific information as possible to develop strong arguments that the many societal benefits of plastics outweigh the problems and that the industry can and does regulate itself without government intervention;
• Read as much as you can about your position and the positions of the other groups; and
• Complete written reflections on your character, interest group, and readings as assigned.

Your Victory Objectives

• You will receive 10 points if the Regulators select your group’s proposal as the final regulation.
• The Regulators will rank the interest groups by how well their goals are represented in the final regulation. You will receive between 1 and 5 points based on how the Industry Group is ranked and how well the regulation reflects your goals.

Sources

Industry Group Sources

• Case Study: Plastics: An American Success Story
• “Interview with Steve Russell,” video, vimeo.com/channels/465871

Your Individual Sources

• “Plastic Bag Bans Are Bad for the Environment,” by Angela Logomasini, Competitive Enterprise Institute, November 8, 2011.
• Select one article from the bibliography on The Case of Plastics website recommended for the Industry Group. Read the article and write two paragraphs summarizing the article and how it will be useful to you in the upcoming debate.