

Plastic bag ban opponents up the ante

By Jessica Calefati, San Jose Mercury News

SACRAMENTO – Lobbyists have launched a frenzied eleventh-hour effort to kill a bill that would make California the first state to outlaw flimsy plastic grocery bags, delaying a key vote and setting up one of the fiercest legislative battles of the year.

Last week, the bill seemed in the bag after it cleared a tough committee vote. But in recent days, industry lobbyists who have squashed more than a dozen other proposed bag bans over the past few years have renewed their effort by targeting moderate Democrats.

“We’re going to do everything in our power to educate legislators on the facts,” said Mark Daniels, a senior vice president at Hilex Poly, an East Coast company that is the largest producer of single-use plastic grocery bags in North America.

Opponents led by the company have spent more than half a million dollars in lobbying fees and campaign donations, painting the proposal as a job killer.

But environmentalists are also expressing confidence as they dig in for an epic battle similar to their ultimately successful fight to pass California’s “bottle bill” in the 1980s. The stakes are even higher this year because the clout of environmental groups is on the line after a series of embarrassing legislative defeats last year.

Supporters say a statewide bag ban is needed to wipe out a particularly noxious form of litter that kills marine life in the Pacific Ocean and costs Californians \$25 million a year to

collect and bury.

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