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RE: Request for inclusion in a Vox article

Dear Editors:

Your publisher describes VOX as “a pioneer in explanatory journalism”; however, Vox’s article *“The spiritual bankruptcy of bottled water”* (<https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2021/7/12/22554546/bottled-water-michigan-waste-flint-plastic>) falls way short on the journalism code of ethics as this piece is extremely biased, misrepresents information, and uses subjective inferences throughout. This article is clearly focused on the bottled water industry, yet neither the writer nor any Vox editor reached out to the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) to obtain information or clarification regarding any of the false or misleading claims made in this article.

We respectfully request the piece be either removed or edited to address inaccuracies and include omitted facts. As it stands, this article grossly misinforms Vox readers about the vital role bottled water plays as a healthy hydration packaged beverage choice and as a safe and reliable drinking water for communities in crisis.

Americans are making great efforts to live a better lifestyle by choosing healthier foods and beverages, and drinking water—tap, bottled, or filtered—should be encouraged. With the high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in our on-the-go society, bottled water provides a safe, healthy, convenient beverage choice. Discouraging people from choosing this healthy drink option is not in the public interest.

The bottled water industry has always been at the forefront of relief efforts during natural disasters and other emergency situations such as the Flint’s lead in drinking water crisis. Access to clean, safe water is a critical need for citizens and first responders immediately following a natural disaster or other catastrophic event. Unfortunately, the availability of water from public water systems is often compromised in the aftermath of such an event. During those times, bottled water is the best option to deliver clean, safe drinking water quickly into affected areas. The efforts of the industry to provide crucial drinking water to citizens afflicted by disasters are contingent on a viable commercial market. The commercial market provides them with the capital and

resources to respond when needed. The industry cannot exist only for disaster response as some industry critics would have people believe. The need for such philanthropic efforts can only be seen when people need it the most.

Bottled water is just one of thousands of consumer products packaged in plastic, yet it is the only industry mentioned in the article's discussion about plastic waste. All bottled water containers are 100 percent recyclable. In addition, PET plastic bottles are the most recognized and recycled containers in the world. And, we know that bottled water drinkers recycle better than consumers of other beverages, and they also litter less, according to a recent Keep America Beautiful litter study. (For more details, visit <https://kab.org/litter-study/>.)

A common misperception is that bottled water plays a significant role in ocean plastic pollution, but the facts show differently. The biggest contributor to ocean trash is mismanaged waste, which is essentially garbage that is thrown directly into rivers by countries that lack waste management systems. Published research from the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research identifies the largest sources of ocean plastic pollution: 90 percent of it originates from 10 major river systems in developing regions. Eight of these rivers are in Asia, and two are in Africa. This research by Christian Schmidt, a hydrogeologist, (<https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.7b02368>) supports IBWA's view that restricting the sale of bottled water in North America — which has both waste management and recycling systems — will have little or no impact on the ocean plastic issue.

Water is an ingredient in thousands of food and household products. Like all commercial water users, bottled water companies that use municipal water to make bottled water pay for the water they use. Companies that use spring water to make bottled water use an extremely small amount of water compared to other industries, as detailed here <https://bottledwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/US-water-use-droplet-2020.png>). Bottled water also has the lowest water- and energy-use ratios of all packaged beverages. On average, it takes only 1.39 liters of water to produce 1 liter of finished bottled water (including the 1 liter of water consumed), which is the lowest water-use ratio of any packaged beverage product. And on average, only 0.21 mega joules of energy are used to produce 1 liter of bottle of water. In addition, because of bottle light-weighting, bottled water producers have reduced plastic use by an average of 51 percent in recent years. All bottled water packaged in plastic containers are 100 percent recyclable, including the cap (but only when it is attached to the bottle).

In 2020, for the fifth year in a row, bottled water outsold carbonated soft drinks (by volume) and retained its title as America's favorite packaged beverage. A significant portion of bottled water's growth (44 percent since 2010) has come from people switching to bottled water from other less-healthy packaged drinks. And nine out of ten Americans (91 percent) want bottled water to be available wherever other drinks are sold, according to a survey conducted on behalf of IBWA by The Harris Poll. This healthy consumption shift from sugary drinks to bottled water could also work in reverse. If bottled water is not available, 74 percent of people say that they will turn to other packaged drinks, not tap water, The Harris Poll found.

(<https://bottledwater.org/nr/consumers-want-bottled-water-to-be-available-wherever->

drinks-are-sold-and-if-its-not-most-will-choose-another-packaged-beverage-that-uses-much-more-plastic/)

We kindly request that you either remove or update your online story to reflect these facts so that your readers are not misinformed about the important role bottled water plays in people's lives.

Sincerely,

Jill Culora
Vice President Communications
International Bottled Water Association