

EDITORIAL

Kicking the bottled-water habit

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THE GOOSENECK faucet is the latest symbol for the environment at the University of Vermont, which, rather than simply getting rid of bottled water, is also trying to promote practical alternatives.

On Jan. 1, Vermont will become the nation's biggest public university to ban sales of bottled water, according to the advocacy group Food and Water Watch. After years of student activism, a 10-year contract with Coca-Cola, maker of Dasani bottled water, was allowed to expire. That was no small issue; under the old contract, Coke reportedly paid the university nearly a half-million dollars for "pouring rights" — money that went into student aid and academic and sports programs. But students made the case to give up that money by citing the environmental waste of plastic bottles and the cost of paying for what, in most cases, is regional tap water anyway.

Yet with victory came another problem: Students still need to drink something, and it would be unfortunate if the ban on bottled water pushed students toward beverages full of sugar, caffeine, or artificial sweeteners. What do you do when you ban the healthiest fluid that can be sold on campus?

In response, the university has retrofitted 75 drinking fountains with extra-tall spigots as refill stations, and a student group sold refillable bottles for \$2 this week at a bottled-water "retirement party." The university is also chilling the water as students find cold water more appealing. Gioia Thompson, the school's director of sustainability, said that there are 215 fountains around the campus, and they will be retrofitted "until people stop asking." These are reasonable steps. Both the environment and students' wallets will be all the happier as the gooseneck spouts good ol' tap water.

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