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## **Trash imports drive dispute on garbage tax increase**

### **Hiking tax hurts communities and citizens while failing to solve garbage problem**

**By Mary Ann Zielinski / Special to The Detroit News**

At a time when Michigan cities have been forced to reduce municipal services and cut manpower because of severe reductions in state revenue-sharing, our Lansing politicians have resurrected legislation to increase the trash fee.

It is an interesting situation. Legislators know the school finance system isn't working, but don't know how to fix it. But they claim to have the "perfect solution" for addressing out-of-state dumping.

The proposal would raise the tax on trash to \$7.50 a ton, something that would hit communities and citizens. It was stopped last year by an outcry of protests, not only from the waste disposal industry, which obviously has a vested interest in keeping out-of-state waste coming into Michigan, but also local government officials.

Have our Lansing politicians forgotten that Michigan, along with Alaska, leads the nation in having the highest unemployment rate in the country and that people are struggling to pay their property taxes, many trying to hang on to their homes while looking for work?

It does have an impact on communities. The proposed \$7.50 a ton surcharge would increase solid waste costs for the five members of the South Macomb Disposal Authority by almost \$866,000. In my community of Center Line, the increase would be almost \$21,000 extra a year. In St. Clair Shores, it would be \$210,495.

This proposal poses another problem for municipalities whose fiscal year begins July 1. We are already facing further cuts in services or having to go to the people for approval of millage increases.

To collect the proposed huge trash tax increase, we will have to look at making more cuts in essential city services, as voter approval of a millage increase is highly unlikely. Although stopping the flow of out-of-state waste has great environmental value, we have to rethink our priorities during these hard economic times in Michigan.

Proponents try to make people feel better about the proposal by saying the

revenues from this proposed legislation would be used for recycling programs. But this is nothing more than a disguise for adding revenues to state general fund coffers.

Furthermore, many cities in urban areas already have recycling programs for which their citizens are paying. Using our tax monies to develop recycling programs in rural areas not only doesn't make sense, since recycling is voluntary, but it would produce a low volume of recyclables.

Nor does it sit well with those of us who took the initiative to provide recycling in our communities at our own expense. I wonder how long it would be before revenues derived from this legislation would quietly be diverted for other uses by the state.

Yes, as local elected official, I can say we are all strongly opposed to the volume and questionable, environmentally dangerous, quality of solid waste being transported into Michigan and put in our landfills. I have personally seen the garbage trucks lined up at the Blue Water Bridge.

I also realize commercially owned and operated landfills are "for profit" operations and have little concern for extending the life of landfills for Michiganians' use in the future.

But the proposed trash tax increase is not the answer or the only answer to the problem. Further, I question whether \$7.50 per ton will make Michiganian less cost effective for out-of-state waste haulers, forcing them to go elsewhere. Hauling distance is a big cost factor.

I suspect in another year or two, proponents will discover Michigan has to increase the tax to, say, \$10 a ton to keep trash out of landfills.

The Democratic Party is already in deep trouble, as proven by the outcome of the presidential election last year. This tax increase proposal is certainly not going to strengthen their position in Michigan, since citizens already are heavily burdened by taxes.

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