

## Trash fee hike appears DOA

Dems want to halt Canadian waste shipments, but GOP stonewalling on massive fee increase

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In a bid to block Canadian garbage coming to Michigan, House Democrats continue to push for a \$7.50 per ton trash fee that critics say is ineffective and Republican leaders have declared as "dead" in the Legislature.

In a series of news conferences held across the state Monday, the Democrats said the fee levied on landfills would convert Michigan from a "magnet" for out-of-state trash to one of the most expensive states in the nation for trash imports.

"Republican leaders have told us this package of bills is DOA -- dead on arrival," said Rep. Fred Miller, a Mount Clemens Democrat, at a Mount Clemens news conference. "There's a cozy relationship between the waste industry and the Republican Party."

The bill would boost the state's "tipping fee" of 21 cents per ton to \$7.50 per ton, with the revenues raised paid back to local communities for recycling programs. The levy would be the highest state-assessed tipping fee in the United States.

Republican lawmakers have said the plan would hit Michigan homeowners and businesses with increased garbage disposal costs of nearly \$200 million a year, with no guarantees that the money would be shared with the communities.

The GOP leadership has said the legislation is not under consideration and no hearings will be held to discuss it.

Democrats say the plan deserves a hearing at a time when Michigan is importing more than 6 million tons of trash per year from Canada and other states. The Pine Tree Acres landfill near New Haven is one of the biggest recipients, handling 1.5 million tons of Ontario trash last year, a 63 percent increase in one year.

But officials at Waste Management, the company that runs Pine Tree Acres, have said the proposed fee would not affect the amount of trash coming to the Lenox Township facility. That trend won't change, they say, until Ontario officials grant long-awaited approval for two Waste Management landfill expansions in the province.

Macomb County Treasurer Ted Wahby, who chairs the five-city South Macomb Disposal Authority, said he is ready to launch an SMDA lobbying effort against the Democratic legislation if it gains momentum.

"This is the biggest farce I ever saw. All you're doing is taxing your own people," said Wahby, a St. Clair Shores Democrat. "What they're proposing won't make one dent in the Canadian garbage coming here. I think they're deceiving the people of Michigan."

Miller said he hopes to work with Wahby to make the plan more palatable to cities and townships. But the lawmaker indicated that the benefits to local municipalities have been unappreciated by skeptics.

For example, the city of Warren, the largest SMDA member, would pay \$518,000 a year in tipping fees but would gain nearly four times that amount -- an estimated \$1.9 million -- in revenues paid back by Lansing.

Under a complicated formula, the net gain derives from revenues generated from out-of-state trash and in-state industry. Those projected profits, which would pay for recycling programs that reduce the waste stream, resulted in a Michigan Municipal League endorsement of the five-bill package.

Democrats say the fee would "level the financial playing field," providing an incentive for Ontario to solve its lack of landfill space. The city of Toronto, which ships more than 1 million tons of garbage to Michigan annually, is ready to renew a contract with a Wayne County landfill for disposal.

Rep. John Espinoza, a Sanilac County Democrat, said he fears that lack of action by the Legislature could result in long-term contracts, perhaps as long as 50 years, between Michigan landfills and Ontario cities. The Democrat bills, Espinoza said, should not be buried.

"Let's at least have them see the light of day," he said.

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