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Raising landfill rates is not the solution

Fifteen years ago, my mother, as chairwoman of the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners, was involved in the fight against imported waste, which ultimately resulted in the "Fort Gratiot v. Michigan Department of Natural Resources" ruling by the United States Supreme Court. Since I came into office in January 2003, I have been proud to continue this fight to protect the residents of Macomb and St. Clair counties.

Last year, I was pleased to have the governor sign my legislation into law. It prohibits landfills in Michigan from accepting waste unless it meets state standards. This legislation started a chain reaction leading Toronto to release a statement in September saying its leaders were prepared to comply with Michigan's new landfill regulations.

I read state Rep. John Espinoza's March 11 column, "Raising rates will reduce trash imports," about raising fees charged for dumping large quantities of trash to reduce trash imports. Although it may sound like a good plan by implying out-of-state trash haulers would pick up the cost, in reality, the plan would cost Michigan residents more.

Espinoza said a \$7.50-per-ton dumping charge would attack the economics of the trash problem. He claims his plan would make it cost-prohibitive for the waste industry to unload their foreign trash in Michigan by slapping waste haulers with the nation's highest dumping charge.

The current landfill-dumping fee is \$0.27 per ton. Increasing our dumping fee by more than 2,700% is not the correct approach to take when dealing with the elimination of Canadian trash from Michigan. Under this proposal, the increased fee would not be paid by the entities dumping into our landfills, but by us, the citizens of Michigan. This is a tax increase on the people in Michigan, not Canada.

The plan punishes the wrong people. It attacks Michigan residents instead of the Canadian trash haulers. Therefore, to make up for the increased costs this plan would essentially raise the price for trash service throughout Michigan and not affect the price of which Canada and other states paid for their trash dumping.

What will ultimately help lead to the end of Canadian trash being imported into Michigan is the expansion of Canadian landfills and a bigger recycling effort.

I will be traveling to Canada in April to take part in a legislative exchange program. I will continue to put pressure on Canadian officials to urge them to cite and expand the landfills in their country. This solution will not cost Michigan residents and businesses any additional money and it will stop the estimated 260 trash trucks that enter our state every day.