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City News

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It'll take more than trash talk to fix the General Fund

Denver residents have been hearing a lot about trash collection fees lately and many are wondering why. In District 2, homeowners seem to like the current system. Trash gets picked up and the cost is already part of their taxes. That may be why 76 percent of you said in my 2011 citizen survey that you oppose any trash fee. Ideas still being bandied about include a flat fee, one based on how much trash you produce; a socialized fee to help low-income people; and a contract with a private hauler.

So why all the trash talk now? The answer lies in the gap between the money the city takes into its General Fund and the amount it spends. This gap is growing and a task force charged with recommending fixes seems to believe that making citizens pay fees for trash collection will help lessen it.

The idea's been around for a while; it's not part of 2012 budget talks. But it's a discussion that gets more intricate the more it's discussed.

My position is well known: I oppose trash fees. There are other ways to lessen our "structural financial gap" that we haven't yet tried. Rather than remake the trash collection system we ought to stop picking the pocket of the General Fund for programs that don't have to do with basic city services.

For example: Some \$2 million of Xcel franchise fees are diverted from the General Fund for private grants; another \$3.1 million of the fund goes to the Crime Prevention and Control Commission for programs its members like; and \$18 million is eaten up for debt payments on projects voters never got to approve. One councilwoman even asked for General Fund money for child care, which has a completely separate funding source.

It's got to stop. Diverting dollars then crying "poor" is wrong.