



Call a halt to crash tax

Saturday, December 22, 2007

Since it was first implemented last year, Wyoming's crash tax has been on a collision course with common sense. A blow to business and a "keep out" sign to visitors, the ordinance -- which charges those found at fault in automobile wrecks for the cost of responding to accidents -- deserves to go.

Thanks to a changing of the guard on the Wyoming City Council, it probably will. This week, the council took a preliminary vote of 4-3 to kill the fee. Next month, council members will make a final decision. They should finish the job.

Under the ordinance, insurers of at-fault motorists are billed for the cost of responding to accidents. If the insurer refuses to pay, the driver gets the bill. The "cost recovery fee," as the charge is called, came into existence in answer to real financial needs. Wyoming has laid off dozens of police and fire employees, experienced the cuts to state revenue sharing that have dogged other cities, and seen potential millages fail at the polls.

The council, however, came up with the wrong response. They decided to stick drivers with a tab that should be part of the routine cost of doing business for any city, even in tight financial times.

Wyoming taxpayers already

pay for police and fire service. Non-residents expect to be taken care of while they're in Wyoming, just as they are in neighboring Grand Rapids or Grandville, without facing fees they frequently discover only after an accident. Though it's hard to gauge the impact on business, the fees can't have been good for restaurants, retailers and others. They certainly haven't been good for Wyoming's reputation.

Council members Jack Poll and Joanne Voorhees, elected in November, drove the policy U-turn. Council members Kent Vanderwood and Richard Pastoor joined the two in voting to repeal the fees. Mayor Carol Sheets and Council members Sam Bolt and William VerHulst voted to keep them.

The program has brought in about \$140,000. That's short of expectations, but not an insignificant amount. Still, as Mr. Vanderwood pointed out, "The money we've collected isn't worth the bad public relations we've seen."

The answer to that problem is simple: Ax the crash tax.

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