

Repeal the unnecessary \$5.2 billion gas tax

By Andrea Seastrand

The Democrat politicians in Sacramento might have gone too far this time. In April the California Legislature passed [Senate Bill 1](#), which raises gas taxes and vehicle fees by more than \$52 billion over the next decade.

In November the California gas tax will increase 43 percent over the current 28 cents/gallon for a total of 40 cents/gallon. The state diesel fuel tax will more than double, and the diesel sales tax rate will increase to 10.5 percent from the current 6.5 percent.

In January you'll be paying a vehicle fee of \$25 to \$175 annually, depending on vehicle value, on top of the current \$53 fee. You're also paying a federal gas tax of 18.4 cents/gallon, 24.4 cents/gallon for diesel.

In November California will jump from the seventh highest gas tax in the nation to second in the nation, according to [American Petroleum Institute data](#). California gas prices, currently second highest in the country (more than \$1/gallon above South Carolina), are likely to be the highest in the country in November, based on data from [Gas Buddy](#).

All of this expense might be worth it if it produced smooth, congestion-free roads. But California is 48th worst in the country in highway pavement condition and congestion, according to [Reason's Annual Highway Report](#).

We pay so much but have so little to show for it because the state politicians have siphoned off our transportation taxes and fees for other programs. The 2017-18 general fund budget is a whopping \$125 billion. But less than 0.2 percent of it – \$241 million – goes to transportation.

As a result, there is a \$7.3 billion annual shortfall for local road maintenance, and a \$59 billion backlog for maintaining and repairing state highways.

The solution is to use the billions of dollars we are already paying in transportation taxes and fees to fix the roads. But nearly all of the Democrat (and one renegade Republican) legislators decided that we instead need to pay more. It is the arrogance of one-party rule.

But there are signs Californians may have had enough. The gas and fee hikes are opposed by 58 percent of those surveyed in a May [poll by the UC Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies](#). Nearly three times as many are strongly opposed to the hikes as strongly support it.

The opposition includes more than three-quarters of conservatives, 60 percent of independents and half of moderate liberals. Opposition is highest in southern California, including 72 percent in the Inland Empire. But even a slight majority in the liberal Bay Area is opposed.

As a result, the public's view of the Legislature has dimmed. In the March UC Berkeley poll, 57 percent said they approved of the Legislature's job performance. In May only half said they approved. That number is likely to decrease further when the gas tax hike hits in November.

Surprisingly Gov. Jerry Brown, who championed and signed the tax/fee hikes, has so far escaped unscathed. His approval rating only dropped from 61 percent in March to 59 percent in May.

That number might be lower if more Californians knew that when Brown campaigned for governor in 2010 he promised to not raise taxes without voter approval. Since he made that pledge, the general fund budget has increased \$38.5 billion. But for some reason Brown now thinks voters don't need to weigh in on tax hikes.

Fortunately, Californians may have the chance to vote on it after all. An effort is underway to place a measure on the November 2018 ballot to repeal the tax/fee hikes. Spearheaded by Assemblyman Travis Allen, R-Huntington Beach, Repeal the Gas Tax supporters need to gather at least 365,880 signatures to qualify for the ballot.

Unfortunately, the powers-that-be are fighting the repeal effort every

step of the way. Gov. Jerry Brown's attorney general recently issued the official title and summary for the ballot measure and not surprisingly, it is very misleading and worded to paint the gas tax as a solution for our failing infrastructure instead of the massive \$52 billion, open-ended tax grab that it is. Attorneys for Assemblyman Travis and supporters of the Repeal the Gas Tax filed a recent lawsuit stating the wording should be changed.

You can follow the latest update re this effort by checking out nocagastax.com.

You're also welcome to join the Repeal the Gas Tax SLO County Coalition, which includes the Central Coast Taxpayers Association, the SLO County Republican Party, A Better Atascadero and many other organizations. A coalition rally will be held at the Government Center Outdoor Plaza, 1050 Monterey Street in SLO on August 14 from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

We can fight back, we've done it before. Gov. Gray Davis was voted out of office in 2003 for his support of an increase in the vehicle license fee. Spending a little time and money now, could save you hundreds, perhaps thousands, of dollars in the next decade.