

## **Suspending the Federal Gas Tax**

Some politicians have, whether you excuse the phrase or not, expletive deleted for brains. The latest evidence of this tragic lack of mental acuity is Sens. John McCain's and Hillary Clinton's proposals to suspend the Federal gas tax this summer.

Now, I'm not crazy about the price of gasoline either. But I understand why it's risen. World demand for oil is rising, primarily because of the growing economies of India and China. That growth in demand is greatly outstripping the growth in supply. And as you should have learned in Econ 101, that means the price has to rise.

The higher price does three things. It induces suppliers to bring somewhat more oil to market, either by spurring exploration for new sources, or by making profitable the pumping of otherwise unprofitable wells. More importantly, it reduces our consumption of oil products like gasoline, either by inducing us to drive less or by convincing us to buy more fuel efficient vehicles. And most importantly for any long run solution to this mess, it spurs research and investment into alternative energy sources, from wind and solar to hydrogen fuel.

A temporary suspension of the gas tax won't affect the supply all that much. But if it actually brought the price down much, it would increase demand. And there's the rub – you can't have more gasoline used than you have produced. Something would have to restrain demand, to make it once again match up to supply. And unless either Senator is proposing some kind of federal gas rationing scheme, that something would almost certainly have to be the price.

So that means that if we suspend the gas tax, we're going to end up with pretty much the same gasoline prices anyway. But instead of that 18¢ going into the Federal Transportation fund, to repair our bridges and highways, it goes into the pockets of ... the oil companies. Brilliant, just brilliant!

Now, this might be news to you, but it shouldn't be news to either Clinton or McCain. They have economic advisors, well known and well respected economists, that are telling them how utterly nonsensical this idea really is. But like moths to a flame or flies to what these politicians store in their cranial cavities, both candidates seem drawn to an irresponsible political proposal that sounds good just as long as you don't actually think about it.

Which tells me a lot about two of the three people still vying to be our next President. Because I really don't think that these two candidates actually have you-know-what for brains. (Unlike certain members of the Wisconsin Senate and Assembly, who proposed suspending our state gas tax last summer. Them I do believe are so cerebrally endowed!)

Rather, I believe that these two candidates are willing to say anything, propose anything, no matter how foolish, no matter how ill advised, as long as it wins them votes. That these two candidates are counting on us not actually thinking about their proposals. That these two candidates are willing to stoop as low as they need to, just to win.

There is however a third option – a candidate who has spoken out against their proposal, not because that helps him politically, but because he knows that's the honest and responsible thing to do. Just imagine – a President who chooses honesty and responsibility over political expediency. It's been – well, I'll let you decide how long it's been. But I think we're overdue.

I hope you agree. Otherwise, it's going to be four more years of you can guess what for brains.