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GOP state senator from East Texas promotes gas tax increase to fund transportation



By Tom Benning / Reporter
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A Republican state senator is arguing forcefully for raising taxes to fund transportation, saying it would be more conservative to pay as you go with increased tax revenue than to go further into debt to complete road projects.

And Sen. Kevin Eltife of Tyler went a step further Monday during a panel discussion at the Texas Transportation Forum in Austin, adding that he's not concerned about how such a stand might impact his re-election chances in typically anti-tax East Texas.

"It is what it is," he said, earning loud applause from the crowd. "I was fine before I got this job. If they kick me out of office, I'll be fine."

Eltife's unusual tactic – by Texas standards, at least – came as he discussed the state's transportation funding challenges with three other state lawmakers: House Transportation Chairman Rep. Larry Phillips, R-Sherman; Sen. Chuy Hinojosa, D-McAllen; and Rep. Larry Gonzales, R-Round Rock.

Texas Department of Transportation Executive Director Phil Wilson has said the agency – and it's \$10 billion annual budget – needs an additional \$1 billion annually for maintenance and another \$3 billion annually to grow the state's road system.

And allfour lawmakers gathered Monday agreed that TxDOT's budget crunch is poised to get only worse and that additional transportation revenue needs to be found this legislative session.

But Eltife, chairman of the Senate Administration Committee, blazed his own path by declaring that it would've been more conservative to raise taxes 10 years ago than to go billions of dollars into debt. He added that the state is in a transportation

"There are times when taxes are the conservative thing to do," he said.

Eltife said he would add a dime to the state's 20-cents-a-gallon gas tax — which he also look to dedicate sales tax revenue on auto repairs to the highway fund.

When moderator Rodger Jones, a Dallas Morning News editorial writer, joked that he explained the transportation funding problem to some of his tea party constituents ?

But not everyone on the panel agreed — not surprising, given the political risk in seeking additional taxes.

"The gas tax is not my favorite choice," said Phillips, who explained that the gas tax is a declining revenue source because of increased vehicle fuel efficiency and other factors.

Most of the transportation funding ideas that have been suggested have focused on existing revenue, save for a proposal to increase the annual vehicle registration fee by \$50. That means ideas such as dedicating the vehicle sales tax revenue to TxDOT, ending diversions from the highway fund to other state agencies and so on.

Eltife agreed that those proposals are more realistic. But he remained adamant that it won't be enough.

"Until we have the political courage to really find the robust, long-sustaining revenue, we're going to damage to our state's infrastructure and to this industry," he said.

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 **Sanders Kaufman** 1 day ago

So, he talks to some tea partier somewhere, and suddenly they change their core principle of zero taxation, following HIM to higher taxes and more government. Did that really happen? Or is it just a story he tells people at his church so they'll give him money?

Evangelicals are so arrogant - they think if folks just hear their "word" we'll all be magically transformed into one of 'em. So they'll believe he converted them... just like that.

0

 **Dallas May** 1 day ago

It never ceases to amaze me how conservatives simply can't understand how our society works.

1. You love your car, and you love your highways. Your lifestyle and your McMansion wouldn't exist without them.
2. You haven't had your gas taxes raised in 22 years. Not even for inflation. If the gas tax in 1991 was indexed for inflation, your gas tax would be \$.32 per gallon. That means that this guys plan is still raising gas taxes to a level less than you were paying 20 years ago.
3. Meanwhile, TxDOT is spending more money. In 2011 they brought in \$2B in gas taxes and spent \$8B. Roads that you love -that subsidize your lifestyle- need to be fixed. Nothing lasts forever. No one works for free. Concrete isn't free.
4. Your cars and trucks are more efficient than ever. In fact, the average MPG vehicle in 1991 was about 19 mpg. Today it's about 24. In ten years it will be 35-40.

That means, once you add up all of those factors, TxDOT is asking for \$4B a year MORE than what they get now -which was already 4x more than they bring in. That would mean that your Gas taxes should be 4x what they are now, or nearly \$.80 per gallon. Not \$.29. \$.80. And TxDot will still have to be subsidized with other taxes.

Conservatives can't do science and they can't do math.

[2 replies](#) +1

 **Hector R** 23 hours ago

BLAH BLAH BLAH people like you are the best slaves the system could ever have its just to bad that you dumb ass followers who go along to get along out number us who know this whole government is a sham, found to be illegitimate in 1993 YouTube NESARA ACT. But as long as you are the majority the people will continue to get screwed and told its our fault that gas has to be so high.

[1 reply](#) -1

 **Ken Duble** 5 hours ago

And your solution for funding the roads?

0

 **Bryan Kennedy** 2 days ago

What a wonderful thing to bring up when gas prices have gone up 70 cents in 60 days.

[1 reply](#) 0



Ken Duble 5 hours ago

Yet the taxes haven't gone up in 22 years, so the system is broken.

When prices are falling, do you complain the tax isn't high enough?

Reply 0



richard schumacher 2 days ago

"I like paying taxes. With them I buy civilization." - United States Supreme Court Associate Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Republican

Reply +1



Freedom Fromtyranny 2 days ago

ONLY FOOLS believe politicians

not surprised

Reply +1



Freedom Fromtyranny 2 days ago

"IF" a "Tea Party" member said higher taxes instead of debt THEN THEY ARE NOT A TEA PARTY MEMBER

NO wheres in the article does it talk about spending cuts

WHERE ARE THE CUTS IN PROGRAMS THAT should be paid for by those that want those programs?

Reply [1 reply](#) 0



Ken Duble 5 hours ago

It's a designated tax. We're talking about highways.

Reply 0



Roy Logan 2 days ago

What he should do is tell Slick Rick to stop refusing to take money from the feds because of his sick logic and obsessive hate for the President.

Reply -1



Fred Witzell 2 days ago

Sen. Kevin Eltife, have you lost your mind? Can you even SPELL Conservatism? Much less DEFINE it?

Reply [1 reply](#) -1



richard schumacher 2 days ago

So you think borrow-and-spend is better than tax-and-spend?

Reply +2



Tod Grimes 2 days ago

I think that tax increase would be like many others and get dedicated to other projects. It may be time to embrace planning for future public transit between cities and states.

Reply [1 reply](#) 0



Ken Duble 5 hours ago

We couldn't afford that either on 20 cents a gallon.

Reply 0



Kelly 2 days ago

Maybe 2 cents a gallon, but 10 cents? Must be trying to get a few \$\$ in his pocket?

Reply [1 reply](#) -1



Ken Duble 5 hours ago

Annual inflation tends to run higher than that. Where's your sense of reality?

Reply 0



Steve Hogg 2 days ago

I would rather pay a .10 increase in gas taxes per gallon than keep building toll roads everywhere in Dallas and all over the state.

Reply

+2



Oscar Slotboom 2 days ago

The gasoline tax is the most logical and efficient way to pay for highway infrastructure for the near and intermediate-term, and it is good to see a conservative politician recognizing that. (But long-term the gasoline tax is a diminishing asset.)

If Rick Perry still has political ambitions, then he won't allow any increase in the gasoline tax. If he is planning to retire at the end of this term, it is possible he will be open to it. But if he plans to run for re-election (most likely), the gasoline tax is a non-starter. If he does plan to run, then even registration fee increases may not be allowed. But of course, I hope he retires and lets some reasonable revenue increases become law.

Reply

[1 reply](#)

-1



Ken Duble 5 hours ago

It's not a diminishing asset if it's per dollar rather than per gallon.

Reply

0



Cons Ervativeguy 2 days ago

Sounds like he needs to switch parties and move to South Dallas. I can't believe a Republican from my part of Texas would suggest this. Be gone...

Reply

[2 replies](#)

+1



Tim Ogden 2 days ago

Yeah! Let's just drive on dirt roads like the good ol' days!!!

Reply

[1 reply](#)

+1



Freedom Fromtyranny 2 days ago

just b/c YOU don't want to pay for roads directly out of your pocket is no reason to demand that others pay

Reply

0



Tim Ogden 2 days ago

It's well known and on record that Ricky P.'s daddy won't give him permission to raise the gas tax, so I guess Senator Eltife will have to duke it out with Ricky to see who will get their way.

Reply

-1

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