

Title: **As Senate debated gas tax, reason flew out the window**
 Author: Hannah Hill
 Size: 44.79 column inches
 Lancaster, SC Circulation: 3



As Senate debated gas tax, reason flew out the window

The state Senate passed its version of the gas-tax hike late Wednesday night, after two days of debate. This version of the bill raises the tax by 12 cents a gallon gradually over six years. The House version was a 10-cent hike.

Whenever large groups of politicians talk for long periods of time, you hear some real gems. Here are a few of this week's Capitol highlights.

◆ **House Speaker Jay Lucas:** "A responsible plan does not raid the general fund to pay for roads."

This quote is from a press conference held by House leaders shortly before the Senate began debate on Tuesday, urging it to follow the House example and do something about roads.

Lucas' statement begs so many questions. When is using general fund revenue to pay for core functions of government considered a raid? And what is the general fund for if it's not for core functions of government?

Of course, if all the currently dedicated streams of revenue just went to the general fund to be divvied out annually in the budget process, lawmakers would be forced to tackle some serious questions of prioritization – which is both a lovely and a terrifying thought, depending on whom you ask.

Guest column

Hannah Hill

◆ **Sen. Hugh Leatherman:** "This isn't just about fixing roads. This is about putting people to work."

This is from a floor conversation Leatherman, the Senate president pro tem, had with Sen. Paul Campbell in which they agreed that the gas tax would be an economic development boon to South Carolina because it's evidently going to rebuild the road industry.

According to the state Department of Transportation, our in-state contractors are completely unprepared for an influx of paving projects, so the plan is to slowly ramp them up and rebuild the road industry. Of course, Leatherman, founder of a Florence concrete company, is a notable part of the road industry, as are a couple of DOT commissioners and the Fix S.C. Roads organization. Yay for economic development!

◆ **Sen. Paul Campbell:** "We gotta stop killing and injuring people."

This was how Sen. Campbell kicked off the roads debate. This one is strange in light of the aforementioned slow ramp-up in paving projects. If lawmakers really are killing 18.75 people a week, as

Campbell explained, why not throw all the money at fixing them as quickly as possible with both in-state and out-of-state contractors?

◆ **Sen. Darrell Jackson:** "Is there anyone in South Carolina who is dying because their taxes are not reformed?"

This one came when lawmakers were discussing whether or not to add tax swaps to offset the tax hike – a smoke-and-mirrors scheme, since whenever lawmakers reshuffle the tax code, government always comes out ahead. We can only hope this statement does not reflect lawmakers' new policy litmus test.

◆ **Sen. Campbell again:** "At a 12-cent increase... a South Carolinian can expect to pay \$60 more per year. That's driving 10,000 miles and getting 20 miles to the gallon. If you drive 20,000 miles a year, it would go up a little bit more. It would cost you about what one soft drink at a convenience store would cost you, a week."

In other words, you'll hardly feel this tax hike. This was from the debate kick-off on Tuesday, which also happened to be tax day. Probably not the best timing on that one.

Hannah Hill is a policy analyst at the S.C. Policy Council, which produces the online publication The Nerve.