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PERPETUAL \$4 GAS?

By Ernest Steadman

I wanted to take a moment to relate something to you before it gets either national attention or in Congress before you become aware of it. I usually take my lead on these kinds of things from the national and multi-national news media. Several weeks ago, a financial commentator for the MSNBC website had an article in which he made the statement that he felt the best thing for America, now and in the future, was \$4 a gallon gasoline. That there should be a "floating gas tax" which would prohibit gas from ever falling below this \$4 level.

At first, I thought the guy was insane but his reasons, the more I thought about it, made me wonder about other areas of how this would affect the average American citizen. He said the movement of the public away from gas guzzling SUV's to the smaller auto and even hybrid offerings came at the exact instant gas rose to \$4 a gallon. Plainly, smaller cars means less of a demand on foreign imports of oil, bringing its cost lower and improving the environment at the same time.

On the tax side, it would be a built-in incentive for Congress to seek ways to lower import costs and thereby increase revenues to the government for road building, improvements and infrastructures that our country so desperately needs, probably to the tune of not billions but TRILLIONS of dollars that we have allowed to accumulate for the lack of adequate funding at the gas pump.

Can anyone of us even imagine the number of jobs this new tax influx into the highway industry would create? And, they wouldn't be meager minimum wage jobs but the kinds of jobs that helped make the "Blue Collar" Middle Class what it used to be.

Adding my own thoughts to his, I have a hunch that there is not a single food commodity that we currently purchase at the supermarket that requires processing by some plant somewhere, if gas were to suddenly drop \$1 or more a gallon, that they would follow in lock-step with a corresponding reduction in price. They would not. What we would see is the continuation of the industry's reinvention of itself. The 16 ounce cans we used to buy would still be the 12.5 to 14.5 ounce "little miracles" they have become with no reduction in their cost. Just as the tire and battery manufacturers did in the sixties and early seventies, they'll continue to give us less, make us think we're getting more and all at a higher price; a HUGE WINDFALL for the movers, shakers and financial backers of the Food Industry. And, just like today, with little of this gouging of the American consumer ever reaching the pocketbook of the farmer.

So I say if there is never going to be a return to prices on basic goods and commodities which reflect the true cost of gas at the pumps, why not a windfall tax for the government, dedicated solely for the upkeep of highway infrastructures we have allowed to fall by the wayside and at the same time create not only a cleaner

environment but also untold thousands of good paying jobs in the process?

In other words, if I have to continue paying through the nose for the most basic of necessities, I'll cheerfully do it if it is going for a worthy cause and I get an indirect benefit from it. Placing my money in the pockets of a select few does not fit that ideal.

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