

# POINT OF VIEW



Chris Barrett  
guest columnist



## Have your say!

Do you like our editorial? Don't like it? Were we way off base? Right on track? Somewhere in between?

Tell us! *The Messenger's* Point of View is a place to state your opinions and share your insights. We welcome letters of 300 words or less on any topic, from school board decisions to someone helping you with a flat tire. Is there an issue we haven't brought up? Tell us!

We require all letters to be signed because we look on letters as personal expressions of opinion. One signature is sufficient; we'll take two; a group of names is too many.

You can send your letters by e-mail: letters@surrymessenger.com; by fax: 719-0026; by mail: PO. Box 1207, Mount Airy, N.C. 27030; or by bringing it by our office at 101 W. Lebanon St., Suite 101, Mount Airy.

Please include a phone number so we may verify your letter. Phone numbers will not be published.

We reserve the right to edit all submitted letters.

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## A reason a day for no gas tax holiday

Presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and John McCain have both proposed a federal gas tax holiday from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

They claim that this will ease the pain we all feel from record-setting gas prices as the summer driving season begins. But while this may be good politics — in other words, it's shameless pandering — it is bad economics.

Here are seven simple reasons why.

1) The 18.4 cents/gallon federal gas tax (24.4 cents on diesel) largely goes to fund maintenance of the federal highway system.

Remember the Interstate 35W bridge collapse in Minneapolis last August? Do we really want to invite more such disasters by skimping on overdue inspections and repairs?

2) Short-run gasoline supplies are relatively fixed while fuel demand is highly price responsive. Basic economic principles tell us that the benefits of the gas tax holiday will therefore accrue mainly to suppliers, not consumers.

With oil companies enjoying record profits — ExxonMobil, Shell and BP made profits of \$11 billion, \$9 billion and \$8 billion, respectively, in just the first three months of this year! — why add to their windfall?

3) Sen. Clinton imagines that she solves that problem by proposing to increase taxes on oil company profits so as to compensate for the government revenue shortfall.

Unfortunately, the oil companies just pass

those taxes along to consumers, workers or both. There's no good way around the fact that oil suppliers win from a gas tax holiday.

4) Worse yet, a gas tax holiday would generate huge windfall profits for big oil exporting countries, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Russia. And there's no possible way to tax those gains away.

Sen. McCain hums "bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb Iran" to the tune of the Beach Boys' "Barbara Ann" (I'm serious; look up the clip on YouTube). But first he wants to line Tehran's pockets?

5) Since Sens. McCain and Clinton both argue that the United States needs to take more of a leadership role in combating climate change, shouldn't they propose HIGHER carbon taxes so that we drive less and burn LESS oil?

6) With the federal government debt at \$9.4 trillion, and growing (yes, that's "tr" before the "lillion"!), one might reasonably expect presidential candidates to seek ways to trim budget deficits.

Instead, this three-month-long empty gesture would add an estimated \$9 billion in lost gas tax revenue to the debt we pass on to our children and grandchildren.

7) Suspend healthy disbelief for the moment, and assume Sens. Clinton and McCain are right, that a gas tax holiday really does lead to lower gasoline prices this summer. Of course

that would also imply increased demand for fuel because people buy more when prices fall. With little room to increase oil supply in the short-term, the added demand must come from corn-based ethanol, thereby driving food prices even higher. So the gas tax holiday will hit us all in the grocery cart. And the timing is especially terrible, nailing families with children just as they get out of school — and free or subsidized breakfast and lunch programs — for the summer.

I'm not the only economist who shakes his head in disbelief at the Clinton-McCain gas tax holiday idea. When asked by talk show host George Stephanopoulos to name a single economist who supported this proposal, Sen. Clinton responded by belittling the entire profession. Keep in mind that economists are known for our "on the one hand... but on the other hand" waffling that famously drove President Harry Truman to publicly plead, "Give me a one-handed economist!"

When all economists miraculously agree that an idea is dumb, serious policymakers should drop it.

Chris Barrett is the Stephen B. and Janice G. Ashley Professor of Applied Economics at Cornell University, where he also serves as Associate Director for Economic Development Programs at the Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future. His brother is Rebel Good, editor of *The Messenger*.

## Editorial

### A good cause, weather or not

Inclement weather, while unavoidable, is by no means the type of threat that should dampen fundraising for something as essential as fighting local hunger.

Thus it was somewhat disappointing that turnout at Sunday's CROP Hunger Walk was below projections on a day when scattered showers rolled across Surry County. But it's encouraging that organizers didn't let the prospect of rain — which never fell during the walk itself — from keeping donations from dropping off considerably. Our community would be well served to pitch in these next few weeks to replenish the projected donations Sunday's rain washed away.

Few causes are more critical or more pressing than feeding the poor. CROP Hunger Walk (which stands for Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty) combats the problem both locally and globally. One-third of the funds stay with local relief programs, which in Surry's case is Yokefellow Ministries, while the rest goes to agencies providing world hunger relief.

Last year's walk, the first locally, raised \$16,000 from sponsorships and donations before, during and after the signature event. Chances to surpass that amount this year looked promising, with 300 people signed up to walk and more expected to show up the day of. But after rains fell

early Sunday, the afternoon turnout was only 240.

Thankfully, donations didn't drop too much, with more than \$14,000 raised. But at a time when more and more local families are struggling to put food on the table because of job losses and rising fuel prices, it's painful to imagine how much more could have come in had the sunny skies of Saturday stayed in place through Sunday.

Food shortages become especially pressing during summer months, when families can no longer count on free or reduced school lunches to provide nourishment for their children. Compound that with the sharp spike in food prices and the issue becomes more dire than ever.

It's for good reason then that CROP Hunger Walk's organizers aren't giving up at reaching or exceeding last year's fundraising total. Here's hoping those discouraged by the rain, along with those who feel inspired to give after reading about the event, will contact one of the organizing churches (listed in Friday's *Messenger* article about CROP Hunger Walk) and keep this year's fundraising totals from dropping off.

Times are tough, but recent fund drives for causes such as The United Fund and a new hospice building in Dobson have proven that our community has a rich capacity to give. Let's not let a few clouds darken that spirit.

## Letters to the Editor

### Environmentalists to blame for . . . everything

To the Editor:

Well gas prices are up, again. On May 16, President Bush was reduced to begging Saudi Arabia to produce more oil, never mind that America has vast reserves of oil that are untouchable thanks to the environmentalists — who by the way, are the same ones prohibiting access of our substantial natural gas resources and trying to impede building of new oil refineries.

No one is suggesting that we should not be exploring alternative energy which might be more efficient or economical, but we should be allowed to use our own oil and natural gas resources in the interim.

It is time we stop kidding ourselves: America is no longer a democracy. We are under the dictatorship of environmentalists, and our leaders bow down to their every whim and fantasy. On Nov. 17, John Coleman, founder of The Weather Channel, openly stated that "global warming is the biggest scam in history." And

during the month of March of this year, Mr. Coleman appeared on several national news networks urging business and industry leaders to unite and sue Al Gore for the financial hardships being foisted on our nation and "to finally put some light on the fraud of global warming" perpetuated by Gore.

Only a miracle can protect us from the financial disaster the global-warming crowd has in store for us.

My prayer is that God will continue to bless our great nation in spite of the cruel, hard-heard and smug environmentalists.

Marlene Tipton  
Cana, Va.

### Badgett case is 'He said, she said'

To the Editor:

In response to the recent letter of Eddie Pinson, we feel the need to clarify a few of the facts. We have read the opinion handed down by the North Carolina Supreme Court. We have read

in detail what the ruling stated.

There are two crucial important facts to consider about this ruling. Fact Number One: Everything that was discovered was based on "He said; she said." (It would be questionable at the very least if this testimony would hold up in a court of law.) It is important to understand that this was an inquiry.

Fact Number Two: Nowhere in this opinion was there ever any evidence to show that Judge Badgett ruled with preferential treatment. (This is the most crucial aspect of this opinion.)

We would like to address the issue of honesty. Bill Southern, Judge Badgett's opponent, resides in Guilford County and only recently rented a house in Walnut Cove, and said rental house is now for sale. According to our state constitution, a judicial candidate is to be domiciled in the district in which he or she plans to run for office.

In closing, it has become apparent to us the DA's office, with a select group of local attorneys, have decided to circumvent the election process. This is an absolute disgrace to one of the most basic rights in this country: that is the public election process and the choice of the