

Tax-on-tax unfair to Alberta drivers

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Lord knows the Canadian Taxpayers Federation isn't perfect.

On more than one occasion, it has allowed its underlying ideological support for conservatism to override its better judgment, and has refused to levy appropriate criticism at our provincial Tories as a result.

But, it's worth remembering that this relatively small-but-effective lobby exists for one reasons: to wrestle our tax dollars out of the greedy maw of government and back into the hands of the people.

And most of the time, it is the only group getting its voice effectively out there. Just as people concerned with the state of democracy can depend on Democracy Watch to remain largely impartial for that purpose, the CTF is usually pretty open about its *raison d'etre*.

So when the CTF launches a campaign, it's worth paying attention, and at least seeing if it's worth supporting.

The latest -- and longest-running-- of these annual exercises is the attempt to stop the federal government from taxing gas twice.

Gas Tax Honest Day, which took place Thursday, has now been around for 13 years. Unfortunately, that says as much about public disengagement from a nonresponsive political system as it does about our politicians.

For 13 years, the CTF has pointed out that gas at the pump is effectively charged twice, because it is loaded with tariffs before it gets to the pump. The government then taxes its own tariffs --built into the pump price-- by charging GST on top of the sale.

In effect, you are paying a tax on a tax. It's beyond unfair. It should be illegal.

And for the last 13 years, both the Conservatives and Liberals have known this is the case, and simply behave in an immoral and unfair fashion.

Worse, the government continues to rumble about high pump prices being the fault of oil companies, when in fact, only pennies of your pump price are actual profit.

Just before the election, then-Industry Minister Tony Clement had the gall to suggest oil companies should appear before the government to explain pricing. As the CTF's Scott Hennig suggested, he'd be better to call in his government's revenue minister.

Consider that every year, this tax-on-a-tax costs Canadians millions on dollars. While Clement might like the public to believe we get that back in some respect in government service, that's a delusional position; there isn't a forensic auditor in the country who, given enough time, couldn't cut swaths of waste out of every level of government in Canada.

Pump price changes aren't fair because oil companies raise and lower them in an oligopical fashion-- there are so few companies compared to market demand, they can effectively collude just by copying each other's practices and not break price fixing laws.

That's wrong.

But it's also a different issue -- and Clement knows it -- from why the price is high to begin with.

As usual, that has a lot more to do with the machinations of government, and our willingness to accept it for 13 straight years.

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