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OPINION

Tax holiday has no gas



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— *Editor's note: Tanya Amador-Daigle is reporting for Florida Weekly on the national primaries until the presidential candidates are chosen this summer. She has a unique perspective on the primaries and the process for choosing a candidate, having traveled the country reporting on primaries and caucuses for the Purple States project. To learn more about Purple States go to www.purplestates.tv.*

Did someone say holiday? I love holidays. Especially one that involves going out of town. However, last week when Sen. John McCain announced that he would like all Americans to receive a holiday he didn't mean a vacation or a day off from work. He meant from paying taxes on gasoline. Lo and behold, as I was putting my suitcase back in the closet, Sen. Hillary Clinton went a step further and announced that she had a plan too. The difference is that she has a plan to pay for it. At a recent rally she said that the oil companies certainly have made enough money on Americans and they can afford to absorb the cost for a while through a temporary wind-fall profits tax that would be imposed on them. In other words, she will make the oil companies pay for it.

In a savvy move, Senator Clinton ripped off McCain's plan and then one-upped him on it. McCain has been vague about how he would make up for the loss of revenue that the gas tax provides for our country's transportation infrastructure. Some experts have said that the proposal would leave about a \$10 billion gap in the Highway Trust Fund. A McCain spokesman said that since the Senator plans on trimming wasteful government spending, the loss would be offset. By some estimates the gas tax proposal would save the average driver about a whopping \$30 over the summer.

My colleague, Elizabeth Gotsdiner from Purple States had an opportunity to ask McCain an interesting twist on that question in Iowa on Thursday. Liz asked him, "If your gas tax holi-

day is such a good idea, why don't we make it an annual holiday?" McCain didn't directly answer the question instead he said that his plan will give lower-income drivers a "little break" when they are driving a little more in the summer to vacation somewhere. I think I'd rather see him use his energy towards a long-term solution.

Don't get me wrong, when I first heard about the idea it sounded terrific to me. "Let's stick it to the man!" I said. I actually don't drive a lot, but for those who do it would probably mean a little pressure off their pocketbooks. If you happen to own an SUV or some other gas eater I would think you would save even more money. When I heard that Sen. Barack Obama was against the gas tax relief, I began scratching my head. Obama is so liberal, why wasn't he jumping on the bandwagon? I did some research and thought about it a little more.

Wouldn't lowering the tax on gas only make the oil companies raise their prices to the pre-tax level? Then when the "holiday" is over, couldn't oil companies leave the prices the same and then add the taxes back on top of that? That would leave consumers with an even higher price than before. Isn't this a band-aid, not a long-term solution?

The debate of why gas prices are so high has been a useful tool for the political machine. It is very easy to buy the "blame it on the oil companies" argument. It is also easy to discard facts that do not agree with one's point of view or agenda. I always try to keep that in mind before buying into an idea put forth by the media or by a candidate. I don't profess to know everything but I think with a little common sense I have to take into consideration some facts.

One of those facts is our demand for oil and the basic laws of supply and demand. The demand for oil has increased globally, with the U.S. and China being the largest consumers. Americans use 45 percent of the gasoline consumed globally. Despite the high prices, we continue to drive gas guzzling SUV's, refuse to use public transportation and rarely carpool. Dare I say it? Could it be that we as consumers bear some of the responsibility? The more we use the more it drives costs up. I believe this is one of the first lessons taught in business school.

I care about the environment as much as the next person but environmental extremism has increased our dependence on foreign oil because environmental groups continually bar our government from drilling in our own backyard. In addition, we have not built a refinery in this country in 30 years for the same reasons. Environmental groups have done this despite the fact that new technologies have shown that drilling can now be done safely and responsibly. If we drilled in our own country rather than continuing this policy of dependence on foreign oil then we could increase our supply, thus driving down the price.

A lot of hard-working Americans have their pension funds tied to oil company stocks. How will they feel when their retirement funds take a hit? Should someone who goes to work everyday, carefully invests in his or her future, pays their taxes and feeds their family be forced to watch their pensions wither?

For the record let me state that I know we need to find alternative sources of energy. That goes without saying. But it's not going to happen overnight. What do we do in the meantime? In my humble opinion, I think we need to do both. We need to take control of our own supply of oil and find new ways to harness alternative energy at the same time. You don't abandon the old way of doing things until you have the new way in place and functioning smoothly.

Don't even get me started on ethanol. In trying to reduce our dependence on oil we've driven food prices up. Until we have an alternate source of energy that is cost efficient and eco-friendly, shouldn't we be taking advantage of the oil we have on our own soil? Some experts say we have enough underneath our American feet to last us centuries. If that's the case then why are we buying Saudi Arabia and Venezuela's oil?

I am disappointed that none of the candidates have offered anything but band-aids for the energy crisis. That includes Senator Obama. But I have to give him credit for his rejection of the gas tax holiday. He said it best last week, "This isn't an idea designed to get you through the summer, it's an idea designed to get them (McCain and Clinton) through the election." ■

MOMENTS IN TIME

- On **May 7, 1789**, President George Washington attends a ball in his honor. The event provided a model for the first official inaugural ball. Since 1809, formal inaugural balls have been held to celebrate new presidential terms.

- On **May 8, 1988**, Stella Nickell becomes the first person to be found guilty of violating the federal Anti-Tampering Act when she is convicted on two counts of murder. Nickell put cyanide in Excedrin capsules in an effort to kill her husband.

- On **May 9, 1950**, Ron Hubbard publishes "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health." Hubbard's book introduced a branch of self-help psychology

that morphed into a belief system boasting millions of subscribers: Scientology.

- On **May 10, 1749**, the 10th and final volume of Henry Fielding's "Tom Jones" is printed. The novel tells the humorous story of the attempts of the illegitimate but charming Tom Jones to win his neighbor's daughter, despite her father's objections to his uncertain parentage.

- On **May 11, 1997**, chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov resigns after 19 moves in a match against Deep Blue, a chess-playing computer developed by IBM. Kasparov, conceding defeat for the first time in his career, said of his decision, "I lost my fighting spirit."

- On **May 12, 1932**, the body of aviation hero Charles Lindbergh's baby son is found less than a mile from his Hopewell, N.J. home, more than two months after the child was kidnapped. Bruno Hauptmann was arrested, tried and convicted of the crime. In April 1935 he was executed in the electric chair.

- On **May 13, 1981**, Pope John Paul II is shot and seriously wounded while passing through St. Peter's Square in an open car. The pontiff, who spent three weeks in the hospital, fully recovered from his wounds. Pope John Paul II died in 2005 from flu complications. ■