

Opinion: Rural fire fee needs to be overturned

By Ted Gaines

I am pleased to announce that I introduced legislation that would repeal the fire tax.

This \$150 fire tax is illegal and unfair – plain and simple. Many rural property owners already pay local fire agencies for protection so it is clearly double-taxation and it is being dumped on the backs of rural Californians when the state has 10 percent unemployment and families are struggling to make ends meet.

Senate Bill 17 would reverse the governor's and legislative Democrats' decision to raise \$84 million in taxes by charging rural property owners a "fee" for fire prevention services as part of the 2011-12 budget.



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These communities are located in "State Responsibility Areas" designated by CalFire, even though their property taxes already contribute to the service contracts that counties have with CalFire.

This tax has been imposed on the owners of more than 800,000 properties in the state. According to Census and CalFire data, my largely rural district includes nearly 25 percent or

approximately 200,000 of the properties whose owners will be subject to the fee.

I have been a leading critic of the fire “fee” since its inception, leading a referendum attempting to overturn the tax and co-authoring legislation last session to see it reversed. I’ve also strongly supported the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association’s class action lawsuit to overturn the fire fee.

The fire tax attempts to sidestep Proposition 26, which prevents the Legislature from disguising taxes as “fees” and circumventing constitutional requirements for passing higher taxes.

I vow to fight this in every way possible and encourage everyone who might get stuck paying this phony fee to get in the arena and fight it too. The answer to fire protection in California is not illegal taxes, but budgets that invest in core government services that protect every citizen in the state – rural, urban and suburban.

I will keep you updated on the status of this bill as it makes its way through the legislative process.

Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, represents Lake Tahoe in the California Senate.