

Opinion: 'Fire tax' caught up in politics

By Ted Gaines

Gov. Jerry Brown is dangling elimination of the illegal "fire tax" as a sweetener for Republicans to vote for his incredibly expensive, pie-in-the-sky climate change scheme that would put billions upon billions of new costs on the backs of California families and businesses.

I hate the fire tax. It smacks of all the worst impulses of the elitist, urban, legislature and their out-of-control spending. In 2011, an overextended legislature and big spending governor cut a dirty deal to take \$90 million from the CalFire budget and put it into the unaccountable general fund.



Ted Gaines

To backfill that \$90 million hole (which they created), they concocted a blatantly illegal tax to punish Republicans for not playing along in sham budget negotiations. Rural property owners, mostly in Republican districts, had to pay, and are still paying, a \$150 fee for every habitable structure in State Responsibility Areas.

It's a bogus tax and it's being challenged in court. I have tried time after time to kill it. I pushed an initiative to overturn it. I introduced bills to eliminate it in its

entirety with not a drop of support from the governor. I tried to limit who had to pay the fee, and give a break to those people on limited incomes who were struggling to pay the bill. Not once did Gov. Brown step forward or lift a finger to help pass any of those bills.

I privately told the governor that since California, according to his own words, was operating with a budget surplus the past few years, that he should kill the illegal, discriminatory fire tax. He did nothing.

Now, in an incredible show of gumption, Brown is telling Republicans who don't support his gold-plated Cap-and-Trade legislation, which includes a suspension of the fire tax, not even a repeal, that THEY will be responsible for the tax.

Brown must have missed the past six years of my and other Republican attempts to kill it.

His climate change bill would chase people out of the state with increased costs. It could add an additional seventy-three cents to every gallon of gas. It would drive up electricity rates, which are already 50-percent higher than the national average. It would drive up the price of every single good and service we buy in the state, for everyone.

Throwing the fire tax into the climate change bill is political extortion. If Governor Brown really wants to know who is responsible for shafting 800,000 rural property owners, he needs to look in the mirror.

And if the governor really believes his shakedown of rural taxpayers is a bad idea, my Senate Bill 9, which would repeal fire tax forever, is in the legislature right now.

I'm still waiting for his support.

State Sen. Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen,

Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.