



New Jersey Wouldn't Need a Gas Tax If We Could Pump Our Own (Opinion)

By: Steve Trevelise, October 5, 2020

Last Thursday, another hike to the New Jersey gas tax kicked — another 9.3 cents a gallon. Every time I see the gas tax rise I'm reminded of how we could be saving up to 23 cents a gallon if we pumped our own.

That's according to Sal Risalvato, the executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline and Convenience Automotive Association.

Risalvato came on my show Thursday, Oct. 1 and said if we were able to pump our own gas, there would be no reason for a gas tax in the first place because people wouldn't be getting their gas out of state.

"At the pump, gas today, based on the cost of labor, would be about 15 cents (a gallon less)," Risalvato said on my show. "And I say in some instances 20 cents a gallon less. So if you went to a self-serve pump, you'd be saving 15 or 20 cents a gallon."

He went on to say, "The increase in the gas tax since 2016, has cost New Jersey, and we can prove this to the penny, \$190 million in revenue to the Transportation Trust Fund. Because, New York and Delaware have taken all of that volume away from New Jersey, once our gas tax went up. Their tax has not gone up at all...they are getting a windfall since we increased our tax. If those gallons were back in New Jersey, and if we had self-serve, they would be because we would be 15 or 20 cents a gallon less than we are today. Those gallons would've never left New Jersey, those revenues would still be in New Jersey. There would've been no reason to increase the four cents two years ago and certainly no reason to raise 9.3 cents this morning."

The biggest question that comes up when we discuss the subject — outside of "Jersey girls don't pump their own gas" — is whether it would drive up the price of insurance.

Risalvato responded by saying: "Baloney. Absolutely positively false. That hasn't happened anywhere else. New Jersey is the only state that does not permit motorists to pump their own gas. And it is not an issue in 49 other states. Why would it be an issue in New Jersey?"

This isn't about taking away the person who pumps your gas, Risalvato says. It's about letting you have a choice. "If you could go to a location and you could save even 10 cents a gallon and a lot of time and you're willing to do so, you should be able to do so."

And of course, what about the poor gas station worker who could lose his job?

"My members are having a very difficult time finding employees right now. They are short at the pumps as well as the convenient stores, if they are able to move the pumpers into the stores, nobody loses their job," he said.

Few people want to risk a job where you're coming in contact with multiple strangers with very little social distancing, all for minimum wage.

Of all the people who own businesses in New Jersey, the ones who suffer the most are the gas station owners because they do not have the option of self serve. It's not fair and in many cases, stations are forced to close and lose money.

Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick, New Jersey's top Republican, was on my show later that day and talked about what a hot potato this topic is in Trenton.

"That is such a hot potato, political item down there (in Trenton) that they won't even talk about pumping your own gas. If you say anything like that, people run away from you. They're so scared. ... Nobody's talking about it in politics anymore."

If Jersey girls want to pump their own gas, let them, but at the same time, those who want to pump their own and save money at the pump should get their choice as well.