



Don't Pump Gas, Jersey Girls; But Let Jersey Guys Pump Their Own | Mulshine

By: Paul Mulshine, January 13, 2022

Perhaps you have seen a car with one of those bumper stickers that reads, "Jersey girls don't pump gas."

But what if no one pumps gas?

You can see how that works out at the site of a new Royal Farms plaza at one of the busiest intersections in the state.

That's the spot in Brick Township that was originally the site of the infamous Laurelton Circle, where state routes 70 and 88 meet, along with a couple local roads.

It's the perfect spot for a gas station, but the 28 pumps there have yet to fill a single gas tank. The company hasn't been able to find enough workers to open the gas station and adjoining convenience store, said Brick Mayor John Ducey.

"The last I heard they needed 50 people to open," said Ducey.

But they can't find them locally because of a labor shortage, he said.

"There are help-wanted signs everywhere," Ducey said. "It doesn't matter if it's a small business or a Shop-Rite."

That raises a rather obvious question. If we're in the middle of a labor shortage, why is the state demanding that gas stations hire employees to do what drivers in the 49 other states can do for themselves?

There are about 10,000 gas-station attendants in the state. With the current labor shortage a lot of them should be able to find more productive jobs in other lines of work.

Things have changed since 2015. When legislators tried to get the state ban on self-service gas lifted that year, Senate President Steve Sweeney pledged that no self-service bill would get through the Senate on his watch.

“There’s nothing wrong right now with our system,” Sweeney said at the time. “There’s not a problem.”

There’s a problem now, says Sal Risalvato. Risalvato, who is the executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store, and Automotive Association, said gas stations all over the state are having to reduce or curtail services because of a lack of workers.

“We have locations that aren’t open at night anymore,” said Risalvato. “We have locations on major highways that have to close in the middle of the day.”

That’s not a problem in other states. Drivers just pull up at the pump, insert a credit card and get their gas without having to wait for an attendant.

If we had that system in New Jersey we could save from 10 to 15 cents per gallon according to Risalvato. With the minimum wage now set at \$13 an hour, it costs more than ever to have someone pump your gas. And even then employees are hard to find.

“We have members paying \$20 an hour and they can’t find help,” he said.

There are prominent senators from both parties pushing for a freedom-to-pump bill. One is Declan O’Scanlon. The Monmouth County Republican is putting together a bill that would permit gas stations to offer self-service for those who want it to pump their own and save money.

“If you were to institute a tax tomorrow to add five cents a gallon, people would go nuts,” O’Scanlon said. “Well this is costing you more than five cents a gallon.”

It’s costing us time as well, he said.

“If they had half the pumps self-serve, you’d see the lines for full-serve disappear,” O’Scanlon said. “I’m not gonna force you to pump your own gas. Don’t force me to pay someone to pump mine.”

One roadblock to self-service was removed as of Tuesday. That was when Sweeney went back to private life after losing his re-election bid.

When I called the ex-Senate President, he said the full-serve gas mandate is too popular for politicians to reverse.

“Maybe that’s changed, but I think it’s suicide moving in that direction,” said the Gloucester County Democrat. “When it was 17 degrees yesterday, I didn’t see people lining up to say ‘Boy, I wish I could pump my own gas.’”

To me, that beats lining up to wait for some shivering minimum-wage worker to pump my gas. No wonder there’s a shortage of attendants; it’s a pretty miserable job.

They should invent a machine that does it instead. Oh, wait. They already did.

And you can see 28 of them sitting unused out on Route 88.