



Dear Friends,

Before I get into the gist of this letter, I would like to say that I really hope that you and your family had a great Christmas season and a Happy New Year. At the Brandenburg home, we sure did! 2015 was an extra special year for my wife and I because we were blessed with our first grandchild, a grandson named Abel. Having a grandchild, as some of you may know, is just an amazing experience.

I wanted to write today because I would like to talk with you about the recent road funding plan that was voted out of the Legislature and signed by the Governor. However, before I talk about the specifics of the legislation, I have some personal thoughts that I want to share with you. The road funding debate lasted two years and eight months. It lasted way too long and I was not satisfied with the final product. Also, when it comes to tax dollars and government, I do not trust government, and I felt that long before I got into politics.

Over the last two and a half years, I have been asked why I took the positions that I did during the road funding debate. For me, it was pretty easy, because it was basically about good common sense. First, spending an additional \$1.2 billion dollars per year is a lot, and I mean a lot, of money. Second, during the last two and a half years, we were never told in what areas of the state this money would be spent. Third, we were never told what types of roads, quality wise, we could expect from the additional funding. Fourth, the repeal of Public Act 51, which is our state's chief road funding mechanism and written in 1951 (64 years ago), was never addressed. Finally, last May 5th, the citizens of the state defeated Proposal One, 80% to 20%.

I feel one of my main duties as your State Senator is to keep the citizens that I represent fully informed, and this is my intention today. There were several parts to the road funding package. Some parts I voted no on and some parts I voted yes on. However, as I said before, I was not satisfied with the final product.

First, there was an increase in the gas tax per gallon that we pay at the pumps. We currently pay .19 cents per gallon, and as of January 1st, 2017, we will be paying 26.3 cents per gallon. To be fair, this tax has not been increased, not even for inflation, since 1997. The deal breaker for me, the reason I voted no, was that Michigan is still one of just a handful of states that does not use any of the sales tax money collected at the pumps to repair our roads. No matter how you slice it, this is just fundamentally wrong. The amount of new revenue generated from this tax will be \$400 million dollars per year.

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Second, the registration fees for cars was increased by 20%. I do not like targeted tax cuts or targeted tax increases. The residents of Michigan bear the whole brunt of this tax. People from out of state use our roads, too. They should share in the cost of road repair. Also, I had a senior citizen call me a few months back with an interesting story regarding this tax. He told me that in 2007 he bought a new Ford F-150. He told me that after driving the truck for eight years, he only had 61,000 miles on it. That is roughly 7,500 miles per year that he put on our roads with his truck. Why should he have to pay the exact same tax as someone who puts 25,000 miles per year on our roads? This part of the legislation will generate an additional \$200 million dollars per year for road funding. That increase will become effective on January 1st, 2017. I voted no because of the reasons listed above.

Third, funding from our general fund would be used for road repair and \$600 million would be allocated. This allocation would start in fiscal year 2019 for the amount of \$150 million dollars, \$325 million dollars in fiscal year 2020, and the remaining amount in 2021 until that amount reaches \$600 million dollars per year. I voted yes on this part of the legislation. I did so because it was money that was already in our budget. I think this is the most prudent way to proceed. Make do with what you have. Keep the economy growing, more tax revenue will be generated and maybe next year there would be an extra \$800 million dollars in our budget.

All told, the three pieces of legislation that I have discussed in this letter will generate an additional \$1.2 billion dollars per year for road repair. This is what the Michigan Department of Transportation says that it needs to improve our roads over the next ten years. I am not a civil engineer so I have no alternative other than to believe them. I am really glad that the debate on road funding has come to an end. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me. As always, it is my pleasure and my honor to be a State Senator.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jack". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jack Brandenburg
State Senator - District 8