



Dear Friends,

On May 5th, 2015, Michigan voters will be asked to approve or disapprove a special ballot proposal to fund the repair of our roads and bridges across the State. I strongly urge you to mark your calendar and come out to vote, because there is a great deal of taxpayer money at stake.

As your State Senator, I am not going to tell you how to vote. However, because I represent you, I will tell you that when this proposal came before the Michigan Senate, I voted no. As is my past practice, I want to keep the people I represent fully informed.

First, the legislative proposal that you will be voting on shakes out to be a major \$1.8 billion tax increase with no sunset date. Ironically, only \$1.2 billion will go for road repair. This alone was a deal breaker for me. Increases to public education, rail transit, local governments, and the restoration of the earned income tax credit should be dealt with on their own merit, separate from a road funding proposal. They simply do not have anything to do with each other.

Second, process means everything to me. On the morning of December 18th, 2014, the last day of the legislative session, members of the State Senate were presented ten pieces of legislation concerning road funding. It was made very clear that a vote had to be taken that night since some of the legislation dealt with changing the State Constitution, which would necessitate a ballot proposal in May. In all candor, there is just no way, absolutely no way, I was going to vote for legislation of this magnitude on such short notice.

Third, the legislative proposal calls for our general sales tax to be increased from six to seven percent, a 17% increase. However, as I stated above, public education would receive an additional \$300 million per year, local governments \$94 million per year, rail transit \$112 million per year, and the restoration of the earned income tax credit, which is a tax cut for the working poor, another \$260 million. I do not have anything against giving out a tax cut to the poor, but I just do not like targeted tax cuts. If you are going to enact a tax cut, give it to everybody!

Fourth, both the 19 cent per gallon tax and the 6% sales tax on gasoline would be eliminated. However, the legislative proposal calls for an implementation of a 14.9% wholesale tax on gasoline, which would more than double the tax paid on gasoline currently. This tax gradually increases the amount of revenue collected as the price of gas increases. Does anyone want to debate the volatility of the price of gas? This part was just unacceptable to me.

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"I AM WORKING FOR YOU!"

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Fifth, more than a year ago I was appointed to a special committee on road infrastructure and modernization. Many officials were brought in to testify from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT). Frankly, I was surprised that they could not, or would not, tell us what kind of roads they were planning to build with all this money, nor where the money would be spent. They were very vague about the enforcement of warranties back to the contractors. Basically, I got the distinct impression that all they wanted us to do was to get them the money in some way, and they would fill in the details later. Nothing doing! I want the details before I vote, or I vote no.

It is a little known fact, but up until four years ago, none of the 6% sales tax revenue generated at the pumps was ever used for road repair. The revenue generated from the sales tax on gas all went to our general fund, public education and local governments. I find this to be extremely odd, and so do forty-two other states. Michigan was one of only eight states not to use sales tax revenue from gas to repair its roads.

I would now like to share some thoughts with you that I am advocating regarding road repair. There is no doubt that the roads in our urban areas are generally in poor condition. However, before we enact a major tax increase on our residents, we should make every effort to find the funding inside our existing budget. We must prioritize that spending. This will require making cuts in other areas, and everything must go on the table. I am ready to make these cuts. If done correctly and fairly, it could generate substantial money to redirect toward roads.

Public Act 51, our State's road funding mechanism, was written in 1951, making it sixty-three years old. PA 51 strongly favors rural counties over urban counties, namely Macomb, Oakland and Wayne. PA 51 stipulates that out of the current road funds, state trunkline roads receive 39.1%, counties receive 39.1% and cities and villages receive 21.8%. This presents a major problem to our urban areas. Secondly, PA 51 calculates total county "road miles", but does not appear to take into consideration how many lanes the road has. Macomb County receives \$43.08 per person in road funding, while Ontonagon County in the Upper Peninsula receives \$275 per person. Bottom line, PA 51 must be re-written, which will be no small feat.

In closing, on May 5th, I strongly urge you to come out and vote. I welcome all feedback. It is my pleasure and my honor to serve as your State Senator.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jack". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a cursive "ack".

Jack Brandenburg
State Senator - District 8