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Silicon Valley state senator takes on California's gas tax critics

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The man most responsible for California's impending gasoline tax increase – State Sen. [Jim Beall](#) from Campbell – struck back at critics Friday who have attempted to derail its implementation even though it passed the Legislature with a two-thirds vote.

Democratic State Sen. [Josh Newman](#) of Fullerton is facing a possible recall vote for supporting Beall's SB 1, and a recent poll by UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies found 58 percent of registered voters oppose the 12-cents-per-gallon increase that will help generate \$5 billion a year to repair freeways and other transportation infrastructure.

Two Republican-sponsored budget amendments to repeal SB 1 were defeated Thursday in the Legislature.

“If you ask people do they want to increase taxes, they’ll say ‘no,’” Beall said in a speech to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco sponsored by San Jose State’s [Mineta Transportation Institute](#). “If you ask them do they like the condition of their roads, they’ll say ‘no.’”

“When everybody says no on everything and you’re in the Legislature, you have to figure out how to do something. You can’t just pass the buck, you have to take care of the problem.”

The gas tax increase is the first in the state since 1994, which means that inflation has eroded the revenue generated by the tax even before taking into consideration the increased fuel efficiency of vehicles, which Beall said has doubled over that period, and the growth in electric and hybrid vehicles, which means fewer drivers pay gas taxes at all.

Though SB 1 received the two-thirds legislative majority two months ago necessary for a tax increase, it did so without a vote to spare and was almost exclusively along the party line that divides Democrats, who hold supermajorities in the Assembly and Senate, and Republicans.

Republicans have said they see the unpopularity of the tax as perhaps their best hope of ending their impotence in next year’s elections.

“I’m not worried about that,” said Beall, who described 23 years with the same tax rate as “a slow, odious destruction of the state’s infrastructure. We’re sort of deficit spending by not doing anything. Recognizing that fact is the first thing we have to face.”

Like most states, fuel taxes cover about half the cost of highway upkeep in California. Beall said the gas tax increase will cost the average motorist between \$8 and \$12 a month. In addition, SB 1 levies user fees on electric vehicles that heretofore had escaped gas taxes.