

## EDITORIAL: Stop complaining about gas prices and hunt bargains

Low gas prices, such as these seen at U-Save Gas & Mini Mart near Clinton and Weber late last year are a thing of the past thanks in part to the cap and trade emissions mandate that went into effect Jan. 1, adding about 10 cents a gallon to the cost. But Fresno drivers can still find cheaper gas by doing a little shopping around.

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California drivers have to dig deeper into their pockets to pay for fuel than most anywhere else in the nation.

This is because our state has the country's highest gas taxes. It has special fuel blends intended to lower air pollution that cost more to make.

This year the cap-and-trade carbon emissions mandate was widened to include transportation fuels, which has added about 10 cents a gallon to the cost, according to industry experts. And forced to make do without pipelines connected to other states, California refineries often can't take advantage of bargain oil prices when there is a supply glut.

Still, as reported Thursday by The Bee's Bethany Clough, savvy consumers can realize substantial savings by shopping around for gasoline. For example, prices Wednesday in Fresno ranged from \$2.99 to \$3.71 a gallon, according to GasBuddy.com.

Wednesday's gap wasn't unusual. GasBuddy.com tracked the top 5% of highest-priced gas stations and the bottom 5% of lowest-priced stations daily during 2014. The analysis ranked Fresno with the 10th widest spread at 65.6 cents a gallon. The Hanford-Corcoran area had the seventh-highest split at 69.3 cents.

We see this yawning price gap as an opportunity for people to keep more of their hard-earned dollars. By paying attention to posted prices and keeping a close eye on the gas gauge, drivers can save \$9 to \$10 on a 15-gallon fill-up

Allison Mac, GasBuddy's West Coast petroleum analyst, told Clough budget-conscious consumers should avoid buying fuel at many stations on major highways.

"A lot of gas stations in that area, right off the highway, can mark up the price," Mac said. "They know people are buying out of convenience."

Though cap-and-trade on transportation fuels has been a reality for more than three months, it remains controversial. Opponents call cap-and-trade the "hidden gas tax." This is because consumers absorb the cost of carbon allowances California fuel providers must purchase for each gallon of gas and diesel sold in the state.

We imagine trucking companies and other businesses with large fleets are squeezing fuel suppliers hard to save



money. Consumers should follow their lead, and hunt for bargains.

Taxes that fund road maintenance and construction and efforts to take the pollution out of our air are not going away. California fuel costs figure to remain substantially higher than those in neighboring states.

With a little effort, Valley drivers can find gas for 65 cents a gallon less than what some stations are charging.

Ultimately, it revolves around personal initiative. You can complain about the high price of gas — or do something about it.

Finally, from the We'll Believe It When Elephants Fly file: On Feb. 24, the California State Board of Equalization voted to cut the excise tax from 36 cents to 30 cents a gallon effective July 1 through June 30 of next year.

Even allowing for the fact the board raised the excise tax by 3.5 cents a gallon last July 1, the cut is good news.

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