

## Explore reform before adding taxes

By [JEFFREY D. PERRY](#)

December 16, 2008 6:30 AM

We are about to start a new legislative session in January and, unfortunately, despite the endless promises of reform and change, the same old liberal policies of those who like to tax and spend are putting up their trial balloons for new taxes and fees.

From what I am hearing across the Cape and the commonwealth, it is clear that residents are struggling now more than ever to make financial ends meet. In the face of a recession, now is exactly the wrong time to increase taxation and the cost of government. We in government need to be coming up with ways to help people with their fiscal burdens instead of making them continue to pay the price for one-party rule in Massachusetts.

According to recent media reports, House leaders are working behind closed doors on gas tax increases and turnpike toll legislation in an effort to fill the state's alleged transportation funding deficit, including the likely potential for the turnpike to be burdened with some \$450 million in near-term debt payments. This should not be a surprise to anyone who has been watching the mismanagement and overspending of the Turnpike Authority.

In response, the authority's board voted earlier this month for the toll increases. Under its plan, the Sumner and Ted Williams tunnel tolls would double to \$7 for regular customers and jump from \$5.25 to \$9 for taxis. Tolls in Allston-Brighton and Weston would also climb to \$2 from \$1.25. Last year the financing commission estimated the funding gap, to maintain current infrastructure without any further reforms or expansion, at up to \$20 billion over the next 20 years.

Also, Gov. Deval Patrick recently argued for toll hikes to support the turnpike's finances and said he was not opposed to hiking the state's gas tax. The governor, who was elected two years ago on a message of change, reform and fiscal responsibility, challenged elected officials to consider the long-term funding needs of the state's transportation system rather than piecemeal solutions. In other words, the governor is supporting both increases in tolls and the gas tax.

From my point of view, long before we begin to consider raising taxes or tolls, we must fully examine all areas where we can cut spending and minimize the heightened burden on our taxpayers. The two solutions which are being offered right now by Democrats are both unjustified and at the wrong time.

The election was only a month ago, and the majority party already wants to increase taxes instead of considering reform measures such as the elimination and merger of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. Under a proposal originally introduced by Gov. Romney, the commonwealth could save hundreds of millions of dollars by dismantling the Turnpike Authority, resulting in the agency being absorbed in the east by the Massachusetts Port Authority and in the west by the Massachusetts Highway Department. This bill has been filed every year, and each session the majority party finds some reason not to adopt it.

Instead of creating ways to save money and make government more efficient and accountable, some legislative leaders and the Patrick administration are brainstorming to find ways to raise taxes.

This has to stop somewhere; there must be some accountability for the state's financial problems, and that accountability rests with the government, not the taxpayers. It is up to the government to find a solution that does not further burden the taxpayers and citizens of the commonwealth.

We need reform before taxes.

Jeffrey D. Perry, R-Sandwich, is state representative for the 5th Barnstable District.