

OPINION

Ray's road to nowhere

Below is an op-ed from state Sen. Ray Scott (“We don’t need a gas fee to fix our roads”) that attempts to rebut Sunday’s editorial calling for bipartisan cooperation on a transportation funding solution, but instead perfectly illustrates why the Legislature can’t get anything done.

The editorial did not “call out” Sen. Scott “to support a new gasoline fee the Democrats are proposing” as he claims in his piece, so right off the bat he’s twisting facts to suit his narrative. In fact, it’s not clear that Scott is making any distinction between the editorial and other legislative proposals, so there’s no “shared reality” in this debate. What is clear, however, is Sen. Scott’s refusal to budge off his own position.

The editorial asked him to consider the merits of a framework formulated by a nonpartisan coalition of business leaders from across the state. They’re urging lawmakers to find a compromise that includes both general fund spending and certain targeted user fees dedicated to road repairs, because neither approach has been viable on its own.

The fees could include a modest increase in what motorists pay at the pump, plus a registration fee for electric vehicles roughly equal to what motorists pay in gas tax in a year and a modest flat charge on trips people make through ride-share companies. We say “could” because no lawmaker has yet stepped up to sponsor a bill similar to what the statewide coalition, A Way Forward, is proposing.

If (hopefully when) someone does, it’ll be the perfect opportunity for both parties to come to the table and hammer out something that works for everyone. Scott isn’t rejecting that approach (indeed, he seems to have missed the entire point of the editorial) so much as he’s trumpeting his own solution. And his ideas aren’t necessarily bad; they just have no chance of passing in a Democratic-controlled General Assembly.

The truth is Democrats can pass a gas fee if they want and Scott seems to suggest he’d rather they do that so he can complain instead of taking a seat at the negotiating table where he can advocate on behalf of rural interests.

“Unlike The Daily Sentinel, I have worked on solutions to road and bridge funding for 10 years,” Scott wrote. Yeah? Well what do you have to show for it, senator? Certainly not better roads. Recently The Road Information Program (TRIP), a Washington, D.C. national nonprofit transportation research group, said Colorado’s bad roads cost motorists \$2,000 a year in wear, tear, fuel and time lost stuck in traffic. And Colorado was ranked 36th of 50 overall and 47th of 50 for rural interstate pavement conditions in the Reason Foundation’s Annual Highway Report, which compared states using several measures of cost effectiveness and road condition.

Sen. Scott is part of the GOP leadership team and sits on the Senate Energy and Transportation Committee. For those reasons we singled him out as a potential difference-maker on finding a bipartisan solution. But we call on all lawmakers of both parties to give up the politics of the past and find some common ground. The key to breakthrough on big complex issues is letting go of far-right and far-left positions and steering toward the middle.

Sen. Scott can badmouth us all he wants for having an opinion about effective governance. The Sentinel is not a member of a lawmaking body. Sen. Scott is. If he’d rather throw bombs than be part of a long-term solution to fund our roads, that’s his prerogative. But if he’s waiting for Republicans to reclaim the General Assembly and the governor’s mansion for a GOP solution to prevail, the term-limited Scott is going to run out of time to join the winner’s circle.