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HEADLINE: No new taxes on heat

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To the Editor:

The state legislature is considering a bill that, for the first time, would tax fuels used to heat our homes and businesses. The proposal includes a 5-cent-per-gallon tax on *heating oil* and *propane*, and \$1 per month tax on natural gas users.

With energy costs in Connecticut already among the highest in the nation, and consumers and businesses (and the energy companies, like *Gault, Inc.*, that serve them) still reeling from last year's energy crisis, taxing necessities like home *heating oil*, natural gas and *propane*, when we can least afford it, is ill-timed and misguided.

The General Assembly says the proposed tax will go towards a "fuel oil conservation account," but this seems unnecessary and redundant, given the fact that more than \$100 million in energy conservation funding – through a Federal Weatherization Assistance Program and Energy Efficiency Grant – is slated to land on Connecticut's doorstep later this spring. I am not sure why the State feels the need to enhance the \$100 million, but sense that this is nothing more than a stop-gap measure designed to help balance the state budget.

To make matters worse, in the few short weeks since the this bill was introduced, two more energy taxes have appeared on both State and Federal radar screens: a State tax on gasoline, supposedly meant to fund rail projects (but with more than 84 percent going to the general fund), and an increase in Federal taxes, under the Department of Energy's "Cap and Trade" program, that will add more than \$640 billion in new energy taxes over the next 10 years.

The answer to controlling Connecticut's spiraling energy costs is not another tax to fund yet another energy conservation fund, which is destined to be raided by State lawmakers to balance future budgets. The answer to reining in energy costs is for energy consumers (that is, all of us) to start taking energy personally. We live in a region of the country that enjoys four distinct, and beautiful, seasons, with a climate that is one of the most varied in the world. And while Connecticut residents have learned how to adapt to extreme seasonal fluctuations in temperature, from very hot to icy cold, they are only just now beginning to understand the cost-savings benefits associated with preparing their homes and businesses to weather these extreme conditions.

Let's be patient, and give Obama's stimulus package, including the more than \$100 million earmarked for Connecticut weatherization and energy efficiency improvements, a chance to work. Weatherizing our homes and businesses is an important first step in making our State more energy efficient. In the meantime, it's up to all of us to let Hartford and Washington know that we won't be taxed into submission on energy issues that affect every citizen of our State. Haven't we had enough?

I urge you to call your State and Federal elected officials today to voice your opposition to the proposed energy taxes.

Sam *Gault*

President of *Westport*-based, *Gault, Inc.*

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Highlights: heating oil, propane, Gault, Inc, Gault, Westport