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The political pulse

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The federal scene

U.S. gas tax increase faces truck changes

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The federal gas tax increase of a nickel a gallon will go into effect April 1 but the full effects of the heavy truck licenses which may be changed will not start before July 1, 1984.

The provisions are part of the Federal Aid Highway Improvement Act of 1982 which passed in December. At that time Sen. Steve Symms, prime sponsor of the measure, voted in favor but his Idaho colleague, Sen. James A. McClure dissented. The measure, however, passed comfortably.

There is little question McClure's action nettled Symms because it was the first time the two have differed on a major piece of legislation — and it was one sponsored by Symms.

Both of Idaho's congressmen, George Hansen and Larry Craig, also voted against the bill, even after the Senate compromises favored Idaho.

Their opposition can be construed in keeping with their tradition of voting against most tax increases, regardless of merits. That gives them perfect voting records with the radical conservative factions which appear their primary goal.

The bill also had a rider which allocates \$6.5 million for rebuilding the Granite Hill section on Highway 26 between Idaho Falls and Swan Valley.

The federal highway tax will increase from the present 4 cents to 9 cents April 1.

Tom Hill, administrative aide to McClure, explained the bill for which the truck license provisions don't take effect until July, 1984, gives the senator adequate time to present amendments that can correct what he thinks are serious deficiencies in the bill, mostly centered on truck licensing.

Ann Canfield, administrative aide to Symms and also with the Senate Finance Committee of which Symms is a member,



Sen. Steve Symms

said the major provisions of the heavy truck licensing increase were purposely delayed to July 1, 1984, to give an opportunity to make amendments.

McClure is one who plans just such a step in easing the truck licensing provisions. He announced a month ago he has joined Sen. Rudy Boschwitz, R-Minn, in sponsoring legislation to reduce the increase in the Heavy Vehicle Use tax.

Miss Canfield said this bill is in the Senate Finance Committee and likely won't be acted on until other tax increase legislation can be considered in bulk. She predicted this won't take place until July.

McClure contended the heavy truck tax increase would amount to more than 700 percent. He also said he did not agree with a Department of Transportation study that indicated that large trucks underpay their fair share of the highway costs while cars overpay their share. McClure said that such factors as weather and chemicals are large contributing factors to road deterioration.

McClure noted the legislation passed in December raise the maximum tax of \$240 a year for an 80,000 pound truck to an eventual \$1,900 a year.

He explained his new legislation, titled the Heavy Vehicle Use Tax Adjustment Act of 1983, will reduce the tax to \$1,200 to be phased in by one-thirds over three years beginning July, 1984.

Symms said he agrees with McClure that some adjustments should be made to ease the tax burden on heavy trucks.

He pointed out he was successful in amending the bill that sets a national uniform weight standards of 90,000 pounds and eliminating "barrier states", or those states which have weight limits under the federal standards.

The new federal gas tax of 9 cents will augment the \$15.5 cents imposed by the state if the new 3 cents per gallon increase is approved as appears probable. That means motorists will pay 24.5 cents in state and federal gasoline tax for each gallon they buy. That seems stiff but it's worth the price to maintain Idaho's excellent highway system, no matter what many shortsighted motorists say.