

GAS TAX FREEZE SUGGESTED

# N.C. advocates push for \$1 billion in state tax cuts

By Mike Barber

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH -- Anti-tax advocates have staked a claim for half of the state's \$2 billion extra money while also declaring a minor victory in their crusade against one of the Southeast's highest fuel taxes.

Bill Graham, chairman of North Carolina Conservatives United and organizer of a rally that drew a crowd of about 1,000 to the statehouse grounds, announced his plan to seek more than \$1 billion in tax relief. Organizers said more than 70,000 people have signed an online petition to support the anti-tax movement.

"Our message is simple: Give us our money back," said Graham, a Salisbury attorney.

Tuesday's rally, held on the same day the General Assembly opened its annual session, was originally billed as a protest against the gas tax. The rally adopted a new message after Gov. Mike Easley urged the General Assembly to cap the tax to keep it from rising again in July.

Easley's declaration, a small victory for anti-gas tax advocates, marked a change in policy for the state's Democratic leadership. They have argued that a gas-tax cut would lower prices by just a few pennies and the lost revenue would harm road construction around the state. Each penny of the gas tax generates about \$53 million annually, according to the state Department of

Revenue

"We're glad to see the governor is coming our way, but we still want him to roll it back," Graham said in an interview. "They're taking too much of the people's money."

South Carolina and Virginia charge an average of about 13 cents per gallon less, which would be an appropriate benchmark, Graham said.

North Carolina's fuel tax rose 2.8 cents per gallon, to 29.9 cents, on Jan. 1 as a result of surging wholesale gas prices after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita ravaged Gulf Coast oil operations. The tax rate is adjusted every six months based on the price of gas.

Several lawmakers called for the state to freeze the gas tax before it was readjusted at the beginning of the year. Senate Republican Leader Phil Berger, R-Rockingham, asked Easley last fall to call a special session to keep the gas tax at 27.1 cents per gallon.

Easley opposed the idea, saying that the money is needed to complete projects around the state.

Berger, who spoke at the rally, said he will now seek legislation to roll back the tax to that figure.

"We finally got the governor to blink. We just need him to turn around and do the right thing," Berger said.

The Democratic governor's proposed budget for the state fiscal year beginning in July would dip into the state's surplus for an additional \$218.7 million for road construction and repairs.

"That's the thing that concerns me most," Graham said. "They're not talking about a tax cut for the people, but they're spending like there's no tomorrow."

Along with repealing some of the state's gas tax, Graham requested that the state eliminate a half-cent sales tax increase enacted in 2001 as a temporary revenue source during a state budget squeeze. The tax has since been extended two times, and is now on the books through 2007.

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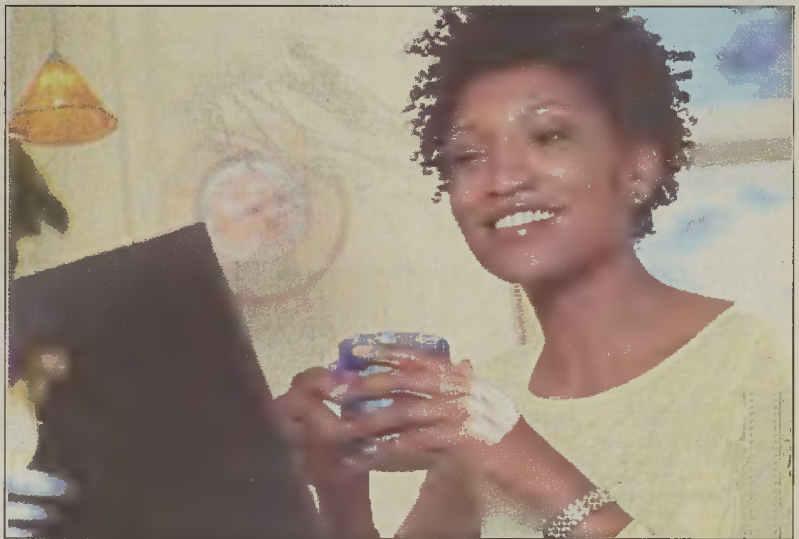
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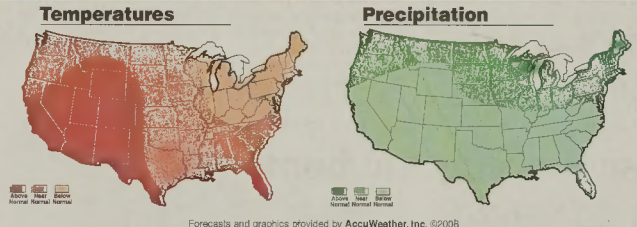
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### AccuWeather.com 7-DAY FORECAST FOR CHARLOTTE, NC

Thursday	Thu. night	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Mostly sunny and nice	Partly cloudy	A p.m. t-shower possible	Partly sunny	A p.m. t-shower possible	A thundershower possible	A thundershower possible	Partly sunny and warm
79°	57°	82° 60°	82° 57°	80° 60°	83° 63°	87° 67°	88° 66°
RealFeel	RealFeel	RealFeel	RealFeel	RealFeel	RealFeel	RealFeel	RealFeel

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### IN THE SKY

Sun	Rise	Set	Moon	Rise	Set	Moon Phases
Thursday	6:18 a.m.	8:23 p.m.	Thursday	1:06 a.m.	11:00 a.m.	Last
Friday	6:17 a.m.	8:24 p.m.	Friday	1:46 a.m.	12:11 p.m.	5/20
Saturday	6:16 a.m.	8:25 p.m.	Saturday	2:20 a.m.	1:22 p.m.	5/27
Sunday	6:16 a.m.	8:25 p.m.	Sunday	2:51 a.m.	2:31 p.m.	6/3
Monday	6:15 a.m.	8:25 p.m.	Monday	3:19 a.m.	3:40 p.m.	6/11
Tuesday	6:15 a.m.	8:27 p.m.	Tuesday	3:46 a.m.	4:40 p.m.	
Wednesday	6:14 a.m.	8:27 p.m.	Wednesday	4:15 a.m.	5:59 p.m.	

### REGIONAL CITIES

City	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	City	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Aiken, SC	81 56 s	84 56 s	82 59 pc	85 61 pc	Memphis, TN	83 61 pc	80 59 pc	78 64 pc	84 66 pc
Augusta, GA	82 56 s	85 58 s	84 56 pc	86 62 pc	Myrtle Beach, SC	81 64 s	81 61 pc	78 62 pc	82 67 pc
Charleston, SC	84 62 s	87 62 s	82 63 pc	86 67 pc	Norfolk, VA	79 61 pc	77 57 pc	71 55 pc	76 62 pc
Columbia, SC	82 60 s	83 57 pc	81 59 pc	85 64 pc	Raleigh, NC	82 60 s	80 54 pc	78 55 pc	80 59 pc
Durham, NC	80 58 s	77 54 pc	76 53 pc	79 58 pc	Richmond, VA	78 56 t	76 52 pc	71 51 pc	76 57 pc
Greensboro, NC	79 58 pc	77 53 pc	73 51 pc	75 60 pc	Roanoke, VA	72 59 t	71 49 c	69 51 pc	74 59 pc
Greenville, SC	80 57 pc	79 55 pc	76 53 pc	78 63 pc	Savannah, GA	83 58 s	87 61 s	88 62 pc	80 65 pc
Knoxville, TN	73 55 pc	74 51 c	74 55 pc	78 63 pc	Wilmington, NC	81 62 s	82 60 pc	79 60 pc	81 65 pc
Lynchburg, VA	73 51 t	71 47 pc	67 45 pc	75 53 pc	Winston-Salem, NC	77 57 pc	77 54 pc	72 51 pc	76 60 pc

### U.S. CITIES

City	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	City	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Atlanta	79 58 pc	78 53 s	80 62 pc	81 64 pc	Miami	85 70 t	85 72 s	87 74 pc	86 75 pc
Boston	74 52 pc	66 48	68 50 pc	65 51 pc	Minneapolis	64 44 sh	62 48 pc	69 50 pc	67 49 c
Chicago	62 42 pc	60 44 pc	62 48 pc	64 45 s	New Orleans	86 65 s	86 69 s	88 70 s	88 70 s
Cleveland	62 44 t	59 41 c	60 43 pc	61 47 pc	New York City	75 54 t	68 52 r	68 52 pc	68 55 pc
Dallas	89 66 s	92 67 s	91 68 s	87 58 s	Orlando	87 64 s	87 66 s	90 68 s	92 68 pc
Denver	63 52 s	65 53 s	65 53 s	79 48 c	Pittsburgh	65 47 t	62 43 c	64 43 pc	62 42 pc
Detroit	60 42 c	60 42 pc	62 45 pc	64 46 s	Phoenix	104 78 s	105 77 s	105 75 s	89 72 s
Houston	67 54 s	69 66 s	69 68 s	83 69 s	San Francisco	68 52 pc	66 53 pc	64 52 pc	66 52 c
Kansas City	84 52 pc	78 55 s	80 58 pc	78 62 pc	Seattle	74 53 pc	68 52 c	64 50 sh	62 48 sh
Los Angeles	78 62 pc	76 62 pc	76 60 pc	74 57 pc	Washington, DC	75 57 pc	70 54 c	74 52 pc	72 55 pc

### WORLD CITIES

City	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	City	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Amsterdam	65 63 r	61 47 pc	60 45 r	61 47 pc	Paris	70 48 pc	62 52 pc	60 57 r	63 45 s
Berlin	67 51 r	63 47 c	61 49 sh	63 47 pc	Rio de Janeiro	76 65 s	79 67 pc	80 64 pc	79 64 pc
Buenos Aires	59 45 r	59 46 s	57 47 pc	63 54 pc	Rome	78 61 pc	78 58 pc	76 54 pc	77 60 pc
Cairo	68 62 s	68 65 pc	60 64 s	63 65 s	San Juan	69 77 c	68 76 pc	69 76 s	69 75 s
Jerusalem	70 52 s	71 53 pc	73 57 s	80 59 s	Saudi	77 57 pc	71 54 pc	82 55 s	83 56 pc
Johannesburg	64 40 pc	48 33 c	49 31 c	50 33 pc	Sydney	68 57 s	70 57 pc	66 55 pc	69 50 pc
London	67 52 c	62 56 sh	63 50 r	62 41 r	Tokyo	70 59 r	72 69 r	74 59 r	76 60 pc
Mexico City	71 52 sh	72 53 pc	74 52 s	77 51 c	Toronto	60 38 t	57 38 sh	54 38 pc	56 41 pc
Moscow	50 29 pc	55 30 pc	57 43 pc	61 50 pc	Zurich	65 50 r	65 41 sh	70 52 pc	64 49 pc

Weather (W) = sunny; (P) = partly cloudy; (C) = cloudy; (S) = showers; (SH) = showers; (R) = rain; (F) = snow flurries; (SN) = snow; (K) = ice.

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