

A TAXING SITUATION

"No man's life, liberty or property are safe while the legislature is in session."

—Mark Twain

For many years, motorcyclists have willingly paid user fees to assure that there is funding available for things like rider education and off-highway vehicle (OHV) trails. Unfortunately, programs like these that benefit motorcyclists

have never had broad enough support for funding unless we have been willing to pay our own way.

Most of the state rider education programs across the country are self-funded by riders through additional fees tacked on to



By Rob Dingman

the cost of motorcycle licenses and registrations. Many states require OHVs to be registered with a portion of the registration fee going to pay for trail maintenance and development.

There is even a federal program called the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) that dedicates a portion of the federal motor vehicle fuel tax attributable to certain off-highway sources to trail funding for both motorized and non-motorized trails.

That's right, in order to get the trails program enacted, OHV enthusiasts had to agree to share the funding with non-motorized trail users.

Hundreds of millions in gas tax money is paid every year by OHV enthusiasts for the fuel they consume riding off-highway. Only a portion of that amount ends up being allocated to the RTP, and an even smaller portion is spent on motorized trails.



Now, we learn that the leadership in the U. S. Congress would like to eliminate the RTP entirely but keep our money. At the same time, we hear rhetorical pronouncements from our congressional leaders about their unwillingness to raise taxes. If a user fee is diverted from its intended purpose, it becomes a tax increase on that user. Simply stated, motorcyclists are being singled out for a tax increase!

It is not just our federal government either. We are seeing the same thing happen all over the country. As cash-strapped states are looking for ways to address their budget woes, programs funded by, and for, motorcyclists are being targeted and raided.

This is an issue that affects all motorcyclists alike. Whether you're a dirt rider or a street rider, as a motorcyclist, you are subject to a tax increase.

In this era of huge government bailouts and big corporate tax breaks, it is ridiculous that motorcyclists are being asked to pay more than our fair share.

The reason legislators feel they can get away with it is because they perceive that we are not a strong enough constituency to do anything about it. Sometimes even our friends in Congress find it more politically expedient to be on the opposite side of our issues.

That would not happen if the AMA had more clout in Washington and state capitals. The only way this is going to happen is for the AMA to grow substantially in size, and more letters and phone calls are made by AMA members to representatives and senators expressing our concerns and needs. When motorcyclists are viewed as a solid voting block capable of influencing the outcome of elections, we will be taken much more seriously.

To some motorcyclists, that notion is far-fetched. But consider this: With an estimated 11 million motorcycles in use in this country, it's not unreasonable to expect that an AMA populated by 25 percent of all riders would swing a pretty big stick.

Longtime AMA members have been working in the trenches to make this a reality, and we are working hard at the Board and staff levels to make the AMA a relevant organization to millions more riders.

You can help in an easy way. Visit AmericanMotorcyclist.com to contact your elected representatives on the Recreational Trails Program. Additionally, the next time the AMA issues an alert about a threat to motorcycling, be sure you forward it to at least one riding friend who you know is not an AMA member. Remind them why a stronger AMA is important to all motorcyclists who don't want to be overtaxed and overregulated. Most importantly, ask them to join the AMA.

Rob Dingman is president and CEO of the AMA.

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