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Transportation Committee
Room 2300, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Opposition to H.B. 6818 - *An Act Concerning the Establishment of Electronic Tolls at the State's Borders*

Analysts of consumer behavior refer to it simply as “the O’Neill”. Specifically, the O’Neill Point is the threshold at which a relatively minor increase in the price of a commodity reaches some psychological trigger, at which a majority of consumers actively seeks out alternatives.

But how exactly did Connecticut’s eight-fourth governor get credited with the phenomenon? The year was 1981 and then-Governor William A. O’Neill and the state’s democratically-controlled legislature called for an increase in the state’s budget. But where would these funds come from, they pondered? The answer came in the form of legislation, which increased the price of tolls located on the state’s highways from 25 to 35 cents.

Just a dime you say?

Problem was, *that dime* got folks thinking. Twenty-five cent tolls were something Connecticut motorists had grown-up with and come to accept without question. Tolls had been a quarter ever since the state’s parkways and highways opened in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. So accustomed were drivers to twenty-five cent tolls that many installed small, spring-loaded coin holders in their vehicles, to hold the stacks of quarters readied to be tossed into the chutes of the state’s toll plazas.

But wait... what’s this 35-cent thing? Hang-on, while I search for a quarter AND a dime, or a quarter AND two nickels, or three dimes AND a nickel. Wait... I think there’s some change in the fold of the passenger seat... C-R-A-S-H! While the motorists were fumbling-around, looking for all manner of change, to satisfy what appeared to be a relatively minor price increase (the root cause of many accidents and fatalities) drivers become acutely aware of the *price of the tolls*.

When consumers begin to consciously think about what they doing, and more importantly, question the need to continue doing it, there comes a point of awareness that drives them into action. The public quickly reached what would become known as the O’Neill Point; and their alternatives included protesting for the removal of all tolls and driving the secondary roads which paralleled the state’s highways. In particular, traffic along Route 1 came to a standstill, as it quickly filled to capacity with drivers who refused to pay the tolls.

Connecticut wisely pronounced last-rites for its highway tolls in 1985 when all were removed.

The “Lock Box” and “Constitutional Amendment” Fallacy:

Some lawmakers will propose a “lockbox” to assure that toll funds can only be spent for transportation-related uses. Connecticut already has such a “lockbox”. Implemented after 1983’s tragic Mianus River Bridge collapse, this “lockbox” has been raided by the legislature three (3) times since its creation... so much for the “Lockbox”, “Super Lockbox” or “Constitutional Amendment”... they are fallacies.

The Fallacy of “Technological Improvements”:

It is often said that “tolling has changed” because of recent technological improvements. This argument does not change the O’Neill effect... trucks and cars of ALL SIZES are going to take to the secondary roads to circumvent tolls.

Tolls ARE Taxes:

Replacing tolls on Connecticut’s highways is simply a shell game. Make no mistake... constituents know that the taxes they currently pay for transportation will simply be re-assigned to other expenditures; resulting in a **net increase in their taxes**. According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, the definition of “Toll” is:

... A TAX or fee paid for some liberty or privilege (as of passing over a highway or bridge).

Quite simply, a Toll IS a Tax.

We learned our lesson thirty years ago, thanks to Bill O’Neill. We don’t need to learn it again.
I urge you to oppose any attempts to place tolls on Connecticut highways.

Respectfully,

Frank C. DeFelice