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Inglis, Jeter rebuff gas tax holiday

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Incumbent U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis and fellow Republican Charles Jeter, who is challenging Inglis in June, said Monday that they do not agree with a summer-long federal gas tax holiday proposed by their party's presumptive presidential nominee, Arizona Sen. John McCain.

Inglis, at his monthly campaign luncheon at Wade's restaurant in Spartanburg, said he was "embarrassed" by that proposal, which would trim about 18 cents per gallon from the cost of gas during peak summer travel months. The congressman later added that the kind of temporary tax break in question "is a simple and wrong solution" because it would lead to deficit financing of road construction and repair.

Jeter, in a phone interview on his way to the Freedom Weekend Aloft in Simpsonville, said: "I see no real benefit from a summer gas tax reduction. I don't see that helping in any significant way the problem that our country is facing. I just see it as a feel-good political ploy."

Gas prices, now pushing \$4 a gallon, and the future of energy have been key to shaping the debate in the 4th Congressional District.

The two men agree in some areas, such as a stronger reliance on nuclear power for this country's long-term energy needs, but differ in other areas. Jeter supports drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, commonly called ANWR, for instance. Inglis does not.

Inglis frowns on traditional coal-fired plants because of their carbon dioxide emissions. Jeter says America has no other option for its short-term power needs.

Inglis believes in developing more solar, wind and clean-coal technology, and that the holy grail in alternative energy eventually will be found in hydrogen. Jeter says he supports alternative fuel sources, but believes solar and wind are ultimately unreliable - and he says that hydrogen will never be a practical fuel source.

They agree on the need to drill offshore and build more refineries.

At Wade's, Inglis pointed out that Republicans had backed themselves into a "weird spot," feeling the need to oppose doing the right thing environmentally out of fear that it's "green." He talked about two women he met on the campaign trail who have lunch together once a week. They used to drive separately. Now, they carpool and alternate who drives.

"We don't want to be the party that says, 'Both of you drive,' because that's the opposite of conservatism," Inglis said.

He later added that former vice president Al Gore does not own the franchise on environmental issues. Gore is often credited for popularizing the matter with his movie "An Inconvenient Truth."

"You restore credibility when you say, 'We're not going to spend our energy hating Al Gore. We're going to spend our energy coming up with a solution,' " Inglis said.

Jeter doesn't believe in "catastrophic" climate-change scenarios, saying that the Earth is constantly going through a period of warming or cooling. He says that Gore has "undermined" this country with his message about climate change.

Inglis doesn't believe there's a short-term solution to high gas prices. He said action now must be toward a future free from oil.

Jeter, on the other hand, said it's not realistic to believe this country will ever be independent from oil. He said the most immediate answer lies in negotiating with Saudi Arabia, Canada, Venezuela and Nigeria, convincing those countries to put more oil into the market.

Democrats Paul Corden, Ted Christian and Bryan McCanless are seeking their party's nomination in the 4th Congressional District.

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