

## EDITORIAL &amp; OPINION

## A fee too far

in highway funds needed, but not all from vehicle fees

Bill Ritter credit for being a realist desire to boost transportation fund- Colorado. He seeks an extra \$500 a year, and that amount should let up with lagging maintenance and

rance last week before the legisla- tion caucus, Ritter could have ed for more; the transportation nted last year mapped out scenarios nstruction and improve-

ged as high as \$2 bil- anel itself recommend- Still, transportation is rthy interest vying for , so we're glad that ng a modest bite from

r suggested raising on fees during his ap- ough his spokesman at he hasn't settled on a

Yet that decision is crucial. It would e fee hike of \$100 per vehicle (with based on weight) to raise \$500 mil- ld cost many households \$200 or year — a hefty hit for something as nding as a "fee."

gistration fee is less than a penny a e average vehicle weighing about e typical fee now runs about \$30. by an average of \$100 could more e costs for most drivers.

at, in our view, fee increases of such

magnitude begin to violate the spirit of the Tax- payer's Bill of Rights, which subjects every tax boost to a vote of the people. Fees, of course, can be raised by lawmakers without voter approval.

Although we agree with Ritter on the need for \$500 million, we'd limit the fee hike to no more than \$50 per vehicle and seek the rest through a propos- al requiring voter consent. Our favorite idea among those identified by the transportation pan- el: end the sales tax exemption for vehicle fuels.

Another reason to resist the temp- tation to get the entire \$500 million from fees: They don't necessarily capture the most revenue from the people who drive the most and inflict the most damage to highways.

Extending the sales tax to cover fuels, however, would satisfy the "us- er pays" principle that is basic to transportation financing. Motorists who drive more would pay more. And unlike the per-gallon fuel tax, whose

rate has not been increased since 1991 — and thus not risen in tandem with retail gas prices — sales tax revenues would go up as prices increase.

Crumbling roads and bridges can slow travel, endanger public safety and impede economic growth. Coloradans should be asked if they're willing to dig deeper to repair our decaying infra- structure. If they're not, so be it. Better they have a say in the decision than have the lawmakers by- pass them by approving oversized fees that look an awful lot like a tax.

**At some point, fee increases begin to violate the spirit of the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights.**

## Serbia turns West — barely

, whose brutal civil wars dominated s, have rather slipped off the interna- green, but a critical election took nday.

, by a worryingly narrow margin, adic, a pro-Western president er of business is membership in the n. Voters rejected, also not by v Nikolic, who favors closer ties with ouses the ultranationalist sense of vement that mars its politics. d in the government of the late Slo- c, whose thuggish policies led to the old Yugoslav federation.

part of Serbia, and it is an unfortunate precedent for the EU and NATO to preside over its indepen- dence, but Serbia's attempt at ethnic cleansing forfeited its right to rule.

A violent reaction to Kosovo's independence, which would certainly have occurred under Niko- lic, could threaten the fragile peace that now pre- vails in the Balkans.

The current prime minister, Vojislav Kostunica, has threatened to impose a trade and travel block- ade on an independent Kosovo, but that would serve no useful purpose other than to drive it into a closer embrace of Albania.

The EU has an opportunity to make this whole

## A DIFFERING VIEW

## Uranium mining a danger to northern Colorado

I believe the *Rocky's* Jan. 28 editorial, "Mining, over and out," failed to recognize the central issue regarding in-situ mining of uranium in Colorado. The issue is not whether we should allow uranium mining anywhere in Colorado or the rest of the United States.

The issue is this: Should we allow urani- um mining in Weld and Larimer counties, within 15 miles of 300,000 people, and within and through the Larimer-Fox Hills aquifer that these people depend on for their drinking water and livelihoods, including farming and ranching?

House Bills 1161 and 1165, if passed, will protect our waters and local communities from toxic and radioactive pollution result- ing from uranium mining.

We must fully support passage of these two bills which are crucial to protecting our lives and the lives of our children.

The people of northern Colorado are endangered by the plans of Powertech USA Inc. and other mining companies to mine uranium in Northern Colorado.

During the past three months, I have attended three presentations by Pow- ertech. The company has yet to provide any guarantees or assurances, whatsoev- er, that the radioactive materials or poi- sonous metals unearthed by the mining will not contaminate our water, land and air. If there is even less than a 1 percent chance of contamination, that is far, far too great a risk for the people of northern Colorado to bear.

We must ask all our representatives to support passage of House Bills 1161 and 1165.

*John S. Dixon is a resident of Fort Collins.*

■ **What do you think? Go to RockyMountain News.com/opinion to join the conversation about this issue.**

## HOT TOPIC

## President Bush's final budget: \$3.1 trillion

The budget deficit under Bush's proposal would balloon to \$410 billion this year — more than twice as much as 2007 — before achieving balance in 2012.

That claim of a balanced budget hinges on only \$70 billion in spending on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, an estimate that even White House aides acknowledge they will exceed during the next fiscal year.

ELENA T. SCHOR, THE GUARDIAN (U.K.)

All in all, the new budget tops off eight years of remarkably spendthrift policies by President Bush. Over eight years, Bush has presided over a huge 67 percent increase in total federal outlays. The comparable figure for President