Gov will schedule more town hall meetings on revenue-raisers

By LARRY WEISS
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NEW BRUNSWICK — More town hall meetings about Gov. Corzine’s tax increase and debt-reduction proposal will be scheduled, and the original plan could be changed to include an increase in the gas tax and other transportation infrastructure, the governor’s policy chief said.

Speaking at an Essex Landmark Forum dinner about transportation infrastructure at Rutgers-Park, Alpert and Corzine’s original town-hall meeting plan is heavy on change and other ideas are being looked at, including increasing the state’s gas tax and descriptive fees for toll-road usage and businesses.

Corzine’s original town-hall meeting plan relied on a borrowing against revenues from a systematic schedule of all injections to finance an $8 billion transportation infrastructure program and to pay off half of the state’s $27 billion debt. The plan was not likely to mean an end to town hall meetings, the governor said.

“We’re working on scheduling more town hall meetings as soon as possible,” Zuber said. While the presentation will remain the same as past forums, Zuber said Corzine will probably address a question that arose because the Legislature raised that issue and added Corzine is open to looking at other revenue sources.

“The Legislature will come back probably with a combination plan, which will include an increase,” Zuber said. “The governor believes in a combination but not what we have in the third-best tax that there is a need to look at the gas tax.”

The forum at the Vohvich Transportation Institute included panels such as Tim Rain, director of transportation for the New Brunswick Public, who said the town hall increase in a park and that a gas tax would be problematic.

“The gas tax is a good way to get it (the burden) off the back of people who use the roads and not the people who use the roads and not the people who use the roads and not the people who use the roads and not the people who use the roads,” Rain said. “It’s not a tax, not a fee, but as we’re not doling out any tax, any tax, any tax, any tax.”

Mary A. Farshing, research director for the New Jersey Policy Perspective, a think tank, said that increasing the current tax per gallon state would not be a burden to consumer and that inflation did not adjust to the inflation.

“The tax is made sense to people in the state. It was used to build roads and to meet the nation,” she said. “People have no problem paying a $4.00 tax, but when inflation goes up, it can’t change.”

Farshing said the state has some revenue from the state that went away with not paying their fair share.

“It’s not fair to make all roads users pay when some of the wealthiest people in Somers, Morristown and Morris counties don’t pay,” she said.

Another suggestion was changing the state tax to capture revenue from people who live in nearby states and are free to do so in New Jersey. Such a change would be more effective for motor vehicles that are parked in nearby states, Farshing said.

“The state has to move quickly to finance transportation infrastructure in order to meet competitive in the global marketplace,” Zuber said.

“I believe we have to have a key player,” Zuber said.