

Sorry, Wrong Tree

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Seeking to exploit the Labor Day weekend gas price surge for political gain, some New York elected officials recklessly – and wrongly – accused convenience stores of exploiting the Labor Day weekend gas price surge for financial gain.

- Fishing for evidence of retail price "gouging," Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, a candidate for governor in 2006, asked 65 stations and stores to furnish documentation about their retail prices and wholesale costs.

- Referencing "unscrupulous retailers," the state Senate passed legislation that would prohibit retailers from increasing their gas price more than once in any 24-hour period – without any corresponding restraint on wholesale suppliers.

- U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer set up a "Gouge Watch" on his web site inviting New Yorkers to e-mail him complaints about "rapid and unnatural fluctuations in the price of gas" at the pump.

You've got the wrong tree, guys. Go bark up another one.

Our retail members acted responsibly and in the best interests of their customers in reacting to a sudden, sharp, unprecedented run-up in wholesale prices, the causes of which were beyond their knowledge or control.

The marketplace has a self-regulating mechanism to deal with any gas retailers who price excessively. It is called competition. Rather than launching a big investigation or introducing feel-good legislation blaming retailers, elected officials would be well advised to simply tell their constituents aggrieved by the price posted at their nearest convenience store to simply shop around.

Convenience stores in New York will continue to do everything they can to minimize consumer pain at the pump, but we are not about to be brow-beaten by grandstanding politicians into pricing gas at a loss.

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