

Legislators discuss taxing studded tires

HARRISBURG (AP) — Two legislative committees reignited the studded tires controversy yesterday, voting to lift the ban on the tires' use in Pennsylvania.

In both instances, the House and Senate transportation committees either rejected or postponed attempts to enact a special tax on the sale of studded tires.

Some legislators, including supporters of studded tires, said they feared a veto from Gov. Thornburgh unless a tax is imposed that would help pay for road damage blamed on the tires.

"Floor action on the tire bills could come quickly, since legislators are concerned about their constituents who are using studded tires in defiance of existing state law.

"My people want studded snow tires," Rep. Joseph Petrarca, D-Westmoreland, told the House Transportation Committee.

"This (law) is a sham, a charade," said Petrarca, a longtime crusader for studded tires. "If you tax these tires, you'll be hurting the poor people."

The House committee narrowly defeated the tire-tax proposal by a 12-8

vote. "I won't support any tax on studded tires until you put a tax on road salt," said Rep. Kenneth Halverson, R-Somerset. "Everyone knows that salt is the biggest doggone cause of road damage."

In the Senate committee, the senators agreed that if any of their colleagues want a tire tax, they would have to bring it up on the Senate floor.

Rep. Ben Wilson, R-Bucks, said that a tax on the 1.2 million studded tires sold annually in the state would help offset the \$40 million in damage that the Transportation Department says the tires cause.

The Senate version would allow studded tires to be used between Nov. 1 and April 1; the House bill would allow their use from Nov. 1 to April 30.

During his campaign, Thornburgh said he favored some sort of tax on studded tires that would provide funds to repair roads. Since then, Transportation Secretary-designate Thomas Larson, a Penn State professor, has said he is opposed to studs, with or without a tax.



William Scranton III
UPI Wirephoto

Scranton resolution dropped by Senate

HARRISBURG (AP) — Senate Democrats decided yesterday to withdraw a resolution that would have stripped Republican Lt. Gov. William Scranton III of the power to refer bills to committee.

Democratic senators made the decision in caucus Monday night based on a request by Sen. Robert Mellow, D-Lackawanna, who said Scranton should be given a chance to show he wouldn't play political games.

"I raised the question what is there to gain by doing this," Mellow said. "We control the committees anyway. It's just a show of good faith. We don't want the people out there looking at us like we're the bad guys looking to cover up things in government."

When the resolution was first introduced, Senate Majority Leader Edward Zemprelli, a Penn State trustee, said Democrats felt they had to protect their power.

The resolution called for giving the power to refer bills to either the Senate

president pro tem or the majority leader.

The move was needed because there was a danger Republicans would try to use Scranton to block bills, Democrats said.

Zemprelli said the withdrawal "should not be misinterpreted by the leadership on the other side of the aisle."

"Hopefully, Senate Republicans will not attempt to play a game of politics by believing a Republican lieutenant governor presiding over the Senate gives them an edge over the party that controls the chamber," Zemprelli said.

"As Democrats we stand ready to present our proposals and as the majority party in the Senate it's not only our right but our duty to make certain our ideas receive consideration," he said.

Scranton said he never considered the issue a major controversy.

"It was the first foray of the two sides kind of testing each other," he said. "I was the new boy in town."

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