

## **Cheap gas, finally: cheers for our free enterprise system!**

*By Rick Maier*

Filled up your car recently? Don't you just love sub-dollar prices? When's the last time you can remember driving 1,000 miles for thirty-five bucks? Having seen little celebration in the press of recent price drops, especially compared to all the hullabaloo over rising prices a few months ago, I feel obligated to draw attention to a few things that make me feel really good about living in this great nation.

I suffered through two horrible gas shortages in the 1970's (apparently other parts of the country were hit harder than Macon). The issue wasn't price – it was availability. You couldn't get gas at any price during those periods. Since then we have had an uninterrupted flow despite continued warnings that world oil supplies would eventually run out. And during this same period carmakers have dramatically improved fuel economy and reduced harmful emissions.

While we should be very grateful for a steady supply, widely fluctuating prices have been bothersome. I don't profess to completely understand the supply chain for gasoline, but I'm sure that production, politics, weather and travel cycles have a lot to do with the supply and demand conditions that determine price.

I guess we all braced for prices to jump from already high levels after the terrorist attacks in September. Instead, the cost of fuel has fallen faster than the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan. And I believe that the suppliers who are getting a lot less revenue these days are some of the very same governments who have been less than enthusiastic in supporting America's war on terrorism.

Not only will lower gas prices do wonders to stimulate consumer confidence and economic activity, they demonstrate just how efficient – and complex – the laws of supply and demand can be. Skeptics always want to slam corporations and blame greedy executives for higher prices, when they should be celebrating the fantastic benefits of capitalism and placing their faith in this system that has served us so well.

I'll bet that proponents of government controls and those who don't understand or support capitalism are totally baffled by recent sharp declines in fuel prices. You mean the oil companies, distributors and retailers did this on their own? The government wasn't involved? This blows all of their theories of the wicked ways of industry and the need for legislation.

Of course these businessmen didn't enjoy lowering prices, but they have no choice in a free market economy. When businesses compete, consumers win with better quality,

innovation and lower prices. It's not just true with gas – just look around at the incredible prices and creative products available during this Christmas shopping season.

In these times of unabashed patriotism and low tolerance for irrelevant political drivel, we need to remind ourselves of just how lucky we are to live in a free market country. Not only are US corporations responding amazingly well to the severe challenges of the past several weeks, they are leading the world toward a global economy that promises more peace and stability than political forces could ever provide in the past. Remember the spy plane incident in China last spring? Did political pressure or the threat of losing the Kmart contract resolve the conflict?

Next time you fill up, thank your oil company for lowering their prices and investing in a brighter future.

**For the cheapest gas in Macon visit [gaspricewatch.com](http://gaspricewatch.com)**