

## Gas tax plan needs Culver's support, Iowa lawmakers says

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JOHNSTON — A key Republican on transportation issues said Friday Democratic Gov. Chet Culver has to give some positive signal of support to lawmakers if a bipartisan effort to raise the state gas tax is to move forward this session.

"He has to indicate that he would not veto that. That he would support that," Rep. David Tjepkes, R-Gowrie, ranking minority member of the House Transportation Committee, said during a taping of Iowa Public Television's "Iowa Press" show.

Leadership from the governor, he said, is the "first and foremost" requirement for lawmakers to take the politically risky step of considering a gas tax hike of 8 to 10 cents a gallon to generate needed revenue to address critical needs for roads and bridges and put Iowans to work, he said.

Culver has both emphatically said he opposes raising the gas tax at a time of economic recession and has left open the option of considering a measure that landed on his desk with bipartisan support from the 150-member General Assembly.

Sen. Tom Rielly, D-Oskaloosa, chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, said he shares many of Culver's concerns that are genuine, valid and real, "but I also think the governor's a reasonable guy" who would consider a case that can be made for raising the gas tax.

Rielly said he has studied Iowa's transportation funding shortfall for two years, traveled the state and read all the research and has yet to find a better option that raising the gas tax to generate the level of funds needed to repair and upgrade Iowa's deteriorating highway and bridge network.

Rielly said he could support a gas tax increase of up to 10 cents a gallon because it would generate \$210 million in yearly revenue — 20 percent from nonresidents using Iowa roads — while costing Iowans an average of \$50 a year and creating 5,000 to 10,000 jobs.

"I think we should make the case that this is a plan that is going to hit the average Iowan the least in the pocketbook," he said. "It's going to be fair, it's going to be equitable, it's going to raise the money to put people back to work, it's going to fix up our unsafe roads, and, most importantly, it's going to be a vehicle to get the people outside the state of Iowa to help fix up our roads."

Tjepkes said he could support increasing the state's gas tax under certain circumstances, but he would have "serious reservations" about Culver's \$700 million infrastructure bonding plan that would be financed using \$56 million in annual state gambling profits over 20 years.

The Gowrie Republican applauded lawmakers for taking bipartisan action last session to raise vehicle registration and other fees to generate about \$115 million by 2012, but he said that action was not enough given that state transportation officials project up to \$150 million in additional revenue is needed annually to address critical needs statewide.

Rielly said a federal economic stimulus plan likely would pump about \$350 million — \$250 million to the state and \$100 million to cities and counties — in one-time money for transportation projects that would spur jobs and help, but not solve, Iowa's infrastructure deficiencies.