



## POLITICALLY SPEAKING

The never-ending race - politics in Iowa and beyond

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### *Key question: Will Culver support gas tax?*

If, instead of U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin being in Sioux City this afternoon, the visiting politician was Iowa Gov. Chet Culver, a key in-person question to pose would be whether the governor would sign into law a gasoline tax increase placed on his desk. There is considerable pressure to more adequately fund Iowa highway needs, and a gas tax is one of the quickest ways to achieve that. It's also politically unpopular in a lot of circles. Very unpopular.

However, when the U.S. 20 Corridor Association was in Des Moines this week, the members lobbied for a gas tax increase. The next major east-west highway south, U.S. 30, also has four-laning proponents who favor the tax increase. Shirley Phillips of Sac City and the U.S. 20 Corridor Association equates a gas tax increase to a "user fee," since those who use — and cause wear — on the roads support the infrastructure with their gas taxes. The last Iowa gas tax increase came 20 years ago, and it runs from 20 to 22 cents, depending upon fuel blend.

And today on the "Iowa Press" show, Democrats and Republicans supporting a gas tax increase revealed there's continuing sentiment to get that hike done. Just as he told The Journal's editorial board earlier this month, Iowa Senate President Jack Kibbie, D-Emmetsburg, still favors a tax bump of a nickle or so per gallon.

A year ago, Culver threw cold water on a gas tax hike as the session opened. Kibbie also said he's not personally heard Culver say he'd veto a gas tax increase. Nobody wants to vote for the increase without the political cover of knowing Culver will sign it.