

Iowa lawmaker predicts gas tax increase

By MIKE GLOVER | Associated Press Writer
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JOHNSTON, Iowa - A key [Iowa](#) legislator said Friday the Legislature could increase the state's gasoline tax by up to 10 cents a gallon.

Sen. Tom Rielly, chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, said lawmakers are actively considering raising the tax, now 20.7 cents a gallon.

"I think we're going to move a bill forward," said Rielly, D-Oskaloosa. "We're going at this under the guise that we really want to get money to our infrastructure."

Rielly said the dime-a-gallon increase would generate an additional \$220 million a year for transportation projects.

The top Republican on the House Transportation Committee indicated [GOP](#) legislators might support the move.

"If the Democrats put a bill forward, I think the Republicans will be willing to work with that," said Rep. Dave Tjepkes, R-Gowrie.

The two spoke during a taping of Iowa Public Television's "Iowa Press" program.

Their comments come a time when the state is dealing with a budget shortfall that could top \$700 million in the upcoming fiscal year. It also reflects a belief that Gov. Chet Culver might soften his stand on a gas tax increase following last session, when he took the idea off the table with a veto threat.

Culver now says he's uneasy with the prospect of raising the gas tax during a recession, but he hasn't rejected the idea.

Rielly said the governor's shift hasn't been lost on legislators.

"I think his concerns are genuine. I've got the same concerns," said Rielly. "I also think the governor is a reasonable guy."

Asked how large an increase was likely, Rielly said "I'd say eight to 10."

Before lawmakers move forward, Tjepkes said they would need some assurance from the governor that he'd support an increase.

"He has to indicate that he would not veto that, that he would support that," said Tjepkes.

The Legislature hasn't increase Iowa's gasoline tax since 1989, but the issue has been debated almost every year since then.

Last year, in the face of Culver's opposition, lawmakers instead increased a series of vehicle registration fees to help spend more on highway projects.