

## Raising gas tax "politically dangerous" but only option, according to one lawmaker

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By [O.Kay Henderson](#)

A key legislator who favors raising the state gas tax says experts estimate a 10-cent-per-gallon increase would cost the average Iowan about \$50 a year --- and 20 percent of the people who buy gas in Iowa are out-of-staters who would share in paying for the upkeep of Iowa roads.

Senator Tom Rielly, a Democrat from Oskaloosa who is chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, says he has not yet heard anyone present a better plan to meet the needs of Iowa's transportation system. "We really want to try to put money back to our aging roads," Rielly says. "We want to address the safety of our roads and, frankly, we want to start putting people back to work."

Governor Culver has repeatedly said that now is not the right time to raise the gas tax, as the state's in a recession. Rielly, however, believes legislators might be able to convince Culver to change his mind. "Look, I'm sensitive to the governor in that I think his concerns...are genuine. I know they're valid and they're definitely real simply because I've got the same concerns. "But I also think the governor's a reasonable guy."

Rielly, a former mayor of Oskaloosa, admits voting to raise the gas tax would be "politically dangerous" but Rielly says he's studied the issue in depth for over two years and found no other solution to maintaining Iowa's roads and bridges. "I consider myself a pretty conservative guy and it's not just like I'm doing this on a whim," Rielly says.

Representative David Tjepkes of Gowrie is the key Republican working behind the scenes on this issue. Tjepkes says the ball is in Governor Culver's court when it comes to increasing the gas tax. "First and foremost leadership...he has to indicate that he would not veto that," Tjepkes says, "that he would support that." Tjepkes isn't ready to say he'd vote "yes" on a gas tax increase, suggesting he and other Republicans want more restrictions on how the money's spent.

Tjepkes and Rielly made their comments this morning during taping of the Iowa Public Television program, "Iowa Press," which airs tonight at 7:30.