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Cheaper Gas Prices for Illinois?

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Pain at the pump is felt significantly more in Illinois, driving many Quad Citians across the river for gasoline. Now, one local legislator has an idea that could save you money.

As of Thursday, a regular fuel on the Iowa side was on average \$3.34 per gallon. On the Illinois side it's \$3.56, partly because Illinois not only has a motor fuel tax, but also a sales tax on gasoline. New legislation aims to make it more of a level playing field, with the idea to relax taxes within a 30 mile radius of a bridge that straddles state lines.

Illinois gas station owners like Jangbar Thaqr in Moline can't compete when the price is right in Iowa. "A lot of people cross the bridge. They always wait until they have to go there," said Thaqr.

Iowa's motor fuel tax is \$0.22. Illinois' is \$0.19, but the state sales tax tacks on 6.25%. "It's the double whammy, a tax on a tax," said Rich Morthland, State Representative for the 71st District. Congressman Morthland is backing a new bill that if passed, would give station owners and drivers a break. Essentially, it would lower the sales tax to a fraction of the percent it is now for gas sold within 30 miles of a bridge of ferry crossing the Illinois border.

"That will greatly reduce the disparity between price of gas in Illinois and the neighboring states. It will be bringing back business. It will be bringing back jobs," added Morthland.

The motor fuel tax wouldn't change, but the sales tax rate on gas would reduce to 1.25% so prices would better compare to those in Iowa. However, sales tax is a lot of the fuel that keeps local municipalities running. Cities like East Moline put sales tax revenue into the general fund, which is money that goes toward everything from public works to police.

"Straight gasoline sales, if you're depleting the money into your general fund or for roads and things of that nature, there is a hangover

effect for that stuff. Yes, you might get the sales but you better hope they're buying something else," said East Moline Mayor John Thodos.

With the state being deep in debt, dropping the prices could be a gamble. But it's one that many hope pays off. "We need to get that revenue staying in Illinois. We have to stop sending our business across the river," said Morthland.

The legislation, HB3836, was just filed Thursday. The next step Morthland says, is get support from other lawmakers.



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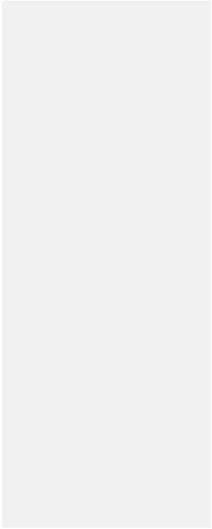


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