

JANUARY 5, 2012

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## Lawmakers unveil plan to raise the gas tax

January 5, 2012 By [Dar Danielson](#)

Two state lawmakers unveiled a plan Wednesday to raise the state gasoline tax to boost road and bridge repair funds. The bill would increase the tax by four cents-a-gallon in each of the next two years.

Senator Tom Reilly, a Democrat from Oskaloosa, says the state has delayed critical road repairs too long. "What got us here is we've constantly kicked the can down the road for the last 22, 23 years, every time it's gotten tough. Since 1989 when the gas tax was last adjusted, the buying power of that same 21 cents has been eroded by almost 70%," Reilly says.

He says it's a safety issue that he's witnessed first hand, as his daughter rolled her pickup because of the condition of the roads and bridges. "I don't have a problem with paying another \$65 a year to ensure the safety of our roads and bridges, not to mention the \$10,000 worth of damage."

Reilly is the chair of the Senate Transportation Committee. Representative David Tjepkes, a Republican from Gowrie, chairs the same committee in the Iowa House.

"This legislative initiative will obviously require a bipartisan effort," Tjepkes says. "Senator Reilly and I are but two of 150 House and Senate legislators, so the challenge remains great." The bill would also raise vehicle registration fees, for a total tax increase of more than \$200 million.

Governor Branstad has said now is not the time to raise taxes and he first wants to look at increasing efficiencies in the Department of Transportation. Tjepkes says now may be the time to push the issue.

"When I was listening to Governor Branstad's initial response, the first word I was listening for real keenly, was 'veto', and he never used that word," Tjepkes says. Both Reilly and Tjepkes served on a citizen's advisory task force appointed by the governor to identify the urgent needs of Iowa's roads and bridges.

The task force reported that Iowa faces a \$215-million annual shortfall in revenue to meet what was defined as "critical" needs on our roads and bridges. The task force recommended an 8 to 10 cent increase in the state's gas tax and applying the state's sales tax and local option taxes to automobiles.

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