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Post Backed Gas Tax Hike in Iowa

Trump's Pick for Top Highway Post Backed Gas Tax Hike in Iowa

- Trump intends to nominate former Iowa Department of Transportation director for top federal role
- Iowa raised the state gas tax by 10 cents in 2015

By Shaun Courtney (mailto:scourtney@bna.com)

Paul Trombino, President Donald Trump's pick to lead the Federal Highway Administration, supported an increase in the Iowa gas tax and called for a reduced federal regulatory burden on states when he was director of the Iowa Department of Transportation.

The White House announced late Sept. 8 its intent to nominate Trombino as FHWA administrator. In addition to his role at Iowa DOT, Trombino was president of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO).

A new administrator will lead the highway agency as the White House continues discussing with state heads of transportation plans for the president's proposed \$200 billion direct federal investment in infrastructure leveraged with \$800 billion in state, local and private funds.

"He knows how to navigate Washington and will be critical to the passage of any infrastructure bill," the Governors Highway Safety Association said in a statement to Bloomberg BNA.

Gas Tax, Regulations

The administration hasn't ruled out raising the federal excise tax on gasoline, which has been set at 18.4 cents per gallon since 1993, to help pay for infrastructure investments. Everything, including a gas tax hike, is on the table when it comes to infrastructure, Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao has repeatedly told congressional committees in recent months.

Trombino highlighted the benefit of an increased gas tax to his state during his June 2015 testimony (<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-114hhrg95231/html/CHRG-114hhrg95231.htm>) before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's subcommittee on highways and transit. He has been widely credited for his support of a legislative push that raised the Iowa gas tax by 10 cents.

"State DOTs play a critical role in ensuring that we have a safe, reliable, efficient transportation network. In fact, this past February, my governor, Governor Terry Branstad, signed into law a 10-cent increase in the State fuel tax, passed by Iowa's House and Senate with bipartisan support," he said in his June 2015 testimony. "Supported by the counties, business associations and organizations, groups like the Iowa Farm Bureau and Association of Business and Industry, this action will raise an estimated \$215 million in additional resources per year to invest in our State roads and bridges."

During the hearing he also called on Congress to reduce the federal regulatory burden in the permitting process, the priority of Trump's infrastructure proposals so far.

Trombino called on the federal government to give state DOTs "flexibility by streamlining regulations."

Highway Background

Highway and transportation advocacy groups are welcoming the nomination of one of their own to serve as Trump's FHWA administrator.

"We look forward to working closely with Administrator-nominee Trombino and the Federal Highway Administration on important issues facing the national transportation system including the deployment of new technologies that increase safety and improve efficiency; streamlining project delivery to ensure the American public gets the best value on its transportation investments; and addressing the long-term stability of the Highway Trust Fund," AASHTO Executive Director Bud Wright said in a statement.

Trombino served as AASHTO's president from 2015 to 2016 as Congress was piecing together the FAST Act surface transportation bill.

The American Society of Civil Engineers, which supports increasing the gas tax to secure funding for the Highway Trust Fund, also threw its support behind Trombino.

"There are many challenges on the horizon for FHWA, ranging from implementing FAST Act regulatory directives to finding a long-term sustainable funding solution to fix the Highway Trust Fund. Addressing these, and other transportation priorities will go a long way in improving our nation's low transportation grades in ASCE's Infrastructure Report Card," ASCE's Executive Director Tom Smith said in a statement to Bloomberg BNA.

Confirmation

The White House still has to submit Trombino's name to the Senate for confirmation. One of Trombino's home-state senators, Joni Ernst (R), sits on the committee of jurisdiction, Environment and Public Works.

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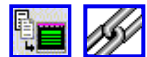
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