

Pelosi: Time is now for gas-tax hike

By [Mike Lillis](#) - 01/08/15 01:04 PM EST

Falling oil prices give Congress a great opportunity to hike the gas tax, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said Thursday.

But the Democratic leader also cautioned that her party won't trade the store in return for the gas-tax increase being floated by some Republicans.

"I can't respond to their proposal because I don't know what it is," Pelosi said during a press briefing in the Capitol. "But I do think that if there's ever going to be an opportunity to raise the gas tax, the time when gas prices are so low — oil prices are so low — is the time to do it."

At 18.4 cents per gallon, the current gas tax hasn't changed since 1993, and many environmental and infrastructure advocates are urging an increase to help eliminate annual deficits plaguing the Highway Transportation Fund. That fund is filled primarily by the gas tax, but the combination of rising infrastructure costs and more fuel efficient vehicles has created a shortfall that reached \$16 billion last year.

In the upper chamber, Sens. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) and Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) are pushing legislation to increase the levy by 12 cents over the next two years. And both Sens. John Thune (R-S.D.), chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, and James Inhofe (R-Okla.), head of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, said they remain open to the idea.

"John Thune made the statement that 'nothing is off the table,' and I agree with his statement," Inhofe told reporters Wednesday.

Pelosi all but dismissed the idea, floated by some Republicans, that a gas tax increase could be used to fund a cut in the income tax, arguing that any new revenues from the gas tax must go toward closing trust fund deficits.

"What I would be interested in seeing is something serious, not something show-biz, which would be how do you relate the gas tax to the Highway Trust Fund. That's the relationship that is real," Pelosi said. "If there is to be an increase in the gas tax, that's where those resources should be used."

Pelosi also acknowledged the difficulty in passing such a tax increase regardless of the price at the pump; the combination of industry lobbying and bipartisan pressure from oil-state lawmakers has sunk such efforts for more than two decades.

"Our friends from oil states would say when the price is low, 'How could you do this to us now, the price of oil is so low?' And when the price of oil is high, they'll say, 'How can you do this to us now, because the price of gas is so high?' " Pelosi said.

"But I'm glad to see that they might be willing [to do] one half of that equation."