

# Gov. Ridge proposes gasoline-tax increase

Gov. Ridge's 6.5-cent-a-gallon gas-tax increase is expected to face resistance in the House.

By PETER DURANTINE  
Associated Press Writer

HARRISBURG — After months of publicly rejecting an increase in the state's gasoline tax while quietly probing for legislative support, Gov. Tom Ridge proposed a 6.5-cent-a-gallon hike yesterday.

He said severe winter weather had pushed Pennsylvania "over the edge" and there is no way to solve the state's highway and bridge repair and construction problems without the increase.

The governor made the remarks in opening a special legislative session to deal with the effects of the winter storms.

The average motorist, who drives roughly 11,000 miles a year, will pay an estimated \$33.40 more annually, said Transportation Secretary Bradley Mallory, who had pushed hard for more funds.

The increase would make Pennsylvania's gas tax the third highest, behind Connecticut's 33 cents a gallon and Rhode Island's 29 cents.

Mallory could not say how many

more miles of highways will be built or maintained with the extra money, but said the money was crucial to making substantial progress against the storm damage and the backlog of maintenance and new construction state drivers are demanding.

The state maintains 44,309 miles of road, more than the combined state systems operated by New York, New Jersey and the New England states.

The Pennsylvania network is the nation's fourth largest.

The tax increase, which likely will face a tough time in the House, would raise an additional \$358 million a year. Local government would get \$28 million and the Pennsylvania Turnpike will get \$9 million, which will be used to borrow to help complete two sections of the Mon-Fayette Expressway in Pittsburgh, Mallory said.

Ridge said Mallory had built a sound case for the increase, which he agreed to support within the last week.

"There is really only one thing to do," Ridge told reporters after he outlined his plan to a joint session of the Legislature.

"We've stretched these dollars every way conceivable. We looked at every possible scenario and



AP Photo

Gov. Tom Ridge proposed gas-tax increase

exhausted every means. There is no way we can get from point A to point B without this increase," the Republican governor said.

Although Ridge has the votes in the Senate for the increase, he faces a tough sell in the House. Sitting on just a one-vote majority in the 203-member House, Republicans so far do not have the votes.

While House Republican leader John Perzel of Philadelphia would vote for the increase, he will not bring the bill to a vote unless he is sure it will pass, said Steve Drachler, Perzel's spokesman.

Rep. Dwight Evans of Philadelphia opposes a gas-tax hike. He said that Ridge should have put more money into roads last year.

# U.S. to intervene in Taiwan

By JIM ABRAMS  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Secretary of State Warren Christopher accused China of "reckless" provocations against Taiwan on Sunday and said U.S. warships would move closer to Taiwan in the coming days.

Christopher said the United States wanted the battle group led by the aircraft carrier Independence, already in the region as part of the Seventh Fleet, to move closer to Taiwan and noted that the carrier Nimitz and its battle group recently sailed through the strait separating Taiwan from China.

"I will say that carrier task forces have gone through that strait before," Christopher said in response to a television interviewer. "We're concerned to make sure that those forces, that carrier battle group, are in a position to be helpful if they need to be. They'll be moved somewhat closer to Taiwan in future days."

While it was not clear from the sequence of questions whether Christopher was referring explicitly to both the Independence and Nimitz being moved closer to Taiwan — or only the Independence — The Washington Post reported that the administration would announce yesterday that the Nimitz will arrive back in the region in about two weeks from its recent duty in the Persian Gulf theater.

Hours after Christopher's remarks, the Chinese foreign minister warned the United States not to intervene in its sovereignty dispute with the island.

"Taiwan is a part of China and not a protectorate of the United States," Qian Qichen said in a news conference.

China has sought to influence Taiwan's presidential election scheduled for later this month and discourage the pro-democracy movement on the island by staging missile tests off Taiwan's coast and announcing plans for live ammunition tests in the straits that divide Taiwan from the mainland.

# U.N. inspectors allowed into Iraqi base

By LOUIS MEIXLER  
Associated Press Writer

UNITED NATIONS — After a 12-hour stand off, Iraqi soldiers allowed U.N. weapons monitors yesterday into a training base used by Saddam Hussein's elite guard.

It was the second confrontation in a week between U.N. weapons inspectors and Iraq.

After a flurry of diplomatic contacts and meetings, James Moore, director of operations for the U.N. monitors, said inspectors had been permitted into the compound but he did not elaborate.

It was unclear whether this meant the Iraqis had agreed to allow a full inspection of the site.

The stand off began at 11 a.m. (3 a.m. EST) when the Iraqis blocked U.N. monitors from inspecting a compound used by Iraq's Republican Guard.

The inspectors are authorized to monitor the dismantling of Iraqi programs for chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles.

Moore would not say why the inspectors wished to inspect the compound in Sarabadi, about 35 miles southeast of Baghdad. The

area is a few miles south of Salman Pak, which was Iraq's main biological weapons center.

U.N. inspectors surrounded the site and used helicopters to monitor the area during the stand off, Moore said.

Last Friday, Iraqi officials allowed U.N. inspectors to enter a Ministry of Irrigation building in Baghdad after an 18-hour impasse.

"This is certainly a worrying picture," British Ambassador John Weston said. "If there are several hours delay that means that things could be hidden which could be incriminating."

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