News

High gas prices are spurring states to waive taxes and regulations amid midterm election



A customer checks gas price while he fills up his vehicle's tank at a gas station in Racine, Wis., Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2026.

PHOTO BY NAM Y. HUH/AP PHOTO

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — State officials nationwide are focusing on rising gas and diesel prices tied to the war in Iran, offering gas tax holidays and other measures to ease costs as affordability remains a top voter concern in the critical midterm elections.

The high gas prices took center stage in Ohio on Wednesday, as lawmakers passed a 90-day state gas tax holiday with broad bipartisan support. Including Ohio, about one-third of U.S. states have implemented some form of fuel tax relief, with many taking action within the past week, according to an Associated Press review.

Some states have suspended their fuel taxes. Others have temporarily reduced taxes. And still more have targeted relief only to farmers, loggers and others who use a special type of diesel fuel.

The average price of regular gasoline stood at $4.43 a gallon on Wednesday, up roughly 50% since the war with Iran began, according to the AAA motor club. The average price of diesel was $6.41 a gallon — just a few cents shy of a record high set last week.

Here's what to know about states' actions on fuel taxes:

Ohio governor's race at center of fuel tax action

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine's office said he plans to sign legislation that will suspend the 38.5-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax and 47-cent-per-gallon diesel tax through the remainder of this year. The plan taps $725 million from the state's general fund to pay for roads and bridges typically funded by fuel taxes.

Republican legislative leaders scrambled to recall lawmakers to the Statehouse after Democratic gubernatorial candidate Amy Acton called for a gas tax holiday last week and rival Republican Vivek Ramaswamy announced a plan to do the same a few hours later. The two are locked in a closely fought contest to succeed DeWine, a term-limited Republican. Democrats criticized Ramaswamy for taking credit for Acton's idea, while Ramaswamy's allies said his plan had substance and Acton's consisted of "tweets."

Ramaswamy's running mate, Rob McColley, is the Ohio Senate president. On Wednesday, McColley used a technical maneuver to quickly close debate on the measure, suggesting Democrats were preparing for nothing more than "theatrics." Senate Democratic Leader Nickie Antonio said one proposal would have called for an end to the Iran war.

Republican state Sen. Michele Reynolds, a co-sponsor of the legislation, said it "will provide much-needed relief to Ohioans at a time when they are feeling the pressure of gas prices continuing to rise."

In the House, Democratic state Rep. Allison Russo, a candidate for secretary of state, accused Republicans of an election-year "stunt" that will save Ohioans an average of $55 over the next three months.



Gas and diesel prices are displayed at a Shell station, Tuesday, Sept. 22, 2026, in Doral, Fla.

PHOTO BY LYNNE SLADKY/AP PHOTO

Several states have already halted or reduced gas taxes

In March, Georgia became the first state to suspend its fuel taxes after the war in the Middle East sent prices spiraling. Republican Gov. Brian Kemp extended the tax break into June. More recently, he announced a 30-day resumption of the motor fuel tax holiday, which began Tuesday.

Indiana Gov. Mike Braun, a Republican, has extended a fuel tax exemption multiple times since spring, with the current version running through Oct. 5.

A six-month, 6-cent reduction in Utah's fuel tax is in effect through the end of this year. Illinois and Kentucky have more modest fuel tax breaks in effect, delaying increases that were due to take effect in July.

Some states have relaxed diesel fuel regulations

In the past week, governors in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma and Texas all have taken steps to provide fuel tax relief for the agricultural industry amid the harvest season.

The executive orders target dyed diesel fuel, which is exempt from state taxes but normally can be used only for off-road machinery like tractors, logging equipment and irrigation pumps. The orders temporarily waive enforcement of those rules, allowing the tax-exempt diesel fuel to be used in vehicles driven on highways.

Some governors noted that reduced costs for transporting crops could affect grocery prices.

California ends restrictions on cheaper fuel blends

The Environmental Protection Agency allowed an annual switch to cheaper, winter-blended fuels beginning Sept. 1, a couple of weeks earlier than normal. The change could save up to 15 cents a gallon, according to data from the National Association of Convenience Stores.

But California sets its own stricter environmental fuel standards. In many parts of the state, summer-blended fuel is required through Oct. 31. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom ended the summer fuel requirement Monday, citing a recent state law that requires a reevaluation of regulations when retail gas prices rise substantially.

Fuel tax changes may have a delayed effect for consumers

State actions intended to provide relief from high fuel prices don't always have the effect some consumers expect. That's partly because fuel price volatility could cause costs to rise even as tax rates fall. But that's also because taxes typically are charged at the wholesale level, not at the retail pump.

"Customers expect the day that a gas tax holiday takes effect that the price at every pump will be reduced by that amount. But it's way more complicated than that," said Jeff Lenard, a spokesperson for the National Association of Convenience Stores.

"The costs and the changes happen further upstream," he said. "The retailer may also have product that has already been paid for with taxes that needs to be sold before you can acquire the new fuel that is not taxed and you can lower the price."

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