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**CONTACT:**

**Ken Sikkema,**

Email: [ksikkema@comcast.net](mailto:ksikkema@comcast.net);

Cell: 517-243-5897

**Rich Studley,** President and CEO,  
Michigan Chamber of Commerce

Email: [rstudley@michamber.com](mailto:rstudley@michamber.com)

Office: 517-371-2100

## **Leaders Discuss Strong Tradition of GOP Support for Transportation Funding**

*Former Republican Senate Majority Leader and Chamber President and CEO highlight history of GOP investment in transportation funding*

**LANSING, Mich.** – Former Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (2002-2006) joined Michigan Chamber President and CEO Rich Studley to reaffirm the Republican Party’s strong tradition of support for transportation funding.

In a letter\* released to Republican lawmakers today, Sikkema stressed the Republican Party’s legacy of taking strong and visible positions in support of transportation funding. In fact, this support has been a source of pride for many Republican leaders.

“Republicans have historically taken the position that investing in transportation is one of the most basic of government services, a fundamental responsibility we must provide for the common good,” said Ken Sikkema, former Senate Majority Leader and now senior policy fellow with Public Sector Consultants. “Republicans have understood that a well-maintained system of roads, bridges and highways is a vital safety issue, and a large factor in creating and sustaining economic development and job creation.”

Since 1997, 11 Republican governors, nine Republican-controlled state Houses and 10 Republican-controlled state Senates have successfully fixed and modernized their roads, and increased investment in transportation infrastructure by raising gas taxes. A total of 15 states – Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wyoming – have raised their state gas taxes. Kansas, Maine and South Dakota have raised state gas taxes twice in the past 12 years.

**\*Please see the attached letter from Ken Sikkema submitted to all Michigan Republican Legislators**

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In Michigan in 1997, led by Republican Governor John Engler, 30 House Republicans (out of a total of 52) and 19 Senate Republicans (out of a total of 22) voted for the 4-cent increase in the gas tax. Not only were those Republicans not punished for their votes in the following General Election – voters rewarded them.

In November of 1998, Governor Engler was comfortably re-elected, Senate Republicans maintained majority, and Republicans took back control of the House from the Democrats.

“There is a sound reason for the Republican tradition of supporting increased transportation funding, even a gas tax. Improving our transportation infrastructure is essential to Michigan’s economic development and job creation,” said Rich Studley, president and CEO of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. “Because of inactivity, we’ve allowed the issue to go from a problem to a transportation funding crisis. If we continue to do nothing, the spending deficit will worsen as Michigan will lose \$1 billion each year in federal funding – endangering 17,000 jobs – because we will not have invested enough money to meet federal matching requirements.”

The Michigan Legislature is currently considering a package of bills to increase road funding over the next five years in Michigan. The plan is expected to yield an additional \$1.8 billion in new transportation revenue per year – increasing the amount local road commissions would receive to maintain, repair and replace existing roads as well as support 46,000 jobs for the state.

“Michigan’s transportation infrastructure needs additional investment, especially now,” Sikkema said. “Michigan has 2,830 structurally deficient or functionally obsolete bridges. In fact, one in five Michigan county road bridges are either closed or reduced to one lane. This is far from the safe, reliable transportation system Michigan taxpayers deserve.”

Conservative business leaders and organizations have united in support of infrastructure investment, including the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and both the Grand Rapids Area and Detroit Regional Chambers of Commerce. Even traditionally conservative newspapers – *The Detroit News* and *The Grand Rapids Press* – have editorialized in favor of increased funding. Even at the national level, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers have recognized the critical link between investment in transportation infrastructure, and economic development and job creation.

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