

**GOP sees tax repair as option;  
Republicans could shift after failing to repeal wage levy;  
House GOP to consider wage-tax repair**

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## **Body**

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Acknowledging that repeal of the state **income tax** is highly unlikely this year, House Republican leaders, in a startling reversal, are considering a version of the middle-class tax cut that they helped kill last month.

House Minority Leader Edward C. Krawiecki Jr., R-Bristol, said the option was one of several that top GOP lawmakers would consider today when they meet privately to settle on a strategy for the 1992 session.

Although Krawiecki would rule out nothing, he distanced himself from the doomsday strategy some **income-tax** opponents discussed last year: hold the 1992-93 budget hostage until Gov. Lowell P. **Weicker** Jr. agrees to repeal.

"This better be a real short session," said Krawiecki, indicating that he did not want to create political gridlock in the session that begins Feb. 5. "It ought to be right to the point."

Krawiecki said his leaders plan to agree today on a session strategy that they would recommend to the House Republican caucus, which is outnumbered by Democrats 87-63 in the 151-member House. One seat is vacant.

With the Democratic majority divided over the **income tax**, the Republican minority has become the single largest voting bloc on tax-and-spending issues, and is more influential than the minority party has been in other years.

That the GOP is even considering amending or repairing the **income tax** is a dramatic reversal.

Although Rep. Richard Foley Jr. of Oxford, the GOP state chairman, argued last month that a vote for repair was a vote for the **income tax**, he said Tuesday that holding the budget hostage still remains an option.

"I don't think a final strategy can be adopted until we know what is in the governor's budget message," Foley said of the proposal that is to be delivered Feb. 5 to a joint session of the legislature.

Krawiecki said repeal of the **income tax** remains the overall Republican goal, but that may be impossible until 1993, after voters elect a new General Assembly. All 187 seats are up for election in November 1992.

"I'm a very practical guy," Krawiecki said. "There's been no change in any of the personalities in the General Assembly. You've got the same governor, the same 151 House members and the same 36 senators."

There is no reason to believe anyone has changed their minds since the legislature adjourned last month, he said.

Repeal failed when the House fell 17 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed to override **Weicker's** veto.

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After the override failed, House Democratic leaders tried to pass what they called "repair" legislation: increasing taxes on the wealthy to give middle-class families a tax cut of several hundred dollars.

The push for repair by the Democrats was seen as politically potent. They said repair could make the income tax palatable enough to lessen the political pressure on those who supported the income tax.

Income tax opponents feared making the tax more palatable might weaken repeal as an issue and make income tax supporters less vulnerable at the polls.

The plan died after Republicans and a Democratic faction opposed to the tax used parliamentary maneuvers to first avoid a vote on the plan and then force an end to the special session.

But Krawiecki said Tuesday that Republicans may now want to amend the income tax to give the middle class a break. If they offer such a plan, it would include a provision to repeal, or sunset, the income tax by some future date, Krawiecki said.

Rep. Geri W. Langlois, D-Thompson, a leading proponent of the income tax, said he viewed the Republicans' willingness to consider some version of repair as evidence of the idea's political appeal.

"I think repair is a very powerful political notion, and is something that will pass in the next session," Langlois said.

Langlois said the state's worsening fiscal picture -- the legislature's budget office has projected a \$ 179 million deficit for this fiscal year and an even bigger gap next year -- also makes repeal unlikely in 1992. Balancing the budget simply would be too difficult without a tax on wages, he said.

Weicker has virtually ruled out a tax increase, and promised to offer spending cuts in his budget proposal next month that will make people "howl."

Langlois said income-tax advocates would consider a sunset provision as part of a middle-class tax cut.

"I think there is an openness to talking about the concept of the sunset. There would have to be a lot more specifics," Langlois said.

Krawiecki said GOP leaders would deal only in the general concept of amending the income tax today.

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