

## New York, thy fiscal solution is a vanity plate

By Stefan Lonce

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Beginning next April Fool's Day, New Yorkers will have to pay \$25 for new license plates that we don't need, to help the state close its budget deficit.

Or maybe not. Gov. David Paterson now says that he will scrap the new plate and fee if the Legislature finds another way to replace the estimated \$129 million that they would generate in each of the next two fiscal years.

The new plate proposal is another example of New York's budgetary gimmicks. According to police and the manufacturer of the mobile license plate readers that most New York police departments use, our current license plate is perfectly legible and doesn't need to be replaced.

Moreover, New York now has one of the best-designed license plates in the United States. Its blue and white colors enhance its legibility, and its Niagara Falls-to-New York City graphic is a pop art classic.

The proposed new plate, with its garish combination of blue and gold, is ugly — and expensive.

We don't know how much it would cost the state to manufacture and distribute new plates for 12 million registered motor vehicles.

And making 24 million license plates (front and rear plates for each vehicle) will consume energy and degrade the environment.

The planned plate replacement is the worst idea for financing state government since Gov. Mario Cuomo sold Attica prison to a state authority to paper over a budget deficit.

Here's a better way for the state to raise revenues: Sell more vanity plates.

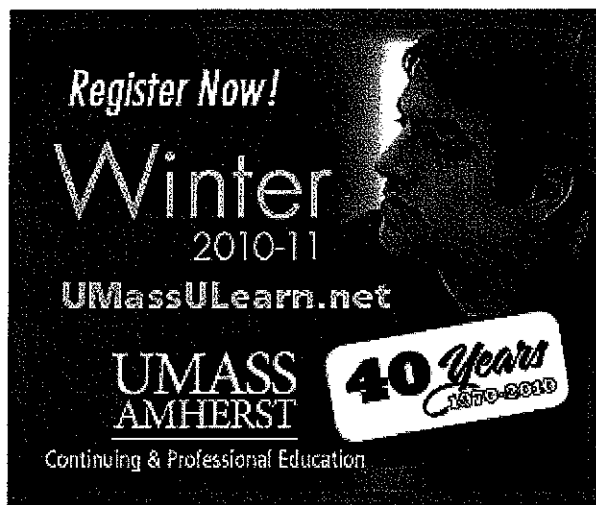
Americans have "vanitized" 9.3 million motor vehicles; New Yorkers have vanitized 264,000 motor vehicles. They rank 35th among the states.

New Yorkers pay \$31.25 a year for vanity plates, and a \$50 application fee, earning the state about \$8.25 million annually — not counting the application fee revenue.

The state could sell more vanity plates if the state Department of Motor Vehicle would ask New Yorkers if they wanted them. Virginia increased vanity plate sales by one-third this way.

The DMV Web site's home page should be redesigned to include a more prominent direct link to the personalized plates order page.

And the DMV should hold monthly and annual online contests for the funniest, cleverest and most compelling vanity plates. Winners could get free vanity plates.



Vanity plates empower New York motorists to tell the shortest of stories, or to promote causes — including themselves — in eight or fewer characters.

Vanity plates are fascinating and fun — and lucrative for states.

Instead of forcing New Yorkers to buy an ugly new license plate that we don't need, Paterson should stimulate New Yorkers' creativity by promoting vanity plates.

Stefan Lonce of Croton-on-Hudson is the editor of the Montauk Sun, a free, monthly newspaper distributed on the eastern end of Long Island. He was co-author of the American Association Of Motor Vehicle Administrators' LCNS2ROM (License to Roam) Vanity License Plates Survey and is writing a book, "LCNS2ROM — License to Roam: Vanity License Plates and the GR8 Stories They Tell" (<http://www.vanityplatesbook.com>).

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