



LICENSE TO ROAM: VANITY LICENSE PLATES AND THE GR8 STORIES THEY TELL™

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Hon. David Paterson
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Paterson:

Here's how New York State could increase revenues without raising taxes or mandatory fees: Sell more personalized license plates, colloquially known as "vanity" plates. According to the NY DMV, as of August 2009, New Yorkers had "vanitized" 263,831 motor vehicles; in 2007, the *American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators – LCNS2ROM [LICENSE TO ROAM] Vanity License Plates Survey* (which I co-authored) found that New Yorkers had vanitized 287,382 vanitized motor vehicles, and Americans had vanitized 9.3 million vehicles. The economic recession probably caused the decline in NY vanity plates, although some states have increased their vanity plate numbers since the 2007 *Survey*.

New York earns about \$8.25 million annually from the \$31.25 annual vanity plate fee, excluding the \$50 application fee revenue. Except for allowing motorists to order vanity plates online, the NY DMV, like most DMVs, does not promote or market vanity plates; here's how the DMV could do so:

- Distribute brochures and posters in DMV offices promoting vanity plates, and have DMV-ers ask all motorist-customers if they want to vanitize (Virginia increased vanity plate sales by about one-third this way);
- Have the DMV place a prominent link on its web site home page to its vanity plates purchase form;
- Have the DMV hold monthly online contests -- such as for the funniest, cleverest, or most compelling stories told on vanity plates -- with winners getting free vanity plates, and hold an annual online contest of the monthly winners, with results announced on Vanity License Plates Day, which I suggest DMVs celebrate on the day after Labor Day (a holiday in both the US and in Canada, which has 440,000 vanitized motor vehicles);
- Have the DMV offer vanity plate gift certificates: Vanity plates would be great gifts, but only the recipient can decide on the appropriate plate message (of up to 8 characters); although the DMV's previous gift certificate program apparently failed, this idea should be revisited; and
- Use vanity plate images on scratch-off lottery tickets.

"LCNS2ROM" is my actual NY vanity plate and the title of my forthcoming book. New York motorists have told GR8 stories, and promoted GR8 causes, on their vanity plates, like this one, "Alison Masry is always with her husband, Rudolph, even when they're miles apart. That's because, in 2003, Ally donated a kidney to Rudy, who suffered from end stage renal failure. Ally's NY vanity plate says **DONOR**, and Rudy's says **DONEE**." Vanity license plates are minimalist poetry in motion, and are fascinating and fun. By implementing my suggestions, New York State could raise more non-tax revenue, and stimulate New Yorkers' creativity. I'd be glad to help the DMV, which generally does a great job, promote vanity plates.

SNCRLY,



Stefan Lonce

cc: Hon. Richard Ravitch, Hon. Malcolm Smith,
Hon. Sheldon Silver, Hon. Sandy Galef, Hon. David Swarts