

BIRTH OF A BOOK

by Stefan Lonce



Change will come to New York next year. We will have a new governor, and we may have a very different legislature.

Change in Albany can't come soon enough: The \$9 billion state budget deficit has, supposedly, been closed. We shall see about that.

NY has the worst credit rating of any state, because our "leaders" in Albany have used the many NYS agencies and authorities to issue more and more bonds. Remember when Gov. Mario Cuomo, in 1984, "sold" Attica Prison to a state authority, which issued bonds to pay for it, in order to paper over a budget deficit? How much did the interest on those bonds ultimately cost *us*, the taxpayers?

The problem in Albany isn't just the politics... it's the politicians. Eliot Spitzer was undone by his arrogance and his proclivity for prostitutes; his scandal plagued successor, David Paterson, was so unable to deal with the crisis in Albany, despite his vast political experience, that he couldn't run for a full term in his own right, and now may be indicted for lying.

And then there are our State Senators. Our former Senate Majority Leader, Joe Bruno, was convicted of using his office for his personal gain. The Bruno-less Senate was crippled as the Senators battled over which party would control it; those shenanigans disgusted almost everyone.

We need new ideas, and a new way of doing business in Albany. We must empower the many dedicated and creative elected officials who serve us in Albany. The fiscal crisis is not unique to New York...47 states have budget crises. Every governor must rethink how his or her state operates.

One bright spot in NYS government, however, is the DMV, which, by and large, does a GR8 job.

As readers of this column know, I have been advocating that NY – and every other state – *EARN* more money from license PL8S.

The NY DMV hasn't promoted vanity plates on its well-designed and easy-to-use web site, or in its offices. That's because the DMV doesn't make *any* money from the \$31.25 annual fee that New Yorkers pay for vanity plates: \$25 goes to the General Fund (the State's main operating account) and

\$6.25 goes to the NYS "Dedicated Highway and Bridge Trust Fund," which is supposed to pay for highway and bridge repairs.

Gov. Mario Cuomo had a GR8 idea, when he signed the Highway & Bridge Trust Fund legislation into law in 1991: establish a dedicated revenue source that would pay to rebuild New York's decrepit infrastructure.

Today, however, after repeated raids by governors and legislatures since 1991, the Fund spends 72.4% of its budget on debt service, according to a report issued by Comptroller DiNapoli last year. Today, the "dedicated" Fund that was supposed to repair our state highways and bridges spends almost \$3 on debt service for every \$1 it spends on highway and bridge repairs.

No one in Albany realizes that a GR8 way 4 NYS 2 *EARN* more money from vanity PL8S would be to publicize the fact that, if you vanitize in NY, you would be helping to fund highway and bridge repairs.

If I ran the NY DMV and didn't make any money from vanity plates...I wouldn't promote them either!

Here's what I propose so that NY could *EARN* more \$\$\$ from license PL8S.

- Allow the DMV to keep \$10 each year for each *new* vanity plate sold; the money should go to a DMV-administered fund that would pay for driver and vehicle safety education, and to train DMV-ers to better serve New Yorkers. DMV-ers must keep up with changing technology, and NY must *invest* in training DMV-ers. The other \$21.25 should go to the Highway & Bridge Trust Fund, not the General Fund. This would vastly increase the (estimated) \$9 million that NY earns annually from vanity plates, and help rebuild our decrepit roads and bridges... making vanity PL8S a cause!

- Give the DMV a small marketing budget to print and distribute posters and brochures promoting vanity and custom plates (which have unique designs and promote causes or organizations – plate sponsors receive part of the fees) in DMV offices.

- Change the home page on the NY DMV web site (www.nydmv.state.ny.us) to read "custom & personalized plates" instead of just "custom plates."

- The DMV should promote vanity plates by holding contests, twice each year, for the funniest, most poetic, and other categories of vanity plates; winners would get free plates.

- Authorize the DMV to sell gift cards good 4 vanity and custom plates, and "souvenir" plates.

- Only issue new custom plates that are sponsored by state entities, so that NYS would *earn* the entire plate fee. This would also favorably end the lawsuit over NY's refusal to issue the anti-abortion "Choose

Life" plate, and end the besieging of legislators by groups wanting new custom PL8S.

- Let New Yorkers choose whether to keep the old blue-and-white standard plate, or the new "Empire Gold" plate (you can vote now on my website, www.VanityPlatesBook.com on the "New



York PL8 info" page). South Carolina and Texas chose their new standard PL8S in online votes. Why should there B more democracy in SC and TX than in NY?

Like many other New Yorkers, I don't like the NEW PL8, with its garish gold-and-blue colors, because it's ugly, and because it will depress vanity PL8 sales. Motorists are more likely to vanitize if they like the standard PL8.

More importantly, if NY copyrights a really good PL8 (the OLD PL8), it could *EARN* \$\$\$ by licensing the plate image for use on clothing, souvenirs, and other stuff.

It's time to CHANGENY by finding new revenue sources 4 the ST8 that aren't from taxes or mandatory fees; we should start exploiting NY's intellectual property, for the gain of the taxpayers, by licensing the OLD PL8 image.

I will be asking candidates for state office in NY if they will support my license PL8 proposals. We could keep the NEW PL8 if it loses the online vote that the DMV should hold next year, as an optional custom PL8, available for an additional fee.

The NY DMV is promoting custom & personalized plates on a flyer sent with registration renewals, and will now allow historical vehicle plates to be vanitized. **WAY2GO, NY DMV!**

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Book update: since 2011 will be the centennial of the birth of Ronald Reagan, who was the father of California vanity plates, *LCNS2ROM* will be my *second* book.

My first book will be:



It will tell how Gov. Reagan championed vanity plates in CA from 1970 – 1973; it will have profiles of vanitizers, but will emphasize the remarkable things Gov. Reagan did to pass and promote vanity plates in CA, where the vanity PL8 fees go to a state fund to fight pollution caused by the motor vehicles to which they R affixed. What a GR8 idea!