



LICENSE TO ROAM:

VANITY LICENSE PLATES AND THE GR8 STORIES THEY TELL™
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June 28, 2010

Hon. Glenn McConnell
Hon. Larry Grooms
Hon. Vincent Sheheen
Hon. Robert Harrell, Jr.
Hon. Phil Owens
Hon. Nikki Haley
South Carolina Statehouse
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Senators McConnell, Grooms and Sheheen, Speaker Harrell, and Representatives Owens and Haley:

I write to respectfully urge you to vote to sustain Governor Sanford's veto of S.1392, because the bill would authorize the DMV to issue a new special license plate that would say, "**Coon Hunters.**" Many observers would misunderstand the **Coon Hunters** plate as a slang racial slur, instead of a reference to raccoon hunting, especially outside the South. The South Carolina Coon Hunters Association reportedly refused to change the plate to say "**Raccoon Hunters**" (as the House version of S.1392 provided).

I care about license plates: I am working on a book about vanity [personalized] license plates because vanity plates empower individuals to express themselves, and to promote causes, by telling GR8 stories, like this one, "Allison Masry celebrated her donation of a kidney to her husband, Rudolph, who suffered from end-stage renal failure, with a vanity plate that says, **DONOR**; Rudy's plate says **DONEE.**"

Special plates, which have distinct designs and promote organizations or causes, empower groups to express themselves. The South Carolina DMV offers 127 different special plates on its web site.

Here's why I think you should vote to sustain Governor Sanford's veto of S.1392:

- Many people, throughout the United States and Canada, would misunderstand the **Coon Hunters** plate: license plates are inherently mobile. (S.1392 allows any South Carolina motorist, not just Coon Hunter Association members, to order a **Coon Hunters** plate, so the DMV could issue a large number of plates).

- I think that South Carolina would be sued if it issues the **Coon Hunters** plate, and could easily lose in court. South Carolina lost the litigation over the first **Choose Life** and the **I BELIEVE** special plates. In the **I BELIEVE** plate case, Judge Cameron Currie (on 5/26/10) ordered the DMV and Department of Corrections, the Defendants in the case, to pay the Plaintiffs' attorneys' fees of \$202,705, which could happen again, with the **Coon Hunters** plate.
- South Carolina already issues too many hard-to-read special plates, and can no longer afford to share special plate fees with plate sponsors. S.1392 would dramatically expand the number of special plates: as Governor Sanford's 6/26/10 veto message states, the bill "allows over 367 public and private high schools ... to create their own license plates." Special plates for high schools would be manageable if S.1392 provided that a standard plate design would be used with each different school's name and logo, but the bill doesn't have this provision. The SC DMV's new license plate manufacturing equipment operates like a laser printer, custom printing a license plate design and plate number on a plate blank, potentially allowing a huge number of special plates. Most other states also issue too many special plates and can't afford to share the extra fees that special plates generate any longer.

I think that the General Assembly could solve these problems by mandating that only state entities may sponsor new special plates, that South Carolina issue only one new special plate each year, and that South Carolinians choose each year's new special plate in an online vote -- as they chose the design of the current standard plate. This would eliminate the problems caused by controversial special plates, and increase funding for state sponsored projects (such as open land conservation) that attract widespread support.

I respectfully urge you to sustain Governor Sanford's veto of S.1392. South Carolina should be known for graciousness and hospitality, not divisive special license plates.

SNCRLY,



Stefan Lonce

