



LICENSE TO ROAM :
VANITY LICENSE PLATES AND THE GR8 STORIES THEY TELL™
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BILL AUTHORIZING CHRISTIAN LICENSE PLATE SENT TO GOVERNOR SANFORD; LITIGATION LIKELY

CROTON-ON-HUDSON, NY – "It's now up to Governor Mark Sanford to decide whether South Carolina should issue the **I BELIEVE** special license plate, which would apparently be the first American license plate with explicitly religious images, and will probably get the state sued," said Stefan Lonce, the author of the forthcoming book, *LCNS2ROM – LICENSE TO ROAM: VANITY LICENSE PLATES AND THE GR8 STORIES THEY TELL*. *LCNS2ROM* examines the vanity and specialty license plate phenomenon.

Governor Sanford has until June 4, 2008 to decide whether to sign or veto the **I BELIEVE** plate bill, S. 1329.

In an op-ed piece posted on thestate.com today, Lonce wrote, "I respect the strongly held beliefs of the **I BELIEVE** plate sponsors.... Governor Sanford is famously frugal with taxpayer dollars, and should consider that the **I BELIEVE** plate would raise no revenue, but would cost the state to defend in court. License plates reflect our values, and our politics."

The SC General Assembly's budget cut spending across the board, to close a deficit estimated to be \$180 million in a \$7.1 billion state budget. On Wednesday, Governor Sanford vetoed \$72 million from the General Assembly's budget, stating, "the budget is fundamentally flawed, because it maintains a higher level of spending than the state can afford."

Also on Wednesday, the House sustained Governor Sanford's veto of a 50 cent-per-pack increase in the cigarette tax, which would have funded increased health insurance tax credits for low-income South Carolinians.

The American Jewish Congress has sent a letter to Gov. Sanford urging him to veto the **I BELIEVE** plate, asserting that the plate would be unconstitutional. The ACLU has not issued any statement on the SC **I BELIEVE** plate.

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SC CHRISTIAN LICENSE PLATE

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Special license plates are no stranger to the courtroom. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, in *Planned Parenthood of South Carolina v. Rose*, enjoined SC from issuing the **CHOOSE LIFE** special plate, which has a pro-life, anti-abortion, message.

"The Supreme Court has held that the First Amendment applies to license plates. It's obvious that the **I BELIEVE** plate could be even more controversial than the **CHOOSE LIFE** plate, and it's a sure bet that SC would be sued if it issues the **I BELIEVE** plate," Lonce said.

Advocates of the **CHOOSE LIFE** plate have announced another attempt to have SC issue it, this time by petitioning the SC DMV to issue the plate, instead of having the General Assembly authorize it. In SC, organizations can petition the DMV to issue a special license plate if they provide 400 applications for the plate, or pay \$4,000. Choose Life, Inc., which sponsors the **CHOOSE LIFE** plates, issued by 17 states, claims to have raised \$8.6 million from plate sales.

SC currently issues college, NASCAR, and other special license plates, including plates for such causes as organ donations. Organizations typically sponsor special license plates, and usually receive some of the extra fees that motorists pay for most special plates. No organization sponsored the SC **I BELIEVE** plate, and there will be no additional fee for the plate.

In most states, special license plates can be vanitized with messages created by the motorists, but not in SC. Standard SC plates can be vanitized with messages created by motorists of up to seven characters, for a \$30 fee. According to the *American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators-LCNS2ROM Vanity License Plates Survey*, SC has 45,214 vanitized motor vehicles (representing 1.35 % of registered motor vehicles). The complete *Survey* results are at www.LCNS2ROM.com.

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