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Governor's veto stops '9/11' license plate bill

Pataki turns away 15 special editions, saying standards are needed

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ALBANY -- Gov. George Pataki Thursday put the brakes on a slew of new special-interest license plates, saying the state needs to resolve legal issues and set standards before the trend continues.

Lawmakers passed at least 15 bills this year for special plates for groups and causes that included a "9/11 remembrance," three different ones for firefighters, and another urging people to "Buy American."

The plates would come with a \$25 annual surcharge.

Pataki, however, said New York and other states face lawsuits over whether creating such plates entitles anyone to demand one for their message. A pro-adoption organization, Children First Foundation in Eastchester, is suing the state in federal court over an effort to get official "Choose Life" license plates.

"While I do not believe that the Constitution compels a state to issue license plates with a message that responsible state officials in the exercise of their discretion believe to be inappropriate, it is important to establish uniform standards and criteria for approving any new custom license plate series," Pataki said in his veto message.

The state already offers about 300 plates featuring sports teams, causes, organizations, regions, veterans, the military, emergency services and professions. Pataki said DMV Commissioner Nancy Naples has imposed a moratorium on new custom plate series while criteria are being developed.

Assemblyman William Colton, D-Brooklyn, sponsor of the bill to create a "New York Recycles" license plate, said he disagreed with Pataki's decision, saying many of the causes are obviously worthy. He also noted his bill directed that the \$25 fee be dedicated to recycling programs and that an environmental group put up several thousand dollars to design the plate. "There's no question that recycling and promoting recycling is in the public interest," Colton said.

The vetoes were among 60 Pataki issued Thursday. He also rejected a host of labor-related bills, a measure to give Empire Zone status to a coal-fired plant in Jamestown, and one to require governments to provide public records electronically under the Freedom of Information Law if the records are already kept that way and it is otherwise reasonable. The governor, however, said the requirement would be costly and went beyond FOIL's intent.

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