

Vote NO on Confederate License Plate

Written by Eryn Roberts
Sunday, 23 October 2011 00:00

You could be seeing these on cars in Houston



Number at Governor's Office: 512-463-2000
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Texas One Vote Away From Approving Confederate License Plate

By Eryn Roberts
Staff Writer

Controversy is mounting surrounding the upcoming vote on whether the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles should authorize a license plate that commemorates the Confederacy and displays the rebel flag.

The license plate, proposed by the Sons of Confederate Veterans to the Texas DMV, would show the group's logo, including the Confederate flag. Proceeds of sales of the plates would benefit the group. The DMV's board, which Gov. Rick Perry appoints, may soon reconsider the proposal after a tied 4-4 vote earlier this year.

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The Texas State Conference of NAACP Units passed a resolution during the 75th Annual State Convention calling on “all fair minded persons to vigorously oppose all efforts to authorize the use of the Confederate Battle Flag on Texas license plates” and opponents of the license plate presented petitions containing 22,000 signatures Wednesday to a state board that could vote on the politically charged issue as soon as next month.

“The rebel flag epitomized slavery. It epitomized oppression. It epitomized lynching and all of the things that we worked so hard for people to move beyond,” said Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee.

Citing opposition from a bi-partisan coalition of publicly-elected officials opposing the plates — including U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, D-Houston, and state Sens. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston, Royce West, D-Dallas, and John Carona, R-Dallas — Texas NAACP President Gary Bledsoe asked the DMV board on Wednesday not to bring the proposed plate up for another vote.

“This particular flag never flew over Texas; it has been adopted by hate groups to intimidate or do wrong against people,” Gary Bledsoe, president of the state NAACP conference, said. “It is every bit as offensive as the swastika. It creates psychological harm, creates fear and intimidation, and is likely to lead to breaches of the peace. It is a fighting flag.”

According to Texas DMV Chairman Victor Vandergriff, the initial request for the Sons of Confederate Veterans license plate occurred in October 2010. The plate was put out for comment from March 25, 2011 to April 4, 2011 and was presented to the DMV Board for consideration at the April 14, 2011, Board meeting. The resulting Board vote was split 4-4.

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Cheryl Johnson, John Walker III, Clifford Butler and Ramsay Gillman, since deceased, all voted in favor the plates. Victor T. Vandergriff, Laura Ryan-Heizer, Blake Ingram and Victor Rodriguez all voted against the plates.

At the April 14 board meeting only eight members were present. Board member Jim Campbell had left the Board but had not been replaced at this time. Since the vote there are two new board members, one to replace Campbell and Gillman, who is deceased. Marvin Rush and Raymond Palacios Jr. are the newest board members appointed by Perry.

Pressure is mounting on Gov. Rick Perry, who appoints members of the DMV, to speak out against the plates. His record on race has been under great scrutiny in recent weeks surrounding his lease of a hunting tract since the 1980s that was known by a racist name.

Jackson Lee attempted to put pressure on Perry Tuesday by condemning the proposal to offer Texas license plates with the image of the Confederate flag.

Jackson Lee addressed Perry directly on the House floor ahead of his scheduled participation in Tuesday's night's Republican presidential primary debate in New Hampshire.

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“I beg you, Mr. Perry, tonight, to speak to your higher angels and talk about bringing us together,” Jackson Lee said. “Do not issue a Confederate license plate in the state of Texas, for God’s sake, and God bless America.”

Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson is a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans who have sponsored similar plates in nine other states. Likely foreseeing controversy, Patterson ironically has also sponsored a plate honoring the Buffalo Soldiers -- Black federal soldiers involved in the battle against American Indians.

“Those are iconic elements of our shared history,” Patterson said, saying the intent is to honor veterans of an important historical period. “This plate is more about the soldier than it is about the war.”

The vote is expected to occur Nov. 10. You can contact your representatives in the Texas Legislature and Congress to let them know where you stand on the issue.{jcomments on}