

GEORGIA LICENSE PLATES FOR FLORIDA GATORS IS A "DUM-DUM" IDEA

Georgia Department of Revenue Commissioner Bart Graham, a graduate of the University of Tennessee, who probably sings "Rocky Top" in the shower each morning, said recently he will approve a specialty automobile license tag for the University of Florida.

In a state wherein is found the University of Georgia, the oldest state-chartered university in the nation, located in Athens, the Classic City of the South, we will soon see Georgia license plates with a Gator on them, sanctioned by a guy who went to a school that has a hound dog as its mascot. I can hear Uga VI weeping softly as we speak.

Every year Georgia fans have to go to the non-neutral site of Jacksonville and endure a bunch of people flapping their arms in an approximation of an alligator opening and closing its mouth while their band plays music from "Jaws," a movie about sharks, not alligators. Evidently, this incongruity is lost on Florida fans.

Not only have we UGA loyalists had to suffer Florida beating us for 15 of the last 17 years and the fact that they are national champions in football and basketball, we will now have to put up with cars barreling around our roads while drivers flap their arms and radios blare, "dum-dum, dum-dum."

I am sure the commissioner would say his decision is not an act of vengeance against those of us who love the University of Georgia, but rather, it is about new revenue streams and fiscal relief. Maybe so. All I know is that if we have to sell license tags to Florida Gators to raise money to keep our state government afloat, maybe it is time we all move to North Dakota where people think Florida is somewhere south of Cuba and wouldn't consider giving them their own license tag.

Your humble scribe is not the only one stunned by this revolting development. Sen. Eric Johnson, R-Savannah, president pro tem of the state Senate, wrote Commissioner Graham questioning the wisdom of his decision. Said Sen. Johnson, "A Gator tag will cause accidents. Gator fans cannot drive or read traffic signs. A car up on blocks cannot move. And it will lower our quality of life. In fact, my children used to have nightmares because we lived dangerously close to the state of Florida." Sen. Johnson added this ominous warning, "If our prisoners have to make these tags, the Supreme Court is going to declare that cruel and unusual punishment." Sen. Johnson is a Great American.

It's bad enough that Florida will get a special Georgia license plate. Now, Commissioner Graham says he will likely approve specialty plates for other Southeastern Conference schools, too. Auburn has already gotten theirs, which is okay because they are pretty close to the Georgia line, and I like their fight song. But you know if Auburn has one, Alabama is going to want one. If Alabama gets one, then Tennessee will want one. If Tennessee is successful, pretty soon Herschel's School of Elevator Repair and Tree Stump Removal will be pushing for its own tag. Where does it end?

At this point, the only ray of hope is a state regulation that requires one thousand signatures and \$25 per signature to qualify for a special license plate. To my knowledge, the only school in the SEC besides my alma mater that has a thousand graduates with \$25 in their pocket who can write their name is Vanderbilt. The other schools have been told that making an X does not count as a signature. (Sorry about that, Arkansas.)

Gone are the days when we elite few with UGA license plates could cruise up and down the highway, nodding smugly to one other or chase down drivers with Georgia Tech tags to tell them we just heard that Reggie Ball had been granted four more years of eligibility. (I just loved the look on their faces!) Now everybody can have a special license plate, which means they aren't special anymore.

I am sure Commissioner Bart Graham feels he is doing the right thing for our state, but to quote my Florida Gator friends, I find the plan "dum-dum, dum-dum."