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QuickPoint! – Car Ownership Is Not a Crime

By John A. Charles, Jr.

A bill has been introduced in the state legislature that would [impose a \\$1,000 ownership tax every five years on automobiles more than 20 years old](#).

Fortunately, leaders of the Republican Party quickly denounced it; and without bipartisan support the bill has no chance of passage. The chair of the House Revenue Committee, Rep. Phil Barnhart of Eugene, has announced that the bill is dead.

The fact that this legislation was even introduced points to a conceptual problem shared by many lawmakers: They think that owning a vehicle is undesirable and should be taxed.

But owning a car imposes no cost on the public; it's the use of the vehicle that we should be concerned with.

As one legislator told me many years ago, "I own four cars—but I only drive one at a time!"

Since we do need money for improved roads, any transportation tax should focus on road use. One option would be to lower the cost of vehicle registration in exchange for a small increase in the gas tax.

Motorists deserve all the roads they are willing to pay for. Raising the gas tax would give drivers a chance to vote with their tires for a better road system.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.