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Pataki fee hike plan hits vehicles

Governor says extra \$1 billion in "revenue actions" are needed to balance state budget

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ALBANY -- Anyone who drives a car, camps in a state park or owns an all-terrain-vehicle would pay more in license and registration fees under Gov. George Pataki's 2005-06 executive budget.

Those are just a few of the \$1 billion in so-called "revenue actions," including an 0.7 percent tax on hospital receipts and an increase in nursing home taxes, in the governor's spending proposal.

Pataki said the hikes are "something I do not like to do."

But in the face of a \$4.2 billion budget deficit and increased needs for everything from roads and bridges to education and health care, the governor said, the state needs revenue.

"I take great significance in the fiscal stewardship that I have to provide in this state," Pataki said.

Among those who would be affected by the increases -- if they were approved as is by the state Legislature, which is unlikely -- vehicle owners would be hit particularly hard.

Vehicle registration fees, which haven't been raised since 1998, would increase across the board -- the amount varying for different types of vehicles -- to bring in almost \$29.25 million more.

The cost of photo driver's licenses and identification cards from the Department of Motor vehicles would rise from \$5 to \$10. The DMV would charge \$7, rather than \$5, for electronic data searches, and \$10, rather than \$6, for those conducted by hand.

The fee for inspecting salvaged vehicles would rise from \$100 to \$150.

ATV owners would have to pay \$45 to register their vehicles -- a \$35 increase that would net the state an additional \$5.8 million.

Pataki also proposes using automated speed enforcement in work zones, which could increase tickets for motorists and bring in an estimated \$18 million.

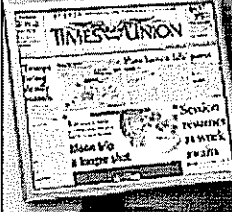
Other revenue enhancements include an increase in penalties for food inspection violations and unfair or deceptive business practices.

Insurance agents would see their license fees increase from \$20 to \$40. Renewing a license to handle asbestos would cost \$500 rather than \$300.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, D-Manhattan, said vehicle fee increases would disproportionately hurt working people in rural and suburban areas who have no choice but to drive to work because there is little public transportation.


In general, Silver criticized the governor for raising fees at the same time he is proposing an early phase-out of an income tax surcharge on the state's wealthiest residents.

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"Clearly, the governor's priorities are out of touch," Silver said. "Health care, education and welfare of the people should be government's first priority. In his budget proposal ... working people are secondary, while his priority is a tax cut for 2 percent of the wealthiest people in New York."

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