

How to stop disabled parking cheats

Let me preface this by saying my wife uses a walker and wheelchair and has a disabled parking placard. I do not use the placard when she is not in the car, as that is against the law. If we park at a meter, I hang the placard on the mirror then pay at the meter. I know I don't need to, but I'm happy to pay my way. Dagnabbit, it's the way I was raised—paying taxes is as important as voting. (Parking fees are like a city tax.)

The idea behind the placards is a good one: Reserve the parking closest to a store or garage elevator for people who struggle to move under their own power, or who have medical conditions that will be worsened by physical exertion.

But tacked on to that is a bad idea that if people cannot move easily, they may not make it back to their car in time to feed the meter, so their parking should be free.

If every car with a disabled placard parking free in downtown Sacramento on weekdays was actually carrying a disabled person, the sidewalks would be impassable due to all the wheelchairs, walkers and people using crutches.

As a crotchety geezer, I have to presume that not every person with a placard is disabled, and that some drivers may be using someone else's placard just to park all day for free. While this abuse is probably limited to just a few people, when it does happen, it prevents customers for the businesses near the parking spaces from spending their money.



Peter Rodman is a retired Sacramento County employee who lives in Sacramento.

I have a solution. Designate a space or two on every block for disabled parking with a blue curb and a parking meter. A car must have a placard to park there. But also completely discontinue free parking for the disabled everywhere. They pay the same rates as anyone else.


Some might say: "But what if I can't get back to feed the meter because I got gum caught in my walker? I could get a parking ticket."

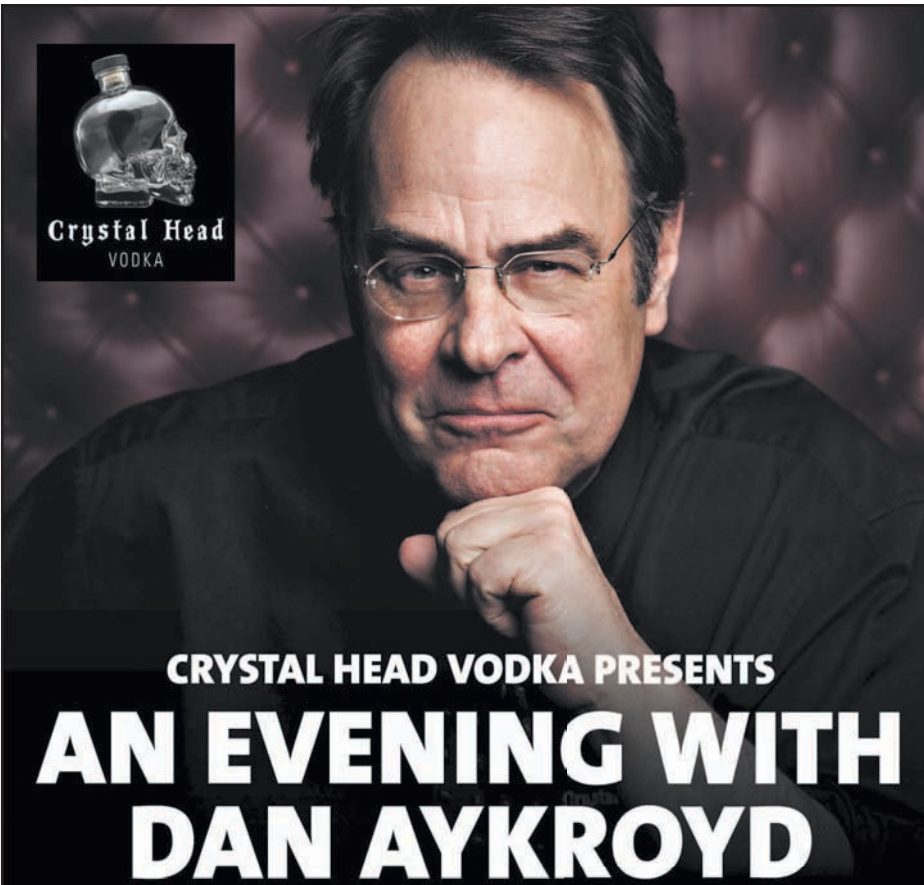
That would be unfortunate. So put a provision in the city code that by mailing in the parking ticket with a notarized sworn statement that you are the owner of a placard (with its number) and were using that car at that time, the city will dismiss the ticket.

Yes, this would be awkward for placard abusers, who have no way to get such a statement from their dead aunt, or can't coerce their asthmatic mother to lie under oath, and it will require all drivers with placards to feed parking meters. It would mean that only police officers, paramedics, construction crews and delivery drivers will be able to park wherever they want for free.

Still, let's try it. It would be interesting to watch the disabled placards disappear when the only advantage to having one is a stretch of blue curb with a parking meter.

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