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Heritage Foundation's Ronald Utt discusses commercialization of highway rest areas

April 11, 3:01 PM - Charlottesville Libertarian Examiner - Richard Sincere



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Dr. Ronald Utt of the Heritage Foundation, April 9, 2010
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In 2009, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) closed down about half of the rest areas along interstate highways as a cost-cutting measure. The decision was controversial, and as a candidate for governor, Bob McDonnell made reopening the rest areas one of his most emphatic promises. As governor, McDonnell followed through and the rest areas began to be opened again last month.

One of the issues raised last summer was a federal prohibition on commercial activity at interstate rest stops, which is not universal but nearly so and includes Virginia. On July 17 – just days before the rest areas were scheduled to close on July 21 -- Representative Frank Wolf (R-VA10) introduced an amendment to the transportation appropriations bill, which was killed in the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on a vote of 26(Yea)-32(Nay).

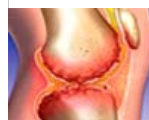
After he spoke at [a Cato Institute briefing](#) on transportation issues on Capitol Hill on April 9, Dr. Ronald Utt answered a few questions about the history of this prohibition and the reasons that highway rest areas are closed to business activity.

Early History

The prohibition “literally goes back to the creation of the interstate highway system,” said Utt, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, “where you already had existing interstate routes, like Route 1 on the

East Coast, that had a lot of commercial development around it that was dependent on the traffic.”

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