



# Marylanders like new license plates, poll shows

## By 2-1, War of 1812 design gets OK, but most don't care

By Michael Dresser and Jessica Anderson, The Baltimore Sun

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Marylanders might not exactly be proudly hailing the War of 1812 license plate design that was introduced this year, but neither are they rejecting it.

By a 2-to-1 margin, state residents who have both noticed and cared about the star-spangled design like it better than the plain vanilla version that preceded it as Maryland's standard-issue plate, according to a new poll by The Baltimore Sun.

But those with a strong opinion numbered only about one-third of those polled in the Sun's statewide survey of voters, with 23 percent saying they like it more and 12 percent giving it a thumbs-down. One fifth of those polled said they feel the same about the two designs, while almost half say they don't care or haven't noticed the new plates.

The new design is inspired by Baltimore's defense against the 1814 British attack on [Fort McHenry](#), which spurred Francis Scott Key to write a poem that when combined with a popular drinking song would become "The Star-Spangled Banner." The plate includes a depiction of the American flag of the era, with "bombs bursting in air" o'er the ramparts of the fort.

After the Motor Vehicle Administration introduced the new design in June, some critics panned the 1812 plates as war-happy, less friendly to vanity messages and just plain ugly. Some unscientific polls found an overwhelming rejection of the design.

But the Sun's survey of about 800 likely voters, conducted by OpinionWorks of Annapolis in conjunction with a survey of voters preferences in the race between [Gov. Martin O'Malley](#) and former Gov. [Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.](#), indicates the opponents are a vocal minority.

The plate design is part of the state's commemoration of the bicentennial of the 1812-1815 conflict between the British Empire and the still-fledgling United States. The war ended in an honorable draw not long after a British campaign that had captured Washington ended in an inglorious withdrawal, and a futile attempt to punish the "nest of pirates" that was Baltimore.

The war is a minor obsession with O'Malley, who frequently refers to Baltimore's role in the repulse of the British in his speeches. Just this week, at a news conference on a state helicopter

purchase, he threw in a reference to Maryland having experience in homeland security going back to 1814.

Despite O'Malley's interest in all things 1812, and the fact that the plate can be seen as an initiative of his administration, Ehrlich's supporters feel more favorably toward the design, according to the poll. They like it more than the old plate by almost a 3-to-1 margin, while the governor's backers split 19 percent for and 13 percent against.

Race and gender apparently have little bearing on Marylanders' opinions of the plate, but region is another story. Baltimore city residents love their hometown plate by a 5-to-1 margin, but residents of Montgomery find it wanting in artistic merit by 24 percent to 20 percent.

A quick quiz of visitors to MVA headquarters in [Glen Burnie](#) and at Fort McHenry Thursday found the reviews uniformly favorable among those who had an opinion.

At the MVA, Jesse Neu said he also likes the new plates over the plain white version.

"They are very patriotic and are colorful," said Neu, who moved to Glen Burnie from Wisconsin in July. "It really signifies the state [and] it's definitely better than a plain white plate."

Jessica Wall of Glen Burnie, who picked up her new plates Thursday, loved them.

"I said to the girl inside that I didn't know that everyone got them," Wall said, adding that the patriotic theme shouldn't be forgotten. And, she said the red hues will match her car too.

At Fort McHenry, city residents said they liked the new plates' focus on the important local role in American history.

"It's nice we actually got something that is representative of Maryland," said Denise Bugglen of Baltimore, who was enjoying a sunny afternoon at the national monument with her husband, Danny.

The new plate is scheduled to remain Maryland's standard design until 2015, when the state is scheduled to revert to the previous black-on-white version. There is no extra charge for the 1812 design unless a person with otherwise valid plates wants to trade them in for the bursting-bomb motif.

The 1812 plate has not supplanted Maryland's popular specialty plates —most notably the "Treasure the Chesapeake" and "Maryland Agriculture" designs for which vehicle owners pay extra.

The switch to the 1812 plates has not triggered a stampede to the specialty plates by those who don't favor it, according to MVA spokesman Buel Young. The agency's figures, comparing the June-to-October periods of 2009 and 2010, show a slight decrease in the sales of specialty plates this year and an increase in the issuance of standard plates.

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/ba-md-poll-plates-20101021,0,7010093.story>

The increase does not necessarily indicate the 1812 plates are more popular than the black-and-white design. According to Young, vehicle sales have rebounded somewhat from the depths of the 2009 slump — resulting in more tags being issued.

Young said the reaction to the new plates has been "mixed." But some of those who disapprove are passionate in their dislike.

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