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In 1997, Virginia gubernatorial candidate Jim Gilmore ran on a pledge of "no car tax." The sound bite captured the voters' imaginations and the statehouse for Gilmore. The twist: car taxes were not levied statewide, but locally. Some localities taxed heavily; others did not. Some localities had new and expensive vehicles to tax; others, less so.

Consequently, the eventual state plan to forgive the tax to taxpayers and reimburse localities created a complex landscape of tax reallocation. The result largely favored the wealthier, more powerful cities and counties in northern Virginia.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how three key regional newspapers took up the issue. Generally, the newspapers were consistent with their own editorial personalities and the interests of their regions. Southwest Virginia's Roanoke Times clearly pointed out the inter-regional disparities, and capital city Richmond's paper marshaled evidence to counter criticism of the plan. The Washington Post generally took little heed of Virginia's pesky geographically based politics.

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