

Editorial: California lawmakers pushing the limit on perks

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No sooner did a poll come out showing that legislators are less unpopular than they have been since 2008, word comes that they still don't quite grasp that they should pay for their own car repairs.

Associated Press reporter Don Thompson reported that as the state was ending the perk of providing legislators with cars in 2011, a dozen lawmakers imposed on taxpayers to pay for repairs or upgrades to those vehicles, and later bought them for their personal use.

We all paid to fix dents, replace wheel covers, put on new tires, and make repairs costing hundreds or thousands of dollars.

One, former Sen. Bob Dutton, a Southern California Republican, had \$6,000 worth of repairs done and evidently used \$12,681 in campaign funds to buy his 2005 Chevy Tahoe, prompting the Fair Political Practices Commission to open an inquiry.

In a sense, the legislators were doing what any smart used car buyer would do – get the vehicle inspected and repaired before buying it. But legislators' relationship with state vehicles long has been troubled.

As the *Bee's* Dan Smith reported last year, legislators regularly crash their cars and send the bills to the state, rather than paying for the repairs themselves as good and honest people would do.

In 2011, the California Citizens Compensation Commission took away legislators' cars and their state-issued gasoline credit cards. The decision was short-sighted and vindictive, typical of actions taken by commissioners who were appointed by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

California is a large state and legislators are expected to live in their districts. Lawmakers who represent Redding or Bakersfield must drive vast distances, and have every right to bill the state for all legitimate mileage. Those bills regularly exceed \$1,000 a month.

Still, legislators have only themselves— or their dim colleagues — to blame for losing state-leased cars. There have been too many instances in which lawmakers misused state vehicles and taxpayer money.

In its latest survey, the Public Policy Institute of California found 34 percent of this state's adults had favorable views of the Legislature, the highest since January 2008. With a few more revelations about misuse of tax money, lawmakers' approval rating will slide back into the 20s.