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## April Fool's Day quiz: Should beggars start taking Visa and MasterCard?

San Francisco considers tax-subsidized credit card machines for panhandlers

**WASHINGTON, DC** — The mayor of San Francisco is considering a plan to give portable credit card machines to panhandlers so they can accept hand-outs via the “swipe” of an ATM or credit card — an idea that’s so preposterous it sounds like an April Fool’s joke, the Libertarian Party said today.

But it’s not.

**“The motto of the San Francisco city government seems to be: American Express — don’t leave the homeless without it,”** said Steve Dasbach, the party’s national director. “It must be an April Fool’s Day joke, right? Unfortunately, it’s not.

“In this case, the only fools are the politicians who are considering this idea — and the joke will be on the taxpayers who would be forced to pay for it.”

This week, San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown said he is considering a proposal that would give homeless beggars battery-powered machines to allow them to accept donations via Visa, MasterCard, and American Express.

The plan — dubbed the “Benevolending Box Program” — would be subsidized by a public/private partnership, with the city paying part of the cost. Under the program, panhandlers would get 20% of what they rake in via credit cards, with the remaining 80% going to the city’s homeless shelters.

Mayor Brown said he liked the “innovative idea” because it “empowers homeless people to take responsible actions for their lives.”

But Dasbach argued that “the ability to take plastic is not the same as the willingness to take personal responsibility for your life” — and that government-subsidized, high-tech begging is no solution to homelessness and poverty.

**“Homelessness is not caused by a lack of credit cards.** It’s caused by a lack of opportunity that discourages initiative — and by an excess of failed government programs that encourage dependency,” he said.

“How can we solve the problem of homelessness? Let’s start by removing regulatory barriers that force people off the lower rungs of the job market; abolishing the zoning laws that destroy low-cost housing; and eliminating the high taxes that discourage individuals from contributing to private charities with a proven track record of helping the poor. That’s an action plan that will be more effective than simply saying ‘charge it’ to the homeless.”

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