

Good Deals

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Gov. Tim Kaine's administration deserves a tip of the hat for its decision to start a small-loan program for state employees.

The loans -- up to \$500 -- will compete directly with the payday and car-title lenders that have preyed on the public with usurious, if not deceptive, short-term loans. The Kaine administration has encouraged private businesses to start similar programs. That's a good idea.

Loan sharks point out that they serve a need, and wouldn't stay in business long if they didn't have customers. Drug dealers can say much the same. And just as there's a rational case for legalizing drugs, there's a rational case for an unfettered market in high-interest loans. Most people don't buy either one, however.

Creating state and private-enterprise alternatives to the cash-loan storefronts has the advantage of detouring around that whole debate. The commonwealth's new program is a useful service and a good deal. What more needs to be said?

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