

You can't blame them for asking, but it is a terrible idea.

Supporters of the plan said so themselves.

Not in so many words perhaps, but in presenting the proposal that the state of Idaho should create a cabinet post for Idaho Indian tribes, its boosters made the best argument why it should never happen.

For those who missed it, representatives of Indian tribes met with Gov. Butch Otter late last year and asked him to create a cabinet post dedicated to Indian tribes.

Tribal representatives argued that the move is long overdue. Tribal economies, they said, generate half a billion dollars a year in the state. In doing so, the argument continued, tribes employ thousands of state residents. Given all that, "It only seems fair for tribes to have a place within Gov. Otter's administration," the press release continued.

Whoa.

Is that really what representative government is all about?

Given that logic, Potlatch Corp. should also get a cabinet post. The Spokane company owns 838,000 acres here in Idaho making it the largest private landowner in the state. The multiplier effect of the wealth created off that land, whether through logging, milling, planting, trucking n not to mention property taxes paid n is mind boggling.

And what about Micron? Sure, the electronics manufacturer has hit hard times of late, but with several thousand employees and billions in sales, with billions more invested here in plant and equipment, they too would deserve a cabinet post.

Then there are the folks who plan to invest \$1 billion in the American Falls area on a coal gasification plant. Plans call for investments of billions more in the ensuing years. Good grief, if that comes to fruition, there would be a decent argument to move the capitol to American Falls.

Yeah, this is getting ridiculous.

Any argument that wealth is a criterion by which access should be granted in representative government is ridiculous.

Now, we're not so naive as to believe that big business does not get different treatment than Joe Blow taxpayer. That is how special tax breaks, like the one for farmers excluding them - but nobody else - from personal property taxes, become law. That's how Potlatch Corp. maintains its timber tax exemption on real estate it advertises at prices thousands of dollars higher than the value for which it is taxed.

Wrong? Sure, and those are just two examples. But it isn't going to change any time soon. Agriculture interests and Potlatch Corp. spend a lot of money on lobbyists to represent their interests in Boise.

As do Indian tribes.

OK. We get it. The relationship between state government and Indian tribes is unique. On the one hand Indian tribes do not recognize state authority, which is why they do not pay state taxes on gasoline, tobacco, alcohol, property and other items for which everyone else does. But at the same time that tribal governments are sovereign, tribal members are state residents and voters. It may be confusing, but it is what it is.

But even given the special relationship between tribal government and the state does not

warrant a cabinet-level job dedicated to representing the interests of Indian tribes.

We do owe our thanks to tribal leaders for one thing.

In boosting their argument for the new state cabinet post, tribal leaders cited the fact that the state of Idaho maintains the Commission of Hispanic Affairs. It seems somewhat unfair - the insinuation is - to deny Indian tribes when Hispanics have their own little piece of the state bureaucracy.

And they're right.

It is wrong to discriminate.

That's why the Commission of Hispanic Affairs should be eliminated. It will save taxpayers \$106,800 each and every year when we do.

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