

Why stop at \$70,000 when you can waste \$150,000?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Odds are if your education cost you more than \$70,000, you'd learn something from it.

Of course, it's your money and your time.

The process is a bit different in Boise.

There, state lawmakers are living off your money and your time.

During a two-year period, members of the Legislature's public lands task force blew through more than \$61,000 on private attorney fees, not to mention the cost of staff time and travel, relearning what Idaho Deputy Attorney General Steve Strack told them in the beginning:

Utah state Rep. Ken Ivory's pipe dream about suing the federal government into relinquishing its lands to the state conflicted with 200 years of federal and state constitutional law and court rulings. If such an idea could have worked, it would have been done long ago.

Yet, here comes state Rep. Terry Gestrin, R-Donnelly, throwing good money after bad.

Gestrin, along with co-sponsors such as Sens. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood, and Chuck Winder, R-Boise, want to spend an estimated \$150,000 a year forging a compact with the state of Utah.

The idea? Continue pressing the feds - presumably through Congress - to turn those lands over to the states.

Do you get the feeling the past two years didn't happen?

Where have Gestrin, Nuxoll and Winder been?

Have they looked over the politics?

Even when Republicans controlled both houses of Congress and the White House during the George W. Bush administration, they could not even tweak the Antiquities Act of 1906, much less pass something as audacious as handing over billions of dollars worth of forests and rangeland to the states.

In case you're counting, it takes 60 votes in the Senate to pass anything, plus you need the president's signature. If you can barely keep the Department of Homeland Security open, where are you going to find the votes for public lands transfers? Even Idaho's Republican congressional delegation has hardly warmed to the idea.

Have they forgotten the public reaction? A generation or two ago, you may have found grass-roots support for a Sagebrush Rebellion. Not now. Three years ago, Republican pollster Bob

Moore found 73 percent of Idahoans thought the federal government was doing a good job of "protecting and preserving our national public lands heritage."

If anything, Idahoans suspect the state would wind up selling those properties to the highest bidder. The fear is well-founded. In the course of the task force's tenure, two studies said the state would go broke trying to manage these lands.

The Congressional Research Service - at 2nd District Congressman Mike Simpson's request - concluded managing Idaho's federal acres cost about \$392 million a year before factoring in another \$101 million fighting fires.

The University of Idaho Policy Analysis Group looked at nine scenarios and found only one in which the state might make some money - the state could cut down more trees than it has since the mid-1970s, make more money selling it than the feds have, and the timber market would remain forever robust. There's no margin for a housing market crash. The whole thing depends on Idaho cherry-picking the choice lands - leaving the feds to continue paying the bills and managing the rest.

Besides, the lure of acquiring properties rich with oil and gas deposits has Utah lawmakers prepared to spend \$12 million on their campaign to get control of federal acreages.

Utah may want Idaho's help, but why should Idaho subsidize what the Beehive State already has underway?

Never mind.

The House Resources and Conservation Committee thought Gestrin has a swell idea. Friday, the Idaho House concurred.

Why not?

It's only money. Correction: It's only your money. - M.T.