

All for local control, but only when it suits your goals

Bill McKee/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

One of the most common complaints heard from conservatives is the constant interference from "big government."

"What business do they have telling us how we should be doing things from over there in D.C.?" is an everyday cry in Republican-dominated statehouses across the country.

And yet, when it comes to allowing local municipalities make decisions unmolested from those same statehouses, lawmakers seem to think they know better.

That's called hypocrisy.

In Idaho there have been proposals by cities in recent years on plastic bag bans and increasing minimum wage levels, all of which failed. Any such future proposals will likely be dead on arrival, however, thanks to preemptive legislative measures currently being considered.

"You have to remember this, not only are cities but also counties, are creatures of the state," said Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter in a Monday story from The Associated Press.

Are not states similarly "creatures" of the nation?

There will be an inclination to want to blame conservative resistance on an idealistic level - the GOP has a long history of opposition to increasing worker pay and environmental causes - but that's probably giving them too much credit. No, as usual, the simplest reason for these state-led impediments can be summed up with the old saying, "follow the money."

Special interest groups like the Idaho Retailers Association are leading the charge against such local initiatives.

"Rather than making this out to be a state versus city issue, it should be touted as the best way to work together to ensure Idaho doesn't become a tough business environment," said IRA President Pam Eaton during a hearing on the local minimum wage ban measure, arguing such initiatives would create a checkerboard of business regulations across the state.

Except that it is a state versus city issue. Historically cities tend to be more liberal and rural areas, which make up the vast majority of the state, are more conservative. But while it might be possible for someone to survive on \$7.25 an hour in a little town like Troy - provided they have a couple of roommates, food stamps and federally mandated health insurance - how far will that same wage go in Boise?

Our conservative lawmakers should start walking their talk when it comes to local control, even when it doesn't fit their goals.

