

# Mighty Idaho to tell Uncle Sam to back off?

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As long as most members of the House State Affairs Committee agree to indulge St. Maries Republican Dick Harwood in mulish braying at Uncle Sam, why be so timid? Instead of sending meaningless junk mail to Congress asserting Idaho's purported "sovereignty," why not tell the federal government to keep its money and leave the state the hell alone?

If legislators are going to embrace a crackpot nostrum, let them really get their arms around it.

Then let the committee turn to Harwood for another bright idea: how to replace the nearly \$2 billion in cash the government sends Idaho's way each year to help it provide services from education to health care.

That's money over and above whatever Idaho is scheduled to receive from the government's \$800 billion plan to revive the nation's stumbling economy, which all four members of the state's congressional delegation voted against. The biggest share of it, more than \$900 million, goes to Medicaid, the government's health insurance plan for poor people. State government's own budget, meanwhile, totals less than \$3 billion.

Nevertheless, Harwood told committee members his resolution, which members agreed to introduce by a 13-4 margin Tuesday, would somehow save the state money. And he said, in customary grammar, the federal government should be more servant than master to the states.

"One of the things the states did, they created the federal government as an agent for themselves," he said.

He also told committee members 31 states have already adopted such resolutions. That appears to be more than a stretch, but there is a movement among right-wing legislators around the nation to approve messages like the one Harwood sponsors.

In neighboring Washington, for example, a measure that has been stalled in committee since the end of January warns the federal government in the identical language used in Harwood's resolution "to cease and desist, effectively immediately, any and all mandates that are beyond the scope of its constitutionally delegated powers."

And what mandates might those be? According to Harwood, they include the Endangered Species Act and the No Child Left Behind education law.

"We think they oughta back off and let the states govern themselves a little bit," Harwood says of the federal government.

What he, or even the entire Legislature, thinks doesn't count for much, of course. Any claim that the federal government is overstepping its constitutional authority would have to be decided by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Until that happens, rants like Harwood's are nothing more than time wasters in a Legislature that has too much time on its hands. It has now been several weeks since House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star, proposed that legislators recess their session and go home until the full effects of Congress' stimulus bill are known. It was that bill that delayed the normal budgeting process that usually provides the time frame within which other legislative business is conducted.

Legislators didn't do that, however. Instead, they are spending at least \$30,000 a day fiddling with foolishness like Harwood's resolution. Maybe it's time voters asserted their sovereignty and instructed legislators to take a timeout. - J.F.