

Should have asked an expert



Terry Ewings.

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S.O.B.'s STORY (spouse of boss) DAN HAMMES

As boondoggles go, this one barely registers.

Not that it isn't an awful waste of your tax dollars. It's just that when it comes to wasting your money, the federal government sets a remarkably high standard.

So when the federales squander \$132, 252 to replace new sidewalks with well - other new sidewalks n a guy really shouldn't get a froth on.

But it's one thing to read about the federal government spending \$349,000 for swine waste management someplace in North Carolina (seriously, this happened) and quite another issue altogether when you actually watch your tax dollars go to waste.

Which they are right now in St. Maries.

For those who missed it, federal bureaucrats in all their wisdom deemed the handicapped ramps on several St. Maries sidewalks inadequate. Observant readers know that many of the sidewalks scheduled to be dug up are only a few years old. They are the sidewalks that were replaced as part of the recent downtown improvement project. So not only are the sidewalks relatively new, they are in fine condition.

But no matter.

Apparently as long as China has money to loan Uncle Sam will borrow it.

Sure. It's true. Sometimes we exaggerate.

Perhaps we are not being fair to the crackerjack central planners in Washington, D.C. who decided new handicapped sidewalk ramps were desperately needed in St. Maries, Idaho. It is entirely possible that someone toiling away in a government office building 1,700 miles from here would know the exact best time to replace the sidewalks.

Of course, that's not how they say it.

The people charged with organizing this effort say the new handicapped sidewalk ramps have to be replaced because there are new standards for such ramps. As the story goes and they actually tell it with a straight face the old handicapped ramps simply are not adequate. Who are we to question the Wise Ones in Washington?

So we didn't.

Instead we asked someone who uses the new-but-no-longer-adequate handicapped ramps every day. Some of you may have seen Terry Ewings as he drives his power chair uptown about 9 a.m. Typically he returns and over the same sidewalks and around noon. So twice a day, every day, Mr. Ewings tests the ramps on our sidewalks. We thought, given he is an expert, we'd ask if they were adequate. So we did.

"They work fine," he observed.

Then he observed some more. He said he thought spending tax money to replace them was a pretty dim-witted idea. Except he said it a little different than that.

It is just unfortunate that the folks who dreamed up this little project did not consult Mr. Ewings before they decided to spend the money.

Of course, there is a bright side to all this.

This project will create jobs.

At least, that's how President Obama has it figured. His view is that if the federal government spends enough money it does not matter then everyone will have a job and we can all be happy. And the good news is it does not matter whether the projects are pointless, or wasteful - or if the government is the only outfit with an expanding payroll and spend enough tax money and life will simply be grand.

As an added note of irony about this replace-the-new-sidewalks-with-other-new-sidewalks-scam most of the sidewalks that will be torn apart aren't even paid for yet.

It is a veritable double-dip of Keynesian economics.

First we borrow money to put in new sidewalks then the federal government borrows more money to tear them up.

And to think some people have the gall to ask whether the trillions in federal spending this administration has concocted is somehow wasted. n DAN HAMMES is publisher of this newspaper.