



The chilling impact of big government

By Jim Waters

WASHINGTON — I'm in the nation's Capitol, where I testified in support of allowing the marketplace, not government, to determine wage scales paid on public projects, especially schools.

But for a moment, let me explain how some cold winds blew my thoughts back home.

I'm disheartened by events in Kentucky, where five years of planning by the city of Hodgenville for the bicentennial celebration of President Abraham Lincoln's birth got wiped out in a matter of hours by snow and ice. Plans called for first lady Laura Bush to kick off events. Many dignitaries hoped to make their way to the birthplace of our 16th president.

Few can rival the effort folks in Hodgenville dedicated and committed to working on this project. But a glitch in the celebration should not allow us to ignore what Lincoln represents.

I choose to ignore revisionist historians who speak ill of Lincoln, including one in that lot who called him a "war criminal." Reasonable and intelligent Americans understand what a great president he made in spite of great obstacles. Honest Abe managed to guide the union through war, emancipation and historic change.

But Lincoln's measure of success went beyond those things.

He coupled his leadership skills with humility and an ability to remind Americans of their uniqueness and the need for them to embrace our country's destiny. He constantly strove for a government "of the people, by the people, for the people."

But my disappointment regarding the cancellation of Hodgenville's events comes with a heavy dose of concern that Lincoln's hopes for Americans face serious challenges.

I see America's progress threatened by a government "of the special interests, by the cloak of secrecy and for the benefit of the few" — a few politicians forever seeking re-election at the expense of many.

Take U.S. Rep. Ben Chandler's bill to get the federal government involved in financing construction of new schools, House Resolution 3021.

It's called the "21st Century High-Performing Public Schools Facilities Act." It sounds great. In reality, it would drive up the already out-of-control public-education costs and ensure even less accountability for how our tax dollars are spent.

As its co-sponsor, Kentucky's Chandler probably thinks it can generate headlines and show that the big, bad, impersonal federal government really cares.

But like any psychologist can tell you, a fine line exists between healthy, “caring” relationships and the destructive and potentially devastating malady of codependency.

What America needs is less of Chandler’s vision of a “caring” federal government and more responsible spending of our hard-earned money fast-tracked to Washington.

Government’s “caring” results in a codependent citizenry that lawmakers such as Chandler seem all too willing to encourage. That caring allows him to practice headline-seeking politics that might get his name on a school or two back home.

That’s what led me to the Capitol.

HR 3021 keeps Chandler’s labor-union buddies happy. Whatever school repairs the federal government deems worthy of financing in Kentucky and some other misguided states would use prevailing-wage rates. The unions stand to benefit greatly if Congress passes this massive education-spending bill.

I wonder if it would make a difference if people knew that this proposed boon for labor bosses and their political pals such as Chandler is “one of the last vestiges of Jim Crow laws,” as Iowa Rep. Steve King so aptly stated during congressional hearing I participated in Feb. 13.

“It was enacted in 1931 to protect the white northern workers from the lower-paid carpet-bagger workers that had come up from the Southern states to look for work,” King said. “Union workers were threatened by the sudden influx of cheap labor. The Davis-Bacon Act of 1931 was passed to prevent them from working.”

How can a government “for the people” find so many ways to increase the number of workers on public projects? A government “for the people” finds ways to reduce costs for building schools so that students get better facilities that communities can afford.

As long as the government remains for the politicians, special interests or winning the next election, it cannot work “for the people.”

It wasn’t the cold weather in Hodgenville that would make Lincoln shudder.

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