

"Writing the truth  
as I see it;  
trying not to  
offend  
those who will  
disagree."

# The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



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## Who should pay for disasters?

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Did our Founding Fathers intend for the government to take care of us when a disaster strikes? Is the federal government the correct resource for disasters? Is managing the aftermath of disasters a Constitutional responsibility of the federal government? Do individuals or local communities have any responsibility? Is the government the most efficient and cost effective entity to offer aid to communities and help them rebuild?

One of our Presidents has already answered this question, but the government is not listening. When Texas went through a crippling drought, Congress did what they do best. They immediately passed bills authorizing large sums of money for disaster relief. And what wonderful money to offer. Most congressional spending gets some public scrutiny; often criticizing them for their pork barreling, even though the criticism leads to little change. But, not so with disaster relief. Congress says "disaster relief" and the money flows without objection, without question, and without significant evaluation.

How does Congress decide when to declare a disaster and how much to spend? An article in Economic Inquiry by Thomas Garrett of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis suggests disaster relief is more political than practical. Between 1991 and 1999, the number of disasters "needing" federal help was 66% higher in election years. What an interesting coincidence. I wonder if the Salvation Army and Red Cross had similar election year surges.

How well does the federal government perform providing disaster relief and reconstruction help? Some New Orleans evacuees stayed in \$400 a night hotels. The government purchased \$300 million worth of trailers and then put some of them too far away to be used. They actually sent an ice truck from Wisconsin to Louisiana to Georgia, rerouting through South

Carolina and ending up in Maryland. Only the federal government could create this route.

More and more experts suggest the way to improve disaster relief is to decrease involvement of the federal government with a goal of ending it. They believe private organizations can better and more efficiently manage disaster relief; doing so with better use of resources. The main difference is, unlike the federal government, private disaster relief organizations, like the Red Cross, must use their resources responsibly or lose their donors.

Is it appropriate for the federal government to use our tax dollars to repeatedly rebuild New Orleans and other areas like it that regularly face the risk of disaster? If private insurance and organizations like the Red Cross can perform better, why not let them? Remember, President Reagan explained why we should not look to the federal government for help saying, "The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help." Those words surmised a simple and pragmatic reality.

What did the President do who was faced with the Texas drought and a bill from Congress sitting on his desk that allotted millions of dollars in disaster relief? Well, he vetoed the bill. He said the federal government had a "limited mission," not an unlimited mission. He said the Constitution did not allow the federal government to accept disaster relief as one of its responsibilities. He admonished Congress saying, "Though the people support the Government, the Government should not support the people." He added that aid from Washington, D.C. only "encourages the expectation of paternal care on the part of the Government and weakens the sturdiness of our national character." After he vetoed the bill, private organizations went to Texas and raised 10 times in private money what the bill

vetoed by the President had authorized. 10 times.

How does the federal government react when they assume responsibility for disaster relief? Congress holds hearings, congressional representatives posture for television, they spend time fixing the blame, they demand accountability, they demand more money, and they again posture for television. And the circle of ineptness continues.

What President dared to veto the bill from Congress for humanitarian aid to drought stricken Texas? It was President Grover Cleveland in 1887.

Over 100 years ago, he understood the Founding Fathers' intentions for the Constitutional powers of the federal government. He knew the government was never intended to provide everything for everyone. He knew to do this, the government would first have to take everything from everyone and then decide how best to use it on our behalf. Why did he understand it so clearly and today the Founding Fathers are ignored? Do we want the tax rates of the European socialist countries? Do we want a socialist government, one that tells us what is best for us? How much of your income are you willing to give the government so they can provide everything for everyone? How much would you be willing to endure to prevent the government from providing everything for everyone? Our choice.

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