

## Watch those Campaign Promises By Glenn Grothman

As we enter campaign season it is important to know what promises politicians are making to win votes. At a time when the federal deficit stands at \$520 billion a year (an additional \$1,800 in debt for each American) efforts to buy votes with unnecessary spending programs should be remembered on Election Day.

I was not aware until recently that John Kerry has committed to hiring 100,000 more firemen around the country if elected. That story has not been prominently mentioned in the national press.

It is important to remember that fire departments are a local responsibility. I would question whether the federal government even has the authority under our constitution to dabble in local fire services.

It particularly irritates me when a federal politician promises more money for a local problem. This means that local city councils (West Bend, Hartford, etc.) apparently feel that they have enough firemen on staff. If they needed more, they could raise taxes and hire more. Instead we will have the federal government tax us, take a cut in Washington, and then give local governments grants for firemen they didn't think they needed.

Worse, federal dollars frequently mean federal control. I wonder how many school boards would gladly give up their federal dollars if they could get rid of all the federal rules that come with them.

The idea of hiring 100,000 more professional firemen than the cities wanted seems especially extravagant – it's a 35 percent increase (there are currently 291,000 full time firemen in the country) in one administration. It's even more amazing when you consider the number of fires declined from 3.2 million to 1.6 million annually over the past 25 years. The number of fire related deaths per year also decreased by half in that time despite a 30 percent increase in population.

This is the result of better building codes, electrical systems, smoke detectors, and sprinkler systems. Apartment buildings with wooden siding - the most common form of urban housing in 1940 – have largely disappeared.

So why, in light of the above statistics, would Senator Kerry propose hiring 100,000 firemen the cities didn't think they needed? Votes. So far it's worked. He received the help of the International Association of Firefighters during the democratic primaries. Even when Howard Dean was the frontrunner, the union stuck with Kerry because of all the new spending he promised.

Usually these promises are tempting for politicians because a slumbering press corps doesn't talk about them. John Kerry will get the votes, campaign contributions, and volunteer hours from the professional fireman's union while the press keeps everyone else ignorant of the commitment.

While the promise was made at the federal level, I see the same thing at the state and local level all the time. The press should publicize endorsements or contributions by special interest groups and ask the candidates: How much taxpayer money are you promising to spend to get that endorsement?

This little escapade also shows the wisdom of our founding fathers in restricting federal government involvement to a few specific issues like national defense, interstate commerce, postal delivery, and maintaining a currency. They knew that if Congress could, they would spend money on functions of government that are better kept local.

Please let me know what you think on this issue. Contact me here in Madison---please call 1-888-534-0058, or in any of the following ways:

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