

Is Carolina Bill About Silver and Gold, or Just More Tea?

(Feb. 23) — South Carolina would turn into a cashless state — as in banning all federal currency as legal tender in favor of using silver and gold coins — if one state lawmaker has his way.

It isn't going to happen. But the idea of refusing to use federal dollar bills fits into a growing trend of what some analysts call frivolous, emotional politics playing out across the country, citing the current secession movement among a handful of state candidates in Vermont as an example.

"There's a strong anti-national government feeling among conservatives, and part of the Tea Party is about this," said Clyde Wilcox, who teaches government classes at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

The South Carolina bill was proposed by Rep. Michael Pitts, a Republican. He is none too happy with current federal spending in Washington, D.C., so his legislation would change his state's currency to gold and silver.

His rationale?

The state is suffering "an economic crisis of severe magnitude" because of the federal system, and needs the guarantee of silver and gold for a "sound monetary system," the bill says.

Pitts explained his bill to CBS News, saying, "If the federal government continues to spend money at the rate it's spending money, and if it continues to print money at the rate it's printing money, our economic system is going to collapse."

Legally, the U.S. Constitution renders the state representative's idea impossible, even in the unlikely event it garners a majority of votes, according to one University of South Carolina political science professor. "I think it's interesting from a political sense to take this kind of stance, but it's really

nothing more than political grandstanding," Kirk Randazzo told AOL News.

Still, the idea of the state thumbing its nose at federal currency may be a bit more than that, according to some political analysts.

Pitts' bill is a symbol "of some of the over-the-top anti-government rhetoric out there right now," according to John Bruce, a political science professor at the University of Mississippi. "How crazy is it? What would happen to SC's large tourism and military sectors if paper money was not used anymore? I understand protests, but this one is just silly," he said.

The South Carolina representative did not return numerous calls for comment. He has not been directly involved with the Tea Party, according to state organizer Ron Parks. However, Pitts' bill is something the movement could get behind, Parks said, because it's in "agreement with what we stand for, in that it would stabilize a monetary system in South Carolina."

However, Jim Weidman, a spokesman for the conservative Heritage Foundation, said the Tea Party movement is not connected to the bill. The party's goal "is not to somehow come up with parallel currencies at the states to enable them to weather a financial Armageddon," he said.

Proposals are being linked to the Tea Party movement, which currently has no established doctrine, to add credibility to ideas or to discredit the movement, Weidman added.

Still, Pitts' notion of protest plays into the growing trend of dissent under the movement, which was launched by conservatives and libertarians in response to the Obama administration's economic stimulus program, which became law last year.

But if the South Carolina bill has no chance of passing, why bother proposing it

in the first place? From a political standpoint, it is pure gold, Georgetown University's Wilcox explained.

"This guy knows it's not going to pass," and it would be a disaster if it did, he said. In putting forth such a bill, Pitts expects that somewhere in the state there will be people who find the symbolism endearing, Wilcox added. "It's a no-loser for him because it's not going to happen and he doesn't have to face the consequences of what would really happen to the state if suddenly they're not accepting federal dollars anymore."

The South Carolina bill likely won't be the end of the emotional political gestures, Wilcox predicts.

"To the extent the Tea Party is just stirring things up, you're going to see more of this across the country," he said. But as it stands now, the Tea Party movement encompasses a wide, rambling range of sentiments, from those who deny that President Barack Obama is a U.S. citizen to those who express a more sensible unhappiness with particular policies, he said.

"Social movements only succeed in America if the people who want to mold them and move them in a responsible direction take control at some point," Wilcox added. "If it's just an amorphous set of complaints that are all over the place, then there's no way that can really accomplish anything."

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