

The Salt Lake Tribune

Brewer sets a limit

Arizona avoids Utah's mistake

Published: May 16, 2012 05:20PM

Updated: May 16, 2012 07:34PM

Lawmakers in Colorado, Arizona and Utah this year had before them similar — and in some passages, identical — pieces of legislation making the wholly foolish and entirely unconstitutional demand that the United States of America cede to those states millions of acres of federally owned land within their respective borders.

Only in Utah did the legislation, HB148, become an empty, expensive and embarrassing law.

The Colorado version, HB1322, died in committee about a month ago, with members of both parties voting against it. The bill did not have a great deal of support and its demise was no surprise.

Support was stronger in Arizona, where the bill was approved by the Legislature and had been expected to win the signature of Republican Gov. Jan Brewer. But Monday came word that Brewer had vetoed SB1332.

Brewer is no shrinking violet when it comes to asserting state sovereignty or staring down the federal government. She is among the most vocal supporters of the Arizona enforcement-only statute — now before the U.S. Supreme Court — that would turn state and local law enforcement officers into illegal immigrant-detecting Blade Runners. And then there's that picture of Brewer jabbing her finger at President Obama when he came to Phoenix in January.

But with picking unwinnable fights that will cost her taxpayers a lot of money with very little hope of any return on investment, Brewer has her limits.

The Arizona version of the land grab bill, the governor said, provided no legal or constitutional grounds for such drastic action. And if it did succeed, she noted, it would saddle the state with the responsibility for maintaining millions of acres at a time when its budget is already overstretched. That's a much more logical view than the pipe dream held by Utah lawmakers, that the seizure of federal lands would be a fiscal bonanza for the state.

Brewer also pointed out, in an argument that had not been widely heard in Utah, that a long dispute over ownership of federal lands would taint leases and other arrangements that now allow mining, drilling and grazing on those lands. In other words, it would deter, rather than encourage, energy and agricultural development of those lands.

Brewer was right to take her veto pen (which she uses a lot more often than Utah Gov. Gary Herbert does) to this latest expression of a so-called renewal of the Sagebrush Rebellion. Bills like this are nothing more than a delusional campaign to allow the exploitation of irreplaceable national treasures for short-term private gain.

© 2012 The Salt Lake Tribune