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For The Independent Mind

Governors oppose federal disaster takeover

WASHINGTON — After the slow and flawed response to Hurricane Katrina, Pres. Bush floated the idea that Congress might want to give the Pentagon authority over states in certain disaster situations. But most of the nation's governors, including the president's brother, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, are openly hostile to the idea of a federal takeover and have banded together to make sure state level authorities stay in control during future catastrophic disasters.

Carrying their message to Congress on Oct. 19, Jeb Bush, along with fellow Republican Gov. Rick Perry of Texas and Democrat Janet Napolitano of Arizona, told members of the House Committee on Homeland Security that states already have the specialized resources to deal with emergencies within their borders, Stateline.org reports. "Let Texans run Texas," Perry said.

Jeb Bush added, "If this responsibility is federalized, it will be as much of a disaster as any natural disaster."

The hearings came less than a week after the National Governors Association led by Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, also a Republican, issued a statement declaring the group's opposition to the suggestion that states agree to transfer some authority to federal officials during emergencies.

"Governors are responsible for the safety and welfare of their citizens and are in the best position to coordinate all resources to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters," the statement said. "Federal aid and assistance are sometimes necessary to accomplish these goals, and governors are open to discussing how to best team with federal emergency officials."

Governors from Alabama, Delaware, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana and West Virginia also have been quoted as opposing any proposal involving the surrender of state level power to oversee evacuations, rescues, and recoveries.

"People could have taken the impression that we in Mississippi need the federal government to come in and take over what we're doing, that we need some kind of czar to tell us how to run Mississippi," Gov. Haley Barbour recently told Larry King. "We don't need that. In fact, that wouldn't help us. That would hurt us."

Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm told USA Today, "Whether a governor is a Republican or Democrat, I would expect the response would be, 'Hell no.' "

Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer added, "People in Washington, D.C. can yap all they want, but they're not going to undermine the constitution of the state of Montana."

A survey by the newspaper indicated that only two of 38 governors who responded — Republicans Gov. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts and Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota — were willing to consider Bush's idea.

"The military is not a fire department, a police department or a hospital," Perry said. "Leave first response to the first-responders."

Student finds oldest red spruce

SACKVILLE, New Brunswick — A third-year Canadian university student has found the world's oldest-known red spruce tree, but he's not telling where it is. According to CBC News, Mount Allison University student Ben Phillips discovered the tree while walking along the Bay of Fundy coast last summer. He took a core sample, and then counted all 445 rings under a high-powered microscope.

Working with a research team, he has estimated that the tree took root in 1560. Most red spruce trees have a lifespan of about 400 years. The previous record was held by a 405-year-old tree in New Hampshire.

Phillips said he is keeping its location secret because he's worried gawkers might trample on its roots, or someone might cut it down. Undisturbed, it could live many more years.

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