

Slouch By Jim Earle



"I think I made a mistake. I would have done better if I had sold them as a pair."

Conference really is 'governors' gamble'

By DAVID S. BRODER

ATLANTIC CITY — Those of us who follow the annual conferences of the National Governors Association from resort to resort are hopelessly addicted to the creation of dateline parables. When the governors were in Denver last year, they were, inevitably on a "Rocky Mountain high," and when they met a few years ago in Hershey, Pa., it was all predictably "sweetness and light."

You get the picture. It was, therefore, dictated in advance that the theme of last week's meeting in the Resorts International casino-hotel here would be "the governor's gamble." And this year, for a change, the cliché fit.

With fingers crossed, the governors offered their sometime-partners in the federal government a deal. You guys take over our share of the big income-support programs like Medicaid and Aid to Families with Dependent Children, now jointly financed by the federal and state governments, they said, and we will not squawk about your dropping federal aid to education, transportation and law-enforcement.

On paper, such a deal would be good for the governors, because the welfare programs are more costly and less popular than the ones the states would assume. But it is still a gamble, because the history of this relationship is that the feds tend to give the governors half of what they propose — the wrong half.

A year ago, for example, the governors adopted an "agenda for federalism" aimed at "sorting out" the appropriate roles of federal and state governments and cleaning out the overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities.

Last January, Ronald Reagan took them up on their invitation — but with a twist. The governors said they could accept a 10 percent cutback in federal aid, in return for the flexibility that would come with a switch from narrow categorical grants to broad block grants. Reagan immediately upped the ante by proposing cuts averaging 25 percent on the programs ticketed for consolidation.

The governors swallowed hard, but stayed in the game. Their chairman, Georgia Governor George D. Busbee, D-Ga., said he knew there were worries, "but our overall approach must be based not upon the sum total of these concerns, but on the great prize to be won if federalism could be

revived." He did say, however, at the mid-winter meeting last February, "The cuts are totally unacceptable if flexibility and relief from mandates do not arrive simultaneously. We cannot have the cuts today and the flexibility to admit to them at some vague point in the future."

Well, Reagan cut the cards and Congress dealt them. And six months later, the governors had been handed all of the cuts and a good deal less than all the flexibility. By the administration's count, Congress approved 57 of the 88 categorical grant consolidations Reagan sought — some with strings. More than 400 categoricals remain on the books.

By the governor's count, \$2.3 billion of federal aid was freed from some restraints, but more than \$11 billion of federal aid was cut.

Nonetheless, Busbee, perhaps the strongest chairman the governors have had since ex-Governor Daniel J. Evans, R-Wash., pushed and prodded his colleagues to take an even bigger flyer here.

The invitation to phase out federal aid to education, transportation and law enforcement will be seized eagerly by an administration searching for \$60 billion more in budget cuts in the next two years. But the call for federalization of welfare and Medicaid will run headlong into Reagan's long held personal and philosophical objections.

Busbee told me the gamble was worth taking because "the proliferation of categorical grants has completely stripped the states of discretion. They not only tie us down on the use of their money, they leverage the use of our own money. So I don't see that we have anything to lose."

But doubts abound among other governors. The 30-5 vote approving the Big Gamble was more a sign respect for Busbee as the retiring chairman than an expression of confidence that the states will collect on their bet.

Busbee himself acknowledged the risk when he described the intensity of the fight he led last month to defeat an administration proposal to cap federal Medicaid payments. This would have shifted an increasing share of that largest of all cash welfare programs from Washington to the states.

"You simply cannot save a buck by passing the buck," Busbee said. It is a message the governors will have to shout in unison at Washington, if the Atlantic City gamble is not to bankrupt them and their states.

Forget Medflies, lacewigs are here

By DICK WEST
United Press International

WASHINGTON — If you think the Mediterranean fruit fly is a problem, wait till the Chinese lacewig gets a toehold in this country.

Green lacewigs are among a batch of Sino-insects recently brought back from China by scientists associated with the U.S. Agricultural Research Service.

According to the Agriculture Department, the Chinese bugs "are natural enemies of some of the aphids and mites that attack cotton, tobacco, vegetables, citrus and other crops and trees in the United States."

The plan is to see what happens when the twain meet under experimental conditions. If field tests show the imported bugs help control domestic pests, they presumably will be introduced in volume to do their number.

In theory, fine. The entomologists mean well, I'm sure. "Fight bug with bug" is their credo. But we all know how the picture is

going to end, don't we?

Just as sure as God made little green neuropteroids, the scenario will take this form:

At first, the program goes along swimmingly. Millions of Chinese insects are produced in government laboratories and then turned loose in them of' cotton fields back home.

The lacewigs quickly drive off aphids and mites and other pests that damage cotton. Crops proliferate. Farmers are rolling in dough.

Now comes the pendulum's inevitable counter-swing.

Once all the bugs that eat cotton disappear, what happens to the bugs that eat bugs that eat cotton?

I mean, here is the "back 40" cotton patch teeming with millions of hungry Chinese lacewigs. Does anyone seriously believe those bugs, deprived of their natural food supply, are going to sit idly around while they waste away to mere shadows of their former selves?

You can bet you last box of sweet-sour jujubes they aren't.

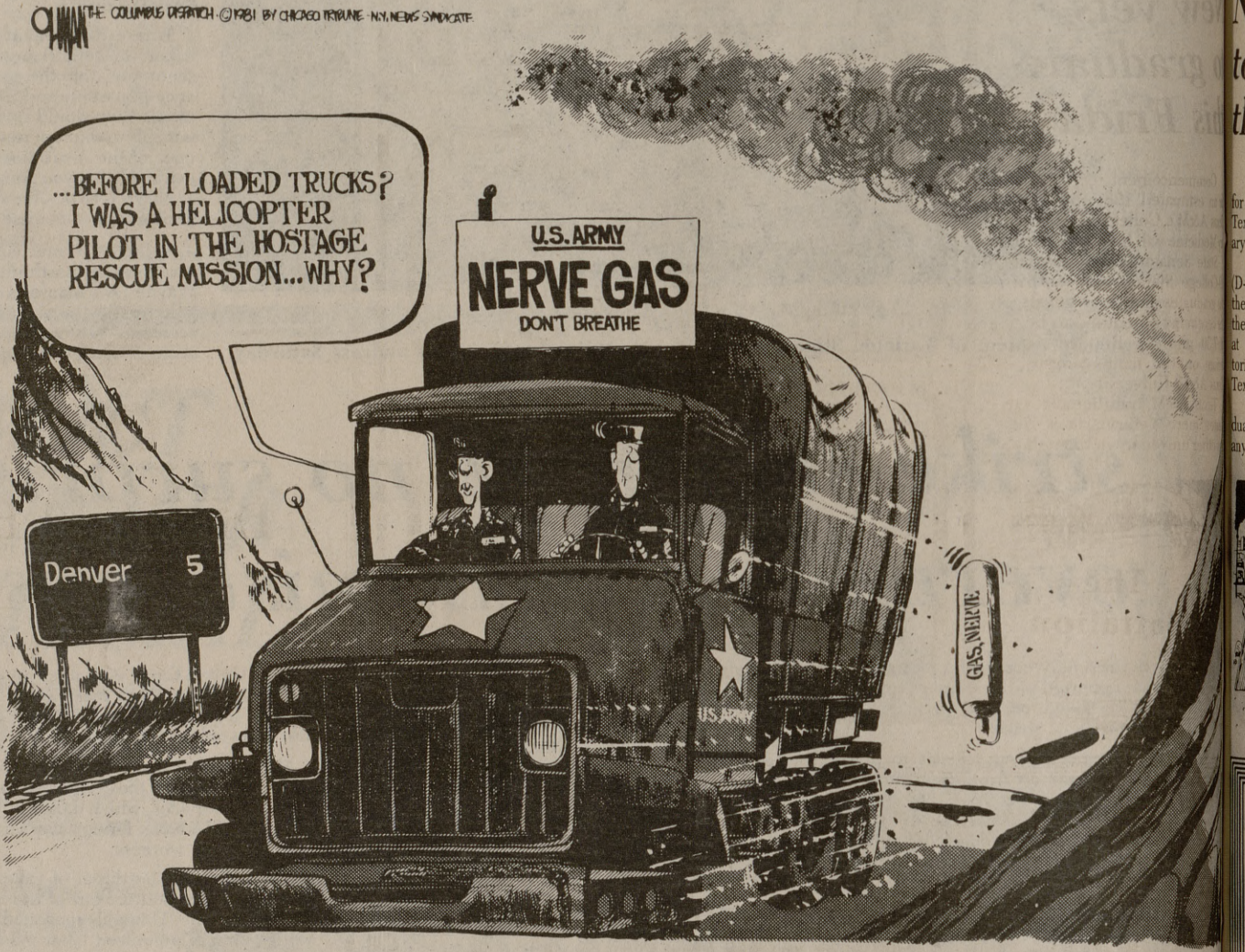
Those ravenous little creatures are going to start scouting around for alternate sources of nourishment. And you don't need a Chinese fortune cookie to tell you what the final upshot will be.

Denied their standard menu, the lacewigs will turn at mealtime to some protein that has never had bug trouble before.

What they will choose for sustenance is anybody's guess. For hypothetical purposes let's borrow trouble from their menu. Let's postulate that the protein found in toupee glue satisfies a lacewig's craving.

Imagine Dolly Parton flouncing onto the stage of the Grand Ol' Opry with a swarm of lacewigs munching her bouffant and can envision the devastating impact such insect infestation would have on national morale.

The next step, of course, would be a massive lacewig eradication program. Considering the problems we had with Medfly spraying, we may wish imports from China had stopped with eggrolls.



Reagan victorious at governors' conference

By CLAY F. RICHARDS
United Press International

WASHINGTON — The Democratic National Committee and party leaders in Congress seemed to have forgotten that governors are party officials too — so once again President Reagan marched into the void and emerged the winner.

Listening to the praise and support for Reagan at the National Governors Association summer meeting at Atlantic City made one forget that Democrats still dominate the governorships, holding a 27-23 edge over Republicans.

By a vote of 30-5, with Democrats joining Republicans in large numbers, the governors voted to forge a partnership with Reagan to negotiate a swap. The states would pay the entire cost of education, law enforcement, transportation if the federal government would pay for the "safety net" programs like Medicaid and Welfare.

The vote continued the alliance the governors began in February when they voted to support the Reagan budget cuts.

The deal was forged by Gov. George Busbee of Georgia, a Democrat who waited for a telephone call from his own party that never came.

Throughout the year, Busbee, the outgoing chairman of the governors' conference, has been courted and wooed by the White House. In planning the budget cuts, Busbee and other governors were consulted constantly on how the cuts were made and what impact they would have on the states.

When Reagan proposed putting a "cap"

on Medicaid costs — which meant the states would have to pay any cost above the cap — Busbee said no. When the governors prevailed in Congress, the administration shook hands with the victors and said let's get on with our work.

When Reagan needed votes in the House, he went to Busbee. And Georgia Democrats voted with Reagan on the crucial tax and budget cut bills. House Speaker Thomas O'Neill, sources said, never made the call to his fellow Democrat.

What the administration held out to the Democratic governors is the promise of block grants. Basically what they do is consolidate all specifically mandated federal funds into broad areas where the states have wide authority over how the money is spent.

Democrats in Congress don't want block grants, because the mandated categorical grants have created thousands of patronage jobs for Democrats across the nation.

So the Democrats in Congress and the Democratic governors were at odds and Reagan stepped in.

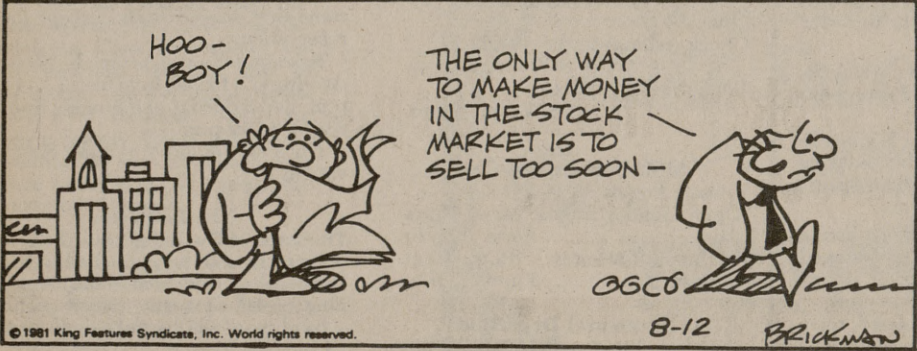
Even liberal Democrats and Reagan foes found it hard to oppose the administration at Atlantic City. Take the case of Gov. Edmund Brown of California.

Shortly before the vote on the resolution supporting Reagan, he blasted the budget cuts as a "shell game" that would only transfer financial burdens from the federal governments to the states.

Then he took off immediately for California — rather than go on record for or against the pro-Reagan resolution.

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