

FEDERAL REPORT



Unfunded federal mandates disable states, legislator says

By Greg Pierce
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Americans With Disabilities Act "is just destroying us," a Missouri state legislator told Rep. James P. Moran Jr. and Sen. Paul Simon yesterday.

Chris Kelly, chairman of the Missouri House Budget Committee and "a die-hard Democrat," made the comment during a session of the State-Federal Assembly of the National Conference of State Legislators, which is meeting in Washington this week.

Mr. Moran, Virginia Democrat, was finishing his presentation on unfunded mandates — federal laws that force state or local governments to pay the bill — when Mr. Kelly interjected, "You guys are just killing us."

Mr. Kelly said his committee has wrestled with ways to pay for the disabilities act, which mandates that facilities be made accessible to the disabled.

Mr. Moran said he was absent the day the bill was approved but probably would have voted for it.

"What you're saying is right on target," Mr. Moran said. "That's not to say ADA was not a good piece of legislation," but it has caused budgetary problems for the states.

Mr. Simon, Illinois Democrat and a co-sponsor of the law, said, "I would take a good look at the law and what people say you ought to be doing."

The senator said a school district in his home state had complained that because of the law it would have to spend \$30,000 on an elevator, but it turned out a \$580 ramp would suffice.

"We tried to make it [the law] practical," Mr. Simon said.

Mr. Kelly said he and his colleagues on the Missouri House Budget Committee had heard such stories but found there wasn't much wiggle room.

"Senator, it is the law," he said.

"I beg you, stop" the mandates, he told both men.

Earlier, Mr. Moran said there will be "some very serious problems" with unfunded mandates in the president's health care plan, but "it is absolutely impossible" to have legislation without them.

He said he favors legislation requiring that every bill include estimates of the cost to state and local governments as well as the private sector. Such estimates would operate like an environmental impact statement, he said.

The Virginia congressman, who had to deal with such mandates as

mayor of Alexandria, said they are unfair because state and local officials are so caught up in federal mandates that they can't set their own priorities.

Mr. Moran said he opposes legislation by Sen. Dirk Kempthorne, Idaho Republican, and Rep. Gary Condit, California Democrat, that would require federal funding of all mandates.

He said he has "serious questions" about the motives of those favoring the Kempthorne-Condit bill and thinks it may just be an attempt to stop federal spending.

Mr. Simon said he supports the Kempthorne bill.

Environmental groups are the most likely to oppose curbs on mandates, Mr. Moran said, because environmental laws often cost a great deal to enforce. If the unfunded costs of such bills were known, they would never get out of committee, he said.

Mr. Simon, speaking out for a balanced-budget amendment to the Constitution, said the Wall Street Journal editorial page had warned that it would lead to tax increases. The New York Times editorial page, on the other hand, warned that it would lead to spending cuts.

They're both right, the senator said.

President Al Gore leads the nation's shift to other fuels.

Mauro, chairman of the fuel conversion task force, president was a catalyst for conversion and dropped a not-so-quiet that he was ready to set

ple. Mauro said that during his time at the White House a few years ago the president "leans back" he said, "Isn't it time that I let those or ride in one of

I said, 'Yes, sir, Mr. President he said, 'Well, let's work it out,' said Mr. Mauro, who had a similar fleet conversion in Texas when he was state agriculture commissioner.

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it would be better to let the commission handle it. Matt DeFife, director of the Budget and Taxation Committee at the National Conference of State Legislatures, said the advisory commission is planning the summit opening.

— Greg Pierce

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