



EDITORIAL

Wacky idea just isn't going to sell

Article published Oct 3, 2005.

It was easier when Richard Pombo was the stealth congressman.

Back then, the Republican from Tracy was a guy who flew just near enough to the ground that he didn't attract much attention.

He still knew how to show up at just enough rubber chicken dinners to keep his name visible in the district.

Now, some members of Pombo's staff have dreamed up a Swiftian proposal: Let's sell off some national parks and sell naming rights to others.

This, it was somehow conjured up in a proposed position paper, would help raise millions of dollars we'd lose if we don't allow oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

It's just as puzzling that, suddenly, raising money for Washington is an argument for oil drilling in Alaska.

Will Rogers used to say that when he made a joke, people laughed. When members of Congress make a joke, it becomes a law.

Pombo's modest proposal is a joke, right? Well, sort of, Pombo's staff says. He has no intention of introducing his sell-some-parks bill. The congressman was trying to make a point, however tortured the logic.

Unfortunately, his point -- presumably that there are worse things than drilling in the Arctic -- is dwarfed by the high-pitched righteous indignation his goofy proposal triggered.

Were Pombo a mere backbencher from some rural district in the Midwest, he might be able to get a few yucks at the Rotary Club with his idea.

But Pombo has the very, very high profile job of chairman of the House Resources Committee. It's through that committee that virtually all of this nation's environmental laws must pass.

To have its chairman even consider such a proposal -- as a bit of fun or just to encourage some outside-the-box thinking -- gives credence to his detractors' suspicions that his trademark cowboy hat and/or companion boots are just a tad too small to allow proper blood circulation.

Here's a modest proposal for Rep. Pombo.

Members of Congress should give up their franking privilege free mail so they can use the money to offset lost revenue from not drilling for oil in the Arctic.