

Perry Fires up Anti-Tax Crowd

2009-04-17 15:27:26 by Southern

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AUSTIN, Texas



Texas Governor Rick Perry | KRIV-TV

Texas Gov. Rick Perry fired up an anti-tax "tea party" Wednesday with his stance against the federal government and for states' rights as some in his U.S. flag-waving audience shouted, "Secede!"

An animated Perry told the crowd at Austin City Hall — one of three tea parties he was attending across the state — that officials in Washington have abandoned the country's founding principles of limited government. He said the federal government is strangling Americans with taxation, spending and debt.

Perry repeated his running theme that Texas' economy is in relatively good shape compared with other states and with the "federal budget mess." Many in the crowd held signs deriding President Barack Obama and the \$786 billion federal economic stimulus package.

Perry called his supporters patriots. Later, answering news reporters' questions, Perry suggested Texans might at some point get so fed up they would want to secede from the union, though he said he sees no reason why Texas should do that.

"There's a lot of different scenarios," Perry said. "We've got a great union. There's absolutely no reason to dissolve it. But if Washington continues to thumb their nose at the American people, you know, who knows what might come out of that. But Texas is a very unique place, and we're a pretty independent lot to boot."

He said when Texas entered the union in 1845 it was with the understanding it could pull out. However, according to the Texas State Library and Archives

Commission, Texas negotiated the power to divide into four additional states at some point if it wanted to but not the right to secede.

Texas did secede in 1861, but the North's victory in the Civil War put an end to that.

Perry is running for re-election against U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, a fellow Republican. His anti-Washington remarks have become more strident the past few weeks as that 2010 race gets going and since Perry rejected \$550 million in federal economic stimulus money slated to help Texas' unemployment trust fund.

Perry said the stimulus money would come with strings attached that would leave Texas paying the bill once the federal money ran out.

South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford and Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, also Republicans, have been outspoken against the federal economic stimulus spending and were supportive of tea parties in their states. The protests were being held throughout the country on federal income tax deadline day to imitate the original Boston Tea Party of American revolutionary times.

In an appearance at the Texas Capitol last week, Perry joined state lawmakers in pushing a resolution that supports states' rights protected in the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. He said the federal government has become oppressive in its size and interference with states.

Since then, Perry has been featured on the online Drudge Report, and other conservative commentators and citizens have latched on to his words.

After praising veterans in the cheering crowd Wednesday, he said: "I'm just not real sure you're a bunch of right-wing extremists. But if you are, we're with you."

Perry said he believes he could be at the center of a national movement that is coordinated and focused in its opposition to the actions of the federal government.

"It's a very organic thing," he said. "It is a very powerful moment, I think, in American history."

For her part, Hutchison issued a newspaper opinion piece Wednesday criticizing the Democratic-led Congress for spending on the stimulus bill and the \$1 trillion appropriations bill.

"On April 15 — Tax Day — some in Congress may need a reminder of just who is underwriting this spending: the American taxpayer. I am deeply concerned over the swelling tax burden that will be imposed on all Texas families," she wrote.

The crowd at the Austin tea party appeared to be decidedly anti-Democrat. Many of the speakers were Republicans and Libertarians.

One placard said, "Stop Obama's Socialism." Another read, "Some Pirates Are in America," and it showed photographs of Obama, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid wearing pirate hats.

Rebecca Knowlton, 45, of Smithville, said she took the day off of home-schooling her three children and brought them to the rally to teach them about civic duty. Knowlton, a critic of the Social Security system and the United Nations, said she felt camaraderie at the demonstration.

"The movement is growing stronger," she said. "You're not alone."

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