This land is red land, paid for by blue land …

Let me say up-front that I’m a uniter, not a divider. But speaking as a blue-state resident, maybe I’ve been a fool.

It’s bad enough that the red states elected President Bush and sent the blues into a psychic tailspin. Bush wins: upper west side put on suicide watch reads a T-shirt in Manhattan. Shrieks in Beverly Hills say they’ve been stampeded by despairing patients. “People … pretty much believe American society is permanently destroyed,” a Washington, D.C., psychiatrist told the Los Angeles Times. Jon Stewart captured the blue zeitgeist when he mused that Bush’s ascent atop a tide of evangelicals was “their revenge for us controlling what’s on TV.”

Overwrought? Perhaps. But it’s time blue America realized it controls more than just the nation’s output of immoral culture, abortions on demand, and gay weddings. It also controls the purse strings. And that suggests a strategy.

As students of the federal budget know, the citizens of some states pay more in taxes than they get back from Uncle Sam in grants and benefits. The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan commissioned frequent studies that showed how New York was the winners—each has, on average, received more federal money than it paid in taxes over the past five years. Blue states are the losers. “R” and “D” indicate which way states voted in the presidential election.

Electoral map?

Nope, it’s a map of Uncle Sam playing favorites. Red states are fiscal winners—each has, on average, received more federal money than it paid in taxes over the past five years. Blue states are the losers. “R” and “D” indicate which way states voted in the presidential election.

Nice federal highway there, Alabama. Hate to see anything happen to it …

For blue staters, it’s one thing to watch red states pick the President and set national policy on everything from Iraq to judges. But to pay them lavishly for the pleasure suggests that blues aren’t just losers, they’re stupid losers. You can feel blue anger rising. You reds don’t like taxes? Okay, stop taking mine! You can have your states’ rights too—and we’ll start by cutting your allowance!

No wonder the hot topic in Blueland is federalism, which now seems a source of, ahem, salvation. It starts with getting red states off the blue gravy train. But “the new federalism,” as Jonathan Taplin of the University of Southern California writes, could go further.

“Ultimately,” Taplin says, “the citizens of the blue states have a right to live with clean air, efficient automobiles, good schools, honest corporations, and universal health care. Their desire to build a sustainable civilization is not a new quest.” Think of it as virtual secession without the Gettysburgs.

But I don’t really want to go there. The U.S. isn’t as divided as the hype suggests, and Moynihan himself never said state payments should be even-stevens. “There is a national idea” behind this pattern, Moynihan wrote, “which is no more and no less than that we are all in this together.”

Still, this election would have steamed even Moynihan. Red states shouldn’t even want blue money, what with it coming from gun-confiscating pinkos on their way to hell. Cutting off that tainted cash would be doing reds a favor. That’s my opening position, anyway. The jig’s up. Nice federal highway system you have there, Alabama. I’d hate to see anything happen to it …

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