

Using Federal Money to Undermine Federalism

[Damon W. Root](#) | February 13, 2012

The Cato Institute's Walter Olson highlights a little-known federal program aimed at encouraging the states to pass more restrictive swimming pool regulations in exchange for federal grant money. [As he explains](#), the end result of this and similar arrangements has been the undermining of our system of checks and balances:

This forlorn little program is a tiny and failed example of a genre of federal initiative that all too often enjoys success: using federal tax dollars to bribe states and localities into raising spending and extending regulation. The proliferation of such programs helps explain why the earlier and sounder idea of federalism — which saw the national and state governments as checking each others' overweening powers — has given way to a spirit of mutual enablement (“cooperative federalism”) at the expense of the citizenry and its freedom. Thus the Obama administration, realizing that public opinion is not yet ready for a federal-level campaign to demonize fattening and salty foods, is happy to drop millions of dollars on local governments like Mayor Bloomberg's in New York City to do exactly that. And for decades Congress has been creating programs subsidizing local hiring of teachers, police officers and other public employees — with the presumably unintended result of saddling localities with unsustainable payrolls and pension obligations when times turn tough.