

Mad money could threaten your liberty

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BALTIMORE - A friend repays you a few dollars, or you were playing a "friendly" game of cards and out popped a strange coin. It looked almost normal — Lady Liberty in gold or silver. On its face were the words "Trust in God."

Drop it in your pocket for a keepsake and you've got a conversation piece. Try spending it in the wrong place and you might have a long conversation — say maybe five years — with some guy named Bubba who has tattoos that could scare Stephen King.

It's called a Liberty Dollar, though its makers (who go by the enormous name of National Organization for the Repeal of the Federal Reserve Act and the Internal Revenue Code, or NORFED) are careful not to claim it's a replacement for U.S. coins. Liberty Dollars are backed by silver and have been around since 1998. According to the site that I won't list here, there are \$20 million in circulation.

That's where the problem starts.

Back in September, the United States Mint warned consumers that "use of these gold and silver NORFED 'Liberty Dollar' medallions as circulating money is a federal crime."

The mint, not known for going after mainstream businesses, said the coins can be confusing because they use similar terms like: "Liberty," "Dollars," "Trust in God" and even "USA." They also use images similar to real coins. NORFED pushes the dollar and even electronic dollars as alternative means of exchange because of the "depth of America's current monetary crisis."

The materials read like ones from those groups that claim you don't have to pay taxes.

It's a good clue that you should steer clear of something when the first question the Web site attempts to answer is legality. And I quote: "Is The Liberty Dollar legal?" the organization asks. Its response is, the "Liberty Dollar is absolutely 100 percent legal, lawful, and Constitutional!"

Just as long as you don't try to use it as coin of our non-realm.

Here is a sample of how the group operates. You can buy a DVD about the coins. Oops. Did I say buy? They finesse that: "This DVD is not for sale, so please donate a minimum of \$10 to cover our cost." Now, if I told you I wasn't going to sell you my Audi, but you had to donate \$35,000 to cover costs, you'd laugh, right?

That's the same deal with these coins. They aren't legal tender, but NORFED is trying to skate by on a technicality. It's like Baltimoreans deciding to use Monopoly money instead of legal

currency. Yes, NORFED would add that its dollars are backed by silver and U.S. dollars are not.

But U.S. money is backed by the United States. And I'd rather have the United States behind me than against me.

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