

Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

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An Endless, But Not Thankless, Task

By Jon Coupal and Tom Schatz

Some people ask why we bother to fight government waste and the misuse of taxpayer dollars. They see the success of our endeavor to be about as likely as that of King Knut, who, while perched on his throne at the edge of the sea, ordered the waves to cease.

We are well aware that our efforts to catalogue and broadcast government waste only scratch the surface. However, we believe publicizing government incompetence, mismanagement, and chicanery is one of the major weapons in protecting taxpayers.

Very few government officials and politicians like to receive publicity for wasting taxpayer dollars. Our goal is to use their fear of becoming the target of public ridicule to provide an added incentive for them to do the right thing in the first place.

For example, earlier this year, taxpayers publicized the questionable use of public funds by the California First Five Commission that administers programs for children. First Five spent \$18 million on television advertising to promote preschool at the *same* time that its chairman, actor/director Rob Reiner, was working to qualify his personal "Preschool for All" initiative for the ballot.

Newspaper editorial writers — and, ultimately, voters, when the measure appeared on the ballot — gave Reiner a good spanking, and an investigation by the Attorney General's office

continues. For the near future, this should discourage other officials who are tempted to divert taxpayer money approved for one purpose to another of their own choosing.

In the *2006 California Piglet Book*, published jointly by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Foundation and Citizens Against Government Waste, we focus on numerous other outrages.

The Department of Fish and Game and other agencies provided nearly 1,200 rental units to public employees charging them below market rent. This amounted to an \$8 million subsidy provided by taxpayers. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Fish and Game has announced that, beginning this month, rents will be increased by 25 percent.

For the second year in a row, we have been highly critical of a taxpayer funded program, ReadyReturn, implemented by the Franchise Tax Board to supposedly help taxpayers fill out their tax returns.

Apparently, we are not the only ones who see a conflict of interest when the organization that collects your tax payments also issues a form that says, "Here is what we think you should pay." The California Legislature has withdrawn funding for this program for the coming year.

Although progress may be slow, we do achieve victories for taxpayers that make our work a lot more satisfying than trying to com-

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mand the ocean not to wet our feet.

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TOM SCHATZ is president of Citizens Against Government Waste, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in government.

The "2006 California Piglet Book" is available online at the following:

<http://www.hjta.org> and <http://www.cagw.org>;

or may be downloaded at:

<http://www.hjta.org/content/pdf/piglet/CalPigletBook2006.pdf>.

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