We *Can* Fight City Hall And WIN

How to Form a Local Taxpayer Group

Printed by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

This booklet is dedicated to the memories of two great taxpayers advocates, Larry McCarthy of the California Taxpayers Association, and John Berthoud of National Taxpayers Union.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Washington, D.C.-based Tax Foundation California's state and local tax burden was 11.5% of income, the highest level since 1977. This amount represents a full percentage point increase over former Governor Gray Davis's last year in office in 2003. In addition, the state's "Tax Freedom Day"—when Californians have earned enough money to pay their taxes—was April 30th in 2008, third highest in the nation on a *per capita* basis. This dramatically illustrates that California is moving in the wrong direction.

While the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association is working full time in Sacramento to battle unjust taxation, much more work needs to be done at the local level.

A city or county taxpayer association can be a major force to keep taxes reasonable and local governments running efficiently. A taxpayer organization can help keep local residents informed regarding how their dollars are spent, and can be a grassroots force to root out waste and corruption and expose risky spending plans.

ORGANIZATION – First Steps

When getting started you don't need many people. Once established you can "grow" your organization. Here are some guidelines that have helped others establish successful taxpayer organizations.

Quality, not quantity: The number of people at the first meeting is not as important as having an agenda that gets people engaged. Laying out early goals and perhaps a funding source, demonstrates viability and ensures members that their time is well spent and a commitment to the organization is worthwhile.

- Who will lead? Nothing hampers a new group more than a long discussion about who the leaders should be at the first meeting. The resulting power play can cause factionalism and totally kill any motivation that prospective members had about fighting to keep taxes low. Rather, select interim officers before the first meeting, and hold elections after a year or so. This will provide plenty of time for you and your officers to present anti-tax proposals and demonstrate leadership.

- Taxes are <u>**NOT** a partisan party issue.</u> We really cannot stress this enough. Do not alienate people based on labels when you share similar goals.

- Figure out what the important issues are in the community. This will provide the organization with an early plan of action, and also demonstrate to new members that you have the pulse of local government regarding what is occurring around you.

- Decide on a name and location: Your home may be the most affordable and effective way to start the organization. If the organization becomes too big, you can always change.

- Using the contributions of your first members, open a checking account in the organization's name at a local bank. This will allow you to accept contributions at your first meeting. Designate your Treasurer and/or your Chairman as the official signatory of all checks.

- Make arrangements for three meetings before you hold the first one. This will help to ensure your longevity, and will also encourage people to support the organization quickly.

- In an age of increased legal liability and financial scrutiny of organizations, it's a smart idea to plan ahead and incorporate your group as a non-profit 501c(3) entity. The process is not as difficult as you might think, and taking the right steps now when you're starting out will save big headaches later. An excellent "do it yourself" publication on the topic is *How to Form a Nonprofit Corporation* by attorney Anthony Mancuso, which even includes the forms you'll need to file with the government and sample by laws. Order inquiries can be directed to the publisher, Nolo Press, at www.nolo.com or (800) 992-6656. Also note that a special edition has been published just for California residents.

Publicize your meeting

1. Notify as many people as you can personally. Contact any of your friends who might be interested, and ask them to do the same. Discuss taxpayer issues with the merchants and businessmen you know. Convince them of the need for a taxpayer organization and inform them of your first meeting. If applicable, you should also show up at the monthly local Chamber of Commerce mixer. These can provide a low-key atmosphere to meet local business leaders and politicians and tell them about your group.

2. Use call-in radio or TV shows and any community action outlets in your area to announce the meeting. Distribute flyers at busy stoplights or other public places, but only where permissible (check local ordinances). Write letters to the editor of your local papers.

3. Write a press release explaining the purpose of your group and announcing its formation. Include the address and phone contact number and the time and place of the first meeting. Perhaps ask to be included in a "community calendar" section of local papers, television, and radio.

4. Contact local and state representatives you feel might be supportive of a taxpayer association. They might be able to provide contacts and other resources, and they could potentially come and speak at a meeting.

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Your first meeting should be well organized, but not programmed. Outline the purpose of your local group and have proposals for projects members may want to start. Carefully gauge what people's response is to each proposal, and be open and receptive to any ideas you may not have thought of. This early brainstorming could provide the groundwork for picking a target issue your group could really latch onto.

- Before the first meeting, do some research on issues that you know are in the forefront of the community's mind, such as bonds or parcel taxes. You may want to discuss these in your introductory remarks, or depending on your audience, you may just want to focus on tax issues pertinent to small business or homeowners.

- Stress that yours is both an activist and an educational group. No matter what an individual's financial contribution, any tax insight or knowledge will be appreciated.

- Keep your agenda loose to give prospective members an opportunity for input. See what concerns are important to them, and move the conversation accordingly.

- Ultimately, these concerns may start gravitating towards an issue that is common to many. This could very well be your target issue. Since your group will likely be small at the outset, it is good to focus on one issue both to stay organized and to give your members a defined goal to shoot for. They will likely derive satisfaction from an early success, and your organization will obtain a good reputation.

- Make each member feel important by assigning responsibility to them. This will better ensure that they will return to the next meeting. Sample jobs could include: research, publicity and public relations, lobbying and government liaison, education, and fundraising. Be listening and make notes based on member participation to see what position might best suit each person

- Members might also contribute by way of special talents they have. A printer can help with printing, advertising and distribution of materials, a teacher can help with public speaking, etc. The important thing to ensure is that everybody leaves the first meeting with the feeling that he or she has something to contribute to the organization.

- While certainly a rigid timeline need not be enforced at any meeting, setting an agenda will help the group to focus its time, and allow you to remain in control of the meeting. A sample agenda could include:

City of Rabid Taxation - Agenda

7:00 pm *- Opening Remarks and Introduction of Officers (10 minutes).*

7:10 pm *- Open Discussion of Tax Problems and Solutions (30 minutes).*

7:40 pm *- Appointment of Committees and Chairmen (15 minutes).*

7:55 pm *– Discussion of each committee's purpose, and general goals (30 minutes).*

8:25 pm *- Closing of Meeting (5 minutes).*

8:30 pm *- Social period.*

If possible, see that refreshments are provided so that new members can get acquainted after the business meeting. Social ties tend to solidify an organization.

In your first meeting, then, you should lay the groundwork for a successful program of operations. Subsequent meetings should be largely informational, consisting of progress reports and suggestions for new tasks to complete. The President should be the facilitator as much as possible, trusting in his committee officers to take on and delegate assignments to hopefully zealous members. It may be good for the officers to meet informally before each meeting, just to ensure that goals and objectives are moving forward. This can also help ensure that members' time—already likely dominated by work and/or family constraints—is used effectively.

GOING PUBLIC

Once your basic organization is in place, it is important to notify politicians and other opinion leaders of your existence.

1. If it has not been done already, certainly write a letter to your representatives in the Legislature, and city and county officials as well as the governor announcing the formation of your organization within your first few meetings. Explain your concern over high taxes and wasteful spending and ask for their help in restoring fiscally responsible government. Let them know you'll be watching their performance, too.

2. Start a website explaining why your organization is needed, some possible targets for action, and a "Latest News" and "Links" section. Also provide a contact page with emails and other relevant information. To provide website interactivity, you may want to consider a blog (e.g. http://www.blogger.com). This may prove to be a

valuable sounding board and will help keep your members in better contact with each other. However, keep in mind that with a blog comes the responsibility to monitor its content.

3. If your state has a broader taxpayer association, keep them in the loop and make contacts with them. Their assistance and support will be helpful as you try to brainstorm and implement ideas.

KEEPING ON TRACK

As discussed earlier, committees can be a useful division of labor in a taxpayer group. They provide direction and personal involvement for your most active members, and they give structure to the efforts of your more casual volunteers. Some suggestions of tasks and structure for committees follow.

The Publicity Committee

Every local chapter should have a publicity committee, or at least a media relations director.

The job of those responsible for publicity is to let others know about the work the members of your chapter are doing. Here are some approaches:

- Use the letters-to-the-editor column in the local papers. (See details below.)

- Write press releases relating newsworthy information concerning your group's activities in the fight against high taxes and spending.

- Start a website and keep it updated with current information about your group and the activities you are engaging in. If you have a blog, you should regularly post thoughts there as well, to generate comments and feedback on a wide variety of issues.

- Watch and listen for TV and radio editorials on spending questions. Editorial replies are often easy to arrange.

- Take advantage of radio call-in shows.

- Use flyers for special occasions. Is there an important spending fight going on in your community? Are elections getting close? Have you formerly taken a position on ballot tax and bond measures? Tell people about this by having information printed or copied and distributed to each home.

1. Letters to the Editor

One of the most effective ways to speak up on public issues is through the letters-to-the-editor section of your newspaper. Readership surveys show that this is one of the most widely read features of any paper. Political figures in your area watch this section since it is generally a forum for political opinions and reflects the mood of the voters.

Choose Your Target Carefully. Your letter is more likely to get printed if it's responding to a recent article — don't delay. Ideally, try to get your letter out no later then the end of the next business day from when the article was published. Letters Editors like controversy, so viewpoints different from the author of that article attract their attention. But even if you agree with the points made in the article or column, you can still take issue with individuals quoted within the story.

Stick to the Facts. Your viewpoint will be stronger if you can back it up with an interesting statistic, or contrasting quote. For instance, if you choose to do a report card (see below) on your local elected leaders, you could use this data to show that perhaps they are not representing the interests of taxpayers as well as they claim to. This type of "hard" data demonstrates the fact that you are not partial; you simply let the facts speak for themselves.

Use Your Own Words — Carefully. Most papers like to see letters that are 200 words or less. This does not leave much room for rambling, wordy letters that typically find their way to the wastebasket, along with anything profane. Aim for a concise, precise statement. Remember that hundreds, even thousands, of people will be reading your letter. This might be the first exposure they get to your organization. So, appeal to people's intellect by quickly laying out the facts. Also, a well-crafted letter may serve to buoy both membership and contributions. Lastly, avoid insulting language when referring to another person. Newspapers and magazines are governed by concern over libel laws and will shy away from any hint of name-calling.

Respect the Format: Be sure to refer to the article you are responding to in your opening sentence. Find out the name of the Letters Editor if possible and address it to his or her personal attention. Faxing or e-mailing your letter can be a good idea, but ONLY if the paper has a policy of accepting letters that way. Unsolicited faxes are as good as garbage. Always use your full name and address when signing a letter to the editor.

Don't Be Discouraged. Since newspapers receive many more letters on one issue than they can possibly print, you may not get published the first time. Don't stop trying. Continue increasing your group's profile and visibility through press releases and fighting higher taxes at City Hall, and "Letters" editors will likely begin to give your comments more weight.

One very successful letter writing technique is an "open letter" to a public official. For example, you may want to begin your letter: "The following is an open letter to Mayor [name]," and proceed to ask the Mayor why he followed a certain policy. Local and even national officials have at times drafted detailed replies for publication in response to such open letters. The debate usually generates a good deal of community interest and will bring publicity to your group.

2. The Press Release

Here are some guidelines for physical format that will make your release more impressive to editors:

- Type the release on one side of an 8-1/2 x 11 piece of white paper.

- Try to use official group stationery for the release. If this is impossible, type the name and address of the organization at the top of the page.

- Below or at the very top, type the name and phone numbers of the individual in your chapter to contact for more information.

- Indicate the time when you want the story released for publication. Example: **"For immediate release"** or **"For release after 2:00 p.m., Saturday, November 3, 2001."**

- Devise a brief headline summarizing the main point of your article in a few words. Headline writing is an art; what you put at the top of your story probably will not be used on the printed headline. It is merely intended to give the editor a quick idea of the contents of your story.

- Begin the body of your story with a dateline: **Smithville, Arkansas, June 13.**

- Try to keep your release to one page in length. If you cannot fit the whole article on one page, type the word "more" beneath the last line and continue on to the second sheet.

- Use the symbol **-30-** to indicate that you have finished the release.

Your news release should follow the style of a straight news story, with the essence of your message placed in the first paragraph (called the "lead" by journalists). Subsequent paragraphs should contain other pertinent information in order of descending importance.

The lead should contain information that is newsworthy and of interest to the general public. Some journalism texts advise that a news lead should contain the five W's (who, what, where, when and why). Try to tailor your release for the intended media audience. For instance, if your city intends to hike taxes on business, you may want to insert a quote from an outraged city business owner. Your "lead" paragraph should certainly explain why business owners are upset and what your group intends to do about it (why you are writing the press release).

If you're dealing with a limited number of media sources, it's a good idea to contact reporters by phone prior, or immediately after, sending your release. When possible, try to get your release to the reporter most likely to write a story about it. For example, if speaking at City Council, talk to the Council beat writer.

Remember that reporters are often very busy at certain times of the day when copy deadlines are approaching. When calling to alert a reporter to a story regarding an event that will take place at a fixed time, call early in the morning at least three days before the event if possible; be brief, informative and enthusiastic.

A final word about press releases. Like any tools, they can become dull if overused. Remember that press releases are intended to report breaking news — they shouldn't necessarily be used to inform the media of routine leadership changes in your group, or to convince them of the merits of your anti-tax stance. Consider other ways to work with the media:

Meetings with Editors and Editorial Boards. Issues that require a lot of background might be better explained through a briefing session involving one or two representatives from your group and the Editor or Editorial Board of your local paper. Be prepared to answer a lot of questions. Editorial Boards often function as decision-making committees that determine whether or not the paper will take a position on a given issue and write an editorial about it. In addition, such a meeting could garner favorable press for your organization later on down the line regarding a host of issues.

Op-Eds. If you have an opinion on an important issue that requires greater elaboration than a letter to the editor permits, consider writing a commentary article of your own for submission to a local paper's commentary page. They are usually 500-750 words in length, and should be written with the same rules in mind for letters. While longer commentaries are less likely to be published, many papers are good about offering space for a longer opposing viewpoint on an editorial or separate column recently written. Many papers even reserve space in their Sunday editions for precisely this purpose.

Mailing Lists. Be sure that members of the media, especially on the local level, receive complimentary copies of your newsletter. An occasional short, handwritten cover note attached to the newsletter is a nice touch that can call the reporter's attention to a specific item of interest.

3. Newsletters

A newsletter is an excellent way to both gain publicity and to keep in touch with your group members and contributors. You can use it to report on group activities and projects. It can also be used as a forum for members to express their ideas about taxpayer issues and can serve as a good piece of introductory literature that you can send to prospective members. It is an inexpensive and effective way to make your group appear more professional.

Your first task with respect to the newsletter is to find an Editor. He or she should be someone who is a good writer and who is familiar with the various personalities and projects of your group.

How frequently your newsletter is published depends on your finances. With a little creativity you can produce 200-300 copies of a good six-page newsletter for under $100. With first class postage, your total cost could be roughly $200.

Your newsletter should be sent regularly to members of your County or City Council, your Mayor or County

Executive, your Representatives in the State Legislature, and all major and minor newspapers in your county or city. Don't neglect local all-news radio stations and talk shows. They thrive on news like the kind you have to offer.

Another major advantage of a group newsletter is that inactive members are drawn into a more active role. Try to ensure that those who actively participate are recognized accordingly.

Lastly, once you get your newsletter started, you may desire to pursue advertisements to help increase revenue. Particularly if your distribution is small, a few ads could allow you to at least break even on production costs, allowing you to save your money for other crucial projects.

4. Website and E-mail

One of the best ways to offer nearly instant information on your group to interested citizens is to start an Internet website. In the past five years, even smaller city and/or county level taxpayer associations have set up their own websites. Check out, for example, **www.thetaxwatchers.org**, which is the website for the Central Solano Citizen/ Taxpayer Group.

Although you may worry about taking the time and trouble to establish your group's presence on the Internet, it is not nearly as difficult as you would think. Office supply stores and computer software outlets offer all kinds of programs that will assist you in designing and organizing information for a website. You can also purchase software that will allow you to quickly convert documents to the proper format for posting online. For a small fee you can register the name of your website.

Some groups even allow prospective members to make donations online through a secure server. This arrangement costs a little more, but can pay for itself by offering added convenience. Others simply have an online form that citizens can download, print, fill out, and then mail with a contribution.

Be sure to choose an address that is easy to remember as well as descriptive of your mission. You can use a simple phrase such as "www.smithvilletaxpayers.org," or your group's acronym if it's catchy enough. Some groups have set up separate websites on hot legislation or ballot proposals, such as "www.cutcartaxes.org" or "www.YESonProposition2.org."

Don't forget to include on your site any links to other Internet pages with useful information for taxpayers. Examples would include local election boards, the county property assessor, and any allied organizations such as the ones listed at the end of this booklet.

An additional benefit for your group's Web presence is the ability to build an "e-mail distribution network" among your own members and concerned citizens.

Over time, you can compile a list of e-mail addresses that may include organization members, local businesses, and other friendly taxpayer groups to whom you can send important legislative updates, requests to contact elected officials, and any of your group's news releases, policy papers, report cards, etc.

Committees

The Lobbying and Governmental Liaison Committee

Members of this committee should be articulate, well versed in current events, and have time to devote to meetings and research. A large part of their job will be to meet with Town Council members, State Legislators, members of Congress, and other officials. Depending on the size of your group, you may want to have a specific member who will volunteer to keep track of your Representative, one for each of your U.S. Senators, and others for your local government officials. Place the most emphasis upon the areas that concern your members most.

For example, if local taxation and/or bonds are an issue, try to mobilize your lobbying committee to keep track of City Council hearings, and perhaps appoint one member to go testify on the proposal in question.

However, you also should be working behind the scenes as much as possible to try and kill legislation. This can include meeting with a councilmember or staff person to amend bad language, or explain why the proposal will not help taxpayers. If applying pressure in these ways fails to work, analyze carefully what chance the bill has of passing. If the likelihood is high, you should probably coordinate with your media committee and do a press release and try to schedule interviews. Often, when tax increases are exposed to the light and citizens can clearly see how they will personally be impacted, these proposals will go down to defeat.

If the ordinance threatens to get out of committee in spite of your best efforts, call your representatives and tell them that you oppose the pending legislation and will be watching in hope that they will vote against it. Certainly on the local level, a small number of calls could have a dramatic and positive impact.

However, even if the proposal is not likely to pass, don't ignore it. Depending on the individual that introduced the measure, it may be wise to continue to chide him or her for introducing legislation that failed to benefit taxpayers. At the very least, if you decide to do a report card, certainly include these types of bills in your scoring process, as they will increase visibility for your organization.

For broader state and federal issues, your organization should not feel overwhelmed by the bureaucracy to the point where you don't feel like you can effectively engage. Any of your members can send emails, write letters, or make phone calls to their elected representatives. You certainly should not assume that government officials do not have the time to take inquiries or complaints seriously, and that they are concerned with more important business. The first and foremost business of any elected official is to get himself re-elected, and to do so, he must constantly extend himself to his constituents. Reading their letters and messages and responding in a timely manner is one of a successful politician's top priorities. It is up to you to make sure that sound spending policy is represented in their mail.

While postal service letters are always a sound way to communicate with elected officials, the Information Age has introduced many new ways, including fax and email, to interact with elected officials. However, as with any communications method, there are easy mistakes to make that make it less likely you will get a response. Just because communication is now easier then ever doesn't mean it should be trivialized or provide an excuse for misspelled words or bad grammar. Also, note that most offices do not respond to e-mails if the message does not include a regular postal address to verify the residency of the writer.

Regardless of your method, offices prefer to see “raw” communication, meaning personal messages that are not canned. If you do send a form letter, expect to receive a form letter in return, if you receive a response at all. While legislators certainly will catalog and make note of all the responses they receive, it is unlikely they will generate a unique response to the thousands of form letters they receive annually.

Whatever method your members use to contact elected officials, here are some suggestions for writing to them:

- Use the legislator’s full name and spell it correctly.

- Write or type legibly.

- Never use abusive language; do not discredit your cause.

- Come to the point immediately. When possible, give the bill number and the title of the legislation in which you are interested.

- Make your letter personal. Give reasons for your stand in your own words.

- Ask intelligent questions in your letter. Request the legislator’s opinions on the points you have raised.

- Write about one subject at a time. Stick to the point — your letter should not be a long list of gripes.

- Do not write just for the sake of writing. Write only when you have a serious point to make and sound evidence to support your argument.

- Enclose any relevant information, such as supportive newspaper clippings or press releases.

- Know on which committees your representatives serve. Write a letter about a bill as soon as it is introduced into committee. Write again when it reaches the floor for a vote.

The lobbying committee is not solely concerned with high-level elected officials. If your chapter is working on an educational issue, send a representative to School Board meetings. Open Town Council meetings should always be attended by an active member of your chapter who will identify himself as a member of your organization and voice the taxpayers' point of view. Visits to agencies making recommendations about their budgets might also be appropriate, more for information gathering than influence. The lobbyist must know what he is working against, as well as for.

Make your members appear to represent as large a segment of the population as possible. If you have twelve members who are willing to attend a school board meeting or an open hearing, let one of them enter and speak as your representative. Have the others sit in other parts of the hall, and have them speak independently, as though they had never known one another. This way, the impression is one of a much larger sentiment of active opposition to waste.

Lastly, the government liaison committee will also most likely be in charge of your group's "report card" and other special projects, including a waste, fraud, and abuse booklet covering state and/or local misuse of taxpayer dollars.

The Political Action Committee ("PAC")

Your group may decide to take a strong stand for the election or defeat of a candidate, for the passage or defeat of a referendum question, or for the passage or defeat of a bond issue. Forming a PAC can be an effective way to directly impact public policy, public spending, or the election of a candidate. Taxpayer groups have commonly used PACs for these purposes. Contact your State Election Board or Federal Election Commission for further information.

The Fundraising Committee

Paying for the activities of a citizen group is not always easy. However, in tandem with willing and devoted members able to sacrifice and nights and weekends, even a small amount of resources can pay off great dividends.

The first money in the treasury of a citizen action group usually comes from passing the hat at an organizing meeting, but you can't last long on this funding, especially if you intend to start a newsletter or website. The second source is from dues-paying memberships. If able, perhaps you can reward these members with the I.D. card or other perk. At the very least, work to show in tangible ways that the money given is resulting in lower taxes and less government intrusion.

A membership drive targeting where the need is greatest (e.g., business owners to fight against a business tax, or homeowners against a parcel tax) is a great way to solicit funds quickly. Major donors who support limited government should also be approached. A contribution of even $100 could go a long way toward covering the cost of your membership drive, printed literature, publicity mailings, and newsletters. Other promotional items such as buttons, books, bumper stickers, T-shirts, posters, or greeting cards are also cheap if bought in bulk, and can serve as not only a valuable fundraising tool, but provide additional means to get your message out. Larger events such as raffles, garage sales, scrap drives, block parties and benefit concerts can also bring in money, show the community that you have a statement to make and increase visibility and membership. The organizing committee should check into pertinent laws and obtain necessary permits, if needed.

Future Projects for Your Group

State or Local Legislative Ratings.

A rating of your lawmakers or "Report Card" is a very cost-effective way to not only have an impact on policy, but also bring good publicity to your group.

First Steps. In preparing ratings of state or local Legislators, there are three critical points to keep in mind:

1. The purpose of your rating is to provide fair, objective, and quantitative information. Those politicians opposed to tax increases will quickly surface if a solid methodology is used.

2. The rating must be free from errors. Just one or two errors on votes or calculations can damage or destroy your credibility with the media and lawmakers. 3. The votes selected should reflect only taxpayer issues, and must never be influenced by extraneous issues such as social mores or partisan politics.

Selecting Votes. Your rating should have a clear intent and focus. This means that the person/persons selecting votes and preparing the rating must have a full understanding of your organization's goals and legislative procedures, and must thoroughly research all roll-call votes. Also ensure that you sent out position letters to all legislative committees as the bill moved throughout the legislative process. If a legislator loses a perfect report card score because you included a bill you never took a position on, the credibility of your organization will take a hit.

Also, a rating should include a reasonable selection of votes. For instance, of the 49 bills HJTA used in its 2007 report card, well over 80% represented either a direct tax increase or a tax masquerading as a fee. In addition, a majority were heard in both legislative houses.

Methodology. Many different methodologies can be used for tabulating votes. In past years, HJTA has simply totaled up the sum of all the votes, divided by 100, and then multiplied by the number of positive votes. Abstentions are given half credit, by multiplying the sum percentage by the number of abstentions and dividing by two. The two totals are then added together for the final score.

In 2007, HJTA spent a little bit of time seeking to overhaul our methodology. Upon review of five different alternatives, we determined that our current system was still the simplest way to communicate these scores to our Members. However, we did take the chance to add some new wrinkles. Earlier in the year we had constructed a list entitled HJTA "Taxpayer Traps" a list of over 20 bills that we deemed to be most detrimental to the interests, and wallets, of our Members. All of these bills were included in our report card, and we double weighted those votes to reflect the increased significance of these bills.

Regardless of the method used, your rating should include a brief (introduction including the following information:

- A description of your organization.
- The purpose of the rating. For example, "to inform taxpayers of how their elected officials perform on reducing taxes, spending, and government waste."
- A description of how votes were chosen and of the methodology used.
- How an individual can identify and contact his or her Legislator.

Publication and Distribution. A rating is useless if no one sees it. Once a voting study is finished, a serious public relations effort should be made to get it to members of the media, members of your organization and the Legislators in the rating. HJTA makes a concerted effort to do this by sending our "Report Card" *Taxing Times* issue to our 200,000 Members, all of the Legislators' Capitol offices, and publishes a general release for the media.

Tax Limitation.

Some of the most successful taxpayer groups have attempted to limit taxes through direct democracy, including taking anti-tax measures directly to the ballot.

California has provisions in its constitution for citizen initiatives. A provision in an HJTA-sponsored initiative, Proposition 218 passed in 1996, allows for citizens to place a local initiative on the ballot to repeal fees and assessments they feel are unjust or too expensive. A group would merely have to collect signatures from a number of registered voters equaling five percent of the number of voters within the district who participated in the last gubernatorial election to place a measure on the ballot. Please contact HJTA for more information on how to begin this process.

Tax and Bond Issues.

Fighting a tax or bond referendum is an excellent project for your group. Your research committee should investigate each local or state bond issue to determine its cost to the taxpayer. Both immediate and long-term costs should be considered. Examples could include increased parcel taxes, or a bond proposal that is particularly egregious.

After the proper research has been done, you should launch a publicity campaign on the issue. See if there are already opposition groups present, and coordinate with them. Other ways to get the word out could include advertisements in your local newspapers, or appearances on local radio talk shows.

A FINAL WORD

This pamphlet was designed to give you a basic blueprint for starting a taxpayer organization in your area. It is by no means exhaustive. If you remain committed to keeping the tax revolt alive, HJTA wants to meet you halfway. We can provide detailed advice on nurturing your organization, and making it a force to be reckoned with in local politics. HJTA fully recognizes that local taxpayer groups are the first line of defense that keeps us from paying even more taxes and bond debt. We would likely not learn of these proposals as early as we do without your diligence. Though we are a large organization, HJTA cannot be everywhere at once. For this reason, we are so thankful for the tremendous support offered by taxpayer groups. Help us to keep the pressure on those who would raise our taxes and increase government interference in our lives!

For additional information, contact:

Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association
921 11th Street, Suite 1201
(916) 444-9950
info@hjta.org

Useful websites for other ideas and issues:

Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association: http://www.hjta.org

National Taxpayers Union: http://www.NTU.org

THOMAS Congressional Database: http://thomas.loc.gov

National Conference of State Legislators:
http://www.ncsl.org

Citizens Against Government Waste: http://www.cagw.org

Pacific Research Institute: http://www.pacificresearch.org/

Reason Foundation: http://www.reason.com/

About the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

The Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association was founded by Howard Jarvis and his wife Estelle in 1978 following the passage of Proposition 13. Since that time, it has become the largest grassroots anti-tax organization in California. HJTA, a non-partisan, non-profit organization, represents 200,000 Members interested in reducing taxes and wasteful government spending.

HJTA Members who contribute $15 or more receive the following:

- A personalized Membership card
- A subscription to our newsletter, *Taxing Times*
- Enrollment in our Legislative Update Network, so you'll stay on top of fast-breaking developments in Sacramento and Washington that affect your taxes.
- Regular correspondence from Jon Coupal, the Association's President, on HJTA-sponsored tax-fighting projects and ballot initiatives
- Your dues also make you a Member of the American Tax Reduction Movement (ATRM), the Howard Jarvis national organization that fights tax increases across the country.

HJTA Membership Application

YES! I want to help. Please enroll me immediately as a Member of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. I understand that I must contribute at least $15 to receive the above benefits for one year.

Please print this form, fill it out and mail it along with your check.

Member Information:

Name:____

Address:____

City:__________________ State:____ Zip:_________

Phone:_________________________________(optional)

E-Mail:________________________________(optional)

Amount Enclosed:

Online sign-up fee* (__ members x $15 each) $_____

Additional Contribution* $_____

CHECK TOTAL $_____

Mail To: **Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association**
921 11th Street, Suite 1201
Sacramento, CA 95814

For further information, visit HJTA's website at www.hjta.org or call (916) 444-9950.

Please note: *Contributions to the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association are not deductible as charitable contributions.*