

## **Public Fed Up With Government Waste** **By Jon Coupal and Tom Schatz**

At a time when many of us are stuffed with leftover turkey, some politicians are still helping themselves to heaping plates of bacon. Pork is a ubiquitous government specialty and the worst form of waste and misuse of our tax dollars.

Whether it is an unneeded local project to pump up a lawmaker's re-election campaign, a duplication of effort at the state level due to mismanagement, or paying too much for service because of lax oversight, the cost is put on the taxpayers' tab.

To focus the public's attention, and that of our representatives, on need to change the way the State of California and its local governments do business, Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) and the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Foundation (HJTF) have teamed up again this year to produce the *2004 California Piglet Book*. The booklet, which provides particular examples of misspending totaling \$12.9 billion, has been released at an especially appropriate time.

When the new Legislature settles in after the first of the year a great debate will begin over spending and the reorganization of the government. Hovering over this struggle, like a cloud of doom, will be the ongoing structural budget deficit of \$8 billion.

When CAGW and HJTF released the first *Piglet Book* in the middle of the recall election campaign last year, it came with advice. We recommended that whoever became governor establish a private-sector commission to make recommendations on how to eliminate wasteful spending.

As a model, we pointed to the Grace Commission established by President Reagan. Headed by J. Peter Grace, the co-founder of Citizens Against Government Waste, the commission made 2,478 recommendations to eliminate waste, mismanagement and inefficiency in Washington, equaling a potential savings of \$424 billion.

And just as important, the commission proved that even a recalcitrant legislative body could be brought into line.

One of the most successful ideas implemented from the Grace commission was the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which overcame Congress's inability to close obsolete military bases, when they were considered individually, by wrapping them all up into one omnibus bill.

Someone was listening because shortly after taking office, Governor Schwarzenegger announced his intention to "blow up the boxes," that is, to streamline the state government's archaic structure to eliminate duplication and inefficiency. To this end, he established the California Performance Review Commission to provide a detailed reform blueprint.

Now the governor's commission has completed its work and he has been provided with a menu of reforms that could save taxpayers as much as \$32 billions over the next five years. As the governor is deciding which reforms he supports so that he can press the Legislature to make the long overdue changes, our hope is that the governor can use the information in the *Piglet Book* for additional leverage.

He can remind lawmakers that since the 1950s, California has experienced a tripling of population, while the California state government has increased fivefold during that same time period. He can also ask them to weigh the significance of the fact that private-sector workers earn 25 percent less, on average, than state government workers.

The *Piglet Book* provides enough examples of government waste that all but the most cynical of officeholders should feel a sense of shame.

The governor must tell lawmakers the public is losing both confidence and patience. Business as usual will not be tolerated. If they do not choose to be part of the solution, they will be considered a part of the problem and, ultimately the people may elect to circumvent the Legislature to achieve reform through the initiative process.

However, even faced with stark reality, some politicians won't want to focus on the harm caused by wasteful spending and the failure to make good use of taxpayers' dollars, because they fear that this will change government's emphasis from serving people to frugality for frugality's sake. They would do well to consider these words from Calvin Coolidge's inauguration address:

*I favor the policy of economy, not because I wish to save money, but because I wish to save people. The men and women of this country who toil are the ones who bear the cost of Government. Every dollar that we carelessly waste means that their life will be so much the more meager. Every dollar that we prudently save means that their life will be so much the more abundant. Economy is idealism in its most practical form.*

The failure by our elected officials to alter their spendthrift mentality should carry the most severe of political consequences.

*Jon Coupal is president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. Tom Schatz is the president of Citizens Against Government Waste, which also publishes the Congressional Pig Book and Prime Cuts, both dealing with federal government pork and waste. Copies of the both the 2003 and 2004 California Piglet Books can be downloaded from HJTA at [www.hjta.org/pigletbook2004.htm](http://www.hjta.org/pigletbook2004.htm) or from CAGW at [www.cagw.org](http://www.cagw.org).*