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**Michael Jacoby Brown**  
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## The Taxpayers' Money

by Michael Jacoby Brown

Like many who believe government can be a force for good, I have worked for government funded efforts and non-profits all my life. But a funny thing happened along the way.

Many years ago I received contracts to train State agency personnel. One paid me to train community health workers to stop smoking in low-income neighborhoods. One contract included thousands of dollars and several days to write a curriculum that no one else would use and then provided only half a day to train a worker in community organizing skills. They hired a young middle class woman fresh out of college to work in white, working class South Boston. No way could she be effective in South Boston with only a half day of training.

Then I was asked to train over 50 staff from the State Dept. of Public Health in how to run meetings *by consensus*. We had a room of over 50 people and only two hours to "train" this large group in a very complex process. There was no way we could do this. They paid us, but it was a waste of taxpayers' money.

I trained the community workers in about 10 Massachusetts cities to develop community "coalitions" to combat drug and alcohol abuse. Some



were very well run and hired competent people. Some were incompetent and/or corrupt. At Boston Against Drugs, for example, a staff member knew nothing about drug addiction. I couldn't figure out how he got the job, until he told me, "I did West Roxbury for the Mayor."

### **Government is not all good.**

Now patronage hiring of incompetent people is not new... ("To the victor go the spoils," harks back to 1829 and the Andrew Jackson administration.) And those who want to cut taxes and government spending have some valid points... There IS waste and corruption in government and if we defend that corruption and inefficiency, we play into the hands of those who want to get rid of **all** government spending. Denying that some government spending is corrupt or inefficient is dumb and indefensible.

Years ago I told these stories at a State-wide annual meeting of social services providers. I emphasized that unless the "liberals" focused on getting rid of the corruption and inefficiency that **did** exist, they risked big tax cutting measures sweeping away the good with the bad. They stopped inviting me to deliver this news and a few years later a big state-wide tax cutting referendum passed.

I was reminded of this when I read, [The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker](#), by Katherine J. Cramer of the University of Wisconsin. Cramer interviewed hundreds of rural voters in Wisconsin and shows how their resentment of the State government, and particularly the "well paid" government workers fueled the vote to elect Scott Walker as Wisconsin's Governor, who went on to repeal collective bargaining rights for most State workers.

The rural voters are proud of their "hard working" culture and resent the State workers' benefits (early retirement at 70% of pay at age 55) They compare State pay and benefits with what they have to put up with - hard, often physically exhausting work, low pay and high health care costs.

The rural voters were also angry at the State Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) with whom they came into frequent contact. Sometimes DNR was disrespectful - like when they ran a gas powered boat onto a lake posted only for electric motors, and then laughed when a local protested the harm to the loons on the lake. DNR also did an expensive study to see if fish always came back to a certain area of the lake - which any local angler could have told them.

Government employees need to listen to people and not to get too far away from those they serve. Former Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire understood this when he began his "Golden Fleece Award," to point out corruption in government spending. As I work on election campaigns, I am reminded that we have to call attention to how and where we spend our taxpayer's money if we are going to have trust in government and those who serve in it.

## Feedback Welcome

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

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**Michael Jacoby Brown Story**

### Who else you will hear from.....

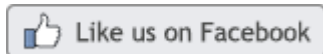
We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

- Jessica Tang**: Boston Teachers Union, AFT
- George Luse** of the Mass Teachers Assn,
- Scott Reed** with the PICO Network, ,
- Cathy Howell**, in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,
- Caesar McDowell** of the Interaction Institute for Social Justice,
- Diana Bell** of Community and Labor United,
- David Hernandez** of the California Education Assn,
- Attica Scott**, State Rep Louisville, Kentucky
- Bob Van Meter** with the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Boston,
- Walter Davis**, of the Tennessee, Health Care Coalition.
- Debra Askenase**, of Community Organizing 2.0,
- Deb Fastino**, of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,
- Rebecca Gutman**, with SEIU-1199,
- Tim Dean**, of SEIU-1199,
- Mary Ochs**, long time organizer in Los Angeles  
and others, hopefully, including YOU

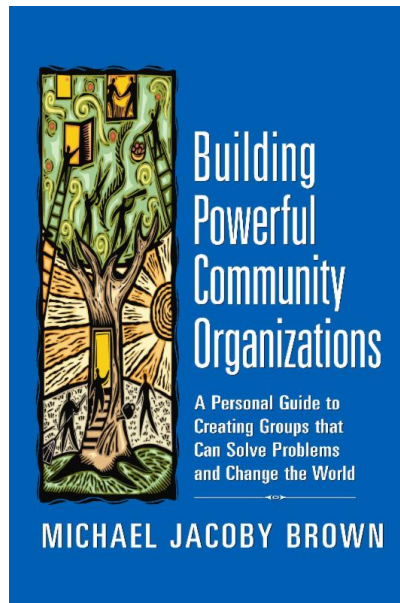
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