

Nonprofiteers

*How to lobby like a corporation
and pay taxes like a charity*

by David Shenk

A brief role-play exercise: Let's say you can't stand Jesse Jackson. You've seen the man on TV, rabble-rousing in verse, and you wish you could take him on, just tell him to shut up. But you're a working stiff of modest means. What could you possibly do that would have any effect?

One day a letter drops through your mail slot. An "alert" message on the envelope catches your eye. "Jesse Jackson wants you to pay his salary and \$3.5 million in benefits." Inside, a letter from the American Conservative Union (ACU) reads, "Jesse Jackson has never been elected to any legitimate office. And outside of Washington, he probably never could be. So he and his liberal friends have launched a campaign to make crime-ridden and corrupt Washington the 51st state. . . . Jesse wants power. . . . And Jesse often gets what Jesse wants."

Your blood stirs. You always knew that guy was up to no good. Whatever they want you to sign, you'll sign. Maybe even throw in a cash contribution, *if* you can write it off.

But then you see the fine print—"Contributions are not tax deductible." Jeez—don't they have tax deductions for pornographic art and other filth? Why not for this?

Just in case, you phone the ACU:

"Hi, are donations to the ACU tax deductible?"

"To the ACU Foundation, they are."

"Well, um, I just got a mailing concerning Jesse Jackson and statehood. . . . I noticed it says that donations to that project are not tax deductible. But is there any way I could give money to it so that it *would* be tax deductible?"

"Well, you could give to the ACU Foundation, which provides most of the research for that project, finding out quotes and stuff like that."

David Shenk is a Washington writer. Research assistance was provided by Jennifer Bradley, Eric Konigsberg, and Dan Rocconi.