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The Price Of Government: Getting The Results We Need In An Age Of Permanent Fiscal Crisis

THE PRICE OF
GOVERNMENT

Getting the Results We
Need in an Age of
Permanent Fiscal Crisis

DAVID OSBORNE & PETER HUTCHINSON

A Common Sense Approach To:

- Squeezing more value out of every tax dollar
- Building budgets from the ground up, based on results
- Making public organizations accountable for results
- Using competition to boost innovation and save money
- Putting government's customers in the driver's seat



Synopsis

Government is broke. The 2004 federal deficit is the highest in U.S. history. The states have suffered three years of record shortfalls. Cities, counties, and school districts are laying off policemen and teachers, closing schools, and cutting services. But the fiscal pain won't go away, and the bankrupt ideologies of left and right offer little guidance. *The Price of Government* presents a radically different approach to budgeting—one that focuses on buying results for citizens rather than cutting or adding to last year's spending programs. It advocates consolidation, competition, customer choice, and a relentless focus on results to save millions while improving public services.

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Customer Reviews

The Price of Government was written by the same pair of government officials that brought us the original primer *Reinventing Government: How The Entrepreneurial Spirit Is Transforming The Public Sector*. The authors, David Osborne and Peter Hutchinson, are both long-time state government officials that tried to place their ideas for better governing into books. This one alleges to find ways to make government more accountable and efficient in what the authors called the "age of permanent fiscal crisis." The moniker is commentary on the federal budget deficit that has limited

value in the book that principally uses examples from state, municipal and city government, all of which must have balanced budgets every year. This oversight is the first of many in this book and hardly the most blatant. Osborne and Hutchinson traverse now familiar territory in five sections called "Smarter Budgeting," "Smarter Sizing," "Smarter Spending," "Smarter Management" and "Smarter Leadership." Each section has a few chapters focused on the authors' ideas backed up by examples some municipality, state or the federal government used. By now, many of the ideas proposed in the book -- from schools of choice to zero-based budgeting (or putting all your priorities in a list and funding them from the top down, then quitting when you run out of money) have been discussed, dissected and even tried by governments all over the place. As a 27-year state government employee in big human services state departments, I found no idea in this book that hasn't at least once been discussed or tried by government.

There is no question today that governments-at all levels-are in dire fiscal straits. Years of political maneuvering, wasteful spending, mismanagement, and an economic roller-coaster have taken their toll. While wonderful innovation has been seen in a number of government agencies at the federal, state, and local level, most have a very long way to go. The resistance to change must be overcome if we are to avoid widespread bankruptcy of the very organizations that we, as taxpayers and citizens, rely on for shared services and support. Change is a community effort, not just something to be delegated to a few elected or appointed officials. But the work to be done is akin to hugging a hippopotamus...especially if the animal doesn't want to be hugged! The authors are consultants-which could be considered good news or bad news. In this case, it's good news. They are founder and senior partner of Public Strategies Group, a firm specializing in the field of improving government. Osborne is author of the best-seller, "Reinventing Government." These authors have the credentials that cry out how valuable their book might be. The five sections of the book organize their huge volume of information, commentary, and advice: Smarter Budgeting, Smarter Sizing, Smarter Spending, Smarter Management, and Smarter Leadership. Through fifteen chapters the authors describe what's been happening, the impact, what changes could-or should-be made, and what benefits will result. There are no illustrations in this book-a few charts; it's straight text in page after intriguing page. Tremendous content that can be absorbed in a straight-through read or studied in a reference book fashion. Community leaders will find an incredible amount of material to work with in these pages.

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There is no doubt that money needs to be well-spent, especially when discussing money managers such as our state and national government officials. As a "customer" of this government, I'm looking for solutions, yet finding more problems. The Price of Government not only identifies those problems, but offers solutions. The premise remains the same- what are Americans willing to pay for the services that we need? The authors review not only America's history of taxation, but introduce components from other sources. Such sources are countries where governmental systems are more effective than ours, and sometimes also citing an example of ineffectiveness followed by review and suggestion. Overall, this book is a valuable source for those who have an interest as to where their tax dollars are being spent. The authors suggest that all Americans should be more well-informed before they vote. After reading many reviews of this text, I believe the authors may wish to re-visit this idea. America wants results. There is a great deal of practical suggestions about moving toward a practical performance-based system. I believe that we are beginning to see this and use of the internet helps average citizens gain information we would not have had access to a decade ago. What I especially enjoyed about this book was that it wasn't just shock and awe... we're going downhill heading for doom, etc. The authors state the obvious- that we've spent more than we have and there needs to be accountability for the money customers provide.

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