

This just in: Romney paid the taxes he owed, not the taxes some of us think he should have owed!

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It's not what the headlines are highlighting, but [Mitt Romney's 2010 tax return](#) includes one impressive fact: his charitable contributions amounted to \$7 million. I know, this hardly put him at risk of losing one of [his houses](#) and ending up out on the street till his driver could pick him up and take him to one of his other houses. Still, giving away almost a third of your income is nothing to sneeze at.

Romney's charitable deductions of course reduced his tax liability, which was already low because his income was mostly from investments, not wages. But while it's a crime for a multi-millionaire to owe less than 14 percent in federal taxes, it's not Romney's crime. I actually think his response at the debate last night was about right: "I pay all the taxes that are legally required and not a dollar more." So do Newt Gingrich, Rick Santorum, Ron Paul and Barack Obama. So does Warren Buffett, his detractors' [mocking proposals](#) aside. And so do I.

I believe that government can be a force for good, so I pay my taxes with pride. But I don't support *everything* the government spends money on (does anyone?), and I believe as well in the nonprofit sector's capacity as a change agent. So when I can afford a voluntary contribution, I write the check not to the IRS but to an organization with a mission I wholeheartedly support.

Separate from the question of which government spending you don't like and which nonprofits you do, isn't this pretty much what people do?

I'd like to see people like Romney pay higher taxes, and I'd like to see that money spent on job programs, the social safety net and investment in clean energy and transit infrastructure. Maybe you'd like to see this money spent on middle-class tax cuts or paying down the national debt. Quite possibly neither of us would go out of

our way to make sure \$4 million went to the LDS church. But nobody asked us. Along with paying his (low) taxes, Romney chose what (large) charitable checks to write. That's how it works.

Romney's tax return is an important story because it draws attention to the deep injustice of the tax code. It's outrageous that people who make his kind of money can [pay taxes at a lower rate than many middle-class families do](#). But this says very little about Romney's personal character or ethics. He's filthy rich; we knew that. He paid his taxes and gave generously to causes he believes in. Hard to find too much personal fault in that.

Hard as it may be, I imagine both Gingrich and Obama will find a way.

This post has been corrected to state clearly that Romney's tax rate, not his actual tax liability, was lower than that of many middle-class families.