



A Chance to Speak Out

06/26/11 by *Agustin Gurza*

Christine O'Dwyer, a homemaker from San Diego, was not one of the most assertive voices in her Deliberative Poll discussion group Saturday morning. But she managed to get her points across, sometimes with a witty and disarming humor.

□ During the dialog, O'Dwyer repeatedly expressed concern about an issue that irks a lot of Californians: How easy it is for judges and politicians to overturn propositions already passed by the voters. So when it came time for the group to draft its question for the plenary session, she noticed that a few of her fellow group members were huddled with the moderator tinkering with the wording.



□ "Don't tell me you're changing what we've already voted on!" she said. The whole room burst into laughter.

□ That light moment captures the serious reason O'Dwyer decided to spend her weekend with fellow Californians discussing the state's future. She wanted to make her voice heard.

□ She can trace her desire to participate to a single story she read one day in her local newspaper about the potential closing of Palomar State Park, where her son Stephen, now 12, attended Sixth Grade Camp.

□ "There's so many things that we don't vote on at all," she told the group. "Why do they get to choose and why do we have no say in the state parks that we go to? This is really important to a lot of people."

□ But when she was called to participate in the Deliberative Poll, she saw her chance. Maybe, it was finally time for her to do something about that park.

□ "One person, no, Twenty people, no. But I felt strongly about coming here. Let's be heard as a huge group. Not one person writing one letter."

Agustin Gurza is a reporter for California Forward.