



In Their Own Words

07/13/11 by Elizabeth Wu

A diverse group of Californians, from across the state, gathered in Torrance in late June for the state's first [statewide deliberative poll](#). Named the "Fabulous 400" for their enthusiasm and commitment to fixing California, participants spent three days deliberating [tax and fiscal reform](#), the [initiative process](#), [legislative representation](#), and [state and local governance](#) issues.

The deliberative poll participants came away with an in-depth knowledge of how their state works and why it often doesn't. They also had a unique opportunity to talk with folks outside of their social circles back home. As one participant remarked, "I learned that I can talk to people who don't look like me, people I never would have talked to before."

Many participants exchanged phone numbers and email addresses before the weekend was over, in order to continue the conversation, while others posted on the [Facebook](#) and [Flickr](#) pages. Two even decided to share their experiences with their communities via their local newspapers:

From Tracy Potter in the [Oakland Local](#):

This event was a wake-up call about how out-of-touch I really am from California politics.

I consider myself to be educated and relatively informed, but as a young, busy - VERY busy - mom who relies on Facebook posts for most of my news, I realized I had forgotten that Jerry Brown had already started his recent term as governor. It's not that I wasn't voting; I voted in November and pored over the initiative results. I was just totally disconnected from politics once the polls closed and the excitement went away.

From what I gathered at this event, my situation isn't that unusual.

Truly, I now have a much greater appreciation for the many layers of our legislative system and the contradictory philosophies of how best to generate revenues for public services while encouraging economic growth. As a budding entrepreneur and hopeful homeowner, I had a tough time finding a balance between wanting to save money for myself and wanting to help my government provide necessary services.

From Arlen Grossman in the [Monterey Herald](#):

I was pleasantly surprised to find that in my small group, despite a wide range of views, we were able to maintain a serious, but pleasant and cooperative attitude. I heard similar feedback from other groups. One memorable moment for me occurred at the beginning of our first small group get-together. One of our members insisted that immigration was the big issue in California, and he loudly insisted we would talk about it even if it wasn't on the agenda. Nobody else agreed with him, and he removed himself from our group for a while. By the end of the weekend, he was back in our group and politely discussing the designated

issues.

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Among the participants I talked to, most indicated they had little knowledge of how our state government worked, but said they learned a lot from the poll process and expected to be more interested and involved when they returned home.

From Florence 'Winkie' Evans in the *Visalia Times-Delta & Tulare Advance-Register*:

There were 19 people in my group. It was an amazing experience. We were a bunch of strangers, from different backgrounds, economic levels, political persuasions, ages, ethnicities and professions, and we were all respectful of each other, listening to one another, expressing different thoughts, observations, considerations, concerns. Everyone spoke up at least a few times, and I thought that was the norm for all 25 groups.

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It was eye-opening and encouraging to me to see that we could discuss the workings of government from our varied perspectives and do so civilly. It also illustrated that average, everyday people had legitimate contributions to make in regard to our state, and that they would do so if given information and opportunity.



Comments



