

Informed Californians Change Mind On Taxes

By [Joanne Faryon](#)

August 22, 2011

SAN DIEGO — It may seem obvious to most that information leads to opinion. But the results of a deliberative poll quantified just how much information matters on many state issues.

The poll was part of an initiative by the group "What's Next California," and was coordinated by the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University.

Earlier this summer, more than 400 voters, including 15 from San Diego, were asked a series of questions about taxes, term limits, and government spending.

Those polled then agreed to spend an entire weekend together in Torrance, Calif., learning more about those issues. At the end of the weekend, they were asked the same questions and many changed their answers. For example, 52 percent of those polled supported raising property taxes for businesses when they learned more about the issue; 72 percent supported higher taxes.

"Unfortunately a lot of what goes on in our political process is learning through this 30-second soundbite," said Pete Peterson, a researcher at the School of Public Policy at Pepperdine University and an advisor to the project.

Those who supported higher property taxes for commercial property did not support raising homeowners' property taxes.

The participants were also asked a series of questions regarding their basic knowledge of state issues, such as what area takes the single largest share of the budget, before and after the deliberation.

Most people didn't know the correct answer -- K 12 education -- before their weekend in Torrance, but 74 percent got it right at the end of the two days.