

What the People Want-When They Think About It

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In June a scientific sample of the entire state of California was gathered to a single place to deliberate about proposals that might fix the state ([What's Next California](#)). They considered thirty proposals in a Deliberative Poll®. After a whole weekend of discussion, questions to competing experts, and small group discussions for many hours, support for some proposals went up, support for others went down. Six of the top proposals, all of which went significantly higher when people deliberated, have been combined to form the [Government Performance and Accountability Act](#). With leadership from the California Forward Action Fund, 1.3 million signatures have been submitted. Since this is far more than needed, we can expect it to be on the ballot in November.

Here are the six proposals and how they fared both before and after deliberation:

Establish clear goals for government programs, assess and report on progress toward them at least once every ten years. 86% rising to 90%

Require the Governor and the Legislature to adopt two-year instead of one-year budgets. 56% rising to 72%

Require the Governor and the Legislature to publish three and five year budget projections prior to the budget vote each year. 80% rising to 83%

Transfer from the state to local governments control and financing of services provided at the local level and require minimum standards for delivering them. 67% rising to 73%

Require state and local governments to identify policy goals and publish progress toward meeting them. 89% rising to 92%

Require legislation creating new programs or tax cuts costing \$25 million or more to indicate how they will be paid for. 84% rising to 88%

The focus is budgetary accountability and transparency. The judgment of the people in June has just been confirmed, in my view, by the unpleasant surprise last week of yet another big shortfall (of close to \$16 billion). As we saw in the Deliberative Poll discussions and results, people want real budgets, real planning and accountability. Pay go, providing that new expenditures or tax cuts of more than \$25 million specify how they are to be paid for, has been controversial among some groups. But 84% of voters endorsed it before deliberation and support increased to 88% after they discussed the arguments for and against. There was similar support for three and five year budget projections and for two year instead of one year budgets to enforce planning. The public would like to avoid nasty budget surprises so far as possible. They have already been through many unexpected cuts and can now expect more. A scientific sample of California voters wanted accountability and transparency and 1.3 million voters endorsed the same view when they offered their signatures.

The magic of the initiative is that the people can make new law. But the process has been manipulated in the past by special interests setting the agenda. In this case, the reforms have been selected after exhaustive discussions by a sample representing everyone. The reforms seem sensible to overwhelming majorities, both before and after deliberation. Passing them would be a fine way to commemorate the 100 years of the initiative process we have just completed in California. Let the people, not the special interests, set the agenda . Let the people govern themselves.

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Posted By: [Jim Fishkin](#) ([Email](#)) | May 22 at 9:39 am

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