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To: Bob Hertzberg and Tom McKernan, Co-Chairs, California Forward
From: David Binder, David Binder Research
Date: April 12, 2010
Re: Budget Reform Research Findings

Per your request, our firm constructed and fielded a statewide survey last month among 807 likely voters in California.¹

Likely voters are extremely dissatisfied with the direction of the state and with the job performance of its leaders. Only 7 percent of respondents indicated that California is headed in the right direction, while 84 percent believe the state is on the wrong track.

Voter dissatisfaction is particularly intense regarding the state Legislature. **Only 1 percent of likely voters strongly approve of the job state lawmakers are doing.** Some 11 percent approve somewhat, while 26 percent somewhat disapprove and 54 percent strongly disapprove.

Against this backdrop, the state budget has emerged as a top-tier issue. Asked to choose the most important issue facing them and their families, 26 percent of voters indicated balancing the state budget was their top priority, with 27 percent giving top priority to creating more jobs, 23 percent choosing improving education, 11 percent selecting ending corruption in government, 3 percent answering improving the environment and 2 percent giving top priority to reducing crime.

When asked to choose whether the Legislature should focus on reforming the state budget process or focusing on job creation, **50 percent of likely voters chose reform**, while 33 percent chose creating jobs, with 12 percent volunteering that lawmakers should accomplish both goals.

We found the majority of likely voters in support of California Forward's plan to reform the state budget process. When read the title and summary of the Best Practices Budget Accountability Act, **59 percent of voters expressed support**, with 25 percent opposed, 14 percent undecided and 2 percent refusing to answer.

(over)

¹ Survey was conducted March 8-13, 2010; statistical margin of error is $\pm 3.4\%$ at the 95% level of confidence.

Substantial majorities of likely voters also support each of the policy elements contained in the proposal including:

Policy	Support	Oppose
Two-year spending plans	77%	12%
Quick action during fiscal emergencies	74%	16%
Performance-based budgeting	81%	9%
Improved program oversight	75%	17%
Directing one-time revenues to one-time costs	61%	23%
Pay-as-you-go for new programs	76%	14%
Majority vote budget, retaining 2/3rds for taxes	59%	30%
Legislative pay forfeiture for late budget	81%	11%

Our findings regarding the vote threshold for the state budget may be of particular interest. We found broad support for reducing the budget vote to a simple majority as part of comprehensive fiscal reform that retains the two-thirds vote requirement to raise taxes.

Some 64 percent of Democrats, 49 percent of Republicans and 63 percent of decline-to-state voters indicated they were more likely to support a ballot measure that contained this element, while only 24 percent of Democrats, 40 percent of Republicans and 27 percent of likely decline-to-state voters were more likely to oppose a measure containing this provision.

Our research also demonstrated that likely voters consider the source of these reform proposals meaningful. Some 60 percent indicated they were more likely to support budget reforms that were based on the work of a non-partisan reform organization that carefully studies the best ways to get California working again.

Overall, while economic concerns dominate the headlines, voters remain deeply concerned about the state's budget problems. Perhaps skeptical about lawmakers' ability to impact job creation, when forced to choose among these two priorities, far more voters would prefer to see lawmakers focus and act on non-partisan budget reform instead.