



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Roxanna Smith
(415) 453-0430

Innovative Online Game Engages CA Students in State Budget Process

Sacramento, CA, May 7, 2007 – Next week, Governor Schwarzenegger will submit his May Revise of the 2007-08 State Budget and Sacramento legislators are gearing up to fight for their budget priorities. Now California students can wrestle with trade-offs once made miles from the attention or awareness of constituents in backrooms of the state Capitol. Next Ten’s “California Budget Challenge”, a nonpartisan Internet tool, educates and engages California students in the budget process and empowers them with the means to tell their legislators the choices they would make concerning policies, programs and funding mechanisms.

Created by the nonpartisan, independent organization Next Ten, the “California Budget Challenge” provides an annual examination of the State’s most pressing budget policy choices. It challenges students to set priorities for the next five years by creating a budget that reflects their values and vision for California’s future. A new “Take Action” button provides a mechanism for constituents to cast their votes on policy choices with their legislators immediately. Since its launch in 2005, more than 40,000 Californians have taken the “Challenge.”

“Next Ten’s online game strikes the perfect balance between finance and fun – ideal for ensnaring our tech savvy youth in a thoughtful civics lesson,” said Kerry Mazzoni, the former Secretary of Education for the state of California. “Students who develop a passion for civics grow into responsible adults who bring about powerful and positive change in their communities.”

Next Ten will hold workshops to introduce the California Budget Challenge to educators and students across the state, working in partnership with LegiSchool, the California Library Association, the League of Women Voters and other nonpartisan educational organizations.

“In order for government to work effectively, we must engage our youth today, even before they reach voting age,” said Jacqueline Jacobberger, the president of the League of Women Voters of California. “The California Budget Challenge takes complex issues and makes them accessible for people of all ages.”

“Before the California Budget Challenge, California’s budget decision making process – which has profound impact on all Californians -- was many steps removed from the voter,” said Leon Panetta, former Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton and senior advisor to Next Ten. “Now constituents can voice their preferences in real-time and influence critical decisions that impact their everyday lives. They don’t have to wait until Election Day to make their voices heard.”

The 2007 Budget Challenge contains 16 questions, half of which are new to the 2007 version, with nine spending policy options and seven revenue policy options. This year’s policy options include such topical choices as whether to levy a carbon tax, restructure Proposition 13, the initiative that dictates the rate at which property values increase, establish a clean car discount or provide universal health care. In addition, a new feature allows users to see how others have voted on each policy choice.

A budget meter at the bottom of each policy option screen shows what the state budget will look like in 2011-12, as well as the operating deficit as it is influenced by every policy choice. The Challenge provides detailed education on how the budget is built, including explanations of growth in spending (caseload, inflation and service level) and revenue (U.S. and California economic growth rates and California tax rates). A new “Prop 98” button appears on every page with an explanation of the proposition’s impact on spending and revenue choice.

“These days political choices are often presented in a vacuum, which oversimplifies the situation and contributes to political gridlock. The beauty of Next Ten’s California Budget Challenge is that it informs while it empowers. Voters must make choices within the complex context of multiple competing interests,” said Next Ten senior advisor Carol Whiteside, president of the Great Valley Center and the former Mayor of Modesto.

Over the course of the budget season, Next Ten will roll out the “California Budget Challenge” to voters, students and other Californians through community, civic

and business organizations, California high schools, community colleges and universities, and public libraries. Next Ten will also convene public events and conduct web-based outreach. The League of Women Voters will hold “Challenge” sessions during their meetings across the state.

“Every Californian has a stake and a role in the state budget process,” said F. Noel Perry, Founder of Next Ten. “The California Budget Challenge is intended to educate, engage and empower. Those who understand the critical decisions and make their voices heard can impact the process and the future of our state.”

The new California Budget Challenge can be accessed through Next Ten’s website at www.nextten.org.

###

About Next Ten: Next Ten is an independent, nonpartisan organization that educates, engages and empowers Californians so that, together, we can improve our future economy and quality of life. Recognizing the complexity of issues confronting California today, Next Ten is focused on improving the state over the next ten years, and the ten years after that. Next Ten was founded by F. Noel Perry, a venture capitalist and philanthropist concerned about California today and the California our children will inherit.