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Published May 11th, 2011

State Government Reform Group Seeks Input

By Cathy Tyson

Self-described political junky Kristin Connelly, Burton Valley mother of two, attorney, and Partnership Coordinator for California Forward, gave a rousing presentation for the organization recently at the Veterans Hall, titled "Real Reform: restoring the California dream and making the state work again."

With the help of a colorful PowerPoint presentation, she explained how the non-profit, non-partisan organization seeks to bring government closer to the people and move the state forward, hence the name, focusing on accountability and results. Their new model includes more fiscal control to local elected leaders, setting local priorities and measuring progress.

"This is just the beginning of the beginning of the conversation," said Connelly, referring to the long journey toward a possible initiative. Workshop participants were encouraged to comment in round table discussion about concerns and frustrations about the current state of California's governance, including finance, education and social justice. Invited panelist Dr. Fred Brill, Superintendent of the Lafayette School District, commented on the complicated and inefficient relationship of the state and local government in his introductory remarks: "I want a divorce. It's just not working."

California Forward has already hammered out draft policy recommendations that work toward improving community services by restructuring the roles of state and local governments. They believe that the state budget should focus on five outcomes: increased employment, improved education, increased health, decreased poverty and decreased crime. Input from the Lafayette dialogue and others held around the state will be used to hone their recommendations.

"It's exciting to be part of government reform," said Connelly, "I want to be part of a solution toward more access and more transparency." With a background in policy and civic participation, she's no stranger to conflict; even as a young teenager she worked to ban polystyrene in Contra Costa County.

She has turned her inspiration into action -- as Partnership Coordinator she's working to enlist support from influential Californians for the Speak Up California Project, talking about how to get the state back on track, and she's developing key partnerships for their valuable input to help shape proposals to empower local communities. The special event was hosted by Lafayette for Education - an organization founded by a core group of Springhill parents that has grown exponentially throughout the community. "Lafayette for Education is working to realize stable funding for our schools at the local level and in Sacramento. It made sense to branch out beyond the educational community to bring stakeholders from all corners of our community together for this discussion," said Jean Follmer, President of the Springhill Parent Faculty Club and member of Lafayette for Education.

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