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PRESS RELEASE: First Lady Maria Shriver Stops in Fresno to Connect Low Income Families to Available Resources

Fresno marks the Fifth Stop of the WE Connect Tour with Shriver

Fresno, CA - Today's visit in Fresno marks the fifth and final stop as part of First Lady Maria Shriver's statewide tour promoting the WE Connect Campaign. Through events in Sacramento, Stockton, Oakland, Los Angeles and Fresno over the last four weeks, Shriver has connected hundreds of families with the information and tools they need to take full advantage of valuable financial resources, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

"This year alone, I have met hundreds of families who have shared their struggles with me. Families in cities like Stockton, Oakland, Sacramento and Los Angeles have discovered that they can benefit from the resources we're promoting through WE Connect," said First Lady Maria Shriver. "We are experiencing one of the most difficult times in our nation's history, and so it makes it even more critical that we continue to educate Californians about the many support programs and resources available to them today. I am so proud of the hundreds of partnerships that we've been able to develop. If there was ever a moment to come together as a community, now is the time."

Fresno's unemployment rate has reached 13.1%, higher than the 10.1% statewide average. That, combined with the 22.3% poverty rate in Fresno, makes it urgently important that individuals and families be aware of the resources available to help them get job training, career opportunities, and money for food and other necessities to help them during these economic hardships.

During the Fresno visit, Shriver previewed One-E-App, a new innovative, publicly accessible tool allowing residents to apply for health, social services and other support programs online. Fresno will become the first county in California to allow residents to apply for these benefits on their own time, in their own homes or at libraries and schools. Partners in this pioneering effort include Shriver's WE Connect Campaign, The Center to Promote HealthCare Access, Fresno Healthy Communities Access Partners, the Children's Health Initiative, Central California Legal Services, United Way and other local agencies. Technology will play a major role in transforming access, but local agencies also continue to provide in-person and phone assistance to ensure families are fully supported.

Since 2005, Shriver has raised awareness of the EITC through the WE Connect campaign, including other key resources to serve working families who work hard but struggle to make ends meet. In addition to the tax credit and financial incentive programs available, www.weconnect.net aims to help people connect with resources to keep their homes, put food on their table and find a job in a time when unemployment is so rampant.

As a result of the First Lady's efforts, more than 10 million Californians have been connected using the website, WE Connector tool and La Opinion supplements.

Intuit and its foundation participate in this public and private partnership by providing both financial and in-kind support. Last year, Intuit introduced the WE Connector, a free, online resource that enables Californians to see if they qualify for public benefit programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and low cost gas and electric services. This year, Intuit has added three new eligibility sections to the WE Connector tool – federal Child Tax Credit (CTC),

Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and other no cost and low cost health insurance programs, consistent with the First Lady's commitment to helping Californians.

As one of the most innovative statewide efforts promoting the EITC, WE Connect uses all available channels to reach out to the over 625,000 eligible families in California who currently are not claiming this credit and also connects them with other key programs and services. The campaign partners with community organizations, statewide programs and major corporations to reach working families where they shop, eat, work, live and learn.

To achieve this, the WE Connect campaign includes the following components:

- **www.WEconnect.net**: This website is a one-stop-shop connecting Californians to programs and services for which they may be eligible. The site now houses an all-inclusive resource map, the first of its kind in the country, which connects visitors to hundreds of locations near them offering free tax assistance, job fairs and other resourceful events.
- **Web Connector**: The Web Connector, the campaign's exclusive online tool, developed by partner Intuit for this campaign, enables Californians to see if they qualify for public benefit programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and low cost gas and electric services. This year, Intuit has added three new eligibility sections to the Web Connector tool – Federal Child Tax Credit (CTC), Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and other no cost and low cost health programs they may be eligible for and how to apply - all with the click of a mouse.
- **WE Connect Events**: WE Connect events take place throughout the state in partnership with a network of statewide partners providing free tax preparation for eligible working families and individuals with one-on-one assistance. Families can learn about and apply for key services and programs while having the opportunity to have their taxes prepared for free. WE Connect materials, including the 2009 La Opinion supplement and 10 Tips for Financial Empowerment are made available at all events.
- **La Opinion Partnership**: La Opinión, the nation's leading Spanish language news outlet, has developed a 24-page special publication dedicated to services and resources available to California's working families, and has offered to work with other states to do the same. Close to 10 million individuals have been reached through the supplement by distributing them in schools, libraries, non-profits, churches and hundreds of other organizations that share our commitment to helping working families.
- **Connecting Working Families in the Workplace**: WE Connect reaches out to working families through their workplace by providing information to a network of small businesses, business associations, unions, and small business development centers. Our goal is to engage small business owners in educating their employees about important resources that may help them. Materials available will include "Connector" tool kits, workplace posters and brochures, payroll inserts and email blasts.

About the WE Connect Partners

The WE Connect campaign partners with community organizations, statewide programs, unions, small businesses and major corporations to connect with working families. WE Connect partners include: Intuit, The Governor and First Lady's Conference on Women, Legal Aid Society of Orange County, Central California Legal Services, California Volunteers, AmeriCorps, California Department of Social Services,

United Way of Greater Los Angeles, United Way of Bay Area, La Opinión, California Association of Food Banks, ClearChannel, California First 5, SEIU, AFSCME, Save the Children, AT&T, PG&E, Sempra Energy Utilities, California Black Media Association, Visa, Inc., California Network of Small Business Development Centers, and Wal-Mart, in addition to over 200 regional organizations across the state.

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For more information on Maria's WE Connect campaign, visit: www.weconnect.net.