

What They're Saying ...

About Maria's "WE Connect" Campaign

Karen Bass, Speaker of the Assembly: "In tough times it's important to remember that we are all connected – that we are all in this together," said Assembly Speaker Karen Bass (D- Los Angeles). "The innovative public-private partnership Maria Shriver has mobilized with WE Connect gives California families valuable information and assistance to tap into the resources that are available to them. Being there for people in need is one of our most important human connections. WE Connect is certainly there for – and making a difference for – California families."

Kevin Johnson, Mayor of Sacramento: "Particularly in this economy, the Earned Income Tax Credit is important to many families who may be unaware of this opportunity to save thousands on their taxes. Sacramento has been hard hit by a double-punch of job losses and foreclosures. That's why I strongly believe that now is the time to come together and make sure that our families a know what help is available to them now."

Monica Lozano, Publisher, La Opinión: "We at La Opinion recognize how difficult these times are for all Californians and we applaud First Lady Maria Shriver for her commitment to connecting those in need with the resources and services available to them. "WE Connect" represents a historic effort to aid the residents of this State during a time of great financial stress, and we are proud to be a partner in reaching the Spanish speaking segment of our population."

Bob Cohen, Executive Director, Legal Aid Society of Orange County: "The First Lady's efforts focused attention on the opportunity the Earned Income Tax Program offered to bring badly needed resources back to California workers, their families and communities. Through the leadership of Maria Shriver, I-CAN! E-file alone has grown from returning \$7.4 million in tax refunds to Californians in 2007 to \$12 million in 2008 – a 62% increase. Importantly, we continue to grow. Other states have followed the example set through WE CONNECT and this last tax year a total of \$34,000,000 was brought back to working families through I-CAN! E-File with the help of partners throughout the nation."

This year we expect to do even more. Due in large part to our past success in California, the IRS has chosen to list I-CAN! E-file among those programs displayed at the very front of its website. The leadership and support of Maria Shriver has made a difference. It enabled programs to more effectively undertake community economic development for the benefit of the families and children they serve. WE CONNECT has provided essential information and the personal involvement of the First Lady has motivated many thousands of working families to take the self-help action necessary to empower themselves and their families".

Sue Sigler, Executive Director, California Association of Food Banks: "Food banks throughout California are grateful to Maria Shriver for bringing them into the spotlight. In these difficult economic times, more and more people are turning to food banks for help. Ms. Shriver has helped ensure hungry people find food and helped food banks provide it."

Nathan Nayman, Head of State and Local Relations, Visa, Inc.: "Visa is proud to partner and support First Lady Maria Shriver who has given new meaning to the word "WE". Through WE Connect, all Californians now have a chance to succeed in their financial future and share in California's economic prosperity. Visa is poised to assist community leaders who are willing to make a positive difference in people's lives. Through partnerships like WE Connect and the vision of Maria Shriver, we are hopeful that all Californian's will be empowered to have a solid understanding of how to manage their financial resources and be the foundation of a strong economy. Through programs like WE Connect we will all be strengthened."

Willie Pelote, Assistant Director, Political Action of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME): "We are honored to serve as a Connector for Maria Shriver's We Connect campaign. This is an issue that affects a lot of our 170,000 members, and providing them with valuable information that could inform them on eligibility and access to programs like the Earned Income Tax Credit is important. We represent nurses, corrections officers, child care providers, EMTs and sanitation workers across the state, many of whom will act as connectors throughout California. WE commend the First Lady in this tremendous effort."

Elise Buik, CEO and President, United Way of Greater Los Angeles: “The United Way of Greater Los Angeles is proud to partner with First Lady Maria Shriver’s WE Connect Campaign as a lead organization for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) partnership in Los Angeles County. The WE Connect Campaign’s single-minded focus on driving awareness and adoption of the EITC—a program that has helped lift more people out of poverty than any other federal program-- is closely aligned with United Way’s focus in creating pathways out of poverty for all Angelenos. Our partnership is an important opportunity to help families reach financial stability, build assets and invest in their futures.”

Carrie Lopez, Director, Department of Consumer Affairs: “The First Lady’s ‘WE Connect’ campaign is just the kind of help California consumers need to get through these tough economic times. Information that is normally scattered can now easily be accessed from the ‘We Connect’ website. Just as ‘WE Connect’ puts information in the hands of Californians to help them access money and opportunity, DCA connects Californians with things they need to know to protect themselves and their hard earned money during this difficult time. We applaud First Lady Maria Shriver’s drive to make government a friend of the people and we will support this effort in any way possible.”

California Black Media Association: “The California Black Media Association is proud to partner with First Lady Maria Shriver and the We Connect movement to help connect California’s working families to important resources that can improve their lives through our extensive network of community-based media outlets.

Gavin Newsom, Mayor of San Francisco: “As we’ve seen through San Francisco’s world renowned Project Homeless Connect, when you bring services to people in need instead of forcing them to seek help on their own, you get results. I’m thankful that Maria Shriver and her WE Connect campaign have selected San Francisco to be one of the host city’s for the project.”

Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chair, California Legislative Black Caucus: “Each year millions of eligible workers risk missing out on important federal tax benefits because they do not know they qualify, do not know how to claim the credits or do not know where to find free tax filing assistance. Providing valuable resources and good financial advice to low income families are worthy and successful community endeavors. I applaud First Lady Maria Shriver and the We Connect Campaign for providing a path towards financial empowerment for families who might not otherwise know where to turn for help.”

Anne Wilson, CEO of United Way of the Bay Area: “United Way is so pleased to partner with Maria Shriver and her We Connect Initiative. We thank the First Lady for her commitment to raising awareness of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which is such an important resource for low-income families during these tough times. When someone of Maria Shriver’s stature promotes the EITC, people listen!”