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## **Students Try to Cut Federal Budget in Online Game**

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This is the VOA Special English Education Report.

Some people think of politics as a game. But an online game lets people think of themselves doing one of the hardest jobs in American politics: cutting the federal budget. The game is called Budget Hero.

Students in Los Angeles and other cities have been playing it. Budget Hero lets them decide how they want to spend federal tax dollars.

STUDENT: "A simplified tax code and a tax code that more fairly and correctly taxes the wealth in this country is obviously preferable."

The game uses information from the Congressional Budget Office. It shows what effects each cost-cutting proposal would have.

High school student Dory Bennett says she thinks spending cuts are needed to keep the economy growing and keep the American dream alive.

DORY BENNETT: "I want to grow up, go to college, get a good job, have kids maybe, a dog and a house."

The students consider the same issues facing lawmakers in Washington.

The game was developed in two thousand eight. In the newest version, students make decisions about what spending is important to them. Do they want to reduce taxes? Spend more on environmental protection? What should they do about defense spending? Making these decisions helps clarify their goals.

A former Democratic representative from California offered students some ideas. Jane Harmon served in Congress for almost twenty years. She now heads the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, which helped create Budget Hero. More than one million people have played it so far, she says, and she thinks they have learned at least two things.

JANE HARMON: "One, how hard it is, but two, that it can be done if there's a will to do it."

Student Jeffrey Burke agrees.

JEFFREY BURKE: "The hardest thing for us to figure out was the little cuts like the gas money and stuff, increasing taxes on gas, because we felt it would have effects everywhere from the truck drivers shipping our stuff across the country or when you order from [online seller] Amazon or whatever, to you drive when you're going to work. I think we need to look at the little things and realize that just because they're small money doesn't mean they're small effects."

Another student, Harry Kidd, says defense spending caused a lot of debate.

HARRY KIDD: "Because at the same time, you've got, 'Oh, we're going to freeze military spending,' but then we're like, 'What is that going to do to jobs?' But then the other half was, 'Oh, we can take troops out of Iraq and we all agreed on that.'"

Joaquin Alvarado at American Public Media, an organization that also helped create the game, says many of the players leave comments.

JOAQUIN ALVARDO: "And they will literally in the comments ask that Congress play this game to just get a little rational around the questions that have to be answered."

Ms. Harmon says the students are having more success than Congress at cutting the budget.

JANE HARMON: "Kids, and actually adults too who play this game, have open minds. They want to learn what the facts are. And sadly, a lot of Congress is a fact-free universe, and that is tragic for our country, for our country's reputation, and for our economy and the livelihoods of millions of people who are presently out of work."

And that's the VOA Special English Education Report. You can watch a video version of this story at [voaspecialenglish.com](http://voaspecialenglish.com). I'm Christopher Cruise.

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Contributing: Mike O'Sullivan