

Opinion: Boxer's seat sparks lists of wannabes

By Dan Walters

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Santa Claus isn't the only one making lists of who's been naughty and nice this month.

Political junkies and pundits in California and Washington are drawing up lists of who might be nice – or at least voter-attractive – enough to become the state's next U.S. senator two years hence.

The natterers at Politico, Daily Kos – even Time and Newsweek – are tossing out guesses from 3,000 miles away while the in-state commentariat is eagerly joining the speculation game that perks up an otherwise slow political month.

It's all driven by an assumption, probably accurate, that Barbara Boxer will retire after four terms now that the Senate is in Republican hands.

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Boxer is the California politician that Republicans love to hate, unlike colleague Dianne Feinstein. She seems to go out of her way to provoke them, and can expect rough treatment once the GOP takes over.

They might even call her “ma'am” just to needle her about an infamous 2009 incident in which she rebuked an Army general who, following military protocol, addressed her as “ma'am” during a committee hearing.

“Do me a favor,” Boxer told the general. “Could you say ‘senator’ instead of ‘ma'am’? It's just a thing; I worked so hard to get that title, so I'd appreciate it.”

Boxer has raised almost no money for a 2016 re-election campaign and has said nothing to dampen the speculation that she will not run. She plans to announce her intention, whatever it is, early next year.

Back to those lists.

They are universally topped by Attorney General Kamala Harris and Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, two of many Democratic politicians waiting out the domination of top-tier offices by generation-older politicians, not only Boxer and Feinstein, but Gov. Jerry Brown.

Harris and Newsom share the same political adviser and are probably smart enough to avoid a direct duel, with one waiting for Feinstein to give it up in 2016 or Brown's final term to end in 2018.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti may be the most viable Southern California possibility. There's some movement for hedge fund billionaire/environmental activist Tom Steyer to run, given his bottomless bucket of money.

Second-tier Democrats who might yearn for Boxer's seat include Secretary of State-elect Alex Padilla, Treasurer-elect John Chiang and former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.



But what about Republicans? The party's best hope, if she would make the run, probably would be former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who's now at Stanford University.

A high-turnout presidential election in a blue state would not be a good arena for any Republican, although were a slew of Democrats to run, it would be very remotely possible for the top-two primary to produce two GOP finalists.

Most likely, however, one of the aforementioned Democrats will succeed Boxer.