

## EDITORIAL: Boxer's successor must be different kind of senator



Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., said Thursday she won't seek re-election after fourth term.

MANUEL BALCE CENETA — ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. Sen. Barbara Boxer's announcement Thursday that she is retiring at the end of her term in 2016 opens a once-in-a-generation opportunity for California and the nation, one that some adept politician will embrace.

Boxer, a liberal who won the senate seat in 1992, has not yet written her final chapter. And we are not yet prepared to describe the impact she has had on California in any detail. What we are thinking about now is who might fill her shoes and what traits her successor ought to have.

The next senator must remain accessible and never lose sight of the fact that he or she represents Californians, not the Beltway bandits and the donors who will finance what likely will be a record-setting campaign.

The next senator must represent the California that exists today, not the very different state of 23 years ago.

There is the obvious difference: Almost a third of the 38 million Californians hadn't been born yet when Boxer was elected.

And there's the cultural and society shifts. The percentage of Californians who are Hispanic has grown by 73% during that time, from 8.5 million in 1992 to 14.7 million now. The Asian population has increased from 3 million to almost 5.2 million, a 70% increase; the white population has fallen from 17 million to less than 15 million.

The issues have become more complex as California has grown. After three years of drought, water shortages and the impact on agriculture show that California's system of delivering water is troubled. The voter-approved \$7.5 billion water bond will help. But whoever replaces Boxer must be steeped in water policy and able to deliver federal aid back home.

The next senator must also recognize that environmental protections and economic development are not mutually exclusive. In much of the state, particularly the San Joaquin Valley, the air is foul and too many children suffer from asthma. Whoever wins the seat must be willing to support steps that will clean the air.

Unemployment and under-employment remains too high in Fresno, Merced, Modesto and the rest of the Valley. The next senator must be willing to capture this state's fair share of funding for economic development, including the high-speed rail.

The widening income gap will become even more of an issue for the next senator than it has been for Boxer. He or she must advocate for the poor as well as wealthy donors and have the savvy needed to tackle complex economic issues involving taxation and Social Security. Along those lines, the next senator must either support the Affordable Care Act or have a good solution for it that ensures lower-income people will have access to health care.

Issues important to Californians — abortion rights, equality, sensible gun control —will be important for the next senator, as will an understanding of foreign policy and trade issues in a state whose fortunes are tightly linked to Asia and Central and South America.

A Republican could win in 2016, though California voters haven't elected a Republican to the U.S. Senate since Pete Wilson beat Jerry Brown in 1982 and Leo McCarthy in 1988. Most likely the next senator will be a Democrat, but it should be one able to find common ground with House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield and other reasonable Republicans.

Name the issue, and Boxer stood to the left, unabashedly so. Her replacement may be as liberal, but a strong ideology, a moral compass and a clear understanding of the state's most pressing issues are as important.

A healthy measure of pragmatism would be welcome, too.

Copyright

© 2015 www.fresnobee.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.fresnobee.com>