

## Path to Senate runs through Silicon Valley

Silicon Valley could be a kingmaker in California's 2016 Senate race.

Sen. Barbara Boxer's (D-Calif.) decision not to seek reelection has created the first open Senate seat in the state since Mark Zuckerberg and many of his peers were in grade school.

To make sure their interests are taken care of in Washington, the well-heeled tech sector is sure to be on the front lines of the potentially billion-dollar race.

"I think they'll be very much involved," predicted Corey Cook, a professor at the University of San Francisco who focuses on California politics. "I think it'll be critical to the fundraising and to the storyline."

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The tech sector has matured rapidly since Boxer won her Senate seat in 1992.

Not only is Silicon Valley a must-stop fundraising destination for any national politician — as trips by Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and other potential presidential candidates have shown — it is also the largest growing industry in California, which makes it a natural target for anyone trying to win a statewide race.

Compared to 1992, "this is a different state" said Larry Gerston, a political science at San Jose State University. "It's a tech state."

"Anybody running is going to have to ... accommodate a good deal of tech needs, not just because of tech but because it makes sense to the state," he added.

If that's the case, early front-runner Attorney General Kamala Harris (D) seems to be already plugged in.

Harris was born in Oakland, Calif., and served as a district attorney in San Francisco before being elected as California's first female African-American attorney general in 2010.

"Kamala comes out of San Francisco," said Cook, the University of San Francisco professor. "She's been dealing with tech politics since she was the district attorney in San Francisco."

Public records of Harris's past political contributors read like a who's who of major Silicon Valley players.

During her reelection race last year, Harris received \$13,600 from Marissa Mayer, the CEO of Yahoo.

Napster co-founder Sean Parker and his wife, Alexandra, gave a combined \$27,200. Shervin Pishevar, co-founder of influential venture capital fund Sherpa Ventures, gave another \$13,600. Apple's design guru, Jony Ive, contributed \$6,800, while Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg gave \$2,500.

Harris has also hosted fundraisers at places such as Airbnb's San Francisco headquarters.

While in office, Harris expanded and enforced some of the nation's toughest online privacy laws, as well as issued industry guidance on preventing data breaches and establishing mobile app privacy policies.

"She's one of the most tech-savvy people running for Senate," said Justin Brookman, director of the Consumer Privacy Project at the Center for Democracy & Technology, a digital rights advocate.

But as the top cop in the state during the last four years, Harris has also had to ruffle industry feathers at times.

In 2012, she negotiated a landmark agreement with Amazon, Apple, Google and others that required mobile apps on their platforms to have privacy policies in line with California's strict laws. That same year, she joined 36 other state attorneys general in a \$17 million settlement with Google over its tracking practices.

More recently, Harris backed an online privacy bill requiring all websites to state whether they honor a user's request to not be tracked — often indicated by putting the browser in “private mode.”

It remains to be seen whether Harris's ability to speak techies' language will translate to statewide support, aside from potentially helping to fill her campaign coffers.

"I'm not sure that is a sufficiently mainstream issue in California politics to work to her advantage," said Fred Davis, a political consultant with Hollywood-based Strategic Perception.

“It would be a little bit of a side interest for most people who are earning a paycheck in California,” added Halpert.

The election is still 22 months away, and there is plenty of time for other candidates to jump into the race.

Leaders within the tech industry have rarely agreed on much beyond a few select priorities such as reform to the nation's immigration, patent and tax codes.

Instead of forcing an established front-runner to embrace their priorities, the industry could decide to vault up someone in its own mold and hope that they catch fire statewide.

Many industry leaders adopted that approach last year by backing Ro Khanna in his failed bid to unseat Rep Mike Honda (D-Calif.). Khanna's poor showing could discourage them from trying a similar path again, however.

If the industry did try to rally behind a dark horse candidate, someone like Steve Westly — a venture capitalist and former state controller— might fit the bill.

Whoever it is that wins the Silicon Valley jackpot, the industry is going to make them work for it.

“We're notorious for not kissing on the first date,” said Carl Guardino, the head of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group.

“We want to be wooed and we don't want to be treated like an ATM machine where people come for our cash and don't stay for information about innovation and job creation,” he added. “We like to build relationships and not just have a first date.”