

## Could Trump Bump Impact Senate Race?

The 2016 November General Election may be one of the most important and influential in some time. In each issue of *California Grocer* leading up to the General Election, I will examine the key national, state and local races and their impact on our industry. This issue: California's open Senate seat.

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It's been 24 years since the last open seat Senate election in California. Can you remember who represented California prior to incumbent Senators Diane Feinstein and Barbara Boxer? My guess is most can't. Last year, Boxer said she was throwing in the towel, opening the door for a new senator to be elected in November.

Before examining the candidates, let's take a quick look back at how we got here. Boxer was first elected to the Senate in 1992, the same year California's other Senator, Diane Feinstein, took office after winning a special election to fill the term left vacant by the resignation of Pete Wilson. Feinstein was re-elected in 1994 and has served ever since.

On the surface, the race for Boxer's seat appears very low-key. It's a safe bet that a Democrat will retain this seat (Democrats enjoy an overwhelming advantage right now in California). And right now there is one clear leader in the race. Who challenges the frontrunner depends on what happens in the June 7 primary. Before I explain, let's first look at the leading candidates.

On the Democratic side, California Attorney General Kamala Harris and Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (46-CA) are the two top frontrunners.

As we go to press, Harris enjoys a comfortable lead over both her nearest party rival and Republican challengers. She has garnered the endorsements of the California Democratic Party, State Controller Betty Yee, State Treasurer John Chiang, Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon and the SEIU California, to name a few. Her total campaign contribution nearly triples that of her nearest contender Loretta Sanchez. Harris would

be the first Indian-American and only the second African-American woman senator.

So what could make the June primary interesting?

California uses a "jungle primary" system that pits all candidates against each other, regardless of party, in a primary race. The top vote getters go on to the general election.

So while Harris appears a shoe-in for the November ballot, Sanchez is in danger of missing the cut (not securing the second highest number of votes in June) and watching the November elections from the sidelines.

A united Republican party is Sanchez's biggest concern. If one GOP candidate runs in the primary, the party could steal the second General Election ballot spot from Sanchez. The GOP took a major step in this direction when Republican Senate candidate Rocky Chavez, an Oceanside assemblyman, dropped out of the race in early February.

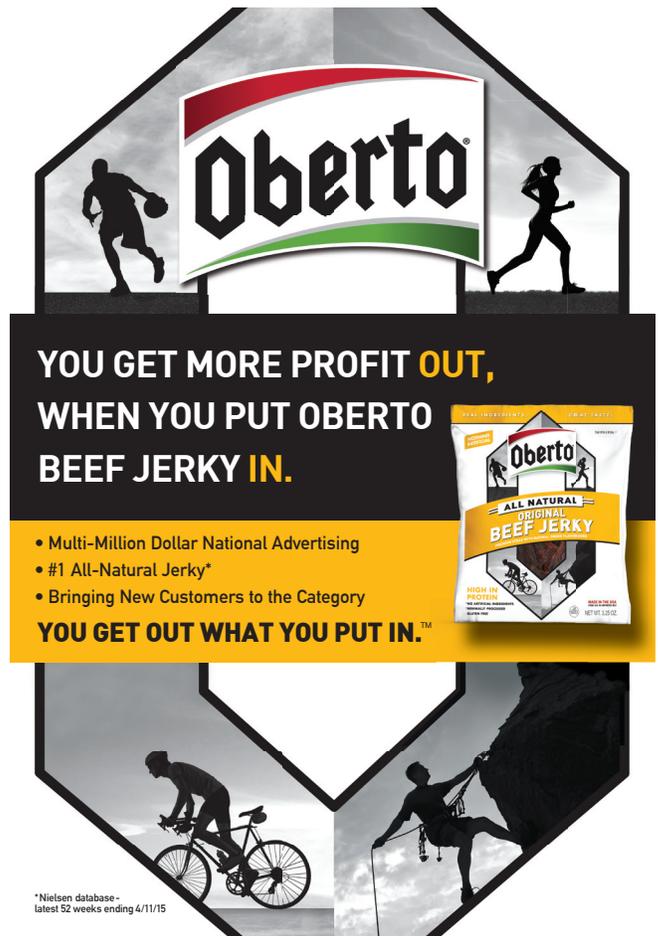
If Sanchez manages to secure the other ballot spot, this could set up a very interesting election come November. While Harris' numbers are still considerably higher, Sanchez stands to become the first-ever Hispanic U.S. Senator from California, a prospect that might have significant appeal to the state's ever-growing Hispanic population. Sanchez also is considered more of a moderate, while Harris is seen as a solid liberal.

The GOP on the other hand, has not won a Senate race in California since 1988 and any contender will suffer the additional handicap of running when the Democratic presidential nominee is sure to carry California by a wide margin, maybe. The wild card continues to be

Donald Trump and his ability to rally the Republican vote.

The top Republican candidates include former state GOP chair Tom Del Beccaro and George "Duf" Sundheim. The GOP field got a little more crowded in early March with wealthy Silicon Valley businessman Ron Unz throwing his hat in the ring. Unz ran for Californian governor in 1994 and is probably best known for authoring Proposition 227, which effectively eliminated bilingual education in California.

Even with a Trump "bump" the chances of a Republican securing Boxer's seat seems like a long shot at best. The real question appears to be whether a more conservative Democrat, or a long-shot Republican has any real chance of defeating Kamala Harris. Stay tuned! ■



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