

[Stockton Record column, Friday, July 9, 2010:](#)

Boxer a welcome if infrequent guest

By Michael Fitzgerald

U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer barnstormed through Stockton on Wednesday, touting her part in securing a \$30 million grant to barge cargo from Oakland to Stockton.

Boxer seldom visits Stockton. If you count French Camp, she's been here twice in the past year. That's actually rather frequent for her.

Granted, Boxer is one of two senators representing a huge, 58-county state. She can't be everywhere.

But as her rival Carly Fiorina's camp points out, Boxer may prefer to be in places such as Beverly Hills, which has contributed 10 times more to her campaign than Modesto.

The political reality is Valley voters historically have given the unabashedly liberal Boxer mixed reviews. Stocktonians gave her Republican rival, Bill Jones, 80,350 votes to Boxer's 99,074 the last time around.

So, how well does Boxer represent Stockton in the Senate? Short answer: Boxer mostly - though not always - visits in person only when campaigning.

But local leaders praise her as open and accessible in D.C., generous with her staff's time and responsive to local concerns.

Whether she's here in the flesh or not (and, being Stockton-centric, I think she should be here), Boxer can point to a record of legislation beneficial to the area.

"She has been a very extraordinarily good friend to the port," Port Director Rick Aschieris said.

Uncle Sam has appropriated \$43 million to the port in recent years, Aschieris said. Boxer, who sits on the Transportation Committee, has been instrumental.

"We couldn't have gotten anywhere without her support," Aschieris said.

The barge system, taking some strain off Oakland's port, creates 276 jobs. It reduces truck traffic through the Altamont Pass. It reduces air pollution.

And the port is one of Stockton's main job engines. "Any recovery that occurs," Aschieris said, "the port will be a major part of it."

On the state water crisis, Boxer supports a "fair solution" that balances everyone's needs without gutting state environmental laws, including those that protect the Delta.

Fiorina has pledged to suspend environmental regulations for south-Valley ag's benefit. That drew a barb from Bill Jennings, head of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance.

"Fiorina would be a disaster for the Delta communities," Jennings said. "Fiorina just won't approve of shipping water south, she'll be out there working the bucket brigade, passing water down. The only fish Fiorina likes is on a plate."

Fiorina's camp preferred to put it another way. "Barbara Boxer has made her priorities very clear when it comes to California's water," a campaign representative said. "She chose fish over families and, in turn, has killed jobs in the Central Valley."

The San Joaquin Council of Governments, the region's transportation planning agency, goes to Washington every year and asks for dollars.

"We have generally had good success with the senator," said Andrew Chesley, COG's executive director.

Most recently, Boxer helped secure millions for the French Camp interchange on Interstate 5. The interchange links I-5 to Arch-Sperry Road, Stockton's airport and Highway 99. This beefs up the county's largest warehouse industry concentration.

She's also shaken loose millions for the Altamont Commuter Express train and local public transit. And she's a major advocate for high-speed rail, which promises to bring thousands of jobs to the Valley.

Boxer has helped keep Stockton police on the payroll. She helped secure more than \$7million to retain 20 cops scheduled for layoffs.

[Boxer has also done a lot to clean Valley air, said Stockton Mayor Ann Johnston, who also sits on a Valley air board.](#)

"I think she works very hard for our area and our needs," Johnston said. "In my opinion - in my short tenure as mayor - she rates at least an 'A' as far as getting the job done."

I was prepared to take Boxer to task if her actions on behalf of Stockton were as scant as her personal appearances. I still will if she forsakes us entirely for Rodeo Drive.

But if area leaders are to be believed, Boxer and her staff do a better-than expected job of representing Stockton's interests in the U.S. Senate.

Of course, Fiorina's camp couldn't disagree more. I posted a thorny list of their objections on my blog. I also posted a more detailed list of Boxer's record in San Joaquin.

"I know that families in the San Joaquin Valley are facing tough times," Boxer said. "I have been working to bring jobs to Stockton and San Joaquin County through investments in transportation, water projects, public safety, education and other critical local priorities."

[Tracy Press guest commentary, Friday, July 9, 2010:](#)

His Voice: Pushing the agenda in D.C.

By Leroy Ornellas

Every year officials from San Joaquin County, local cities, agencies and other community leaders embark on a journey to Washington, D.C., to meet with federal officials and elected representatives to advocate for funding for local transportation and infrastructure projects. We spend an entire week ensuring the Feds get a firsthand look at these projects and that they understand their importance to the quality of life for our communities.

You rarely leave with absolute assurances that a project will be funded or even supported, but you kick-start the lengthy and sometimes cumbersome process. This was my seventh such One Voice trip.

This year, we touted 26 projects throughout San Joaquin County. These projects include the Interstate 205-Lammers Road interchange in Tracy, the Louise Avenue-Interstate 5 interchange in Lathrop, the Austin Road interchange in Manteca, widening I-5 in Stockton, and the MacArthur Drive above-grade crossing project.

You can learn more about these projects on the San Joaquin Council of Governments website at www.sjcog.org. These projects will be paid for with your tax dollars — whether it is through federal, state or local sales taxes, you are the purchaser of these projects.

We also lobbied for a number of county-specific projects, among them were solar projects for the county jail and agricultural center, a public health laboratory, a new juvenile camp for the Probation Department, as well as some airport and hospital projects.

We pressed the Veterans Administration to locate its planned Regional Outpatient Clinic and Community Living Center at the San Joaquin General Hospital campus. There are endless benefits to locating this facility in the French Camp area.

The importance of our annual pilgrimage to D.C. cannot be overstated. Although there is a certain amount of turnover, a relationship develops, and officials begin to recognize us and our projects. Forging these relationships is proving valuable, and we are seeing fruits of that in seeking federal funding for a study to improve Highway 4 through the Delta.

I have long pushed for this project and believe the improvement of Highway 4 would have a positive impact on traffic congestion throughout the county, but especially the roads and highways of the south county — most notably I-5, I-205 and Interstate 580.

An improved Highway 4 would more easily accommodate truck traffic to and from the Port of Stockton and provide an alternate route for commuters out of Stockton, Lathrop and Manteca. Challenges do exist, such as two-lane bridges that pre-date World War II and unstable peat soil, but a proper study should determine the improvements' feasibility.

Last year, three months into a new administration, there was a sense of giddiness and euphoria as officials took to their newfound positions. The term "deer in the headlights" would have been appropriate. Also, there was a faint odor of printing ink in the air, no doubt due to all the new money being printed. This year those officials seemed quite comfortable in their positions of authority. The city itself has a different look, with large cranes throughout, reminding me of the never-ending building in Las Vegas. There is certainly no economic slump in Washington, D.C.

I had the opportunity to take part in meetings with several interesting elected officials. There was Rep. Barney Frank, who was in a bad mood and somewhat condescending. I found Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to be elegantly understated and yet scary-powerful. Preceded by the speaker was a congressman who told us in a forceful tone about his face-to-face meeting with the president and his demands before he would vote for certain bills. Once the speaker walked in, he melted like a snow cone in August.

I found Majority Leader Steny Hoyer to be a well-spoken Southern gentleman — the scary thing was that Hoyer was the only person in D.C. I heard utter the words, "private sector," for the entire week I was there.

I want to thank the entire SJCOG envoys for their efforts. It is imperative we converge on D.C. as a team to cover as much ground as we can in one short week. Our local federal representatives were more than gracious hosts. And, lastly, I want to thank our private sponsors, who help to keep the costs of this effort to a minimum.

Supervisor Leroy Ornellas represents the 5th District of San Joaquin County, which includes Tracy and Mountain House. He also sits on the Governing Board of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.