

Dianne Feinstein: The Whore Of Politics In San Francisco

- She uses politics to grow her husbands stock market assets and destroys any of her constituents who competes with her businesses
- She ran the crookedest part of the Tesla and Solyndra crony government payola

Feinstein faces growing storm on the left
The California senator appears likely to face a serious primary challenge.

By CARLA MARINUCCI

Dianne Feinstein, the oldest member of the Senate, has been the target of sustained liberal criticism since January. | Justin Sullivan/Getty Images
Politico Magazine

By Philippe Reines

SAN FRANCISCO — Sen. Dianne Feinstein has dominated California politics for more than a quarter of a century. But facing blistering criticism that she's out of touch with the progressive left following her recent comments about President Donald Trump and DACA, it's increasingly looking like the Democratic lawmaker will face a major primary challenge if she runs for a fifth full term.

Feinstein, the oldest member of the Senate, has been the target of sustained liberal criticism since January. Her centrist brand of politics, skeptical view of single-payer health care and support for some of the president's earliest nominees have drawn the ire of progressives who have little tolerance for Feinstein's pragmatic approach in the Trump era.

At times, the senator has been highly critical of Trump. But her recent suggestion that, given time, Trump "can be a good president" — and her concession Tuesday that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program might be on shaky legal ground — have emboldened her critics and turned a spotlight on her reelection plans.

Buzz in state political circles increasingly centers on one prospective Democratic challenger, Kevin de León of Los Angeles, the first Latino to hold the powerful position of state Senate president pro tempore in more than 120 years.

De León, the son of immigrants — his father was Chinese and Guatemalan, his mother Guatemalan — has joined forces with billionaire environmental activist Tom Steyer to become a leading advocate on the issue of climate change. And, with his introduction of the California Values Act, also dubbed the Sanctuary State bill, he has assumed a leading role in the branding of California as the "state of resistance" against Trump. De León drew national notice last week when he took public umbrage after Feinstein's seemingly conciliatory remarks about Trump. His public rebuke, the toughest from any prominent state Democrat, was pointed: "This president has not shown any capacity to learn and proven he is not fit for office. It is the responsibility of Congress to hold him accountable — especially Democrats — not be complicit in his reckless behavior."

Appearing Wednesday on CNN, de León again countered

Feinstein — though not directly — forcefully asserting that over 100 legal scholars have said DACA is fully legal and constitutional.

Those comments — and the implicit contrasts between the 50-year-old Los Angeles Democrat and the 84-year-old senator from San Francisco — caught the notice of California Democrats looking at the 2018 landscape.

“I think he’s looking for a place to go. He’s got a lot of money,” notes Democratic strategist Katie Merrill, in a reference to de León’s \$2.8 million war chest, officially set up as a “De León for Lt. Governor 2018” committee. That money couldn’t be used for a federal campaign, she notes, but it provides a measure of de León’s fundraising heft.

Courtnei Pugh, de León’s political director, sought to tamp down any 2018 talk. “Senator de León has his head down and is focused on California’s Legislative business,” she wrote in an email responding to questions about a possible Senate run. Still, some de León supporters privately say that in recent days, the Senate president pro tem — once viewed as a potential 2018 gubernatorial candidate — has gotten a groundswell of support from backers urging him to look beyond the Capitol dome in Sacramento. They say he may begin to assess some new opportunities later this month, but his first goal is delivering on key state issues like the sanctuary bill, a housing package and his 100-percent clean energy bill, in addition to parks and water bonds.

Congress

Many Democrats say that whether it’s de León or another up-and-coming Democrat, Feinstein will almost certainly have a race on her hands.

“I, frankly, will be surprised if she doesn’t draw a challenger,” says

Democratic strategist Garry South, who notes that in a state where the Republican Party has shrunk to just 25 percent of the electorate, California's "top two" primary election format has completely changed the equation for Democratic Party upstarts hoping to take on a powerful senator like Feinstein.

The primary rules, which call for the top two finishers — regardless of party — to compete in the general election, mean that a viable Democratic candidate doesn't necessarily have to beat Feinstein in the June Senate primary. The challenger need only come in second place to end up in a November showdown with her, South notes.

South says Feinstein's comments last week about Trump struck many California Democrats as a major misstep in a state where the party's progressive wing, as evidenced by de León, is increasingly muscular.

To progressives and millennials who are expected to become an energized voting bloc in a 2018 race, "waiting for Donald Trump to be a good president is like leaving the landing lights on for Amelia Earhart," he told POLITICO.

By sharpening the contrast with Feinstein, de León may be best positioned to take advantage of the rift.

"He has nowhere to go. He's term-limited out, and he will have to hand over the gavel of the pro tem sometime next year," South noted. With the 2018 June primary just nine months away, he says, "it's too late to get into the governor's race unless you're Don Quixote."

That's because with an already-crowded Democratic gubernatorial field — where several candidates have already amassed millions of dollars — that door appears to be closing. Other statewide contests, including the lieutenant governor's race, are also quickly solidifying.

That leaves few statewide options for de León and other

ambitious Democrats like Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, Secretary of State Alex Padilla, Reps. Adam Schiff and Eric Swalwell, all of whom have been mentioned as possible hopefuls should Feinstein choose not to run for reelection.

For some of those pols, the Senate race is a now-or-never move — because if Feinstein is reelected in 2018, it's six more years before the seat comes up again.

"If you're one of these younger aggressive, progressive Democrats who wants to find a place to land — and you think the U.S. Senate is a cushy spot — you almost have to be thinking of 2018," says South. "To allow her to be reelected with no Democratic competition means that even if you think you're a bright star ... by the time 2024 rolls around, there will be some other bright people out there who are younger than you."

Merrill, the Democratic strategist, says ambition alone won't be enough to overcome Feinstein's considerable advantages — and she's betting against a high-profile Democrat jumping in to counter her.

"Feinstein's polls show she enjoys over 50 percent approval among state voters, and nearly 100 percent name ID in the state," Merrill said. "So if you are a challenger, you'll have to raise \$40 million to get there."

Some of the senator's friends and longtime allies say Feinstein won't be surprised if she faces challengers. They insist that opponents won't be able to match the senator's experience and considerable Senate clout.

As the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, and a formidable presence on the powerful Appropriations and Intelligence committees, Feinstein "has the ability to get a lot of stuff done in California," said former California Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher, a longtime friend. "She is enormously respected,

and very, very hardworking. ... So selfishly, we should all be on our knees every night and pray she decides to run.”

And, especially in these times, Tauscher added, many Democrats may want a steady hand on the tiller.

“Don’t forget if there is some kind of action from the House on impeachment, it’s the Senate that will serve as the jury,” she said. “It’s one of the reasons why, out of respect for her responsibility, she is keeping her powder dry, because she could be a future juror.”

Tauscher cautions that Feinstein has always maintained an uncanny instinct for political survival. “Should she decide to run,” Tauscher insists, “she will run a tough race — and she’ll run to win.”

Feinstein is hauled away by her billionaire Israeli husband

The Feinstein Family

Feinstein used lithium batteries for her personal stock portfolio and screwed over 40 California companies for her profits

Feinstein & Musk Plot Crony Payola