

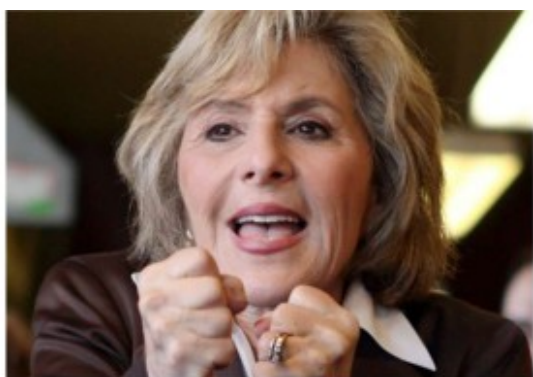
# Boxer not in lockstep with environmentalists

By Richard Simon, Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON – Barbara Boxer has long been one of the Senate’s environmental champions, racking up perfect scores for each of the last five years on the League of Conservation Voters’ report card on key votes.

But the Californian now finds herself on the opposite side of an issue from her usual environmental allies and some of her fellow Democrats. Environmentalists are upset because she is pushing legislation that would impose deadlines for environmental reviews of water projects, a move they see as “tilting the scales” toward rushed approvals.

“It’s difficult to have one of your stalwart environmental champions working to undermine one of the bedrock environmental laws,” said Friends of the Earth President Erich Pica, who, like other environmentalists, was conflicted about publicly taking on a powerful longtime ally.



Barbara Boxer’s moves are not sitting well with environmentalists.

“I say to my friends in the environmental movement, we can’t

agree 100 percent of the time,” Boxer said.

At issue is the \$12-billion Water Resources Development Act. The measure, coming before the Senate this week, is a rarity on hyper-partisan Capitol Hill: It was passed unanimously out of the Boxer-chaired Environment and Public Works Committee.

Boxer disputed any effort to weaken environmental laws but acknowledged that she was seeking to end delays to crucial projects, such as those needed to protect communities from flooding.

“The environmentalists don’t like to have any deadlines set so that they can stall projects forever,” Boxer said. “I think it’s wrong, and I have many cases in California where absolutely necessary flood control projects have been held up for so long that people are suffering from the adverse impacts of flooding.”

Although she said she was open to listening to the environmentalists’ concerns, in this case, “I don’t think this is legitimate.”

Boxer’s support for the bill puts her in a tough spot, trying to balance her devotion to environmental groups with her desire to attract Republican votes for a bill she considers important to the economy and the environment.

The measure would authorize not only flood protection projects that have gained urgency after Superstorm Sandy, but also coastal restoration in the Florida Everglades and the Gulf Coast and projects aimed at promoting commerce on waterways. The bill is also expected to bring more money to Los Angeles and Long Beach for maintenance of their ports.

“It’s always hard for us to go after one of our champions, particularly someone like Sen. Boxer,” said Scott Slesinger, legislative director of the Natural Resources Defense Council. “We’re going to have to fight our normal allies if they’re

going to be attacking what we think is one of the most important environmental statutes.” He referred to the National Environmental Policy Act, which requires extensive reviews of projects that could affect the environment.

Slesinger said Boxer’s legislation would establish deadlines for project reviews, leading to a “rush to judgment” on development that could cause significant environmental damage. Government agencies would face fines of up to \$20,000 for failing to meet deadlines for project reviews, a requirement that he warned could lead to “slapdash” reviews.

“If the agencies are pressured into making decisions quickly, we will end up with projects that cause more harm than good,” said Melissa Samet, senior water resources counsel for the National Wildlife Federation.

Two of Boxer’s Democratic colleagues, Sens. John D. Rockefeller IV of West Virginia and Ron Wyden of Oregon, also have expressed concern about the “project acceleration” provisions.

But the senator says she is only seeking to end needless delays.

It’s not the first time Boxer has surprised her allies.

A few years ago, the stalwart liberal and frequent antagonist of big business sided with Republicans to champion a tax break for multinational corporations. She also defied the majority of her own party.

At the time, she was pushing a measure eagerly sought by California’s high-tech industry.