

Fiorina: I Can Save Taxpayers a Half Trillion Dollars

February 25th, 2010 at 3:33 pm by [MICHAEL ROSEN](#) | [8 Comments](#) | [Share](#)

"After going through chemotherapy and losing my hair," Carly Fiorina is telling an eager San Diego crowd, "taking on Barbara Boxer doesn't scare me one little bit."

A former CEO of Hewlett-Packard who launched her campaign for California's Senate seat in November, Fiorina indeed stands a decent chance of dethroning Boxer, especially after the race was officially downgraded by congressional handicapper Charlie Cook from "likely Democratic" to "leans Democratic" for the first time in Boxer's career, according to an [early January analysis](#).

And given Scott Brown's resounding victory in Massachusetts' special election, the prospect of another blue-state Democrat going down in 2010 suddenly appears possible.

As she made clear in her address to the San Diego County Republican Party and in the thoughts she shared with me, Fiorina's candidacy holds great promise—and faces high hurdles.

First, on the issues, conservatives will find common ground with Fiorina, who recently emerged victorious from a tough battle with breast cancer.

"Job creation, first and foremost... is priority number one," Fiorina told me. The first woman to head a Fortune 20 company, Fiorina knows a few things about job creation. While at H-P, she spearheaded an industry-wide [project](#) that encouraged Washington to "ensure a business climate that encourages entrepreneurship" while eschewing protectionism. At a press conference launching the initiative, Fiorina [candidly stated](#) "there is no job that is America's God-given right any more. We have to compete for jobs as a nation."

In a local manifestation of the jobs issue, she's been hammering Boxer for her disregard for California's thirsty Central Valley, where environmental restrictions on water usage have triggered a surge in unemployment—as high as 40% in some cities. Fiorina notes that Boxer, as chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, has the power to invoke an emergency clause to waive portions of a federal regulation protecting wildlife in the Sacramento Delta, but she's deliberately refused. Fiorina's loudest applause line: "common sense tells me that 46,000 jobs in the San Joaquin Valley matter a whole lot more than a two-inch fish called the Delta smelt."

After jobs, she told me her second priority is "get[ting] federal spending under control" given that we're "adding to our federal deficit at a rate of a trillion dollars a year."

Fiorina is fond of illustrating her fiscal conservative bona fides by way of anecdote. At one point at H-P, she was managing engineers who bought \$2.5 billion worth of "stuff" each year. In an effort to pinch pennies, she scrutinized the bills and found some mistakes. She got

some more people to examine the invoices, and they found even more errors. Eventually, she assembled a team of 90 people that collectively identified some \$300 million worth of mistakes.

Applying these skills to business as usual in Washington, Fiorina claims there's half a trillion dollars worth of waste in the federal budget and wants to "put every budget and every bill up on the Internet for the taxpayers to see." When I pressed her campaign about how they came up with \$500 billion in waste, they pointed me to studies by the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute.

The [Heritage memo](#) estimates that "Washington loses hundreds of billions of dollars annually on spending that most Americans would certainly consider wasteful," including everything from corporate welfare to improper payments to Medicare and Medicaid fraud.

The [Cato Handbook for Policymakers \(7th Ed.\)](#) offers suggestions on how to trim \$440 billion (in 2008 dollars) from the annual federal budget, including by indexing Social Security payments to the price (as opposed to the wage) index, increasing Medicare premiums, and converting Medicaid into a block grant program. The Handbook also contains detailed, line-by-line proposed cuts from every federal agency.

Fiorina's antipathy to government waste has philosophical roots. "I'm a proud conservative for the same reason Reagan was a conservative: I have faith in people," Fiorina told the crowd. "If given a chance, people will make better decisions and use of their money than other people far away can make of it."

She also told me she opposed the healthcare reform package currently wending its way through Congress because it "solves none of the problems it purports to solve." Instead, she says, it "increases the cost of healthcare, it does nothing to improve [its] quality, and it's going to add an incredible burden on the backs of, in particular, small businesses who are job creators."

Temperamentally, Fiorina comes across as a tad shy and unused to the energy and crowds of the campaign trail, most likely because her first genuine political involvement came during the 2008 presidential race, where she strongly backed John McCain and spoke at the Republican National Convention.

But she takes heart from Brown's insurgent campaign against an entrenched, establishment Democrat. She told me, a week before Brown won, that Bay State voters are "obviously willing to challenge the tradition of Democratic senators and have an open mind to a different person and a different message, and I think that same thing is going on here." She's confident that Californians' concerns over lost jobs and runaway spending "translates into a willingness to listen to somebody new."

When it comes to campaign cash, while Fiorina told me she's "not in a position to self-finance the whole thing," she says that she and her husband have already sunk \$2.5 million to "ensure that we get this campaign off to a very strong start." She also noted that "in less than 60 days, we've raised over \$1 million from a broad-based group of supporters." In what will surely be a steeply expensive race, she will undoubtedly need to tap even more of her personal resources.

But not everything's rosy for this challenger.

For one thing, the specter of a bitter—and even an unsuccessful—primary battle looms over Fiorina's campaign. Already facing a tough challenge from the right, in the form of Orange

County State Assemblyman Chuck DeVore, Fiorina will now have to fend off a candidate to her left—former congressman and assemblyman Tom Campbell, who [quit the governor's race](#) to join the Senate fracas.

DeVore's attracting Tea Party and other conservative support (despite Fiorina's insistence that she's a "proud, pro-life conservative who believes that marriage is between a man and a woman," a self description that earned raucous applause in San Diego), while Campbell retains significant name recognition in Silicon Valley, Fiorina's own political base. At this point, it's unclear whether Campbell and Fiorina will split moderate votes, helping DeVore, or whether DeVore and Campbell will share the male vote, tipping the race to Fiorina (most likely, a bit of both).

Also, like gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman, another prominent businesswoman running for statewide office in California, Fiorina must account for her failure to vote in several elections; so far, she's offered a mea culpa, telling the AP "[shame on me.](#)"

Lastly, Fiorina's large severance package from her H-P departure is likely to attract attention and may undermine her appeal to everyday Californians. While she can plausibly paint herself as an outsider to Washington, her opponents (primary and general) will inevitably, if perhaps unfairly, tie her to corporate bonuses and Wall Street bailouts.

Still, that Fiorina has already caught the most flak among the GOP candidates from Boxer's campaign and the DSCC strongly indicates that Democrats fear her candidacy more than anybody else's. The [latest Rasmussen poll](#) puts her within four points of Boxer. And while other surveys place her behind Campbell, her now-famous (or infamous) "[demon sheep](#)" [ad](#) demonstrates she's not afraid to take the gloves off, even during the primary.

Fiorina's certainly not shy when it comes to criticizing Boxer, whom she labels "a failed senator" who has authored three measly pieces of legislation during her 18 years in the Senate.

When I asked her if, in her heart of hearts, she thinks she'll knock off Boxer, she firmly replied "yes I do, or I wouldn't be doing this." No self-respecting politician would answer that question differently, but her conviction came across clearly in her tone.

"Barbara Boxer has never faced a candidate like me before," Fiorina concluded her San Diego remarks by saying. Come November, with any luck, Boxer will encounter yet another first: defeat.

Michael M. Rosen is an attorney and Republican activist in San Diego. Reach him at michaelmrosen@yahoo.com