



Marissa Roth for The New York Times

Representative Jane Harman sought support in Torrance Monday for her race for governor of California.

In a California Race, Is Being a Woman Enough?

By TODD S. PURDUM

LOS ANGELES, April 28 — As she wrapped up a breakfast speech to a friendly hometown audience in Torrance, a suburban city just south of here, Representative Jane Harman paused to reflect the other day on her six years in Congress and the seat she is giving up to run for governor of California.

"I often say that life has chapters," said Ms. Harman, a 52-year-old lawyer who is seeking the Democratic nomination in the June 2 primary. "This has been my best one by far. Who knows what will come next?"

But in my view, this should be said about the race for governor: May the best woman win."

Of course, Ms. Harman is the only woman in the race, and her audience laughed appreciatively. But the line was more than just a wisecrack in a state that has nominated Democratic women for major statewide office five times since 1990, and where women make up nearly 60 percent of the Democratic electorate. Ms. Harman's sex is the central mathematical rationale for her candidacy.

"Californians are very used to seeing women run for big offices and succeed," said Ellen Malcolm, the founder of Emily's List, a Washing-

ton group that raises money for Democratic women who support abortion rights and is backing Ms. Harman. "When we started doing Congressional races in 1988, there were 12 women in the entire House, and now there are 12 in the California House delegation alone."

Both of the state's United States Senators are women, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, and Ms. Harman jumped into the race this year at the last minute, after Ms. Feinstein, who has become the state's most popular politician, decided not to make another run for the

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