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Boxer names screening panels

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The swirl surrounding federal legal appointments continued Thursday, as Sen. Barbara Boxer appointed her vetting committees for each of California's four districts.

In addition, Northern District Judge Maxine Chesney has notified President Obama that she will take senior status later this year, Chief Judge Vaughn Walker said.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein is already responsible for filling the Northern District vacancy created by Judge Martin Jenkins' departure. Boxer is expected to name Judge Ronald Whyte's successor when the San Jose-based jurist takes senior status in March, meaning the responsibility for filling Chesney's vacancy will likely swing back to Feinstein.

In a voicemail, Chesney said she would go to senior status in August.

To chair her Northern District panel, Boxer selected a lawyer she had previously named to the bipartisan vetting committee that operated under President Bush: Minami Tamaki partner Jack Lee. Boxer also selected former Northern District Judge Eugene Lynch, a Republican appointee now at JAMS, along with retired First District Court of Appeal Justice Linda Gemello.

Berkeley defense lawyer Cristina Arguedas landed a slot, as did civil rights lawyer

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William Turner. In terms of South Bay personalities, Santa Clara University law professor Margaret Russell is on the panel. So is Christopher Arriola, a deputy district attorney in Santa Clara County who has been very active in promoting diversity on the state bench.

In a press release, Boxer said her committees will ensure that her federal appointments are "worthy of the enormous trust that Californians will place in them." Boxer will be responsible for filling the Northern District U.S. attorney slot, should Obama ask current top federal prosecutor Joseph Russoniello to resign.

So far, attorneys who have expressed interest in the U.S. attorney job all share a similar resume, moving from the prosecutorial trenches to white-collar practices at big firms. In addition to Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe partner Melinda Haag and McDermott, Will & Emery partner Matthew Jacobs, John Hemann at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius said he would think about applying for the top job, should there be a vacancy. Hemann changed his party affiliation from Republican to nonpartisan in December, according to the county registrar's office.

Stephen Meagher, a former federal prosecutor in the Northern District, also confirmed Thursday that he is interested in the U.S. attorney slot. Since leaving the office, Meagher has represented whistleblowers and said he has recovered hundreds of millions for the federal government. Asked why he wants the job, he pointed to the office's increased emphasis on gun and drug cases, which he said has come at the expense of white collar. With billions in federal financial rescue funds likely to come to the Bay Area, Meagher said it would be a "lost opportunity" if the U.S. attorney's office were not prepared to handle any fraud that arises.

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Jones Day partner Martha Boersch is also said to be interested in the U.S. attorney slot. She declined to comment.

Boxer's Central District chair is Joseph Cotchett, the well-known Democratic funder and plaintiff lawyer. Also landing on Boxer's Los Angeles committee is Brown Woods & George partner Eric George, a Republican and the son of California's chief justice.

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