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IN CALIFORNIA

Of 'rational turkeys' and other tales: Women voting for women

Two Democratic congressional candidates from California are trying to topple age barriers for female members of Congress. If 28-year-old Michela Alioto wins, she will be the youngest woman ever to hold a seat. If 82-year-old Sally Alexander triumphs, she'll be the oldest female freshman. Is the California Democratic

party an enlightened enclave for nominating these generational bookends?

The truth is that age had little to do with either candidate securing her nomination. Alioto, who is in a tight race with Rep. Frank Riggs in one of California's northernmost district, has money and a big political name—her grandfather spent two terms as mayor

of San Francisco. Alexander's campaign is explained by the "rational turkey theory." Political scientists use the term when a party runs a marginal candidate where the other party is strong, just in case some catastrophic event knocks off the front-runner. In her conservative Orange County district, Alexander was uncontested in the primary because the incumbent, Rep.

Dana Rohrabacher, won almost 70 percent of the vote in the last election.

Older than Dole. Both women have worked to shed a too-young/too-old image. Alioto says convincing women voters she's ready for the House is hard. "I think in part that women are tougher on women," she says. "It has been an acceptable career path for young men, but I have to show women it is also acceptable for us."

While she is a paraplegic as a result of a skiing accident at 13, it's her youth, not

her disability, that seems to put off some voters. A goal for Alexander, who is nine years older than Bob Dole, has been to persuade voters that women can be productive in their "golden years." She has tried to prove she is young at heart. Recently she donned her wet suit and took an ocean dip, giving a couple of hundred voters a boogie-boarding show. To get her to Washington, it will take a tidal wave of Democratic support.

BY JOSH CHETWYND

BRUCE STRONG—ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



Alexander. A new pitch: Send an octogenarian to Washington.

GEORGE WOLF—NAPA VALLEY REGISTER VIA AP



Alioto. Money and a famous name vs. questions of youth