



CHOOSING LABOR

Behind-the-scenes machinations convince Martin Ludlow to leave the City Council to head up the Count

By [Bobbi Murray](#)

Down at Pete's Café and Bar last Friday night, right down the street from City Hall, the habitual political chat came around to what has been a kind of open secret in Los Angeles for two weeks now: That Martin Ludlow, the councilman representing the 10th District, had been tapped to succeed the late Miguel Contreras as executive secretary-treasurer of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. It seemed like such a done deal that talk at several tables quickly went on to discuss mayoral politics and the fight between the governor and the state's labor unions.

Sources close to Ludlow say that he enjoys support among some of the most respected labor leaders at both national and local levels, and his advocates have lined up the votes to win the seat should Ludlow decide to run. Delegates from over 300 locals will vote on June 20.

Ludlow was reportedly torn about whether or not to give up his council seat, which he won just a year ago, but announced Tuesday that he would accept the nomination by the County Fed's board. His name had come up in some labor circles as a possible candidate early on. *CityBeat* asked him at an Election Day rally, May

17, whether he would consider the post. Ludlow expressed support for County Fed political director Charles Lester, selected as interim executive secretary treasurer, then said that if his name was indeed being floated, it was one of at least a dozen being thrown around.

Ludlow was the County Fed's political director - sometimes considered the Fed's Number Two position - for a time under Contreras, whose personal relationships and political astuteness helped L.A.'s labor movement become the most dynamic in the nation. Contreras's sudden death in May left a complicated vacancy. In this year's mayor's race, hairline fractures had developed between locals as the County Fed endorsed incumbent James Hahn against Antonio Villaraigosa, a former labor organizer and now mayor-elect. Several union locals split with the Fed's position and went to open endorsement or supported Villaraigosa, while the leadership of two Service Employees International Union locals energetically supported Hahn, one of them spending as much as \$400,000 on failed efforts to defeat the challenger.

Labor has since shown a unified front. And although Villaraigosa isn't known to be vindictive, it's an open question how much leverage his most vigorous labor opponents would have in a mayoral administration pulled in several different directions.

But Ludlow is both a longtime Villaraigosa ally and widely respected in the labor movement. He could help smooth over any rough edges. "It's an inspired idea," says a source close to both Ludlow and the labor movement.

"Martin Ludlow was the very best possible alternative," says Kent Wong, director of the UCLA Labor Center and a close observer of union politics. Ludlow's background has given him a good understanding of politics at the city, state, and community levels, Wong said, and he was widely respected as a get-it-done political director.

Maria Elena Durazo, president of UNITE HERE Local 11, the hotel workers' union, was the first name to emerge after Contreras's death, and was regarded as a star pick. She has played a key role nationally in pushing labor to embrace immigrant workers and to take a more aggressive stance toward organizing. Besides having been Contreras's wife, Durazo also enjoys good relationships with both community allies and state legislators.

The County Fed drafted Ludlow, who had not been seeking the post, at Durazo's behest, say sources close to the labor scene.

Durazo, who lost her husband only a month ago, is not discussing her apparent decision not to seek the post herself. She would have several reasons not to do so. The hotel workers represented by her local have worked without a contract since April, 2004, and negotiations have been fitful and contentious. A source says that a strike or a lockout could happen as early as this week.

Meanwhile, UNITE HERE, where Durazo is a key player, has a central role in a potentially serious contretemps at the national level. UNITE HERE is one of five unions that have urged AFL-CIO President John Sweeney to step aside for a candidate who would more forcefully organize new workers into the union movement. One union, the Service Employees International Union, with 1.7 million members, has threatened to split off from the AFL-CIO. The whole issue could come to a head at the national convention in July, where such a split might seriously affect the County Fed.

Wong, of the UCLA Labor Center, is only too well aware of the dynamics as he enthusiastically supports

Ludlow as L.A.'s new union leader. "He brings all of the skill sets needed to move the County Fed forward," Wong says.

Published: [06/09/2005](#)

[DIGG](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [REDDIT](#)

[Other Stories by Bobbi Murray](#)

Related Articles

- [Frontlines](#)

Post A Comment

Requires free [registration](#).

Username:

Password: ([Forgotten your password?"](#))

Comment: