Henry to succeed Stern as president of SEIU

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Mary Kay Henry, a 31-year staffer of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) — and head of its Healthcare Division — will succeed Andy Stern when he steps down as president of the 2.2-million-member union May 8.

Henry's election that day by SEIU's Executive Board was assured on April 28 when Stern's anointed successor, Secretary-Treasurer Anna Burger, withdrew from the race after she lost SEIU's biggest Eastern health care local. Instead, the Executive Board of New York Local 1199 bucked its own president, political powerhouse Dennis Rivera, and voted for Henry.

Prior to that, Henry, 52, had won endorsements from four other SEIU vice presidents, plus the union's largest affiliates on the West Coast.

Realizing the political realities, Burger withdrew. She dismissed claims that her loss was a "rejection of the Stern/Burger agenda" or a shift in the union's priorities. But Henry, who is an SEIU executive vice president, is known for her emphasis on organizing, while Burger was more into politics.

Burger will remain the union's secretary-treasurer. Both terms end in June 2012.

"We women have a special knack for putting our egos aside and keeping our eye on the bigger picture and the common good," Burger said in conceding. She said Henry has "the same goals for our union and for the larger labor movement."

Stern, like Burger, a 59-year-old Philadelphian, announced in mid-April he would step down in mid-term. He held the presidency for 14 years, succeeding John Sweeney after he was elected president of the AFL-CIO. [Stern later disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO to form the Change to Win labor federation with United Food and Commercial Workers, Teamsters, Laborers, United Farm Workers of America, Carpenters and UNITE HERE. The latter two have since left, with UNITE HERE returning to the AFL-CIO.]

Outside commentators said the movement to Henry was not so much to affirm her bid, but a turn away from abrasiveness Stern and Burger often exhibited towards other unions and even towards SEIU leaders and locals who disagreed with them.

Henry, they added, is viewed as more of a conciliator. Stern is heavily involved with the Obama Administration and Burger only slightly less so. Henry is not.

Henry's bio on SEIU's website says she became an SEIU staffer in 1979. She heads the Healthcare Division, one of four "unions within the union" Stern created. Henry helped forge agreements between SEIU and Kaiser Permanente in California and the Allina system in Minnesota, among others.

The bio says Henry believes in "a new and different model of labor-management relationships" and is leading SEIU's effort at creating "new kinds of partnerships with hospital employers" to improve quality of patient care, strengthen the hospital's competitive performance, and give workers a voice in decisions that affect care and working conditions." It added Henry is "active in the fight for immigration reform and gay and lesbian rights" and is a co-founder of its gay and lesbian Lavender Caucus.

...Federal building gets union project labor agreement

(From Page 1)

Regional Council of Carpenters make up Construction Alliance II.

"We received a notice to proceed in mid-April," Wilson said.

Because the Portland project labor agreement had yet to be signed by all parties, GSA Public Affairs Manager Ross Buffington was unable to comment.

At its peak, 350 to 400 construction workers will be employed on the job.

Of the 10 targeted projects, Portland is the third to receive GSA clearance to gather signatures. The first was the Prince Hunio Kanaianaole Federal Building and Courthouse in Honolulu, and the second was the 50 United Nations Plaza in San Francisco.

Obama backs plan to curb worker misclassification

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Unions and the Obama Administration announced April 22 that they back legislation to curb employer misclassification of workers as "independent contractors."

The legislation, by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and House Workforce Protection Subcommittee Chair Lynn Woolsey, D-Calif., makes worker misclassification a violation of federal labor laws. Building trades union delegates, in the nation's capital for their annual legislative conference, made a ban on misclassification a top legislative cause.

Another misclassification curb is in the new health care overhaul. That ban requires any employer who pays an "independent contractor" more than $600 a year to file documents with the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS can then determine whether the worker is truly independent of the employer, or whether the worker is an "employee," covered by Medicare, Social Security, workers' compensation, overtime pay, and labor law, among other safeguards.

"This is welcome news to many workers who are misclassified by their employers," including home health care workers, construction workers, hospitality industry workers, broadcast technicians, stagehands, truck drivers, and day laborers, said AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka.

By classifying those workers as independent, "unscrupulous employers can cut costs by as much as 30 percent" and "gain an unfair advantage over law-abiding competitors," Trumka said.

Teamsters President James Hoffa agreed. The Teamsters have seen hundreds of thousands of truckers misclassified as "independent contractors," and helped truckers successfully sue against such misclassification by nonunion FedEx. "Workers misclassified as independent contractors receive no protection from workplace health and safety laws, no legal rights to equal opportunity in the workplace, no rights to job-protected family and medical leave," Hoffa said. "Their rights to form a union are also denied. These employers are clearly violating federal labor laws and ripping off the American taxpayer. They must be held accountable."

U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis also backed the misclassification ban, and noted her department's budget for the year starting Oct. 1 envisions a $25 million Labor Department initiative to crack down on employer misclassification of workers. Solis called misclassification "significant and troubling."

The misclassification issue stretches across party lines. Hoffa noted the Republican-controlled Nebraska Legislature recently banned employer misclassification.

And Hoffa said Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., will introduce legislation to specifically ban misclassification of port truck drivers — a large problem in the ports of Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif., and New York City.