

New SEIU President Eyes Leadership Shake-Up



By Matthew Murray, CQ-Roll – Wed May 12, 7:52 am ET

Major changes to the [Service Employees International Union's](#) downtown operations could be under way soon.

In an interview Tuesday, new SEIU President Mary Kay Henry said she is conducting a monthlong review of her top deputies, including Secretary-Treasurer [Anna Burger](#), Henry's main opposition in the union's recent election to replace longtime head Andy Stern. Burger mysteriously dropped out of the race two weeks before the May 8 election.

"She and I have begun discussions and are committed to reaching an agreement by the end of May. ... Every officer is now in a review process about what role they will assume," Henry said in the interview. "It is the prerogative of the president to reassign responsibilities."

Henry added that her union may bulk up its K Street lobbying presence, particularly on issues such as immigration. She's also exploring whether SEIU needs more bodies to fuse the group's Capitol Hill outreach with its massive grass-roots operations, a division that she recently vacated to replace Stern.

"What we have decided is that we want to put more resources nationally in our fight to win comprehensive immigration reform, so we will definitely be adding resources to our national immigration campaign, but whether they are specifically toward lobbying resources, I don't know yet," she said.

As evidenced by SEIU's ongoing broadcast onslaught against Democratic Sen. Blanche Lincoln in Arkansas, Henry said it's "full steam ahead" for the organization's political operations, which are expected to spend \$44 million by Nov. 2. In Arkansas, as in several other congressional races nationwide, SEIU is backing a primary challenger because the union doesn't see an ally in Lincoln, a conservative Democrat.

"Our union has been working on preparations for these elections for two years," Henry said. "We've made commitments to get our members off the job as our ground troops in many states."

She also denied that her victory was a mandate on the lengthy and often contentious tenure of Stern, who backed Burger to replace him.

A close ally to President Obama, Stern rankled many labor bosses by leaving the [AFL-CIO in 2005](#) and helped form rival federation Change to Win. But he also scored points recently for helping the health care overhaul across the finish line.

"Our union celebrates Andy's leadership. I don't think there was fatigue at all," she said. "I think the key thing that distinguished me was that I had a united team of officers and a vision for the future. It was a lot less about personality than it was about program."

Earlier this week, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka called Henry "a dynamic and talented labor leader" and indicated an interest in wooing SEIU back to the AFL-CIO.

"We look forward to working with her and the leaders of SEIU on our common agenda, speaking out for a better life for all of America's working families," Trumka said in a statement. "Never has it been more important to have unity and strength in the fight for good jobs, rights and respect for working men and women."

On Tuesday, AFL-CIO spokesman Josh Goldstein wrote in an e-mail that his group continues to encourage its former affiliates to leave Change to Win and [return to the AFL-CIO](#).

"As [former AFL-CIO President] Lane Kirkland once said, 'All sinners belong in church and all unions belong in the AFL-CIO,'" Goldstein wrote.

Despite repeated AFL-CIO entreaties, Henry gave little indication that she is considering rejoining.

"It's settled at this moment," she said. "But we want to have a discussion with every union about how we restore relationships and what we can do together to make sure we win as many races as possible in the 2010 election. What I want to put my energy toward is something that matters for workers, [rather] than restructuring of relationships that isn't connected to an outcome for workers."

A [Change to Win](#) spokesman on Tuesday reiterated Henry's recent statements on comity for SEIU and the AFL-CIO.

"The needs of hardworking women and men in this country transcend conversation about the configuration of the [labor movement](#) and instead call on us all to work together in the interest of workers and their families," the spokesman, who did not want to be named, wrote in an e-mail.