

Face to face:

L.A. City Councilmember Nury Martinez

Each quarter, the L.A. Area Chamber speaks with a civic leader about issues affecting the business community in the L.A. region.

This quarter we spoke with newly elected L.A. City Councilmember Nury Martinez (District 6), on issues important to her and what she hopes to accomplish during her first term.

Based on your campaign, the community that you live in and the constituents in your district seem to be of utmost importance to you – what are some challenges that you see facing your district and what can you do as its new City Council representative?

Councilmember Martinez: The biggest challenge facing our district is the historical lack of investment in infrastructure. In some areas, the infrastructure is either non-existent in some cases or badly in need of repair in other parts. Whether its streets, sidewalks, street lighting, or sewers and utilities, this is a serious concern for me because inadequate infrastructure not only affects the day-to-day quality of life for residents in my district, but it can affect businesses that provide good paying jobs by potentially impeding day to day operations or hampering the growth or attraction of new businesses to the Valley. My main goal as a Councilwoman is to deliver those basic core services to improve the quality of life for all of my stakeholders. If I can bring that investment, I am hopeful that not only will our communities be safer and more attractive, but local businesses will thrive, our commercial corridors will be reinvigorated, and good paying manufacturing and industrial jobs will grow. These infrastructure investments will benefit all of the 6th District and the San Fernando Valley.

The Chamber is an advocate for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, on a local and national level. What can the City Council do to help make this a reality?

Councilmember Martinez: We need to advise our colleagues in Congress to stay strong and firm in their resolve to put forward real reforms. From the local level we can attest that the current regulations are not stopping people from making that journey for a better life. We can continue to tell the day-to-day stories of those people contributing to Los Angeles, but living in a gray area, because we get to see it on a daily basis. The Federal government is long overdue in coming up with real common sense reforms that allow people, who have already been in this country contributing to the great fabric of this society, to resolve their legal status. Furthermore, we need to ask our colleagues in Congress to look at the bureaucracy that has bogged down the naturalization process, which can take so long that it serves as a disincentive to follow the rules.

As a former Los Angeles Unified School District Board member, education is obviously a priority for you. What are some other big priorities and is there anything that you learned from sitting on the LAUSD Board that you hope to bring with you in your new job?

Councilmember Martinez: The top priority is a renewed focus on bringing back the core services a city is supposed to provide to its constituents. Beyond that, I want the San Fernando Valley to again be the hotbed of quality middle class jobs. To do that I am hopeful that the LAUSD Board will continue on the great work we started to make our public education system a world class system for students. Combined, these three items are the building blocks to reestablishing the quality of life for the Valley. If we are able to properly educate our students and fix the infrastructure deficits in our area, we should see the return of those middle class jobs that I want to bring back to the 6th District.

The implications of the City of Los Angeles' problems, financial and otherwise, are critically significant and a major challenge for us all. My service on the LAUSD Board, however, was focused on addressing a deficit while fulfilling the educational obligations we had towards our students. I am confident that my colleagues have the capacity and commitment to continue to fix many of the problems facing the City, and we can be successful, because we started to fix those structural problems at the LAUSD.

Your platform when running for L.A. City Council was to "break the gridlock of business-as-usual politics at City Hall to get back to the basics and deliver resources to Valley residents." What is your first plan of action in accomplishing this?

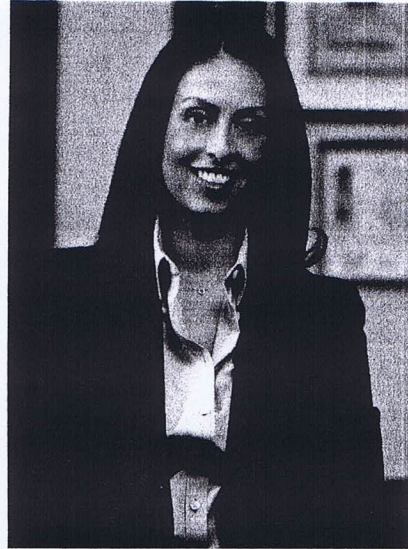
Councilmember Martinez: As chair of the Audits Committee I intend to review the efficiencies (or lack thereof) in our municipal government. If we can find and fix those inefficiencies it will allow us to use those extra dollars to provide greater resources to our basic responsibilities of sidewalk programs, street repair, street lighting and tree trimming. We have gone too long accepting that this is just how government works. It's slow and inefficient. While there is some value to not having knee-jerk responses to issues facing the City, our government has grown too cumbersome for its own good, and for the good of Angelenos. We need to be able to respond to concerns and requests in a much timelier and less expensive manner. I intend to make inroads on those issues, so we can begin to deliver greater service to our taxpayers.

As one of several new members of the L.A. City Council, and the only woman, what is your vision for the Council as a whole?

Councilmember Martinez: I want to see the Council work together to improve the lives of our city residents. However, we should not be afraid to have an honest and forthright debate, battling over ideas to make this city stronger. It's the reason why voters elected us to these positions. Just because we disagree on one particular issue shouldn't mean that we can't work together on another issue. We all come from different parts of the City with different needs and different experiences. I would guess that we do not always need to move as one homogenous group. A vigorous debate is always healthy and I hope that we as one body can engage in those debates without creating animosity that handicaps our ability to work on issues going forward. After all, a healthy discussion will only ensure that the final resolution by the Council is the strongest resolution for Los Angeles.

What are some issues that you will be working on that are of interest to the business community?

Councilmember Martinez: The first thing I want to work on that will be of interest to the business community is creating certainty within our systems. Right now, those who want to contract with the City to do business, want to apply for building permits or even apply for land use determinations feel like they are just rolling the dice with no real firm idea of how they will be judged. There is no certainty to the City processes



If we are able to properly educate our students and fix the infrastructure deficits in our area, we should see the return of those middle class jobs that I want to bring back to the 6th District.

— L.A. City Councilmember
Nury Martinez

and that is unacceptable. You shouldn't be guaranteed a "yes," but you should be guaranteed an answer in a fixed window of time. That answer should be based on facts, fair analysis and the rules that govern the question and not subject to political winds that create uncertainty and lead to reticence to come and do business in the City of Los Angeles.

In addition, and as mentioned earlier, many businesses are hampered by the City's often outdated infrastructure. Not only must the Los Angeles business climate support the philosophy of business, but the infrastructure, where the rubber meets the road, literally, must support the actual daily activities of local businesses. I intend to be strategic in investing in infrastructure where appropriate, to ensure we support business and the good paying jobs they provide.