

## POLITICS

# California Democratic Party elects L.A. labor leader Rusty Hicks as chairman

By **CHRISTINE MAI-DUC** and **PHIL WILLON**  
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Rusty Hicks celebrates with supporters after winning the election for chairman of the California Democratic Party during the 2019 California State Democratic Party Convention at Moscone Center on Saturday in San Francisco. (Kent Nishimura / Los Angeles Times)

Labor leader Rusty Hicks was elected the next chairman of the California Democratic Party on Saturday, a win cemented by support from many elected officials and most of the state's major labor organizations, who hope he can steer the party out of an internal crisis in time for the 2020 elections.

Hicks, president of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, bested Bay Area activist Kimberly Ellis, who finished in second place, to succeed former party Chairman Eric Bauman, who resigned last year after a series of sexual harassment allegations.

With 3,162 votes counted, Hicks dominated with 57% of the vote. Ellis, who narrowly lost to Bauman in 2017, received 36% of the votes, and Daraka Larimore-Hall, the party's vice chairman, trailed with just 6%.

Supporters of Hicks gathered at the W Hotel in San Francisco on Saturday night and greeted him with loud cheers shortly after the results were announced.

"We're going to get to work tomorrow, but tonight we're going to celebrate," he said.

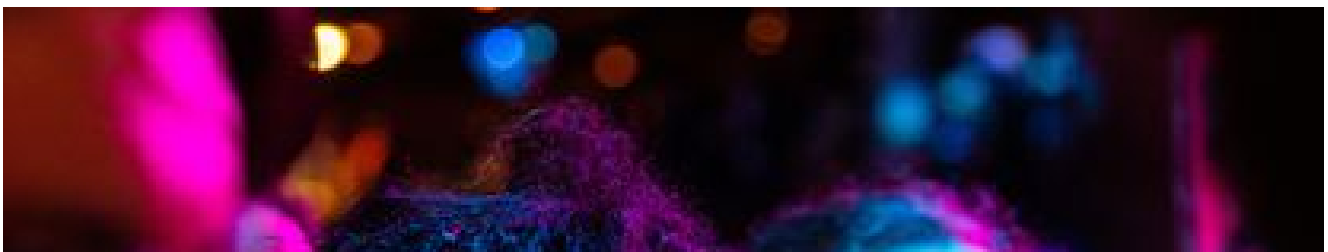
Hicks said he has plotted out a plan for his first 100 days as party leader, including increasing efforts to train grass-roots activists and to reach out to conservative and moderate areas of California, including the Central Valley.

But Hicks added that his top priority will be enacting policies to restore the party's credibility, including implementing a "zero tolerance" policy on sexual harassment.

"We have to put in not only the culture that says that this is no longer tolerated, but also the systems that ensure that it never happens again," Hicks told reporters. "I think it means we have to have a clear code of conduct. We have to have a system in which complaints can actually be lodged, that they are investigated by a third party and that we take clear and decisive action."

Party insiders said Hicks' victory is the first step toward stabilizing the organization, preparing it for the March presidential primary and to help oust

President Trump.





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“There’s a deep breath of relief from Democrats who are happy that the party is going to be in good hands and have a strong chair that can help fulfill the party duties,” said Doug Herman, a Democratic consultant who was supporting Hicks. “It’s a direct reflection of the fact that Rusty represented stability and the course that the party delegates were looking for and that the party needs.”

Hicks, 39, has been praised by his backers as a skilled political strategist and a steady, even-keeled leader in the labor movement. A native of Texas, he served as political director for the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor under Maria

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Hicks said he hopes to bring all the factions of the party together and understands why his biggest rival in the race, Ellis, had such passionate followers.

“We should embrace the passion that comes into the party, and also remember what our party is singularly focused on – and that’s seeing a change in the White House in 2020,” Hicks said.

But supporters of Ellis, who would have been the first woman to lead the state party in more than 30 years and the first black woman to chair the organization, say the vote represents a missed opportunity for the party to show it takes new voices and issues of representation seriously.

Dallas Fowler, a delegate from Los Angeles, said Ellis' candidacy was a chance to make history and elect a capable leader committed to opening the party up to more women, young people and people of color.

“If I, as a young black woman in this party, can't see myself in leadership, then what's the point?” Fowler said. “This is a majority-minority state, and until our party really shows up and puts our money and our time and our muscle behind these communities to ensure that we have adequate representation, we're not going to see that.”

Hicks' victory comes on the heels of a contentious campaign that centered on how best to steer the party forward after months of turmoil.





state's top Democratic leaders.

Ellis' political cachet and connections to top California Democrats rose steadily during her years as director of Emerge California, a nonprofit devoted to electing more women to office. Though she backed former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic presidential primary, Ellis gained the support of the progressive wing of the state party, appealing to supporters of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders in her first run for chair.

In this year's contest, Ellis' support of publicly financed elections raised concerns among state Democratic leaders that she would further limit corporate donors or ban them altogether, a move that could handicap the party financially.

"If we don't have a supermajority or a majority, then that puts our policies at peril," said Kevin de León, who was Democratic leader of the state Senate when Ellis narrowly lost her first race. De León said he "had some concerns" two years ago about Ellis and decided to endorse Hicks, a longtime friend, in this year's race, adding that he called delegates to lobby them to support Hicks.

"We must always have the utmost confidence in whoever is the leader of the California Democratic Party," De León said.





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## Christine Mai-Duc



Christine Mai-Duc covers California politics and breaking news from Los Angeles. She has previously written for Capitol Weekly in Sacramento and The Times' bureaus in Washington, D.C., and Orange County. Christine grew up in Sacramento, graduated from UC Berkeley and left her heart in Oakland. She is coping well with healthy doses of breakfast burritos and baguettes from Figaro.

## Phil Willon



Phil Willon covers Gov. Gavin Newsom and California politics for the Los Angeles Times. He reports from Sacramento and his previous assignments included the 2018 governor's race and the 2016 U.S. Senate race. Before heading north, Willon covered Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and roamed Southern California's mountains and deserts as the paper's state correspondent in the Inland Empire. Prior to joining The Times, Willon served as the Washington, D.C., correspondent for the Tampa Tribune. At the Tribune, Willon also covered Florida Gov. Lawton Chiles, Hurricane Andrew and the investigation leading to the arrest of serial killer Danny Rolling. He began his newspaper career as the Kent Island correspondent for the Capital in Annapolis, Md. Willon grew up in Southern California and graduated from UC San Diego.

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