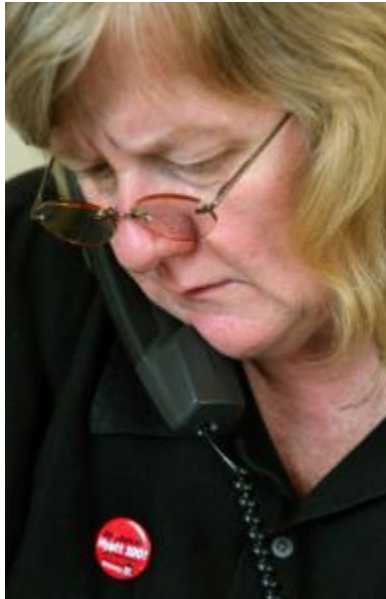


New day, new fray for labor chief

Hyatt is latest target for Loux



Janice Loux has a reputation for being as “tough as nails.” (David L. Ryan/ Globe Staff)

By [Katie Johnston Chase](#) and [Megan Woolhouse](#)
Globe Staff / October 1, 2009

Janice Loux knows a thing or two about putting up a fight.

The union president was thrown in jail for trying to give workers at the Logan Airport Hilton turkeys one Thanksgiving. She helped a pregnant Haitian worker block a truck at a Roxbury laundry where workers were on strike. And when the Amsterdam restaurant at the Park Plaza Hotel put curtains on the lower windows to block out the union’s 406-day picket line, Loux brought in a stilt walker to keep the protest visible inside.

Now, the head of Unite Here Local 26, which represents hotel workers, is locking horns with Hyatt Hotels Corp. over its firing of 98 nonunion housekeepers - staffers replaced with lower-paid workers from a subcontracting firm. Loux organized pickets and press conferences and meetings between housekeepers and the governor, who threatened a state boycott against Hyatt. And on Monday, Loux vowed to go after the hotel company’s big customers unless it reinstates the workers.

Loux has battled plenty of hotels over the years, but her tough stance on Hyatt - rebuffing the chain’s offer of temporary jobs to the fired workers - could be as much about preserving union clout as it is about saving jobs.

Communications Workers of America Local 4250
3055 Glenwood-Dyer Road, Lynwood, Illinois 60411
Steve G. Tisza, President (708) 757-4065(Office)
stevetisza@sbcglobal.net (E-Mail)
<http://www.cwalocal4250.org> (Website)

“I think this is all part of an effort [by Loux] to build a strong coalition with community groups, immigrant groups, and political leaders so there’s a more united front,” said Thomas A. Kochan, cochair of the Institute for Work and Employment Research at MIT.

“The downside,” he said, “is that this is a very difficult issue, and it’s not clear she will be successful.” That is a big “if” for the fired housekeepers, and a high-profile gamble on their behalf by the leader of one of New England’s largest private sector unions.

Loux, pronounced “Lux,” is an imposing 50-year-old woman with a thick South Boston accent who has the ear of everyone from developers to the mayor to state officials. The daughter of an MBTA laborer and a hotel waitress who led the drive to force the all-male bartenders union to admit women, Loux is the first female president of Local 26 in its 121-year history, as well as the longest-serving board member for the MBTA. She has a reputation for being an aggressive negotiator - a bully, even, some say - as well as for being a compassionate voice for hotel workers.

John Wilhelm, president of the international umbrella of Unite Here, said “Janice has a heart as big as the Atlantic Ocean” but is also “tough as nails.”

Indeed, Loux, who was elected president in 1997 after serving nine years as vice president, has even gone to battle with her union brethren. In 2006, a federal court of appeals agreed with a decision by the National Labor Relations Board that Loux had improperly fired a union researcher who complained about her workload during a four-month protest at the Boston Hilton. A judge ordered Loux to rehire the employee.

Since taking the helm, Loux - whose salary from the local and international unions is \$100,000 - has focused on unionizing new hotels before they opened and launching protests if they resist. She has reached agreements with 27 hotel developers, operators, and owners, acknowledging the right of workers to organize and giving her union exclusive rights to represent them.

During her tenure, Local 26 has nearly doubled its membership, to more than 6,300, and has increased the percentage of unionized hotels in the city - which has more than 60 hotels - from 40 to 60 percent, according to union researchers.

A dozen developers didn’t return calls seeking comment about Loux and the union’s role in construction projects. Ronald N. Cogliano, president of the Merit Construction Alliance, which advocates for nonunion contractors, said he is not surprised: “There’s no one I know willing to talk about it.”

Hyatt became Loux's latest target after the fired Hyatt housekeepers asked for her help. If Hyatt does offer the workers their jobs back, Loux said, she will not discuss unionization: "The main goal of this effort is to get them their jobs back."

The hotel company offered the fired workers jobs at their old wages with an outsourcing firm, an offer a majority of the workers rejected. Hyatt declined to comment about Loux.

Part of Loux's success comes from her connections to city and state officials. Loux has crossed picket lines at least twice to support the Mayor Thomas M. Menino. Because of that, she said "a lot of people were upset."

The city also has supported her efforts, postponing a vote to approve the Liberty Hotel until the developer agreed to sign with the union, and stalling a plan for a Loews Hotel until the developer bowed to the union's demands.

"My relationship with the mayor is born out of the fact that the mayor has created a climate where developers are not the only ones with the voice, that the workers in these hotels have had a voice," Loux said. "It's not like I'm on the phone with the guy all the time."

Menino's spokeswoman Dorothy Joyce said: "There are a lot of union presidents in this town, and I don't think she's treated any different."

Loux also has ties with the governor. The day the Hyatt firings became public, Patrick called Loux to express his concern. He soon took the unusual moves of appealing to Hyatt chief executive Mark Hoplamazian, meeting with the housekeepers, and threatening a state boycott.

In a statement yesterday, Kyle Sullivan, a spokesperson for Patrick, said the "governor continues to discuss the situation with both the workers and Hyatt management."

Richard R. Tisei, a Wakefield Republican, said he thinks Patrick took up the cause of the Hyatt hotel workers "as a way to curry favor" with Loux and the unions.

In the past, Loux has been supportive of Patrick, helping draw public support for his proposal to bring three casinos to the state. Last year, Loux and her supporters showed up at the State House for testimony on the casino bill. Additionally, Loux's right-hand public relations man, Steve Crawford, has been a public relations consultant to Patrick for the last three years.

Some say Loux did Patrick's bidding when she used her position on the MBTA board to launch blistering attacks against former MBTA general manager Daniel Grabauskas last year. Grabauskas, who said at the time that Loux was angry because he refused to hire one of her relatives, resigned in August.

Grace Shepherd, a veteran board member, said the debt-ridden MBTA ended up paying more than \$327,000 to buy out Grabauskas's contract. But she added that she never thought Loux behaved unfairly.

"I guess there are some people who live in the world where attacking is the way to get things done," she said. "But I respect her, and if I had a problem and I had her on my side, I would consider myself lucky."

Katie Johnston Chase can be reached at johnstonchase@globe.com; Megan Woolhouse can be reached at mwoolhouse@globe.com. ■

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