



Photograph by Alan Mittelstaedt Big Mama

Maxine blesses Bernard Parks and hopes to overcome the County Fed's \$4 million

## Blowing Up L.A.'s Secret Government

**Are either Mark Ridley-Thomas or Bernard Parks up to the job of reforming the county supervisors?**

By [Alan Mittelstaedt](#)

Why am I sitting at this Board of Supervisors meeting all by myself? It's 3:30 p.m. Tuesday and Bernard Parks and Mark Ridley-Thomas, the two who so badly want to be part of this board, should be here with me. But they're nowhere to be seen. They aren't even returning my phone calls. I left very specific messages asking if they were up to the challenge of blowing up this secret government.

Maybe they're afraid to touch the question, and want the outcome of the race resting on this one: Can big-bad-ass Congresswoman Maxine Waters' endorsement of Parks be enough to match the County Fed's pouring up to \$4 million into pro-labor candidate Ridley-Thomas? I'm tired of playing this game by the old rules.

But if these guys intend to run on a business-as-usual platform, with one favoring business and the other labor ever so slightly, they both deserve to lose. The battle should be about open government and who is committed to doing the people's work in full view of, well, the people.

Until that day arrives, it's damn hard to sit and listen to a county Board of Supervisors meeting without wanting to storm the front of the room and start throwing chairs and toppling tables. But today the sheriff's deputy at the front of the massive hearing room, his right hand on top of his pistol, will be enough of a deterrent. Maybe.

The current supervisors, even the best ones, Gloria Molina and Zev Yaroslavsky, too often agree to do the people's business in secret away from the people. It's anti-democratic, and these politicians, even as entrenched as they are in their empires, should have learned their lesson when the pre-Sam Zell L.A. Times won a \$100,000 open-meeting case against them in 2004.

But these old dogs are hard to train. They still operate the most undemocratic display of raw power and corrupting influences within a half-block radius of the downtown cathedral, which, of course, is right across the street. Even today they were expected to go into a secret session – later cancelled – to talk about resurrecting the most bungled health care program in America – King/Drew Medical Center, the first and last resort of hospital care for hundreds of thousands of South L.A. residents before it was

forced to close last year because it killed and maimed too many people.

Ask most supervisors, and they would say they're in the clear, even though a specific operator to run the medical center was not up for discussion today. The only real company, Pacific Hospital of Long Beach, backed out of the deal that could have opened in phases within months. They have no specific deal to discuss, and media lawyers have warned them that they're skirting the state's open-meeting law. But the Brown Act often exerts as much control over them as Blue Laws do over drunks on a Sunday.

The real culprit here is someone very few people know. His name is Raymond G. Fortner Jr. He's the county counsel, the top lawyer serving the whims of the five supes, who have the power to fire him if he crosses them. The supervisors keep him around for the same reason that alcoholics rarely part ways with their enablers: He tells them what they want to hear. He was the chief deputy to the former County Counsel Lloyd Pellman, whose bad advice got the board in trouble four years ago.

Maybe, just maybe, this cycle will end with the June 3 election. There's still reason to hope that Ridley-Thomas or Parks will show courage. They're both strong candidates and would pass the usual degree of scrutiny given – or not – to political candidates. And the two men, despite their differences, used to be strong allies. Six years ago, Ridley-Thomas was a great champion of Parks, when then-Mayor James Hahn canned him as the police chief and brought in Bill Bratton.

Parks is the anointed successor of Yvonne Burke, and won the blessings Saturday of the most powerful African-American woman in South L.A. – Congresswoman Maxine Waters. The big question will be whether Waters's influence over thousands of voters will carry the day against the infusion of money into Ridley-Thomas' campaign by the County Federation of Labor. Parks is expected to spend \$1 million; the County Fed is rumored to be kicking in up to \$4 million in independent expenditures to elect their pro-labor voice.

L.A. Sniper also wanted to ask the two candidates if they were up to the challenge of firing County Counsel Fortner and replacing him with someone who is encouraged to tell them what the law is rather than what they want to hear.

There's still time for them to respond before the election.

Meanwhile, Parks gathered his friends and supporters together for an endorsement party at his campaign office on Crenshaw Boulevard. Anyone could come in, and it shouldn't be too surprising that a well-known candidate like Parks might have some troubling friends, though most politicians are clever enough not to draw too much attention to them.

That wasn't the case Saturday when Bill Burke, the man who founded the L.A. Marathon three decades ago and made a career in so-called public service by calling in favors as a member of the governing board of the South Coast Air Quality Management District and other powerful agencies.

A buoyant Parks called out for Burke to join him on stage. "Where's my marathon man? Burke is the first person who called me up and said, 'Have you thought about the Second District?' Ever since, we've been on this path."

Maxine Waters is an egomaniac, not a rare diagnosis for a politician, but she referred to herself in the third person at least a half-dozen times in her three-minute speech. Said Maxine: "A lot of people have been speculating, 'What is Maxine Waters doing?'" She rattled off reasons for supporting Parks. "The first is I went to high school with Bobbie, his wife ... but aside from that, Bernard Parks deserves this seat. He is a man of integrity and has the respect of all of the community."

OK, fine, Maxine, but can your guy pull the trigger on secret government? It's not like the county supervisors fool anybody. Most people who watch them every week are onto their games. "They violate the Brown Act constantly," says gadfly and medical-care expert Genevieve Clavreul, who rails at the

board nearly every week during the public-comment portion of the meeting.

Does she ever hear back from the supervisors?

“Most of them never respond to me,” she says. “But once District Attorney Steve Cooley called me because I was quoted saying he was too friggin’ scared of them to do anything about it. But he is. How can you expect him to do anything when his friggin’ salary depends on them?”

Is Parks or Ridley-Thomas ready, or do we need to find someone else to save King/Drew – and the county?

## **Unholy Communion with ‘CityBeat’**

The Pope had concluded his visit to Washington, D.C., and the cherry blossoms had peaked as Cardinal Roger Mahony walked through Union Station last week. Tall in a black suit with only his white clerical collar to give him away, Mahony went all but unnoticed. That is, until D.C.-based CityBeat correspondent Jeffrey Anderson spotted him from across the lobby. Mahony had been in town as part of the Pope’s traveling road show, a classic propaganda visit in which the Pope confessed his shame at the Catholic clergy pedophilia scandal that has shaken the church and its faithful. Once, L.A.’s cardinal had been among the most powerful Catholics in the world, his name on the shortlist should an American ever become pope. That was before Mahony, a former social worker with great business acumen, presided over the largest settlement of priest abuse cases in history – a staggering \$660 million doled out to more than 500 victims – but after tying the matter up in court for more than five years and practically perjuring himself at a 2004 deposition, in which he claimed to have no knowledge of priest molestation until well into the 1980s.

“Cardinal Mahony, how does it feel to have the church’s legal mess behind you?” Anderson asked. “Oh, we still have work to do, issues to address,” the pedophile protector responded with a smile. Mahony was reminded of some of the sharp criticisms and unkind words that have been directed at him over the years, sometimes by the media, sometimes by members of his own flock. He nodded in acknowledgment. Then he was invited to reflect on the clergy crisis, and share some of his thoughts and wisdom gained from the ordeal – an epic moral debacle that at times reduced him to a caricature of hypocrisy.

Again, he smiled warmly. “Oh, I’m afraid it’s still a little too soon for that,” he said as he wandered off, alone, to find his train.

## **Who’s Afraid of Sam Zell?**

Well, the new owner of the L.A. Times scares me, too. But I still went into spasms Saturday morning reading Nick Goldberg’s clueless and chickenshit explanation for not running an op-ed piece written by San Diego County Supervisor Dianne Jacob. The ignoble Zell and his national trailer park company sued Jacob for criticizing rent increases and plumbing problems at three parks in her district. Any time the owner of a media company plays a role in filing a defamation lawsuit aimed at stomping someone’s freedom of speech, people should hear about it.

Goldberg refused to run Jacob’s column and was quoted in his own newspaper, saying:

“We asked ourselves whether we would publish this op-ed piece about a mobile-home-park owner’s battle with the county of San Diego if it was not about Sam Zell, and we decided we probably would

not.”

Really, Nick. Shut up already and run the piece or at least admit the real question that inspired your decision: “How do we keep Sam the Lunatic from firing our asses?”

*Send insults and ammo to [BigAl@lasniper.com](mailto:BigAl@lasniper.com).*

Published: [04/23/2008](#)

[DIGG](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [REDDIT](#)

[Other Stories by Alan Mittelstaedt](#)

### Related Articles

- [L.A. Sniper](#)

### Comments

[www.bishop-accountability.org/abuse-track...](http://www.bishop-accountability.org/abuse-track...) for daily verified coverage of the ongoing Rog 'Mahal' Mahony crime spree, fleecing billions of dollars from LA laity, while continuing to endanger tens of thousands of children, in the LA Criminal Archdiocese (since the spineless LA Times, under new Zell ownership, is afraid of their own shadows, and has ceased covering this major ongoing crime story).

STOP DONATING LAITY, to rid yourselves of the single largest yet unconvicted felon Cardinal in the entire history of the American Roman Catholic Church!

Reporting From Heaven,

William F. Buckley, Jr.

posted by **William F. Buckley, Jr.** on 4/24/08 @ 12:10 a.m.

Regarding County Counsel:

Are you so sure Pellman gave bad advice? Perhaps the Board, as a majority, didn't always take his advice? His retirement from County service seemed abrupt. Perhaps he was unhappy with the Board? He went right to work for a law firm, and continues to this day working for another law firm. He must have done something right, and clearly wasn't ready to actually retire from working.

And if I recall correctly, Fortner was Chief Deputy before Pellman was appointed. That Fortner remained does not mean he and Pellman share the same philosophies and tactics. Fortner, who Pellman beat out for the top spot, finally got it after Pellman retired. When the Board announced his appointment, they also announce he would be retiring within a couple of years, but apparently things changed. My guess is that there are/were already too many County Department Heads leaving (what does THAT mean?) and the Board prefers some stability. Or maybe Fortner decided he likes the work too much. Or perhaps it is a combo of both.

Remember that the County Counsel essentially serves at the pleasure of the Board. The Board can either take the advice or not. Any lawyer will tell you that sometimes, clients go against their advice.

posted by **The Playful Walrus** on 4/24/08 @ 10:10 a.m.

**Post A Comment**

Requires free [registration](#).

Username:

Password:  ([Forgotten your password?"](#))

Comment: