

ROLL CALL

Mercado Parts the Crowds for Insiders

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Moses Mercado isn't just any superdelegate. The longtime Congressional aide turned Ogilvy Government Relations lobbyist is an operator. Mercado, who is attending his fourth Democratic National Convention, is part Democratic Party ambassador, part donor appeaser and, deep down, still the consummate staffer.

A Roll Call reporter who spent Tuesday roaming across Denver with Mercado notices that his party loyalty goes all the way to the DNC cufflinks he is sporting with his navy suit and pink tie.

A former deputy executive director and director of intergovernmental affairs for Howard Dean at the Democratic National Committee, the 44-year-old Mercado has a new role at the convention: D.C. delegate-at-large.

Mercado's early morning is a swirl of activity at his headquarters in the Hotel Teatro in downtown Denver.

From an international call during which he fields questions in Spanish about Democratic National Convention activities from representatives of the Chilean government, to mapping out the game plan with DNC Executive Director Tom McMahon for delivering floor passes to Democratic donors and staffers, to figuring out the schedule of what speakers and sessions to attend in the afternoon, Mercado is in demand.

Drinking a cup of coffee — no time for a real meal — Mercado has been up since 6:30 a.m. prepping for the day.

"It's a lot of wheeling and dealing," Mercado said of passing out credentials. "Today there is a big demand because of all of the people that want to see Sen. Clinton speak."

The dickering over Pepsi Center passes is a stark contrast from Mercado's day job lobbying for clients such as port operator Ports America and the Recording Industry Association of America. But for Mercado, the convention work falls into the mantra of once a staffer, always a staffer.

"It is kind of what I did" for Dean, Mercado said of his time doing outreach for the DNC with mayors, state legislators and Members. "I have the Rolodex."

That political Rolodex started in Texas, where Mercado served as assistant attorney general following law school. But after meeting with then-Texas Democratic

Congressional candidate Gene Green, he entered the world of politics. After helping Green win his House seat, Mercado traveled to Washington, D.C., for the first time as Green's chief of staff.

From there, Mercado jumped to then- Majority Leader Dick Gephardt's (D-Mo.) staff. After 12 years on Capitol Hill, Mercado went downtown to the American Insurance Association in 2003. After just over a year in his new lobbying gig, he got a call from Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who wanted him to become the New Mexico director for his presidential bid.

Following Kerry's loss in 2004, Mercado said, he returned to a different Washington.

"That was a tough time to be a Democrat," Mercado said.

Then he got a call from Dean to come work at the DNC. "In my interview, I told him I was honored because I'm probably the only guy who has worked with every candidate that was against him," Mercado said.

Dean didn't hold any grudges, though. In fact, after Mercado left, he appointed him as a superdelegate in 2007. Little did anyone know what a huge role they would play, particularly Mercado, who early on was a vocal supporter of Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.).

But this week, with his presidential pick ready to claim the Democratic nomination, Mercado focuses on meeting up with fellow Democrats and getting tickets to the right people. Following breakfast on Tuesday, Mercado makes a stop at the women's forum, hoping to catch Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton's (D-N.Y.) address. Sitting in the back of the conference room, several people stop by, asking Mercado to attend luncheons and seminars.

"It's great to see these folks, to reconnect," Mercado said. "It's nice to reconnect with the Democratic family of state legislators and governors."

After a little more than an hour of waiting for Clinton, Mercado is back at work helping the chief of staff to the French ambassador secure tickets. This is most of what will take up Mercado's day: negotiating passes for mayors, legislators and Democratic donors.

It's also a tricky dance, trying to keep everyone happy.

"Because Chairman Dean has a box, he wants to be helpful," Mercado said. "Credentials here are very different from Congress. If you don't have a credential you can't go. Even a Member of Congress has to do a lot of fast talking to get through."

After a lunch at the Cheesecake Factory with more ticket planning and a brief stop back at the hotel, he's on his way to the Pepsi Center by 3 p.m. with more passes to be handed out prior to joining the D.C. delegation for speeches and a visit to the Democratic leadership party — before getting up to do it all again the next day.