

PEOPLE TO WATCH

PRESS-TELEGRAM

LIFESTYLE

Ron Cedillos

It hasn't been all that long since Ron Cedillos was a bad actor playing bad guys in B movies.

He chuckles at the thought. At 41, he owns Cedillos Testing Co. in North Long Beach, which tests components for aerospace manufacturers, and is a Republican Party fund-raiser. Columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak recently suggested that he might be a candidate for a Bush Cabinet post as secretary of commerce.

These days he regularly confers with Gov. Pete Wilson, rides in the vice presidential limousine with Dan Quayle and chats at parties with George Bush.

"It's heady stuff. It's wonderful," he says with boyish enthusiasm. "I personally will never run for politics. My role is to get good guys in office. I'm a behind-the-scenes player. I'm good at it and I think I have something to contribute. But if the timing were right, yes, I'd go to Washington."

Cedillos is a self-made man who grew up in a "real middle-class" family in Torrance, was an avid surfer and made a killing selling flowers while still in elementary school.

He is a former Army paratrooper who attended El Camino Community College and now serves as a trustee of the California State University system. He is a former karate champion, who now spars with captains of industry. And he is a former actor who once appeared with karate hero Chuck Norris in the movie "Breaker, Breaker" as a lawman-gone-bad, and now contemplates becoming a Cabinet secretary.

He is a highly successful businessman with a Latino surname who says he doesn't have any "cultural linkage."

"My reputation with the White House is mainstream," he says. "I'm not

into heritage denial. I just don't have a lot of Latino history. I don't speak Spanish. I have trouble getting through the menu at the Red Onion. I'm not against offering my ideas, though. Latinos need leadership and they need to focus on economic mobility. But I have a much broader constituency."

Cedillos says he sleeps only four hours a night and works on "Washington stuff" almost every day between 4 and 6 a.m. He is a tireless advocate of a better regulatory climate for California business, particularly the aerospace industry.

Referring to the industry's decline, he says, "I truly believe the horse is half out of the barn door. We will stem the exodus of aerospace out of California, but we won't end it.

"What America needs is a high degree of accountability in politics," he adds. "Politicians focus on getting re-elected. They aren't risk takers.

"I am."