

## UNION DEMOCRACY

## New leadership at ILWU

Willie Adams succeeds Bob McEllrath after the union's first contested election in 18 years

Members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) elected their union's first-ever black president, Willie Adams. Adams, ILWU's long-time secretary-treasurer, outpolled long-time mainland vice president Ray Familathe 4,423 to 4,030 in mail ballots cast beginning in August.

Adams succeeds "Big Bob" McEllrath.

McEllrath has been president since 2006, but the ILWU Constitution bars members over 65 from running again.

Election results were certified Oct. 29 after the union executive board voted 15 to 6 to reject a challenge over irregularities in how ballots were mailed to and collected from members in Panama. ILWU represents 3,000 dockworkers and pilots in Panama in addition to 35,000 dock and ware-

house workers in California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawaii, and Canada. It withdrew from the AFL-CIO in 2013, citing jurisdictional disputes and political differences.

Adams grew up in Kansas City, Missouri. He went to work as a longshoreman at the Port of Tacoma, Washington in 1978, and became a member of ILWU Local 23. Since 2003, he has served as international secretary-treasurer at the union's San Francisco headquarters. He's also served as a mayor-appointed member of the five-member San Francisco Port Commission since 2012, and is currently the commission's vice president.

Also elected were: Bobby Olvera, Jr., mainland vice president; Wesley Furtado, Hawaii vice president; Ed Ferris, secretary-treasurer; and incumbent Coast Committee members Frank Ponce De Leon and Cam Williams.



Willie Adams

## ...Shapiro

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## movement?

The Carpenters left the AFL-CIO just prior to when I joined. So my impression partly is just understanding the history of the AFL and the CIO is that it's been pretty common throughout the decades for there to be a lot of flux of membership within those organizations. And particularly in the craft unions, whether the unions are in the AFL or not, there are jurisdictional disputes. Certainly not being part of the AFL or the Building Trades in certain areas affects that. There could be a perception that there's more

jurisdictional raiding, but I haven't found that to be the case. I think the Carpenters union is aggressive about organizing, and that's important. But I think there's an overarching problem in craft unions in particular where there is way too much time and resources and energy spent on infighting and concern about jurisdiction.

**You've just been elected to head the largest construction union in the Pacific Northwest. What direction would you like to lead the regional council in?**

My main focus is around organizing and growth. Having a really aggressive growth strategy is important for our union and for any of the craft unions, especially when the

vast majority of construction work nationwide is nonunion. That affects us at contract time, and pretty much any time we're looking at wages and security and safety for our members. In order to organize and grow, we need a much higher degree of participation from the membership. I think historically the union has not necessarily believed that we could get that level of engagement from our members. That is not a vision I share. I believe that we absolutely CAN. Internal organizing is something we're going to be focusing a lot more energy on, so that we can go back to the basic principles of organizing that formed our union. We're not going to do it without the members, plain and simple. We just need to go back to those basics.

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