

Williams More Seasoned in Second Run for DA

THE RACE FOR DA

BY AMARIS ELLIOTT-ENGEL

Of the Legal Staff

Editor's note: This article is the second in a series profiling the candidates for Philadelphia district attorney. Profiles of the Democratic candidates will appear in random order, followed by the Republican field.

When Seth Williams ran in the Democratic primary for Philadelphia district attorney in 2005, he says his campaign office was

located wherever he happened to be standing at the time.

Now, four years later and in his second bid to become the city's top prosecutor, Williams said he is a better candidate because he has been tested once before by the city's political process and he has been rendered strong by his tenure as the city's inspector general, a mayoral appointee responsible for investigating



WILLIAMS

government fraud and abuse.

Williams said he is the kind of person "who can talk to both white folks, black folks and brown folks and can be influential in any neighborhood in this city."

He also is trying to tap into an Obama-mania tailwind. Williams estimates that a "supermajority" of his campaign's 350 volunteers also volunteered for President Obama's campaign. Williams was the eastern state coordinator for the Obama campaign.

In a recent interview at Obama's former Philadelphia campaign headquarters

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at 15th and Sansom streets in Center City

and in a cavernous room outfitted with just a couple of tables and Williams' lawn chairs from home, Williams said that, in 2005, he was considered to be a nice guy with good ideas. But now, Williams argues, because of his inspector general tenure, he has the

hands-on experience of building partnerships with Philadelphia residents that will help him reduce crime. Williams is renewing his 2005 campaign platform of promising to institute a community-based prosecution model in which prosecutors would be assigned to a

geographic area of the city instead of a specific courtroom.

Williams said his biggest accomplishment as inspector general from Nov. 15, 2005, to January 2008 was "making the office real

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to the public." Williams also said he gained real management experience by leading the office's staff of 11 and **coordinating** his office's efforts with those of the Philadelphia police officers assigned to that department's internal investigations unit.

"We didn't just go after the little guy," Williams said. "Our investigation rooted out people at the top of the food **chain**."

In 2005, Williams won half of the city's wards and 46 percent of the vote when he ran against his former boss, District Attorney Lynne Abraham. With Abraham stepping down at the end of her current term, Williams is second in **fundraising** and might have the most name recognition of the five Democrats because of his prior run.

Williams said that the residents of **Philadelphia** don't care about global crises like the recent Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the West Bank and Gaza Strip when they are **worried** if they can "walk between their house and their cars and not get shot" and are worried if their children can go the playground without getting shot.

Williams said he believes he can lower the number of the city's homicides, lower the number of teddy bears placed on the city's street corners to commemorate murder victims, by changing the District Attorney's Office from a vertical prosecution model to a community-based prosecution model.

In a community-based prosecution model, Williams said — **using one** of his favorite statistics — **there would be a reduction in the 59 percent of felony cases that are dismissed during preliminary hearings.** He said this **organizational** model will match the nature of the city's division into sectional neighborhoods. And prosecutors will work with neighborhood **leaders** to harness their energy to prevent recidivism by criminal defendants, Williams said.

The district attorney not only has to advocate for **law enforcement** but advocate for economic development, education and public health, Williams said, in order to reduce the recidivism rate of **many** criminals. Williams hopes to **borrow** a page from the book of San Francisco prosecutor Kamala D. Harris, whose "Back on Track" program is a model for "restorative justice" by the development of education and employment opportunities for young adult drug offenders, Williams said.

Williams lives in West Philadelphia with his wife, Sonita, and daughters, Alyssia, Taylor and Hope. He grew up in the Cobbs Creek section of West Philadelphia.

The only child adopted by his parents, Imelda and Rufus O. Williams, Williams said they taught him: "Unless you're willing to be part of the solution, you have no right to complain."

Since Mayor Michael A. Nutter's swearing-in in January 2008 and the end of Williams' tenure as former Mayor John F. Street's appointee, Williams has been of counsel with Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young.

Before his inspector general tenure, Williams was an associate from February 2003 to November 2005 with Zarwin Baum DeVito Kaplan Schaefer Toddy's litigation department. Williams left the District Attorney's Office in 2003, where his assignments

included serving as assistant chief of the Municipal Court unit and leading the repeat offenders unit.

Williams also has been in the Judge Advocate General Corps of the U.S. Army Reserve since 1998. Williams said he joined as a JAG in order to continue his service and in order to supplement his ADA's income.

Williams graduated from Pennsylvania State University with his bachelor's degree, where he served as president of the Black Caucus and later as president of the Undergraduate Student Government, which represents the entire student body. Williams earned his law degree from Georgetown University in 1992.

Liz Greenfield Martin, a Philadelphia assistant district attorney from 1984 until 2003 and a full-time volunteer with Williams' campaign as the director of administrative operations, said that other district attorney

candidates might be pushing for **community-based** prosecution in their platforms. But she said she believes they are doing so because Williams got out there in 2005 with the idea first.

"There's not a scintilla of doubt in my mind they're taking it from him," Martin said.

Community-based **prosecution** is needed in Philadelphia because preliminary hearings are often pushed back several times, and the **time-consuming** process makes victims of crime feel victimized all over again, Martin said.

Martin said she also believes that Williams' election as district attorney will increase the transparency of the office and will improve morale of the prosecutors.

"It needs to be 'Obama-ed.' We need a fresh start in that office," Martin said. "We need a new way to look at things. We need people to feel happy about working there

again."

Danny Cappiello, an auditor who worked under Williams in the Inspector General's Office, said Williams was great to work for. Williams would take staff along to meetings with the city's managing director and other higher-ups because they had the specific expertise to answer questions, Cappiello said. Williams went out on investigations with his staff, and was very independent from the mayor's office, Cappiello said. And Williams conducted extensive public outreach about the Inspector General's Office, holding meetings with various groups to invite their complaints of fraud, waste and abuse and handing out **business cards** defining the role of the inspector general to members of the public, Cappiello said.

"I trust in him and I believe in him and he'll be a good district attorney," Cappiello said. ■

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