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Seth Williams will run for DA again Former inspector general may not face Lynne Abraham

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Next year Philadelphians are scheduled to elect a district attorney who is expected to be at the forefront of stopping crime.

Attorney and former candidate for the position R. Seth Williams, told The Philadelphia Tribune that he still wants the job.

Williams made an unsuccessful attempt to unseat District Attorney Lynne Abraham in 2005. Her office confirmed with



Seth Williams

The Tribune on Monday that she has decided not to run for reelection.

Williams is set to announce his intentions to become district attorney on Saturday, Dec. 6, at the National Constitution Center.

Abraham's departure naturally would leave a hole open for Williams. However, at Tribune press time, there were at least two unconfirmed names floating about that could be seen as challengers for Williams. Judge Leon W. Tucker hasn't made a decision yet, but said that he is "seriously considering running for the office."

According to Williams, in 2005 he had 46 percent of the vote and took half of the wards. "I was within 12,000 votes of winning," he said.

Abraham has had 17 years in office. She has garnered broad

community support and is politically savvy. She's been highly visible and personally involved in ongoing legislative and community efforts to get illegal guns off the streets, which is just one of the challenges faced by the next district attorney.

"One of the biggest challenges for the district attorney is to make the justice system work, and right now it's broken," Williams said. "We have 59 percent of the felony cases getting discharged for lack of prosecution and Philadelphia leads the nation in murders committed by handguns."

Prior to his 2005 campaign, Seth Williams was a political unknown. He was an assistant district attorney under Abraham from 1992 to 2003.

More recently, he served as Philadelphia's inspector general — an appointment he assumed under the administration of Mayor John Street on Nov. 15, 2005.

During his tenure as inspector general Williams began an investigation of City Councilman Curtis Jones Jr., which began in November 2007.

According to the allegations, the Philadelphia Commercial Development Corp. allowed Jones to maintain possession of a Dodge Durango that PCDC was financially responsible for after he resigned as head of the nonprofit agency to run for Council.

The OIG also looked into a

severance package paid to Jones by the quasi-government agency in the amount of \$31,331.64 on Oct. 3, 2006 that was not based on any pre-existing PCDC policy of procedure.

Furthermore, this payment was issued approximately three months prior to Jones' separation from PCDC. Jones did not enter into a contract with PCDC requiring severance pay.

In June 2008 District Attorney Abraham cleared Jones of the allegations. She said there was no evidence to support the allegations that Jones had violated the Home Rule Charter after leaving PCDC to run for office.

Mayor Nutter later replaced Williams with Amy Kurland.

One of the already established crime-fighting initiatives that Williams said he would continue is the Gun Violence Task Force, a joint effort through Abraham's office and state Attorney General Tom Corbett.

Started in December 2006, the task force is comprised of veteran police officers and assistant district attorneys with the primary goal of aggressively investigating and prosecuting the sources of illegal firearms used in crimes throughout Philadelphia.

Since it began, the task force has opened 807 investigations, made 244 arrests and confiscated more than 460 firearms.

"In Philadelphia we have 5 percent of the population committing 60 percent of the crime," Williams said. "Victims and witnesses have to feel safe so they will come in and testify. We really have to continue efforts to improve the relationship between law enforcement and the community. If I'm elected, the lynchpin will be community-based prosecution, which is something I proposed in 2005."

Williams said if he becomes district attorney he would assign assistant district attorneys geographically so that the residents of a particular police district would get to know them and vice versa.

"There are over 2,000 people in this city who have been arrested more than 25 times," he said. "In many respects, the system has failed them. If these people don't have job skills and don't have a GED, they're going to keep committing crimes. It's about prevention, partnership and protection. Working within the community to help end the cycle of crime. We have to continue to develop programs aimed at first time offenders so that they won't become repeat offenders and aggressively prosecute the most violent offenders, namely those who are causing all the bloodshed in this city."