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## ILA planning one-day shutdown, march on Washington

[JOC](#) > [Port News](#) > [Longshoreman Labor](#) > [International Longshoremen's Association](#)

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Talk of a shutdown has injected a new element into bargaining for an extension of the International Longshoremen's Association's existing contract.

US East and Gulf coast dockworkers are laying groundwork for a one day coastwide port shutdown and march on Washington to protest "government interference" by the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor and state port operators in the Southeast.

No date has been set for the protest, which was proposed last week in Delray Beach, Florida, at an informal conference of the International Longshoremen's Association officials in advance of bargaining on a new labor contract to replace the one that expires Sept. 30, 2018.

“The call was made for everyone to stop for a day, rent as many buses and trains as we can, and go to Washington to draw attention to government interference in our industry,” said Kenneth Riley, an ILA international vice president and president of ILA Local 1422 in Charleston.

Riley said ILA members want to highlight their complaints about the Waterfront Commission, which the ILA has battled for years in the Port of New York and New Jersey, and the use of state employee dockworkers at Charleston and other state-operated South Atlantic ports.

“We have to do something about the Waterfront Commission,” Riley told JOC.com. “What happens in New York affects the ILA as a whole. New York is the largest port on the coast, and anything that affects it also affects the rest of us.”

The ILA has long had a rocky relationship with the Waterfront Commission, a bistate agency created in 1953 to combat mob influence on the docks. Commission duties include vetting dockworkers and port businesses and conducting criminal investigations.

ILA President Harold Daggett has denounced the agency as an “evil empire” and has called for its abolition. The ILA and the New York Shipping Association have jointly pursued unsuccessful legislation and litigation to limit the commission’s authority.

Riley appears to be taking the lead in organizing the ILA’s planned coastwide protest. Daggett and other top New York-New Jersey ILA officials have spent the last year battling the Waterfront Commission after a Jan. 29, 2016, a wildcat strike that idled the East Coast’s largest port. After the strike, which apparently was aimed at the Waterfront Commission, the commission subpoenaed Daggett and dozens of other union officials and members in an effort to identify the strike’s cause and ringleaders.

There appears to be little, if anything, the ILA and its employers can do in their contract to affect relations between the commission and the industry. However, that didn’t stop union officials from using last week’s Florida meetings to vent their anger with the commission and to muster support for a coastwide protest.

Riley said he and other union officials at the Delray Beach conference were shocked by conference attendees’ stories about alleged harassment of ILA members by the commission. “We can’t sit passively by and let these things happen,” he said.

Although the Waterfront Commission is unique to the New York-New Jersey port, Riley said union complaints about the agency dovetail with the ILA’s longstanding objections to the use of non-union state employees in dockworker jobs at state-operated ports in the Carolinas and Georgia.

In 2013, the ILA negotiated contract language to encourage state-run ports to hire ILA workers for port jobs, such as crane operators and terminal work, which now are performed by state workers. The ports, however, have ignored ILA requests to expand union jurisdiction.

Riley said expanding union jurisdiction at Charleston and other state ports is his top priority in contract negotiations that are expected to begin this year. He said the issue has gained new urgency with the South Carolina Ports Authority’s scheduled opening of a new container terminal in 2019.

He said dockworkers from New York-New Jersey and other ports have supported efforts to expand union jurisdiction in the South Atlantic, and that ILA protesters also can count on support from dockworkers in other countries.

Riley spoke by phone Tuesday from Algeciras, Spain, where he participated in an International Dockworkers Council demonstration against proposed government reforms of Spain’s stevedoring industry. He said he would be in Gothenburg, Sweden, this week to support dockworkers in a contract dispute with APM Terminals.

Though Riley said the Maine-to-Texas work stoppage and Washington demonstration appears “inevitable,” he would not speculate on how soon it would happen. “We have a lot to do in order to prepare,” he said. “If it takes 30 days, we’ll take 30 days. If it takes 60 days, we’ll take 60 days.”

He said the Washington protest would be held on a weekday, in order to maximize attention from policymakers in the nation’s capital.

Although no ILA officials at the Delray Beach meetings spoke up against the planned work stoppage, several union officials privately told JOC.com they were not enthusiastic about the idea.

Riley said protest organizers plan to spend time lining up support among union locals through meetings and a planned documentary film featuring interviews with ILA members who’ve had run-ins with the Waterfront Commission.

He said union officials also would seek to explain their position to industry stakeholders in an effort to win their backing. “This government interference in our industry affects beneficial cargo owners,” he said. “We don’t want to let our partners sit idly by or just say passively that they’re in support.”

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