Candidate interviews: The ILWU International Executive Board met with Senators Kamala Harris, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren at the meeting on August 23 in San Francisco. Invitations were extended to all of the candidates running for the Democratic nomination. Additional candidates are invited to December Board meeting.

Presidential candidates meet ILWU Executive Board

Three top contenders running for U.S. President met with ILWU International Executive Board members in August. Senators Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and Kamala Harris each took several hours from their busy schedules to sit down with the Board, give short presentations and answer questions from union members on August 22 and 23.

Their appearances resulted from an invitation extended by International President Willie Adams, who said he was pleased that three leading candidates made it a priority to attend. “We’re hoping that others will be able to attend our next Executive Board meeting in December, including former Senator Joe Biden,” said Adams.

The visits are part of a new effort to involve more union members in the endorsement process by providing more information about the candidates. Local unions have been encouraged to hold their own meetings for members to discuss the candidates and issues.

Elizabeth Warren goes first

After thanking International President Willie Adams and Board members for the invitation to appear, Warren launched into her fast-paced overview of the problems facing America’s working families. She explaining that her views were shaped by growing-up in a working-class family of six, “…on the ragged edge of the middle class in Oklahoma, where my dad sold fencing and carpeting – then ended-up as a janitor with my mom working a minimum wage at Sears. Both had no unions to protect them, so we went through some hard times,” she explained.

Working-class family struggles

She recounted that when her father suffered a heart attack, he lost his job and the medical bills almost cost their family to lose their home and station wagon.

All three of her older brothers served in the military, including one who spent five years in Vietnam. Another brother got a union job, and became a life-long union member.

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Beating the odds to teach

“I wanted to become a teacher, but our family had no money to pay for a college application, let alone four years of tuition, so I got a scholarship but then got married and dropped-out at 19. I later went to a community college that cost $50 a semester where I got my teaching degree and taught children with special needs, which I loved.”

Teaching law, studying business

Her first year of teaching was successful, but brief, because her principal made her to quit after she became pregnant. Before long, Warren got childcare help from a relative and was able to attend state college and get a law degree. She taught law students and studied how companies made money, used the tax system and passed laws to favor investors and the wealthy.
LETTERS TO THE DISPATCHER

Dear Editor,

The issue of robotics, AQMD regulations, and efficiency at Pier 400 is only the most recent and public excuse for attacking working people, their union voice, and our collective communities, state and U.S.A.!

The daily news reports that “we” have full employment in the USA today. Not True...political rhetoric, not realistic. Many people in Southern California are working two or three part-time, minimum wage jobs to pay rent, extended families share apartment space, students live in their cars, with children, other young families live with partners.

Management at Pier 400 blame the ILWU for their plan to automate. Another “Red Herring”. The words “automate” or Robots, does not identify the type of automation intended. We all want clean air, no one wants cancer, asthma, C.O.P.D. all of which is rampant in port work and community environments.

The selection of the automatic equipment and processes to be implemented are not consistent with the public verse itated in its offence or defense by Pier 400 representatives and some legislators.

Automation, robots, can and must serve humans, not replace humans, if so designed.

Robots, as planned will, in addition to replacing longshore workers, replace supervisor, managers, caterers, vendors, effect city and state taxes, Social Security, health care, medication access and availability; electrical workers, machinists, civil service employees, police, fire department, emergency services, gas stations, local stores, credit unions, pot hole repairs, alley cleanup, and, many small businesses. What will be left?!?

Twenty-five years ago, our communities were filled with people who made things, contributed by their labor and their ability to purchase commodities, take care of their families and extended families, and give back to others. Today L.A. County has only identified 60,000 homeless. This number is an understated quota of the devastation of the Los Angeles’ previously others. Today L.A. County has only identified 60,000 homeless. This number is an understated quota of the devastation of the Los Angeles’ previously employed workforce that made autos, steel, aircraft, tires, garments, tools, rubber products, food products, again—and then we exported goods!

Look around in the U.S.A. the “rust belt”, Baltimore, Detroit, and yes, Los Angeles and Long Beach, Wilmington, San Pedro, Compton, Watts, Hawthorne, Gardena, Inglewood .... Choices will be made by those currently with authority to affect the lives of longshore workers, port workers, and lower level managers currently dependently on an economic infrastructure that includes human workers, resources, and an interdependent outlook for our communities and state.

Greed is a disease. It is myopic and dangerous, self-serving with benefits limited to a few.

Newton’s 3rd Law of Motion, with every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. In plain English-karma-what goes around comes around in some way, in time.

Hopefully the decision makers will realize before it is too late, the wrong decision will leave the mess to their kids and ours to survive. They must have the integrity and the courage to stand with working people and our communities, before they declare they don’t know what happened.

What will be next? What company will automate and say they can’t compete with Pier 400, and then what?

Although Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Ford, Morgan, and Carnegie are revered as visionaries and heroes, they accomplished nothing alone, and as their workforces formed unions to attempt to balance democracy in America, the middle, really working class people of America, had a voice for the first time, on numerous subjects, education, Social Security, pensions, health care, equal rights, voting rights, child care and yes, better wages, safety at work, job security... And a future at the time and, as we look at the Port of Los Angeles, and Port of Long Beach and Terminal Island, we must thank the International Longshore and Warehouse Union for the hard work of their members each day, and the Teamsters, and the railroad workers, the pile driver, the iron workers, the machinists, the labors, the electrical workers, the port pilots, port police, and their unions, without whom there would not be the ports of L.A./L.B., Vincent Thomas Bridge, Henry Ford Bridge, General Desmond Bridge current, and forthcoming.

Robots couldn’t have done this. You will protect your future when you protect ours.

Luisa Gratz, President, Local 26 Secretary-Treasurer, Southern California District Council

Send your letters to the editor to: The Dispatcher, 1188 Franklin St., San Francisco, CA 94109-6800 or email to editor@ilwu.org
Several thousand union members, families, and community supporters came out to celebrate the ruby anniversary of the Harbor Labor Coalition’s annual Labor Day Parade and Picnic. The event was the brainchild of ILWU Local 26 President Luisa Gratz. The Harbor Labor Coalition was formed by Gratz along with then newly elected Local 13 Executive Board member Dave Arian, David O’Day, Regional Coordinator for the Inlandboatmen’s Union and Diane Middleton. Their goal was to fight the Crowley Maritime Corporation from bringing a substandard contract from their tugboat operation in Florida to the Ports of LA and Long Beach.

In 1979 the Harbor Labor Coalition started the Labor Day Parade and Picnic as a demonstration of solidarity and labor unity. What started as a small parade and picnic with a few hundred union members 40 years ago, has grown to become the largest Labor Day event west of the Mississippi River.

The day began at 7:30 am with an egg, sausage, and pancake breakfast at the Longshoremen’s Memorial Hall sponsored by the Southern California Pensioners Club. The meal fed an estimated 1,500 people. During the breakfast, federal, state and local elected officials were given an opportunity to speak to the crowd before heading over to the assembly point for the Labor Day Parade on Broad and E Streets.

The parade was kicked off by a short press conference that included ILWU Local 13 President Ray Familathe, PCPA Pensioner President Greg Mitre, Congresswoman Nanette Barragan, Congressman Alan Lowenthal, Congressman Gil Cisneros and LA County Supervisor Hilda Solis.

Familathe addressed the issue of automation and technology that is affecting workers in virtually every sector of the economy, including longshore, maritime, and warehousing.

“We are here to send a message that workers are not going to be forgotten. We need to be included as we move forward,” Familathe said. “We need a just transition with new technology and automation. Robots don’t pay taxes and don’t shop in the local community.”

The parade was led by the ILWU Southern California Pensioners who followed behind the Color Guard. The pensioners rode on a fatted truck and tossed candy to hundreds of children and families who lined Avalon Blvd to watch the parade. Thousands of union members marched with motorcycle clubs, marching bands, classic cars, and low-riders. The march ended in Wilmington’s Banning Park where firefighters cooked over 5,000 hot dogs. Sno-cones, cold sodas and popsicles awaited the marchers as they streamed into the park. Live music was provided by the Brian Young Blues Station and The Topics.

The absence of former ILWU International President Dave Arian was felt throughout the parade and picnic. The 2014 Los Angeles Poet Laureate Luis Rodriguez recited a poem he wrote honoring Dave, who passed away earlier this year. The poem, Show Up, captured the spirit and passion embodied by Dave’s lifelong commitment to fighting for social and economic justice.

Ray Familathe and Luisa Gratz were among the speakers at the picnic. Local 13 pensioner and PCPA Poet Laureate, Jerry Brady, recited one of his poems. Gratz spoke about the threat of automation and other attacks on labor. She urged everyone in attendance to take the energy present at the event and channel it into an ongoing organizing effort.

“We cannot just get together one day a year. Let this be a beginning. Think about what you are going to do tomorrow make unions stronger and keep up the spirit of solidarity that we have here today,” Gratz said.
Presidential candidates meet ILWU Executive Board

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“Why I’m in this fight”

“I am running because I’ve seen how our federal government has worked better and better for the wealthy and well-connected – and kicked dirt in the face of everyone else. That’s why I’m in this fight. I’m in it to build a grassroots movement to take on the corruption in Washington and change the structure of our economy to deal with big, inter-national corporations that aren’t loyal to workers or this country, and have too much power,” she said.

More power for workers

Vice President Babby Olvera, Jr., told Warren that newly-organized workers were in the Board room with her, and that many more wanted to join the union, but faced brutal opposition from employers. Warren responded, “To get more power and structural change in the economy, we need to make it easier to join unions, and we need to give unions more power when they negotiate. I’ve said that in 128 town hall meetings that we’ve held so far, and I’ve personally said it to 30,000 people - plus many more who’ve watched my videos.”

Wealth tax on richest 1/10th of 1%

“I also say that it’s time for a wealth tax on the richest 1/10th of one-per-cent of people who can afford to pay 2 cents on every dollar that would generate enough money for universal child-care for infants through age 6; enough for universal Pre-K schools for every 3 and 4-year old; enough to raise wages for every childcare and Pre-K worker in this country; enough to pay for trade schools, technical schools and public college tuition – and enough left over to cancel student loan debt for about 95% of kids. We could also provide more support for historically Black colleges – and still have $100 billion left to help fight the opioid drug crisis that’s killing thousands of our brothers and sisters out there.”

Wide-ranging support

Warren says her wealth tax is both necessary – and practical – because it has support from people across politi-cal lines with Democrats, Independents and Republicans – all backing her wealth tax proposal.

“I’m not somebody who backs down,” she said as she concluded her remarks. “The way I see it, you don’t get what you don’t fight for. And I’m in this fight because I believe we can build a better America if we do.”

Warren answers questions

Asked whether her message appeals to a broad enough audience to win next November, Warren responded that she’s visited 26 states plus Puerto Rico, including many where a majority supported Donald Trump. She cited a recent visit to the town of Kermit, West Virginia – a former Trump stronghold where 80% backed the President. The town’s population of only 302 is noto-rious because drug companies shipped 9 million opiate pills to one pharmacy there during a 24-month period. The re-ident said the audience at her Kermit town-hall included some who wore Trump shirts and hats, but many of them came over to her side after hear-ing how the wealth tax could help their community. She said her campaign is putting down strong roots in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan where she has hired a small army of field organ-izers and attracted a diverse group of supporters.

Immigration

Asked about Immigration, Warren recounted her recent visit to the bor-der, where she saw men, women and children being held in cages – noting one cage was filled with nursing mothers. Warren said she supports an immigration policy that expands legal immigration, provides a path to citi-zenship for immigrants already in the country, ending private profit-making detention facilities, halting the prac-tice of breaking-up immigrant families in order to inflict pain, and requiring border enforcement personnel to uphold the law, prevent abuse and be more accountable.

Future work and technology

President Adams asked Warren to share her ideas about the future of work in light of new technology and automation.

“I think the future of work is tied to the future of taxation because those taxes will determine where our society will make investments. Right now the system encourages investment in auto-mation instead of people,” she said.

“The reason that happens is because the system today is controlled and corrupted by the wealthy and powerful, instead of serving the majority of Amer-icans,” a problem she sees at the root cause of many conflicts in America.

Gridlock in U.S. Senate

Adams also asked Warren how she would work with Senator Mitch McCon-nell, the Senate Majority leader who has used his power to block legislation in Congress. Warren said one strat-egy has been to change the balance of power in the Senate by directing resources from her own Senate re-elec-tion campaign to support other House and Senate candidates who are willing to stand-up for working Americans. She added that her presidential cam-paign had rejected expensive media buys in favor of investing in grassroots organizers, believing they can better support worker-friendly candidates “down the ballot.”

Climate change

Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferro asked Warren what she would do about climate change. She responded by expressing support for the “Green New Deal,” a plan to transition from foss-il fuel to renewable sources, creat-ing a million new jobs and protecting workers impacted during the change-over. She would also end the practice of giving public land to private oil and gas companies for drilling and min-ing. She said fighting climate change requires a global strategy, noting “the U.S. is directly responsible for about 20% of the problem, but believes “we have to help the other 80% succeed or we won’t be able to save the planet.” Warren says the global market for new energy technology has been estimated at $23 billion – so she wants to see more U.S. investment in green research and development, but would require companies that benefit from that R&D to produce their goods in America. She says that policy could generate over 1 million good-paying union union jobs.

Health care for all

Warren responded to a question about health care from Coast Benefits Specialist John Castanho, explaining that her Medicare-For-All plan will cover everyone and let them choose and retain their providers – while sav-ing money by ending the insurance industry’s unnecessary duplication, waste and profit.

Endangered pension plans

Local 26 President and Board member Luisa Graziat asked about pro-ecting pensions. Warren said that she undertook the problem because two of her own family members depend on pensions, along with Medicare and Social Security in order to survive. She recounted how the federal government was quick to bail-out Wall Street with $700 billion in loans after they nearly bankrupted the country – and caused millions of Americans to lose homes and savings. At the same time, pension funds were allowed to go insolvent and drastically slash benefits for retirees. “We did it for the banks and we can damn-well do it for pensioners,” she said.

Role of religion

Hawaii longshore leader Dustin Dawson asked the candidate to talk about religion and its role in society. Warren said it was time to grow up in the Meth-odist Church where she was a Sunday School teacher who read stories from the Bible to teach good values to chil-dren. She said her favorite Bible pas-sage is Matthew 25:31-46, because it emphasizes the need to care for one another, and then quoted the text: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was ill and you cared for me, I was in prison and you visited me.” She continued by saying, “I think that means God is in all of us, and calls on us to act.” Despite her strong religious background, she says America is a diverse country with many different beliefs and faiths, so she strongly backtracks tradition of separat-ing church and state.

Bernie comes roaring back

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders was the next to appear and opened by warmly thanking the ILWU for endors-ing him in 2016, when he won 23 states and 43% of delegates, including the key states of Wisconsin and Michi-gan, before conceding the race and supporting Hillary Clinton.

Young people embrace Bernie

Before beginning his stump speech, Sanders offered a final reminder about his 2016 bid: “We won more votes last time from young people than Hill-ary and Trump combined.” He added

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Supporting union organizing: Senator Elizabeth Warren told of her family’s struggle with debt and dead-end jobs in Oklahoma.

working class family: Senator Elizabeth Warren told of her family’s struggle with debt and dead-end jobs in Oklahoma.
his view that no candidate could win against Trump without an energetic campaign that motivates young people and working class voters.

**Hard-hit style**

Sanders delivered his strong, pro-union message with the same direct and hard-hit style that inspired union members, young people and working families four years ago. Some highlights of this year’s talk included:

“…you’re looking at the only candidate who believes there’s something wrong when three people in America own more wealth than the bottom half of America,” he said.

One person can’t do it alone

“Our campaign has the most pro-union platform – but if you want real change, you’re gonna’ have to take on Wall Street and three financial institutions with assets over 100 billion dollars. That’s real power. You want health care reform in this country? You’re gonna’ have to take on the insurance companies. You want to lower the cost of prescription drugs? Then you have to take on the pharmaceutical industry. Last year the health care industry made over $100 billion dollars in profit – while 87 million Americans were uninsured or underinsured; 30,000 people died from lack of care, and 500,000 people went bankrupt last year from medical bills. The health care industry will spend hundreds of millions of dollars to keep their system. The most important point I want to make is that no president can do it alone. You can’t transform this country with one person and one election. It’s takes a people’s movement, and that’s what I promise to do.”

His second point was equally direct: “I’m the strongest candidate to defeat the most dangerous President in the history of the United States.”

**Millions have been ignored**

He followed with a point that few candidates have dared to ask: “how the hell did Trump get elected in the first place?” he said, quickly answering his own question. “There were millions and millions of working class people who felt that the Democratic Party was not listening to their pain. Today, in a relatively strong economy, half of our people are living paycheck to paycheck. That means you get sick, you can’t afford to see a doctor. If your car breaks down and need $500 to fix it, then you can’t get to work and you lose your job. After 45 years, how much better is the average worker doing? The answer is zero. The top 1% has seen a 21 trillion-dollar increase in their wealth – while the bottom half of Americans have seen a 900 million-dollar decrease. We have massive wealth and income inequality and a corrupt political system with billions buying elections.”

**Support for unions**

“…the middle class doesn’t grow in this country unless the trade union movement grows in this country,” said Sanders, adding that he recently unveiled a new plan to double the number of union members in America and pledged to be “the strongest pro-union President since Franklin Roosevelt, and maybe stronger.” His plan would allow workers to join a union when a majority sign cards, without delays and interference from anti-union consultants. It would also require employers to negotiate first contracts or face severe penalties, and he would outlaw “right-to-work-for-less” laws.

**More caring & humane society**

“This campaign is about ‘us’ not ‘me’. I believe from the bottom of my heart that we are in this together, to build a decent society where we care about each other, that we don’t step over people living in the street, that we don’t ignore the fact that life-expectancy in now declining in America.”

**Overcoming divisiveness**

“…the transformation this country will require an unprecedented grassroots movement to change the power structure – and the trade union movement needs to be at the center of that movement. The goal is to transform this country by bringing working people into the political process and run the government so it benefits workers and not just the billionaire class. If we organize and bring people together, we can transform this country and lead the world in creating a dignified, civilized democratic country.”

**Bernie answers questions**

Questions followed many of the same topics that Warren addressed, beginning with pensions, Social Security and Medicare. Sanders said he had authored strong legislation to protect workers in underfunded pension plans, and wants to raise the cap on Social Security contributions so those earning $250k will start paying the same rates as someone earning $50k a year – a change that would raise enough revenue to protect the system for the next 50 years.

**Subsidies for automation**

“…the people out on the street? ‘No it’s not. It is not a bad idea if we use technology to replace a dirty, hard job and we’re going to help the people out on the street.”

**Inflating our privacy**

ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton jokingly confessed that he had “a man crush on Bernie,” which caused the room to erupt in laughter, and made Bernie blush bright red. Ashton went on to ask about the high cost of drugs and health care in America. Sanders replied, “We have to make technology work for everyone in America with health care. All care is free. Health care is a human right, not a privilege, and we should expand Medicare to cover dental, hearing aids and eyeglasses – then expand Medicare to cover everyone. We have to address climate change because it’s real and we just announced a plan to solve it. We can’t keep building more jails and putting 20% of people in jail just because they can’t afford to pay bail.”

**About the border crisis**

Board member David Gonzalez asked Sanders for his thoughts about the border crisis. The Senator blamed much of the “crisis” on President Trump’s “racist and xenophobic” behavior who demagogued immigrants and promoted inhumane treatment of refugees. He then outlined his own immigration plan which was nearly identical to Warren’s, with a path for citizenship, comprehensive reform, an end to separating immigrant family members and more.
Harry Bridges – the rank-and-file immigrant dockworker who helped found the ILWU by combining militancy, democracy and pragmatism – died 29 years ago at the age of 88 after leading the union for four decades.

During his life, Bridges resisted efforts to build monuments in his honor, but the urge to memorialize him has endured. The latest transformation of Bridges’ image into a beautiful, lifesized bronze statue was unveiled in front of Local 13’s new dispatch hall in Wilmington, CA, on July 28 – the same day Bridges was born in 1901 in Melbourne, Australia.

Pensioners President Greg Mitre served as the host for an hour-long ceremony that celebrated Bridges’ enduring connections to the union that including family members who were honored as special guests.

Mitre said the idea for the statue was conceived ten years ago when he and former International President David Arian imagined how such a statue might enhance Local 13’s new dispatch hall by greeting union members who arrive each day for work. Arian was stricken with cancer and died on January 2nd, before the statue was completed, but it was one of his last wishes to see it finished and he donated generously to finance the project. Final funding to complete the job was provided by the Southern California Pensioners Group.

Bridges’ son, Robbie, led the family delegation and delivered a heartfelt “thank you” as he fought back tears. The family delegation included Harry’s granddaughters Annie and Marie, niece Carol Waltz and great-grandsons Buckeye and Joe Lenchner, plus several spouses.

Los Angeles City Councilmember Mike Bonin asked the audience of nearly 200 to reflect on values that Bridges’ promoted which still remain relevant.

“In today’s world, when labor is under attack and racism is being spewed across the land and immigrants are being vilified, it is a good time to remember the important work of Harry Bridges.”

Fellow Councilmember Joe Buscaino echoed a similar theme in his remarks.

“The fights in 1934 are still relevant 85 years later. Today we need to foster and encourage new leaders with the spirit and vision of Harry Bridges.”

Greg Mitre added that “Bridges’ determination to help longshore workers win one contract for all of the ports up and down the coast was a genius move that made the union so effective and powerful to this day.”

Los Angeles Port Commissioner Diane B. Martin explained how former International President Dave Arian, who later became a Port Commissioner, came to admire Bridges and founded the Harry Bridges Institute in 1993 to educate younger workers about the principles of democracy, solidarity and action.

International Vice-President (Mainland) Bobby Olvera, Jr., was recognized and invited to speak, but graciously deferred to Coast Committeeman Frank Ponce De Leon, who observed that ILWU members had managed to survive and prosper despite the introduction of container technology in the 1960’s.

“In all my years on the docks, I only used my dad’s book once,” said De Leon, referring to the once-essential tool that all longshore workers used to help load cargo by hand before containers became king.

Local 13 President Ray Familathe recalled meeting an older dockworker from India who shared fond memories of meeting Harry Bridges during a conference in the 1950’s.

Harry encouraged solidarity, and that meant ILWU members were respected around the world,” said Familathe. He also told of being visited by Harry’s widow, Nikki, who recalled the time that President Nixon called Bridges to ask if he would end the 1971 longshore strike. Bridges responded by telling the President that the strike would end only after the membership voted democratically to do so.

“This has always been a democratic union, and we can thank Harry Bridges for helping make it one of our principles,” said Familathe. “For helping make it one of our principles,” said Familathe. “We’re going through challenges now, including automation, just like Harry Bridges and ILWU leaders of his generation faced challenges during their time.”

Local 13 Vice-President Gary Herrera said the recent fight over automation at Terminal 400 was still painful. “We may not have won that fight, but we fought to protect everyone in our community who depends on good jobs.”

Frank Anderson of the San Pedro Historical Society was recognized and thanked for including the history of unions and workers in the Society’s efforts to educate the community.

Actor Ian Ruskin was asked to improvise a few words while impersonating Harry Bridges, using material from his one-man show: “From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks.”

“Remember that it wasn’t just me,” said Ruskin, who seemed to channel the leader’s speaking-style and substance, “it took thousands of men and women to accomplish what we did.”

The last speaker was Local 13 Pensioner Jerry Brady, who shared a poem dedicated to Dave Arian.

Before adjourning, everyone was invited to come up front and pose for a solidarity photo beside the new statue of Harry Bridge – a gesture intended to lift the spirits of 400 public ferry workers in Alaska who belong to the Inlandboatmen’s Union and were striking for a fair contract.

“This is perfect,” Greg Mitre said quietly, “It’s exactly how Dave and Harry would have wanted this to end.”
Presidental candidates meet ILWU Executive Board

This is what change is about. We have to change consciousness in America to make people think that the ideas of decency and dignity are what the country was founded on. Sanders argued that every American deserved to be free from economic insecurity. Sanders went on to explain that his own campaign is embracing Medicare for All, childcare, tuition-free public colleges and universities, and a strategy to address climate change – all designed to meet basic human needs while also providing good jobs.

Fossil fuel transition

Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris asked Sanders about his plan to help America shift from dependence on fossil fuels and the oil industry. The Senator said the first task is to recognize that scientists are clear that global warming presents an urgent danger to the planet – even if the President believes the scientific community is wrong and crazy until enough people stand up and vote. Gay people have always been told they are not normal or I support can’t be done. The system is not broken until it is done. Sanders said it is possible until it is done. The Senator concluded with words of encouragement, “Everything is doable and it can be done. When enough people stand up and vote, we can do these things.”

Koch Brothers and Jones Act

Board member John Fageaux asked Sanders whether the Koch Brothers are a threat to America. “It’s not just them,” said Sanders, noting that America’s billionaires have been taking trillions for themselves while the majority of Americans are losing ground and seeing cuts to Medicare and Social Security.

IBU President Marrna Scaccitano asked Sanders about his stand on the Jones Act, which provides good union jobs for the workers in the maritime industry. Sanders replied with an enthusiastic, “yes!”

Concluding remarks

The Senator concluded with words of wisdom from Nelson Mandela, who said, “everything always seems impossable until it is done.” Sanders said it is important to recognize that “the system wants you to believe that anything you or I support can’t be done. The system wants us to think tiny and little, but think about history. Slavery was ‘natural’ until enough people stood up and said it was barbaric. One hundred years ago, women did not have the right to vote. Gay people have always been told they had no right to love who they want. Workers were told that they couldn’t come together to collectively bargain for better conditions. Everything is wrong and crazy until people stand up and fight for it. Thirty years from now, people will still say they can’t believe that 30,000 people used to die every year because they had no health care. The idea of a $15 minimum wage was considered a radical idea four years ago and now it’s the law in seven states. Making marijuana legal was once thought to be impossible. Tuition-free public colleges and universities was considered a radical idea, but not anymore.

Help for unions

Board member and Local 63 Office Clerical Unit President John Fageaux asked what Harris would do to stem the decline of unions. She began by acknowledging that “labor is under attack and workers are losing ground,” then provided some specifics. “The Secretary of Labor should be someone who supports workers,” she said, referring to President Trump’s recent appointment of Eugene Scalia who is anti-union. She also expressed her opposition to “right-to-work-for-less” laws that have been enacted in 27 states. On a personal note, she added, “I’ve walked on picket lines with the ILWU and other union members.”

Border crisis and Trump’s wall

Board member and Local 34 member David Gonzalez asked Harris about the border crisis and Trump’s wall. She said the President helped create the problem by agitating voters against immigrants and by promoting his border wall. She said that when Trump began, there was “illegal immigration into the U.S. – meaning as many people were leaving as arriving to the U.S. Now Trump is putting babies in cages and separating children from their parents at the border,” practices that Harris said are human rights abuses. Harris then described her visit to a private detention facility in Florida where 2700 children were being held – noting that President Trump has cut aid to poor countries in Central America that need help to address poverty, injustice and violence in order to reduce immigration to the U.S.

Homelessness

Board member Dustin Dawson from Local 142 Longshore asked Harris what she would do to stem the growth of homelessness. She cited the nationwide housing shortage in 99% of U.S. counties where minimum wage workers cannot afford the rent. The Great Recession in 2008 triggered a foreclosure crisis that added to the problem. The lack of affordable health care and mental health services are also factors that would be addressed with her Medicare for All plan.

Private prison industry

Board member and Local 26 President Luisa Gratz asked whether Harris could do anything about the growth of private prisons and detention centers. The Senator responded quickly, saying, “we need to shut them down.”

LGBT rights

ILWU President Rob Ashton asked about abuses of LGBT immigrants. Harris said she understood the problems and would not tolerate any abusive behavior.

Subsidies for port automation

Board member Dan McKisson from Local 19 asked Harris if she would support banning federal tax dollars from being used to subsidize the automation of ports. She expressed support for a study on the issue and said analysis should be done by neutral parties.

Criminal justice & prison reform

Vice President Bobby Olvera, Jr. asked what could be done about prison inmates who receive indeterminate sentences, are subject to lengthy solitary confinement, and are held beyond their release dates. Harris said she is supporting several bills that address all three problems and would support even stronger legislation. She told of her visit to California’s super-maximum security prison in Pelican Bay, and meetings with inmates who served long terms in solitary confinement, a practice she described as, “absolutely inhumane.”

College & trade schools

Board member and Local 22 President Dan Koho asked Harris about the challenges facing young people who attend college, graduate in debt and have trouble finding good jobs. Harris said she is concerned about the privatization of student loan programs that occurred since she went to college. She said the current system allows predatory lenders to make more profits while student debt continues to grow.
Presidential candidates meet ILWU Executive Board

The future of work and automation

President Willie Adams asked why more candidates aren’t talking about automation and the future of work – and he asked Harris for her views. She replied that the issue requires “a leader who will bring everyone together for an honest conversation about the consequences of automation, including jobs, productivity and who will benefit and who will lose. I admire innovation, but don’t think it should cost whole populations of people to lose employment. There’s a lot of information, and a lot of misinformation about the benefits – whether its job creation or the destruction of jobs, so these have to be honest conversations and they require an honest broker, and I intend to be that honest broker.”