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NEWS SERVICE

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Burrus Sworn In As New President

'We Face the Greatest Challenge ...'

Before a packed Shoreham Hotel (Washington, D.C.) ballroom, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney administered the oath of office to William Burrus as APWU's new national president, and to all other national officers who begin new three-year terms.

At the same time, President Sweeney announced the appointment of President Burrus to the AFL-CIO Executive Council, effective Nov. 8. He also commended the nation's postal workers for the extraordinary dedication and commitment that they have exhibited in recent weeks in carrying out their jobs.

In his first statement as president, Burrus focused on the anthrax crisis confronting postal employees:

"As I assume office, we face the greatest challenge in the 225-year history of the Postal Service. The terrorists are using us as a means of transmitting poisons to the American public. In the performance of our duties, we are exposed to the deadly microbe, anthrax. "Two of our brothers have been killed by this terrorist act. Others have been hospitalized, and hundreds of thousands have been terrorized. Never before have we reported to our jobs with the uncertainty present today. Our challenge is great, but we will move beyond this — because we must. We have come too far to have the successes achieved, taken away in acts of terror.

"We will win and remove the uncertainty from our employment because we are Americans and members of the American Postal Workers Union. And no challenge is beyond our will," he declared.

Burrus appealed to APWU members about the need for unity with management in wiping out the terror that has victimized the United States Postal Service:

"We must put aside our militancy to labor-management issues. Let's find new ways to collectively make postal employment safe again. This is not an APWU problem or a union/management problem. This is a postal problem, and we must face it together. Neither arbitrators, judges nor the government can make our jobs safe again. We must do that for ourselves. The postal community is working arm-to-arm to return normalcy to our lives." At the same time, Burrus warned

management by explaining: "When we differ with management on this road to safety, we will go our separate ways."

Burrus indicated that APWU may have some differences in the protocol being developed for responding to contaminated facilities.

"Never again will our bargaining unit employees work in a facility known to be contaminated," he said. "If pressed, we will take whatever action is necessary to protect the health and safety of those whom we represent. We will not place our trust in the Center for Disease Control, the local health authorities, and medical people who readily admit that they have uncertainty and little knowledge of this deadly organism. Postal employees will not serve as guinea pigs. If necessary, we will take matters into our own hands and let the chips fall where they may.

"I want to convince management that we must move together — but if we must go it alone as a union, we will," Burrus added.

On the new national agreement, Burrus said that he looked forward to the completion of interest arbitration hearings. "Our objective is comparability with other postal employees engaged in postal activities. Employees represented by APWU will be treated with dignity and respect, which includes adequate compensation and improved working conditions. If this arbitrator denies us our due, it will only serve to strengthen our resolve. So I warn management that if they prevail within the statutory process, they will only unleash the determination of 380,000 workers," he said.

On a final note, President Burrus reached out to all new national officers and recent candidates by saying that: "We have changed officers through the democratic process. The election is now behind us and we carry forth the determination of those who went before us, to make ours a more perfect union. APWU is alive and well."

In Praise of Postal Workers

The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives passed resolutions praising postal workers during this critical time in American history. The Senate resolution, SR 177, was sponsored by Senators Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Daniel Akaka (D-HI), and was passed on a voice vote on Nov. 9.

H. Con. Res. 257 contained almost identical language to SR 177. Introduced by Reps. Danny Davis (D-IL) and John McHugh (R-NY) and passed 418-0 on Nov. 14, it expressed "the sense of the Congress that the men and women of the United States Postal Service have done an outstanding job of collecting, processing, sorting and delivering the mail during the time of national emergency."

Several representatives from both political parties spoke on the House floor to praise postal workers, including Reps. Davis, McHugh, Connie Morella (R-MD), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Chris Smith (R-NJ), Dianne Watson (D-CA) and Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX).

H. Con. Res. 257 states:

Whereas, On September 11, 2001, evil acts of terrorism were perpetrated against the people of the United States and all humanity.

Whereas, in October 2001, reports of anthrax-tainted letters began to surface;

Whereas, the United States Postal Service handles approximately 680,000,000 pieces of mail each day,

Whereas our Nation's postal and delivery sector accounts for approximately 8 percent of our gross national product;

Whereas, since September 11, 2001, the United States Postal Service has delivered more than 20,000,000,000 pieces of mail;

Whereas 2 employees of the United States Postal Service have died as a result of anthrax infection;

Whereas a number of employees of the United States Postal Service are being treated for anthrax-like symptoms;

Whereas the more than 800,000 men and women who work for the United States Postal Service have done an outstanding job of collecting, processing, sorting and delivering the mail during this time of national emergency; and

Whereas the delivery of anthrax through the mail is an attempt to disrupt our ability to communicate through the mail, and threatens the viability of the postal system: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), that —

(1) It is the sense of the Congress that the men and women of the United States Postal Service have done an outstanding job of collecting, processing, sorting, and delivering the mail during this time of national emergency, and

(2) Congress will work with the United States Postal Service to assure the safety and well-being of postal workers as they carry out their duties and responsibilities, and of the general public.

Rep. McHugh said that it is "very fitting that the House consider this resolution honoring the dedicated people of the Postal Service in this, the same week as we have celebrated and observed on National Holiday on Veterans' Day.

"As they have literally for centuries, postal employees today are putting their lives on the line each and every day for those of us in America. It is their commitment to this job that is ensuring our Nation can continue to communicate through these difficult times by way of the mail. We as a House grieve for the Postal Service, which lost 2 of its own, dedicated, devoted employees to inhaled anthrax, postal workers Thomas Morris and Joseph Curseen truly died in the line of duty, and I know we all join in expressing our most heartfelt sympathy and deepest words of appreciation to their families and to their loved ones in this time of great loss for them."

Rep. Davis said, "I also want to commend the American Postal Workers Union, the largest postal

union, representing approximately 365,000 postal workers, and its newly elected President Mr. William Burrus, for seeking to honor the memory of their deceased brothers.

"The American Postal Workers Union has designated this week, the week of the Veterans' Day observances, as a time to properly acknowledge that postal workers are heroes, too. The resolution says it is time for us to deliver for the men and women of the post office, and the best way we can possibly do that is by looking at the needs, in a very serious way, of our postal system; by making sure that we provide resources that are needed to make sure that the workplace is safe, and to make sure that men and women who work every day handing the mail can do so without the fear or infection on possibly death.

"So we say to the postal workers of America, we say that we want to thank them for the work they have done, the work they continue to do. Because of them, America continues to be strong, and vibrant and continues to be the great democracy that we know it is."

Rep. Morella said, "Today, more than ever, postal workers are being recognized for their selfless service of delivering the Nation's mail under all circumstances. This includes the usual weather conditions we have always associated with the Postal Service in the past. We have all said Through wind and rain, sleet and snow, but now, for the first time, it is through safety threats against postal workers."

Rep. Norton said, "I want to bring to the Members' attention an experience I had. I was on my way to work on Capitol Hill, where I live, on Saturday; and I saw a postal worker besides his postal truck. I did what I am sure everybody does; I stopped to shake his hand and to say thank you.

"He said he was pleased that I took the time to do that; but he stopped to say to me, Congresswoman, we still do not have a labor contract. Madam speaker, the National Association of Rural Letter Carriers, the National Association of Letter Carriers, and The American Postal Workers Union are working now without a contract.

"I have to tell the Members today, as we sat there with an overload of postal workers, they are not happy campers. They are frustrated workers, I know this resolution, is much appreciated and certainly much deserved."

Rep. Smith said, "We certainly know first hand what that is all about in Mercer County, in central New Jersey, Hamilton and Trenton. In Hamilton, the John K Rafferty postal facility on Route 130 was shut down and continues to be shut down. There have been seven people affected by anthrax in my state. One was not a postal worker, but she is working in the building complex where my district office is located. Thankfully, they have all made great recoveries because of marvels of antibiotics and cipro in particular.

"Again, I think by recognizing that they are on the front line, we need to put postal workers on a pedestal, and thank them from the bottom of our hearts for their courage and their commitment to public service during these very trying times."

Rep. Watson said, "I grew up in the post office. My mother worked for the Postal Service in Los Angeles at the Old Terminal Annex for 3 decades. And as a working parent, one could say that she raised my sister, my brother and myself there. I myself worked there for seven Christmas seasons, sorting the Christmas mail.

"My mother worked hard for the post office as do all the other postal workers who each day labor to keep millions of letters, checks, cards, packages, and even bills moving around our country. These hard-working Americans provide a vital link for each and every community across our country, across our world, no matter how remote."

Rep. Jackson-Lee said, "I too have worked for the U.S. Postal Service. It was always the commitment of the Postal Service, as I recall as a person growing up, rain or shine, the mail would go; and I recall working during the holiday season to ensure that would happen. It is tragic that we lost two valiant lives, men that were on the front line serving their country and serving the American public.

"I want to say to the postal workers that as the tragedy occurred, let us make a commitment to you, that we will not fail you again. I believe that part of the tragedy was because of the lack of information and knowledge in the public health system about how anthrax was able to travel. We believed it was through an open envelope, and the envelope was opened in the Hart Building. But those mistakes should never be made again."



New President Bill Burrus, at center, was among the APWU officers sworn in by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney (behind Burrus, at podium) during the installation ceremony Nov. 10.