

USPS 'Transformation Plan' Misses Mark, Burrus Says

The USPS "Transformation Plan," unveiled by Postmaster General John Potter on April 5, fails to address the chief cause of the Postal Service's current financial crisis, said APWU President William Burrus. The transformation plan was developed in response to a request from Congress and the General Accounting Office (GAO) that the Postal Service outline how it intends to function in the wake of changing markets, new technologies and a severe financial crisis. A copy of the plan can be found on the USPS web site at www.usps.com.

"In a one-inch thick document made public during a two-hour presentation, not one word was said about the loss of billions of dollars in unwarranted discounts to giant presort mailers," President Burrus said.

The economic slump and the anthrax attack are principally responsible for recent reductions in mail volume, Burrus said. However, billions of dollars in subsidies to the major mailers are the cause of the long-term financial problem, he said, and cutting costs or instituting regulatory reform cannot overcome the money lost in excessive rate discounts. "The cause of the crisis that led to the transformation plan has been plastered over with promises of greater efficiencies and requests for regulatory relief."

Fifty percent of all first class mail is discounted, and the discounts are far above the costs that would be incurred if postal employees performed the work, Burrus noted. These discounts are subsidies to the giant mailers, pure and simple, he said. "APWU members who sort the mail know that Optical Character Reader (OCR) and the Bar Code Sorter (BCS) machines sort more than 30,000 letters an hour and are run by two or three employees. There is no way that the Postal Service should have to pay large mailers discounts of 9.5 cents per letter to prepare their mail to avoid these operations. That is far more than it costs the Postal Service to do this work," he said.

Key elements of the plan include:

- Giving the Postal Service pricing flexibility
- Lifting the moratorium on closings of small post offices
- Automating flat processing and mail forwarding operations
- Exploring new work sharing opportunities
- Reducing letter carriers' office time
- Redesigning the postal logistical network, which may lead to plant consolidations
- Pursuing regulatory and legislative reform

As a part of this effort to become more efficient, the postmaster general proposes to modify the collective bargaining process to make it more management friendly and to deny employees their collective bargaining rights. "This is a nonstarter and the postal labor unions will vigorously oppose it," President Burrus said.

The plan lays a foundation for changes in the Postal Service that may adversely affect APWU represented employees, but no specific initiatives have been proposed for immediate implementation. In fact, PMG Potter wrote to the union, "there are no national plans for implementing/consolidations of processing centers in the near future." The USPS areas and districts are expected to continue efforts to reduce costs and streamline operations. The union at the national and regional level will monitor the implementation of any changes and require the strict enforcement of our collective bargaining agreement.

OPM Offers Early Enrollment for Long-Term Care

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has announced an early enrollment for eligible employees to submit applications for enrollment in the Federal Long Term Care Insurance program. Early enrollment began March 25, and will run through May 15, 2002. The Federal Long Term Care Security Act, signed by President Bill Clinton on Sept. 19, 2000, authorized the OPM to negotiate with insurance companies to offer long-term care insurance to the approximately 20 million people who are eligible for coverage.

The Federal Long Term Care Insurance program early enrollment period is an opportunity for eligible employees to submit applications for enrollment before the open season begins on July 1, 2002. Early enrollment is designed for people who are already knowledgeable about long term care insurance and do not need the extensive educational campaign that LTC Partners, the program's underwriters, will undertake before and during the open season.

The guidelines for early enrollment, published in the March 15, 2002, Federal Register, are:

Eligibility: Eligible groups include postal and federal civilian employees and annuitants; members of the uniformed services; retired members of the uniformed services; their spouses and adult children; and the parents, stepparents, and parents-in-law of employees and members of the uniformed services. There will be no difference in eligibility requirements between the early enrollment period and the open season.

Underwriting requirements: Postal and federal civilian employees, members of the uniformed services, and their spouses will be required to submit applications with abbreviated (short form) underwriting. The short form contains several questions regarding health status.

All other eligible people will be required to submit applications with long form, or full, underwriting. If you are subject to full underwriting, you must answer more

questions about your health status. It may also include a review of medical records and/or a personal interview.

Benefits available: Under early enrollment, a limited number of benefit options will be available. Benefit levels will be described in printed material provided by LTC Partners and on their website at <http://www.ltcfeds.com>. More options will be made available during the open season that begins in July. You will be able to change to a different benefit level during that open season if you wish, and still retain your "billing age" from early enrollment.

Billing age: Premiums are based on your age at the time LTC Partners receives your application for coverage. Billing age rules will be different for the open season.

Premiums: Premiums vary depending on your age and the level of coverage you choose. Premiums will be provided by LTC Partners in print material and on their website.

During early enrollment, premiums may be paid in one or two ways. You may request direct billing for premiums, or you may have premiums automatically deducted from a bank account. Payroll deductions will not be available until the open season. You may switch to payroll deductions at any time after they become available.

Effective date: The effective date of an enrollee's coverage under early enrollment is the later of May 1, 2002, or the first day of the month that is on or after the date LTC Partners approves your application for coverage.

For additional information: For more detailed information about the Long Term Care program, visit OPM's website, www.opm.gov/insure/ltc/index.htm, or call a certified long term care insurance specialist at 1-800-582-3337 (1-800-LTC-FEDS) or TDD 1-800-843-3557, Monday through Friday, EST.

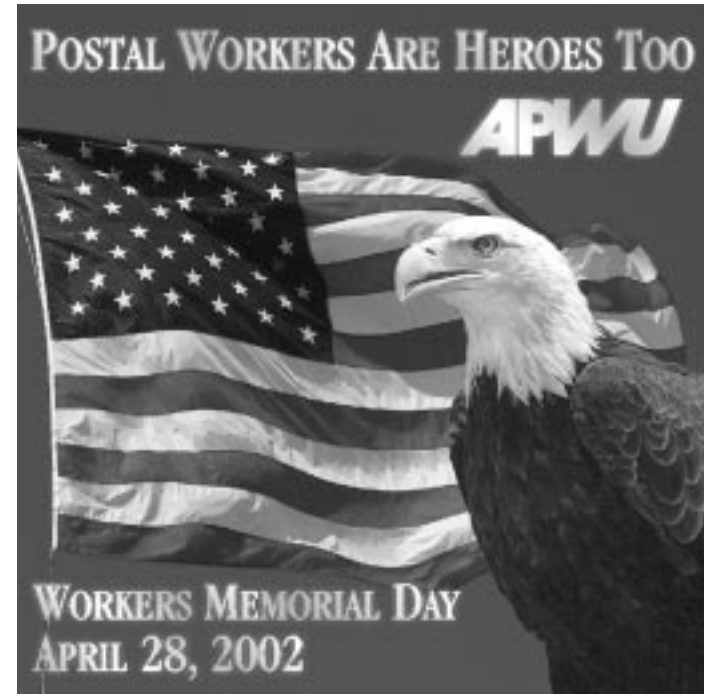
Workers Memorial Day April 28

On April 28 each year, the unions of the AFL-CIO observe Workers Memorial Day to honor those who have suffered and died from job-related injuries. As we pause to remember them, we rededicate ourselves to the fight for workplace safety.

This year, Workers Memorial Day holds special significance. The Sept. 11 terrorist attack claimed the lives of more than 3,000 people, including more than 600 union members. Among them were heroic firefighters and policemen, restaurant workers, construction workers and many more. Several weeks later, postal workers and others were sickened and died when anthrax was sent through the mail.

The terrorist attacks put health and safety issues front and center. While workers address new threats, we must press against long-recognized hazards. Each year, 6,000 people are killed at work, 50,000 die from occupational disease, and millions more are injured. Meanwhile the Bush administration has joined with business supporters to block or roll back needed safety regulations, including ergonomic standards.

We urge all APWU members, locals and state organization to participate in Workers Memorial Day activities in their area. We also ask you to give generously to the Postal Workers Front-Line Heroes Fund, c/o APWU, 1300 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005.



Bush on Worker Safety: 'Make Enforcement Voluntary'

On April 5, 2002, without any advance notice, the Bush administration issued a workplace safety proposal that offers workers no real protection against the nation's biggest job safety problem – ergonomic injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome. The proposal, issued by Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, essentially makes enforcement of OSHA's ergonomic standard voluntary. This is a major setback for organized labor's efforts to provide a safe workplace for workers.

John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, immediately condemned the Department of Labor's plan. "After over a year of delay the administration has today announced a meaningless measure that yet again delays action and provides workers no protection against ergonomic hazards," Sweeney said.

More than a year ago, the Bush administration repealed an ergonomics safety regulation enacted by the Clinton administration after a 10-year effort begun under Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole. At the time, President Bush and Labor Secretary Chao promised to implement a comprehensive approach to protect workers from ergonomic hazards. "With today's announcement, the Bush administration again caters to corporate special interests and abdicates its responsibility to protect workers," Sweeney said.

The plan does not outline an enforceable ergonomic standard, Sweeney said, only an intention to develop voluntary guidelines for selected industries that are not identified. Its enforcement component also fails to identify industries targeted for inspection, even the highest risk industries. Instead of action to fix

dangerous workplace hazards, the plan relies on voluntary assistance and passive outreach tools such as new web sites, he said. The plan does not call for any immediate action.

Since taking office, the Bush administration has stopped work on dozens of important safety and health standards, withdrawn worker training grants, and stopped important recordkeeping rules that would require employers to identify which injuries are musculoskeletal disorders. President Bush also appointed one of industry's anti-ergonomic leaders, Eugene Scalia, as the Department of Labor's top lawyer.

The AFL-CIO and its unions have fought for more than a decade to protect workers from crippling injuries and we will continue that fight. We will seek action from the Congress to keep its commitment to protect workers and pass legislation to require a new ergonomics standard.

The Breaux-Specter Ergonomics Bill

Sen. John Breaux (D-LA) and Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) are planning to introduce legislation to require the Department of Labor to issue a new ergonomics standard. The bill is similar to bipartisan legislation (S.598) introduced by Sen. Breaux last year, but it now includes provisions to make clear that the new standard must be protective and based upon effective employer practices that reduce injuries and control hazards.

As soon as the Breaux-Specter bill is reintroduced, we will notify APWU members seeking immediate grass-roots activity.

National Presidents' Conference Set

The next meeting of the APWU National Presidents' Conference (NPC) will be held on Sunday, June 9, and Monday, June 10, 2002, at the Sheraton Burlington Hotel & Conference Center in Burlington, VT. The Vermont APWU is hosting the event and Vermont State APWU Secretary-Treasurer Donna Buchanan is the Conference Coordinator. The NPC business sessions will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Monday.

Please mail agenda items for discussion to:
NPC Agenda Items
Att: J.N. "Jim" Alexander, Chairperson
P.O. Box 4004, Medford OR 97501

In addition, you can fax agenda items to:
(541) 826-9427 or e-mail them to
jimsturn@internetcds.com.

Make reservations at the Sheraton Burlington by May 1, 2002; call 1 (800) 325-3535. Room rates are

\$151.51 per night, including taxes. Pre-registration is encouraged.

Please mail your registration form, along with a check for \$50 payable to APWU NPC, to:
APWU Vermont
Att: Donna Buchanan, Sec-Treas
P.O. Box 845, Burlington VT 05402

REC Conference, Organizing Forum

A REC Site Conference will be held from 9 a.m. until noon on Saturday, June 8, 2002, at the Burlington Sheraton. The REC Conference is open to all presidents, officers and shop stewards with REC concerns. Please submit agenda items Moline Moore, REC Conference Chairperson, at P.O. Box 469, Beaumont, TX, 77704. If you have any questions, please contact Moline Moore at (409) 838-0189.

A forum on APWU organizing will be held on Saturday, June 8, 2002, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

REGISTRATION FORM, APWU NATIONAL PRESIDENTS' CONFERENCE

June 8-10, 2002

Name	Title		
Address	City	State	Zip Code
Phone	Fax	Email	
Local	Delegate	Alternate (choose one)	

Enclosed is a check or money order for \$50 payable to: APWU Presidents' Conference

Mail check and form to:

APWU Vermont, Att: Donna Buchanan, Sec-Treas, P.O. Box 845, Burlington VT 05402