

White House Calls For 'Comprehensive Postal Reform'

Ending speculation about what role the White House would play in the debate over legislation to revamp the nation's mail system, President Bush called on Congress on Dec. 8 "to enact comprehensive postal reform." Bush made the announcement during a meeting with members of the President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service, Treasury Secretary John W. Snow, and Postmaster General John E. Potter.

"This announcement signals the president's commitment to passing legislation to overhaul the Postal Service," said APWU President William Burrus. "His administration has shown that it can be extremely focused in accomplishing its goals, so we must be focused as well."

While the administration was short on specifics, a Treasury Department statement outlined the general principles that should guide reform legislation. The criteria, which reflect recommendations made by the Presidential Commission, are:

"Implement Best Practices: Ensure that the Postal Service's governing body is equipped to meet the responsibilities and objectives of an enterprise of its size and scope.

"Transparency: Ensure that important factual information on the Postal Service's product costs and performance is accurately measured and made available to the public in a timely manner.

"Flexibility: Ensure that the Postal Service's governing body and management have the authority to reduce costs, set rates, and adjust key aspects of its business in order to meet its obligations to customers in a dynamic marketplace.

"Accountability: Ensure that a Postal Service operating with greater flexibility has appropriate

independent oversight to protect consumer welfare and universal mail service.

"Self Financing: Ensure that a Postal Service operating with greater flexibility is financially self-sufficient, covering all of its obligations."

Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Susan Collins (R-ME) said the principles Bush outlined would guide her in developing reform legislation, which she is crafting in a bipartisan effort with Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE). House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) issued a statement expressing his commitment "to making postal industry reform a top priority for the second session of the 108th Congress." He was joined by the House committee's ranking member, Henry A. Waxman (D-CA); the head of the committee's Special Panel on Postal Reform and Oversight, Rep. John M. McHugh (R-NY); and the special panel's ranking member, Rep. Danny Davis (D-IL).

"The Presidential Commission proposed giving broad authority to a politically-appointed regulatory board to establish postage rates, define and adjust the scope of universal service, amend the postal monopoly, set wages and benefits, and review and act on complaints," Burrus said. "This recommendation would give such a panel unprecedented authority, with no accountability. We would be very concerned if the president's call for 'flexibility,' 'accountability,' or 'best practices' were applied in legislation to give a governing body such wide-ranging authority," he said.

The Governmental Affairs Committee has held two hearings on the report of the President's Commission and plans to hold additional hearings in 2004.

"We await specific legislation and hope to play a positive role in its development," Burrus said.

Postal Workers' Health Insurance Open Season Extended 3 Weeks

The Federal Employees Health Benefits Program Open Season has been extended for postal workers by 21 days, and now runs through Dec. 29. If you haven't already made your choice for 2004, this is a great opportunity to enroll in one of the APWU Health Plan options.

The APWU Health Plan's Consumer-driven Option gives flexibility and control over healthcare expenses with a Personal Care Account (PCA) that provides \$1,000 (Self Only) or \$2,000 (Self and Family) for first-dollar, 100 percent coverage.

Dental- and vision-care expenses are covered in the PCA up to certain limits. PCA benefit dollars that are not used during the year roll over and are added to the PCA for the following year. In-network preventive care is covered at 100 percent in the Consumer-driven option.

The top-rated High Option provides comprehensive coverage and top quality service at a true value. The High Option provides an outstanding prescription drug program with no deductible and low co-payments. APWU Health Plan's High Option provides benefits such as the innovative Wellness Benefit that reimburses enrollees who use few benefits in a plan year; 100 percent coverage for immunizations, lab tests and physical examinations for children (when PPOs are used); and 100 percent coverage for accidental injuries.

You have two great options to choose from for 2004. This is the year to join APWU Health Plan.

Other Open Seasons

The *Flexible Spending Account* open season ends Dec. 21; the *Thrift Savings Plan* open season ends Dec. 31.

Agreement Reached On Rehab Assignment Complaint Before EEOC

A tentative agreement has been reached in an 11-year old EEO class-action complaint against the Postal Service, affecting postal employees in permanent rehabilitation positions.

The suit was filed before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) under the Rehabilitation Act. EEOC Administrative Judge Dickie Montamayer gave preliminary approval to the settlement on Dec. 3, 2003. The charging parties and the Postal Service are in the process of drafting the final settlement agreement, which must be approved by the EEOC.

This case was filed on behalf of employees in permanent rehabilitation positions who were denied promotion or advancement opportunities, including training assignments, temporary "detail" assignments, and awards that would have enhanced their opportunity for promotion. The settlement will establish a claims process to be used by individuals who seek compensation under the settlement. It also will require the Postal Service to change its current procedures to provide employees in permanent rehabilitation assignments the same opportunities for promotion, advancement and reasonable accommodation as other employees.

Employees who believe they are covered by the EEOC settlement must file a claim under a process to be established by the settlement. Claims that are accepted for processing may result in the payment of compensation. If compensation is denied, the validity of the claim may be determined by an arbitrator selected jointly by the Postal Service and the class members' counsel. Arbitrators' decisions will be final.

Please note that this is *not* arbitration under the APWU's Collective Bargaining Agreement: The APWU will have no right or responsibility to participate in the arbitration of disputed claims under the settlement.

The tentative agreement includes specific monetary amounts to be paid for the denial of an award, training, assignment or detail, or promotion.

Employees denied a promotion will be eligible for additional compensation, in specified amounts, depending on when the denial occurred.

Any postal worker who served in a permanent rehabilitation position at any time since Jan. 1, 1992, and who can answer "yes" to all the questions listed below may have a legal claim under the settlement:

- 1) Are you a current or former employee of the USPS?
- 2) Have you ever been injured on the job?
- 3) Did you file a claim with OWCP as a result of the injury?
- 4) Did OWCP accept the claim?
- 5) After acceptance of the claim, were you placed in a permanent rehabilitation position?
- 6) Since being placed in that position, have you been denied promotional or advancement opportunities?

The complainants in the case and their attorneys have created a Web page (www.gloverclass.com) and a toll-free phone number (800-280-8301) to answer questions about the case.

Postal Employees Fighting Terrorism Granted Five Days of Uncharged Leave

The Postal Service has informed the APWU that it will provide five days of uncharged leave to USPS employees called to active duty in the war on terrorism.

In a directive issued to the heads of executive departments and agencies on Nov. 14, President Bush ordered that the leave be provided to "Federal civil servants," without specifically mentioning postal employees.

"This is notification that Postmaster General John E.

Potter has determined that postal employees should be included in this benefit," Labor Relations Policies and Programs Manager Doug A. Tulino said in a letter to APWU President William Burrus on Nov. 25.

"The Postal Service recognizes the service and sacrifice of members of the Reserve Forces and the Air and Army National Guard," Tulino wrote, "and wishes to ensure that Postal Service employees, who are not covered by the President's Memorandum, are included in this directive."

COLA Update

A decrease in the Consumer Price Index in October means that if the adjustment were made based on the third month of the six-month measuring period, the fifth Cost-Of-Living Adjustment period under the National Agreement would give employees an annual raise of \$166.

The adjustment, which is subject to fluctuation in the next three months of accounting, would amount to an 8 cents per hour increase, which works out to \$6.40 per pay period. The fifth COLA will be based on the January 2004 index point and will take effect in March 2004.

The three most recent COLA increases took effect Sept. 6 (\$291) and March 8, 2003, (\$250), and Sept. 7, 2002 (\$312).

APWU-represented postal workers received a 1.3 percent increase in their annual salaries Nov. 15, based on their wage rates as of Sept. 13, 2003. Effective with Pay Period 25-03, this pay hike will be reflected in paychecks issued Dec. 5.

Updated pay scales can be found in the November/December edition of *The American Postal Worker*. Pay scales also can be seen at www.apwu.org.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

The officers and staff of the American Postal Workers Union wish you and yours a happy and healthy holiday season.