

APWU Condemns Administration for Silence On November's Ricin Mail

The American Postal Workers Union on Feb. 5 condemned the Administration for its failure to notify the American public and the union about a package containing the deadly poison ricin that was mailed to President Bush last November.

"Published reports indicate that authorities were made aware on Nov. 12 that contaminated mail had passed through a mail processing center in Chattanooga," APWU President William Burrus said, "but that information was never shared with employees."

"As the ricin incident in the U.S. Senate has unfolded in recent days, I have withheld comment or criticism," Burrus said. "I have avoided inflaming the fears and passions that postal workers feel at times like this."

"However, I am outraged that when there was clear evidence that workers could have been endangered last year," Burrus said. "The Administration failed to timely inform the Postal Service and its employees. Regrettably, this unfortunate failure to communicate with the union is reminiscent of the uneven handling of information during the anthrax terrorist attacks two years ago."

The incident involving tainted mail sent to President Bush came to light only after the ricin incident on Capitol Hill earlier this week. Three Senate office buildings were closed for a few days after ricin was found Feb. 2 in a

suite of offices used by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-TN).

Testing of ventilation systems and air samples indicated that the powdery ricin discovered in a mail room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building had not been found anywhere else in the congressional complex, and no one was known to have fallen ill. Testing of the USPS "V Street" facility, though which mail bound for Capitol Hill is processed, also proved negative for the poison.

Following up on another scare that took place Feb. 2, the Postal Service reported Feb. 3 that a suspicious powder found at the Southern Connecticut Processing & Distribution Center in Wallingford tested negative for both ricin and anthrax.

The tests were conducted by the Connecticut State Public Health Laboratory after preliminary field tests performed by the Connecticut State Police Emergency Services Unit were "inconclusive."

"We will not permit postal employees to become canaries," Burrus said, referring to the air-quality testing practices of early coal mining operations. "Postal employees demand to be treated equally with political officials."

"I intend to call for a congressional investigation of this matter."

Judge Cuts by 6 Months the Delay On Burdensome LM-2 Filing Order

A federal judge ruled last month that extensive new financial reporting requirements for unions could take effect as early as July 1, 2004, modifying her earlier ruling which had postponed the rules until 2005.

The Labor Department's October 2003 order to include on LM-2 forms extensive details about local union finances will require many locals to hire outside accounting firms. In a ruling made New Year's Eve, U.S. District Court Judge Gladys Kessler declared that unions would suffer "irreparable harm" in trying to meet a Jan. 1, 2004, deadline, and she delayed the implementation of the regulations by one year.

The ruling was made in response to an appeal by the AFL-CIO, and Kessler noted that she would follow up with a decision on the broader issues in the complaint. On Jan. 22, she ruled that the Labor Department order was "reasonable, adequately explained and not arbitrary or ca-

pricious," and issued an order permitting the Department to implement the new rules 90 days after it provides an operational computer program to handle the reports, or July 1, 2004, whichever date is later.

The new rules require national, regional and local unions with incomes of more than \$250,000 to disclose detailed information on all transactions of more than \$5,000, including those directed toward member-representation activities. The LM-2 preparations will require costly measures such as the purchase of computer hardware and software, and the training of officers and/or hiring of staff, and the contracting of services from professionals.

The Labor Department has promised to have testing of its software completed and available to labor unions in 90 days. Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO is continuing to review legal options.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing Task Force Seminars

The APWU Deaf/Hard of Hearing Task Force has scheduled two regional educational seminars, the first to be held in Colorado Springs in late April.

The conference at the Antlers Adam's Mark hotel is set for April 23-25. Hotel reservations can be made at 800-444-2326. Conference attendees who reserve by March 23 will receive the negotiated rate of \$129, plus 14.5 percent tax.

The conference registration fee is \$50, which includes the Saturday luncheon. Complete the form available on the Secretary-Treasurer's page at www.apwu.org and forward it by March 23 to: Deaf/Hard of Hearing Task Force, American Postal Workers Union, 1300 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20005.

A second educational conference is scheduled for May 21-23, at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC.

APWU SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE

APWU members are reminded that scholarships are available to children and grandchildren, including stepchildren, of active or deceased members of the union.

Two types of scholarships are available to high school seniors. The E.C. Hallbeck Memorial Scholarship provides \$1,000 for each of four consecutive years of college. The APWU Vocational Scholarship is for students attending accredited vocational schools or taking part in

community college vocational programs as full-time students. The vocational scholarship is for up to \$1,000 for each of three consecutive years.

Applications must be postmarked by March 1, 2004, and received no later than March 15, 2004. Complete rules and applications can be obtained from your local union or APWU headquarters (202-842-4215). Guidelines and forms also can be found at www.apwu.org.

Burrus Testifies Before House Subcommittee on Postal Reform

APWU Leader Assails Presidential Panel's Labor Proposals

APWU President William Burrus told the House Special Panel on Postal Reform that recommendations of the President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service for the postal workforce were "totally unacceptable."

Testifying at the panel's Feb. 5 hearing in Chicago, Burrus said, "The report repeatedly states that the Commission supports the right of postal workers to engage in collective bargaining. Nevertheless, it recommends the establishment of a three-member Postal Regulatory Board, appointed by the president, which would have the authority to set the compensation of postal employees.

"The Commission seems to believe that postal workers are fools," Burrus told the panel. "The report paid lip service to the importance of good labor relations, while making recommendations that would ensure labor conflict," he said.

The APWU president also criticized the Commission's recommendations to remove postal workers from federal retirement and retiree healthcare plans. "This would be a diametrical departure from appropriate public policy," he said. "We categorically reject the contention that it would be appropriate for postal employees, now or in the future, to be paid fringe benefits that are less than those provided to other federal employees."

"In recent years," he noted, "postal workers have repeatedly stood on the front lines of homeland security.... It would be an insult to their courage and determination to suggest they should be afforded something less than federal status."

Burrus told the panel that Congress must understand the Postal Service will continue to lose money as long as it

grants excessive postage discounts to companies that presort their mail.

"The Postal Service is currently giving away hundreds of millions of dollars every year in the form of excessive worksharing discounts," he said.

The problem was tacitly acknowledged by the President's Commission, Burrus said, in its recommendation that all future discounts be limited to the costs that the USPS would avoid if it processed the mail in-house. "What the Commission has proposed is simply not good enough," he said.

Asked to comment on the union's views of the principles for postal reform that President Bush endorsed in December, Burrus said, "It is difficult to tell from the five principles, what, specifically, the Administration supports." The principles include "implementing best practices," "financial transparency," "flexibility," "accountability," and "self-financing."

APWU supports those broad principles, "but the devil, as they say, is in the details," he said. "We have some very strongly-held views about how the principles supported by the Administration must be carried out, and we are aware that others believe that these same principles justify changes which we adamantly oppose."

The presidents of other postal unions also expressed their opposition to the commission's labor proposals. The union officials, including Burrus, had been invited to share their views at a Senate Governmental Affairs Committee hearing on Feb. 3, but that hearing was postponed due to the ricin incident on Capitol Hill, in the same building where the hearing was to take place.

That hearing is now likely to be held later this month.

Tunstall Retires; Stapleton Approved As Union's New Secretary-Treasurer

APWU Secretary-Treasurer Robert L. Tunstall announced his retirement at the union's National Executive Board meeting Feb. 4, and was replaced by Terry Stapleton, the former Southern Region Coordinator. Frankie Sanders, a Clerk Division National Business Agent from Dallas, replaced Stapleton as Southern Region Coordinator.

Stapleton and Sanders were recommended by President William Burrus and approved by a vote of the executive board, in accordance with the APWU Constitution. Tunstall's resignation took effect at the close of business Feb. 4; Stapleton and Sanders assumed their new duties Feb. 5.

Secretary-Treasurers' Conferences

APWU presidents, secretary-treasurers, trustees, and other officers with fiduciary responsibilities are invited to attend an upcoming Secretary-Treasurer seminars.

A registration form for the March 11-13 conference in Hartford, CT, is available on the Calendar of Events page at www.apwu.org.

Complete the registration form and mail it to the national Secretary-Treasurer's office. The registration fee, which should accompany the completed registration form, is \$50; the fee for computer courses is \$100.

Registration fees are refundable for cancellations received prior to Feb. 17.

"I have had a good ride," Tunstall told the board. "I took special pleasure in last year's COPA fund-raising campaign," which was the union's best ever.

APWU President William Burrus praised Tunstall's contributions. "Bob has done an excellent job as Secretary-Treasurer. But kind words from me are not a measure of that - the union's strong financial position is."

Tunstall and Stapleton said they had spent the last several weeks working together on the transition. Both expressed confidence that the Secretary-Treasurer's office will continue to run smoothly.

The conference is being conducted at Hartford's Crowne Plaza Hotel. To make reservations, call 860-549-2400. To get the guaranteed room rate of \$105 (plus sales and occupancy taxes of about \$15), reserve by Feb. 17, and identify yourself as a participant in the APWU Secretary-Treasurer Seminar.

Secretary-Treasurers' conferences also are scheduled for Oakland, CA (Feb. 14-16), Houston (Feb. 26-28), Fairborn, OH (March 4-6), and Philadelphia (March 28-30).

If you have questions, please contact Secretary-Treasurer Terry Stapleton's office at 202-842-4215, or by fax at 202-842-8530.

Local Unions Asked to Help Support Striking, Locked-Out UFCW Workers

The AFL-CIO is asking local unions and individual union members nationwide to provide financial assistance to Southern California grocery workers who have been walking picket lines for more than four months.

Southern California United Food & Commercial Workers union members struck the Von's grocery chain Oct. 11. Hours after the strike began at the Safeway-owned stores, two other chains, Albertsons and Ralphs, locked out their employees, which put 70,000 union members on the streets.

The workers have been asked to make extensive con-

cessions, particularly on healthcare benefits: Many are being asked to pay in premiums amounts that will virtually eliminate future wage increases.

Local unions have been asked to pledge as little as \$200 per month to the "Adopt-a-Striking-Family" campaign. Pledges and individual contributions will be acknowledged by striking UFCW members.

Send your contributions to: UFCW Strike Hardship Fund, Attn: Secretary-Treasurer Joe Hansen, 1775 K St. NW, Washington, DC 20006. You can also donate online at <https://secure.ga3.org/08/holdtheline>.