

Postal Reform Update

'Aggressive' Legislative Timetable Announced

Senate Governmental Affairs Committee Chairwoman Susan Collins (R-ME) has announced that she and Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) plan to introduce postal reform legislation by the end of this month. "We are trying to keep an aggressive timetable because we're committed to getting postal reform legislation enacted this year," she said at the conclusion of the committee's eighth public hearing on the subject.

Collins' statement followed April 7 testimony by David Fineman, chairman of the USPS Board of Governors, and George Omas, chairman of the Postal Rate Commission. The witnesses told lawmakers they favor a speedier, less litigious rate-setting process that gives more flexibility to adjust prices.

The April 7 committee meeting was her panel's final hearing before taking up legislation on proposals made last July by the President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service. Although no formal announcement has been made about a timetable for introducing a postal reform bill in the House of Representatives, legislation is expected to be introduced soon there as well.

Once bills are introduced, votes could be scheduled with little advance notice. APWU members are urged to be vigilant, and to keep an eye on union bulletin boards and pay regular visits to www.apwu.org.

At the April 7 hearing, Fineman called for streamlining postal rate-setting procedures that can take as long as 18 months to complete. Omas advocated a "less adversarial and trial-type" process, but spoke against a proposal to bypass public review by creating a Postal Regulatory Board.

Fineman and Omas each endorsed a proposal made by the Commission to set a price cap limiting future rate hikes

to increases in the Consumer Price Index, which measures inflation.

"The American Postal Workers Union supports pricing flexibility for the Postal Service," said APWU President William Burrus after the hearing. "However, we strongly object to price caps that would, in practice, be used to suppress wages while driving up profits for corporate mailers."

"The Postal Service's financial problems will not end unless excessive postage discounts for the mailing industry are eliminated," he added.

"Unfortunately, the hearings held since the Commission completed its report last July were dominated by representatives of the mailing industry. Notably absent from the discussion of rate-setting policy was any examination of the excessive discounts given to major mailers and the wide disparities in the rates charged for different classes of mail."

"APWU members must let lawmakers know what issues are important to us," Burrus said.

"While there are some Commission recommendations we support, we oppose limits on collective bargaining and we oppose limits on the health and retirement benefits currently enjoyed by active and retired postal workers. We also are against the closing of plants and post office without benefit of community input."

"We must continue to impress upon our elected representatives that rate-setting policies that benefit very large mailers at the expense of consumers and small businesses are unfair," Burrus said. "Any proposed legislation must include a prohibition on all outsourcing that exceeds the costs avoided by the Postal Service."

APWU Readies Massive Media Campaign To Battle Anti-Worker 'Reform' Proposals

The APWU is preparing to finance a large-scale media campaign to battle anti-worker, anti-consumer "reform" aspects of proposed legislation should it become necessary, President William Burrus said recently.

"Nine months ago, the APWU National Executive Board authorized a special assessment of union members' dues to fund such a campaign," Burrus said. "I am prepared to implement the assessment if legislation is introduced that is detrimental to postal workers and the American public."

The assessment would generate \$2 million. Vowing to do "whatever it takes" to defeat anti-worker "reform" efforts, the board approved an \$8 assessment per member at its July 8, 2003, meeting, to be paid in \$2 increments over four pay periods. The effective date would be determined by the APWU president.

Burrus also announced this week that he would ask the union's 1,500 locals and 50 state organizations to "go all out" to provide additional funds to support local media campaigns. "I will call on local and state leaders

to embark on independent efforts to raise fivefold that amount if proposed legislation is harmful to workers or American citizens," he said.

"We intend to raise enough money to thwart any legislation that would undermine postal services, or the rights of postal workers," Burrus said. "And we will work to end giveaways to the mailing industry that threaten the viability of the USPS," he said. "We will do whatever is necessary to defeat any plan that would weaken the nation's mail system."

"Recent polls indicate that November's elections will be hotly contested," Burrus noted. "We are prepared to target any district to protect the USPS and postal jobs. Our media campaign will lay the groundwork for educating the public about the issues of postal reform."

The special dues assessment is separate from the union's Committee On Political Action fund-raising efforts. By law, dues *can* be used to educate the public about postal reform legislation, but *cannot* be used to make contributions to candidates' political campaigns.

Surveying Top Concerns of Working Women

Whether your top priority on the job is equal pay, flexible hours, child care, training, or gaining respect, one thing is certain: Working women find that it's more effective working together to make changes than trying to go it alone.

Because of that, the APWU has joined the AFL-CIO "Ask a Working Woman" campaign, which involves not just unions. Also taking part in the action plan to address

job-related concerns are women's and religious organizations, civil rights groups, and community activists.

Individuals, meanwhile, can voice their top concerns by participating in a survey. Visit www.aflcio.org/issues/politics/women to take part in the "Ask a Working Woman" poll and express your opinions on important on- and off-the-job issues.

APWU Member Dies of Injuries Suffered at Mailer's Warehouse

An APWU member working as a Bulk Mail Unit technician at a private warehouse in Indianapolis died April 4 from injuries sustained on the job four days earlier.

Bruce L. McFarland, 57, who had been employed by the Postal Service for 37 years, was working at Brylane, a mail-order operation best known for its Lane Bryant Catalog. While standing on a loading dock, he was crushed between the arm of a telescoping conveyor belt and a dock bay door.

A waist-high safety bar at the end of the conveyor is intended to retract the mechanism if it encounters pressure during extension. The bar apparently failed to react, and the conveyor belt pushed the worker through a dock-bay door, which itself was extensively damaged.

Brylane markets and distributes apparel and home furnishings for 10 catalogs and 10 e-commerce sites. According to the company Web pages, it mailed more than half a billion catalogs in 2003.

In November 2002, several union groups staged a protest in front of the company's New York headquarters. The demonstration spotlighted unsafe working conditions both in overseas sweatshops and in the warehouse and distribution facilities in Indianapolis.

Participants in the protest included representatives of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees and Brylane employees from Indianapolis. Two months later, Brylane workers in Indiana voted to join UNITE.

"Safety matters were a major concern of Brylane's warehouse workers," said UNITE Health and Safety Director Eric Frumin. "We identified hundreds of stress and strain injuries that had resulted from bad management practices at the plant. We feel that helped us to win over the workers and the public."

Reports from the Indiana Occupational Safety and Health Division and the Postal Inspection Service are not expected before late May. The APWU is conducting its own probe.

"We are determined to get to the bottom of this," said APWU President William Burrus. "We want to know how the accident happened and whether proper safety procedures were followed."

"We extend our heartfelt sympathies to Brother McFarland's family and co-workers."

McFarland had worked "off-site" at the Brylane facility for the Postal Service for about 20 years. The U.S. Army veteran is survived by a wife and three children.

April 28 Is Worker Memorial Day

On April 28, the unions of the AFL-CIO, along with labor organizations worldwide, will observe Workers Memorial Day to remember those who have suffered and died on the job.

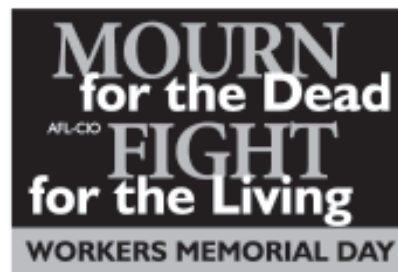
The first Workers Memorial Day in the United States took place in 1989. April 28 was chosen since it is the anniversary of the creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and is also the date of a similar remembrance in Canada.

The event known throughout the world as the International Day of Mourning honors workers who have sustained work-related injuries or have been killed during work-site catastrophes.

American unions have gained laws and protections—such as OSHA and the federal Mine Safety and Health Act—and have pushed for higher standards that have made workplaces safer for all workers. Nonetheless, the toll of workplace injuries, illnesses and deaths remains enormous.

Workers Memorial Day gives union members a chance to demand stronger enforcement of existing laws, protection from known workplace hazards, and safeguards against new safety and security threats.

For further information on worker-commemoration events this year, visit www.aflcio.org/yourjobeconomy/safety/memorial.



PA State President Plans 'Awareness Walk'

The head of the Pennsylvania Postal Workers Union (PPWU) plans to raise awareness about postal "reform" along with a few clouds of dust and money for the APWU's Committee on Political Action over five days in May.

PPWU President LeRoy Moyer plans to walk from Philadelphia—site of the nation's first post office—to Washington—the seat of the government that is considering radical changes to the way that the U.S. Postal Service operates.

"I'll be walking 30 miles a day from May 10 to May 14 to help make people aware of the potential dangers of postal reform, to workers and service to the American public," says Moyer, a disabled veteran who has a foot problem.

"At the same time, I plan to raise money for COPA. I hope that APWU locals nationwide will utilize sponsor sheets through which members can contribute 10 cents a mile."

While the contributions would all be sent to the PPWU, the donations earmarked toward the 150-mile jaunt would count toward individual local and state COPA goals," Moyer says.

"My primary purpose," he said, "is to use the walk as a way to get members motivated."

Information about the awareness walk is available at www.ppwu.org. Updates will be posted daily, mapping Moyer's progress and showing pictures of his trek.

USPS, APWU Discuss Commuter-Costs Benefit

The APWU is holding discussions with the Postal Service concerning a pre-tax "Commuter Benefit." Working with a company called WageWorks, the Postal Service is setting up a plan that would allow commuting-related expense items on a pre-tax basis.

APWU-represented employees would be eligible under IRS rules to purchase from WageWorks as much as \$100 per month's worth of "pre-tax" public-transportation fares. These purchases typically are for use on anything classified as mass transit: buses, trains, vanpools, or any combination of these.

Employees also could be reimbursed as much as \$195 per month for parking as a work-related expense. If a worker's actual expenses are greater than that, employees could still purchase whatever they needed through WageWorks. Any amount over the expense cap, how-

ever, would have to be paid with taxed dollars.

Participating employees would either call a toll-free number or go to www.WageWorks.com, and place an order for tokens, paper passes, swipe cards, etc. WageWorks then sends the chits to the employees and lets the USPS know how much to deduct from their pay. (The system, of course, would have to have been tested and proven secure.)

The commuter benefit would be paid by a special payroll deduction and would not affect the total number of allowable allotments currently available.

The proposed program is similar to Flexible Spending Accounts except that there is *no* "use it or lose it" provision. Because of this, the Commuter Benefits program should prove to be very valuable.