

APWU, USPS Consider One-Year Extension to Contract Agreement Would Require Union Members' Ratification

APWU President William Burrus announced June 20 that the union and management have reached "an agreement on a framework" for a one-year extension of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, with specific details still under discussion. The current contract is set to expire Nov. 20.

"If an agreement can be finalized and if it is approved by the union membership," Burrus said at a meeting of APWU local and state presidents, "it will include a raise, along with two cost-of-living adjustments, and upgrades of some positions in the clerk, maintenance, and motor vehicle crafts."

There would be no change to employee contributions to the health benefit or retirement programs.

Speaking at the APWU National Presidents' Conference in New Orleans, Burrus outlined the criteria he would use in deciding whether to extend the contract. "A major consideration is whether we can achieve through a contract extension improvements that we are unlikely to achieve in negotiation or arbitration.

"If we are able to reach agreement on an extension, we will avoid the risks inherent in any contract negotiation," he said, noting that the union expected a major assault on workers' health and retirement benefits in the upcoming negotiations, which would begin in August if an agreement is not reached before then.

In addition to a contract extension, the parties are also exploring an entirely new concept: the creation of Retail Sales Assistants who would work in grocery stores, malls, and other venues that are easily accessible to the public, the union president said. These positions would be reserved for retired postal employees, who would continue to draw their retirement annuities.

"This could create an opportunity for new jobs in areas

where traditionally we have not had them," Burrus said. "However, we would have to have absolute protection against any erosion in the number of Retail Sales Associate positions at postal facilities in order to agree to such a model."

Extending the contract would mean that the collective bargaining agreements of the four largest postal unions – the APWU, the National Association of Letter Carriers, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union, and the National Rural Letter Carriers Association – would all expire on the same day, Nov. 20, 2006.

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"No specific contract language has been agreed to," Burrus cautioned, "and no papers have been signed.

"I expect to meet with postal officials in the coming weeks to see if we can come to an agreement that will best serve the interests of APWU members and the Postal Service."

If a tentative agreement is reached, members of the APWU Rank and File Bargaining Committee must approve it before it can be sent to union members for a ratification vote.

In December 2002, APWU members voted to extend the 2000-2003 agreement, to this November. A contract extension this year would be only the second one in the union's history. For more information, visit www.apwu.org.

COLA Update

A slight decrease in the Consumer Price Index in May means that if the adjustment were made based on the fourth month of the six-month measuring period, the eighth Cost-Of-Living Adjustment period under the National Agreement would give employees an annual raise of \$582.

Subject to fluctuation in the next two months, the ad-

justment currently amounts to a 28 cents per hour increase, which works out to \$22.40 per pay period. The eighth COLA will be based on the July 2005 index point and will be effective Sept. 3, 2005.

The most recent COLA increase (\$208) took effect March 19.