

APWU NEWSservice

WILLIAM BURRUS, President ROY BRAUNSTEIN, Editor

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American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO

Bush Appoints Panel to Study USPS

As expected, President Bush issued an executive order Dec. 11 that created a nine-member Commission on the Postal Service, which will make recommendations for sweeping changes. The panel is charged with producing a report by July 31, 2003.

"President Bush has put in motion the most serious effort in our lifetime to undermine the principles of universal service and uniform rates," said APWU President William Burrus. "I expect that it will produce a set of recommendations that will adversely affect postal services for most Americans."

Peter R. Fisher, the Treasury Department's undersecretary for domestic finance, said at the press conference announcing the commission, "this is not a stealth project to privatize the Postal Service."

But the Executive Order establishing the commission instructs it to consider whether the USPS monopoly status remains in the public interest. The commission will also consider changing the Postal Service's universal service mandate and will address what the Executive Order called "rigidities in cost or service."

In the wake of a failed seven-year effort to pass a postal "reform" bill, the Postal Service's Board of Governors, the Direct Marketing Association, and the Mailing Industry CEO Council have been pressing the White House to name a postal commission. The panel will draft new legislation and the prestige of a presidential commission means that Congress would be expected to act swiftly on its recommendations.

"The commission could produce recommendations including ending the postal monopoly, rolling back collective bargaining rights, ending six-day delivery, and closing postal facilities, particularly in rural and inner-city communities," Burrus said.

In creating the commission, "Bush is responding to political pressure from the nation's largest business and advertising mailers, who are interested only in protecting the subsidized postage rates they now enjoy," he said.

The APWU has demonstrated to Congress and the Postal Rate Commission that large mailers currently receive discounts for presorting their mail that by far exceed the costs saved by the Postal Service from processing that mail, thereby depriving it of the revenues it needs to maintain its national infrastructure.

Noting that the panel is dominated by industry representatives and that neither postal workers nor the AFL-CIO will have a seat, Burrus said that "The right-wing ideologues and mailing-industry profiteers will try to use the commission's report to justify their agenda. For years we've been reading the reports they funnel through the Cato Institute and other conservative think tanks," Burrus added. "Now these reports undoubtedly will serve as the blueprint for the commission's final report."

"I want to impress upon the membership that this is a serious threat to the future of the Postal Service. Every APWU member and non-member must engage in the coming struggle to preserve the Postal Service. We shall be calling for your assistance," he said.

COLA Update

An increase in the Consumer Price Index in November means that after the fourth month of the third Cost-Of-Living Adjustment (COLA) period in the National Agreement employees have accrued an annual raise of \$213.20.

The COLA adjustment amounts to a 10.25 cents per hour increase, which works out to \$8.20 per pay period.

The rise in the CPI-W from January through July (the second COLA period in the contract) resulted in a \$12 increase in APWU members' biweekly paychecks; the increase was reflected in paychecks issued Sept. 27. The next COLA will be reflected in March 28, 2003 paychecks.

Pay scales can be seen at www.apwu.org.

Fumigation, Testing Under Way

Anthrax Decontamination Begins At Washington Postal Facility

Decontamination finally has begun at the Washington, DC, mail processing facility closed for more than a year because of the presence of anthrax spores.

Chlorine dioxide gas was pumped into the Joseph Cursee Jr. and Thomas Morris Jr. Processing and Distribution Center (formerly the Brentwood PDC) Dec. 14-15 to kill anthrax spores. Thousands of samples will be taken from the building and an independent committee of scientists will review the results over several weeks.

If the scientists find no trace of anthrax, they are expected to say that the facility could be safely reopened. With an estimated two months necessary to paint and clean it and to install new carpeting, the earliest the PDC could open is late April 2003, some 18 months after APWU members Cursee and Morris were exposed to inhalation anthrax while handling letters bound for Capitol Hill.

The fumigation process is similar to one used to decontaminate the Hart Senate Office Building, where the tainted mail was discovered in October 2001. The closed postal facility is about 175 times the size of the Senate building. Hill staffers were back at their desks in January.

The Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine are among federal agencies involved in the cleanup.

If no anthrax spores are found, the fumigation equipment and cleanup team will begin work at the Trenton Mail Processing Facility in Hamilton, NJ, where APWU members also have been displaced since the anthrax terrorism attacks of October 2001.

Annual Pay Projections, APWU-Covered Workers

Due to a formatting error, the Dec. 10 News Service bulletin presented mislabeled projected salary levels. The following table shows the correct projections for Level 5, Step O and Level 6, Step O.

			LEVEL 5, STEP O (Increase)	LEVEL 6, STEP O (Increase)
1998-2000 Contract	Last Increase	Sept. 9, 2000	40,472	41,484
2000-2003 Contract	1st General Increase	Nov. 18, 2000	40,952 (480)	41,983 (499)
	2nd General Increase	Nov. 17, 2001	41,679 (727)	42,725 (742)
	1st COLA	March 9, 2002	41,679 (0)	42,725 (0)
	2nd COLA	Sept. 7, 2002	41,991 (312)	43,037 (312)
	3rd General Increase	Nov. 16, 2002	42,558 (567)	43,613 (576)
Contract Extension (If approved)	3rd COLA *	March 8, 2003	42,891 (333)	43,946 (333)
	4th COLA *	Sept. 6, 2003	43,203 (312)	44,258 (312)
	4th General Increase**	Nov. 15, 2003	43,765 (562)	44,833 (575)
	5th COLA *	March 6, 2004	44,077 (312)	45,145 (312)
	6th COLA *	Sept. 4, 2004	44,493 (416)	45,561 (416)
	5th General Increase **	Nov. 27, 2004	45,055 (562)	46,136 (575)
	7th COLA *	March 5, 2005	45,367 (312)	46,448 (312)
	8th COLA *	Sept. 17, 2005	45,741 (374)	46,822 (374)

* Estimate based on a projection of the CPI-W index provided by Joel Popkin & Co., a firm that specializes in wage and price projections.

** Calculation based on the Sept. 6, 2003, wage, which includes estimations of COLA.