

Burrus to Address Presidential Panel

APWU Leader to Stress USPS 'Flawed Rate Structure'

APWU President William Burrus will testify Feb. 20 before the President's Commission on the Postal Service. The second meeting of the full panel is to focus on the Postal Service "business model," including an assessment of its universal service obligation, the postage rate regulatory structure, and pricing flexibility.

"Despite our opposition to the establishment of the commission, I am pleased to be given the opportunity to testify," Burrus said. "The recommendations of the commission could have a devastating impact on postal workers and postal customers, so it is important that our voice is heard."

Burrus has been asked by the commission to include in his address his views on work-sharing, which involves private companies performing work that historically has been handled by the Postal Service. Work-sharing includes the pre-sorting done by big mailers who receive discounts.

"The excessive discounts are nothing more than subsidies for these businesses," Burrus said. "The Postal Service's flawed rate structure is the root cause of many of its current problems. When you combine the rate-setting policies with a weak economy, it is no wonder the Postal Service is drowning in red ink."

The commission's report, due July 31, is likely to serve as a blueprint for legislation that the White House will support in Congress.

The President's Commission could make recommendations to:

- Reduce delivery to five days or fewer;
- Expand work-sharing to permit private companies to perform retail, maintenance, or processing work;
- Eliminate the USPS monopoly on mail delivery;
- End the universal service obligation;
- Erode workers' collective bargaining rights;
- Create a two-tiered postage rate structure that would charge businesses less than consumers; and
- Establish "user fees" for delivery.

At press time, the union was working diligently to com-

plete position papers to submit to the commission by the Feb. 12 deadline for written comments.

The commission will hold field hearings in Texas, California, and Illinois in March and April. The APWU will ask that its state presidents be permitted to testify about the impact that changes to the Postal Service could have on workers and consumers in each state.

Other challenges, such as plant consolidations and expected proposals for legislation, also loom. National officers and staff are developing plans to meet these challenges, Burrus said.

Among the ideas are the activation of a national legislative network to contact elected officials to oppose plant consolidations and to fight any legislation that would be detrimental to postal workers and consumers.

In addition, the union will develop guidelines to help state and local unions form coalitions with citizens whose mail service is likely to deteriorate if plants are closed.

If legislation is proposed that would erode postal workers' collective bargaining rights, the APWU would seek to form a coalition with other postal unions and labor groups to oppose such attacks.

"We will evaluate whether we can be successful in quashing legislation in the Congressional Committees, or whether the fight will occur in the full House and Senate," Burrus said. "Our legislative strategy will be influenced by that decision."

"If the White House's legislation is backed by the Republican Congress, it will be extremely difficult to defeat," he said.

"This is a fight in which the union will need the involvement of all APWU members, their families, and community activists.

Our members must understand that their future is at stake."

Commission Names Subcommittee Members

The President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service established four subcommittees at its initial hearing on Jan. 8. The subcommittees are to report back to the full panel on specific issues, each of which is likely to be the focus of one of the commission's public hearings.

The **Business Model Subcommittee** is chaired by economist Richard C. Levin, president of Yale University, who is embroiled in a protracted struggle over wages, benefits, and working conditions with unions representing the school's clerical, technical, service, and maintenance employees, as well as with graduate students and hospital workers' organizations that are trying to win union recognition. Other members are Don V. Cogman, Carolyn L. Gallagher, Norman Seabrook, and Robert S. Walker, all of whom have close political ties to the Bush administration. This subcommittee will assess the Postal Service's current "government corporation" business model, including its universal service obligation, mail-delivery infrastructure, current rate regulation system, and pricing flexibility.

The **Technology Challenges and Opportunities Subcommittee** is chaired by former congressman Robert S. Walker (R-PA). Walker now heads the Wexler Group, a

Washington lobbying powerhouse. Dionel E. Aviles and Joseph R. Wright also serve on this subcommittee, which will study the impact of new technologies (such as online billing) on the Postal Service.

The **Private-Sector Partnership Subcommittee** is headed by business executive Wright, a former Reagan administration official. Cogman and Seabrook are the other members of the subcommittee, which will analyze the current role of the private sector in the mail-delivery system. This panel will look at expanding negotiated service agreements, "outsourcing," and "work-sharing." The Postal Service's current "work-sharing" policy is responsible for the excessive postage discounts it grants to big presort mailing houses.

The **Workforce Subcommittee** is chaired by Carolyn L. Gallagher, a former furniture company owner who then-governor Bush appointed to several government posts in Texas. Aviles and Levin also serve on this panel, which is responsible for reviewing current collective bargaining and dispute-resolution procedures. It will review employee compensation and productivity, workers' compensation claims, and the USPS pension and retiree health care obligations.

Taking the Message to Major Mailers

APWU President Bill Burrus took the union's case directly to the major mailers in late January, speaking to the board of directors of the Association for Postal Commerce.

This is the first time an APWU leader has been invited to address the group, whose board reads like a Who's Who of big mailers, with representation that includes AOL-Time Warner, Publishers Clearinghouse, and L.L. Bean.

Burrus tackled the most contentious issue right away, describing postage discounts on pre-sorted mail as excessive. "Discounts to mailers should never exceed the costs that the Postal Service avoids," the union president said. "A large percentage of the discounts are, in fact, subsidies to business, and the USPS is not in business to subsidize business."

The subsidies deprive the Postal Service of revenue it desperately needs to maintain its infrastructure and to provide universal service at uniform rates, Burrus told the group. And he added a warning: "The demise of the USPS would be adverse not only to the interests of our union, but to the American public."

Although the major mailers are at odds with the APWU on the issue of discounts, they rely on the Postal Service in its current form to bring their advertising message to

America's households and businesses, and are wary of efforts to privatize it.

The APWU president decried the efforts inside and outside the postal system to "reform" it through drastic change, particularly in cases where those efforts affect labor relations.

"The Postal Service complains that labor costs are too high," Burrus said. "But our productivity has soared. In fact, I will match the productivity of postal workers—especially those in our bargaining unit—with any workers in the private sector," he said.

One item under consideration among the so-called reformers, he pointed out, is the elimination of collective bargaining, which culminates in interest arbitration. "But we have opted for arbitration only when the Postal Service refuses to bargain with us—when management presents their wage proposal for the first time on the last day of the 90-day negotiating period, and says, 'take it or leave it.'" Burrus noted that the Railway Labor Act, which has been suggested as an alternative to current collective bargaining rules, is so ineffective in resolving labor disputes that Congress often imposes wages and conditions on railroad workers through legislation.

"Collective bargaining is not debatable," Burrus said. "We will use every tool at our disposal to preserve it."

Basic Arbitration Training Conference

The APWU Research & Education Department is hosting a Basic Arbitration Training Conference from April 7 to April 13 in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

The Basic Arbitration Training Conference is designed to acquaint local union officers and stewards with the techniques needed to effectively prepare a case for basic arbitration. In addition to daily classes, there will be homework assignments and work with an assigned team during evening hours. Students also will take part in a mock arbitration case.

Classes and topics to be covered are: Introduction to Arbitration, Preparing the Case, Identifying and Framing the Issues, Threshold Issues, Exhibits and Stipulations, Opening Statements, Rules of Evidence, Objections, Direct Examination, Cross Examination, Closing Statements, and Finality of Awards.

The conference will be held at the Sheraton Grand Hotel at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. Call 800-345-5251 or 972-929-8400 for reservations. The room rate is \$119 per night, plus tax, for single or double occupancy. To secure the negotiated rate, identify yourself as attending the APWU conference and register by Friday, March 21.

The registration fee is \$150 per person. Two daily coffee breaks, a dinner on Monday and a graduation breakfast on Sunday are included. To register for the conference, participants must submit a written request from their local or state president (on local or state letterhead) authorizing their attendance. Pre-registration for the conference must be made by March 21.

Participants must arrive at the hotel no later than 2 p.m. on Monday, April 7. Classes begin at 3 p.m. that day. No walk-ins will be allowed.

National Presidents' Conference

The next National Presidents' Conference will be in St. Louis from Saturday, March 29, through Monday, March 31. The St. Louis Gateway District Area Local will host the event at the Embassy Suites Hotel Downtown.

Saturday will be an all-day training session on strategies for coalition building and mobilizing the membership in light of privatization, the postal commission, and other mailing industry issues. Sunday (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and Monday (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) will be general business sessions.

Officers are encouraged to submit agenda items to: NPC Agenda Items, J.N. "Jim" Alexander, Chairman, PO Box

4004, Medford, OR 97501. Items also can be faxed (541-826-9427), or e-mailed (jimsturn@internetcds.com). A form for these agenda items can be found in the "Calendar of Events" pages at www.apwu.org.

Representatives of state and local unions interested in hosting the October 2004 NPC should be prepared to make a brief presentation to the delegates in St. Louis.

To make reservations at the Embassy Suites Hotel Downtown St. Louis, call 314-241-4200. The room rate is \$139, plus tax. Early registration for the conference is encouraged.

APWU NATIONAL PRESIDENTS' CONFERENCE

Central Region - St. Louis March 29-31, 2003

Name _____ Title _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Local _____ Delegate _____ Alternate Delegate _____ (check one)
Telephone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Enclosed is a check or money order for \$50 payable to: The Presidents' Conference.

Send this completed form to: St. Louis Gateway District Area Local, Attn: Fred Wolfmeyer
1907 Locust St., St. Louis, MO 63103

BASIC ARBITRATION TRAINING CONFERENCE

Sheraton Grand Hotel (D-FW Airport), Irving, TX April 7 - 13, 2003

Name _____ Social Security Number _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Local _____
Phone (Work) _____ Phone (Home) _____ Email _____
Work Hours _____ Enclosed is a check \$150 payable to Basic Arbitration Conference.

Send this completed form and check by March 21 to: Joyce B. Robinson, Director
APWU Research and Education Department
1300 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20005