

## APWU, USPS Discuss Procedures for Early Outs

### Union Seeks Information From Interested Employees

The union and management are discussing procedures for offering voluntary early retirement to APWU-represented employees, despite the fact that the Office of Personnel Management has not yet responded to management's request for authority to do so. A favorable decision from OPM is expected within several weeks.

When approval is confirmed, notice will be provided to employees immediately. In the interim, it would be helpful to have an estimate of the number of employees who are considering voluntary early retirement, and the installations that would be affected.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement between the APWU and the USPS required management to seek authority to offer early retirement to all eligible APWU-represented employees. Management did so in a letter to OPM dated Jan. 23, 2003.

The early-out opportunities are likely to be phased in to coincide with management plans for plant consolidations. If OPM approves the Postal Service request for Voluntary Early Retirement Authority, the opportunities could be staggered over a period of six months or more, depending on where employees work.

Notwithstanding statements made by local or regional postal officials to the contrary, unless OPM disapproves the Postal Service request, the early outs will be offered to all APWU-represented employees nationwide.

To determine the number of interested employees by installation, it is requested that those APWU-represented employees who are eligible and are interested in voluntary early retirement (without a monetary incentive) go to the APWU Web site ([www.apwu.org](http://www.apwu.org)) and click on **Early Retirement Opportunities** in the vertical blue INDEX bar on the left side of the screen. After completing the requested information, simply click on **Submit**.

## CSRS Funding-Formula Bills Advance in Congress

The Senate Governmental Affairs Committee and the House Government Reform Committee last week approved measures that would adjust the formula that determines payment into the Civil Service Retirement System.

The APWU strongly supports the legislation which, if enacted, would help the USPS reduce its \$11 billion debt. Under the proposed bills, an adjustment to the CSRS funding formula would reduce this year's Postal Service pension liability by \$2.9 billion, without affecting retiree benefits.

"The Postal Service Retirement Funding Reform Act" (H.R. 735 and S. 380) was introduced Feb. 12. The actions taken March 6 and 7, both of them by unanimous vote, suggest that the measures will be acted upon quickly in Congress.

The Postal Service has said that without the measures it would have to raise postage rates next year.

The APWU is in favor of using the money that would be saved under the new funding formula to reduce the deficit

### A Survey – Not an Application Form

Supplying the information to the APWU will *not* represent an application for retirement. It is not a commitment to retire, but will simply provide the union with estimates that will be used in our discussions with management. Employees who do not meet the eligibility criteria for early retirement should not submit information, as their inclusion would skew the results and prevent an accurate analysis.

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Please provide the information as soon as possible, and no later than March 25, 2003.

To be eligible for Voluntary Early Retirement, both CSRS employees and FERS employees must be at least 50 years old and must have at least 20 years of federal service (including military service). Employees of any age, however, are eligible if they have at least 25 years of federal service.

The annuity payments for CSRS employees will be reduced by 2 percent for each year that they are younger than 55 at the time they retire. They also must have at least five years of creditable service and must have been in a pay status for at least one of the two years immediately preceding their retirement. (This is known as the "one-out-of-two rule.")

For more information about eligibility requirements and the benefits available, check with your Human Resources department or click on the **Early Outs Magazine Article** link on the APWU Home Page on the Web.

and hold rates in check, and thus bring needed stability to the Postal Service.

Nearly identical House and Senate bills would require the Postal Service to use the money saved on pension contributions to pay down the debt to the Treasury Department in fiscal years 2003, 2004, and 2005.

An OPM review last year revealed that if contributions continue at the current rate, CSRS would eventually be overfunded by approximately \$71 billion. A report by the General Accounting Office earlier this year concluded that the retirement system could be overfunded by as much as \$100 billion.

The Civil Service Retirement Fund pays – and will pay – the retirement annuities of career employees who were on the rolls prior to Jan. 1, 1984. It is funded through contributions by employees of 7 percent of their salary, a matching 7 percent contribution by the Postal Service, and an additional yearly payment by the USPS for the difference between 14 percent of employee salaries and the expected cost of retirement for CSRS employees and their survivors.

## On Capitol Hill

## Postal Committees Announced

The 108<sup>th</sup> Congress has finalized its committee assignments for 2003-2004.

The most important committees for APWU members are the two panels that have jurisdiction over postal issues. These committees will shape congressional debate over postal reform proposals after the Presidential Commission issues its report, which is due July 31.

On the Senate side, the Governmental Affairs Committee, with nine Republicans and eight Democrats, will consider postal legislation. The GOP Senators are: Susan Collins (ME), Chairwoman; Ted Stevens (AK); George Voinovich (OH); Robert Bennett (UT); Peter Fitzgerald (IL); Norman Coleman (MN); Arlen Specter (PA); John Sununu (NH); and Richard Shelby (AL). The Democrats are: Joseph Lieberman (CT), Ranking Minority Member; Carl Levin (MI); Daniel Akaka (HI); Richard Durbin (IL); Tom Carper (DE); Mark Dayton (MN); Frank Lautenberg (NJ); and Mark Pryor (AR).

In the House, the Government Reform Committee has jurisdiction on postal matters. This panel has 24 Republicans, 19 Democrats and 1 independent. The GOP house members are: Tom Davis (VA), Chairman; Dan Burton (IN); Chris Shays (CT); Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL); John McHugh

(NY); John Mica (FL); Mark Souder (IN); Steve LaTourette (OH); Doug Ose (CA); Ron Lewis (KY); Jo Ann Davis (VA); Todd Platts (PA); Chris Cannon (UT); Adam Putnam (FL); Butch Otter (ID); Ed Schrock (VA); John Duncan (TN); John Sullivan (OK); Marsha Blackburn (TN); John Carter (TX); William Janklow (SD); Timothy Murphy (PA); Michael Turner (OH); Katherine Harris (FL); and Thaddeus McCotter (MI). The Democrats are Henry Waxman (CA), Ranking Minority Member; Tom Lantos (CA); Major Owens (NY); Edolphus Towns (NY); Paul Kanjorski (PA); Carolyn Maloney (NY); Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC); Elijah Cummings (MD); Dennis Kucinich (OH); Danny Davis (IL); John Tierney (MA); William Lacy Clay (MO); Diane Watson (CA); Stephen Lynch (CA); Brad Miller (NC); Chris Van Hollen (MD); Linda Sanchez (CA); Dutch Ruppersberger (MD); Chris Bell (TX); and Jim Cooper (TN). The independent member is Bernie Sanders (VT).

Committee Chairman Tom Davis announced the appointment of a Postal Service Task Force that is to work closely with the nine-member commission that President Bush appointed to study the Postal Service. Republicans McHugh, Schrock, Miller, Murphy, and Janklow, and Democrats Danny Davis, Owens, Maloney, and Clay are the members of the task force, which is headed by McHugh.

## The Commission: What's Next

The President's Commission on the Postal Service will meet next in Austin, TX, on March 18.

The focus of this hearing is the work of the Technology Challenges and Opportunities Subcommittee, which is studying the impact of automation and new technologies, such as online bill payment and e-mail, on first-class letter mail. The panel is also considering how technological innovations may provide opportunities for the Postal Service to grow its business.

In addition to holding hearings, the commission has established a public-comment process. Written comments had a deadline of Feb. 12. Rebuttals to those comments are due March 13. The commission's Web site ([www.treas.gov/offices/domestic-finance/usps](http://www.treas.gov/offices/domestic-finance/usps)) features many of these comments and will feature rebuttal testimony as well. The APWU submissions also are posted at [www.apwu.org](http://www.apwu.org).

Two other public hearings have been scheduled. The hearing in Los Angeles on April 4 will be on the work of the Private-Sector Partnership Subcommittee, which is analyzing the current role of the private sector in the mail-delivery system. The Workforce Subcommittee, which is looking at collective bargaining and dispute-resolution procedures, will provide the focus for the work of the commission in Chicago on April 29.

At least two other hearings are expected between May 1 and July 31, the commission's deadline to have a report to President Bush.

## No Anthrax Spores Found in Tests Of Fumigated Brentwood Facility

No anthrax spores were found in any of the thousands of samples taken from the air and surfaces at the Brentwood Road postal facility in Washington, DC, U.S. Postal Service officials announced March 4.

"While we're certainly pleased to hear of these findings, we have not yet received any report or any data to review for ourselves," said APWU Safety and Health Specialist Corey Thompson. "We hope the findings are borne out, but we will withhold judgment until we see the data."

The sample results are being reviewed by the Environmental Clearance Committee, a 15-member group of academic, government and private-sector experts. The independent body is chaired by the D.C. Department of Health and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and will make a recommendation on whether the building is safe to reopen after further evaluation.

The main mail processing and distribution center for the nation's capital has been closed since mid-October 2001. Postal officials are now saying that they hope to have it open again this summer. Reoccupation of the facility, however, will not take place until the environmental committee reviews the results of this and other tests.

The building, which until the anthrax terror attacks was the primary work site for about 1,600 employees, has been

renamed in honor of Joseph P. Curseen and Thomas L. Morris Jr., APWU members who died shortly after being exposed to anthrax spores while working at the site.

Before the Curseen-Morris facility is reopened, carpet and office furniture will be replaced and the walls will be repainted. Further environmental sampling will be conducted during the renovation.

The fumigation equipment used in Washington will be shipped to Hamilton Township, NJ, to clean a second postal facility known to have processed anthrax-laced mail. Four New Jersey postal workers also became ill from exposure to the bacteria.

Along with the cleanup at the facility near Trenton, there is a Government Accounting Office investigation into whether the Postal Service responded adequately to the crisis, or put the 1,400 employees in the Hamilton facility at unnecessary risk by not immediately closing it down when anthrax was suspected.

Cleanup there is expected to begin sometime in the spring or summer. If that occurs on schedule, the facility could reopen sometime this fall.

A GAO report on the response to the discovery of anthrax at the Wallingford, CT, postal facility is expected soon.

## 91 USPS Sites on OSHA 'High-Injury' List

Ninety-one Postal Service facilities were among more than 14,000 workplaces nationwide that the Occupational Safety & Health Administration recently identified as having high occupational injury and illness rates.

OSHA categorizes workplaces by their lost-workday injury and illness rates. In a study of data for 2001, U.S. businesses nationwide suffered an average of three lost-time workdays for every 100 workers. Based on this study, OSHA recently mailed letters to 14,200 businesses that had more than twice the nationwide lost-time

average and that need to take major steps to provide better protections for their workers.

In the letter, OSHA encourages employers to hire outside safety and health consultants. It also recommends that they make use of the agency's free consultation services.

The list of workplaces can be found at OSHA's Web site ([www.osha.gov/as/opa/foia/hot\\_9.html](http://www.osha.gov/as/opa/foia/hot_9.html)). The list is arranged alphabetically, by state and by facility name.

## COLA Update

An increase in the Consumer Price Index in January means that after the sixth and final month of the third Cost-Of-Living Adjustment period in the National Agreement, employees have accrued an annual raise of \$250.

The adjustment amounts to a 12 cents per hour increase, which works out to \$9.60 per pay period.

The COLA increase took effect March 8, and will be reflected in March 28, 2003, paychecks.

Updated pay scales were distributed in the March/April edition of *The American Postal Worker*.

Pay scales also can be seen at [www.apwu.org](http://www.apwu.org).