

Wages, Benefits Attacked In Final Days of Testimony Before Postal Commission

During the final two days of testimony before the Presidential Commission on the U.S. Postal Service, most of the witnesses were from the corporate world, and most of them painted a bleak picture of the future, placing a large part of the blame on the costs associated with postal worker wages, health care and retirement benefits, and collective bargaining rights.

Offering virtually a lone counterpoint for those most directly affected by the nation's mail-delivery system was William Clay Sr., who represented Missouri's 1st District in the U.S. House for 32 years and served a long tenure on the Postal Service's oversight committee.

"I have been disappointed that consumers have generally not been heard from at your hearings," Clay told the commissioners. "You have heard from vendors, large mailers, marketers, union representatives, and the Postal Service itself, but the voices of individual Americans who rely on the mail during their daily lives have been missing."

Among the first witnesses during the two-day hearing (May 28-29) was Tom O.S. Rand, who served as a USPS consultant during past contract negotiations. Rand claimed that postal workers' health care, retirement, and paid-leave benefits greatly exceed those typically earned by private-sector workers. One way to trim costs, Rand said, would

Former Congressman William Clay testified that an in-depth review of how rates are set for big mailers is "the least this Commission should do before recommending drastic reorganization."

be to move postal workers out of the Federal Employees Health Benefits plan. Another option, mentioned by Rand and endorsed by other witnesses, would be to make all health care and retirement benefits – currently guaranteed by law – subject to collective bargaining.

Gary Mulloy, Chairman and CEO of Advo, the nation's largest direct mail company, echoed Rand. Mulloy told the panel that, "at a minimum," an arbitrator should be required to select either the union or management's last, best, and final offer when negotiators fail to reach an agreement. "All benefits as well as wages should be subject to contract negotiations and arbitration," he said.

The panel also heard testimony from David M. Walker, Comptroller General of the General Accounting Office. "The time has come to take bold and comprehensive action," Walker said. "Incremental steps, while useful, cannot resolve the fundamental and systemic issues associated with the Service's current business model," he said.

Speaking on behalf of the Consumer Alliance for Postal Services (CAPS), a broad-based range of consumers across the political and economic spectrum, former Rep. Clay said that the current business model works. "For the first half of the current fiscal year, the Postal Service has run a budget surplus of \$1.65 billion," said the former chairman of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee.

"Chief Financial Officer Richard Strasser attributed the good financial news to gains in productivity, reduced expenses, and rate increases – even at a time when mail volume has declined. ... The U.S. Postal Service is not in the dire financial shape that some folks believe. And it is hardly in desperate need of the radical changes that some witnesses before the Commission have suggested."

"I have a simple and straightforward message for this Commission," Clay said. "We oppose postage rate increases that are not absolutely necessary, do not affect all Americans equally, and do not require all classes of mailers to pay their fair share of overhead costs."

To improve the bottom line, Clay suggested that the Commission zero in on rate-setting. "CAPS is very concerned with the subsidies that the Postal Service gives to industrial mailers" who presort their mail.

"It seems that the Postal Service is discounting more than it would cost if they did the work of sorting the mail in-house. If this is true, the least this Commission should do before recommending drastic reorganization of the Postal Service is to conduct an in-depth review to determine to what extent the bulk advertising mailers aren't paying their fair share."

APWU President William Burrus has asked the Commission to look more closely at these subsidies and he repeated Clay's sentiments on how the panel has chosen to operate. "Throughout the public hearing process, the Commission has failed to seek out ordinary citizens who rely on the mail for so many things in their lives," Burrus said.

"Consumers and citizens organizations were barely heard, and only after they demanded a seat at the table. They certainly were never encouraged to participate," Burrus said. "The Commission gratuitously offered that anyone could speak from the floor microphone. Such spontaneous comments are not adequate substitutes for prepared testimony."

The last person to speak at the hearing, Postmaster General John E. Potter, urged the Commission to recommend greater pricing flexibility and more latitude to close small post offices and consolidate mail processing facilities. Potter said that he advocates eliminating the mandate to "break even," suggesting that management be permitted to retain surpluses to bridge economic slowdowns.

Northwest, 3400 W. Euclid Ave., Arlington Heights, IL. The room rate is \$99 per night, plus tax, for single or double occupancy. Call 888-627-8093 for reservations; to secure the negotiated rate, register by July 18, and identify yourself as attending the APWU conference.

To register for the conference itself, participants must submit a written request from their local or state president that authorizes their attendance. Pre-registration is due July 18 and no walk-ins will be allowed.

Classes begin Monday, Aug. 18, at 3 p.m. Two daily coffee breaks, a dinner on Monday, and a graduation breakfast on Sunday are included.

The registration fee is \$150; forms are available at the August "Calendar of Events" link at www.apwu.org. Send the form, authorization letter, and check to: Joyce B. Robinson, Director, APWU Research and Education Department, 1300 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20005.

Maine APWU Delegation, Burrus Meet With Sens. Collins and Snowe

Concerned about reforms that may be proposed by the President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service, a delegation of state APWU leaders and President William Burrus met with Maine's senators on May 20.

After hearing the union's concerns, Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe, both Republicans, expressed their interest in mail service and postal jobs in their state. Each said she was willing to consider union positions after the Commission delivers its recommendations in late July, and while legislation is being shaped.

"These meetings were a necessary step in our efforts to work with these important senators," Burrus said. "Based on the open and constructive nature of our discussions, I have high hopes that we will continue to have a positive relationship with Sens. Collins and Snowe."

Maine's APWU leaders had requested the meetings on Capitol Hill as part of the union's efforts to protect jobs and universal mail service. Collins chairs the Governmental Affairs Committee, which controls Senate legislation affecting the Postal Service. She will play a key role in crafting any legislation introduced as a result of the presidential commission's report. Snowe, Maine's senior senator, serves on the Commerce and Finance committees.

Representing APWU of Maine were President David Greenlaw and Legislative Director Dennis McDonald. The Bangor Local was represented by President Gary Walcutt. From the Portland Local were President Peter Brogan, Vice-President Kathy Condon, Clerk Craft Director John Riley, and Legislative Director Phil Rotolo. APWU Legislative Department officers Roy Braunstein and Myke Reid also participated in the meetings.

Private-Sector O.T. Pay Jeopardized By Proposed 'Comp Time' Measures

In the latest right-wing assault on working families, the Bush Administration and conservatives in Congress are gearing up several attempts to undermine overtime pay for millions of private-sector workers. Proposed changes to the way the Fair Labor Standards Act is administered would allow employers to offer many new categories of workers "voluntary compensatory time" instead of the time-and-a-half pay rate mandated for overtime work under the FLSA.

The regulatory and legislative measures would not affect postal workers, whose overtime pay is protected by collective bargaining agreements. In solidarity with our union brothers and sisters and more than 80 million private-sector workers, however, APWU opposes any effort to undermine overtime pay and the 40-hour work week. If big business and its friends in Congress succeed in denying overtime pay in the private sector, they will certainly try to gut it for postal workers.

Since the FLSA's passage in 1938, many workers have grown to depend on overtime pay to make ends meet, and the time-and-a-half requirement encourages employers to give workers predictable schedules that

allow workers to meet family and other obligations.

The regulations that the Labor Department has proposed, however, would make it harder to qualify for overtime pay, largely through expanding the categories of workers who are exempt from FLSA. Police, firefighters, and nurses, for example, would be reclassified as administrative or professional employees, and thus would be ineligible for overtime.

In Congress, anti-labor forces are expected to push for the passage of Rep. Judy Biggert's (R-IL) bill, H.R. 1119, shortly after the House returns from its Memorial Day recess. Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH) is leading the charge in the Senate with S. 317, which would allow employers to offer "comp time" instead of overtime pay, and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), has introduced bills that would strip pay protections from computer professionals, construction engineers, and funeral-home workers.

APWU members are encouraged to participate in an AFL-CIO grassroots campaign on this issue by contacting their senators and representatives. For further information, visit www.afl-cio.org.

28 House Republicans Help Fight Onerous Labor Reporting Proposals

Twenty-eight House Republicans recently spoke out against the burdensome financial reporting requirements the Labor Department has proposed for unions to follow under the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA).

The purpose of the 44-year-old reporting act is to make unions more accountable to their membership. But the proposed new rules amount to little more than union harassment and would impose onerous paperwork that likely would prove very expensive to keep up with, especially at the local level.

"The current proposal would expand both the content and detail of the LM reports that labor organizations are required to file under the LMRDA," the GOP House members said in a letter to Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, "and we are concerned that such costly requirements would be unduly burdensome. We believe that union resources are best utilized when representing members during negotia-

tions or grievance handling, not adapting and complying with an unprecedented level of detailed financial information and government forms."

The 28 Republicans are: Spencer Bachus (AL), Don Young (AK), Rob Simmons (CT), Jerry Lewis (CA), Lincoln Diaz-Balart (FL), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL), Timothy Johnson (IL), Ray LaHood (IL), John Shimkus (IL), Jo Ann Emerson (MO), Dennis Rehberg (MT), Sherwood Boehlert (NY), Amo Houghton (NY), Sue Kelly (NY), Peter King (NY), John McHugh (NY), Jack Quinn (NY), Jim Walsh (NY), John Sweeney (NY), Mike Ferguson (NJ), Frank LoBiondo (NJ), James Saxton (NJ), Chris Smith (NJ), Steven LaTourette (OH), Tim Murphy (PA), Phil English (PA), Curt Weldon (PA), and Mark Green (WI).

The APWU thanks these outspoken U.S. Representatives for asking the Bush Administration to stop its senseless plan to hobble unions with needless financial reporting requirements.

Arbitration Training Conference

The APWU Research and Education Department is hosting a Basic Arbitration Training Conference from Aug. 18 to Aug. 24, near Chicago.

The 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. Therefore, there will be very little free time.

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 Chicago

National POWER Conference

The national convention of APWU POWER (Post Office Women for Equal Rights) has been scheduled for Aug. 7 to Aug. 10 in Las Vegas, at the Tropicana Hotel.

The POWER gathering – the 11th since the organization was formed in 1979 – will feature workshops, regional caucuses, and a general session.

Workplace-oriented workshops include "What to Do When Injured at Work" and "Understanding the Family and Medical Leave Act." Outside-of-work issues to be covered will include "Crime and Fire Prevention," "Budgeting and Investing Your Money," and "Planning for Retirement."

Also scheduled are workshops on such general subjects as "Women's Health Issues: Menopause/Breast Cancer" and "Nutrition and Exercise."

Pre-Convention workshops begin at 9 a.m. on Thurs-

day, Aug. 7. Regional caucuses will be held that evening from 5 to 7 p.m. The convention closes at noon on Sunday, Aug. 10.

To make reservations, contact the Tropicana Hotel at 800-634-4000 or 702-739-2222. Be sure to identify yourself as a participant in the Post Office Women for Equal Rights Convention. The room rates vary from \$39 to \$99, depending on the size of the room and the days of the week included in your visit. To guarantee the negotiated rates, reserve prior to July 7.

The convention registration fee is \$65 per person for delegates or guests. For additional information, contact the APWU Research and Education Department, 1300 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20005, or phone 202-842-4225.

Convention registration forms are available at the August "Calendar of Events" link at www.apwu.org.