

## OPM Notifies APWU: Early Outs Approved

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) informed the union today that the Postal Service's request for authority to offer Voluntary Early Retirement to APWU-represented employees has been approved.

APWU President William Burrus will meet with USPS officials on June 20 to review the procedures for offering early retirement opportunities.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement between the APWU and the USPS, approved last December, required management to seek authority to offer early retirement to all eligible APWU-represented employees. The Postal Service formally sought that approval in a petition to OPM on Jan. 23 from Chief Operating Officer Patrick F. Donahoe. The following are excerpts from that petition:

**"The Postal Service has committed to an effort to take \$5 billion in expenses out of our operating base over five years. To accomplish this, we have begun to implement a number of specific measures designed to improve operational efficiencies. These efficiencies include efforts to automate our mail forwarding operations, to further automate the processing of large envelopes, magazines and packages, and to reduce our transportation costs, by focusing on ways to maximize our distribution/transportation network.**

**"While the Postal Service's efforts to date have been successful, certain external challenges have surfaced. The recession, electronic diversion of first-class mail, and bio-terrorism have had an adverse impact on our mail volumes. In fact, our first-class mail volume has decreased by 1.6 billion pieces in the past year. Other classes of mail have sustained similar impact. These business drivers require the Postal Service to review and adjust our complement requirements as we move forward."**

**"At this time, there are approximately 16,000 po-**

## In Solidarity With Hotel Workers, POWER Conference May Be Moved

Because of a local labor dispute, the APWU POWER National Convention set for Aug. 7 to Aug. 10 in Las Vegas may be moved and/or postponed.

On June 4, the Culinary Workers Union, which represents 1,400 employees who work in housekeeping, food service, and as porters at the Tropicana Hotel – the scheduled site for the convention – sent APWU a letter alerting the union about a labor dispute. The employees have been working without a contract since May 31. About 10 days earlier, more than 2,000 union members had picketed the Las Vegas hotel in a demand for a fair contract.

Additional picket activity and a possible strike are an-

**ticipations represented by the APWU excess to the needs of the service nationwide by September 30. We anticipate that approximately 50 percent of these positions will be vacated through normal attrition. VERA [Voluntary Early Retirement Authority] will help the Postal Service reduce a portion of the balance of that number."**

**"[A]pproximately 58,000 APWU members are eligible for VER. We expect 5 to 6 percent, or approximately 3,000 of those VER-eligible employees to opt for early retirement. In light of the number of positions that we need to eliminate from the Postal Service during this fiscal year, we respectfully request that you give this proposal favorable consideration so that we may use VER as a tool in our downsizing strategies."**

In March, OPM notified the union that the new regulations would be completed by the end of April. In early April, however, OPM announced that the request for authority to offer voluntary early retirement was being delayed by activities surrounding the creation of a national homeland security agency. (As a part of the Homeland Security Act signed into law late in 2002, modifications were made to procedures for the approval of agency requests.)

Burrus met with USPS officials on May 9 and again in late May to discuss the agreement to offer early outs to all eligible APWU-represented employees. The director of OPM finally approved the draft regulations governing voluntary early retirements on June 4. The rules were forwarded to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for final approval and determination of how to charge the early outs against the federal budget. On June 13, OMB gave final approval to the new regulations, and the Office of Personnel Management published the revised rules in the Federal Register. On June 16, OPM formally approved the USPS request.

Employees will be notified by management of their eligibility, and local unions will be informed of the specific steps to be followed.

icipated. The hotel workers have asked the APWU not to cross their picket line and to move the convention from the Tropicana Hotel. In solidarity, APWU attorneys have notified the Tropicana that if the dispute is not settled by June 18, the POWER convention will be moved.

APWU members who were planning on attending the conference have been advised not to make airline or hotel reservations – or to cancel existing plans – until further notice.

For additional information, please contact Joyce B. Robinson, APWU Director of Research and Education at 202-842-4225.

## Biohazard Detection System Testing Postponed

A 14-city test of a new anthrax detection system that was planned to go into action June 2 has been indefinitely postponed.

The system, which uses rapid DNA testing to establish the presence of germs, was developed in the wake of the anthrax-by-mail attacks in late 2001 that killed five people and sickened many more.

The 30-day test had been scheduled after the system was tried out in Baltimore for several months.

The Postal Service announced on May 30 that although the biohazard detection systems have been installed in the 14 cities and are ready for use, the test was postponed to allow more time to develop procedures for an "appropriate public health response" if tests yielded positive results.

Postal officials have not offered a revised timetable for when the detection equipment's testing phase might begin.

The investigations of the bioterrorism incidents continue, with FBI teams twice searching woods and ponds outside Frederick, MD, in recent months in attempts to locate lab equipment that might have been used in the attacks.

Frederick is home to the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases at Fort Detrick, where a bioweapons expert who has been questioned in the case once worked.

Meanwhile, the Postal Service continues to irradiate mail addressed to government agencies to kill any biological hazards, a process that can slow delivery.

## Survey Shows Americans Like USPS 'The Way It Is'

*"Americans have an overwhelmingly favorable view of the Postal Service ... [They] are largely satisfied with the current performance and see no need for a major overhaul or sweeping changes."*

The above quote is found toward the end of the Executive Summary that accompanies the release of a nationwide survey conducted for the President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service.

Members of the commission no doubt were surprised to find that American "lack any sense that the system is broken." Three out of four respondents to the telephone survey conducted May 19-20 feel that it doesn't need a major fix, that the USPS requires only minor changes, or that it works "extremely well as it is."

Not that it works perfectly. Participants were asked what changes could be made that would increase their satisfaction and the most frequent response was that lines are too long at the local post office and that more clerks are needed. Less than half of the respondents said that they would like to see the USPS have the authority to close post offices when similar services can be provided through agreements with grocery stores and other retailers: Nearly a third said they were "strongly opposed" to such a move.

And while they like to see the Postal Service operate efficiently and be up-to-date technologically, four in 10 said that they never plan to receive or pay any of their bills over the Internet or via e-mail.

"The survey results show that the American consumer is happy with the Postal Service, and does not want to see changes that will affect when, where, and how they get mail," said William Clay, a former chairman of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee and the head of the Consumer Alliance for Postal Services, a citizens' coalition.

## Unions Derail Comp-Time Bill

In a hard-fought victory for working families across the nation, a coalition of labor unions, Democrats, and progressive Republicans defeated – at least temporarily – the House Republican leadership's attempt to undermine overtime pay for more than 80 million private-sector workers.

Thanks to a grassroots campaign led by the AFL-CIO, House leaders canceled a vote they had planned for June 5 on the so-called "Family Time Flexibility Act," sponsored by Rep. Judy Biggert (R-IL), which would allow employers to offer compensatory or "comp" time off at the straight-time rate instead of time-and-a-half pay for overtime work.

"After pushing this bill for months, the Republican leadership finally realized that not all of their members would blindly go along with unraveling the basic right to overtime pay, which could literally take billions out of the paychecks of working families," said AFL-CIO President John J. Sweeney. "I commend the Republicans who stood up to their leadership on this issue and stood with working families."

The battle is not over, however. House GOP leaders have signaled that they will try again to pass Biggert's Comp Time bill if they can convince 12 more House members to vote for it. Efforts to pass a similar bill in the Senate have stalled due to the House vote.

lition. "This survey mirrors exactly what we have been saying, that Americans see the Postal Service as an important public service that shouldn't be changed: They don't want to lose the services it now uniformly provides to every citizen."

Although some Americans want change, the executive summary says, "most clearly think that privatization is not the answer. By 67 percent to 24 percent, Americans reject transforming the United States Postal Service into a private company. A remarkable 53 percent strongly oppose the proposal, which is an unusual level of intensity."

"In fact, Americans express little interest in having private entities conduct even part of the Postal Service's mail delivery tasks," the summary continues. By a three-to-one ratio, the public also strongly opposes proposals that would allow private companies to use home mailboxes for commercial mail delivery.

"Overall, few people see enough problems within the USPS to endorse major changes, especially when it means any sacrifices on the part of the public," the summary says. "The overall findings point to a public that is largely satisfied with the current performance of the United States Postal Service."

APWU President William Burrus declared: "The American people have spoken. Their views about the Postal Service are in direct conflict with the demands of the major mailers, who are petitioning for sweeping changes. Appearing them would require shifting the focus of the Postal Service from providing service to the people to making more profit for the mailers. I ask the commission, 'Which side are you on?'"

(The study results and the survey firm's executive summary can be seen, along with other "Consulting Projects," at [www.treas.gov/offices/domestic-finance/projects](http://www.treas.gov/offices/domestic-finance/projects).)

In a related move, the Bush Labor Department is trying to gut overtime pay protections under present law by rewriting regulations to expand the categories of workers who are exempt from overtime protections under the Fair Labor Standards Act, which sets the minimum standards for wages and overtime. Labor Secretary Elaine Chao has proposed the reclassification of many workers – including many police, firefighters and nurses – earning between \$22,000 and \$65,000 per year as administrative or professional employees – as ineligible for overtime pay.

The comp-time bills and the Labor Department's proposed new rules would *not* affect postal workers, who are currently protected under collective bargaining agreements. However, APWU President William Burrus noted, "Our union stands in solidarity with our union brothers and sisters in opposition to any efforts to undermine overtime pay and the 40-hour work week. This attack on private-sector workers, if successful, will surely lead to an attack on public-sector workers."

"The union movement's success in staving off comp-time legislation shows that despite the long odds in this right-wing Congress, when we work together, we can win," Burrus continued. "We must do the same if the postal commission and Congress attack our wages, benefits and collective bargaining rights."

## Retirement, Injury Compensation Conference

APWU seminars on retirement counseling, injury compensation, and "Building Your Local Union" will be offered over the course of four days beginning July 9.

The seminars, hosted by the APWU Retirees and Human Relations departments, will take place in Santa Clara, CA. Each department is offering a three-day training seminar. The union-building seminar on Saturday, July 12, is for all participants.

The **Retirement Counseling** seminar, presented by APWU's Retirees Department, will offer overviews of the role of the counselor, the various retirement systems, employee contributions, civilian, military and leave credits, life and health insurance, computation of annuities, resources, and more.

The **Injury Compensation Specialist** seminar, presented by the APWU Human Relations Department, is modeled after the training offered to the federal agencies by the Department of Labor, Office of Workers' Com-

ensation Program. It's tailored to address issues specifically relevant to postal workers and union representatives. The agenda includes types of claims, claimant and agency responsibilities, continuation of pay, scheduled awards, second and referee opinions, record-keeping, and reconsiderations and appeals.

The **"Building Your Local Union"** seminar will be a full-day workshop sponsored by both APWU departments. The full-day class will focus on ways to regenerate interest and participation among the membership.

The registration fee for the four-day event is \$80, and includes a graduation luncheon on July 12. The deadline for registering is June 26. Late registration will be accepted on a space-available basis.

Rooms have been blocked at the Hilton Santa Clara (near San Jose International Airport) at a special APWU room rate of \$109 per night. Reservations should be made directly with the hotel at 408-330-0001.