

## APWU Board Vows to Do 'Whatever It Takes' to Prevent Gutting of USPS

### Dues Assessment Approved to Fund Media Campaign

Vowing to do "whatever it takes" to defeat anti-worker "reforms" likely to be recommended by the presidential commission studying the Postal Service, the APWU National Executive Board at its July 8 meeting authorized a special assessment of union members' dues to fund a media campaign.

The assessment, which passed in a nearly unanimous vote by the 12-member board, is authorized by Article 16.3 of the APWU Constitution and Bylaws. The board approved an \$8 assessment per member, to be paid in \$2 increments over the course of four pay periods.

"The APWU must do whatever is necessary to preserve our interests and the interests of the American public," said APWU President William Burrus before introducing the resolution to the union's governing board. "We have to be prepared to react to whatever happens. Whether that means loudly opposing commission recommendations or fighting against detrimental legislation, we must do everything in our power to defend consumers and workers."

The Presidential Commission on the U.S. Postal Service will deliver its report by July 31. Postal reform legislation has been introduced into the Senate and significant and similar measures are expected in the House. Burrus said that the money collected by the assessment would be used to launch a public education campaign in key congressional districts about threats to the nation's mail system.

"The goal is to raise enough money to finance a campaign that will thwart potential legislation that would undermine postal services in America and provide further giveaways to the mailing industry," Burrus said. "We intend to do whatever it takes to prevent the destruction of the Postal Service."

Several board members pointed out that the APWU cannot afford to wait. "We have to be ready to react to the commission's report," said Executive Vice President Cliff Guffey. "If they're trying to destroy us, we had better hit back with everything we've got."

## Time Line Established For Early-Out Opportunities

The union has announced the time line for voluntary early retirement for eligible APWU-represented employees:

- Early retirements will take effect no sooner than Oct. 31, 2003.
- All APWU-represented employees who will be age 50 or older as of Nov. 1 and who have at least 20 years of creditable service as of Oct. 31, will be eligible.
- Employees of any age who have at least 25 years of creditable service as of Oct. 31, will also be eligible.

Depending on the number of employees who elect to retire with this initial opportunity, an additional opportunity for retirement may be set for next February.

If a supplemental opportunity is established, the date for computing creditable service will be moved beyond Oct. 31 to the last service day prior to the date of retirement. For example, if next Feb. 1 were to be established as a date for termination of employment, the eligibility date would become Jan. 31, 2004.

APWU President William Burrus was provided with a draft copy of management's letter that will go to all APWU-represented employees that the USPS identifies as eligible for the "early out." The letter is not an offer for Voluntary

Other board members agreed that the special assessment will prove to the American public that the union is serious in its fight and willing to encourage its members to take an active part.

"I think we have an obligation to take this action. It will help make the members feel that they are more a part of the organization," said Secretary-Treasurer Robert L. Tunstall. "Even if it only makes them suddenly decide to come to a union meeting to discuss the matter, it's getting them involved."

The effective date of the assessment will be determined by the APWU president based upon the report of the presidential commission. "The purpose of the special assessment is to conduct a media and public relations campaign to protect and ensure the rights of APWU-represented workers and service to the American public," the resolution states. "These monies will be placed in an account separate from the union's general fund."

"If the media campaign proves to be unnecessary," Burrus noted, "the special assessment will not take place." An example would be if the commission were to recommend only minor changes to the relationship between postal workers and its employer.

The monies will be used only to fund media projects, which could begin in key districts during the August congressional recess and will widen in the fall, when Congress reconvenes, to include a broader range of critical congressional targets.

"This special assessment should not be confused with the union's COPA fund-raising drive," Burrus said, referring to the APWU Committee On Political Action. By law, dues cannot be put towards political campaign contributions.

Any local willing to assume the cost of the assessment can do so by notifying the national Secretary-Treasurer. A letter explaining this option will be distributed to the local presidents later this week.

Early Retirement, but a means for employees to indicate their interest in early retirement.

Accompanying management's letter to eligible employees will be a "Statement of Interest for Voluntary Early Retirement." This form will require the signature of an interested employee, but will not represent a commitment to retire. Interested employees must return the form, which formalizes the request to have eligibility validated.

Upon receipt of the statement of interest, the Postal Service will begin the process of validating each employee's age and number of years of service. Employees who have expressed interest and are determined to be eligible will receive an early-out package that will include a retirement application, an annuity estimate, a service history report, and filing instructions.

Although postal management at various times may have informed employees in some locations that they would not be offered "early outs," the agreement to offer voluntary early retirement applies to all eligible APWU-represented employees.

The union intends to enforce this agreement, which was part of the contract extension ratified by members late last year. The national agreement now runs to Nov. 20, 2005.

## Union Delivers Final Message To 'Stacked Deck' Commission

In the union's concluding statements to the President's Commission on the U.S. Postal Service, the APWU charged that the panel has overlooked the concerns of postal workers and ordinary postal customers to the advantage of the mailing industry.

"By our count, the commission has received oral testimony from at least 25 representatives of business, and from only three witnesses even arguably speaking for private citizens interested in postal services," APWU President William Burrus wrote the panel in a July 8 statement. "The commission has, in effect, been playing with a stacked deck."

Burrus reminded the commission that most Americans have a very favorable view of the Postal Service and see no need for a major overhaul, according to a survey conducted for the panel by Peter D. Hart Research Associates. The survey showed that the public gives postal employees high marks for the services they provide, and that a large majority of citizens oppose further privatization and cuts in mail service. "We urge the commission to carefully consider the views of the American public, which values the Postal Service as it is," Burrus wrote.

APWU's president charged that from the start the commission has proceeded on the false premise that major changes are needed. He reminded the panel that despite the ongoing economic slump, postal rates have stabilized and compare favorably with those of the Postal Service's competitors and with foreign mail systems. He pointed out that the Postal Service will have a surplus of approximately \$4.5 billion this fiscal year, including the savings realized from the recently enacted Civil Service Retirement System Funding Reform Act, which will allow the USPS to stop over-funding the government's retirement account that covers most employees hired before 1984.

The commission also seems to have accepted the assumption that e-mail, electronic funds transfers, and other new technologies will erode future postal revenues, though the panel has received very little actual evidence of such an impact. "On the other hand," Burrus said, "the commission has heard many opinionated attacks on collective bargaining and postal compensation. This inability to demonstrate a problem with the erosion of mail by technology does not justify these attacks on postal employees' wages, working conditions, fringe benefits, and collective bargaining rights."

Burrus noted that most of the witnesses that the panel heard from would profit from the changes they advocated. "A number of business interests testifying before the commission contended that greater use of work-sharing and the use of private-sector businesses to perform postal services would help control costs or increase the efficiency of

postal services," he wrote. "The record shows, however, that private-sector companies have repeatedly failed in their attempts to perform significant aspects of postal work."

"If the commission is to be guided by the facts rather than by the self-serving advocacy of business interests, it will not endorse efforts to privatize or 'commercialize' postal operations."

Rather than seeking to further pad the mailing industry's pockets, Burrus said, the commission should protect USPS revenue by ending excessive discounts for pre-sorted mail. "The single most important change this commission could recommend for the preservation of the Postal Service," he wrote, "would be the strengthening of the requirement that discounts not exceed costs avoided by the Postal Service."

Other changes that the commission should endorse, Burrus wrote, would be to speed up the postal rate-setting

**"If the commission is to be guided by the facts rather than by the self-serving advocacy of business interests, it will not endorse efforts to privatize or 'commercialize' postal operations."**

process, allow the Postal Service to retain profits, strengthen the Postal Service Board of Governors, and give consumers a stronger voice in postal rate-making.

The commission will hold what is expected to be its final public meeting on July 16 in Washington, DC. At this hearing, it will consider the reports of its various subcommittees. Its final report is due to be submitted by July 31, 2003.

APWU's final statement to the commission can be found on the union's Web site, [www.APWU.org](http://www.APWU.org).

The commission, which was formed late last year, held a public organizational meeting at a Washington hotel on Jan. 8, followed by five hearings between Feb. 20 and May 29. While the first and last of these were held at the same Washington location, three "field" hearings were convened in Austin, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

The panel's final meeting is to be staged in a Senate office building on Capitol Hill.

## Members Can Now Contribute To COPA With *PostalEase*

The APWU has established an efficient way for members to regularly contribute to the union's Committee on Political Action: APWU members now can make a salary allotment to COPA through *PostalEase*.

"Initially, I rejected using *PostalEase*," APWU President Bill Burrus said, "because we had an agreement with the USPS to process and report COPA payments through payroll deductions. The Postal Service, however, reneged on what we were led to believe was a firm commitment."

"While I intend to pursue this matter, we are eager to make use of the *PostalEase* system in the meantime," Burrus said. "We hope it will prove to be a convenient and effective mechanism for political fund-raising."

Full details on how to help fund APWU COPA through a biweekly allotment are available in the July/August issue of *The American Postal Worker*.

The magazine is being mailed to APWU members this week.

## Clerk Craft Conference

The 2003 Clerk Craft Conference is set for Oct. 27-29 in Las Vegas.

The conference will be staged at the Riviera Hotel and Casino, 2901 Las Vegas Blvd. The first two days of the conference are given over to workshops, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The General Session will be held on Wednesday, Oct. 29, also from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Registration packets can be picked up as early as Saturday, Oct. 25. The packets will be available at the hotel's registration desk from 3 to 6 p.m. that day and from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday. The packets also will be available at the APWU office at the hotel, on the first day of the conference, Oct. 27, from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m.

Delegates are asked to stay at the Riviera Hotel and to begin early to secure rooms there, where the APWU

has guaranteed rooms at a discounted rate. The telephone number to register is 800-634-6753 (toll free) or 702-794-9412. You can also register online through the APWU Web Site. Information on discount airline tickets and car rentals also is available on the Web site, as is a registration form for the event.

There will be a \$50 registration fee to cover the cost of materials. Clerk conference registration forms must be postmarked no later than 5 p.m., Sept. 15. The fee for any registration requests received after that date will be \$75.

Please make checks payable to APWU Clerk Craft Conference, and send the check and registration form to: Clerk Craft Conference, 1300 L St. NW, 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20005, Attention Jim McCarthy, Director.