

Union Presents Economic Demands; Assails 'Lack of Progress' in Talks

After offering a blunt assessment of the first two months of negotiations, APWU President William Burrus presented the USPS with economic proposals on Nov. 6, calling for raises and upgrades that are commensurate with union members' performance over the six years of the contract that expires Nov. 20.

"I have been disappointed in the progress of the talks," Burrus said of the Postal Service presentations. "We all know the difference between bargaining and bull----. And there has been far more of the latter than the former. I don't want to waste any more of my members' time on a charade of bargaining."

Deriding management's seemingly endless procession of formal presentations on USPS marketing plans and financial conditions, Burrus said that these displays would have no effect on the union's demands or its members' expectations. "If management's posture in these negotiations is just a prelude to arbitration, so be it. But it is our belief that a voluntary agreement is preferable for both parties."

Burrus then made the following economic proposals for a contract of three years duration:

- Basic annual salary increases of 4 percent, effective Nov. 25, 2006, Nov. 24, 2007, and Nov. 22, 2008;
- Semi-annual COLA increases, using the current formula with a base month of October 2006, based on the change in the CPI-W Index points for January 2007, July 2007, January 2008, July 2008, January 2009, and July 2009;
- Upgrades;
- Return of Night Differential to 10 percent of the basic hourly straight-time rate;

- Continuation of the bi-weekly Employer contribution for Federal Employees Health Benefits Program self-only and self-and-family plans at 85 percent of the weighted average biweekly premiums; and

- Conversion of the current uniform and work-clothes allowances to a centralized purchasing and distribution system for required on-the-job clothing.

Burrus said that postal workers are proud of their contributions to the financial success of the Postal Service over the course of the 2000-2006 contract, a time that he described as "an unprecedented period of labor stability."

"During this period, the mailing community has enjoyed the benefit of this stability, and increases in postage rates have remained below the rise in the Consumer Price Index."

After a time of financial uncertainty caused by 9/11 and the anthrax terrorism attacks one month later, the APWU president said, USPS revenues have exceeded expenses for three straight years and total mail volume has reached unprecedented levels.

"While the entire postal community has contributed to these accomplishments, APWU-represented employees have played the most significant role," Burrus said. "Their efficiencies – represented by seven years of total factor productivity increases and 10 straight years of labor productivity increases – and commitment to serving the American public have had a profound effect on this positive record."

"The employees we represent are responsible for the Postal Service's outstanding achievements," Burrus said, "and are entitled to share in the progress commensurate with their contributions. Our members deserve real bargaining, not bull----."

Regressive USPS Proposals Declared 'Dead On Arrival'

In a Nov. 3 *Burrus Update*, the APWU president expressed outrage at USPS proposals made at the bargaining table a few days earlier.

"We held guarded expectations that a final agreement could be reached on or before Nov. 20," when the current contract expires, Burrus wrote in describing the first two months of talks. "Unfortunately, our hopes came crashing down at the negotiating session held Oct. 31, when management presented a series of proposals that, if

adopted, would drastically demean postal employment."

The subjects included elimination of no-layoff protection; increased use of casuals; expansion of part-time employment; elimination of local negotiations; modification of holiday scheduling and pay; and expansion of work and/or time standards.

"The union's response is straightforward," Burrus wrote: "***These proposals are 'dead on arrival.'***"