

Postal Reform Legislation Introduced in the Senate

Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), chair of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, introduced a postal reform bill March 17 that is similar to legislation approved by the panel last year. The measure was co-sponsored by Sen. Thomas R. Carper (D-DE) and Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH).

Senate bill S.662 does not contain controversial anti-union language requested by the USPS Board of Governors that would have required postal unions to bargain for healthcare and retirement benefits that are currently guaranteed by law. The bill also omits the Board's proposal that would have required arbitrators to consider a selective set of economic criteria when ruling on postal workers' contracts. Consideration of these economic factors would have guaranteed that the wages and benefits of postal employees would be eroded and would have ensured union opposition to the bill, APWU President William Burrus said.

The bill contains an important provision – opposed by the White House – that would relieve the Postal Service of responsibility for the retirement costs for military service of USPS employees, returning the obligation to the U.S. Treasury. No other federal agency pays these costs.

The bill relieves the Postal Service of the obligation to place in escrow (beginning in Fiscal Year 2006) overpayments to the Civil Service Retirement System that would have resulted under the old funding formula. The bill requires the USPS to pre-pay health benefits for retirees.

The Senate bill retains language limiting excessive “worksharing” discounts, with only minor differences from

the language adopted by the committee last year. The APWU agreed to the final wording contained in the bill, which was the subject of extensive debate.

The bill includes a provision that would require workers who are injured on the job to miss three days of work before becoming eligible for workers' compensation. “The union is concerned about provisions that would restrict the rights of injured postal workers,” Burrus said. “We object to any legal disparity between postal employees and other federal workers, and we will urge lawmakers to adopt the House model on this issue.” The House bill (H.R. 22), introduced in January by Rep. John McHugh (R-NY), is similar to the Senate bill, but does not reduce compensation for injured workers.

The bill would change the way postage rates are set. Approval for postage increases by the Postal Rate Commission would no longer be required, but the USPS would not be able to increase postage rates by more than the annual increase in the Consumer Price Index.

“The fight is far from over,” Burrus cautioned. “The bills may be subject to amendment when they are considered by the full Senate and House, and we must ensure that our position remains clear as the bills move through the legislative process.” If the bills are approved in their respective chambers, a House-Senate conference committee must be established to reconcile differences between the two versions.

“Throughout this process, mailers and others will continue to lobby for their views,” Burrus said, “and we must fight for ours.”

Basic Arbitration Training Conference

The APWU Research and Education Department is hosting its first Basic Arbitration Training Conference in 2005 in San Francisco, from May 23 to May 29. The conference is designed to acquaint local union officers and stewards with the techniques needed to effectively prepare a case for basic arbitration.

Classes and topics to be covered include: Preparing a Case for Arbitration, Identifying and Framing the Issues, Exhibits and Stipulations, Opening Statements, Rules of Evidence, Examination of Witnesses, and Closing Statements.

The registration fee is \$175. Participants must submit a letter from their local or state presidents (on union letterhead) that authorizes their attendance.

The conference registration deadline is April 29. Hotel reservation information and registration forms can be found at www.apwu.org.

JCIM Available for Purchase

Printed copies of the Joint Contract Interpretation Manual are available for purchase online, through the **APWU Store** (www.apwu.unionwarehouse.com) for \$4 per copy. The manual, which is Item MH-1110, offers jointly agreed-upon interpretations of the APWU-USPS Collective Bargaining Agreement. The JCIM can also be downloaded from the Industrial Relations Department pages at www.apwu.org.