

Local, State Presidents Urged To Promote APWU Health Plan

Local and state presidents are being asked to help spread the word about an important gain in the 2006-2010 Collective Bargaining Agreement: the increase in the Postal Service's contribution to health insurance premiums for those who enroll in the APWU Consumer Driven Plan.

"Healthcare coverage is one of the most important benefits a union can negotiate for its members, and the APWU Health Plans are among the best in the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program (FEHBP)," President William Burrus wrote in a letter to APWU local and state presidents. "Yet, for a variety of reasons, many APWU members are enrolled in other health insurance plans."

Burrus noted that new provisions of the National Agreement offer union officers and other activists an important opportunity to spread the word among members (and non-members) about the great benefits of the APWU Health Plan.

Beginning next year, the USPS will pay 95 percent of healthcare premiums for APWU-represented employees enrolled in the APWU Consumer Driven Option. "As a result of the increase in the USPS contribution – which is 89 percent this year – members of our plan will pay less for health insurance in 2008 than in 2007," Burrus said.

This means that union members who enroll in the APWU Consumer Driven Plan will be giving themselves a raise. Although premiums for 2008 have not yet been finalized, if they were to remain at the 2007 level, self-only coverage would cost employees just \$8.18 per pay period; family coverage would cost only \$18.40.

"Healthcare decisions are important," Burrus wrote to the APWU presidents, "and wise consumers need time to consider their options." For this reason, he wrote, the union will now begin to publicize the benefits of the Consumer Driven Plan. (For more information, visit www.apwuhp.com.)

Enclosed with each letter to an APWU president was a sample of postcards that the Health Plan Department will be mailing to all APWU-represented employees who do not currently belong to an APWU Health Plan. Postcards will be mailed directly to potential participants and also will be sent, in bulk, to union leaders for distribution on the workforce.

"We are asking you to distribute the postcards in swing rooms, cafeterias, and anywhere else postal workers congregate," Burrus wrote, "as well as at union meetings and other events."

Burrus said he hoped that the local APWU leaders would do more than distribute the postcards. "We all know that there is no substitute for word-of-mouth endorsements. I hope we can rely on your support in spreading the word about the outstanding coverage and excellent value of the APWU Consumer Driven Health Plan.

"The APWU Health Plans provide great coverage to our members and their families, and promoting the plans will strengthen these crucial benefits and enhance the union's ability to provide them in the future.

"Your assistance is critical in helping to inform our members about the APWU Consumer Driven Plan."

APWU Sues USPS, Advisory Committee Over 'Secrecy'

The APWU, together with an organization representing a coalition of consumers and nonprofit mailers, filed a suit May 30 challenging secret policy-making by a Postal Service advisory committee. The USPS also is named as a defendant in the suit.

The panel, the Mailers Technical Advisory Committee, is made up of trade associations that represent large business mailers. Chaired by major mailer representatives and postal officials, MTAC "work-groups" undertake studies and make recommendations to senior USPS management on postal operations, postal rates, and postal regulations.

Under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, government panels such as MTAC must open their meetings to the public. MTAC has refused to comply, holding its meetings in secret, and refusing to release any details, despite the

APWU's repeated requests for access to the information.

MTAC also has refused to admit to its membership the Consumers Alliance for Postal Services (CAPS), which is made up of nonprofit associations, small mailers, and individual consumers who rely on the Postal Service.

"It is unconscionable for the USPS to develop its most important policies in secret in consultation with a select group of business mailers," said APWU President William Burrus. "We have learned that the Postal Rate Commission is also now included in secret MTAC deliberations, which makes the committee even more dangerous. Our suit asserts that as an advisory committee to a federal agency, MTAC is not allowed to operate in secrecy. It is wrong – and it is illegal."

(For more on the lawsuit, visit www.apwu.org.)