

Burrus Shocked, Disappointed By Retirement of PMG Potter

Responding to news of the retirement of Postmaster General John E. Potter, APWU President William Burrus issued the following statement:

The announcement of Postmaster General John Potter's retirement comes with shock and disappointment. We have had disagreements on a variety of issues – most notably, the cozy relationship he fostered with major mailers, and the policy of granting them excessive postage discounts. But Potter has always considered the impact his decisions would have on postal employees. Having begun his career as a distribution clerk, he has never overlooked the contribution of workers.

During Jack Potter's tenure as Postmaster General, postal workers have faced tough challenges. The uncertainties arising from the expanded use of electronic communication, which has eroded mail volume; the subsequent reassignment of employees, and the restructuring of the postal network have caused severe hardships for many union members. However, Potter's decisions were driven by changing conditions, and in each instance, he considered the consequences for employees.

In prior years, the union has asked for the resignation of postmaster generals who we identified as anti-worker bureaucrats. But in spite of the many decisions in recent years that had adverse effects on our members, I refrained from projecting blame on John Potter, knowing that his business decisions were made without malice, and that the fallout on employees was unavoidable. The union insisted that the contract be adhered to, and when disagreements arose, we arbitrated our differences.

The most progressive Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiated in the history of the Postal Service bears the signature of John Potter: The 2006 contract resulted in the conversion of all part-time flexible employees in large offices to full time; pay increases; consecutive days off for workers in large offices; upgrades for all APWU employees, and numerous other benefits that were achieved with his approval. I seriously doubt that any other past or future Postmaster General would agree to such sweeping changes.

I have no inside information about the reason for Potter's decision, and no reason to believe that his retirement was demanded by the Board of Governors; but if it was, the Board has made a terrible mistake. The Postal Service is at a crossroads, and its relevance in

American society is being questioned. The U.S. Postal Service needs a leader like John Potter to ensure its continued viability.

The Board of Governors has announced that Deputy Postmaster General Patrick R. Donohoe will succeed Potter. I choose not to prejudge his policies regarding employees or his ability to lead the organization at this pivotal period, but filling Potter's shoes will be a major challenge. Postal workers are losing a strong advocate for the USPS and its employees.

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As I enter the final weeks of my career, it is disheartening to know that I leave President-Elect Cliff Guffey and his team with the unsettling fact that they will inherit a new group of postal officials whose employment policies have not yet been tested.

Contract negotiations must now be viewed in a different light: It is highly unlikely that Potter will commit the next PMG to contractual provisions that are acceptable to the union. As I have said in many forums, in 2010 a negotiated agreement will require innovation and new ideas. I am very disappointed that Jack Potter will not have the freedom to join Cliff Guffey in finding the pieces that can lead to such an agreement.

The APWU has interacted with Pat Donohoe over the years and we begin the new relationship with an open mind. He should be judged by his decisions as Postmaster General, and that story has yet to be written. He faces major challenges, but I can assure him that APWU will be a strong ally if workers' concerns are included in his agenda.

For additional news on contract negotiations, visit www.apwu.org.