

Michigan

MESSENGER

APWU

Volume 41, Number 151
November-December, 2010

Affiliated with: American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO, APWU Postal Press Association, Michigan State AFL-CIO & Michigan Labor Press

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by John Marcotte, President

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Our Union Did Michigan Proud

By the time you're able to read this article you will most likely be fully engaged in holiday planning and working hard, as this time of year is our heaviest mailing season. In that light, Happy Holidays and I wish you peace and joy in the upcoming New Year.

The district meeting in October was held at the Otsego Club Resort in Gaylord, Michigan. The classes were well received and all that attended were please with the efforts of the instructors. I wish to thank all of the instructors who helped educate our membership and gave of their time to aid our union. Brothers Richard Blake and Gary VanHoogstraten for basic/advanced stewards training, Sister Jennifer

Amos for Injury Comp/NRP, Brother Jason Rushing for Maintenance Issues/Excessing, NBA Lynn Pallas-Barber for Articles 12 and 1.6B, Brother Mike Long for computers, Brother Joe Gordon CSRS/FERS Retirement and Brother John Smeekens Veterans Issues. Although a long drive for some of you, the hospitality of the ski lodge and the host local made it more than worth while. Working hard with Otsego Club management the MPWU was able to provided catered lunches to keep our members together in a social atmosphere to promote solidarity and exchange of knowledge. I believe it was a resounding success and will make every attempt to likewise contain costs in other areas of the meeting so we can provide these features at all future district meetings.

The MPWU had the honor of hosting

the National Presidents Conference at the Kalamazoo Radisson Hotel and Convention Center. While facing the challenges of hosting an NPC directly after a National Convention and during the run up to mid term elections our union did Michigan proud. The legislative training was well received with key note speaker Congressman Schauer taking the time out of the most expensive House race in the country to address the NPC. This is true friend of the APWU, Labor and working people everywhere. Legislative Director Myke Reid presented the full effect of pending legislation in Congress and that which will be attempted next Congressional secession. Michigan AFL-CIO president Mark Gaffney presented AFL-CIO resources in helping to educate our members and the public on issues important to working

families. The Bobby Hopewell mayor of Kalamazoo Michigan spoke about grass roots involvement in politics and gave a look at politics from the up and coming candidates point of view. Mayor Hopewell was campaigning for a vacant Michigan Senate seat when he spoke to the NPC. An in depth overview of the history and direction of the USPS was presented by University of Michigan Research Scientist Rolland Zullo. It was a very well received impartial look at the condition of the postal service and its race to privatize services which after analyzing historical data these actions have led to increased costs to consumers, decreased service and corruption. It was interesting to see the postal service from an outside scientific point of view. After the training the NPC itself

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Legislative Report

Obstacles In Our Contract Fight



by Paul Felton, Legislative Director

As I write these words in early November, contract talks are entering a critical phase. We may know the outcome by the time you read this. In this article I want to address two factors that make it more difficult to get a good contract. One is the organized effort by right-wing pro-business ideologues to influence the process through the media. The second is the Republican victory on November 2nd. The anti-worker (and anti-USPS) slant of the right wing media campaign is very similar to the anti-government rhetoric that the Republicans rode into power on Election Day.

PRO-BUSINESS IDEOLOGUES

Outgoing APWU President Bill Burrus has often taken the time to share his responses to anti-worker ideologues on the national web site www.apwu.org. For example, on October 20 (Web News Article 117-2010), he responded to an opinion piece by a Mr. Tad DeHaven. A few days later, an opinion column

appeared locally in the *Oakland Press* written by a senior fellow at the Cato Institute named Doug Bandow. Towards the end of the article, Bandow quotes his "Cato Institute colleague Tad DeHaven." It's not a coincidence both authors are from the Cato Institute. This is one of the right wing think tanks that is out to smash our union.

Let me give you the DeHaven quote from Bandow's article: "The USPS will likely bleed red until policymakers run out of band-aids and are finally confronted with the choice of either privatization or direct taxpayer funding." You can see where this is going; according to these Cato fellows, you and I, the overpaid postal workers, are responsible for this dire situation. Brother Burrus already responded to Mr. DeHaven, so I'll concentrate on Mr. Bandow's piece, expanding on my Letter to the Editor that the *Oakland Press* printed on November 9.

The first point to address is simple: Mr. Bandow asserts: "The average USPS salary is \$83,500 a year." We all know that's not true. I've reached the top step at the most common grade level

and I make about \$30,000 less than that. Either I've been shorted on my check all this time, or Mr. Bandow is playing games with numbers (or should I say he's lying).

Bandow goes on to assert that USPS is in financial crisis, debt-ridden, unable to survive on its own, etc. He ignores the fact that a proposal that passed Congress during the Bush Administration required the USPS to pre-fund a 75-year future retiree health care obligation in a period of 10 years. No other business or federal agency has this obligation. Before it sells a single stamp, USPS starts each year \$5 billion in the red. Furthermore, the USPS is really owed **\$142 billion** due to a variety of overpayments to various health care and pension funds. Management is not going to ask Congress to help us get our money back while it's crying poverty at the bargaining table with us — and the new anti-worker Republican House of Representatives is not likely to help us once the contract is finalized.

Back to Bandow. He does mention the health care pre-funding obligation — not as the cause of our financial problems,

but as another excuse to take a shot at us. See how he twists things around: "USPS also wants Congress to eliminate the requirement to pre-fund retiree health care benefits. Most companies don't offer coverage for retirees, and virtually none provide such lavish benefits. Dropping the pre-funding mandate would likely leave taxpayers paying the bill."

Oh, where to begin! First off, if Congress would pass HR 4736, retiree health benefits would be adequately funded and USPS would not be in the red. Secondly, I do not consider our health coverage to be "lavish." I think everyone should be covered to the extent that if you get sick, you'll receive the treatment you need to get well again. I don't call that "lavish"; I call it human.

It sounds like Mr. Bandow would prefer that postal retirees weren't covered at all. You know what? That's the one approach that **would** throw the cost onto everybody else — when we kept showing up, uninsured, at emergency rooms, everybody else's rates would go up.

As part of his expose on the "inef-
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Our Union Did Michigan Proud

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was held and both President Burriss and President Elect Guffey were available for a contract negotiation update and Q and A. A host of other national officers were available to the body and participated in NPC and the social activities held after hours. It was good to see our national officers lead by president Burriss and local presidents mixing so well and raising important dialog between the parties at such a critical time for our union. The MPWU should be proud to host such a successful event and the lessons we learned would allow us to host an even better conference in the future if the membership so desires. While rewarding to host this conference it was exhausting as well and could not have been completed without the tireless support of Brothers Darren Joyce, Gary VanHoostraten and Mike Long. Reducing the staff at these events enables us to cut costs but places a large burden on those who agree to staff our events and all of them deserve a hardy well done for the best Presidents Conference I have attended.

I attended a district wide excessing meeting with Central Region Coordinator Sharon Stone and NBA Lynn Pallas-Barber as well as all the other effected local presidents. It was a poorly run affair as management did not have the contractually required information for this meeting. What information that was available was incomplete and not usable. There were glaring problems with management's plan, no hard data to support management's conclusions and no standard method of operation between compared facilities making the comparisons invalid and worthless. In small AO's elimination of the only APWU employee will automatically result in a 1.6b violation. None of these concerns were addressed by management, nor have they been up to this point. Management is proceeding without addressing these glaring flaws. In short this is the "dam the torpedoes, full speed ahead" management we saw when "casual in

lieu of" was management's solution to save the postal service. The final bill on that boondoggle has not even been reached and they are off on another knee jerk, uneducated, foolhardy quest to solve a complex problem with a simple one size fits all solution. Most if not all of the small office consolidations cost more money than leaving them alone. We are excessing from facilities with 25% immediately eligible to retire and 50% of the workforce eligible to retire in 5 years. How much does it cost in administrative, labor relations and moving expenses not to mention overtime at the losing facility to excess these employees? How much of the data relied on for this excessing is inaccurate, misleading and/or fraudulent? Delayed mail, supervisors changing tags on mail, having non clerks work mail and paying grievances to keep those work hours off the books and transferring hours in TACS (to operations those employees did not work) to increase BPI. These actions and more are common and the result of management once again trying to fit a square peg in a round hole.

All this noise about excessing is a smoke screen to keep the public and the board of governors from the truth. The OIG is dead on, the district and area offices need to be closed. These facilities could close tomorrow and the mail goes out the same, I dare say better than with all this excessive overhead expense. All the data analyzed by these offices goes straight to Washington. Email, teleconferencing, cell phones and satellite communication has made these offices as obsolete as sorting exclusively by the letter case. As we constantly have lost jobs to mechanization and automation management has gained positions, seems they won't use the same criteria on themselves that is used on craft positions. It is time we get leadership that is willing to lead by example and look in the mirror and not at our customers when it is time to tighten the belt. Reducing service is so foolish it borders on the insane as a solution to reduced

revenues in a competitive marketplace.

Postal Headquarters is in bed with large mailers to such a degree that the idea to stop work sharing "discounts" never was even discussed, but closing post offices thus reducing access to our customers was. The OIG clearly stated closing of the small offices will not save the USPS a considerable amount of money and will not help with the current fiscal shortfall (big negative bang for very little buck). What it has done is open the door to our competitors for Saturday service. "Last Mile" delivery is a sick joke; we provide the most expensive part of the operation and leave our competitors the most profitable part of the delivery to parts of the country where we have a huge competitive advantage. The work sharing "discounts" are greater than the cost of us sorting our own mail, this is nothing but cooperate welfare at the expense of our customers. These same postal executives chose to purchase the APPS, FSSP, TMS and other multi-billion dollar systems that simply don't work, and add cost to our operation, why? A serious look at the ties to the mailing industry by postal executives and ex-postal executives and the decisions they made while employed with the postal service is way over due. This investigation can not be performed by the Postal OIG or the Inspection Service as both reports to these same executives who are entwined with the mailing industry. The privatization of the postal service has been a cash cow for the mailing industry at the expense of the American people in both cost and service. The MPWU will work non-stop to protect our rights and to preserve a postal service that is viable and available to the American people. However, we are only as strong as our membership. We need all of you to stand up and insist on being heard. We need to STOP THE INSANITY NOW!

Yours in Solidarity and Friendship.

The Michigan Postal Workers Union proudly represents the Members at Large within the Great State of Michigan. The following locals have also affiliated with the MPWU for training, education and information sharing between their members, stewards and officers of their own local and others throughout the state and nation:

| | | | |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------|
| Alpena | Flint | Muskegon | Stevensville |
| Battle Creek | 480-481 | Pontiac | Traverse City |
| Central MI | 498-499 | Roger City | Troy Local |
| Cheboygan | Gaylord | 486-487 | Western MI |
| Detroit District | Jackson | Sault Ste Marie | |
| Farmington | Ludington | Southwest MI | |

The MICHIGAN MESSENGER is published six times yearly, and is the official publication of the Michigan Postal Workers Union, American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO, also affiliated with the APWU Postal Press Association.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Editor, the MPWU, the APWU or the Postal Press. Any and all correspondence to the Editor may be sent to: Michael Long, Editor, PO Box 280, Sheridan, MI 48884-0280; fax to: 616-776-1536; or e-Mail to: mpwueditor@yahoo.com

Your articles are welcome! They must be signed to be printed, but your name will be withheld upon request. Articles sent via electronic media will be treated as being signed. Be aware that articles may be edited to fit the confines of this publication.

Lastly, this paper is designed with everyone in mind, please be aware that all mistakes are intentional for the express purpose of keeping those happy that are most happy when finding errors in others.





Editor's Report



by Michael A.
Long,
Editor

I Have Seen The Enemy, And He Is Us!

I have seen the enemy, and he is us!
When the comic strip POGO came out and its writers coined this phrase back on Earth Day 1970, one could only imagine how much impact a single line can hold on a generation of then, and certainly of now.

I use this line, because now, more than ever, the enemy is us. The Postal Service is devouring itself from within. Management says the Union is killing the Postal Service; and the Union is saying the poor management is doing the same. Which is true? Which is false?

From a union perspective, I can definitely see management's hand at the destruction of the Postal Service; and these observations can be as slight as when someone changes from their local drugstore in their town to a Walgreens or CVS. Why? Because honestly, I believe most of it; whether intention or not, is because people are not thinking and using common sense. I started off this column using one quote; and I will continue to use another: "Some of us don't have the common sense that God gave to a dog."

I strongly believe that people don't look at the repercussions that arise from any change. Using the drugstore analogy, thinking about what you actions have done. Will one person moving from one store to another change anything? Probably not, but your actions, along with others . . . will! It may, and probably will, make the small, local drugstore, the one that knew you and your family while you were growing up, close up shop. Think about changing from your local grocery store to a big chain store like WalMart. It is going to be cheaper to buy, maybe. But do you think the WalMarts of the world are going to give back to the community and provide good-paying jobs to those in the community. Probably not. On their ads, they say they have given this much money to the community, and such, but when you think about how much money they have "sucked" out of the community with lower wages, lower benefits, etc., that little check means absolutely nothing. Think about what you are doing, when you are actually doing it; not after the fact. Not only management, but those of us on the workroom floor and in our communities as well. But back to the original, I don't know about you, but every time there is a change in the Postal Service, it generally ends up generating more overtime opportunities and more grievances. Both of which cost the Postal Service more money. Most of you that might read my column regularly might remember my rant about Express Mail delivery and hauling one piece of mail more than 60 miles to just make sure it is delivered. This is a prime example of no

common sense. Yes, I know you want to make sure the numbers look good for Area and for National, but come on . . . stop spending hundreds of dollars to ensure an \$18 Express piece is delivered. Like I said, before, a little change here and a little change there, adds up.

What precipitated this column was: I was checking my Available Earnings Statement on-line earlier today; and something struck my eye. It stated: "You are now receiving a printed pay stub mailed to you. To no longer receive the printed pay stub, click on this option." Wait a minute! I had to check and recheck this to make sure I am reading it right. We are and work for the United States Postal Service. We process and deliver Billions and Billions of pieces of mail each and every day to all 50 states and territories; along with our partnerships with other Postal Services overseas. Then why, will someone please explain this to me (and I am being rhetorical, please do not mail me and actually answer this question) . . . Why is the Postal Service doing away with mail? Is it because of the paper cost associated with printing the Pay Stub? Is it the cost of postage?

"Management says the Union is killing the Postal Service; and the Union is saying the poor management is doing the same."

(remember, we don't pay postage) Is it to justify the elimination of more craft jobs; not only at the Plant, but also at Eagan Minnesota (for those who do not know, that is where Finance is located, and they are union and come under the APWU). Come on management . . . Think! We are cutting off our nose to spite our face.

Another item that is currently stressing me is the proposed Excessing that is currently underway within Michigan. This also ties directly into the lack of common sense approach that management is currently underway. In Grand Rapids, we have just received an Excessing Notice of 23 clerks. I know that Traverse City, Gaylord, Kalamazoo, Saginaw, Detroit, and the list goes on and on, are also under the guise of excessing out their employees as well. Any questions on where we are all going to go? Associate Offices maybe? Iowa (I keep hearing this one for some reason) or Pittsburgh (I keep hearing this one too). How many more people do they need there (in Iowa or Pittsburgh), and if so, who has been doing the work thus far? Now I heard that management is going to "create" jobs in the carrier craft for these impacted employees. Great! They don't have to move. They are probably going to be a little better off (since carriers generally make a little more than we do in the clerk craft), and guess what . . . they are on days. Yes, they will now have

to brave the elements that Mother Nature now throws at them, and walk miles and miles each day (so you can stay in shape) (unless it is a mounted (vehicle) route) . . . but what am I forgetting? Oh, that is right . . . where were these jobs in the first place? According to management, the jobs are newly created, but the mail was being delivered all along beforehand, and according to the last route adjustments, more routes were being taken away. Am I being paranoid? Because something just doesn't add up.

How about Deals between management and the employees? I overheard one employee recently say . . . "That isn't what we agreed to." Agreed to? It is our job; why does one person get preferential treatment over another; or worse yet, what or who did that person have to rat out, or talk smack about to get this "agreement." We already have an agreement! It is called the National Agreement. Everyone falls under it! While there are LMOUs in offices, it is all under the auspices of the National Agreement. When you make "agreements" to receive preferential treatment, you are harming your fellow co-workers. I can see it now, those of

you that have these type of "agreements" saying to yourself: "Well, maybe they (co-workers) should have thought about doing that." Pity! While I am on this subject, lets talk about 204Bs. When you step up as a 204B, sometimes you are doing it for your career, or maybe you just want the power; anyways, I have a question for you...who is doing your job when you are up? Is it still getting done? If so, you are proving that your job was really never needed. As I started off this column, who is the enemy?

Well, I think my soapbox is done supporting me, so time to get off of it! However, before I close this article, I have a couple of things that I want to make sure you are aware of:

1. I hope everyone knows about the changes to the Flex Spending Plan for the new, upcoming year (and beyond). You are no longer going to be able to buy Over-The-Counter (OTC) medicine with the United Healthcare Credit Card (that is linked to your account). Period! The only way to get FSA to reimburse you is that you are going to be required to have a prescription for that item. I am not saying that you are going to have to go to the doctor to get a prescription to take an aspirin (as some have suggested); you are more than welcome to still go to the local pharmacy (if your town still has one), and buy your OTC

medicine; however, if you want reimbursement for that through your FSA account, then you will need one.

One way I have heard to circumvent this, and I want to pre-face this by saying that I have an e-mail into the Michigan Department of Community Health in Lansing, but as of the date of this writing and sending the paper into press, I have not received any response, so you will need to check this out with your own doctor and pharmacy. What I have heard is that if you know which OTC medicine you use throughout a normal year, when you actually go to the doctor (or heck, give them a call and see if they will just write you one), have them write you out a prescription for this OTC medicine at the beginning of the year (e.g. the week of January 2nd), and put an ending date of December 31st. Someone told me that prescriptions (when they are for non-narcotic drugs) are good for up to a year (this is the part I am not sure about, so check with your doctor). If this is the case, you can have a script on file at your local pharmacy, and/or keep it with you and submit your reimbursement forms.

2. Do you have a Credit Union near you, or better yet, an actual Postal Credit Union. If not, check out USPSFCU.org or call 800-USPS-FCU. This is a Nationwide Credit Union, for those of us who don't have one near them. While their office is out of Maryland, all the work is done via MAIL, internet, and phone and you can join anywhere.

3. Guaranteed Disability Insurance. Yes . . . I said Guaranteed. You can't be turned down. In this edition of the Michigan Messenger is information regarding a benefit that was presented to us at the recent Area 10-11-12 District Meeting. I know the APWU already has a short-term disability program through Voluntary Benefits, that one you have to answer medical questions, and dare I say it . . . be healthy. This one, you are accepted no matter what you have and all. While you will have a waiting period of 12 months for an injury or disability you presently have (e.g. Back, MS, etc.), you can still be covered.

I would like to take this opportunity before closing to wish Thanks, Congrats, and best wishes to two of our Board Members who have chosen to resign their positions since the last edition. Michael McCain (Director of Education), and Michelle Yuhasey (Area 12 Director). They both will be missed and I wish them luck in their future endeavors.

In closing, I wish each of you the best of this Holiday Season. No matter how you celebrate, I hope each of you have an enjoyable and positive holiday season and look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

Yours in Solidarity.





by Joe Wrobel,
Motor Vehicle
Craft Director

Motor Vehicle Craft Report

Wheels And Wrenches

Greetings, brothers and sisters of the M.P.W.U. I would like to wish a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you and your family. This past year brought a lot of the same to our craft, cutting or gutting runs, cutting VMF clerk positions, and contracting out work. We had a couple of arbitrations scheduled for Article 32 violations from Grand Rapids. A short while before the scheduled hearing the post office advocate canceled the arbitration hearing. I am sure that they will reschedule for the first part of the New Year.

Accidents have been numerous in the past 6 months, while I believe that most accidents are not preventable, Management thinks the opposite. In all of the districts that I have had the opportunity to talk and meet the managers

they really have convinced themselves that all accidents can be prevented. I think they are right in some instances, wrong in most others. In one of the accident review board that I attended the driver was asked "how the accident that he was involved in could have been prevented?" I thought to myself that the only way that the driver could have prevented this accident was if he flew out the window and picked up the tractor/trailer allowing the idiot that ran the stop sign to pass under the postal vehicle safely and then setting the truck back down on the road getting back in the truck, Buckling up, checking his mirrors. Then and only then when the light turns green pass through the intersection with extreme caution watching for flying assholes that drive in today's world. The driver replied the only way that he could by stating he couldn't do a thing to prevent this accident. The only

way to answer this kind of question is carefully, what you say will be used against you in most cases (not all). To be fair I also have attended some accident reviews where management was just going through the motions because even they realize that the accident could not have been prevented. Bottom line if you get into an accident report it, write down the surrounding circumstances of the accident, and include all the parties involved. Every vehicle should have an accident kit in them, follow the guide lines in the envelope or the directions on the front cover of the kit. Above all of the previous list notify your Union Representative of the accident and write them (the union) a statement of your view of what happened. This is very important if a grievance has to be filed to protect you and your rights.

Once again the VOE surveys are out; the Royal Oak VMF has the lowest par-

ticipation in the Great Lakes Area. This goes to show that the bounty program that is in effect in the 480-481 area local is working, the other 2 VMF's participated going against the national's request that we do not fill out the VOE surveys. I would strongly encourage that other locals come up with a bounty program. Should your local already have a program in place let me know so that we can get the word out to everyone not to participate. May be we can start one at the state level, just remember this is your mail and you can do whatever you want with it, throw it out, use it for kindling, or put it in your shit house at your hunting cabin (for emergency use) it's yours so you do not have to fill it out and return it.

In closing let me say thank you for another year as the M.P.W.U. MVS Craft Director and I am looking forward to representing the MVS Craft throughout the New Year.



by Jennifer Amos,
Human
Relations
Director

Human Relation's Report

Let's Make A Difference

Thanks to the Michigan Postal Workers Union for allowing me to lead a class October 16, 2010 on the Federal Workers Compensation Act and the National Reassessment Process. I did my best to provide a full day of PowerPoint presentations and Q&A sessions on these very important subjects. The presentations can be found on my local web page www.wmal.org/owcp.htm — or can be linked through the MPWU Injury Comp link on the MPWU.com site. Click on NRP Info to view

PDF versions of the PowerPoint files.

The following article is from the apwu.org website Human Relations department. I am challenging all Michigan locals to contribute generously to this cause; we can really make a difference to a homeless veteran who needs our help.

HONORING THOSE WHO SERVE 'WINTERHAVEN STAND DOWN' HELPS HOMELESS VETERANS

Every soldier, sailor, airman, Marine, and Coast Guardsman deserves

the lasting gratitude of the American people.

That's why the union wants to remind APWU members to honor our nation's veterans by participating in the union's "Winterhaven Stand Down" and other Support Our Troops and Veterans programs.

'STAND DOWN' HELPS HOMELESS VETERANS

Each year, more than 1 million of our nation's veterans are homeless. This is hardly the thank-you they deserve and hardly the thank-you they have earned. So, in January 2010, for the second consecutive year, the APWU is giving a hand up to homeless and under-served veterans during the Veterans' Administration's Winterhaven Stand Down. The annual event offers veterans a variety of social services, such as legal and medical aid, employment counseling, and housing assistance. Hot meals, haircuts, showers, warm clothing and other necessities will also be available.

The APWU will have its own station at the Stand Down, where we will distribute donated backpacks filled with specific items. Go to <http://www.apwu.org/news/webart/2009/09-136-vets-backpack.pdf> to see what is needed to help these veterans get through their long days and cold nights. We are the only organization that participates on such a large scale. To ensure we leave no veteran behind, APWU members, locals, and state organizations were

asked to donate at least one new, filled backpack.

Last year, nearly 400 homeless veterans received new backpacks, blankets, and care packages that were donated by APWU state and local organizations as well as by individual union members. At the suggestion of the VA, the APWU also provided vinyl "portfolio" briefcases to help the homeless veterans protect their important documents. Our goal this year is to distribute a minimum of 500 filled back packs.

FAST FOOD FAVORITES

If your local can't put together a backpack, then consider contributing gift cards for fast food restaurants.

Among hospitalized troops, \$5 and \$10 gift cards to McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, Taco Bell, KFC, Popeye's Chicken, Papa John's and Domino's pizza are in great demand. Many have recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, where it's impossible to indulge in most American fast-food favorites. For visiting families, enjoying a restaurant meal is both costly and time consuming. Gift cards for nearby fast-food chains offer the perfect solution to those looking for a quick fix away from the hospital cafeteria. Hospital staff is often willing to pick-up orders for recovering troops and their car-less visitors.

Let's help those who helped us! Let's show our gratitude to a Veteran.

Humana Disability Income Insurance

Humana Disability Income Insurance (Policy Number 80330 (07/10))
Exclusively offered by Humana Voluntary Insurance Partners - Designed Especially for: Postal Workers

Disability Income - Sickness and/or Accident - Pays a Monthly Benefit for Total disability or Presumptive Disability if you are unable to work due to a covered Sickness or Injury. Monthly benefits begin after an elimination period of 14 or 30 days (depending on what you chose). Monthly Benefits continue while your Total Disability lasts or until the end of one year.

Bi-weekly Costs range from 12.09 for \$500 monthly benefit (30/30 elimination) up to \$61.47 for a \$2,000 monthly benefit (14/14 elimination) and in between.

This policy pay in addition to any other insurance (50% if Worker's Compensation or similar law pays. Policy may be continued if employee changes jobs. This policy is Guaranteed Renewable up to age 70, and the rates are the same for male and females.

If you would like more information, please feel free to contact Jim Janicke at jjanicke@resultmktg.com.

Obstacles In Our Contract Fight

continued from page 1

“inefficiency” of the Post Office, Bandow points out that there are 26,000 Post Offices that are losing money. Actually, I am **proud** of that fact. Why? Because USPS is a service, not a profit-making business. We serve the small communities, the poor communities, as well as those communities that give us a thriving business. And that means some of our stations and branches are going to lose money. Should we discriminate against people who live in tiny or poor communities, or should we provide a valuable service to **all** of the American people? That’s a point that Mr. Bandow just doesn’t get.

Similarly, Mr. Bandow quotes a Wall Street analyst as saying that if FedEx or UPS management ran the USPS, they could “whip it into shape.” Again, Bandow forgets that USPS is a service, where these other companies exist solely to make a profit.

Mr. Bandow criticizes the fact that “bulk mailers enjoy artificially low rates due to the political clout of these businesses.” He neglects the obvious conclusion — we should raise these rates and/or bring this work in-house where postal workers can process this mail cheaper. Instead, he uses this as an argument for privatization, when the truth is, this **backdoor privatization** is costing the **public** Post Office money.

There’s a lot more to respond to in Mr. Bandow’s article but you get the gist of it. The Post Office needs to be privatized, it’s losing money because the unions have too much influence and the workers have salaries that are too high and benefits that are too lavish, etc.

Our contract is not negotiated or arbitrated in a vacuum. These articles are part of a carefully orchestrated campaign to help management force concessions from us in this contract round. And now we have a House of Representatives that will put the same kind of negative pressure on us — with the same right-wing, anti-worker ideology.

CONGRESSMAN ISSA

The Republican victory on November 2nd makes Congressman Darrell Issa the head of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, which oversees the Post Office among other things. Before the election, Congressman Issa wrote: “No union has or ever will lobby for a layoff, so it’s up to USPS management and Congress to demand concessions.” I don’t know how to make it any clearer. The man who chairs a House Committee that deals with postal issues wants the USPS to demand concessions. He wants layoffs. Layoffs and concessions. This is the man we put into power on Election Day. And after the election, he uttered the following words: “There are too

many distribution centers, too many postal workers, too many post offices, and there’s a reluctance to make these changes.” He suggested setting up a federal commission to decide which Post Offices should be shut down.

The ideology behind the Republican Election Day victory included the phrase “limited government.” This term is used selectively to restrict spending on anything that helps workers or poor people. (I doubt you’ll see Republicans pushing for a reduction in military spending, much of which produces huge profits for private contractors at taxpayer expense.) The ideologues of Cato Institute latch onto the “government is inefficient” sentiment and apply it to the Post Office. While these ideologues decry government infringement of individual freedom, they do not hesitate to say government should restrict our right to organize and bargain through our union — as Congressman Issa’s remark that Congress should “demand concessions” indicates.

THE DEMOCRATS

I don’t want to give the Democrats a complete pass either. It’s clear to me that the Republican Party is completely under the influence of corporate money, so they are hostile to unions and postal workers. The Democrats also receive their share of corporate contributions, and to that extent they are also pro-

business. That influence is only partly offset by the work of the labor movement.

In some respects, the Congressional elections were a referendum on the Obama Administration. When Barack Obama ran for President, he inspired people with a vision of change. He achieved a lot less than what people expected. This is partly because the Republicans set out to sabotage anything and everything he tried to accomplish. But it is also because, in an effort to work together with the Republicans (who refused to work with him) and the business community, he put forward compromises and half-way measures when a bolder approach was needed. In many respects, the problem wasn’t that President Obama “went too far,” as his critics on the right say; the problem is he didn’t go far enough. The unfortunate result was that many people who enthusiastically supported Obama two years ago stayed home in 2010, while the Republicans took advantage of people’s discontent and uncertainty. Like I said, this is bad news for postal workers.

The only thing to be thankful for is that the Republicans don’t have control of the Senate or the White House; if they had the Executive Branch and both houses of Congress, we would surely see an all-out attack on postal workers. Just watch what happens in Michigan

where the Republicans have this kind of power. I expect public employees who work for the state to be under serious attack, and I expect an attempt to make Michigan a “Right-to-Work” state, which would further weaken private sector unions here.

OUR FUTURE

The election results and the rising anti-government tide that includes USPS and postal workers will make it harder for us to get a good contract. Hopefully, by the time you read this we will have heard positive news that in spite of these obstacles, an agreement has been reached on a contract that we can live with. If so, kudos to our negotiators at the national level.

In any event, it will be more critical than ever that individual members get involved by giving to COPA and becoming e-activists (join the APWU E-Team by going to the web site www.apwu.org, clicking on Departments and Divisions — Legislative and Political, and find the blue box which says “Join the E-team.” Congress has a tremendous influence on the fate of postal workers. Now that we have elected people who are hostile to us (with the votes of a substantial minority of APWU members), the least we can ask members to do is become active around the specific issues that affect our jobs and our future.



News

Union Plus Scholarship Applications Now Available

Application deadline Jan. 31, 2011, for \$150,000 in awards

Washington, DC— Applications are available for the 2011 Union Plus Scholarship Program, which provides \$150,000 in scholarships to union members, their spouses and dependants.

To download the application, visit UnionPlus.org/Scholarships. Or, send a postcard with your name, return address, telephone number and international union name to: Union Plus Education Foundation, c/o Union Privilege, P.O. Box 34800, Washington, DC 20043-4800. The application deadline is January 31, 2011.

Union members, their spouses and dependent children are eligible to apply for scholarships. You do not need to participate in a Union Plus program in order to be eligible.

Since 1992, the Union Plus Scholarship program has provided more than \$2.8 million to help fulfill the educational dreams of students across the nation. Union Plus Scholarship awards are presented annually.

In 2010, 121 students were awarded a total of \$150,000 in scholarships from the Union Plus Scholarship program, which is offered through the Union Plus Education Foundation with funding from HSBC, the issuer of the Union Plus Credit Card.

HOW THE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM WORKS

In addition to demonstrating academic ability, applicants are required to submit essays of no more than 500 words describing their career goals, detailing their relationship with the union movement and explaining why they are deserving of a union scholarship.

Individuals must be accepted into an accredited college or university, community college or recognized technical or trade school at the time the award is issued. Graduate school students are also eligible for Union Plus Scholarships.

Veteran's Report

Information For Veterans



by John
Smeekens,
Veterans
Director

VET CENTER

I was recently informed by one of my contacts at the Macomb County Vet Center, that a new Veterans' Center was opening in Traverse City. I called Bill at the listed phone number, and he confirmed the opening of the facility located at 3766 North, US 31 South. The phone number is **231-935-0051**. By the time you read this, the center should be open and operational.

E.A.P.

For those of you who are in the Southeast Michigan Area, there's a new EAP Consultant for this district. Ms. Diane Johnson-Loush, LLP, LMSW. Ms. Loush is replacing Bob Racine, the previous EAP consultant, who retired in September, 2010. Need someone to talk to, give her a call to set up an appointment. She can be reached at **248-524-6646**.

VET CENTER MACOMB COUNTY

Here's another new Veterans' Center, and it's on Garfield Road in Clinton Township, just South of 19 mile road. I stopped in and took a tour with the Team Leader, Paul J. Chute. There are also two additional counselors that work at the facility, Katherine A. Ibach, and Shawn M. Flaharty. So if you're a Veteran who resides in Macomb County, and you need someone to talk to, give Paul a call, and set up an appointment. The number is **586-412-0107**.

VETERANS' BENEFITS

If you need some help with benefits, give your County Veterans' Department a call, that's what their there for. Or contact a local VSO, through one of the many Veterans' Organizations. The Vet Centers are more for counseling.

GAYLORD

I would like to thank all of you

who stopped in to say hi while I was in Gaylord for the Area 10,11,& 12 Meetings. It was great to be able to put on a class on Veterans' Issues for those who were in attendance. I hope those in attendance were able to derive some good and helpful information to pass along to our brother and sister Veterans', their families, or use for themselves.

AGENT ORANGE

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun distributing disability benefits to Vietnam Veterans who qualify for compensation under recent rules changes for Agent Orange exposure. Up to 200,000 Vietnam Veterans are potentially eligible to receive VA disability compensation for medical conditions recently associated with Agent Orange. The expansion of coverage involves *B-cell (or hairy-cell) leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease*. Providing initial payments — or increases to existing payments — to the 200,000 Veterans who now qualify for disability compensation for these three conditions is expected to take several months, but *VA officials encourage all Vietnam Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and suffer from one of the three diseases to make sure their applications have been submitted*. In practical terms, Veterans who served in Vietnam during the war and who have a "presumed" illness *do not have to prove an association between their illnesses and their military service*. This "presumption" simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits.

The three new illnesses — *B-cell (or hairy-cell) leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease* — are added to the list of presumed illnesses previously recognized by VA.

Other recognized illnesses under VA's "presumption" rule for Agent Orange are:

- *Acute and Subacute Transient*

Peripheral Neuropathy

- *Chloracne*
- *Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia*
- *Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2)*
- *Hodgkin's Disease*
- *Multiple Myeloma*
- *Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma*
- *Porphyria Cutanea Tarda*
- *Prostate Cancer*
- *Respiratory Cancers*
- *Soft Tissue Sarcoma (other than Osteosarcoma, Chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or Mesothelioma)*
- *AL Amyloidosis*

Veterans interested in applying for disability compensation under one of the three new Agent Orange presumptives should contact your *County Veterans' Representatives, a VSO of one of your local Veterans' Organizations*, or go to www.fasttrack.va.gov or call **1-800-827-1000**.

FACEBOOK

Yeah, I know you never thought you'd ever see me talk about Facebook, but boy did I get a lesson from Mike Long, the editor of the MPWU, while attending the recent Area 10, 11, & 12 District Meeting. The VA is on Facebook, and is it ever great! Mr. Long showed me a few clips from the VA's new advertising campaign to make their services aware, and spread to Veterans' around the country. Two television ads were very inspiring, and one of them took me to tears. On Monday, October 18th, the Veterans Affairs Department was to begin "launching a six-city advertising campaign . . . aimed at spreading the word about available help for newly discharged combat veterans. The campaign is all part of an effort to address the fact that there are 23 million veterans in the United States, and only 8 million use VA services. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, a retired four-star general, former Army chief of staff and combat-disabled Vietnam veteran, has been pushing outreach efforts aimed at smoothing the transition to civilian life for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans by making sure they know about available resources such as disability compensation, medical treatment, education benefits and home loans. If you're on Facebook, give it a look, and don't forget to spread the word to others. As for me, I'll get some help from my wife and daughters, and take a look, but don't look for me on Facebook yet, I'm still learning computers, let's not get to crazy here!

OUR VIETNAM GENERATION

January 28, 2011. That's the date of the Fox Theatre Film Premiere, of the new movie by Keith Famie

and Visionalist Entertainment Production. This new film, honors Vietnam Veterans' for their service to the United States and will feature Michigan Veterans' who became successful business and community leaders and others who still suffer from haunting memories or wounds. The event will feature speakers from the Vietnam generation, along with News/Talk WJR 760's Paul W. Smith, who will be the emcee for the evening. The Michigan Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall will be on display in the FOX lobby throughout the evening. The evening will be closed with a candlelight vigil in honor of the 2,654 Michigan men and women who died for their country in Vietnam. Tickets are available at Ticketmaster or the Fox theatre box office. Prices range from \$25 to \$35. Proceeds will benefit the Veterans' Memorial Park of Detroit and other charities. Sometime in February, the date has yet to be determined, the movie will air on Detroit Public Television. For more information and updates you can go to www.ourvietnamgeneration.com.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Yeah I said it. So what? I like the term Merry Christmas, so I'm going to use it frequently. If it offends you, I'm sorry. So Merry Christmas to you and your family. I hope it is a blessed, and safe one for you and yours. Keep safe, don't drink and drive, eat lightly, so you don't have to make up some dumb News Years resolution that you're going to lose weight. And don't forget our troops. Say a prayer, or whatever you do, for them and their families.

NEW YEAR

Happy New Year to one and all. Ditto on the words above about being safe and not drinking and driving and those resolutions that are so far out of reach that you can't keep them. Keep our troops and their families in your prayers and thoughts.

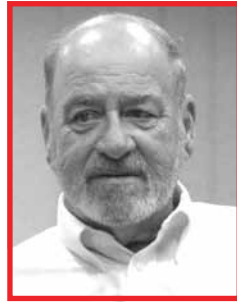
DARREN'S DIARY

Darren's presently somewhere in Afghanistan. I heard from him early in November, and he's still undergoing training there. Please keep him and his wife Janet in your prayers and thoughts during the Holiday's.

TROOPS OVERSEAS

If any of you have family members over there, please let me know so we can keep them and their families in our ongoing prayers of support for our troops. If you can get me an address, we will send them a card.





by Al
LaBrecque,
Retiree's Chapter
President

Retiree Involvement Report On Conference

Mad as Hell! About time to tell it like it is! That was my reaction to the 2010 National Convention beating down of retiree Resolution proposals to amend the APWU Constitution. That assessment has only deepened these past months, only to be exceeded by abject disgust as I've learned more about what has been described as the vile delegate tone of the opposition to retiree initiatives. I'd like to ask these "sisters and brother" naysayers; "What the Hell is your problem?!"

Let me make it perfectly clear these remarks do not apply to our Michigan State or MPWU affiliated Locals. Quite the opposite. Michigan delegates and leaderships who have been supportive of retiree proposed Resolutions from the State Convention to the national, expressed utter dismay at the derisive tone in debate by the opposition, and blaring chorus of "NO's" from the delegates on anything retiree.

I'm fairly aware of who did and didn't step up to the microphones in support. My profound gratitude for those who did; Judy Beard, Bobby Donnelson, Al Fouche, and the One, and ONLY one of the 5 elected Retiree Delegates who took the brunt of the shocking animosity, Brother John Richards. We'll know exactly who spoke for and against when the Official Proceedings are published.

I'm not so naive as to expect that all our proposed Resolutions would be welcomed with open arms either by the Constitution Committee or delegates. That notion was quickly dispelled 16 years ago. We've been in a dogfight over the last 8 conventions for every gain we've managed to eke out. But, this convention didn't so much as throw retirees their usual "bone". Oh sure, delegates very narrowly approved an amendment to the Convention Rules to allow retirees on the floor without voice or vote. Maybe that was their reluctant "bone". What it amounted to was a paternalistic, appeasing pat on the head to be seen but not heard. No thanks!

No! My disgust isn't so much about the total rejection of retiree initiatives as it's about the antagonistic tone of dissent from the Constitution Committee Chair and delegates that's so disturbing. It's as if Retirees' Dept members, particularly the \$36. per year members, pose some kind of threat to the active leaderships and members rather than an asset. What the Hell is their problem?!

Hey! You want opposition? I'll give you opposition! To the APWU anti-retiree element; shame on them! Where do they come off disrespecting the Mothers and Fathers of this

Union?! Selfish, spoiled brats! But, that's not the extent of my disgust. Retirees have division within our own ranks with about 39,000 Dept. members, second largest department in the APWU, only some 600 or fewer are full dues-paying members. The majority are compensated officers or appointees from the Local to National levels. And in that number there is an element who unabashedly opposes any proposal to allow \$36. per annum retiree members eligibility to vote for the top 3 APWU General Officers and 4 resident officers who directly affect our membership. Somehow these elements of dissent consider themselves as the elite. Never mind that we all paid our dues in many ways when this generation of Union leadership and delegates were still wetting their britches.

Then, there's the 5 elected National Retiree Delegates, one from each Region. Save but only one, John Richards, four were mum on retiree Resolutions, including our Central Region delegate. Since the 2000 Convention, I can count on one hand with fingers left over that either the N.E. Region, Southern Region, Central Region, or the last 2 conventions, the Western Region Retiree Delegates so much as got off their collective hind quarters to support a retiree Resolution. Check the Official Proceedings since 2000. It's either been former Western Region Delegate Byron Denton, or Eastern Region's Richards. So, why did they run for delegate? An expenses paid vacation to schmooze and collect pins? It certainly hasn't been to advocate for the best interests of the retired members via Resolutions one would expect them to do. Some "voice" that is!

Delegates acting as this Union's highest governing body emphatically said "NO" to limited eligibility to vote, to salary equity for our Retirees' Dept. Director (a real slap in the face), to providing the overburdened Dept. a much needed Technician or elected Asst. Dir., or to redesignating to positions of the 5 Retiree Delegates to Regional Retiree Representatives to better serve the retiree membership.

Okay! I get it! The anti-retiree element values the revenue we generate for the APWU, just not us! And, it's not only as their COPA "cash cows" That's glaringly evident. The Nov./Dec. APWU magazine reports retirees have contributed \$162,225. so far this year. Since 2008, after budgeted expenditures, Retirees' Dept. revenue balance was \$1,259,681.16 for the period ending July 31st, derived from the \$24. annual basic dues. The \$1. per month dues dedicated to the Dept. Organizing Fund had a balance after

expenditures of \$308,201.49 for the same period. The Dept. is financially self-sustained and then some. There's those who surmise that retiree revenues subsidize P.O.W.E.R, the Auxiliary, and PPA. I have no problem with that if the opposition would take their foot off our neck. Then, there's the APWU Health Plan. Retirees comprise the majority of the enrollees. Word has it that the APWU General Fund realizes more than \$4 million windfall annually from that little moneymaker. Yet, the "just say NO" delegates would deny retirees' eligibility to elect the Health Plan Dir.!? Where would the Plan be without retiree enrollees who must belong to the Dept. to be eligible?

What if a movement should evolve from repeated rejections where retiree members get some spine and resolve to say "NO!" to all of the above? Maybe when retirees get that frequent COPA appeal letter, or there's an informational picket, or legislative alert to contact Members of Congress on a critical APWU issue, or responding to active member's inquiries on retirement or providing retirement education for active members; that we just say "NO!" Oh, but then we'd be just like them.

Other than having a 16-year investment in Retiree Involvement, the only incentive I have to keep hammering at that brick wall is for the tremendous support of our State Union, Michigan Locals, and the faith and support from some sister states, Locals and Chapters. Call me gullible, but there's a glimmer of a chance that the newly elected APWU leadership could result in a change of attitude toward furthering retiree inclusion beyond retiree

member's cash value. I'm watching with great interest.

ALERT! 2009 "EARLY OUT" RETIREES: The check isn't in the mail! The Postal Service in its usual inept methods is predictably making the second 2009 early out \$5,000. incentive payment a complicated, inconvenient process. The final payment was tentatively scheduled to coincide with the P.P. 22 payroll on Oct. 29th. The incentive checks are being mailed from the PDC to the local postal installation where eligible retirees were last employed. Eligible 2009 early out retirees who choose to pick up their checks in person are required to contact the installation head of your last P.O. finance number to make arrangements to pick up your check.

If you prefer to have your check mailed to your current address, you are advised to provide a written, signed request to the installation head at the postal facility where you were last employed. You may be required to obtain PS Form 3077 "Request to Forward Salary Check" to complete and submit to have your check mailed to you or your designated financial institution. Nothing changes. There's the right way, the wrong way, and the Postal Service way!

So here we are at the end of a turbulent 2010 already. Halloween, Veteran's Day, "St. Antler Day", have gone by with Thanksgiving just around the corner. Despite the struggles of the past year, we still have much to be thankful for; especially Family, Friends, faithful Sisters and Brothers to whom I sincerely wish a Merry and Blessed Christmas, and a Happy and Healthy 2011.

Be Strong!

27 Pay Periods in 2011 Leave Year

Additional Annual leave Earning No Change to Carryover Limit

The 2011 leave year begins January 1, 2011 (Pay Period 02-11) and ends January 13, 2012 (Pay Period 02-12) for a total of 27 pay periods. Therefore, employees may earn one additional pay period's worth of annual leave during the 2011 leave year as compared to the typical 26 pay period leave year. For a full-time employee, the extra pay period amount will be 4, 6, or 8 hours, depending on the employee's leave earning category; the pay period amount is prorated for part-time employees.

Although employees may earn one additional pay period's worth of annual leave during leave year 2011, the annual leave carryover maximums will not increase for leave year 2011. Employees must use any annual leave in excess of the standard carryover limit that applies to them by the end of leave year 2011 (January 13, 2012) or they will forfeit the hours of annual leave that are in excess of their carryover limit.

Employees may also earn an additional increment of sick leave during leave year 2011. For a full-time employee, the extra pay period amount will be 4 hours; the pay period amount is prorated for part-time employees. However, there is no carryover limit for sick leave.

Definition: The leave year is the year beginning with the first day of the first complete pay period in a calendar year and ending on the day before the first day of the first complete pay period in the following calendar year.



by Linda Turney, National Business Agent

National Business Agent's Report

— Turney Talks —

When you read, you empower yourself. When you write, you influence others.

WHERE THE FLAG FLIES

Wherever the flag flies, there is the United States Postal Service. This past year we have seen a concentrated effort to reduce our facilities and our presence in every community. The new Republican chair of the powerful Oversight and Government Reform Committee in the House of Representatives has vowed to take on postal reform. His name is Darrell Issa. Congressman Issa has consistently stated that the employees of the United States Postal Service are simply not needed and has advocated for changes in our Collective Bargaining Agreement that will allow for layoffs.

We suffered major blows to our representatives in Congress. Republican Dan Benishek, a surgeon from Crystal Falls, tapped into voter angst to convincingly beat Democratic state Rep. Gary McDowell of Rudyard and take

the northern Michigan seat long held by Bart Stupak. I don't think it is a surprise that GOP newcomer Rick Snyder is the next Governor of Michigan due to his double digit leads in the previous polls. Over the next two years, we will see the ramifications for not voting for candidates that support APWU.

Did you vote? Did you ask your members to vote for the candidates that support us? Tea Bag Candidates which won many districts, campaigned on increased ages for Social Security benefits, reductions in Medicare and Social Security, a continuation of the Bush Tax Cuts for Americans that make over \$250,000 a year, reduced Veteran benefits, and a continued effort to close the United States Postal Service and reduce our presence in every community where the flag flies.

NEGOTIATIONS

It should be of no surprise that the Postal Service is going to demand concessions in contract negotiations. The financial predicament, the media and the recently elected Tea Baggers are trying to reduce

wages and benefits. Management's proposals for wage proposals and greater workforce flexibility are draconian. Their objective is to control costs and demand a more efficient service. These cost controls have primarily affected APWU. APWU will work out every move in advance. We will plan and predetermine a way to achieve our desired result in negotiations. Our leaders will process advantages and disadvantages prior to the decision to arbitrate or go to the rank and file with a possible contract. APWU is focused on keeping our jobs and continued job security.

HONORING VETERANS

As Americans, we can never fully repay our Veterans for their service. We can honor our commitment to them by supporting positive Veteran legislation.

Recently, Congress increased funding for Veterans health care by nearly 70 percent, the largest increase

honor our commitment to these American Heroes.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

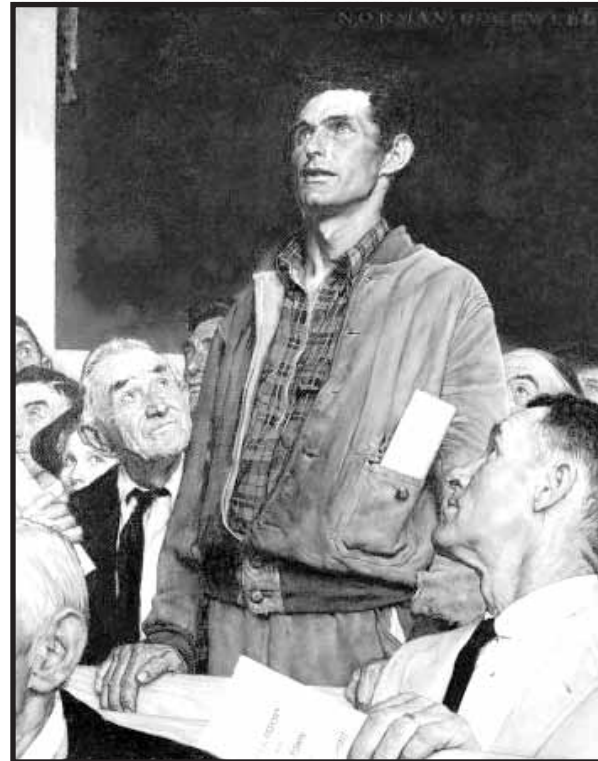
I recently went to Washington DC where I saw a special Smithsonian exhibit on Norman Rockwell, a great American Artist. One of my favorite paintings was called "Freedom of Speech". The idea came to Rockwell after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. There was a Town Meeting, all of the Neighbors agreed on the topic of discussion except for one. This man stood valiantly and spoke his mind and even though he had disagreed with the majority, his Neighbors let him have his say. Rockwell later said, "They let him have his say. No one shouted him down. My Gosh, I thought that was it. There it is: Freedom of Speech."

When you think about the vulgarity and personal attacks into which so much of our National conversation has fallen, too many have convinced themselves

that there can only be one side to every issue, their own. I feel it from the conservative right all the time. Yet, I also understand that in my world of ardent and passionate political beliefs, I feel that I am correct. It is always important to remember that we can respect differences of opinion. A very well respected newsman, Eric Severeid may have said it best when he said, "In a world of passionate certainty, it is as important to retain the courage of one's doubts as the courage of one's convictions."

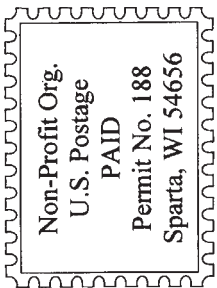
With that thought in mind, I would like to wish

you and your families a Happy and Safe Holiday Season. I would also like to send special greetings to those who are Muslim or Jewish or Agnostic or Atheist or Buddhists or Pagan or any religion other than the religion of the majority. Our Veterans have fought for Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Religion. American Artists have painted it. Newsmen and women have chronicled it. United States citizens are proud to be tolerant of all opinions and beliefs.



in the 78-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are now provided with an additional three years of free VA health care and expanding mental health screening and testing to treat disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), the signature injuries of today's wars.

Congress passed landmark legislation to improve and expand educational opportunities for Veterans. Last August, the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which guarantees that returning veterans have the opportunity for a full, four-year college education, went into effect. In the upcoming Congress, Americans should demand that we



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