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A Postal Valentine

by Jim Hightower

We all know the word “valentine” from the February day when sweethearts exchange red-frilly cards. But it’s also the name of a third-century saint who literally lost his head, a ninth-century pope whose reign lasted only 40 days, three Roman emperors, a silent movie heart throb, a peppery Mexican hot sauce, the first woman in space... and a town in Texas.

I have been to that town, and it has a story to tell us about the meaning of community. It’s a haul to get there, for Valentine, population 217, is way out in Southwest Texas on a long and lonely stretch of US 90, close by the Mexican border. One of only two burgs in the far-flung desert of Jeff Davis County, it was founded in 1882 by the Southern Pacific Railroad as a whistle stop and shipping point for area ranches. The railroad also named the place.

It seems that Southern Pacific’s construction crew arrived at the town site on February 14, and who would’ve guessed that in 1882 in Nowhere, Texas, there’d be a bunch of romantics on a burly construction crew? The men were apparently so touched by the felicitous beginning of a new town on the symbolic day of romance that – well, what else could they have named it? (Actually, some historians offer a less charming version, claiming the place was named for John Valentine, at the time the president of Wells Fargo and a major stockholder in Southern Pacific. But no one likes a cynic, so let’s stick with the enchanting story of Cupid’s influence.) In fact, this tiny town has one particular attraction that truly does enchant people, drawing attention from every state and many foreign lands: **The Valentine Post Office**. The post office opened in 1886, shortly after the trains started running, and it has continued its proud public service ever since. Today, Postmaster Leslie Williams runs the one-room adobe PO, not only serving local residents, ranchers and businesses, but also serving thousands of customers worldwide who mail batches of their valentines to her each year. Why would they mail them to this faraway station? People around the world send their pre-addressed and stamped valentines to be re-mailed pre-addressed and stamped valentines to be re-mailed bearing this fanciful postmark.

Ms. Williams, who has been a postal worker at the Valentine station for 22 years, is happy to do this for all sweethearts who want this extra spoonful of sugar on their missives. Adding to the love, each fall she asks local students to submit artistic designs for the next Valentine’s Day postmark. The city council chooses the

winning drawing, and the US Postal Service certifies it to be the Love Station’s official cancellation stamp for that season.

Then, around February 1st, Postmaster Williams begins the task of hand stamping and re-mailing the envelopes sent to her from some 30 countries, totaling nearly 40,000 valentines. Sometimes she has to bring in

lobbying suites to undermine our invaluable public postal system. Elimination and privatization of this civic asset is their goal, and for several years now they’ve been using ideological flimflam, legislative monkey-wrenching, and political deceit in constant attempts to disable or dismantle piece after piece of the system – including trying to shut down the little jewel in Valentine.

A Public Mugging

In July 2011, word wafted out to Jeff Davis County that the venerable post office on Highway 90 was on USPS’s list of 3,700 offices across the country under review for closure. Budgets, you know – USPS is running about \$5 billion a year in the red, explained a postal spokesperson who’d been dispatched to this outback to calm the locals. He sympathized with their loss, but said with a sigh: “The postal service has to *look under every rock*, to save every dollar, to try to *keep the service alive*.”

That comment makes the postal powers seem almost heroic, but their actions are actually somewhere between pathetic and vile. Three points:

1. The “savings” hoax. Locking the door on Valentine’s station would save a paltry \$60,000 a year for the \$67 billion a year USPS (which, since 1971, has been a quasi-private enterprise that’s slowly funded by sales of its stamps and services, so the widespread notion that taxpayers somehow benefit from these cuts and closures is completely fallacious). Not only does \$60K do nothing to solve the company’s problems, but the bulk of that goes to pay the salaries of Leslie Williams and one postal support employee. Thus, the so-called savings would be achieved by siphoning out of Valentine the dab of revenue that creates two of the town’s few middle-class jobs.

2. The “every rock” hoax. While Congress and the postal service’s top bosses busy themselves by scrutinizing financial pebbles, they continue to pretend that the massive boulder of manufactured debt hung around the neck of USPS isn’t there. You see, far from bring broke, as the right-wing, anti-government crowd ceaselessly claims, the Postal Service’s annual revenue greatly exceeds its operating costs these days, generating an impressive operating profit of \$1.4 billion. Yet, the service appears to be sinking in red ink, thanks to one outside factor: Malicious congressional meddling. While Washington has loudly insisted that our public mail network must sink or swim on its own as a business, getting no taxpayer subsidies, Congress quietly intervened (directly and massively) in the Service’s business in 2006 to rip a Titanic-sized gash in its balance sheet. That fall the Bush-Cheney regime and lobbyists for privatizers pushed Congress to ram the “Postal Accountability and Enhance-

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The APWU contract campaign is in full swing as we go to press. See page 2.

another postal worker or local volunteers if the volume is heavy and the deadline for delivery is closing in. But zip code 79854 gets the job done every year – on top of its normal workload, and all for no charge beyond the standard 49c stamp. Now that’s service!

Like thousands of their counterparts around the country, the Valentine station and its postal workers are a public treasure, literally delivering for the people – no matter who they are, how poor they are, or where they are. Hardly an impersonal franchise that peddles stamps, a post office is a place where townspeople from all walks of life regularly cross paths, maybe have a bit of conversation, and begin to see each other as neighbors in a shared community. Each station also links its postal community to all others, forming a human network for the common good. That’s why this institution is widely appreciated, often beloved, and consistently rated the most trusted by the people – whether their zip code is in a teeming metroplex or is in a place like Valentine, a dot on the map of America’s vast countryside.

So here we have a highly beneficial social entity that’s located everywhere, open to all, dedicated to service, resourceful, and extremely popular – obviously, this thing needs to be shut down.

That’s what passes for logic among the boneheaded/goober headed/Koch-headed muck-a-mucks who are using their lofty perches in Congress, atop the USPS managerial hierarchy, and in Washington’s corporate



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by Paul Felton, Editor

Editor's Report

Who Are We Fighting For?

By the time you read this article, the May 14 Day of Action will be history. Depending on mail service, by the time you read this, the May 20 contract expiration may have passed. That's a key phrase, "depending on mail service." Which reminds me that we are not just fighting for ourselves; we are fighting for many different people in America.

"We are fighting for every big city and little town in the country."

We are fighting for veterans. The drive to privatize the Postal service is also a drive to throw veterans onto the street. Or at a minimum, it's a drive to shut off opportunities for servicemembers returning from overseas, trying to readjust to civilian life. A job at a living wage would certainly help that adjustment.

We are fighting for young people looking for a living wage job that will give them a future that is secure. The Postal Service has always provided

good-paying jobs for people in every community in America. There is no reason why it can't continue to do so.

At the same time, these jobs con-

Postal management has some nasty plans for old people. It's not just the delay in mail service that will make your bill payments late (if you're part of the generation that isn't comfortable using the internet). Management plans to eliminate door-to-door delivery, making you walk some distance to get your mail. Imagine,

frail senior citizens having to trudge through the snow in the winter to get their mail every day. And for senior citizens who live alone, there goes the security and peace of mind that comes with the mail carrier who knows you and will notice if something is wrong.

We are fighting for low-wage workers who get ripped off by check cashing outfits and payday loans with exorbitant interest rates. The demand *continued on page 3*

tribute to the economy and tax base of every community in America. So, in effect, we are fighting for every big city and little town in the country.

For some people, a postal job has provided a path out of poverty. For some, it helps put the kids through college. In so many ways, a thriving, hiring Postal Service helps so many people.

We are fighting for senior citizens.



by Robin Ely, Area 3 Director

Area 3 Director

Inform The Public

Hope this year is starting off to be a good year for all my union brothers and sisters. We all know that our contract is about to expire. With contract negotiations going on we have to educate the American public on what we are really fighting for.

We have to inform the American public that we are fighting to keep their post office delivering their mail from point A to point B as quickly as possible. It is a rough battle with the post office closing so many of their processing plants. We

need to encourage each and every one of them to notify their representatives to let them know they want their mail delivered with the standard they are used to. Stop closing their processing plants slowing down their mail.

The post office gets no funding from the Federal Government. We do not get a dime of taxpayers' money. We get our revenue from the sales of First Class stamps and other postage the American people buy to ship their mail from point A to point B with the USPS. We also get revenue from delivering packages to our customers that have been originally

shipped through UPS or Fed Ex. Yes that's right, we deliver packages from USP and Fed Ex. They trust us with their packages because of our reputation that we are fast and efficient in serving the American people.

The post office is currently understaffing every post office across the country. This causes longer lines, frustrated customers and poor customer service for the American people. This is their way of destroying the postal service. Trying to get it one step closer to privatization. We must fight this fight together. We must protect the sanctity of the US mail. We need to keep America's mail in the hands of federal employees. We need to fight to keep excellent customer service. We need to inform the American people that it is their Postal Office that is under attack.

We must fight this fight together. Help us educate the American people that we need their help to save their post office and the safety of their mail. Let's get the word out we are all in this together. The US mail is not for SALE . . .

Proud steward of Belleville and Area 3 Director MPWU
Robin Ely

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:

Battle Creek	480-481	Ludington	Stevensville
Central MI	498-499	Muskegon	Traverse City
Cheboygan	Gaylord	Roger City	Troy Local
Detroit District	Great Lakes Area	486-487	Western MI
Farmington	Mail Haulers	Sault Ste Marie	
Flint	Jackson	Southwest MI	

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Legislative Report



by Roscoe Woods,
Legislative Director

Elections Have Consequences

Words cannot describe how angry I am as well as how we all should be at this latest attack on us as postal/federal employees.

Any APWU member who cast a ballot for the GOP candidate in November's state and local election has no one but themselves to blame if this pile of steaming crap becomes the law of our land.

- This bill represents a 5.2% increase in retirement contributions with no increase in benefits. Do the math – subtract 5% from your yearly base and think over the course of a career how much you could have saved or what you could have done with that money. For a level 6 Step O that's nearly a \$2,900.00 a year increase in the contribution to your retirement – with no additional increase in your benefit. That's money you could have put toward your TSP, in your kids college fund, towards a car payment . . .

- This bill represents a 12+ % increase in what we currently pay for our health care. It will also remove the contribution levels we currently pay as a negotiating tool for the APWU at the HQ level – so in addition to attacking your paycheck again, this attacks our rights to collectively bargain. Add 12% to your current bi-weekly health plan payment and see what that costs you.

I lay this legislation at the feet of the GOP and all those working people and union members who supported them in November's election.

Those Democrats who couldn't be bothered to show up and vote last November need to take a hard look at what this legislation represents as well.

The GOP has never hidden their anti-worker agenda whether at the Federal or State level and going back to APWU President Bill Burrus and his statements that as soon as the GOP union busters finish with the others they would get to us – well welcome to the future. Kudos to the House Democrats who stood firm (all of them) and Kudos to Justin Amash the House Rep. from the west side of Michigan who broke ranks with the remaining GOP'ers in Michigan and voted no. Thanks as well to the 26 Republicans who supported us and voted no as well.

Sisters and brothers – Elections have

consequences and those short sighted members of the APWU who either voted for the GOP or who sat on their backsides not bothering to vote at all – well look in the mirror when your paycheck gets slashed as a result of this crap piece of legislation; our apathy and our misguided loyalty will only serve to further erode our ability to support ourselves and our families.

We all work way too hard to continue to vote against our ability to earn a living. Elections have consequences and this is only the beginning of the attacks on postal/federal employees.

In Solidarity.

A snapshot of the bill appears below:
House Passes Budget Targeting Postal, Federal Workers

The measure passed 219-208. All but 26 Republicans voted YES; every Democrat voted NO.

In late March the House of Representatives approved a budget bill that targets the earned health and retirement benefits of postal and federal employees. House Concurrent Resolution 27 passed the House by a 219-208 vote. The measure hits Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) contributions, the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). In addition, the budget bill suggests changes to mail frequency and type of delivery.

Pensions: The budget bill proposes to require members of the federal and postal workforce who participate in the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) to make a greater annuity contribution. The budget bill assumes the use of the equal-share proposal embraced in the 2010 National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform (aka Simpson-Bowles Commission); that is, a 6 percent contribution rate by FERS participants. Currently, most FERS participating NAPUS members contribute 0.8 percent towards their annuity.

Retirement Savings: The budget bill proposes to lower the interest rate earned on Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) contributions into the G-Fund. The G-Fund invests in special short-term Treasury securities. Since its inception in 1987, the G Fund has earned an average annualized rate of return of 5.43 percent. The budget proposal would have the effect of reducing the rate of return to about 0.01 percent, according to the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board.

Health Benefits: A perennial cost-cutting proposal has been the replacement of the current Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) contribution formula with a fixed-dollar voucher, adjusted annually to the consumer price index (CPI). Presently, the employer contribution is based upon the weighted average premium of all FEHBP plans. As a result, health care

inflation is taken into account when adjusting employee premium contributions. The net impact of the proposed change would be to shift about \$127 billion over the next decade from the government onto the backs of federal and postal employees and retirees. A second proposal that would impact FEHBP premium contributions is longevity-based retiree health plan contributions. And, finally, the budget proposes that USPS contributions on behalf of its employees be the same level as provided to federal employees. Postmasters already pay the same share of premium as federal employees; so, this proposal would impact postal employees covered by collective-bargaining agreements that provide for a higher contribution level.

Postal Operations: The House budget proposal references the adoption of unspecified changes to the "frequency and type of delivery." It should be assumed that the budget is promoting five-day delivery and a move towards centralized or curbside residential mail delivery.

The Senate is still considering its budget bill, Senate Concurrent Resolution 11. Senate Budget Committee Chair Michael Enzi (R-WY) introduced it. Over 640 amendments to the bill were filed and we expect votes on about one-quarter of them. Significant cuts are assumed in the Senate budget measure and would impact our benefits; however, the legislation did not identify those cuts.

Who Are We Fighting For?

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for postal banking is a demand that helps our members' job security but also could be a godsend to hardworking low-paid struggling families.

We are fighting for the tiny towns that want to keep their post office. The post offices in these communities are about more than mail. They are community centers, playing a major role in the life of these towns.

We are fighting for the communities of every mail processing plant that is slated to close or has already closed. We are fighting to prevent or roll back a devastating blow to their local economy.

This contract fight is about a lot more than wages and working conditions. It is about the future of the Postal Service. And it is about what

kind of values we have as Americans. Will we let the profit-seeking privatizers have their way? Or will we continue to serve every city and every town in all the ways mentioned above.

Figures lie and liars figure. Those who want to destroy Social Security finance studies and reports that the system is in trouble. You wouldn't believe a study that says eating chocolate helps you to lose weight and is good for your teeth, if it was financed by Hershey Corporation. Well there was a headline in *Fortune* recently that read: "Taxpayers Give an \$18 billion Gift to the Post Office Every Year." The headline was based on a "study" by Robert J. Shapiro. Guess who financed the study. UPS.

The fact is, USPS takes not a dime of taxpayer money. The fact is, USPS

turned a profit of over a billion dollars last year on its day-to-day operations. The fact is, there is no reason for any of the cutbacks being implemented or planned for the future. No reason to "relax" service standards. No reason to close mail processing plants. No reason to stop delivering mail on Saturday. No reason to stop door-to-door delivery. No reason to close and/or shorten hours at neighborhood post offices while sending customers to Staples. All of these cutbacks hurt a lot of people. All of these cutbacks are paving the way for the privatization profiteers.

This is a historic contract battle. Who are we fighting for? We're fighting for ourselves, of course. But we're also fighting for just about any random stranger you meet on the street. Because, truly, we are fighting for the American public in its entirety.

A Postal Valentine

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ment Act” into law. Some enhancement! The law mandated that the Service must *pre-fund all of its retiree benefits for the next 75 years*. And pay for it within 10 years. That’s criminally outrageous! No other business or government agency has to pre-fund for even one year, much less seven and a half decades. This adds an unbearable, artificial, government-manufactured debt of more than \$5 billion a year to USPS – accounting for 100 percent of its current “losses.”

3. The “keep the service alive” hoax.

Excuse me, but the only important part of the Service is – hello – its services. Kill off the community facilities and the dedicated workers who deliver, and what’s left of the PO? Nothing – which is precisely why the extremist, anti-public ideologues and corporate profiteers keep chanting their “shrink to survive” mantra. In addition to its PO closure list (which bears the ridiculously Orwellian title of “Retail Access Optimization Initiative”), the postal hierarchy is either contemplating or is already implementing such “shrinkages” as —

- **shutting down about half** of the 487 mail processing centers throughout the country (thus slowing delivery);
- **reducing the hours** of business for more than half of America’s post offices;
- **cutting nearly a third of postal jobs** by the end of this year (the largest reduction in the PO’s 223-year history);
- **eliminating Saturday mail delivery;**
- **corporatizing the marketing** of the most popular and (most profitable) mail products by letting Staples run boutique PO kiosks in its big box stores, staffing them with its poorly paid, minimally trained, non-union workforce.

That’s not a survival plan – it’s a slow-motion mugging. This vital, vibrant national resource has been seized by a band of official ruffians who don’t want it to survive. Cut-by-cut they’re draining the Service’s ability to serve. And if we let them, they will bleed it until there’s no life left – no sense of public mission, no throbbing heart of an energized workforce, no community soul... no customers.

What a contemptible bunch of no-can-do “leaders” they are. What a disgrace they are to the legacy of Ben Franklin, our first Postmaster General (appointed by the Continental Congress in 1775 – prior to the establishment of the USA itself). Franklin not only set up a mail system, he saw it as a tangible expression of the new nation’s inventive, public-spirited, democracy-expanding possibilities. Have we Americans today lost all of that spirit?

Are we now so culturally corporatized that we can no longer imagine the big possibilities that we as a society can team up to build?

No. Although it’s clear that the sluggish sad sacks in charge of America’s marvelous postal framework are eager to surrender it all to corporate plunderers, I’ve found in my travels through grassroots America that We the People want to do the exact opposite. If the eminences in Washington accidentally stumbled upon some workaday folks at a Chat & Chew Cafe, they’d find a powerful commitment to the democratic ethic of “we’re all in

“It takes a movement to advance democracy – and this is a democratic movement that needs and wants you.”

this together,” a yearning to rebuild and expand The Commons, and a rebellious dismay at the obsequious servitude of our national leaders to the corporate few.

Revisiting Valentine

Back in 2011, when the USPS fellow came to tell Valentinians that the shuttering of their branch office was both fiscally necessary and not that big of a deal (after all, he cheerily explained, the station in Marfa is only 36 miles away!), he was met by a packed house of 79854ers. They hadn’t come to talk about the inconvenience of driving to another county for service, but about community:

- “Once the post office goes away,” said one, “we’re just another ghost town. Where we go to get our stamps is not important. It’s our central place.”

- “Where will the community bulletin board be?” asked another. Good question because this community counts on the very lively bulletin board at the post office to learn what’s going on in the area. The out-of-town postal man, growing weary of the challenging questions, answered rather curtly, “That’s up to the community.” Well, thought the locals, if it really was up to us, we’d keep it in our post office.

- Then came the biggie: “What about all those sweethearts who send valentines (here)?” Nothing needs to change, the official assured the crowd, though he conceded that the actual stamping of the Love Station postmark would not be done in Valentine, but would likely shift 223 miles away to the postal processing center in Midland. In short everything would change, including having the global integrity of the Valentine name turned into a big fat marketing fib. But what the hey, exclaimed the clueless USPS spokes-

man: “Who’s to know the difference?” To which one exasperated attendee cried out: “She would!” pointing to the town’s postmaster. Indeed, everyone in the area would know the difference and feel both abused and used by officials who’re so obtuse that they view a town’s post office as nothing but a \$60,000 liability, rather than a physical and emotional force of gravity that pulls a community together. So Valentinians joined a nationwide rebellion against the shutdowns, standing up and speaking out loudly enough that even Washington heard them. In 2012, USPS had to suspend its wholesale closure

that the real path to postal prosperity is to do more, not less. They also make the point that the USPS is uniquely positioned in the marketplace to deliver important but unavailable services people want – for example: low-cost, basic banking services.

Millions of Americans in low-income neighborhoods and rural areas now have no alternative to the Wall Street-backed predatory lenders and check cashing chains that rip them off. In a January report titled “Underbanked and Overcharged,” United for a Fair Economy (UFE) documented that this is a huge market of 68 million adults – more than a fourth of US households. UFE’s report confirms the findings of another study done a year earlier by no less an authority than the US Postal Service’s own Inspector General. It found that the average underserved household is spending some **\$2,400 a year** (nearly 10 percent of their income) on the outlandish fees and usurious interest rates charged by predatory financial stores.

Both the Inspector General and UFE pointed to the obvious solution: **Postal banks**. A third of America’s zip codes have no bank – but all of them have a post office. With 31,000 post offices, USPS is by far the largest retail presence in the country, so the national infrastructure is already there to offer savings accounts, reloadable pre-paid debit cards, access to e-commerce, small loans, and other banking needs at an affordable price. Plus, the postal network is trusted, accessible, and secure, making it one of the few national retail entities that has a positive reputation in these communities.

Expanding into banking makes sense for USPS – in fact, until the banker lobby got Congress to kill the business in 1967, post offices had been offering savings accounts for more than half a century. Even today, the Postal Service provides international money transfers and sells more money orders than any other entity. And postal systems around the world (in Japan, New Zealand, France, Brazil, India, and China, for instance) run very successful postal banks.

Postal banking would help decentralize money, meet a real need, save billions of dollars for America’s struggling families, and enhance and extend the agency’s historic mission of public service. Oh, one more reason to do it: The Inspector General estimates that postal banking can bring nearly \$9 billion in revenue for the USPS.

A Grand Alliance

The post office is not merely a thing, though it is composed of many things – buildings, touch-screen postage machines, delivery trucks, mail boxes, etc. The

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plan, and the doors to the Love Station remain open today in its proper 79854 home (albeit with its hours reduced to six a day, and no Saturday openings).

What the majority of people are making clear in fights like this from coast to coast is that the common good matters more than all of the doctrinaire blather from corporate suites, Wall Street, and Washington about shrinking and privatizing government. The people of our country are not small thinkers. Unlike those in power, their vision and goal is not to have a postal service that can “survive,” but one that can expand and thrive.

Bank on It

At that 2011 meeting in Valentine to tell folks that their iconic post office was a goner, the USPS man blamed it on the office’s declining sales of stamps. Well what the hell, asked a clear-thinking resident, “Why not sell other items to generate revenue?”

The answer: “It’s not legal.” Sadly, congressional leaders and top USPS managers who’ve been directing our postal future have the cutting-edge creativity of a pair of dull scissors. Their entire vocabulary is restricted to variations of “cut, chop, cancel, contract out... corporatize.”

Instead, why not listen to those in the USPS who really know what’s going on, who deal directly with customers, who are not in cahoots with the privatizers, and who see the entrepreneurial possibilities of this phenomenal public asset: The post office workforce. For years, the four major work groups in the USPS (American Postal Workers Union, National Association of Letter Carriers, National Postal Mail Handlers Union, and National Rural Letter Carriers Association) have been pointing out to the system’s aloof powers



by Thomas
Lothamer,
Clerk
Craft Director

Clerk Craft Director's Report

Is It Just A Postmark?

The first thing that comes to mind is April 15th, the most coveted postmark day of the year. For those of us that work the window we all grit our teeth and be as friendly as we can to embrace what is about to become an exhausting day. I have heard of Post Offices that have (had) little postmark parties and turn it into what is (was) a customer appreciation day. That is pretty cool. I have never experienced it myself in 20 years of being an SSA but it is so nice to think of the differences we make in our communities.

So many reductions in our small towns throughout Michigan and throughout the United States. Tiny towns with a 2 hour window operation being ran by a PMR, usually someone who never worked as a clerk in a small office for a decade or more. Who doesn't pay dues to a Union. A town so small without the

Post Office's existence would not be incorporated or show up on a map.

Four hour, 6 hour operation and level 18's have dropped in their number of full time assignments. Level 20 staffing is half or more in some offices than it was 10 years ago.

We have closed down plants, divided local membership of Unions. Our path for a defense is ever evolving; it appears that those of us today may be the last of our kind. A historical figure of our Country's great strength once upon a time.

Our business is shrinking which is taking its toll on our structure as a Union. We could be a stronger voice with more membership. I find it disappointing that there aren't more people willing to "invest" in the Union. The only real voice we have as people on the floor and a couple of bucks and lack of involvement and there it is, the

business making all these decisions, plant consolidations, office hour reductions. Look how hard they are pushing the online postage. Does that postmark matter? The Inspection service says it does, what I am to understand by them is it can be corrected with a zero PVI but if it continues then online privileges for printing postage should be reported and consequently revoked.

Managers however in an effort to give the company away ignore the fact that the information is incorrect, an acceptance scan is all they want; after all, we are all about the scanning business but service is the worst it has ever been. There is no accountability for actions, the customer prints what they want when they want, and the company gets something even if it is horrendously erroneous.

We have outsourced our business to anyone with a printer and a credit card.

For years we have had to abide by the rules and security surrounding a killer bar, round dater, a postmark. We have done so with good reason but online postage isn't treated with the same sanctity that we honorably uphold.

The fight continues to save our jobs as best as possible, to keep our offices large and small, to keep our processing plants going but the company has such an indifference to such a goal. Let's give the store away, reduce service standards, eliminate positions and destroy the very fiber of our country. I can't help but think it is like telling an American they can't fly the U.S. flag when they take the attitude you can't have your little Post Office anymore, you can't have your service and mail standards you once had, how have they done this in one small but very effective way? Made the Postmark insignificant. What difference does it make to them? After all, it's just a Postmark.

Area 4 Director

Your Rights As A NTFT

by Angelynn Gebstadt,
Area 4 Director

NTFT's – in the AO's a new contractual animal:

It may seem a little late to be talking xmas – or a little early for that matter – but as we are still dealing with issues from that time frame in Area 4 – lets go there. I'm speaking mainly to the non-timeclock office – but the same rules apply to every NTFT.

As a NTFT in an AO, do you know what your rights are?? I'm going to go with **NO** as I didn't hear from anyone of you when management shorted your pay check in December and January.

So let's fix that. As a NTFT you are entitled to the following:

8 hours of Holiday pay on each Holiday – yes even if you normally would 6.5 hours a day Management is still required to pay you for 8 hours.

You are guaranteed to be worked/paid for the time listed on your bid (read that the start/end times listed on the letter making you a NTFT) – so when they closed your PO on Xmas Eve and New Year's Eve at 1 PM or so and you normally worked until 4pm – management either had to move your start time earlier the previous Wednesday so that

you put in 6.5 hours or they had to pay you from the time the office was closed until you normally would have left. Yes I know you could have taken annual leave – but why as they have to work or pay you.

Out of Schedule Overtime. Well it's pretty much what it says. Any time out of your bid schedule is going to be paid an addition ½ time. For example, you normally start at 9am. Management brings you in at 8:45. You will be paid the straight time for the 15 minutes from 8:45am to 9am and then a 50% or half time because it was outside your schedule.

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post office is also an idea, an important concept and a mechanism for making real our people's Big Ideal of a democratic, egalitarian, one-out-of-many society.

It's this idealism, this inherently public nature of the postal service, that is the heart of its appeal and its significance – and it is the only thing that will save the service from being shrunk to just another corporate profit center by Congress and top USPS officials.

Overtime – easily confused with out of schedule OT. Management schedules you for overtime before or after your normal shift.

Penalty Overtime. You are paid double time for any time worked over 10 hours. This normally occurs when management pulls you in to the APO early in the morning and then sends you back to your office at your normal time.

Night Differential. When management pulled you into the APO at 5am they owed you 1 hour of night differential. Night differential is paid for hours worked between 6 PM and 6 AM.

Travel and Mileage. When you were pulled into the APO and then sent directly back to your Post Office to open – that time should have been on the clock and – if you used your own car you should have been paid mileage.

Several of you have heard from me on this subject for payment of the necessary back pay and we have supposedly straightened out your Postmasters on these issues . . . HOWEVER – I do not receive your paycheck stub – you do. It is on you – now that you know the rules to make sure you are being paid what you are due – if you see something you think is incorrect – call me and I will get into it.

A Postal Valentine

Just over a year ago, Mark Dimondstein, the fiery, newly elected president of the American Postal Workers Union, roused his members with a populist call to action. "Writing to Congress is not enough," he declared. "Lobbying is not enough. History shows that only movements move Congress. We in labor must build a grand alliance with low-wage workers, retirees, civil rights organizations, women's groups, rural communities, Occupy, veterans, family farmers, faith leaders, seniors, small business and

other allies to restore the primacy of the public good – including the right to a vibrant, expanding public postal service." Sure enough, last month, more than 60 national people's groups joined with APWU to launch a remarkable grassroots campaign: "A Grand Alliance to Save Our Postal Service." It takes a movement to advance democracy – and this is a democratic movement that needs and wants you: AGrandAlliance.org.

— reprinted from the
Hightower Lowdown



by John P. Smeekens,
Veterans
Director

Veterans' Report

Memorial Day

Memorial Day is the day we set aside, to honor and remember our Veterans who have made the Ultimate Sacrifice. Please take a moment to bow your head in honored respect for those heroes. They kept this country free, and gave us the ultimate freedom to pursue the lifestyles and choices that we have chosen. Many of those freedoms were earned with Blood, Sweat, and Tears. I know it's the start of summer, and with thoughts of your upcoming vacations, family reunions, graduations, golf, pool parties, cook outs, etc., please try to set aside a minute with your family, with your friends, or by yourself, to bow your head in honored reverence and silence and say a prayer, or whatever you do, for those special Men & Women who made the Ultimate Sacrifice for all of us. Have a great summer! And if you receive this AFTER Memorial Day, I apologize. It was my error in not getting it in sooner.

New at the VA

Effective March 24th, 2015, the VA has implemented a process to make it easier for you to apply for benefits.

Online application tools, standardized forms, and a new intent to file process will create faster and more accurate decisions on your claims and appeals. As part of the VA's full-scale transformation in 2015, the new changes will; #1-Streamline the benefits process, making it faster and easier, #2-Use standardized forms to file disability claims and compensation appeals, #3-Establish a new intent to file a claim process.

Net Worth Eliminated

Currently, the VA combines a veteran's income and assets when making income-based eligibility determinations for health care benefits and co-payment obligations. Effective 2015, VA will only consider a veteran's gross household income and deductible expenses from the previous year when making such determinations. This change will expand health care access to low-income veterans and reduce out-of-pocket costs for thousands of veterans. VA estimates that 190,000 veterans will become eligible for reduced health care costs over the next five years. To read more about this change, visit: <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2684>

Phone Scam #1

VA officials want to warn Veterans about a new phone scam that's mak-

ing its rounds across the nation. In the scam, the caller will claim to be from the VA, and that the Veterans doctor wants to change their medication. They will then ask for personal information such as Medicare details and social security numbers. **Don't do it!!!** Get the caller's name and the Doctor's name, tell them to mail you the information, or tell them you'll be there tomorrow, now wait for the CLICK!!!

Phone Scam #2

Another group of con artists are currently contacting Veterans stating that the Veteran missed jury duty and now the Veteran must pay a fine ranging from \$500 - \$1000. Here's how the scam works. The thieves are posing as police officers from the neighborhood or city where the Veteran resides, and the thieves are using real badge numbers, and real police officer names from the police force in the Veteran's city. If the Veteran refuses to pay, the thieves threaten to stop disability payments or threaten to have the Veteran's wages garnished.

Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015

H.R.313 Entitles any federal employee who is a veteran with a service-connected disability rated at 30% or more, during the 12-month period beginning on the first day

of employment, to up to 104 hours of leave, without loss or reduction in pay, for purposes of undergoing medical treatment for such disability for which sick leave could regularly be used. It requires the forfeiture of any such leave that is not used during such 12-month period. Please contact your Representatives and ask them to Support this Bill. So far Mr. Levin is on board!!!

Golden Age Games

This year's National Golden Age Games will take place in Omaha, Neb., from August 8 to August 12, 2015. Competitive events include air rifle, badminton, bowling, cycling, dominoes, track and field, golf, horseshoes, nine ball, shuffleboard, swimming, and table tennis. VA will be accepting applications through May 15, 2015. To learn more about this event, please visit: www.veterans-goldenagegames.va.gov

Mr. Spock

Leonard Nimoy was born in 1931 in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1953, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He was assigned to Fort Ord, California, Fort Benning, Georgia, and spent much of his time at Ft. McPherson in Georgia. Leonard was discharged in 1955 as a technician 3rd grade, which was equivalent to the WWII-era rank of staff sergeant.

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by Michael O'Hearn,
National
Business Agent

NBA Report

Untimeliness, Ugh!

In the last few months, I had three removals that I presented in arbitration that were all untimely filed at Step 1. This is very discouraging. You have to fight this issue before the merits of the grievance can be addressed. Untimeliness can kill your grievance before you can argue the rest of your case. We can lose the grievance just on the fact that the grievance was not filed on time. This will be heartbreaking for our members who are fired without getting to tell their side of the story to the Arbitrator. Whenever I teach a basic Stewards class, I always emphasize that you must hit your time limits. Yet, I still see many grievances not filed on time at Step 1. Therefore, I am going to give some suggestions to help with filing timely grievances.

First, we need to educate our members about time limits in the grievance procedure. You as the Steward may know that a grievance

must be filed within 14 days of the incident, but do your members know this? I suggest that every Union bulletin board have a notice posted on it stating in big bold letters "**Important Notice! All grievances must be filed within 14 days of the date of the cause of the grievance. Your Steward has 14 days, not you. Contact your Steward immediately when something happens that you wish to grieve. If you wait, your grievance will be fatally flawed and withdrawn from the procedure.**" You can add additional information like Stewards' names and contact information. Also, Stewards should be talking to their members about time limits for grievances regularly so the membership becomes well informed about this issue. At Union meetings every so often make an announcement about the time limits for grievances. If you have a Local newsletter, put in there an article about grievance time limits. All this should help get the word out there to the members about being

timely in contacting their stewards.

Another thing to watch at the work site is attendance problems. Stewards and coworkers should watch out for their fellow members. A Union should be about helping each other. If you notice someone is not reporting to work say something to the Steward or Management. The Steward should ask Management where is this person? Have you fired them? If they get coy with you and do not give you a satisfactory answer, put in a formal written request for information. In the request, ask for a copy of any discipline or discharge issued to the grievant and all information relied upon to issue the discipline. Ask for this information immediately. In many of the removals I am seeing that are untimely, the members just stop coming to work. Then, after a few weeks, Management sends them a letter asking them to document their absence. When the members does not response to this, as often happens,

Management sends another letter setting up a pre-disciplinary interview. When the members do not respond to this, Management fires them. All this takes time. As a Steward you should be talking to Management and insisting that they tell you what is happening with this member. Again, put in a request for information if Management resists your attempt to represent this member. These efforts could save your Union brothers or sisters their jobs. If you know the member is fired, file a grievance immediately, even if you have trouble contacting the member. This will protect the timeliness of the grievance and buy you some time. You can always expand or improve your grievance at Step 2 after you get in touch with the grievant. I am a firm believer in the old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Therefore, take some early steps to ensure that grievances are filed timely. It will be a lot easier than trying to fix an untimely grievance.

The Drive To Privatize USPS And Social Security

by Nora Mendez

Social Security is the nation's most successful anti-poverty program and it remains a fundamental pillar of the American economy. For 78 years Social Security has succeeded in keeping millions of senior citizens, widows and disabled out of poverty. And it has a surplus today of \$2.8 trillion.

The USPS is America's most trusted government agency and the backbone of a trillion dollar industry. It is the second largest civilian employer in the country and has been the gateway into the middle class for thousands of postal workers and their families. The USPS generates \$67 billion in revenue a year. Had it not been for the ridiculous pre-funding requirements, USPS would be in the black.

Yet despite the importance of both agencies to the people and economy of the country, both administrations are closing offices and degrading services.

The SSA has cut 11,000 front line, direct service employees since 2011, closed 80 field offices and vowed to cut essential services at the remaining office locations. In the future, the 43 million Americans who visit community offices annually would instead be required to go online.

The USPS has "consolidated" hundreds of mail sorting facilities. It has closed stations in communities, reduced hours in thousands of post offices, and sold off historic public buildings. It has been trying for years to cut down delivery days.

Make no mistake about it, the proposed deep cuts in public service workers' pensions, jobs and benefits is what anti-union zealots have been proposing for decades. The roots of the efforts to attack Social Security and America's Postal Service run deep in the far right. Billionaires like the Koch brothers, Pete Peterson, the CEO of FedEx, Frederick W Smith and others are spending huge amounts of money funding right-wing think tanks that actively advocate the privatization of these agencies. As part of this campaign, an enormous amount of misinformation is floating around.

"We will champion efforts to strengthen Social Security and undo the damage already suffered by opening shuttered field offices, restoring all services, ending long wait times, and hiring all the

staff needed to meet the mission," said AFGE (American Federation of Government Employees) President J. David Cox, who represents SSA workers.

"We have a common struggle and a fight against privatization of public services," said APWU President Mark Dimondstein. "Social Security and Medicare are constantly in the crosshairs of budget cutters. Everything that stands for public good – public libraries, schools, utilities, transportation and postal services – are under severe attack, as are public sector workers and our unions."

We must fight to preserve these public services and protect the stable union workforces who provide them.

— a PPA reprint



by Linda Turney,
National
Business Agent

Turney at the Table

Article 15.2.Step 2 (d)

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

I was arbitrating recently in Grand Rapids MI where management claimed the Union did not fully disclose information into the grievance procedure at Step 2. Management asserted at the hearing that the Union failed to disclose supportive documentation at Step 2 in the grievance procedure. Arbitrator Doyle was clear in his award stating that:

"A failure to disclose at lower steps of the grievance procedure may properly be fatal to a claim for the very reason that it is only through disclosure that the grievance machinery can effectively and timely resolve disputes."

Testimony of our Union Steward John Hansma showed that management in the Step 2 meeting curtailed the initial meeting suggesting that the manager could resolve the situation. John testified he made attempts to meet again with management. John could not establish another meeting or get a denial until his time limits were almost up. John testified that he sent the information to Step 3. John did a great job as a steward. He attempted to fully disclose all of his documents and arguments at Step 2. When he could not, he sent the documents to both Union Step 3 and Management Step 3 (Tampa) in a timely manner.

Article 15.2.Step 2. (d) is clear:

At the meeting the Union representative shall make a full and detailed statement of facts relied upon, contractual provisions involved, and remedy sought. The Union representative may also furnish written statements from

witnesses or other individuals. The Employer representative shall also make a full and detailed statement of facts and contractual provisions relied upon. The parties' representatives shall cooperate fully in the effort to develop all necessary facts, including the exchange of copies of all relevant papers or documents in accordance with Article 31. The parties' representatives may mutually agree to jointly interview witnesses where desirable to assure full development of all facts and contentions. In addition, in cases involving discharge either party shall have the right to present no more than two witnesses. Such right shall not preclude the parties from jointly agree-

ing to interview additional witnesses as provided above.

The Union must disclose our arguments and documents at Step 2 or face an arbitrator who would squash our argument and not allow our documents into arbitration. Management also must disclose all of their arguments to the Union as well. Please disclose your arguments to management at Step 2 of the grievance procedure. Send your documents to Tampa at Step 3. If your case is not fully developed and you need more time, ask for an extension and get that in writing. We won the overtime case in Grand Rapids on the merits and

documents that were not presented at Step 2. They were accepted into the record because our steward had a good explanation for not disclosing at Step 2, so we were able to fully present our overtime documents and case without disclosure at Step 2.

Disclose your arguments and documents at Step 2. Send all of the documents to the USPS in Tampa with proof of receipt. This will assure there will not be a procedural fatal flaw and we may proceed to arbitration on the merits of your case.

I look forward to seeing you in June at the Michigan state conference.

Veterans' Report

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During his Army career, Leonard worked with the Army's Special Services branch, where he wrote, narrated and emceed shows. He also played a soldier in a film produced by the U.S. Navy on Combat Psychiatry during the Korean War. After leaving the Army, Leonard became a successful actor, best known for his role as Spock in Star Trek. Leonard Nimoy, recently passed away at the age of 83.

We honor his service. He lived long and prospered.

S.A.N.G. Deployment

Recently, in April, 350 airmen, and 12 of their A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft, from the 127th Wing at Selfridge Air National Guard base, located in Harrison Township, were deployed to South West Asia, to help combat operations in their fight

against the terrorist group called ISIS. The deployment is scheduled to last for 6 months. Let's all hope and pray that it will not be extended. Any time away from your loved ones, is hard!

Included in the deployment are units from the 107th Fighter Squadron, the 127th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, the 127th Maintenance Squadron, and the 127th Operations Squadron. This is one of the longest large scale deployments since the Kandahar Afghanistan deployment of late 2011 into early 2012. Plans for later this year are to include a deployment of Air personnel, along with the KC-135 Stratotanker. Let's keep these Military personnel in our thoughts and prayers for a safe tour and quick return!

Were You Aware?

On Sunday May 10, 2015 "Moth-

ers Day," there were 5 status changes made on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC in regards to MIA's. When the remains of an MIA are recovered and identified, changes are made to The Wall. As an MIA, their name was inscribed on The Wall, when it was dedicated, a long time ago. When a service member is designated as an MIA, next to their name is a Cross symbol. Once their remains are returned and identified, the symbol is changed to a Diamond. The Diamond denotes that the service member's death was confirmed. Here is an amazing fact not known by very many. If a man returns alive, a Circle will be inscribed around the Cross, representing a symbol of life. **No such cases have occurred.** Presently there are 1,629 service members who remain unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

An Expanding Postal Service Is Possible

by *Ralph Nader*

The ongoing, preventable plight of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is an important issue for those of us who have observed its steady decline over the last several years due to unimaginative management, huge prepayment obligations imposed by Congress, and a deck stacked to favor corporate rivals such as FedEx and UPS. The historic institution, created by Benjamin Franklin, has cut thousands of jobs: There are 220,000 fewer postal workers now than there were just over a decade ago. In addition, postal rates have been raised, and services have been cut or scaled back.

The USPS reported a \$5.5-billion loss in 2014, out of \$67.8 billion in revenues. Some critics argue that the postal service has become antiquated in the modern age of instantaneous email, and that its services should be corporatized. Despite setbacks and unnecessary fiscal burdens, however, the USPS still reliably delivers over 150 billion pieces of mail a year, at

uniform rates, regardless of whether or not the area is deemed profitable for deliveries. The corporate mailers cannot make the same claim. The USPS has impressively not taken any

“The USPS has not taken taxpayer money since 1971, a feat not achieved by many subsidized or bailed out big corporations.”

taxpayer money since 1971, a feat not achieved by many subsidized or bailed-out big corporations.

The postal service has suffered from a severe lack of broad thinking and imaginative leadership. Recently retired Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe sought to fix the USPS's declining business by proposing shutting down rural post offices, reducing hours, slashing an additional 150,000 jobs, ending Saturday delivery and door-to-door delivery, and extending delivery times into the evening. Through these actions, Donahoe aided the postal service's spiral of decline

by slashing away once-steady and reliable services and fair costs instead of seeking bold, transformative new strategies to bring in new revenue and maintain the postal service's

vital utility and relevance for future generations.

Subtracting the prefunding requirements from the USPS, it would have been in the black by \$1.9 billion in 2014 — the second year in a row of revenue growth.

Mr. Donahoe's replacement, Megan Brennan, will be the first woman to serve as Postmaster General. Here are a few questions and concerns for the new postmaster general to consider as she begins her historic tenure:

- Where does she stand on the congressional mandate that required USPS to pay out \$103.7 billion by 2016 to cover future health benefits of postal retirees for the next 75 years? No other government or private corporation has to meet such an absurd financial burden. It is the primary reason for much of the USPS's financial woes.

- How does she feel about reinstating the successful Postal Savings System (which bank lobbyists forced into cessation in 1968) for simple savings accounts? There are tens of millions of unbanked Americans, whom the banks do not want, who could use postal banking.

- What about other sources of revenue? Establishing an honest notary service, cashing most checks, selling fishing and hunting licenses, wrapping holiday gifts, and accepting wine or beer for delivery are just a few congressionally prohibited proposals that have been put forward by postal activists and watchdogs.

- What of improving the USPS's

use of the Internet, even so far as providing affordable broadband and email services?

Recently 64 organizations, led by the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), came together in what is being called the Grand Alliance to Save Our Public Postal Service. (Check out the finely produced video featuring actor Danny Glover, who comes from a family of postal workers, discussing the new alliance to save and expand the Postal Service.)

The alliance is advocating for increased services, including the aforementioned postal banking service.

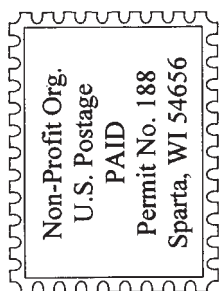
“Building the grand alliance is the only way we will ensure that a vibrant, public Postal Service exists for many years to come,” said APWU President Mark Dimondstein.

Too many members of Congress lack understanding and appreciation of the USPS as a vital public service. Privatization advocates in Washington, D.C. — most of whom don't use the USPS — obscure our postal system's defining mission: “to bind the nation together” with universal service.

There are numerous compelling reasons to save the Postal Service from further degradation. It's one of the largest employers of veterans and minorities in the United States while also offering fair wages and benefits. Having a letter carrier walk all neighborhoods each day can be both a deterrent to crime and also an important safety protocol; there are many examples of elderly or infirm people in trouble being discovered and aided by their letter carrier. And the USPS is never going to redline your neighborhood or threaten to move overseas.

For more information on the Grand Alliance to Save Our Public Postal Service, and for information on how you can get involved, visit agrandalliance.org.

— reprinted from *Huffington Post*



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