

RAZORBACK SCHEME

Newsletter for Fayetteville, Arkansas, APWU Local #667

September 2009

OKLAHOMA SENATOR KILLS SICK LEAVE BILL

Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK) killed an amendment July 22, 2009, to a Defense authorization which included FERS sick leave credit for postal workers upon retirement. The amendment would have allowed sick leave cash-back to employees when retiring – same as CSRS employees (those hired prior to 1984).

Sen. Coburn stated: "We've institutionalized sick leave. We've made it an entitlement," he said, criticizing the expansion of benefits for employees he said already are paid better, enjoy better benefits and have more job security than most taxpayers.

Given the senator's loud objection to sick-leave payback, his benefits and life-long pension are inconsistent with his rhetoric.

Oklahoma postal workers should keep in mind Sen. Coburn's actions.

WOLF at the DOOR

No Drill This Time

By Loren Adams, Editor & Arkansas APWU VP, Dist. 6

You've probably heard this warning many times before. But this time it seems for-real: "The wolf is at the door." However, the important question now becomes: "What are we going to do about it?"

For decades a sizable portion of the workforce failed to see the big picture. So, they voted against their interests in favor of heart-throb issues that never materialized once the anti-labor politicians came to power, evidence it was a con-job from the start.

Nevertheless, workers voted against themselves, thus we all suffer.

Now we see the results. It may be a long time between planting season and harvest, but now we're at the reaping and weeping stage. Not only has poor politics played a role, but the Internet and other technologies have cut into the Postal Service's bottom line. The wolf has been knocking at labor's door for years – excessing, not replacing employees as they retire, closings, and paycheck insecurity – but now he's huffing and puffing and ready to blow our house down. A \$7-billion loss in one year is nothing to sneeze at.

In coming negotiations, starting October 2010, management will be asking for "give-backs" similar to what automakers and other industrial unions in the private sector have been forced into. They will be asking for elimination of the no-layoff clause and other benefits taken for granted all these years. Also, management wants to go after retiree benefits & incomes; so you're no longer safe just being retired. Do you hear the wolf knocking?

Like the banking cartel bailed out for almost a trillion by taxpayers, USPS execs have made ridiculous errors in judgment. Examples: (1) Relocation costs estimated at \$29 million in 2008; why continue the program? (2) Postmasters and managers are detailed to other locations on a routine basis, which costs the business untold millions per year in expensive housing, travel and per diem; why do postmasters and managers have to be relocated away from their domicile so often? (3) Mailers are offered discounts by the millions for bundling & banding mail that, when received in processing centers, must be un-banded and un-strapped to be properly processed; why are these counterproductive measures being awarded? Politics? (4) Bonuses (incentive awards) were still being handed out after it was known the Postal Service was deep in the red. Only recently was the program discontinued – after realizing they'd soon be begging Congress.

Five-day delivery is expected by March 2010 – which, incidentally, Congress hasn't approved and has actually voiced its opposition. Regardless, postal execs are laying the groundwork. Postal centers and branches are being closed all over the country. Johnson supposedly has avoided the ax this round, but who knows what's next?

Every challenge supposedly opens up an opportunity. The Union's "opportunity" now is to further unite, strengthen our ties, streamline organization, and prepare for change. Now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of their Union. We need strong, reliable, and credible leadership to meet expected challenges which will give birth to an uncertain future.

SWINE FLU

What You Can Do to Stay Healthy

The following is from the CDC website. The Postal Service has issued guidelines, but because of limited time and fewer & fewer employees, many are unaware and unprepared.

Several containers of disinfectant lotion have been distributed throughout the Plant for employees to clean hands often. Hopefully, other facilities will follow suit. The "attendance policy" is strict and unforgiving in recent months due to attempted accelerated attrition. However, Swine Flu is a life or death matter and should be taken seriously. If you suffer from symptoms, see a doctor and get appropriate documentation. Below are the CDC's official guidelines:

Stay informed. This website will be updated regularly as information becomes available.

Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.

Take everyday actions to stay healthy.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

Stay home if you get sick. CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

Follow public health advice regarding school closures, avoiding crowds and other social distancing measures.

Find healthy ways to deal with stress and anxiety.

Call 1-800-CDC-INFO for more information

VER INCENTIVE AWARD

(From APWU National website): APWU-represented employees who retire or separate on or before Nov. 30, 2009, will receive a monetary incentive of \$15,000, in accordance with an agreement negotiated by the union. The incentive will be paid in two installments to eligible employees.

The incentive will be offered to eligible career full-time employees who terminate their service through regular retirement, Voluntary Early Retirement, or voluntary separation. (Eligible PTR and PTF employees will receive proportional percentages of the incentive.)

To qualify for regular retirement, employees must have at least 30 years of service and be age 55; must have at least 20 years of service and be age 60, or must have at least five years of service and be age 62.

To qualify for early retirement, employees must have at least 20 years of service and be 50 years of age or must have 25 years of service at any age. (The annuity is reduced for employees covered by the Civil Service Retirement System [CSRS] by 2 percent for each year employees are under age 55.)

Employees who do not qualify for regular or early retirement but wish to receive the incentive may resign.

There will be a \$10,000 payment to eligible full-time employees who terminate their service through regular retirement, Voluntary Early Retirement, or voluntary separation, to be paid as soon as administratively possible, but no later than two pay periods after separation;

Each full-time employee who terminates employment also will receive a \$5,000 payment on Oct. 29, 2010.

QUESTIONS ASKED:

Many are asking, "What will be my monthly income if I accept the offer?"

First, for an "official" number, the employee must contact the various government offices (TSP, USPS Accounting Services, OPM, and Social Security Administration) and then personally combine the figures to come up with an estimated monthly income.

FERS RETIREMENT

Employees covered by FERS do not have a penalty like the CSRS covered employees. A FERS annuity is calculated using the high-3 average salary x 1% x number of years of service. (If age 62 or older when retiring, a factor of 1.1% is used instead of the 1%.)

A FERS employee's Social Security benefit will be based on his/her earnings under SS at age of 62. The Social Security Administration sends benefit statements every year that lists the current benefit. The SSA should be contacted to answer questions regarding benefits.

TSP (Thrift Savings Plan) is separate from the OPM annuity. TSP.gov website offers options on how to withdraw monies, be it a monthly payment, a lump sum or purchase of a lifetime annuity.

Under FERS, the year of birth determines the MRA (Minimum Retirement Age). In order to receive the retiree annuity supplement, an annuitant must have met the qualifications for retirement. When the annuitant reaches their MRA, then a FERS annuitant will receive the annuity supplement until reaching age 62. The supplement is roughly the number of years of service divided by 40 multiplied by the estimated benefit from Social Security. Again, that SSA benefit statement comes in handy. If you do not have yours, you should contact their SSA office.

Only the USPS and OPM service history database has the exact information. If you are eligible, you should have received an annuity estimate from the USPS Accounting Services. It's important to do your own research before filling out their paperwork. In the end, it is your own decision whether or not to take the VERA.

CSRS RETIREMENT

As in FERS, if the employee is eligible for retirement, he/she should have received an annuity estimate from the USPS Accounting Services.

Here is the formula used in calculating a CSRS annuity:

1.50% x High-3 Average Salary x 5 (years 1-5)

1.75% x High-3 Average Salary x 5 (years 6-10)

2% x High-3 Average Salary x number of years over 10

TSP is separate from the annuity. Employees should contact www.tsp.gov for information on withdrawing their monies.

Also something that should be considered – If you had LWOP hours that exceeded 6 months in a calendar year, that year will be affected by the pro-ration factor. In other words, you will not get full credit for that year. The pro-ration factor affects both CSRS and FERS covered employees.

Employees considering going out should make sure they understand their retirement system. The Administrative Chapters of the Handbook and Manuals on the OPM.gov website covers the components of both CSRS and FERS.

KARA McCONNELL – PRAIRIE GROVE CLERK

Kara McConnell, one of our Local Union members, was diagnosed with a renal cell carcinoma (kidney cancer) a few

months back. Since then, Kara had a craniotomy (to remove a brain tumor) at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. A second trip was taken back to Minnesota for the kidney surgery. On July 16, Dr. Chow took Kara's kidney out. It took them a few days, but the pathology finally came on Tuesday, July 21. Dr. Chow informed Kara that it was definitely a high grade, renal cell carcinoma.

Unfortunately, insurance fails to cover all her expenses and support for the family. Her income has essentially evaporated.

Friends & family have set up a special account for Kara. It's called Karing 4 Kara.

Donations may be sent [written out to Kara McConnell] to:

Arvest Bank – Prairie Grove
P.O. Box 207
Prairie Grove, AR 72753

The account # is: 22808798.

Website is:

<http://karing4kara.blogspot.com/2009/08/update-from-kara.html>

We encourage all postal workers to contribute. Thank you.

CARL DeMOSS

Carl passed away Saturday, September 5 and is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Siloam Springs.

Carl was a good friend to all. We became acquainted in 1962 when our family moved to Siloam from out West. Always a good sport, he loved attaching nicknames to fellow workers whom he admired. He was such a pleasure to know and be with. We will always cherish his memory.

NEXT UNION MEETING:

Sunday, September 20, 1 pm
Jim's Razorback Pizza, Fayetteville

Local President Writes...

Dear Members,

It has been a pleasure and a great honor to serve as your president this year. This is a daunting task and one that I do not take lightly. I have tried to do a good job but I know that it is impossible to make everyone happy.

I have not accomplished everything that I wanted to, because as usual I am too ambitious. I want to get our office and files better organized, but there are not enough hours in a day and I still have not learned how to live without sleep (after all this practice!).

Nest month's meeting will be time to nominate officers again. I would be happy to serve as your president for another year if that is in the cards. I'm sure there are many who are better qualified than I, but the most important qualification seems to be the willingness to do the job. Experience is a great teacher and I have learned a lot this year.

I know that the economic climate and the state of the Postal Service are on everyone's mind. We should all be very grateful for our jobs at this time. The job security and benefits that we enjoy are due entirely to our union. Our contract will be up for negotiation again next year. Don't forget that your union needs your support during these critical times.

Pam Beck