

Razorback Scheme

American Postal Workers Union • Northwest Arkansas Area Local

May-June 2023

From the President

Changes Are Coming!

Keep Yourself Informed! Log onto APWU.org

by Ike Mills

Well, there is so much going on, it is hard to know where to begin — but here we go. On April 25, 2023 the APWU posted on the website two new fact sheets concerning the **Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB)** plans which is a new program in the FEHB to comply with the PSRA passed in 2022. It is important that you all take the time to log into APWU.org and educate yourselves on these upcoming changes that affect your health benefits as you prepare for retirement or if you are already there – how these changes affect your options.

Another issue is one we discussed at the last Union meeting and that is the **“Delivering for America Plan”** and the many rumors circulating around the possibilities that could affect our offices with these changes. With the absence of any official documentation from management, it is hard to even discuss any possible changes contractually. As we are made aware of any changes, we will pass those on to you. All I can recommend is log onto the APWU website often and keep yourselves informed.



Nancy Sramek Retires!

Photo left to right is Local President Ike Mills and Nancy Sramek, Local Safety Representative for 15+ years. Nancy is a wonderful friend to the Union and has been a joy to work with. She will be greatly missed.

(Photo taken at May 7th, 2023 Local Meeting.)

The *RAZORBACK SCHEME* is the official voice of the Northwest Arkansas Area Local of the APWU – AFL-CIO. However, opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individual writers and not necessarily those of the APWU, Local, officials or Editor. Articles, artwork, cartoons and/or other material are solicited from member readers who wish to share their views. Although freedom of the press is recognized, contributors are exhorted not to submit derogatory material about any fellow union member or to submit any false or unsubstantiated allegation concerning management or any other individual inside or outside this organization. All letters must be signed (if hard-copied) or emailed via an identifiable, recognized screen name and are requested to have been received by the Editor ten (2) days prior to the announced publication date. Names will be withheld upon request. Send submissions to *RAZORBACK SCHEME*, P.O. Box 654, Fayetteville AR 72702; or email to Editor's screen name listed below or on website. Submissions may be returned upon request.

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 Maintenance Alternate Greg Green

Springdale Steward Shelden Harrop
 Rogers Steward vacant
 Siloam Springs Steward Darrell Barnes

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NEXT UNION MEETING:

Sunday, June 11, 2023 – 1:00 pm
 Foghorn's, 1100 48th Place, Springdale AR
 NW Arkansas Area Local – 2300 S City Lake Rd
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What's the Importance of Being a Postal Worker?


By Loren Adams • Editor

Becoming a postal worker is an accomplishment within itself. If we recall, it wasn't easy getting in... and for good reason. Being a postal worker means holding one of the most rewarding and prestigious jobs in the world. A lot of times, we forget this. We take for granted that which should be treasured.

Being a postal worker (since we're part of a unionized workforce) means the following:

- **Excellent Income**
- **A+ Health Benefits**
- **Union Representation & Protections**
- **Sick Leave**
- **Insurances of all kinds**
- **Vacation Pay (Annual Leave)**
- **Thrift Savings Plan**
- **Excellent Retirement & Senior Benefits**
- **Ability to Buy a Home**
- **Ability to Pay for Kids' College**
- **Ability to Buy Cars & Vehicles**

So, let's show our gratitude by doing our work with a sense of healthy pride, showing up for work, treating one another with respect & kindness, and putting in a full day's work for a full day's pay. Count your blessings and your sense of thankfulness will make your days go better.



UNION MEETING!

Sun., June 11th, 2023, 1 p.m.

Foghorn's Restaurant
1100 48th Place, Springdale
 (Take Exit 72 off I-49, turn east 1 block to 48th St signal light, turn L to Foghorn's.)

You could win \$50+ door prize!

2023 Spring State & Tri-State Conventions

by Barney Barnes, Siloam Springs Steward

Once again, you folks have allowed me the privilege of going to these APWU conventions. Thank you.

I also had the privilege of serving on the Publication Committee with Loren, Bernie and John. As some of you know, Loren is the Editor of our paper. Bernie and John are two relatively new members from the Mena area. Neither one is a steward or union officer, but both were interested in becoming one. I really hope they stick with it, because they both came across as sharp individuals and would both be great assets to the USPS and the APWU.

The Publication Committee decided to make a few changes to the state's union paper, but rather than tell you what they are, I'll let you discover them on your own. (Yes, this means you'll need to read the paper.)

Another committee brought up something that I was personally unaware of. (I've been lucky enough to avoid this problem in my 28 years with the P.O.). The Resolution Committee brought up the fact that, if you are injured on the job, OWCP time-off of work is not like Annual Leave or Sick Leave.

It does not count as "work time" and with enough OWCP time-off, you will lose your FMLA eligibility and status. We hope to find a way to change this in coming contracts, but for now – everyone needs to be aware of this loop hole the Post Office (and other outfits) can use to take away your FMLA protections.

Just remember – **Rule #1:** You have to come to work, on time, to keep your job (ELM #511.43 & 665.43).

If you are late or absent enough times, management can (and will) fire you.

Also, read your 3971s closely. If your leave is denied and charged to AWOL, tell your Union rep and grieve it immediately.

The Union is here to protect our Contract and by doing so, to protect YOU.

P.S. – If you are called in for discipline, you, the employee, must say that you want a steward at the meeting. However, management must get the steward for the meeting, not the employee.



PHOTO: Kaylynn Mills at 2023 APWU Tri-State Convention, March 17, 2023, Springdale Holiday Inn. Kaylynn coordinated COPA, Registration tables, gifts & prizes. It was one of the most impressive setups ever. (Assisted by Pam Beck, Drew Heyd, Chris Mantia, Nancy Sramek, Sonya Kirsch, Cheryl Wing, Tina Delay, and Ike Mills.)

Calling In Sick

by Pam Beck

“If they give me sick leave, why do I get in trouble for using it?” That is a question heard from many union members over the years, myself included.

“Bottom line is, if you want a job with the US Postal Service, you gotta show up for work.” — *Quote from the APWU’s National Business Agent, Bob Kessler.*

Over the years it seems that the USPS has been constantly changing the rules and expectations regarding use of sick leave. Their current stance is as strict as I have ever seen it. Whether you are an old timer or a new hire, please understand, the USPS will not be like any other employer you have ever had. The USPS has NO MERCY. An unscheduled absence is an unexcused absence, unless you can qualify for FMLA. The Family and Medical Leave Act, passed under President Bill Clinton, is a wonderful thing, making many reasons for sick leave protected by law, however, I believe it gave USPS management an excuse to treat anything less with complete disdain. In other words, your doctor’s note is not worth the paper it is written on, (but get it anyway!). Your family situation and details of your life will likely make no difference whatsoever in management decisions regarding your absence.

The current unofficial policy, (which management will not bother to explain,) is that they will allow you only 2 unscheduled, unexcused, absences in any 90-day period. The third will almost certainly bring you discipline. Each time you call in, they will look back at your last 90 days to see if you have racked up 3 absences. Note that the 90 days is not the same as a “quarter” as in the quarters we use for the OT list. If you had 2 absences in December and you don’t call in again until February, those 2 absences are still in your last 90 days, even though it is a new year and a new quarter. However, an absence you had in October cannot be considered, as it is not part of your last 90 days.

Other items of note:

- A tardy of 8 clicks or more (or possibly less) can count the same as an absence.
- If you are late calling in for your absence or tardiness, you may be charged with AWOL. Always ask your steward to grieve AWOL, even if it is only a few clicks. Otherwise, it never disappears from your record.
- It is a good idea to keep track of your unscheduled leave used and your reasons, so that you can recall when called in to an investigative interview.
- If you are calling in due to severe weather, do not use sick leave. Request emergency annual and select community disaster as your reason. But remember emergency annual must be documented so be creative and take pictures or something.

Upon your return from your third absence in 90 days, management will generally give you an “investigative interview.”

You should always make sure a union steward is present for your interview. Answer questions truthfully, but you are never required to disclose medical information. After the I.I., you will usually get a letter of warning. It is a rare case where they decide NOT to issue discipline for unscheduled absences.

Management is required to give you an “official discussion” BEFORE you have reached the point of discipline. To be considered an official discussion, the talk should take place privately, in an office, not on the workroom floor. It should explain the problem, and exactly what will lead to discipline. It must be stated out loud that “this is an official discussion.” The discussion in itself is not considered discipline and you will not be allowed a steward. If you are given an investigative interview without having had an official discussion first, be sure to let your steward know that.

If no grievance is filed on whatever discipline you receive, the discipline stays on your record for 2 years. The usual steps for progressive discipline are: **1)** Letter of Warning; **2)** 7-day Suspension; **3)** 14-day Suspension; **4)** Removal (loss of your job). If there is a Letter of Warning on your record, and you have another occurrence of 3 absences in 90 days, you will get the 7-day suspension. If you have a suspension on record and another occurrence, then you will get another suspension, and so on.

A union grievance can usually get the term of the discipline on your record reduced by half or more. For example, let’s say you got a Letter of Warning for attendance in August of 2022. In September of 2023 you again accumulate 3 absences in 90 days. If no grievance was filed, the first LOW is still on your record and this time you receive a 7-day Suspension. If a grievance was filed and the term was reduced to one year, then you would receive another LOW, not a suspension, for this occurrence. You can see, then, how important it can be to file a timely grievance.

The union exists to help you. We prefer that you be a member. Membership is what makes the union strong. However, you don’t have to be a member to file a grievance or to have a grievance filed on your behalf. Please, always ask for a steward in an investigative interview, and then communicate with your steward so that they can help you. If you need time to speak with your steward, request union time from your supervisor. You are not alone and you are not being singled out by management for your attendance. They are putting everyone through the same wringer. We just have to learn the rules to be able to play the game. First, come to work if you possibly can. Second, if you are too sick to come to work, go to the doctor and get a doctor’s note. Finally, keep notes in a small calendar or notebook, or your phone, of your unscheduled absences and the reasons thereof.