



The RETIREE RECORD

A NEWS BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS
AFFILIATED WITH APWU POSTAL PRESS ASSOCIATION

PITTSBURGH AREA RETIREE CHAPTER
OF THE AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION, AFL-CIO

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JOHN P. RICHARDS, *President and Editor*

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The following was printed as an op ed in the Washington Observer Reporter on May 9, 2020.

Postage due: Don't cancel the post office

There has been much talk recently about the financial issues surrounding the U.S. Postal Service. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought economic uncertainty to many businesses, and the USPS has not been immune. While many of us are ordering more online, the use of first-class and media mail has decreased sharply, bringing estimates that the USPS will see its revenues cut in half by summertime.

The recent CARES Act, providing stimulus to individuals and businesses, originally included \$13 billion in grants to the USPS that it would not have to repay. President Trump adamantly opposed any help for the postal service, saying he would not support the legislation if it contained any money for the USPS. So instead, \$10 billion in loans were added from the Treasury Department to allow the postal service to remain solvent into summer. The loans are still pending and are conditional upon the USPS raising its rates and ceding oversight to the Treasury Department and Trump administration. However, these conditions are not in the best interest of the American people.

The USPS has not always experienced financial difficulties and its issues can be traced back directly to decisions by Congress. In 2006 the Republican-controlled Congress passed a mandate that the postal service pre-fund its retirement system for the next 75 years. In other words, to pay ahead for the pensions of its workers before they even retire (or before they are even born!). Congress also hamstrung revenue by tying any postage increase to the consumer index. This means that the USPS cannot make decisions based on actual revenues and spending, but instead is held to minimal rate increases in-



BEN BRIGHT

stead of being able to adapt rates to business demands. Before Congress made both of these changes, the USPS was a profitable, self-sustaining government entity. Now these poor decisions from over a decade ago have caused it to be cash-strapped and reeling, exacerbated by the economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current session of Congress is trying to reverse the mistakes of its predecessors. The House has passed H.R. 2382, the USPS Fairness Act. This bill, pending as it waits to be brought to vote in the Senate, would repeal the required prepayment of future postal service retirement benefits. The measure has broad, bipartisan support including our local congressman, Guy Reschenthaler, who has signed on with many of his colleagues as a co-sponsor. However, the Senate, specifically Speaker of the House Mitch McConnell, has been reluctant to bring the bill, and many others, up for vote. It continues to languish with little optimism that it will ever be brought to vote.

Here in Washington County, small businesses rely heavily on the USPS as a cheap, fast, and effective method of not only shipping goods, but also for mailing bills and distributing advertising materials. Any major increase in postal rates, as proposed by the president, would have an adverse effect on our small businesses, and overly so during these times as

we are just now beginning to ease stay-at-home orders and business restrictions in less affected areas.

But the people who benefit most from the success of the USPS are those who live in rural America. No other function of government is trusted more than the postal service, and this is especially true in our rural areas, like much of Washington County. And no other parcel company is equipped to fill the void that would be left if the agency ceased to exist. The postal service is the only business that reaches every household in the United States daily and is responsible for half of the mail volume worldwide. The USPS not only delivers the mail to rural America, but is also a lifeline for many where broadband internet access is not available or affordable. In these areas, and even impoverished urban areas, the ability to pay bills online may not be affordable or even exist. And more and more life-saving prescription drugs are being delivered through the mail. These everyday needs would not be available at an affordable rate if the post office ceased to exist.

The U.S. Postal Service does a great job – a public service – delivering mail at an extremely reasonable rate. It's an all-American ideal that has served us well over the lifetime of our country, giving small towns and big cities alike the service of mail delivery at the same price no matter how far your letter or medicine is going. We must act to support this American institution and prevent it from being reduced or torn apart to appease proponents of smaller government. There are plenty of examples of excessive government spending, but the USPS is not one of them.

Ben Bright is chairman of the Washington County Democratic Committee.

SHUT-IN LIST ~ Robert Gesk, Norbert Conway, Jeanne McCarthy, and Veronica Bujdos are on the shut-in list. Please keep a good thought for our shut-ins. There but for the grace of God... (To be included on the shut-in list, call the Chapter at 724 947 9374.)

IN THE LAST RETIREE RECORD we reprinted a letter sent to President Diamondstein dated March 15, 2020, about annuity increases for some recent retirees, and an e-mail response from Retiree Director Olumekor, dated April 23, 2020. Below is President Diamondstein's reply to our letter:

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April 28, 2020

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Dear Brother John:

Hope you are well and staying safe during this challenging and dangerous time. I did not know until recently you were seriously ill earlier in the year and glad you have recovered!

After you mentioned on the Retiree Chapter leaders phone call that you had sent me a letter dated March 15, 2020 and had not received an answer, I went looking for it. Unfortunately, it was "lost in the shuffle" as we had to close the office, shelter in place and work remotely beginning March 16th. My apologies for the problem and delay. I also took a little more time to research your question #2 to ensure an accurate answer.

The answers to your questions are as follows:

- 1) Yes, the position of the union is that anyone who retired between the time that the last contract expired in September 2018 and the issuing of the Arbitrators award and lost out on earned wage increases and COLA for the time they were still actively employed, is due the retroactive payments. Historically that has been the practice.
- 2) Your second question, "How do they go about collecting those amounts?" is the 64-dollar question. Historically, the Postal Service has refused to send retroactive checks to home addresses or to direct deposit. The Postal Service position is that checks will be sent to the last place of employment.

Obviously, this is problematic and in 2013 the union negotiated and actively promoted the filling out of a PS 3077 which enabled retirees to request that the payments be sent directly to their address. We will be entering negotiations with management in an effort to convince them to send the retroactive checks to the last known address. The retroactive checks will still take some time to cut, so we do have some time to try to fix this problem.

- 3) Yes, this is under the jurisdiction of the National Union and will pursue the issue to the necessary conclusion.

Thanks for writing for your questions are important to every recent retiree. Be well and please send Sister Charlotte my best wishes. I hope she is enjoying, as best we can in these times, her well-earned retirement.

Sincerely and Fraternaly,


Mark Dimondstein