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yours a Joyous Peaceful
Holiday Season and a
Prosperous New Year!*



*from the
Officers and Directors
of the Michigan
Postal Workers Union*

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY



by
Eric
Chornoby

My Time As President

My title is a bit misleading, but I sure did get your attention! For those who don't know, I spent a couple weeks as acting MPWU President. This was a rewarding opportunity and responsibility. As of writing this my time is coming to a close but I am not done yet. I do believe I experienced enough to share with the Membership, you, what happened.

National Day of Action

I had the honor of representing the MPWU at the October 1st Day of Action Rally at the Detroit GWY. The National Day of action was inspired by the We Won't Be Silence Movement founded by my friend Sheri Butler. This was a day of protest to ensure the USPS hears our voice about the consolidations, better staffing and better service!

It was technically my fourth day on the job, but some prep involving the National APWU, contacting the media, and sending out Press Releases, etc. This administrative work is often forgotten as work, but in total a considerable amount of time is spent putting something like this together. I could not have contacted media and politician offices without the help of 480-481 Vice President and MPWU Legislative Director Roscoe Woods. Roscoe was instrumental in helping

me ensure we had as much exposure as possible on a tight deadline.

Roscoe also gave me good advice, prepare remarks. Fortunately I listened as I did speak at the rally on the importance of the USPS. To quickly summarize, I spoke on how the USPS are the last true Public Service. We delivered during COVID. We deliver medications to Veterans. We serve the public and connect our Country. America needs the USPS!

For the MPWU I was accompanied by Marti Jablonski, Dana McLean, and Brittany Thompson. Several other MPWU Officers attended with their home locals such as Steve Wood, Keith Combs, and Tony Friday. National Business Agent James Stevenson also rallied with us and spoke. The APWU was not alone. We had public support and political support. Representative Rashida Tlaib rallied with us, and lead us in chant for a period of time.

Due to being the Editor of the 480-481 Area Local I was attempting to grab some pictures of the event, and I appreciate Michael Nelson grabbing a couple for me. When all was said and done we had several APWU Locals, the MPWU, rank and file employees, Union allies such as Labor Notes and political support. The rally was an overwhelming success in Detroit.

National Support

Like any good Union Officer, I had

to learn the balance of doing things myself, escalating, or delegating. My gut reaction to most issues I came across was to 'just do it.' In communication with Central Region Coordinator Amy Puhalski it became clear I was too eager to jump into things and I needed to back off a bit.

The MPWU has a very deep roster of extremely talented and knowledgeable individuals I should let handle their respective expertise. Amy offered guidance, and answered my (sometimes stupid) questions.

Unfortunately my entire experience was not like I had with Amy. I had some hiccups with escalation involving phone tag, unanswered emails, etc. Fortunately I had the support of my own local when other questions came to light. I regret to say I had to loop in President Mike Mize once, but we made it work!

Management is going to Manage

The first glaring topic I dealt with is the few issues I may have helped with involved Management either doing something completely asinine, or forgoing regulations and our contract for personal reasons/beliefs. That is my polite way of saying Management either did something we all know is wrong, or Management was being personal.

My Postal Experience includes a large office (Royal Oak), smaller satellite offices (Madison Heights and

Berkley), a distribution center (Michigan Metroplex) and a Call Center (Troy Customer Care Center). I have seen just about everything you can think of. I have dealt with my share of uncooperative EAS employees.

The difference here was I was, at times, hundreds of miles away from who I was communicating with. Between getting emails at 2 AM (Which I did respond to at 2 AM), to bad USPS policy being implemented I quickly discovered the President of the MPWU was a challenging job not due to scope, size or workload, but due to the logistics. Michigan is the 11th largest state in the country. With the huge land mass, multiple USPS districts, and vast population differences it made for a unique experience.

How'd I Do?

To quote John Wooden, "Without proper self-evaluation, failure is inevitable." I think I objectively did very well. I answered all emails and phone calls promptly. Any issues I experienced I immediately sought advice on. I delayed nothing and jumped into every situation head first. My ability to delegate definitely improved, out of necessity.

The most challenging portion was time management. I attempted to juggle: Being a full time Steward; minimally assisting with organizing
continued on page 3

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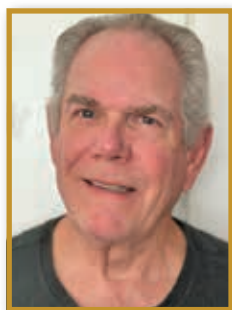
The Michigan Postal Workers Union proudly represents the Members at Large within the Great State of Michigan. The following locals have also affiliated with the MPWU for training, education and information sharing between their members, stewards and officers of their own local and others throughout the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

Battle Creek	Gaylord
Central MI	Great Lakes Area
Detroit District	Mail Haulers
Farmington	Jackson
Flint	Muskegon
480-481	Southwest MI
486-487	Traverse City
498-499	Western MI

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by
Raymond
Novakoski

PRESIDENT, MPWU AL LABRECQUE RETIREE CHAPTER

Retiree's Corner

I hope everyone enjoyed their summer. It's unfortunate it's over but fall brings beautiful colors and a chance to prepare for winter. Stay safe and warm.

The special enrollment period for Medicare Part B has ended. I trust the information provided helped you decide on enrollment. New health plan details should be available, with PSHB rates likely like last year's. Choosing a health plan can be tough. If you're happy with your current plan and it's included in the new program, you'll be automatically enrolled. If not, you can select a new plan that suits your needs or let OPM assign you a comparable one. I recommend reviewing and comparing available plans to ensure they meet your medical needs. The APWU Plan is excellent, especially the High Option and Medicare

Advantage part. Remember, open season is from November 11 to December 9.

By now, hopefully, the elections have concluded. It's been an eventful year with many candidates and significant stakes for our country, but it's time to move forward.

As retirees, I'm not fully updated on all post office matters, but it seems both the plant and customer service are facing familiar issues, like staffing shortages, a hostile work environment, and unfilled positions, which has resulted in delayed mail. The Postmaster seems to be determined to drive the USPS into the ground. Hopefully, the ongoing national negotiations will result in a favorable contract and correct some of these issues.

Retirees can look forward to a 2.5% COLA for CSRS and 2.0% for FERS. On the legislative side, we're hopeful the Social Security Fairness Act (HR

82, S 597) will reach the floor this November and get passed, then move on to the Senate and President for signing. This will address the reductions in Social Security for CSRS retirees. Thanks to all retirees and APWU members for urging representatives to support this bill and the discharge petition to bring it to the floor. Another priority for us

and the APWU is the Equal COLA (HR 866), aiming to equalize COLA calculations for CSRS and FERS.

Enjoy the rest of the year, and remember you're retired, so make the most of it. We wish you a Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year.

In Union Solidarity.

My Time As President

continued from page 2

Amazon; assisting the 480-481 Local doing Step 3/Arbitration Appeals; chairing the 480-481 Area Local Young Member Committee; and my duties as Editor for the 480-481 Area Local. I simply had too much work on my plate at times.

I greatly appreciate 480-481 President Steve Wood understanding and not giving me more to do during this period. Central Region Coordination

Amy Puhalski for helping me with questions I had and President Mike Mize for assisting when my back was against the wall. I had enough sleepless nights as it was, I could not imagine what it would be like if I were alone! I appreciate the trust and faith Mike and the MPWU placed on me to fill his shoes. The President of the MPWU has to be 'on' 24/7, and while I did it, I certainly have a new found respect and appreciation for all Mike does.

We give our
pledge to protect
and support you.

WELCOME
to the NEW 2025 Postal
Service Health Benefits
(PSHB) Program.

High Option

With low copays and low deductibles, the High Option is a premier plan in the Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program.

100% coverage for in-network services

- ✓ Preventive care and screenings
- ✓ Lab tests (covered blood work performed at LabCorp and Quest Diagnostics)
- ✓ Maternity care and support
- ✓ Quit for Life® tobacco cessation program
- ✓ One Pass Select fitness and gym discounts
- ✓ Maven maternity program
- ✓ Accidental injury outpatient services within 72 hours
- ✓ Generic oral diabetes medications
- ✓ Visits to a registered dietician/nutritionist
- ✓ No primary care provider (PCP) requirement
- ✓ Freedom to use network and out-of-network providers

What's new for 2025

- High Option
 - First two Teladoc® Virtual Visits are free
 - Vaccine coverage now includes RSV
- Medicare Advantage
 - Part B reimbursement increases from \$85 to \$100
 - Eyewear allowance offered every 24 months: \$130 for glasses or \$175 for contacts
- In-network copays
 - \$10 for a Virtual Visit
 - \$25 for office visits, including specialists
 - \$30 for urgent care
 - \$10 for retail non-specialty Tier 1 drugs

Consumer Driven Option

The Consumer Driven Option is a proactive alternative to conventional healthcare that can save you money.

100% coverage for in-network services

- ✓ Your own Personal Care Account (PCA) helps pay for medical expenses
- ✓ Preventive care and screenings
- ✓ Maternity care and support
- ✓ Breast cancer screenings
- ✓ Quit for Life® tobacco cessation program
- ✓ One Pass Select fitness and gym discounts
- ✓ Maven maternity program
- ✓ No primary care provider (PCP) requirement
- ✓ Freedom to use network and out-of-network providers

What's new for 2025

- Receive a \$25 wellness incentive for completing a mammogram
- Receive a \$25 wellness incentive for completing a cervical cancer screening
- Use your PCA to pay the Medicare Part B premium
- In-network copays
 - Pay just 15% of the Plan allowance for a Virtual Visit
 - No upfront deductible, coinsurance, or copay until you exhaust your PCA
 - Receive a discount on prescriptions when you use OptumRx® Home Delivery



I was elected as director of APWU Health Plan in 2019 to help create and foster the kind of health insurance benefits and services you and I would want for our families—and to keep your best interest at heart. I'm not only the Health Plan director, I'm also a member and feel a huge sense of security knowing my family is protected from high-cost healthcare bills.

Sarah J. Rodriguez
Director, APWU Health Plan

APWU
HEALTH PLAN

All eligible postal
employees and
retirees can enroll.

Compare premiums for the 2025 plan year.

High Option premiums

High Option members will pay a lower premium in 2025.
A yearly savings up to \$829.

Self PSHB enrollment code 23A		Self Plus One PSHB enrollment code 23C		Self & Family PSHB enrollment code 23B	
Biweekly	Monthly	Biweekly	Monthly	Biweekly	Monthly
\$109.86	\$238.03	\$213.05	\$461.61	\$277.28	\$600.77

Consumer Driven Option premiums

Self PSHB enrollment code 23D		Self Plus One PSHB enrollment code 23F		Self & Family PSHB enrollment code 23E	
Biweekly	Monthly	Biweekly	Monthly	Biweekly	Monthly
\$80.62	\$174.68	\$175.23	\$379.66	\$191.16	\$414.17

★ APWU special rates biweekly ★

For APWU career bargaining unit employees with more than 1 year in PSHB/FEHB.

Self PSHB enrollment code 23D		Self Plus One PSHB enrollment code 23F		Self & Family PSHB enrollment code 23E	
APWU career less than 1 year and PSE	APWU career more than 1 year	APWU career less than 1 year and PSE	APWU career more than 1 year	APWU career less than 1 year and PSE	APWU career more than 1 year
\$80.62	\$16.12	\$175.23	\$35.05	\$191.16	\$38.23

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2024
Nov. 11 - Dec. 9



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by
Dustin
Hume

EDITOR

NCED Special Guest

I was sent to the NCED training center for a LCREM class for two weeks in the middle of October. It just happened that Maintenance Division Director Idowu Balogun, Assistant Director Terry B. Martinez, Assistant Director Jason Treier, and Motor Vehicle Division Assistant Director Garrett Langley were conducting a meeting with students while I was there.

It was a great chance for us students to talk with them about our stay at the NCED, what issues we encountered, and what those in attendance thought was important for the directors to know. We spoke about our contract, issues with per diem, issues with travel, and general thoughts on the state of the postal service.

Both Director Balogun and Assistant Director Martinez spoke about what they have been up to recently and addressed concerns many attendees had. After that, all four of them opened the floor to questions. We had a lively discussion about NCED, the maintenance craft, and the motor vehicle craft. It was a pleasure to hear from all four of them and to hear all the concerns that many students had.

If you get the chance to go to one of these smaller meetings, do not hesitate to go. It was quite informal. Everyone was welcome to ask questions. They listened to everyone's concerns while doing their best to give us honest, straightforward answers. It is also beneficial to get to know your leadership and connect with them. Assistant Director Terry B. Martinez added everyone in the class to an email



Maintenance Division Director
Idowu Balogun



Maintenance Assistant Director
Terry B. Martinez

chain and sent answers and updates to what we talked about during the meeting. Knowledge is key to success and information is necessary to

obtain that knowledge. The more you can learn from others, the more successful you will be as a steward, officer, or member.

The Night Before Christmas . . .

by Frank Antinone

In 1991, we had a clerk on Tour 3 by the name of Laura Pytlik in Youngstown, Ohio Local 443. She wrote a really good Postal Christmas rendition of **The Night Before Christmas** that by the way won a PPA Award in 1993. I hope everyone enjoys it.

The Night Before Christmas . . .

Laura Pytlik, Tour 3 (With apologies to Clement C. Moore)

Twas the night before Christmas, and throughout the P.O., the clerks were exhausted, morale was so low.

The parcels were piled from the ceiling to floor, and out on the dock were sixteen pushers more.

The U-carts were missing, not a sack to be found, no equipment this year for the folks at Y-town.

The catalogs, finally, were starting to slow, but piles of red envelopes continued to grow.

Then out on the dock there arose such a clatter, the mailhandlers ran to see what was the matter.

Another full truck, backing up to the dock, more work to be done, there was no time to talk.

Like elves they did seem, breaking down all the mail, soon hampers were lined from the belts to the scale.

When, what to our wondering eyes should appear, but the GF, with clipboard in hand, drawing near.

With a look on his face that we dreaded to see, we knew in a moment there must be O.T.

We scattered like roaches, to avoid what he'd say, but to our despair, he turned on the P.A.

"Now dispatch! Now outgoing! Now scale, dock, express! Now LSM! FSM! This place is a mess!

Although you have all worked twelve days in a row, there is one little thing that I want you to know . . .

We'll need four extra to get out of this fix. Staying is mandatory . . . Heck, let's make it six!"

There arose from the floor a loud helpless wail . . . we'd not seen our kin till we dispatched that mail.

As I drank down my coffee and swallowed No-Doze, in bounded the Postmaster, with

a few HO, HO, HOs.

He was dressed all in mink, from his head to his foot, and his clothes had never felt Post Office soot.

His wallet it bulged, and his gold it did flash, (the bonus we earned him was paid off in cash).

He was merry and bright, a right jolly old elf, when he saw our production he was pleased with himself.

I curtsied and said "Please excuse me dear man, but there's something I really cannot understand.

'Tis the season for peace, and goodwill, and for giving, but our families have forgotten that we're even living.

A shortage of workers left us in a lurch, why, we can't even have annual leave to see church!"

Then a wink of an eye and a twist of a head, soon gave me to know that his words I would dread.

"What, attend church during THIS hectic season? You'll have to come up with a much better reason!"

And he spoke not a word of our hard work and sweat, and not even a turkey or ham did we get!

Then he sprang to his limo, and as he drove away, "Merry Christmas to All!" the clerks heard him say.

"Now take a day off, stay home and keep warm, 'cause when you get back, there'll be piles of tax forms!!!"

Happy Holidays.

— Ohio Postal Worker



PMG Going Full Bore On USPS Destruction

by Scott Hoffman,
Northeastern Region Director

Hello, Sisters and Brothers:

I would like to start out by extending my condolences to the family and friends of Ed Brennan. There is not much I can say that hasn't already been said, but I am compelled to point out that it is not likely we will see a person of his character again in our lifetimes, and certainly not in this organization. He was a man of his word, and delivered those words often dressed in humor, yet he was never afraid to say what was needed to be said, popular or otherwise.

He spoke from the heart and always came from the position of the good of the body. Whether it be the APWU or the ABA. His motives could never be challenged as he was always coming from the protection of the organization and/or its people. God bless, you will be missed.

What also will be missed is a public Postal Service. The current Postmaster General is going full bore on its destruction by way of his 10-year plan. That does not mean we have 10 years to save it. We must act now. We already see that local management are cowards. They will risk involvement in scan falsification, deliberate delay of mail, deliberate short staffing making the full scope of our service commitments impossible, bul-

lying and retaliation for anyone daring to speak truths, rather than stand up and expose upper management's false claims and destructive acts.

So, it's on us. We are on the inside. We see firsthand the destruc-

no longer dispatched at the end of the day, meaning it's automatically one day later on its way. We see that the Service is systematically removing infrastructure to weaken the system. We see a Postmaster General who

but cannot be made in a public service industry. What kind of bus service would it be if buses were held until they were full? The 6:00 pm bus won't leave until 7:00am when it gets filled? How is that bus/public transportation service? We need to expose their lies, their distortions. We need to inform the public, by all means available, that the public Postal Service is being stolen out from under their feet, while the Service sings a soft lullaby that everything is and will be ok. We need to alert the public. Involve family and friends. Involve elected officials. Start locally, then go to Congress. But do not hope this will pass or it's just folly. It will not and is not. It is a purposeful plan meant to destroy that which can't be replaced once gone and broken. It is well designed.

Look in the mirror. Push back starts there. We can and will win if we all report, grieve, and expose reality. The public needs to know. Go forth and fight and those in positions of leadership who remain inactive and silent have exposed themselves. They've got to go, too. Let's go people! Time to save the public Postal Service, our jobs, jobs for the working class and voting rights by mail to push back on suppression. Every now and then you hit a crossroad. Which way are you going? I'm taking the one where the fight is. See you there.



tion and we know how to expose it. We just need to do it. All hand's on deck. You see committed mail left behind. You see passport appointments scheduled in advance canceled on the spot due to lack of staff. You see facilities not cleaned properly or with the required frequency. You see mail

makes his fortune in the trucking aid logistic business, creating scenarios that now require additional trucking to be sub-contracted out, all the while obliterating service. We see them withholding trucks that are not "full" until they can be filled. Those are decisions made in the trucking industry

Thank You For Your Knowledge, Curtis!

by Dustin Hume, Editor

I just heard the news that one of our National Business Agents, Curtis Walker, is retiring! First, and foremost, I would like to congratulate Curtis on his retirement and thank him for all that he has done for us. He has not only been a great asset for the MPWU, but one for APWU local 300 as well. He has come to our office to help with line H grievances, fought hard for us during

arbitration, and has led many classes that I, and many of us, have been lucky to attend.

I've been to several courses that he has led, even before I was in maintenance. My official last day as a clerk and my first official day as an Electronic Technician happened to be during the state training in Kalamazoo. Curtis welcomed me to the other light side and told me it is great to have "fresh eyes" in the

maintenance craft. Little did he know, a week before that I damaged left eye and had a blind spot in the center, making my "fresh eyes" useless at the time.

All jokes aside, the training he has led has been very helpful here at my local as a steward and the installation director. Coming from the clerk craft to the maintenance craft is a somewhat different environment. There is new information, new handbooks and

manuals, and a different atmosphere. He helped me become a better steward and to be better prepared for grievances when they arise.

Thank you, Curtis Walker, for all the knowledge you have imparted to those in the MPWU and all the locals in the state of Michigan. You have been an asset to our Union.

In Solidarity and best wishes for the future!

Thank You Curtis Walker

by Maceo Cosper, APWU
Local 300 President

Thank you, Curtis Walker.

A few days ago, I got an email from Central region maintenance National Business Agent Curtis Walker announcing he would be retiring. I would like to say thank you to Curtis for the guidance and leadership he has given me over the years. Curtis has been a great trainer and teacher to me and the maintenance stewards of APWU 300.

Curtis instructed me not only



how to be a good maintenance craft Director and local president but also showed me what it meant to be a good union member and true unionist. I will do my best to impart the knowledge and tactics I have learned from Curtis to my APWU brothers and sisters. Thanks, and enjoy your retirement!



OPM Starts The Process Of Booting USPS Employees To A New Health Care Program

by Eric Katz

The Biden administration will soon begin accepting applications from health insurance companies to be a part of the new exchange exclusively for U.S. Postal Service employees and retirees, according to an interim rule published Thursday, which will cost \$100 million to stand up.

The Office of Personnel Management's rule follows a requirement in the 2022 Postal Service Reform Act that USPS workers enroll in postal-specific plans as part of a health benefit network designed specifically for the mailing agency. OPM will run the exchange as part of the larger Federal Employees Health Benefit Program, but starting in 2025 postal

employees and retirees will no longer be eligible for those government-wide plans.

Non-postal federal employees will see slightly lower premiums as a result of the change, OPM predicted, as older postal employees are shifted out of the risk pool. Postal workers' premiums will also likely tick down, as newly eligible retirees will face a requirement to make Medicare Part B their primary coverage. Plans for current employees will become younger and cheaper to cover.

Over the next 10 years, Medicare premiums are expected to absorb about \$9 billion in costs as a result of more postal retirees joining the program. About 75% of current Medi-

care-eligible postal retirees are enrolled in it, but starting in 2025 those who newly become eligible will face a requirement to sign up. Retirees who remain enrolled in their USPS-sponsored care in addition to Medicare may see their premiums increase, OPM said, but their out-of-pocket costs will likely decrease.

OPM, the Postal Service and a select few other agencies will spend a total of \$101 million to stand up the new exchange, according to the interim rule, and will incur about \$51 million in costs annually going forward. OPM said it will require 153 full-time employees to run the program. As part of the reform law, Congress provided \$94 million to stand up the Postal Ser-

vice Health Benefits initiative.

Health insurance companies must match the benefits of the plans as they existed in FEHB "to the greatest extent practicable," OPM said, though they must match exactly for the first year at least. The agency will attempt to keep in the new exchange any plan that offers care to at least 1,500 postal employees. Carriers will begin applying for inclusion on PSHB in the coming months and must submit their applications by August. OPM stressed that it is facing a tight timeline to meet its deadlines to ensure postal employees are knowledgeable about the upcoming changes and can make their selections in late 2024 to avoid any disruption in health care coverage.

"Given the complexities of establishing this program," OPM said, "expeditious issuance of these rules is required because otherwise PSHB plans will not be established by January 2025, potentially resulting in the loss of health insurance coverage for millions of Postal Service employees, Postal Service annuitants, and their family members."

Laurie Bodenheimer, OPM's associate director for healthcare and insurance, said creating a brand new health insurance system for 1.7 million individuals was "nothing to sneeze at."

"It's fair to say that it's a very tight timeline to implement something of this magnitude," Bodenheimer said. "There are changes. Change is always difficult." She added OPM and USPS were engaging in significant planning to "make sure this transition is as smooth as possible."

Unlike FEHB, where each individual agency is responsible for enrolling its employees, OPM will centralize and run the operations of the new postal program. OPM Director Kiran Ahuja previously told Government Executive that FEHB's structure is a "challenge" and the postal program would be a test case for better management. She suggested it would help reduce improper payments and make the benefit more customer friendly. OPM said in its new rule its centralized system would include "an online portal to enter and process enrollment transactions, robust decision support tools, and a customer support center to assist enrollees via phone, email, or online chat." The agency will begin developing and testing the new system this year.

OPM last month released a request for proposal soliciting bids for vendors to set up the centralized system. The agency asked for a flexible and scalable product that could "potentially service an additional 6.5 million" FEHB enrollees. Bodenheimer said OPM is trying to be innovative in its approach and the need to integrate its data with the Centers for Medicare

continued on page 7

Think Before You Post *Survival in the age of social media*

Our handheld devices provide us with an unprecedented level of convenience and accessibility to our neighbors, our friends, and the world around us.

At the touch of a button, information – whether it's true or false – can go from obscure to viral within a few hours.

This may sound great to those who aspire to be the next YouTube sensation, but the consequences can be dire for a democracy that needs accurate information in order to make important decisions.

Don't Spread Misinformation

As union members, you've probably heard from your union rep to "not spread misinformation."

It's a common reminder when the union is negotiating a contract on your behalf. We need a united front to secure the best contract possible, and when lies and half-truths are floating around on the work floor and in break rooms, it only serves to weaken and divide us.

It's damaging enough when lies are spread throughout a work location or company. It gets even worse

when they've spread unchecked across the entire country.

That is the unfortunate situation we're in now. Social media across all platforms are overrun with conspiracy theories containing misinformation and lies. The corporations that own these powerful platforms have displayed an inability – and, at times, unwillingness – to confront this problem.

Many of these conspiracies have come to mainstream attention as the United States continues to lack a unified response to the coronavirus pandemic. In the absence of a coordinated approach from the current administration, some

Americans have put their trust in unproven "miracle cures" or channeled their frustration into outrageous claims about the origin of the virus and its continued spread.

Such dangerous theories used to be relegated to the dark corners of the Internet or laughed off as fodder for tabloid newspapers. But in 2020 they have real-world implications.

It is a verified fact that countries and organizations have been using social media to tear apart the social and political fabric that has bound Americans together for most of our nation's history. They do this by spreading outright lies and exaggerating minor events to inflame passions and stir up resentment be-

tween groups of Americans.

Consider The Source

Before you share something you see on social media, pause for a moment before pressing the "send" button. Consider whether the source is a reliable news organization. If it's an unattributed YouTube video or an organization you've never heard of, there's a good chance it is not legitimate.

You can also verify the information by using one of several online fact-checking sites like **Snopes.com** or **PolitiFact.com**.

A functioning democracy requires having an informed populace. This can't happen when truth and falsehood are alternative "realities" that we select merely to confirm our personal prejudices.

Whether your social media platform of choice is Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, X, TikTok or anything else, we urge you to keep your employer out of your status updates.

Please note that your company may not accept even looking for the time on your cell phone, let alone texting or checking social media, while on the clock.

Please do your part by sharing responsibly!





USPS Is Getting Better At Hiring, But Half Of Non-Career Postings Still Have No Applicants

by Eric Katz

The U.S. Postal Service is improving its hiring practices and onboarding employees more quickly, according to a new report, but is still struggling to recruit applicants for large swaths of positions across the country.

USPS added 192,000 employees in fiscal 2022, 184,000 in fiscal 2023 and 93,000 so far this fiscal year, but has still failed to solicit a single application for hundreds of thousands of positions over that period.

The issue is particularly acute in the “pre-career” workforce, or employees who generally only work part time and do not receive the same suite of benefits as career workers. The mailing agency had 700,000 pre-career job openings between fiscal years 2021 and 2023, the USPS inspector general found in its new report, but no prospective employees applied for more than half of them.

Two-thirds of those positions were rural carrier associates. While the IG credited postal management with taking steps that significantly improved the agency’s hiring processes, the number of postings without applicants increased to 58% in fiscal 2023. In the Wisconsin and Minnesota-North Dakota districts, 87% and 84% of RCA postings, respectively, received no applicants. Those areas also had the highest no-applicant rates for city carrier assistants.

Postmaster General Louis DeJoy launched an initiative to reduce the time it takes USPS to hire as part of his 10-year Delivering for America plan and has led an effort to convert more than 150,000 pre-career employees into career roles. Management had taken steps to hasten the hiring process in 2019, just before DeJoy’s arrival.

The Postal Service centralized its pre-career hiring process and no longer conducts interviews for those roles, instead requiring applicants to take a Virtual Entry Assessment. Those tests include videos that explain both the perks and challenges of the job. Applicants who pass the exam are then in line for openings for 90 days, while those who fail cannot apply to the same position for one year.

The Postal Service’s overall “time-to-hire” dropped by 35% from fiscal 2021 to fiscal 2023, the IG found. The auditors praised USPS for launching more virtual and in-person job fairs that include on-site exams and fingerprinting. They also noted postal management has teamed up with the agency’s marketing team for help with difficult-to-fill positions and is sending more vehicles to those areas so fewer employees have to use their personal cars and trucks.

The IG identified several hurdles, however, that are still preventing the Postal Service from soliciting a sufficient number of applicants.

“Postal Service job postings did not



always receive applications in certain areas due in part to, the national unemployment rate, a rising cost of living, especially housing rates and more competitive starting wages from other employers,” the watchdog said.

The Postal Service, unlike the rest of federal government, does not adjust its wages for the cost of living. In expensive areas, the IG said, employees often cannot afford to work in pre-career roles that do not guarantee hours or fixed schedules.

The watchdog suggested management create a plan to improve recruitment for unfilled jobs, but the Postal Service rejected the recommendation and — without getting into detail — said the IG was improperly influenced. It noted in addition to other improvements, it can now text applicants throughout the hiring process to provide updates. The

IG maintained that issues persist despite those reforms.

“The Postal Service disagrees with the audit findings regarding recruitment and onboarding of employees,” said Simon Storey and Thomas Blum, USPS’ vice presidents for human resources and labor relations, respectively. “We maintain the perspective that OIG’s viewpoints are influenced by a limited number of external stakeholders.”

They added management has “worked tirelessly” to boost the visibility of its hiring efforts and has “encountered few challenges” outside of a few areas.

The IG also called on the Postal Service to improve its pre-career application process by creating more realistic expectations for potential candidates. The job postings are typically vague and lack details on hours, locations

and physical demands of the roles. They do not spell out whether carriers would work on walking or driving routes, for example. Facility managers complained to the auditors that the listings did not contain the requirements of specific jobs.

The lack of details contributed to high turnover, the IG said, with rates growing from 56% in fiscal 2021 to 57% in fiscal 2023. One-third of pre-career hires were no longer at USPS 90 days after they were onboarded.

Storey and Blum said USPS did not agree that the agency should provide facility-specific information in its job postings, as the listings were descriptive enough for the various positions and locations to which new employees could be assigned. They agreed the agency should better ensure local managers engage in “meet and greets” on employees’ first day at work and will send out a memorandum to that effect.

The IG said postal management’s efforts will likely fall short if it does not address locality pay. Insufficient hiring, it said, would lower job satisfaction, decrease morale and boost turnover.

“Specifically for the Postal Service, these risks can translate into low employee availability, delayed mail and increased overtime for employees on the rolls,” the IG said.

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OPM Starts The Process Of Booting USPS Employees To A New Health Care Program

continued from page 6

and Medicaid Services, Postal Service and other agencies required a custom-built system. The challenge also presented an opportunity, she added.

“It can be hard to do big, innovative things in a system that is that old and that decentralized,” Bodenheimer said of the existing FEHB structure. “We will try to use this as an opportunity to look afresh at how we administer a health benefits program.”

USPS employees who do not make a selection for a postal-specific plan in 2024 will be shifted onto the most similar plan offered by their current carrier. If their insurer does not have an offering in the new exchange, the employees will be placed on the lowest cost, non-high deductible national plan. New retirees who fail to enroll in Medicare Part B will automatically lose their PSHB coverage. Existing retirees will have a six-month period beginning in April 2024 in which they can enroll in the program without facing the normal late enrollment penalty.

Other benefit programs will continue to operate as they have even after the switchover to the postal specific

health care network, including dental and vision insurance, flexible spending plans, group life insurance and long-term care insurance.

Under the law, USPS must set up an education program to help employees and retirees navigate the new system and make decisions appropriate to their health care needs. OPM said those efforts will begin in October and will raise awareness about the upcoming changes. Bodenheimer added OPM is working with the Postal Service on building the education program, calling it “very much a work in progress.” She said USPS has a variety of ways to reach its workforce, such as through videos, visits to facilities, a call center for employees and working with unions.

OPM cautioned that some employees and retirees may no longer see their plans available in the new program, but predicted that overall they will have access to a larger number of offerings. The agency noted there is a lot of uncertainty with exactly how the new system will play out and there are some risks that the highest-risk retirees could remain in the pool while others opt for only Medicare cover-

age, which could increase costs for all participants.

Bodenheimer called the release of the interim rule a big milestone, as it allows OPM and USPS to begin having many more conversations about next steps. Carriers were anxiously awaiting information on their expectations and will now quickly put together their bids to be included. The rule will be open for a comment period for the next 60 days.

“There are lots more details to come,” Bodenheimer said.

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No Stress Holiday Season Tips

Not only can the Holiday season bring on stress, but for some people, it can bring on the blues. Holiday depression is common and should pass as the stress and strain of the holiday season ends. However, experts advise getting help from a mental health professional if it does not end with the Holiday season.

- 1. Be more realistic about holiday expectations** - both yours and the ones others may have of you. Whose expectations are you trying to meet and why?
- 2. Give yourself and others a break.** Don't be overly critical if things don't go as planned.
- 3. Don't expect the holidays to solve your personal or family problems.** It might be a magical time of year, but it won't automatically make problems go away.
- 4. Manage your time wisely.** Let others know what you can and cannot do. Don't say "Yes" when it's better for you to say "No".
- 5. Create a master to-do list.** In other words, write down everything that needs to be bought, made, baked, sent, etc. Now pare down this list. What can you cut out or scale down?
- 6. Be reasonable about what you can accomplish** and limit holiday baking, decorating, and gift giving, as necessary.
- 7. Maintain your health.** Watch what you eat and drink, get enough sleep, and make time for your exercise program.
- 8. Money worries can also add to the stress of the holiday season.** Shop within your budget and plan in advance when, how, and where you will shop.
- 9. Delegate tasks to other family members.** Involve your spouse and children in holiday tasks and preparations.
- 10. Carefully choose the events you will attend** so that they will bring the most to your celebration of the holidays. Focus on what the true meaning of the holiday is – for you.
- 11. Celebrate each event along the way** and not just "the day". For example, take joy in decorating the house, baking cookies, gift-wrapping, etc.
- 12. Make time for yourself to replenish your energy.** Have a long soak in the tub or indulge in a cup of your favorite hot drink.
- 13. Acknowledge your feelings of grief and loss** and allow yourself to express these normal feelings if you are separated from family and friends, or have suffered the loss of a loved one.