To save USPS, postal unions appeal to the Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. (PAI) — Postal union members staged a national call-in Feb. 25 asking U.S. senators to support a bill that will help keep the United States Postal Service solvent.

The U.S. House recently passed House Resolution 2382, The USPS Fairness Act. The bill, in part, puts an end to the biggest financial drain on the USPS—a $5.5 billion yearly pre-payment for future health care costs. The mandatory prepayment was imposed by the Republican-controlled Congress in 2006, and is responsible for the entire deficit the agency runs.

The House, which is controlled by Democrats, passed HR 2382 on a bipartisan vote of 309-106 on Feb. 5.

The national call-in on Feb. 25 was to try to convince the Republican-controlled Senate to agree with the U.S. House by passing its version of the legislation, S. 2965.

Without the financial drain of having to pre-fund health care costs, the Postal Service would turn a profit every year and be able to invest its money in buying newer vehicles, modernizing its machines and diversifying into other services, say American Postal Workers Union (APWU) President Mark Dimondstein and National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) President Fredric Rolando.

"The entire first quarter loss—$748 million— stems from the unfair obligation placed on the Postal Service by Congress in 2006 to pre-fund future retiree health benefits decades in advance," Rolando said. "That mandate cost the Postal Service $1.2 billion in the first three months of the fiscal year."

Labor leaders believe the prepayment scheme is part of a plan by right-wing privatizers and some Republican politicians to bleed USPS into submission, resulting in it being sold to private firms.

No other government agency or private organization is required to pre-pay future health care costs. None.

Citing that hemorrhage of red ink, postmasters general since 2006 have fired workers, closed post offices and distribution centers, tried to outsource stamp sales to low-paid non-union workers at Staples, and increasingly turned to part-timers, not full-time union jobs.

The red ink has also led the Trump Administration to advocate other cost-cutting moves, such as eliminating Saturday delivery and ripping up union contracts. And of course, more layoffs and forced retirements from a workforce that is majority woman, people of color, and military veterans.

With or without the health care prefunding mandate, the USPS faces another existential threat from the Trump Administration. His proposed budget blueprint for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1 repeated it: More privatization, delivery cutbacks and "modernization" of labor relations — code words for ripping up NALC's and APWU's union contracts with the Postal Service. Trump also claims other cuts in USPS pension contributions on behalf of its workers could save the federal government $91 billion over 10 years. And he advocates "more closely aligning Postal Service employee wages with those of other federal employees." That's Trump code for "pay cuts."

Foreseeing the Trump privatization threat last March, a bipartisan group of 25 senators introduced a resolution to ban the Administration's move. Their measure is separate from HR 2382. Their resolution also pointed out USPS receives no government subsidies.

"Privatization would result in higher prices and reduced services for USPS customers, especially in rural communities," said lead sponsor Sen. Gary Peters (D-Michigan).

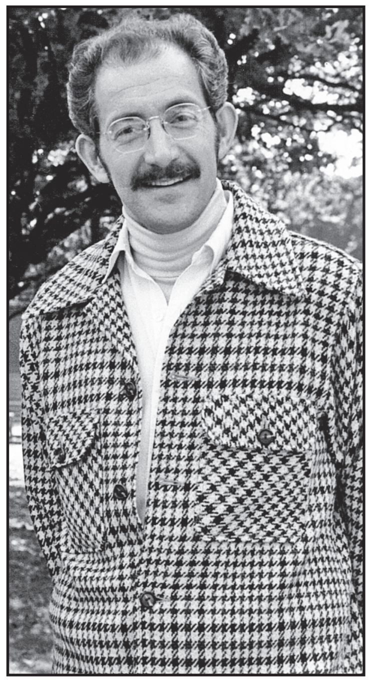
Union house painters

In the Portland area, unionized painters have focused on large commercial and industrial work, leaving the small-scale residential painting market entirely nonunion — until now.

In February, two residential painting contractors signed on with Painters Local 10: Swearingen Painting and MJE Industrial and Residential. That means if it's time for your home's exterior or interior to be repainted, there's a skilled union crew that can do the work — and earn a livable wage and benefits while doing so. Under the union's residential pay scale, painters make $23.94 an hour, plus benefits.

IN MEMORIAM

Steven Deutsch, 1937-2020



Steven Deutsch, one of the founders of the University of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center (LERC), died Feb. 10 at the age of 82 after a brief illness.

Born in 1937 in Vienna, Deutsch and his sister were brought by their parents to Chicago in 1938 after Nazi Germany overran Austria. He studied sociology at Oberlin College, where he met Elizabeth Gale; they married in 1958 and went on to have three children. After graduate school at Michigan State, Deutsch taught at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland, and later moved to Eugene, Oregon to teach sociology.

Deutsch helped organize a broad coalition calling for the creation of LERC, and when the Oregon Legislature established LERC in 1977, Deutsch served as its interim director until a permanent director could be hired. He then continued on at LERC, training union stewards and staff in contract negotiations and contract administration. A longtime member of the American Federation of Teachers, he was also an active Quaker and a lifelong activist for peace and justice.

He is survived by son Peter Deutsch, daughter Jennifer Bender, and eight grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held March 14 at 2 p.m. at the Eugene Friends Meeting, 2274 Onyx St, Eugene. Donations can be made in his name to the American Friends Service Committee or the Community Alliance of Lane County.

Jimmy Hoffa Jr. won't seek re-election as head of the Teamsters

James P. Hoffa on Feb. 21 signaled the end of an era for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, telling The Detroit News he will not seek re-election just as the labor union makes a historic exit from government oversight.

"I think it's time for the next generation to take over," the 78-year-old labor leader said. "We rebuilt this union. We've rebuilt our finances. We rebuilt the spirit. We put the swagger back in the union. … I'm very proud of what we have done, but I also realize maybe it's time for the next generation to take over."

Hoffa's term expires in March 2022.