The Hi-Lites

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Milwaukee Wisconsin Area Local

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Glenn Griggs
President

Benefits At A Glance: For Newly Converted Employees

"Get involved in your union. Go to union meetings."

Congratulations... *to all newly converted career employees! As a career employee you now have more rights and benefits. Below are many of the benefits that are either now available to you for the first time or which are improved upon as a career employee. All thanks in large part to the union negotiated contract with the USPS.*

Health Insurance: The USPS will now pay more towards the premiums of all plans thanks to the APWU contract. Additionally, please remember that Health Plan Open Season occurs once per year for an approximate one month period near the end of the year and allows you to change your current plan to a different plan during this period. (Certain personal situations that meet the criteria of a Qualifying Life Event [QLE] may allow you to change your plan during other times of the year. Marriage, divorce, birth of a child, etc. would meet the conditions of a QLE.) You can contact me as the local APWU Health Plan Representative to find out more.

Life Insurance: You now have the opportunity to enroll in a Federal Employee Group Life Insurance plan. If you have family members who depend on your income you may want to make sure they are protected in case something happens to you. You have a limited amount of time to enroll in this so please review all information the USPS sends you as soon as possible.

Job Bidding: As a career employee you have the opportunity to bid on vacant duty assignments that are posted. The rules vary somewhat depending on what craft you are in (Clerk, Maintenance, MVS) so contact your steward to find out more information on how to bid and apply.

Overtime List: You can sign up to work overtime for every 3 month period (quarter) during the year. The Overtime Desired List allows you to sign up to work your off days and/or before tour and after tour. Check with your steward on how to sign up for overtime if you have any questions.

Holidays: As a career employee you will get 10 paid Holidays. These are: New Year's Day; Martin Luther King Day; Washington's Birthday; Memorial Day; Independence Day; Labor Day; Columbus Day; Veteran's Day; Thanksgiving Day; and, Christmas Day.

Additionally, in conjunction with the holidays, you have a right to volunteer to work the day designated as your holiday and/or any of the other 2 days considered part of the "Holiday Call." Contact a steward for further information on how to go about this.

Contractual Pay Increases: You will get annual pay increases and Cost Of Living pay increases where applicable added to your hourly and yearly rates of pay.

Step Increases: In addition to your contractual raises and Cost Of Living Allowances guaranteed under the union contract with the USPS, newly converted career employees also get step increases depending on what pay level you are in as follows:

- Level 3 = 44 weeks
- Levels 4-7 = 36 weeks
- Levels 8-11 = 30 weeks

Sunday Premium: Full time career employees receive an additional 25% of their hourly base pay during a scheduled tour that includes any part of Sunday. This cannot exceed 8 hours per day and does not apply when you are working on overtime.

Penalty Overtime Time Pay: Also known as "double time" pay, this applies under certain situations such as when working both off days in a service week or over 10 hours in a service day.

Annual Leave: Is accrued based on your number of years of creditable federal service (military time included.) Less than 3 years of service = 104 hours per year; at least 3 years and less than 15 years of service = 160 hours per year; 15 years or more of service = 208 hours of annual

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leave per year. Keep in mind that these hours will be pro-rated for the remainder of the year but at the beginning of the new year you will get the total amount forwarded to you to be used for the duration of the year. Also, as a career employee you will be asked to choose annual leave for the next year as part of the "initial annual leave" selections. This is usually done in December and is based on your seniority in the section or office you work in.

Sick Leave: Is accrued at no more than 4 hours per pay period based on number of paid hours in a pay period. Unlike annual leave, sick leave is NOT forwarded to you as you must earn it as you go.

Transfers: As a career employee you may request a transfer to another office anywhere around the country. The approval is based on certain criteria that must be met prior to the transfer being approved.

Human Resources Shared Services (HRSSC): You can call 1 877 477-3273 when you have to report an absence, to bid or to check on other postal related benefit issues. You should have already received a pin number sent to you to allow you access to the HRSSC phone system.

Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS): You qualify for a pension when you retire and are automatically enrolled in FERS. The amount is based on your years of service and your base pay. Previous military service and casual service prior to 1989 can be counted provided you take measures to buy back that time. HR Shared Services can be contacted for further info on military and casual buyback at 1 877 477-3273.

Thrift Savings Plan (TSP): Is a retirement savings and investment plan that is separate from the Federal Employees Retirement System plan. You may contribute money from your paycheck into the TSP with matching funds up to 5% of your base pay. There are several different funds you can invest in. See tsp.gov online for further information.

Liteblue and PostalEASE: Make sure you are password registered to access these sites in order to utilize many different employment options from viewing your pay information to bidding on jobs to applying for a transfer to TSP contributions. Remember, the password for these sites is different than the one used to contact HRSSC by phone. The web addresses are *liteblue.usps.gov* and *ewss.usps.gov.* *These sites are best viewed using the Internet Explorer browser.

APWU Website and News: As an APWU member you can keep up on postal and union related news at the website apwu.org. Additionally, you should receive the APWU magazine every 2 months and the local *Hi-Lites* newsletter. Read this information to learn about your rights as postal employees and ask questions!

Some Additional Advice for All Members...

Get involved in your union. Go to union meetings. Learn what your rights and benefits are by asking questions of your stewards and officers. Membership meetings are held monthly (with the exceptions of June, July, August and December) at the Union Hall, 417 N. 3rd St. (Across the street from the main office downtown.) Read the monthly minutes that are posted on your APWU boards or that are mailed to your office for dates and times of meetings. Also, if you have good attendance and are willing to listen and learn, you should think about stepping up and becoming a union steward. It takes APWU members like this to continue standing up for those hard fought rights and benefits we all enjoy today. If anyone has any questions regarding this article or anything else you can contact me during normal business hours at the Union Hall. 414 273-7838.

Remember...

***THE UNION
IS ONLY AS GOOD
AS IT'S MEMBERS
MAKE IT.***

Health Plan Open Season Announcement

During Open Season, you have a chance to review your health care needs and evaluate your benefits, provider networks, and rates for the upcoming year. At any time during Open Season, you can make changes to your coverage. If you're a current member of an APWU Health Plan and want to keep your current coverage, you don't need to do anything. You'll be automatically re-enrolled in your existing plan. It's important to consider your options carefully because your health benefits can help you care for yourself and your family.

Postal employees have from Monday, November 8th, 2021 until Monday, December 13th, 2021 to enroll or make any changes to their current USPS health, vision, and dental plans for the 2022 calendar year. Please remember that this is a once-a-year event and opportunity to make desired changes during this time frame.

- To enroll or make any changes to their current health plan, career employees can visit liteblue.usps.gov
- To make changes to vision or dental insurance offered by the USPS all employees can visit benefeds.com
- Meanwhile, PSEs who have at least 1 year in their current USPS assignment must fill out and fax or mail the necessary forms to make changes. The forms can be attained by contacting HRSSC at 1-877-477-3273.

You can contact the APWU Union Hall at 414-273-7838 for help or if you have any questions regarding this subject.

Open Season Virtual Health Fairs

During this Open Season , APWU Health Plan is hosting a series of virtual health fairs for employers, postal workers, federal employees, and retirees who are eligible for the Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. These are VERY INFORMATIVE events in which APWU Health plan representatives will be available to answer your questions and discuss features of the High Option and Consumer Driven Option plans.

The Open Season Virtual health fair schedule is as follows

All Times are 12 noon - 2pm ET

Tuesdays in November 9, 16, 23, 30,
Tuesdays in December 7

Thursdays in November 11, 18
Thursdays in December 2, 9

Once registered, you will get an email confirmation with a GoToWebinar link and dial-in information. On the day before the virtual health fair date you selected, the APWU Health Plan will email you a reminder and include the dial-in information with instructions.

To register for the virtual health fairs in order to learn about what the health plans have to offer please go to:

https://www.apwuhp.com/virtual-open-season-health-fairs

Chris Czubakowski
Local Business Agent

Federal Benefits - Fast Facts What is FEGLI ?

"...you must elect coverage within 60 days after becoming eligible."

The Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance Program (FEGLI), provides term life insurance at group rates with payroll deductions available through your Federal agency. Benefits are paid if you or a family member dies or if you become dismembered while insured. It's important protection to help you plan for the future financial needs of your family and loved ones.

What types of coverage are available? There are two types of FEGLI life insurance: Basic and Optional.

Basic:
Equals your salary rounded up to the next even $1,000, plus $2,000; includes Accidental Death and Dismemberment coverage at no additional cost; plus "Extra Benefit" coverage for enrollees under age 45. The Extra Benefit doubles the amount payable for Basic if you are age 35 or younger when you die. This extra amount decreases each year by 10% until there is no "extra" coverage payable if you die at age 45 or older.

Optional:
There are three types of Optional insurance:

- *Option A Standard*

$10,000 of life insurance

- Option B Additional

You choose from 1 to 5 times your salary

- Option C Family

Coverage on your spouse and eligible dependent children

Am I eligible?
Most Federal employees are eligible. If you are employed in a "FEGLI-eligible" position, you are automatically covered the first day you are in a pay and duty status with your employing agency for basic coverage.

You may also purchase additional coverage or elect to cover your spouse and eligible dependent children under this Program. If you elect to waive basic coverage, you may not elect optional coverage(s).

How much do I pay?
Basic is free for U.S. Postal Service employees. For Optional insurance, you pay the full cost, which varies depending on the option(s) you elect, your salary, and your age.

Optional insurance premiums increase based on five-year bands. *Premiums are available at:*
www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/program-information/.

When can I enroll?
Newly hired and newly eligible employees are automatically enrolled in Basic insurance on their first day in pay and duty status. If you want Optional insurance, you must elect coverage within 60 days after becoming eligible. You have a few other opportunities to enroll in Basic insurance or increase coverage after your opportunity as a new employee ends:

- If you experience a FEGLI-specific qualifying life event (QLE), you may elect Basic and all optional coverage (Option A, Option B, and Option C) or increase Option B and/or Option C up to the maximum of five multiples.
- FEGLI QLEs are: marriage, divorce, spouse's death or acquisition of an eligible child
- By providing a satisfactory medical information paid for by yourself (SF 2822)
- During rare FEGLI Open Seasons (the FEGLI Program does not participate in the annual Federal Benefits Open Season).

FEGLI

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FEGLI...
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How do I enroll? Complete a Standard Form (SF 2817) "Life Insurance Election" form and submit it to your servicing Human Resources (HR) office. Some agencies allow electronic elections. Contact your HR office to see if this applies to you.

* Can I continue my coverage after I leave government or retire?

- You cannot continue FEGLI coverage if you leave the government, but you get 31 days of free coverage after you separate and you have the right to convert your FEGLI coverage to an individual (non-FEGLI) policy.
- You can continue FEGLI coverage as a retiree if you meet certain eligibility and enrollment requirements.

Who receives the FEGLI benefits after I die?
You can designate the recipient of the insurance benefits by completing an (SF 2823) "Designation of Beneficiary". If you don't specify, benefits are paid in a particular order, with your spouse first. If no spouse, then benefits are paid to your child(ren) and if no children, then to your parent(s), etc. For more information on this payment order,
go to: *www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/death-claims/#url=Annuitant.*

You should submit your completed "Designation of Beneficiary" form to your agency Human Resources office.

Where can I go for more details or additional information?
You can find these resources at: www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/

JEFF WORDEN'S RETIREMENT

I would like to take a moment to wish Jeff Worden a WUAH-DER-FUL retirement! I have worked with Jeff for over 20 years and would like to thank him for all the work he has done in the various positions he has held during his career. His Union experience and sense of humor are second to none and they will be greatly missed but now it's time for him to enjoy some throwback Pepsi's with his new buddies at the Kwik Trip. LoL... Wishing you the best. Take Care Brother!

* * *

Covid-19 Vaccines Are A Safety Issue. Unions Can Help Make Mandates Fair And Efficient

Opinion by Sara Nelson

"Does your union support vaccine mandates?" I've been asked that question countless times. The answer is yes. But more important, unions have an active role to play in getting people around the world vaccinated against covid-19 and making sure mandates are implemented as smoothly and as fairly as possible.

Safety and health are at the core of a union's role, and this pandemic is no exception. Sweatshop fires, mine explosions, limb crushing machinery and aircraft accidents have long driven union organizing. A paycheck is meaningless if you die at work. Functionally, official union support or opposition to covid-19 vaccine mandates is academic. U.S. courts and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have made it clear that employers can require vaccination as a condition of employment with or without a union's approval.

Even so, unions as different as the National Education Association, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, and the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers have publicly endorsed vaccine mandates, grounding their approval in the mission to promote a safe workplace and the solidarity required to end the pandemic.

Now that the Food and Drug Administration has announced full approval of the first coronavirus vaccine and President

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Biden is using Occupational Safety and Health Administration authority to enforce such mandates, the key issue is how to use the power of our contracts and bargaining rights to ensure consistent, transparent and non-discriminatory standards for implementation. The different approaches aviation companies have taken to coronavirus vaccination are perfect illustrations of just how important implementation can be — and just how much difference unions can make.

At United Airlines, the work of unions to promote information about the vaccines coupled with negotiated incentives and other supportive policies led to vaccination rates of more than 80 percent of flight attendants and 90 percent of pilots before the company-wide vaccine mandate was announced.

Meanwhile, Delta Air Lines, notorious for opposing workers' rights to join a union, unilaterally announced that unvaccinated workers would have to pay a $200 monthly surcharge for their health insurance and submit to weekly testing without exceptions. This punitive approach would never happen with a union contract. And by implementing it, Delta perpetuates the lie that public safety is a personal choice — if you can afford it, that is.

Everyone has suffered from this pandemic, but generally workers with unions were able to stay safer on the job, and get paid for the risks they were assuming. Health-care worker unions obtained PPE during shortages. Grocery worker unions secured hazard pay for their employees. And aviation unions locked in federal relief for frontline job security and continued paychecks.

Companies and whole industries with unions that fought for safety and economic protections also were better prepared to recover and to implement vaccine mandates. While United Airlines announced a company-wide vaccine mandate with the vast majority of workers in unions, corporations that have fought to keep unions out like McDonald's, Citigroup and Walmart have only implemented partial mandates. Rather than acting as an obstacle, unions can help implement vaccine mandates because they can identify and resolve worker concerns about these programs through the bargaining process.

Long before employers began mandating vaccination, unions from the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters were working to secure vaccines for our members and engage workers in honest conversations about the realities of this pandemic. We petitioned governors for priority vaccine access, worked with airlines and airports to set up vaccine clinics at airports, and called on world leaders to remove all roadblocks to production and distribution of the vaccine around the world.

Vaccination is an individual action, but unions also send the message that those individual actions are a necessary part of a global mobilization to end the pandemic.

While politics and weaponized disinformation have made this vaccine a controversy, it's worth reiterating that vaccine mandates are nothing new. They've been mandated for the military since George Washington required smallpox vaccines during the Revolutionary War. Vaccines are required for health-care workers, teachers, most first responders and many others — including flight attendants who fly international routes. Nearly all schools require vaccinations for students to enroll.

It's important not to let the controversy overwhelm the reality: Most Americans support a coronavirus vaccine mandate. And it's no wonder. More than 660,000 have lost their lives, millions have spent days or weeks in the hospital, and many suffer long-haul symptoms. The flight attendants I represent are no different from the majority of Americans.

We've lost friends, family and coworkers. We've faced the destruction of our jobs. Covid-19 is the threat. There are proven strategies to mitigate that threat. As union members and union leaders, we're ready to implement them.

Sara Nelson is international president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA.

Greg Becker
South Sectional Director

What Is An Employer Claim?

"Always request a Steward to ensure that your rights are protected in accordance with Article 28..."

Whenever the U.S.P.S. makes a demand for money for any reason, this is called an Employer Claim. As an employee of the U.S.P.S. we may be liable to pay back money owed to our employer for any reason.

Management can make a claim when a Sales and Service Associate or SSDA (Window Clerk) is "out of tolerance" on the window, if an error is allegedly made when calculating negotiated benefits, or if the U.S.P.S./ O.W.C.P. makes a "Claim" that the Clerk owes the Continuation of Pay benefit, etc.

In accordance with Article 28, management has the right to make an Employer Claim.

Some Clerks will receive an invoice from Eagan, Minnesota when the Clerk requests Annual Leave recredited when management has transacted A/L instead of LWOP (for FMLA, military, etc.). You have the choice to pay this invoice or leave things as they are.

In this example, you requested this action which resulted in an invoice being sent to you and you have the option to pay this invoice or not (just use your annual leave for the absence).
Sometimes, you may receive an invoice from the U.S.P.S. payroll and have no idea why you received this document. You can ask your supervisor to find out why you were sent an invoice.

Regardless of the reason... a good rule of thumb is that if you didn't request the action which triggered the invoice, the union recommends that you make sure the contract is followed. If management demands payment, request a Steward as soon as possible. The invoice itself may not have the information required in accordance with Article 28 of the National Agreement.

Article 28 states, "In advance of any money demand upon an employee for any reason, the employee must be informed in writing and the demand must include the reasons therefore." Management must issue a "Letter of Demand (for money)" with the determination of existence, nature, and amount of debt.

Furthermore, your appeal rights should be included. Management has a right to issue a Letter of Demand, and Clerks have the right to challenge the merits. Always request a Steward to ensure that your rights are protected in accordance with Article 28 and the Handbooks and Manuals.

Sometimes after a full investigation, it is found that you do owe the money. The contract states that, "No more than 15 % of an employee's disposable pay or 20% of the employee's biweekly gross pay whichever is lower, may be deducted each pay period to satisfy a postal debt, unless the parties agree, in writing, to a different amount."

No money can be collected until the grievance and /or petition has been filed pursuant to the Debt Collection Act has been exhausted of contractual and / or administrative remedies.

NEVER IGNORE A LETTER OF DEMAND!

A Letter of Demand that is ignored is a debt that must be paid. Clerks who are Sales and Service Associates are especially vulnerable to receiving a Letter of Demand unless the Clerk "exercises reasonable care in the performance of his/her duties. What does that mean?

Management is responsible for adequate security, an established procedure for cashing checks, and giving audits every 4 months. Clerks should keep a record of poor financial practices at your Post Office. Always lock your drawer, never let anyone work out of your drawer, put your "RSS" in standby when away, stay within tolerance, and check your key envelope to insure that it has not been tampered with.

Taking these precautions should help prevent a Letter of Demand.
I have grieved instances where management took leave right out of a Clerks Annual leave balance to collect an alleged debt, or issued a Letter of Demand for miscalculation of leave 25 years prior. Always check your paycheck to see if your leave/ pay adds up, and question any invoices sent to you.

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Failure to grieve or file a petition pursuant with the Debt Collection Act could cause you to owe money that may not be contractually owed. Always request a Steward. If you work in the South Sectional A.O.'s I can be reached at (414) 530-3449. Please call me about this or any other matter. Thank you.

* * *

Mail Delays, Price Hikes Are Coming To USPS, Slow-Downs Could Affect Rural Communities The Most.

By Ellen Ioanes, Vox

The United States Postal Service started slowing its mail delivery on Friday, part of an effort by Postmaster General Louis DeJoy to cut costs over the next 10 years. The most widespread and significant change will affect first-class mail — things like letters, small packages, bills, and tax documents. Prior to the changes, customers throughout the US could expect first-class mail to reach its destination in one to three days; now, that timeframe will extend to between one and five days. That "means mail delivery will be slower than in the 1970s," for an estimated 40 percent of first-class mail, Paul Steidler, an expert on the postal service and supply chains at the Lexington Institute, told CBS. That's because the USPS is set to reduce its reliance on planes to transport mail as part of a broader cost-saving effort, instead shifting some deliveries within the continental US to ground transportation. According to the Washington Post, the Postal Service will reduce the amount of mail transported via plane from 20 percent to 12 percent. According to an August notice from USPS in the Federal Register, using cargo planes and passenger aircraft to transport mail is more expensive and less reliable because of "weather delays, network congestion, and air traffic control ground stops."

Who will be affected by the changes, and how?

The USPS said in its Federal Register notice that approximately 61 percent of first-class mail would still be delivered at its current standard — meaning, theoretically, that many customers wouldn't notice much of a change in the delivery schedule. But in practice, according to Steidler, the new policy will be "disastrous," especially for certain populations like the elderly, people with disabilities, and those in rural areas for whom mail delivery is critical to their health care, financial security, and connection to the broader world. "It's the least fortunate who will be hurt hardest by this," Steidler told CBS. "Everything in American society is getting faster, it seems, except for the mail delivery — which is now going to get slower." As Catherine Kim explained for Vox last April, mail delivery is a crucial lifeline for millions of Americans in rural areas. Since the USPS is mandated to deliver to any postal address in the US, no matter what — something private companies like FedEx and UPS aren't required to do — the Postal Service in particular plays a vital role in ensuring rural communities, including tribal areas, have dependable access to mail service. "USPS isn't just a public service," Twyla Baker, a member of the Mandan-Hidatsa tribe in North Dakota, told Vox. "It's a lifeline."

Another crucial aspect of USPS service is its affordability — which is currently being undercut by price hikes on many first-class mail products. As the USPS points out, their flat rate deliveries are still among the lowest in the industrialized world, and a three-cent increase in the price of a Forever stamp doesn't seem like much. But heftier — albeit temporary — price increases are set to take effect between October 3 and December 26, during USPS's peak holiday delivery season, with package prices increasing as much as $1.

The Postal Service will also revise its rates more frequently going forward, according to the Washington Post: Prices could increase twice a year, in January and in July, as the agency looks to limit its budget shortfall.

Why is USPS making changes?

DeJoy, a major donor to former President Donald Trump who started his tenure as postmaster general in June 2020, outlined his plans for the Postal Service in March of this year, citing the need to make up for what he predicts will

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Mail Delays...
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be a $160 billion shortfall over the next decade. DeJoy predicted in March that postage rate hikes will make up for about $44 billion of the expected shortfall, and package rate hikes will make up about $24 billion. But the plan — like DeJoy himself — has its share of critics, including Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI), the chair of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, which oversees the Postal Service.

"While I understand Postal Service leadership's desire to set long-term goals, I am concerned that several of the initiatives in this plan will harm service for folks across the country who rely on the Postal Service for prescription drugs, financial documents, running their small businesses, and more," Peters said when DeJoy introduced the plan in March. Peters also expressed concern that the proposed cuts, specifically the delivery delays and decreased hours at retail locations, would have a particular negative impact in rural and otherwise under-resourced communities.

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA) was even more forceful in his criticism, saying that DeJoy's plan "guarantees the death spiral of the United States Postal Service." The independent Postal Regulatory Commission, or PRC, which serves as a regulatory body for the USPS, has also signaled that USPS slowdowns might not have the intended effect. The agency warned in July that while the price increases for first-class mail and packages made sense, the plan to slow delivery is based on "unproven assumptions," and that the Postal Service would achieve only "paltry" savings from the plan.

What's in store for the Postal Service going forward?
As Recode's Adam Clark Estes explained in January, USPS has been dealing with financial difficulties for years. Many of these can be traced back to 2006, when a Republican-led Congress passed the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act. This required USPS to prefund the health care benefits it promises future retirees in its workforce with annual payments of about $5.5 billion. This meant that even when the agency was operating at a profit, it looked like a financial disaster on paper. Then the Great Recession happened in 2008, causing first-class mail volume to plummet and slashing the Postal Service's revenue.

Although the House of Representatives moved to change the prefunding mandate in February of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic took hold shortly thereafter, leaving the legislation to flounder in the Senate — and causing more delays at the Postal Service. The USPS Board of Governors appointed DeJoy, a logistics CEO with no background at the Postal Service, as postmaster general that June. Under Trump, the Postal Service had already suffered; in trying to run the operation like a business, as opposed to a public service, Trump suggested raising prices as much as fourfold, and threatened to veto a $25 billion package — which passed the House with bipartisan support — for the agency as it struggled with delays due to Covid-19 and operational changes in the lead-up to the 2020 election.

Congressional Democrats saw DeJoy's appointment as another blow to USPS, and his policies — like removing high-speed sorters from some postal facilities, decommissioning postal boxes, and cutting hours at retail locations — drew widespread criticism in the run-up to the 2020 election, which relied heavily on mail-in voting in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. DeJoy paused the implementation of those changes ahead of the 2020 presidential election in response to public outcry, but he's facing renewed pushback over this month's changes to USPS services. Opponents have called for DeJoy's ouster practically since he took over the postmaster general position, citing conflicts of interest and negative changes in USPS performance under his leadership. While it's possible for DeJoy to be removed from his position, that's the remit of the USPS Board of Governors, which makes it unlikely to occur with the current board.

Some Democrats have also urged President Joe Biden to remove Trump-appointed board members directly to clear the way for DeJoy's firing."Your power to remove postal governors 'for cause' is absolute," Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) wrote in an August letter to Biden. "It would be difficult to identify clearer cause than the refusal of board members to protect USPS from chaos and ruin."

Negotiations Update: September 21, 2021

APWU And USPS "Stop The Clock" To Continue Bargaining For A New Contract

The collective bargaining agreement (union contract) between the American Postal Workers Union and the United States Postal Service covers the wages, hours and working conditions of 200,000 postal workers. Our current contract was due to expire at midnight, September 20, 2021.

Over the last two weeks, the APWU and postal management have engaged in frequent negotiating sessions at both the "main table," the "craft tables," and in other committees. There has been modest progress on a number of issues affecting all our crafts, including on job security. There has also been a narrowing of the differences on important items including the economic package.

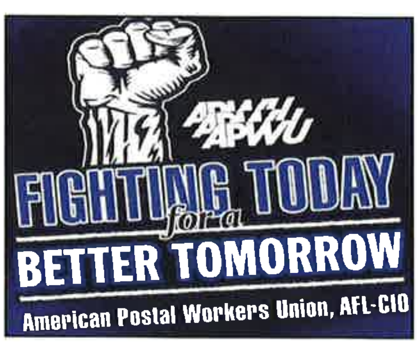
However, the union and management have been unable to secure a negotiated agreement by midnight September 20.

The APWU National Negotiating Committee (NNC) had two choices: Either start the process of mediation heading to interest arbitration, or with mutual agreement with postal management, "stop the clock" (meaning the contract does not expire at midnight) and continue negotiations for a period of time.

It is the unanimous decision of the National Negotiating Committee to "stop the clock" and continue bargaining. It is also the position of the NNC that we will reevaluate progress on a regular basis and invoke mediation if further negotiations are not productive.

"The entire APWU negotiating team is working together and working hard to secure the new contract that our members have earned and deserve," said APWU Chief Spokesperson Vance Zimmerman. "Continued negotiations for a short period of time are in the best interests of the members."

"The APWU is leaving no stone unturned. Based on progress thus far we have the possibility of reaching a negotiated union contract," declared President and Lead Negotiator Mark Dimondstein. "It is vital we all stay union strong and union proud in our collective quest for workplace justice."



John Miceli
Treasurer

What Does High Inflation Mean For The Markets?

"...worries about inflation and the prospect that the Fed might need to tighten monetary policy more aggressively down the road were factors..."

(MarketWatch)

U.S. Could Be Heading Into An "Era' Of High Inflation That Produces Paltry, Or Even Negative, Real Returns On Safe Assets, Analyst Warns.

Sudden Realization That Inflation May Persist Is Starting To Dawn On Many U.S. Investors

The U.S. may be heading into an "era" in which inflation remains significantly higher on average over the next decade, according to London-based research firm Capital Economics. In a note this week, John Higgins, its chief markets economist, puts a new spin on the inflation debate, by theorizing that price gains won't necessarily climb sharply from here, or be accompanied by weaker economic growth and tighter monetary policy. In that case, he says, markets won't falter the way they have during past periods of high inflation.

The prospect of persistently higher inflation worldwide is gaining traction after the heads of the Federal Reserve, European Central Bank, Bank of England and Bank of Japan acknowledged on Wednesday that the spike in price gains seen in many advanced countries this year may stay elevated for some time. Over the past week, worries about inflation and the prospect that the Fed might need to tighten monetary policy more aggressively down the road were factors behind the runup in Treasury yields, which caused stocks to falter and the U.S. Dollar Index to spike.

A crackdown on the energy sector in China, record energy prices in Europe and cargo pile-ups at California ports are some of the events that have once-complacent investors considering the notion of longer-lived priced gains, even if they haven't been fully priced in yet. The forecast from Capital Economics goes further out than most firms' expectations, while delving into the impact on bonds, stocks and currencies.

"We envisage a future in the US in which inflation is significantly higher than it has been in the past decade, but still only moderately above target; economic growth remains healthy as supply constraints ease; and the Fed doesn't press very hard on the brakes," Higgins wrote in a paper titled, "What would an era of higher inflation mean for markets?"

His firm's base-case view assumes that inflation will remain below 5% in most advanced economies and many emerging markets, though "the risks to this view lie more to the upside than the downside," he said. The headline U.S. consumer price index rate could average around 3% later this decade, compared to the sub-2% level that prevailed over the 2010s. And U.S. monetary policy could remain "very accommodative" in the next few years, considering the Fed's flexible average inflation targeting approach.

What that means for financial markets is that real, or inflation-adjusted, returns on low-yielding, safe U.S. assets like Treasury bonds "will be paltry, or even negative" in the next few years or more, according to Higgins. But those of the most risky U.S. assets, like stocks, "will be positive," even if real returns "fall far short" of the "spectacular" returns seen since early 2020.

On Thursday, U.S. stocks rose as Wall Street aimed to wrap up the last trading day of September and third quarter. The Dow Jones Industrial Average was down by around 0.5% and the S&P 500 index was lower by 0.1%, while the Nasdaq Composite Index was up 0.3% early in the session.

Treasury yields have stabilized, the 10-year rate hovered around 1.53% and 30-year rate at roughly 2.08% — both still headed for the sharpest monthly rise since March. Meanwhile, the U.S. Dollar Index, continued to hover around a one -year high. For currencies, an era of higher and less stable inflation in many major economies "would result in a rise in exchange rate volatility and, over time, the depreciation of the currencies of those countries which experience higher inflation," according to Jonas Goltermann, a senior markets economist at Capital Economics.

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Among developed economies, the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Australia "are more at risk of sustained higher inflation," Goltermann wrote in a note Thursday. This suggests "that their currencies will weaken in nominal terms relative to the currencies of many European and Asia economies, where we expect inflation to remain subdued."

Within the group of major emerging markets –aside from Argentina and Turkey, where inflation has already been in double digits in recent years — "Brazil, Colombia, South Africa, Indonesia, and the Philippines are at risk of a significant pick up in inflation, which would undermine their currencies," he said.

* * *

20 Attorneys General Sue In Ongoing Battle Over Proposed Mail Slowdown

Axios

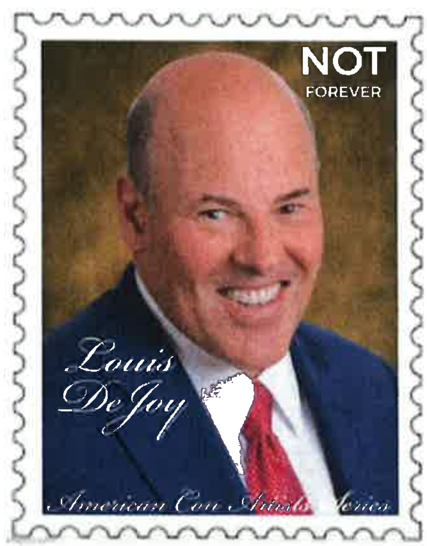
Twenty attorneys general on Thursday sued the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC), arguing the agency did not fully vet Postmaster Louis DeJoy's 10-year plan for the U.S. Postal Service, which ultimately led to a slowdown of mail delivery.

Why it matters:

The USPS argued that the slowdown would save money, but the changes could affect people who depend on the mail for their businesses, medication and bills, according to North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein. "The Plan reflects multiple unprecedented changes in the Postal Service's operations and service, at a time when reliance on the mail remains at historic levels," the attorneys general said in a statement.

The big picture:

The suit alleges that the PRC did not give an advisory opinion for most of DeJoy's plan. "The Postal Service has only submitted two requests for an advisory opinion [from the PRC], which represent only a small portion of the Plan's scope," the suit alleges.



Flashback:

A PRC report released in July said that the Postal Service did not prove "its case for reducing service standards for all Americans." "The plan also fails to provide sufficient evidence to justify exceptionally limited cost savings projections," PRC Commissioner Ashley Poling wrote. The slowdown went ahead despite the PRC's report and began Oct. 1.

What they're saying:

The PRC said it received the lawsuit and plans to establish a docket and take it under advisement, per CBS News. The USPS told CBS News that the lawsuit "has no legal or factual merit, and the Postal Service intends to move to dismiss it pursuant to the rules of the Postal Regulatory Commission."

Kenni Liggan
Customer Service
Director

Labor Management Meeting

"The Union is tracking all vacant positions to make sure they are being reposted correctly."

On Tuesday September 21st, 2021, the American Postal Workers Union had a Customer Service Labor Management Meeting. Several of the topics that were brought up were the staffing issues at the City Stations, PSE staffing, newly converted (PSE's) being held at the stations, PSE window training, adding more pool clerks and the mask policy.

Staffing regulars & PSE's

First off, management agrees with the Union that in most of the city stations they are short staffed. Unfortunately, Management says their hands are tied as far as posting city station jobs. The Union is tracking all vacant positions to make sure they are being reposted correctly. As of Monday September 27th, 2021, 13 new PSEs were hired for the city stations. Management has stated that more are yet to come. Newly Converted PSEs that are assigned to the Plant or Annex are being held at a city station for 28 days. Management should fill out a 1728 putting that employee on a detail at the station so that management at that station will still have access to their TACs, pay and leave.

PSEs being window trained

Management assured me that they would make every effort to put PSEs in the SSA Training Class. Also, PSEs should go to the station manager and request that they be signed up for SSA Training as well.

Adding more pool clerks

Management said that adding more pool clerks would have to come from Head Quarters. But the Union will still try to get additional bids added as well. It doesn't hurt to try!!

Face Mask Policy

The Union and Management both agree that the Face Mask Policy should be enforced in all Postal facilities. Management also said they would work on getting the 6-foot Social Distancing sticker on the floor of each City Station lobby.

* * *

Attend Your Union Meetings !

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Submitted by Vice President, Larry Brown jr

The following proposed Constitutional Amendments were read at the September 29, 2021 General Membership Meeting. It will be voted on at the November General Membership Meeting.

ARTICLE 5, SECTION 2A of the Local constitution currently reads:
"A general membership meeting will be held in the months of January, February, March, April, May, September, October, and November of each year. The general membership meetings will be scheduled on a rotating basis in the following manner: the first meeting (after adoption of the constitutional amendment) will be held on Friday with a scheduled time between the hours of 6:00 A.M. and 8:00 A.M., the next on Monday with a scheduled time between the hours of 4:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M., and the next on Wednesday with a scheduled time between the hours of 9:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M. General membership meetings will continue to rotate in this manner. General membership meetings may be held in the other months upon two-thirds (2/3) vote of all members present at any general membership meeting and will continue in the rotating fashion."

Change to read: "A general membership meeting will be held in the months of **January, March, May, July, September, and November of each year. The general membership meetings will be scheduled on a rotating basis in the following manner: the first meeting (after adoption of the constitutional amendment) will be held on Monday, the next Wednesday and the next Friday. The start time for each subsequent meeting will be determined by majority vote at each preceding meeting.** General membership meetings will continue to rotate in this manner. General membership meetings may be held in the other months upon two-thirds (2/3) vote of all members present at any general membership meeting and will continue in the rotating fashion."
ARTICLE 9, SECTION 2 currently reads:
"All nominations shall be made at the membership meeting held in January of each odd numbered year."

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Submitted by Local Business Agent, Chris Czubakowski

ARTICLE 6, SECTION 1 of the local constitution currently reads:
"By virtue of their positions, the President and Vice-President shall be delegates to all conventions of the APWU, the Milwaukee County Labor Council, and the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO Convention. By virtue of their positions, the Local Business Agent, Customer Service Director, Automation Director, Mechanization Director, West Sectional Director, South Sectional Director, North Sectional Director, MVS Director, and the Maintenance Director shall be automatic delegates to all Wisconsin and National Conventions of the APWU."

Change to read: "By virtue of their positions, the President and Vice-President shall be delegates to all conventions of the APWU, the Milwaukee County Labor Council, and the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO Convention. By virtue of their positions, the Local Business Agent, Customer Service Director, Automation Director, Mechanization Director, West Sectional Director, South Sectional Director, North Sectional Director, MVS Director, and the Maintenance Director shall be automatic delegates to all Wisconsin and National Conventions of the APWU. **By virtue of their elected positions, the Treasurer and the Recording Secretary shall be automatic delegates to all Wisconsin and National Conventions of the APWU, only if they are stewards."**

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
Submitted by Vice President, Larry Brown jr

Change to read: "All nominations shall be made at the membership meeting held in January of **every third year beginning in 2023.**"

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
Submitted by Vice President, Larry Brown jr

ARTICLE 9, SECTION 3 currently reads:
"Officers shall be elected biennially and installed at the next regular meeting."

Change to read: "Officers shall be elected **triennially** and installed at the next regular meeting." Any and all other references to two (2) year/biennial terms in the Local Constitution will **be changed to three (3) years/triennial terms** as a result of the above referenced portions of the Local Constitution.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT
Submitted by Vice President, Larry Brown jr

ARTICLE 9, SECTION 12B currently reads:
"The executive board shall meet at the call of the President or a majority of the members of the board. A report on all actions taken be the executive board shall be made to the membership at the next following meeting. A majority of the members of the executive board shall be required for a quorum. All actions requiring a vote during an executive board meeting will be a "roll call" vote and recorded as such in the minutes."

Change to read: 'The executive board shall meet in December, February, April, June, August, and October or meet at the call of the President or a majority of the members of the board. A report on all actions taken be the executive board shall be made to the membership at the next following meeting. A majority of the members of the executive board shall be required for a quorum. All actions requiring a vote during an executive board meeting will be a "roll call" vote and recorded as such in the minutes."

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Submitted by Vice President, Larry Brown jr

Article 16, Section 1 currently reads:
"Terms of office shall begin on April 1st, formal installation notwithstanding. Officers shall hold their official position for two (2) years."

Change to read: "Terms of office shall begin on April 1st, formal installation notwithstanding. Officers shall hold their official position for **three (3) years.**"

* * *

Santa Claus Is About To Drop A Bomb On Biden

Thom Hartmann, The Hartmann Report

Americans deserve to know how we've been manipulated, & by whom, for the past 40 years. Hopefully the Democrats & our media will begin to call the GOP out on Wanniski & Reagan's Two Santa Clauses scam

The only thing wrong with the U.S. economy is the failure of the Republican Party to play Santa Claus. —Jude Wanniski, March 6, 1976

The stock market is falling today, in part a reaction to GOP threats to shut down the government: it's all part of their plan. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen last week warned us that the GOP is about to use Jude Wanniski's "Two Santa Clauses" fraud again to damage Biden's economy and our standing in the world. And, sure enough, Mitch McConnell verified it when he said last week there would be "zero" Republican votes to raise the debt ceiling. Yellen responded yesterday by telling The Wall Street Journal that if the Republicans force a shutdown of the US government like they did to Obama in 2011, "We would emerge from this crisis a permanently weaker nation." But the GOP is adamant: they have their strategy and they're sticking to it.

Here's how it works, laid it out in simple summary:
First, the Two Santas strategy dictates, when Republicans control the White House they must spend money like a drunken Santa and cut taxes to run up the US debt as far and as fast as possible. This produces three results: it stimulates the economy thus making people think that the GOP can produce a good economy; it raises the debt dramatically; and it makes people think that Republicans are the "tax-cut Santa Clauses."

Second, when a Democrat is in the White House, Republicans must scream about the national debt as loudly and frantically as possible, freaking out about how "our children will have to pay for it!" and "we have to cut spending to solve the crisis!" Shut down the government, crash the stock market, and damage US credibility around the world if necessary to stop Democrats from spending money. This will force the Democrats in power to cut their own social safety net programs and even Social Security, thus shooting their welfare-of-the-American-people Santa Claus right in the face. And, sure enough, here we are now with a Democrat in the White House. Following their Two Santas strategy, Republicans are again squealing about the national debt and refusing to raise the debt ceiling, imperiling Biden's economic recovery as well as his Build Back Better plans. And, once again, the media is covering it as a "Biden Crisis!" rather than what it really is: a cynical political and media strategy devised by Republicans in the 70s, fine-tuned in the 80s and 90s, and rolled out every time a Democrat is in the White House.

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Drop A Bomb...
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Jude Wanniski hatches the scheme that saves the GOP
Republican strategist Jude Wanniski first proposed his Two Santa Clauses strategy in The Wall Street Journal in 1974, after Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace and the future of the Republican Party was so dim that books and articles were widely suggesting the GOP was about to go the way of the Whigs. There was genuine despair across the Republican Party, particularly when Jerry Ford couldn't even beat an unknown peanut farmer from rural Georgia for the presidency. Wanniski reasoned the reason the GOP was losing so many elections wasn't just because of Nixon's corruption, but mostly because the Democrats had been viewed since the New Deal as the Santa Claus party.

On the other hand, the GOP, he said, was widely seen as the party of Scrooge because they publicly opposed everything from Social Security and Medicare to unemployment insurance and food stamps. The Democrats, he noted, got to play Santa Claus for decades when they passed out Social Security and Unemployment checks — both programs of FDR's Democratic New Deal — as well as their "big government" projects like roads, bridges, schools and highways that gave a healthy union paycheck to construction workers and made our country shine. Even worse, Democrats kept raising taxes on businesses and rich people to pay for all this stuff — and those taxes on the rich didn't have any effect at all on working people (wages were steadily going up until the Reagan Revolution, in fact). It all added, Wanniski theorized, to the perception that the Democrats were the true party of Santa Claus, using taxes from the morbidly rich to fund programs for the poor and the working class. Americans loved the Democrats back then. And every time Republicans railed against these programs, they lost elections. Therefore, Wanniski concluded, the GOP had to become a Santa Claus party, too. But because the Republicans hated the idea of helping out working people, they had to come up with a way to convince average voters that they, too, have the Santa spirit. But what? "Tax cuts!" said Wanniski.

To make this work, the Republicans would first have to turn the classical world of economics — which had operated on a simple demand-driven equation for seven thousand years — on its head. (Everybody understood that demand — "working-class wages" — drove economies because working people spent most of their money in the marketplace, producing "demand" for factory output goods and services.) To lay the ground for Two Santa Clauses, in 1974 Wanniski invented a new phrase — "Supply-Side Economics" — and said the reason economies grew wasn't because people had good union jobs and thus enough money to buy things but, instead, because business made things available for sale, thus tantalizing people to part with their money. The more products (supply) there were in the stores, he said, the faster the economy would grow. And the more money we gave rich people and their corporations (via tax cuts) the more stuff (supply) they'd generously produce for us to think about buying.

At a glance, this move by the Republicans seems irrational, cynical and counterproductive. It certainly defies classic understandings of economics. But if you consider Jude Wanniski's playbook, it makes complete sense. To help, Arthur Laffer took that equation a step further with his famous napkin scribble. Not only was supply-side a rational concept, Laffer suggested, but as taxes went down, revenue to the government would go up! Neither concept made any sense — and time has proven both to be colossal idiocies — but if Americans would buy into it all they offered the Republican Party a way out of the wilderness.

Surely this would both "starve the beast" of the American government and force the Democrats to make the politically suicidal move of becoming deficit hawks. And that's just how it turned out.

Bill Clinton, the first Democrat they blindsided with Two Santas, had run on an FDR-like platform of a "New Covenant" with the American people that would strengthen the institutions of the New Deal, strengthen labor, and institute a national single-payer health care system. A few weeks before his inauguration, however, Wanniski-insider Alan Greenspan and Goldman Sachs co-chairman Robert Rubin sat him down and told him the facts of life: Reagan and Bush had run up such a huge deficit that he was going to have to raise taxes and cut the size of government. Clinton took their advice to heart, raised taxes, balanced the budget, and cut numerous programs, declaring an "end to welfare as we know it" and, in his second inaugural address, an "end to the era of big government." Clinton shot Santa Claus, and the result was an explosion of Republican wins across the country as Republican politicians campaigned on a platform of supply-side tax cuts and pork-rich spending increases.

State after state turned red, and the Republican Party rose to take over, ultimately, every single lever of power in the federal government, from the Supreme Court to the White House. Looking at the wreckage of the Democratic Party all

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around Clinton in 1999, Wanniski wrote a gloating memo that said, in part: "We of course should be indebted to Art Laffer for all time for his Curve... But as the primary political theoretician of the supply-side camp, I began arguing for the 'Two Santa Claus Theory' in 1974. If the Democrats are going to play Santa Claus by promoting more spending, the Republicans can never beat them by promoting less spending. They have to promise tax cuts..."

Two Santa Clauses had gone mainstream.
Never again would Republicans worry about the debt or deficit when they were in office; and they knew well how to scream hysterically about it and hook in the economically naïve press as soon as Democrats again took power. Plus, Republicans could be double Santa Clauses by cutting people's taxes! For working people the tax cuts would only be a small token — a few hundred dollars a year at the most — but Republicans would heavily market them to the media and in political advertising. And the tax cuts for the rich, which weren't to be discussed in public, would amount to hundreds of billions or even trillions of dollars, part of which would be recycled back to the GOP as campaign contributions.

The Republicans got what they wanted from Wanniski's work. They held power for forty years, made their donors trillions of dollars, and cut organized labor's representation in the workplace from around a third of workers when Reagan came into office to around 6 percent of the non-governmental workforce today. Think back to Ronald Reagan, who more than tripled the US debt from a mere $800 billion to $2.6 trillion in his 8 years. That spending produced a massive stimulus to the economy, and the biggest non-wartime increase in American national debt in all of our history. Nary a peep from Republicans about that 218% increase in our debt; they were just fine with it and to this day claim Reagan presided over a "great" economy.

When five rightwingers on the Supreme Court gave the White House to George W. Bush he reverted to Wanniski's "Two Santa" strategy and again nearly doubled the national debt, adding over a trillion in borrowed money to pay for his tax cut for billionaires, and tossing in two unfunded wars for good measure, which also added at least (long term) another $5 trillion. There was not a peep about that debt from any high-profile in-the-know Republicans; in fact, Dick Cheney famously said, amplifying Wanniski's strategy: "Reagan proved deficits don't matter. We won the midterms. This is our due."

Bush and Cheney raised the debt by 86% to over $10 trillion (and additional trillions in war debt that wasn't put on the books until Obama entered office, so it looks like its his). Then came Democratic President Barack Obama, and suddenly the GOP was hysterical about the debt again. So much so that they convinced a sitting Democratic president to propose a cut to Social Security (the "chained CPI"). Obama nearly shot the Democrats' biggest Santa Claus, just like Wanniski predicted, until outrage from the Democratic base stopped him.

Next, Donald Trump raised our national debt by almost $7 trillion, but the GOP raised the debt ceiling without a peep every year for the first three years of his administration, and then suspended it altogether for 2020 (so, if Biden won, he'd have to justify raising the ceiling for 2 years' worth of deficits, making it even more politically painful). And now Republicans are getting ready to use the debt ceiling debate to drop their Two Santas bomb right onto President Joe Biden's head. After all, it worked against Clinton and Obama. Why wouldn't they use it again? And if Republican debt-ceiling default threats could lower the stock market, as they did to both Clinton and Obama, all the better: Republicans could just blame the Democrats in power! Americans deserve to know how we've been manipulated, and by whom, for the past 40 years. Hopefully Democratic politicians and our media will begin to call the GOP out on Wanniski's and Reagan's Two Santa Clauses scam.