

POSTAL NEWS

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1. Dozens of ex-postal officials got generous no-bid deals, report says

Who says you can't go back? Apparently you can at the U.S. Postal Service.

Dozens of former top executives and hundreds of former employees have returned to the agency in recent years as private contractors, sometimes making double the salaries they made as full-time workers, according to a new watchdog report.

Three audits released this week said the cash-strapped Postal Service is doing a poor job tracking its use of no-bid contracts, contributes more to worker health and life insurance benefits than other federal agencies and should consider closing more of its regional offices to help address an anticipated \$230 billion, 10-year budget gap.

The three reports come as the Postal Service is set to report billions of dollars in losses Wednesday because of declining mail volume, awaits permission from postal regulators to raise postage rates and is locked in negotiations with two of its largest unions.

The Postal Service has awarded more than 2,700 contracts to former employees since 1991 and awarded 17 no-bid deals to former executives between 2006 and 2009, according to one of the reports. Most of those executives made six-figure sums, the report said. One unnamed executive received a \$260,000 no-bid deal in July 2009 to train his successor just two months after retiring.

"It appears unethical to hire back former executives at nearly twice their former pay to advise new executives who were placed in their position based on their expertise and years of Postal Service experience," the report said. "There is also employee morale and public image issues management must consider when the Postal Service is closing post offices and seeking a reduced delivery schedule."

Beyond employment contracts, the Postal Service improperly classified the status of 5 percent, or \$910 million of its \$18 billion annual contracting costs, according to the report.

"The Postal Service, like the federal sector and private industry, will use noncompetitive purchases in those instances when a noncompetitive purchase is the

best contracting method to meet our business needs," Postal Service spokeswoman Joanne Veto said. The mail agency is also reviewing its deals with former employees and has instituted new policies to guard against potential conflicts of interest, Veto said.

The federal government procures about 30 percent of its goods and services, and the Postal Service has stringent approval requirements for noncompetitive purchases, she said.

A separate report detailed the Postal Service's contributions to worker health care and life insurance benefits. The mail agency's contribution rate to the Federal Employees Health Benefits program is 79 percent for most postal workers, higher than the 72 percent contribution rate the federal government pays for civilian workers. Postal officials involved in ongoing labor negotiations hope to win concessions from labor unions to reduce that contribution rate in coming years.

But postal auditors told the office of Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) Friday that the Postal Service pays 100 percent of health benefits for senior executives, some administrative staffers and directors of its office of inspector general.

A third report published this week presented plans to save \$289 million to \$894 million in the next decade by merging or closing dozens of administrative offices. Auditors recommended either merging several nearby offices into a central location, closing district offices with low work hours and mail volume, or moving regional offices into its Washington headquarters.

USPS has trimmed \$10 billion in costs since 2008, and this year ceased hiring and promoting administrative staff. But Collins and Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) plan to use the audits to urge an additional \$800 million in cuts in fiscal 2011.

Aides said the senators requested the reports after auditors revealed this year that former postal executive Robert F. Bernstock had awarded millions of dollars in noncompetitive employment contracts to former colleagues. Bernstock left the Postal Service in May before auditors issued their report.

Collins called on Postmaster General John E. Potter to immediately consider the recommendations from the three reports.

"These IG reports raise extremely troubling questions about the management abilities and core decisions of the Postal Service," Collins said, adding that the mail agency "is at a crossroads in its history. The survival of this institution, which is vital to our country, depends on its regaining its financial footing."

The Maine Republican opposes a Senate bill unveiled Thursday that would give the Postal Service more flexibility to cut Saturday mail deliveries and close thousands of post offices. She also opposes plans to raise first-class stamp prices to 46 cents in January. The Postal Regulatory Commission must issue a binding decision on the rate increase by Oct. 4.

By Ed O'Keefe | September 24, 2010; 3:44 PM ET

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2. I Love My iPhone but Need to Break Up With AT&T

Posted by Ilana Angel

Remember when people used to say they were going to go “postal” on someone? There were so many disgruntled postal employees who were wreaking havoc by barging into post offices and shooting people, that when people got mad the tag line became “I’m going to go postal.”

Thank goodness all is well with the United States Postal Service and things have calmed down. The new number one place to get pissed off is any cellular company store. For me it happens to be AT&T. I seriously love my iPhone but cannot stand anything else about AT&T.

There is never a day I don’t want to go “cellular” and kick some AT&T ass. I drop calls constantly and when I call to see what the hell is going on, I am forced to speak with people who do not speak English. When I try to explain the problem, they talk over me from a script.

There have been rumors for months that the iPhone will soon be an option for Verizon and I am not ashamed to admit that I pray for this to become a reality. I have many friends who use Verizon and their calls are never dropped. Verizon is the promised land of cellular service.

I have not had a home phone for years. My cell phone is my home and business phone. I rely on it for everything and even used it to blog when I went home to Canada this summer. To not have service causes me stress and I could go cellular at any given moment.

The most frustrating thing is when calls from my son are dropped. People are constantly thinking I am hanging up on them. I start my conversations with “Sorry I’m with AT&T” so people understand the conversation may require 4 or 5 calls since I will drop them that often.

AT&T likes to talk about how much coverage they have around the country but they never mention that just because they have coverage, it does not mean you will get service. AT&T uses it’s commercials to lure you in, only to show you they suck. It’s just not right.

One could argue the easiest thing to do would be to get a new phone and take my business to Verizon. People who make that argument are people who do not use the iPhone. I never thought I would be one of those people who love their phone, but I seriously love my iPhone.

There are some who love the Blackberry and I have moments, usually in the middle of going cellular, when I think about breaking up with my iPhone. Being with AT&T is like a dysfunctional and abusive relationship. They treat me badly, but I stay because I love the phone.

It might be time for me to just man up and walk away. I have survived break ups before so how hard can it be? Will I start crying when I see someone else using an iPhone and I am sitting there with my Blackberry? Will a Blackberry make me want to sit on the couch and eat ice cream?

It has been a long relationship for my iPhone and me and as much as I know it's not good for me, I just can't seem to pull away. The iPhone is my drug of choice. I know it's bad for me, but I can't stop using it. I need to get in iPhone rehab and finally break up with AT&T.

If anyone who works at AT&T is reading, your service sucks. If we can put a man on the moon, how is it possible I can't maintain a phone call while sitting in my own home? Just writing this blog is causing me to feel a little cellular and that is just not right. Get it together people.

To my iPhone, it's not you Sweetie. I love you but there are people who don't want us to be together. I've hung on as long as I can my darling and it may finally be time to let you go. You'll meet someone new and I promise that if I ever learn to speak Hindi I will come back to you.

I am going to spend some time this weekend looking at phones over at Verizon. I am very hopeful that once there, I don't have the need to go cellular. Maybe once I take the plunge the iPhone will follow me and we can be reunited. For that day, I am keeping the faith.

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