

for working on Sundays, employees would be taking about a 17 percent cut in pay and benefits, the source said.

"They basically put this crazy offer on the table and said it was because of their financial problems," said David Martinez, who has worked at Flexel for 16 years. He began with the company when it was owned by Du Pont. "We came through with a lot of suggestions of things that they could save money on. They just basically put that offer on and never negotiated anything in good faith."

Workers were told the new policies would be instituted Friday, and many think the mandatory meetings today will announce that plan.

Martinez said employees haven't received pay raises in more than four years, which has added to their disenchantment with management.

Wages were frozen in December 1991 at the average salary of \$13.66 an hour, according to a report in 1993.

Martinez alleged poor corporate management was the reason for the company's woes.

Martinez cited the purchase of a machine to make rubber gloves that is boxed and sitting in the warehouse unused as an example of poor decisionmaking by Flexel.

In previous years, management said the company experienced financial difficulties because of unfair competition from Mexico. Mexican companies export cellophane to the United States without paying a tariff.

In 1991, Lindsey Walters, president of the Atlanta-based Flexel Corp., said Mexican cellophane plants increased their penetration of U.S. markets to 18 percent from 3 percent during the previous four years.

OUTRAGEOUS THAT LONG ISLAND'S VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS MUST TAKE VACATION TIME FOR FIGHTING THEIR WORST EVER FIRE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York [Mr. FORBES] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FORBES. Mr. Speaker, many of us in this Nation for many years have heard about the values of volunteerism. Our own President of the United States came up with a program where he thought we ought to pay volunteers in a program called national service. Tonight I want to address the floor for the purposes of talking about some tremendous individuals who work for the Federal Government. They are the postal workers of this Nation, the men and women who deliver our mail and the people like in my own village of Quogue, Long Island, where we go down to the mail and the employees in the post office are our friends there. They are our neighbors. They donate time to their communities, and a large number of these postal workers on Long Island also happen to be volunteers in the local fire company, volunteer firefighters.

Last evening I addressed this floor and talked about the recent fire on Long Island in which over 5,000 volunteer firefighters made a tremendous contribution. They saved our property, they saved our communities. At threat during that fire could very well have been the local post office in Eastport, the local post office in Speonk, the

local post office in West Hampton, Long Island, NY. All of these facilities, had they burned, would have cost the taxpayers many, many dollars to replace these fine postal facilities.

I am forced to come to the floor this evening because of an outrageous incident that I have learned involving the U.S. Postal Service. The postal employees who are our friends, many of our relatives, our neighbors, on Long Island who donated their time to fight the worst fire in Long Island history are now being told by their supervisors at the Postal Service in Washington that they are going to have to take vacation time to cover their absence from work to fight the worst fire in Long Island history. Mr. Speaker, I find that outrageous, I find that the worst example in government of bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo gobbledegook that serves no reasonable purpose. We have small employers on Long Island, delis, Main Street merchants, who can ill afford the loss of an employee for a full week, and yet these smallest of businesses are paying their employees who had to leave the business to go fight the fire.

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These volunteer firefighters are the best example of volunteerism, of courage, of bravery, and I find it outrageous that the United States Postal Service, the supervisors in Washington, have deemed them not worthy of being paid while they fought to save our communities.

Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous. I attempted to reach the Postmaster General of the United States, but I was told he was in Hawaii, and he has been there for about a week, and he is jetting home to Washington as we speak. I am hopeful that we can convince the Postmaster General and the hierarchy of the United States Postal Service that when men and women give up their time, thousands of hours to train themselves to stay up in the latest techniques in fighting fires, that they ought to be paid when the community is at risk, such as our communities on Long Island were at risk. I find it outrageous, as I have said repeatedly, that the United States Postal Service in Washington does not deem the volunteerism of its own postal workers in this time of need as worthy of reimbursement for their time away from the post office.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage the United States Postal Service to rethink its position, to pay the employees of the Postal Service who gave of their time to save our communities during the fire, and I ask them, again, to reconsider their position.

THE TRUTH ON MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. KINGSTON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINGSTON. Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to discuss a couple of items tonight. A previous speaker on the other side of the aisle actually stood in the House Chamber just minutes ago and said that there is no problem with Medicare, that Medicare is not going bankrupt. I just find that unbelievable, that somebody would be still arguing about the April trustees' report, when it was offered by Clinton appointees, including Secretaries Shalala, Reich and Rubin, who are all appointed by Clinton. They are his right arm, for crying out loud. Drawing partisan lines on a trustee report that really is a Democrat report. I am flabbergasted, after a month back in the district talking to senior citizens, that somebody is at that stage of the debate.

The stage on this side of the aisle, number one, is that this is a bipartisan problem. People that get Medicare, they do not care if they are Democrats or Republicans who are writing the legislation. They want health care.

We are not going to get into a partisan debate on Medicare. What we are going to do is try to preserve and protect it so that it will be there tomorrow, and we are going to try to slow down the rate of increase. Medical inflation on average is about 4.5 percent. Medicare growth has been 11 percent. We are going to increase the benefit to each recipient from about \$4,800 to \$6,400. So the door is open. Any ideas from either party are welcome, but we are going to solve this problem in a bipartisan way. We are going to simplify Medicare, and protect and preserve it.

The gentleman from the 9th District of Georgia [Mr. CHAMBLISS] joins us, and I yield the floor to him.

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. Speaker, I too am just somewhat flabbergasted by the comments made by the previous speaker from the other side of the aisle regarding the cuts in Medicare. He made one statement that Medicare is more solvent today than it has been in a long time. We had problems with it in the past and the reaction of this Congress was to make minor adjustments in the Medicare program.

Well, what the Democrats consider as "minor adjustments" is raising taxes. That is not what the American people want. The American people want a solid program with solid funding, not a program that is a runaway program that requires raising taxes to fix it.

Congress must act responsibly. We are charged by the American people to take a program like Medicare, to reform, revise, and improve that program to where we take money from the taxpayers and we spend it wisely. When it comes time for folks to receive the benefits of Medicare, they ought to be able to receive those benefits without the necessity of raising taxes.

Mr. KINGSTON. If the gentleman will yield, we actually raised the taxes on Medicare in 1993. All that did is postpone the bankruptcy I think three to six months. So raising taxes is not the solution.