

## Letter from the Editor

**H**aving been involved in one fashion or another with the media for a long time, I never cease to be amazed at how poor a job they often do in reporting the news. Amazed, but not surprised. Let me explain, because it bears on the challenges we now face.

Even as a part of the media for a quarter-century, based in New England, the Midwest and then in Washington, DC, I was frequently critical of the performance of the craft I worked in. Too often, we engaged in simplistic, superficial and sensationalistic reporting, with a good dose of pack journalism thrown in.

Take elections, for example. Every two or four years, as the bureau chief and reporters gathered in our Washington Bureau to plan campaign coverage, I'd make yet another plea to focus this time on the issues, instead of the horse-race aspect. Rather than writing endless stories about the polls, money-raising battles or candidates' electoral strategies, I'd suggest that we delve into the actual positions candidates were advocating and how their policies would affect ordinary Americans. In other words, emphasize the substance of governing, not just the razzle-dazzle of politics.

The others would listen politely—regarding me, perhaps, as a hopeless idealist—and then we'd proceed to cover the election the same old way. Why? Because this approach generated clear story lines about who was winning, because it was easier to report on the horse race than to analyze complex policy issues, because journalists are creatures of habit, because editors felt this was what readers wanted.

Subsequently, I glimpsed the media from a different perspective, for three years offering commentary or being interviewed on why labor remains as relevant as ever and how labor's woes are linked to the assault on the middle class. While I experienced some thoughtful work on outlets including National Public Radio and C-SPAN, I also observed cable TV discussions deliver more fire than light.

**Trying to influence coverage of postal issues** since joining the NALC last August, I've been amazed at how dismal some of the reporting and commentary is, but not surprised. If I haven't said it already, reporters

tend to be creatures of habit, and to seek the most obvious story lines. It's easier to parrot the conventional wisdom, to run with the simplistic notion of a Postal Service losing billions of dollars a year, to fit the USPS into the prevailing narrative about wasteful federal spending, than it is to untangle what's really going on and to dissect the nuances of pre-funding and pension surpluses.

It's easier, but as we know, it's misleading, and it doesn't serve the public interest.

**Turning this around is difficult, but it's not impossible.** It involves a lot of work at all levels of our union, it requires persistence, and it demands some strategic thinking.

The local and regional levels provide opportunities to make important strides, because poor reporting there tends to result more from a lack of knowledge or information than from the adherence to ideology often in display among national commentators. This, of course, is where you all come in, from NBAs to state presidents, branch leaders to rank-and-file activists.

Region 1 NBA Chris Jackson, for instance, stepped in deftly to avert reporting by a local newspaper that would have detracted from the positive work of so many California letter carriers who collected food in a state hard-hit by the recession. Totals were down from last year, but Jackson provided context that gave readers the full picture. Meanwhile, the *Sun-Sentinel*, a Florida newspaper, wrote an editorial that, while somewhat balanced, downplayed the value of Saturday delivery. The ink wasn't dry before Region 9 NBA Judy Willoughby alerted us, and the paper has agreed to run a response outlining the value of maintaining six-day delivery.

On the national level, things are complicated by a mixture of ideology, politics and the presence of many journalists who are, shall we delicately say, ever so impressed with how much they think they know. We're engaged in some dialogues, including with *Business Week*, whose recent unfortunate story on the Postal Service prompted a good number of you to call the Communications Department. We appreciate those calls, and we'll keep you informed on that and related matters.



PHILIP DINE

### EDITORIAL STAFF:

Managing Editor Philip Dine  
Designer/Web Editor Mike Shea  
Internet Communications Coordinator  
Joe Conway  
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges  
Editorial Assistant Jenessa Kildall

*The Postal Record* (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

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Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

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