

Letter from the Editor

The week of July 4, I was in the small Massachusetts town where I spent summers as a child and where I generally take my family each summer. The timing this year was fortuitous; the day we left the Washington area, it was hit by a ferocious storm, most homes lost power for multiple days, and temperatures hovered above 100 degrees. Meanwhile, the area we visited was sunny and cool the whole week.

More importantly, I was struck by a few incidents involving the mail.

One afternoon, I was on the bustling main street, ready to put a letter in the mailbox and trying to figure out whether it would go out that day. A woman who seemingly had a shop in the area walked up and assured me it would. She was clearly familiar with the timing of mail pickups and deliveries.

A couple of days later I was in line at the post office, a major gathering place where folks converse and catch up on people and events. I was wearing a T-shirt that read, "Letter Carriers Support Workers' Rights"—partly because it was red, white and blue and appropriately patriotic, partly to see if it would draw any attention and start a conversation.

Ahead of me in the lengthy line was an obviously well-to-do business type used to giving orders. (I gleaned that by his commanding tone on his cell phone: "I need my sister to be picked up. She's on the 12:05 p.m. ferry. She has to go first to my house to drop off a dog, then to the golf club. I'll pay for it.")

He noticed my shirt and asked whether there was a problem with the Postal Service. I began to tell him about the misleading conventional wisdom and the pre-funding mess, and he quickly got it. Referring to anti-worker legislators, he summarized, "So they want to close it down." He was quite intrigued by this, evidently sympathetic to our cause, and said he'd had no idea of the political machinations going on.

As he was leaving after completing his business at the counter, he walked by, tapped me on the shoulder, and promised to spread the message.

At the counter, the clerk told me how disruptive it would be for the busy post office's customers if they were denied Saturday mail delivery. Some were year-round residents,

some were summer residents, and they wanted their mail.

Toward week's end, I was seated in a local bank speaking with a customer service employee, who said it would have a huge impact on her if reduced mail service led her post office in the nearby town where she lived to curtail its Saturday hours.

She has a post office box and doesn't leave work early enough during the week to get her mail. So she collects her week's mail on Saturday.

What was my takeaway from these various conversations?

That in 2012, Americans remain highly interested in mail and mail delivery and post offices and opposed to degradation of the service they're accustomed to—and further, that when they find out the real story, they're often outraged.

And that, in a larger sense, we are fighting for the soul of America, for the kind of public service that makes our country what it is. Where I was in Massachusetts was not the type of isolated community often depicted as relying for any connection with the outside world on its post office. On the contrary, this was a tourist destination visited by tens of thousands of people during the summer. The people I spoke with did not need a post office or postal delivery to feel connected. They simply want their traditional mail service because it's important to them, whether they're residents or small-business owners. And they're particularly annoyed when they learn about the ideologically driven effort to deprive them of this service.

Finally, that in a very real sense, we are the conservatives in this fight, striving to preserve what is good about this country, what is tried and true, what is patriotic, while those who would strip Americans of a service they have enjoyed for two centuries and that is embedded in the Constitution are the radicals, the social experimenters, the activists.

When our foes try to denigrate us by referring to Big Labor or the like, we need to remind people of the nature of those we fight as we seek to protect public services: Radicals with little regard for tradition or for the people of this country.



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

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