

Strategic tinkering with our communications efforts



**Philip
Dine**

Following the recent congressional elections and how they altered the political landscape, an adjustment to our communications effort is in order. Nothing too drastic, but some changes nonetheless—involving scope, breadth and content.

You're already doing more than any other union's membership on the messaging front, and to great effect. You've educated the public and politicians alike, thereby changing the conversation. Topics that were tightly held secrets—pre-funding, operating profits, the upside of the Internet, the spike in package deliveries—now are common knowledge and typically make it into news stories. And you've presented the in-

formation in a way that shows we're fighting for the public interest.

The effort you've put in makes one pause before asking you to do still more. But at the same time, that very effort suggests a willingness and an ability to do what's necessary to protect an iconic American institution, and, along with it, our jobs.

Please keep in mind that we're not talking about wholesale changes, rather some strategic tinkering around the edges.

First, let's get our message to even more media outlets. Along with letters to the editor and commentary pieces, it can be productive to call a newspaper's city or business editors and suggest stories on why six-day delivery matters to small businesses. Or, what it would mean to the elderly and everyone to have to traipse in wintry weather to a cluster box for the daily mail. Similar calls to news producers at local TV stations also could be fruitful, as could call-ins to radio talk shows in your area. Remember, no outlet is too small to have an impact. You never know when an influential business or civic leader—or congressional spouse—is paying attention. So, let's raise the number of interactions with the media, to inform and persuade even more people.

Second, let's cast our net even wider, engaging in more rural areas or other generally majority-Republican areas. The political shift in Washington means we have to make sure that constituents of GOP members, as well as the lawmakers and their staffs, hear our message. Those of you in districts or states with a conservative hue are vital to our effort.

That leads to the third point, which is to focus on the value—indeed, values—associated with the Postal Service. Thus far, you've done a terrific job explaining the actual fi-

nances of the Postal Service and why it's unnecessary to degrade the networks. Building on that, we now can tell people why they should care about the fate of the Postal Service and what will be lost if it's dismantled—by addressing the impact USPS has on the life of our communities and our nation.

We still need to explain the finances but we also need to discuss values—the second part of the one-two punch, if you will.

Let's talk about things like the Constitution, history and tradition, the role of the Postal Service and letter carriers in homeland and neighborhood security, charitable and community efforts that involve people helping people without taxpayer money or government programs, veterans and public service, the providing of affordable service to small businesses that create two-thirds of all new jobs, the linking of communities and people around this vast country. Employ evocative terms like patriotism and tradition and economic growth, security and community and national unity—and explain how they apply.

If you want to discuss any of this or need help in getting the message out, feel free to let me know.

As I write this, the dramatic events of Nov. 14 remain fresh. That Friday saw a trifecta of developments—the annual USPS financial report, the four postal unions' national Day of Action in protest of the planned closing of 82 mail processing plants, and the postmaster general's unexpected retirement.

Given the PMG's proclivity to present the worst possible financial picture possible in pursuit of his shrink-to-survive legislative agenda, the subsequent media reports could have been damaging.

But effective work by NALC's president prevented that. The postal unions held their first-ever teleconference media call, to counter the PMG's call, and by taking the lead, President Rolando ensured that USPS' \$1.4 billion operating profit for the year got reporters' attention. Moreover, he got comments about the folly of dismantling profitable postal networks into most media reports. To cap it all, his letter in the next day's *Washington Post* detailed USPS' financial turn-around and its meaning for the appropriate legislative remedy.

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