

Continuing letter carriers' powerful communications efforts



**Philip
Dine**

Once again, letter carriers rose to the challenge this past month, telling people the real story about the Postal Service at a time when it was imperative that someone step forward and do so.

You shouldn't have to do this. You signed up to deliver the mail, and you provide your customers with the best and most affordable service anywhere while delivering 40 percent of the world's mail. And this magazine regularly reports the additional ways you enrich and protect the communities you serve.

You fight for legislation that will protect the Postal Service, though a national treasure based on the Constitution shouldn't require protection.

On top of all that, it shouldn't also be incumbent on you to cut through myths and ideological rhetoric so the public will know the truth about the Postal Service. But it is.

That's rarely been more the case than early last month, when the outgoing postmaster general took a parting shot at his own employees. Patrick Donahoe, speaking at the National Press Club, could have offered a positive vision for the future. He could have focused on the remarkable turnaround in postal finances. He could have outlined the opportunities the communications revolution offers for the USPS. He could even have challenged the various stakeholders to compromise or work better together.

Instead, he lashed out at postal workers and their unions, and also at mailing industry groups and at lawmakers (for the wrong reason, of course—that they haven't enacted the service degradation he so relentlessly pushes). It was, indeed, Pat Donahoe vs. the world.

But those who care deeply about the future of the Postal Service and about its employees quickly responded—none more forcefully or factually than President Rolando.

He was the sole person besides Donahoe quoted in a story in *The Hill* the day after the PMG's speech: " 'It's important to note that all the stakeholders have a constructive plan for the future—except for the departing postmaster general,' Fredric Rolando, the president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, said in response to Donahoe's speech. 'His slash-and-burn approach ignores the facts and would destroy the Postal Service by degrading service to Americans and driving mail and revenue away.' "

When a *Washington Post* columnist wrote that same day about the state of labor relations at USPS, he too sought out President Rolando: "Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, said that 'the postmaster general's tone in his remarks with regard to the employees—and

to other stakeholders, including businesses and lawmakers—is insulting,' Donahoe, Rolando added, 'is mired in blaming everyone but himself.' "

In a story on a separate issue that happened to run that day as well, a *Washington Post* reporter examined Postal Service ideas about creating "flexibility" for USPS employees by shifting workdays and workweeks and using temporary employees—supposedly to please existing workers while attracting new ones. The first voice in the story: " 'A stable, full-time workforce leads to the superb relationships the Postal Service has with customers,' said Fredric Rolando, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers, which represents about 270,000 of the Postal Service's delivery workers. The push for flexibility at the USPS is trying to 'solve a problem that doesn't exist,' he added. "

His thoughts transformed the entire article—from one that would have applauded workplace flexibility as a 'win-win' into a tougher look at the real motivations behind the proposed changes.

We've focused in recent columns on the importance of communicating with folks through media outlets in their towns and cities, but sometimes it's necessary to have a large microphone to combat an adversary possessing a large microphone of his own—such as a departing PMG addressing a group of journalists.

It's worth noting the symbiotic relationship here, with each type of outreach—community and nationwide—reinforcing the other and working toward the same goal of an informed public and informed legislators.

Over the past month, NALC continued its communications efforts on the local and regional levels as well, with President Rolando having hard-hitting commentaries about Postal Service finances and the need to maintain the now-profitable postal networks in the *Xenia Daily Gazette*, *Denver Post*, *Springfield News-Leader* and *Idaho State Journal*. He also was quoted in a *Baltimore Sun* news story about the public rating the Postal Service tops among federal agencies.

Numbers of you joined in this effort, in print and on TV, with commentaries, quotes in news stories, or even feature stories prompted by your good works and the respect you have engendered in your communities. This complementary work is what makes NALC's communications effort so powerful.

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