

Postal politics is local



Philip
Dine

“All politics is local” is a remark generally associated with Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, the former Speaker of the House and Democratic congressman from Cambridge, MA.

Indeed, people tend to view politics through the prism of their community and their everyday life. Ideology may be central for the chattering classes and the highly partisan, but regular people are far more practical and focused on the environment around them. When it comes to choosing a mayor or governor to maintain public safety or remove the trash (i.e., daily life back home), voters—even those who predictably vote along party lines for president—often put ideol-

ogy aside and go for the most trusted, competent and likable contender from whatever party.

Here’s something else that’s intensely local in nature: how people perceive, process and interpret the news. National and international news is read, viewed or listened to differently (and often by fewer people) than local news. What happens in our neighborhood or town or city is taken in far more visceral fashion, because it directly affects us and our families and communities on a daily basis.

And that truth, in turn, strongly affects what NALC members and officers do—and need to continue to do—to get the message out about the U.S. Postal Service and win the battle for public and political support.

This manifests itself in two key ways:

- **The mail affects people where they live and work.** The Postal Service is a huge enterprise, a pre-funding mandate is a rather abstract concept, USPS financial statements are (often intentionally) murky. But changes in service that would force a homeowner in Minneapolis to roam the neighborhood searching for a cluster box or make a grandmother in rural Nebraska wait longer for a card from her grandson in Omaha or deprive a small-business owner on Florida’s Gulf Coast of receiving his checks on a Saturday—those are clear (and worrisome) prospects that people can be persuaded to rally around. They hear how a national change in policy out of Washington will translate in their community—and they readily grasp the local impact.
- **A similar dynamic pertains in terms of influencing our other key audience: lawmakers in Congress.** Stories in the national press matter, but when a politician or his staff reads a local article or letter reflecting constituent

anger about the possibility of losing home delivery—that hits home. These, after all, are the people he represents, and who have the power to hire or fire him.

Moreover, politics and ideology intrude less by dint of the news outlet being local. A commentary in the conservative *Wall Street Journal* or liberal *New York Times*, a segment on Republican-leaning Fox News or Democrat-leaning MSNBC, will be taken with a grain of salt. But when the local newspaper interviews elderly residents about mail service—well, that seems more like real life and less like partisan gamesmanship.

These factors are particularly critical given the new political landscape and our need to influence residents, and legislators, from rural areas and other GOP-leaning places.

So, all this makes it highly valuable when President Rolando has a letter in a major Louisiana newspaper or in the *Kansas City Star*, Missouri’s biggest paper and one that also circulates heavily in Kansas.

Or, when Idaho State President John Paige so inundates newspapers with information that—to paraphrase a popular bumper sticker—if you live in Idaho and don’t know the truth about the Postal Service, you aren’t paying attention. But beyond penning letters to the editor, Paige has engaged with his hometown mayor in Pocatello as well as with state and federal lawmakers—Republicans, by the way. All this prompted his local newspaper to write an editorial supporting the postal networks—which provided an opening for President Rolando to weigh in.

These are just examples of what so many of you are doing on the local scene, using media outlets to get out the message and influence the public and politicians—as we face a new year and a new set of challenges.

There’s one other reason for this focus. Letter carriers, as we know, enjoy respect and credibility among the public. Nowhere is that more true than where you actually live and work and are known.

This personal credibility is one of our greatest advantages. Let’s use it!

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, and at additional mailing offices.

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).

© 2015 by the National Association of Letter Carriers.

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

CHANGE OF ADDRESS? Contact the Membership Department.

Follow us on the NALC Activist Alert Blog and on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube by going to NALC.org.

