

A key period for letter carriers



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This is a key period for letter carriers, with a new political landscape, a new Congress, the administration's new budget proposal, the Postal Service so much in the news—and, of course, a new postmaster general.

And so, our work of getting the message out and helping build an informed citizenry—and informed politicians—never has been more important.

Fortunately, it's also a period full of opportunities to do so.

As we all know, the Postal Service has embarked on an effort—begun by the previous PMG—to slow the nation's mail by reducing service standards and closing or consolidating dozens of mail-processing plants.

That has sparked an outcry in communities around the country—duly reported by regional print and broadcast media. This gives us the opening to explain why degrading service (including eliminating Saturday or door delivery) not only hurts residents and businesses, and the Postal Service itself, by driving away mail and revenue—but is unnecessary, given USPS' rising profitability.

What makes our role all the more meaningful is that the reporting often fails to provide context. After noting how poorer service is irritating residents, the stories typically quote a USPS mouthpiece contending that (supposedly) falling mail volumes necessitate service cuts to save money.

Enter letter carriers. When someone who actually understands the big picture writes a letter or commentary piece filled with facts, or gives an interview to a TV or radio station, people discover that this isn't a narrative of technology (Internet) doing the Postal Service in, but rather a matter of misguided public policy (pre-funding).

Once we've done the news outlet's darned reporting for them, things change. Now, armed with knowledge, residents or small-business owners can stop lamenting the supposed impact of technology—and pick up a pen or phone and tell their representatives they don't like what Washington's doing.

The same holds true when a newspaper editorializes about these developments. Some recent editorials decry the impact on their region yet accept the changes as necessary cost-cutting steps, citing USPS talking points.

Whether it's an incomplete news story or a misleading editorial, we have a great chance to inform folks on an issue they care about. We need to be on the lookout for such opportunities.

Meanwhile, the conservative ascendancy in Congress has emboldened some anti-government think tanks and com-

mentators to produce opinion pieces blasting the Postal Service or even espousing privatization. Because such pieces get so many basic facts wrong—USPS is taxpayer-supported, loses billions a year because of the Internet, is inefficient and is unpopular among the public—they practically beg for a response. We can do this effectively by simply presenting the facts—including USPS' \$1.4 billion operating profit in fiscal 2014, the \$1.1 billion figure for fiscal 2015's first quarter, and the rise in letter and package revenues.

By taking advantage of these opportunities, we let residents and business owners know they don't have to accept degradation of their services, we influence lawmakers, we boost the Postal Service, and we help ourselves. Not bad for writing an opinion piece or giving an interview!

Over the past month, President Rolando has responded to editorials, news stories and commentaries to explain why the cuts don't have to occur and what's at stake for the community and state involved. He's done that in metro papers (including in Detroit; Lexington, KY; and Worcester, MA), mid-sized papers (Xenia, OH) and community or rural papers (Wisconsin and three in Arizona). He's done that while also aggressively shaping national reporting on the Postal Service's quarterly financial report as the most-quoted person besides the USPS' PMG and CFO, by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* among others. Speaking of which, Executive Vice President Tim O'Malley's letter to the editor demolished the *Post's* misleading editorial.

Others have joined in this effort; most recently (as I write this) Ronnie Roush, CDL for Indiana District 5, in the *Indianapolis Star*; Wisconsin State Association communications director Jody Spencer in the *Journal Times* (Racine); Idaho State Association President John Paige in print and on TV.

There are various ways to wage this battle. Recently retired Minneapolis letter carrier Chuck Glover, a former Branch 9 editor, spotted a misleading image of USPS on his local cable provider's website. He called the cable company, which removed the photo, and he also notified his NBA's office.

Our foes can't match this type of leadership from the top or engagement from the rank and file. We can extend our advantage by scouring the media for the types of opportunities discussed above, and for others you may find.

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