

# Closing the communications loop



**Philip  
Dine**

**B**efore taking a broad look at NALC communications efforts and their impact—and at what remains to be done—let’s note some recent particulars.

President Rolando had a strong letter in the *Washington Post*, touting the Postal Service’s financial turnaround and rebutting outlandish statements made at a discussion on the Postal Service held by the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank.

The *Santa Monica Mirror (CA)* ran a piece by the president; and his commentary in the *Idaho State Journal*, along with an *Idaho Statesman* letter that same Sunday by state association President John Paige, assured that Idahoans would be well informed.

Iowa’s KIMT-TV (CBS) depicted Rep. Steve King (R-IA) getting a behind-the-scenes look at a day in a letter carrier’s life—courtesy of an invitation by State Association Vice President Herb Copley and members of Mason City Branch 471. William Cook, director of legislation for the New York State Association, had a letter in the (*Schenectady Daily Gazette*, as did Waupaca, WI Branch 1298 President Howard Pope in the *Waupaca County Post* and Spokane, WA Branch 442 letter carrier Mike Rapp in the *Spokesman-Review*. Napa, CA Branch 627 letter carrier E.J. Aguarin was written about in the *Napa County Register* for saving a man on his route, while Salt Lake City’s KSL-TV (NBC) featured community reaction to Layton, UT Branch 4506 letter carrier Brent Coulam’s retirement.

You clearly are influencing public opinion, but that understates what you’re accomplishing. You’re knocking the misleading conventional wisdom—which too long dominated the discussion—for a loop, and reshaping how people view the U.S. Postal Service and its future.

**Most reporters and commentators with a shred of objectivity** (i.e., those not intent on privatizing all public services), now acknowledge that the red ink at USPS stems not from the mail but rather from the congressional pre-funding mandate.

Further, journalists routinely tell their readers, viewers and listeners that USPS finances are improving, even showing operating profits. And they typically note the skyrocketing package revenue resulting from online shopping, which demonstrates that the Internet is a benefit as well as a challenge.

This isn’t happening because reporters suddenly decided to get the story right. It’s happening because your countless letters, commentary pieces and interviews are altering how people perceive the Postal Service and its finances.

Importantly, your efforts have a multiplier effect. By getting your voice in newspapers or on air, you directly influence not

only the public but also legislators, who tend to be careful monitors of the media. You also get a second bite at lawmakers, because some of their constituents absorb your points and communicate with their representatives. And by appearing in news outlets you inform journalists, thereby helping shape future reports to people and politicians.

**However, our work is far from done. With a few exceptions,** journalists haven’t closed the loop in their reporting on postal trends. They’re increasingly presenting the facts cited above—a major improvement—but they haven’t yet done the analysis to show what those facts mean. So the public and legislators still often get an incomplete story, or even a misleading one.

For example, in the same stories where reporters note pre-funding’s impact and cite the operating profits, they often pose as reasonable the “bi-partisan” effort to end Saturday delivery.

We need to make clear the inherent illogic at play here. If the networks are profitable, and the red ink is caused by political meddling, how does degrading the networks improve things? In fact, driving mail and revenue away would worsen things for the Postal Service, which relies on earned revenue—revenue that would diminish were mail made less accessible. Not to mention the hardships that eliminating six-day or door delivery would cause for residents and small businesses.

With more and more media outlets reporting the financial turnaround amid a positive letter and package picture, our communications task is to help connect those trends to the appropriate public policy—strengthening the now-profitable networks while addressing the elephant in the room: pre-funding.

Having spent a quarter-century as a newspaper reporter, and having been subjected to hundreds of radio and TV interviews, let me share a trade secret—journalists are sometimes too harried or unfocused to take a deep breath and think straight. We need to help them draw the logical conclusions from what they themselves—to their credit—are reporting.

**Pioneering newspaperman and first Postmaster General Ben Franklin**, who died 225 years ago almost to the day as I write this, would salute your efforts and your effectiveness. Given how the public discussion has changed, it’s evident that millions of Americans appreciate and value them as well.

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