

Reaching across the ideological divide



**Philip
Dine**

Because of who we are—the type of work you do, as well as your geographic dispersion—we have a politically diverse union, ranging from ardent liberals to thoughtful moderates to staunch conservatives.

As President Rolando often says, this is an advantage for us as we deal with an ideologically divided Congress. In any given part of the country, we likely will have activist members well suited to approach the congressman or senator in place.

The political strength provided by the diversity of our membership is enhanced by our goals as a union. We have the same aims as other unions as far as the labor-management realm—obtaining good pay and work-

ing conditions, safeguarding benefits, assuring safety and job security—but on top of that, we also are fighting for something broader.

We seek to protect and strengthen a national treasure that is embedded in the Constitution and is of vital importance to rural and urban areas alike, to businesses of all sizes, to veterans and the elderly. And so, our issues translate to, and resonate on, lawmakers' local turf.

All of this helps us navigate the political arena, but it also gives us an edge in another key area—the world of the media. In the critical effort to get our message out to the public, our political diversity, combined with a message that crosses political boundaries, means a couple of things.

It gives us an *entrée* to media outlets across the ideological divide. In other words, editors or news directors or producers might take a call or read a letter or e-mail from us when they otherwise wouldn't. And then they might do a story or run our commentary piece or letter to the editor, because it's clear that this isn't a typical labor-management issue but rather a matter of public importance and public policy that affects their readers, viewers or listeners.

It also helps our message resonate with a broad segment of the population, not just the "usual suspects."

We're obviously going to appeal to liberals and many moderates, who are predisposed to support us. They often are union-friendly to start with, tend to support a strong public sector, are sympathetic to public employees, and are skeptical of those who want to decimate government and boost the fortunes of their corporate friends. These folks may simply lack accurate information about USPS and its finances; hence the importance of informing them. We may turn bystanders into advocates.

Conservatives, meanwhile, sometimes are predisposed to oppose us, given those very same factors—government, union, public employees, competition with the private sector. Once they learn more about the Postal Service, however, that often changes. Some are flat-out on our side, others at least reconsider things, while the anti-government zealots won't budge.

The ability to make allies out of adversaries depends on how good our message is. With conservatives and conservative media, the basic message remains the same—operating profits, problem not technology but the congressional mandate and resulting artificial "crisis," USPS offering Americans and their businesses the industrial world's most-affordable delivery network, and so on. But what we can add often resonates strongly with conservatives.

Here are some ideas to consider adding to what you write and say about the Postal Service: based in the Constitution, critical for businesses and rural areas, largest civilian employer of military veterans, doesn't use taxpayer money, delivers for private carriers, centerpiece of a \$1.3 trillion mailing industry that employs 7.5 million Americans in the private sector, letter carriers boosting communities and families through such volunteer actions as conducting the nation's largest single-day food drive or sometimes by saving lives on the route, role in national security as reflected in George W. Bush's Cities' Readiness Initiative.

Simply enumerating those elements makes it clear that we have natural allies throughout the political spectrum, potential allies who can be made into actual allies if we get the facts out.

President Rolando has been working to bridge the political gap for years now—in terms of delivering the message in print, on radio and on TV, and in terms of the content of the message—and he has done this relentlessly.

I can say without hesitation that no other labor leader even approaches his efforts to reach out across the ideological divide. Through this work, he is showing all Americans why they have an interest in a thriving U.S. Postal Service.

That's good for the Postal Service, it's good for us, and it's good for the country.

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