

Motivated messengers delivering the facts



**Philip
Dine**

As the NALC's Executive Council met at Headquarters to begin its session in mid-February, with one of the key items being preparation for the collective-bargaining process for a new five-year contract with the U.S. Postal Service, I couldn't help but reflect back five years in the opposite direction.

Back then, the Communications and Media Relations Department had just embarked on a clear and focused goal: changing the national conversation about the Postal Service.

It was an ambitious undertaking but an essential one, we felt, because much of the NALC's other work—bargaining, legislation and more—depended on it. If the dominant senti-

ment in the public sphere remained that the Postal Service was losing billions of dollars a year delivering the mail, and further that this was linked to the growth of the Internet, then the existence of our employer would be increasingly threatened. Even the majority who valued the Postal Service would soon see it as a lost cause, and the ideologues would have their way.

Looking around the meeting room, it was pretty obvious why the conversation has indeed shifted—from the billions in red ink allegedly caused by the Internet, to how the unique pre-funding mandate disguises operating profits generated in large measure by Internet-generated online shopping.

Every member of the council, whether national business agents, trustees or resident national officers, has in one way or another helped get the NALC's message out through the media to the public and its elected representatives. Equally pivotal in that enterprise have been state and branch officers and rank-and-file letter carriers across the nation, with the yeoman's work you've done communicating the real story about the Postal Service.

The combination of a coherent, fact-based message; consistency over time while allowing for tweaking as circumstances warrant; and the engagement of so many carriers on local, regional and national levels, has had a self-reinforcing effect. The more that journalists read or hear these verifiable facts and this credible narrative, the more they tend to accept it or at least give it good play (whether by using it to frame their stories or by running our commentaries).

Indeed, you've helped make commonplace the type of media coverage that once seemed impossible.

For too long, news about postal finances tended to be reported in doom-and-gloom fashion even when the developments were, in fact, positive. And NALC's views were

either left out entirely or given dismissive treatment. You'd read a story and it seemed as if the reporter had engaged in the following thought process: "Let's stick a short labor quote in for 'balance,' even though everyone knows it lacks merit and is no more than self-serving drivel from a head-in-the-sand union trying to protect its own interests."

Fast forward to early February, when NALC was more prominent in the news coverage of the Postal Service's financial report for Fiscal Year 2016's first quarter than anyone else. Whether it was *The Washington Post*, Associated Press, *International Business Times*, Federal News Radio, *The Hill*, *Linn's Stamp News*, Dow Jones Business News or others, not only were President Rolando's comments decisive in framing the stories, he sometimes was quoted more than all postal officials and lawmakers combined.

It's not the space that matters, but rather the effect on what the public—and their elected representatives—are told about the postal situation. And what news consumers learned in this instance was about rising revenue, profits, Internet-sparked package deliveries, the unique burden of pre-funding and—critically—how the continuing upswing in postal finances shows the importance of maintaining and strengthening the postal network. Moreover, how all this contributes to a growing consensus among key lawmakers, the Postal Service, postal unions, businesses, mailers and industry groups to move forward with practical reform that all stakeholders can buy into.

This kind of coverage (which followed similar reporting just two weeks earlier, about a Senate hearing on postal issues) leads to people reconsidering what they thought they knew, looking at the actual facts and, in many instances, reaching different conclusions about the best way forward.

So you've done impressive work—but there's much more to do. Though now on the defensive, the zealots will regroup and seek new ways to advance a nihilist agenda that attacks government and the public sector.

What they can't match, if we keep up and indeed expand our efforts, is the work of so many informed, trusted and motivated messengers delivering the facts to the American people.

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