

# Small item...big returns



Philip  
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**I**n some instances, getting the message out can require speed. Other times, the stakes are high. When those two factors overlap, things can get dicey.

Case in point: There was a small item about the Postal Service in a recent magazine. It would have been easy to overlook, but fortunately—for the NALC, for letter carriers and for the USPS—it wasn't overlooked, thanks to some alert members.

In the February issue of *Costco Connection*, Costco ran a poll for its readers on possible privatization of postal services, with results to be announced in the March issue. This loomed as a potential problem, given not only the uncertainty over the results but also Costco's status as the

world's second-largest retailer.

All the more so, because *Costco Connection's* wording of the question made privatization seem like a reasonable choice. Moreover, to inform its readers, the magazine ran two essays, arguing for and against, and the anti-privatization columnist wrote like a do-gooder hoping to keep mail accessible, while leaving out such major points as the increasing operating profits.

President Rolando immediately called for a proactive response. The magazine's editor was contacted and once postal issues were discussed with him, he reacted as a fair journalist would, readily acknowledging that important information—growing revenue, pre-funding, the Constitution—had been left out of the presentation. Readers would benefit from having the broader picture outlined, he said, and he agreed to run a letter explaining all this.

**President Rolando quickly sent such a letter, explaining the constitutional basis for the Postal Service, its value to the public, its improving finances, pre-funding's impact, the absence of taxpayer funding and the need for targeted, practical reforms.**

But the magazine's printing schedules dictated that the president's piece wouldn't run until the April issue. That could have been a problem; if the poll results were bad, they would have sat rebutted for a month.

Fortunately, in no small measure because of the groundwork so many of you have been doing in terms of communicating the facts about the Postal Service, respondents overwhelmingly rejected privatization.

So, what could have been a large problem for us instead turned into a one-two punch for letter carriers. Supportive polling results one month, a positive letter the next month that kept the issue alive for readers while giving them critical information.

That occurred in part because of the quick actions of Florida State President Al Friedman, who spotted the poll before the

magazine's ink was dry, and California State President John Beaumont, who early on alerted many to the potential import of the survey.

Why were the stakes high? *Costco Connection* happens to be the largest monthly magazine in the United States, with 8.6 million subscribers. In addition, its readership is relatively affluent (i.e., influential) and it's one of the few growing print magazines in the country.

The broader point here is that we all need to be vigilant about what's being reported, and opined, about the Postal Service. That's particularly true now, at a time when our foes are getting increasingly aggressive and seemingly willing to say anything that serves their purpose. Let me explain.

**Recently, I've noticed two divergent trends. Even as the media's reporting and editorializing on the Postal Service are evolving in a positive way—more factual, more balanced, therefore more helpful to us—some of the outside commentary pieces being submitted to and run by media outlets are becoming ever more shrill, replete with nasty accusations and dishonest assertions.**

Here's what I think is driving this. Those who look objectively at facts, evidence and trends, a category that includes most reporters and editorial writers, see the improving postal finances, the changing political sentiment, the emerging consensus among stakeholders and the continuing public support for USPS, as well as the information put out by so many of you, and they are appropriately influenced by what they observe. That's because in their line of work, they have to be receptive to empirical data and to new information, open to learning and changing their views.

But an entirely different mind-set exists among the anti-government, anti-union and extreme libertarian zealots, who have a single-minded focus on dismantling the public sector and privatizing anything that can yield a profit. They look at the very same facts and trends and, rather than being enlightened, are threatened, because they realize that these developments threaten their ideological goals. Desperate, they adopt an increasingly aggressive approach. The wounded animal analogy wouldn't be far off.

Let's all be on the lookout for what's being circulated by the media, so we can respond in a timely and effective manner.

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