

# Reflections on the convention and our message



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Dine

**N**othing too profound this month—just some reflections on our 70th Biennial Convention and our get-out-the-message efforts.

But first, it's important to mention that when the Postal Service released its most recent quarterly figures—just a few days before the convention began on Aug. 15—President Rolando once again dominated the news coverage. Not only was he frequently quoted, he helped shape the stories—averting what might otherwise have been negative coverage given the so-so financial report.

It's clear at this point that reporters regard President Rolando as the go-to person for perspective on postal issues and, specifically, on what the Postal Service's quarterly or annual

figures mean. They quote the postmaster general or USPS' chief financial officer on the report itself, they may talk to a legislator about possible congressional action—but they rely on President Rolando to explain the big picture, including the overall financial status of the Postal Service and the best way forward, legislatively and otherwise.

As usual, in the coverage about the third-quarter report, this included national outlets as well as specialized ones that cover federal issues, it comprised print as well as broadcast, and it spanned the political spectrum.

Why does this happen, especially with a press corps prone to ignoring labor's viewpoint? Because the NALC president's incisive comments help illuminate the story behind the story. Rather than spinning, he's informing—an all-too-rare occurrence in Washington. The upshot: His remarks are useful to reporters trying to craft stories that will enlighten their audience. All of which works to our benefit, because it means the public—and its representatives—get the real story, not the misleading conventional wisdom.

It would be easy to take what he regularly accomplishes for granted, but it's too difficult to achieve—and too important to our future—to do that.

**Now, to Los Angeles. During the weeklong convention, everywhere I looked I saw examples—big and small—of why letter carrier efforts to get out the message are flourishing. In the interest of space, here are just a few.**

- **Larry Brown, president of Los Angeles Branch 24, was widely credited with hosting a successful convention.** But more specifically, on the convention's last day, when a Spanish-language television network requested on short notice—very short notice—a couple of Spanish-speaking delegates for an interview, despite

everything else Larry was responsible for, within a few minutes he had dispatched two such letter carriers. And subsequent conversations I had with him following the convention made clear the savvy and experience he brings to dealing with the media.

- **The convention recognized a letter carrier named Thomas Deaton, who turned 100 two days before it began.** Deaton, who now lives in California, joined the NALC 80 years ago as a letter carrier in Indiana. After serving in World War II, he resumed his letter carrier career. But what particularly intrigued me was his son's initial contact with us, just a few weeks before the convention. Bob Deaton called to lament the fact that his father had not received his June issue of *The Postal Record*—unfortunate because he reads it cover to cover every month. After mailing the missing copy, I thought about what that says about our union. First, the involvement of retirees, absent in far too many unions. At NALC, retired letter carriers are key in getting our views published in newspapers across the country. Second, the attention members pay to NALC publications. Many other unions have difficulty getting their members to even glance at their publications; the close reading our members routinely give keeps them informed—a prerequisite to their effectively communicating the message.
- **The attention to detail and presentation shown by staff and officers in conducting the daily workshops.** These workshops help provide information that allows letter carriers at all levels to explain what's really going on with USPS and the contributions of our craft. Equally important, they cultivate a sense of belonging and of pride that motivates carriers to explain those things.
- **The constant flow of discussion and dialogue throughout the convention, with no hesitation from delegates to take to the microphones and say what's on their minds, including challenging national officers.** We may regard that as normal, but as a reporter I covered many a convention where such frankness is firmly discouraged. The openness at NALC's conventions facilitates members' engagement and sense of participation, spurring letter carriers at all levels to do the hard work of getting out the message.

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