

The urgency of now



**Philip
Dine**

Growing up, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King—whose birthday we celebrate this month—was one of my heroes. Inspired by him to fight for racial justice, but too young to join the country’s leading civil rights organization, the NAACP, I became a youth member and proudly carried the group’s membership card in my wallet. I was impressed, naturally, by Dr. King’s commitment to making our nation live up to its promises, and by his bravery—but what astounded me was the ability of such a young man to move the conscience of a vast nation by the force of his oratory and the poetry of his words.

And so, I listened raptly, albeit from afar, as the 34-year-old preacher prodded the nation in his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech on the National Mall by urging Americans to put aside their traditional gradualism and instead recognize “the fierce urgency of now.” His admonition helped produce, within months, the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender or national origin.

There is, of course, no direct correlation between the struggle he led and our effort to save an American treasure by changing the national conversation about the Postal Service. But any time, especially January, is a good time to evoke the memory of Martin Luther King. And, more to the point, there is an urgency right now to getting out the message. Fierce, perhaps not, but an urgency nonetheless.

We are, after all, ushering in a new federal government this month. A fresh cast of players is pouring into Washington, particularly in the administration, where not only are the White House and cabinet positions changing parties, but many of those arriving have little or no experience in the federal government—or in government at all.

They will have a steep and rapid learning process, and what they are focused on right now are campaign flash-points such as trade and jobs, the military and veterans, terrorism and Obamacare, federal regulations and China, immigration and energy policy.

It is a safe bet that little attention is being paid to the Postal Service or to letter carriers.

So we have an opportunity to help them learn about what we do and what it means for Americans and their businesses, whether in rural areas or small towns or bustling cities. About how we provide the industrial world’s most-affordable delivery network. That we are operating in

the black without a dime of taxpayer money. That USPS is the nation’s largest employer of military veterans and also the most-trusted federal agency. That we are based in the Constitution and help connect this big country. That we are the centerpiece of a national mailing industry that employs 7.5 million Americans. That we help feed the hungry while daily saving people on the route. That we wear our uniforms with pride while delivering the mail and do all these other things with humility because it’s what the job means to us.

In short, we need to show them the positive—including things few of them have likely ever considered—so that when it comes time for government to weigh in, they will understand our value to everyday Americans, to businesses and to society as a whole. And they will be able to grasp why common-sense legislation would right some inequities and allow us to continue to do all this.

And it’s not just the folks in the executive branch. There will be some newcomers in the Senate and the House, and all of them—first-timers and veterans—will be legislating in a new environment of one-party control. Because they therefore can act more easily than before—for better or for worse—it’s all the more important to inform and influence them.

We have had some success recently with our communications efforts. In the fall, our Heroes, featured in a breadth of media outlets, bolstered the respect in which all letter carriers are held by the public. More recently, when USPS announced a \$610 million operating profit for Fiscal Year 2016, President Rolando provided the analysis and context for the public as he dominated the national media coverage. Director of City Delivery (and now Executive Vice President) Brian Renfroe and Chief of Staff Jim Sauber helped get our message out on major radio programs, and many of you recently have contributed as well.

At present, as the newcomers settle in and the new Washington takes shape, we have the need—and the opportunity—to deliver a sweeping message in all corners of the country, to create a still-more favorable impression.

Now is the time.

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