

Journalists' perspective



**Philip
Dine**

If letter carriers get out their message better than anyone else in the labor movement—and they do—it’s not by chance. It is, rather, the result of an interactive, two-way process involving carriers and journalists.

It starts with so many of you, letter carriers at all levels who work diligently to counter the misleading conventional wisdom regarding the Postal Service, thereby facilitating the needed legislative and regulatory reforms.

Your communications efforts, though, would not be fruitful if journalists weren’t receptive, both to you and to your message. Fortunately, they often are, and so your work has a profound impact. Here are a few illustrations of their willingness

to listen, and why they chose to do so—in their own words.

The Postal Service issues quarterly financial reports and an annual report. The most recent one, the annual Fiscal Year 2019 report released in mid-November, drew substantial media interest. Almost all of the articles not only included comments from President Rolando but also were informed by his thoughts and featured NALC’s take on the financial numbers and the factors behind the numbers. Our president and the postmaster general were the most-quoted people overall.

That wasn’t an outlier—President Rolando generally is relied on by news outlets to help explain USPS financial reports. To find out why, I turned to one of the most prolific journalists covering these events; Jory Heckman, who reports on federal workforce and postal workforce issues for Federal News Radio.

“I definitely do think that hearing from President Rolando always provides valuable context, so we always make it a point to include his comments in the story,” Heckman said.

“Particularly in the last report, the Postal Service was citing some of the costs with the liabilities and the pre-funding, so it was really great to hear President Rolando reflect on it, give some broader understanding of what that means.”

Heckman added that, more broadly, “It’s really good to know what NALC sees as some of the bigger issues for the Postal Service and its workforce.”

Leadership that helps deliver the message effectively is a big boost. Leadership that inspires others to do the same is—to deploy a term we’ve used before in this space—a force multiplier for us.

John Paige, who carried mail for almost 43 years and is president emeritus of the Idaho State Association, has had letters to the editor published in recent weeks in the *Idaho Statesman*, *Idaho State Journal*, *Post Register*, *Coeur d’Alene*

Press and elsewhere. Those letters, like his many others over the past few years, touch on a breadth of issues, including public service, reasonable rates, universal service, earned revenue and the large presence of military veterans.

Why do the papers run so many of his letters?

We turned to Scott McIntosh, opinion page editor at the state’s largest newspaper, the *Idaho Statesman*.

“I appreciate his attempts to dispel the myths, and I appreciate that his letters tend to be fact-based and verifiable and informative—and that they provide information that most people are not aware of,” McIntosh said.

McIntosh mentioned the initial submission he received from Paige, during his prior stint as top editor of the *Idaho Press-Tribune*, the state’s fourth-biggest paper.

“Absolutely, I remember the first time I got a letter from John. He had something in there, and I said ‘that’s not right.’ I looked it up, and he was dead on. After that I got a few more letters. I checked them too, and sure enough... He always is fact-based and accurate.”

The impact of Paige’s letters extends beyond readers and lawmakers, McIntosh said: “I definitely learn stuff from his letters. I think he does a real good job of informing everyone—not just the general public but journalists as well.”

We’ve noted in this space that retired letter carrier and Navy veteran Aubrey Fisher of Delaware, a 51-year member, reached out to a *Barron’s* reporter after reading an article that he felt didn’t tell the full story about postal finances. That reporter subsequently researched the role played by pre-funding and has since written several balanced and insightful articles.

So why did Al Root, a senior writer at the nation’s leading finance weekly, listen, do his due diligence and incorporate a new perspective into his journalism?

“It’s an underrated source of information, when knowledgeable readers reach out and offer a different perspective,” Root said.

“It can take me down a path that I did not see in the course of my regular reporting. It presents a fuller picture of what’s going on. I don’t know everything.”

Diligent letter carriers, inquisitive journalists—and look what happens.

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