

Journalism: Promise and problems



Philip
Dine

As we know, letter carrier safety unfortunately is a mounting concern for all of us. You shouldn't have to worry about being attacked on the route. Fortunately, public awareness of the problem also is rising, thanks to your work getting word out about the robberies and assaults targeting letter carriers to the tune of 2,000 since 2020.

Alerting folks around the country is the first step in addressing the problem, and you are influencing the national discussion, as you did with another existential threat to letter carriers and the Postal Service—the artificial financial crisis generated by the pre-funding mandate. Your “Enough is enough” rallies, 10 so far including in Minneapolis three days

ago as I write this, combined with your media presence when crimes occur, such as recently in Boston, are sparking extensive coverage on TV and radio, in newspapers and online.

Why the media attention? It's not as if there's a deficit of news these days; we have Europe's largest military conflict since WWII, a volatile and tragic situation in the Middle East, a presidential election heating up at home and more.

I attribute the interest to three factors. To the power and clarity of your message—the attacks are surging; the consequences are dire for our safety, for the security of mail meant for residents and businesses, for local quality of life if we're hampered in our ability to serve as the eyes and ears of the community; and deterrence is needed, including through federal prosecutions with severe penalties. To the messenger—America's letter carriers, who enjoy strong respect across geographic and political lines.

And, referring to this column's title, to the current status of the news business itself. The national media is facing its own existential crisis, its credibility tanking as a result of ill-fated decisions to jettison the craft's timeless principles of objectivity, curiosity and fact-based reporting, and instead promote political agendas. In 40 years of practicing, teaching and writing about journalism, or dealing with media outlets in my current capacity, I have never seen journalism veer so sharply off course.

To be fair, there are many talented journalists at major outlets, but you would be startled at how often, on a variety of news topics, I find myself urging some to put aside their preconceptions and absorb the facts. And, as courteously as possible, to suggest they recall why they entered the profession in the first place (which was, ideally, to inform folks, not to influence them). Many of our most fabled TV networks

and national newspapers are mere shadows of their former selves, engaging in narrative-driven reporting that aims to reinforce what their viewers or readers already believe. This, in turn, threatens our democracy—actual journalism unites us around shared facts and common information, while advocacy journalism further divides us, exacerbating the rampant polarization that makes governing more and more difficult.

Fortunately for us, the rallies are taking place on the local and regional levels, where the crimes occur—and where journalism still is practiced largely as intended, through reporting that seeks to get out the facts and let the audience decide for itself. So please continue your extraordinary work of delivering a focused, powerful and succinct message, whether at the rallies or in separate media interviews, to reporters eager to learn and intent on serving the communities they cover; the very communities you deliver in. With any luck, national reporters are watching—and recalling.

Speaking of journalism being practiced as intended, I'm pleased to note that the magazine you are holding has—once again—been recognized for excellence by the International Labor Communications Association, the country's largest entity for labor media. As reported on page 7, in ILCA's 2023 media contest *The Postal Record* garnered eight awards: five for writing (outpacing other unions), two for illustration/design and one for social media. This included three first-place honors.

I attribute the magazine's recognized quality to three factors (yes, as I've periodically mentioned, journalists tend to deal in threes...): the dedication and skills of Mike, Rick, Jenessa and the current/prior editorial assistants, Sarah and Joelle; their complementary interests and backgrounds; and the cohesion and teamwork they exhibit as they put this magazine together month after month.

The synergy between our efforts to provide relevant, accurate and timely information to you, and in turn your media engagements aimed at informing the public and its representatives, goes a long way toward explaining why NALC's communications are second to none in the labor movement, and more broadly why our union is as effective as it is. The credit rests with you.

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Director of Communications and Media Relations Philip Dine
Managing Editor Mike Shea
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges
Writer/Editor Jenessa Wagner
Editorial Assistant Sarah Eccleston

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