

# A forceful response



**Philip  
Dine**

## Talk about a tour de force.

When the U.S. Postal Service released its financial report for the fiscal year's second quarter on May 8, postal beat reporters covered the event as they usually do. They reported what they saw as the news in the numbers, wove in statements made by the postmaster general or the chief financial officer in the USPS' conference call or press release, and turned to others for reaction and interpretation as to what it all meant.

Except that, in this case, the "others" to whom journalists turned were a single "other"—as in NALC President Fredric Rolando.

Whether it was Washington-based publications widely read by lawmakers and congressional staffs, wire services or national newspapers and magazines, the sole non-USPS voice was that of President Rolando. And some reports contained more commentary from him than from either—or even both—of the other two.

And what did he tell reporters, and thereby the public and its elected representatives?

He told them that the impressive results—including a \$313 million quarterly operating profit, for a half-year's total of \$1.4 billion already exceeding all of last year's black ink—show the absurdity of hurting the public by degrading service. Rather, he said, the now-profitable postal networks should be strengthened while lawmakers fix the pre-funding fiasco that accounts for the red ink.

Far beyond merely lending balance, his comments provided readers with insight into what's actually happening. Moreover, they influenced the leads and the overall stories reporters wrote, and as a result influenced the headlines copyeditors wrote, headlines that often cited rising revenues or operating profits. So, what President Rolando said had a direct impact on how the USPS results were perceived.

And that, of course, is why his efforts mattered. It's not the attention. It's the opportunity to tell the truth, to debunk the conventional wisdom or ideological spin, and ultimately to help save a valuable and venerated American institution—all while protecting the jobs and well-being of NALC's members.

Just a few years ago, it was a good day when NALC was quoted at all in a story, typically toward the bottom after the misleading narrative of a USPS reeling from the loss of mail to the Internet already had been told. Not only did such comments have little impact, they risked appearing to be a flight from reality.

**What's changed? Several things: President Rolando's** steady efforts have built up credibility, given the consistency and logic of his message. (A message reinforced as USPS financial trends have borne out much of what he's been saying.) And, branch officers and state officers, NBAs and RAAs, rank-and-file letter carriers and retirees have been so effective in getting the facts out to the public and to journalists that the truth no longer is met with skepticism. On the contrary, there's a growing appetite for reasoned insight into the situation at the Postal Service.

The few weeks preceding the quarterly report are a good microcosm of these efforts. In community after community where residents, business owners and civic leaders are fighting to protect the quality of their mail service, President Rolando put their struggle in a broader context by showing why slowing the mail or ending Saturday and door delivery make no sense given the postal financial turnaround—thereby giving them added ammunition. He did so using such vehicles as Florida's *Bradenton Herald*, Indiana's *Herald-Press*, the *Arizona Daily Star*, the *East Oregonian*, Utah's *Deseret News* and the *Southeast Missourian*.

These commentary pieces were complemented by the work of many other letter carriers. Among the most impressive: NALC Executive Vice President Timothy O'Malley and Kansas State Association President Emeritus Rod Holub met with Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS) when the senator spoke at the association's convention, an event that produced good media coverage and also prompted Moran to include some highly positive remarks in his weekly newsletter to Kansans.

And it only helps when letter carriers' good deeds become part of the news, as occurred when Carmichael, CA Branch 4494 member Scott Gallegos, an Iraq War Army veteran in his fourth week as a letter carrier and on his first delivery of the morning, risked his life by putting himself between a woman who'd apparently been shot and the alleged assailant, who later engaged in a five-hour standoff with police.

**All of this lent heft to our communications effort, setting the stage for NALC's vigorous response to the quarterly report. A tour de force indeed—and for a noble cause.**

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*The Postal Record* (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

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Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

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