

New year, new opportunity



Philip
Dine

It's a new year, with a new Congress and the start of a new presidential race presenting new challenges but also new opportunities to get out our message.

In Congress, the House will be run by Democrats even as Republicans have strengthened their hold on the Senate—setting the stage for increased bicameral conflict. Meanwhile, lots of folks in Washington and elsewhere look in the mirror and see a potential 2020 presidential candidate.

It's unclear how the likely legislative and political turmoil will affect our efforts to influence the postal debate. What is clear, though, is that we need to continue—indeed, elevate—those efforts.

Three questions ensue.

Why do we need to do this? Because recent years have shown that we can't be sure when, how or where the next threat will arise—and because, as President Rolando says, after playing defense against bad proposals, we need to go on offense to secure the future of the Postal Service.

For both reasons, it's incumbent on us to get accurate information into the public sphere; remember, the truth is our best weapon.

The time is opportune because newcomers to Washington will be seeking issues, and with the attention USPS has received in recent months—White House comments, anti-privatization rallies, postal task force report—some may focus on postal matters. Before they latch onto some privatize-the-world group's spin, let's set them straight.

Moreover, there's no reason that protecting and securing the most popular federal agency—the people's Postal Service—could not be an attractive issue for an aspirant for higher office.

Why should we be confident we can do this? Because we've already had extraordinary success in changing the national conversation on postal matters. Whenever our backs have been against the wall, letter carriers everywhere—from national leaders to rank-and-file members—have delivered a concise, compelling and consistent message that provided the facts, dispelled the myths and set our foes back on their heels.

And while the political environment over the next couple of years may render progress difficult in some policy areas, postal reform isn't necessarily among them. After all, postal issues are not partisan issues.

Disabusing folks of the misleading conventional wisdom about USPS finances and noting the best policies moving forward is key.

How do we do this? By expanding what we're doing, using every opportunity to get out the message in media outlets large and small, regional or local—but with a slight twist.

Given a situation in flux, rather than highlighting specific bills or issues, for now let's think broadly. Anything that puts the Postal Service and letter carriers in a positive light helps. Let's make sure the public, lawmakers and media know the facts about postal finances, the role of pre-funding, absence of taxpayer money, most-affordable delivery network in the industrial world, importance of universal service, the constitutional basis for a Postal Service to unite the country, value of letter carriers as shown in the food drive or in saving residents on the route, USPS's status as the country's largest employer of military veterans, its particular importance to rural residents and seniors.

There's no stock approach. If you're writing a letter to the editor, choose a topic or two, be concise, factual and positive. As always, let me know if you'd like assistance along the way.

There also are other ways to help NALC's communications efforts. It's hard to top the following example.

As I noted after NALC's national convention in Detroit, a delegate informed me that AARP, possibly the nation's largest organization with 38 million members, had included this in a list of money-saving tips for seniors: "Stamp out stamps"—by setting up automatic withdrawals for bills instead of mailing checks.

I mentioned that a call to AARP headquarters had elicited a promise to look into the matter, adding that I'd let you know the outcome while also requesting help in identifying the delegate, whose name I hadn't caught in the crush of activity as NALC military veterans prepared kits for Detroit's homeless vets.

Here are the promised updates. In mid-December, AARP told me it had run our letter from President Rolando in a fall issue of its magazine, sent to 24 million households. And the letter carrier is Jim Smith of Lexington, KY, now retired (and an AARP member) but long active in Branch 361 as an officer and congressional liaison.

As Smith put it, "They don't need to be bad-mouthing us. I try to keep my eyes and ears open when I see or hear things like that."

A salute to this 27-year carrier and four-year Navy veteran for his invaluable contribution to our efforts.

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