

Letter from the Editor

In the winter of 2003-2004, two Democratic presidential candidates were far ahead in the fight for the nomination. The others lagged badly; among them a senator named John Kerry. His campaign lacked energy, momentum and, it seemed, hope.

As the Iowa caucus loomed, Kerry was polling in single digits. His only significant backing came from the International Association of Fire Fighters, a union in its first foray into national politics, with just 2,400 Iowa members.

Kerry ended caucus night with more delegates than the two top rivals combined, a stunning win he rode to the nomination. His upset was due principally to the firefighters, whose national leadership provided strategic guidelines and then turned Iowa over to the local rank and file, who were familiar with their communities, were spread evenly around the state by dint of their jobs, and were respected public servants.

The IAFF involvement flowed from a national imperative transcending politics; this was the first post-9/11 presidential election, and firefighters felt that an administration that had commissioned them as first responders in the war against terrorism wasn't providing the resources to do the job.

If anything here is starting to hit home, that's good. The IAFF and the NALC, firefighters and letter carriers, have much in common. Similar-sized unions, each representing a single craft, disciplined organizations with strong leadership at all levels, geographically dispersed memberships with highly positive public images. Each group is highly engaged in charitable work, and for many this isn't their first time in uniform.

The point is this: A determined, homogeneous union with dedicated leaders and engaged members who know their communities, command respect and recognize the stakes, can prevail against tough adversaries and tougher odds.


Our challenge is far greater than persuading 3 million Iowans to vote for a presidential candidate. We're trying to influence the views of 300 million Americans and their representatives about how to save a national treasure that for two centuries has been—and that remains—essential to our way of life. But in 30 years of studying and reporting on labor before coming to the NALC in 2010, I never saw a union that's better led or has a more involved membership than ours.

On the national level, President Rolando continues his work; in just the few days before this issue went to press in mid-December, he had a

commentary piece in *The New York Times*, an op-ed article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, an interview in *Politico*, a letter in the *Economist*, was quoted in a CNN story and was interviewed on public radio in California.

Now, let's think local. We are 300,000 strong—an average of 6,000 per state. What a force for getting our message to the public via print, radio and TV—right where you live and work, and are known and respected. More and more of you are seeking guidance for letters to the editor, commentary pieces or radio appearances. Let's summarize the major points to get across:

- The service degradation being proposed by the postmaster general and some legislators would hurt the public and small businesses (which create two-thirds of all new jobs) by reducing the quality and accessibility of the world's most-efficient postal service.
- It would destroy the Postal Service itself, by driving customers away and reducing revenue. One can't save the USPS by dismantling its unique feature—the universal network.
- The chief financial drain is the pre-funding mandate, which no other agency or company faces. It accounts for 84 percent of the red ink. Without it, the Postal Service would have realized a \$611 million profit in fiscal years 2007-2010, despite the worst recession in 80 years.
- Congress, which created this mess, can easily fix it. Already, H.R. 1351—which addresses the pre-funding fiasco—has a bipartisan House majority of 227 co-sponsors. Extremist legislators who detest government and public service need to let it come to a vote.
- Then the Postal Service can focus on adapting to society's evolving needs, as it's done for 200 years. The Internet offers opportunities; the goods people order online must be delivered, and that's a growing profit-maker for the USPS. The best day to deliver packages: Saturday, when people are home.
- The country has a stake in this. The Postal Service, which hasn't received a dime of taxpayer money in 30 years, is the centerpiece of a \$1.3 trillion mailing industry that employs 7.5 million private-sector workers.

If thousands of you drive these points home in every corner of this country, just imagine the impact on the debate. 



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