

NALC's message and the ripple effect



**Philip
Dine**

The NALC has a persuasive message and a solid communications strategy, but the most important element in getting the message out is the breadth of the effort.

That means that in what's been done, is being done and will be done to present the case, you are the key.

In this critical period, when we're in a war of ideas and perceptions and politics, what sets the NALC's communications effort apart is that this is a union fully engaged in that effort, from the president to rank-and-file letter carriers and everywhere in between.

Few unions can say this; in fact, few unions seek to encourage this. Indeed, a problem plaguing much of the labor movement is a top-down tendency. (In fairness, most unions don't have members as involved and informed—and as respected in their communities—as does the NALC.)

The NALC approach not only increases the number of voices explaining our issues and the collective volume—it also creates an expanding cycle.

Take a senator, for instance. He hears about our issues from one of our national officers. Then he reads a commentary piece President Rolando wrote in a national newspaper, and he realizes that a hard-boiled editorial page editor regards these ideas as having merit, and that the paper's fact checkers find the specific assertions credible. Then he hears from a senior citizens group back home (that had been informed by our state leaders of the importance of house-to-house service), so he knows this resonates among important constituencies. Then his press folks show him a letter to the editor written by a local letter carrier that explains the value of Saturday delivery service. Then his staff gets calls from residents of his state demanding that Congress face up to the fact that it's responsible for 80 percent of the red ink, so he's aware that these issues resonate with average folks. Then a staffer sends him a link to a TV news segment about an elderly resident rescued by a letter carrier after falling at home, and he understands why protecting the universal network is an imperative.

By now, his sense of why all this matters—on the merits as well as in political terms—is just a little bit keener.

Put simply, the whole of the NALC's communications effort is greater than the sum of its parts. And rarely has the breadth of this effort been more obvious than in recent weeks.

In op-ed pieces in the *Charleston Daily Mail* (WV) and *Union Leader* (NH), conservative-leaning newspapers influential in their regions, President Rolando explained the facts behind the postal financial crisis—and what's at stake for the readers in terms of jobs and services. He had an op-ed in Washington's *Examiner*, also a conservative newspaper and one that's widely read on Capitol Hill.

Various members made our case through letters to the editor, including Bob McLennan, president of Buffalo-Western New York Branch 3, in *The Buffalo News*; Dave Burke, president of Davenport, IA Branch 506, *Quad-City Times*; Brenda Fisher, Cape Girardeau, MO Branch 1015 member, *Southeast Missourian*; George Elias, president of San Diego Branch 70, *Federal Times*; and Bob Wilkerson, president of Wilmington, DE Branch 191, *News Journal*. Vince Atlas, a member of Chicago Branch 11, was interviewed on WBEZ-FM along with former letter carrier Phil Rubio.

Meanwhile, in a development rarely seen in the past, several newspapers ran hard-hitting, detailed editorials or commentaries supporting the USPS, often lamenting pre-funding and citing the need for lawmakers to fix the problems they caused. Among them: the *Hunterdon County [NJ] Democrat*; *Cap Times* of Madison, WI; *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*; and *Register-Guard* of Eugene, OR.

Now, where do you think they got all those ideas and all that information?

Meanwhile, Congressman Bill Owens of New York had a letter in the Glens Falls *Post-Star* opposing drastic cuts and citing the need for Congress to address both pre-funding and overpayments to pension funds.

So not only are lawmakers being influenced by you, they're then using their voices to affect the public debate.

Everything you do to spread the message expands this cycle, with your words affecting public opinion, the views of media outlets and the political judgments of those who represent you in Washington. No platform is too small to add to the ripple effect.

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