

Responding to threats



**Philip
Dine**

A couple of months ago in this space, we discussed seizing opportunities to get out our message. When a positive USPS quarterly financial report or an incomplete newspaper editorial presents itself, we take the opening to provide information that enlightens the public about what's really going on at the Postal Service.

The flip side of our communications effort involves reacting when we're under attack. A politician, say, offers a proposal that imminently threatens us. In such instances, we're not seeking creative ways to influence the public discussion. Rather, hit by a broadside, we must respond to the specific threat in targeted, quick fashion.

Case in point: Rep. Darrell Issa's latest effort to end six-day delivery, a thinly veiled attempt to degrade the Postal Service by capitalizing on support for military veterans. He sought to eliminate Saturday delivery under the guise of using the "savings" to avert the hit on military pensions in the recent budget deal.

Even though Issa, driven by his anti-government, anti-public service, anti-labor zealotry, had previously tried—and failed—to institute five-day delivery, the fluid nature of the budgetary negotiations in Washington created risks when added to the public and political support deservedly enjoyed by our veterans.

Faced with this ploy, the NALC wasted little time in responding. President Rolando was on national radio for an impassioned interview one afternoon, followed by a national television interview the next evening. Both shows had a largely liberal audience, and in a sense he was preaching to the converted. Often, we aim to speak to those who might not ordinarily be with us in a bid to win new friends. But in this instance, NALC needed to get the facts out fast and mobilize our allies—whether lawmakers or citizens around the country—by exposing what Issa was up to.

President Rolando made several points to viewers and listeners: Postal Service operations are now profitable as the economy gradually improves and package deliveries rise; reducing service could stop that turnaround in its tracks; Saturday delivery is important to millions of small businesses and residents; pre-funding is the source of the red ink and is what Congress should address; eliminating tens of thousands of good jobs—many filled by veterans—would hurt veterans rather than help them.

Goals dictate tactics in communications, and in this instance doing an interview on shows well-versed in the topic allowed

the NALC's points to be made efficiently and effectively, rather than a contentious back-and-forth interview or one marred by distracting inquiries from a host unfamiliar with the matter.

Though letter carriers once again led the charge to defend the Postal Service, we weren't the only ones to speak out. Key postal reporters in the national media clarified things for the public. The liberal *Nation* ran a piece under a headline reading: "Darrell Issa's Cruellest Cut: A Seriously Cynical Attack on the Postal Service." The surprising headline in the corporate-oriented *Businessweek* was: "Darrell Issa's Mischievous Postal Reform Bill." And the *Washington Post* article questioned how ending Saturday delivery would help veterans—terming Issa's proposal "one of the more debatable ideas."

Such coverage gave extra resonance and credibility to what President Rolando was saying. The result: Not only did all this reduce Rep. Issa's prospects for success with this particular venture, it also will damage his credibility for his next destructive measure.

We've not seen this type of critical media response to Rep. Issa and his proposals before. Why did the media play such a positive role this time around? Was it simply fortuitous?

The truth-telling, in fact, occurred because more journalists—too long misled by congressional zealots, privatizers or the PMG, and too long purveyors of the conventional wisdom—are gradually learning things they should have known all along. Increasingly, they're studying the facts rather than simply repeating their assumptions.

And why would that be? In large measure, it's because of the work of so many of you who've helped get information into the public sphere about the value of the USPS, the actual financial situation, what letter carriers do for their communities, the presence of so many veterans in our ranks, and so much more.

As I've noted, every letter to the editor or TV interview creates an ever-expanding ripple effect that provides a context within which journalists and media outlets interpret new developments.

What happened here helps our cause moving forward by bolstering public understanding of the issues and, just maybe, by giving pause to the next politician hoping to fool the public and its representatives.

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Managing Editor Philip Dine
Designer/Web Editor Mike Shea
Internet Communications Coordinator
Joe Conway
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges
Editorial Assistant Jenessa Kildall

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).

© 2014 by the National Association of Letter Carriers.

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

CHANGE OF ADDRESS? Contact the Membership Department.

Follow us on the NALC Activist Alert Blog and on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube by going to NALC.org.

