

# Influencing public opinion



**Philip  
Dine**

**T**his month's column includes a nod and a nudge.

A nod to those of you who did so much this past month to get our message out, and a nudge to others to join, on yet another major front, the battle to save the Postal Service.

**First the pat on the back: We've said** in this space that letter carriers do two things to help our cause—informing the public and carrying out your job in ways that build ever greater public respect. That's never been truer than during the past month.

Readers of the *Columbus Dispatch*, *Dallas Morning News* and *Hunterdon County Democrat* (NJ) learned the truth about postal finances from President Rolando, whose commentary pieces

set the record straight following misleading editorials or columns. That was buttressed by Idaho Association President John Paige in the *Twin Falls Times-News* and Findlay, OH Branch 143 letter carrier Jeffery Kranz in *The Courier*.

Meanwhile, letter carriers were recognized in profile pieces around the country for braving the extreme cold and snow and for their professionalism and dedication. These stories featured, among others, Royal Oak, MI Branch 3126 letter carrier Kenny White in the *Detroit Free Press* and on National Public Radio; Rockford, IL Branch 245 letter carrier Craig Anderson on WREX-TV; Garden Grove, CA Branch 1100 letter carrier Charles McDaniel in the *Orange County Register*; Sacramento Branch 133 letter carrier Randy Krohn on KXTV-TV; Minneapolis Branch 9 letter carrier Don Albee in the *Star-Tribune*; and Cleveland Branch 40 letter carrier Gerry Jaksic-Thompson on WKYC-TV.

Then, when a Senate committee reported out a misguided bill that would reduce services, President Rolando was quoted by the *Washington Post*, Reuters and Federal News Radio on the bill's problems.

The very next day, when the Postal Service released its financial report for the first quarter of fiscal year 2014, President Rolando was prominently quoted by the Associated Press and Reuters, explaining why the large USPS operating profit made it absurd to consider degrading the very network that had produced it—meaning his comments ran in hundreds of newspapers and broadcast outlets around the country. His analysis also influenced stories and headlines in the *Hill*, *Federal Times* and *Government Executive*.

Absent letter carriers—both your messages and the praise you've earned for your work on the route—a number of newspapers and TV news shows would have had problems filling space or time, respectively.

**Now, the gentle push: We need as many members as possible** to engage in the effort to influence public opinion on the serious flaws of the Senate's Carper-Coburn bill. In that struggle, we'll make use of ammunition provided by the USPS financial report.

And what ammunition it is! USPS reported red ink of \$354 million for the quarter; that figure includes the \$1.425 billion pre-funding charge—meaning that without the unfair congressional mandate to pre-fund future retiree health benefits, USPS would have been \$1.1 billion in the black. (Yes, the first quarter is typically a good quarter because it covers the busy holiday season, but the \$1.1 billion operating profit dwarfs the \$100 million operating profit from last year's first quarter.)

It's up to us to make sure the public—and legislators—know this, because USPS surely won't tell them. To promote its service-reduction congressional agenda, the Postal Service, as we've all learned, is the only company in the country that trumpets bad news and buries good news.

And the good news here goes beyond the large operating profit. Our message, flowing from the Postal Service's own figures, is clear and powerful:

- The Postal Service now is profitable delivering the mail. And rather than being an isolated event, this reflects a trend, following on the heels of the \$623 million operating profit for fiscal year 2013.
- The operating black ink is fueled by broad developments: a gradually improving economy has led to stabilized mail revenue, and increased online shopping has sparked skyrocketing package revenue (up 14 percent this past quarter).
- This means that the Internet, which supposedly would do us in, is now a net positive.
- Given all this, reducing service and degrading a network that's now profitable isn't only unnecessary but also counterproductive; it would stop the postal turnaround in its tracks by driving mail—and revenue—out of the system.
- Instead, lawmakers should address the problem that's causing 100 percent of the red ink—the mandate that the Postal Service, alone among all entities, public or private, pre-fund future retiree health benefits.

**This is a forceful message and you are the right messengers.**

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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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