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Thursday, October 6, 2016

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Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

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• (1000)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, I think we'll get going. I know we're missing a panellist or two, but I don't want to delay the proceedings. We do have some panellists who have been patiently waiting. I believe in trying to start the meetings on time.

Welcome, everyone. Panellists, you probably know this anyway, but I'll just reiterate that the minister responsible for Canada Post, the Honourable Judy Foote, has initiated an extensive consultation process to try to determine the future of Canada Post.

The first phase of the consultation process was the appointment of a task force whose mandate was to examine the financial viability and sustainability of Canada Post. The task force has completed their report. We have had a chance to take a look at it. We have met with the task force members and have had an opportunity to question them.

Phase two of the consultation process is why we are here in Bathurst today. We are going from coast to coast to coast as a committee, talking to organizations, individuals, municipalities, communities large and small, urban and rural, and first nations communities, asking their opinions on what they would like to see for the future of Canada Post. That is why both of you are here today.

We will be asking each of you to give a brief opening statement, which hopefully will be no more than five minutes. I'll try to give you a signal when there's one minute left, in case you're still talking after four minutes. Following those presentations, there will be an opportunity for all of our committee members to question you and try to elicit more information from you.

At the end of the day, all of the comments you make and those of others who will be making comments from now until the end of this tour will be included in our final report, which I hope to be tabling in Parliament before the end of this year. I'm guessing it'll probably be towards the latter part of November or early December that the report will be tabled. All of you, obviously, will have a chance to take a look at that report.

Without further ado, we'll get going. I would like to welcome Ms. Anderson.

Ms. Anderson, you have the floor for five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Amy Anderson (President, Atlantic Region, Local 12, Canadian Union of Postal Workers): Thank you. Bear with me, I'm a little nervous. I will be reading my speech.

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about a topic that is very near and dear to my heart: our public post office. First, I'd like to say I'm not a banker or an accountant, nor a politician or a lawyer, and I don't hold a business degree, so please don't expect me to have all the answers here today.

What I am is a postal worker and I'm proud of it. One of my strengths is common sense, something that seems to be in short supply these days. I've been a postal worker for 30 years and I've seen many changes in the postal service over the years. I am here today to tell you a little bit of what I've experienced and seen over that span of time.

It seems someone, whether it was a group or an individual is unknown, decided that Canada Post either shouldn't exist or shouldn't exist as a crown corporation, and then it began. At first there was a gradual decline in services, the opening of private retail outlets, and the centralization of sortation centres which increased the time for mail to move from point A to point B. Also, there was reckless spending, like the forking out of billions of dollars for high-speed, automated sorting machines, when the first-class mail was already beginning its decline. They cut retail hours and sometimes completely closed rural post offices, where in some locations it was the only face of government left in the community. As well, there was the spending of hundreds of thousands of dollars on reducing the size of public retail areas of small-town urban post offices, making them as unfriendly and uncomfortable as possible for customers. Actually, one of our residents asked me one day why Canada Post seems to hate its customers. She said that when she complained to someone in management, the response she received was that she should go to Jean Coutu for her postal needs.

Thank goodness she hasn't let that stop her and continues to bring her business to the local post office, even though she says it makes her angry to see the postal worker in a box, or what is left of our retail counter.

Last but not least is the latest development, the loss of door-to-door delivery in the city. In a northern New Brunswick community with an aging demographic and some pretty harsh weather conditions, we now have a high number of seniors risking hips and ankles, slipping and sliding down our streets to their community mailbox, and hoping their mail compartment won't be frozen solid when they get there.

Speaking of winter, residents of Bathurst were informed by mail last week—and I have my own letter here with me today—that Canada Post is replacing every single community mailbox lock in the next couple of months due to the high number of complaints about locks freezing last winter. The Acadie-Bathurst local has requested a cost on this from both management and our MP, but to date have not received an answer to either request.

Despite all of this, Canada Post in the last 17 years has had net cumulative profits of \$2.18 billion, has paid \$589 million to the government in the form of dividends, and paid \$537 million in taxes. As I said earlier, I'm not an accountant, but these numbers don't seem to add up to the projected loss that Canada Post keeps talking about in the media. From what I understand, just in the last quarter, there was a profit of around \$44 million before taxes.

Just imagine what we could do if we had an agenda to save the post office rather than squander away its resources. The discussion paper and online survey released last week seemed to focus on cuts and rate hikes, and closing post offices and opening more franchises, which to me is the same as privatization. I was disappointed to see that there was little to no consideration for revenue-adding services proposed by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, with the proposal of banking being dismissed almost completely.

Would any of these ideas work? I'm not the expert, but a discredited idea never works. I know that a corporation that continues to squander money and send paying customers elsewhere has no chance of survival. Why is Canada Post so set on self-destruction?

It doesn't take a lot of common sense to know that we need to adapt and grow to survive. If we're seeing this type of irresponsible mismanagement in our public postal service happening in a small town like Bathurst, I can understand why it looks like Canada Post is in serious trouble.

This Liberal government needs to stop the demolition of Canada Post and find a leader who will stop treating postal workers as the enemy, and work together with us and the public to develop and expand services and create a public postal service that will completely meet the needs of all Canadians in our cities, towns, and communities. Our post office does need to change, but let's work to make it better, not cause its downfall.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Anderson.

Next up is Mayor Fongemie. Your Worship, you're up for five minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paolo Fongemie (Mayor, Municipality of Bathurst): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello.

This is the first year that we have had community mail boxes.

• (1005)

The transition was quite difficult. There were locks that were frozen or defective. Personally, the lock on my community mail box

has been changed three times in the recent months and it will be changed a fourth time, according to the note we received.

People are worried about the location of the boxes. A number of people have to walk past a box to get to their own. The location of the boxes seems a bit problematic. There is no parking. Some boxes are located on busy streets and people have to park on the street. This could be dangerous, a safety issue.

Then there are cleaning and clearing problems. The boxes are cleaned by a small van with a scraper on the front. After a storm, the first three or four rows of boxes are not accessible for a number of days.

Sand and salt are spread out by a dump truck. In some places, though, there is no salt or sand.

Moreover, there are no garbage cans near the community boxes. When people receive flyers, it creates pollution.

There is no lighting at night where the boxes are located.

[*English*]

However, today, we do have some media through which to have discussions. We have focus groups and social media. I invited our population to fill out the survey online and to provide comments on Facebook.

Part of the population wants the door-to-door mail delivery, but a good portion of the population has accepted community mailboxes.

That being said, everyone has concerns for the elderly, seniors, and people who have mobility issues or disabilities. The population of our region has the highest average age in New Brunswick—I think the average age is close to 50—which means this issue affects a lot of our citizens because they are seniors.

Having documentation or a survey to ask if someone would be open to the idea of paying extra to have door-to-door mail delivery is not a viable option for our citizens, because most of them have fixed revenue or limited revenue. The service should be provided to all of our citizens.

Carbon tax is a big issue right now. Canada Post is not a greener organization. We were very deceived. All the vehicles that have been bought are not electrical vehicles. When we want to encourage green energy and green habits among the citizens, I think the institutions in the province and in municipalities in Canada should be the leaders in embracing greener change by having electric cars or cars that run on biomass. When institutions embrace those new technologies, it brings down costs for citizens, if they also want to go in that direction. Therefore, it would be nice if all the vehicles were electric and if we provided some access to electrical outlets for people coming in.

Now I'll talk about the jobs. I'm a college professor and a college director now. I remember, in early 2000, we went to an e-commerce conference and they asked what the biggest competitor of Canada Post was in 2000. Everybody said UPS or Purolator. It was email. Technology and new trends do affect the working environment.

For a region like ours, losing eight jobs is the equivalent of Moncton losing close to 100 jobs. How can we do things differently?

In the 1980s, the Trudeau government decentralized the public service. That's why all the social insurance numbers are created in Bathurst. That's why in Newfoundland we have Revenue Canada, and Moncton has DFO.

How can we profit from all of those outlets across Canada and in rural areas add new services for our citizens through the current offices of Canada Post?

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

To all our panellists, I'll just give the same briefing that I've given panellists in meetings we've had before. I know that many times you have things unsaid in your opening statements; however, we will have copies of your opening statements. Also, we find that most of the information that you wish to impart is covered during the question-and-answer period.

We'll have ample opportunity, Your Worship, if you have additional information during that time.

Now we turn to Mayor Atkinson. Your Worship, you have five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Carson Atkinson (Mayor, Village of Chipman): Thank you very much.

My name is Mr. Carson Atkinson. I'm a retired educator. I was a long-time educator in various parts of the country—Yukon, Northwest Territories, New Brunswick—and I find myself as mayor of Chipman.

As mayor of Chipman, I am pleased that our community has been given the opportunity to appear before the House of Commons standing committee.

Scotiabank is closing its doors on Chipman today at four o'clock, and I will be there for the closing, provided I'm not tied up here too long.

From the brochure, which I've given you as well, we wish to convey our strong support for postal banking in our community. You have a brochure that we have put together, and I'll highlight it briefly. Going back, Chipman dates to the 1830s.

The Chair: I'm not sure if every committee member has a copy of that. We'll ensure that copies get circulated—

Mr. Carson Atkinson: I was told seven would be sufficient.

We are situated on the Salmon River, leading into Grand Lake, the largest freshwater lake in the province of New Brunswick. Recreational opportunities abound in our community. There are all kinds of activities, from birdwatching to cross-country skiing, four-wheeling, snowmobiling, and boating—extensive boating. We can have 60-foot boats tied up at the wharf and they can go anywhere in the world from there.

We have a population of about 1,250. It's probably stabilizing; however, we do have a mainstay. We have an employer, J.D. Irving, that employs 200 people within the boundaries of our small community, and there are about 300 to 350 people working in

support industries outside, to support that mill operation. It has had a \$38-million expansion in the last three years, and another \$3-million one this summer. It's a substantial employer. In fact, we have jobs we cannot fill in the community, 15 at the moment. We have this Irving mill in the area only because of CN's accessibility. They ship their product out on CN every day, five days a week.

For services, we have all of the usual kinds of activities: an industrial park, Service New Brunswick, post office, hardware stores, insurance companies, two schools, Chipman Outreach, Chipman Community Care, and Care 'N' Share, which support various groups, from children to adults and seniors. Like my compatriot here, we have a very high number of senior citizens.

We have seven churches and a local winery, Sea Buckthorn—I shouldn't even mention the name. While I always say Chipman is open for business, Sea Buckthorn is developing. They started at 2,000, and they hope to go much higher in terms of production, 2,000 per month.

We have seniors complexes, some of them being built. As the new mayor, I am fostering that. I am talking to everybody in the country: come to Chipman and build, because we need housing.

We have a monthly newspaper, the *Grand Lake Mirror*. I've talked about the J.D. Irving mill within our community. We have a local call centre, Cloud5, which employs about 30 people. Our Chipman Outreach has about 50 people employed there.

We sent out a banking questionnaire to about 1,100 people in the surrounding area, because the bank closure today at four o'clock strongly impacts the further growth of our community. We have a committee which includes one of the MPs, a lawyer, a former deputy premier, and a variety of people who volunteered, including executives who are retired bankers. We got responses back with over 800 supporting it. You see some of the pictures from some of the press reports we've had, a couple of the support letters, including Jim Irving's letter of support for a banking institution, and pictures.

The Scotiabank closure highlights a number of issues facing all small communities across our country. Loss of banking capabilities for business further erodes local businesses. The unequal treatment of rural and urban citizens is to the detriment of rural citizens. The demographics of rural New Brunswick speak to the need of our aging population to access local banking and avoid being further victimized by keeping cash in their homes. There is the loss of secure night depositories at the bank which are used by churches, Service New Brunswick, the post office, and over 100 businesses. At a time of substantially increasing profits by our major banks, government is still allowing bank closures, especially in rural areas.

What does Chipman need? We need a secure night depositor, to be used by our many businesses, organizations, and churches; a local place to deposit funds and get basic financial services; and a place for banking for our current residents who don't do online banking. We need the amenities of basic banking, as it is critical to maintaining the vibrancy of our community. If you choose Chipman as a postal banking pilot site, we would be very appreciative. Moving government strategy toward postal banking, especially postal banking in Chipman, would be a great opportunity for our federal government to demonstrate unquestionable support of rural and isolated areas.

Thank you.

•(1015)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go directly to the questions from our committee members. The first intervenor will have seven minutes, and that will be Monsieur Ayoub.

[Translation]

Mr. Ayoub, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the three witnesses for being here and for welcoming us.

Thanks also to those in attendance. There is a bigger turnout than elsewhere, and I am very pleased to see that.

We are discussing a very important topic, Canada Post. As you know, we are doing a cross-country tour and today we are in Bathurst.

To begin, I would like to address the mayor of Bathurst, and then the mayor of Chipman.

Roughly how long ago was the change made in Bathurst?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: It was in the past year.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Through a bit of research on the Internet, I found documents prepared by Canada Post that outline the plan to eliminate home delivery and introduce community mail boxes.

You said that some people agreed with the change once it was made and that some people still do not. How do you account for this difference?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: People will resist any kind of change.

The common concern, even among those who accepted the community mail boxes, was for seniors and those with reduced mobility. Yet that describes our community. There are more and more people from villages or neighbouring communities who move to our city and live in apartments. Our population is older. The problems arise primarily in the winter.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: As regards the planning of the changes, how were you consulted or informed by Canada Post?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: To my knowledge, there was very little communication. We learned that Bathurst was one of the cities in the

province that would receive the new service. It was kind of hush hush.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Were you able to take part in choosing the location of the community mail boxes?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: So it was imposed on you. There was a plan and it was implemented.

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: Yes.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: So there was no meeting with Canada Post before it happened.

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: No.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Based on that, if you had had the opportunity to provide input or had been consulted, what would you have suggested as regards the replacement of community mail boxes, in terms of distance and safety? You talked about maintenance. You did not really receive any information about maintenance, for example. The city is not responsible for the maintenance.

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: No.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Is it a sub-contractor?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: A sub-contractor is responsible for the maintenance.

Actually, the only communication we received was the written message last week informing us that all locks will be changed over coming weeks, in view of the problems we have had. That is a recent message and we did not receive anything else.

•(1020)

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: There was no contact person or intermediary between you and Canada Post?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: No.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I can tell you that you are not the only ones, unfortunately.

If you had been informed in advance and had taken part in those discussions, do you think it would have changed anything as to the installation, the approach, and the success of such an important undertaking?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: Yes, certainly.

In our community, the people who accepted the community mail boxes report all the problems I mentioned with regard to location, safety, lighting, snow removal, winter maintenance, and parking.

It would have been helpful if there had been some cooperation and communication so we could work together to resolve these difficulties. There is currently a lack of communication.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

I will now turn to you, Ms. Anderson.

Are your union's communications with Canada Post similar to what the mayor just described? Was information provided in advance or were you not informed until the last minute when it was a fait accompli, without any sharing of information or cooperation?

[English]

Ms. Amy Anderson: With the postal workers there was very little collaboration. There was a survey that did go out to the residents probably very early in the process, but the questions were so limited. It was, do you want small CMB, community mailbox, sites or do you want large CMB sites? There was really no, do you want this or don't you want it, or where would be a safe location for this?

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Do you agree or not?

Ms. Amy Anderson: Exactly, yes, it was so limited. A lot of people, if they didn't see the surveyor or find out about it in advance, the only time they found out about it was when the postal workers held a town hall meeting and we had about 200 residents who came and everybody in that meeting was against the CMBs.

There was very little collaboration. Even as postal workers in our office, there was none.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Can we say that there is a big lack of confidence between the two of you, and if the confidence were higher, the transmission of the information and the success of the project would be in a better way?

Ms. Amy Anderson: It would definitely make things a lot better. Mind you, as postal workers, we are against the loss of jobs and the implementation of CMBs across the country, but they don't work with us at all, on anything.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Mr. Mayor, on postal banking, there is a challenge with the technology. There is the same kind of technology with Canada Post and the banking. How are you going to deal with that?

The Chair: It will have to be a very brief answer.

Mr. Carson Atkinson: The answer is that we're looking for basic functions in the community, access to change, those of kinds of things. We're looking at safe night depositories, because our local businesses, and there are over 100 of them, don't have that kind of thing as of tonight.

This is a major factor in our community: basic banking, deposits, and maybe other kinds of things. The technology is not that complicated on that kind of aspect.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is Mr. Kmiec, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, all, for coming in today. I really appreciate the time you're taking to present to the committee.

I will direct most of my questions to postal banking.

Mr. Atkinson, thank you. I believe you are the first person I know who has actually presented some hard data on the need in your community for some type of banking services.

Do you know why Scotiabank closed its branch? Did they provide you with an explanation?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: In March, Scotiabank announced, per the six-month requirement, that they were closing the bank in Chipman and transferring accounts to Minto, which is 15 miles away.

Part of our problem is that we are equidistant from Oromocto, Sussex, Fredericton, and other communities. We are about the same distance, 75 minutes, to Newcastle, Saint John, and Moncton. Part of it is that they felt that they could high-grade, close the bank, and move quickly into the next community, and people would follow.

The answer was, no—

• (1025)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Atkinson, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I have a bunch of questions I want to ask both you and Ms. Anderson.

Was it because it was a low-volume branch, or because they were just consolidating their services?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: They consolidated because they thought that they could save money.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Did you at any point contact any of the other chartered banks, or maybe the Atlantic credit unions?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: We have gone through an extensive process. We met with five different banking institutions. We have someone who's going to come in and provide full-service banking. Ironically, in the last week, Scotiabank has agreed suddenly to give us the building that it's in, make a big donation to our library, and bring in a full-service ABM into the community. None of that was going to be available before the committee started its work and hundreds of hours of preparation.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay, but they're not going to put the branch back in.

Mr. Carson Atkinson: No.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Have any of the other ones committed to bring in the type of banking services that you need in the community?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: No.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Not at this point.

Mr. Carson Atkinson: No.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: My next question is going to be about the process, if postal banking was a solution.

By 2026, we expect Canada Post to have a \$700-million shortfall accumulated. This committee has heard that 7% of Canadians told them that they would use some type of postal services through Canada Post, and 11% of businesses said they would use it, but it comes with investing a large amount of financing to get Canada Post up to speed. It would require capitalizing the banks, because to take in deposits you need to have a float. In the case of a payment bank in India, they took \$500 million to get it started like that.

You require chequing, cash, reconciliation, compliance, training, licensing, money-laundering controls, on-site security, and SAP software to get it started. It's a large investment.

Do you think it would be a wise investment for Canada Post to get it there, or maybe instead use that money through a different government program or institution to attract banks and credit unions to open branches in smaller communities?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: I think, first of all, that it's too easy for banks, which are making burgeoning profits, if we look at Scotiabank as an example. This is not 2008 when they had perhaps an excuse to rationalize. They have increased their profits substantially year over year, whether it's the National Bank, Scotiabank, or any of the major banks. That's any of the major ones. There are some that have not had that much success.

To answer your question, I think it would be a good investment to invest that kind of money in that kind of structure. We have a community that has a major employer. Basically those services, the basic services, are going to be lost, and most people often drive by the door to go to work. They will not be driving by Scotiabank going through Minto. Access is important.

This mill is increasing in size, and is probably one of the most efficient east of the Rockies. We don't want to see our core business eroded, as is currently happening.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Another option for banking services would be to provide a free space where these banks could put in ATMs or actually bring in staff. Is that something that would be acceptable to your community, providing a building in your community where banks could position their services? Was that ever considered during this process?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: We marched this process through, in fact, meeting with one bank's executives and its vice-presidents. We took pictures all through the community. We have a site that we would basically give them that was going to be available. They would have to secure it and do the basic infrastructure.

We looked at Monday, Wednesday, Friday banking to provide that kind of basic need, especially to our seniors. They are a very large proportion of our population outside that younger group who works at the mill operations, the Cloud 5 call centre, or Service New Brunswick.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'll give you an example. I'm from Alberta, and I represent a Calgary area. I have lived in small-town Alberta as well. After Alberta Treasury Branches, a quasi-bank owned by the Government of Alberta, upgraded its software in order to provide better banking services, it cost them \$355 million and 76,000 hours of training, and that was only to train 5,000 employees. Canada Post has 50,000 employees who provide some type of service with a great many more branches.

This committee needs to look at the long-term sustainability of Canada Post. The investment required to get it to the point where it could provide a postal banking service would require a lot of financing from the government side.

Do you think we should do this through higher stamp costs or differential costs for letter delivery? Should we do it by raising taxes or direct subsidy, perhaps, from the government to Canada Post to finance this?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: My first point would be a direct subsidy, initially, because I think there's a payback in postal banking, and

there's definitely payback in terms of the security of the people in our communities and the erosion that's happening in our small rural communities, which you mentioned. Do you want all of the small communities in our country hollowed out, so it's all in Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax, that kind of thing? That would be my question for you.

• (1030)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: There's another thing I'm going to ask then. Is there any room to consider whether it would be better... The financing here is what I'm worried about, the sustainability of Canada Post. I very much don't want to see small communities hollowed out, but at the same time, if banks and what they consider low-volume institutions are closing, would investing all these funds result in Canada Post not making a turnaround despite those large profits that the chartered banks are making? Isn't there room for continued conversation, especially with the credit unions, to invite them in and have half of them stay in to open up shop within Canada Post locations themselves?

The Chair: We're out of time, Mr. Kmiec, but I would hope that Mayor Atkinson will have an opportunity to answer your questions, perhaps on the next intervention.

Mr. Duvall, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Thank you to our guests for sharing their valuable time with us. We appreciate it.

Ms. Anderson, you mentioned in your statement that you felt that Canada Post should not exist as a crown corporation, and you also said that spending was out of control, and they're making post offices unfriendly. Could you go further with that? Why do you think that is happening?

Ms. Amy Anderson: I can go back about 15 or 20 years. We met with MPs in Ottawa when rural postal workers were starting to get organized, to unionize, and we met with several MPs who at that time told us that Canada Post should not be a crown corporation. That's where that line came from. They believed it should be privatized and not a crown corporation.

Excuse me, what was the second part of the question?

Mr. Scott Duvall: That's good. I appreciate what you're saying there, but the other thing is, some of the ideas that we've been hearing at this committee from some of your colleagues at Canada Post are ideas to make it profitable. We've heard some good suggestions.

Have the union and Canada Post executive ever sat down together and tried to come up with a plan and ideas that they could work on to make it more profitable, and if so, what came out of those communications?

Ms. Amy Anderson: As far as I know, a lot of this probably went through...even just with the last round of negotiations. We all kind of know that the last round of negotiations was just two huge lockout threats to put us out on the street.

Canada Post doesn't seem to have any interest in expanding services. They seem to want to cut services more than expand. We're not quite sure why. We're not sure about the whole situation. There's no transparency there with Canada Post at all.

Mr. Scott Duvall: It's more of an ultimatum, I guess, of do this or else; we don't need your services.

Ms. Amy Anderson: It seems that way.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay.

To the mayors, thanks very much for your remarks, especially on postal banking. I completely get that, especially coming from a small town. You need some help in there. You guys do have the offices. One of the things Canada Post did, however, when they announced under the previous government that they were going to stop door-to-door delivery service....

They have responsibilities on how they deliver the mail. Under the current system it's door to door. But now what's happening, from some of the ways they implemented this and the lack of communication, is that those boxes are in spots that don't show good urban planning. There's a cost related to that, which Canada Post has now caused for municipalities, i.e., snow clearing, garbage pickup, graffiti cleanup, and accessibility for people who have mobility issues. As a former city councillor, I was getting many other complaints, that we need lighting, that Canada Post is not answering the phone, and it was taking up a lot of our valuable time.

Do you believe those costs should be borne by the municipality for something that they should be providing a service for?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: No, I don't think so. It should be their responsibility. They provide the service and it should be A to Z.

Mr. Scott Duvall: When you had the community mailboxes come into place, was there no consultation, not even an attempt to sit with you to come up with this?

• (1035)

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: We're all a newly elected council. There's nobody from the past. Having said that, from talking with previous councillors and city management, there seems to have been a lack of communication and collaboration. It's as if we were working in silos.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay.

Mr. Atkinson, I'm not sure if you have door-to-door service in any of your areas.

Mr. Carson Atkinson: No, we have a central post office. In some circumstances they can pick up there, or they have to go to these outlying boxes to pick up. That's throughout the region.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Has it always been that way?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: It's been that way for a long time.

And yes, there is a cost to us, as the mayor suggested, when we have to do clearing, bush cutting, keeping it open, things like that. They sometimes have someone who does that, but very often not adequately. The village ends up doing it.

Mr. Scott Duvall: I experienced that many times with the City of Hamilton.

The other issue I have is this. You mentioned seniors and people with disabilities. There's an option where Canada Post has now said

that if they can't get to the community mailbox, they might get a once-a-week pickup, or they could try to have their family and friends pick up their mail. To have the pickup delivered to them once a week, they'd need some kind of proof about their disability. There's a cost associated with this.

Do you think it's fair that the resident should have to pick up the cost for the change that Canada Post has implemented? Should the cost go to them, or should Canada Post be paying for this?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: It should go to Canada Post. The target audience with those issues have limited revenues or fixed revenues, and everything is going up. I think it's an essential service.

Having said that, the once-a-week pickup would create issues for the elderly, with the medical appointments they may get through the mail. It might be a week, and you'd miss your appointment.

It is a service to all of the population. Different age groups have different services. In a community like ours, where the population is aging and where there are disabilities, there should be a service that's provided adequately for them.

Mr. Scott Duvall: My last question is for Ms. Anderson.

The Chair: Could you make it a brief question?

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay.

Do you have any idea of how much it has cost so far to start up the community mailboxes? What is the actual cost for them?

Ms. Amy Anderson: So far it's been \$210 million.

Mr. Scott Duvall: That's \$210 million to date, just for the ones that have been implemented.

Ms. Amy Anderson: To date, yes, and there's still a lot more to do, if it continues.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Whalen, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Yes, I'm going to pass my time to Ms. Ratansi.

The Chair: Madam Ratansi, you have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you all for being here. Thank you for your perspective. It's quite interesting.

We are here to listen to your views because we need to move Canada Post into the 21st century. I listened to the quantitative analysis on its financial sustainability in the future, 10 years from now or 20 years from now. I know there are questions about whether or not it's financially sustainable, and we have to look at the figures with Ernst and Young, the task force, etc.

From a qualitative perspective, you've talked about issues around life, people needing their jobs, etc.

Mayor Fongemie, you mentioned that there are federal buildings. How would you propose to use those federal buildings, and how does that impact on Canada Post?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: I think the advantage right now is all the outlets we have in Canada in the rural communities. It's a great network. Adding the service of postal banking is one, and how we can work more closely with our other federal departments, or even provincial departments, to provide certain services to all our citizens without added cost. Canada Post is working in a silo and other departments are working in silos, and there are no efficiencies, so how can we work closely and provide maybe new services to our population without increasing any costs?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That's good. If you have some ideas, we would love to have them. In this short seven minutes, it's very difficult to get a very critical analysis of these things. We do want the middle class to increase.

Mayor Atkinson, we do want remote areas to be healthy and prosperous, because Canadians generally live near the border and we have empty land we could fill. But if we want to fill it, we have to provide opportunities.

I have a question. You know banks are totally profit driven. Do you think Canada Post should be profit driven, self-sustaining, or subsidized?

• (1040)

Mr. Carson Atkinson: Well, initially I said subsidized in terms of some of the initial costs, but it should be self-sustaining over a long period of time. You have to look at other private agencies that are making money and providing the kinds of services that Canada Post could provide. You have to ask why they can do it more efficiently than Canada Post. That's the basic question.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Do you have any ideas of how Canada Post could be more efficient, more self-sustaining? At the moment the focus is on, as Ms. Anderson has said, cutting services and investing in large technological warehouses, despite the fact that the market trend was against mail delivery. I think it's made some strategic investments, which have not given the return on investment that they're supposed to get.

As a mayor, the closing down of a bank like Scotiabank and probably reopening, how does it affect Irving, your biggest employer?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: In a lot of cases the people coming from the mill very frequently will use the banks, stop in and use the services as they're leaving a shift in the morning. There are three different shifts. Basically in the circumstances these people are accessing it, and if they can't do it there, in some cases they can't get access because if they go north they won't be able to access it that

way, if they go east there's no bank, and if they go south it's 45 miles to Sussex.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Therefore, the inconvenience might just draw the business out of there?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: That's correct.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: In terms of the postal banking, I guess the Canadian postal workers union has given us some analysis of successes in banks. What sort of service would you want, complicated services? The reason I say that is that other countries have used e-commerce and e-banking, making it more efficient for people to use it. What would you suggest? Do you want full service mortgage and things like that?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: No, definitely not. I don't think they can compete on that kind of basis. I think they can compete with the basic things, for example, a solid, safe place for a night depository for businesses. Those are pretty simple kinds of things. The pick-up comes. Armoured trucks are coming through the community anyway. It's not a big deal in terms of that. I mean there could be basic services to open an account for seniors, particularly seniors who don't get out much. It gives them the access through Canada Post, a very simple kind of thing. I'm only looking at a small group of these, because with this electronic development you know everybody shops for their mortgage rates online. We're not into that kind of thing, no.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Perfect.

I have a minute or two left, so I'd like to ask Ms. Anderson a question.

There have been challenges that Canada Post employees are not probably well equipped to do banking. Do you have an idea of what you could offer as an employee to the banking service?

Ms. Amy Anderson: The union has actually done quite a large study on postal banking and the different types of banking services that we could offer in different communities in different areas. We have the infrastructure. We have the employees.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That's MoneyGrams, Visa, and bills, or whatever.

Ms. Amy Anderson: Yes, there would be some training involved, and there would be a set-up cost. We understand that, but it would also be a money earner for Canada Post at the same time.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Going forward, what would your recommendation be to Canada Post?

I want 30 seconds from each of you, if you can. What would you like to see? I have a minute left.

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: Well, it's working together with other government agencies.

Recently, in villages up north... We have something in New Brunswick called Service New Brunswick, which provides service to the citizens, such as renewing your driver's licence, registration for your car, hunting licences, but they're closing those offices because it's not feasible. Now we're closing Canada Post outlets because it's not feasible.

Why can we not combine both services and provide a service that would be more efficient?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mayor Atkinson.

The Chair: A very brief answer, I'm afraid.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Yes, 20 seconds.

• (1045)

Mr. Carson Atkinson: I'm not quite sure how to answer that.

I really believe that a Canada Post that provides just the basic services, in a secure place, for those people who can't access, and drive, and that kind of thing, would make a big difference—quaint, very simple kinds of things. It does not have to be the complicated system we were talking about previously in terms of a massive expansion. Those are not high-technology items.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Fair enough. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, we have five minutes for you, sir.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks for having us here. It's a beautiful community. I'm very happy to be here.

Mayor Atkinson, I'm very impressed with your city. I wish we could just copy and paste it throughout a lot of rural areas in the country.

Going back to the banking, I know you spoke to a lot of banks, and I congratulate you on the hard work. Where did you get with the savings unions or credit unions?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: A lot of them have found that they're having problems. As small community-based banking, they have found it more challenging probably than the large banks. Their profit margins have been severely cut.

When we approached, say, Progressive—I'll use that as an example—they said no right up front. Some of the larger banks, interestingly enough, gave us a hearing, sometimes a polite hearing, but nonetheless a hearing. Some actually came into the community, looked, and said there's a business case. Year one and year two worked, but they could not justify years three, four, and five.

That's a quick answer.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Perfect.

This is a difficult thing to answer. I come from the tourism industry, where for new flights, the hotel community, the tourism community, and the airport authority, would subsidize Air Canada, Icelandair, etc., and guarantee them x number of seats—profits—for the first five years.

Would your community consider doing that for a savings union? Would you say come in, but because it's such a battle for service, we the citizens of the city will subsidize it if necessary?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: Under the circumstances, with 1,250 people, a budget basically of \$1.7 million, limited services, sewage, that kind of thing, it is not in the books to do that.

We could, because we have a facility available, with nominal costs, subsidize them in that sense. We would be willing to do that, and are prepared to do that, and have announced that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I understand.

That's why I said it's a difficult situation. We get into this a lot where we want these services, but someone else to pay, that type of thing. Thanks very much for that.

I don't know if they do it out here, but, out west, CIBC offers mobile banking services to small communities. They actually bring in, pretty much like a Brink's truck and open up the back. There's an ATM. There's also cash for cash exchange, etc.

Has that come up at all?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: No.

Royal Bank talked about bringing in some services, but not that kind of thing. They talked about sending in specialists in the different categories, for mortgages and all those kinds of things, part-time.

That's not the answer, truth be known, because people have businesses. The businesses in the community have to have a place to make deposits. We have no place to make deposits as of today.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is the biggest thing the overnight deposit?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: Yes, that's a big thing, and so is access to coin, although we're already working on a system for that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I was going to say there is a global coin exchange.

Thanks very much and, again, the city sounds fantastic.

Mayor Fongemie, what discussion did you or any of your department have with Canada Post before any of the CMBs were put in? I ask because we have been asking all the communities if they were consulted. We've heard from one and I've heard from others that have said, "We actually refuse to consult with them. We're so against the idea of CMBs." Of course, then the constituents end up with CMBs in locations where they don't want them. What was the process that you experienced? I know you have noted that the CMBs are in areas that are not perfect.

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: I think it was an open communication, and the city was open. There were certain areas of the city where we already had community mailboxes, in one subdivision, in particular. I think there's openness and communication, but with all the issues that were brought to us by the citizens, we feel that nobody's listening to us now about all the issues.

• (1050)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Were you consulted?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: It's a little bit hard for me to say because we're all new since May. I think there was some consultation, but not in the way we would have liked it to happen.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: What would you have liked? Would you have liked for them to walk through with your engineers and say, "put it here, and put it here"?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: Yes. We could have worked together on planning the boxes and the maintenance, etc., on whether there was something that maybe the city could have done or provided input on. Obviously, that wasn't done.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final intervention will come from Mr. Whalen.

You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you all for coming.

We've been focusing a bit on the service levels that Canada Post has provided and a bit on the financial impact. I want to ask a few questions about the future of Canada Post. It can either be leveraged to greater serve the community, or perhaps contract so that it can avoid burdening taxpayers and allow the markets to provide service. This is the fundamental difference in views that different groups share in terms of Canada Post going forward.

When we look at the community mailbox issue and when we talk about saving door-to-door delivery, different people come at it with different figures, and there are different understandings of what door to door means. The annual report and the task force report talk about five types of service. I'd like each of your thoughts on what you would group together as door to door. We have a delivery service that is directly to the door in urban areas. We have a delivery service that is to the end of laneways in some rural areas. We have a delivery service to community mailboxes. We have a delivery service to common indoor locations in apartment buildings. It's not to someone's apartment door but to the common area on the ground floor. There's also delivery to the rural post office. When we talk about door-to-door delivery and saving it, which of these would you categorize as a sufficient level of door-to-door service?

Ms. Anderson.

Ms. Amy Anderson: You've named most types of door-to-door delivery. There are rural boxes at the end of the street and panels in the apartment buildings in the cities. Actually where my son lives in Vancouver, he has door-to-door delivery to his apartment door.

We also consider delivery to a person's mailbox attached to their house as door-to-door service.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay, so you consider all three of those things as door-to-door delivery.

Ms. Amy Anderson: Yes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Atkinson, I know it doesn't apply to your community particularly, but when we talk about door-to-door service, what would you consider to be door to door?

Mr. Carson Atkinson: Our current situation, in truth, is that we're not having a lot of reaction to that kind of thing. We have a lot of reaction, but not to that.

In the rural places, I consider it where they pick up their mail and that kind of thing. If they have a question, they can go to the post office. Outside the community, it's a little different. I really can't speak to that because I don't know their comments. They don't report to us or complain to us.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay, fair enough.

Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: I consider all of those options as door to door. We live in a city with a lot of rural characteristics. There's downtown concentration and subdivisions, but there are rural parts within city limits where we have farms. All of those different options are considered door to door, in my mind.

Mr. Nick Whalen: When we talk about the potential additional cost savings by moving to community mailboxes, you talk about an extra \$320 million per year. There is \$80 million per year that's claimed to have been saved by converting about 850,000 doors to community mailboxes. There's discussion about converting the rest—about 28% of homes that still have directly to the door delivery—to community mailboxes. That's about \$100 per unit per year. Do you feel that using tax money to subsidize this type of higher level of service is justified? Or do you believe that all things being considered equal, the community mailbox service is a high enough level of service when you take into account that if we don't go ahead and do this, we'll have to find the \$320 million elsewhere? Maybe you disagree with the premise. Mr. Mayor?

Mr. Paolo Fongemie: I think everyone has to be efficient. If the service provider gives a quality service, which it's not right now with the implementation of the community mailboxes, it brings other issues and does bring other costs. I'm not sure the savings are real savings if they've changed my box four times in the last six months. That's a lot of added cost.

Having said that, coming back, it's working together with other departments, because what we have with Canada Post is that network in rural communities, and how we can benefit from that network is by adding other services and maybe being more efficient overall with all the departments in Canada.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

Mr. Atkinson.

Mr. Carson Atkinson: The community post office boxes I think are working. We're not hearing a lot of complaints about that because they can reasonably access the local post office. Were that post office to close, it would be an entirely different situation. There would be a crisis and there would be another one of these presentations on that issue alone.

• (1055)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Fair enough. Thank you very much.

Ms. Anderson.

Ms. Amy Anderson: Postal workers believe that the post office is profitable. I can't see any savings with the community mailboxes, just from what I see on a daily basis. We have unassigned employees now who are in our office every day. Some days they have work and some days they don't. We have letter carriers doing many hours of overtime because the routes are overstructured. It was just done badly. Some of our unassigned people are also using rental vans for delivering parcels and doing other things because we can't get the work done with the people we have on the street right at the moment. I can't see any huge savings in what they've done in the city.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm sorry, Mr. Whalen—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Well, thank you for your answers. I greatly appreciate them.

The Chair: Lady and gentlemen, thank you so much for being here today.

Should you have any additional information that you wish to give to the committee that would assist us in our deliberations, we invite you to do so. You can contact our clerk and give that information to her directly. All of that information will be combined with the testimony that you've already given today, which will help form part of our final report.

Thank you once again.

We will suspend for a couple of minutes while our next panellists come to the table.

•(1055) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1100)

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen and colleagues, we'll start again.

Monsieur Bélanger and Madame Gammon, welcome.

Were you both in the room for the last session so you were able to see how this process works?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger (Director General, Association acadienne et francophone des aînées et aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick): No, we just arrived.

[*English*]

The Chair: Very quickly then, this is—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: Our invitation was for 11 o'clock, so we stuck to that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'll make a few opening comments to explain how the process works.

We will ask both of you to give a brief opening statement for, hopefully, no more than five minutes. After the conclusion of your opening remarks, all committee members will have a chance to ask each of you questions about your presentation, and more specifically, your views with respect to the future of Canada Post. All of your comments, recommendations, and observations will be taken into

account and will help form part of our final report that we will be presenting to Parliament later this year.

Monsieur Bélanger, I would ask you to give your opening statement of, hopefully, no more than five minutes. The floor is yours.

•(1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: Allow me to introduce myself. I am the director general of the Association acadienne et francophone des aînées et aînés du Nouveau-Brunswick.

Parliament's announcements about the changes in Canada Post services caused seniors a lot of worries. They are used to receiving services nearby. In the regions, there is home delivery for some services, while others are through the community mail boxes.

All of these issues and new technologies worry seniors because they can not always get about, depending on whether they live in a rural or urban area. In New Brunswick, there are three main urban centres, which are nevertheless not cities like Montreal, Quebec, Ottawa or Toronto. There are many rural communities in the rest of the province.

The whole issue relates to seniors and their concerns about services. Seniors are not always up on the latest technology. They are still used to relying on Canada Post services. Those services are so important to them because that is how they keep in touch with people close to them. Nowadays people are spread out all over the country, or even outside the country, and communicating with their children and grandchildren is important to seniors. Mail service is still essential to many people.

Of course the baby boomers reaching retirement age and the generation X and Y cohorts are and will remain much more comfortable with technology. So we want to talk about the transition between the two. This is important. How can the transition be managed in a gradual way, so that seniors do not feel vulnerable about their habits and their traditional way of using Canada Post?

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gammon, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon (President, Réseau communauté en santé Bathurst): Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to participate in these discussions.

[*Translation*]

I attended the public meetings held by the union in Bathurst. For my part, I have had a mail box and have not had home delivery for 31 years. We used to live in Janeville and now we live in Bathurst, and we chose not to receive home mail delivery. That does not mean, however, that I do not believe in the importance of home delivery. Bathurst has a population that is aging rapidly. I think our population is aging more rapidly than anywhere else in the province, and there are several people with disabilities. Personally, I think we should give people the choice between home delivery and a community mail box.

I think Canada Post's future could be guaranteed by adding related services such as banking services, MoneyGram, for example, and similar services, that could be offered at the post office. Moreover, the fact the role of Bathurst's main post office has been reduced and some services have been transferred to Jean Coutu—I think the Jean Coutu stores across the province won the contract—is not necessarily a good thing for Canada Post's survival.

Now that contracts have been awarded and post offices eliminated, there are employees who do not necessarily have the same wages or working conditions. Personally, I think we should examine Canada Post as a whole and determine what is beneficial not only for the corporation, but also for citizens across the country.

In New Brunswick, as I said, our population is aging and not everyone has a car to get to a community mail box. That concerns me. Nor is everyone physically able to walk to the box, even if it is nearby. That also concerns me tremendously. A number of people have commented on this and I wonder if it was the right decision to install community mail boxes.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Our first intervention will come from Mr. Ayoub.

[Translation]

Mr. Ayoub, you have the floor and you have six minutes.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like a clarification, Ms. Gammon. You represent the Réseau communauté en santé de Bathurst. What is this network?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: It is a community network—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Community!

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: — made up of various community organizations that work together to improve the health of people in the Bathurst region.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Okay.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: There is a community health network that covers the whole region of Chaleur, New Brunswick, but our network focuses exclusively—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: On Bathurst.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: — on Bathurst. We have—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I have to interrupt you because I just have seven minutes to ask you some questions and get a few answers.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Okay.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: We are also very concerned about the quality of service for seniors, especially those who have mobility issues or are disabled. There are, however, different levels of service. There are people like you—you gave your own situation as an example earlier—who have never or almost never had home delivery. That does not really seem to bother you.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: No.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Would you move from your current location to get home delivery? Would that be an important factor?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: No.

We lived in Janeville for 21 years and there was no home delivery. When we moved to Bridge Street, in Bathurst, we were asked what we wanted. We were used to a community box. As well, we have two vehicles, my spouse and I, and we go out regularly. Not everyone has that choice.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Do you ask someone else to pick up your mail from time to time while you are on vacation or if you have to leave town, for instance?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: No.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: So the mail stays in your box and no one picks it up.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: The mail stays in the box.

• (1115)

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: We have also heard that it is difficult for seniors who do not have a car, not only because they do not have home delivery but also because they have to go out for certain other services. How do they manage? Does someone help them or is there a community service?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: There is no community service here and it is very difficult for those people. If they have family nearby, they can help out. For my mother for example, we could go get her mail. Some neighbours are also very generous with their time. For the vast majority of people without a car, though, it is a major concern. It is also a concern for people who do not have the physical mobility to get out. Moreover, the boxes are not always installed in easily accessible locations.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Mr. Bélanger, you can reply also.

Are you aware of a service for people with reduced mobility? In order to get back the home mail delivery service these people have lost, however, they have to show a doctor's note saying they have reduced mobility. Did you know that?

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: I did not know that Canada Post offers that service. In any case, all of these services for people with reduced mobility are offered in New Brunswick by non-profit organizations. There is no provincial agency as such. In urban centres where there is public transit, they can have access—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: What I am saying is that a person with reduced mobility can make a special request to Canada Post for home delivery even if they have lost it. The service is available and it is not related to public transit.

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: I did not know that. There are so many details about so many things. It is not always easy to keep track.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Ms. Gammon, would you like to add anything?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: People often do not know about that service or how to request it. As you know, the literacy rate in the region is very low and people do not know how to access this service. Moreover, making calls to get information is very frustrating!

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: That leads me to another question that you have both raised. I am referring to technology. Technology is becoming increasingly pervasive in the world today. Canada Post is no exception. Banks are no exception either.

We are often told that there is a solution. The Canada Post union said that banking services could be a solution. In your opinion, how would seniors and persons with reduced mobility adapt? How could we replace or improve a service when technology is constantly evolving?

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: The technology is not always easy. We may take it for granted. It is somewhat surprising that a lot of people of a certain age use a tablet. I know grandmothers who use a tablet to communicate easily with their children and grandchildren. However, this may not necessarily be the case for online banking or much more specific technology such as how to fill out a form on the Web, among other things. They are used to Facebook and some use Twitter, but using more advanced technology may not be as easy.

As I mentioned earlier, the baby boomers who have been in the system since 2011 are much better prepared to use technology. In New Brunswick, poverty is still a reality among seniors. They don't have the means to purchase equipment and pay for an Internet subscription. They can go to public libraries or other public places, but they have to find a way to get there. In rural areas in New Brunswick, a lot of seniors live alone. Their children moved elsewhere for work. They have fewer family members. They have to depend on their neighbours or other people for help, to drive them to the doctor or that sort of thing.

I know that the socio-economic agency that has existed in New Brunswick for a few years is quite interested in the issue of transportation in rural areas. In cities, transportation is not necessarily easier, but there are more possibilities, which is not the case in rural areas.

In New Brunswick, close to 60% of the population lives in rural areas. The little post office that used to be there and has disappeared in some places is a loss for those people. Some have even lost their church, their credit union, their school, and now they're losing their postal service. These are not necessarily tragic losses for these people, but this is nevertheless the loss of an important traditional service.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Kmicc, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Tom Kmicc: Thank you, Ms. Gammon and Mr. Bélanger.

I am a member of Parliament from western Canada. I am going to take this opportunity to practice my French with you a bit today.

First of all, I'd like to talk about the Canadian Postal Service Charter, and then the level of postal service seniors should receive, in your opinion. Do you think seniors in New Brunswick would agree to see mail delivery go from five days a week to three days a week, to allow Canada Post to decrease its delivery costs?

• (1120)

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Did you want to answer, Mr. Bélanger?

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: That is an excellent question. It all depends on the people you speak to, the general population or our seniors. Canada Post has a list and says it is going to cut this and that and reduce costs and so on, and there are fewer nuances.

What additional elements could Canada Post add to its current range of services to generate income that would mean that it would no longer be necessary to cut basic services as much for persons of a certain age? That is a question we hear on a regular basis.

We would prefer that Canada Post add services that would benefit seniors and the population as a whole, instead of reducing current services. That is of course the choice of last resort. We are aware that there are economic factors, that technology may improve and that people will eventually get connected.

In New Brunswick, the Internet is available just about everywhere, but according to the most recent statistics, 50% of women and 40% of men of 65 or more in New Brunswick live under the poverty line, that is to say that they get by only on Old Age Security benefits and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. Poverty is thus a reality in New Brunswick.

Access to technology and the capacity to pay more for services are also issues for our seniors, because they don't necessarily have the income to do that. For instance, it may cost \$25 to have a parcel delivered by Canada Post, depending on its weight and the distance involved, which is not always affordable for low-income persons, most of which are women in New Brunswick. We have to give them access to more services.

Mr. Tom Kmicc: I have to interrupt you, because I only have seven minutes.

Ms. Gammon, go ahead.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: I second Mr. Bélanger's statements. It is true that a lot of women live under the poverty line, and it is difficult. However, if I had a choice between no home mail delivery and delivery three times a week, I would prefer to receive mail three times a week rather than having no door-to-door service.

Mr. Tom Kmicc: I see.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: I think this is really important for all of the population. There are also young families who live under the poverty line. They are in a difficult situation. In several of our regions, there is no public transit, and that is the case in our area. So you can't take the bus to go to the post office. The Community Inclusion Network is working on it, but it's not done yet.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: According to the figures that were given to the committee, Canada Post will have a deficit of \$700 million by 2026. We are all trying to find ways to reduce costs. We are trying to see if new services could reduce those costs as much as possible.

How would you rank Canada Post as compared to the various other public services different levels of government provide? Compared to health services, urban and rural transport, and so on, how would you situate Canada Post?

Are you ready to pay more income tax to obtain a better postal service, or would you prefer that those taxes go to health care or other services for seniors?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Those are really difficult decisions. Public health care is important, certainly, since the population is aging and there are now many new syndromes that did not exist before.

I am a teacher by profession. When I began to teach in 1969, we had one class and there were no students with special needs. Now it is not rare for teachers or the spouses of teachers to have to deal with that. For instance, in one class in our region, there were 27 students and 9 of them had special needs.

It is very difficult to determine what we would prefer. There is no doubt that health and education are important, but we also have to find new services. In my opinion, additional services would help Canada Post achieve financial equilibrium.

Some countries offer a lot of complementary services that allow their institution to not be in deficit. I think that is what we have to consider. That said, it is less important for populations in large cities like Toronto and Montreal. In New Brunswick, 60% of the population is really rural. For the people who live in those areas, it is really difficult to get to the community mailbox, the post office, or elsewhere.

•(1125)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Duvall, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Thank you to our guests for coming today. I appreciated very much listening to your concerns.

We mentioned before and you were surprised, Mr. Bélanger, that there was an option for people with mobility issues to get home delivery once a week. With Canada Post making that home delivery, as they do now, they're telling people there is an option to do this but someone would have to prove they had a mobility issue and fill out an application and get a doctor's note, which comes at a cost. Whatever the doctor charges can vary.

Since Canada Post has changed the way it wants to deliver mail, do you think it's fair that seniors should have to pay a fee in order to prove their mobility issue, or to pay a fee because of that change in delivery method?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: That is a good question, Mr. Duvall.

As we explained earlier, the economic situation in New Brunswick is perhaps different from that in other provinces. The circumstances of the population are not as good as in certain other provinces. So when we are asked whether we are ready to pay more for this or that service, the answer is not simple. It is often nuanced.

We've been talking about statistics, but we must not forget that at this time—we think this is an important point—New Brunswick is the province with the most elderly population: 19% of the population is 65 or more, as compared to the Canadian average which is 16%. By 2036, 29.7% of the population of New Brunswick will be seniors. Some people will live longer.

Mobility is always an issue, especially in rural areas, where 60% of our population lives. They have to have access to service at a reasonable cost. As Mr. Kmiec was saying, these people might be willing to accept a compromise and have less frequent mail delivery.

I was talking about transition earlier. I am convinced that the matter of transition has to be examined in the context of any decrease in service or proposal Canada Post will be making to the government. How will we make the transition? It should not happen all at once, in a shocking manner. It should be done one element or one sector at a time.

As Ms. Gammon pointed out, we are learning things about Canada Post today. This means there is a deficiency somewhere. We are very involved with the associations, but we did not know that Canada Post provided door-to-door delivery to people with impaired mobility. There is something missing in the communication with people. As Ms. Gammon said, people aren't always aware of that.

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall: I appreciate that, Mr. Bélanger

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: May I answer?

Mr. Scott Duvall: Yes. Then I have to ask another question.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: In New Brunswick, like everywhere else in the world, we have migration toward the larger centres.

•(1130)

[Translation]

The people in our rural communities no longer have family members to help them. Seniors want to remain in rural areas, but their families have moved to the big cities. And so it is very important that that aspect be taken into account when you decide to eliminate a service as important as Canada Post.

For seniors, Canada Post means CPP cheques and Old Age Security Benefits. These people need to have access to those financial resources at a very specific time.

[English]

Communication is also something that's very important.

Mr. Scott Duvall: I want to ask you another question, please.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Okay.

Mr. Scott Duvall: This is very important because yesterday when this committee met in another province, one of the witnesses, who was a Liberal MP, admitted that under the previous government, when it was announced that the community mailboxes were going in, there was an outcry across the country. It was loud and clear.

When the election was coming up, the Liberals said in their platform that they were going to save door-to-door delivery. That's what they said. It's in their statement. Another Liberal MP came yesterday and admitted that. He said they were saving home door-to-door delivery.

What did you hear? Is that what you thought that they were going to do, or was there something else?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: The present government?

Mr. Scott Duvall: The present government, yes.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: It was loud and clear. I know that our mayor, the mayor of Bathurst, who made a presentation, wanted to make sure that we saved door-to-door delivery. Bathurst was one of the first communities that accepted that.

If I were to go back, I was a municipal councillor at that time and I was vocal. I was at the presentations by the labour movement and whatnot. I thought door-to-door delivery should be kept. I think that's a very important service. Since we had—

Mr. Scott Duvall: That's what you heard. That's what I'm getting at.

Mr. Bélanger.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: That is what we heard during the election campaign. Was it implied or did we misunderstand? During the election campaign, the current government said that it would maintain door-to-door delivery where it was still being provided. That did not mean that it would restore it where there wasn't any. There is a nuance there.

[English]

The Chair: I appreciate that.

We have Madam Ratansi for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you both for coming. You're bringing quite an interesting perspective.

Madam Gammon, why did you stop or not want door-to-door delivery to your own house?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: When we moved to Janeville there was very little or no door to door. You had to go to a community mailbox and the community mailbox was on the way home. So every night, every second night, every third night, whatever we decided, we'd pick up the mail. We were used to that.

When we moved to where we are now.... We moved to Bridge Street and there wasn't that much community door to door. There were community mailboxes, so it was normal for us to do that.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay, thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Bélanger, I am going to speak English because my French isn't very good.

[English]

You say that your understanding of the platform is that door to door to those communities that already had door to door will be restored. We would put a moratorium on community mailboxes and then we would move to this consultation, which will result in whatever. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: That is what I had understood.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Fine.

[English]

Madam Gammon, you talked about a holistic approach to Canada Post. That's quite interesting. You were given a choice of comparison to some provincial jurisdictional issues, i.e., do you fund Canada Post at the same level as public health, etc.

I'd like to look at it as a crown corporation. Canada Post is a crown corporation, like CBC, CN Rail, CDIC, etc. There are many crown corporations. We need a crown corporation to be self-sustaining. If you were to look forward and see how one makes a whole approach to Canada Post, what would your suggestions be? At the moment, just to clarify, we looked at a very tight quantitative financial analysis. You talked about the holistic approach, so you're talking beyond numbers. What would you suggest Canada Post do?

• (1135)

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: I think other services like certain types of banking services could be done by Canada Post so that it could increase its revenue. I think there are other ways also. I'm not too sure that all of this—like for us, it's a Jean Coutu—is good a way. Not everybody lives around Jean Coutu, so how do you go? Jean Coutu is not easier to access than it is to go downtown.

We need to look at Canada Post as a service. When Canada became a country 150 years ago, post was one of the important things, as well as rail, so that people could communicate right across Canada—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That's your national symbol.

Now we're moving forward. Our 150th birthday is going to take place next year. What should we do?

Monsieur Bélanger, you talked about services that used to be provided. I think you must have been here when they talked about fishing licences and passports. Have any of you used the services like MoneyGram at Canada Post?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: No, I haven't used MoneyGram. We hosted an international student from Italy and her parents sent her money through MoneyGram on a regular basis.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That was from Canada Post?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Yes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Oh, okay. That's perfect.

In Scotland and Ireland the postal system is used for travel insurance, money exchange, passport applications. If those types of services were to be given, do you think your communities would be able to use them, and how many would use them?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Definitely. The people who travel.... Right now, we're thinking of going to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Where do you get travel insurance? I really do think the people who would use it are the people who travel a lot, the people who do a lot of transactions, and definitely people who are in a lower income bracket.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: They would use it for what?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: They would use it to mail, to receive their cheques, and to mail little things. They wouldn't necessarily be doing a passport, and they wouldn't necessarily be buying insurance to travel and whatnot, but other people who are middle class and up would certainly use it.

I know that before we used to be able to go to our MP's office and our passport would be all done. Now it doesn't work that way.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Monsieur Bélanger.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: I think that any other banking service or service provided to consumers would have to not be too expensive; prices would have to be competitive. A lot of businesses work in this sector already. Banks, insurance agencies, and others are active in these markets. For Canada Post to be able to offer some of these additional services for the purpose of generating more revenue, it would have to be competitive in these areas. Otherwise, how will the rural area have access to the service?

Like Ms. Gammon, I have been to different places. I went to a small community in France. The post office was really the nerve centre of the town. The village was called Saint-Restitut. It was quite close to Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux. My niece lives in that village.

The post office had everything, it was it the centre of the community's activities. In addition to postal services, there were all of the economic elements, messages, exchanges.

The postman went around with his car in the morning—the village has a population of about 500 residents—and he distributed everything to the homes, just as it has always been done. It depends on the system of services.

You have to examine the value added. Of course since Canada Post is a crown corporation, it has to be profitable. For any enterprise, that is fundamental.

I always come back to the idea of making the transition in the context of a short-term five-year or ten-year plan. These things have to be done together, and you have to see how the additional services could be added and generate additional revenues. How could certain services be offered differently, in the course of a transition? Mail delivery could be cut one day a week. In the context of a transition that might be acceptable, but if the service were reduced by two or three days all at once, it would be less acceptable.

• (1140)

[English]

The Chair: *Merci beaucoup.*

Mr. McCauley, for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thank you for joining us today. I mentioned earlier to the mayor what a beautiful community you have, so thanks for having us here.

I want to chat quickly about service to seniors. There are some who are well aged and who are still very mobile, but we'll discuss the ones that are not quite as mobile.

One of the services Canada Post has, and Mr. Duvall mentioned, is that they will do five-day delivery to the mailboxes, and then once a week they will clear out the entire mailbox and bring it to the house.

Are you aware of that, and do you think that's a viable solution for those who are disabled or elderly, and who are not able to get to a mailbox?

[Translation]

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: It's very difficult for seniors, and they have some very grave concerns. If they are waiting for their cheque or other important mail and do not receive it, it's a source of anxiety.

Delivering mail one day a week may not be such a bad thing, but I don't think it is positive. You have to think about value added; it is important, as the lady has just said. It is very important. Canada Post should work on that and keep its employees.

We should not forget either that Canada Post is a service that is provided to the population. It is no different from health or education. We have to pay for all of these services, that is the way it is.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's a good point to bring up. You said it is a service, but it is a service mandated to cover itself, and that's what we're running into. When we see reports, one of them shows, as my colleague mentioned, a loss of three-quarters of a billion dollars in the next nine years. Another report says that's a very conservative loss and it could be \$1 billion. We're faced with the question of whether we pay higher taxes, do we take \$1 billion from health care services to cover that, or do we make changes? That is why we're doing this. You brought some very good things up.

Mr. Bélanger, you talked about your trip to France. We actually have it very similar in Alberta where a lot of the government services are done through that. You can get your driver's licence, health care, everything, but it's been done through a mass privatized system, so these stores are within blocks of each other. There are more of them than there are liquor stores, and they provide services 7 a.m. to midnight. It's quite fascinating.

One of the things that we've seen with the growth in a lot of our communities, Edmonton being one, is adding 100,000 or 200,000 people to a region. It's grown so vastly that what used to be a rural post office is now inside a big city. Canada Post has about 500 of them that are rural but inside a big city. They've moved a lot of these mailboxes to pharmacies, as you mentioned.

Would you consider that being a viable solution? Should we transition these into pharmacies, etc., and use the money saved so that we can continue serving the true rural post offices? Basically, the money saved would be used to subsidize or continue with the good services in the true rural areas.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: I think that—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You can speak French. It's okay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Fine, thank you.

Yes, that could be a viable option, but I think that we really have to take the service and the employees into account. Canada Post has a certain responsibility to the community but also to its employees. As is often the case, the jobs might be less well paid than the ones at Canada Post. That concerns me somewhat.

• (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's where the savings come from.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Yes.

The Chair: We're out of time. Thank you.

Our final intervenor will be Mr. Whalen, for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank all of you. I feel very comfortable here. There are a lot of seniors in the Chaleur region. Perhaps I am picking up on their wisdom.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Ah yes, that's it!

Mr. Nick Whalen: A lot of questions are being raised about the future of Canada Post, the solutions that might work, the appropriateness of subsidizing its services, and so on.

In your opinion and that of your members, should Canada Post be subsidized, and if so to what extent?

Are we talking about \$500 million, or \$1 billion?

Should we instead improve the services and offer them in a way that eliminates waste?

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: It was clear from the exchanges we held with our members and with seniors that they hope that Canada Post will work on creating value added. I think I said that out already.

In all enterprises these days, this is more a way of doing business than a simple trendy expression. Businesses are trying to create value added with the services they already provide. This allows them to keep some of them, even if some changes prove necessary. As mentioned several times, Canada Post could offer other kinds of services, such as financial services, or could change its delivery

service. It is a big challenge. Of course people never want to lose what they have or are used to having.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ms. Gammon, you have the floor.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: Thank you.

I am in favour of the value-added concept, but in this province, Service New Brunswick already offers a lot of services. From them we can obtain our hunting permits, driver's licences, and many other things.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Are you suggesting that Canada Post and Service New Brunswick work together, or something along those lines?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: It could be something like that. It would have to be profitable. Service New Brunswick has demonstrated that that service is very profitable and allows the province to save money.

Mr. Nick Whalen: If all of those services were not offered by Canada Post but by Service New Brunswick, would that bother you? Does Canada Post have something special that means that it should be the institution to offer services?

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: Sir, I would like to make a small correction.

Recently, the Province of New Brunswick declared that it was going to reduce the number of service centres—there are 20 or 25—to four large centres. Everyone is opting for technological solutions. This is not because people are all in favour of that.

Service New Brunswick is where people can purchase their driver's licences and licence plates. It offers all of the services, even marriage certificates, and other things as well. You can pay all of your taxes and income tax through Service New Brunswick. However, in 2017-2018, Service New Brunswick is going to emphasize computerized and technological solutions. That is a fact.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you.

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: I simply wanted to specify that.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: I would like to add that not everyone has access to technology.

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: That is true.

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: It is a mistake to believe that everyone in the community has access to technology. A lot of seniors do not, and a lot of people who live under the poverty line do not have access to it either.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes, I understand what you are saying. That is what everyone says, throughout the country.

Mr. Jean-Luc Bélanger: Yes, there always seem to be cuts down the road.

• (1150)

Mr. Nick Whalen: I apologize, but I only have one minute to ask a question.

Will seniors use the postal banks? Would you go from a private bank to postal banking services if they existed?

Ms. Anne-Marie Gammon: It would depend on the services, their cost and a lot of things. Currently, we hear about the Tangerine bank on television.

It would depend on what Canada Post were offering. If Canada Post wants to attract people and if they want them to use the new services, as Mr. Bélanger said, the rates would have to be competitive and perhaps even better than others.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Madam Gammon, Monsieur Bélanger, thank you so much for taking time out of your very busy schedules to be here today.

I will extend the same offer to you that I do to all our panellists, and that is, should you have additional information that you think would benefit this committee in our deliberations, please feel free to direct it to our clerk within the next couple of weeks. We'll be starting to examine all our transcripts and begin our deliberations and our report sometime after we get back to Ottawa.

The meeting is adjourned.

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