

*Government Orders*

post office from this village would be devastating". Mrs. Lutz makes a very good point.

As you go around the prairies, and you are from the prairies, Mr. Speaker, you know that in the small towns and in the villages of prairie Canada, we have a lot of senior citizens. The average age of some of these small hamlets, towns and villages would be up in the upper fifties or sixties or perhaps even older. You can sometimes go down a street and you think that the only people living in a small village are people that are on retirement. There is the occasional family with small children. It is these older people that need the postal service.

That postal service is a very important aspect of culture in this country in terms of popular culture. People gather at the post office. They meet their neighbours at the post office. It is the centre of communication and the centre of activity in the community. It knits together and holds together these small communities.

I remember when the people of Dubuc were fighting for their post office. They made the point and it is still true. Often in small towns, the only place you will see the Canadian flag flying is over the post office. That is the only federal presence in a small town or a small village. When they closed down the Dubuc post office a couple of years ago, down came the Canadian flag, the only explicit federal presence that we had.

Now with the crisis facing this country, we need more flags flying. We need more of a federal presence. We need more of Canada in all parts of Canada. Instead, the federal government is tearing it down, piece by piece, flag by flag, post office by post office. The people out there notice and they are worried about it.

In terms of the cost, a lot of these post offices are very efficient: city of Yorkton, 18,000 people; Kamsack under review, 3,000 people. Many towns of 500, 600 people have a good, efficient post office. When I say 500 or 600 people I mean in the town or the village there are 500 or 600 people but the surrounding farms will add maybe another 100 or 200 people. The community is one that is large enough to service a post office economically and efficiently.

The second constituent that has written to me recently is Jean Barteski, from the town of Invermay. I hope the member from Toronto who is concerned about retail postal outlets, the RPOs, who is sitting in the back bench, will listen. Ms. Barteski says: "The switch to retail outlets is helping destroy rural Canada. Let us put a stop to—"

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Hughes):** On a point of order, the hon. member for Halton—Peel.

**Mr. Turner (Halton—Peel):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not wish to be identified as the member from Toronto.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Hughes):** Perhaps the member from Saskatchewan can carry on with his speech.

**Mr. Nystrom:** The member from Ontario, let us say. What Jean Barteski was saying was that the switch to retail outlets is helping destroy rural Canada. Let us put a stop to post office closures.

Finally, I have a letter from Mr. Glen Smith of Saltcoats. He says in his letter: "Quite a number have been closed in our riding and one supposes the rest are at risk in Saskatchewan. Rural Canada needs these jobs and this federal presence".

• (1230)

Once again, here is a gentleman talking about the federal presence disappearing because of the closure of the post office. The flag is gone, the federal presence is gone, the community gathering point is gone, the service is deteriorating, the consistency of the hours is not necessarily there. The fact that we will lose jobs is also a key point.

All of these rural post offices have a postmaster or a postmistress. They all need a back-up person, part-time help, and it is a real asset to a small village, town or hamlet to have a few extra part-time jobs in terms of the economics of the community.

Often it is one family with children who go to school. It provides extra economic input into a small community. With the closure of the post offices it is gone.

Finally I want to say that if one looks at the statistics we find that in this country since 1984 there have been 1,239 post offices closed. One hundred and seventy-four of those have been in the province of Saskatchewan, roughly 15 per cent for a province that has around 4 per cent of the population of Canada.

If we add the number of post offices closed and those under review, there are now 1,595 closed or under review across this country. Two hundred and thirty-one of those are in my province of Saskatchewan, again a much greater share than we should have in accordance with our proportion of the population in Canada.

I cannot agree to support this bill. It is a bad bill. The post office has failed miserably in providing a decent and reliable service to the people of this country.