

*Government Orders*

I appeal to the backbenchers of the Conservative Party to stand up and speak out on behalf of their constituents. I even know the government Whip from Calgary probably in his heart of hearts is very upset—and he has a big heart—that his government would open the door to privatizing the post office. I do not know why he supports the bill. Maybe it is the Reform Party in Calgary giving him the nudge. It wants to privatize absolutely everything.

• (1220)

I hope he will get up and speak his mind on this bill and help those of us in the opposition fight for the ordinary Canadians to keep the post office as a service to all of Canada.

I rise mainly because I wanted to put on the record the facts regarding the post office as it pertains to my riding of Yorkton—Melville in rural Saskatchewan. We have recently had the closure of rural post office after rural post office. In fact since 1984, when the government across the way took office, we have had 174 post offices close in the province of Saskatchewan. In less than eight years of Conservative government 174 post offices have closed their doors. Another 37 are being reviewed.

In many of those cases the people of the local towns have rebelled; they have petitioned, they have called meetings, they have lobbied to have their post office remain open. However, we have had a government which has not been receptive, which has not listened to what the people in those communities have said.

The post offices closed in my riding since the Conservatives came to power are in the following centres: in the small community of Arran, which serves the northeastern part of my riding; the small community of Danbury, which is now the home of the newly elected MLA, Ron Harper, from the riding of Pelly; the small community of Okla; the community of Togo; the community of Orkney; the village of Runnymede; the village of Waldron; and again to a larger centre, the town of Saltcoats, where several hundred people live in a thriving community, the post office has closed down; the village of Stornoway; the small town of Dubuc.

Some members across the way will remember the campaign by the people in the village of Dubuc. About two years ago a delegation came down to Ottawa. They came before a parliamentary committee and made their case. They got national news stories and a lot of stories in Saskatchewan about their fight for the preservation of the Dubuc post office, in that case a very well-kept building. People wanted unanimously to keep it open. They did not want a retail postal outlet, a RPO, but the government failed to listen, they failed to respond.

The towns of Tantalton, Lintlaw, Spy Hill, Whitespruce and Mikado have all lost their post offices since 1984. Those are the towns in my riding that have lost their post offices.

In addition to closures, we now have a number of post offices being reviewed in terms of whether or not they should remain open: the towns of Gerald, Bredenbury, MacNutt, Springside, and the large town of Kamsack, which has a population of about 3,000 people. The government is now reviewing the post office with the possibility of closing it down.

I mentioned Sheho. Just today in the House I tabled a petition signed by 174 people from the town of Sheho. That is roughly the same number of people who are patrons of the post office and they are asking the federal government to keep the post office open. I hope that the postmaster general will do something quite extraordinary, listen to the people of these small communities and keep the post offices open.

In addition to that, roughly a year ago the city of Yorkton, a city of 18,000 people, lost its post office. It is one of the largest centres in the country to lose a post office: a city the size of Yorkton with around 18,000. In my riding, we have had a reduction of hours in the town of Churchbridge, the town of Langenburg, the town of Theodore; in all cases causing concern to the local people who are served by the post offices in these towns.

Members across the way will say, what about the RPOs, the retail postal outlets? If they were to go around in rural Saskatchewan in my riding, they would find that the residents are pretty well unanimous in wanting to keep the post office, and are speaking out to keep that facility.

I will give members three examples of letters I received recently. A person who is the postmaster in the town of Goodeve, Mrs. Evelyn Lutz, writes: "Our community has many elderly people and to take away the