

*Routine Proceedings*

As you may be aware, Mr. Speaker, a number of post offices in rural Canada have been under attack for closing, conversion or the new expansion program of Canada Post. In fact, in my own riding of The Battlefords—Meadow Lake, there are eight post offices that are currently in negotiations with Canada Post about the future of the operations in those communities.

I have also worked strongly with the people in Dubuc, Saskatchewan, which has been fighting as hard as any community in this country to ensure that its post office is retained and the postal services from those full-time post offices are retained. I have also worked with people on Prince Edward Island with the help of Rural Dignity, the organization that has been working very hard to help maintain post offices. I must say that the advice and direction I am able to provide to these people comes down to one of just remaining vigilant, being constant and never giving up.

The Dubuc situation is one that provides us with a great deal of frustration and many of the other communities could find it very difficult to deal with. The community of Dubuc found itself 100 per cent in favour of maintaining service from the existing post office. Canada Post came into that community and asked if there was a business person who would be willing to provide service from his or her business location and establish a retail postal outlet in the community of Dubuc, Saskatchewan.

The people of Dubuc said no. None of the business people in the community of Dubuc wanted a retail postal outlet. They wanted service from the post office and a full-time postmaster working from that post office meeting the needs of that community. They even travelled to Ottawa to make their case before our committee, before the minister and before members of this House.

When Canada Post could not find a retail business that was willing to give service from a store, cafe, or even the grain elevator, Canada Post said: "All right. We will just close your post office and you will not get any service". Canada Post blackmailed the community, and now one of those businesses has said that it will put in a retail postal outlet, if it is the only way there can be service to the community and residents do not have to drive 15 miles to the next community to pick up registered mail, buy stamps, and those types of things.

That community right now is very angry. They have held a funeral service in their community for their post office. They have continued to write letters. They have not given up. They are going to fight Canada Post and this government for as long as it takes to get maintenance of the service in their own community.

The advice that I can give to other communities in this country is to do what Dubuc has done, and that is to remain vigilant, strong, united and true to their belief that rural Canada must be served well by a Crown corporation that delivers postal service in a quality and effective manner, and I salute the people of Dubuc for that very reason.

• (1140)

I could say similar things about people in Prince Edward Island whom I travelled to visit with for several days earlier this year. When the committee of Consumer and Corporate Affairs refused to travel across the country to meet with people in rural Canada, to meet with retail postal outlet operators, I decided I had to travel myself. On doing so, I learned a tremendous amount about rural Canada that this committee never had an opportunity to learn.

I presented a report to the committee on my findings throughout the Atlantic region. Obviously not only the needs of rural Canadians were ignored but also the voices of all those people through my report were ignored.

In answer to the second part of the question offered by my colleague, the commitments from Canada Post are ones that are very well couched in good public relations language. Canada Post treats what is happening in rural Canada, not as a problem but as a public relations challenge. They would rather not have to deal with the problems of rural Canada, maintaining a rural postal service, but instead would rather convince people that what they want is wrong, that what Canada Post is providing is the best for them.

Commitments made by Canada Post to communities in my own riding are: "We will maintain a quality service in your community". That means that the business person who is also selling everything from diapers to pizzas to you name it in that community will also be selling postal services. That is not a maintenance of quality postal service in a rural area where the full time postmaster is providing services that go way beyond selling stamps