

*Routine Proceedings*

I want to give an example of a situation that took place in my constituency in a community called Westwold, British Columbia. Let me describe Westwold, as I know you are familiar with much of British Columbia and I suspect you even know the community well, Mr. Speaker. It was founded back in the 1880s when the first cattlemen brought their herds into British Columbia from the United States on their way to the gold rush. They found this huge area called Grand Prairie to be a fantastic place to feed animals over the winter season.

In the 1880s the agricultural sector was established and it has been a thriving community since. Today, Westwold is a community that is thriving. The farms are well kept and some of the ranches and farms have been there for generations. As a matter of fact, I know a number of families with four generations still on the land. There is the great grandfather, the grandfather, the father and now the young children. That is rather remarkable.

Westwold is one of the oldest communities in western Canada. It has had a post office for over 100 years, which, for western Canada, is a long time to have a post office in a small rural community. It is very vibrant and very alive. People are proud of their community, proud of their heritage and proud of what they have accomplished in terms of developing farms and ranches and a variety of other businesses, particularly in the forest industry.

Here we have a community with a relatively long history by Canadian standards. Here we have a community that is thriving and we have a community where the people are proud of their community and they are proud of their accomplishments. They are good and hard-working people. They work hard to make a success of their lives and they provide for their families in a way that can only be considered a model in our country. Part of the spirit and life-blood of that community is its post office.

• (1250)

That is where a lot of community work takes place, the exchange of ideas and notices, where people do their post office work at a certain time each day. There is a regular pattern of life in the community that focuses around the post office and has done for over 100 years.

The postmaster had to resign a few days ago. This was a sad day in the community. The postmaster performs many functions other than simply handling and processing mail for the people of the area. The postmaster keeps an eye on senior citizens in the area and when they do not show up for two or three days they ask someone to drop in or perhaps the local RCMP members are asked to check out this person to make sure everything is all right. Often they find out that things are not all right. This service is a lifeline in the community.

Within hours after the postmaster resigned bureaucrats from the post office descended on the place and said "This is our chance. We can now get rid of the post office". It was almost sinister. It was sad and a shock to the community. People could not believe that somewhere out there lurks these people who just wait for the opportunity when someone either passes away or has to leave the post office for family reasons, or for whatever reason, and there is a change of postmaster.

The bureaucrats come and pass around notices in the community stating "There is great news. We are going to close the post office". People could not believe it. They were aware that this was going on elsewhere.

My colleague from The Battlefords—Meadow Lake has raised this issue on many occasions in the House. Post offices in Atlantic Canada, the prairies, Ontario and Quebec, and in northern Canada are closing down almost on a weekly basis. Hundreds of post offices have closed. But until it happens to you one does not really appreciate the effect. You cannot believe that the Government of Canada would actually close a post office that has been open for over 100 years. That is what is happening. It is Canada Post Corporation that is doing this with the support of the federal government. If the federal government did not support this initiative, it would speak out.

This is a rural community based primarily on ranching and forestry and because there have been a number of disastrous fires over the last number of months there are no retail outlets in the community. There is no service station or community store because of these drastic and tragic fires which have taken place. There is no place to have a post office. You cannot consider a local service