

Government Orders

riding, that flag is gone. What is left? You have a few garages, a cafe, a few stores, a service station, a Saskatchewan government insurance office and a school that flies the Saskatchewan flag, but where is the Canadian flag? It is gone.

The other thing I said that I want to repeat is that for these small towns and communities, particularly on a Saturday morning, the post office is a centre of activity. Farmers and villagers come in and meet their friends, neighbours and family. Often, as a member of Parliament, not just in campaigns but other times as well, when I want to meet people and get a sounding and a feeling for the community, I go on a Saturday morning or any other morning of the week and stand in front of the local post office and meet the people. It is amazing how in a couple of hours you can meet just dozens and dozens if not hundreds of people. It is an activity they look forward to.

My father and mother live in the small town of Wynyard, Saskatchewan with a population of about 2,700. My father is now just a bit over 80 years old and he still enjoys going down every single day to the post office. That is where he meets most of his friends, gets most of the news, exchanges points of view and keeps in touch. It is an activity and a thing to do. It is like a community centre where people can meet. That is gone. It is gone and if this government gets its way it will be gone and gone, not just for 1,200 or 1,400 communities I have mentioned in this country, in fact there are 1,239 that have had their post offices closed since 1984, but it will be gone for the other hundreds of rural communities that are still hanging on in a very fragile way to the post office that is serving them.

• (1240)

Mr. Garth Turner (Halton—Peel): Mr. Speaker, I was chairman of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs during the period of time that we conducted about a six-month study into pretty well all the facets of Canada Post. We wrestled with a great number of the issues which have been raised during this debate. We heard from delegations from places like Dubuc, Saskatchewan, from corporate competitors of Canada Post, from labour people, from virtually anyone who has anything to do with

Canada Post. We issued a series of recommendations as a result of that.

Having gone through that whole process, I can see through the rhetoric of a lot of what has been said in this House, particularly by the last two speakers. There is a lot of rhetoric surrounding the culture and the mythology of Canada Post. There are the absolute statements which are made in this House that service has been diminished, that there are fewer points of service for individual Canadians to access the postal service.

I would like to put on the record that in fact there are more points of service because of the move to retail postal outlets from corporate outlets than there were prior to that program starting. There are actually more places today than before where Canadians can access postal service, just as there are more addresses now being serviced by Canada Post in total. The level of service has actually gone up. Statistically we can prove that.

As far as the rural post office fulfilling a role as a community drop-in centre, I am not sure that as a Canadian taxpayer that is necessarily how I want my tax dollars spent, providing a community drop-in centre in a number of thousands of communities across this country. I thought we were talking about postal service, delivering letters, the cost and efficiency of dispatching our mail. That is what Canada Post is supposed to do, not provide drop-in centres.

In terms of the federal presence, I will grant members opposite that the diminution of the federal post office presence in small communities does, in fact, remove some of the national elements, the national fabric, the national presence. There is some validity to that argument and I will accept that. However, I am not sure at what price that needs to be maintained. I am not sure that the gross inefficiencies of a lot of rural post offices are really worth making the whole system less efficient simply to have a Canadian flag in that community. Maybe there are better ways we can do it, more effective ways.

My feeling is if we have to force nationalism, if the Government of Canada has to go into Dubuc, Saskatchewan to put up a Canadian flag, and if there will not be a Canadian flag flying in that community unless Ottawa goes and does it, then our country is in a lot worse trouble than maybe a lot of us even think.