

difficult for communities to carry on business activities between themselves.

People in northern Saskatchewan realize that to build up the fishing industry, the wild rice industry, the local forestry business or to create business organizations you need to be able to communicate with each other by postal service. Now that is not possible. The postal service is useless. If you want to call a meeting you have to send out the mail a full month in advance, and you do not get the minutes before the next meeting is due. People in the south just do not realize what kind of constraints businesses and, indeed, community organizations and individuals operate under in these kind of communities when they get the kind of postal service that Canada Post is giving them. It is a high-handed and arrogant approach, not only to the postal service that already exists in many small communities, but it is totally counterproductive if we are looking at building up the economies of these regions which, historically, have been underdeveloped and have had high unemployment rates.

Mr. Skelly (North Island—Powell River): Madam Speaker, the example of the Halfmoon Bay post office was one of just incredible arrogance in its shut down and then in terms of the accountability.

I would like to suggest to my hon. colleague that the president of the Canada Post Corporation, and the regional director, have absolutely no sense or feeling for the people who live there. The fact is that post office is an incredibly historical operation there. It is a major support to small business in that community. The high-handed attitude has got to change. The corporation has to get in there, negotiate and attempt to consult with the people involved before making these kinds of decisions about service to the community. Only in that way can the Conservatives hope to stop the drop from 19 per cent to 9 per cent and then right through the floor.

The fact has been mentioned that postal service stations could provide other things such as banking services in these areas. There has been a lot of talk that banks no longer serve many of these smaller communities. There are banking functions that the post office could perform. It could also serve as a government office and deal with pension forms, citizenship forms and passport forms. It could be a representative of the

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Government of Canada providing a service on a broader basis through those postal facilities to the community and to small businesses.

If there is anything that the Halfmoon Bay case gives us it is an illustration of the arrogance, the high-handed approach and the unwillingness to work with people.

Mr. Funk: Madam Speaker, I totally agree with the member. Not only the case that he describes represents high-handedness and arrogance, but that is true right across this country in many small communities.

As he points out, not only have post offices played an historic function in holding those communities together, they being the centre of those communities, a place where people gather, but there are a lot of government services that people need on a day-to-day basis. They need contact with the Government of Canada and those services could be expanded to operate through those post offices. In fact, I believe that is true in Britain, where post offices are used in that fashion. I think it would be a good model for us. Services could be extended to people who certainly have an equal right to get those services as everybody else.

As long as this government is totally obsessed with running the post office to make a profit what will happen is that it will be run into the ground in the small communities. Certainly a small community post office is not going to be a big money-maker compared to shipping large volumes of mail between Toronto and Vancouver. Everybody knows that. I think it is criminal for us to ignore the infrastructure and service function of the post office just giving it the function of making money for the government.

Mr. Robert E. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Madam Speaker, I know some of the Tories may be concerned about the opportunity to get away on a holiday but I am under the impression that we are here in this House to debate. We have time limits established. I was also under the impression that the Tories consider small business an important element in the Canadian economy. I may be wrong.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, first, we on this side were under the understanding that the debate was to be finished. It has nothing to do with our attitude toward small business which is reflected by the bill that we put forward in the House of Commons. So perhaps the hon.