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Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

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• (1900)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. This is our 35th meeting for the year, but I think it's our sixth or seventh meeting on this consultation tour.

Gentleman on the panel, you would know that the minister responsible for Canada Post, the Honourable Judy Foote, has engaged in a very extensive consultation process concerning the future of Canada Post.

Phase one was the establishment of a task force, the mandate of which was to examine and make suggestions as to how Canada Post could remain financially viable in the years to come.

Phase two of that consultation process is what we are doing here tonight, and that is engagement with Canadians, whether individuals, organizations, municipalities, or anyone with something to say about Canada Post and how they would like to see Canada Post continue to operate now and in the future. We're here today on a coast-to-coast consultation tour speaking with all of you and getting your views on how you see the future of Canada Post and how that will unfold.

The process this evening is very simple. We are asking all panellists to deliver an opening address of five minutes or less, which will be followed by a series of questions and answers from all of our committee members. As I said to Mr. Dyer, just a few moments ago many times panellists do not get through their entire five minutes before I interject, but we have found that during the question-and-answer process, almost all of the information that you may have wanted to present in your opening statements will come out, and that's truly when we get some meaningful dialogue. I would ask you to try to keep your opening statements as short as possible, recognizing and respecting the five-minute time limit that we have, and we'll get into questions immediately after that.

Our first speaker is Mayor Gosine.

Go ahead, Your Worship, for five minutes, please, with an opening statement.

Mr. Gary Gosine (Mayor, Town of Wabana): Canada needs postal banking in rural communities.

Thousands of rural towns and villages in our country do not have a bank. The community of Bell Island is one of those rural areas, but we do have a post office that could provide financial services. As

well, nearly two million Canadians desperately need an alternative to payday lenders, and a postal bank could be that alternative.

A point to consider is the failure of the existing banking system to answer the needs of individuals in rural regions. Postal banking could be a low-cost alternative to traditional banks. CUPW national president Mike Palecek stated that profits earned through postal banking could help the post office thrive as a public service and provide returns to the communities.

Postal banking is supported by the postal workers union, anti-poverty and community groups, and over 600 municipalities in the country. I was a representative in March in Ottawa. It's already instituted in many parts of the world and it existed in Canada until 1967. In small-town rural Canada, 3,326 communities have a post office, but there is no bank or credit union branch. According to my research, I think it may have been in 1969 rather than 1967.

According to my research, minorities, low-income residents, younger households, and the unemployed are particularly impacted by a lack of traditional banking. Reports indicate that nearly half of our households in this country are financially underserved. In my research on this important issue, I learned that Japan Post Bank is the largest deposit holder in the world, and the postal service of China serves over 400 million customers. Something must be working.

If we don't provide banking service to rural Canada, which experts say can be done through postal banking, then we're not providing the fair financial opportunities that exist elsewhere for rural and small-town businesses and homeowners.

I do know it exists in Brazil and Italy

I know that the banking institutions are saying that there are lots of banks, and I've read that there are close to 2,500 banks in the country, but just to give you an indication, I have a clear example here today. I come from a community that has no bank. We have a little ATM machine; you can take money out, but you can't put money in. The ferry broke down at 10 o'clock and the next ferry landed me right here at this hotel at ten to seven. We have no bank, and if a post office were open all day today, it could service the people. When I was in Ottawa, they asked me if we have any type of banking, and I said, "Yes, two—shoe boxes and mattresses", because that's what a lot of seniors are using when they can't go to the bank.

I guess that's my story, and I'm trying to promote our town as well as any other rural town in this country.

• (1905)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Your Worship.

You have five minutes, please, Mr. Dyer.

Mr. Craig Dyer (President, Local 126, Canadian Union of Postal Workers): Good evening, panel, and thank you very much for this opportunity to speak.

The last time public consultations were held in St. John's, Newfoundland, was in 2011, and we missed it. I received a phone call from a counterpart at the students' union who said that Canada Post management showed up in St. John's, invited a few friends, had a meeting, and then flew out.

My name is Craig Dyer. I am the president of the St. John's local. I represent 350-plus clerks, letter carriers, technicians, and rural and mail service couriers in the Avalon Peninsula area of Newfoundland.

These workers are parents, grandparents, community volunteers, Girl Guide leaders, C.L.B. leaders, volunteer firefighters, and coaches. In their hours off, they work with both the youth and the elderly. They are your neighbours, your relations, and your friends. They are hard-working, honest people who should be treated with respect in the workplace, but they aren't.

I've worked 27 years as a letter carrier in St. John's, and the sky started falling the second day. They are mismanaged, and we see it every day. Every day we watch the corporation waste money without any accountability, just because they can.

I would like to speak today about forced overtime, jobs, and service.

In the past five years in St. John's, we've had two major restructures reorganizing the letter carrier routes. One occurred in 2011 when the corporation invested \$2 billion in the postal transformation. This started in 2007, and at the time we were in a global crisis. The federal government was pumping money into the economy and creating jobs, while Canada Post spent \$1.8 billion—which is what your document says, but we believe it to be a little bit more, almost \$2 billion—to eliminate jobs.

As a result, a grievance was filed, the corporation failed, and we lost 28% of our jobs then. We recouped a small percentage.

In 2015, just after the federal election, the corporation implemented community mailboxes and took service away from the door-to-door delivery of almost 28,000 residents in St. John's, Mount Pearl, and Kilbride. As a result, the corporation came back and did another reorganization, because they recognized there was an error, and we did create a few more jobs, but at that time we lost approximately 40% of our workforce.

These losses were not due to volumes but to changes in the way that Canada Post processes the mail. Since these changes, forced overtime has become a major issue in the St. John's depot. Staff is down significantly, and overtime is through the roof. We have letter carriers who now make \$30,000 to \$50,000 a year in overtime while people sit at home without a job.

The majority of the letter carriers only want to work their eight-hour day. I've been a carrier for 27 years, and I enjoy my job, and I enjoy working eight hours a day, but I also have a life. We have families and we have community commitments, but that isn't happening, and now the workers are feeling it. They are being

harassed, mismanaged, intimidated, and bullied on a daily basis. You have to get your route done.

The employer, locally, doesn't trust our valued employees. They believe that the workers are the problem, and not the routes.

My counterparts and I have arbitrated several arbitration cases that were proven wrong, and we did receive more jobs back.

For years now workers have been forced to work overtime at time-and-a-half and two times their regular rate of pay with the hope of getting their routes done, while this work could be done more cheaply and more people could be employed. Daily there are arguments in the letter carrier depot about staffing and overtime. If you don't finish your route, you are reprimanded; if you do work overtime, you are reprimanded.

I'll just quickly go through some examples that are actual events that happened.

We have a volunteer fireman in our depot. He received a five-day suspension for refusing to work overtime, in the dark, and in unsafe conditions. He lost five days' pay. He had to go home to his partner and tell her why. Three years later we arbitrated, and of course the arbitrator ruled in our favour.

Another gentleman—and I can give names if you wish—received a five-day pay loss for not being able to justify his overtime. We sat in a meeting, and the person worked above pace expectations and should have worked more that day, but he received a five-day suspension. The supervisor who suspended him said, "Don't worry; you'll get it back in arbitration."

• (1910)

I have a lot more, but I'd like to finish.

I talked to Mr. Whalen about this in his office. We have two women who recently returned from maternity leave. The employer has told one of them that they have to work overtime and find child care to take care of their child while they work overtime. One of those women has now moved to another job, and recently, within the last month, the other woman received a suspension because she has chosen her child over working overtime.

Canada Post can go in a favourable direction and we can create jobs in our community, just on the quantum of overtime and monies paid out.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dyer.

We'll go into the seven-minute round of questions now and start, of course, with St. John's own, Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Gary and Craig, for coming out today and providing your thoughts and feelings on Canada Post and what its future can and should look like.

Our introduction to this, Craig, was really during the campaign last year. We had some difficult conversations about the fact that although the Liberal campaign policy platform called for us to save door-to-door delivery, the limited way we promised to do that was by putting in a moratorium on future community mailboxes, then holding these consultations to figure out a proper way forward for Canada Post in some fashion.

The task force had a limited mandate and they talked about self-sustainability of Canada Post, but we don't feel bound by that. We want these consultations to be open, we want to hear from all parties about the future, and we are prepared to entertain everything.

Mr. Dyer, could you provide some information about the input and implementation of those community mailboxes right after the election here in St. John's East, and how that made the community feel, and whether or not the community was consulted?

Mr. Craig Dyer: As I said in my statement, Mr. Whalen, the community wasn't consulted. I've worked closely with the mayors of both St. John's and Mount Pearl, and the consultation process prior to the implementation was that this is what we are going to do and here is where we're going to put it.

If you drive around St. John's, Mount Pearl, and Kilbride, you'll see the unsafe locations. You'll see them in no parking zones, you'll see them in fire lanes, you'll see them adjacent to fire hydrants, and you'll see them adjacent to handicap parking spots. That dialogue did go ahead with Canada Post and the union and the municipalities, to no avail.

I presented Mr. Whalen with a bunch of pictures of unsafe locations, but the community itself was disappointed. I remember that I was on Royal Oak Drive when the announcement of the moratorium came out and I received many phone calls that night from my peers and from people who were genuinely concerned: "Why not St. John's?"

• (1915)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Fair enough. We actually had a consultation here over the summer, so this isn't your first consultation on this topic since 2011.

Mr. Craig Dyer: No.

Mr. Nick Whalen: We did hold one, and my report from that will feed into the committee once it's completed.

How do the community mailboxes in the new areas compare to the locations of the community mailboxes in areas that had them as part of the municipal planning that went into the creation of those areas, in terms of safety and access?

Mr. Craig Dyer: My understanding is that in 1980, with growth in the area of St. John's, Mount Pearl, and Kilbride, new subdivisions were plotted to have community mailboxes. There was consultation, but when you take the physical location of streets in St. John's or Mount Pearl, it's not very safe. There was very little consultation.

In the thought process in the eighties there was a thing called an "iron ring", a circle wrapped around your community, and anything outside that circle received delivery by community mailboxes, which is approximately 12,000 out of 50,000 in the St. John's area we serve.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Did you find that those were safer, or did the ones that were implemented outside that ring also have the same safety and access concerns as the ones inside?

Mr. Craig Dyer: I would say that totally, without a doubt, the ones that were put in were rushed in. They were actually being put in the day the delivery was supposed to start, with very little consultation or attention to safety concerns.

I do know that the corporation had a manual and gave them specific instructions to not put it here or not put it there.

On my own route, I have to travel up laneways in icy conditions, so if I have a proper pair of shoes on and I travel up a laneway, that's okay for Craig Dyer, but for the residents—Mr. Gosine, or anybody else who is receiving mail there—it is a safety hazard.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Gosine, even though you're in the riding of St. John's East, because of where Bell Island and Wabana are, it is rural, because you're cut off, and maybe other people on the committee wouldn't realize it. Is the mail service on Bell Island a mix of door-to-door delivery, or is it mostly people going to the post office, or how do the people on Bell Island get their mail?

Mr. Gary Gosine: We used to have three post offices at one time. Within in the last five years, two of those small ones have shut down. We have one main one that we fought to have some extended hours for, because on the second-to-last one Canada Post gave us an alternative of 13 hours or not have it all. We chose not to have the 13 hours and we extended our Saturdays that they shut out to have it from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on a Saturday.

There are some community mailboxes for Lance Cove. That's about the extent of our delivery. There's one post office now on Bell Island.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In an ideal world, if Canada Post were to provide additional services on Bell Island, in addition to the postal banking, what other federal government services do your residents want to access but can't access, be it Internet service, be it access to Service Canada, and whatnot?

Mr. Gary Gosine: We think another post office would definitely help. In the last federal election all we did was...I won't say fight, but give them the proposal as to why we should have two. We've got one now for a community of a little fewer than 3,000 people.

We just got \$17.3 million worth of cable—because I live on an island—come across to feed our town for electricity and we just got two new pieces of equipment that the telephone company has powered on Kenmount Road.

We'll never get—we just talked about this an hour ago—fibre optics in our town, probably one of the only rural towns in this province.

What I just went through today myself was there was no ferry. The last ferry that left Bell Island this morning was at 11 o'clock. It tied it up in Portugal Cove. They started working on the ferry. The ramp was broken. From 20—

•(1920)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Sorry, Mr. Gosine, we're not going to solve the ferry problems on this committee, but we're asking in terms of services at Canada Post itself.

Mr. Gary Gosine: I'm just trying to illustrate that not having a ferry is another reason we need extended postal services, because if that boat had broken down an hour earlier, we wouldn't even have had post services for about four days, since Friday to today. That ferry situation is very important to the postal community on Bell Island.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. McCauley for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks for joining us tonight.

Mayor, a special thank you for making that trip. How are you going to get home tonight?

Mr. Gary Gosine: I got to get a run home because that's another story.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is the ferry going to get you home?

Mr. Gary Gosine: The ferry will get me home, but after three years and two weeks I was fortunate enough to get my licence back. I've got an R on my licence. I'm not allowed to drive in the nighttime. I'll get a taxi or thumb a ride over what we call Cove Road. I'll definitely get home somehow.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You live in a beautiful area. I used to live a few blocks away from here. Friends with CHC toured me over your whole area in their helicopter. It's a beautiful area. Thanks for being here.

Mr. Dyer, you've chatted a bunch about consultation, no consultation, some consultation. I'm using your own words: there was none, there was some, there was very little. I understand that in 2013 Canada Post came to town to do consultations. Was it just CUPW that wasn't involved?

Mr. Craig Dyer: The information I received from the president of the students' union was that there was a meeting and it was considered public consultation. We were not invited.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Was that the 2013 one? You said 2011.

Mr. Craig Dyer: I thought I had said 2011 because that was leading up to the five-point plan.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, okay. That was probably 2013.

Mr. Craig Dyer: The five-point plan was in 2011.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: They were here in 2013.

Mr. Craig Dyer: Then if they were in 2013, I'm not aware of it.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Later on in your conversation you said there was very little consultation. You've gone from none to very little. If there was very little, what do you term very little? Can you fill us in on what was done then if there was very little? To me that sounds as if there was some.

Mr. Craig Dyer: There was.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Is that just a term that there was—

Mr. Craig Dyer: No. There may have been consultation. As I've said, I found out from the president of the students' union. There could have been many consultations that were not advertised, such as this forum here.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It's one of the issues that we're running too. We're running crazy for three weeks straight. We'll get to 25 cities; that leaves 3,000, 4,000 cities that we can't get to. Unfortunately, it's the same with Canada Post.

Mr. Craig Dyer: On your form that you put in place, with the questions of the week and people putting in submissions, we weren't even privy to it at that time. Yes, your public consultation process is limited, but everybody I'm aware of had an opportunity to put forth, and if they weren't able to attend today, they were able to put forth submissions and answer questions. To me, that's a public consultation.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: There was previously a spot, but maybe it was just not advertised enough.

Did you see the task force recommendations? It was quite a heavy report of some 80-odd pages. You read through it?

Mr. Craig Dyer: Yes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: They paint not the strongest future for Canada Post, showing \$750 million in losses, I think, in 2026. I'm asking as we go across.... People are not keen on paying higher taxes. They don't want to pay more for the stamps, but they want the services. It's always "We want everything, but we want someone else to pay for it", but we know that's not going to happen.

Where do you see the solution? Let's put postal banking aside. Where do you see a solution if we have a \$750-million minimum deficit coming in a very short period?

Mr. Craig Dyer: As you heard in my opening statement, since I've been here, I've been told the sky is falling. The Conference Board of Canada projected major losses for the last couple of years, and obviously those projections were wrong, because we are very profitable.

What I see is that the feasibility of Canada Post in the future is to manage properly. In my opinion, Canada Post management has no accountability to anybody, and they should be accountable to the Canadian government.

A couple of days ago, there was an article in the newspaper saying that the 28,000 people who lost their service last October are now going to get lock changes. Nobody thought to do the research and say that Newfoundland has some really wet and freezing weather, so now the corporation has put it out that 28,000 people will get lock changes. That same news article said that there were 65,000 complaints.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I saw that article.

Mr. Craig Dyer: Obviously, if they had done their homework, they could have saved, just in little old St. John's, possibly a million dollars.

We see it on a daily basis. I work as a letter carrier. We see the money they spend.

My focus here today is the quantum of overtime. When you have a worker working overtime at \$30,000 to \$50,000 annually, that could be another job. That's also an effect on the service, because today in St. John's they are working later. I just got a report that six letter carrier routes didn't get delivered. That's a violation of the standards and the code. Today, in 2016, six routes didn't get covered because they didn't have enough workers.

• (1925)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: So you believe that the \$750 million... Well, I guess you don't believe it.

Canada Post made a limited amount of money last year. It could be argued that it was because of the stamp price increase and the 50 million who were switched to community mailbox savings. If you take that away, yes, Canada Post did lose money in a very strong revenue year.

You don't believe going forward that the revenues are going to drop, as the Conference Board has said or as Ernst & Young has said?

Mr. Craig Dyer: I—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm not trying to badger. I'm just trying to get your opinion without—

Mr. Craig Dyer: My opinion is that Canada Post is very mismanaged. We deliver two out of three parcels from coast to coast to coast. Most of the major courier companies use us for the last mile, because they will not provide the service to rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. There's a vibrant future for Canada Post if we're managed correctly.

As I said, I'm a letter carrier. Last year at Christmas, we worked 24-7 from the middle of November in delivering parcels. Our parcel delivery has gone through the roof.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Right, so you do accept, obviously, on the other hand, of course, the—

Mr. Craig Dyer: The letter mail? Yes.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: In five years, it will be even less.

Mr. Craig Dyer: What the public doesn't know is that there is a route measurement system, which takes into account the volumes decreasing and the parcels increasing.

To say that we deliver mail to every house every day, no. Look at my route in Mount Pearl. I deliver to route number two. I have 1,500 houses that I deliver to. According to the calculations, I should only deliver to 700 a day. Not everybody gets mail every day. Those formulas increase or decrease the staff and allow for growth in one area and a decrease in the other.

One of the issues was that it costs \$286 per house per year for door-to-door delivery. I'd love to challenge those numbers. I asked the committee if they had challenged them. My last route, door to door, was only prior to October and it was 600 houses. If you do the math, I should make \$171,000. I make \$54,000.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Right—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I understand that, but you just can't use—

The Chair: We're going to have to move on.

Mr. Weir is next, for seven minutes.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Thanks very much for the presentations. Mr. Gosine, I think you made a strong appeal for postal banking. I think you're speaking on behalf of a potential customer base. I'd like to ask Mr. Dyer whether he could address the possibility of postal banking from the point of view of Canada Post employees.

Mr. Craig Dyer: To my knowledge, in 1968 Canada Post banking stopped in Canada. That was in the main part of Labrador, and it was a service that was provided. As Mr. Gosine said in his opening, it has shown a way to be very profitable. For me, using our network of 6,000 postal outlets across the country provides plenty of opportunities. There is one for postal banking and there are others for providing services and generating revenues.

These revenues have been used in other countries to offset the decline in letter mail and to assist with the service that is being provided. I think it's a great opportunity.

I represent 30 post offices in the Avalon Peninsula. If you go down to Burnt Cove, which is a small community, there is no federal identity there, but at the same time there's a post office. That post office can provide many federal services. It can provide postal banking. It could be a hub for the community. I believe these post offices are underutilized.

If you're going to provide a service, then you can charge a fee. There are opportunities to generate revenue. The studies are out there. I know our national officers presented their position. The biggest question I have is about whether we received the report from Canada Post, the 600-page redacted report. Has the committee seen it, and is it feasible? From Canada Post, my understanding says it's a win-win. If we can generate revenues by providing services to Mr. Gosine's community and use the post office in Bell Island to create jobs, then I think everybody wins, and I think there's an opportunity that we should explore in the future.

For my counterpart from Labrador, their post office is flourishing because of the Internet online services. If you have a community like Labrador, and if they have to rent out more space because of the online world, then why wouldn't we put more services into that post office, generate more revenues for Canada Post, and offset the costs of door-to-door delivery?

• (1930)

Mr. Erin Weir: Those are all fantastic points. I'd also like to pick up on a point that Mr. Whelan raised about door-to-door mail delivery. He touched on the fact that the current government had promised to maintain door-to-door delivery during the election campaign. It now seems that there's some doubt about that commitment.

I wonder if you could speak to your understanding of the promise that was made during the election and your expectation of what the federal government should be doing with home mail delivery.

Mr. Craig Dyer: As a trade unionist and an organization, we approached all levels of the government leading up to the election, and we did make it an election issue. Many parties made serious commitments. My understanding from the Liberals was that they would restore door-to-door delivery and they would do this review.

When I was on Royal Oak Avenue in Kilbride and I got the moratorium on community mailboxes, it was about a week too late. Our hope is to convince the panel and the government that door-to-door delivery is a viable solution.

Here's a quote from the year 2000: Canada Post and CUPW negotiated the removal of community mailboxes to the sum of 150 full-time jobs. In St. John's, Newfoundland, we've removed 111 CMBs, or community mailboxes, and we created one job. Guess what? The letters that were sent out from the corporation from Mr. McNeill, who I think was the delivery service officer out of Halifax, said we were giving you the best service possible, but door-to-door delivery is the best service possible.

I find it hard that the corporation would put out numbers like \$268 for door to door versus \$127 for mailboxes. That's what people tend to focus on. That's an average. I don't believe doing the math is reflective. I ask the panel, have they asked the corporation to show how on average it's \$268 to provide a service to the door?

Mr. Erin Weir: Absolutely. Excellent. Good points.

Do you have any thoughts on this, Mr. Gosine?

Mr. Gary Gosine: I think what Craig is saying is a big thing. When it comes to postal banking in a rural community like mine, there are ways and means for Canada Post to pick up a lot of money if they are suffering. In my community there is no bank. There has been no bank since 2002, and the people could not travel because there was no ferry. There are ways and means of picking up money, that's for sure.

Mr. Erin Weir: One of the ideas that has been floated to save money at Canada Post is alternate-day delivery. Would you like to address that proposal?

Mr. Craig Dyer: I did watch CPAC when Mr. Chopra said that it was not feasible simply because our neighbourhood mail, our parcels, and our mail.... As I said earlier, residents don't receive mail every day. If you're on my route, you receive mail 50% of the time. That could be Monday, Wednesday, Friday. That is formulated and calculated into my daily workload. I have 1,500 houses, but I'm only delivering 700, and that is my eight-hour work day. It has been proven through engineering and a letter carrier route measurement system.

So alternate-day delivery is not an alternative, because if you're expecting a letter from the doctor, you have to wait two days, which means you may have to change the standards under the Canada Post charter. I read that alternate-day delivery was small savings, but I think it would actually hurt the corporation because, if I'm delivering in Mount Pearl today, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and you expect your mail or your parcel on Tuesday, you have to wait

another day. One, you're violating the charter, and two, people will not like your service and they'll go somewhere else.

Mr. Erin Weir: Right. You're already working at full capacity and it's not as though it would be feasible to just do your route every second day or something.

Mr. Craig Dyer: Well, I'm sure there is a mechanism to make it happen. I'm sure the corporation has thought about it, but what I heard in evidence was Mr. Palecek and Mr. Chopra saying that it was not a viable alternative, and I agree, because of the parcels and the neighbourhood mail. The neighbourhood mail, the direct marketing, is a huge portion of our business, and the customer wants that letter or that flyer for their sale on Saturday, and I can tell you, in St. John's there's a huge focus on those revenue streams.

• (1935)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Gentlemen, if you're not fluently bilingual, I would suggest you put on your translation equipment. I believe Mr. Ayoub will be speaking

[*Translation*]

in French.

You have seven minutes.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the both of you for appearing before the committee today. I'm glad to hear what you have to say and to be in Newfoundland and Labrador, a first for me.

It's interesting to note that, in our discussions on Canada Post over the past few days, we've heard facts and statements that are sometimes different and sometimes the same.

Today, I listened to you talk about routes, letter carriers, and mandatory overtime. That gives me an opening to discuss something I was wondering about.

If I understand correctly, the problem you're experiencing is local in nature. It may be a problem specific to St. John's, where considerable overtime is necessary.

In other places, I've heard about letter carriers who are paid their eight hours a day regardless and who, if they finish their route in less than eight hours, can help out with the mail on another route. It's not overtime, technically speaking, but they are paid overtime within their eight-hour shift. Obviously, if they work more than eight hours, then, they are doing real overtime, in my view.

Is that possible? Am I wrong about that?

[*English*]

Mr. Craig Dyer: No, you're absolutely correct.

Prior to 2011, the day was evaluated at eight hours, 400 minutes, and the volume fluctuates from day to day to day. What was happening after the last two restructures was they made the routes that tight, or they made the routes well over eight hours a day. That is not happening, but there was a time when, if the flight never showed up or the trailer never showed up, you might get your work done in six hours and there might be a portion of another route available, and article 17.04 says you could bid to work on that route and get paid at premium rates.

That is factual, but that's not what it is today. Today many workers, with the reduction of routes, now are forced to work eight, nine, 10, or 11 hours a day on their own route to get their work done, and I'm an example. I worked last week. Monday I took some time off to go cook for soccer players. I volunteered all year, so I took two hours off, and it cost me my leave. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, I worked a combined nine and a half hours overtime on my own route, which was nine and a half hours that I didn't get to see my family. My son was in bed three nights, and I was told to work it or be disciplined. That's wrong. There were people sitting home—

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I see. You already said that. My time is running out, and I have other questions for you.

Canada Post wants to reduce the number of letter carriers by doing away with home mail delivery. How much would Canada Post save if it were to redesign the routes in St. John's and hire additional people to work regular hours, since overtime wouldn't be necessary? Have you calculated that? Do you have that kind of information?

[English]

Mr. Craig Dyer: No. I don't have the calculations on hand, but I have arbitrated forced overtime when the corporation chose to force individuals to work while people sat home not earning any income.

The big thing about overtime for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers is that it's non-pensionable. There is a concern about the pension fund. If they force Craig Dyer to work three hours of overtime, that is non-pensionable, but if they offer it to another worker to give them a job, then they have to pay into the pension.

I don't have any numbers, but I do know that since the postal transformation, there is a staggering amount of overtime work. The corporation nationally does have those hours.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I'd like to talk about consultation.

At the very beginning of your presentation, you said that none had taken place.

• (1940)

[English]

The Chair: There was no translation there for a moment.

Please start over, Ramez, if you wouldn't mind.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Right at the beginning of your presentation, you mentioned that little or no consultation had taken place. I can assure you that our committee's objective is to consult people. We are non-partisan, and we don't represent Canada Post. That's very

important to understand. I don't represent Canada Post. I don't think anyone at the table has preconceived ideas about Canada Post. We are here to listen to what you have to say.

The only people we represent are Canadians. Like Mr. Gosine, I used to be a mayor, so I represented citizens at the municipal level. Now, we simply represent citizens from numerous municipalities. We just represent more people.

As far as the lack of consultation goes, this is what I took away. There appears to be considerable mistrust when it comes to the figures and the way things are done, specifically, the way new letter carrier routes are put in place or eliminated. There's even mistrust of the figures in the reports produced by Canada Post or independent firms.

Do you still have any trust in Canada Post's senior management? Is there enough trust to keep the talks going? Further talks on the future of Canada Post are going to take place. Do you trust them?

[English]

Mr. Craig Dyer: From my 27 years' experience, I do not trust them. I have engaged in many consultations concerning issues in our plant and have come forward with ideas to save money, to make things better, to better accommodate the corporation and their goals, only to be told no.

As I said, last week I attended a consultation on 11 routes. It was already predetermined what was going to happen. To the input from me or the people I represent, who were sitting at the table, we were told, "No, we can probably fix it later", so there is a trust factor there.

What we do in St. John's is try to consult. We try to bring issues to the forefront before going to arbitration. There is a complaint stage in our collective agreement. We try very hard to resolve issues. If you look at our record, St. John's, Newfoundland, is probably one of the highest per capita for grievances filed, and it should never be. We understand the corporation. We understand that they need to be self-sustainable. We are not out to create jobs that are not productive. We are out to serve our community. That's why we find it so difficult to have trust in our management, because it starts from the top down.

I found out about the five-point plan when I was delivering mail on Duckworth Street. I was walking into the Fraize law office when several media people called me and told me that the corporation was implementing this five-point plan. Nobody—local, regional, or national—had the courtesy to contact me or anybody in my position to make us aware. They just put it out into the media and blindsided us.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: That was very clear. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to two five-minute interventions.

Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, gentlemen, for coming in.

This committee heard in prior testimony that Canada Post is facing an uncertain financial future. The Ernst & Young report provides numbers of \$700 million in annual losses from this time till 2026. It noted, “The current business model of the corporation does not generate sufficient income and cash to finance the realignment needed to continue its journey from a letter-centric to parcel-centric business...”.

I specifically want to focus on getting to new services and this idea of returning to a banking service. We know from prior testimony that 7% of Canadians and 11% of businesses said they may or would like to use it. Are we talking about an ATM machine or something more than an ATM machine, or are we talking about full-service banking?

Your Worship, if you want to start, is that what you want to see?

Mr. Gary Gosine: Well, in my community, we have an ATM machine, but unlike downtown on Water Street.... If you want to use the bank on Water Street, you can go in and put a cheque into the bank and into the machine and take money out. In my community, you can only take the money out. You can't put anything in. I live in a community that you have to travel to by ferry. In other words, for someone to put something in.... Also, there are a lot of seniors, and they don't know how to do telephone banking. They can't do it. They have to get to the nearest bank—

• (1945)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I only have five minutes. Do you mean to say that you want to see full banking services provided through Canada Post?

Mr. Gary Gosine: Definitely.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Do you, Mr. Dyer?

Mr. Craig Dyer: Of course I support that, and to put it into perspective, the five major banks last year made \$36 billion—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay. I have to interrupt you there, because that's what I want to get at now.

To stand up a bank, what you're talking about every single day is cheque-and-cash reconciliation at the location, compliance, quite a bit of training for the people who are involved, and licensing, because there are different federal and provincial licences that you have to obtain to sell different financial products.

You're talking also about having money-laundering controls and procedures in place to prevent money-laundering operations from abusing a service like that. You need on-site security, and you need to adopt SAP software in order to be compliant and to be able to communicate with other banks.

This seems to me like a huge cost increase for the 7% of Canadians or the 11% of businesses who may use this. In unique situations like Bell Island, I could see that there's a—

Mr. Gary Gosine: For you to say that, you can't be from a rural town.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I live in and I represent Calgary. I've lived in small-town Alberta where there are no banks, maybe just credit unions that we had to use. I've happily used credit unions when I could. In Alberta there's a lot of animosity towards the big banks, because they basically abandoned Alberta in the 1980s, so I know what that feels like and I've heard it from people.

Canada Post would have to do all of these things. It would have to train all of its people on the ground and retrain some of them. It just seems like a large cost increase to provide a service that may not work out and may not ensure the financial sustainability of Canada Post.

Is this the best service, or is there something else they should be looking at instead, considering all of these factors?

Mr. Gary Gosine: In my community, if we had anything other than just taking out money, it would be great. Anyone who has a problem with it in my community, 24-7, they're calling me. I have to call a number based out of Halifax to see why the armoured truck wasn't on the ferry. Today, I know it wasn't on the ferry because there was no boat from 11 until six o'clock tonight.

Yes, there's going to be an initial cost, but the initial cost is going to override that when there's room at our post office for two or three employees who are there anyway. They're there from nine in the morning until five in the evening. I'm sure that any kind of increased service—and not even full service—is better than what we have in our rural town right now.

Mr. Craig Dyer: Just to speak to that, we do have a highly trained staff at Canada Post in our retail section. Right now they also do MoneyGrams and money orders, so they do provide some kind of financial services. We don't just sell stamps or deliver parcels; we do a full range of things. We did student loans here locally, so there is an opportunity.

Whether it's full-fledged banking I can't say, but I know Mr. Gosine's community, and they have nothing. Would you be putting one downtown on Water Street when there are three banks down the road? Probably not, but there's an opportunity there to investigate, do your homework, put the service in place, and generate revenues.

The studies have shown that these other countries have generated revenues through postal banking, yet Canada Post management will not share the report they did that said it was a win-win. Why would they not show it if there's an opportunity to generate revenues and provide a service to many communities—and we are a service, not a business—from coast to coast to coast? We have more offices than Tim Hortons has franchises, so we're out there. Why wouldn't the government take on the opportunity to enhance these communities by providing postal banking, Internet services, and hubs?

Yes, there would be a big change, but that's what the union is willing to work for. The union is willing to work for change. We're not saying that this is going to mean carrying mail every day. Things have to change. Why wouldn't we change to generate revenues when it's been proven in so many other countries, and the skill is there?

• (1950)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final intervention will come from Madam Ratansi. You have five minutes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you both for being here.

You talked about Canada Post being a service, but it's both a business and a service. As a business, it has to be financially sustainable. I know that the restraints that were put on the way the task force was working, or perhaps on the way Canada Post was working, were within the financial model.

You've come up with some creative ideas. Canada Post has to operate within these constraints because of its charter. The Canada Post charter says that it has to be sustainable, and it can't go out for subsidies unless we change the charter.

In terms of postal banking, you've given us ideas about Japan. The Japan Post Bank is wholly owned by the Government of Japan. You talked about Canada Post not being able to manage itself at the moment as a corporation. Would it be able to manage the bank? Would you want the government to manage the bank?

Mr. Craig Dyer: I hope my point is taken. We need a different style of management at Canada Post, from the top down.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Fair enough.

Mr. Craig Dyer: That is a huge burden for postal workers, because we have to work together, and that's not happening. When we come forth with a solution to generate revenues, eliminate a footprint by removing a vehicle from the road, and create a full-time job, only to be told "no" because that's not in their plans, it's very discouraging.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: You keep on blaming Canada Post as if there were a directive coming down from the CEO. Is it possible that there is something going on between the management here and the workers that is causing so much animosity? Do you think it stems from the top? There may be personality issues or whatever.

Mr. Craig Dyer: I have a fantastic personality.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I don't mean you.

Mr. Craig Dyer: I'll qualify that. I've been there 27 years. I've gone through seven plant managers. There is definitely a personality clash between workers and management in St. John's, simply because we believe that we do have rights. We do want to be respected, and we do come forward with good ideas to save the corporation money, only to be told "no", so where is the encouragement to continue?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: With regard to the task force, Canada Post said that it did a consultation of 46 communities before it came up with its five-point plan. We have taken note that you said you were not consulted.

Mayor Gosine, were you consulted by Canada Post when they put in the community mailboxes? Do you remember?

Mr. Gary Gosine: I'm trying to remember. Yes, we were consulted. We were contacted by a couple of union members who brought it to our attention. I think it was Louise Ade, maybe.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: The corporation—

Mr. Gary Gosine: Yes, we were contacted. We went to bat for our post office, to absolutely no avail.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay. The bottom line is that you do not feel you were engaged in the process when they put in the community mailboxes.

Mr. Gary Gosine: Definitely not. They wanted to go from a 40-hour work week in a store that was already open 70 or 80 hours a week down to 13 hours a week.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Was this post office there within your community, and was it acting as a hub for your community? Would people gather together at that post office to do their business?

Mr. Gary Gosine: Yes. The post office had moved, but the old post office had probably been in place for over 50 years.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: I have a quick question.

Canada Post's review says that Lettermail has been reduced, but that Admail has gone up. In your experience, is this true? Have you decreased your day-to-day door delivery of letters but increased Admail?

Mr. Craig Dyer: Yes. The first-class letter with the stamp on it has definitely decreased. There is no argument there. Our direct mail and our parcels have increased significantly.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Has there been any modernization? You talked about route changes. Has there been something that has created efficiency or inefficiency?

•(1955)

Mr. Craig Dyer: The changes in 2011 and 2015 were due to the introduction of technology and also transformation, machines that sort the mail for us. In 2015, it was the introduction of the community mailboxes and the loss of door-to-door delivery for 28,000 residents. It wasn't a decrease in volume; it was a change in process.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Has your workforce—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for your appearance here today. Should you have additional information that you think would benefit our committee in its deliberations, please feel free in directing it to our clerk. We'll make sure this information forms part of your testimony. You can get a hold of our clerk after this meeting, if you want to get her coordinates as to how to make sure the information comes to her attention.

Thank you both for taking the time to be here. More particularly, thank you both for your perspective and your candour.

We will suspend for a few moments while we wait for the next set of panellists to approach the table.

● (1955) _____ (Pause) _____

● (2000)

The Chair: Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, we'll begin. Mr. Whalen is predisposed for a moment or two, but I know he will be back with us very shortly.

Ladies, it looks like you were in the room for most of the first presentations, so I think you know how this all works. We're going to ask each of you to give a short opening statement, which is hopefully no more than five minutes. That will allow adequate time for the questions and answers from committee members. It has been our experience that most of the information that helps us comes out during the questions and answers. If you don't have enough time in five minutes to get all of your points out, I can assure that those points will probably come out during the Q and As.

We will begin now with Ms. Dawson as our first intervenor. You have five minutes, please, Ms. Dawson.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson (Executive Director, Empower, The Disability Resource Centre): Thank you very much for the invitation to present. I'd like to welcome you to Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm impressed that you have included us in your nationwide consultations, because quite often we're left off the mark.

I'm here on behalf of Empower, the Disability Resource Centre. We have 450 members and we provide approximately 10,000 services annually throughout the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are a cross-disability organization, supporting people with disabilities to live independent lives. In 2015 there were more than 73,000 people here in our province who had a disability.

First and foremost, we must remember that Canada Post has a mandate to provide universal services. We all have the right to mail services, whether we have a disability or not. However, in any changes you are making to Canada Post, I would ask that consideration be given to people such as me, who have a disability—for instance, people who use a wheelchair and can't get to their mailbox, or those who have agoraphobia and are afraid to leave home.

As we've seen, people do not like change and they don't react well to it. When change is not communicated effectively, that compounds the problem.

I have five very short recommendations.

Number one, ensure community mailboxes are accessible and safe. This means access for anyone, anytime, no matter what the mobility is, and it means through all seasons. We've had instances of the snow not being cleared or conditions being too icy to allow people to get to the existing community mailboxes. Canada Post has not been clear as to the area around the box they are responsible to clear snow from. This impedes anyone who has a mobility issue from getting to their mailbox and getting their mail.

Community mailboxes also need to be placed in safe areas, where vulnerable populations will feel less vulnerable and more safe. One of our consumers who was unable to reach her mailbox called the toll-free helpline and was told to get someone else to get her mail. That's not a solution. It's not effective for our consumers who want to

live independently. It also puts them at risk of someone else knowing their business, tampering with their mail, and theft. We need to find a better solution for those who require accommodation.

Number two, avoid barriers. If you are accommodating someone and asking them to provide a letter from a doctor, this can be cost prohibitive, or they may not even have a doctor. Please consider this when you're looking to make accommodations for people.

Number three, provide additional services. Postal banking is an opportunity to have banking services in communities where none exist. I know it would be beneficial here, as we have many rural areas in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Number four, communicate changes effectively. Personally, I believe Canada Post is near and dear to people's hearts. It's like ice hockey, maple syrup, and health care. We don't want Canada Post privatized, so any changes to it must be communicated effectively.

Number five, partner with independent living centres such as ours. This would help in communicating your message effectively to consumers. Whatever changes and decisions you make, they must be communicated effectively to the community, and we can help do that.

Thank you for your work thus far, and I congratulate you on your thoroughness.

● (2005)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next up we have Ms. Christy for five minutes, please.

Ms. Emily Christy (Executive Director, Newfoundland and Labrador, Coalition of Persons with Disabilities): Thank you.

Dear members of Parliament and the standing committee on operations and estimates, thank you for the opportunity for the Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, Newfoundland and Labrador, to be consulted about the Canada Post review process.

Currently it's estimated that one in five people in Canada live with disabilities. That's 3,775,910 individuals who will be affected by the decisions that are made with regard to postal service and how Canada Post as a crown corporation moves forward.

In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, with close to 75,000 citizens in this province having at least one disability, the concerns about changes in service for persons with disabilities become even more discouraging as we reflect on the changes made in the metro St. John's area, and to our rural and remote communities where services and provisions are even more at risk and bring even more challenges to access and equity.

The major concerns in this province for persons with disabilities are as follows: the ending of home mail delivery service or reduction in service, access and safety of community mailboxes, the lack of independence and privacy given to persons with disabilities with the changes in service, and persons with non-visible disabilities not being afforded the rights of access to accessible services based on medical regulations.

To end door-to-door delivery would have many negative impacts on persons with disabilities. Converting the mail service to community mailboxes increases barriers in the built environment for persons with disabilities, whether the community mailbox is difficult to reach because of the height of the box location, uneven or icy snow-covered terrain, difficulty or inability to read the box number because of low vision or disability, and increased safety risks of accessing boxes on busy roadways or in poorly lit post offices during off-hours.

Home delivery is part of a personal safety plan for persons with disabilities. Being told that you should ask a family member, friend, or caregiver to pick up your mail on your behalf as a solution to inaccessibility of community mailboxes removes the independence and privacy for persons with disabilities, independence and privacy which are afforded to the rest of the citizens of this province. Giving the suggestion as a solution to the mail retrieval process removes the equity which persons with disabilities should be afforded.

Beyond just the autonomy that door-to-door service provides for persons with disabilities, there are serious concerns about safety and fraud that allowing someone else to pick up your mail generates. Persons with disabilities are at greater risk of being financially abused or stolen from, and this can be exacerbated by having to ask someone to pick up your mail. If you are in a shared, supportive housing situation with someone you don't know, and thus sharing a community mailbox with essentially a stranger, the possibility that your mail could be tampered with, stolen, or inadvertently lost is out of your control. You could not receive notice of appointments or change in wait-list for programs you were trying to access. You could lose benefit cheques.

Having your mail pass through more hands increases the chance of error, fraud, and distrustful situations. Individuals with mental illnesses such as agoraphobia, paranoia, or post-traumatic stress disorder may find it impossible to get to the mailbox. Others who deal with chronic illness or episodic disabilities may also experience additional fatigue or pain that would prevent them from getting to a community mailbox before parcels are returned to the sender or the box runs out of space to hold their mail.

The need for proof of eligibility for service becomes another barrier to service for persons with disabilities. The difficulty is not only financial, but also how the scope of criteria is developed and how that could be exclusionary to persons with non-visible disabilities. Assessing a family doctor is becoming more and more difficult in this province, especially in rural communities, and just having the ability to get such an approval process signed off could pose the greatest barrier of all. Regulating this kind of eligibility would be an additional cost and put persons with disabilities, especially those with non-visible disabilities, under surveillance.

If services are discontinued, we endorse the Council of Canadians with Disabilities' position to simply decrease the frequency of home delivery and not remove it completely. We call on the Government of Canada to uphold its commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities as set forth in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and to afford the citizens of this province equitable service, especially those in rural and remote communities.

There is an interesting suggestion coming forward in terms of increasing the strength and delivery of service by this crown corporation. With regard to persons with disabilities in rural and remote communities, it's clear that a program like postal banking would create opportunity for persons with disabilities who do not have financial banking services in their communities.

● (2010)

As noted in the CUPW presentation materials, there could also be opportunities to leverage community development models such as those found in Calgary's Momentum to enhance financial literacy, to create microlending opportunities, and to assist unemployed or underemployed Canadians with disabilities with opportunities towards economic empowerment.

Investing in Canada Post and increasing its services to make it a stronger and more competitive force in the market is a great way for Canada to invest in and serve persons with disabilities, by showing them dignity, fairness, and respect in the form of mail delivery service and investing in the communities in which we live.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Finally, we have Ms. Callahan. You have five minutes, please.

Ms. Sharron Callahan (Chair, St. John's-Avalon Chapter, Canadian Association of Retired Persons): Good evening.

I sit here this evening as chair of the CARP St. John's-Avalon chapter. CARP, for those know the acronym, is the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. Our CARP membership in Newfoundland and Labrador is more than 1,000. In addition, I'm chair of the Newfoundland and Labrador Coalition of Pensioners, Retirees, and Seniors Organizations.

Seniors represent the single most powerful segment of our society. According to the census of 2011 for Newfoundland and Labrador, the population of persons aged 55 years and over is 163,880. If you extend the relationship of these persons to include adult children and other connected persons, the range of outreach and usage by those persons extends to well over 300,000. This represents real power when it comes to public awareness on issues that have an impact on them, and it is important that the voices of older persons are recognized with the information, knowledge, and credibility that they bring to matters influencing public policy, so CARP St. John's-Avalon chapter and the coalition appreciate the opportunity to bring forward the perspective of older persons through this presentation this evening.

It is recognized that the cost to deliver postal services has increased dramatically. In addition, the dynamics associated with living in a digital age must be examined and considered in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness and to reduce the burden of cost from the shoulders of the taxpayer. This is not an easy task, and there remains a highly emotional attachment to services that are available through personal delivery. This nostalgic attachment to receiving your personal letters, parcels at holiday times, and greetings and other holiday occasion cards should be maintained until such time as the demand for this service through Canada Post has ceased. In other words, until citizens have completely transitioned away from mailing cards or parcels or businesses have completely discontinued paper invoicing, advertising, and other services, home delivery must continue as an essential service.

If it is believed and accepted that all citizens, especially older citizens, have a right to essential services, and if it is recognized that home delivery is one of these essential services and that it must be delivered to the address of the recipient, then this service should not have to pay for itself. Do not look for the solution to be discontinuance of a service, but look to other ways to finance the service. If it is deemed an essential service, it becomes a service that is funded by the government, just like any other essential service, such as policing and fire services, health services, and so on. Some services, no matter how efficient one tries to make them, will always be in the red; then we have to simply accept this and move on without continuously charging the consumer for the service.

If the solution is to transition from physical mail delivery to online delivery, this will create more hardships than might be necessary. From the seniors' perspective, I have four points to make in that regard.

Many seniors do not have access to computers, and others are unwilling to enter personal information. A 2009 Statistics Canada study revealed that only 21% of individuals over the age of 75 were online. When CARP last polled our members, 70% indicated they were online, but half of those actually used computers that belonged to children or grandchildren.

Secondly, community mailboxes are not the answer. Besides being a community eyesore sometimes, they put the vulnerable at risk in two ways, as my colleagues have already indicated: in inclement conditions, the risk of a fall increases significantly, and even in good weather, the mailbox is a target for vandalism, as pension and other assistance cheques may be targeted by thieves, so security becomes an issue.

● (2015)

As well, just in case you're not aware, seniors have a tendency to get shorter as they get older. If your mailbox is on the top level, it's just impossible to reach the lock or to look inside your box to see what might be there for you to retrieve.

Relying on family members to pick up and deliver mail is not the answer. Senior persons are intensely private and wish to maintain their independence and dignity as long as possible. They prefer to keep their affairs to themselves, which is ensured when their personal mail is delivered directly to them. In addition, family members picking up and delivering mail also puts seniors at risk of financial abuse, as someone else will be collecting their cheques.

Most recently, there's been an identification of problems with the locking mechanism on these mailboxes, to the extent that Canada Post is having to entertain certain excessive costs in order to replace those locks.

I have one last point to make, if I may. This has to do with the information in your discussion paper on Canada Post in the digital age. I offer a final point on the matter of the cost of running Canada Post by the federal government, which needs to consider all efficiencies. To a consumer, a post office is a post office, whether it's in a large corporate structure, a counter in a community drugstore, or a private room in a home in a very remote area. As long as the Canada Post sign is visible to the customer and personal service can be accessed more easily, take the actions that are needed for cost efficiencies to physical locations while still maintaining a service for seniors.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Whalen for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I'd like to thank you all for coming. It's great to hear the different perspectives from mayors, from unions, from business, and certainly from your membership and all the organizations you represent.

It's interesting, because during the campaign we made a promise to save door-to-door delivery. We would do that by halting the installation of the community mailboxes and then consulting about the future of Canada Post. We don't feel bound by the task force study. They made a number of recommendations for cost savings, for revenue generation, but we don't feel bound by their constraints. We want to hear from Canadians and come up with our own opinions on what the future of Canada Post should look like to make our own recommendations to Parliament.

In this regard, there are some nuanced points. I'm hoping that each of you can help answer them.

Canada Post talks about five types of delivery: to the end of the laneway in rural areas, to a rural post office, to a community mailbox, to a centralized location in an apartment building, and then something that they call "door-to-door".

Of those five things, which are acceptable to you? Do you consider end of your laneway and to a box within your home just as good as door-to-door delivery? I'd love to hear quickly from all three of you.

● (2020)

Ms. Sharron Callahan: Home delivery is obviously at the top of the list of five. If I had to rank the five, I would then very quickly say community mailboxes. It's been my observance that community mailboxes are fairly close to the neighbourhoods, so they're not too far away from your home address, notwithstanding the other complexities. The end of the laneway would be my third-ranked one, I guess.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

Ms. Emily Christy: I agree: door to door is kind of the—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Do you consider door-to-door delivery to be the same as if you live in an apartment building, the centralized location—

Ms. Emily Christy: Yes—

Mr. Nick Whalen: If you don't have a mailbox on your house but you have it at the end of your driveway, do you still consider that to be door to door?

Ms. Emily Christy: Yes. I consider door to door to be the mailbox on your home, the mailbox in your apartment building, and the mailbox at the end of your laneway. The problematic ones for us would be the community mailboxes and the mailboxes in your postal office.

Mr. Nick Whalen: What's the problem, precisely, with the mailboxes in the postal offices?

Ms. Emily Christy: As I outlined earlier, I think access to the building is one piece. You need a key to access the building after hours.

The hope, of course, is that a community post office is accessible, but that's not always the case. When I think of my post office, for instance, in my community in Pouch Cove, it's not. The ramp is there, but it's rather steep, I would say. To get in there during off-hours is difficult, beyond just the ramp. The lighting in there is very dark. It's not a welcoming environment to be in if you have any kind of disability, whether you have low vision or anything that inhibits you from entering that space. It's more difficult, I would say, than even a community mailbox on the side of the road.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Go ahead, Ms. Dawson.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: I would agree. First I would go with door to door, and I would include end-of-lane and apartment buildings as being part of door-to-door delivery. Community mailboxes would be a second choice for the exact same reasons.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay. That's interesting to hear.

In St. John's East and this area, the people you represent receive all the different types of service in oddly defined geographical regions. You can go a few streets over to Torbay and all of a sudden you're in Flatrock. Go a street over, and you're in Pouch Cove. Everyone has different services in those three communities.

Do you have any data from any of your members about slips and falls or assaults or physical harm to people that has arisen out of their attempts to use community mailboxes or attempts to access the postal service?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: We do. It's more about a hindrance to them getting to their mailbox. They would try to avoid falling because it's icy or they couldn't get to their mailbox because of the snow. There were no injuries, but it was more about not being able to get to the mailbox because of a hindrance.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Go ahead, Ms. Christy.

Ms. Emily Christy: We don't have any data on that issue.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

Ms. Sharron Callahan: I don't have data, but I would say that there is a reservation in going to collect your mail if the conditions that have been referenced are present. Your mail could be sitting there for a week or two, which is bad if you're dependent on mail delivery for your income.

Mr. Nick Whalen: That's fair enough.

Ms. Christy, I know that the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities Newfoundland and Labrador has focused a lot recently on accommodating people with disabilities in the workforce. You've publicized a 10% target for jobs for disabled people in the workforce. I'm not sure which of the groups within the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities has targets. I think Empower has talked about that as well.

I'm wondering if you could speak to me about your experience with Canada Post as an employer for people with disabilities, and if it has demonstrated itself to be a good employer and a sufficient employer of people with disabilities to provide them the same opportunities as other businesses are expected to provide.

● (2025)

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: That's a really good question, and I have to say that I haven't looked into it. We haven't heard from them. We haven't provided any kind of training. We provide etiquette training in regard to disability and disability awareness. We haven't done any with Canada Post. We haven't worked with them as a business or as an employer, but that's definitely something I'll look into.

Ms. Emily Christy: We haven't done any inclusion training with Canada Post either. It's not on my radar since I've been with the coalition, so it's not something I'm aware of.

Mr. Nick Whalen: You don't have statistics on how many of your members are working in postal offices, or in the postal service, to achieve this 10% threshold you're hoping to achieve.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: I know of none.

Ms. Emily Christy: I'm not sure if that 10% is with inclusionNL or...

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: It's actually the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Nick Whalen: It's the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Okay. I learned about it from your organization.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: The time is up. Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. McCauley for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I used to live in Mr. Whalen's riding, and there are all types of mailboxes. It's interesting.

Ladies, thank you for joining us today. I appreciate your passion for helping others. It's quite amazing. All of you are very well-spoken. You made a lot of great points, and I appreciate that.

Canada Post, I understand, for areas with community mailboxes, will deliver mail once a week. They'll deliver to the box every day, and then on a designated day they pick up all that mail and bring it to the house. I've been told—and I have to look into it more—that they will do so once you fill out a form, but a doctor's note is not required, so there's no money involved in that.

Are all your organizations aware of that? They'll do it for seniors, disabled, and mobility challenged, as well.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: We found out about it by accident when one of our consumers came and tried to put in an application to get the mail. That's how we have found out. It would have been beneficial if we'd known in advance so that we could have let our consumers know.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I agree. I don't want to say I found out about it by accident, but I was not aware either, even though I've been head of a seniors' foundation and a group of hospitals in Victoria.

What's the best way to get that communicated? Should that come from the municipality? I want to follow up because we've talked about consulting. It's impossible for everyone to track down every single group to consult and to ensure the best possible service. What's the best way to get that information to—I don't want to say to your various clients—the various people you're supporting? What's the best way to get feedback to Canada Post? Should it be through the municipality, or directly through a Canada Post ombudsman? We've heard of other suggestions. I'd like to hear the best way to get your organizations engaged.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: I know you didn't ask, but I just want to make reference to your mention of getting your mail once a week. That's a little bit problematic for people who have disabilities and probably for seniors as well, because we have special appointments. I don't know if it's just in Newfoundland and Labrador, but you get very short notice about when your next appointment's going to be, and you get it by mail.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: In Alberta, you get about a 12- to 18-month waiting list.

It's good you brought that up, because we've heard various things, such as “Oh yes, that's perfectly fine, too.” Someone else commented on that as well.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: Yes, it can be problematic.

In reference to your question, I think going through the municipality is an excellent idea. Also, we have a national organization. CODNL has a national organization, and CARP. I think you can communicate through the municipalities, but also let the national organizations know, and that information will funnel down to us and then we'll get it out to our consumers and our clients.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay. Sharron, you look like you want to....

Ms. Sharron Callahan: The same would apply. I have to admit that I was not aware of that service, but I think, just in addition to that, there are probably other services that Canada Post offers that the general public are not aware of as well. Just recently, within the past month, I had an opportunity to discover a service that would have been beneficial to the seniors community. Someone directed me to Canada Post. It was a total blow-away that we didn't know about it.

I guess my point is twofold. One is that they need to get better at communicating the services that they have. Second, the more we are aware of what services are available, the more they can be utilized. Our national organization would clearly be a way to filter the information down through to everybody.

• (2030)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay.

Go ahead, Ms. Christy.

Ms. Emily Christy: I agree with both the points made around lines of communication. I'm just kind of thinking of using the postal service as a way to get out information as to what services are offered or how people can go about getting special delivery privileges.

I also agree with Kimberley's point on the difficulty around a one-day-a-week delivery mode in terms of getting notices for appointments and things like that. A letter comes out the week before to tell you about an appointment that you have the following week, and that's a very difficult turnaround when we're talking about only getting your mail once a week. That's definitely an important thing to keep in mind.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: In Mr. Whalen's riding and my own riding, it's all three: community mailbox, door to door, and apartments/senior centres. Also, there's a large rural area, oddly enough, where they have to go in and pick up. Not everyone's getting door to door right now. There's a fair number of seniors or disabled who don't have it.

How are they addressing these issues? Those people aren't going to get door to door tomorrow. Others are adjusting. How do you think they're doing that?

I'm asking because you know more than I do.

Ms. Emily Christy: I think at the moment they're being supported by their support system, if they have one. An important qualifier to make is that to assume that there is a support system is a difficult thing to assume. From my understanding, there's a toll-free number that people can call to get their mail actually brought to them if they do have problems picking it up. Some feedback that we've heard within the community and from consumer calls is that people are being told to ask a family member or a friend to pick it up for them if it's possible.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, I understand they do ask if you can you do this or do that before go ahead with delivering.

Ms. Emily Christy: Yes. I think from our perspective, it's about a certain level of autonomy and independence. If I can't physically do something for myself, I shouldn't be asking other people to do it for me. It should be an equitable service provided to me that everyone else has equal access to. If that's a service that everyone has equal access to, but I don't because I can't physically access the space, or whatever other limitations may be posed on me, then I have to extend—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You've hit upon a good point, because it's not equitable right now.

Ms. Emily Christy: Exactly.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: There are huge.... Probably 50% don't have much.

Thank you again.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Weir, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Erin Weir: To pick up where Mr. McCauley left off, it's certainly the case that many parts of the country don't have door-to-door delivery right now, but is it not also the case that seniors and people with disabilities may have made choices to live in neighbourhoods that do have home delivery? Doesn't that speak to the importance of maintaining that service?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: I would agree; they are either in apartment buildings or they have home delivery. I think the change is difficult for people with a disability and seniors as well, as is the unknown. When they read about it in the newspaper and they wonder what it means for them and whether they are going to lose their mail service and what's going to happen to their mail, that makes it difficult for people with disabilities.

Mr. Erin Weir: Certainly.

Now to address the issue of home delivery a little bit more broadly, in some ways it's a strange topic to be discussing, because in most advanced industrialized countries it's just taken as a given that mail would be delivered to your home. We now have a federal government that was elected promising exactly that, so I wonder if you could speak a little bit to your understanding of what was put forward during the election campaign and your expectation of the government in terms of keeping door-to-door delivery?

Ms. Emily Christy: It's our hope to keep in place whatever door-to-door delivery still exists and to ensure that if we are keeping home delivery in place but changes are needed, that those will involve a reduction in delivery days rather than a complete cutting of the service.

● (2035)

Ms. Sharron Callahan: I would say the same. Since we understood this to be a key issue of the election platform, we thought that the current movement toward community mailboxes would cease. We did not think there would be a complete return to home delivery unless that proved to be more equitable and fair for everybody in the analysis of the business model associated with it, but we thought that the service would not be decreased any further beyond what it currently is.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: I agree.

Mr. Erin Weir: Excellent. So if we have these consultations and the government were to remove door-to-door delivery, you wouldn't see that as really honouring what was promised during the election.

Some voices: That's right.

Mr. Weir: I just wanted that to be clear.

I also want to raise the issue of postal banking.

You mentioned in your presentations that it's a service that could help people with disabilities. I think it's also something that could help Canada Post make better use of its network of offices across the country, and I wonder if any of you would be interested in elaborating on the potential for postal banking.

Ms. Emily Christy: I will. It's interesting that you just mentioned that it was people's choice to live in the communities in which they live, but for a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador, it's not necessarily a choice. The choice is either to move into St. John's to have access to all the services or to stay where you were born and to

live there with your community, your family, and the people you know and have grown up with.

To do that is also to make a lot of financial choices for yourself that are very limiting. I think of small, rural communities where there are maybe two or three places people can be employed. We're talking about maybe 10 or 15 people maximum in these kinds of situations. If Canada Post could have a postal banking system there, that would enable people to have microfinancing opportunities to start their own businesses and to have flexible employment opportunities.

Especially for people with disabilities, the full-time work week of nine to five, driving into the office and driving home at the end of the day, is not necessarily the setup they will mesh with that will allow for the accommodations they need in their lives. However, if they could have microfinancing opportunities and self-employment opportunities within their communities, which are very small but which could flourish with that infusion of economic prosperity, that would be a good place to be. Since there are already post offices in those communities, it would be great to use that infrastructure to infuse the rural communities with economic strength.

Mr. Erin Weir: Is there anyone else on postal banking?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: I can speak about my parents.

They live in Southern Bay, and they're about 40 minutes from a bank. They're seniors as well. They're actually considering moving to Clarendville or coming to St. John's because of banking and health services. They plot their doctor's appointments and their medical appointments around their banking.

It would be extremely beneficial for people with disabilities and seniors to have access to banking at a post office. As Emily said, you're getting a great return on investment when you already have the people and the infrastructure there.

Ms. Sharron Callahan: I would concur.

The same thing applies to seniors. The banks are moving out of rural communities. They're just big corporations now, especially with all the technology that is available with smart phones and everything else. You can do so much with technology, but some people still require a machine where they can deposit their cheques and do their banking.

Mr. Erin Weir: Absolutely.

Ms. Callahan, I feel that your presentation was somewhat constrained by time. Do you have any further points you'd like to make if you were given a bit more time?

Ms. Sharron Callahan: No. I did cut short a couple of points. My colleagues have fairly well covered it, because the communities of seniors and the disabled have similar challenges. I ended up talking about the need to replace locks and everything else. I did a very quick synopsis of what I was going to say.

● (2040)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ayoub, you have seven minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, ladies, for joining us this evening. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to hear what you have to say.

Please know how empathetic I am to people with mobility issues or disabilities.

Now I'd like to get down to the fun stuff, not that this is a game—far from it. What we're doing here is very serious, but I'd like to issue you a challenge, if you will. As I listen to people speak, I am, of course, very sensitive to their situations. At the same time, however, I'd like to get answers to questions that may be a bit more complicated or difficult. I'd like to hear your opinion so that we can get a real sense of what's going on and ultimately make recommendations to the government.

We all know that service quality is important, as you indicated quite clearly. Canada Post provides what appears to be an essential service. People with mobility issues and disabilities have numerous requests at all levels. Today, though, we are talking about Canada Post. If you had to prioritize some of the most essential services, where on the priority list would you put the service provided by Canada Post? Where on the list of needs that people with disabilities have would home mail delivery fall?

Ms. Dawson, would you care to go first? Then, the others can respond.

[*English*]

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: If I understand your question, you're asking what the most important service is that Canada Post should be delivering.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Not Canada Post particularly. I'd like to know, with respect to services for the disabled, what the ranking of Canada Post would be if you had to choose between Canada Post and something else. What is the ranking of Canada Post as a service?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: It's extremely important. Most of our consumers are isolated and book medical appointments using Canada Post.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: But you don't have a ranking of service?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: No.

Change, I think, is very difficult—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: It's very difficult. I know that.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: —and I don't think it was communicated effectively. People with disabilities and seniors like the status quo.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Madam Christy, would you comment?

Ms. Emily Christy: I would say it's hard to rank, because Canada Post is almost the network between those essential services you need: your health services, how you hear about your appointments—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I'm not talking about Canada Post in general. I'm talking about home delivery, because you need Canada Post, that's for sure. There is no going back on that. What is the ranking for the importance of home delivery, especially in regard to disabilities?

Ms. Emily Christy: It's very individualized, I think, for people with disabilities, but I think our stance is that home delivery is an

essential part of delivering equitable service to people with disabilities. Home delivery ranks above other accessible services.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Okay.

Madam Callahan, is it the same thing for you?

Ms. Sharron Callahan: The arguments are very similar, because seniors are very nostalgic and are very tied to services that they've been used to getting. Also, as you get older, it becomes more difficult to publicly access services.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Okay.

I'm going to go back into French, if you don't mind.

[*Translation*]

You represent seniors and retirees, some of whom have disabilities. I gather that people can join your association beginning at age 50 or 55. Is that correct, Ms. Callahan?

[*English*]

Ms. Sharron Callahan: The age really depends on whether you consider yourself to be retired from the workforce. CARP's age is 50-ish plus, but a lot of people don't consider themselves to be seniors until they're actually in receipt of the old age pension or something like that. It's more the—

● (2045)

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: That's the point I want to make.

Ms. Sharron Callahan: —upper age group, the older person.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Did you prioritize the service for certain...? It's not age, because your membership is maybe 50 to 55 to 80 to 85 and 90, until the end of their—

Ms. Sharron Callahan: I would not want to make a qualification on the basis of age only, because there are many complexities that impact on age. There are some very healthy and active 80-year-olds and some very—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: That's the point I want to make. Sometimes people don't want to stay home. They want to go out. They don't want to be considered invalids. They want to be free to walk. They don't want to stay home. Maybe they want to go to the post office. That's the kind of point I want to make.

How many more minutes do I have? One minute?

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

You talked about asking family members or friends for help. Asking strangers for help isn't a solution.

There's a question that sometimes comes up when people talk outside a committee such as this one.

They wonder how individuals with a particular disability do their groceries. How do they function on a daily basis? What's the difference between asking someone for help to do your groceries, let's say, and asking someone for help to get your mail? Is there a difference? And if so, what is it?

[*English*]

Ms. Emily Christy: I'll answer that question.

I think it has to do with privacy.

If you have a caregiver or personal home support worker, you don't care if they're helping you to pick out bananas, but you might care if they're fiddling through your cheques and your personal information. When it comes to having someone drive you to the grocery store versus looking at very personal things in your mailbox, I think there is a level there that does put—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: But the letters are not opened. Do they open the letters?

Ms. Emily Christy: They're not opened.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Okay.

Ms. Emily Christy: Of course, mail fraud is a very serious offence, but if someone has access to your mail, there's still the possibility that people can steal letters that you didn't know were there or misplace letters that you didn't know had arrived.

I think the other piece is that people with disabilities have funding for a certain amount of hours for home support workers. Those are very precious hours in the day, where they're helping you get your meals ready or helping you clean up your house in certain areas that you can't do yourself, but maybe you can—

The Chair: I think we'll have to stop it there, if you wouldn't mind.

We are now going to our final two interventions, for five minutes each.

We have Mr. Kmiec, please.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you all for coming.

I won't go into postal banking again because you probably heard me talk about that with the previous two witnesses.

What I do want to talk about is something that came up in Corner Brook, this theft of mail in homes or at the boxes. Is this common? Do you have any statistics on how often theft of letters or parcels happens, either at a person's residence or at their CMB, their community mailbox?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: We haven't had feedback in regard to theft. We have had feedback in regard to delay in getting your mail. If you're having a support worker get it for you, or a family member, I think people put more emphasis on the need for food and money than they do on the postal service. If someone's going to get you food, he or she will bring the food to you right away. but if they're going to get your mail, they'll let it sit around for a few days.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay. I think one of you had mentioned that theft was a concern for seniors, especially when having to go down to their CMB. They're worried that someone might steal from this community mailbox.

For those who have door-to-door delivery...forgive me; I don't know about this. I used to live in Montreal where we had postal delivery to the home, but nobody there ever had one of those locked mailboxes at their door, the ones you can put a lock on. Anybody could just walk up to it and take the mail right out. Nobody was

around during the day. They were out at school or out working, and this would happen.

Is that common here? Do people have locks? No?

• (2050)

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: The only people who I can think of who have locks are those who use the community mailboxes or live in apartment buildings.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'll give you an example from one of my communities. It's Douglas Glen. It has community mailboxes in a very highly lit area in the middle of a kids' park. It's covered. It has a roof on top of it and it has recycling bins in it. When the community was built, it was built with this in mind, and since then the community association has continuously tried to improve it. If you had a better relationship directly with Canada Post, would these roofs be something your communities could work on having? That way you wouldn't have ice on the mailboxes. I fully hear that seniors don't want to go up there, tippytoe to try to get in, and slip and fall.

I have a community mailbox right near my house, and I won't even go out on some days because it's full of ice, because there's a slough around the side and all the water comes out. It's Calgary, so everything melts every two days, and then there's more snow, and then everything melts. It's a cycle.

If you had a working relationship among your members, the city, and Canada Post to basically work out the best location, maybe in an area where the city would be willing to pay an extra thousand dollars to put a roof on top of it, would that make it easier to adopt CMBs in certain communities?

Ms. Sharron Callahan: Anything is an improvement, and all improvements would be welcome.

There was consultation in the beginning when community mailboxes were coming out. People received questionnaires and things like that, and points were made about why certain locations might not be suitable for one reason or another, but it seems sometimes those recommendations fell on deaf ears.

If there is a way to cement the recommendations and make them happen for the positive, of course....

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I've probably gone through every single committee transcript, because I joined this committee later, and a recurring theme was this concern about theft, again, at the mailboxes, or persons being unable to get their mail on time. On this theft component, people say there are falls, there are thefts, there are accidents, but there's very little data. None of us really knows what the accident rate or what the theft rate is per 100,000 visits to community mailboxes.

Is that information your organizations would be able to help this committee collect, through CARP or other national organizations?

Ms. Sharron Callahan: It's possible that CARP could undertake some kind of a poll of its members. I'm just throwing that out there. I haven't had the discussion, to my knowledge, there isn't that data, other than anecdotes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I have maybe one last question, again, on this Criminal Code thing. Would you support an increase to the penalty for stealing someone's mail, or a senior's mail? That came up in the last election. Crimes that target seniors specifically should maybe be treated differently, because they're a growing demographic in our population. They may require further protection, especially in the Criminal Code, and that would dissuade criminal acts targeting seniors, such as attacks, identity theft....

The Chair: Please give a very short answer if you could. We're out of time now.

Ms. Sharron Callahan: Of course.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final intervenor will be Madam Ratansi.

You have five minutes, please.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you all for coming and staying late for this.

I think I want to clarify something. Are you saying you don't want any privatization of Canada Post? That was a theme we heard, but maybe there's a misunderstanding that Canada Post was not going to be privatized. Canada Post did say it consulted 46 communities and came up with a five-point plan. Maybe there's that confusion, and that is why, during the election, we put a moratorium on it.

You talked about partnering with living centres, etc. Were you or your organization ever consulted for your opinion on whether it would be damaging to your organization or to your community if community mailboxes came?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: No.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: No. Okay.

How about you, Ms. Christy?

Ms. Emily Christy: We were never consulted.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: You were never consulted.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: No. We were never consulted.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: They may have consulted national organizations. Is it possible that it didn't stream down?

Ms. Emily Christy: No. I asked.

• (2055)

Ms. Sharron Callahan: I'm actually not sure. It would be wrong for me to say yes when I'm not sure.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Fair enough.

You see, we're here to get creative ideas. We're not constrained by financial sustainability. I shouldn't say we're not constrained by it; we find solutions for it. We can't say, "Here is my problem, and my solution is cut, cut, cut."

Here is a part of a problem. We need solutions for it. You came up with an interesting concept of postal banking. We've been listening to postal banking, and everybody created this brouhaha that postal banking may be terrible because you have to invest millions of dollars.

I did some research. Brazil has e-commerce banking. Its postal banking is e-commerce banking, and it is doing very well. I've just

come back from India, and Narendra Modi wants to reach out and be inclusive. India has a huge rural population, so he has actually commanded his minister of finance to utilize the postal network to help get banking into rural communities.

Everybody has a smart phone, so my question is, do your seniors have smart phones or cellphones that would help them?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: Persons with disabilities are usually on a fixed income and don't usually have a cellphone. If they have a cellphone, it's pay for service or it's only on data use and not on Wi-Fi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That's the problem. Most of the developing countries have cellphones that are very cheap.

How about you, Ms. Christy?

Ms. Emily Christy: I agree with Kimberly. Persons with disabilities have varying income levels. Some people have smart phones, and some people don't; some people are open to technology, and some people are not. Some people have the capacity to access some of these things, and some people don't have the technology that

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: So it's a monetary constraint, really, because of the way we use our cellphones.

Ms. Callahan, would you comment?

Ms. Sharron Callahan: I would say exactly what my colleagues have said. One additional qualifier is that seniors do have cellphones because they are very concerned about being able to communicate with family and things like that. The two purposes, probably, for cellphones are the purpose of the telephone itself and just so that they can be contacted themselves, since the signal would give their location. However, in terms of all of the sophisticated applications—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Therefore, the question arises that if, say, in the remote areas where we would like to get microfinance, etc.... All the postal banks of Japan, Germany, France, and Italy all made money, and some of them had to sell shares—especially France, because it joined the EU and had to bring in competition. How would you then, logically, get your people...? If the banks came in, who would utilize it if we are going to e-commerce banking? That would be a problem. When you give us solutions, I guess we try to figure out what to do and how to manage it.

In terms of post offices, do your communities, collectively, use them as a community hub? Was there a post office that was being utilized? Mr. Ayoub talked about prioritizing. What sort of services would your communities use at a post office, for example?

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: I've always had a community mailbox. I've never known anything different, and it just happens to be right outside my house.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

Ms. Kimberly Yetman Dawson: My parents have a community mail centre, which is a store, and they live in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It's a hub. It's where they get their telephone book, their flyers, their mail. It's where the men get together and have chats over coffee in the morning.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you.

The Chair: Ladies, thank you so much for your presentation here. I will say, as I mentioned to all of our panellists, that should you have other additional information you think would be of benefit to our committee members during our deliberations, please get that to our clerk directly and we'll make sure that it's incorporated into our final report.

Let me just once again say thank you. You were all wonderful panellists. We appreciate the information. We appreciate your directness.

The meeting is adjourned.

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