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Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

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• (1800)

[English]

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

Ladies, gentlemen and colleagues, I think we'll get started if we can. Welcome to our presenters and welcome to those of you who may be in the audience observing how these meetings work.

Let me start off by giving a few comments. As you undoubtedly are aware, the minister responsible for Canada Post, the Honourable Judy Foote, has engaged in a very aggressive, I believe, consultation process discussing and trying to determine the future of Canada Post.

The first phase of the consultation process was to establish a task force whose mandate was to determine or examine, at least to the best of their ability, the financial viability and sustainability of Canada Post. The task force has completed their work. They have submitted their report. We've had a chance to take a look at it, and this committee has had a chance to talk with the task force members.

Phase two is what we're in right now. We are in the midst of a cross-country tour, speaking with individuals, organizations, municipalities, and communities and asking them for their views on Canada Post and what they believe Canada Post should be doing to ensure its long-term viability. We're asking for suggestions and recommendations. That's why we're here tonight.

I'm going to ask all of you to keep your comments to five minutes or less. Following those opening comments, we will have a series of questions from all of our committee members. At the end of that time, all of your comments and questions, suggestions, recommendations will help us form part of our report, which will be tabled in Parliament no later than the end of this year.

After that brief introduction, I think we'll start now. Mr. White, I have you first on my list representing the Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce. If you could make some opening comments in five minutes or less, sir, the floor is yours.

Mr. Adrian White (Chief Executive Officer, Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce): Thank you.

The Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce represents the business community as the voice of the private sector here in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. We have a wide variation in the types of businesses and in the size of businesses in our community. Some of the businesses that we have are very technologically advanced, and I might say even further advanced than Canada Post is, but some of our businesses are not. Some of the businesses are

run by very young individuals, while some of them are an older demographic as well.

My only reason for making that statement is that I understand that technology is evolving and so is the post office with it. I believe that's good commerce for the entire country, but there is a concern over the pace at which some of the technology is evolving not to put at a disadvantage some of the older business communities that might not be as comfortable with it or as familiar with it as one would hope they would be. Eventually, in time, I'm sure they will be, but I and my membership are concerned about the pace of transition that will be taking place over time.

That is just the opener for me. I don't think there's much more I can say at this point in time. I'd be happy to take your questions later in the program.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and I thank you for your economy of words.

I now have two presenters from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. Ms. MacEachern, I think we'll start with you, representing the Save Canada Post Campaign. You have five minutes or less, please.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern (Coordinator, Save Canada Post Campaign, Canadian Union of Postal Workers): Thank you. Good evening. My name is Kristen, obviously.

First off, I would like to say thank you to the committee for allowing me to speak regarding the future of Canada Post.

I'm not an expert and I'm not a CEO, but I am a postal worker and, more specifically, I'm a rural carrier, an RSMC. I do the job and I know the effects locally.

As a postal worker, a concerned citizen, and an owner of this tried and trusted public service, I'll say it's vital that we be given space to voice our concerns, and until this moment, we've been given very little opportunity to do so, so we appreciate the fact that we're being chosen to speak.

I want you all to know that I'm a proud postal worker and very proud of the job I do. Any postal workers I know feel exactly the same way. Having said that, I would like to make it perfectly clear that I'm not proud of the fact that our employer continuously forces us and the public to fight tooth and nail to do our jobs the best we can to provide the service that the Canadian public both deserves and is accustomed to.

Manufacturing crisis after crisis, which are unproven at all ends, and scaring the public has done what? To me it looks like self-sabotage. Canada Post continuously underestimates its performance. In every single year since 2009, its financial performance has been vastly superior to its projected losses. Look at 2014. They predicted a financial loss of \$256 million, which included the impact of a price increase. The reality of 2014 was a \$299 million profit. That's a difference of \$555 million.

Part of this problem, I believe, is their attempt to show a decline in services that is just not there. Locally, in Antigonish, where I'm from, we had a thriving main street post office. There was ample parking and it was conveniently located in the downtown core.

Canada Post franchised out to the Shoppers Drug Mart that was next door and used some of the same parking lot. When this franchise opened, I knew what would happen. It would be the same thing that has been happening in offices all over Canada. It would not be long before we were moved, moved to a less convenient place further in distance from the downtown core and in a less visible location. It was just over one year later that they moved us to the Antigonish Mall, on the outskirts, far from downtown.

They decided to send customers to our retail outlet, in this case Shoppers Drug Mart, to pick up cards or parcels, again taking customers away from our office and giving that business to a franchise.

When you're not as accessible to the public and not in the line of sight daily, it affects the number of customers who will frequent your building. The numbers split between the corporate and retail outlet. Our corporate number is falling, which gave them further fodder for further cuts in this office, even though the numbers are not a true indicator of customer usage.

This brings me to another equally important issue: our rural offices. Our rural offices are covered by a moratorium that was announced by the Liberal government in 1994. The actual number of offices that were covered was 4,000, but we're down to 3,598 because the other 350-plus offices were shut down. The question is, why? I see rural offices thriving. I see them being a necessity in the communities that they belong to. I see postmasters' hours being cut and those workers being forced out of decent jobs, and in a lot of these communities, those decent jobs are few and far between.

I see vital hours, the 4:00 to 5:00 and before 10 a.m., being cut. They're the same hours the majority of the working public would use to access these offices. I see a huge lack of relief for these workers, and they have to close offices for lunch breaks because of it.

Creating a service that is not accessible is a great way to show a misrepresented decline and use. CUPW has offered many alternatives to the cuts and the raising of prices. Postal banking is one of them. Through my own research, I found that out of the roughly 136 communities in Nova Scotia, 103 of those communities do not have a bank, and it's desperately needed in these small communities, first nations reservations, etc.

Through diversification of the products we offer now, such as prepaid credit cards, and with broadband Internet, etc., and using infrastructure that is already existing, I can't understand why Canada

Post has no ability to think outside the box that they've been living in for the last however many years.

The amount of money that Canada Post has spent on postal transformation and on the community mailbox conversion project could have been used as a test flight for some of these products and services, but instead they've spent it on projects that fail. They've spent it on projects that further alienate their customers and the workforce.

Canadians need this public service in one way or another, as do small businesses, seniors, online shoppers, and companies wishing to advertise.

● (1805)

We all deserve the best public service that can be offered. Speaking as one of the postal workers providing that service, I intend to continue delivering that service for a long time to come, even if I have to fight to do so.

Thank you for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacDonald, go ahead for five minutes or less, please.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald (President, Local 117, Canadian Union of Postal Workers): My name is Gordon MacDonald, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before the standing committee to speak about our public post office.

Canada Post is a public service, one of the few public services we now have left in Canada, and Canada Post is a very profitable corporation, having had profits in 20 of the last 22 years.

I've worked for Canada Post for 31 years, and I've never seen such an outright attack of its own business as I have seen in the last four and a half years.

Here in Cape Breton we no longer prepare and sort our mail for the island. Canada Post now ships it to Halifax to be sorted and machined. Where it always took a one-day turnaround for local delivery, it now takes three to four days to get the same mail back to our customers locally.

We lost two and a half well-paying jobs here in small-town Cape Breton so that Canada Post could justify paying over \$2 billion for letter-sorting machines when they knew Lettermail was falling off. It seems nobody wants to address this poor management.

Let's talk about Lettermail. Lettermail is mail like our power bills, cable bills, birthday cards, etc. CUPW is very aware that this specific revenue has been decreasing. I must stress that this is the only product that we have seen a decrease in, and our parcel sector is making Canada Post busier than it has ever been, with profits we have never seen before. Normally, we were a seasonal profit-driven corporation, but with revenue profits now coming in the second and third quarters, this is a great sign that Canada Post is on stable ground.

Canada Post is trying to eliminate our letter carrier delivery and have everyone go to community mailboxes down the street to get their mail. When I first started 31 years ago, security of the mail was paramount, and we were instructed at all costs to protect the mail. Today, in 2016, I've never seen such a disregard for the security of our mail. A community mailbox is made of aluminum door panels, and any would-be thief could pop those open with a screwdriver.

I can tell you for certain that our mail and the products you and I ship through Canada Post are of great value. People still mail rings, heirlooms, family pictures, art, important documents, and human remains, and the list goes on. If you can imagine it, Canada Post delivers it. Having door-to-door mail delivery is the only way to protect what we ship through Canada Post. It must also be noted that Canada Post handles not just Canadian mail but mail from all over the world, a world that believes we still protect its mail, which really isn't true today.

CUPW has been talking about expanding our services for decades, and management of Canada Post seems to want the exact opposite. Canada Post is set up to be able to deliver so much more to Canadians as a public service, but it seems only to want to destroy what is the only service in our country that can deliver to the last mile. We should be proud, but it's very difficult to be proud of this poorly run public service.

Can you imagine getting ready for your job in the morning, knowing your day consists of 25-plus kilometres of walking, carrying up to 35 pounds of mail on your back, having more than 1,000 customers to deliver to, and getting to do this every day? You also might not get home until 8 p.m. and miss your family mealtimes or your children's homework. Canada Post may force you out on overtime as well. If you can't physically get your work done, because it's impossible, you're now open to disciplinary procedures to add to your already miserable existence at Canada Post as their employee.

Canada Post in small-town Canada is the cornerstone of these places. People still gather at small community post offices to mingle, get the daily information, pick up their mail, and do their own mailing business. However, our new Canada Post will be in the drugstore or pharmacy where you go to pick up your mail products, as we see with the many postal outlets Canada Post is opening across the country. I go to a pharmacy for my medications, not a post office, and the same should be said for our mail.

We now have mail, usually parcels, that comes back to post offices because it can't be delivered for one reason or another, and customers cannot pick that mail up at the post office. They need to wait until a postal clerk scans it from the post office to the postal outlet, and then a truck comes and picks up the mail that is at the post office and takes it over to the postal outlet across the street, where now the customers can come pick it up. It makes no business sense whatsoever.

Thanks for listening.

•(1810)

The Chair: Thank you very much, all of you.

We'll start with our seven-minute rounds of questions. Our first intervenor is Mr. Whalen.

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

Thank you all for coming here tonight.

As you know, this time last year we were in the midst of an election campaign. One of the promises made by our party during the campaign was that we would put a moratorium in place on the installation of community mailboxes and examine, through a consultation process—this process—what the future of Canada Post should look like: have it self-sustaining, provide it as a service, or in some other fashion continue its nation-building exercise that we've all come to know and to expect.

As part of this process, the task force prepared a report. The task force focused primarily on the financial aspects of Canada Post. As we review it, we're faced with some pretty stark realities—10 years out, we're looking at \$700 million in annual losses at Canada Post. We have to find some way to address these.

My first question is to Mr. White.

Would the business community in the Cape Breton area be open to the idea of subsidizing Canada Post on an annual basis if the various types of transformations being proposed don't generate enough revenue to cover the cost of operations and to fund venture plans?

Mr. Adrian White: Do you mean paying for additional service beyond what you're currently...?

For instance, everyone buys a stamp to mail a letter. Everyone buys postage to mail a parcel. How would this subsidy be charged, or how would business find out how much subsidy—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Well, this is the question.

Various different options have been put on the table by the task force, from franchising to moving from door-to-door delivery in urban areas to community mailboxes. There are various things. Alternate-day delivery was one of the options that was proposed. There were various types of options proposed by the task force to save money for the corporation.

Even if all of those are implemented, they're still projecting some losses within the corporation. My question is to you as the representative of the business community in this area. To what extent would you be open to providing government subsidies to support the provision of the services?

The Chair: Perhaps I could suggest, Mr. White, that it might be in the same fashion as the government subsidizes the CBC, to the tune of about a billion dollars a year.

•(1815)

Mr. Adrian White: I think they're a little different, the CBC and the post office.

In the business community, it's all about survival. In order to be a survivor, you have to be a competitor. If I'm subsidizing a service that my competitor is getting cheaper somewhere else, then I'm at a disadvantage.

Right from the start line on that one, I would say the answer is likely that we would resist a subsidy. We would really make a wide effort to seek alternatives to get the job done for us, whether that be a courier system that is less expensive than Canada Post, when you add the subsidy.... I think those other alternatives are yet to come out of the woods, if you put the price up or increase the cost of using this service beyond what is competitively reasonable.

Not only are we competing with business in this country, but we're also competing globally. That would definitely be a big concern, I believe, of our business community.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. MacDonald, you talked about the locations of rural post offices where people can go to get their mail and also about the maintenance of door-to-door service. Can you describe for us a little bit the different types of delivery mechanisms that exist in the Cape Breton area, the area you represent?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: The way we deliver mail here in Cape Breton is by foot routes, through letter carriers on foot. Our rural communities are done by our rural and suburban mail couriers, exactly the same as a mobile courier working in the urban operations would deliver the mail in the city—in Halifax, let's say. The RSMC people would deliver that same kind of mail in the same fashion.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Do you have community mailboxes in this area already?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: There are community mailboxes in the rural communities, or outside the “iron ring”, as it's called in Canada Post—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: —but there was no conversion of foot walks during that disaster over the last four years.

Mr. Nick Whalen: With the existing community mailboxes outside the grandfathered regions, is there a large history of accidents, theft, or tampering with the mail?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: You can imagine somewhere out in Balls Creek, where I know there's actually a community mailbox set up around a corner in by an isolated little lake. I think there are probably 40 or 50 customers who come to that box. That box has been vandalized, stolen from, tipped over. It's in an isolated area. It's secluded. It's unsafe for anybody to go to when it's dark, because there's no lighting. In all parts of rural Cape Breton you find those kinds of products in those kinds of areas and in those kinds of circumstances.

Then you can imagine that in the clearing of the roads and streets that has to be done, when the plow comes around, it knocks those things over. Seniors and people with disabilities are trying to get out to get to those places. These are all kinds of factors with those CMBs.

Mr. Nick Whalen: How many of these CMBs have been knocked down or vandalized, and how often does it affect mail delivery in Cape Breton? I mean actual—not imagined, but actual—disruption.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: I would say that just last winter alone there were CMBs not delivered to over the course of eight to 10 days. In my opinion, that's a lot, because I've always been told “rain, snow, sleet, and hail...” and we lived by that during my years. That's

not the case anymore; they'll stop mail delivery whenever they feel like it.

Mr. Nick Whalen: About how many small rural post offices are on the island of Cape Breton?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: On the whole island...gosh, I have 35 in my local, and there are probably—

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: Just over 50 of them.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: —approximately 50 on the full island.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sorry; we're out of time.

Our next seven-minute intervention is from Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks for hosting us. It's been about 15 years since I've been to Sydney, and places like the harbour look as beautiful as before.

Mr. White, you commented about concerns over pace of change. Briefly, because we don't have a lot of time, can you give me some of your worries or some of the issues that you see with that? Do you mean just the way society is moving, or the way Canada Post is moving, or both?

Mr. Adrian White: I want to give you one simple example. Most businesses today with young business owners use advancing technology all the time because they're in that business do most of their transactions globally online. I have business owners who are 70 years of age and not very computer literate. They expect to receive an invoice or send an invoice to a customer, and they expect to receive a paper cheque back in the mail. That's one of the differences that I wanted to explain, because in time all businesses will roll to a technology that enables them to reduce their costs, and if you're not sending an invoice in the mail and you're not receiving a cheque back, you're not incurring a postal cost to do that. You can send it by email for free.

However, not all of our businesses are ready for that; they're just not there. The pace of change in the post office and how you move forward is of concern because I do not want to disadvantage any of our more established businesses that are not yet technologically savvy enough to participate in or take advantage of those technologies.

● (1820)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It sounds as though they reflect pretty much every other community across Canada. I don't think they're seeing anything different—

Mr. Adrian White: Correct.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: —but thanks.

One of the issues that came up with the survey was that Canadians and businesses do not want to pay more for stamps, which would put businesses, etc., at a disadvantage, especially those who are still using that service. Would your members feel the same? Would they be open to higher stamp prices to address some of the fiscal issues?

Mr. Adrian White: I think the stamp increase that we had last time was monumental—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It was.

Mr. Adrian White: —and it drove a lot of our folks to try to find out a little bit more about technology. Maybe pushing it up higher will force more of my older clientele to find ways to address it and survive in that marketplace. I seriously don't believe that any of our members are out to pay more just for holding or preserving Canada Post as an entity in the country. They're looking to compete globally, and if this service is too expensive, we believe that other services will come out of the woodwork that will compete and provide that service.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We basically had the same feedback about taxes when Canadians were asked if they were willing to pay higher taxes, and it was business individuals who were overwhelmingly not keen on it.

Mr. MacDonald, you commented that you've been with Canada Post for 31 years. Your relationship with the management doesn't sound like it's a favourable one, but bluntly, CUPW has never enjoyed anything other than a caustic relationship with management over the years. I'm not a young person; I remember the various issues going back quite a few years. What's changed, do you believe, and how is this any different from, say, 10, 15, or 20 years ago?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: What has changed is that 30 years ago, when I first came into the post office, we were fighting to get some rights, some quality pay, some benefits, some pension, some things that every citizen in this country deserves and should have. Prior to 2011, we had 15 years of labour peace. There was no strike action and there were no problems. Canada Post was recognized as being among the top 100—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: So you think it's all just based on the five-point plan?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: Everything started going bad for us in 2011. When the Conservatives were elected—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We were elected in 2006, actually.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: —they were hell-bent on destroying public services, and that's what happened.

Everybody is talking about the cost and raising prices. Well, I'd like to see the numbers. The Conference Board of Canada was predicting a \$212-million loss, and they ended up with a \$198-million profit. How do you trust numbers when you hear—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That leads me into the next question.

You talked about the profits. Can you not admit—I don't want to say “admit”; that's a bad word. Can we recognize that profit this year and last year is a result of some of the changes made? I understand that between the price increase of stamps, which is not popular, and the changes to the CMBs, it's about \$80 million a year.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: I think the amount of money Canada Post has wasted on trying to do something with the post office has to be a factor in the amount of money that's...and the lack of profits. There was millions of dollars wasted in a postal transformation for CMBs and \$2.5 billion that they wasted seven or eight years ago on the mail sorting machines when they predicted a 26% loss in mail volumes.

As we're talking Lettermail, I wish I had an envelope here, because Lettermail is specifically the letter, the 24 x 10 letter—

• (1825)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Sorry. We're so short of time that I do have to interrupt. I want to give Ms. MacEachern a chance to chip in.

The way you're explaining it, it almost sounds like a conspiracy by Canada Post to destroy it. I don't want to think that's like a fake moon landing, but do you really believe there is this conspiracy to destroy it for the sake of destroying it? To what end purpose would it be? You seem to be coming across—

The Chair: Can we get a short response, because we're running short of time?

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: It starts with a “P”.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: They've done this to justify the losses that they're coming up with.

I'm going to tell you, during negotiations—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do you think the changes are being made for financial stability or sustainability?

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: I wish it were for sustainability.

I think the changes in the long run point to privatization. It's an unfortunate—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Oh, that “P”. I thought maybe you meant a profit.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: That “P”. It's an unfortunate—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We're probably out of time, but I don't think that has ever—

The Chair: We are out of time.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It has not come up at all, but—

The Chair: Mr. Duvall, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you to our guests for showing up today and giving of your valuable time.

Ms. MacEachern, you mentioned something about cutting workers. Is that because they've restructured to a point where they've contracted out this type of work and they don't need that many workers, or have they restructured to a point where they're making overtime mandatory and overtime has gone through the roof?

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: Specific to what I was speaking about, or was it Gordon?

Mr. Scott Duvall: It was what you were speaking about.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: I was speaking about the rural post offices and the postmasters who are working there. They're cutting the hours in these offices and therefore, of course, their work is diminishing. They're going from full-time decent-paying jobs to part-time intermittent work. That's what I was referring to. As far as cutting the workforce is concerned, it's certainly happening in the major urban centres as well, in all of our offices. It's being justified by the lower numbers.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Are those cutbacks through attrition, through people retiring, and the jobs are just not being replaced?

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: For some of those, yes, it is. They're justifying the cuts by saying we no longer need those positions.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Also, and maybe Mr. MacDonald can answer this, I think you mentioned the pharmacies doing some of the mail. Do they charge the same price for handling that mail, or is there an increase? Do they feel that they can make up their own prices?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: I was already under the impression that they charge the same prices, but I'm working retail across the street from a Shoppers Drug Mart and my customers come back to me at the retail and tell us personally that they get charged more money to do their mailing at the Shoppers Drug Mart.

I haven't had that experience myself by going there, but I have customers on a daily basis come back and tell me so. They're just across the street.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Maybe you can answer this, Mr. MacDonald. It's been reported that since they went to the community mailboxes and until the Liberals stopped it about a year ago, they saved about \$400 million.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: Canada Post saved that?

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay, but here's my question. It's been reported that there's a \$400-million savings going to community mailboxes, or they anticipate that—

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: They just spent \$200-plus million in the failed conversion.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay, that's what my question was going to be. Do you know how much the start-up cost was to implement these mailboxes and the operating costs to keep them on an ongoing basis?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: Did you want to jump in on that, Kristen?

Mr. Scott Duvall: If you want to answer that, go ahead.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: It is not something that I have sitting in front of me, but I believe you may have something sitting in front of you. The Delivering Community Power document speaks to the CMB conversion, I believe.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: I lost my train of thought.

A lot of the costs of the CMBs being implemented is being downloaded onto the municipalities, as well as the snow removal.

Mr. Scott Duvall: I'm getting to that, and this is where I'd like to ask something to Mr. White, who represents the businesses.

Canada Post has made a decision to go to the community mailboxes because of the high costs of labour and overall to make a profit, but some of those turnovers are causing grief to the municipality because Canada Post does not want to pay the road allowance permits when they put in the community mailboxes. It's taking away money from the municipality. Also, if the community mailbox is put into a place where it's not accessible because of a curb, there has to be a curb cut, which is done by the municipality. Then people are demanding lights. As well, there's the amount of garbage that is thrown around now, and that's being picked up by the municipality. Then there's the snow removal. What do you think of the business of picking up or subsidizing Canada Post's responsibility?

• (1830)

Mr. Adrian White: It's unfair. The municipality here in Cape Breton has the highest commercial taxes in Atlantic Canada, and it now has the highest residential taxes in Atlantic Canada. That is actually a topic of discussion in our municipal election.

I don't think that it's fair, and it's happened from the federal government to the provincial government and from the provincial government to the municipal government. It's rolling down and it will always be rolling into the municipal tax base as a result of that, but I do not think that's fair and I think that when changes are made, the cost of that change should be borne by the folks who have decided to create the cost, not the municipalities, which had little to no say in that change at all.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Okay. You're saying it's a form of downloading, correct?

Mr. Adrian White: That is correct.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Did you want to say something?

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: I actually found the number for how much it's going to cost or has cost. The CMB conversion, which is only partially completed, has cost \$210 million.

Mr. Scott Duvall: That's \$210 million, but we don't know if that's for any land or for any permit fees that they've been paying or they might have to pay in the future, or for operating costs, right? That's just for sticking them in there.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: Sorry; that's the number given to us by Canada Post themselves.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Another big issue that has come up is seniors not being able to get to their community mailboxes. Canada Post has put forward the idea that maybe families or friends can go and pick up their mail if they give them the keys, or they could make an application and have medical proof that they're incapable of doing that and maybe get that type of mail once a week. Are you aware of this and do you know the cost for a person to make that application through a doctor?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: First of all, I think it's a pretty sad that Canada Post would expect our seniors and our disabled to do that.

I know several people who are seniors and disabled and differently abled. When they go to these places, it would be costly for them to get a cab to the end of the street. It would also be costly for someone to pick them up and take them to the end of the street.

I'm going to tell you that as a letter carrier—and I was a letter carrier for 25 years, up until I needed a knee replacement from all the pounding on the street—we used to check on our seniors every day. We knew their routines. We'd go in, and if we saw their mail wasn't picked up, we'd knock on their door. We checked on them. That's what they got to expect in all our communities, and it was a regular thing. On my walk, I had 500-plus customers, and a lot of them were seniors. In small-town Canada a lot of seniors are in place. Cape Breton is full of seniors. We're a senior community. It's almost a bedroom community of seniors nowadays.

The Chair: I have to stop you there now, but thank you for that. [Translation]

Mr. Ayoub, you have the floor for seven minutes, please.

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

I thank you for welcoming us to your beautiful region. This is the first time I've been to Cape Breton and I find the scenery wonderful. I'd like to come back here with my family.

Our committee is doing a cross-Canada tour. Over the past few days, we have been to several cities. Today we are here, and I would like to hear something different. My remarks are addressed to the union representatives in particular.

From one meeting to the next, we are given the same information, more or less, and the same messages. You are well briefed; the message is being conveyed, we have heard it.

Mr. MacDonald, you have worked for Canada Post for 31 years. Madam, you have also been with the corporation for a long time. In your opinion, what is the future of Canada Post in this region? You know the area well and you know the ropes. As we would say in Quebec, you know the poutine.

Perhaps Canada Post did not consult you. From what I see, there has not been any communication. If you had been consulted, what would you have said about the future of Canada Post?

Obviously, the Canada Post Corporation is not what it was 30 years ago. Email, for instance, did not exist 30 years ago, and the postal banking service that used to exist is no longer in use today. We have to consider all of the services. Today, the government is being asked to make a decision that will determine the future of Canada Post. I'd like to hear your point of view.

Stray from the beaten path. What is your future with Canada Post? You are going to retire in the next few years. What do you want to leave your children? What is the future of a letter carrier or postmaster here in Cape Breton?

• (1835)

[English]

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: The unfortunate part is what I see for Canada Post and what I believe is going to happen with Canada Post unless serious things happen with the government right now, such as, as you said, postal banking. I can see us thinking outside the box and offering services to these smaller communities that have no access and have been left out in the cold, communities that services and companies are running away from.

We have more offices than Tim Hortons has in Canada. There's no reason we shouldn't be using the offices, the infrastructure we already have, and offering services to people, such as broadband Internet. These communities pay the same taxes as people in urban centres. There's no reason they can't have the exact same service and exact same quality of postal service that everyone else does, and for me, it would look completely different. Post offices would be the hub of the community again, as they should be. That's what I see and what I hope will happen.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: It's what you hope.

Mr. MacDonald, would you comment?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: What I would hope is similar to what Kristen is saying.

When I came into the post office 31 years ago, I was excited. I felt very fortunate to have a good, stable job with a pension in my future and to be able to raise my children at home here in Cape Breton. I felt that way 31 years ago. I'm not as very proud today of Canada Post as I was then.

As to what I would hope to see in our future, I believe the Canadian Union of Postal Workers is very envisioned, is very clear on the direction in which Canada Post is going and on the direction that we need to take. We understand that mail volumes are going down, but we are also aware that our parcel volumes and the Internet have exploded our business and we need to look at how we can deal with that explosion.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: At the same time, you realize that there is a need to change. There is a need to maybe improve some of the services somewhere, add some services, maybe regroup services that you're not offering right now, but we need to go in a positive way to find some other revenue, other services.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: Do you know you can't buy an 8 x 10 envelope in a single pack at the Canada Post outlet? Why not? We deal with paper. Why are we not selling every kind of paper product at Canada Post? Why are we not doing passport applications at Canada Post? Why are we not—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Do you feel that you need more...not understanding, but more communication with the head office of Canada Post, with the higher management? Right now that seems to be a trigger between the two, *les deux solitudes*. You're far apart. Sometimes you get together; you've signed a contract for two years. What's going to happen in two years from now?

• (1840)

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: It will be more of the same. We're not improving. Canada Post has been closed-minded for so many years now. It's crazy to try to deal with how closed-minded they are, even locally, because in their local offices they're so micromanaged they cannot make a decision. If we got rid of all the supervisors in Atlantic Canada, it wouldn't make a difference, other than that the profits would go up. They micromanage it so finely from Ottawa that it's unbelievable.

They don't make decisions. They do a bunch of paperwork, and all the managers and supervisors—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I have another question. My time is running out. I have maybe a minute left. I'm sorry, Mr. White, that I don't have a question for you.

Mr. Adrian White: That's all right.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: What's your feeling when you hear Mr. White's testimony on the business side of Canada Post's service, and there is a gap between the two? There is a big gap.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: As far as costs being raised for business owners is concerned, I completely agree with him. It doesn't need to happen, because we're a profitable entity. We are meant to break even, but that has flown over the heads of many of us, apparently, and he's right that we are a public service and we should remain a public service. We are making money. During the last 22 years, there was one year in which we did not make money.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: There is a study that says you're not going to make money but lose money in the next 10 years—\$700 million.

That's what a study shows. Maybe we can believe that study or not.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: Forgive me for not believing the projections, because they were off by \$555 million in one year.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I understand.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to our final three interventions. They will be five minutes each, and we'll first go to Mr. Kmiec for five minutes, please.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming.

Mr. White, I'm so happy to see someone from the Chamber of Commerce. I used to work for the Calgary Chamber of Commerce as manager of policy, so I'm going to ask you a bunch of questions on the business side, because I'm curious.

Over the summer there was the potential for labour disruption on either side, either a lockout or a strike. Whatever it was, there were employer-employee disagreements. What was the impact on business here?

Mr. Adrian White: For our local community there was a lot of hesitation, a lot of paying attention to the day-to-day progress, or lack thereof, and looking every day for information on whether to take a chance by putting something into the system or to hold off and take on a little more expense with a courier.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: On that, what are the alternatives for local businesses if they have to send something such as a letter that's mission-critical to the business for it to get there?

Mr. Adrian White: It would be private courier systems service.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: How much more expensive is it?

Mr. Adrian White: It's about double.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It's about double right now.

Mr. Adrian White: Yes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Do you have any other choices, such as using secure email or some type of app that would allow you to do that?

Mr. Adrian White: Sure, you can do that. As I said earlier, some of our business owners are very technology savvy and would be able to tap into that for sure, and they did use that. Others did not.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Then my question is this: Canada Post right now enjoys a monopoly on the 500-gram letter delivery, but what if that were to end and perhaps there were more alternatives created out there?

For example, this committee has heard from Stéphane Ricoul about Relais Colis in France, a French company that was basically created to do that kind of business side of things, something that their postal service wasn't providing. The postal service there is privatized, so it's just an add-on to the service right now, but it's more business-oriented—B2B, or business to business, so to speak.

If that monopoly that Canada Post enjoys were ended, leaving Canada Post as it is but just ending the monopoly to allow for business people in places such as Cape Breton and region to perhaps develop other means of transmitting letters or very small documents like that, would that be something that businesses locally would be interested in?

Mr. Adrian White: I think that's an inevitable evolution that will happen anyway. Businesses will find alternative means to address that need.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: So they'll do it either way—

Mr. Adrian White: That's right.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: —although right now there's actually a monopoly on it: you're not allowed, under section 14 of the Canada Post Corporation Act.

Mr. Adrian White: Technology will come to find a way around it.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It will be like email, basically. Something will exist to get around it.

Mr. Adrian White: Yes, correct.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: How many businesses are members of your chamber of commerce?

Mr. Adrian White: There are around 400 here.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: How many businesses does your Nova Scotia chamber network include?

Mr. Adrian White: How many...?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Roughly, how many business members are there across all of Nova Scotia?

Mr. Adrian White: The Halifax chamber has about 1,700, and I believe the Annapolis Valley chamber, which is the second-largest, has around 500, but there are a lot more businesses in Nova Scotia. They are not all members of the chamber of commerce.

● (1845)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Right.

One thing that has been developing in Alberta through our chamber networks there is payment services, insurance services. The chambers are kind of pre-entrepreneurial. You are very connected to local business people and you try to give them a hand up and to figure things out.

We keep talking about postal banking and adding more services to Canada Post to sustain it financially. My colleague was alluding to the fact that there is a \$700-million shortfall expected by 2026, so this committee's goal is to find a means to offset that shortfall. The chamber network already exists, and it's a model that has worked for over a century. Why can't we let businesses basically solve their own issues? Do you have comments about that?

Mr. Adrian White: They will. They'll find a way. Businesses that you haven't even heard of today will come out of the woodwork to establish themselves and fill the void, if one is generated. If there is a cheaper approach, business will look for it and find it, and competitors will provide it. That's inevitable.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: My next question goes back to the labour disruption concept. If, for some reason, there was a labour disruption, either employer or employee, what would happen to businesses over a quarter or two quarters? Locally, you said, they would use courier services. How sustainable is that for local businesses? How long can they do it before they just can't do it anymore?

Mr. Adrian White: It would be a shame if that happened, because other postal systems around the world would be operating and Canada would not have one, so there would be a disadvantage to business. If all countries around the world didn't have one, that would be fine—that would be a level playing field—but for us not to have that service over a long period of time would definitely impact us on the cost side. Those costs would not be that easy to pass along to customers if we are operating in the global business community, as most of our members are, here in this community.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final intervenor will be Madame Ratansi.

You have five minutes, please.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you all for coming and giving your input.

I would like to ask Ms. MacEachern a question. You say, both of you, that there was labour peace for 15 years, before 2011. What happened in 2011?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: Stephen Harper decided he wanted to destroy all unions and public services in Canada.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay, fair enough. That's your opinion.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: I believe so.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: In 2011, a new management team came in, and you had problems with the new management team throughout that period. Is that correct?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: He was hired by Stephen Harper.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Could you please respond?

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: About the problems in 2011...?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Yes.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: As we were saying earlier, it has been a complete cut-off of communication. It's a one-way communiqué—ours going in this direction, with a closed door, and his coming this way, with a closed door.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Perhaps it was that the management was given directions. They are public servants and they were given directions.

Now we are being given different directions, and there is no privatization. There is a Canada Post charter, which says it has to be sustainable, and there is no privatization, no matter what anybody on the other side says. If we are to look at the complete picture.... We are here to get ideas, and you've given us ideas. I know that postal banking has succeeded in different parts of the world, in different iterations—i.e., it started off as a postal bank and then was privatized, or vice versa.

How do we move forward now? You've told us that they wasted \$2 billion on restructuring routes, that \$210 million has been spent on CMBs, and that a crisis has been created to create a void. You are saying there is a void. If you create a crisis, then you have a void.

Let's leave that aside and say we are moving forward. Would you work with management, if it is given a different direction?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: Absolutely. I don't see us not working with management if we're going to try to grow the corporation.

When you look at our labour unrest since January, the corporation was basically giving its work away. It was like McDonald's sending its customers over to Burger King. It was telling our customers not to come to the post office because it had a labour dispute going on.

The CEO of Canada Post is paid somewhere in the vicinity of \$500,000 and was being paid to basically destroy the corporation over the last 10 months.

• (1850)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: If there is such a toxic environment—

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: That's unreasonable.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: —is there going to be labour peace?

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: If they keep trying to take away the things we fought so hard for, the benefits and rights we enjoy today as working people in Canada working for the government as a public service, there will never be labour peace.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

Mr. White, your group has small and medium-sized enterprises, and you feel that Canada Post is moving into an e-commerce area, which is not keeping up with your 70-year-olds. Is it not accommodating you in any way? It is delivering mail, at the moment, to your businesses, isn't it? They are receiving their invoices and cheques. Is there anything you think your business owners are not receiving from Canada Post?

Mr. Adrian White: Not at this time, no. My only concern is the evolution of the change and how fast it might go.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay. You're saying change and evolution, and we need to evolve, because we are in the 21st century. There are suggestions here about retail banking, postal banking, and other venues to expand. As a small business, what would your premise be if you wanted to make it a continuous, growing business? How would you move forward to ensure that all your irritants were over?

Mr. Adrian White: Do you mean if I were running the post office?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Yes.

Mr. Adrian White: That's a....

The Chair: Please give a very short answer, which may be difficult with a question like that.

Mr. Adrian White: Well, if you—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: A creative answer.

Mr. Adrian White: A creative answer is that the cost of doing business in this country has to be the same as doing business globally in other countries. I completely understand the concerns my colleagues have brought forward about having a decent standard of living, a pension plan, and benefits. The fact is, though, that you're competing with parts of the world that don't provide that to the workforce, yet you're expected to be as cost-effective as they are. That's a difficult thing to achieve in this country.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: That part of the conversation we'll have to have later.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Ladies and gentlemen, that will bring this session to an end.

I want to make one comment, though, to both Mr. MacDonald and Ms. MacEachern. I've been struck over the last few weeks, as we've been conducting these consultations across Canada, that every CUPW presenter who has come to us has been a very long-term employee. I have a brother-in-law who is a letter carrier in Regina. He's been employed by Canada Post for well over 25 years. To me, it really speaks to the loyalty the workers have to the corporation, regardless of the disputes you may have from time to time or on an ongoing basis.

What I would ask you to do, if you could, is talk to your national president, Mr. Palecek. I'd be curious to know the average length of time your employees have served. What is the length of service? I would suspect that it's probably longer than at most corporations in Canada.

Mr. Gordon MacDonald: The average in Sydney is probably 35 years.

The Chair: That's amazing.

Ms. Kristen MacEachern: I believe that across Canada they figured it out to be about 27 years.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's very helpful.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for being here. Thank you for your perspectives and for your suggestions and recommendations. Should you, however, have additional information you think would benefit our committee members in our deliberations, I would

ask you to contact our clerk directly and provide that information to us, and that will be included in our final report.

● (1850)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1855)

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, we're back.

Welcome, gentlemen. I suspect you were here for a good portion of the last session, so you probably know how this works, but just to reiterate very quickly, I'll ask each of you to make a short five-minute opening statement. Following that, we will have a series of questions from our committee members. At the end of that session, we will be asking you, should you have additional information to present to our committee members, to please get that directly to our clerk.

I have Mr. Cormier first on my speakers list.

Mr. Cormier, the floor is yours for five minutes.

● (1900)

Mr. Lowell Cormier (Municipal Councillor, District 11, Cape Breton Regional Municipality): Thank you very much.

Good evening, everyone. It's a pleasure for me to be present this evening to address the committee regarding Canada Post door-to-door service.

I'm a councillor for District 11 in Cape Breton Regional Municipality. My district includes the former town of New Waterford and surrounding areas of Lingan, New Victoria, Scotchtown, and River Ryan.

On March 18, 2014, CBRM council is on record, through a motion of council, as supporting the maintenance of door-to-door service in Canada. I supported this motion at the time and have become more hardened in my support since that time.

As some of you may be aware, there's a municipal election happening in CBRM. I'm busy knocking on doors, and I can't help but notice the high number of senior citizens and residents with disabilities. I'm going to be repetitive in my presentation, realizing that you will have heard the very same arguments many times during your deliberations. These scenarios would probably be the same whether they take place in Burnaby, B.C., Etobicoke, Ontario, St. John's, Newfoundland, or New Waterford, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

Removing door-to-door delivery will pose a great hardship to the residents of my district. The distance to the proposed community mailboxes will be particularly burdensome to our aging demographic, who are struggling as it is to remain in their own homes. Residents with mobility issues will become more dependent on others to get their mail, and often that support is not available to them. Our harsh winters make footing dangerous, and problems with lighting and snow removal will create further hardship for our residents. Over the past four years, I've received numerous calls for snow removal and lighting around existing community mailboxes in the suburban areas of our district.

As most of you would be aware, the unemployment rate in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality is in the high teens, well above the national average. It's a very disturbing issue, to say the least. Losing well-paying postal jobs will only increase those numbers.

Our door-to-door letter carriers do a fantastic job in all kinds of trying weather. They're also a great safeguard or security blanket to many of our residents who are living alone and who rarely have regular visitors. Cape Bretoners care for one another, none more so than our letter carriers.

In closing, I want to thank you for listening to me and taking the time to go across the country getting feedback from Canadians of all walks of life. Door-to-door delivery is part of the fabric that makes Canada the country that it is. Please don't alter this wonderful and necessary service. Our citizens are counting on you.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Clarke, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Cecil Clarke (President, Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities): Thank you.

Good evening. I'm here in my capacity as president of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, but I also serve as mayor of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, so I want to welcome all members of the standing committee and staff and those who have come to present to this deliberation. On behalf of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, I want to thank the standing committee for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today on important issues concerning Canada Post.

I would note that all 50 municipalities within the province of Nova Scotia are members of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities. In Nova Scotia, municipalities recognize the importance of maintaining a strong national postal service in both our urban and our rural communities. At the same time, given the decline in mail delivery, we recognize the status quo is no longer an option. That said, the UNSM favours an alternate-day delivery approach as a cost-saving measure, rather than continuing with the expansion of the community mailbox system.

The UNSM supports the view that rural postal service is an integral part of Canada's mail service. To this end, in 2012 the organization passed a resolution requesting that Canada Post halt the further erosion of rural mail delivery. Similar to the position of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the UNSM is encouraging the federal government to continue to enforce the moratorium on rural post office closures and to maintain service standards for both postal delivery and post office accessibility.

Here in Nova Scotia we're hearing from seniors who have to drive 20 kilometres one way to pick up their mail at a community mailbox. This location is simply too far from houses and businesses. A number of safety issues associated with the location of the community mailboxes have also come to our attention. These include poor lighting conditions, lack of snow clearing and litter pickup, and lack of space for a vehicle to pull over to the side of the road for entry and exit purposes.

In some cases, Canada Post ignored municipal rights of way when locating the community mailboxes, even after municipalities consulted with the corporation.

Maintenance concerns have also been raised, in particular the freezing of mailboxes in either a closed position, where mail is difficult to access, or in an open position where mail is exposed to potential theft.

While Canada Post has indicated its commitment to meaningful consultation with municipalities, the consultation among various municipalities in Nova Scotia is inconsistent. Because not all municipalities are the same, different levels and types of consultation may be required. For example, land use planning practices may be more stringent in some municipalities when compared to others.

Where community mailboxes are already in place, or if new ones are created, the cost to maintain them should be borne by Canada Post, or alternatively, Canada Post should adequately compensate municipalities to provide that service.

Consultation does not imply a meeting in which Canada Post hears municipal concerns but does not take the appropriate steps to respond. Municipalities are the order of government closest to the people. We are in constant touch with the residents in our communities. It is in Canada Post's best interest to properly consult with us so that we can outline relevant municipal bylaws and policies and residents' concerns.

I did want to inform the standing committee that Canada Post is providing a new service to municipalities in Nova Scotia, an e-billing project with the Property Valuation Services Corporation. UNSM congratulates the organization on its commitment to providing good value and support for this project.

To reiterate, municipalities in Nova Scotia consider mail delivery an essential service in our urban and rural communities. Given Canada Post's declining revenues, the UNSM supports switching to an alternate-day delivery model rather than the creation of more community mailboxes.

Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today, and I reiterate the welcome to this beautiful island.

• (1905)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I know I can speak on behalf of our entire committee when I say that it truly is a beautiful part of the world, and we very much appreciate your kind wishes.

Our first intervenor, for seven minutes, will be Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you both for coming to present to the committee tonight. It is wonderful to hear from municipal leaders, especially someone like Mr. Clarke, who has represented a broad variety of municipalities across all the members of the union of municipalities of Nova Scotia.

We're looking at the future of Canada Post and its need to change over time due to an average decline in Lettermail volumes of 5% or 6% every year over the last five years at least. As we try to deal with this the decline in usage of that service and the decline in revenues, we have to come up with creative solutions to manage that change appropriately.

A question that we've been asking most of the people who come before the committee is this: among the various changes that are proposed to address the financial gap between what the corporation requires and what it receives from services, would either of you or the groups you represent support some type of direct government subsidy for Canada Post if it's unable to achieve its break-even point or unable to earn a profit in any given year?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: Yes. I'm a municipal councillor, and I represent about 10,000 people. I would think they would go along with a government subsidy if they were able to save their door-to-door delivery. I know that Cecil, on behalf of UNSM, has talked about alternate days of delivery. I'm not sure if people want that, but if that's what it has to be in order to be viable, then I guess we could be going there. I think that if our residents lose door-to-door delivery, it will be tragic, because a lot of them don't even have cars. A lot of them don't have a visitor who comes to see them regularly, and they rely on the mailman to get their mail and also to check on them every now and then. If a subsidy was in order and was necessary because the corporation couldn't become viable, then I would support that. I also think most of our residents also would, because it's a service that is crucial and it's part of our fabric, as I alluded to before.

• (1910)

Mr. Cecil Clarke: I would like to add to that.

When you look at what governments do, you see that we're here to facilitate and provide public service. Getting the people to and from places is what we do in transportation, and governments have to be there to invest in that process to move things. If it's a highway, then we have investments we make for the public good. When it comes to the mail service, is it in the public good? The question needs to be reversed sometimes. Is this in the public good? Is it in the interest of the national fabric of our country and the citizens of this country to be connected? In such a vast country as Canada, the economics are always going to be challenging, especially in rural areas and in places like aging provinces, such as the Atlantic provinces.

This is not only an issue of Cape Breton; it's also a dilemma outside of urban cores. The question becomes whether it is in the public good to provide a national postal service in the same way as it is in the public good to provide a national transportation network. You don't stop the highway system in Saskatchewan because the cost per mile there doesn't provide a greater return for the trucking industry. You're going through Saskatchewan because it's connecting provinces, people, and economies. I look at the public good being served, and if it is the priority of governments, then the question for debate for parliamentarians should be about how much the public good is valued and about the gap that we have to close.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I will say that since the creation of the crown corporation and over the last 35 years, we've been fortunate to receive that public good at no cost to taxpayers because it's been operating either at a profit or at a break-even point for almost every one of those years, or with small losses.

We have seen a gap in the pension liabilities. We do need to manage this change, and the scope and magnitude of the problem seem to be growing.

When it comes to new opportunities for services in your region, we heard from the previous presenters that there are slightly over 50 post offices on the island of Cape Breton, which I'm assuming has a population of around 100,000 people. That seems like a large number of postal outlets. What types of services should be provided at those outlets so they can have the hours of operation and the types and levels of service people in urban centres who have access to their post at a Shoppers Drug Mart are able to enjoy?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: There are about 138,000 people on the island, 100,000 within the Cape Breton region municipality. It comes back to whether you penalize someone living in a rural community that sustains the tourism industry that people love to come and be part of, because of the geographic location, or whether you support them.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I'm not saying to close it. What additional services might we be able to provide to allow these post offices to be more self-sustaining?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: From a retail point of view, I know from going to my own postbox—I don't have home delivery and I go to the post office because I choose to have a postbox—it's a way to interact because of transactions I do as an individual. If there are other services that add value to citizens in rural areas, then we would welcome looking at those things. I know the employees want to add value and bring value when they go to work. No one wants to sit at a postal station doing nothing. That's not an engaging career. They want to serve. It's about service.

Mr. Nick Whalen: We've heard a lot of proposals for postal banking. As a municipal leader, are you in favour of that?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: The Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities at this point has not discussed or been asked to discuss this matter. I can take that back to the membership for discussion. I won't speculate on what my colleagues would want to bring forward, but our annual meeting is in November. These types of things do get raised at that level.

Suffice it to say that I think everyone is open-minded to whatever ideas the corporation can present that would add value. We also know how many people get assistance at a post office with their passport applications and receive that level of front-line service to help them better navigate the system. There's an example of a service that has real value. More and more Canadians have to have a passport and/or renew one, and people do not object to having that local access and not have to travel, in this case, to Halifax to have in-person service. Are those things that can be transferred to Canada Post through the other aspects of government delivery?

• (1915)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr McCauley, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for hosting us. One of our caucus colleagues, Lisa Raitt, who is from Cape Breton, is eloquent on the beauty of the area. She's certainly very right. It's wonderful to be back here after being away for a long time.

Mr. Cormier, you commented on going door to door and on feedback from your constituents, which is wonderful. We do the same thing. Do you get a sense that they're aware that Canada Post, for those who have community mailboxes, will collect the mail for those who have mobility issues and will deliver once a week to a residence?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I didn't pick that up from anybody. Maybe they're aware of it, but they weren't articulating that to me. That's interesting.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: We've been chatting with a lot of municipalities about consultations. We heard one mayor—I won't say where—who commented that he refused to consult because it wasn't his opinion that Canada Post should be making changes. Then we hear from seniors' groups that they want to have more input.

Do you think the best way to consult on changes with Canada Post is to do it at the municipal level, because you are closest to the grassroots? The reason I ask is that it's impossible to consult every single group. Is it best to go through the urban municipality level for any changes, etc.? Not that I want to download more burden on you.

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I think it's an excellent avenue, because we're the closest to it. If you couldn't consult with every municipality, you could at least do it with the major groups like the UNSM. You could hit the umbrella groups who represent the municipalities. I know our citizens would become very engaged in that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: So would service groups and seniors' groups.

Mr. Clarke, you mentioned about Canada Post consulting, but then items that municipalities requested were not followed. Were any items that you had suggested or requested followed, or is there a sense that it was just a complete roadblock to your reasonable suggestions?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: With regard to inconsistency, an urban-intense area like Halifax has much more direct connectivity and daily contact compared with other areas of the province, where municipalities felt they were not as connected. The one thing that municipal governments do have, which is no different from the structure of this consultation, is very defined, consistent public participation processes.

Using municipal units for public feedback to parliamentary committees or to the corporation allows for a respectful forum and exchange of information and objectivity in presenting that information. I believe municipalities definitely desire to be engaged and be constructive and to add value. Again the challenge is knowing that it's going to have an effect.

As an example, as mayors, every time there is a reduction of service or a closure of a post office, we receive the obligatory notification from Canada Post. I would circulate that to my colleagues. In some cases, we brought it to the council chamber and then went through the process of writing back with some

objections, but it really is a pro forma process: we know we're going to receive it and we know that nothing is really going to happen. It's just going through the process for notification. That has been consistent over a long period of time.

Again, if there is a desire to have an established public participation process through municipalities, they would welcome that opportunity to provide objective, fact-based, and hopefully reliable information in a constructive manner.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Cormier, what's the ratio between community mailbox and door to door?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I would be guessing.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: A ballpark figure is fine.

Mr. Lowell Cormier: Out of about 10,000 residents and 4,000 houses, maybe 10% would be mailboxes. We're mostly door to door.

• (1920)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay. Do you know in the general area of Cape Breton?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: I wouldn't have that statistic. I would have to rely on Canada Post officials to give that information. I know the location issue is a real matter of concern, especially when it's on, in some cases, highway roads rather than just a rural or suburban road, and there are safety concerns. There's also the sighting and the maintenance.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: There's certainly an opportunity to get everyone more involved.

I was curious about your level of participation, because this mayor said, "I don't want it, so we're not going to chat", and I said he was hurting his constituents.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: To the point you made to Councillor Cormier—an observation that the corporation would be willing to provide door-to-door delivery in an aging demographic—quite frankly, look at the number of disabled people. You're going to have a high request factor there. In an urban setting, those are challenges.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: That's fair, and that's what has to be done.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: Right, but it depends on the community's needs. I don't think an application...I really don't believe comparing us to what the delivery in Nunavut is going to be is a good thing. What I would look at is that in Nova Scotia, we can provide context of what Nova Scotians would be interested in.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Okay, thanks.

You brought up a good point. There are very clearly two different worlds there. There are the big cities where people think the post office is a Shoppers Drug Mart and there are rural areas, where it's very different.

Very briefly, because we're almost out of time, you talked about the subsidy and what people want. We're seeing everywhere people want as many services as they can get—you're not alone in that—but the survey that's been done shows very clearly that Canadians don't want to pay higher taxes and also don't want to pay for higher-cost stamps. Do you think your constituents would support paying higher taxes to support...?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I think you're 100% right.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: What I'm getting at is there is no free lunch.

Mr. Lowell Cormier: People don't want to pay higher taxes. It would be the question of how much for what service.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Duvall, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for coming. You do have a beautiful province here. It's gorgeous.

On the consulting part, did any of your municipalities consult with Canada Post, and were your residents consulted, or was there just a letter, a question and answer, and please mail it in?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I'm not aware of any consultation. Maybe Cecil is, but I'm not aware of any consultation with Canada Post.

Mr. Scott Duvall: I find that interesting.

In Hamilton, where I'm from, Canada Post went on the public record and said it was consulting with people across Canada when they were bringing in the CMBs. I know that on the exact day that they consulted me, it wasn't a consultation; it was information about what it was doing in my riding when I was a city councillor. That's the consultation we had.

The rest of it was just getting letters to my residents, asking them to fill them out. I mailed mine in that day, and Canada Post came to my office and told me what it was going to do. That was the consultation. It was more of a dictatorship. I will just leave it at that.

You picked up on people with mobility issues. According to the task force report, several associations representing people with reduced mobility do not believe that a person should have to provide proof of eligibility to continue their home mail delivery. Do you feel that persons with a mobility impairment seeking to maintain home delivery of mail service should be required to provide proof of eligibility? If so, and if there's a cost, who should pick up that cost?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I think the question you're asking is whether disabled people who want to continue to have home delivery should have to validate that they are disabled. Was that the first part of the question?

Mr. Scott Duvall: Right.

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I can't see any reason why, if I were disabled, I wouldn't want to validate that, if it would enable me to receive home delivery.

My hearing is not great. What was the second part of the question?

• (1925)

Mr. Scott Duvall: The second part was about the cost to validate it. When you make the application and there is an administration fee of \$75 or \$100, or maybe the doctor would charge that, who should be picking up that cost?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: Personally, I think the person who's disabled probably has enough challenges without having to pick up the cost for validating that they're disabled.

The Chair: Mr. Clarke, what are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: Look, because we're in the municipal process, we're knocking on doors. Whether we like it not, there are more walkers coming to doors. There's more "Hang on a minute, let me get to the door." There are more people trying to find ways....

We're trying to find ways. We're investing in a Handi-Trans service. We're working with our public transit buses. We're trying to buy new buses by working with federal-provincial programs so that we can connect people better for their services so they can go out and do these things. We're working with private taxi companies for accessible vans to allow people to be more connected.

There's a cost to that, but there's a public benefit because of it. When you look at the real crux to this issue, it's what the Government of Canada's view is of postal delivery. What value does it have to Canadians? If it has value, then what is the cost to maintain a consistent and valuable service that has merit in meeting its objectives?

In a country like Canada, in a province like Nova Scotia, this is going to be a challenge. If you ask people to validate what their issues are and bring in a doctor's note, I can tell you right now that you're going to be adding more bureaucrats to the process. You're not going to save a single dollar. The cost of an application is going to be far outweighed by the cost of the public administration process.

Mr. Scott Duvall: My next question leads into that.

Canada Post has made the decision, and now we're going through the details of whether to continue with door-to-door service. If it doesn't continue and it goes to community mailboxes, Canada Post has a service that they provide. They charge you on the stamp, and they go through all their financial liabilities.

However, this is now putting some onus on the municipalities. Canada Post is now putting their mailboxes on the road allowance, which is not adequate for people with mobility devices. There could be a shortage of parking in that area, and parking spots may need to be taken away because people have to have access to the mailboxes. There's the cost for the no-stopping signs or the no-parking signs. There are the problems with the sidewalks, garbage, graffiti, lighting.

Who should be picking up that extra cost, which wasn't in the original plan, but now Canada Post has changed that plan?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: It shouldn't be the municipalities. We're challenged enough as it is in trying to provide infrastructure.

Without any consultation, they put mailboxes at the end of Mills Drive in Lingan. I was inundated with requests for lighting, which we hadn't budgeted for. It was a big hardship and it was very stressful for me to be dealing with these people requesting lighting from the municipality—and for good reason, because it was a nightmare there. It was really dark and there wasn't a lot of street lighting anyway.

We did make some allowances, because the road was under-served anyway and at every second pole there is supposed to be a light. I made some creative gestures to our public works department and they accommodated this mailbox, but it could be a nightmare if this continues.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ayoub, you have seven minutes.

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

Gentlemen, thank you for having us in your beautiful area. I already feel a connection with you, because I was a municipal councillor for ten years, and a mayor for six years in the Montreal region. I am now the federal member for that region.

I have also lost home mail delivery. My city was one of the five first cities in Canada to lose door-to-door delivery. In my region, 30% to 40% of residences already had community mailboxes. The others still had home delivery.

There is an election here. You are going door to door. This is a very good opportunity to meet with electors.

We hear a lot from people who are unhappy with change. Earlier, Mr. Clarke, you said that the status quo did not seem to be possible, despite the wish to maintain the service. No one gets up in the morning thinking that they will be losing a service, especially not the municipalities, because we know that everything lands on their doorstep eventually. I understand that if door-to-door service or post offices are lost, the municipality receives the calls, the mayor receives the calls, and councillors are put in the hot seat.

Mr. Clarke, let's take you as an example. You have a mailbox. How many times a week do you go to your mailbox?

● (1930)

[*English*]

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I would go to the post office maybe once every two weeks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Do you receive your mail at home, Mr. Cormier?

[*English*]

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I receive home delivery, but there is a post office in my town.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I was looking for the answer because Mr. Clarke said he has a postbox.

Mr. Clarke, would you comment?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: I would be frequent yet infrequent, because of my schedule. The former presenter gives me my mail most of the time. That's when I go into the post office. My situation is a lot different from the average person's.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I receive my mail in a community mailbox and I go there once a week. I might even go once every two weeks if I'm not expecting anything in particular, aside from a few bills that are not delivered electronically.

We have seen a large drop in the volume of paper letters being delivered. We hear that we have to evolve and find solutions.

We hear about the silent majority. Is there a silent majority? In my neck of the woods, in my region, when people lost the service, they were not happy. Now that the service has been lost, I'm hearing

something different. People tell me that after all, it is not such a big change. I am setting aside seniors and mobility-impaired persons, as for them the situation is different. They have a need and we must meet it, perhaps in a different way.

Do you think that the silent majority would accept new, different, door-to-door delivery services?

[*English*]

Mr. Lowell Cormier: If you're talking about the silent majority, I'm not quite sure they would. I'm only speculating, though. How would I know? I don't think they want to lose the service.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: I know on behalf of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities that the answer would be no, they wouldn't want to lose that service.

I'm a bit of an anomaly, because for 16 years I've chosen to pay to have a postal box, so I don't mind. I make that choice to invest in that flexibility. Other people don't have this need. I'm very fortunate to be able to make that choice versus other people who need the day-to-day service.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Let me speak about my personal experience. When we lost home mail delivery, in a way we also lost the post office, even though we had been guaranteed that we would not lose it. That was already unpleasant.

We even considered installing the post office at city hall or in the library. We wanted to make room for it somewhere. We did not want to lose it.

In your opinion, would solutions such as relocating the post office and other services at city hall, the public library or other municipal facilities be viable solutions in Cape Breton municipalities?

● (1935)

[*English*]

Mr. Cecil Clarke: When you look at the retail outlets in the community of North Sydney, you see that Shoppers Drug Mart is literally a few hundred feet away from the post office, so two alternate elements are in place.

When you talk about locations and you talk to workers within the postal service, it's not so much geographical. It's about being there to provide a service. Is it about these opportunities that public servants are providing being contracted out, versus where they would provide it? There would be efficiencies in having it in a town hall in a smaller municipality, but what I've heard is that people want the service and the jobs. That's of value.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: How much time do I have? I have one or two more questions.

The Chair: You can perhaps ask just one.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: It's going very fast.

We heard snow removal is your responsibility. In my experience, it is not the responsibility of a town. Canada Post was supposed to pay for it and was responsible for outsourcing it or for whatever solution they managed to find. Is it the same case here?

The Chair: Reply with very short answers, if you could, please.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: We don't have a provision for snow clearance.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Did they ask you to do it?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: Not to my knowledge.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going into our final two interventions, which will be five minutes each.

Mr. Kmiec, you're up first.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you, gentlemen, for coming in. I hope you hit lots of doors. I knocked on probably about 14,000 or 16,000 doors last election, so I know how it goes. I used up a perfectly good pair of shoes as well.

Mr. Clarke, about the 20-year moratorium on the closure or franchising of rural post offices, what's happened over the past 20 years? I go into this subject because according to reports that we've just seen on the financial situation of Canada Post, over the next few years, until 2026, there will be a shortfall of \$700 million. We have two options. It's either find new lines of services that Canada Post could get into—my preference is at minimal cost with the most uplift in revenue—or find a means of saving money somewhere.

We've repeatedly heard loud and clear in different communities that rural post offices are important to the local community. I understand that, but some local communities that are now considered rural include Brampton, Saskatoon, and Halifax. I think it would shock most people in a small community that Halifax or Brampton is considered rural.

Would your union of municipalities think it would be a good idea to move to a franchising model for some of these corporate post offices, and then take these cost savings and put them into maintaining rural post offices? Right now there are about 3,600, some of them in true rural communities, not in these areas that have grown to become urban.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: Each level of government has a general area of specialty and an understanding of where things can be done. As an example, the regional municipality here is now just in its 21st year; it was eight former municipal units that were forced together into one body, and there are three operation divisions. As an example, for snow clearing, two of those divisions have public works employees doing it. The one we're in right now has contracting companies doing it. Contracting service is actually not efficient, and we're looking at public provision of the service, so sometimes public employees provide greater value for money. We've actually contracted out in Sydney because that's the way it was, and the service levels are down compared to the other areas. You can see in a snowstorm that the east and north divisions have better service delivery just from the effectiveness of government being able to do something better. Therefore, I think we have to talk about whether government is in the business of providing a postal service or whether it is no longer a public service.

I fully agree with other lines of business, if you can find revenue streams. We all know that Canada Post is very efficient and very good at moving parcels effectively. We all know mail volume is down for the traditional letter coming in the mail. I mean, I don't race to my mailbox to look for a letter, but I do go to it for goods and transactions that are about living your life.

I guess the question really is at the federal level. The discussion among your colleagues needs to be about what postal service is. Is it more effectively done at one level or another? Here, as I say, we have to weigh out what public servants do better, and in the case of public works, they actually do baseline delivery better than the contracting community. When it comes to other projects, the contracting community is very effective at doing some of the work that we can't do in-house.

I just don't want to speculate on the federal jurisdictions.

● (1940)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: What I'm getting at is this. A place like Halifax isn't considered rural, but your view is that it's worth maintaining the rural post offices in urban Halifax instead of changing to a franchising model whereby they would be at the local Sobeys or grocery store or Shoppers Drug Mart and then taking those savings and moving them in order to sustain rural post offices in Cape Breton.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: I think, in fairness, what the UNSM would do would be to have a discussion and have Halifax weigh in on what its interests are versus ours within the CBRM.

There are two urban centres in the province only, two cities. The 50 municipalities are trying to work together to have a collaboration in consistency, so I would defer to the Halifax council for what its opinion would be on that. I know our opinion here is based on a different reality from theirs, and it's reflected in the UNSM's position.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Cormier, can I get your thoughts on how you would...?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: It would be very easy for me to sell out Halifax and tell you to do that, but that wouldn't be fair. I agree with Cecil's idea of consulting Halifax about its issues.

I understand where you're going—franchise in Halifax and typical Halifax-population-type cities and use the savings to help rural areas like Cape Breton—but I'd have to hear a lot more discussion and hear what the Halifaxans have to say about that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you very much. I'll ask some questions and you could give me the answers.

Mr. Clarke, you say you represent 50 municipalities. What is the approximate size of each municipality, say, in terms of people? Do you have any idea?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: I'll start my list from A to—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: No, no, no.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: I'll end up in Yarmouth, but—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Is it 1,000, 5,000?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: It can be all over the map.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: In fact, this is a dilemma we're going through. This was, as I said, eight former municipal units. Halifax was merging into a regional municipality. Queen's County volunteered to come together. The province is going through a process. We've lost. We were 54 municipalities a couple of years ago, but we're down to 50.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: There are other realities coming to bear, and regional government is going to be a new reality, because municipal units are not sustainable. As governments at the municipal level, there is no average municipal size—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay, fair enough.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: —but everyone's being stressed to get the job done.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: The reason I asked was that I wanted to know if the post office acted as a hub for some of your remote areas. Does the post office act as a hub in terms of people gathering there?

Mr. Cormier, you said you go to the post office once in two weeks. Did you go to meet people, or did you want to canvass there? What is it that you used the post office for?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I certainly didn't go to canvass there, because there wouldn't be very many people there.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

Mr. Lowell Cormier: Where I'm living downtown in Waterford, the post office wouldn't be considered a hub for social engagement, but I would dare say that in certain rural communities, it certainly is. In Gabarus or New Victoria or a small rural setting, I think people do gather at post offices. That's just an opinion.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: They do. In the communities of Donkin, Port Morien, or Gabarus—I've been in them—you stop in the post office to say hello because then the community will know that you're there when you're campaigning. People do use that as their hub. In fact, at a veteran's door, he goes, "Okay, I'm talking you up down at the post office." Everyone's coming and going. That's where the focal point is. That's where everyone's mailboxes are in those communities.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: You talked about the rural moratorium stay in place and you talked about unemployment. Do you know how many postal workers there are within your municipalities? Do you have any idea?

Mr. Lowell Cormier: I wouldn't have that—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay. That's not a problem. The reason I ask is they're well-paid jobs. Somebody suggested that to be competitive with the world, you could pay a rupee, probably, to the postal worker, but this is Canada and the cost of living is totally different, so it would be rather like comparing apples to bananas, and it would create a real mess.

I guess for you the rural moratorium is an important aspect, because the jobs stay. They are not sent off to Shoppers Drug Mart or whatever.

Mr. Cecil Clarke: Well, when I look at the public service aspect, I get a lot of sensitive information that comes into my mailbox, and I know a lot of other people who are making transactions. The difference with contracting out to retail is it's not just about paying for a service. You're also paying for confidentiality. You're paying for legal preservation. I saw two voters' cards in two voters' envelopes with their PINs on them that were improperly placed on a mailbox in a seniors' apartment, and the first thing you want to do is return them to the post office, but it's actually breaking the law to even touch them.

These employees are also entrusted. It's a position of trust as well, because you're dealing with confidential material that should be protected and legally is protected, so when you want to talk about farming that out, are you getting people who understand the legal and fiduciary obligations that come with those roles, obligations that a public employee would be held to?

● (1945)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: The last question I have has to do with when they instituted the CMBs in your municipalities. Did they consult you, number one? Number two—I think it was Mr. Ayoub's question—how much does it cost to clear the snow from around the CMBs? If there's a community mailbox, there must be snow gathering. It's your job to clear off the sidewalks, etc. Do you have any costs on that?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: The only clearing would be done in a public way. They wouldn't go into anything that would be off a public roadway or a public sidewalk.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Were you consulted when these boxes were put in?

Mr. Cecil Clarke: With the CMBs, the inconsistency is the aspect that the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities has mentioned. In some cases they have been satisfied with the level of consultation and in other cases they haven't been. Oftentimes, when they haven't been, it's been reflective of all the problems of ice buildup and other congestion that is not conducive to a safe operating environment for postal delivery and gathering.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you.

The Chair: Gentlemen, thank you both for being here. I appreciate the time you've taken out of your day to be with us.

Should you have any additional information that you wish to present for the benefit of this committee, please send it directly to our clerk.

In closing, I would like to say that everyone around this table, from an elected officials standpoint, knows what you're going through in the middle of a campaign, so in a very non-partisan manner, we wish you both the best of luck.

Mr. Lowell Cormier: Thank you very much. Thanks for the opportunity.

The Chair: You're welcome.

This meeting is adjourned.

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