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Chair

Mr. Tom Lukiwski

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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•(1330)

[English]

Chief Jim Bear: Not at the current one.

The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)): I will call the meeting to order, it being 1:30. I understand that Ashleigh Shultz-Bear is going to be joining us, hopefully. If she does show up, we'll just incorporate her into the proceedings.

First, Chief Bear, thank you very much for the opportunity to visit you and your community. Thank you for all the participation and help, and for giving us, hopefully, some very useful information that will assist us in our deliberations.

Chief Bear, the procedure we follow here is fairly simple. We will ask all of our witnesses to give a brief opening statement—hopefully, five minutes or less. That will be followed by questions and answers by all committee members. The intent of this meeting is to try to get suggestions and recommendations as to the future of Canada Post, and how it can better serve your community, and some ideas that you may have for ongoing success for the corporation.

With that very brief opening, Chief Bear, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Chief Jim Bear (Chief and Council, Brokenhead Ojibway Nation): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and fellow sister and brother panel members. I would like to welcome you to the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation, Treaty No. 1. I'd like to thank you for taking your time to come to the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation.

Our nation has been using Canada Post services for many years. Unfortunately, the hours have been restricted from nine o'clock in the morning until noon, which provides minimal access to the individual mailboxes. If our members are not able to access the services, we're forced to drive a half-hour away to access postal services, just south in Selkirk.

Canada Post services are currently being provided in a building the size of a small storage shed, just down the street. This infrastructure has created a very limited and confined way of providing postal services to BON. However, the outlet is moving to our new BON grocery store, which is next door here. We understand hours of operation for the postal outlet will, unfortunately, stay the same. We feel that should be reviewed.

Mailbox holders will have access to their mailboxes during store business hours from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. In negotiating the lease in the grocery store for the local postal outlet, very little information has been provided in terms of the types of postal services that will be

provided. Information sharing is key in order to maximize services. It seems like Canada Post operates in isolation of the community it is servicing. This current relationship can obviously be improved upon.

BON does not maintain an ongoing dialogue with Canada Post in terms of areas such as employment equity opportunities. BON would benefit from this information, as we have many members who also reside off our main nation land here and we share information with them through our website, social media, and face to face where possible.

The stats on indigenous peoples are alarmingly high when it comes to health concerns and social factors such as diabetes, intergenerational impacts from residential schools and so forth, and retention rates due to our lack of sense of belonging in mainstream sectors. Does Canada Post consider our actual health and social demographics in terms of accommodating and maintaining indigenous participation within the postal services system?

BON is also not aware of the environmental approach to postal service delivery, and would appreciate having this kind of information in the wake of the growing daily concerns regarding our home and external environments.

Meegwetch. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Bear.

Now we have Ms. Chief for five minutes.

Ms. Debbie Chief (Director of Health, Medical Clinic/Pharmacy, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Deborah Chief. I'm the health director for Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. I'm presenting on behalf of the people of the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation in regard to Canada Post and having it moved to our grocery store building.

I'm just going to tell you a little bit about the community. Brokenhead is an Ojibway First Nation community of about 700 people who reside in Treaty 1 territory. Brokenhead nation 4 extends north to the shores of Lake Winnipeg. It includes part of Netley Creek. The Brokenhead River runs through the core area of the community. Highway 59 crosses through the northeast section of the reserve. To the south is Winnipeg, which is 82 kilometres away, and to the north is Grand Beach, Patricia Beach, and Victoria Beach. Our economic base is agriculture and our local businesses. The total population is 1,838, with 776 people living in the community and about 1,062 living off-reserve.

I've spoken to several people, and the major reason for the move is accessibility, being able to receive their mail. Currently the hours, as Chief Bear had mentioned, are only from 9:00 to 12:00. That's not enough time for everyone to get to the post office. Another reason is that people who work outside of the community cannot get their mail in that short time frame.

If the post office is located in the grocery store, then they have access any time the store is open, which is 9:00 to 8:00 Monday to Saturday, and 10:00 to 6:00 on Sunday. It will act as a one-stop-shop where they can pick up their groceries, pharmacy, and mail all at the same time. We'll soon have medical doctors working out of our medical clinic.

The majority of the people I've spoken are in agreement on moving the post office to the grocery store. They said they were happy because they can get their mail every day if they want to. They feel it's more convenient for them and more accessible. The current post office building is very small. It's not very secure. In terms of temperature, it's not warm in the winter and it's very hot in the summer. The postmaster will also enjoy the space, the warmth, and the safety of the new building.

With that, that's my report. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Shultz-Bear, we're asking you to make a brief opening statement, perhaps five minutes or less. Then we will follow with questions and answers from all of our committee members.

Over to you for your statement, please.

Ms. Ashleigh Shultz-Bear (Manager, Entertainment Center, As an Individual): I work at the Entertainment Center in Brokenhead. It's in the same parking lot as the post office. We use the post office a lot. We need to get money orders done, and I can't drive all the way to town to the bank to get them, so we use the post office daily. We also have to pick up cheques at the bank office and then rush them to the post office before 12 o'clock. I think it would be better if it were moved over here so we had more time. A lot of people have to go there before lunch because they're closed at 12:00.

That's pretty much it.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We'll start our line of questioning from Ms. Shanahan, for seven minutes, please.

● (1335)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you all for joining us here this morning, and for receiving us here.

It sounds like the thing that's happening right now is this move from the current location to the store location. We've been hearing testimony from different communities about how some like to keep that postal location. For some, where they have a lot of services there, it becomes like a community hub. You're sharing with us that, actually, the preference is that it goes to the grocery store location, which is open 8:00 to 8:00. What strikes me about that is everyone has a different preference, every community has different needs.

Do you feel that you were consulted about the move before it happened? If so, how did that proceed? Chief, I think you mentioned there's still not a lot of communication about which services are going to be delivered out of that postal outlet.

Chief Jim Bear: Yes, that's true. We have a number of senior managers in the community. Our director of operations unfortunately isn't here, but she brought it up with the senior managers. They reached out into the community. Deborah has done the same thing. The majority of feedback we're receiving is on improved services, a better location, just more convenience.

I was just over at the South Beach Casino, and one of the individuals told me that by the time he gets off work, if he has to go to Selkirk to pick up whatever, by the time he wants to do his postal-related services he's unable to. He's looking for improved hours as well.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: What I'm curious about, too, is that it seems to be a positive move. Ms. Shultz-Bear, you talked about the fact that you're doing daily business at the current location, and that it is a great inconvenience having to get there before noon and so on. Had this been voiced before? Was Canada Post receptive to the limitations in service? What took this change now to the grocery store location?

Ms. Ashleigh Shultz-Bear: I'm not sure. I just heard about it recently. The post office lady, Olive, was telling me that they were thinking of switching. She asked about putting it in the Entertainment Center, too, but individuals have to be 18 years old to be in there, so I said it wasn't a good idea.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Oh, so that's it. You couldn't send your kids to go get stamps. Okay, understood.

Ms. Chief.

Ms. Debbie Chief: I'm not aware of any conversations with Canada Post prior to...going to them and saying this is not acceptable. I know there were some discussions when they constructed the building, and that's a few years back.

Chief Jim Bear: Originally it was in a worse location as well: it was about two miles off the main highway here. That was inconvenient. We're always trying to make improvements. Whenever we do things here, we always try to present them to the community. We'll be having another community session coming up on the 26th. We always put things out for our people. We also do surveys. We don't come up with these things in isolation of our community members.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Very good.

The purpose of our committee here, of course, is we're trying to get ideas about Canada Post going forward. We're asking Canadians how they feel about Canada Post. Is it important to their community? Is it an essential public service? Could it be run as simply a private business?

Could you give me your thoughts on that?

Chief Jim Bear: Certainly. We would like to have those kinds of more detailed negotiations. If it is privatized, what does that mean? You're going to have to look at the cost factors, how long will you have these services provided. Yes, if we had access to a lot of information, then we could look at more options. Until then, I can't really say. All we are trying to do right now is to improve services in any manner that we can.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay.

Ms. Chief.

● (1340)

Ms. Debbie Chief: It's definitely an essential service. Older people, especially, still depend on that way of communication and for getting their bills and cheques, whether old age security or whatever kind of income they have. It's something they grew up with and it's important to them. That is where they come from, essentially, especially the elders.

Then there's also the question of who is responsible for the construction and the rental fee of the building. Is that the communities? Is that the post office?

I think there were some discussions about that when they built that little building there. I don't remember the details. I think Councillor Winston DesJarlais could probably recall a little bit better than I can right now. There was quite a big discussion around it, because when that building was constructed, I believe the band helped with some of those costs.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Sorry to interject, but I have a quick question. Do you have Internet service here?

A voice: We do.

The Chair: Mr. Maguire, it's over to you for seven minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to all three of you for your presentations today. Thank you for welcoming us to the Ojibway Nation here and Treaty 1, Chief Bear.

Ms. Chief mentioned the number of people as 776 living here still. How many post office boxes, then, roughly, would there be in the post office? There wouldn't be one for everyone because there are families involved.

Ms. Debbie Chief: I would imagine there would be one per household, yes. I'm not exactly sure how many houses we have right now.

Chief Jim Bear: On top of that, there are individuals on the outside who utilize the services as well, even though they don't live here.

Ms. Ashleigh Shultz-Bear: I know our mailbox number is 238, and ours is at the end. I think there are only about 200-and-something mailboxes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Okay.

The second part of my question is that there are people who don't live here who would come here. They don't live on the reserve, but would they get their mail here as well, from outside the area?

Ms. Debbie Chief: On lot 3.

● (1345)

Chief Jim Bear: Yes. Even though you can see the reservation, further back in there are some lots that aren't reserve land. You're driving, and all of a sudden you come to non-reserve. You drive a little further, it's reserve, then it's non-reserve, then it's reserve. Yes, there's—

Mr. Larry Maguire: It looks like the east side of my constituency, like a Lego set.

Thank you.

I want to just talk, then, as my colleague just did, about the move to the store. I know they've checked on some of the trial situations. I believe there have been two areas, one in Vancouver and an area here, that are looking at options and changes. The store is the change that's taking place here.

A voice: Yes, it is.

Mr. Larry Maguire: That's working much better with the longer hours that have been—

Chief Jim Bear: Well, at least the store is, but the postal service is still down the road.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Okay, yes, so they're looking at moving it to the store. It hasn't moved yet. That's what I want to get clear.

Do you see other services that could be offered through a postal outlet, or anything like that? Part of this study is to look at viability, and to make sure that Canada Post is still there as a service. There's some talk in other regions on how to make it more viable. I wonder if you have ideas you could share with us on that.

Chief Jim Bear: Personally, I don't, offhand. Certainly those kinds of things we can eventually entertain with the people as well.

Ashleigh has given you some of the services that she would like, or is going through at the current time. She might have some ideas of any improvements of what she would further like to see.

The Chair: Chief Bear, we've heard in several other communities that people have suggested that the post office could be used to approve and hand out hunting and fishing licences, passport applications, those types of things. In other words, other government services could perhaps be offered in a post office. Would that type of approach be beneficial to your community?

Chief Jim Bear: Definitely, but we also have to watch what kinds of services, because we are government as well. We're trying to structure those kinds of things in our own government. If we set aside a postal service, then we can say that they can possibly look after those types of things.

We have, right now, a term band membership section, so maybe those kinds of things can be done in our own current office. We'd have to take a hard look as to what we'll really designate in terms of the postal aspect of it.

I can't rule out any of those things you've mentioned as well.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: That's what I was looking at. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for pointing those out, because those are some of the things I've heard of. I've only been on the committee today, but I have heard others, and in reading presentations, on the fact that they have asked for some other services.

In your case, it's a situation where you want to develop those as well through your own nation. Certainly, I believe there are opportunities for you, which I don't think need to be taken over by Canada Post, necessarily, in your case, and other first nations the same way.

I come from the western side of the province. The Dakota Sioux in Sioux Valley get their mail mainly in the little town of Griswold. There are only 25 people who live in Griswold, but there are about 200 mailboxes. They are not on the reserve. They have to come about six miles south to get their mail, but fortunately, that's the direction most of the traffic flow goes anyway. You don't have that situation here.

I would ask Ashleigh, then, about the post office in regard to the Entertainment Center. It's convenient to use it here now, but it's only for three hours, is what you were saying, for all of the postal needs you need at the centre and everything else. It would be much better to have it expanded to the store here.

Ms. Ashleigh Shultz-Bear: Yes.

• (1350)

Mr. Larry Maguire: You would use it, probably, every day, then, would you?

Ms. Ashleigh Shultz-Bear: Maybe three or four days out of the week.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Well, I don't have any other questions, Mr. Chair. Am I out of time?

The Chair: That's seven minutes, anyway, Mr. Maguire. You're out of time.

Mr. Blaikie for seven minutes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thanks for hosting us here today.

I just want to go back to what Ms. Shanahan was saying. One of the basic questions of this review is whether Canada Post should primarily be seen as a public service that needs to be maintained, or whether its services could be offered by a private entity. How much

Internet shopping goes on here? How much are packages and parcels part of the life of the community here?

Chief Jim Bear: Gee, I wish I could have had a good handle on that. I just got back to the community recently, five years ago.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: You're not sure. Maybe it will help if I explain what I'm driving at.

What I'm interested to know is if that's an important service for people here because they are buying things online. The Brokenhead Ojibway Nation has the benefit of being closer to Winnipeg than many rural and northern communities, but would private parcel delivery—FedEx, UPS—likely come here if Canada Post weren't there to provide that service? Are you confident that you would get good postal delivery service from whatever the private service provider ends up being?

Chief Jim Bear: Again, that's one thing we'd have to have a good dialogue on, and get further information on that. You're right. We are in a convenient location, but we still have a lot of challenges, even in terms of the number of mailboxes, because our population is going to be growing. Last year we put in 20 new homes, and those are occupied by our people who are working, so they own those homes. Of course, a lot of them have families. We're going to be doing more, so yes, we need the service badly.

The Internet service, believe it or not, even in Brokenhead goes out for a few days at a time sometimes. That causes a lot of problems. Improvements in terms of the postal services would just be an asset to the community overall. Yes, people still would, knowing that it's well set up... However, they may have things sent, so that is always an option.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: What do you imagine as being a helpful way forward? You mentioned earlier that it's not always the most constructive relationship with Canada Post, or it's not that consultative. What do you imagine as being the ideal way for Canada Post to engage your community better and to serve your needs?

Chief Jim Bear: I guess it's a two-way street. We in the community should also be reaching out to the postal services. I'm not saying it's entirely the postal services' fault in terms of communication. I'm really glad to see this panel going around the country. Even just the little recommendations that we are giving will go a long way to improving the services for our people.

• (1355)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you.

The Chair: We have Mr. Whalen.

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

It's interesting that, when we come to different rural and remote communities, or ones that aren't even that far but have a different population, people see the role of Canada Post differently. When we heard from various union groups, they talked about using the rural post office as a community hub of some type. Could the community post office that exists here be used for anything other than what it was used for? Was it even suitable for that purpose?

Ms. Debbie Chief: This structure is very small. It's probably not much bigger than this inner circle of the table.

A voice: If that.

Ms. Debbie Chief: Yes, if that.

Mr. Nick Whalen: It's like a shed.

Ms. Debbie Chief: Yes, basically.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes, it's similar to the ones in rural Newfoundland, I think. I look forward to seeing it after this meeting. It's probably about a 25-foot by 10-foot building, or a 30-foot by 15-foot building, or even smaller than that. You wouldn't expect to be able to offer banking services or whatnot from a structure like that.

• (1400)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Not even a café?

Chief Jim Bear: You have to go outside to change your mind.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

From your perspective, this notion that Canada Post could lease some space in an existing building for the employee who's working and managing.... Is there a Canada Post counter in the pharmacy or is it just the location of the mailboxes?

Ms. Debbie Chief: No, there's a counter.

Mr. Nick Whalen: There's a counter, but there's also a counter down the street in the post office. If you thought they could be consolidated and maybe have more services for a longer period of time, would that be a benefit to the community? If you just completely closed your post office and only offered services from the pharmacy, would that be an option?

Sorry, they can't hear your nods.

Ms. Debbie Chief: Yes, that would work.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Are there unionized Canada Post employees who operate in both locations, or is it unionized in one and not unionized in another? On the employment logistics, I know you work in medical, health, but you don't know who works the Canada Post counter at the pharmacy.

Ms. Debbie Chief: It's still over at the building. If they were to move, it wouldn't be in the pharmacy; it would be in the grocery store.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay. Sorry.

Ms. Debbie Chief: An assigned place.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Oh, so it's not operating there yet.

Ms. Debbie Chief: No.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Oh, okay. I'm sorry. I misunderstood. I thought that, from the previous conversation. The move is just proposed. It's not happened yet, but it is the preference of the community that you have a hub: it's the grocery store, where a pharmacy and the medical services are. You would like Canada Post services to be moved to your existing community hub, not to create a competing one.

Ms. Debbie Chief: Yes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In terms of banking services, what's the nearest bank you can go to? Is there one on-reserve?

Ms. Debbie Chief: No, there isn't. We go to Selkirk.

Chief Jim Bear: It's 20 to 25 minutes away.

Mr. Nick Whalen: It's about 25 kilometres away, or maybe a little further, maybe 50 kilometres away. I can take a look at the map to figure it out.

Chief Jim Bear: It's not far. It's only 25 minutes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: It's not that far.

Do you think there would be a market for—

Chief Jim Bear: You also have to realize a lot of people don't have access to vehicles and are getting very limited. As many services as we can provide in the community would be an asset to them.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Would you be amenable to having a bank open its doors, having a physical bank presence here in the town?

Chief Jim Bear: That's what we crave.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes, and do you think if it were Canada Post

Chief Jim Bear: We're working on it, but yes, it's very hard to get them to come out and open a small bank.

Mr. Nick Whalen: We heard from the credit unions, I guess it was yesterday in Saskatchewan, wasn't it? They had a mobile bank that would go around to service rural communities. Is there something similar to service your community? Are you aware of anything like that?

I should get to the point. Would you use Canada Post as a bank if Canada Post had a bank and they operated a bank from the grocery store? Would you use those services?

Chief Jim Bear: Absolutely. Definitely. As I said, a lot of people don't have access to vehicles, so it would be very convenient for them.

• (1405)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ashleigh, how do you do your banking? Do you do it on your phone, like I do?

Ashleigh Shultz-Bear: Do you mean personal banking?

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes.

Ms. Ashleigh Shultz-Bear: Yes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: It's on your phone. Do you need to go to your bank branch regularly, once a month, or occasionally? How important would it be to you, as a young person, to have physical banking services here in the community?

Ms. Ashleigh Shultz-Bear: Personally, I do everything from my phone. At work we have to use the bank. We have to use actual documents from the bank.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay, so from a business perspective, for small businesses to start up in this area, it's important to have banking services.

Ms. Ashleigh Shultz-Bear: Yes.

Chief Jim Bear: As well, in terms of access to cellphones, again, that's on and off. A lot of the older people don't have access to cellphones. It's just the young ones, like Ashleigh, who is employed, who are able to do those kinds of things. Then you're missing out on a huge sector; they don't have that convenience or can't afford it.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ms. Chief, did you have something to add to that as well?

Ms. Debbie Chief: I was just going to say that yes, we young people use online banking.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nick Whalen: Touché—careful with the ages.

In terms of other services that Canada Post might offer, there's been mention that it could maybe operate as an ISP, so maybe have Internet service that it would have available to sell, or maybe offer a service desk for mobile companies, or operate as a charging station for green vehicles. If someone were going to charge their Chevy Volt or their Tesla, where would they go, in your community, to do that charging? Is there a public place to get that done? You do have a gas station, maybe.

Chief Jim Bear: Again, limited services.

Mr. Nick Whalen: So there's a market for this sort of thing here if people wanted it. If you were going to have those services, would you prefer that the charging station be located at your existing gas station, or would you prefer that Canada Post undertook the capital expense to make these improvements to their location so that people would go there instead?

Chief Jim Bear: We're talking partnership.

The Chair: Madam Ratansi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here. We have heard about isolated communities and under-serviced communities. I guess you would call yourself an under-serviced community, would you?

Chief Jim Bear: An under-serviced community.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: We're looking at Canada Post with its wide network. As we were driving along, I thought about the fact that the gravel roads are the only roads that lead to communities where Canada Post, with its mandate of last mile delivery, delivers to that last mile. If Canada Post were to close its office here—and once you go to a franchise store, it is privatization—would they be able to deliver that type of service to your communities?

Chief Jim Bear: Again, in terms of privatization, we'd have to have a discussion on that.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: At the moment FedEx, UPS, and Purolator actually dump the parcels with Canada Post, and expect Canada Post because of its mandate to deliver to the last mile.

You may not have the answers now, panel members, but you can think about it and always give us some insight into what the needs are. In an under-serviced area, what are some of the things we can do? How can we use leverage with Canada Post to help the

communities gain social cohesion? You talked about the youth and you talked about the seniors. How can we get them in a better place by using that network and the assets that they already have?

Chief Jim Bear: Again a lot of it boils down to the operational, which of course includes the salaries and so forth. What would it take in order to dialogue with Canada Post in terms of the service delivery? As we say, it's only limited right now, but with longer hours...again that depends on how we set it up. Do we utilize some of our existing staff and what kind of—

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Services that they can provide?

Chief Jim Bear: Well, even in terms of funding individuals and how much time would it take of them, because a person is not just going to stand there for hours and help people on and off.

● (1410)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: You want an open dialogue and conversation with Canada Post because you told us that Canada Post is operating in isolation in your area. I would like to ask you a question. How many young people are there in this community?

Chief Jim Bear: I think of the number that was mentioned probably 60% to 70% is not out of the question.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Sixty to seventy percent of the total population of...?

Chief Jim Bear: Yes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: They would probably go off-reserve to go to university. If they want to access information about what university to go to, or what high school to go to, with limited access to Internet would a hub that provides that service without infringing on your nation...? If that hub says, here is the information by the provincial, federal etc., would that help?

Chief Jim Bear: That would be an asset, however as mentioned earlier, we are trying to take things on, but if they have access to another source it only benefits them.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: In terms of health and well-being of people, we heard that good food is so expensive. Others have used the Canada Post network to help deliver nutritional food that is not as expensive as you get at a grocery store. Would that be another area that you would look at if, it doesn't infringe on your rights?

Chief Jim Bear: Right now we have two convenience stores, and we have the grocery store, so it's not as much of a barrier as it is up north where you have to put these through the mail. This is a totally different environment.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Okay.

Thank you.

The Chair: Chief Bear, once again thank you for welcoming us into your community. It's been a tremendous experience.

I thank all of you for being here to offer your suggestions and your observations about Canada Post. Should you have any additional information or suggestions that you think would benefit our committee in our deliberations, you can contact our clerk directly. Caroline could certainly give you her coordinates, her information. Any other additional information you think would help us will certainly be included in our final report that we'll be tabling in Parliament later in November. So if you have additional information, the only thing I would ask is that you try to get it to us within the next 10 days so we'll have a chance to include that in our draft report.

Thank you once again for taking time to visit with us. We will pause until the next set of panellists come to the table.

• (1410) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1430)

The Chair: Colleagues, I think we'll start.

Welcome to our witnesses. Thank you very much for taking time out of your day to be with us today. The purpose of the meeting is of course, as you know, to discuss with you the future of Canada Post, but more specifically how it relates to this community: what services perhaps you would like to see enhanced from Canada Post and how they can better provide services to your community.

Also, if you have any recommendations overall on how Canada Post could perhaps become more financially stable and how it should move into the future, we'd love to hear your comments.

The way the process works is fairly simple. We'll ask each of you, if you have an opening statement, to try to make it in five minutes or less. After you make your opening statements, we will have a round of questions from all of our committee members. Through that process we hope to find out all of the information that you wish to transfer to us, and your testimony will help us as a committee to develop our final report, which we will be tabling in Parliament later next month.

With that brief word of opening we'll ask Ms. Pommer for an opening statement, please. If you could keep it to five minutes or less, that would be tremendous.

Ms. Jackie Pommer (Director of Operations, Brokenhead Ojibway Nation): Thank you. My name is Jackie Pommer. I'm from the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. I was asked to come here to be a witness on behalf of Brokenhead because of the hours that we have in the community. We had full-time service quite a while back, and it was cut back to half a day. Now we're at 9:00 to 12:00, which is very inconvenient for many of our people who work outside the community and also inside the community, because we have a hard time leaving work to go to check the mail.

The location is not an ideal location. We would prefer to see it inside one of our businesses where we can access it all the time, not just during the three hours that it's open.

Basically that's all I have. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Petrash.

Ms. Angela Petrash (Development Corporation, Brokenhead Ojibway Nation): Good afternoon, everybody. I want to say thank you for including Brokenhead in your tour here as you seek input from all of the communities. Thank you for choosing to hear our voice.

I'm the development corporation manager for Brokenhead and I am from the community. My statement today will focus on the business end of things and how the post office affects our business. I'll talk a little bit about the solution that we think we have found to help that situation and how I see it being of benefit to Canada Post as well, as far as service provided by Canada Post is concerned.

As Jackie said, right now the post office is in a stand-alone building. If you are familiar with an ice shack, that's what it looks like, and it's about that size. The hours of operation that the postmaster is allowed to operate out of it are Monday to Friday 9 a. m. to noon. The mailboxes are locked up, so there is no access outside of those hours to the mailboxes. If you need to buy a stamp to mail something outside of those hours, you don't have the option to do that; if you're not there between 9 a.m. and 12:00, you don't have access to it.

The solution we're proposing with our postmaster right now is to relocate the existing location inside our grocery store. This would give everybody access to their mailboxes seven days a week any time that the grocery store is open, rather than just from 9 a.m. to noon. We see this as a benefit to everybody who needs to access their mail.

We'd also like Canada Post to consider staying open longer to provide a service. I heard a little bit of the statements earlier and about questions being asked concerning online purchases. Personally, if I lived in the community and wanted to purchase something online, which I do, I would only have from 9 a.m. until noon to go to pick up my parcel. It's a deterrent for me to shop online if I can't go and pick up my parcel, because I can't be there between 9:00 and noon Monday to Friday to pick up my parcel.

I think that if we had better access, that would push online sales, which are sales for Canada Post.

I think that's about all I have.

• (1435)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Nault, did you have anything to share?

Ms. Sandra Nault (Housing Clerk, As an Individual): My name is Sandra Nault. I'd like to thank you all for inviting me down here to speak on behalf of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. I'm the housing clerk for our housing department in Brokenhead here, and we do not have access to the post office.

I have to agree with Jackie and Angela. We have a lunch break at 12 o'clock. That doesn't give us enough time to run down and check our mail. I was telling the lady in the back that we're lucky if we get to leave five minutes early to go to check the mail, and then, when we get there, sometimes it's closed and we can't.

The location is not very good, as far as I'm concerned. The post office is really small. You can probably only fit three people in it at a time, and sometimes when I go there are five or six people lined up trying to get in to check their mail.

As for the weekends, we have businesses open here on weekends. People work seven days a week, and we need access to our post office for stamps, purchases, to pick up online orders, as Angela said.

Our post office is of very poor quality.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start now with questions from our committee members.

Mr. Whalen, you're first up.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming. It's great to hear from various user groups. This is our last meeting with stakeholders on our cross-country tour, so it's really a nice moment for us to finally try to tie things together.

We've heard different things here from those we've heard across the country, especially with regard to the level and the type of service that people on the Brokenhead First Nation enjoy or don't.

I want to talk a little bit about the rural moratorium. There's a policy at Canada Post that says that the moratorium on the closure of rural post offices is maintained, but that situations affecting Canada Post personnel, such as retirements, illness, death, etc., or affecting Canada Post infrastructure—fire or termination of lease—may nevertheless affect the ongoing operation of a post office.

When I read that, I would be of the view, as someone who doesn't live in a rural area, that the rural postal service is being maintained and is not going to change. But you've told me that the service has gone from full-time to half days, and now to only three hours a day. Is this essentially the same as closing the post office just through attrition? Would you prefer it if your post office simply had the full-time, permanent hours that you enjoyed just a few years ago?

• (1440)

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Personally I would prefer more accessible hours for the community to be able to go to check their mail; 9:00 to 12:00 isn't cutting it.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes, but you used to have more hours before.

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Yes, we did.

Mr. Nick Whalen: So...?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Yes, I would prefer that.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Definitely. Who wouldn't want it to provide a better or more service? As I said in my opening statement, there's an opportunity as well for Canada Post to be open longer, to have more services, to have more hours. If she's mailing packages in the afternoon, we're putting her in a great location that has security cameras, that is in a nice work environment for her to be there longer.

Keep in mind it's not just Brokenhead that utilizes our grocery store, as well. Our business plan is based on 10,000 people, and that's the surrounding area: Beaconia, Gull Lake, Stead, and cottage country is huge out here in the summer. There are opportunities there for Canada Post to be successful as well, with the traffic.

Mr. Nick Whalen: When we were in Dryden a couple of weeks ago we heard from a chief who mentioned that they had received a certain stipend to pay for the postal service management there. Who manages the post office now? Is it managed through your department, or is it managed separately by Canada Post?

Ms. Angela Petrash: Olive is our postmaster, who is looked after by Canada Post.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay. And under the new arrangements that you're trying to negotiate now, is the proposal that she would then move over and work in the grocery store area, or is it that your department would take over and manage the operation like a franchisee?

Ms. Angela Petrash: No, no franchise....

In Olive's current situation, she is in a Brokenhead-owned building providing the service. Canada Post gives her a certain amount a month to cover her expenses, like operating, hydro, and such. That doesn't change; she is just in a different location.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes, but you said that it has recently changed. About how long ago was it that the operating hours for Olive were a regular 40-hour a week job?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Would you say that again?

Mr. Nick Whalen: When was it that the post office was open normal 9 to 5 hours?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: I would say six years ago, or seven, or maybe a bit longer.

Mr. Nick Whalen: It wasn't two decades ago. It was certainly within the time frame of the rural moratorium.

When we look at the notion of franchising, we've had some discussions about certain areas of the country that used to be considered rural are no longer rural. As larger cities have expanded, they've taken in areas that now encompass rural post offices. Delivery to rural post offices is actually the most efficient delivery in the country. It's about \$72 per address, whereas community mailboxes, it is \$126, and home delivery is almost \$300 an address.

However, this general delivery at \$72 an address seems to be too low maybe. It doesn't sound like they are providing the quality of service you need.

When the service is moved into your community hub, what is your expectation on how long the counter should be open and when people should have access, not only to their own mailbox, but to the services that Canada Post should offer?

Ms. Angela Petrash: As far as expectation, right now Olive is there at nine. That's when she starts sorting her mail. If it were a full-time position, or maybe two part-time positions.... As I said, our grocery store is open seven days a week. The summer weekends are busy with the people who are out in the cottage country or out at the lake for the summer. We're busy on the weekends.

It would be nice for someone to be able to come in and mail a parcel on the weekend, or buy a package of stamps, or whatever other services that outlet could provide. I think we can all agree that 9 to 12 is not going to be successful for that purpose.

• (1445)

Ms. Sandra Nault: When Olive comes in, she starts at 9 o'clock in the morning and she starts to sort the mail. This is also an inconvenience to the people who are going to pick up their mail because sometimes they have to go back in an hour because she hasn't finished putting the mail in the mailboxes yet. You might as well say that she is open for business at 10 a.m., sometimes 10:30 depending on how much mail she has to sort.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you to the witnesses for being here to make your presentations today.

It's not obvious to everyone, but it's certainly a clear comment. When you start, the boxes don't magically fill themselves, so you have to distribute that and it takes time.

I want to touch base. Right now, it's open three hours, five days a week. There have been some discussions in other areas about having mail delivered every other day, where it's being delivered.

I'm assuming that you do need it open at least the three hours every day because, as was just pointed out to us earlier by Ashleigh, there is some use of it every day from the businesses here and the individuals.

As a solution, would you be amenable to keeping it open longer for three days a week, instead of shorter five days a week or is there any combination of hours, which is what I'm looking at, that would be tenable, still keeping the same hours? You can't keep 15 hours in a week and really have much more than two days out of it, but I don't think it's that so much as the fact that, it has to be open at least that minimum, whereas if you moved it, it's open all the time.

Ms. Angela Petrash: There are two things to consider. The new location gives everybody access to retrieve their mail seven days a week. Great. The other aspect is the service component that Olive provides: could she be providing more, if she were there longer?

It's two different things. One part is access for everybody, longer, better—we know that. The other part of it is that the service end that Olive provides right now is only accessible three hours a day, because that's when she's open. The new location definitely provides better access for everybody to retrieve their mail seven days a week.

It's still the other component. If somebody walks in at 2 o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, they don't have access to the other services with her there now. They just have access to retrieve their mail.

What I was getting at is that we're putting in place a really great location for Canada Post. Is there an opportunity there for Canada Post to have more sales of a service?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Obviously the proposal that you'd like to see is to move it to the grocery store, where there are other services, where it's open seven days—not for 24 hours, but certainly seven days. And you're very right: this is a very busy part of the country in the summertime, and even in winter you have tourism here, with the casino across the road and Brokenhead. Tourism doesn't just end when the lake freezes over, or the shores do. There is cross-country skiing and everything else that goes on in this part of the country; therefore it's not just locals who could use it. That's what I was looking at.

I want to assure you that, coming from a small town, I do know what an ice shack size is. The post office was described earlier as being pretty much capable of being put in the centre of these tables here, as far as the space goes.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Three of us would have a hard time to stand in there and grab our mail, if all three of us were in there right now.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I liked Chief Bear's comment. He indicated it was so small you'd have to go outside to change your mind.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Yes. That's very good.

• (1450)

Mr. Larry Maguire: I thought that pretty much describes it.

I don't think there's any doubt that it would be better for everyone if there could be some arrangement made. Other than that, I believe I heard correctly from the others, you'd have to go half a mile south to get any other mail service.

Where would the other nearest mail service be, if this were closed?

Ms. Angela Petrash: It's about five minutes away, about seven miles.

Mr. Larry Maguire: It's seven miles? Okay.

Then, it is more than just the local people on the reserve who use the boxes here as well. There are also a few other citizens.

A voice: That's correct.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Okay, good.

Have you any other advice that you could provide, as far as the types of services you might want to see are concerned? Obviously you can't fit them into the building that's here to do that kind of work in the shack, as you describe it. The type of facility that you're looking at going into is a grocery store. There is a pharmacy there as well. Is there anything else that you think could be used to utilize that facility better than just adding a post office?

Ms. Angela Petrash: The Post Office we're in right now definitely needs to be upgraded, because Olive is working in an L-shaped building all day. She is walking back and forth in an L-shaped building that's maybe about the size of these two tables put together. She has no room for parcels, depending on the sizes of the boxes that come in. There were times I had to go to get mail for the band office and I had to pick up boxes and parcels. She has no wiggle room whatsoever. It definitely needs to be upgraded. It needs to be moved. She needs to be moved out of there into a bigger place.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I guess my question was more, assuming it is moved to the other facility, is there anything else to complement that store? What is there in that facility that's being offered now, other than groceries and a pharmacy?

Ms. Angela Petrash: There's the pharmacy, mail.... I was here for the end of the last panel, and there was some discussion about banking services. When I walk into the post office in Selkirk I know I can do MoneyGrams, money orders.... They are digital. Olive is on a manual system right now.

Our hope is that once she gets into the grocery store there is Wi-Fi Internet access to which we can upgrade her so that she can do some of those things: MoneyGrams, envelopes, packaging, all that kind of stuff. I can go there to get a passport application; that's where I go to do those types of things. It would be nice to have those services here as well.

I think Canada Post is missing the boat on some of those sale items. They don't offer them here, so they're not going to get the revenue for them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blaikie, go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much for being here.

Ms. Petrash, because of your role with the Development Corporation, you are working with a lot of the businesses here. If you could access the post office counter more throughout the day, do you think there are services the businesses here could use that they are missing out on, either because of the timing issue or because certain services just aren't offered?

Ms. Angela Petrash: Yes, there is definitely that aspect of it. Keep in mind that all the businesses are open seven days a week, so the store managers don't work Monday to Friday, 9 to 5. They all work different shifts, and they are all off during the day, so if there is something they have to get done at Canada Post, they are basically trying to schedule their shift based on what's available, to do whatever they need to do at the post office. There is that to consider as well.

I like the idea that Mr. Whalen brought up to Chief Bear about having a banking service. All our businesses need change. If we had a safe drop-box for our deposits and those types of things, would that be a benefit to the business side of the community? Absolutely.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: What is the ideal relationship with Canada Post? How do you think Canada Post could be better at engaging the community to find out what its needs are and how to be more responsive?

● (1455)

Ms. Angela Petrash: From my experience, just trying to make this transition over to the grocery store.... Olive is a postmaster. She is not your typical Canada Post employee. She is under a different union agreement, and there are different rules for her. I've had some discussion with the gentleman who would look after this. His name is Bernie. I was a little disappointed that he wants to take a hands-off approach dealing with this situation, basically, "Your deal is with the postmaster, and you look after it with her." I was a little disappointed to hear that, versus "How do I help you and Olive make this work?"

Personally, I thought, "She's working for you. You're Canada Post. Why is this not an open dialogue?" It was more of a hands-off approach—"You deal with your postmaster"—which I still have a hard time understanding.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: If there was a reimagining of Canada Post and it went the way of being not just about the mail but about other services—whether it's postal banking or being a place where people can come not just to get their passport application but to actually get their passport or a hunting and fishing licence, which I think was one of the suggestions earlier—do you think that this kind of more overall service approach might be part of an organizational change for Canada Post that allows you to have that conversation with Canada Post people, who would come in and say, “What are the needs of the community? What are the kinds of things that our existing infrastructure as the post office can help you with, and how do we do it?”

Do you think it's just weird to have that as a role for the post office, or do you think that it would be a real asset?

Ms. Angela Petrash: Absolutely, I think this would be an asset, so a community member doesn't have to hop in a vehicle or find a ride to Selkirk or to Winnipeg to get that service or to pick up that licence—not that our community members need the licence, but if somebody else does.

I know the hunters and the fishermen actually use the hotel across the street quite often. That's where they stay. If the hotel could say, “You can get your fishing licence or your hunting licence across at the grocery store”—versus now telling them, “You have to go to Selkirk to get that. That's the only place they offer it”—how awesome would that be?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Do you think people in the area are open to the idea of the post office doing that? If all that stands in the way of the post office becoming that is the attitude that it's a post office and it should just deal with the mail and that's it, do you think people would really welcome the idea of thinking about the post office and seeing the post office do more than the traditional mail service?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: I believe it would definitely help.

Ms. Angela Petrash: I believe it would, too, because we have people in our community who have to hire people to take them to Selkirk or to Winnipeg. If they want to send money to their families anywhere in the country, they can't. They have to buy a money order.

I know that people use e-transfer, but a lot of people don't have that on their phones or on the computer. A lot of people are old school, and they like to live traditionally.

I think it would be a great asset to the community.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: One of our witnesses earlier today in Winnipeg said that, in his opinion, changes to the post office along these lines could actually be a way of helping people who are living in poverty because there are a lot of costs. He spoke specifically about payday loans, but what I'm hearing is that there are other costs associated without having those services in the community. Would it be right to say that, for people who are living paycheque to paycheque right now, it would make a real material, financial difference for them if those services were being offered closer to home?

Ms. Angela Petrash: That's bang on.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Ratansi.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: As we were telling you, we're here to get ideas and you are an under-served community and there is so much that can happen...

Did you say that the post office operates out of the band building somewhere?

• (1500)

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Yes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Do they pay you rent at the moment?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: No.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Canada Post doesn't pay you rent?

Ms. Angela Petrash: They will when we move them into the grocery store.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: At the moment, the set-up is reflective of what Canada Post requires...its symbols, whatever. How is the post office set up? Does it have all the symbolism of Canada Post there?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Yes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: When you move to the grocery store, which is owned by the band as well, you are making an assumption that the hours will expand, but the postmaster is paid by Canada Post and she is probably paid for a number of hours. What makes you think that Canada Post will extend those hours? Have you had any negotiations with them to say, “we're moving from this office, which is owned by us anyway, to this office and all the paraphernalia that Canada Post requires is going to be there?”

Ms. Angela Petrash: Bernie, who I believe Olive answers to at Canada Post, has been out here several times to look at the location and has given his blessing on the location. We've gone through him to set up the specs for the build. Keep in mind, Brokenhead is paying the construction bill for Canada Post to go in there. What Olive receives right now is approximately \$91 a month to pay her overhead, which is hydro and telephone, from Canada Post plus her wage.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: She's given a wage based on 9 to 12. What makes you think because you're going to move her—this is an assumption you are making—to the grocery store where the grocery store is open, there are more facilities, there is Internet...has Bernie agreed that she will have extended hours?

Ms. Angela Petrash: Bernie has not agreed to that as of yet although I believe the door is open to consider something more, but we do not have a confirmed commitment from Canada Post to pay Olive more at this time.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Is the band paying for Olive?

Ms. Angela Petrash: Canada Post pays for Olive.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: If the band were to come with an agreement with Canada Post because you would like extended hours, would you be willing to chip in anything to keep the post office open seven days a week?

Ms. Angela Petrash: No.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Fair enough. We have to ask the question.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Is Canada Post going to give me a cut on the stamps that we sell?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Well probably. As a postmaster, you are in negotiations. Do you think Canada Post is shooting itself in its foot when it's not extending the hours and the opportunities to serve in such remote areas where it has the network?

Ms. Angela Petrash: I would think that they would realize that they're missing an opportunity now with the new location and the traffic and such, because now with the new location, we're not just servicing the people who have mailboxes. We could be servicing the people who are travelling in front of the grocery store along the highway.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Have you ever asked for a facilitated session with Canada Post? You could say to Canada Post, "Here is what our requirement is, here is where opportunities exist, and here's what we would like you to do." Have you had the conversation with anybody except Olive or Bernie?

Ms. Angela Petrash: No.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Would you like to have those types of conversations?

Ms. Angela Petrash: Absolutely.

• (1505)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Have you ever reached out to them?

Ms. Angela Petrash: I see that more as the next step above me to have those conversations with Canada Post.

Once we get Olive into the grocery store, I think we're in a better position to have those discussions because then it will become a reality versus the last two months talking about making this move. I would hope that Canada Post would realize that this is an awesome location, versus just having access to mailboxes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: We were having confusion about whether it was a franchised store, but it isn't. It's moving from one band building to another band building. All you need to negotiate with Canada Post is that you're going to set up the Canada Post area in a correct way and that you would like to increase the hours.

You were talking about banking. We also understand that there are issues with broadband. Most people in remote areas seem to do banking on their phones. With Internet access, do you think...?

Ms. Angela Petrash: Up until very recently, Brokenhead owned BON Communications, where they were responsible for the Internet service in the community. We've recently sold that business to a local Internet provider and high-speed, fibre-optic Internet is being installed in the community starting next spring.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Then your businesses would benefit if a postal bank were here, which provided at least the basic services.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Yes.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our final intervention will come from Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much. This is really such an interesting discussion. I feel like this is the impetus for something really awesome that's going to be happening. I love hearing that optimism because that's exactly the kind of spirit that we're looking for in trying to help Canada Post.

What really shocks me is that Canada Post has not been more of a partner with the Brokenhead community here. When we first heard about the hours being from nine to noon, and in the shack and so on, I was thinking that maybe people were okay with that or whatever. Who am I to judge?

You've fleshed that out a bit; that it was full-time, but now it is limited to nine to noon, and it's not even accessible until after the mail is sorted. I was thinking, who would accept that? Nobody would accept that. That's worse than the status quo. That's going backwards.

On top of that, you are engaged in starting up businesses and you're bringing in fibre optic, which is awesome as well. I have communities in my riding that would love to have fibre optic and are struggling to get that, so you're really on the right track.

What kind of a partner are you looking for in Canada Post or do you need Canada Post at all? What would it mean to you if Canada Post were here as a full partner versus not here at all, or the essential service versus a business partner?

Ms. Angela Petrash: I'm going to let Jackie speak a little bit because she has been with Brokenhead longer than I have, so I don't want to speak out of turn. I don't know if there have been any discussions about the hours or if they were just imposed and we accepted.

Ms. Jackie Pommer: They were imposed and we accepted.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: They were imposed, with no discussions about it.

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Yes, no discussion.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: All right and the reaction of the community at that time...?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: The reaction of the community was that they couldn't retrieve their mail and they couldn't do their postal services when they needed to. That was the reaction and they were quite upset.

To move it to a more central location, like the BON grocery store, would make it a lot easier for the people of Brokenhead Ojibway Nation and the people in the surrounding community to access their mail.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Excellent.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but this is what we're hearing from other communities. Is online shopping and parcel post something that's growing in your community?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Definitely.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Even with full-time access to boxes, not all parcels fit into the postal boxes, so there is still going to be a limit as to when people can pick up their parcels.

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Yes, and that would definitely be an issue if they can't access their parcels, as it is now.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I hear you.

We've also heard very compelling testimony. It's one thing to have poor retail delivery to individuals needing their parcels. It's another thing when you're trying to develop businesses and need to get that MoneyGram or get a parcel delivered and get that specialized service, otherwise the business cannot grow.

I'd like to hear from the panel as well. What would that mean to the growth of this community, if you don't have more access to services?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: Is the question what it would mean if we didn't have the access—?

• (1510)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: —if you didn't have it, if it just stayed as 9:00 to 12:00. Olive is there—and I love the way everyone is on a first-name basis—from 9:00 to 12:00; she closes up her counter; people can still go and open up their boxes, which is great, but if somebody comes in who has a rush order... We heard from a company this morning that makes mukluks; they're doing \$15 million in mukluks. There is potential; there is demand. I'm sure you have a lot of young people; you have a lot of great ideas. If somebody comes in and needs to get something done, but Olive has gone home for the day....

Ms. Jackie Pommer: I would suggest that Canada Post work with us and try it out here in Brokenhead. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, it doesn't, and we will come back to the table and talk about it.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you for the testimony.

I have a question. I will invoke the right of the chair on this. You have a casino across the street. Where do they do their banking? Is it in Selkirk or Winnipeg?

Ms. Jackie Pommer: They are a totally separate entity from us. I don't know.

The Chair: Okay. I would just assume that they have fairly heavy financial transactions with whatever bank they're using—

Ms. Angela Petrash: An armoured vehicle comes out, so they have that service.

The Chair: Clearly, a local bank with the ability for overnight deposits or transactions of a fairly basic nature like that would benefit one of your largest employers, I would assume.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Our businesses would benefit from an overnight deposit box as well. Keep in mind that we basically operate Monday to Friday. As well, our businesses are open Saturday and Sunday. Those are busy days. There could be a lot of—

Ms. Jackie Pommer: [*Inaudible—Editor*—]—in the community right now that's almost at the \$2 million mark that they bring in each year.

The Chair: Really.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Yes.

The Chair: That's interesting.

Thank you very much. I thank you all for being here and taking time out of your busy schedules.

Should you have additional information that you wish to provide to us that would help us in our deliberations, you can certainly direct it to our clerk. You can get her coordinates before you leave here today.

We'll be drafting a report and tabling it in Parliament probably in the latter part of November, so if there's anything else you would like to provide to us by way of testimony, if you could get it to us within the next 10 days or so—

Ms. Angela Petrash: Just to understand the process, you will compose the report and report back in November. Are you reporting on recommendations?

The Chair: I can't speak to exactly what form the report will take, but we've heard a number of recommendations. We will certainly be reporting the recommendations that were made by panellists such as you coming in.

Whether the committee itself determines to make a committee recommendation is yet to be determined, because we haven't had that discussion yet. Certainly we'll be including all of the recommendations and suggestions, compiling what we've heard over the last three weeks.

Ms. Angela Petrash: What is the end result? You're going to make the report to....

The Chair: —to Parliament. The minister responsible for Canada Post, the Honourable Judy Foote, will obviously be very interested in reading that report. At some point in time, I suppose the minister will make some recommendations or perhaps deal with issues at Canada Post that we've identified, but it will be a government-to-Canada Post decision-making process.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Okay. We all understand that Canada Post is a revenue-generating entity, and like any other business, it looks to be more efficient and responsible with its funds.

Is this a fact-finding mission for Canada Post to figure out how to be more efficient, or to cut other services, or anything like that?

The Chair: It's a fact-finding mission for the government—for the minister, primarily—who requested that this committee deal with the study; it's not so much for Canada Post.

Obviously there are issues between stakeholders and Canada Post itself. We've heard, for example, many of the unions representing workers in Canada Post say that Canada Post is in their opinion financially stable right now. Others, including Ernst & Young and the task force responsible for looking at the long-term financial viability, have indicated that in their opinion Canada Post is facing a very serious deficit situation.

We're trying to hammer out what's right and what's real, what's right and what's not, and all of those considerations will be taken into account when we begin our deliberations before the final report is drafted.

Ms. Angela Petrash: Do we get to see a copy of the report?

The Chair: Anything that's tabled in Parliament will be available, absolutely.

Thank you all for coming.

Now officially we are adjourned.

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