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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. We're in session. Welcome to meeting number 10 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(c), the committee is undertaking its study of the situation of Canada Post, starting with Minister Lightbound.

In my 10 years of OGGO, I haven't seen you here before in our committees. Welcome to OGGO, Minister Lightbound. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Before we start, colleagues, I know we're normally a bit more generous with our time. Today, I'm going to keep everyone identical or straight to their time. If you run out, I will cut you off. If you don't leave time for the minister to answer, I will cut him off as well. Watch your clocks.

Minister, the floor is yours. Again, welcome to OGGO. You have five minutes, sir.

[Translation]

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all members of the government operations and estimates committee for the invitation. It is special for me to be with you as this is my first appearance before the committee as Minister of Public Works and Procurement. It's an honour to be here.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to discuss Canada Post today, an institution that is vital to our country, that Canadians love, and that they are very attached to, as am I. I think it's important that we all have this discussion together.

[English]

I would also like to thank the committee for their valuable report entitled "Canada's Postal Service: A Lifeline for Rural and Remote Communities". As Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement, I welcome the work of this committee. Our government is committed to addressing their thoughtful recommendations. On Monday, October 20, 2025, the government tabled its response to the committee's report. I'd be pleased to discuss it later today.

Mr. Chair, we are equally committed to seeing Canada Post survive through this existential crisis it is in. As you all know, the

labour dispute is ongoing. I continue to urge both management and the union to find a path forward at the bargaining table. Over the course of the last weeks and months, I've met with both the union and management. I know they are both committed to finding a sustainable path for Canada Post. I urge them to keep negotiating in good faith.

Canada Post is an institution that needs saving. At this juncture in its history, and maybe more than ever, it's an institution that needs saving.

[Translation]

For nearly 160 years now, and to this day, postal workers have connected Canadians, rain or shine, in small towns and in big cities, providing a lifeline to hundreds of northern, indigenous and remote communities.

However, the current situation for Canada Post is unsustainable. Since 2018, Canada Post has accumulated more than \$5 billion in losses. In 2024, it operated at a loss of \$1.3 billion and, in January of this year, required an injection of \$1 billion to keep it afloat.

[English]

In the second quarter of 2025, the corporation lost \$407 million, which is their worst quarter ever. At this point, the corporation is losing \$10 million every day. In fact, with the labour unrest it is currently facing, it's probably more than \$10 million per day at this point. The fact of the matter is, Mr. Chair, that Canada Post is effectively insolvent.

[Translation]

When we look at how the world is evolving, this should come as no surprise. The world has changed in recent years. Letter mail volumes have declined from 5.5 billion 20 years ago to 2.2 billion today.

[English]

Twenty years ago, Canada Post delivered 5.5 billion letters per year. Today, that number is two billion. Twenty years ago, Canada Post delivered to 14.3 million addresses. Today, that number is 17.6 million.

While Canada Post delivers fewer letters to more addresses, Canadians have been sending and receiving more packages than ever before, but they are increasingly turning toward private competitors.

[*Translation*]

Canada Post provides an essential service to Canadians, especially rural, remote and indigenous communities. Canadians rightly want this service to be protected.

[*English*]

I think this bears repeating in English.

Given the current financial situation of Canada Post, the status quo and repeated bailouts by the federal government are not the solution.

As the minister responsible, I must ensure that the overall direction of Canada Post aligns with the government's policies and objectives. That implies making responsible but at times difficult decisions. This is why in September I announced that the Government of Canada would accept the recommendations from the Industrial Inquiry Commission, led by William Kaplan.

This means making a series of changes to stabilize the financial situation at Canada Post, including flexibilities in delivery standards.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

In Canada, the average household now receives just two letters per week, yet operations are still designed for much higher volumes. Adjusting delivery standards will allow non-urgent mail to travel by ground instead of air and will save more than \$20 million a year.

This government has also removed the moratorium on the conversion to community mailboxes. Three quarters of Canadians already receive mail through community, apartment or rural mailboxes, while one quarter still receive door-to-door delivery. The government has authorized Canada Post to introduce community mailboxes to approximately four million more addresses, which will ultimately save the corporation nearly \$400 million per year.

[*English*]

As recommended in the Kaplan report, we'll be lifting the rural moratorium that was imposed in 1994. The moratorium has not evolved in 30 years, but Canada has changed. Areas that used to be rural may now be suburban or even urban. It also means that multiple post offices operating near each other, including some that are just a few hundred metres apart, are required to stay open. I have instructed Canada Post to come back within 45 days of the announcement with a plan to protect service in rural, remote and indigenous communities.

Let me be clear: Canada Post has an obligation to serve all Canadians in every community in Canada, and that will not change.

I'm almost done. I'll speak at my pace in question period, so I'll try to be a little faster.

At last, the government is reviewing the process for increases to the stamp rate to modernize and shorten it, in line with the Kaplan recommendations. Taken together, these measures will help stabilize Canada Post's financial situation by generating close to half a billion dollars in savings a year.

There is more to do. As such, I have also asked Canada Post to come back to me within 45 days with a plan for how it will be taking immediate action to address its financial challenges, which means finding efficiencies, reducing costs, reducing overhead, and reviewing and lightening its management structure.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, our government must make choices. If we do nothing, Canadians will have to bear losses of \$10 million per day. For us, inaction is not an option. These changes are necessary to save Canada Post and put it on the path to sustainability, and that is what we are committed to doing.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's all the time we have for today. Thanks, Minister.

I forgot to welcome back Ms. Reza and Mr. Ieraci.

We're going to start our six-minute round with Mr. Patzer.

Go ahead, please, sir.

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Thank you very much, Minister, for being here.

Did you have a chance to ever read and go over the 2017 report by this very committee?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you very much for the question.

There have been numerous reports on Canada Post and its future. I've looked at many of them. I wouldn't say it was necessarily with the same detail that perhaps members of this committee did, but I did look at all the reports.

I will highlight that in the Kaplan report, on which we based the changes that we announced on September 25, the commissioner had looked at all the reports. In fact, there is one part of the Kaplan report that is titled "Studied to Death". The future of Canada Post has been studied over and over again by this committee—which I thank for the work—and also by other institutions and organizations over the years. That has informed the decisions we have made to move forward with the transformation of Canada Post.

Jeremy Patzer: Recommendation one from the 2017 report is the following:

Canada Post be maintained as a universal public service for all Canadians and conduct its operations on a self-sustaining financial basis while ensuring that profits generated are reinvested within the Corporation.

What went so wrong?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I've touched on it in my remarks. What we see with Canada Post we see across the world with different postal services. The volume of letter mail has declined substantially over the years. What was 5.5 billion 20 years ago has gone to 2.2 billion.

The anchor for Canada Post is that it has a monopoly on delivering letter mail. It's the way that Canada Post has attained profitability over many years. However, we've seen the decline in letter mail volume, as well as the rising number of addresses to which it needs to be delivered. I think that accounts for what went wrong, to answer your question.

I would also add, and it's highlighted in the Kaplan report, that the organization has become too big for the volume that it needs to deliver. It's been constrained—

Jeremy Patzer: I'm sorry, but I'm going to cut you off there because, as you know, we have limited time.

Recommendation 15 is:

Canada Post continue investing in the growth of its parcel/e-commerce services, which provide needed infrastructure for Canadian businesses.

You did highlight that Canadians are largely choosing other providers for parcels. I'll note that one of them is even owned by Canada Post. How on earth did Canada Post not figure it out? One of its own subsidiaries is a profitable, money-making company, yet it can't even take that as a model and implement it as its own to be able to make money.

There have been so many recommendations, so many studies, so many reports and a big emphasis on parcels and identifying that this would be a path forward for them, yet nothing has been done to address that for 10 years.

Why is that?

• (1540)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I would suggest that we are moving forward with it. The Kaplan report highlights some of what you've just mentioned. In order for Canada Post to be competitive in the parcel business, it needs to be more agile and more flexible. There are some things we as a government can do, and by that I mean lifting the rural moratorium and lifting the community mailbox moratorium, which we are doing; changing the delivery standard, which we are doing; and changing the way we increase the stamp rate in this country.

There are things over which we don't have power, and those would be the collective agreements. That has to be achieved at the bargaining table. I'm hoping both parties, given the dire financial situation Canada Post is in, will find an agreement by virtue of which Canada Post will be able to be competitive going forward in the parcel business and reach a path towards financial sustainability.

Jeremy Patzer: I mean, why wait until they're in the middle of job action? It's gotten to the point that it's so bad. It's not as though this year and last year were the first years they were losing hundreds of millions of dollars. It was pretty evident for years, even before COVID hit it, that this was the pathway this was going down.

Why was it delayed up until this point, when it's the middle of a job action and, as you even admitted in your opening remarks, as a company it's basically insolvent? Why wait so long to implement a plan for the future of Canada Post?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: When you look back at the evolution, for instance, when the moratorium was imposed on the implementation of community mailboxes 10 years ago, the financial situation of Canada Post was not the same. In hindsight, it probably should have gone forward; I agree with you on that. However, I would argue, given that, for the first time, the federal government had to invest or inject \$1 billion just to keep the lights on at Canada Post and that, in the foreseeable future, the government will.... At the pace it's losing money right now, without any changes, we'd be in repeated bailouts. I think that warranted change and the beginning of the transformation of Canada Post, which is what we're doing. I'm proud that we're taking that responsible decision.

Jeremy Patzer: What political considerations went into you guys not implementing the plan until the eleventh hour?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Listen, I've been minister for not even six months now—

Jeremy Patzer: You've been an MP for 10 years, though. You've been in the government for the duration of the time.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: When you look at the evolution, which is what I've highlighted, in 2024, for this year, we had to inject \$1 billion, and Canada Post just had its worst quarter in history this summer. I think it warranted the changes to transform Canada Post, and I think Canadians are generally on board with the changes we've announced.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gasparro, please go ahead, for six minutes.

Vince Gasparro (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Thank you for coming, Minister.

I'm a little taken aback by some of the economics here in your presentation, including \$5 billion in losses and a burn rate of \$10 million per day, which is probably accelerating more quickly than that because of job action, as you pointed out. Do you think it's possible for Canada Post to get on a path of financial viability?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I think it is. It's not going to be easy, and it will take some time, but that's why I've tasked the corporation with coming back with a plan to rightsize itself, taking a look at its overhead and finding efficiencies in how it's managed. I've also asked both the union and management to negotiate in light of the financial situation Canada Post is in. I think there is a way. The changes we announced on September 25 in turn will generate savings of close to half a billion dollars a year. That goes a long way in the initial transformation to reach financial viability for Canada Post, but there is definitely more work to do. The first step to stop the bleeding, so to speak, was to go forward with these recommendations from the Industrial Inquiry Commission, which we announced on September 25.

• (1545)

Vince Gasparro: Thank you.

Maybe we can drill down a bit. What do you feel are the key priorities for ensuring that Canada Post is financially stable and provides quality service to all Canadians, regardless of their postal code?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: As part of that, lifting the constraints that it's been operating under is really the first step. For instance, when you look at the rural moratorium, I note that in reports from this committee it was often highlighted that this needed to be updated. It will allow for Canada Post to look at ways to be more efficient. This moratorium was implemented in 1994 and hasn't changed one iota in the last 30 years. As I've highlighted, some of the rural post offices that are included in the moratorium and that may have been rural 30 years ago are now, by any stretch of the imagination, suburban, and in some instances, urban.

I was given an example in B.C. of a plot of land where a post office sits that is covered under the moratorium. Hundreds of housing units could be built, but nothing can be done because the moratorium is in place. Lifting it will allow this flexibility and will allow Canada Post to rightsize itself given the changing nature of the letter-mail business.

Canada Post is not alone in this situation. If you look at the situation in the U.S., France and Denmark, they're stopping letter-mail service altogether, for the most part, except in certain instances on islands. The change that we're announcing is the initial step that is definitely needed to stop the bleeding, because \$10 million a day, by any stretch of the imagination, is not reasonable or acceptable to Canadians. Lifting these constraints will allow for the corporation to find ways to rightsize itself.

Vince Gasparro: There's obviously a global shift going on in the parcel business, as the stats you laid out make very clear, and this isn't unique to Canada. Having said that, I've heard from my constituents in Eglinton—Lawrence who are worried about the transition to community mailboxes, especially for seniors and people with mobility issues.

Are there accommodations in place for Canadians who won't be able to access their community mailboxes?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: That's a very pertinent question.

To that effect, in my own riding—

Vince Gasparro: You might as well say the riding, because it's all part of the—

Hon. Joël Lightbound: My own beautiful riding of Louis-Hébert, the best riding in the country, in all impartiality—

Vince Gasparro: I may have to call a point of order on that, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Denied, denied.

Honestly, in my own riding, 77% of my constituents still receive door-to-door delivery. In fact, when you look at the broader picture in Canada, 77% of Canadians already receive mail through community or rural mailboxes, as well as apartment buildings. That said, I've made it clear to Canada Post that as they move with this transition to community mailboxes, they absolutely need to make sure that the communities that will transition are informed of the accommodation program in place for Canadians with mobility issues. There is a program that exists that needs to be well advertised and needs to be known by all those who might require it. If it needs to be enhanced, then it should be enhanced. I'll be monitoring closely how Canada Post operates this transition, because it's important for all Canadians to have access to their mail.

The Chair: That's our time.

Thanks very much.

Madame Gaudreau is next, please, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Welcome to the committee, Minister.

We have the opportunity to respond to several questions from our fellow citizens and workers. I will start directly with rural areas and the vitality of the regions. People are concerned when we say that the moratorium has been lifted. What is the plan? I am sure you will respond that you are working on it, but what can we expect today?

• (1550)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Thank you for that excellent question, Ms. Gaudreau.

I understand that our announcement regarding the lifting of the moratorium is causing concern. The directives I have given to Canada Post are very clear: It is essential to protect service in rural, remote and indigenous communities, and I expect this principle to be reflected in the plan that will be provided.

Let me explain the thinking behind lifting the moratorium. It has been in place since 1994 and has created some incomprehensible situations. In some communities—I could give you a whole list—such as Richmond Hill, which is not necessarily a rural area today but may have been 30 years ago, there are post offices covered by the moratorium that are located a few hundred metres from another service point, if not across the street.

Lifting the moratorium will therefore allow service to be distributed appropriately across the country, so that there are no such anomalies, while preserving service in rural communities. On this subject, I have had good discussions with the people at the Union des municipalités du Québec to reassure them, because I understand their concerns. I am aware that the post office is often an essential link in many communities. That is really not the aim of lifting the moratorium.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: What needs to be understood is that people saw that the results of the study were going to be applied uniformly everywhere. The announcement on September 25 had the effect of a bombshell, let's be honest. We couldn't help but expect such an outcry. People needed to be consulted.

There are vulnerable people. I'm thinking, for example, of Francine, from Mont-Rolland, who wants to retire in five years. Since there are other offices nearby, she wonders if she's going to lose her job.

What can we say to these people? Canada Post has 45 days to produce a recovery plan, but I'm sure you already have an idea today.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: As I just mentioned, the idea is to focus more on post offices located in suburban areas than those in truly remote or rural communities.

With regard to jobs, it will mainly be Canada Post that will be responsible for operationalizing the transformation of its activities. We will have more information in the recovery plan, but based on the figures I have seen, there are still many postal workers who, as in the example you mentioned, will be retiring in the next few years. I am therefore convinced that part of this transformation will be achieved through attrition.

With regard to consultations, many reports have been produced, and this committee has done some work. There was also Mr. Kaplan's report, which is quite substantial and takes note of all these other documents. Furthermore, the recommendations submitted by Mr. Kaplan at the end of his investigation will help to begin the transformation.

In my opinion, given that Canada Post is losing \$10 million a day and has just had its worst quarter ever, it is not feasible to tolerate the status quo for much longer. I know that we have even discussed the situation, because you intervened in the middle of a labour dispute. However, the labour dispute has now been going on for 21 months. Waiting was not an option for me. The transformation must begin, and negotiations between the parties must take place in light of Canada Post's financial reality.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Since I still have a bit of time, I want to talk about workers' concerns.

What will happen if letter mail delivery is maintained? Municipalities come to mind. They, among others, still use it. They really need the official information on that. Remote and northern areas also come to mind. Just sending a microphone to a witness who was supposed to appear next week was a big deal. We had to postpone her appearance because she didn't get it in time. Will all that be taken into account?

People are worried. They haven't heard anything since September 25. What should they expect in the coming days?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: The direction given to Canada Post was very clear: respect its obligation to continue serving rural and remote communities, because we consider that to be an essential service.

In fact, the decision to go ahead with the changes that were announced stems precisely from the fact that Canada Post is a vital institution to the country. It is more vital in Canada and Quebec than postal services in other countries, because of our vast territory and the geographic location of some communities, who need that service.

When I announced the changes, my objective was to make sure we saved Canada Post and maintained a good level of service in those communities.

• (1555)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now start our five-minute rounds with Mrs. Block, please.

Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to cede my time to Mr. Boulerice.

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, welcome back to OGGO.

The floor is yours for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister.

I'm disappointed and sad. A few years ago, you were against cutting home delivery, but you flip-flopped. Today, as a direct result of the cuts, four million Canadians will see their service interrupted. They will no longer be entitled to the service they had been receiving, because you changed your mind.

I represent the riding of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, a densely populated urban area where community mailboxes will be forced on everyone, because the services they were accustomed to receiving for decades are being cut. My first question is very simple. Where in the riding are you going to install the community mailboxes?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Let me start by saying that this is my first time before the committee, and what a pleasant surprise it is to see the level of co-operation between the Conservative Party and the NDP. That's not something you see every day. My hats off to you, Mrs. Block, for letting the member have your speaking time.

Mr. Boulerice, I'm delighted to be able to answer your question. First, I want to point out that 77% of Canadians already get their mail through community mailboxes, rural mailboxes or a centralized mailbox in their apartment building. That means they don't have home delivery per se.

Second, I want to respond to what you said about me, specifically that I am now in favour of cuts when I wasn't 10 years ago. The fact is that, 10 years ago, Canadians were receiving a lot more mail at home than they are today. On average, a Quebec household receives two letters a week; that number was seven 20 years ago.

Just to be sure, there was a—

Alexandre Boulerice: Minister, your 77% figure is wrong. You're counting apartment mailboxes, which are at the entrance on the ground floor. You're including them in your 77%, but that is home delivery.

You didn't answer my very specific question. Where in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie are the community mailboxes going to go? There's no room for them. Are you going to put them in schoolyards, parks? Are you going to buy studio apartments? Are you going to rent space? Where are you going to set up the community mailboxes?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: That decision is up to Canada Post. I can't give you information about a specific community.

I can tell you, though, that Canada Post has experience with transitions. Some communities used to have door-to-door delivery but now get their mail through community mailboxes.

As I said, the people in my riding who had home delivery are largely in favour of getting their mail through community mailboxes, for the reasons I just mentioned. They, too, are aware of this new reality.

Door-to-door delivery costs \$279 a year, whereas community mailbox delivery costs \$157 a year, so home delivery is more expensive. I think reasonable Canadians who are aware of Canada Post's financial situation realize that going to a community mailbox to get their mail is the lesser evil, so to speak.

Alexandre Boulerice: You're not answering the question.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: For those who can't—

Alexandre Boulerice: If you have to rent space to accommodate community mailboxes in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, it's going to cost money. I don't see how that's a better option, considering the figures you're giving us.

Nevertheless, I'll ask you something else.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: It's \$400 million a year.

Alexandre Boulerice: Five minutes is all I have, and I have another question.

The last time Canada Post turned a profit was 2017. Since then, the Liberal Party of Canada, your party, has been in power, so it has let the Crown corporation's financial situation deteriorate.

All you talk about is letter mail, never parcels. Canada Post used to have 60% of the parcel delivery market. Today, that share sits at 20%, and your party has done absolutely nothing about it. Why did you let Canada Post's parcel delivery business wither away?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: A number of things account for that decline at Canada Post. For instance, because of its operational constraints, Canada Post does not have a lot of flexibility when it comes to weekend delivery. It needs that option given what we know about Canadians' expectations for parcel delivery: very fast service. I think that certainly contributed to the decline.

I hope the union and management will be able to come to an agreement on that and reach a deal that makes Canada Post much more competitive in the parcel delivery market.

• (1600)

Alexandre Boulerice: The union and many others have been proposing a solution for years. It is yet another example of something the Liberal Party did not do. According to Ann Armstrong, a professor at the University of Toronto's Institute for Management and Innovation, Canada Post could have generated more revenue by expanding postal services, like Japan did years ago.

The UN's Universal Postal Union did a survey and found that 84% of countries provide financial services through their mail carrier. That's additional revenue that could have helped Canada Post, and the Liberal Party did nothing on that front.

Why do you still stubbornly refuse to let Canada Post offer banking services, something that would bring in revenue and keep people employed?

[English]

The Chair: I have to interrupt. I'm afraid you haven't left time for a response, Mr. Boulerice, but perhaps on another round, or perhaps with Ms. Rochefort...

Go ahead for five minutes, please, Ms. Rochefort.

[Translation]

Pauline Rochefort (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Mr. Minister, I want to say that in my riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming, which is a rural-urban riding to some extent, a number of citizens have mentioned to me how they find you to be an excellent communicator. As a result of the manner in which you—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Pauline Rochefort: Yes, and I personally, actually, think the same thing. I'd like to add that to that comment.

Certainly, what I have found is that, of the citizens with whom I've spoken, they basically understand the need for change. I think the communication has been in such a manner that people understand, yet I have many seniors and rural communities that want to make sure that there will be continued service and a Canada Post that moves forward. Basically, I've heard the term, "It's a vital organization," and no one disputes that. The need for change is understood, as is the fact that it is a vital organization that needs to survive. Those views are equally very present, I find, in my community.

At the same time, people appreciate that we're in a digital world that's changing very quickly, so I'd like to hear your thoughts on how you view the role of Canada Post in the future, in this digital economy in which we live.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: First off, I'd like to thank your constituents. Now, I'm reassessing. Of course, my riding is the best, but I would argue that yours is the second best now.

It goes to answer the previous question from MP Boulterice, and it's in line with Commissioner Kaplan's report. In my mind, if we are to talk about Canada Post's future and how it can evolve in the next 10 to 20 years, it first has to be efficient at its primary mission, which is connecting Canadians, delivering mail, delivering parcels and delivering services in rural and remote communities.

I think the work of this committee certainly will be useful in looking at what could be done with Canada Post in the long term, but in the short and medium terms, it's important for us, if we are to be responsible, to stop the bleeding, given that Canada Post is currently losing \$10 million per day. It reported its worst quarter in history in Q2 of this year.

I think Canadians are on board with this transformation. They realize that the world has changed. As you mentioned, it has gone digital at such a fast pace—and COVID accelerated that—that Canada Post needs to adapt. It cannot be stuck in a business model that was designed for the 1990s. It needs to adapt to today's reality.

One other thing you mentioned, Madame Rochefort, which is near and dear to my heart and is important for the government, for Canada Post and for Canadians as we transition to community mailboxes, is that it's essential that Canadians with mobility issues still have access. The accommodation program, which may not be as well known as it should be, has to be fully advertised, so that all Canadians have access to a reliable postal service.

Pauline Rochefort: It's interesting, because I was going to do a test in my community about the accommodation program in the months to come, to understand exactly how it works so that I can convey it to the citizens who are in need of that service.

Quickly, could you say a few words on the impact that you've seen on the business community?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: When the postal workers were on strike before Christmas of last year, you could definitely feel the impact on small businesses. I think it goes to show how essential a service Canada Post provides, in particular, to small businesses.

To this point, I'll just reiterate what I've said many times, but I'm hoping it doesn't fall on deaf ears: Both for management and the

union, we need to find an agreement, and the sooner, the better. Finding an agreement between both parties will lift the uncertainty that has plagued Canada Post and its revenues, and it will offer the kind of certainty that small businesses need as they operate.

• (1605)

Pauline Rochefort: Thank you. I'll leave my 30 seconds to Monsieur Boulterice.

The Chair: We'll have Madame Gaudreau for two and a half minutes, and perhaps the 30 seconds from Ms. Rochefort.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'd like to look a bit further down the road, the medium term, say.

I imagine you're familiar with the German postal model. In the 1990s, Germany decided to let the company DHL absorb the country's postal service. That makes me think of Canada Post and Purolator. A lot of people are thinking the same thing.

Will you commit here and now to not weakening Canada Post by having Purolator take it over?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Absolutely.

Canada Post and Purolator have very different missions. Canada Post has a universal service obligation, a service obligation to rural and remote communities.

Since the announcement, I have often been asked why we haven't privatized Canada Post. To me, that's unthinkable, considering the essential service that the corporation offers. Canada Post needs to be financially viable and sustainable. That is why these changes were announced.

Lifting the moratorium and allowing mail delivery on the weekends will give Canada Post more flexibility. The population will receive service that is not only essential, as per Canada Post's mission, but also competitive when it comes to parcel delivery. Everyone will benefit.

We'll see how negotiations go and whether the union and management can come to an agreement.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'm still very worried, because the competition is fierce.

This is my first time on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, but for years, my predecessors have told me about all sorts of studies on the subject, and we're still talking about it.

Since September 25, conversation has dramatically increased. There's talk about reducing costs. Everyone agrees that Canada Post provides an essential service, so let's focus on how to deal with the competition. If Canada Post can't deliver a parcel to someone's home and they have to walk to pick it up or drive an hour to get it, they will turn to a competitor that can. I understand community mailboxes are not an hour away, but people want fast and efficient service.

How are we going to get there?

[English]

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please.

[Translation]

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Canada Post's network is its strength, but also its weakness. It's about finding a balance.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Jansen, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Minister, Canadians rely on Canada Post not just for their mail, but also for their everyday needs. It is used for things like prescriptions and small business deliveries. It keeps our communities connected.

Canada Post has been saying for years that its hands are tied by government rules. Why has this government waited until now to save a system that's clearly been broken for years?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Let me first congratulate you on your French skills. It is honestly admirable, and I thank you.

I would say two things. First, a lot has changed over the last 10 years. I've already mentioned that the volume of letters has gone down and that Canada Post's financial situation has gotten worse. Now more than ever, the changes announced are not only important, but also reasoned and justified.

Second, since the April 28 election, our government has shown that it is ready to make responsible and sometimes hard but courageous decisions to ensure a sustainable future for Canada Post, and I'm really proud of our government for that.

• (1610)

[English]

Tamara Jansen: You've been in the government for 10 years as an MP and as a parliamentary secretary, and the problems at Canada Post didn't appear just yesterday. Why sound the alarm now? Canadians are wondering, if everyone at the table saw warning lights flashing, why it took a decade for anyone in cabinet to grab the wheel.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: As I've highlighted, the reality has changed over the last 10 years. If you look back to 10 years ago, when the moratorium on community mailboxes was imposed, the volume of letter mail was not the same. The financial situation of Canada Post was not the same. I think now, more than ever, these changes are warranted to put the corporation on a more sustainable financial footing.

As I have mentioned, in hindsight, if you look back, I think these changes were warranted in many instances. I think it's good that we're moving forward now, and I'm glad that I'm part of a government that's willing to make difficult decisions, to show political courage and to move forward with these changes that we announced on September 25.

Tamara Jansen: I don't want to run out of time. I have one question for Ms. Reza.

Our committee recently reviewed the ombud's "bait and switch" report, and it raised some tough questions.

PSPC is changing how contracts are awarded, moving from a task-based system to one more focused on corporate capacity. That's a big shift, and people are very concerned. They're worried about what it means for fairness and outcomes.

Would you be willing to return to committee so we can take a closer look at those changes together and make sure that Canadians are getting real value for their money?

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Kanata, Lib.): On a point of order, Chair, I'm just wondering if we are straying off the topic of today's meeting, which is Canada Post.

The Chair: We always allow a very wide latitude, a wide berth, for questions, so I'm fine with it.

I'll restart the clock.

Go ahead.

Arianne Reza (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you very much for the invitation.

As it happens, I'm coming back to committee next week, and I will be staying for an additional hour. Perhaps that will work for the committee. Otherwise, at your convenience, we'd be happy to come back to talk about some of the changes, why we're putting them in, and from a vendor performance management perspective, how it's going to work with SMEs.

Thank you.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I'm coming back as well, so please feel free to send us your questions in advance, and we'll be well prepared.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Tamara Jansen: Really quickly, leadership means acting before a crisis, not after. After 10 years in and around the cabinet table, I guess we're wondering why Canadians should believe that suddenly today there's the political will to fix the problem that your government helped to create.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: As I've mentioned, the reality has changed. The world has evolved, and I think the pandemic accelerated many of those changes that we're discussing today, whether it's the decline in letter mail volume or the digitalization of our lives. That warrants the changes that we announced on September 25.

I thank William Kaplan for his report, which is a very thorough report. It outlines the immediate steps that need to be taken to stabilize the financial situation of Canada Post. I'm proud to be part of a government that's moving forward with the recommendations in the Kaplan report.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Ms. Sudds, please.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being with us today and, obviously, for the attention that this file and this issue with Canada Post has taken.

You just mentioned the pace of digital change in Canadians' lives. I've heard you describe Canada Post as "a vital national institution worth preserving". When you put that in the context of the pace of digital change and an increasingly digital world, I'm wondering what role you view Canada Post as having in that new world where digital is taking over.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Canada Post is owned by Canadians. Looking at the future of Canada Post, it's important that we review its mandate with an idea of what Canada Post will look like in 10, 15 or 20 years. How can it better adapt and offer services that make sense to Canadians as the world changes? I'll be looking forward to hearing from Canadians, and hearing from, hopefully, this committee at some point as well on what this can look like.

Given the financial situation, given the losses in Q2 and given the \$10 million a day, and I hear it's even more than that, to me and to the government it was important to move quickly and decisively with the changes we've announced to put the corporation on a sustainable financial footing, to give it the opportunity to rightsize itself, to transform itself and to be efficient at what Canadians expect Canada Post to do, which is connecting Canadians from coast to coast.

• (1615)

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you very much.

I know we've talked a little about rural today, but even for myself, I have the Village of Carp as part of my riding of Kanata, and there are questions as to what service will look like in rural parts of our country.

Can you share your thoughts on where you think service levels are going with respect to our rural communities?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: The directive I gave Canada Post was crystal clear. As they operate under this new paradigm where the rural moratorium that's in place hasn't changed in 30 years.... Without the constraint of this moratorium, I've made it crystal clear to the corporation that their obligation to serve Canadians and provide a good level of service, comparable to what Canadians in urban areas get, is paramount. I'm looking forward to seeing how they intend to operationalize it.

As I've mentioned, the idea of lifting the moratorium is really because some of the post offices that are covered under the moratorium and have been covered for 30 years used to be rural but are now suburban and urban. The list of examples is fairly lengthy across the country. It makes for incongruencies where you would have communities where you have a post office and a point of service across the street in suburban Canada.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Thank you for that. It's certainly an important consideration that you're obviously on top of.

During your announcement in September, you indicated that reviewing the process for increases to the stamp rate to modernize it and shorten it in line with Commissioner Kaplan's recommendations was an important piece. I'm curious about the status of that review. Do you have an update, or are there any specific barriers to a shorter process for a stamp rate increase?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I'm happy to report that there are no barriers. We'll be moving forward with an expedited process that will allow Canada Post to increase the stamp rate.

It's an important point, because the time it takes to increase the stamp rate to better reflect the actual cost of delivering mail and the burdensome aspect of that process has made it so that the stamp rate in Canada has not kept pace with what other countries have done. In international comparisons, Canada is way down compared to other countries in terms of the price of stamps. I think giving that flexibility to Canada Post to move quickly will be included as part of our red tape reduction process, so we're moving forward with that.

The Chair: Thanks, Minister.

We'll go to Mrs. Block. Then we'll have one more intervention from the Liberals and finish up with Madame Gaudreau for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Mrs. Block, for five minutes.

Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you, Minister, as well as your departmental officials, for joining us.

In your opening remarks—and I've heard you repeat it a few times during your answers to my colleagues—you said that Canada Post is losing \$10 million a day or more.

Given that Canada Post has reported a \$1.5-billion operating loss, which works out to about \$4.1 million a day, where exactly are you getting the figure of \$10 million a day?

• (1620)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: We've had extensive communications with Canada Post's chief financial officer, and on a daily basis, currently that's what they're losing. In fact, it's probably more at this point. This is largely due to the labour unrest that we've seen in the last 20 months, if truth be told, because when flyers and commercial mail aren't sent, it impacts the bottom line. It's \$1 billion in revenue for Canada Post. All this taken together accounts for this very high number of \$10 million, but I'm hearing it's way higher right now, though the \$10 million has been duly verified.

I can't speak to the numbers I've heard recently, so I won't go there, but I think it speaks to the importance of the union and management reaching a negotiated deal, and the sooner the better.

Kelly Block: Thank you.

You also mentioned the recent study that this committee undertook. As you may be aware, Conservatives agreed with the recommendations that were submitted in that report. We also submitted a supplementary report that specifically noted the testimony of the Canada Post CEO, who noted that the federal government had failed to approve their strategic plan from 2019 to the date of his testimony.

Therefore, I'm wondering if you would advise us: What were the political reasons behind vetoing the independent strategic plan submitted by Canada Post over the last five years?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I can speak only for my tenure as minister.

I have approved their latest corporate plan, and it's my intention that corporate plans be submitted and approved and available for review by parliamentarians on a yearly basis as we go forward, because I think it's important for Canadians to see how the transformation is going.

Kelly Block: Okay. Were you made aware that their plans had not been approved from 2019 to 2024?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I'll defer to the deputy minister on this point.

Arianne Reza: I think that those corporate plans have been reviewed and looked at by the Treasury Board to provide an annual overview, and I think some of the considerations were around how best to manage the fiscal situation and some of the issues that were faced with the labour unrest.

Kelly Block: By not approving their strategic plan over the last five years, do you think you did that, given where Canada Post is today?

I'm just going to leave that question there.

Minister, you've talked about Canada Post now being in a process of rightsizing itself. How many additional jobs do you expect will be lost under this rightsizing, and over what timeline?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: That's a question best asked of Canada Post, which is in charge of the operations. I'm not. However, I think, even as the government is going through a comprehensive expenditure review where we're looking at efficiencies across government, it's only fair to expect the same thing from Canada Post, and even more so, given that they're losing so much money.

I'm looking forward to seeing their plan. It's forthcoming. I think they have about 20 days left to bring that plan back. On the specific numbers you're asking about, it's best asked of the corporation in charge of the daily operations of Canada Post.

Kelly Block: At no time, while you were preparing to make these announcements that happened on September 25, did you take into consideration the impact on the workforce that your announcements would have.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: That's not correct. Of course it's something....

When you look at the organization of Canada Post, it has a very big structure that is designed to deliver volumes that are not existent today, so I think it's only fair to ask the organization to right-size itself, given the nature of letter mail today.

Kelly Block: You announce a plan and then tell them to rightsize themselves without knowing exactly what the cost to the workforce might be.

Hon. Joël Lightbound: On that note, I'm not in charge of the daily operations of Canada Post. Management is, so I think that's a question best asked of management, but when you have a Crown corporation that's losing \$10 million a day, I think it's only fair—and I'm sure you would agree, MP Block—to ask them to find efficiencies and rightsize themselves.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Gasparro, please go ahead.

Vince Gasparro: In regard to rightsizing, the average household now receives two letters per week, a dramatic decrease from five years ago. There's a degrading of demand for letter services to individual households. However, there is significant demand for parcel delivery. Some of the traditional media companies, for example, have picked up a lot of the deliveries from Amazon and other outlets.

Can you talk a bit about the strategy around parcel delivery and how critical that is for Canada Post?

• (1625)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: It's a good question. Thank you very much.

I think it's very important for Canada Post to find ways to be competitive, and I think it's highlighted in the Kaplan report that, in order for Canada Post to be competitive, it needs to find ways to be more flexible and more agile. A lot of this has to do with management and the union finding ways to work together much more efficiently than they have done in the past. I hope that the relationship between labour and management is renewed and, given the financial circumstances, that they'll both work together.

My team and I have met extensively with the union, and I've met with management as well. I can tell that they both have the future of Canada Post at heart. They both want to find a viable path for the future of Canada Post, and I hope that they will find ways in their collective agreement to make it possible for Canada Post to find a financially viable future.

Vince Gasparro: I have no further questions, Chair.

The Chair: Madame Gaudreau, please finish off, and then we'll suspend quickly to allow our new witnesses to join us.

Go ahead, Madame.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to come back to parcel deliveries in different communities that I've visited, such as Îles de la Madeleine. After the September 25 announcement, people needing an ostomy, for example, didn't know how they would get their medication, since Canada Post was the only one that delivered to their area. It was the same thing for citizens of Kuujuaq or the Basse-Côte-Nord. The competition is so strong that they're worried Canada Post will focus only on mail delivery and drop parcel delivery.

The fact that we are talking about an essential service is reassuring. There's no plan to tweak efficiency or security in the delivery of both letters and parcels, but how much will that cost? How much are we willing to add to the deficit for an essential service?

Hon. Joël Lightbound: I would say as little as possible. Canada Post's mission is basically to offer financially sustainable services. It's in its letters patent. However, it has become apparent over the years that Canada Post is unable to meet that goal. That is why the government had to inject \$1 billion in the corporation and why it will need to inject more money over the coming years. I believe we need to inject as little as possible. Canada Post must find ways to significantly improve its efficiency in carrying out its essential mission. One way is to remove the constraints that I mentioned in my opening statement and that we've been talking about.

It's important to point out that Canadians and Quebecers care about Canada Post, especially in remote areas like Îles de la Madeleine, as you said, because it's their only link to the rest of the world. Thank you for raising that point.

That said, everyone understands that bailing out Canada Post year after year means less money for other essential government services. I think that would also be a concern for Mr. Boulerice. Resources are limited. That's why I think Canada Post needs a transformation. There is a path to get there and that is the path we've asked the corporation to take.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a lot of questions, but it seems there are still a lot of things to clarify. I know there are 20 days left, but I think the president and CEO must appear before the committee to explain what he's been tasked with. What we've heard is somewhat reassuring. However, many aspects still need to be clarified, including service.

• (1630)

Hon. Joël Lightbound: Like I said, we've set clear conditions: Canada Post must protect service in rural, remote and indigenous

communities. Once I receive the corporation's plan, I'll be happy to share it with you, Ms. Gaudreau, considering your interest in protecting the regions.

[*English*]

They have to get this right.

[*Translation*]

I will make sure they do.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Let's hope so.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks, Madame Gaudreau.

Minister, thanks for joining us again.

Colleagues, we'll suspend for a couple of moments to bring in our new witnesses.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: Good afternoon everyone. We are back. Thanks for your patience.

We have witnesses today: Mr. Ryder and Mr. Lee.

I understand you both have opening statements.

Why don't we start with you, Mr. Lee, as you are virtual? Then we'll go to Mr. Ryder.

You have five minutes each, please. I'll ask you to watch your clocks. Thanks.

Ian Lee (Associate Professor, Sprott School of Business, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First, I'll give my disclosures to the honourable members. Number one, I don't belong to or donate money to any political party or display any lawn signs.

Second, I completed my 850-page Ph.D. thesis in 1989 on Canada Post, using every annual report of the then post office department, Hansard from 1820 to 1981, as well as the public archives on Wellington Street.

Third, I completed my 2015 MLI study based exclusively on every annual report of Canada Post from 2000 to 2015, the annual CRTC media monitoring stats reports and the annual Payments Canada stats reports.

Fourth, I completed the 2024 study, “Canada Post: The Tipping Point Has Arrived”, using the same government sources and audits, but updated to 2024.

My final disclosure is that for 35 years, I've taught the strategy capstone course researching the competitiveness of firms and industries in Canada and the United States.

Before summarizing my empirical research over the past 25 years, I want to briefly mention the single most important analysis I've ever read concerning communications technology and policy, because it goes to the very core of all the issues you're discussing.

In 1995, MIT engineering prof Nicholas Negroponte, co-founder of Wired magazine and the very famous MIT Media Lab, wrote *Being Digital*. He argued that all of existence is composed of either atoms or electrons. Human bodies—mine and yours—and indeed any physical object, including trucks, planes and trains, are made of atoms, which have mass and weight. Einstein's laws of relativity limit the speed at which atoms can travel—i.e., very slowly. By contrast, any information that is digitized is composed of electrons, which have no mass and no weight. This means that electrons travel at the speed of electricity, which is almost the speed of light—300,000 kilometres per second.

From these principles of physics, Negroponte concluded that electrons everywhere in the world will always trump atoms in the realm of communications. From this, Negroponte predicted in 1995, astonishingly, the complete digital deconstruction of every western society over the next third of a century for everything informational, from post offices to newspapers to broadcasting to publishing to education to entertainment to banking to government to payments systems and to health care. He was absolutely correct, before any other person in the world.

My 2015 study of the audited annual reports of CPC revealed that the Negroponte trend started in Canada in 2006, with a steep decline of letters every year, without exception. My 2024 report brought the numbers up to date, showing the very same report with no exception. There were declines every year.

In the core business, you've already heard that the numbers declined from 5.5 billion to two billion pieces. However, some do not understand that these numbers continue to collapse going forward. Indeed, letter mail will mostly, I predict, disappear within 10 years, as the remaining small businesses that still use mail will digitize their value chains due to the Negropontian logic. Those few remaining elderly who still write letters will, sadly, die.

The second core business of parcels is very different, because e-commerce increases by 9% a year. However, during and after the pandemic, CPC lost over half its market share in parcels due to the entry of the gigs. In my 2024 report, I provided estimates of average operating costs for truck, driver and fuel. It's about \$65 an hour for CPC, about \$45 an hour for the big private contractor couriers and about \$25 an hour for the gigs. Now you can understand why CPC is collapsing in parcels.

As the CEO and CFO stated in 2024, the current architecture is not sustainable with this decline. As I have stated for the last five years, long before Kaplan did, CPC was and is insolvent. It's unable to pay its bills as they become due. This is why the government

provided a \$1-billion bailout and will have to again and again—bigger and bigger—until it's restructured.

There are critics, probably in this room, who state that this doesn't matter, as it's an essential service. I argue that this is an error that assumes precisely what is being debated, because, first, CPC is not a going concern. It exists only because the government is saving it by a bailout.

Second, the alleged essential services provided are not essential. This is supported by the radical decline in usage by more and more people every year using the post office less and less. If it was essential, we wouldn't stop using the post office.

Third, it is argued that CPC doesn't need to make a profit; it's not different from National Defence. This is a false analogy, because defence is a pure public good that benefits everyone and is not divisible, whereas Canada Post delivers a private good that is divisible into discrete units: We call them letters with stamps.

• (1640)

In conclusion, this is not an argument to shut down or privatize the post office. However, it must be radically restructured to a much smaller entity—maybe 15,000, or maybe 20,000. I don't have the internal data from Canada Post that services those citizens most in need—approximately 15% of Canadians, which StatsCan estimates precisely at 5.9 million Canadians, and the rural and remote communities where there are no private alternatives.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Lee.

Mr. Ryder, I'll go over to you, sir.

Welcome to OGGO.

Marvin Ryder (Associate Professor, Marketing and Entrepreneurship, DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University, As an Individual): Thank you. I thought this committee was tough, but look at what Ian just told you there. My God, he scares you to death, doesn't he?

I'd like to make four points, if I can, in my five minutes. Much of this you've already heard, and I apologize for that, but I didn't know what other words you were going to hear.

First, Canada Post is a very sick company. If I were teaching this at the university, I would describe it as being in a death spiral. This is what we found with the Hudson's Bay Company, for instance. It's a Crown corporation backed by the Canadian government, and because no postal service in the world has failed in the last few years, I don't think it's necessarily going to be dead in six or 12 months, but clearly strong action is needed now, sooner rather than later. As I said in my little note, think months, not years in terms of the change.

Secondly, I'm fine with the changes being proposed by the federal government and the minister, who sat here just a few moments ago. Moving letter delivery to community mailboxes is fine. I've had a community mailbox for three decades. I absolutely love it. I actually view it as a service enhancement. I go away, and I don't worry about a porch poacher going through my mailboxes when I am not there.

It's the same thing with getting rid of Canada Post-owned post offices, probably in favour of franchises. I haven't been in a post office, again, for decades. I visit a Shoppers Drug Mart that has a Canada Post kiosk inside. It has longer service hours, and it operates seven days a week. That's an enhancement to the service that I used to get from Canada Post's own post office.

On slower delivery of mail from four days to seven days, I don't think most people will notice that, but I want to emphasize that while these are necessary changes, they are not sufficient.

Ms. Block pointed out some of the math problems. I'll just point out another one. If Canada Post is losing \$1.5 billion this year, and you do these three things, you save \$500 million. It's a step in the right direction, but you're still losing \$1 billion. We have to go beyond that, which gets me to point three: Canada Post has to also generate more revenue. You can't cut your way or shrink your way to success. You have to find a way to generate more revenue.

The only bright spot is parcel mail. This is where they've lost the biggest volume, but they also have a couple of competitive advantages. Number one is that they serve every community in Canada. The private couriers have chosen to cherry-pick. They visit suburban areas and urban areas, but if you're in northern B.C. or if you're in the Magdalen Islands, it's too bad. FedEx can't get there. In fact, oddly, the private people subcontract to Canada Post at that point for the delivery.

How do you get back to a higher market share? For people sitting at this table, that means that a Crown corporation is going to have to try to take back market share from private companies. That raises lots of interesting philosophical issues.

I'm not keen on a postal bank or on postal insurance. I'm surprised Ian didn't mention this in his comments. We used to have a Canadian postal bank, and it shut a little over 60 years ago. If Canada Post were to get into the banking business, what competitive advantage would it have? It doesn't know the first thing about banking. Also, if you started a bank today, for it to generate any kind of significant profit, you'd be talking about years and years and years, and you do not have years and years and years.

About the only bright spot I could suggest is looking at other delivery partnerships. Canada Post has this army of workers out there

who are trained at delivery. Are there other people who might need deliveries that they can go to?

Finally, if we're going to win back customers, if Canada Post is going to win back customers, it has to have stability. Therefore, I would agree with what the minister said around having a collective agreement. We also need a collective agreement that's not for six months or eight months or a year. We need a three-year or a four-year collective agreement, so that we can get some harmony out there as it goes....

I'll be honest with you, though. As I sit here today, I don't know how you achieve that. I suspect that if I were a member of the union, I would want to sign a collective agreement that gave me job guarantees. Bless your heart, Ian, for suggesting.... I'm not going to go to quite as big a number as him, but I think we're looking at at least 10,000 employees who need to be either encouraged to retire or perhaps given severances to go. No union is going to want to agree to that as you go forward. They want to keep every job that they have today.

I don't quite know how you're going to find that labour harmony that is so necessary, but if you can get that harmony and then you free up Canada Post to tackle some of these tough issues, I think there is a future for it.

• (1645)

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

We'll start with Mrs. Block, please, for six minutes.

Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank both of our witnesses for joining us today.

I have to admit that this is much more interesting than I thought it would be. I've really appreciated your testimony here. It's caused me to wonder why you both, Mr. Ryder and Mr. Lee, can speculate on the number of jobs that could be lost. We heard from our minister earlier that he didn't give that a thought, because it's not his job. I think that's an interesting take-away for me.

I'm going to direct my first questions to Mr. Lee.

You have long commented on the future of Canada Post, the postal services here in Canada, with an obviously long-standing interest in that corporation. Would you say that you believe that the government has been aware of the deteriorating state of the postal service for some time, as you have indicated?

• (1650)

Ian Lee: Yes, and I realize that my answer is going to sound self-serving, so I'll just disclose that right away.

I was asked to testify in 2016 before the blue ribbon panel set up by the then newly elected Trudeau government. They appointed a blue ribbon panel; it's been well published. Everybody knows that panel. I went before it, and I had just published the year before my 2015 Macdonald-Laurier Institute report, with all the data on the losses and declines and so forth.

I had in there the radical surgery that I recommended, which was franchising all post offices, ending delivery five days a week and ending home delivery to the 25% of Canadians who are privileged to get home delivery. For full disclosure before anyone attacks me, yes, I'm one of those people. I shouldn't be getting home delivery to my door, but I do, although there are no letters coming anyway, so it doesn't matter.

To your question, I put some very precise recommendations in that report. I was there testifying for probably three hours, and they rejected the advice, the very concrete recommendations. Then I disclosed them in the media, in questions. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm absolutely certain the then prime minister and Dominic LeBlanc, the minister responsible, rejected it, as did CUPW, as did the management of Canada Post. I'm not trying to point the finger at one person. Everybody said, "No, no, no."

I think their basic argument was this, very quickly: Yes, the letters are declining very precipitously, but it's come to an end. It's going to plateau, and the problem is going to be okay, because we're going to stabilize it at lower than 5.5 billion letters, but it's not going to be that bad.

My response was that there was absolutely no evidence whatsoever that the decline had plateaued. Any one of you can look at the decline, and every year it goes down by 6% to 8% to 9% in the pieces of letter mail delivered. It's not because of something I'm doing. It's what Negroponte pointed out, that the economics of digitization just overwhelm the physical distribution of letters and mail.

Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

There was the blue ribbon panel in 2016. In 2017 the task force suggested changes. The committee did a report, years of posting losses, and still the government didn't approve the strategic plans being put forward by Canada Post for five years.

Would either of you like to comment on that?

Marvin Ryder: I'll maybe put a different spin from Ian on this.

I think 10 years ago, when Ian testified, you had a fairly healthy Canada Post, and we find the need for change is harder to get through when things look fairly healthy.

However, it was five years ago, around 2020, that you had the first significant signs that something wasn't right at Canada Post. Unfortunately, that was also when the country was facing COVID. I think, if I was in government—which I'm not—which challenge would I face first, a pandemic or the situation at Canada Post? Probably people prioritized the pandemic.

Again, I would think that the government should have dealt with this sooner rather than later. I was surprised, when Mr. Kaplan submitted his report in May, that we didn't get a response until September. The report is very clear on what it had to say, and I was waiting for it to drop in.

I think there's good reason perhaps to say that we've been slow, but again, in my world, late is better than never.

Ian Lee: Can I add to that? I don't disagree at all—

The Chair: I'm sorry; I have to interrupt, Mr. Lee. I'm afraid Mrs. Block's time is up, but perhaps you can get a response in during the next intervention.

We'll go to Mr. Gasparro, please, for five minutes.

Vince Gasparro: Thank you both very much for your very detailed presentations. If there was a window that was open on a higher floor, I could jump out of it. It was pretty stark.

Mr. Ryder, you made some comments about Denmark. Denmark's postal service has been the canary in the coal mine. Denmark's postal service is ending letter delivery after a 90% decline in mail volume and a strong national digitization strategy.

Can you speak to the key factors that made this possible in Denmark, such as digital infrastructure, government public policy or cultural readiness more broadly?

• (1655)

Marvin Ryder: I'd have to give you a two-part answer to that.

First, although they say the post office itself is discontinuing letter mail, they have another organization there, called Dao, which delivers newspapers and magazines. As of January 1, 2026, they're going to pick up the letter mail. Also, it costs \$6 per letter in Denmark to mail a letter. It's \$1.44 in Canada.

The other key thing here—and Ian, bless his heart, has been saying for some years that we should be getting rid of letter mail altogether—is that digitization has not yet put us in a position to do that in Canada. We haven't digitized.

What do I mean by that? You get a digital passport. I still have a physical one. I used it today. How about a digital credit card? Well, I still get a physical credit card. I still get a physical driver's licence. I still get a physical health card. Denmark digitized many of those things; therefore, they were not using the mail to send them. When we had the strike back in November and December, there were all kinds of worried Canadians: "How am I going to get my passport to take my trip? What am I going to do?" Until you digitize those, we're still going to need letter mail.

To Ian's point, he's absolutely right. I call it the canary in the coal mine. If I look out 10 years from now, assuming digitization solves those things and makes them go away.... By the way, neither of us has mentioned AI. God knows what AI is going to do. I think that 10 years from now, yes, letter mail could be dead here in Canada.

Vince Gasparro: If you want to add something, sir, go ahead.

Ian Lee: I do.

I don't want to leave anyone with the idea that the process of digitization is over. We are in the middle of it, or perhaps two-thirds down the road. We can quibble over whether or not it's two-thirds of the road.

In the next 10 years, we know.... There are discussions in many countries, including Canada, about digital passports, digital driver's licences and digital health cards. That's coming. We know it's coming. My point is that we won't be dealing with a.... I didn't say we should end letter mail; I said we should be planning on its very imminent demise, so that we don't have to worry about it.

We should really be focusing on what Marvin said: How are they going to get back into the game in parcels? That is their core business—parcels and letters—and if they don't get back into parcels, then their future is very bleak. I don't believe they have a snowball's chance in hell—pardon my language—of getting into banking. We have one of the most dynamic and brutally competitive bank systems in the world, which is why the French banks didn't come in, or the Germans, the Swiss, the Americans or the British. They know they wouldn't make it here.

Vince Gasparro: I guess in my—

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Our interpreters are extremely talented, but they are having trouble keeping up with the witnesses and may not be hearing everything that's being said. They cannot do their job properly. I know; they've told me so. It might be a good idea to remind witnesses to speak more slowly.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think probably all of us in the room should slow down our cadence in our speech a tiny bit.

We'll go back to Mr. Gasparro. You have a minute.

Vince Gasparro: You touched on parcels. I'll be really quick. Could you guys please provide the strategies you would recommend to help Canada Post regain some market share in parcels and compete more effectively with the private sector?

Marvin Ryder: Canada Post has two competitive advantages in that area. One is that they serve every community in Canada, every mailbox in Canada. The private people don't, so that's one advantage.

The second advantage is their prices. We haven't talked necessarily about a big jump in postal rates. Most small business people were very reluctant to move to the other delivery people, because they get a much better deal from Canada Post.

They did leave, however, because they weren't certain the parcel would get there, and until we get some harmony back in the marketplace, so that it's not Russian roulette, I think those people are staying away.

Ian Lee: I'll just add that I agree with what Marvin said completely. I think—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lee. We're out of time, but perhaps in the next intervention....

We'll go to Ms. Gaudreau, please.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, obviously, if I speak very quickly, it'll be difficult for the interpreters to do their job. When I'm true to myself and express myself in my mother tongue, I feel like there's not enough time. I know I've missed a lot of things in the discussion. What the witnesses have said seems very relevant, and I wouldn't want them to repeat themselves. I just need to point out that I feel discriminated against. There. I've said it.

What I take from your opening remarks is that, for the corporation to be profitable, it may need to be privatized. Now, you're referring to urban areas. Yes, Îles-de-la-Madeleine and other regions have been talked about, but Canada Post's competitors have no interest in mail delivery in those communities. I could even add my community of Mont-Laurier to that list.

There are 41 million people in Canada living at 17 million addresses. I wonder whether we want to go through the same thing as other countries that privatized an essential service. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Marvin Ryder: I apologize, but I'm not getting any interpretation, so I didn't really understand what you said.

Ian Lee: It's the same here. I didn't get the interpretation either.

The Chair: We'll pause for a moment, and I'll get IT to check both connections.

• (1700)

(Pause)

• (1705)

The Chair: I'm sorry for that interruption. We are back.

We'll start at the very beginning for you, Madame Gaudreau.

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If Canada Post is to continue providing services to all Quebecers and Canadians, I question the idea of privatization. Canada has a population of 41 million. I'm in business, so I understand the concept of cost and profitability. Should we go ahead or not? Other countries that privatized their postal service have not met the goal of providing service to everyone.

How can Canada Post be profitable while delivering to 17 million addresses from coast to coast?

[English]

Marvin Ryder: Let me just say quickly that I'm not advocating privatization. I don't necessarily think we're at that stage in the game to consider it. Certainly, I am advocating that Canada Post take on the private delivery people and try to gain back the market share. I also think it should be looking at other kinds of partnerships that it can bring value to as it goes forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, you do have an alternative strategy here. Again, using quick math, if you have 17 million households and each household paid a \$100-a-year Canada Post tax, you'd have \$1.7 billion. I've witnessed from afar how people reacted to carbon taxes. I have a feeling that Canada Post taxes wouldn't be loved any better, but that is an alternative. In the United States, they have done that to some extent. They've dipped into their own treasury to fund the U.S. postal service.

I would like to encourage management to do it on their own. Give them the best chance before we say that we should dip into our pockets and pay.

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Lee, what do you think?

[English]

Ian Lee: I'll go a bit differently. I think that in Canada we have already de facto—not de jure—privatized much of the post office in the biggest cities, like the Calgarys, the Montreals and the GTAs, etc. If you look at the stats and break it down, the national, regional and local private couriers have taken over a very large chunk of the business in the bigger cities in Canada. However, they haven't in the rural and remote communities, so I think we have to really look at the future of Canada Post. There are two completely different scenarios.

In the cities, I know all kinds of people who just don't use the post office. I'm talking about business and about individuals. If you go to the rural... I grew up on a farm in rural eastern Ontario, in Lanark County. If you go to these small towns and communities, they're very dependent. I'm sure it's the same in rural Quebec.

I think we have to come up with two different solutions. One is for the rural and remote, because their needs are completely different, and there are no alternatives. In the urban areas across Canada, many Canadians have abandoned the post office, which is why there was not this huge blowback, as we saw in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, with the postal strike.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I like what I'm hearing, Mr. Lee.

You probably have access to bandwidth and Internet, but you also have what it takes in that you're very smart.

What about people in unique situations, people with an intellectual or physical disability? Unless we can show that they'll receive the service, not only where they live, but also in a way that meets their needs, it's like we're abandoning them. There's the distance element, but a high percentage of Canadians are illiterate or don't have a cell phone. Just a few kilometres from here on the way to my riding, there are areas where there's no reception. We have to be careful with technology; people are afraid of AI. As you can appreciate, gentlemen, lawmakers do not move fast enough to keep up with technology.

I am out of time, but I would like to thank you both. This discussion has given me a good idea of what the situation looks like.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Patzer is next, please, and we'll do our five-minute rounds.

Jeremy Patzer: Thank you very much.

Maybe I'll chuck this out there for both of you.

Purolator, for example, which is actually owned by Canada Post—at least to the tune of 91%—in the first half of 2025 turned a \$101-million profit.

Does either of you know what their market share of parcel delivery is in Canada and why that is not a model that Canada Post is looking to use, when they actually own that very company?

Marvin Ryder: I don't know.

Ian, do you know what the market share is?

Ian Lee: I don't have the market share for the courier companies, but I do want to point out—because I did look at them—that if you look at their head count, forget 65,000 and forget 25,000.

I'm not trying to justify it, because you know what I've advocated for on that side, but all the major courier companies in this country are in the 5,000 to 12,000 head count range. I just looked it up in their annual report, and 75% of the Canada Post cost structure is wages.

When people say we're going to downsize Canada Post but we're not going to get rid of people, well, it's not possible. The arithmetic doesn't work.

Marvin Ryder: Going back to your point about Purolator, remember that it is like the other courier companies: It really only serves the urban and suburban markets, so it's able to cherry-pick. They also charge a higher cost. It's \$1.44 to mail a letter in Canada. It's not \$1.44 to ship something by Purolator.

That business has taken the high end of the market, and it competes very successfully against the other courier companies. Canada Post offers a different kind of service.

Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Lee, I didn't read your 2015 report line for line, but I definitely flipped through it and read a good chunk of it. If the government at that time had implemented your report, what standing would Canada Post have today, and what would it look like today?

Ian Lee: It would not be hemorrhaging the cash that it's hemorrhaging now. In fact, I don't believe it would be losing money, but remember, I did advocate pretty radical surgery. I said to franchise all the post offices. I agree with what Marvin said. They give great service. I've been going to a Shoppers Drug Mart franchise for a long time.

To your question, based on the \$400 million for the door-to-door service for 25% of Canadians, in 10 years at \$400 million or \$500 million—and Deloitte estimated at the time it was \$500 million—there is \$5 billion. That's the accumulated loss of the last eight years—just that savings alone.

If they had ended the universal service delivery of five days a week for the 17 million addresses, there would have been savings there, yes, and the reduction in head count would have been massive, and then by franchising the post offices, you would have been talking in the billions of dollars.

I want to get this out for everybody. This will not bring back letter mail; it will not. We're not going back to writing letters to our dear old grandmama. Those days are gone. The old analog economy is gone, and we're deep into the digital economy, but it would have given Canada Post a lot of degrees of freedom and a lot more money to reinvest into parcels to recover their game. If they had done this 10 years ago, they could have literally saved billions on those costs that they absorbed needlessly.

• (1715)

Jeremy Patzer: The minister was here and basically tried to say that it was only recently that the struggles have really happened.

You're indicating that, obviously, as far back as 2015 it needed drastic measures. You had the foresight to know that. Why didn't the government, when they had 10 years and didn't do anything?

Ian Lee: I'm guessing it was because it's such a political hot potato, and this came out of my thesis.

I want to be very careful and very delicate, but CUPW has a reputation for being the most militant union in the federal public service. If anybody wants to challenge me on that, I can point you to pages.... It ended up that one-third of my thesis was on all of the strikes in Canada Post. They weren't called CUPW then, but postal workers were involved in the 1919 general strike in Winnipeg. I'm not criticizing them, and I'm not condemning them. I'm simply saying that it's much more militant than the other public sector unions

in the Government of Canada, so it could have been a reluctance to go down that road and engage in a long, protracted strike.

Jeremy Patzer: Basically, what you're saying is that the political will of the government of the last 10 years to act wasn't there.

Ian Lee: In essence.

Marvin Ryder: Mr. Patzer, can I maybe offer something slightly different?

In our world, the need for change often explains how people want to change. Ten years ago, I don't think people looked at Canada Post as being on the precipice of what we now see today; therefore, the need for change 10 years ago would have been a much harder sell. It would have been a much easier sell five years ago, but we were tied up with the pandemic.

You're on the right track. These are changes that should have been done before, but if you could have convinced people 10 years ago, you are a better person than I am.

Ian Lee: Just to put some facts on the table, I don't disagree with Marvin—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I have to interrupt. We're out of our time.

Jeremy Patzer: Okay. I was just going to say that I think the Conservative Party was on the right track prior to the election, but I digress.

The Chair: Thanks.

We'll go to Ms. Rochefort, please, for five minutes.

Pauline Rochefort: Thank you for that discussion and that additional comment there, Mr. Ryder.

For me, personally, I think back 10 years to when we were bringing in some of the post office boxes in my community and the outrage people had about switching from home delivery to post office boxes. I simply could not see the changes that are being proposed now being proposed 10 years ago.

Something else that has mystified me that I would love to hear both of you comment about is the lack of willingness by the union to engage in organizational or operational flexibility. I guess in the Kaplan report he recommended a series of changes to address the need for flexibility. I think Canada Post had discussed hiring part-time staff, and different options were brought forward. Why was the union critical of that? Why have they been so resistant? In this day and age, they see the competitors, especially with parcel delivery. Why are they so against operational flexibility?

Ian Lee: My own interpretation is that Canada Post and the workers have been under what I'll call the letter-mail monopoly model for so long—two centuries, literally going back to the origins of the post office. It was the letter-mail monopoly model. They had a monopoly. They didn't have to compete, and nobody expected them to. We didn't ask them to compete. That's part of their corporate culture and their value system. Then, because of this transformation into the parcel business, where it was not a monopoly model but a brutally vicious, competitive model.... I think the transition is very difficult; it's difficult to switch from a monopoly model mentality into a much more competitive mentality.

I'm unionized at my university. The second reason, understandably, is that unions do not want to give up past benefits that have been negotiated at the bargaining table. CUPW has been very clear about that, and I certainly understand that.

• (1720)

Marvin Ryder: What I was going to tell you is that there are two kinds of flexibility. One would be to bring in these part-time workers who work only on the weekends. The other would be to say to workers, "We're not going to do that. We're going to keep you employed, but your weekend might be Tuesday and Wednesday rather than Saturday and Sunday." There are lots of people working in hospitality who understand that. You don't always get Saturdays and Sundays off. As Ian just pointed out, though, the union would have to go back to the workers and say, "We're giving something up. We're going to change something here. Maybe we're even in agreement with some of you moving to early retirement." This is a union that's not used to backing down. It's fast and forward. When you ask them to go backwards and give up some things they've had, it's very difficult to do that.

Pauline Rochefort: I thank you for your comments. That's good.

The Chair: We'll finish up with Ms. Gaudreau, please.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have one simple question: What is your top recommendation to ensure that Canada Post's president and CEO submits a report worthy of the corporation and that it no longer runs a deficit?

[*English*]

Marvin Ryder: I'll take a first shot at that, if I can.

As I said in my remarks, the three changes that have been proposed are necessary but not sufficient. He has another 20 days to come back to tell you how he's going to move people to community mailboxes and, Mr. Boulterice, where they're going to be located. In my case, they're on municipal rights of way; they aren't rented spaces. He has 20 days to tell you how many people he's going to

probably furlough or move to early retirement. He has 20 days to talk about some of these rural post offices, but that's still not enough.

I don't know if he can give you the second half of that. How do you, then, grow this business so you can get rid of that extra \$1 billion? You should hold him accountable to that—that is why you have a CEO of the organization.

I think if he can get the last piece, which is this flexibility around the workforce, it is possible to win back, I think, some of this market share, but I have to warn you that I don't know if it will be enough. Again, frankly—you'll have to think about this—if he could reduce the deficit from \$1.5 billion to just \$500 million, and he says, "Look, I've done everything I can, but that's as low as I can get it," is this group prepared to say, "Well, maybe we should think about subsidizing it again"? I don't know. He hasn't had the ability to have a free hand to tackle that, so let's give him that chance and see what he comes back with.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

Mr. Lee, could I get your thoughts?

[*English*]

Ian Lee: I'm going to cheat and give you three fast answers.

Number one, delivery five days a week has to go. It's just not sustainable at all to go out to 17.5 million addresses 52 weeks a year. It's not possible.

Number two, franchise all of the post offices that are corporate owned.

Number three, go to dynamic route scheduling, so that they can reschedule to get the flexibility that they desperately need.

Those three recommendations were in my report in 2024.

[*Translation*]

Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lee and Mr. Ryder, thank you very much. It was very informative, very interesting and a lot more fun than I thought it would be.

Colleagues, thanks very much. Everyone have a wonderful weekend, and we will see you on Tuesday morning.

We are adjourned.

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