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Chair

The Honourable Diane Marleau

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• (0900)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.)): I'm going to call the meeting to order.

It's a little different to see Ms. Greene here. It was this committee that approved her nomination...when was it, two years ago, now?

Ms. Moya Greene (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canada Post Corporation): No, just a little over a year.

The Chair: Just a little over a year? The years go by so quickly, and I'm trying to make them go more quickly.

Before we start with Ms. Greene, I just want to ask about this. There was a motion we were working on last Tuesday. I'd like to know whether the committee would prefer to deal with it right away or put it off until after we hear from Ms. Greene.

Madam Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): With all due respect for the CEO of Canada Post, I believe we should deal with this right away. We have had the last two and a half days to think about it. I suggest that we spend a couple of minutes discussing it, and then I will ask that the question be put.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Actually, we can carry on with it right now.

The Chair: You want to carry on with it now.

If you don't mind, Ms. Greene, we're going to deal with this. It really has nothing to do with you.

Ms. Moya Greene: Of course.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): I think this could be an hour's discussion. I'm concerned that we have a guest sitting here.

The Chair: I'm here to serve the committee.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Can we commit to dealing with the head of Canada Post within an hour and then have the discussion during the last hour?

Ms. Moya Greene: Thank you very much, Mr. Wallace. If you have committee business, I'm fine.

The Chair: Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Chair, out of respect for our guests this morning, could we just poll the committee to see what the intentions are with regard to that motion and the amendment? If we see that it's going to take too long, more than five or ten minutes, I don't think it would be reasonable on our part to hold the witness here. So if we could check to see what the intentions are....

The Chair: First of all, we have adopted one amendment on that motion, and that's Mr. Warkentin's amendment. Mr. Proulx put forward a motion, which we were debating, and of course there was no consensus.

At the end of the meeting, I asked the parties to see if they could come up with an amendment that they would be happy with. I don't know whether there were discussions subsequently and where this is going, so perhaps if you could let me know, we could have some idea of what will happen with this motion. As Mr. Proulx says, if it's not going anywhere, and if it's going to take an hour and a half, then we'll hear our guest.

First Mr. Proulx, then Mr. Kramp, and then Mr. Wallace.

• (0905)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I will surprise you, Madam Chair, in saying that I agree with my amendment to Mrs. Thibault's motion. Even though her motion has already been amended, I agree with my amendment.

Let's see what the others are saying.

The Chair: Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Suffice it to say that even though we, the Conservative Party, support the principle of the 75/25 according to the terms and conditions of the 1984 agreement, we don't think, with the manner in which it's being presented, that this is in order right now. We will be opposing it.

The Chair: Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I just need some clarification. We had another updated or revised motion from Madam Thibault. Is that what we're going to debate right now?

The Chair: No. After Mr. Warkentin's amendment was passed, we were looking at Mr. Proulx's amendment, which hasn't been voted on.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: That's essentially what the motion is now...as amended.

Yes, Mr. Kramp.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: As well, Madam Chair, I don't think too many people have any disagreement with the intent of the motion. We are concerned with what we believe to be inadequate preparation for this event. I have no problem, and we have no problem, with bringing this back to committee and bringing forth the witnesses we need to be able to reinforce the terms and conditions of the original 1984 agreement: the present status, accurate facts, with data supplied to us by the different departments. Then we can make an intelligent decision and be totally in line with the spirit and the intent of the original 1984 agreement.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault: I understand that my colleague is suggesting that we study this matter, but we will not be able to do that today. I would like to have a discussion on the motion. I have a point to make, and the clerk will let me know if I'm in order or not.

The clerk sent us Mr. Warkentin's amendment to my motion. I would like us to deal with this by putting it to a vote, and then if people agree, we can conduct this study in the fall. The amendment would replace the word "jobs" with the words "real property". I will have to consult the « blues », but I don't believe I'm incorrect in stating that Mr. Warkentin said that he didn't think this would have such an impact. Ms. Nash said she had voted, but hadn't realized... I understand what she means, because things went very quickly. The motion wasn't read.

Would you all agree to change the amendment to replace the words "real property" with the word "jobs".

Mr. Moore, you were not present, but I must say that people stated that they had made a mistake. I will get the "blues" out in September and show them to you.

The Chair: We have the "blues" right here.

Mr. Albrecht.

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Chair, it seems pretty obvious that we're not going to deal with this within five or ten minutes, and I would respectfully argue that we should hear our witness and deal with this later.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Since people don't agree, the amendment will remain as is. Now, Mr. Proulx has tabled another amendment and we have discussed it. I want to say to Mr. Proulx and my other colleagues that Bloc members are in agreement. There is no need for you and I to discuss this, Mr. Proulx, because we agree with your amendment.

The Chair: I believe the Conservatives do not agree.

[English]

Mr. Kramp, are the Conservatives in favour of the amendment that Mr. Proulx put forward?

Mr. Daryl Kramp: No, we're not.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I would like a recorded vote.

• (0910)

[English]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: A recorded vote, please.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Nash.

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Something we didn't have at our last meeting was the original policy we had been discussing. Everyone was talking about a 75/25 policy, and I think there was consensus on that around the room; we heard from the minister and everyone around the room that they supported that principle. I have gotten hold of that original policy, and to my way of thinking it's something quite different from what is being proposed today. So it seems to me that this is something we actually would want to take the time to look at very carefully, because what is being proposed would take us, if not in a different direction, certainly in one having more ramifications than the original policy that is in place today.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Proulx.

[English]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: On a point of order, the vote has been asked for or called, so let's vote, with a recorded vote.

The Chair: On Mr. Proulx's amendment.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That's right. The vote is called.

The Chair: Okay. What we were looking at is who has the right to vote. I don't think Mr. Comuzzi is on, so we only have three votes for the Liberals.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: There are three registered with the clerk, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Which three?

We'll just call their names, as you wanted a recorded division.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Omar, Raymond, and me.

Mr. Mike Wallace: On a point of order, Madame Chair, are we voting on...?

The Chair: His motion.

Mr. Mike Wallace: On his amendment.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: My amendment.

Mr. Mike Wallace: His substitution, is what I would call it.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Don't change the word!

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

The Chair: The Clerk of the Committee.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Bibiane Ouellette): You are voting on Mr. Proulx's amendment. You already have a copy of it.

[English]

Can I dispense?

The Chair: Yes, dispense.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Have we passed it yet?

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Yeas, five; nays, six.

[*English*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: You've got it backwards.

The Chair: It's nays 6 and yeas 5.

The Clerk: That's right.

The Chair: Ms. Nash voted with the Conservatives.

The Clerk: That's right.

The Chair : The others voted in favour.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: What do we do with the main motion?

The Clerk: It was adopted already.

The Chair: The motion wasn't adopted as such.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: It was the amendment.

The Chair: The amendment was adopted.

They want to have a vote on the actual amended motion, which hasn't been voted on.

Madam Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I would ask for a recorded vote on the motion, as amended.

The Clerk: You are now voting on the main motion, as amended. You all have a copy.

(Motion negated: nays 11; yeas 0)

• (0915)

The Chair: I want to thank you, because I had asked you to agree among yourselves. I was not expecting this kind of an agreement. It's been defeated. That means that we're back to what we now have. If members agree, we can look at another proposal at a future date.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

We're now going to go to our witness, Madam Greene. Madam Greene has previously been before this committee.

As you know, we'll give you approximately 10 minutes to make a presentation. Each of the parties will then get seven minutes for questions and answers for the first six people. We'll then go to five minutes.

Madam Greene.

Ms. Moya Greene: Madam Marleau, to you as chairman of the government operations committee, and to members of the committee, I would start by saying how delighted I am to be back before you.

It was this committee, an all-party committee, that confirmed my appointment. It was my pleasure then, and it is an even greater pleasure today because I've now been in my post for over a year. I

can certainly offer more on the operations of the post today than I could the last time.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear.

I know that for members of this committee, and in fact everywhere in the House today, matters of transparency and accountability are perhaps the most important ones for all public office holders of any kind to be really aware of.

It's my pleasure to tell you that in that spirit, Canada Post had its first ever annual meeting last week in Winnipeg. I believe we are probably the first crown corporation, certainly the first commercial crown corporation, to have had such a meeting. It was a great pleasure to introduce the issues and operations of the post office to a wide variety of stakeholders, customers, suppliers, and Canadians who are obviously very interested in receiving their mail.

[*Translation*]

Before answering your questions, I would like to talk a little bit about Canada Post operations, and about our aspirations and achievements. Many things have changed since I came before you seven months ago, including the government, of course, and the composition of the Committee. Everything goes exceedingly quickly these days, and people at Canada Post are aware of that, probably more so than anyone else.

[*English*]

The scope of this company, Canada Post, is enormous. As we sit here right now on Parliament Hill, letter carriers all across the country are delivering on foot 40 million pieces of mail to 14 million mailboxes in every reach, in every town, village, and city of the country.

We provide service through perhaps the largest network of retail offices of any company. There are about 7,000 postal offices and dealerships across the country. We employ 71,000 people in the Canada Post group of companies. That makes us the sixth largest employer in Canada. And every year we add about a quarter of a million new addresses we have to serve—we're pleased to serve. In addition, we spend about \$2.8 billion every year as a big buyer of services and goods all across the country, and that \$2.8 billion employs an additional 30,000 Canadians.

What we do, and equally importantly what we do not do, are things I want to talk to you about today. For example, we do not rely on the taxpayers of this country to pay for or subsidize the operations of Canada Post. In fact, I'm so pleased to tell you this company has been profitable for 11 straight years. The profitability this year, at \$199 million, is a modest level of profitability given that our revenues are almost \$7 billion. Many of you come to this honourable committee having run businesses of your own, and you will recognize that while that is a modest level of return, I'm very pleased that at least it's on the right side of the ledger.

That wasn't always the case. Madame Marleau has great expertise in postal matters, having at one point been the minister responsible for Canada Post. So Madame Marleau will remember what I call the bad old days when Canada Post was reliant on the taxpayers of this country for more than half a billion dollars of subsidy in a single year. Half a billion dollars in those days would be worth a great deal more today.

This achievement of continuous profitability for 11 straight years is one I wish to continue during my time as the CEO and president of Canada Post. Members of this committee, we do this with some of the lowest letter mail rates of all G-7 countries. I think that is a considerable achievement.

● (0920)

[*Translation*]

Our whole reason for existing is to serve Canadians. The methods we employ to that end have changed dramatically in our 150 years of serving Canada, in all our different incarnations. For example, there is a general belief, which is not accurate, that the letters we deliver from one person to another are the mainstay of our corporation. Canadians clearly value that a great deal, but the reality is that personal correspondence only represents 2 per cent of our revenues.

[*English*]

That doesn't mean we don't take very seriously every letter, every personal letter, every letter of any kind that is given to this company to deliver in the country. In fact, I'd be remiss now, today, if I didn't speak a little bit about the disruptions in service that we have had in some parts of the country.

I would like to apologize to members of this committee who, in their ridings, have experienced some disruption of service. We have been working very hard with some of you—Mr. Temelkovski, for example, and Monsieur Bonin as well—where you've had disruptions in service in rural mail delivery. I want you to know that I'm very sorry for Canadians who've had to be inconvenienced, and we are doing our absolute utmost to make sure that convenient alternatives are getting put in place as quickly as possible.

Rural mail carriers are required to repeatedly stop their vehicles on the sides of roads, and many of these roads are not the same as they were when we started rural route delivery 40 or 50 years ago.

Newmarket, for example, in Mr. Temelkovski's riding, 50 years ago was a small town and it really was quite a rural area. It is no longer that. It is now really a suburb of the city.

I know many of you will appreciate that patterns of urbanization have changed pretty starkly in the past 10, 15, or 20 years and that traffic patterns on what were once country roads now have way more traffic than they did even five years ago. So the hazard of frequent stopping is far greater today than it would have been 10 or 15 years ago. With municipal expansion—and in some provinces, municipal amalgamation is in fact the policy of the province to enable the province to better deliver services—I expect that these traffic levels are only going to get worse in certain parts of the country.

Like any employer in this country, safeguarding the health and safety of our workers is not only a moral responsibility, but now a legal responsibility, and it is a legal responsibility with far greater

ramifications in terms of liability as a result of changes in the law in recent years for any company that is governed by those particular laws.

We are very committed to finding a solution anytime there is a disruption in service as a result of an employee refusing work on safety grounds. We work very hard, literally 24/7, to put alternatives in place as quickly as we possibly can. This is an absolute priority for us as a company and for me personally.

I gave Prime Minister Harper and Minister Cannon my personal undertaking that in the face of inconvenience to Canadians that results when there is a refusal to work on safety grounds, I would do everything I could to put alternatives in place quickly and for these alternatives to be as convenient as possible under the circumstances. This is only one of the challenges we face.

Another is, of course, as you know, the necessity, the requirement according to our act, to provide our service to all Canadians and to the businesses that rely upon Canada Post as an economic enabler in this country, to provide those services on a cost-efficient and profitable basis. Some of you—Madame Thibault, for example—have spoken to me personally, and actually in this committee, on rationalization of the network that we have been doing as a matter of course over the past 15 years.

Most recently, that has involved the closure of the plant in Quebec City, but I am so pleased to tell you that not one single employee—not a part-time employee, not a full-time employee—will lose their job as a result of that closure. In fact, our service to the residents of Quebec City is better today than it was before we made this operational change, as a result of having put on three additional transport routes in that area. So we are now at 13 movements a day between Montreal and Quebec City, as opposed to 10 previously.

It's a big logistics exercise to deliver 40 million pieces of mail to 14 million addresses, and thankfully we have new opportunities—new transportation and logistics opportunities arise—so that we do not have to do things today the way we did them 40, 50, or 60 years ago.

● (0925)

To deliver the best possible service to all of our customers, we have to function in a businesslike manner. That is more important today than it was even 10 years or 20 years ago when we were first established. Madame Marleau, you have been in this House since, I believe, 1988, so you will remember the early days when Canada Post was established as a commercial crown corporation. It is more true today than it was then. We must operate in as businesslike a fashion as we possibly can.

We must keep in mind that 90% of our revenue is coming from Canadian businesses. They still rely on Canada Post as an enabler, an economic enabler, for them. We deliver their statements, bills, and invoices. That's critically important, for Canadian businesses to get paid for the services they have provided. We help Canadian businesses through our direct marketing mail to deepen their relationships with their customers and in fact to acquire new customers at a cost that is more effective than any other way to acquire new customers. These are intensely more competitive lines of business today than they were 20 years ago, and I'm very pleased to tell you that Canada Post is committed to keeping up.

The Chair: Madam Greene, maybe you'd like to wrap it up soon. You're well over your 10 minutes.

Ms. Moya Greene: I'm sorry. I can wrap it up, Madam Chairman.

Our responsibilities are huge. Many of you know about them.

I'm happy to answer any questions you have. I feel we outlined our priorities reasonably well to the committee the last time I was here, so let us move directly to your questions.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Alghabra, for the first one.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, Ms. Greene. Thank you so much for coming here.

I will start by asking you, since you have held your job for just over a year, has your perspective changed? If it has, what has changed from what you thought the job would entail, and what is it now?

Ms. Moya Greene: It has changed a little bit, because I've had the advantage of seeing it far more closely. For the first six months I didn't actually spend much time in the head office. Not coming from the operation, I decided I'd better get out there and talk to as many of our people as I possibly could, on the night shifts and on the evening shifts of our plants, see as many of our letter carriers as possible in our 1,500 letter carrier depots across the land, look at as many of our retail outlets as I possibly could, and hear from our supervisors, the 2,800 men and women who, 24/7, are there making sure the mail gets out to everybody in Canada every day. That was a great educational experience, to see the company from the ground up. I think that's how you get the real feel for what a logistical piece of work it is. That's number one.

The second thing I've realized more now than when I first began, from my discussions with customers, many of our customers...I'm very pleased to say that Canada Post has probably some of the bluest chip customers in the business list of any company in Canada. Getting out and actually talking to our customers, finding out how they see our services and what alternatives they have, what the competitive alternatives are that we must meet every week, every month in this country, to keep those businesses as our customers, meant that I learned a lot from those conversations.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Ms. Greene, if you were to choose two or three items that have changed your mind, or you had a vision of something and then after the experience you have had over this year

it has become something else, as a product of that new perspective...?

Ms. Moya Greene: I don't think I realized how competitive the market is now and how many alternatives there are, how many alternatives can come into the space and pick off very important parts of the value stream in any process and probably leave us, at Canada Post, with a part of the value stream that would be harder for us to pay for. I think I have a new appreciation that the competition is there and it is vigorous. That's number one.

Number two, I learned that engaging every single one of our employees in the future success of the company is probably one of the biggest growth opportunities that this company, like other companies, has.

Those are the two things that really come to mind from those early conversations.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: I think we would all agree that being a crown corporation is different from being a private corporation.

Ms. Moya Greene: Yes.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: I'd like you to tell me what you think the major differences are between running a crown corporation and a private corporation.

Ms. Moya Greene: Well, I think that depends on whether the crown corporation is a fully commercial crown corporation, first, because I think there are differences between commercial crown corporations and non-commercial ones. In our case, let me start with the commercial crown corporation, because that's the one I'm most familiar with.

The differences between a private sector company and a crown corporation have to do with the dual mandate of the crown corporation. The crown corporation must be commercial and business-like, but it also must keep in mind that there may be some policy reasons for its existence, and there may be things that the crown corporation has to do as a matter of public service and not, strictly speaking, as a matter of business. I don't think that dual mandate is as much a consideration for a strictly private sector company.

I would say, though, in a crown corporation that is fully commercial like this one, that it's perhaps a surprise to some members of the committee to know that I believe that the governance arrangements now in place for commercial crown corporations mean there are virtually no differences. The shareholder, in the case of the commercial crown corporation, is, of course, the Government of Canada, as represented by the government of the day, unlike the shareholder of the private sector company.

In terms of how a commercial crown corporation now operates under the new guidelines and accountability regime for crown corporations, it is very similar. We have a very good business-like board. My appointment probably marks a very important departure. I was recruited under a professional recruitment exercise that was led by the board, as you know. Of course, the appointment was still formally made as a Governor-in-Council appointment, but it was not a Governor-in-Council appointment that was made in the manner that they had previously been made. So I would say, from the governance point of view, we're seeing far more similarity in the cases of commercial crown corporations and private sector corporations.

Matters of operations and matters of business are left to the board and to the management of the crown corporation to run. I think that's a difference that has developed over the years for companies like Canada Post, which are fully commercial.

I think the third difference, though, is this. When the government is the shareholder, you do have to be mindful of the public service dimensions of the mandate. When the government is the shareholder, even if the government has made a decision, as they have in this case to treat that shareholding as a business, there's always a greater danger, I suspect, that matters become politicized very quickly in the case of crown corporations. It's easy for things that are in the nature of operations and the business of the company to wind up on your desk.

So those would be some of the differences and some of the similarities that I would see.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Thibault.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for being with us this morning, Ms. Greene.

You won't be surprised to hear that my colleague and I are going to focus most of our questions on the mail sortation centre and rural service.

I was very pleased to review Canada Post's annual report. It talks about how you remain competitive and clearly explains that 90 per cent of your business is with other businesses.

If I should address my question to Mr. Feeney, please say so right away.

In this report, six major corporations were selected to describe the organization, if you will, and make it easier for people reading it to understand what you're all about. The result is an extremely user-friendly report. Now, I'm not questioning the motives of yours or any other organization, but it seems to me that these six corporations are receiving some extraordinary publicity from the fact that they are cited in this very important document.

I have to admit I haven't read previous reports. Is this a common practice? Have you always done this? Or is it new? Does this not create certain advantages for some corporations? Are you not

creating a showcase for corporations like McDonald's, Best Buy, and so on? Is that common practice at Canada Post?

Ms. Moya Greene: Yes, it is perfectly normal for us to pay tribute to our clients.

Ms. Louise Thibault: But why? And how do you choose them?

Ms. Moya Greene: In my opinion, it's very important for people reading the annual report to know who Canada Post's clients are.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Since I only have seven minutes, I would ask you to be very brief; I am trying to be equally brief. How did you choose these six corporations? Do you base it on the business you do with them?

Ms. Moya Greene: No, not exactly. We wanted to include small, medium-sized and large corporations to emphasize the fact that in order to do business in Canada, you must be able to rely on the services provided by Canada Post.

Ms. Louise Thibault: In the same report, Ms. Greene, there is one section that deals with the pension plan. We had an opportunity to discuss this when we met previously. Companies are realizing—and this applies to all companies—that the more advantageous pension plans are, the more of a burden they represent—even though it is a necessary burden—for the company concerned. People live much longer now; as a result, the burden is far more substantial. This is discussed at the end of the section dealing with the pension plan, and I quote:

Canada Post's long term capacity to make these payments depends on its ability to maintain cost-efficient operations and generate revenues from these operations.

The explanation is relatively user-friendly. But I want to draw a parallel to the closures. In order to meet those goals, do you have a rationalization plan or a strategic plan? You are the Chief Executive Officer and you're facing substantial pension benefit pay-outs. Have you thought that you should be rationalizing your operations or shutting things down? When you decided to shut down the mail sortation centre in Quebec City, you had a plan.

Indeed, since you're still facing the same commitments, is it your intention to close other mail sortation centres? I'm not talking about small offices; I'm talking about large ones where you could realize significant savings. That my first question.

• (0940)

Ms. Moya Greene: No, we have no such plan. Such decisions are made naturally, as the situation evolves. We've been making similar decisions for the last 15 years. For example, we consolidated two mail sortation centres in Montreal into a single centre. In Toronto, we consolidated five mail sortation centres and ended up with two. We closed the mail sortation centre in Barrie and the one in St. Catharines, and merged the two mail sortation centres in Edmonton into a single centre. That sort of thing will continue, because our requirements in terms of mail sortation centres 40 years ago were not the same as what they'll be in another 15 years from now, because of changes relating to logistics and transportation. There is no plan in place, but we will make such changes when they are possible, and when we have an opportunity to do so, because of the number of people retiring, for example. Can I rationalize our system without penalizing any employee? If the answer to that question is yes—and that was the case in Quebec City...

Ms. Louise Thibault: Ms. Green, I believe that you clearly explained that when you appeared before the Standing Committee on Transport. At the time, you addressed three specific points. I believe all my colleagues are aware of your rationale.

You said a little earlier that there would be no job losses. To me, that means that there will be no job losses because you are not dismissing anyone or giving advance notice that any particular employee category is about to disappear. However, let's look at the Quebec City example. When these people retire, I'm sure you agree that there will far fewer jobs in the Quebec City area.

Ms. Moya Greene: There will 1,100 employees in the Quebec City region and we will be spending \$90 million a year.

Ms. Louise Thibault: What does that compare to?

Ms. Moya Greene: In Quebec City, we will also be investing \$4 million in the parcel hub. I believe that there will always be very significant investments made in that area. At the same time, some rationalization is in order. We're talking about 300 jobs that will not be lost. People will be paid. At Canada Post, when we give someone a job, it's for life. Also, these employees' pension plan will be indexed for life. I, personally, am proud of that.

These 300 jobs constitute change. That change will occur very slowly, since it will be spread over two and a half years. I don't think that is a highly significant statistic for Quebec City's economy.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kramp.

[English]

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Ms. Greene.

Ms. Moya Greene: Thank you.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I want to just touch on the first round of questioning on a couple of areas. One is the potential association and/or level of cooperation with Service Canada, something we might look at. Another area I want to touch on—and maybe I'll start with this—is the rural mail delivery.

Ms. Moya Greene: Okay.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: We heard at a previous committee meeting from the representative of CUPW an inference that Canada Post was using the rural mail interruption simply as a way to potentially cut costs and that there was a lack of communication taking place between both the union and yourself on this issue. How would you respond?

Ms. Moya Greene: I'm very surprised. We have had many discussions with CUPW on health and safety. I should tell you, though, that these refusals to work started in November. We hadn't had a rash of refusals to work on safety grounds until then, and then it moved all across the country. We were a little bit taken by surprise, because a number of things had changed. The safety laws had changed. The group of employees who were delivering the mail in rural Canada became members of CUPW just two and a half or three years ago. Their status had moved from an independent contractor status to an employee status. So we were surprised by the refusals to work. We had to do our own homework. We had to find out what

this was about. We had to do work. We're not experts in traffic safety. We had to get experts from the National Research Council to help us understand what has changed on these routes. We had to get ergonomic experts to help us.

In fact, of all the refusals to work that we have had, three-quarters of them are on ergonomic grounds. So we've had to get expertise in to help us. We have shared all of that expertise and research with CUPW.

We are trying to manage this in an orderly way. I think a disruption in service for rural Canadians is a very inconvenient thing. It is something that I personally apologize for. So what we've been trying to do is balance the need to continue service to rural Canadians in the face of this legal refusal to work, and manage, of course, our collective bargaining relationships. We have four of them. So I'm very surprised that CUPW would say that.

My colleague Mary Traversy is the senior vice-president of employee engagement and has the labour relations portfolio under her. I know she has had regular meetings at the national and local levels with CUPW. So I guess I am surprised.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I think everybody recognizes the changing demographics, the traffic increase flow. So there's nobody who wants to put anybody in a position of danger, and we don't want to compromise safety standards whatsoever. I think we can see an evolution of safety measures put in. The one that really did surprise me, though, was this repetitive stress injury syndrome. I had never heard of it in my life, from 30 or 40 years...and I know hundreds and hundreds of rural mail carriers. All of a sudden now we have hundreds of complaints. That one just blew me away, and quite frankly, I don't personally look kindly on that because I do think there's been an abuse there. That's just a personal opinion. I have never met any one of the complainants who have signified that this has been a problem in the past, but all of a sudden it's surfaced. I don't want to play the management versus union card here. It just seems to be such a coincidence.

Do you have any record at Canada Post of these kinds of injuries surfacing or being reported to Canada Post in the past? How many would there have been?

Ms. Moya Greene: We didn't keep records on this until the rural route drivers became employees. The first collective agreement applied in 2004, so these employees have been employees, for the purposes of our keeping records, for only two years.

● (0950)

Mr. Daryl Kramp: So you wouldn't have any manner, then, to calculate whether or not there had been previous complaints on this matter.

Ms. Moya Greene: That is so, Mr. Kramp. We don't know. These would have been employees of small independent contractors prior to 2004.

I must tell you, while I share your view that when you think about immediate safety you think about things that can kill you right away, I myself have had to learn about repetitive stress. We're not experts in that field. We've had to acquire expertise to help us understand it. We're still doing work in that area to let us come to some determination, as an employer, on how much repetitive stress you can absorb before you're put in a situation of risk.

I actually cannot give the honourable members of the committee an answer to that question today, but next time I appear, I will have more information on that.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Fine.

In terms of the safety matter, whether it's a right-hand vehicle drive or anything else, are there any specific measures you could tell us about that Canada Post has taken or is contemplating to deal with the...and the removal of mailboxes, etc.? Can you give us any specifics?

Ms. Moya Greene: I can. Many of you, including Mr. Temelkovski and Mr. Albrecht, will know that I've been living with this issue for several months now, pretty well day and night. Let me tell you about the range of options we're looking at, because we're looking at every option right now.

When someone refuses to work, we have an immediate situation on our hands. We have to decide how we're going to get the mail to people. If I have no notice that someone is going to refuse—they show up at 8:30 in the morning and say, “We're not delivering the mail to this group of addresses today”—I can at that point choose to suspend mail delivery. Or I can choose to get the mail to some other place so that at least people can pick up their mail. It's not convenient, but I need to take a stopgap measure. Those are the only two choices I have at that instant.

I and all of the colleagues working with me on the issue then immediately go into high gear. We notify the leadership in the community, we notify the households that are affected, and we notify you as the elected representatives of the people in the area. We immediately go into high gear to try to get views from the individuals affected—i.e., “We've had to put your mail here, right now, due to a safety issue with respect to that group of stops. Can you, as Canadians, tell us what would be a reasonable alternative, a convenient but safe reasonable alternative?”

It takes us several weeks to get that information, and we do it in several ways. Sometimes we do it one on one with individual Canadians. In other cases, as some of you will know, we have had town halls—in Fredericton I had four town halls in the space of a week—to gather together Canadians' views on what is reasonable.

In addition, we look at the alleged safety hazard. Sometimes it is a road safety hazard, but in three-quarters of the cases it is an ergonomic issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Greene.

We will go to Madam Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Ms. Greene, to the committee. I want to congratulate you on your heading up probably one of the most successful crown corporations in Canada. I think a lot of people don't realize that it is a

crown corporation that operates on a for-profit basis. It's had 11 straight years of profitability, I think you said.

Ms. Moya Greene: That's correct.

Ms. Peggy Nash: I want to commend you and all of the staff and employees at Canada Post for that success story.

You've talked about operating a crown corporation that is committed to profitability, but there are some differences to being a purely commercial enterprise. Just as a broad question, can you describe for the committee, briefly, what is the overall mandate of Canada Post?

• (0955)

Ms. Moya Greene: The mandate of Canada Post is to deliver the mail to all Canadians, at a reasonable cost to Canadians, in a profitable way. That's the mandate.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Great. So wherever you live in the country, in Inuvik or Toronto, you're entitled to get your mail delivered.

Ms. Moya Greene: You are entitled to receive your mail.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Right.

I understand that there has been a review going on by the federal government and that the policy framework that they have put in place includes things like the price of a stamp, the targets for service, and the issue of closures of facilities. Are you expecting, as a result of this review, any dramatic changes to the framework as we know it now? When do you expect to hear the outcome of the mandate review?

Ms. Moya Greene: It's not really a mandate review, but a policy review.

It's a one-page document that lists the things we as a business and a service are expected to do. It lists year-over-year levels of profitability. It lists the service guarantee, how quickly we must deliver for various distances in the country. It lists the return on equity that we are expected to achieve. It's literally one page.

No, I don't expect that to change, except that the numbers will change, because every year the numbers are different, depending on what the revenue target for the company actually is.

Ms. Peggy Nash: You've been with Canada Post, I understand, for about a year now. You were saying a year.

Ms. Moya Greene: Yes.

Ms. Peggy Nash: So you've had a chance to really settle in and become comfortable with that.

I understand in your background you had worked for the airline industry. You've been involved in the deregulation of the airline industry.

Ms. Moya Greene: No, I never worked for the airline industry. I was a senior public servant in the Department of Transport at one point in my career.

At that point in my career, the government of the day made some very important, and I believe very positive, changes to the regulatory structure of the airline industry that would allow new entrants to come and apply and take over routes that were not very well served in the country, that would allow for more competition in the airline industry, that would allow for new segments of air traffic to grow up in the industry—for example, charter airlines to come into the business.

Ms. Peggy Nash: So that's the whole deregulation period in the airlines.

I understand you were also involved, I guess probably through the transportation ministry, around the privatization of CN Rail.

Ms. Moya Greene: Yes.

Ms. Peggy Nash: So I just want to ask you what you think about privatization and deregulation of Canada Post. Are there any changes in those areas that you're aware of that either you or the government are contemplating?

Ms. Moya Greene: No, I'm not aware of any changes on the part of the government with respect to its ownership of Canada Post. In my opinion, as the CEO, it is for the shareholder, the government of the day, to decide what, if anything, it wants to do with the shares, the value that it has created in Canada Post. That's their decision. I'm not aware of any discussions at all, whatsoever, around the privatization of Canada Post.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Thank you.

Do I have more time, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have two more minutes.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Great.

There were questions raised already about health and safety at Canada Post. I understand that the injury rate at Canada Post is one of the worst in the federal sector, that in 2005 there were almost 10,000 compensated injuries—not just complaints or claims filed, but actually compensated injuries. Can you tell us about your strategy to bring the injury rate down?

• (1000)

Ms. Moya Greene: Absolutely. These numbers are very worrisome indeed. In fact, when I saw that we had 8,000 accidents in 2005, I have to tell you I was shocked. Thankfully, only 4,000 of them required any time off work. Still, 10,000 people requesting light duties in any given year, and 8,000 people having accidents....

We have to remember that this is a big country. It's cold in the winter and it's icy underfoot in lots of places and our letter carriers are out there delivering the mail in all kinds of weather, and lots of times there are slips and falls. Thankfully, the injuries that happen at Canada Post are usually not life-threatening, but there's no question that the number is very high—worryingly high.

Here's what we have done. Under Mary Traversy, the new senior vice-president of employee engagement, we have made employee engagement our number one priority. Under that rubric, we have employed 16 new occupational health and safety experts who have been deployed in the field in regions across the country to help bring to Canada Post, on a day-by-day basis, much greater awareness than we have had and a culture of safety in our company.

In other companies in which I have worked, the safety discussion that takes place at the top of every shift needs to be embedded as part of the operation of Canada Post, and that's what these occupational health and safety experts will be doing. They are creating plans; we have targets in place for every plant and for every depot to bring the rate of accidents down with the help of occupational health and safety experts, and to help our supervisors work with employees so that the environment in which they work is a safer environment for them than it was in the past.

There is also the corporate team incentive. The corporate team incentive is the incentive given to the management cadre of the company, usually for the financial performance of the company. For the first time in the history of Canada Post, 25% of that team incentive this year will be granted on the basis of how well we're doing on what I call the employee engagement matrix. One part of that matrix is a reduction in the rate of accidents across the country, so it is—

The Chair: Thank you. We'll go to the next questioner. It is Monsieur Bonin.

Mr. Raymond Bonin (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Merci, madame la présidente.

Thank you, Ms. Greene, for being here.

I have three points I want to cover, and I have seven minutes, so I apologize now if I interrupt. If I think your answers are too long, I'll have to interrupt—

Ms. Moya Greene: That's fine.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: —because I need to get them done.

My first point will be very quick.

You committed to this committee to do an assessment of historical sites, of post offices that are historical properties—the value and the disruption of that status of building for the operation of the local post office because it's filled with tourists. Is that report forthcoming? Paul Szabo asked me to ask that.

Ms. Moya Greene: Mr. Bonin, I will have to get back to you on that and see where we are. The head of real estate has that, I know, as part of his program, but thank you for reminding me. I will get back to you personally in a week with the answer on that one.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Through the clerk we'll have it.

Ms. Moya Greene: It will be through the clerk of the committee, yes.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: I had suggested to Monsieur Ouellette at a similar meeting that instead of delivering mail to most of the homes, with new construction not getting home delivery or door-to-door delivery as a result, he consider delivering mail three days a week: Monday, Wednesday, Friday in my area, and Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday in his area. I don't need mail everyday any more. Before there was a stack of mail everyday, but as you've mentioned in your presentation, there is less and less mail, and there's going to be even less yet. I think it's unfair that I should receive mail at the door and a person who is building their \$3 million home very close by does not get home delivery. I'm not asking for an answer, but I'm hoping that senior management is discussing this, because I think it's a good way to serve all Canadians.

The major point I have is that in your presentation, you use “I” an awful lot. I sense in my contact with Canada Post that it's very centralized, very top controlled—almost like the Prime Minister's Office.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Raymond Bonin: You even said that decisions made at senior management have to be embedded, which is why you hired 16 people to embed those decisions. I want you to know there are some very intelligent people working for Canada Post in our communities.

I did have a problem, as you know and as you mentioned. I did not get forewarning, but I found out from constituents, when we got the calls. I had to carry all of the blame for it, because I was the first contact that people made. I called a town hall meeting and your representatives came. They did as good a job as they could; I sensed they weren't free to speak their minds. When I do ask specific questions locally, they cannot make a decision; they have to check with somebody outside of northern Ontario.

A perfect example of this was a dead-end street, where there was a totally handicapped lady in an electric wheelchair in the last house. They forced her to use her electric chair to go up a hill to the neighbour's mailbox, because they said it was unsafe to drive down that hill—which had been ploughed by the town. Locally, everybody sympathized with this lady using her wheelchair. I went back three times and asked them to go to higher-level management, which was always outside of northern Ontario; a local decision was never made on it, because they would have said we're going to find a way to get you your mail. Finally, on the third time they said no, I said, watch the local news this evening, as I'm going to the media with this and the lady and I are going to go and pick up her mail. Instantaneously the problem was solved.

I sense that your operation is too centralized. We've had problems with that in northern Ontario with FedNor and Human Resources. In northern Ontario, we don't want to call Peterborough or Ottawa, or anywhere else, for our decisions. We're intelligent people and can run our operations, and the post office there doesn't belong to Ottawa; it belongs to the people in my riding.

I say this because I had a problem with delivery. I have 52 communities, and I'm going to have a lot more problems. You say you spend seven days a week, 24 hours a day preventing problems. What solutions have you found that will make it different for me the next time somebody calls and says, I'm not getting mail delivered? I have 52 communities.

•(1005)

Ms. Moya Greene: Mr. Bonin, first I want to apologize for any service disruption. I cannot tell you how important a matter this is for Canada Post, that Canadians anywhere in your constituency...that this should be laid at your door. I can only apologize.

In terms of what we can do to prevent it in the future, I can only tell you that there are 4 million rural points of call, Mr. Bonin—4 million. Only 850,000 of these rural points of call get service to the lot line. The other rural Canadians are picking up their mail at a post office, getting their mail in a superbox, or getting their mail in one of the green collective neighbourhood boxes that you sometimes see in

cottage country, where eight or twelve households are coming together to an area.

When someone refuses to work, I assure you we don't get very much notice either. If I had more notice...that's what I am saying. If I had more notice, the disruption would not be as bad as it has been for your constituents, for example. But if I have notice.... What I'm doing is trying to figure out these 800,000 points of call that are getting lot-line delivery now, which is where this problem is concentrated. There's no issue around superboxes or getting the mail at post offices, because nobody's saying it's unsafe to go to the superbox or to the post office. It's only the lot-line delivery that people are saying is unsafe.

If I get some notice, I'm able to go out with regional and local officials. I'm able to say to the people who work in those areas “Can you go and look”—

•(1010)

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Again, you say “I'm”. I don't suspect that the problem is solved in your office. It should be solved locally.

Ms. Moya Greene: Let me rephrase it then. That's probably a bad way of saying it. Let me rephrase it. The company is able, with regional and local officials, to go to the area to actually look and see what alternative we can put in place. In that case, the company officials locally, personally, go to those doors and ask Canadians what would be a reasonable alternative, given that we have to discontinue lot-line delivery.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll go now to Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Ms. Greene, for coming today.

I have a somewhat opposite opinion from my colleague to whom you were just speaking. I'm fairly new here, but we have witnesses to a number of events and there's usually a plethora of people to whom they pass the buck. I appreciate that you're sitting at a table here and taking complete responsibility for the organization you represent. I commend you for that.

I have two questions, and they're similar to what I asked the union representatives we saw a couple of weeks ago. I did a little research on other issues with Canada Post, and one was absenteeism. I think you did a very fine job in your opening statement indicating that you're in a very competitive business environment and productivity can make the difference between profitability and non-profitability. When I looked at it, the information we got from Canada Post—it came from your HR group—was that in absenteeism you're averaging 15.5 days per year.

I think it goes to Ms. Nash's point, probably, that some of that is due to this large injury reporting you're getting. But your numbers are even higher than construction, which I think would probably have more likelihood of injury.

Do you have any comment, first of all, on why there's such a high absentee rate at the post office, and, second, what do you think you're going to be able to do about it?

Ms. Moya Greene: The rate of absenteeism at Canada Post is higher than that at other companies. I believe that the success of the company in the future depends upon all of our people being engaged in that success and all of our people understanding, better than they do today, how the competitive landscape has changed and what the customers are expecting of our company. We have a major strategic initiative under way in the company to bring the customer closer to the shop floor, to bring the ideas and the opportunities that our customers have about providing postal services in a different way, and to help our people understand that there are big changes happening in the landscape.

Besides this, we have retained medical experts to help us understand why a particular problem in one region requires a certain level of absence but in another region seems to require a much higher level of absence from work. We're trying to understand more completely than we do today why that is, so as a company we are retaining more expertise than we've had in-company to do that.

There is a third thing that I think will help. Employee engagement is all about everybody feeling connected to the whole company and feeling that the task they do actually has a relationship to the overall goals of the company. We have instituted a new training program for our supervisors. We have 3,000 supervisors across the country. Their ability to communicate customer expectations to our people on the night shift, on the evening shift, in the plants, and in the depots, and to help our people feel attached to the overall success of the company is a critical part.

So I think all of these steps need to be taken together: getting more expertise on the shop floor and in the letter carrier depots; training our supervisors; and helping our supervisors become better leaders, so they can lead our people in their understanding of the competitive landscape. And I think, as I mentioned earlier, a portion of the corporate team incentive this year will go to employee engagement, which includes a reduction in absenteeism.

• (1015)

Mr. Mike Wallace: You actually have a senior vice-president in charge of employee engagement?

Ms. Moya Greene: Yes.

Mr. Mike Wallace: On a flight recently, I had the fortunate luck to sit beside an individual who is a senior person at the post office and who talked to me about this program you've got going. Would you be surprised to hear that I asked the union representatives about the employee engagement program and their response was that they really didn't know much about it and what its purpose was and whether it had any effect at all? Could you explain to me where you are in the evolution of this program and what you have done to communicate what the expected outcomes are?

Ms. Moya Greene: We just built the strategy in January. We started communicating the elements of the strategy through 16 regional forums that were attended by all of our supervisory people. For the first time in the history of the company we've brought our supervisors together to lay out the elements of the strategy. It was communicated to our 400 most senior executives of the company. It

is communicated every month in a letter that I write to every single employee of our company. It is communicated to our people every month in progress reports on how we're doing. It's communicated at the local and the regional levels by plant managers and the supervisors in charge of depots. People are starting to become much more aware of issues like accidents and absenteeism than they were in the past. So it is being communicated I think very vigorously.

In terms of actual union discussions, we have union discussions pretty well every week at the local level. It has been communicated twice by me at the national level, so I am surprised.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski, go ahead, please.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Temelkovski, we're down to five minutes, starting with you now.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I've read some of the reports of your previous meetings and appearances here, Ms. Greene, and you mentioned in one of your last submissions when you appeared in front of the committee that you would make a significant effort to maintain an equitable service level throughout the post office network, including rural communities.

Would you say that's still the goal? And are we winning the battle or are we losing the battle?

Ms. Moya Greene: It definitely is the goal. We are committed to service to all Canadians, and I feel that commitment more strongly today than even when I started. In rural Canada, as you know, Mr. Temelkovski, we have 4,100 rural post offices and dealerships. There is a complete moratorium on the closure of rural post offices, which I completely and fully respect. But in a network of that size, as you know, things happen. We have had a couple of cases this year where rural post offices have burnt down. We have had five or six cases in rural Canada where—it's probably not that well known that 1,100 of our rural post offices are in individual homes—postmasters have retired, or they have had a heart attack, or they have even passed on and their spouses and families say, we no longer want the post office in our living room. In that case, we have to look for alternatives, and in some of the places in rural Canada there are no retail establishments in the community for us to use as an alternative. So those kinds of situations will arise. It's just inevitable.

But am I committed to service to rural Canadians? Absolutely.

• (1020)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: You mentioned earlier as well that if you had more time or more notice... I think we've had seven or eight months' notice right now. We know that there will be another rural mail route that will stop receiving mail tomorrow, or next week, or the month after and so on and so forth, just purely on the fact that it has increased since they first appeared in November.

So what measures have we taken, other than the temporary green boxes? Do we have enough green boxes that we can employ them immediately? Have we talked to other potential...? Have we done any surveys or risk assessments in other rural mail routes?

Actually, I also spoke with the CUPW people, and they mentioned that they were not involved in the safety study for which you have hired experts in this matter—to look into the ergonomic as well as the safety issue.

The final point is, could you maybe comment on your meeting with the Prime Minister and the minister? Did the meeting touch on rural mail delivery, or was it something else? Do you anticipate that one of the solutions may be that the government will use their dividend of \$80 million this year to maybe pony up and subsidize some of the costs that are required to maintain rural mail delivery? You mentioned to me previously, as did your staff, that it is a costly way to get right-hand trucks and so on and so forth. So maybe for part of that \$80 million, the government would part with some of it and maybe partner with you, half and half or something like that. Was there any discussion about that?

Ms. Moya Greene: First, what are we doing on the risk assessment side? There are 800,00 points of call, and these points of call are organized around 6,000 different routes, so there are sometimes many hundreds of points of call in a single route. To assess which point of call has a highway traffic safety problem is a huge undertaking, because you have to go out to all of those routes and have a look, site by site.

That's what we're doing. We've asked the rural officers of our company and the local officers of our company—officials of our company—to do that for us, and the National Research Council study at least gave us some criteria that we could use to make that assessment.

We are also relying, to get this done as quickly as we possibly can, on engineering maintenance companies that work with us throughout the country on maintaining our facilities, because they have engineering capability. We're relying on these companies to give us extra arms and legs, to go and look and try to assess where we might have an issue so we can be a little bit more proactive and say to Canadians who might be affected, "We're worried and we don't want you to see a disruption in service without notice." So we're doing that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to go on to Monsieur Nadeau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Good morning, Ms. Greene.

If I'm not mistaken, you announced on August 3, 2005 that you would be shutting down the mail sortation plant in Quebec City. When exactly did you decide to shut down this centre?

Ms. Moya Greene: I will have to check the exact date of our meeting with Mr. McCallum, who was the shareholder's representative. The announcement was made just before that meeting.

As you know, under article 29 of the collective agreement, we had to notify our union of our rationalization plans. That is exactly what

we did. The announcement was made precisely at the same time. We had an obligation to do that under the contract.

• (1025)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: And how did you arrive at that decision? On what documentation and what kind of analysis did you base yourself to make the decision to shut the Quebec City sortation centre?

Ms. Moya Greene: Operational matters are handled by people who work in operations, in the region. For myself and others in the Corporation, the criteria are always the same. We ask ourselves whether it's possible to rationalize operations without cutting back services, without penalizing either part-time or permanent employees or causing job losses in those areas, and whether this can be accomplished in an orderly manner. Finally, we must ask ourselves whether this can be done while maintaining service to the people of Quebec City, both operationally and logistically. These people are tasked with answering those questions.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Did you carry out an impact study to ascertain the consequences of the sortation centre closure for Quebec City and Eastern Quebec?

Ms. Moya Greene: Operationally speaking, our people in Quebec took all necessary steps to ensure that service would be maintained in the region. They were aware of existing transportation links. Three additional links were put in place. They also set up a special system in Montreal for mail from Quebec City. So, from an operational standpoint, our people in Montreal, Quebec City and the surrounding area put in place...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Excuse me, Ms. Greene. If I understand you correctly, an assessment was made.

Ms. Moya Greene: Well, our people...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Fine. I want to put a very simple question to you. Madam Chair, please enlighten me in this regard. I would like the Committee to be able to get a hold of the assessments or assessment that was carried out of the potential consequences for Quebec City and Eastern Quebec. I would like us to be given copies of that document, and I would also like to receive a written document from Canada Post setting out the rationale for closing the Quebec City mail sortation plant. Will you provide us with a written document setting out the rationale for your decision and providing an assessment of its impact?

Ms. Moya Greene: I don't know whether such a document exists. I will ask my colleagues in the region and in operations whether such a document does exist.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: If I understand you...

Mme Moya Greene: I will ask them.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: My background is in teaching. When you have to present a curriculum or evaluate your students, you have to have proper documents. We're talking here about the closure of a mail sortation centre, so I do hope there are documents to support that decision. I certainly hope that such an important decision was not made verbally, in the course of a conversation one day. Madam Chair, I would like it to be noted that we should receive documents from the Corporation explaining the rationale for closing the mail sortation centre in Quebec City and setting out the impacts of that decision on Quebec City and Eastern Quebec.

•(1030)

Ms. Moya Greene: I will find out whether such a report exists.

The Chair: If it does exist, you will provide it to the Committee.

Ms. Moya Greene: That's what I intend to do, Mr. Nadeau. I will make enquiries.

The Chair: Thank you, your time is up.

[English]

Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Greene, for being here today.

I live in a rural area. I've watched rural delivery people sit in the middle of that bench seat, drive with one hand, and reach out with the other hand, or they go to the wrong side of the road to deliver mail. I am concerned about the safety aspect and the aspect of ergonomic injury.

I want to follow up on the question Mr. Temelkovski asked in terms of right-hand driving. What kinds of studies have been done in terms of the cost of right-hand-drive vehicles?

I see that we have a profit of \$199 million. You said there are roughly 7,000 postal offices across Canada. I'm assuming that probably 5,000 or more of those are rural.

Ms. Moya Greene: It's 4,000.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It's 4,000. That's better.

If my math is correct, at a cost of \$50,000 per vehicle, which is probably very generous, it would seem to me that in one year we could actually purchase enough right-hand-drive vehicles to offset two concerns: one is delivery on the wrong side of the road, and the other is repetitive stress from reaching across. I know I'm oversimplifying, but that's the first part.

I'll get my second one in quickly, so that you can hopefully respond to both.

Secondly, as Mr. Bonin mentioned, in an area with houses that are getting door-to-door delivery, people in houses adjacent to them go to green boxes. I'm not talking about homes that cost \$3 million. I'm talking about homes that cost \$200,000, where the density is very evident.

It would seem to me that, after a certain tipping point, criteria would be in place where door-to-door delivery would be implemented. Could you give to us a set of criteria or a range as to when the decision is made by Canada Post to implement door-to-door delivery, opposed to continuing with green boxes year after year in subdivisions that are very large, and quite a lot larger than other areas where there is already door-to-door delivery?

Ms. Moya Greene: On right-hand-drive vehicles, first I would like to say yes, we are investigating every single option, and we are trying to better understand the ergonomic issues involved. I agree with you, there are definitely some ergonomic issues involved.

Right-hand-drive vehicles do not exist. They are not manufactured. We have gone to several manufacturers to test out if they might even be interested, and because it would be a single purchase,

not very many of them are. They are considerably more than \$50,000. We have 15-year-old right-hand-drive vehicles. We have about 1,000 of them that are quite old. They're used for some of the urban system. Our urban network is enormous, so if we were to change all of our vehicles to right-hand-drive.... You can't just say, well, if we have to have a right-hand-drive vehicle in rural Canada, we don't need a right-hand-drive vehicle anywhere else. I ask the committee to share the understanding that this is a huge network. There are thousands and thousands of routes. It's a very big logistical exercise.

I am being told that if right-hand-drive vehicles could be procured, if you could find a manufacturer and you were going full bore, the first ones could not come off any assembly line in less than three years, with all of the regulatory issues you'd have to get through. But as a very preliminary, what I would call class Z estimate, just for the rural areas we know about—and I think Mr. Temelkovski is correct that we will certainly, over the course of time, find out about others—you would be talking about a couple of hundred million dollars of capital cost.

But there's another point I need to mention. Right now a significant portion, about 20%, of rural route salaries is attached to the use of a private vehicle. The amount of money rural route people are paid is on the basis of how long it takes for them to do the stops, so if we were going to provide right-hand-drive vehicles, let's say three or four years down the road—

•(1035)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Okay, I think you've convinced me you've done some looking into it. I'm glad you're looking into it.

But I really need an answer to the last part of my question. Are there criteria that you could supply the committee that will give us an expectation as to when a certain community might be able to expect door-to-door delivery as opposed to having to continue going to superboxes for 15 to 20 years?

Ms. Moya Greene: Superboxes are well liked by the people who have them because they are secure and they are conveniently located. We have done studies of new subdivisions to ask whether the superbox figures at all in the decision to buy the house in the area and it does not.

I guess what I would say is we have been using superboxes as a safe, effective, secure, and efficient way to deliver the mail to every new community that has been built up over the past 20 years. I would have to see a study—which I have never seen—that would tell me that we would change that.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I guess I would ask why we don't all go to superboxes, then, and cut our costs, have a lot less door-to-door delivery?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albrecht.

Mr. Comuzzi.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Lib.): Thank you.

No, stay with your superboxes; I like the letters delivered to my home.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So do I.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Don't be making those radical changes.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to come to your meeting today, and it's nice to see you again, Ms. Greene.

We were very pleased to see that you were appointed to your present position. We've followed you, and you're doing remarkably well in the first year of operation, so I compliment you on that.

Ms. Moya Greene: Thank you very much.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: I'm here today on something that has some effect on Canada Post, though not a great deal on the amount of business you do. It has to do with the collection of mail and having it delivered to destinations outside of Canada. You have a special name for that.

A voice: Remailers.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Yes.

And Madam Chair, I had to go to another meeting at 10 o'clock, so if that's been discussed, I won't belabour it.

The Chair: It has not.

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Let me try to succinctly put in some background. There was a court decision on February 17. Canada Post had asked for a permanent injunction on the particular business doing these particular cross-country mailings, not only in the United States but in all the European countries and so on, as you well know.

The injunction was granted. I don't know how many of these businesses there are in Canada; there are perhaps 50 or 60, and they employ almost 4,000 people. Part of the injunction—the draconian part, I think, of the court ruling—was that they gave these companies six months to cease operations.

We don't think that's policy of Canada Post, inasmuch as you've mentioned the chairperson's length of stay here in Ottawa; I thought you were going to give a rage, but you just stopped short of that.

We spend an inordinate amount of time in Canada, as you well know, trying to create jobs, spending huge amounts of money on retraining people for jobs and so on and so forth. This decision seems to be counterproductive to what we're really trying to accomplish in a policy network within our country.

You don't have to answer this, but I suspect very much that this is one of the areas you inherited when you took over, and it's gone down to the legal decision. As we all know, common sense doesn't always prevail in a legal decision, and I think this is one of those instances. I know this would be of concern to you when you start thinking about all these businesses and these people who will be displaced.

Have you considered any alternatives to that decision? More importantly, the decision was on February 17. They were given six months. We're talking now; we won't meet again until we come back in the fall. It will be active, and we're causing a lot of unrest. Do you have any options you would like to talk about this morning?

Thank you.

● (1040)

Ms. Moya Greene: Mr. Comuzzi, it's a very interesting question and issue you raise, as usual.

I welcome all competition in our business. I think it's healthy. It's good for us. It drives innovation to see what others are doing in the market, so I really welcome it.

The law as it stands now, though, puts an enormous responsibility on Canada Post that no other competitor has, and that responsibility is to deliver the mail at a reasonable cost to everyone. That's the obligation we have. That's an expensive obligation, and it gets more so every year, with a quarter of a million new addresses being added.

In this case, this is illegal activity. It is clearly illegal. We have six decisions; these companies are really in partnership with foreign posts in the world that have come into the Canadian market and picked up some of our most profitable mail, that being business mail destined for other countries.

We need the profit from that mail. That's the reason we were given the shrinking, shrinking, so-called exclusive privilege. There's not much exclusivity left to the exclusive privilege. That's the reason we were given the exclusive privilege: so that the portion of the market available only for Canada Post would help defray the huge costs of our service obligation.

I understand, and in some ways I feel exactly as you do. It is not good that a behemoth—the sixth largest employer, with a \$1 billion-a-year pension responsibility—should be asking that others exit the market, but that's the arrangement the Government of Canada has put in place. Along with other aspects of our business, that is how we pay for the universal obligation we have.

Until we change that, new entrants into some aspects of our market are going to be watched by Canada Post pretty carefully; otherwise, we will have entrants illegally moving into the most profitable segments of the market without having any of the service obligations we have.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thanks, Ms. Greene, for coming in today. We appreciate it.

I do have a couple of questions, actually several questions, so let's see where we get.

With regard to the library book rate, it has been extended on a temporary basis. How long is that extension, and are there plans to make this a permanent establishment? What are your views on it? In a few sentences, if you could.

Ms. Moya Greene: On the library book rate, I'm very committed to that program. This is part of the commitment of Canada Post, and the rate has been established until 2007. We negotiate with the library associations, as a very important customer of Canada Post, at the expiration of every agreement.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: So it's until 2007. Are you already in negotiations for—

Ms. Moya Greene: I think they're completed until 2007, so there's a rate guarantee in place until 2007.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: So now you'd start the negotiations for beyond then. How long would the next negotiations be extended to?

Ms. Moya Greene: It depends. We need to look at what the volumes are going to be. We have to make sure that our rates are going to at least cover our costs.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Yes, I understand that. When would those negotiations begin?

Ms. Moya Greene: I'd have to check that for you. I'll have to ask our commercial reps who have the libraries as part of their portfolio. I will get back to you on that.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Maybe I'll make this a comment more than a question—maybe you don't have the answer and maybe it isn't planned, as of yet, to change things. What I'd like to see is an extension of the library book rate to all library materials. There are a number of other literacy tools that libraries use. It could be DVDs, those types of things, and I think it would be important that these be included in the next negotiations, that the book rate be extended to other materials for libraries.

Maybe I'll give that as a consideration for you. It is something I'm hearing a fair bit about from the libraries, that it would be an important thing as the new media develop.

• (1045)

Ms. Moya Greene: Yes, we have those discussions with libraries and others across the country as to what should and should not be included in the commercial agreements. I'm sure this will come up.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Do I take it from your comments that you are in favour of extending it to things other than books?

Ms. Moya Greene: I'm not going to go that far.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Okay.

In terms of rural post offices, certainly, we have issues, specifically in my constituency. You talked about extenuating circumstances where rural post offices may close. Obviously, in Alberta specifically, there's an issue of labour force. It's very, very difficult to get people to work in post offices because the competition is so rigorous. It's going to take some particular efforts on behalf of Canada Post to ensure that rural post offices remain open in the coming years, specifically in competitive labour markets. What are you doing to ensure you can maintain service in these markets?

Ms. Moya Greene: You're absolutely correct. There are some parts of the country where labour markets are very, very tight. What we do in that case is to advertise positions regionally, and nationally in some cases, so we do go to extraordinary efforts to try to find people. For the most part, I have not heard—I'll have to check—that while we're out searching.... Obviously, there may be a couple of months or a few months where we have temporary people or part-time people there, but I have not heard that we're not able—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'll give you the story.

I'd like you to look into Little Smoky, Alberta. We have a situation there where that circumstance is happening, right as we speak, so look into that. Look into places like Hines Creek and Cleardale. Those areas are experiencing these types of things. Certainly, there

are stories, and I think if you investigate them a little bit further, you'll find out it's tied to the amount Canada Post is willing to pay these people, because the market is so.... And we're talking about closing post offices as a result of these labour issues.

With regard to rural communities, you mentioned that roads are changing and maybe they're different from what they were in the past. In my community, the roads have only improved since they started delivering mail into these communities. The roads have been built up and are bigger and nicer and there's more room to get off the roads. Yet we're still seeing these different issues with regard to safety. Obviously, all of us being Canadians, we know that winter is probably the biggest issue with regard to road safety, if we have blind spots and that kind of thing. That's not going to change.

What are you doing, and how are you going to address this? I'm very concerned that as we reach the winter months, we'll have hundreds and hundreds of mail delivery folk saying, "I can't do it. It's unsafe for me to go out there." What we'll be doing then is forcing all of the people to go to other locations and face those roads. I think it will be a major safety concern as we reach winter if we don't have something to ensure that we'll have mail service throughout the winter.

Ms. Moya Greene: I agree with you. We are doing everything we can. As I mentioned, proactively we're trying to figure out where we might have a problem down the road. I'd like to be able to say to every single Canadian, exactly where you're getting your mail today is where you're going to get your mail forever and all time, but I can't.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: So you're suggesting that because of our winter roads, you might have to move to other methods of delivery?

Ms. Moya Greene: It depends if it's a safety issue, Mr. Warkentin.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've gone over our time once more.

I will turn to Madame Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Ms. Greene, did you appeal the arbitration decision? Is it still before the Superior Court? Has the case dealing with arbitrator Dulude's ruling been heard? Is it resolved now, or is your appeal yet to be heard?

Ms. Moya Greene: The arbitrator ruled in our favour. As far as I know, the only thing he referred to did not deal with article 29. We fully complied with article 29. So, we can continue to move through the seven steps of the process to transfer the mail

• (1050)

Ms. Louise Thibault: I will check my information in anticipation of next fall. Thank you, Ms. Greene.

We are very stubborn over here, so I'd like to come back to the question raised by my colleague with respect to the closing. We talked about Quebec City, but we have exactly the same concern in relation to every other major mail processing centre in Quebec.

In reply to one of my questions earlier, you stated that five centres in Toronto have now been consolidated into two, I believe. I don't remember the exact numbers, but in Quebec City, this phenomenon is known as "montréalisation". Operations are being transferred to Montreal. Of course, we all love that great and beautiful city, but every time operations are cut back in major centres in Quebec and Canada, something is taken away, and that will eventually have an impact. That is what I believe, so this isn't really a question.

You talked about Toronto, Calgary, Western Canada, Eastern Canada and the Maritimes. You were appointed a year ago and you have financial targets. In fact, you tend to talk about the company, whereas I would prefer that you talk about the Crown corporation. So, you have to meet your financial targets. You told us that you ask nothing of Canadian taxpayers. On the other hand, you most certainly have a strategic plan. At some point, you and your management teams sit down and take a look at your operations. I know that studies are carried out at the local and regional levels, but the final decision is made by the person who is the equivalent of the deputy minister. And very often as well, the decision is made at the political level.

Somewhere there must be planning that allows you to justify cutbacks. You will say there is no reduction in service, but I'm sure there must be some document somewhere on which you relied to make such important decisions as merging three or four sortation centres or shutting down one in Quebec City and moving the work to Montreal.

Ms. Moya Greene: It's not a question of service. Service is not being reduced. The fact is that service in Quebec City is now the best in the country. Mail is delivered there on time in 98 per cent of cases. So, no one can say there have been any cuts in service. Nor have there been any job losses. This is an operational matter.

With all due respect, Mr. Bonin, I'd say that decisions on operational matters must be made by people with expertise in local operations. They are the ones that made this decision, because they know how to change the mail handling process to ensure better service.

As regards Quebec City, I would remind all Committee members that our future expenditures in Quebec City will amount to \$90 million annually.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Yes, you said that earlier.

Ms. Moya Greene: They are the ones that make these decisions.

We now have access to new equipment for transportation. They can get the mail out in different ways. In fact, if we're talking about Montreal, it's important to remember that 70 per cent of the mail is addressed to people living in that city. So, for them, this is a service improvement.

• (1055)

Ms. Louise Thibault: Based on what you were saying earlier, a letter leaving a given city or town en route to Quebec City will now go to Montreal, and then be returned to a city or town located some 30 kilometers away.

I'm sorry, Ms. Greene, but my time is up. I'll ask you that question another time.

The Chair: Ms. Nash.

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash: Ms. Greene, I want to recall for the committee that when the Conservative Party was in opposition last year they said they opposed the closing of the Quebec sorting centre and that they would review it.

Now, Minister Cannon has said:

...the members of Parliament and ministers from the Quebec City area did fulfill their election promises by thoroughly reviewing and examining the closure issue.

He said he had obtained information from Canada Post showing "that the quality of mail delivery in that area will be improved". I guess that's what you are describing for us. I can only assume that this is not just verbal information, that in fact there are appropriate written documents. I wanted to echo the request from Monsieur Nadeau that we should be able to reassure ourselves as a committee that the service to Quebec City, and to eastern Quebec as well, is not suffering because of the closure of the processing plant.

And I guess I want to ask you, if these are inconclusive or unsatisfactory, would you be willing to work with parliamentarians and others to do an independent assessment to make sure that the quality of service is not suffering for people in Quebec?

Ms. Moya Greene: Madam Nash, the quality of service and the timeliness of service is done independently, for all posts, by IBM. We don't do it because we need to have agreements with posts around the world as to how long we will take to deliver their mail. In Canada, we have service commitments as part of our policy framework: service commitments inside individual cities, service commitments between cities, and service commitments between provinces.

In order to make sure that we are respecting these commitments, internationally and locally and regionally and nationally, IBM is the third party—it's completely independent of Canada Post—that does the checks on how service delivery is affected. They do it at all seasons of the year, so we know how we're doing in the winter as well as in the summer. That research is available, as soon as we get it from IBM, on our website. So it is done.

Ms. Peggy Nash: All right, good. Thank you.

My last question is around energy efficiency and the environment. Our party, the NDP, launched a green transportation policy recently, which looks at a number of ways to increase energy efficiency. Maybe you could tell us a bit about the greening of Canada Post. What measures are you putting in place to ensure that energy efficiency is increasing and greenhouse gas emissions are declining?

Ms. Moya Greene: As you probably know, Ms. Nash, we have one of the largest fleets in Canada. Obviously, we don't replace our fleet every year; we let the vehicles go their natural life and then we replace a certain percentage of them periodically. Now, in the RFPs—to replace whatever percentage we are replacing—we are insisting on far greater fuel and energy efficiency. I think that's probably one of the most important things that Canada Post can do to reduce greenhouse gases.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Is there any move to have more hybrid vehicles or to explore alternative fuel sources. What kind of specific measure have you taken?

Ms. Moya Greene: We look at hybrid vehicles all the time. Right now, at the state of development of hybrid vehicles, we don't have vehicles of the right size and the right configuration for the delivery of mail. But we're paying attention to that, because that's a developing market. Every year there's something new in that market. We're paying very close attention to that.

When we can get vehicles with the right stability and the right size and weight configurations for our needs, we will certainly be moving in that direction.

• (1100)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Given the size of the operation of Canada Post and the success of the operation, with a real desire on the part of the federal government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it would be an important procurement initiative for our government to stimulate the production of these kinds of vehicles, given their wide usage in Canada Post.

Ms. Moya Greene: Well, the government, of course, can manage its procurement as it sees fit. Canada Post is a commercial crown corporation, and our procurement is managed under a very rigorous CITT, NAFTA-supervised process.

All I can say to you is that I think we have probably one of the most successful procurement processes in Canada. Unlike anybody else I've ever heard of, we have not had a successful CITT challenge yet. When we do procure, the manufacturers' specifications and the possibilities from manufacturers are completely researched. We have in our company fleet experts, as you can well imagine, given the—

Ms. Peggy Nash: If the federal government wanted to stimulate investment in high-efficiency vehicles—the type that Canada Post needs—it would be a smart move to generate sales within Canada for Canada Post.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Nash.

We'll have one very short, last question from Mr. Bonin.

Before we end the meeting, I wish you all a good summer, and we will meet again, probably on September 19.

Monsieur Bonin.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: There we go.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I will keep it short.

I have a few issues, but I'll stick to this one, because of my thought that your operation is very centralized in your office; there are no decisions made locally. That explains why Mr. Warkentin asked you to investigate a situation in a small rural post office, because you're sitting alone at the table. It's the first time in 13 years that I have had a person of your position come without senior officials.

In answering my earlier question, you offered an apology to me for the situation in my riding. I didn't suffer because of it. My mail came to my home, because I live in a different area. So I would ask if you would send an apology, in writing, to the 220 families, instead of apologizing to me. It would make them very happy to receive an apology from the chief executive officer.

Ms. Moya Greene: I would be happy to do that. I want you to know that apologies on behalf of the company have already been sent, but I would be very happy to send a personal apology.

Mr. Raymond Bonin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you for appearing before the committee. And have a great summer.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Do we have an agenda item?

The Chair: Yes, we're doing our study on the accrual business.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Oh, it's on accrual accounting. All right. I can't wait to get back!

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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