

Rural mail delivery threatened?

Independent panel set to make recommendations this fall

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As critics take stabs at the government, charging that a review of Canada Post operations is either a waste of time or a secretive move towards deregulation and privatization, Cumberland Coun. Rob Jellett says his only concern is the maintenance of rural service.

“I wouldn’t support a move to super mailboxes and the elimination of rural routes just to make it more cost effective,” says Jellett, who indicated he had not heard about the review until asked. “I understand they have a business case to make, but they are in the service business and that means you serve your customers.”

Servicing existing customers equitably is exactly what Canadian Union of Public Employees president Denis Lemelin says his union wants to continue to do, however he is not hopeful. Lemelin says although the three-member review panel is still accepting submissions and the final review will not be delivered until December, he expects the recommendation will be a deregulatory move to eliminate the crown corporation’s exclusive privilege to letter service delivery, which will be bad for rural residents.

“If (letter service) is open to all the big corporations maybe they will be profitable in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal and forget about the rural areas,” says Lemelin.

“Canada Post has been put in place to make sure that service is universal and equitable across the country.”

Lemelin charges the review is being conducted quietly over the summer to limit participation. He says this limits public participation, and that the selection of Dr. Robert Campbell as panel chair is evidence that the review will most likely recommend deregulation.

“(Campbell) has talked about deregulation and pushed deregulation. In 2002 he wrote about 10 points the government can use to deregulate and update the postal service,” Lemelin says, referring to Campbell’s 2002 article *The Post*

Modern: It's time for Serious Postal reform.

In the article Campbell writes, "Canada's postal regime should pursue liberalization and deregulation" and "gradually remove exclusive privilege." President of Mount Alison University, Campbell has spent several years studying global postal services and authored two books on the subject, *The Politics of Post: Canada's Postal System from public service to Privatization* and *The Politics of Postal Transformation: Modernizing Postal Systems in a Technological and Global World*.

Karen White, press secretary of the Minister responsible for Canada Post, Lawrence Cannon, dismissed any accusations of bias saying all members were selected from a pool of candidates "on the basis of their expertise, experience and objectivity."

Any inherent bias may be a moot point says Liberal critic Joe Volpe. He's confident the four guiding principles laid down for the review panel – that say Canada Post cannot be privatized, must maintain universal service, continue as an instrument of public policy and attain a realistic return on equity – do not allow for deregulation, and the more important question is why the review is being conducted at all.

"I look forward to hearing what it is he has to say, but if it is everything he has already said then it doesn't make much sense to conduct (the review)," says Volpe, adding that the Liberals do not favour deregulation or privatization.

Rural residents should not be concerned about a loss of service, according to Volpe. With a Conservative Party heavily reliant on rural seats it is unlikely there will be any further loss of rural service.

"I think the rural lobby is so strong that it won't allow for any change," he says.

Currently accepting public submissions via e-mail, fax and mail until Sept. 2, the independent panel will deliver its recommendations to the government about market and competition, public policy objectives and responsibilities, commercial activities and financial performance targets on Dec. 2.

-- By David May