

Minister
Responsible for
Canada Post Corporation



Ministre
responsable de la
Société canadienne des postes

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE DAVID C. DINGWALL, P.C.
MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR CANADA POST
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Speaker, for many years, if you went for a drive through rural Canada - or if, like me, you had the privilege to live there - you would inevitably come to a small town. And at the centre of that small town, you would find a small brick or wooden building, with the Canadian Flag fluttering overhead. This was the small-town Post Office. It was a place where people would come to mail packages to loved ones who had gone off to war. It was a place where people would come to pick up letters from children away at school, or where they would go to send a few dollars to a relative in need. It was a place where rural Communities would come together to chat about their hopes and dreams - or even to share a little bit of gossip.

A few years ago, under the previous government, that all changed. A new policy was put in place - a policy called "conversion". The 1986-1990 Canada Post Corporate Plan, was the beginning of conversion. With the approval and encouragement of the previous government, Canada Post proposed to close or convert all Rural Post Offices, and a significant number of Urban Post Offices, too. All across Canada - despite the protests of thousands of Canadians, despite the trauma and anger it caused - the "conversion" policy slammed shut the door on an important part of Canadian life.

Since 1987, close to 1,500 federally operated post offices have been closed or converted. That is close to one-third of the 5,500-odd post offices in Canada. In Ontario, 391 post offices were closed. In Saskatchewan, 214. In my own Province, Nova Scotia, there were 83.

In the province of Québec, 234 post offices have been closed since 1987. In Québec as in all other provinces, post office closures have caused much anger and concern.

Before the election campaign, the Liberal Party said "NO" to Post Office closures. The Liberal Party has always said "no" to this policy.

During the Election, Mr. Chrétien said "NO" to Post Office closures. And now, today, our position remains the same. We say "NO" to Post Office closures.

Today, as the Minister responsible for Canada Post, I am announcing the end of the previous government's Post Office Closure and Conversion Policy.

Post Office closures in rural and small town Canada are over. Beginning today, an indefinite moratorium is in place for all rural and small town post offices in Canada.

Changes to the new policy - as in urban areas with two or more Post Offices - will not take place unless there has been a full and comprehensive consultation with Postal Services Customer Councils. The people will decide.

The moratorium - which follows very helpful consultations I have had with executives at Canada Post, Labour Leaders and various community groups - is effective immediately.

It follows a lengthy review I have conducted into the implications of eliminating the CPC's closure and conversion program. I also appreciate the help provided by the Canada Post Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is a viable Crown Corporation, and we want to keep it that way. I can assure Canadians today that the Canada Post Corporation will be doing what it was designed to do - provide an essential and viable public service. And that means just that: serve the public.

Let me conclude by saying this: for millions of Canadians, the rural Post Office - or the small town Post Office - has been a point of connection for millions of Canadians. They have been an important part of our heritage.

They are points of connection between millions of Canadians and their government. In tough times like these - when people feel disconnected from governments and each other - we need to build links, not sever them. We need to bring people together, not cut them off. In this sense, the Post Office plays an important role in unifying our great country. That is what our New Government is about and that is what my announcement today is about.

Thank you