

Ottawa Report

Post office should be more accountable

As I write this, Canada Post workers are on rotating strikes. A settlement between the union and management is, I hope, close at hand. But it also could be a longer and troubled strike.

For many MPs - me included - the operations of the post office are sometimes tough to deal with. I wrote about this a few weeks ago - saying Canada Post is no more responsible to individual Members of Parliament than, say, Canadian National. So, when a decision is made to change a rural route operator in Terra Cotta or alter the post office hours in Alton, Canada Post does not consult Garth Turner first. In fact, I often learn of the changes after postal users themselves do.

There are people who don't like this. They think the post office should be accountable to local MPs. There are others who refuse to believe the statements I have just made, and still others who are just plain angry.

"It is your government that has created this mess by not embedding the necessary safeguards into the legislation and regulations governing Canada Post," one man writes me. "It is incumbent upon you to respond to the people who have elected you. It is incumbent upon you and your colleagues to correct the deficiencies that exist in the current legislation in order to respond to the shareholders of Canada Post."

Well, I agree.

The post office should be more

Garth Turner

MP  
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accountable, and I have tried to influence the government into making that happen.

I was chairman of the House of Commons committee which conducted the biggest enquiry ever into Canada Post's operations. And I was the one who authored the report which asked the government to make big changes. Among them:

- End the illusion that politicians have control over the post office, and privatize it by selling shares to the 64,000 employees, and other individual Canadians. Canada Post is profitable - it would be a good investment for people.

- Then create an agency to regulate Canada Post - a watchdog with real teeth, like the CRTC which regulates the broadcasting and phone systems. Then we'd have an agency people could appeal to, ensuring good postal service.

- And if Canada Post and the

unions can't work together, then postal users should not be held hostage. I recommended that during a strike, the post office should lose its monopoly over delivering letter mail.

There were other recommendations, dealing with every aspect of the way Canada Post does business. Some were accepted, but many were not - including the three I have just outlined.

When Parliament resumes in a few weeks, I will push once again for these kinds of fundamental changes. I don't think it's right that small business and others who rely on the mail should have to suffer when union and management bosses can't get their act together. I don't think it's fair that a town can lose its post office and have absolutely no mechanism through which to respond. I also don't think that business decisions taken by the postal service should be subject to political interference.

Canada Post is vastly better than the old postal department run by the government. But it could be better, still.

If you agree with any of these recommendations of mine, your letters of support could help a lot in Ottawa. If you don't agree, I'd appreciate knowing your position.

And as for this strike, maybe common sense and good faith will end it soon. If it doesn't, I'm sure that Parliament will. I'll be in my place to vote on it.

Queen's Park Report

New location for constituency office

By NOEL DUIGNAN

MPP, Halton North

Last week I told you about my decision to move the Milton constituency office to the downstairs unit of the present building to allow for easier access. My staff are almost settled into the new location but they ask for your continued patience while they finish setting up the office. I managed to miss most of the confusion because I had to travel to several Ontario cities as part of my committee duties as an MPP. The Standing Committee on General Government has been holding public hearings on Rent Control. Six legislative committees in all have been participating in hearings this month to receive your comments on various provincial matters.

Meanwhile, in Toronto, Municipal Affairs Minister Dave Cooke announced the establishment of a six-minister steering committee to guide the province through a realignment of provincial/municipal roles and responsibilities. He made the announcement during a panel discussion at the annual August conference of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

Stating the issue as "good, efficient and accountable government," the Minister indicated a commitment toward finding a better way for the province and the municipalities to deliver the services that communities demand and deserve. The new committee must work through the funding and program problems between the two levels of government so that services are delivered efficiently with a fair and understandable sharing of responsibility.

Ongoing federal cutbacks to social program payments have made the challenges facing the committee even more difficult. The steering committee will consist of six municipal representatives who will be appointed by AMO and six provincial cabinet ministers: Municipal Affairs Minister Dave Cooke; Treasurer



Noel Duignan

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Floyd Laughren; Environment Minister Ruth Grier; Community and Social Services Minister Zanana Akan; Education Minister Marion Boyd; and Transportation Minister Gilles Pouliot. The members will rethink local and provincial roles and contemplate which level of government should be responsible for designing, delivering and paying for the programs and services people want and need. Disentanglement - the term used to describe the realignment - also addresses questions of accountability to taxpayers.

The process should result in a clearer understanding of which level of government provides what program or service, which level will be responsible for it, and what source of revenue should fund it. Our government will be establishing a Secretariat to provide policy and administrative support to the committee.

A few of you have inquired about the proposed changes to provincial labour legislation so I would like to clarify a number of issues. Building on a commitment outlined in the Throne Speech of last November, Labour Minister Bob Mackenzie asked a group of six labour experts (three management, three union), to put forward and assess a number of suggestions for review of the Ontario Labour Relations Act (OLRA). The Act has not been updated since 1975.

This preliminary step resulted

in the completion of two reports in April 1991 which made up the first phase in the policy development process. These suggestions are not yet in the firm of legislation before the House. The Ministry of Labour is still at the stage of policy development and will be issuing a consultation paper in the fall that will be used as the basis for a province-wide consultation process involving business, labour, municipalities and all other affected groups.

In the Throne Speech, our government stated a commitment to make it easier for workers to have greater workplace participation. For too long, labour-management relations have been characterized by confrontation and antagonism and we hope to improve productivity and competitiveness through greater cooperation between the two parties.

I hope that this information answers some of your questions about the process.

ECOLINE

by Catherine Forley

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Burning more fossil fuels accelerates global warming. Glaciers and the South polar ice-cap melt, and sea levels rise.

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Source: Worldwatch Institute

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