



HOUSE OF COMMONS
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Dennis Bevington MP
Western Arctic

House of Commons Debates
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Canada Post Corporation Act

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-321, a bill that my colleague from Brandon—Souris has put forward on a number of occasions in this House of Commons. I am glad to see that it is moving toward completion for him. He has been an excellent proponent for this particular service and also a very good chair of the transportation committee, on which I served for three years. I am pleased to do this for him.

Since 1939, Canada Post has set a reduced postal rate for library materials. However, this is under a corporate policy. It is not under legislation.

Over 2,000 libraries regularly use the library book rate. The library book rate is not a government program and it is not currently financed by the Conservative government. Therefore, I think my colleague will find support on his side of the House for the bill because it will not cost the penurious government any money.

The ability of Canada's libraries to transfer materials across the country at a low rate allows Canadians in rural and remote locations to have access to the same materials as those who live in large urban centres. For me, growing up in the Northwest Territories when libraries were the dominant form of knowledge and information, this service was absolutely required.

Through this program, the Ulukhaktok Community Library on Victoria Island in the High Arctic has the same access to library materials as the Toronto Public Library, through the national libraries.

The rate contributes to the public policy goals of literacy, lifelong learning and vibrant rural and remote communities. Of course, the new information age has assisted greatly in communities across northern Canada. Improvements to other forms of delivery for those information services are still required and those still should be pushed forward.

Access to knowledge is an essential part of democracy. However, in this latest Conservative budget, we see that the Conservatives are opposed to knowledge. They are opposed to the dissemination of knowledge. They are opposed to the collection of knowledge on the part of the public. We see this over and over again in the budget implementation bill.

I want to speak specifically to libraries because the Conservatives are also gutting the National Library Service, the very repository of knowledge and information and the very people who not only collect the knowledge but also create ways to disseminate the knowledge across the country to those thousands of libraries that exist in Canada.

Library and Archives Canada is subject to \$9.6 million in cuts over the next three years. Twenty per cent of the staff are being cut. This is a shameful situation in a country where the use of knowledge is so important to the development of our economy and to the development of our citizens in a good and equitable fashion across the whole country.

The inter-library loan program is being cut. The very program that the bill would help support across the country is being cut by the Conservative government and through the cuts to the national libraries.

We have a good-intentioned bill that is being superseded by these massive cuts that are taking place at our national libraries.

Also, within that, the national archival development program is being cut. Across the country, the development of archives, which can hold the information, hold the history of this country, is being cut. The country's history is rich right across the whole country. We need this kind of archival development program in my territory, especially because much of the history is oral and is not easily available. We need to have ways that we can preserve this over time.

We heard that libraries are being closed at many government departments. The libraries at Agriculture Canada, Environment Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Industry Canada, the National Capital Commission, National Defence, Public Works, the Public Service Commission and Transport Canada are gone. The formation is gone. The availability of information and the people who understand the information and can provide it to others are gone.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada has already announced the closure of its library. That information is gone and those people who can provide that information to others

right across the country are gone. Canadians expect to have access to a vast wealth of materials managed by Library and Archives Canada. What is going on with this picture?

Canadian Library Association president Karen Adams said, in part:

“Our national library and archives has a broad mandate to acquire, preserve and make available the documentary heritage of Canada. It is also responsible for the management of the archival records of government. Even before the [latest round of] cuts, Library and Archives Canada was challenged to fulfill its mandate;...”

So what would we have? We have a situation where knowledge would be lost to Canadians; where the ability to deal with knowledge would be lost by Canadians; where the ability to understand what our country is all about, by Canadians through their public government, would disappear. Knowledge would be paid for. Knowledge would be hard to collect. Knowledge would be part of a system that, for Canadians, is so different from what we have expected over the years.

This is a difficult situation. It is one that I hope my colleague who has put this bill forward will understand and will plead with his government to do something different from what it is doing today with information services in this country. It is utterly vital to the future of our country to have information that is well documented, well understood and that is presented to people. Librarians have those responsibilities. What we see here would be the denigration of our library system right across this country. What is going on this country today? What is the purpose of denying Canadians access to knowledge?

Can the government ask those fundamental questions? Did it ask those fundamental questions or would it, in an idealistic orgy of cutting, just simply cut out this particular piece of our Canadian heritage and our Canadian future? What is going on?

An hon. member: It's going backwards.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: We are going backwards.

I support what my colleague across the House is doing with his private member's bill, but I do not support what the government would do for information services in this country.

