



## Executive Director's Remarks

### CLA Breakfast with the Conservative Rural Caucus

April 8, 2008

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Honourable members and guests, it is a great pleasure to welcome you to this little event. It's been quite a while – about six years – since the Canadian Library Association has held an activity like this, and we greatly appreciate you taking the time from your busy schedules to come here this morning.

My name is Don Butcher, and I'm CLA's Executive Director. I bring greetings from our President, Alvin Schrader, who is in Edmonton right now. I'm joined by Alana Fontaine of our government relations consulting firm Impact Public Affairs.

The "Order of the Day", so to speak, is that I have a short general briefing for you, we'll talk about a specific issue, and then I'll call on a special guest.

Because we are a nice small group, if you have any questions I'm sure we can take them as we go along.

First, a little bit about the Canadian Library Association/association canadienne des bibliothèques. CLA has individual members like your local public librarian, and institutional members like the larger public, university or college library. We represent librarians from all four types of libraries: public, academic, school and special.

Like any other association, CLA has four basic roles. The one our members say is most important is the one that impacts you: to be the national advocate for and national voice of the library community. Just for the record and for transparency, I am a registered lobbyist, and CLA is non-partisan.

CLA has two categories of advocacy issues: public policy issues and federal funding for libraries. You may be a little more aware of our public policy advocacy on issue like literacy, privacy, censorship and especially most recently, copyright.

On the funding side, there are a few federal programs that flow money into libraries. Your government's recent Budget, for example, added to the pool of funds for the indirect costs of research in universities: some of that money ends up in libraries.

This event is about a national initiative that provides support to libraries in every province and territory: as of Friday, 2,103 library outlets across Canada are serving basically every Canadian.

Since 1939, Canada Post has offered a special, reduced rate to libraries to ship books to other libraries, the Library Book Rate.

The Library Book Rate is incredibly important to libraries in Canada. For the first 11 months of 2007, Canada Post shipped almost 590,000 parcels of library books using this rate: that's right, just shy of 2,700 every working day. The average weight of each parcel is 1.3 kilos. Just to help me understand what 1.3 kilos of books looks like, I grabbed some books off the bookshelves in my office and weighed them.

- Hard-cover text book
- Hard and soft cover children's books

So if this is representative, roughly 2.4 million books moved around the country last year due to this initiative.

For these 590,000 parcels, Canada Post charged about \$647,000. Canada Post figures it cost about \$5 million to provide this service. There has been no increase in the Library Book Rates since January 2005 despite the fact the inflation rate since then has risen by about seven percent.

So every opportunity we get, we thank Canada Post for helping to improve the literacy of Canadians by giving them access to the books they want to read that their local library can't afford to buy.

However ...

For many years, Canada Post and the Department of Canadian Heritage negotiated agreements on postal rates for particular sectors, like the magazine publishers, and Heritage provided direct financial support to Canada Post. The Library Book Rate was part of these agreements. But since March 31, 2006 Canada Post hasn't been compensated for the Library Book Rate.

Canada Post is a Crown corporation, not a government department, and it has certain obligations to its shareholder. Canada Post is reluctant to make a long-term commitment

to the Rate. That leaves the library community concerned that one day, Canada Post will pull the plug on it.

Now, why is this important to you?

Interestingly, the way the Book Rate works, smaller rural and remote libraries actually benefit the most from it. Larger public or academic libraries, if faced with a request for a book, can often afford to buy it if it meets their collection criteria. Rural and remote libraries, especially aboriginal and small public libraries, have to borrow it from a larger centre. So the Library Book Rate ends up being disproportionately more valuable to rural areas.

In summary, we have an activity that's not covered in federal literacy or economic policy, is run by a Crown corporation that's not funded by a government department to undertake it, and that provides its greatest benefit to the citizens of rural and remote areas.

Canada Post has been reviewing the status of the Rate on an annual basis, which of course leads the library community to have an annual worry: "Is Canada Post going to pull the plug on this? Is Canada Post going to raise the Rate? By how much?"

In particular, will rural and remote libraries simply be turned down by their larger urban cousins when the rural library asks to borrow a particular book? Will rural Canadians be forced to buy books they'd rather borrow, or do without?

Since the 1960s, the library community has lobbied to have the Book Rate extended to audio and visual media. Information comes in all formats, not just books. Back in the '60s, it was cassette tapes; today, it's CDs and DVDs. But we have never been successful.

The Canadian Library Association has been working extremely hard for years to ensure that Canadians have equal access to library and information services, regardless of where they live, and the Library Book Rate is a key component of this.

Which brings us to Bill C-458.

We want to show you some media coverage of an event we did in Brandon last fall.

### Brandon media clip

As you have seen, your colleague Merv Tweed, the Honourable Member for Brandon-Souris, has taken the lead on the Library Book Rate issue. Mr. Tweed is with us here today. Merv, will you be so kind as to talk about what you've learned from your constituents about the Book Rate, what you've done about it, and what the reaction has been?

### Merv Tweed

Merv, thank you so much, both for being here today and for truly working on this issue that's so important to all of your rural colleagues. The one million Canadians who use this Rate to get the books they want also thank you.

If you have any questions, Merv and I will be pleased to answer them.