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OTTAWA (CP) _ Within one day of Britain's top-ranking general leaning into a BBC television camera and saying, "Come on, Royal Mail," the British government did what Saint John MP Paul Zed has been urging the Harper government to do for months.

They made it free to send mail to soldiers serving overseas.

The British made their decision Monday, the day after the chief of the general staff made his public appeal while visiting British soldiers in Afghanistan.

Gen. Sir Richard Dannatt made it clear he was "irritated" that the families of soldiers serving in Afghanistan and Iraq had to pay to send letters and parcels, the Times of London reported.

Britain's quick action leaves Zed frustrated with Canada's slow response to his proposal.

"It's clear to me Canada Post could do this," he said Tuesday. "This confirms it. I literally get an inquiry every day from a military family asking when this will happen."

Zed introduced a private member's bill in early May to allow free letter mail to and from members of the Canadian Forces serving overseas. He tried to get his bill fast-tracked by the House of Commons, but the Conservatives didn't agree.

Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson has called Zed's idea a good suggestion, and Lawrence Cannon, the minister responsible for Canada Post, has said he's "open-minded" about it. But Cannon's latest letter to Zed, dated Aug. 10, says the financial impact of his proposal is still being evaluated by Canada Post.

Cannon's letter points out that the postal service has a legislated mandate to provide affordable postal service on a financially self-sustaining basis.

Zed said he'll be writing Cannon to tell him about Britain's quick action. Zed worries that if the prime minister prorogues Parliament this fall, he'll have to start all over because that would kill his bill.

"That's one more reason why this initiative is all the more urgent now," said Zed.

Canada Post provided free parcel service to designated Canadian bases for family and friends of deployed Canadian troops last Christmas. As well, Canada Post and the Defence Department have a long-standing agreement under which letter mail may be sent overseas to Canadian Forces members for the domestic rate of 52 cents.

Canadians can also write troops through an electronic bulletin board on the Canadian Forces website.

Zed began his campaign after a constituent, June Dobson of Saint John, complained to him about Canada Post returning an overweight letter because it was six cents shy of the correct postage. She had been writing to her

nephew, a soldier from Hoyt, N.B., in Afghanistan.