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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

I think because of the time factor today...we do have a quorum and I think we should proceed. We're here pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), to study safety solutions on all modes of transport and security. With us today are witnesses from the Department of Transport: Marc Grégoire and Susan Greene.

I assume you have a short presentation to give to the committee, and then we'll move into questions and answers.

Mr. Marc Grégoire (Assistant Deputy Minister, Safety and Security Group, Department of Transport): Actually, last week I offered to give you a technical briefing, so with your agreement, I will proceed with the deck. You have in front of you a deck in both French and English, so I'll walk you through it.

I welcome the opportunity to provide you with the facts concerning the development of the regulatory proposal on flight attendant ratios.

I have with me today Mrs. Susan Greene, Transport Canada's leading safety expert on this issue. Mrs. Greene flew as a flight attendant for eight and a half years, during which time she also supervised and trained flight attendants. Mrs. Greene currently holds the position of chief, cabin safety standards; however, she also gained security experience following the events of September 11, 2001, when she was responsible for developing the revised security training requirements for crew members and guidance materials for passenger agents working at check-ins.

I don't think you need an introduction from me, since I was here on Thursday.

[Translation]

On page 2, you will find a summary of the current flight attendant requirements. Canadian Aviation Regulations require that there be one flight attendant for every 40 passengers. Regulations also include a provision under which certain eligible aircraft configured with only 50 passenger seats can operate with a limited number of flight attendants, namely on regional aircraft such as the ATR42 - 300, the Dash 8-300 and the Canadair Regional Jet.

The International Civil Aviation Organization requires that all countries adopt regulations based on the number of passengers or the number of seats. ICAO does not recommend the ratio, as such, and allows member countries to make the appropriate determination. The

one flight attendant for every 50 passenger seats ratio is currently used almost everywhere in the world.

• (1105)

[English]

As an example, you have on the slide some countries that use the one-to-fifty regime today, but just glancing at the regulations in other countries, one sees that Austria, Bermuda, Brazil, China, Chile, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Jamaica, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Singapore, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, United Kingdom, etc., are some of the countries using the one-to-fifty regime today.

On slide 4, when an aircraft is originally designed, built, and certified to carry passengers, a maximum permissible number of seats is established for the aircraft, based on numerous safety-related criteria, among which are the number and size of exits from the aircraft, the distance between the exits, and the aisle widths. Each crew and passenger must have emergency means to allow rapid evacuation in crash landings. The manufacturer of the aircraft must prove through actual demonstrations that a full aircraft can be successfully evacuated within 90 seconds in darkened conditions with 50% of the emergency exits blocked.

The common standard used worldwide for this certification requirement is primarily based on one flight attendant for every 50 passenger seats. So even in Canada, for the aircraft that we certify, we use the one-in-fifty rule. So do the United States, France, and Brazil, countries in which a lot of aircraft are manufactured. Slide 5 is about the risk assessment. As I mentioned last week, the first industry proposal was rejected in March 2001, as the information provided failed to demonstrate a level of safety in keeping with the existing rule. As there were, and still remain, polarized views on this issue, and with the broader scope the second proposal provided, Transport Canada decided that a formal risk assessment should be conducted. Stakeholders from industry, unions, and passenger safety and consumer groups participated in the risk assessment, and in September 2003 they were provided with the risk assessment report. The ability to manage risk in a consistent and effective manner is essential to making prudent safety-related decisions. Therefore, a strong risk management process is an important part of the department's effective service delivery in safety monitoring. While we cannot remove the risk completely, we can use proven techniques to ensure that all aspects of the risk are identified and considered when making decisions.

The Canadian Standards Association's Q850 process is the basis for Transport Canada's approach. This proven process provides a guideline that assists decision-makers in identifying, analyzing, evaluating, and controlling all types of risk, including risks to safety and health. This is the formal assessment that was used. I should add that most of our staff in civil aviation have been trained to use this process.

[*Translation*]

On page 6, there is a brief explanation of the proposal. Based on the recommendations from the risk assessment and comments from stakeholders, Transport Canada has developed a regulatory proposal in order to provide an alternative, along with additional mitigating factors, which will offer the same level of safety to Canadians. It is important to note that the proposal is a minimal requirement and that airlines will be allowed to select a higher number of flight attendants, as is often the case currently, for client service purposes.

Under the proposed regime, airlines which choose the 1:50 passenger seat ratio would be required to meet specific conditions that do not currently exist in the regulations. These additional requirements have been included to ensure that the proposed 1:50 ratio offers the same level of security as the current 1:40 ratio.

I won't get into the technical details of the mitigating factors we would implement but we will answer any questions you may have. However, I would like to point out that three new items are proposed to require airlines to demonstrate that they have the same evacuation procedures in case of an emergency, in order to assess the procedures and the airline's emergency training program as well as the crew members' skills and the capability of the emergency equipment onboard.

• (1110)

[*English*]

As shown on page 8, additional amendments are proposed to four existing sections of the regulations. I would like to draw your attention in particular to numbers three and four. Flight attendants would be limited to working on three aircraft types. As there are no limitations on the one-to-forty rule, that would remain the same. For large aircraft with two aisles, we would require at least one flight attendant per floor-level exit.

There are other considerations: first, passengers with disabilities, on page 9.

[*Translation*]

Canadian Aviation Regulations already require airlines to implement procedures for special-needs passengers, like visually impaired, hearing impaired or mobility impaired persons or unaccompanied minors. These procedures include a preflight briefing, as well as a briefing on emergency and evacuation procedures. An able-bodied person is designated to help every special needs passenger in case of an emergency or an evacuation. Flight attendants must provide an individual briefing to special-needs passengers and any able-bodied passenger accompanying them to explain emergency or evacuation procedures.

Transport Canada is confident that with the current additional regulatory requirements, aimed at ensuring inflight safety, the

proposed regulations will contribute to maintaining passenger safety, including for passengers who have special needs.

[*English*]

Moving on to page 10, there are security considerations.

[*Translation*]

Moreover, these safety requirements are designed to prevent persons or objects that could pose a threat to inflight safety from coming on board an aircraft or having access to restricted areas in an airport. The overall objective is to avoid this type of situation by improving controls and better assessing threats to safety before they reach the aircraft. No scenarios regarding security issues were developed during the risk assessment portion of the safety assessment analysis since risks involving loss of life from terrorist or hijacking activity remain high regardless of the number of flight attendants onboard. The change in the number of flight attendants has no impact on safety issues raised during the consultation process.

[*English*]

On page 11, in choosing an option, it's important to know that air operators would be required to determine, on a company-wide basis—and I insist on that, as I believe I mentioned last week, it would be on a company-wide basis—whether it's to their advantage to stay with the current one-to-forty passengers or whether to move to the proposed one-to-fifty passengers. For each company, this will be a matter of examining their fleet composition, with the number of seats installed on each airplane, the number of floor-level exits on each wide-bodied airplane, and the projected load factor as critical parameters.

At the back of your deck I have included a chart that shows the impact of the one-to-forty and one-to-fifty regime for each operator and each aircraft in Canada.

On average, Canadian air carriers operate at an 80% load factor. In almost all cases, at 80% or below, there is no impact. As you will see by glancing through the table, the data indicates that the majority of aircraft would operate with the same or a higher number of flight attendants. At 90% and 100%, which is quite rare, there are some reductions for some types of aircraft. In most instances, there would be no difference in the number of flight attendants.

To illustrate this, I have picked three aircraft, which were referred to before, that are commonly used in Canada. Slide 12 shows the differences between the one-to-forty and the one-to-fifty ratios, based on various load factors of an Airbus 320, a common aircraft type used by Air Canada. Using the Air Canada configuration of 159 seats, with an 80% load of passengers, there is no difference in the number of flight attendants required under both scenarios.

On page 13 we show a scenario of a Boeing 737-700, again, with various passenger load factors. Under both the one-to-forty and one-to-fifty regimes, WestJet would be required to carry the same number of flight attendants: three, when there is a load factor of 80%. However, at full capacity, the one-to-fifty rule would mean one less flight attendant than the one-to-forty regime.

• (1115)

[Translation]

As you can see on page 14, on wide-body aircraft like the Airbus 340-300, the 1:50 seat ratio requires that there be more flight attendants in almost all instances, except if the flight is full. In this case, and only in this case, the regulatory requirement of the 1:50 ratio would be the same as the 1:40, it would require eight flight attendants onboard. For any other passenger configuration, there would be more flight attendants under the 1:50 ratio.

In closing, I would say that the proposed change was developed through broad consultation, in-depth analysis and expert studies that demonstrated that the different options will have no impact on safety. During the development stage, we consulted industry representatives, unions, consumer groups and passenger safety groups. And these people were also part of the risk assessment. The stakeholders will also have an opportunity to express their views on the regulations when they are published in the *Canada Gazette*, part I.

A majority of countries require one flight attendant for every 50 passenger seats. These aircraft often take off or land in Canada and Canadians often travel onboard these foreign-owned aircraft in which the 1:50 ratio applies. The regulatory changes would harmonize our regulations with those of most other countries.

I would like to add that in this day and age, airlines have code share partnerships with other airlines. For all practical purposes, that means that if you have traveled abroad, even with a Canadian airline ticket, it's very likely that you have traveled onboard a plane where the 1:50 ratio applied. We are convinced that you did so safely. The same can be said of domestic flights. In the case of the Regional Jet or the Dash 8-300, the ratio is currently 1:50. We have never heard complaints of any kind regarding this.

[English]

Consultation is part of the development of all our Canadian aviation regulations, and our formal mechanism for initial consultation is the Canadian Aviation Regulation Advisory Council, commonly called CARAC. CARAC has participation from a large number of organizations outside Transport Canada representing the overall viewpoints of the aviation community.

I can assure you that throughout the regulatory process, whether at CARAC or during the gazetting process, all comments are carefully reviewed and play an important challenge function in ensuring that the department's decision is sound and can withstand scrutiny.

[Translation]

That means that when the time comes to decide to move forward with a regulatory proposal, the risk assessment has taken place and the department feels that this decision is in the best interest of Canadians.

Transport Canada will not introduce a change that could be detrimental to Canada's excellent reputation on safety. We take our role very seriously. The proposed regulatory changes demonstrate that we are determined to maintain a profitable civil aviation network without compromising its safety.

Thank you.

• (1120)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to advise the committee that with the three groups we have, with agreement, I would like to have a five-minute round for each member, and then we'll switch to the next set of witnesses, if that's reasonable.

Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good day, Mr. Grégoire.

What airline is the safest in the world right now? Of all the airlines in the world there must be one, from year to year or in any given year, that is rated the safest in the world.

Do you know which one that is?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: I don't have that information right now.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: As you know, in 2001 the department found that the 1:50 ratio was not safe—you've heard this many times—and then in 2005, or 2003, it declared that it was safe.

What has changed? Have the standards changed, or the criteria?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: The proposal looked at in 2001 was not declared not safe, per se, it was declared not as safe as the 1:40 regime. Some people claim it was not safe, but let's not play with words: it was declared not as safe as 1:40. And we rejected it; we said it was not good, and we rejected it outright.

The proposal we have on the table today, after consultation and after a risk analysis, is quite different. It has a ratio of 1:50 plus a series of mitigation measures, as I explained. We feel that those mitigation measures, along with a ratio that is harmonized with what's being used in the world, will offer a level of safety equivalent to the 1:40 regime. It's not changed.

The proposal is to keep the regime we have now and to offer the airlines, as an alternative for their whole fleet, the possibility of using the other regime. But in order to benefit from this, they would have to make an application to Transport Canada. This would be part of their operating certificate. They would have to demonstrate that all of the mitigation measures would be put in place.

With those measures, we are very confident that it does offer an equivalent level of safety.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But in your opening statement you mentioned that an important aspect of safety is the ability to ensure that in a crash landing all passengers can be safely evacuated. I don't imagine that the sample size of crash landings could be that great from around the world at different times over the last number of years, yet we have a real-life example from Canada itself. It was only a year ago that we had a crash landing, and the number of flight attendants on that flight was, oddly enough, much higher than the required ratio. Everyone got off without serious injury.

What is the rush? Why does the department have to go ahead now? Why can't they wait for the Transportation Safety Board report? How much money does an airline save by having one less flight attendant on a flight? Is this a crucial economic issue for the industry? Why can't we be cautious? Why can't we, especially in light of contradictory evidence, hold off for a year or two, or however long it takes for the Transportation Safety Board to issue its report?

So what is the rush? I just don't get it.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: I believe Minister Cannon already answered that question in his appearance on June 1.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I wasn't here, and I apologize. If you could reiterate, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: He said we were ready to move, so I won't contradict—or repeat—what he said.

As to the rush, I understand you're meeting with ATAC when we leave, so you can ask that question of ATAC.

The fact is that we like to put regulations to bed, and there's a limit to the number of years we can spend debating a regulation. At one point in time you have to say, "We feel we've listened to all concerns, and we should move on to publish the regulations in the *Gazette*, part I"—which is, by the way, another consultation with all Canadians.

• (1125)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: This is highly complex—you must need one formidable computer to crunch these numbers and do these analyses—and yet there's no discernible benefit from having one fewer flight attendant. There's no discernible benefit for Canadians. I don't even know if there's a discernible benefit for all of the airlines in Canada; there may be for one.

I just don't get it. I think you act when there's a discernible benefit for Canadians and for air travellers. I just don't see the benefit in this or anywhere else.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Well, there is. We did a cost-benefit analysis and we quantified that it would be beneficial for the industry as a whole to move on this. There is, today, a competitive disadvantage for airlines flying on international routes where all of the other airlines—except for Australia, where they have a different ratio, 1:36—fly with a regime of 1:50.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: So what you're saying, Mr. Grégoire, is that it's really an economic issue. You're saying that it's really an economic issue.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Laframboise.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Grégoire, with regard to the minister's position, you must understand that the committee's response is expressed in its majority decision on the motion. Before any regulation is tabled or published in the *Canada Gazette*, we want to discuss it at the committee level. That is this committee's response. The minister has stated his position, but the committee has responded to it and wants to assess every regulation before it is enforced. That's why we are here today, Mr. Grégoire.

You know our population is aging. You've analyzed the financial capacity of the industry, but our obligation, as members of Parliament, is to ensure that our fellow citizens are as safe if not safer than ever. It's not simply a question of providing services to disabled clients. Our population is aging and mobility is shrinking. When a problem arises, elderly people certainly need help to evacuate.

Mr. Grégoire, you are probably aware of a report that was tabled by your department. It dealt with recommendations made to CARAC in 2004, in which there was a series of questions regarding the debate held at the time. A risk assessment of the government's proposal was called for. Could you tell us if CARAC has conducted such a risk assessment on your current proposal?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: As I said earlier, a risk assessment was carried out, but I gave you the technical details on the regulatory proposal in my presentation. The regulatory proposal that was tabled today is different from the one we discussed two years ago at CARAC's level. That's why it differs. As one of your colleagues pointed out last week, there are diverging views within the community. Some people want more flexible rules and others want stiffer regulations. Some don't want changes and some want the flexibility to adjust the ratio on every flight.

There are mitigation measures that have been prepared by our officials, by Susan and her team.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: But you have not conducted a risk assessment on this proposal.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: These recommendations were made by professionals, experts in their field, and in many cases they go further than other countries' rules. If I agreed with your line of thought, Mr. Laframboise, I would have to advise our fellow citizens not to fly on Air France, British Airways or any of the American airlines. You seem to feel it's a dangerous proposition. I'm trying to tell you that people can fly safely onboard these airlines' aircraft under our proposal, and in many cases our regulations will be stiffer than in other countries.

• (1130)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: That's your perspective. What's important to my fellow citizens is that I be in a position to explain different risks in a transparent fashion, including when they fly on foreign-owned aircraft. I'm happy to provide them with that information.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: There is no risk.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: You have not conducted a risk assessment. I have a table here, for example, indicating that when the ratio is one flight attendant for every 40 passengers, the safety score is 404. When there is one flight attendant for every 50 passengers, the score is 102. Obviously, that's not your proposal. I'm simply saying that there is a risk assessment procedure, it allows us to tell the population, amongst other things, that when there is one flight attendant for every 40 passengers, the safety score is 404 points. Have you conducted such an assessment on your proposal, in order for me to tell my fellow citizens that what the government is proposing represents between 102 and 404 safety points? Perhaps it's 300, but you've not done this assessment.

I'm not comfortable with this because I am not capable of telling my constituents that the government's proposal entails the same or a reasonable level of safety. I'm leery when I hear you speak about what goes on elsewhere. As far as I'm concerned, all I can see is that for on a 1:50 ratio, the safety score is 102. That worries me.

You say you're proposing mitigation measures, which are probably a reasonable adjustment, but you have not conducted a risk assessment. I therefore cannot reassure my fellow citizens. Your own department requested this analysis, but you haven't done it. You tell me you have experts. As my colleague said, perhaps you're putting the cart before the horse. I know the department wants to deal with the issue, but does it have all the information it needs to make an informed decision? I'm not so sure of that.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Was that a question or a comment?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: It's both a question and the comment, Mr. Grégoire.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Did we conduct a risk assessment after the risk assessment? No. Have we introduced mitigation measures to ensure that the level of safety remains the same? Yes, and that's what I explained today.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Did you conduct a risk assessment following the introduction of the mitigation measures?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: No. That's what I just said. It has not been done.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: So it hasn't been done.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you very, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

If I was worried before the presentation, I'm even more worried now after the presentation.

According to your own figures, Mr. Grégoire, what you're saying is that for a WestJet B737-700 with four exits, you'd be looking at three flight attendants. So for the fourth exit, for a stroke victim or a person in a wheelchair, they're basically going to have to figure their own way out. By your own figures, what you're saying is that there's an exit uncovered.

We know that flight attendants play an important role in evacuation procedures, so you're in the process of telling us, even though it's buried in the back pages of your report, that for dozens of aircraft flying in Canadian skies, if there is an evacuation, there will be exits uncovered in those cases. I find that appalling. The figures are right there. This is what you've provided to us: 44 aircraft, B737-700s, with four exits but three flight attendants.

You mentioned risk assessment. You mentioned a whole variety of groups that I know are opposed to this plan and yet you mention them. So I would like you to table that risk assessment that was done with the stakeholders, including disability groups from across the country and including flight attendants, because we need to know what they actually said. You're actually trying to use the names of those organizations to suggest that in some way they approve this change, and they don't.

My comments are more specific to what's happening internationally. We know Australia has just done a review, and Australia chose to maintain the same flight ratio. In fact, Australia sees a competitive advantage in having a safer airline industry. I think that's the public policy issue here: having a safer airline industry. That provides a competitive advantage, not a cup of coffee per passenger for a flight, which is what WestJet would save by leaving exits uncovered.

So Australia has chosen to maintain the same flight ratio. Why is that?

As to other evidence internationally, in the U.S., in the inquiry into the accident involving TWA flight 843, the National Transportation Safety Board said the evacuation of the airplane occurred within two minutes, and the speed in evacuating 292 passengers and crew from the airplane was complemented by TWA's requirement for nine flight attendants, which is actually higher than the FAA minimum.

So how many other airlines around the world with better safety records actually choose to maintain stronger standards?

Then I come back to the question I asked a few weeks ago—since you're back here. In the Air France accident, we know the flight attendants played a crucial role in ensuring that all those passengers got off safely. You mentioned that the government had no intention of waiting for the results of that TSB investigation—which is beyond me. You have an investigation that is tied clearly to flight attendant ratio. So I need to ask, is that Transport Canada's normal procedure, to ignore the results of a TSB safety audit, a safety report, in an incident that has a very clear link to where the government intends to go?

• (1135)

Mr. Marc Grégoire: I will attempt to answer your five questions.

First, on the WestJet table, as you can see, we're not hiding anything. We're showing you the figures for each and every aircraft used in Canada. So we're playing extremely transparent here.

If you look at the WestJet B737-700 that you mentioned, it has four exits. The basic requirement for the certification of the aircraft is two flight attendants. You can find this in the middle column. If you look at all similar aircraft, which are not considered large aircraft, aircraft with only one aisle, there is no requirement anywhere in the world to add one flight attendant per exit. We're only adding this requirement as a mitigation measure for large aircraft with two aisles. So what you pointed out is correct.

If we look at the figures all along this line and at the occupation or the load factor of airlines in Canada, on average it is around 80%. These figures are published regularly in various papers. So you can see that in comparing the 80% ratio, you would have three, whether you were at 1:40 or 1:50, and the same goes below. It's only when you're above the 80%—say the aircraft is full—that you would have one flight attendant fewer than you have now.

On your second question, the risk analysis, we have tabled this before. It is published on our website. But it would be our pleasure to give a copy to the clerk or to you personally—I don't know, Mr. Chair, what is appropriate.

The Chair: Give it to the chair, and we'll see that they get distributed.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Actually, your clerk may already have a copy from the last time we gave it. But we'll check with him and re-table.

In terms of what Australia does, to my knowledge Australian authorities were convinced that the 1:50 ratio was the way to go. But they decided to stop the change of the regulatory process because of diverging views in Australia.

Mr. Peter Julian: Which is what we have here in Canada.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Yes, well, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities still has the option of moving ahead or stopping. That's his decision.

But we think from a technical point of view it is perfectly safe to go with the regime of one to fifty. So if that process is stopped, it will not be for safety reasons but for other considerations.

In the TWA accident you mentioned, there were more flight attendants. This is often the case, as I mentioned in my opening remarks. Airlines very often have more flight attendants than the basic regulatory requirement. The basic regulatory requirement is a safety regulation. Whatever the airlines want to add to this is for service and other reasons. It's not purely a safety reason. Otherwise, they would have opposed the change in the regulation.

On the Air France accident we discussed at length last week as well as a few weeks ago, we don't have any information. We have an observer on the accident investigation. We do not have any information either from TSB or from anywhere else that shows that the 1:50 ratio was a factor there. The requirement for the Air France flight was to have six flight attendants. They were fortunate; they had more people. But that doesn't mean that if they'd had six, all the people wouldn't have evacuated. We can't replicate this accident and say, "Well, if they'd had six like the Air France regulations require, all of those people would have exited the aircraft". Everything worked as it was supposed to, but there were too many flight attendants from a safety perspective. Now, did that create a problem,

the fact that there were too many? I don't know. But we don't see any reasons to—

Mr. Peter Julian: My point is, why not wait?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Because the TSB often takes two, three, or four years for a major investigation like this. And we've been at this so many years. If we had heard any safety concerns from the board, we would stop it immediately. We haven't.

• (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here this morning, Mr. Grégoire. We're happy to have you. As you can see, the members of this committee are interested in passenger safety and they are concerned about it, and that's perfectly legitimate.

You prepared a document that clearly demonstrated the impact of the proposal for each scenario. Earlier, we spoke about risk assessments. Could you tell us more about the consultations you've conducted to come to your recommendations? I see you consulted a rather large group of people. Some of these groups may want to contact us to voice some of their concerns. What comments were made during your consultations? You briefly spoke to the issue. On the whole, how did industry, workers and passengers feel about the proposed changes?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Some passenger groups expressed concern, namely passengers with disabilities. We reassured them by explaining the additional measures, much as we are doing here today. Some groups expressed concerns with regard to safety. There again, the measures we have implemented in Canada, namely a closed cockpit policy and an enhanced passenger screening process, have led us to believe that the flight attendant to passenger ratio has no impact on the level of safety onboard our aircraft.

The airlines are very supportive of this measure but would like it to go farther. They would prefer a 1:50 passenger seat ratio or a 1:40 passenger ratio on every flight. Unless they have changed their mind, they would like to have the opportunity to adapt to every flight. That was their initial position. They wanted as much flexibility as possible.

The in-flight crew, namely the representatives of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, with whom you will meet later on, are vehemently opposed to any change of the ratio. Perhaps they fear job cuts but we don't believe that's a likely outcome. In fact, if airlines are more competitive, they will penetrate new markets and create more jobs.

For every company, it will be a matter of reviewing its own fleet to decide which regime better suits its operation. It's not obvious that a company using a number of different aircraft types will want to change regimes, because there are costs associated to the certification of aircraft.

Mr. Steven Blaney: You also mentioned that you had conducted a general review of the current situation worldwide and, but for a few exceptions, all countries seem to be headed in the same direction you are.

Why have you chosen a combined system, 1:50 and 1:40? Is this a transition?

Mr. Marc Grégoire: There's no other reason but to offer as much flexibility as possible to our airlines. Many of us would have preferred harmonizing the regime across-the-board to have only one ratio, 1:50, to simplify things, but airline companies, namely, preferred having more flexibility. As far as we're concerned, as long as the level of safety is the same under both regimes, we have no objection to maintaining a dual system.

The 1:40 regime we are proposing today is identical to the current one. The 1:50 regime has been supplemented by the mitigation measures we have already spoken to.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Thank you very much.

• (1145)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

I would like to thank our guests. We have more people coming into your chairs now, so I appreciate your time today.

Mr. Marc Grégoire: Mr. Chair, it was a pleasure.

The Chair: You're welcome. Thank you.

We'll be calling the Air Transport Association of Canada, if they'd like to move into the hot seats, as they are.

Joining us at the table will be Fred Gaspar, the vice-president of policy and strategic planning, and Andy Vasarins, the vice-president of flight operations.

I want to welcome you today, and I would assume that you have a short presentation.

Very short? That's good. It will get us caught back up on our time allotments.

Whenever you're ready, I would ask you to begin, please.

Mr. Fred Gaspar (Vice-President, Policy and Strategic Planning, Air Transport Association of Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and good morning.

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, we did not have time to translate our presentation. I apologize for that.

[*English*]

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the Air Transport Association of Canada to speak to the issue of modernizing Canada's flight attendant-passenger ratios.

Before I do so, however, I do want to make one thing perfectly clear for the benefit of committee members, in response to some of the characterizations about our industry's position in this debate in the press over the last few weeks and months. Neither ATAC nor any of our members would ever propose a regulatory change that we believe would endanger passengers, period—not to cut costs, not for any reason whatsoever. It simply wouldn't make sense. In fact, safety and innovation have been the hallmarks of our association from the beginning.

ATAC was founded in 1934 as the national service organization for Canada's commercial air service providers, and it currently represents over 200 members, comprising 95% of Canada's commercial aviation revenues. Our membership is diverse, ranging from Canada's largest airlines to flight schools throughout the country. ATAC works on behalf of the industry to promote a world-leading commercial aviation sector based on safety, efficiency, and innovation.

On this issue in particular, ATAC, and more specifically my colleague Andy Vasarins, has been working through the Canadian Aviation Regulation Advisory Council, or CARAC, process to advance this change—Andy, specifically, for over two years now, ATAC for much longer. Indeed, this issue has been studied thoroughly at CARAC, which is an open, inclusive body, where organized labour has been a robust participant in the process. It has also been debated before this committee in each of the last two Parliaments.

While we have no interest in revisiting old ground on this debate, we would like to take the opportunity you have graciously given us here today to provide some context on the issue, to speak to the integrity of the process of amending aviation regulations in Canada, and to set the record straight on some misperceptions that have been perpetuated by those who have waged a very public campaign against modernization.

As you all know, Mr. Chairman, the issue we're referring to is a request by our industry to bring Canadian flight attendant ratio regulations in line with those of the U.S. and most EU countries. The current regulation requires one flight attendant for every forty passengers, whereas most regulatory regimes throughout the world require one flight attendant for every fifty seats. Opponents of this proposal have suggested, unfortunately—and we would suggest irresponsibly—that this would compromise safety. In fact, a detailed review of this proposal, conducted by an independent consultant for CARAC, concluded that no such case could be made. The data wasn't there.

Moreover, it should be noted that during the three years this proposal has taken to work its way through the CARAC and CARC processes, significant amendments and caveats have been added to ensure that this proposal does not in fact compromise safety.

First, air carriers will not be allowed to rotate back and forth between one to forty and one to fifty. We are now going to be required to declare which one we're operating under, and stick with it, to avoid potential confusion amongst staff. For similar reasons, flight attendants will only be allowed to be certified on up to three aircraft types.

Also, notwithstanding the ratio, all wide-bodied jets will have to have as many flight attendants on board as there are emergency exit doors on each passenger level. Moreover, carriers that choose to operate under the new standard will be required to demonstrate equal capability to evacuate their aircraft in case of emergency to the same standard that applies under the existing ratio, commonly known as the 90-second standard.

The result, Mr. Chairman, is that even after this change is implemented, it is highly likely that many flights will still carry more than the minimum crew complement assumed by those doing the simple one-to-fifty math calculation.

In short, the process has worked. Detailed data-driven studies concluded that there would be no reduction in safety by adopting this proposal, and consultative dialogue with all stakeholders resulted in a further set of restrictions to ensure that all possible concerns were addressed.

We respectfully suggest, Mr. Chairman, that this committee should and would want to support the work of a CARAC process. It is one that ensures that civil aviation regulations are debated in a non-politicized, data-driven environment to seek to achieve the best result for Canadians.

Unfortunately, opponents of this proposal have chosen to use fear in their attempt to achieve politically what they have failed to achieve at CARAC. Again, the facts are our best ally in rebuffing these claims. The one-to-fifty ratio has been in use for a little over 30 years in the United States and for slightly less time in the EU. In that period of time, not one aviation incident report has cited this ratio as the contributing factor in cases of serious harm to passengers from aviation incidents. In fact, since air carriers are regulated according to the regime of their home countries, there are literally dozens of large commercial flights from U.S. and European airlines that operate into Canada every day, carrying thousands of passengers quite safely under the one-to-fifty ratio. This standard is so common and universally accepted as a safe one that the modern aircraft are actually designed and built assuming the one-to-fifty ratio. It's working today in Canada and throughout the world.

Similarly, it's been working for some Canadian certified aircraft as well, which are operating under special provisions, allowing them to staff according to one to fifty. Specifically, each of the Bombardier CRJ200 aircraft, the Dash 8-300, and the ATR 42-300 aircraft have been operating safely using the standard for some time now.

• (1150)

Mr. Chairman, it's time to allow Canadians and Canadian carriers to compete fairly with their U.S. and European counterparts. Yes, this is largely a cost issue for our members, but as I stated at the outset, we would never allow cost concerns to supersede safety concerns. The simple reality is, however, that there is no data to suggest there are any outstanding safety issues associated with this proposal. Let's recall that there was a time when every aircraft had a flight engineer on the flight deck. There was a time when every flight attendant had to be a registered nurse. Clearly, those regulations have all been in response to the times. So, too, the flight attendant-passenger ratios in Canada must evolve to meet safe and proven international standards, which allow Canadian operators to compete

and thrive with their international counterparts on a level playing field.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Chairman. With that, we look forward to your and the committee members' questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

I'm against this regulation. I think the airlines are overregulated in general.

Mr. Scarpaleggia asked a question about the safest airline in the world. Do you have any data on that?

Mr. Fred Gaspar: Unfortunately, we don't, and one of the reasons is that it's very hard because not everybody uses the same benchmarks and the same standards. All international, integrated, full-service passenger carriers generally ascribe to and meet the same safety standards; there's very little variation.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: The flight attendant is being limited to work on three aircraft types. Is that a new regulation?

Mr. Andy Vasarins (Vice-President, Flight Operations, Air Transport Association of Canada): The regulation as it exists right now in the 1:40 scenario does not limit the flight attendants to the number of types they can work on in Canada. To have companies embrace the 1:50 standard would require them to limit themselves to no more than three types of aircraft. The types are dependent on where portable emergency equipment is—if it's in similar locations, if the chutes operate in a similar fashion; those kinds of things determine the types.

Mr. Fred Gaspar: In short, it's a mitigating measure to the proposed regulations.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Are pilots limited to the number of planes they can be certified to fly?

Mr. Andy Vasarins: Pilots are limited to the number of types their licences are endorsed for.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: But they could get endorsements for...

Mr. Andy Vasarins: For quite a few types.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Why would we limit flight attendants? They're no less intelligent than pilots. Why would we limit them to three types?

Mr. Fred Gaspar: That's a good point. The best way to answer that is that this is just another attempt to bend over backwards to make this measure acceptable to the critics. You're right, there's really no evidence for it, but we're doing it in an attempt to make it palatable.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: My last question is, how would this affect the ability of people with disabilities to have assistance to get out if there's one fewer flight attendant, as in some of the scenarios?

•(1155)

Mr. Fred Gaspar: That's a very fair point. As Mr. Grégoire spoke to quite accurately, it is true that in cases of emergency evacuations, carriers do rely on able-bodied passengers to assist. One of the primary reasons is that in the case of an emergency, where time is of the essence, a flight attendant isn't going to obstruct the aisles to get to the disabled passenger first. People evacuate as quickly and in as orderly a fashion as possible, and people who remain in their seats are then aided by the flight attendants. If there are three disabled passengers left on a 100-seat aircraft, whether you've got three, four, or five flight attendants, that is going to have minimal impact on your ability to evacuate those couple of disabled passengers. Ideally, the able-bodied passengers around them provide assistance in those instances, as they are requested to do.

The Chair: Mr. Carrier.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Good day.

I would like to know what you think of the department's proposal.

Does it imply that you will have a choice to make for every aircraft, whatever the passenger load? In the tables we were provided with, we can see that according to the passenger load, the flight attendant ratio is sometimes lower. When the flight is full, in some instances, fewer flight attendants are required.

Is a choice made according to the type of aircraft or the passenger load?

[English]

Mr. Andy Vasarins: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman, I didn't get the translation on that for some reason. It didn't appear to be working.

Mr. Fred Gaspar: That's okay. I can answer it.

As Mr. Grégoire pointed out, the proposal as it's currently drafted, I believe, is that you have to make a fleet-wide determination of the ratio you're going to operate under.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Is the ratio decided for every flight or according to the type of aircraft?

[English]

Mr. Fred Gaspar: Yes, it's by the type, not by flight; you can't go back and forth.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Every aircraft will have to abide by the 1:40 or the 1:50 ratio, in accordance with the new regulations.

[English]

Mr. Fred Gaspar: My understanding, as Mr. Grégoire pointed out, is that each company would have to make a determination fleet-wide as to the ratio they would be operating under.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: From what I understand, the 1:40 ratio could be more interesting to you because it requires fewer flight attendants in many instances. That being the case, I'd like to hear your appreciation. According to you, how often will the 1:40 ratio be

selected? Do you believe airlines will mainly choose to operate under the 1:50 ratio?

[English]

Mr. Andy Vasarins: The percentage of flights that would be maintained on a 1:40, 1:50, again, would be company-wide. For example, if WestJet chose to go to 1:50, they would have to invoke their whole fleet to transfer to 1:50. In other words, all their flights would be operated on 1:50.

If Air Canada chose to stay on the 1:40, then their flights would be operating, all their flights...except for the ones that are currently exempt under the 1:50 rule, which are the RJ and the Dash 8, which are exempt.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: From what you know, which ratio will most airlines choose? Will they decide to maintain the 1:40 ratio in most cases or will they choose the 1:50 ratio?

[English]

Mr. Fred Gaspar: There really are so many different factors at play that it's very hard to say. In the interest of trying to be as clear and open with you as possible, I will make some guesses—and let the record show these are pure guesses.

My expectation would be that carriers that have many different fleet types, many different levels of service requirements, and essentially many different manifestations of the service they're offering on any given day are less likely, probably, to go to 1:50.

Let me just give you a very pointed example, to be as concrete as possible. Air Canada, for instance, has a business class. That is always going to have to be taken into account for the purposes of their providing service. Their flight attendants are fully professionally trained as well, so someone who is on board for the purposes of service is actually also a fully qualified safety professional as well. I would stress that they need to speak for themselves, but I would suspect that they will not be at the 1:50 ratio level very often, even if they choose to apply it.

•(1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Consequently, the new regulations will not mean much change for you. You will maintain the 1:40 ratio.

[English]

Mr. Fred Gaspar: Insofar as we're speaking in the academic sense, and I've shared with you one potential guess, I suppose that's a reasonable conclusion to draw. But I think the only absolute conclusion we can draw about our industry is that it is absolutely improper and impossible to foresee the future. I think anybody who can guess the aviation industry's future would be a millionaire today by having shorted lots and lots of stock positions.

All this to say that really what this is about is modernizing and harmonizing the industry to put it into a position where it can respond effectively to competitive challenges, and to respond to the marketplace such as demand actually exists.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming before us today.

I've got a series of questions. I'll get them all out and then ask for responses.

First, what's the estimate on the actual cost saving of having one less flight attendant? I'm thinking particularly of the B737-700s. How much would the airline save by having one less flight attendant?

Secondly, why are you not calling for stronger regulations? It is a major competitive advantage in an industry where, as you know, safety is a primary concern. Why not call for the strongest possible safety regulations and have a worldwide reputation that Canadian airlines are under more rigorous safety regulations than any other airline in other countries?

Third, on the issue of the internal process, it's my understanding that you mentioned organized labour. I assume you were referring to flight attendants. They've been part of the process, and they've been vehemently opposed. Within the internal process that you have, why aren't those views reflected in what you're bringing forward today?

Fourth, you mentioned an independent consultant who had done a study. Would you release that to the committee?

Fifth, on wide-body jets, you mentioned that you're looking at regulations to ensure every exit is covered by a flight attendant. But as you know from previous testimony, again for the B737-700s, there's an exit that's not covered. The fact is, with these new flight regulations, we're looking at dozens of aircraft with an uncovered exit. Is that not of concern to you? It certainly is to me.

The next question is on the United States. If I didn't misinterpret what you said, you mentioned that not one single report has indicated flight ratios were a factor. But I cited TWA Flight 843 and the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, which clearly indicated that flight attendants and the fact that TWA went beyond FAA requirements were factors in ensuring that all of the 292 passengers were evacuated.

You also mentioned that it was universally accepted, but we know that Australia has reviewed flight attendant ratios and has rejected any diminishment of the safety standards they have. Why can't we emulate best practices in the industry?

My final comment is on an issue that Mr. Grégoire raised as well. We've been working on this for a number of years, but the public obviously has serious concerns. Flight attendants who are the first-line responders have serious concerns. Why don't you drop it?

Mr. Fred Gaspar: Mr. Chairman, I'll respond in order, and I apologize in advance if I have missed some of the questions. I trust you'll remind me. I think I have them all.

As to your first one—how much an airline would save in going to a 1:50 ratio—I have to admit we really don't know. Each individual carrier is going to have to determine for itself what the potentials are.

Some of the factors and the reasons we don't know are that so many different factors play in deciding how many flight attendants to deploy and essentially what the costs of deploying a flight attendant are under given situations.

As to your second question—why not call for the strongest possible safety standards as a competitive advantage—this is a very important point, and I'm glad you brought it up. It allows me to once again reinforce this message to the committee. I don't even know if it's unspoken, but it's a pretty blatant tradition in the industry that you do not use safety as a competitive element. Safety is something that should be and is taken as a given. The regulator exists to ensure that we operate in a safe environment. Airlines exist to ensure they provide safe service. We do not compete with each other on safety. Safety is a given, and if there is anybody out there competing on safety, they're really doing a disservice to the entire industry.

And to that point, just before I leave the question, we don't accept the premise that staying at the 1:40 ratio would ensure the strongest possible safety standards, because the data-driven assessment of the CARAC process has shown, as Mr. Grégoire rightfully pointed out, that there would be no appreciable decline in the safety levels. We don't accept the premise of the question.

As to your third question asking why, if the CARAC process is open and inclusive and CUPE's views, as the union that participated, were opposed and their views aren't reflected in this process, the committee will be interested to know that their views were in fact included.

The way the CARAC process works, objections are noted in detail, and members around the table are required to respond to them. When they can't respond quantitatively to those objections, the CARAC committee then decides whether further study is needed.

In fact their views were very much noted, and each and every one of their concerns was addressed at a substantive level. Were we able to make them happy at a political level? No, and I cede the point that I don't think we'll ever be able to.

As to your fourth question, whether we would be able to release to the committee a substantive study that we cited as having been made, I referred to the same study Mr. Grégoire referred to, which he indicated is either already on the record or he is about to submit it to the committee. I will defer to this. If in fact he does not submit it, I invite the chairman to get in touch with me, and we'll do our best to make it available.

Concerning your fifth question, about the Transport proposal showing there are in fact emergency exits not covered, despite my comments that suggest one of the mitigating factors would be that all emergency exits would be covered, unfortunately I didn't get a copy and haven't seen the Transport Canada proposal. But we noted with interest the reference to the Boeing 737-700 having four exits. It's our understanding it actually has more than that, but that's not even the issue here.

The specific mitigating measure that's put in place is that on all wide-body jets—that's jets with two aisles or more—irrespective of the 1:50 ratio, if you choose to adopt it, you have to have one flight attendant for every exit door on that aircraft.

As to your sixth question, about the TWA report showing that the flight attendant ratios were a factor despite my statements that they are not, what I actually said was—I can give my exact words—there is no report that shows the lack of flight attendants was a reason why people were harmed.

Perhaps we're playing with words a little here, but going to that same point, I can refer to the quote you read. It's important to note that what they actually qualified it as was I think "a contributing factor". Maybe I'm mischaracterizing the word, but—

Mr. Peter Julian: "Complemented".

Mr. Fred Gaspar: It complemented. I'm sure it did complement, but as Mr. Grégoire rightfully pointed out, we have to exist in a data-driven environment, and in fact there was no evidence to suggest that more flight attendants would have made the process any quicker or any better.

As to your seventh question—why not emulate best practices such as Australia's—Australia has looked at this, and they've decided not to go the other way. I would suggest to committee members that it would be an error in judgment to conclude that Australia is not going to the 1:50 ratio model because they have looked at this thing inside and out and have concluded it is unsafe. They are dealing with the same political pushback we are dealing with here. Unfortunately, they do not have the courage of their convictions to proceed. It's up to them to decide in their own best interests, but I would suggest to you, respectfully, that it was not because of a lack of merit of the position.

Unfortunately, I believe you had another question, but I didn't have time to write it down.

Mr. Peter Julian: Why don't you drop it?

• (1205)

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Gentlemen, is there any possibility that you could have too many flight attendants? For instance, I fly every week, and I see these aisles and I can't imagine.... I've been thinking about it ever since we decided to study this. Is it possible that you could have too many people clogging the aisles or the emergency exits?

Mr. Fred Gaspar: I guess it would be possible. Your question speaks to an important way to look at the issue, and that is to really almost look at mathematical modelling and data in terms of how people actually move in emergency situations. To that point, you're absolutely right, there could be those kinds of circumstances. We feel very satisfied that the current measure strikes the right balance.

Mr. Brian Jean: That's one, minimum, per exit, and the one in....

Mr. Vasarins, could you give us a 30-second rendition of your job history? I understand you worked at Nav Canada for a while.

• (1210)

Mr. Andy Vasarins: Yes, I've been in the aviation transportation business for over 40 years. I started out, actually, as an air traffic controller. I worked in a number of facilities, including Toronto International Airport radar and at the centre, and then I graduated to management. During 9/11 I was vice-president of operations, and my

responsibility and accountability was to clear the Canadian skies on that dreadful day and to restart the operations a number of days later.

I retired from Nav Canada two and a half years ago, but I retired on April Fool's Day, and that never sticks. Then I started with the Air Transport Association of Canada as vice-president, flight operations two years ago.

Mr. Brian Jean: It's my understanding that with Nav Canada you spent considerable time on regulation, safety, security, and so on.

Mr. Andy Vasarins: Yes, I did.

Mr. Brian Jean: Actually, those are all my questions. Mr. Chair, I'd like to give Mr. Julian the opportunity to ask more questions of the witnesses if he would like.

The Chair: I appreciate your offer, Mr. Jean, but I think we would be prepared to take one more question each. We have about six minutes, so if you can keep it brief and to the point, we can maybe get more questions.

We'll go to Mr. Bell.

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Thank you.

First of all, I just want to clarify Mr. Jean's comment. It isn't one flight attendant per exit. That's only on a wide body. That is my understanding. Is that not correct?

Mr. Fred Gaspar: Yes, that's a mitigating factor.

Mr. Don Bell: It's under mitigating factors.

I have one question that you could answer. What is the most common load factor? I'm saying the most common. We have examples here of 70%, 80%, 90%, and 100%. The flights I'm on right now are running between 90% and 100%, I suspect, and I just want to know what the average is.

Mr. Fred Gaspar: Unfortunately, we have to defer to the public statements of our members. The major ones, WestJet and Air Canada, do disclose on a regular basis, and I believe, if I'm not mistaken, that the most recent ones had them at about 80%, domestically. But again, those are average figures.

Mr. Don Bell: The reason I ask that question is because—and it's not based on the number of aircraft but on the number of aircraft types that were given to us by Mr. Grégoire in his presentation—at the 80% load factor, it looks like six out of 43 are going to require an increase in the number of flight attendants, and six types of aircraft will require no reductions. At 90%, six out of 43 would be increased and 14 out of 43 would be reduced. And at 100%, four would be increased and 23 would be reduced.

It appears that the major beneficiaries are the smaller aircraft with fewer than 200 passengers. It seems that they are where most of the reductions occur at the 90% and 100% levels. The other question I had is, if that's the case, what's the difference between the wide body and...? Why wouldn't we have a requirement for one flight attendant per exit, whether it's a wide body or a single body?

Mr. Andy Vasarins: The main reason is the distance between exits. As a matter of fact, as Mr. Gaspar related to you earlier, even today, based on 1:40 figures, there are numerous cases in which you can demonstrate that you don't have a flight attendant for each exit. For example, the Airbus A320 and the Airbus A319 all have six exits. Under the 1:40 ratio, they don't really require six flight attendants. The Airbus A320 requires four flight attendants, and that's assuming you have a full aircraft, because that's based on passengers, not seats.

If you have percentages, as you mentioned, it would be less. Airbus A319, on a 1:40 ratio, has three, based on a seat capacity of 120.

The reality for the narrow versus wide body is the distance between exits and the fact that there are seats and galleys and so on blocking exits on a wide body, because they're in the middle and the exits are on the outsides, whereas on a narrow body, the flight attendants are in much closer proximity to those exits and therefore can handle more than one exit at a time.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: My understanding is the same as yours. I think most large companies offering a wide range of services, such as Air Canada, will probably maintain the 1:40 ratio. Even Mr. Gregoire, in his presentation seemed to say—

My question is simple. Why are we introducing this change if our largest airline decides to maintain the same ratio? Why shake up the current regime?

•(1215)

[English]

Mr. Fred Gaspar: It's for the same reason we pursue any modernization or innovation initiative, and that's to prepare for the future, because if there is one imperative in commercial aviation that's true, and has remained true throughout the era of aviation, it is change.

We are coming off a series of negotiations on open skies. The skies are more open today than they've ever been. We're dealing with a hyper-competitive environment, in which I would suggest it's plain and simply unfair to handcuff Canadian aviation service providers while their international counterparts are operating in more liberalized, but equally safe, environments.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: But you realize that our population is aging. You have to take that fact into account. I for one, think that this is a step behind and not a step forward.

[English]

Mr. Fred Gaspar: Your point is well taken, and that's why the issues of service and safety coexist. That's why members carriers are going to have to decide for themselves what the best way to proceed is, and no pre-emptive decision has been made.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, you have two minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman.

I would like to know how many airlines in your group will be concerned by the measures. As Mr. Laframboise has just pointed out, Air Canada is probably not one of them, judging by the type of planes it operates. Obviously WestJet is concerned. How many other members of your organization are concerned and how many airplanes does that represent in all?

[English]

Mr. Andy Vasarins: Actually, every airline will have the option to harmonize or not with the one to fifty. That includes Air Canada. We are not really saying that Air Canada won't.

Let me give you an example. In Germany, Lufthansa operates many types, including Boeing 707s, 727s, 737s, and 747s, McDonnell Douglas DC-10s, and Airbus A300s, A310s and A320s. Under similar regulatory requirements, they chose to standardize their fleet equipment so that they fall within those three types and therefore went through the one-to-fifty standard. They are doing very well and are more profitable.

Every airline company in Canada will have the option to harmonize. It will be strictly up to them, based on their load factors, the type of aircraft, and whether they can combine the types to make that decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: I will rephrase my question. How many members of your organization expressed interest in the change?

[English]

Mr. Fred Gaspar: We haven't pursued this regulation from that perspective. We pursued it from the sense of best practices, in terms of international and aviation innovation. So we don't know which of our members are or aren't going to take advantage of it. We do know that as a group, they do favour this move.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

The Chair: With that, I would like to thank our guests. We do have another group of people coming forward.

Thank you for your presentation.

I would now call on the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

We're actually pretty much on schedule.

Joining us, we have Pamela Sachs, president of the Air Canada component, and Richard Balnis, a senior researcher.

We welcome you, and please make yourself comfortable. Whenever you're ready to proceed, I would ask you to start.

Ms. Pamela Sachs (President, Air Canada Component, Canadian Union of Public Employees): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

My name is Pamela Sachs, and I'm also the chairperson of the council of component presidents of the airline division of CUPE. I'm also a flight attendant. I was a qualified flight attendant for 26 years before I assumed my union role, and I have been in this union role for nine years.

Appearing with me today is Richard Balnis, a CUPE research officer. We'd like to thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today and for your interest in this very important safety issue.

We represent flight attendants throughout the Canadian airline industry. Flight attendants are the first line of defence when things go wrong, and since 9/11 we've been able to depend less and less on the flight deck crews. We deal with onboard fires, cabin decompressions, unruly passengers, security breaches—remember the shoe bomber?—medical emergencies, and conducting aircraft evacuations in the event of a crash.

Aircraft mechanical problems occur once every five hours every day; smoke in the cabin or cockpit occurs once every four days; and there's a serious medical emergency once a week. We deal with the serious incidents as well, and you'll remember Fredericton and the near tragedy in the Azores.

I'd like to turn the technical part of the briefing over to Richard.

Thank you.

• (1220)

Mr. Richard Balnis (Senior Researcher, Canadian Union of Public Employees): Each member of the committee has been given a PowerPoint presentation in English and French, some poll results in English and French, and a blue book that I'll be referring to, which is completely bilingual under the tabs. I'd like to walk you through the PowerPoint presentation, because I think we'll be able to answer many of the issues raised by Transport Canada, and by ATAC, and hopefully answer some of the questions you have.

One of the things is on page 11 of the slide show. We met with the minister on June 6 with Mr. Grégoire. It was the first time we heard that there is now a company-wide election for this rule, so something has changed that we weren't even aware of. But let's be clear on what the proposal is. I would draw your attention to slide 3. Mr. Grégoire described it on his slide, but it will be unique in the world. You will have a choice between three rules: the current one-to-forty passengers, with some long overdue improvements; a one-to-fifty seats rule for wide-body aircraft, above the U.S. rule; and a one-to-fifty seats rule for narrow-body aircraft, which we believe will be effectively the same as the U.S. rule. Airlines will be able to pick and choose as they see fit. The last time we saw this rule go forward, it was by aircraft type, so we're surprised that there has been a change.

If you go to slide 4, you will see what is referred to as Frances Wokes' comment. Mr. Grégoire told you today that Transport Canada rejected the one-to-fifty seats rule in 2000 because of safety concerns, but to date we've not been able to get the document because it has been withheld at the direction of the deputy minister. As you can see on slide 5, it was rejected in 2001 because it did not maintain an equivalent level of safety, which Mr. Grégoire says it does today. We would like to discuss that very seriously. He also insists that the 2001 proposal is different. Today we have a different proposal.

I would like to draw your attention to slide 6. Some of you may have been able to see these documents that Frances Wokes prepared. What we have in the yellow tab in the blue book is a summary of what MPs from this committee have told us were in those documents. Those documents contained a three-column matrix. The third one is blanked because of access to information, even though the same analysis in 2005 was released in its entirety. They never showed us the document, but members of the old SCOT

described it to us and said that the documents were a smoking gun, and they saw no reason why those documents could not be released.

We believe we cannot have a regulatory process that is fair when all the available facts are not on the table. As you can see on slide 7, we met with the minister on June 6, and we asked him to release the documents. We may need your help to get those documents released.

I would draw your attention to slide 8. We have had mention repeatedly of this risk assessment that Transport Canada conducted in 2003. There is the scoring of the five rules they looked at. The current rules scored 404; the U.S. rules scored 256. To answer, I think, Mr. Laframboise's question, the risk assessment did not score the new proposal.

Moving to slide 9, there's a lot of talk of one-to-fifty being the gold standard. The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board has always been critical of that move, and in fact Transport Canada's own risk assessment concluded that the one-to-fifty rule had to be improved for wide bodies by putting in the floor-level coverage, which is unique in the world.

Going to slide 10, we have already had reference to the TWA crash. The evidence shows flight attendants save lives. Mr. Gaspar and Mr. Grégoire talk about the lack of flight attendants being the cause of deaths of people. Here we have a crew in excess of legal minimums, that saved lives. We believe that properly conducted accident investigations demonstrate the weakness of bad rules.

Slide 11 shows us the commitment of the Conservative Party during the election. Many of you are recipients of e-mails from our members. These are the responses back from the Conservative Party. They don't believe there would be a bad impact. We heard from Mr. Grégoire today that there would not be a bad impact. We have all the numbers of different ratios.

• (1225)

We would now draw your attention to slide 12. We want to have you look at full loads. Monsieur Grégoire said the one-to-fifty was deficient, particularly as it relates to wide-body aircraft, and that Canada has done better. Transport Canada is going to require one flight attendant per floor-level exit.

The diagram in slide 12 represents the typical configuration of an Air Canada A340-300. It is the same type of aircraft that crashed at Pearson last summer, just a few seats smaller. There are eight floor-level exits on this aircraft. They are circled in the diagram there. Under the U.S. and European rules, only six flight attendants would be required, leaving two of the exits uncovered, which are marked in red. That is the rule that ATAC sought in October 2002 when they filed their petition. This is the debate. They wanted a crew of six, leaving two floor-level exits uncovered.

I would like to move to slide 13, to the same plane, the A340. As a result of the Transport Canada risk assessment, when this plane is full, eight flight attendants will be required under the current Canadian one-to-forty rule, covering all floor-level exits. Transport Canada has agreed that under their version of the one-to-forty rule, they would ensure full coverage for these wide-body aircraft. This is more than the so-called international standard because the risk assessment found that the international standard was deficient. It ensures that one-to-forty and one-to-fifty Canadian...are the same. This is a good thing, a safe thing.

Now let's look at the impact on narrow-bodied aircraft like the A320, which is shown in slide 14. I would like to clear up the confusion. There are two floor-level exits at the rear of the aircraft, two floor-level exits at the front, and the two little dots there are overwing type III exits not to be run by a flight attendant. They are passenger self-help exits. So when somebody says there are six or eight exits on an aircraft, we're talking about floor-level exits. There are four floor-level exits on an A320.

Mr. Grégoire said that TC would never reduce safety. Well, under the current one-to-forty rule, this plane requires a crew of four flight attendants at full passenger loads, at 121 and 140 seats. There you can see there are four flight attendants. There will be complete floor-level coverage. Carriers will have the option to flip to the one-to-fifty rule, the same standard Transport Canada rejected in 2001, and you will be able to operate this same aircraft with only three flight attendants. This is a 120-foot cabin; there is no margin for error at these crew levels. If a flight attendant is injured or unable to help, there will only be two flight attendants to evacuate that full aircraft.

I will move to the next slide. This is not just affecting Air Canada; it also affects WestJet and other aircraft.

We've heard a lot about these mitigation factors. There are 14 such mitigating or compensating factors; 12 of the 14 will apply to both the one-to-forty and the one-to-fifty rules. So what mitigation is there to move from the lower one-to-fifty to the higher one-to-forty when they both have the same enhancements? The limitation of aircraft types.... In our view, WestJet, for example, will not be subject to the limitations because they only have three aircraft types. Air Canada has many more aircraft types, but Transport Canada has watered down the definition so much that we think Air Canada will be able to get under the rule of five. It's not three; it's also five.

The only mitigating factor we see is new in-charge training. The cabin personnel who are in charge of the aircraft will have new training. They should have had new training required by law. It may be as little as one-half a day. Such extra training for one person on a reduced crew will not compensate for one less body on these aircraft. We would suggest that moving to a one-to-fifty rule will cut the crews on narrow-bodied aircraft overnight, without any mitigating factors whatsoever.

• (1230)

That is why Frances Wokes' report is so important. She found out the problems with that rule in 2001. In our view, it is indeed a smoking gun.

There were some questions.

In the blue book is the staff report that Monsieur Grégoire carefully avoided answering on. I listened very carefully to his answer, but he never answered it.

You will see the staff recommendation where they expressed concern. This is not scaremongering. These are not the foes of modernization that ATAC would lead you to believe. This is from a Transport Canada staffer, Christopher Dann, who was sitting here during the presentation but unfortunately had to leave.

They talked about the sensitivity of this issue and the risk of lowering public confidence in aviation safety. They went on to say that we needed to do eight more things, seven of which, to our knowledge, have not been done.

We have finally seen the aircraft analysis tied to this slide show, an analysis we have been asking for since April 2004. It has appeared today, and only because this standing committee made Transport Canada come.

In addition, you will see the Australian quote "after a security incident". After a passenger attacked flight attendants with pointed sticks, Australia realized they should not lower their ratio of 1:36, and we believe for good reason.

Will passengers benefit? Will there be lower fares, better service, and free blankets and pillows? We don't think so.

You have the complete poll results as well, and 69% of Canadians want to maintain the current 1:40 ratio. More importantly, 50% strongly oppose the change, even if it is to maintain corporate international competitiveness.

In summary, Transport Canada's culture of secrecy is inconsistent with the government's commitment to open and transparent government. Transport Canada officials are asking you to deliberately increase risks to passengers for no tangible public return, and even their own staff believe more homework must be done.

I'll say a word on consultation. We had two one-half days in 2003 to discuss risk assessment in separate rooms. The unions were in one room, the employers met separately, and there were public interest groups. We had two one-half days of that. In April 2004 we had two days when we were all brought together. There have been three days of consultation on this regulation. The rest of the time, any delay has been due to the department.

Finally, we ask you as parliamentarians to take action to put this initiative on hold. We need all the work done that was identified in the November 2004 staff report. We need the full Wokes' analysis. We need to return to the department, because, quite frankly, it's now on a fleet-wide basis, and that's news to us. We need to know what is being planned.

In conclusion, we need to ensure that you have done your job. In 1981 the U.S. House of Representatives had public hearings when the U.S. government considered moving to a 1:50 passenger ratio. After considering it, they rejected it.

Finally, with the greatest of respect to Mr. Grégoire, if you want to be data-driven, you learn from accidents. Wait for the investigation report of Air France Flight 358.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear.

We know that we ran too long, but I think we've anticipated a lot of the questions and we've tried to put the full debate before the committee on all these issues.

We're open to your questions, Mr. Chair.

•(1235)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you.

My first question would actually be to you. How is the order of appearances determined at a committee meeting such as this?

The Chair: It was a meeting of the subcommittee where we agreed to invite certain witnesses before us at this particular meeting.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Who determined who appeared first and last?

The Chair: We didn't. We selected the groups that we thought should be here. There was certainly no influence on my part or, I don't think, on any member's part as to the order. Is there a problem with it?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I'm not suggesting there is. I'm only suggesting that in a matter such as this, I would really have appreciated it if Mr. Balnis and Ms. Sachs had appeared first. They've given us a great deal of ammunition to lob at ATAC and the department. I'm a little disappointed.

As a true Conservative, no doubt you would appreciate this. A true Conservative believes that the onus of truth is often on those proposing change, and the ones proposing change got out before CUPE's presentation.

Mr. Balnis—

The Chair: I think I should correct that. I don't think you should cast those types of aspersions. We had a subcommittee meeting.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: No, I'm not suggesting at all. I totally accept your view.

The Chair: Please continue. Your time is running.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: You said the House of Representatives rejected this proposal.

Mr. Richard Balnis: The U.S. representatives conducted hearings in the move from one flight attendant per 50 seats to one flight attendant per 50 passengers.

To be clear on the origin of the rule, the rule originated in 1971. Australia had one flight attendant per 36 passengers. The U.S. at that time had one flight attendant per 44 seats. Canada took the middle: one flight attendant per 40 passengers. Then the U.S. moved from one flight attendant per 44 seats to one flight attendant per 50 seats. The U.S. NTSB said it is unproven.

The airlines then said they'd like to go to one flight attendant per 50 passengers, to give them the flexibility and even fewer flight attendants, because they would be able, then, to staff to load as well.

The U.S. House of Representatives stepped in, convened a full day of televised public hearings, and rejected it based on the evidence presented.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: So it never went ahead.

Mr. Richard Balnis: It did not go ahead, but that's one flight attendant per 50 passengers, not one per 50 seats.

You get really confused. You just have to keep them clear in your head. One is passengers; the other is seats.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: But you seem to be making some sort of parallel between the way the U.S. has handled the change and the way we're handling it. I was suggesting that somehow they were more rigorous, but you say it's apples and oranges.

Mr. Richard Balnis: No, I'm not suggesting that. I'm suggesting that when it comes to an important issue of public safety, the U.S. House of Representatives held public hearings, because we have been criticized for upsetting the regulatory process, for bringing the standing committee into a place it does not belong.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I see. Okay.

Mr. Richard Balnis: We believe Parliament, you as MPs, are the ones at the end of the day who go back to your constituents and say, "Here's what my...."

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I understand.

Mr. Richard Balnis: That's what I mean. So we're suggesting that you need to take that action.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: That's it, Mr. Chair. You can go to the next questioner.

The Chair: Monsieur Carrier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Good day. I'm very pleased to meet you.

Earlier, Mr. Gregoire said that the average passenger load on airplanes was 80%. By looking at the table that he's given us, I noticed that the ratio change would have no negative impact because it would increase the number of flight attendants at this passenger load.

Are you in agreement with his statement, generally, that passenger loads hover around the 80% mark?

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Balnis: We have no disagreement with that figure, but it is, in our view, fun with numbers. The slides we put up there show the safety impact when the planes are full. I think that is what the department is trying to avoid.

I think someone indicated that almost half those aircraft would suffer a reduction, when we believe a flight attendant is more needed when that aircraft is full.

For example, if you use an 80% load factor, it's only a 60% load factor on Air Canada's South American routes. If you average that in, that means that somewhere else in the system it's 100%.

We tried to do some little estimates. We believe six million to seven million passengers would be exposed to this reduced ratio, based on calculations provided by a Sypher:Mueller study commissioned by ATAC. That, we think, is a great exposure of risk. So the 80% factor hides the reality of what happens at full loads, and that's where I think you should focus your attention.

• (1240)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Representatives of other airline companies said that each company would have to choose its ratio, either 1:40 or 1:50. It seems most airlines will want to maintain the 1:40 ratio.

In your opinion, which of the two will the airlines pick?

[English]

Mr. Richard Balnis: I would like to disagree with Mr. Gaspar. I would think if anybody is going to go to a 1:50 ratio, it's Air Canada.

The A320 accounts for 51 aircraft of their 200 aircraft fleet. Who knows what other little mitigating factors may disappear in the wash?

My own gut instinct is that the floor-level coverage for the wide-body will disappear. If when we met with the minister on June 6 and told him, "Mr. Minister, don't do it, this is aircraft type by aircraft type," and now it's gone to a fleet-wide election, I bet you the minimum floor coverage on wide-body will also disappear.

It's also for you to know that it's not a regulation; it's a standard. It's not consulted through the *Canada Gazette*; it's actually consulted within the department. After we dissent to it, that rule could disappear in short order.

Air Canada, if anything, will take the 1:50 ratio, because that's the minimum level they would allow them to reduce it in a wide range of aircraft, including some of their wide-bodies. So I respectfully disagree with the ATAC position.

As to who has advanced it in the past, I do have the letter buried in my papers here in terms of who advocated this. It included Air Canada and WestJet and I believe Skyservice and First Air. Air Transat has not elected to support this issue. That was in their letter of October 2002, and I believe that was tabled with the committee back in April 2004—for you to check my memory.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Was the increased number of flight attendants onboard an aircraft considered in terms of passenger safety?

[English]

Mr. Richard Balnis: On the slide you saw three or four flight attendants. The reality is that in a crash, some of those flight attendants will die or be incapacitated. That's what the U.S. NTSB said for a study of redundancy, that there may not be all the flight attendants when that plane finally comes to rest; then you do with what is left over.

It is factored in, then, in the sense that it provides a margin of error in the event of incapacitation or death. I believe that is why Transport Canada staff decided to go with one flight attendant per floor-level exit on the wide-body plane. They realized that coverage was needed for the A340—to go back to that slide—rather than the A320, as you can see. That's why Transport Canada said that one flight attendant per floor-level exit was needed.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll take the first minute to raise a notice of motion for Thursday's meeting:

(1) That this committee demands that the Minister of Transport do a risk assessment of the proposed "mixed option" flight attendant ratios and release it to the Transport Committee prior to further moves to change the existing flight attendant ratio requirements.

(2) That this committee demands that the Minister of Transport conduct the 8 actions required by Cabin Safety Standards in their November 23, 2004 recommendations prior to any further move to lower flight attendant ratios, and that the results be released to the committee.

(3) That this committee demands that all documents related to changes in flight attendant ratios be made public by the minister prior to any further moves to change flight attendant ratios.

(4) That this committee insists that the minister await the Transportation Safety Board investigation of Air France Flight 358 prior to any further moves to reduce flight attendant ratios.

Again, that's my notice of motion for Thursday's meeting. I'll provide a written copy after this meeting, but I wanted to satisfy the 48-hour requirement.

Thank you very much for your presentation. It was extremely detailed—certainly the best presentation we've seen on this issue.

• (1245)

Mr. Richard Balnis: And on 72 hours' notice, too.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, even more so.

I was not aware, and had not understood, that there hasn't been a risk assessment done on this combined option.

Mr. Richard Balnis: And it was surprising...until we managed to pull out this November 2004 document. Finding Transport Canada documents is like digging, but eventually this popped out. We kept asking and asking. This staff report was phenomenal; they said they didn't examine the implications or the enforceability of this rule.

We're hoping that perhaps the new minister may sit back and say, yes, we'd better do our homework.

Mr. Peter Julian: So at this point we don't know what the weighted score would be. We certainly know that the European rule actually scores almost half of the weighted score of the current ratio.

I have two questions coming out of that. First, are you aware of any work that's been done to compare the Australian ratio with risk assessments from other jurisdictions? And second, what is your best guess? Would this be below or around the U.S. rule or below or around the European rule?

Mr. Richard Balnis: On the Australian rule, back in June 2003 we learned that the.... In fact, in this document here, dated June 2, 2003, we submitted this evidence to the risk assessment that Transport Canada was conducting at the time. We were told, “You're too late, we've made our recommendation to management”. So I don't believe they included a full assessment of the Australian model. It's not in their five scores there.

In terms of the risk assessment score, I think you need to do the risk assessment, but I wouldn't want to prejudge that process; it does involve looking at the issue on seven different scales, and it does involve people considering the evidence.

So I would not want to make up a number without going through the process. I wouldn't want to prejudge the outcome.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Thank you.

I'd like to move on to consultation. Both of the previous presenters made great issue of the broad consultation, though I think it's fair to say that our understanding is that most of the organizations mentioned are actually opposed to these changes. For instance, it was a surprise to me that particularly the disabilities groups were mentioned as part of the consultation process when they're opposed to the changes.

Were your views taken seriously into consideration? Did you feel that the issues raised about this change, the concerns of the first-line responders, the flight attendants, were taken into consideration by either the Air Transport Association or the ministry?

Mr. Richard Balnis: Just to go to page 5 of Transport Canada's slide, CUPE, ACPA, ALPA, the teamsters, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind all expressed their opposition in principle to the proposal. We expressed opposition to the risk assessment. We were ruled out of order. The only people who spoke in favour of this were from ATAC, WestJet, and Air Canada, who from my recollection were in the room in April 2004.

Were our views taken seriously? We submitted a 100-page dissent; we got a 90-page response. Some of our criticisms were acknowledged with the cryptic “noted”, so I don't believe they were taken into account at all.

The proposal that is going forward is pretty well what was proposed back in April 2004. ATAC got its golden victory here, where they redefined “aircraft type” to make sure that rule would pretty well not apply to anyone in Canada. Even at Air Canada, which goes from Embraers all the way to A340s, will be covered under the airline types of five—not three, but five—and will not have to put on those additional restrictions. That was the biggest victory for ATAC there.

For the in-charge training, the only mitigating factor is half a day, and it should have been done for years.

So no, sir, our concerns were not addressed seriously. It's basically the 1:50 rule that WestJet wanted back in 1999, dressed up with a lot of mitigating factors that people are going to flip out of. You don't have to do it; you don't have to do the floor level. You just say, “Thanks, we'll go to 1:40.”

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Quite frankly, I don't know where to start, because there's so much contradictory information before us. I should add, it's not only this particular delegation that has been informative; the previous two delegations, in my mind, were quite articulate and provided an excellent review of the process that has led up to this point.

My question to you has to do with the amount of evidence out there to support your position. What I have before me right now is a risk assessment conducted by Transport Canada, a study from CARAC that addressed a similar issue, and you've submitted a poll that was conducted. I've just had a brief chance to look at it, but I think you would agree with me that the methodology used in preparing a poll question is key to ensuring that we receive the proper information to help us make decisions.

Would you agree with me?

• (1250)

Mr. Richard Balnis: Of course, sir.

Mr. Ed Fast: All right. Let's address the poll, then.

Mr. Richard Balnis: Could I answer your comment on the risk assessment? On slide 8 of our presentation, the scores we gave you are the scores in the risk assessment. They score 1:40 passengers at 404 and the U.S. rule at 256. Those are TC's own numbers. There's a margin of safety there. That one, sir, we did not.... That's them.

Mr. Ed Fast: I understand that.

The recommendation that is coming from Transport Canada is based on that risk assessment. It's presumably based, at least in part, on the CARAC study. It's based on the fact that virtually all of the other major airlines in the world use the 1:50 rule.

Going back to the poll itself and the methodology used, I'll refer you to page 3, first of all. The question, presumably, that was addressed to the survey participants was whether they were in favour of maintaining Canada's current regulation for flight attendant requirements or matching regulations with the U.S.

Why just the U.S.? If 99% of the world's major airlines are using the 1:50 rule, why do we focus on the U.S.? Given the fact that Canadians have a much more cautious approach than our American neighbours—for a number of different reasons—than we did 30 years ago, it seems to me that referring to the U.S. in this question would tend to skew the results in favour of the answer you wanted to receive.

Before you answer the question, just to buttress that point, I'll go to page 6, which does the same thing. Again, I believe it's incorrect methodology at play here. The question is, “Should Canadian airlines lower their safety standards to stay internationally competitive?” In fact, the evidence from TC is that safety standards aren't being lowered. So if you use the words “lowering safety standards”, obviously you're going to get a response that's negative from Canadians. In fact, I'm surprised it's not 100%.

It's how you ask the questions. Clearly, I would feel uncomfortable using this as the basis for my decision, and for the decision that the minister is going to make on this issue.

I'll leave it up to a response from you, but I'm really concerned when we use a poll like this, which isn't a study. None of these survey participants, presumably, were asked questions such as, "Are you aware that the large majority of airlines in the world are using 1:50?" They probably weren't provided with copies of the risk assessments. They probably weren't provided with the TC briefing.

So that's my struggle in trying to put any weight on this document.

Mr. Richard Balnis: To respond to why it was compared to the U.S., WestJet repeatedly made the argument that they needed to be competitive with the U.S. because they were entering the transborder market. That was their argument. That was their direct competitor, and that's why we used the U.S.

In terms of Canadians perhaps feeling more antipathy towards Americans versus Europeans, we did not think that would have skewed the results.

In terms of your other comments, I'll use a TC line: noted.

You raise the issues. We are arguing, sir, on that picture up there. The A320 will go from four flight attendants at a full load, covering every exit, to only three. In our view, that is lowering a safety standard, regardless of what TC says.

•(1255)

Mr. Ed Fast: Can you show me an independent study, perhaps an academic study, that actually shows that the 1:50 rule is going to reduce safety in our Canadian airlines?

Mr. Richard Balnis: I'll give you two answers to that. There is a study, but it's actually been discredited.

Do you believe smoking causes cancer?

Mr. Ed Fast: I'm not going to get into a debate on smoking.

Mr. Richard Balnis: There is no scientific study, in the pure, gold standard sense, that proves smoking causes cancer. But I think we believe that. There's a lot of evidence there.

And the practitioners on those aircraft, from their own experience, sir, believe there will be a reduction in safety when you go from four to three flight attendants on a full load. It's the people on the front line who are saying that to you.

That is the response we would like to give you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Due to time constraints, I would thank our guests again for the information presented to us. We appreciate you taking the time.

Just for the committee's information, as of now we will be meeting on Thursday; a location will be determined. And you'll be notified of Mr. Julian's notice of motion as quickly as we get the translations in, and out to you.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'm curious, and I never got an opportunity to ask a question of the witnesses. How many Canadians were sampled in that poll? I would like to know because it wasn't indicated anywhere.

The Chair: Could you perhaps ask Mr. Balnis later?

Mr. Richard Balnis: I believe it's on the first page past the cover page in the poll that was given to you in English and French. The unweighted number of interviews was 1,011. The weighted number of interviews was 1,000, and it's broken down by territory and later in gender. It's on page 2.

The Chair: I'll ask the committee, since I presume this will continue to be the issue for the committee to deal with. Is there any interest in bringing any other witnesses forward?

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, Transport Canada cited that they had consulted a number of disability groups. I know that I forwarded a number of those groups to the clerk to appear as witnesses. Since Transport Canada raised the fact that they had been consulted, I believe it would be very appropriate that we actually hear from them.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: My only suggestion is what Mr. Scarpaleggia said.

Sorry, I apologize for butchering your name.

I would like to hear from Transport Canada in relation to what they've said. I think we should forward their comments from this committee meeting to Transport Canada and ask them to respond to it.

The Chair: Mr. Laframboise.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Perhaps we should invite the Air Canada Pilots Association to the committee. After all, they're the ones who are flying the aircraft and they have first hand knowledge of what goes on inside.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Maybe Transport Canada, if the committee wishes, could come at the very last. I think that would be appropriate. That way they could respond, because it's they who are putting this forward.

The Chair: So Thursday we will deal with perhaps one of the organizations that were listed as being consulted.

Mr. Peter Julian: Three were mentioned by Transport Canada: the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind—

The Chair: What I'm asking, Mr. Julian, is would one of those three organizations be okay?

Mr. Peter Julian: Well, all three of them were cited, so I think we should hear from all three of them. If Transport Canada is saying they have consulted with these groups and is using that as a justification for moving forward with this, I would like to hear from the groups.

The Council of Canadians with Disabilities is for those with physical disabilities, those people who are in wheelchairs; the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association deals with those who are hard of hearing or late-deafened, so those are folks who would not be able to hear voice commands in the event of evacuation; and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind is for blind and visually impaired Canadians. All three of them have been cited by Transport Canada as having been consulted. I think it's important that we hear from all three groups.

Mr. Ed Fast: What about the other groups—the Air Line Pilots Association, the Teamsters? They're all there.

The Chair: The reason I asked about having just one of those three at this Thursday meeting was the idea of time allowance in the committee and also availability. If I can't get all three for the Thursday meeting, do I not take any? That's what I'm asking.

• (1300)

Mr. Peter Julian: My suggestion, Mr. Chair, would be to have all three. I think they would be available. If they can't attend, of course, that would be unfortunate, but let's have as many as possible.

I can't stress this enough: these are three different levels of disability. In a sense, they are three different groups. We often—and this comes from my disability background—regroup people with disabilities as though they're all the same. Well, there are fundamental differences between how a person in a wheelchair might evacuate an aircraft and how a person who is deaf or blind might do so.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I was going to suggest, Mr. Chair, that they are going to have the same message. If Mr. Julian would like them to be here, I'm in support of that as long as they present at the same time

and take up the same time as one presenter would. They could invite comments that would be interesting for each. I think they're going to have the same message, in essence.

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I agree with Mr. Julian in the sense that it's important not to assume they have the same point of view for the same reasons, but I would agree with Mr. Jean's suggestion that they sit at the table together and each do a short presentation. I'm sure their presentation would be very interesting, but I think many of us have questions we want to direct to them. I would hope they would give more time to questions and less to presentation, or something like that, but I agree that we should see all of them.

The Chair: With the will of the committee, we will invite the three groups requested by Mr. Julian. We will also try to contact the pilots association and we will bring Transport Canada in at the end. Agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to make sure that Transport Canada will be provided with copies of the presentations by the other groups here so they will be able to comment before the—

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to do that.

Mr. Brian Jean: If we want a response, especially for CUPE, I think that's important.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thank you.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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