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Chair: Mr. Vance Badawey



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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.)):

Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure to get back to work here in the new session after the holiday season.

I would like to welcome all of you to meeting number 12 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are in fact available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of "floor", "English" or "French".

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in the committee room. Keep in mind the directives from the Board of Internal Economy regarding masking and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as it normally is by the proceedings and verification officer.

I remind you that all comments by members or witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain the order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting today to continue its study on the impact of COVID-19 on the aviation sector.

I would like to introduce our witnesses for today.

From the Air Canada component of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, we have Wesley Lesosky, president; and from the

Air Line Pilots Association, International, we have Tim Perry, president of the Air Line Pilots Association of Canada.

From the Canadian Union of Public Employees, local 4070, we have Christopher Rauenbusch, president; and from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, we have Paul Cameron, business manager and financial secretary, as well as, no stranger to the Hill, Matt Wayland, executive assistant to the international vice-president and Canadian director of government relations.

From the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, we have Debbie Daviau, president, and Emily Watkins, senior adviser to the president. Finally, on behalf of Unifor, we have Jerry Dias, national president, as well as Kaylie Tiessen, researcher.

With that, I'm going to go right into our witnesses for 10 minutes each. We'll start off with the Air Canada component of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Mr. Lesosky, the floor is yours for 10 minutes.

Mr. Wesley Lesosky (President, Air Canada Component of the Canadian Union of Public Employees): Good afternoon. My name is Wes Lesosky. I am a professional flight attendant and the president of the Air Canada component of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I represent just shy of 10,000 flight attendants at Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge.

I am also the president of CUPE's airline division, which represents 15,000 flight attendants at nine different Canadian airlines across Canada.

I am very grateful to the committee for the invitation to appear today and speak about the impacts of the pandemic on workers like me in Canada. Flight attendants, as you know, were some of the first workers in Canada to confront COVID-19 in the workplace.

Even as many were flying repatriation flights to bring Canadians home from around the globe, flight attendants were losing their jobs by the thousands. Unlike many other sectors of the economy, by and large those jobs have not come back since the onset of the pandemic last March. In fact, we have hundreds more being laid off next week. Around three-quarters of our members are currently laid off, and wondering if there will even be an industry to return to once the pandemic dust settles. Needless to say, it has been a difficult year for us.

To be quite frank, it has been made much more difficult than it needed to be by the federal government, which has repeatedly ignored our calls for help, and rarely, if ever, consulted labour representatives on major decisions affecting our members, their health and safety, and their livelihoods.

On behalf of our 15,000 members, I would like to propose the following for the committee's consideration.

Number one, the government needs to better protect the rights of airline workers to a healthy and safe work environment, including the right to refuse unsafe work. Our members went through hell in the early months of the pandemic, and we had a regulator that refused to act when we tried to push for protections to make our jobs safer. The government needs to work with us, not against us, to make flying safer for cabin crew and the flying public.

Number two, it's time for the government to take a serious look at implementing pre-boarding rapid testing at airports. For months, we have been calling on the federal government to implement rapid testing to make flying safer for both cabin crew and the public, without harming the industry. Instead, the government hastily imposed its pre-travel test policy earlier this month, which the numbers show does nothing to increase safety and which led to thousands more jobs lost overnight.

Number three, our industry needs targeted financial aid from the federal government that prioritizes protecting workers and their families from the impacts of the virus. We are perplexed that Canada remains the only G7 country without a comprehensive aid package for the airline industry. Since April we've been hearing that financial aid for the industry is just around the corner to help protect tens of thousands of jobs, and yet each time we think the government may act, we're met with more delay and disappointment.

Number four, the government must fix well-intentioned programs like the Canada emergency wage subsidy so they cannot be abused by employers. The program was established to help employers avoid sweeping layoffs by covering 75% of the payroll, but instead of honouring the intent of the program, Air Canada, for example, has laid off the vast majority of its workforce, including about 8,000 of my members, but it is still utilizing the wage subsidy for active employees. The federal government has, since day one, resisted putting any conditions on this program to prevent companies from taking the money while leaving their workers behind.

Canada is a very large place. More than almost any other country, we rely on a safe and dependable air transportation network to connect our communities and keep our economy strong. Just like roads, highways, ferries and rail networks, Canada needs a strong airline industry. Ours is an industry where safety is paramount. We should all be concerned with the long-term implications of losing tens of thousands of flight attendants, pilots, air traffic controllers, aircraft technicians and other workers who have years of training and expertise in keeping the public safe while they are 30,000 feet in the air, all because the federal government decides not to act while it has the chance.

Our members answered the federal government's call for help when COVID-19 struck. Now we ask that you answer theirs.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

• (1535)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lesosky.

We'll now move on to the Air Line Pilots Association International, Mr. Tim Perry.

Tim, for five minutes the floor is yours.

Captain Tim Perry (President, Air Line Pilots Association Canada, Air Line Pilots Association International): Thank you very much.

On behalf of the 5,500 professional pilots at 16 airlines in Canada, ALPA appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the committee for its study on the impact of COVID-19 on the aviation sector.

As you know, workers continue to bear the brunt of the impact that COVID-19 has had on the aviation industry. The almost complete shutdown of the industry has made flight operations a financially losing proposition and the industry's eventual restart very complex.

Aviation jobs, in particular, will either take several years to fully return to the extensive time required to requalify or, worse, disappear altogether. While other governments around the world have been quick to support their airlines and people, we are still waiting.

I would like to remind you that compounding this issue is the fact that, prior to COVID-19, our industry faced a severe pilot shortage. Any study will tell you that we'll face this issue again before long, and this time even more acutely and with even more severe consequences to the industry. This path of inaction will ensure dire consequences, not just now, but in the future as well.

I want to emphasize this as clearly as possible right now, because I've become aware of some misinterpretation here from talking to many over the last number of weeks and months. Safety for Canadians is, and always will be, number one. We agree on this. We do, however, believe that our testing and border policy could be better if better information was taken into account and proper consultation occurred, but I will speak to that in a moment.

Nothing I say here is any way contrary to the public safety of Canadians. ALPA's position on how to help the industry and weather the storm has, since the beginning of the pandemic, been consistent: implement an aviation-specific financial assistance program, with strong labour protections that provide direct support to airlines that have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I understand that this seemingly simple request may be challenging to deliver even when all parties agree about its necessity. With this in mind, I want to offer our perspective and experience as an organization deeply familiar with the sector.

I'd like to highlight the perspective that we bring to the table and put a human face on the impact the pandemic has had on the airline industry. I have several letters from our members expressing in their own words the impact, the hardship and the frustration that the lack of support for the industry is creating in their lives. I will forward these to you, and I strongly urge you to read them as you consider a path out of these unprecedented times for the sake of the industry, its workers and our country.

To date, meaningful dialogue between the government and aviation labour organizations has not adequately occurred. Unless this changes, and changes soon, it will be to the detriment of aviation workers, the industry and Canada's economy. Policy decisions that ultimately affect so many Canadians and workers, in particular, cannot continue to be made without proper consultation and engagement.

For example, conflicting definitions for "crew" in orders in council, interim orders and guidance materials have caused confusion, not only for those pilots who are fortunate enough to still be working, but also for those who are charged with implementation and enforcement of COVID requirements that apply to air transportation, such as airlines and CBSA. With more restrictions currently being considered by the government, the industry is faced with an even bleaker outlook, as it will increasingly be unable to absorb them unless there is substantial support from the government to compensate for the impact more restrictions would have.

The uncoordinated patchwork of federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions that are dealing with the pandemic, combined with a lack of financial support from the federal government, has created the perfect storm for the failure of the Canadian airline industry.

ALPA offers significant expertise and a unique perspective on the industry. We speak for and defend those who are most affected and acutely in need of stability. As the industry remains under threat, we need to take action now and together to ensure the stabilization, continued viability, and ultimately, the survival of the airline sector in Canada.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perry.

We're now going to move on to CUPE, local 4070, the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Mr. Rauenbusch.

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch (President, Canadian Union of Public Employees - Local 4070): Thank you very much for having me.

My name is Chris Rauenbusch and I've been a flight attendant at WestJet since 2002. I am the president of CUPE Local 4070 representing the over 4,100 flight attendants at WestJet, WestJet Encore and Swoop.

Canadian airlines are in crisis. It's a crisis caused by COVID but made worse by the inaction of our government.

To put the crisis in perspective, let me tell you quickly that I have just avoided layoff for February by two years of service. I've been employed by WestJet for 19 years, and there are currently no flight attendants with fewer than 17 years of service who are actively flying. Roughly four out of five flight attendants at WestJet are grounded right now.

According to the International Air Transport Association, IATA, in its report titled "The Value of Air Transport in Canada", which was published in 2019, just prior to the pandemic, the aviation sector directly supported 241,000 jobs in Canada. Our sector supported another 146,000 jobs through the necessary supply chains and other support businesses. Our sector supported yet a further 55,000 jobs through spending of wages earned by our sector's workers. A total of 633,000 jobs are associated with the air transport sector, and that includes 190,000 jobs created due to foreign tourists.

The aviation sector, including domestic-based airlines, generated \$37 billion U.S. of GDP annually prior to the pandemic. Since that report from IATA in 2019, Canada's aviation sector has shed hundreds of thousands of jobs as a direct result of COVID-19. Some of these workers are on the CEWS wage subsidy, but many are not. Irrespective of the wage subsidy, many fear that they may never return to their jobs as airlines have shed capacity since the pandemic began, including both of Canada's largest carriers—WestJet and Air Canada—which, yet again, starting in February of this year will be laying off many more of our members. Much of this capacity will, sadly, likely never return.

Within the WestJet group of companies, over 4,100 flight attendants were employed a year ago, prior to the pandemic. As of February 1, a total of only 777 flight attendants will remain active. This number represents an 81% cut to our actively employed flight attendants. This is unprecedented.

We have heard the government discuss the importance of regional routes and air service as one of their top priorities for any aid that they might provide to our sector. This is an understandable position but the reality is that regional air service is most productive when regional routes are connected to a larger network of domestic, transborder and international flights on a main carrier's global network. Regional routes are not efficiently served by strictly point-to-point service just because the government demands it.

Regional routes are best served by multiple frequencies by more than one carrier, which benefit consumers in these regions. Good regional air service is a by-product of healthy global networks built by airlines over time.

Good regional air service cannot thrive simply because Ottawa decrees it should be so, but because regional routes feed the global networks of these airlines, thereby creating profit. That's the incentive that is needed to properly see regional markets well served with more and more service being added unless, of course, Ottawa wants to nationalize passenger air service once again.

If I leave you with nothing else today, please do hear this: We can't assume that airlines like WestJet or Air Canada will simply bounce back after the pandemic ends. The damage being done to the sector is too intense for us to survive, particularly if the pandemic continues. A country as large as Canada needs profitable airlines, and I'm deeply concerned that we won't have them if this government doesn't act fast.

Canada remains the only G7 country without government sectoral support for airlines. In the U.S., billions of dollars in government aid has been provided to airlines to help keep them afloat.

The WestJet network is operating at a level seen in 2001, based on flights per day and available seat miles, a key indicator of an airline's size and market offering.

As Canadians we cannot afford to let the things that are currently transpiring in our industry happen. This government cannot afford to recklessly be complicit in abandoning our key sector, which contributes to our national economy, particularly after hearing testimony from my colleagues and me today.

I implore the committee to take our testimony today with the weight and seriousness that it deserves. Our sector urgently needs federal sectoral support. Sectoral support coupled with a nationwide pre-board testing program is the only way to avoid the national disaster that would be the full or near-full collapse of the Canada's airlines.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rauenbusch.

We'll now move on to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. We have Mr. Paul Cameron and Mr. Matt Wayland.

Gentlemen, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Matt Wayland (Executive Assistant to the International Vice-President and Canadian Director of Government Relations, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, committee members, fellow witnesses and guests.

I would like to thank you for allowing us to present today to members of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for your study on the impact of COVID-19 on the aviation sector.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, IBEW, represents 70,000 members here in Canada, and over 775,000 across North America in a variety of sectors. For today's discussion, we'll be focusing on our members who work for Nav Canada.

Joining me here today is Paul Cameron, business manager of IBEW Local Union 2228, which represents just over 2,000 mem-

bers across the country, including all 600 members at Nav Canada who work as electronics technologists.

Nav Canada is a private non-profit corporation that provides air traffic control, airport advisory services, weather briefings and aeronautical information services for more than 18 million square kilometres of Canadian domestic and oceanic airspace. It is Canada's sole air navigation services provider and, prior to privatization, was once part of Transport Canada.

Nav Canada's safety record is undeniably one of the best in the world amongst air navigation services providers, thanks in large part to the expertise of IBEW members and those who belong to the seven other unions that represent the over 4,000 highly skilled Nav Canada employees nationwide.

We often describe Nav Canada as an essential utility, much like our electricity system. Many people take electricity for granted until the day the power lines are down and they cannot be reached. Nav Canada is a utility that is used by international and domestic airlines, and it cannot simply be reduced in capacity and returned to a full level of functioning by the flip of a switch.

Nav Canada's customers include airlines, air cargo operators, air charter operators, medevacs, air taxis, helicopter operators and business and general aviation.

Nav Canada operates under the Civil Air Navigation Services Commercialization Act and recovers its operating expenses through service charges from its customers on a break-even basis, and herein lies the major issue for Nav Canada. It is restricted to operating on that break-even basis.

With air traffic down 86.8% year over year according to Stats Canada, it didn't take long for it to run into financial issues, much like the other presenters across the aviation sector have mentioned here today. Nav Canada is currently losing millions of dollars every day, even after the benefit of the Canada emergency wage subsidy is factored in.

IBEW members at Nav Canada are employed as electronics technologists, with specialized training in aviation navigation technology. This specialized training is delivered by Nav Canada to eligible employees who are hired after completing electronics technology courses on their own.

Nav Canada's training is not offered at any other school in the country. The specialized training for IBEW members can take up to two years to complete. Our members and those experts working for the seven other unions at Nav Canada work in close collaboration with one another on a daily basis, and one can simply not operate without the other.

Now these professionals are being laid off, and they are not going to wait around for a call back to work. Their skills and expertise will land them jobs in other sectors around the country and around the globe, leaving a massive gap in Nav Canada's ability to ramp up service when air travel returns to pre-pandemic levels, which we are all hoping for. Simply replacing laid-off workers who seek work elsewhere is not as simple as you may assume.

Inaction on this request will cost Canadians the training and expertise of these professionals who have kept our skies safe and will only slow down the post-pandemic recovery for Canada's air travel, cargo and tourism industries.

- (1550)

I think this important point bears repeating. Reducing staffing levels and the company's capacity to provide an essential service now and for many years into the future is a potential catastrophic safety risk to the aviation sector and to the Canadian public. We need the federal government to act now. It's time to put safety first.

Our ask is simple. We want to see emergency funding in the form of a grant to Nav Canada in the amount of \$750 million for both 2020 and 2021. That will help stabilize its operations and retain all Nav Canada employees, including those workers who have been laid off since the pandemic began. This will ensure Nav Canada can safely continue to deliver the key services post-pandemic and into the future.

These measures must be in the form of a grant, as all cost recovery for Nav Canada would require higher fees that would only be passed on to airlines and other clients that are already devastated by the pandemic. We urge the Government of Canada to act now. Further delays will only exacerbate the problem.

Thank you for your time. We look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wayland.

We're now going to move on to the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada and Ms. Daviau, president, as well as Ms. Watkins.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Ms. Debi Daviau (President, Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada): Thank you very much. Good afternoon. My name is Debi Daviau and I'm the president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. We represent over 60,000 professionals across Canada.

I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to present our concerns about the situation at Nav Canada and how best to ensure its continued viability. I'm accompanied here today by my senior adviser, Emily Watkins, and we are both available to answer questions after the presentations.

Our union represents some 475 engineers and information technology specialists at Nav Canada. Thanks to them, the Canadian automated air traffic management system is one of the most advanced and integrated flight data-processing systems in the world. They are essential to providing services to commercial and general aviation from facilities throughout Canada. These include air traffic control, flight information, weather briefings, aeronautical information services, airport advisory services and electronic aids to navigation, and they are responsible for enterprise security and cyber activities.

Since last fall, some 50 of our members have been given notice of their surplus status. I'd like to assure committee members that we are very much aware that Nav Canada is losing millions of dollars every day because of the dramatic drop in air traffic over the past year, and we understand that management had to scramble to put together a plan to deal with that, but much more needs to be done. The government must take immediate and decisive action to keep the company in business, protect the safety of air travel in Canada and protect the jobs of people who ensure that safety. Continued cuts to personnel and the closure of facilities across the country are simply not the way to do that.

An important reality for all members of Parliament and indeed all Canadians to consider is that air traffic control in Canada has only one provider, Nav Canada. Responsibility over air traffic control is not done by any other entity in Canada. Nav Canada has no counterparts, no competitors. The federal government needs to ensure that it has the support now that it requires to be able to resume its operations when air traffic returns to pre-pandemic levels.

We have many concerns regarding the impact the cuts will have on the long-term health of air safety and of the company. Reductions in services and personnel have resulted in Canadians expressing safety concerns about their air travel. Remote and northern areas are heavily dependent on air traffic for many aspects of their daily lives—food, supplies, medical care and travel in and out of their communities. They cannot be left without this critical access.

Many facilities have been or are scheduled to be closed across Canada. Many more are under review. In what remains a male-dominated environment, many of the laid-off staff are women, and often the most recently hired employees. Gender equality and diversity have suffered.

Nav Canada is a company that not many Canadians are familiar with, a fact that actually speaks volumes to the level of service and the stellar safety record it has enjoyed. It has not gotten much attention, but that's a good thing.

However, now we have to talk about the company because it needs the help of government and it needs it now. To address the current realities, we need the following.

The government must take immediate and decisive action to support Nav Canada by providing sufficient emergency funding to get it through this crisis. This must take the form of a grant in the amount of \$750 million for each of the next two years to preserve and restore its workforce and continue to deliver its key services. A grant is the only viable government financial support option as the cost-recovery model used by Nav Canada would require it to charge higher fees to airlines that are already devastated by the pandemic. The grant must be accompanied by a moratorium on layoffs. The skills, expertise and experience that have kept our skies safe must be retained. They're the key to the successful recovery of air travel and related industries in Canada. Every effort must be made to rehire the former employees once the air travel industry resumes normal activities. Such specialized staff cannot be found and trained overnight.

Given the airlines' and related industries' huge impact on the Canadian economy, and the tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs affected, I'd like to conclude by emphasizing how further inaction will only slow down Canada's post-pandemic recovery. I urge the government to step in right away.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer your questions.

- (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Daviau.

We're now going to move on to Unifor. We have Mr. Dias and Ms. Tiessen.

You have five minutes. The floor is all yours.

Mr. Jerry Dias (National President, Unifor): Thank you.

My initial comments will be to the committee. So far, you've listened today to the heads of the largest public and private sector unions in this country. As you can tell, we're frustrated, we're disappointed and, frankly, we're completely pissed off over the lack of action from the government on this important file.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today on the impact of COVID-19 on the air transportation industry.

You've already heard the headline statistics. Air traffic plummeted in the second quarter of last year and remains unsustainably low. Even in October, eight months after the pandemic began, air transportation-related GDP was only 10% of the pre-pandemic levels. Passenger traffic was only 15%, and domestic and international flights remain at all-time lows.

Those are just a few of the most recent statistics. With the new travel restrictions being discussed, we know that these numbers are going to get worse. Each of those numbers represents real hardship for tens of thousands of workers across the country.

Unifor represents more than 15,000 workers in the air transportation industry. Our members are pilots, customer sales and service agents, air traffic controllers and flight service specialists. They work as aircraft mechanics and flight schedulers, flight attendants and baggage handlers. They keep our airports running smoothly. They've all been taking a beating like no other during this pandemic.

Let me tell you what our members and locals have experienced as a result of this crisis. Forty-five per cent of our members in airlines are laid off, furloughed or have had their employment relationship completely severed. At Air Canada alone, 60% of our members are laid off. At Porter and Sunwing, all of our members are laid off or furloughed. At ELS, our members have been permanently let go as their work is now being done by another entity altogether.

Many workers have already lost their health insurance, and more are given notice each day. They are being forced to take pay cuts in order to avoid layoffs, all while wondering if they'll have a job to go back to.

We've been here before, and we do not need to go through it again. It's not only workers who are feeling the effects. Communities are struggling too. Air Canada has closed 17 stations and suspended dozens of routes. There is no guarantee that these stations will open again.

Our members at Nav Canada are warning that flight services at rural airports have been cut, and two flight information centres will be closed. Pilots are losing flight time, and trainees in every job category have been let go. Training to recertify can take up to two years and is incredibly expensive. All of this has direct impacts on the cost of training and recertifying, as well as safety when commercial travel restarts in earnest.

I could go on, but I want to get to the solutions.

Unifor began warning of the grave effects on the industry way back in March. We have not let up. We have met with and written to the government nearly a dozen times on this topic, but the government refuses to act.

We are calling on the government to create a national recovery plan for the aviation industry. Without a plan, Canada's workers and employers are being left in the dark. The plan must include vital government support to carry Canada's airlines, airports and navigation services through this crisis and ensure they are ready and able to fly again as soon as restrictions are lifted.

People are going to want to fly again, and right now there is no plan in place that ensures capacity will exist to serve the pent-up demand. Globally, governments have provided airlines with nearly \$150 billion in relief. Canada has provided less than \$2 billion, of which \$1.1 billion was in wage subsidies. In the G7, only Italy has provided less.

We can and we have to do better. The plan must ensure services are preserved and remote locations do not lose service or their vital connections to medicine, business and family and friends.

• (1600)

The plan must include adapting border restrictions to safely re-open borders when it is safe to do so, in line with the International Civil Aviation Organization's universal standard to implement rapid testing and dynamic quarantine. All of this is outlined in our recovery plan submitted to the government in October. Copies have been provided to you.

Finally, we need to make sure that any plan focuses on a network for recovery that builds a better industry for all participants. The stimulus after the 2008-09 crisis was critical to recovery, but it delivered recovery for the corporate sector, while workers and families continued to experience long bouts of unemployment, stagnant wages and precarious work. Every worker deserves better.

I look forward to answering your questions, and thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dias.

We're now going to move on to our speaking list. We have six minutes for each member in the first round.

Ms. Kusie, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses who are here today.

Chair, it's unfortunate but I'm going to be moving the two motions that I put on notice. I think this is perhaps a lesson in hindsight and also in looking ahead that perhaps we should plan to schedule committee business on our return to the House after any significant period of delay because certainly we want to use the time with our witnesses as well as possible, but I also feel these motions need to be made, ultimately, for their benefit.

The first motion I put on notice, which I will read now, is:

That the Committee hold a minimum of one meeting to hear witness testimony from Transport Canada officials regarding approval of the 737 MAX aircraft return to service, and that these meetings occur no later than 18 February 2021.

Mr. Chair, I did say a minimum of one meeting—it could be only one meeting—but I do think, as we concluded the session in the early winter, that we did not go so far as to put forward the idea of a national inquiry into the MAX. I do believe it is our responsibility to return to this issue for one final meeting with officials from Transport Canada, given their public justification on the record as to the rationale behind the return of the MAX.

The second notice of motion I'm putting forward is:

That the Committee invite the Transport Minister to appear for two hours, with the first hour focussed on the Supplemental Mandate Letter

—which of course brings up very important points, new points, the first one being particularly relevant to the group of witnesses we have here today around an airline plan. It seems to me that all of our witnesses are very aware of this, and I'm certain they've read point number one on the supplemental mandate letter—

and the second hour on the pre-entry testing requirements,

—and given that it is front-page news that we are seeing new travel requirements, which we anticipate will be implemented any day, relevant to that—

and that this meeting occur as soon as possible but no later than 25 February 2021.

I put forward those motions, which I put on notice previously, Chair.

Again, my sincere apologies to the witnesses. I'm hopeful in the future we can put forward at least a half-hour or hour of committee business prior to having witnesses scheduled so as not to take away from their valuable time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

I appreciate the sentiments. We were going to move forward with a committee business meeting following our first meeting back in session, but having those put forward today is fine.

Members of the committee, we have heard the motions.

Mr. Clerk, do we have a handle on the motions?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): Yes. The motions were already distributed to all members. I would just advise that we take them one at a time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Clerk, can you read out the first motion for the members, please?

The Clerk:

That the Committee hold a minimum of one meeting to hear witness testimony from Transport Canada officials regarding approval of the 737 MAX aircraft return to service, and that these meetings occur no later than 18 February 2021.

The Chair: Members of the committee, are there any questions or comments on this motion?

Mr. Sidhu, you have the floor.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I do believe these are important matters to my colleague, but I think we need to respect the witnesses' time here. I do believe the minister should appear because these are very important issues that relate to all of us here, but I think this is a discussion we should be having after we speak to our witnesses today.

The Chair: Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I apologize. I'm having some technical difficulties. I've moved closer to my modem, but that may also mean that I'm closer to my toddlers, and they might be coming in very soon. I do apologize in advance to everyone.

I'm a little disappointed that we're moving this motion now. I agree with Ms. Kusie that we should be setting aside committee business, but I guess it's not surprising that we're doing this when labour is here to testify.

We don't have an objection to the minister appearing or to members of committee appearing. The only request we would make—and we hope it's a friendly amendment—is that the clerk work with the minister's office to find a time, and that we don't necessarily set a timeline.

As I messaged Ms. Kusie earlier today, the minister is happy to come to the committee in and around that time. We just want to find a time that works both for the minister and for the committee, rather than setting the firm deadline. If we can change the language to say “as soon as possible” or that “the clerk will work with the minister's office to find time”, we're happy to support that motion and the officials coming to committee.

• (1610)

The Chair: Ms. Kusie, do you want to respond?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Yes. Again, it's unfortunate, frankly, that the government did not plan for committee business prior to calling in witnesses.

Also, Chair, the clerk did read out the first motion, which is the motion we are talking about, and Mr. Bittle was addressing the second motion.

This one was in regard to the MAX. Clearly the government has no comments about the MAX since they've already moved to the second motion, so then perhaps I would call the question for the first motion, please.

The Chair: Mr. Bittle, go ahead.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I just want to clarify one point. The government doesn't schedule committee business. It's the committee that schedules committee business. We happen to be in the minority on this committee, so that's a bizarre comment.

I'm sorry for trying to save some time in addressing both issues.

Again, with respect to the one issue, we do not have a problem. I guess this is an issue of clarification. Are we reopening the previous study? Is this a separate study? Just to clarify that point...

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: This is one meeting that I'm proposing for Transport Canada to come back. It's not a separate study.

Mr. Bittle, every time you raise an objection to the motion when I've called the question, you are wasting the witnesses' time, so let's move forward, please.

The Chair: With no further questions, I will call the question on Ms. Kusie's motion.

Mr. Clerk, I guess virtually you have to do this, so the floor is yours.

The Clerk: The question is on the motion with regard to the 737 MAX aircraft.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Thank you, members.

Are there any questions on the second motion that was put on the floor?

Mr. Clerk, did you want to read that motion out, please, for clarity for the members?

The Clerk: It states:

That the Committee invite the Transport Minister to appear for two hours, with the first hour focussed on the Supplemental Mandate Letter and the second hour on the pre-entry testing requirements, and that this meeting occur as soon as possible but no later than 25 February 2021.

The Chair: Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Again, we're requesting a, hopefully, friendly amendment that the minister come and that we leave it a little bit open in terms of scheduling with the clerk to find a time for the minister to come. I'm hoping the Conservatives agree to that point. It's not a matter of months; it may be a matter of an extra week.

• (1615)

The Chair: Mrs. Kusie, do you want to comment on that?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Yes. For the sake of congeniality and for the sake of our witnesses, I will go along with that—that it be for two hours but that a more flexible time frame be provided. Mr. Bittle can be certain, as can the rest of the committee, that I will be coming back with another motion should it be beyond the reasonable amount of time that Mr. Bittle is putting forward. I will be friendly to that amendment.

I'm not sure how the clerk would suggest we word it. In terms of the reasonable time frame, we said here February 25. I'm looking at my CPAC sitting calendar. I see that the time beyond that would be March 12, which means there will be a lot of water under the bridge before that time. Certainly if it's not by March 12, I will be coming back.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

I see none, so please go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: I guess we're taking it for granted that Mr. Bittle's suggestion was adopted unanimously and that the date is now March 12.

The Chair: That's correct.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: We're now going back to Mrs. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much for the teamwork of this committee and for the patience of our witnesses, who have taken their time to come here today.

Mr. Dias, we know you as the champion of the auto workers.

Let's focus on the workers. How bad is the situation?

Mr. Jerry Dias: First of all, we have more members who are not working than who are working. The concern is about the financial situation today. Some of our members who are furloughed are receiving nothing.

However, the bigger issue is what will happen when we come through the pandemic. What happens if we don't have a strong industry? What happens when we lose air traffic controllers and pilots to other countries or they've moved into other industries? How are we going to restart the economy that we know is going to need a jump-start?

The frustration that we are all expressing is about where we're at today and, as importantly, where we're going to be tomorrow and next year. This is an industry that is going to take forever to get back on its feet.

We've lived through the bankruptcies of Air Canada, and we've lived through the bankruptcies of the industry in the past. We don't want to go down that road, and that's why there's a lot of frustration today. Of the 20 nations in the world with major industries, Canada is the one that has done the least. One could argue the same is true about Italy.

• (1620)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I'll go now to Mr. Perry. I feel like I know many of our witnesses here far too well, unfortunately, for what they've experienced as leaders in their organizations to this point.

Mr. Perry, can you tell me, please, what percentage of your membership is currently on furlough as a result of COVID?

Capt Tim Perry: Tens of thousands of aviation workers are unemployed or furloughed or have had their employment terminated. At ALPA approximately half of our 5,600 Canadian members have been furloughed. I really want to pick up on what Mr. Dias mentioned earlier. The point is that employment is one thing. It is in a very bad and precarious situation, but employment security worsens daily. This number has the potential to grow significantly if the industry remains unsupported. Not only that, but the industry will be unable to support employment to the degree it has historically if it doesn't receive support now.

We have very practical solutions on how to maintain employment as we go forward. It means better air policy, border policy, testing and quarantine measures, but also support for the industry that will allow us to be there in the future. It's not an industry where you can flick the light off and have it just be flicked on again.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Perry, this is possibly the most important question that will be asked today. Can you explain to our committee why the government support for the industry is in the public interest? I believe we have a committee here, and, more importantly, a government here, that doesn't care about the 200,000 votes of your sector. They see no benefit beyond it, so they've left you behind. Can you tell this committee today, please, why government support for the industry is in the public interest and why they should care about this, especially as we're going into an election here soon?

Capt Tim Perry: Canada depends on air transportation perhaps more than other countries in the world. It's in the public interest that

the industry not only survives but is in a position to thrive when COVID is behind us. I think it should go without saying that an industry that has the capacity to invest in its future remain environmentally, socially and financially sustainable, and then is able to recover, is in everyone's interest. Those are very important factors. The movement of people, goods and services, for which air transportation is best positioned, is paramount to Canada's recovery.

For those reasons it's in the public interest.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. El-Khoury, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the witnesses.

As you know, it is very important to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the aviation sector. This may help us find the best way to support that industry.

The pandemic has resulted in a tremendous drop in the number of international and domestic flights, as well as a reduction in the number of passengers. So this sector is really in a critical situation.

My first question is for Wesley Lesosky.

Do you think that support for the aviation sector should be conditional on refunding customers whose flights have been cancelled—

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Chair, I have a point of order. We are not hearing the interpretation.

The Chair: It is working now. Thank you, interpretation team.

Mr. El-Khoury, the floor is yours again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Okay, thank you.

My first question is for Mr. Lesosky.

Do you think that support for the aviation sector should be conditional on refunding customers whose flights have been cancelled by airline companies?

[*English*]

Mr. Wesley Lesosky: As the president of CUPE's airline division, my focus and my priority are the safety and livelihoods of my members, not the corporate undertakings of the airlines. As people whose lives have been deeply affected by this pandemic from a health perspective and a financial perspective, we strongly reject being used as a political football in these negotiations between the airlines and the federal government. The reality is there are hundreds, if not thousands, of members who can't make rent right now because of the government not acting.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Some companies have used government assistance, including the Canada emergency wage subsidy, to rehire employees who had been laid off.

My next question is for Mr. Rauenbusch.

Would you like to suggest regulatory amendments to continue to protect workers under the Canada Labour Code?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch: Under the Canada Labour Code, we strive to ask for conditions and additional policy to be made that protect the interest of our membership. The focus right now really has to be surviving this crisis, quite frankly. I speak specifically on behalf of the WestJet, Swoop and Encore flight attendants, but employers—right across the industry, I would imagine, from what I'm hearing today—are very much in a position of asking, “Will we survive?” We're focusing on asking for policy changes that will allow that to happen.

In terms of Canada Labour Code changes, that's something we would want to look at down the line, once we get through the pandemic.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. El-Khoury, you have time for one more quick question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: My question is for Mr. Dias.

I understand your perspective that only from 1% to 2% of COVID-19 cases may be related to international air travel. However, what would you say to my constituents who are worried about the possibility of those 1% to 2% of cases potentially being critical in the spread of new COVID-19 variants?

• (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Jerry Dias: That's a good question. I share this frustration with your constituents because for all of us on this call, the preoccupation is with safety. What we're talking about is, number one, safety comes first. You can't leave anything to chance.

What are the measures that can be put into place? One is rapid testing. Another is making sure people are quarantining. Then there's making sure the industry receives some type of financial support from government in order to come through this. Much of our presentation is dealing with the economic hardships that our members are facing today, but I'm more concerned about the long term.

We all share the same fear of COVID. Nobody here is suggesting anything different, but we are suggesting that we need a plan. We need a plan once and for all. Here we are 10-plus months into a pandemic and we still don't have rapid testing. We still don't have a whole host of initiatives, and I can argue that we are lagging behind some countries in this regard.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to move on to our third presenter for this first round, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, for six minutes.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to begin by thanking the witnesses who are joining us today. They are testifying about a crisis situation, and I think they have a real sense of urgency. I invite my Liberal colleagues to listen carefully to their concerns and grievances, to take into consideration the future of people working in the aviation sector who will need a job, and to finally resolve the issue of loans or assistance to the aviation sector.

Mr. Lesosky, you represent a portion of Air Canada flight attendants. Have you been able to meet with the previous Minister of Transport, Mr. Garneau, or the new minister?

[*English*]

Mr. Wesley Lesosky: We've definitely reached out to the minister for a meeting. We have not had a meeting at this point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Lesosky.

Mr. Perry, how many meetings have you had with the Minister of Transport?

[*English*]

Capt Tim Perry: We have yet to meet with the new Minister of Transport, although we expect to meet with the minister this week for the first time, and that would be it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: What about the former minister?

[*English*]

Capt Tim Perry: I believe we had one meeting as part of a coalition of union leaders.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Rauenbusch, how many meetings have you managed to have with the previous or the new Minister of Transport?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch: I never met with the previous minister. We have reached out to the new Minister of Transport as well and have not heard anything back. We do not currently have a time to meet with the current minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

Mr. Wayland, you must be anticipating my question.

[*English*]

Mr. Matt Wayland: We've had meetings with staff and a parliamentary secretary of the previous minister but not the current minister. We have reached out to the new minister's office to re-engage.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Ms. Daviau, I put the same question to you.

Ms. Debi Daviau: It's exactly the same thing. We have joined other unions to talk to the employees of the minister's office.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: What about you, Mr. Dias?

[English]

Mr. Jerry Dias: I met with the current minister last week. I've had at least two or three discussions with former minister Garneau. I've spoken to Chrystia Freeland. I've spoken to the Prime Minister's Office. I've spoken to every bureaucrat in Ottawa. I think it's fair to say that the federal government knows our position and our frustration level.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Dias, you seem to be the exception to the rule. You should give some tips to the other stakeholders, so that they may have more meetings.

We wish the best of luck to the new Minister of Transport. I hope he will listen to you proactively and also propose solutions.

Mr. Wayland—

• (1635)

[English]

Mr. Jerry Dias: I think it might have something to do with my charming personality and striking good looks. Maybe neither.

It wasn't very complicated. We asked for a meeting. His office was very co-operative. We had a very lengthy discussion on the challenges of the industry. Specifically, we talked in depth about how our members were feeling, the frustration, what Canada should be doing as it relates to the industry and the concerns about the future. With Nav Canada, we talked for quite awhile, and we covered, I would like to think, all of the issues.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much, Mr. Dias. Your comments are invaluable.

I would like to come back to Ms. Daviau.

Nav Canada managers and employees are not in the same situation as airlines. The aviation sector is going through a major crisis, but it is often forgotten that Nav Canada provides an essential service to airlines everywhere, including in all of Quebec's regions.

What impact do the service and job cuts have on our regions and on service quality?

[English]

Ms. Debi Daviau: As you know, we represent only a certain segment of the workers at Nav Canada, but collectively the workforce at Nav Canada is going to be essential to the recovery of the entire aviation industry.

When we talk about aviation, we can't just look at the airlines, although that is an important piece. The airlines aren't going to be able to fly if Nav Canada's services aren't in place. More specifically, the cuts that are planned are already closing down some of the

regional airports or downgrading the type of service that's being provided. Many of you will see cuts in your community because of those issues related to Nav Canada's being unable to provide service in those communities.

Basically, the whole aviation industry is going to require a strong and stable Nav Canada, and cuts now unfortunately cannot be recovered from quickly. As some of my colleagues mentioned, the training that goes along with these highly specialized jobs takes upwards of two years, and these types of professionals will be sought after, either elsewhere in Canada or around the world. They'll be difficult to get back. It's not an industry that can recover without Nav Canada, and Nav Canada can't recover without its workforce.

The Chair: Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you can have a quick question.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Ms. Daviau, how do you explain the government refusing to help Nav Canada, even though we are talking about an essential service, and accepting such high fare increases for airlines, in addition to significant job cutbacks?

[English]

Ms. Debi Daviau: Nav Canada is a fee-for-service company after being privatized, and it recovers its money from those fees to airlines. As the number of flights has dropped, in order for Nav Canada to be able to maintain a certain level of service it has to charge even higher fees. That's why we're asking for a grant for Nav Canada, not a loan, because a loan would result in higher fees to airlines down the road, and that's certainly not going to help anybody.

At the same time, the higher fees are not enough to sustain its workforce. They're having about a \$750-million-a-year deficit. For every year that this pandemic goes on, Nav Canada's budget is having a shortfall by that amount.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

Our last intervention for the first round goes to the NDP and Mr. Bachrach for six minutes.

Mr. Bachrach, first off, I want to congratulate you on your new role as the transport critic for your party. Welcome aboard.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. There has been some excellent testimony, and I really appreciate the answers to the questions thus far.

I wanted to start with Mr. Rauenbusch and Mr. Lesosky, and talk about the wage subsidy program. To my understanding, a lot of the workers you represent have been fully laid off from their positions when the companies had the option of furloughing them and using the wage subsidy to provide them with some financial benefits while they were furloughed. Is the wage subsidy serving your members? Is it serving the workers in your industry? Or should it be structured differently in order to make sure that workers are protected and have what they need during these difficult times?

Maybe we can start with Mr. Lesosky.

Mr. Wesley Lesosky: Is the wage subsidy working for my members at Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge? No, it's not.

Roughly 72% of our members, just shy of 7,000 members, have been laid off or will be laid off in the next week. Of all those members, none is able to participate in the CEWS program because the company is not utilizing it for those members.

Do I think the government should do more? Yes, I think there should be a tie-in with the program that if the program is going to be used for active employees, those who are flicked off as inactive or those who are laid off or furloughed should be placed on the program.

One of the main things with the program is to keep the employee connected to the job force, to keep them able to be flicked on, per se, instead of going through a huge recall process. Of course there is an avenue there to bargain with the union to deal with the benefits, the pension and the other things that come along with it, so yes, I definitely think more needs to be done.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Maybe I'll just follow up with Mr. Lesosky on that point and move on to the issue of workplace safety.

My understanding is that Transport Canada has really been working with the airlines to try to represent the workplace safety concerns of airline workers. Are they doing an adequate job of that, or is there a different arrangement that you think would better represent the workplace safety needs of the members you represent?

Mr. Wesley Lesosky: Thank you for asking that question. I am definitely passionate on that one as well.

Transport Canada is definitely more engaged with us. There are weekly calls; there is dialogue. However, what I find with Transport Canada, especially in my role as union president with the airlines, is that there are many recommendations but there is nothing being enforced.

I'll give you a good example. One thing that is highly recommended industry-wide is a lavatory dedicated for people working on the plane, that's sanitized, that's clean, that is only for cabin crew and pilots. That's a recommendation put out by Transport Canada, yet no airline in Canada is following it because nobody can enforce it.

This is a huge problem. There are great recommendations that come out, but there is nothing with teeth to follow up on them, and that causes us problems at our health and safety committees, in which scenarios, I believe, profits come ahead of safety.

If Transport Canada is putting it out, we have to believe that it is doing so because it has a basis on which to do that. It's looked at something that has led it to believe that this is a safe practice. If it's a safe practice out there and our loads are at 50%, I don't understand why we're not following it, but even more so, why the government doesn't enforce it.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you very much, Mr. Lesosky.

Mr. Rauenbusch, you mentioned regional routes, which are of great concern to people in northwest British Columbia, where we've seen the suspension of scheduled passenger service on several routes.

You mentioned the importance of those routes being connected to international routes or long-haul routes. We're at a time right now when it looks as though the public health advice is against international travel, and yet there is an immediate need in regions like the one I represent for those regional routes to be maintained at some basic level of service.

To your mind, is there a way to structure this federal financial relief in a way that keeps those regional routes whole at a basic level of service for absolutely essential travel?

• (1645)

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch: Yes, absolutely. What I was getting at with that part of my statement was that until we reach a point in the world where the pandemic has reached a certain level, where we can once again see these global networks resuming to a certain capacity to be fuelling those regional routes in Canada, we need to keep the regional routes going. My intent was to indicate that, as the Prime Minister has indicated a number of times, part of an airline aid package would be for regional routes. The point was that we will need some financial assistance in order to be able to get through the next period of time until the pandemic has reached a point where the global networks come back.

That was my intention, so absolutely yes, and I agree that they are key to our nation's functioning.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Maybe the last quick question is to Mr. Wayland about the NavCan services.

Can you talk a little bit more about the potential safety implications of losing these services, especially in remote communities? I know right now we're talking about concerns in Windsor and Whitehorse and Prince George, really important centres. Can you talk about the safety concerns that have been raised as a result of this speculation around termination of those services?

Mr. Matt Wayland: Mr. Chair, I will defer to my colleague Mr. Cameron.

Mr. Paul Cameron (Business Manager and Financial Secretary, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers): As far as air traffic services are concerned, I can't quite comment on that. Any types of cuts you're looking at will obviously, for the passengers and the surrounding people, slow it down. Our concern is more for the employees. It's not just the members that local 2228 represents, but all employees of Nav Canada. When they do cut jobs from any area, we're looking at the safety of not just the flying public and the other public, but also the employees. We're talking about fatigue management.

The company and everyone else will be looking at a certain level of service. Nav Canada pre-pandemic was understaffed. The previous CEO said publicly, a year or so ago, that they were ramping back up to try to get close to 100% staffing. Well, now they've laid staff off, so now you're even further down that rabbit hole. They were more than willing to pay overtime to people to make up those levels of service. That's probably what's going to happen again. You're looking at fatigue management in just about every sector of Nav Canada, so that safety will take a hit.

I hope I answered your question.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to the second round.

Mr. Strahl, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Thank you, Chair. It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of the official opposition, as the shadow minister for labour.

I want to get right into it here. It certainly is not normal to have a panel like this come before the committee and universally condemn the lack of action from the government. That's something I certainly haven't seen an awful lot of in my nearly 10 years as a member. It's not often that the regulator is universally condemned in that way for a lack of action.

We thank you for the extra work you're doing, while doing your own jobs, advocating for your members. I'm sure that's a very mentally taxing activity in addition to having concerns about your own job security.

We need to get things back to normal, as normal as possible during this. That means we need to get the majority of the population vaccinated [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] those who want to get vaccinated, and we've seen certainly huge problems with the rollout of that. My observation is that as those problems have been clear, as we have, for instance, zero Pfizer vaccines being delivered, the Prime Minister has started now to dangle this possibility of a 14-day mandatory hotel quarantine as a way to distract from the failure on vaccines.

Mr. Rauenbusch, and then Mr. Lesosky, have you been consulted, has your union been consulted, on a possible 14-day mandatory hotel quarantine at cost to travellers? What is your view on the impact that will have on the industry?

• (1650)

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch: That's a very much appreciated question. No: In simple terms, no, we have had zero consultation on that potential taking place.

In terms of the impact, when the announcement was made, just before the new year, of the mandatory testing for passengers coming into Canada from abroad, the view of my union was that this was going to further destroy demand and our ability for the airline to keep revenue coming in. If this were to take place, for which, again, we were not consulted, I would foresee almost decimating levels of complete inability to bring in any revenue whatsoever.

This crisis began for our industry as a liquidity crisis for airlines. Quite simply stated, if this measure does get put in place and demand is just absolutely decimated.... I absolutely believe that the health of Canadians is important, but we need help as an industry to get through the next period if this announcement is made. If WestJet, as an example, doesn't have the liquidity to survive, no one's coming back to a job when this is over. That's why we are so insistent that we need something here in order to be able to have jobs and an employer to return to. I can't overstate the significance of how that would unfold without an aid package or some sort of assistance.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Maybe I'll get Mr. Lesosky to take this next one. You talked about the Canada emergency wage subsidy and how it certainly wasn't serving the people who had been laid off and were not receiving it. I wonder if you or your union have any comments on the fact that foreign-based carriers were collecting the Canada emergency wage subsidy when they were not Canadian airlines.

Mr. Wesley Lesosky: I've heard of that, but again, my only comment would go back to what I originally said. Without a foundation for how the program is supposed to work, of course anyone who feels they're entitled to it or has an entitlement to it is going to take it.

I think that's the primary foundation behind a program like this. You have to have conditions and you have to have something set so that the expectation for the employers is there, but more importantly, so that everyone who should be entitled to it, especially those Canadian companies that are laying off thousands and thousands of workers, can utilize it to assist in supporting those people.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Dias, you obviously have a very productive and positive working relationship with this government, as evidenced by the fact that you've had several meetings with ministers of transport when the other witnesses have been unable to get one.

In October, Unifor came out and strongly suggested that rapid testing could be a saviour for the airline industry and for your workers. Why do you think the government has ignored that request? Why has there been no action to increase rapid testing for the airline sector over the last number of months?

Mr. Jerry Dias: Well, there's no question that it has been a moving target since October, but it's no justification for why we wouldn't put in place some of the basics as we're heading towards an element of normalcy within the industry, and we're clearly not there now.

There's a variety of things we have suggested that have yet to be done, that we've said to the government. Right now, we're talking about Nav Canada and the increase they're giving to the airlines as it relates to gates and landing fees. Our argument is that Nav Canada needs the money but the government should be doing that, because the airlines can't afford the extra costs. Also—same thing—the government should be waiving the fuel tax right now.

We should be taking certain measures for Canadian companies. I wouldn't be giving the fuel subsidy and I wouldn't be giving the landing fees to international carriers. Their governments, by and large, have already given them billions.

One of the things we've also raised with the government is that most of the airlines aren't asking for free money. They're saying, look, give us.... We were talking about \$7 billion for the entire industry: a 1% loan over 10 years. Loan, fuel tax and landing fees: that helps Nav Canada and it helps the industry, but so far we're hearing a lot of crickets.

• (1655)

Mr. Mark Strahl: My next question will be for you, Mr. Perry. I wanted to get you to follow up on this. Again, I think there's been haphazard.... There was the announcement for people to have to secure a test when they were abroad, but many of them had already travelled. Also, we heard that 50,000 reservations were cancelled almost immediately.

We're doing a similar thing now, with premiers and the Prime Minister now openly musing about severely increasing the quarantine for travellers. What would be the impact on the pilots association and on your members?

Capt Tim Perry: I think it's difficult to overstate that impact. The industry is hanging by a lifeline, and that would prevent any traction from happening that could possibly be gained.

Those types of measures would go against recommended practices that come from world organizations, as we've referenced many times in our submissions to the government. There's a better way of doing that with testing and involving our quarantine measures that achieve safety for Canadians, and that can allow the traction to happen in our industry.

I could go on, but I mean, it would be devastating.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bittle, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank all of the witnesses for advocating on behalf of all their members.

I, along with the chair, represent a region that has a tourist industry, and anything connected to the tourist industry, but especially airlines, has been devastated by this because ultimately we're telling Canadians to stay at home. That is because we want to con-

trol the spread and that is the least risky thing to do. Every time we step outside of our house, the level of risk increases.

We heard from the National Airlines Council, which lobbies on behalf of the big airlines. I was a little worried about what I heard from them when we asked them about refunds, regional routes, maintaining aerospace contracts, executive compensation, opening their books and hiring back employees as conditions. They really skated through those things. I do take the point of Mr. Lesosky that that's between us and the airlines, but I think it's important to state that everyone in this room and everyone on this call wants to see compensation for the airlines and wants a successful industry, but there are steps that we have to go through.

I have a question for a few of the witnesses. We've heard it in the past about rapid testing and [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] side of it and we've heard that there is up to a 30% negative rate.

Is this an effective way to reboot the airline industry, with that level of error? Is that going to be effective? I believe it was Mr. Rauenbusch, Mr. Lesosky and Mr. Dias who brought that up.

I'll direct that to Mr. Rauenbusch.

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch: To clarify, you're talking about rapid testing specifically or about other types of testing?

Mr. Chris Bittle: It's rapid testing.

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch: We as the union for our 4,100 flight attendants feel that there's still an element of risk with rapid testing. Rapid testing will help in the short term, but we do feel that this government does need to create a framework for, frankly, world-class testing and arrival procedures for airlines to follow. This needs to be something that's not a mishmash of different things. It needs to be a policy that is integrated into public health and it needs to very much be a part of the long-term thinking to help this industry survive.

Rapid testing in the very short term would absolutely be better than what we have today, but we think it needs to go further than that into a national framework for arrival with full PCR testing or whatever the case may be.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I would ask the same question to Mr. Lesosky and Mr. Dias.

Mr. Wesley Lesosky: I completely echo what Chris just said. I think to paint a picture, since we've been doing the testing 72 hours out from departure, we've had, as of yesterday, 134 flights come in to the country with COVID-positive passengers on board since January 9. That right there is a concern.

A rapid test is going to narrow that window down from 72 hours to a time frame that is closer to when somebody gets on the plane. If you were to do it on the outbound, which I have been strongly suggesting and advocating, however you want to put it, through the union—Air Canada Component and the airline division—it would make the environment on board safer. A rapid test might have its flaws much as the other tests do, but at least it's something with a much closer time frame, and I think the results would be a lot better because you'd be dealing with a real-time scenario as opposed to one from 72 hours out.

• (1700)

Mr. Jerry Dias: As the previous speakers said, it's one tool in the tool box. There's no question we have to be in a situation where the rapid testing is done on departure as well as on arrival. We have to make sure there is adequate time so that we can get decent results. Is it perfect? No. That's why, obviously, for people coming in to Canada there's still going to have to be some quarantine.

It's just one part of the overall strategy, not the entire strategy.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you very much.

In terms of the Canadian model—I don't want to call it that, because I don't think it originated from us. There are 20 other countries doing it and I think the U.S. is moving to it as well. In terms of the rapid testing, does the infrastructure exist? I don't have up-to-date figures and I take you at your word. We've heard from Transport Canada officials, or I have anyway, that the numbers are way down. I know that an airport is a big space and our land borders.... Do we have the capacity to do these rapid tests? At what point do they stop being effective? Have those discussions taken place?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bittle.

Who are you directing that question to? We have time for only one answer.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'll ask Mr. Dias.

Mr. Jerry Dias: I'm sorry.

I didn't catch the question. You were going in and out.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'm sorry.

Basically, does the infrastructure exist at our airports and land borders to conduct these rapid tests to the extent that would be required?

Mr. Jerry Dias: Yes, absolutely. We have some basic structures in place already. I don't think implementing it would be all that difficult. It's going to require political will.

Let me just talk about one other thing you have raised, if you don't mind.

When I speak to people, there seems to be a preoccupation with executive compensation and the whole issue of return to shareholders: the amount of money, for example, that Air Canada had on hand when the pandemic hit. That can't be justification for doing nothing. It's not about executive salaries, even though they're exorbitant. It's not about return to shareholders. It's about the tens of thousands of people who are unemployed and the future of the industry.

We need to start concentrating on that, because we're not going to have a “build back better” if we don't have a strong airline industry.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dias set the stage nicely for what I want to say in my next question.

I must say right off the bat that I am disappointed to see my government colleagues unrepentant about the government's current inaction in terms of assistance to the aviation sector.

Airline companies and the government are engaged in a negotiation process. That's very well, but it should not excuse the inaction. Issues such as ticket refunds, bonuses, restrictions related to dividends and executive salaries are being raised. Yet the government is calling the shots, as it can decide on the assistance to provide and impose its conditions. A company executive disagreeing because they will not get their bonus this year does not prevent the government from taking action.

What do you think about this, Mr. Lesosky?

• (1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Jerry Dias: I covered it. Look, I know Air Canada just borrowed \$6 billion at pretty high interest rates. That's not the ticket for a long-term strategic business plan.

The whole issue of executive salaries and bonuses is a subject for another day, and I could eat up the entire two hours on that alone, but you can't miss the forest because of the trees. This is about preserving the industry. It's about putting money in people's pockets and making sure they can pay their rent and put food on the table.

That's the big issue here. We can always go down rabbit holes and say we can't do something because of this and that, but we're missing the bigger picture. We'll never have an economic recovery coming out of COVID if we don't have a strong airline industry, period.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you for your answer, Mr. Dias.

I would like to hear Mr. Lesosky on the issue.

Do you think something prevents the government from attaching conditions to its assistance?

[*English*]

Mr. Wesley Lesosky: No. I don't see anything that would prevent the government from imposing conditions.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: In other words, we are going around in circles. The government could have made a decision nearly a year ago. In March, Mr. Trudeau said he was talking to airline companies. In November, Mr. Garneau said that assistance was imminent. That was at the approach of the economic update. It is now nearly February. What all the witnesses are calling for here is quick and immediate action. The time for fooling around has passed.

I have no further questions on this, Mr. Chair. In any case, my time is running out.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: My first question is for Mr. Dias.

I was listening with great interest to your remarks about potential conditions and some of the concerns the Canadian public has around how these financial packages are structured. A lot of Canadians were pretty dismayed that there were big corporations that took the wage subsidy and then turned around and paid dividends to their shareholders.

I take your point that we need to see the big picture, but do you not feel there's some way to structure a financial relief package that ensures that workers are protected and that these kinds of misuses of public funds are avoided? If so, what do you think those restrictions or conditions might look like?

Mr. Jerry Dias: First of all, there's no question that none of that money can be used to bolster CEOs' wages. I think that would be an insult to Canadians. The whole issue of return to shareholders is not what it's about. The money should be used specifically for the industry to put people to work. One of the problems with the wage subsidy program was saying to the employer, "We'll pay you the wage subsidy, but you're going to provide all of the payroll taxes, the benefit costs and everything under the sun." In some circumstances, it just wasn't compatible with what they could afford. We have to make sure it's structured so that the bosses get absolutely nothing.

By the way, I realize that we're keeping away from this subject, but the federal government will not be giving a nickel to an airline unless they're prepared to pay citizens who want their cash returned. There's an element that will have to satisfy the consumer, and I understand that as well. There's no reason why the government can't put into place a package that says, "Here's x amount of dollars. You're going to repay the customers. We're going to fix the wage subsidy piece so that you can bring more people in to work." It all has to be based on getting people back to work and securing the industry, not those who are profiting from it.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Cameron, the member of Parliament for Windsor West, Mr. Brian Masse, has a private member's bill right now that would empower the minister to remove certain airports from consideration by NavCan for service cuts. Do you feel this private member's bill would help prevent the kind of situation we're seeing right now?

Mr. Paul Cameron: Without seeing it, the only thing I can say is that, to a small extent, yes. To my understanding, the commercialization act holds Nav Canada's feet to the fire for a certain level of service, but they can still cut. They just have to tell people when and where, and have to give them a certain amount of time.

If it would slow things down, yes, I'd like to see it happen, because the more services we have still at airports, the easier it is to maintain and not bring it back. It's very difficult to bring it back once it's gone.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Kram from the Conservative Party.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for joining us today and sharing their perspectives on this very important study.

I was interested in your opening statements, Mr. Wayland and Ms. Daviau, in particular your request for a \$750-million subsidy to Nav Canada. This subsidy would be contingent on a moratorium on layoffs. As I'm sure you're aware, Nav Canada is currently studying the closure of several air traffic control towers across Canada. Does that mean your unions are also in favour of a moratorium on the closure of air traffic control towers as well?

Mr. Matt Wayland: Yes, we've heard from witnesses and from members of the committee that any reduction in services is not just for airlines; it's food security and it's cargo materials getting to these smaller airports. We certainly want to see a moratorium on those, as well as any layoffs. I believe my colleague Mr. Cameron mentioned that the reduction in staffing also increases fatigue for those who may still be left behind.

Ms. Debi Daviau: As you can tell by Matt's and my opening remarks, we've been comparing notes and working together on this issue. That's because not one of our groups of members could operate in a silo. The workers, particularly at Nav Canada, rely very heavily on each other's expertise. A cut to my members, for example, could necessarily affect the safety of other members and the Canadian public. It's really important to recognize that we're not just talking about an airline industry. As I mentioned, this is about a whole aviation industry. When you cut workers, you absolutely have to reduce points of service, or at least reduce the level of service. That necessarily impacts on safety for Canadians and definitely needs to be addressed.

We absolutely support a moratorium on further layoffs. We believe the money we're requesting could fund the existing workforce so that no further cuts would be required. As we mentioned, Nav Canada was understaffed even before the pandemic. Understanding that there's been a reduction in air traffic, a number of these services don't reduce their workload as a result of reduced flights. It means that those left behind will have to work that much harder. Again, that results in safety concerns for Canadians.

Mr. Michael Kram: I believe Mr. Wayland and Ms. Daviau indicated that they were unable to get a meeting with the then minister to present this plan, but they were able to meet with the parliamentary staff of the minister.

Can you tell us what the parliamentary staff said when you presented the plan for a subsidy for Nav Canada?

Ms. Debi Daviau: They said, "Thank you very much, and we'll relay this information to the minister."

Unfortunately, there was no outward support of the plan or even an understanding of the urgency of putting a plan in place. These cuts are happening as we speak, and across the entire industry, and time is not our friend here. In many parts of this industry, you simply can't flick the switch and put it back on once you've taken these steps to make mass reductions across the industry.

The Chair: Mr. Wayland, did you want to comment on that?

• (1715)

Mr. Matt Wayland: Yes.

Certainly, that is the case. We've had meetings with the minister's staff. I've had several myself. I did relay the information as well to meetings at the PMO in trying to push it up the chain. We did have some discussions on it, but again, we're still here discussing it today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rogers, the floor is yours.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses today for your presentations and for taking all the questions from the committee.

In Atlantic Canada, we have some major challenges, of course, and in rural Canada as well. The challenges seem to be compounded in terms of travel. We have major issues with the closure of routes to places such as Gander and Deer Lake in Labrador, in parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, and in other parts of Atlantic Canada.

That seems to be compounded by the Atlantic bubble, which has worked really well to protect the residents of the Atlantic provinces. We've been able to really control the spread of the virus and protect the lives of the people who live in Atlantic Canada. Many people believe that we've done a fantastic job of that.

Of course, the problem with it is that it's a catch-22 situation when it comes to travelling and airlines and airports. We have major issues with people such as rotational workers, for instance, who need to go to their jobs in other parts of Canada and fly back to Atlantic Canada. It's compounding their problems. Getting back and

forth and getting home is creating all kinds of problems for these people. We have a situation where we're doing a great job of protecting health, but of course the airline industry has borne the brunt of that.

In our fall economic statement, we announced over a billion dollars in support for small and medium-sized airports. I know that there are ongoing negotiations with the airport and airline industry, and we're equally anxious to see something done that will salvage the airline industry.

I guess, depending on the demands.... Mr. Dias, you made reference to compensating Canadians. Do you think support for the air sector should be conditional on airlines restoring services to regional routes?

I'll put that question to Mr. Perry and then to Mr. Dias.

Capt Tim Perry: I think it is a clear benefit and a clear requirement to have connectivity across the country. That's in everybody's interests. As for how that deal is structured, clearly the government is in some conversations with airlines. I think better outcomes would come about if labour organizations were part of that.

You've mentioned people travelling around the country and elsewhere for the purposes of work. I think it's clear that this connectivity across the country is important. I think it should be part of the discussion, and I think we should be part of the discussion so that we can bring our voice to that conversation.

Mr. Jerry Dias: I believe it would be political suicide for the Liberals to give money to Air Canada and others that still owe their customers money. There's no question that this would have to be a part of the deal, in my opinion, because there would be screams from customers, and understandably so, if Air Canada were to receive billions of dollars and not repay. I think that just has to be part of the deal.

Number two, we can't have it both ways. We can't say that as a result of provincial jurisdictions, where we're going to create the Atlantic bubble or we're going to have rules based on safety, and where the government's regulations, rules, restrictions, which are done for all the right reasons.... I'm not second-guessing, but you can't have a situation where there are regulations enforced and rules put forward by governments that in essence are destroying the industry and then say to the industry, "Well, you're on your own." We can't have it both ways.

We understand the preoccupation with safety. There's nobody here who disagrees with that, but what we're saying is that if the government is going to put in place restrictions that are going to lead to the economic carnage of the industry, my gosh, then, you would think that they would put up their hands and say, "Listen, we understand, and we're all in this together." Just like this pandemic, we're all in this together, regardless of industry and regardless of profits, and the only way we're going to get out of this is by doing it together. That means we're going to need to have a strong economy as well.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to move on to the third round. We're going to start for five minutes.

Mr. Shipley for the CPC, you have the floor.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today. I took some quotes as I was listening intently.

We're all in a very tough state here. The airline industry is in a very tough position. I have mentioned many times that my riding of Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte is sometimes referred to as "Terminal 4", because I have so many employees in my area from Pearson airport who travel up and down Highway 400. I'm hearing about this daily.

Some of the comments I heard today were quite shocking. I will repeat a couple of them.

Mr. Lesosky, your exact quote was that "government needs to work with us, not against us".

Mr. Perry, your quote was that there was no "proper consultation" on safety by the government.

Mr. Rauenbusch said that the "crisis" has been "made worse by" the government.

Obviously, the pandemic is bad enough in itself, so perhaps we can start with Mr. Lesosky, and he can expand on what he means by saying that the "government needs to work with us, not against us", as a good starting point.

Mr. Wesley Lesosky: I think that can happen in a multitude of ways. I think I primarily said it with regard to the work refusals and just the government not listening through that process. I think the queues are another thing that I've reiterated today as well: to ensure that our members are protected in that sort of realm. Number three, of course, is just with regard to some form of assistance to the aviation sector as a whole, to ensure that it is there, it is sustainable and there are jobs to go back to. I think I've reiterated it quite a bit, but I think those are the three main points I'd definitely move forward again.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Mr. Perry, on your comment about no "proper consultation" on safety by the government, would you like to expand on that just a little more one more time?

Capt Tim Perry: I think consultation has been an issue for us all along, since the beginning. All of these policy announcements,

travel announcements and the lack of announcements for funding have just a tremendous impact on us.

On safety, any time you have a safety-sensitive industry—and there is no more safety-sensitive industry than aviation—where training and efficiency are at issue, you really need to be talking to the people who are the experts, and we share that with Nav Canada employees and pilots. Actually, basically all aviation employees share that issue, so consultation is of the utmost importance when safety is involved. Frankly, we're the experts, as are all the other members of this panel.

Mr. Doug Shipley: I'll just go to my last quote. Mr. Rauenbusch mentioned that this crisis has been "made worse" by the government.

Can you expand on that, Mr. Rauenbusch, please?

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch: What I was getting at with that statement was really quite simply the length of time that this is taking. I know that some of the previous questions alluded to that. We're now going on 11 months since this pandemic began in Canada, and airlines aren't going to last forever. That's where I was going with that comment.

As you know, we're 11 months in and we're now being convened to have this discussion. I just want to reiterate that I wouldn't imagine that there's one witness before you today who hasn't spent a significant amount of time trying to reach out and communicate with government officials around the severity of this situation. For it to have dragged on this long is just extremely frustrating and, to be very honest, very frightening to our members, who may not have an industry to go back to. That was the gist of that comment.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you.

I'm not sure exactly who to direct my last question to, Chair. Perhaps it should be one of those three gentlemen who spend more time at the airports than some of the others do.

I had a call just before our meeting, so I didn't have a lot of time to do my own research on this. I was speaking with a member of an association down there who works at Pearson and who was telling me there's actually a Pearson COVID log, which was news to me. He was indicating that some of the highest COVID percentages or results, of people being entered into the COVID log, were coming from the actual passenger screening, the security screening. They were having a fairly high COVID result at the airport.

That must be a little alarming for all of you people who have to go through the airport and work with these.... Rapid testing is one thing. It really doesn't do much good if you get a rapid test and then you're actually getting the COVID virus from someone who's screening you at the airport.

Have you heard about this Pearson COVID log and can anybody comment at all on the numbers that are being kept on that, particularly with the passenger security-screening people? Does anybody know about that at Pearson?

• (1725)

Capt Tim Perry: I'm unfamiliar with the log although I can say that we've submitted multiple recommendations about how passengers and airports should be oriented, and how these processes should be addressed. There's good information out there from ICAO, IATA and other organizations, and we've forwarded much of it to the government.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perry.

Mr. Sidhu, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being with us today.

I have spoken to many of the constituents in my riding who've been able to access the wage subsidy through their employers or to access the simplified EI program as many of them are employed or were employed in one way or another by the transportation sector.

I've also had a chance to speak to friends in other countries who say the CERB, EI or wage subsidy types of support are not available in their countries. You know, these are very important programs that we have, and lots of Canadians, millions of workers, in fact, have benefited across the country through this very challenging time.

Mr. Dias, my question is to you. Are you supportive of the Government of Canada's broader measures to support Canadians through this pandemic, measures such as the Canada recovery benefit and the simplified EI program?

Mr. Jerry Dias: Well, there's no question. In the beginning everybody was scrambling to put money in people's pockets. So many of the initiatives, of course, were positive.

But what we're talking about is how to do it better. What did we learn from it? You talked about EI. The reality is we know that the EI system here in Canada is broken. When the pandemic hit, we were completely unprepared.

Now it's not a question of just reverting back to the old ways of doing things. What have we learned? We've learned that workers deserve at least a floor as it relates to EI. More people need to qualify. You can imagine that more people are qualifying based on the government's initiatives during the pandemic than normally ever have, because we know that only about 38% of Canadians ever qualify for employment insurance.

We know that the social security system here in Canada is broken, so it's time to fix it. Have there been some initiatives that I have supported? The answer is yes. Have some programs been wildly ineffective? The answer is yes.

I give the various governments credit for coming together and mainly leaving the politics at the door. This has been a challenging time for everyone. We have come together more as a nation, and we will come together better if we leave the politics out, but the question now is what we are going to do next.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for your insights, Mr. Dias.

Mr. Rauenbusch, what role did the wage subsidy play in keeping your members employed?

Mr. Christopher Rauenbusch: In a similar answer, yes, the wage subsidy was actually effective for the membership that I serve. The employer did offer it as an option for all furloughed cabin crew members across our three airlines, and we had very significant uptake on it. If this pandemic does continue well into this year, the trailing off of the percentage amount may be less effective, but overall the CEWS has been helpful to my members.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you.

My other question was answered by a previous witness, so I'll leave it at that. I think our time has run out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I would like to take the floor, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Since I had some time left at the end of my last turn and Mr. Sidhu did not use all his time, I would like to take the floor, Mr. Chair.

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Chair: I can give you one question, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Perry, from the Air Line Pilots Association.

At the end of last week, I read in La Presse a very touching letter to the editor from Bradley Small. He piloted the Prime Minister's plane during his election campaign. In his letter, he mentions that he got to know the Prime Minister and appreciate him, and that he voted for him at the last election. However, he has come to the point of saying the following to him:

Today, you are showing contempt for us, blaming us and humiliating us. You have left us completely stranded.

I will also read you the end of his letter because it touches us:

I don't know whether I'll still have a job a month from now. I don't know if my employer will be able to survive. I don't know how many of my colleagues will have lost their homes and their retirement savings at the end of this. But I do know one thing, your inaction won't be forgotten.

Is Mr. Small's sentiment in line with yours and that of your members who are in the same situation?

[*English*]

The Chair: I am assuming you were directing that question to someone.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: My question is for Mr. Perry.

[*English*]

Capt Tim Perry: I am aware of the very heartfelt letter that was written to the Prime Minister. I think his thoughts and feelings characterize the thoughts and feelings of basically my entire membership. Everyone, all the pilots, through their union and engagement, have been doing what we believe is their end of the bargain. They've been working through a very difficult and trying time, and there is very little in the way of certainty for their professional future and the future of the industry in which they are invested.

I'm aware that they are aware of the promises that have been made about support for this industry, and they are wondering where it is.

It does characterize the thoughts and feelings very much of our membership broadly.

The Chair: Thank you.

To all the witnesses, thank you sincerely for your time today. There is no question that we do find ourselves in a challenging time, not just within this sector, but in many sectors throughout the country. I am sure everyone can appreciate that we are all working together, all 338 members. Regardless of party, we are all working together to ensure that Canadians' backs are looked after.

Members, as well, I want to congratulate you and thank you for your interventions today.

Hopefully, we'll be taking a lot of the input we have received throughout this study and, of course, as Mr. Dias alluded to, using this for building back better.

We do recognize that the past is no longer the norm. It is what we're living today as well as what we are going to be into in the post-pandemic recovery in terms of finding new ways, better ways to ensure that Canadians are well looked after.

With that, I do thank all of you who participated in today's meeting, and we look forward to the next meeting.

Have a great evening.

I will adjourn this meeting, and we'll see you back here on Thursday.

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