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• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 36 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 3, 2022, the committee is meeting to study anticipated labour shortages in the Canadian transportation sector.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Appearing before us today from the Air Transport Association of Canada, we have John McKenna, president and chief executive officer. From the Canadian Council for Aviation and Aerospace, we have Robert Donald, executive director. From the National Airlines Council of Canada, we have Jeff Morrison, president and chief executive officer. From Nav Canada, we have Ben Girard, vice-president and chief of operations, and Jonathan Bagg, director, stakeholder and industry relations. From Pascan Aviation, we have Julian Roberts, president and chief executive officer, and Yani Gagnon, executive vice-president and co-owner. From Unifor, we have Kaylie Tiessen, national representative, research department.

We will now begin opening remarks with the Air Transport Association of Canada.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. John McKenna (President and Chief Executive Officer, Air Transport Association of Canada): Good afternoon.

The Air Transport Association of Canada has represented this country's commercial air transport industry since 1934. Our 175 members are engaged in all levels of commercial aviation and flight training, in every region of Canada. Our membership ranges from the very large domestic transborder and international carriers to regional carriers, along with flight training organizations and the Canadian air transport support industry.

The labour shortage in the commercial aviation sector is at a critical stage. Although the industry has been dealing as best it can with personnel shortages for many years through enhanced recruitment, training and retention strategies, and by importing experi-

enced aviation personnel through immigration, the ever-growing shortage has been greatly exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the restart phase of operations.

[*Translation*]

The current state of affairs, if left without appropriate and quick Government of Canada action, will not only prevent the air transportation system from recovering but will be sure to deteriorate at a fast pace. This will have a devastating impact on the overall Canadian economic outlook, as all industries in our export-focused country rely upon available and efficient transportation of people and goods.

Northern and remote regions which rely on aviation as an essential service will be particularly vulnerable to unstable aviation transportation due to lack of resources.

[*English*]

Commercial pilots, cabin crew, air traffic controllers and aircraft maintenance and related personnel are all at critical levels. That is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Shortages in maintenance personnel are not just related to licensed aircraft maintenance engineers and design engineering staff, but also to the so-called unskilled trades, such as baggage handlers, cargo loaders, fuellers and de-icing crews.

Our industry is subjected to delays never before encountered in processing service requests at many federal government departments. What used to require up to 90 days now requires easily two to three times that long, leaving millions of dollars of equipment idle. Our industry is also being harshly impacted through poor levels of service by the lack of experienced engineers and inspectors within our regulator, Transport Canada's civil aviation directorate.

[*Translation*]

In order to see the air transportation system successfully recover following the pandemic and in the new labour realities, we need serious assistance from the Government of Canada, and we need it now, not sometime in the distant future.

This assistance can be provided in various forms. To be successful, innovative solutions based on regulatory streamlining and efficient alternative methods utilizing the latest technology for training are key. Canada must quickly catch up to other major regulatory systems such as the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, the FAA, the UK Civil Aviation Authority, the CAA, and Europe's European Union Aviation Safety Agency, the EASA, in these matters.

[English]

One benefit of the pandemic has been the allowances by TCCA, for which we are very grateful, to use exemptions of alternative equivalent processes for training and licensing. ATAC urgently encourages TCCA to embed these and other proven alternatives, which are widely accepted by other major regulators, into the Canadian aviation regulations. This would enable Canada to properly support our industry in a time of dire need, and would do so efficiently for both the regulator and the industry. This would lead to a truly safe and efficient air transportation system, which Canada is so reliant upon and could be proud of.

Finally, Canada has been asking the Canadian government to co-operate in the establishment of a federally guaranteed loan program to support the training of the next generation of commercial pilots. Access to funding has been identified as one of the major barriers to entry for youth who are considering aviation as a career. Near full employment of professional pilots would result in a near zero exposure for the government within a guaranteed loan program so desperately needed to help train the next generation of pilots, especially in these times of high interest rates.

ATAC and its members stand ready to continue to co-operate with TCCA on the development and implementation of these required improvements, as quickly as possible.

• (1545)

[Translation]

I will gladly answer your questions once my colleagues have made their statements.

[English]

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McKenna.

[English]

Next we have the Canadian Council for Aviation and Aerospace.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Robert Donald (Executive Director, Canadian Council for Aviation and Aerospace): Good afternoon.

The Canadian Council for Aviation and Aerospace, CCAA, is a not-for-profit national partnership organization working with industry, labour, educators and government. CCAA is the only national organization dedicated exclusively to the labour market and the workforce in the aviation and aerospace industry.

Two points I'd like to talk to you about this afternoon are the critical labour shortage, as referred to by John McKenna just a minute ago, and the need to improve the system for access to foreign workers.

On the critical skills shortage, some of you will be familiar with the 2018 CCAA labour market information study. The study documented the critical skills gap in the sector. It is the most widely cited report on the subject. At that time, the study projected 55,000 new workers would be needed by 2025. CCAA has recently com-

pleted a new study, which will be published shortly. The new projection is for 58,000 workers by 2028. Of that, air transport requires approximately 31,800, which is 58% of the current workforce. Support activities for air transport require 13,200, which is 50% of the current workforce. Aerospace manufacturing requires 13,100, which is 25% of the current workforce. Of the 31,000 needed, 7,574 are pilots and 5,203 are aircraft mechanics.

Air transport will see high replacement demand and insufficient supply of new entrants. Of replacement demand, retirees make up 38% of the total hiring requirements. The balance is growth. There are projected to be 5,000 and change new entrants to the industry, which will make up less than 20% of the 31,000 needed, so 26,800 workers will need to be found from other industries or other jurisdictions. ICAO, Boeing and IATA all document that the shortages are worldwide, so recruiting from other jurisdictions will continue to be challenging, as it will be from other sectors.

The other point I want to talk to you about is streamlining the process for hiring foreign aviation maintenance engineers, AMEs. All Canadian companies prefer to hire within Canada for obvious reasons; however, as mentioned, Canada cannot produce enough workers, so companies are often forced to hire foreign workers. The process is time-consuming and costly. Adding two NOC codes to the list of critical labour shortages would be an important step towards making the process less costly and faster for a critical part of the industry. Those NOC codes are 7315 for aircraft mechanics and inspectors and NOC code 7244 for avionics and electronic technicians. All companies need a mixture of experienced workers and apprentices. Hiring 20 experienced foreign workers allows a company to hire 20 additional apprentices.

The other important related point is on recognition of foreign trained AMEs by Transport Canada. According to a recent report by CAMAQ out of Quebec, Transport Canada refuses 99% of requests from AMEs licensed in other jurisdictions like EASA or FAA. While their experience is recognized, elements of their academic education are considered deficient, because foreign regulators have different requirements for academic training. You have a licensed AME who's worked for a major airline, say in Germany, for 20 years, authorized by Transport Canada to work on Canadian planes in that jurisdiction. However, when they come to Canada, they are not recognized by Transport Canada to be an AME here because 20 years ago when they studied in Frankfurt, they didn't have exactly the same curriculum as that required by Transport Canada for colleges in Canada. Moving to a competency-based system instead of this methodical bureaucratic approach would be important.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll be happy to answer questions after the others have spoken.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Donald.

Next we have the National Airlines Council of Canada.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Jeff Morrison (President and Chief Executive Officer, National Airlines Council of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Jeff Morrison. I'm the president and CEO of the National Airlines Council of Canada, or NACC. NACC represents Canada's largest passenger air carriers, including Air Canada, Air Transat, Jazz Aviation LP and WestJet. The mandate of our association is to promote safe, sustainable and competitive air travel by advocating for the development of policies, regulations and legislation to foster a world-class transportation system.

This study that the committee is doing on anticipated labour shortages couldn't come at a more opportune moment. Canada's airlines and their workers have felt the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic acutely. This sector was among the first to be hit and the last to recover. A large number of workers left the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic, either voluntarily being furloughed or offered early retirement.

If there's one thing I would stress that you take away from my remarks today, it is that there is no question that Canada's airlines are powered by the skills and talent of the people who work in this sector. Our success depends on them. Despite the many challenges that airlines and airlines staff have had to face during the COVID-19 pandemic period, I am pleased to state that our member airlines have been successful in returning their staffing capacity to 2019 levels. But we need to think about the future. The aviation ecosystem is reliant on the availability of a large, well-trained, competent workforce, and it must include professionals in adequate numbers to cater to the diverse roles found across the aviation sector and ecosystem. As legislators, you know that labour shortages aren't just buzzwords you read about on social media or hear about

in the news. They impact the opportunity for sustainability and growth.

As you just heard from Robert, my colleague from the Canadian Council for Aviation and Aerospace, their labour market information study forecasts a need to hire more than 58,000 workers by 2028 to meet industry attrition and growth. Just as a bit of perspective, that total is roughly 43% of the current aviation workforce.

[Translation]

The air transport sector, in collaboration with aviation stakeholders and the Government of Canada, must succeed for Canadians and the aviation industry as we look to the future.

The sector relies on the Government of Canada to process the credentials of airline workers and other aviation personnel. This includes medical certificates, security clearances, restricted area identity cards and other identifying information.

As travel demand has increased, so have the demands for accreditation, and we must ensure that Transport Canada maintains adequate resources. Eliminating the backlog and ensuring that accreditation keeps pace with travellers' needs are immediate steps the Government of Canada can take.

For newcomers to Canada who want to work in aviation, we often see barriers to expediting the recognition of foreign credentials, as my colleague Robert also mentioned, and this is another area that we are bringing to the attention of the government.

● (1555)

[English]

We also believe the Government of Canada can do more to promote airlines as a positive career choice, similar to the effort it has made to encourage students or new Canadians to pursue careers in the skilled trades. In fact, by coincidence, earlier today the U.K.'s Department for Transport unveiled a new program called Generation Aviation, which aims to boost recruitment into the U.K. aviation sector. The Canadian government could look at this new program as a model.

Lastly, there is a need to use technology to further digitize services and requirements that will help enhance the travel experience, whether that be in airport operations, for instance, or customs screening. As another example, biometrics could play a role in addressing labour shortages.

It's critical that the Canadian airline industry remain globally competitive now and for decades to come, and that travellers have confidence that their journey is predictable, timely and enjoyable, with clear service standards across the air travel ecosystem. This means ensuring that the airline sector continues to attract and retain skilled workers now and into the future.

Mr. Chair, I too look forward to the discussion.

[*Translation*]

Thank you again.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Morrison.

The next speaker is Mr. Ben Girard from Nav Canada.

You have the floor for five minutes, Mr. Girard.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Girard (Vice President and Chief of Operations, Nav Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Nav Canada is the not-for-profit corporation that owns and operates the world's first privatized air navigation system, ensuring the safest, most efficient movement of aircraft from the Pacific to the Arctic to the mid-Atlantic, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Having enough people to deliver safe and efficient air navigation services is a top priority for the company. This includes recruiting, training and staffing across a large number of roles such as air traffic controllers, flight service specialists, technologists, aeronautical information specialists, pilots, engineers and a range of supporting corporate employees.

Nav Canada employs a total of 4,400 employees, each with an important role to play.

[*English*]

Throughout the pandemic, Nav Canada has maintained the highest level of safety and a high level of service reliability and is still doing so today. Our direct contribution to system delays and bottlenecks represents a very small percentage of delays experienced within the aviation ecosystem.

Nonetheless, we take any Nav Canada related delays extremely seriously. We have been able to mitigate these to a large extent through the commitment and efforts of all of our employees and the strong collaborative relationships that we enjoy with our unions, customers and industry partners.

Unfortunately, we have seen an increase in unplanned absences across the business, including those related to COVID, unpaid leave due to the vaccine mandate, unexpected retirements as people make lifestyle decisions and additional leave entitlements applicable to federally regulated employers.

In the few instances when a staffing shortage may have impacted service delivery, Nav Canada did everything possible to minimize our impact on the industry. These steps included working with our staff to backfill the absences with overtime, optimizing staff scheduling and extending staff hours.

To support our operation, we have issued contracts to more than 50 retired employees, redeployed staff from other units, hired controllers from foreign jurisdictions and taken a number of other actions to ensure we have people in the right places.

Like other stakeholders in this industry, Nav Canada has faced and continues to face challenges made worse by the pandemic as well as the current employment market. As others have told you, there are significant challenges in recruiting people in the aviation industry.

Nav Canada's staffing plan is aligned with the future projected traffic over several years. Staffing plans take into account anticipated attrition and are mindful of our capacity to successfully train new employees. Supported by increased collaboration and information sharing with major airlines, we are monitoring traffic forecasts and the impact on staffing on an ongoing basis.

We are planning for the future, both in the short term and in the long term. Our frontline air traffic services training programs are currently running at full capacity. More than 250 individuals are currently in various phases of training, which can take between 24 to 36 months to complete. An additional 500 trainees will enter training programs for operational roles over the next two years. We are also adding 250 employees in non-operational roles this year.

The training for operational positions is delivered by training professionals and unionized operational employees. On this basis, the unions contribute to success rates for certification in air traffic service. Modernizing training programs are a key strategic priority for Nav Canada. We are improving training efficiency to support increased employees in operational positions over the long term.

In addition to a focus on staffing, Nav Canada is moving forward with strategic investments to introduce technology that increases safety, enables increased capacity and reduces the environmental impact of aviation.

Labour shortages are a complex issue, and there is no one simple solution to this issue. We are committed to working with our employees, unions, customers, stakeholders and the government to continue to provide a world-leading service while investing to meet future needs of aircraft operators and the flying public.

• (1600)

[Translation]

We have been and will continue to work collaboratively to address staffing issues and to continue to make Nav Canada an attractive place to build a career.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Girard.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Roberts of Pascan Aviation.

Mr. Roberts, you have five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Julian Roberts (President and Chief Executive Officer, Pascan Aviation Inc.): Thank you so much.

My name is Julian Roberts. I'm with Pascan Aviation.

We're a regional airline operating on 703, 704 and 705 air operator certificates. We serve 11 regions in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Ontario, moving 7,000 passengers per month on approximately 40 flights per day. We currently employ 200 aviation professionals.

We've been invited here today to discuss the labour shortage in the aviation sector. We're a regional carrier based in Montreal, and our employees are constantly solicited by mainline companies such as Air Canada, Jazz, WestJet, Sunwing and Air Transat. This is not new for us, as these companies require experienced personnel and usually come to companies like ours for that experience.

In the past years, we have experienced a 50% turnover in flight crews alone. Until recently, we usually had a nice stockpile of résumés of ambitious young women and men wanting to join our company. Since the pandemic, we've noticed a steady decrease in qualified professionals in our sector. We have problems recruiting specialized workers, such as flight dispatchers, aircraft maintenance engineers and ground service personnel, but our biggest challenge remains the pilot shortage.

There are numerous reports that exist—I'm sure you have all seen them—on current and future shortfalls of pilots in Canada. The data is not good, especially for smaller, regional carriers like ours. The pilot shortage is no surprise, nor is it a new issue. In 2019, we were already feeling the impact, but the pandemic alleviated the problem for us, temporarily anyway.

Today, we are in a perpetual recruiting mode for all levels of personnel, especially for qualified pilots. Unfortunately, we see very few applying. We have increased our salaries and conditions significantly. We don't see better retention or attraction of these qualified workers because there just aren't many out there.

When the new flight and duty regulations came into effect in 2020 for the 705 operators, the larger companies started to stock-

pile pilots, putting on additional strain. As for Pascan, we ended up requiring 30% more pilots in our 705 operations to do exactly what we were doing the previous year.

On December 12, the flight and duty regulations will come into effect for the 703 and 704 operators, once again impacting the number of pilots required. Unfortunately, we had to make the decision to cease our 703 operations earlier this year. In early 2023, we will also suspend our 704 operations, greatly impacting the regions we serve, as the required number of pilots will be too high and our operations will no longer be viable.

The effects on regional airlines will eventually make their way to the mainline carriers as well. New pilots coming on to the market will have fewer options to build hours and experience in the smaller 703 and 704 operations. Understand that I'm focusing a lot on the pilot shortage today, but without the pilots to fly my planes, I won't require anyone to dispatch them or any mechanics to fix them.

Where has everybody gone? As I stated earlier, this shortage isn't new; it has just been amplified. A lot of it is due to the pandemic. A lot of early retirement packages were given out to the pilots at Air Canada, WestJet and Air Transat, and some people just decided to start different careers due to the instability in the industry. The pandemic greatly impacted the training of new pilots for almost two years. The cost to become a pilot is astronomical, and as interest rates increase, this will only be a further deterrent.

There isn't much awareness out there either for young people that this is an incredible industry to work in. Regulation changes have also made a great impact on the pilot levels.

As we're already in the middle of this shortage, there isn't much that can be done in the short term to solve this issue. Unfortunately, it will quickly get worse as bigger airlines ramp up and pilots start to leave for other countries, like the U.S.A. under the EB-2 program, offering unconditional green cards for pilots and their families, huge salaries, and sign-on bonuses.

For us, regional aviation is at risk. We need help, and we need help quickly.

Thank you.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Unifor.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen (National Representative, Research Department, Unifor): Thank you.

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Kaylie Tiessen. I work in the research department at Unifor studying the air transportation sector as well as many other sectors. This is one of my favourites.

Unifor represents more than 16,000 members working in the air transportation sector. We represent pilots, customer service representatives, ramp attendants, baggage handlers, flight attendants, airport authority workers, flight service specialists and air traffic controllers. All of these workplaces have experienced the effects of a shortage of workers in the last year.

These labour shortage conversations are nothing new. We've heard a couple of times today already that this is not something that's recent. These conversations have been ongoing. One thing we're all talking about in Unifor across the sector is higher-quality work. That's one of the many solutions needed. What's become clear to our members as we listen to these conversations is that government doesn't truly understand the root of this problem and our employers don't necessarily understand the root of the problem, or some of them just refuse to make the changes necessary to fix some of these issues.

In higher-wage jobs like air traffic control and with pilots, some of our employers have really manufactured a shortage of labour by failing to hire and train an appropriate number of workers after people have retired or by even preparing ahead of time. In lower-wage jobs, employers have manufactured a shortage by paying low wages and creating very chaotic work rules that leave workers with little ability to plan their lives outside of work or to make ends meet. They go and work somewhere that is maybe more stable.

In customer service roles, employers are able to hire people, and they're filling the roles, but turnover is really high because of inadequate training, low wages or precarious schedules. The job that could be very fulfilling, and used to be very fulfilling, turns out to be less fulfilling as workers are subject to violence and harassment by customers and are provided with little support from their employers. It shouldn't be a surprise that if an employer treats their workers unfairly, they will be hard pressed to retain employees or to hire them at all.

I have a couple of examples. Our pilot members at Sunwing could soon be working side by side with people hired on temporary contracts who are paid more than they are for the same work. Sunwing has applied to hire workers through the temporary foreign worker program, but we believe the company has not done enough to hire pilots who are available to work in Canada.

We've heard reports from our members at Sunwing that they had upwards of 800 applicants for a recent job posting for pilots, but they hired only about 150, or less than a quarter of those qualified applicants. Sunwing has manufactured its own labour shortage by not hiring and training pilots in advance of the busy travel season, and is now taking advantage of the current labour market situation in order to undermine our members' collective agreement and the quality of work available in Canada. Permanent jobs could be offered to pilots from abroad who would become a part of the Cana-

dian workforce, benefiting from the collective agreement and the general protections offered most workers in Canada.

Another example is contract flipping. Contract flipping is a common practice in the sector that treats workers unfairly and leads to a shortage of people who are interested in doing that kind of work. Airport authorities, airlines such as WestJet and Air Canada, and virtually all international carriers that fly into Canada create incredibly precarious work by contracting out particular tasks, including baggage handling, wheelchair handling and customer service. Every few years those contracts are flipped and new suppliers take over. That's kind of common practice. The work is exactly the same, but the winning company does not have to hire the workers back or provide the benefits or other provisions they may have earned over time. The collective agreement does not follow the job either.

Unifor members faced this demeaning and really heart-wrenching situation at least three times this year when their employer lost a contract. They had to fight to be hired by the new company for less total compensation, fewer benefits and actually a loss of any work rules that they had been able to negotiate.

Furthermore, as I mentioned, our members are increasingly facing harassment from customers. They have insufficient training to conduct their jobs to the best of their ability. Employers are really abdicating this responsibility and then blaming workers for their lack of capacity.

• (1610)

Some of these issues need to be solved by employers, but government has an important role to play in increasing standards and supporting safety and security in the industry too.

Some concrete steps that government could take immediately to improve the labour situation at airports include instituting a minimum living wage at airports across the country; implementing full successor rights to ensure workers keep their jobs, pay and collective agreements when a contract is flipped; enhancing oversight of the temporary foreign worker program to ensure employers don't abuse the system and workers are treated fairly; granting migrant workers permanent residency status upon arrival to ensure equal rights and protections for all so that's not being taken advantage of; and helping to lead the development of a solution to the escalating problem of on-the-job harassment. Employers need to take responsibility for the frustration that their business models and technological change introduce into the system and take a stand to ensure that customers know harassment won't be tolerated.

Those are just a few of the solutions that are available that you can make right now.

I look forward to taking your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Tiessen.

We'll begin our round of questioning today with Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Lewis, you have six minutes.

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses. It's been really awesome testimony.

I'll start out by saying that all of us around this table or virtually have known the story about the airlines over the last two and a half years. Most of those stories—although they're trying hard—aren't the most fun stories to say the least, so this is really, really an important study.

Mr. Chair through you, sir, I'll start with Mr. Morrison.

We heard you say that more people need to be trained. What specifically is needed by the government and what could the government have done differently? Also, what does the future look like to get us out of this mess, quite frankly?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Mr. Chair, first of all, I think the future is definitely looking better in the next few months and years than it has in the past several months and years.

You heard extensively about the impacts of COVID on our sector. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we were the first to be hit and the last to recover.

The fact that our staffing levels at our member airlines are back to what they were in 2019 I think is a positive development. Obviously, the fact that COVID restrictions have been removed as of October 1 is a positive development. The fact that we're seeing passenger volumes return to somewhat close to 2019 levels again is a positive development.

However, there are lessons that will need to be learned from the pandemic, no question. In particular, especially with the numbers that my colleague, Mr. Donald's group, put forth, the fact that we need to hire at least 58,000 new workers into the sector over the next six years is going to mean—and frankly, I think the testimony of Mr. Roberts in terms of some of the challenges his company is facing is very—

Mr. Chris Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Morrison. I'm sorry, but I have very limited time.

I have one more question for you, sir.

Through you, Mr. Chair, you spoke about using new technologies to speed up things. That is what I heard you say.

With all due respect, sir, I've heard from CATSA and from CB-SA unions that computers cannot replace people and that indeed it doesn't really speed things up.

I'm curious. Are you hearing a different story than I am? All of the testimony we've heard, through more than this committee, says that it's not going to work. We know that ArriveCAN, quite frankly, really held people up, as opposed to getting them through quickly.

Can you comment on that?

• (1615)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Very quickly, if we look at the history of technology over the past several years, we have seen improvements across the travel ecosystem via technology. It wasn't that long ago that you had to call up a person to book a flight. Now you can do that online. It wasn't that long ago that you had to go in person to see a customs agent when you were coming back to Canada. You can now do much of that online and via technology.

We do see that it plays a role. Can it solve every problem in terms of minimizing disruptions? No, it can't, but can it play some role? Yes, it can.

Again, we'd be happy to have more discussion on that with this committee.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Thank you, sir. I appreciate that.

Mr. McKenna, you spoke about how many more people we need. Let me ask you this, sir.

Do we have the proper resources to meet the demand today? Do we have the schooling systems, all the infrastructure we need to actually train these folks? I know it's not a click of the fingers overnight, but do we have the infrastructure there?

Mr. John McKenna: The training infrastructure is there; there's no doubt that it's there. Access to it is difficult, because of funding, for one thing, and also because our regulations date back to the 1990s. They're not modern, not up to date. They're not following the world trends as far as incorporating new teaching technologies and so on.

The infrastructure is there but the regulation is not, and the funding is desperately lacking.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair to Mr. Donald, very quickly, on temporary foreign workers, I have a very simple quick question. Is it standard across the globe?

If we were to bring in TFWs, temporary foreign workers, to help subsidize our workforce here in the aviation industry, is it standardized in that everybody would be safe on an airplane? Are the folks that are repairing our airplanes and doing all those types of jobs safe?

Mr. Donald?

The Chair: I think it might be best to ask a question of another witness, Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I hope this isn't coming off my time.

The Chair: We'll make sure it doesn't, Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Very well, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

Can you tell me, Mr. Chair, how much time is left, please?

The Chair: You have one minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Excellent.

I'll conclude my line of questioning with Ms. Tiessen, Mr. Chair.

I have a private member's bill coming forward to the finance committee, Ms. Tiessen, on Wednesday. It's a travel tax deduction for skilled trades specifically. It allows them to write off their meals, lodging and hotels.

You represent Unifor in a vast variety of sectors across Canada. Would this be something that Unifor would support for their workers? They could travel upwards of 120 kilometres away from home and spend a few nights out of town to support the aviation industry.

Is that something that would be palatable for Unifor and/or helpful for our workforce?

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: Answering that question is far above my pay grade today.

We'll have a conversation here and we can get back to you on that question.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Excellent. Thank you, Ms. Tiessen.

I would certainly hope that you do get back to me. We look forward to your support, because any time we can help skilled trades, I think we're all on the same team.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lewis.

[*Translation*]

We will continue with Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here.

My first question is for Mr. Girard.

To what extent are the different levels of government working together to help provide training for skilled workers in the sectors you need?

Mr. Ben Girard: The situation is a bit unique at Nav Canada. We don't necessarily hire a pilot who has been trained by a school. Nav Canada hires people, trains them, and allows them to develop the skills required. That's why it takes a long time to get people qualified. As I said, it takes two to three years for some air traffic controllers. So the government is not necessarily involved in that aspect of the industry.

• (1620)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Was it the same situation before the pandemic?

Mr. Ben Girard: The situation was the same: the same process existed.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: How many years before the pandemic did this problem exist?

Mr. Ben Girard: What do you mean by "this problem"?

I want to make sure we are talking about the same thing.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I am thinking about the labour shortage.

Mr. Ben Girard: There have been ups and downs over the years. Personally, I've been in the industry for 34 years; sometimes it goes well, but, other times, it goes a little less well.

Since 2008, we have been hit by different crises. It is important to look at what happened just before the pandemic. In some parts of the industry, there were sufficient numbers of employees. In several units in the country, there was even a surplus of staff.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's fine.

Ms. Tiessen, how easy is it for inexperienced workers to enter the labour market in your sectors?

What can be done to facilitate their integration?

[*English*]

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: It's a great question. It really depends on what job people are taking on and the training requirements. Of course, training to be a pilot and training to be a customer service representative both require extensive training. Obviously, the training is incredibly different.

For some of our employers where we have the most new staff or where levels of staff have come back to levels that were available before the pandemic, we see that 60% of the staff are new. They haven't been trained as well as people were being trained before the pandemic. That creates a lot of frustration for the new employees and the employees with more seniority—our members—who have been working side by side with their new colleagues to try to make sure that everybody is up to the task. Those frustrations then lead to people quitting or taking a job somewhere else. There is extremely high turnover.

The training is not offered to the same extent that it could be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: What are you doing to retain older workers or to get retired workers back into the labour market? What are you doing to encourage them to return?

[*English*]

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: That would be something that would be taken on by employers, not necessarily by the unions. We'd be happy to work with our employers to develop attraction and retention—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I know. Do you work in collaboration with employers? To do that, the employer needs an agreement with the unions.

[*English*]

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: Yes, we would be happy to work together in that collaboration to develop an attraction and retention program with our employers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's good.

In your case, what steps have the different levels of government taken to finally address the labour issue in your sectors? How have you worked with the different levels of government?

You said that governments don't understand the problem. In your case, what have you done to address this issue? How have you approached the different levels of government?

[*English*]

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: For the air transportation sector, it is particularly working with the federal government. We have meetings. We've written many letters, particularly talking about the problems that we have with using the temporary foreign worker program. I would like to see permanent immigration that doesn't undermine the quality of work in Canada as one example. We'll work directly with different government representatives in order to discuss those solutions and see them implemented.

Another that we've talked about extensively is full successor rights in order to end the worst effects of contract flipping and implementing living wages at airports across the country to increase the quality of work there. All of these pieces are very important.

How do we do that? We do it by coming to things like this, having other meetings, etc.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Mr. Roberts, what was done before the pandemic to address the labour shortage?

Mr. Julian Roberts: As I said earlier, before the pandemic, we were getting a good number of CVs on a regular basis. We managed to keep control over the experience level of the crews. A lot of pilots were working fewer hours, so it was a little easier to put them in the cockpit. The CVs we get today are from pilots who have 200 to 250 hours of experience. They are not pilots that we can hire and put in commercial aircraft immediately. There is a big difference between 2019 and today.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Iacono. Thank you, Mr. Roberts.

We'll turn the floor over to Mr. Barsalou-Duval for six minutes.

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

I would like to start by asking if it is possible to confirm that all the witnesses have done the sound tests. I forgot to ask at the beginning of the meeting.

The Chair: Yes, I can confirm that this is the case, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much.

My first question is for Mr. Morrison of the National Airlines Council of Canada.

I have heard you complain about the long delays in receiving applications from your members for staff certification with the federal government. How does this affect your operations? In a labour shortage environment, how can this be an issue for you?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: I will answer you in English.

[*English*]

Part of the challenges, especially over the past summer, were in receiving health certifications for pilots from Transport Canada. There were significant delays, much longer delays than the average. What that meant essentially was that pilots were sitting around not able to work.

Another good example is any airline personnel who required access to sensitive areas of airports requiring a certification an RAIC. There were delays in getting those out as well. As a result, without those proper certifications, airline crews, including flight attendants, were not able to access airports and were therefore also not able to work. That was a contributing factor to some of the disruptions that we saw this summer. We hope that those delays won't be repeated in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

I also have a question for Ms. Dias from Unifor.

The Bloc Québécois feels that one of the possible solutions to the labour shortage is to retain experienced workers in the labour market. Among other things, we thought of possibilities such as implementing tax incentives to make it financially attractive for them to stay in the labour market longer.

I was wondering if you found this solution interesting and if you had any other possible solutions that would make it possible to retain experienced workers in the labour market.

[*English*]

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: I'll answer for Ms. Dias, who had some technical difficulties today, so she couldn't join the meeting.

In terms of attracting experienced workers, we're talking about higher-quality work here. If someone left and went to a different job, they did so because the job was more attractive. That would mean higher pay, less chaotic scheduling, being able to plan their life and not just be following the whims of some scheduling technology, as one piece of the puzzle. Then other pieces of the puzzle would be to attract people to come back from retirement, and those sorts of things. I would love to have a conversation about that.

We could talk about that here in the office and get back to you. I'm sure that Ms. Dias has thought of that, but unfortunately she just couldn't be here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much, Ms. Tiessen.

I brought it up because it seems to me that we often talk about the time it takes to train staff and the fact that people who come in, once they've been trained, don't necessarily have the work experience, whereas experienced workers already have all that. It might be more practical to try and keep them longer, because it saves a lot of work not having to train new people.

I'll speak to the representative from Pascan Aviation Inc.

Mr. Roberts, we have had the opportunity to meet elsewhere than here, sometimes with your partner, Mr. Gagnon, to discuss the pilot shortage you are facing.

From your side, do you see any particular measures that could be put in place by the government, for example, to help you make sure that you have enough pilots, and that people see this as an interesting profession?

When I was younger, I was an aviation cadet, and at that time, when I spoke to my colleagues, a lot of them said they were interested in aviation, but that becoming a pilot was expensive, and one of the only ways to get access to it at a reasonable cost was to do it through the cadet route.

● (1630)

Mr. Julian Roberts: Good afternoon.

Honestly, when I was young, I was really attracted to aviation. It's much less common for young people to be interested in it today. I have three young children, and I never heard them or their friends talk about aviation. Back then, working in aviation was almost a trend. Now there is not much advertising in schools. There are obviously not many programs that exist, except for the aviation mechanic program at CEGEP. There are flight schools, but they only train about 30 pilots a year, when 300 are needed.

Becoming a pilot costs, today, about \$90,000. It's certainly not easy for young people to take out a loan from the bank or have their parents sign a mortgage for this training, especially in an industry that in recent years has been very volatile.

There are probably education activities that should be organized in schools, to talk a bit more about our industry. It's a really interesting and exciting industry, but it doesn't appeal to young people today like it did in the 1990s, for example.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: In that case, I will come back later with another question.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses.

I'd like to ask Ms. Tiessen, from Unifor, a couple of questions.

What you said, Ms. Tiessen, around contract flipping is particularly concerning. I was trying to imagine what it would be like to be an employee in one of those roles and to have a set of benefits as part of a collective agreement, and then to have the contract flip and lose the stability and the expectation of those every couple of years.

First, I'm wondering if this problem has become worse in recent years. Second, I'm wondering if you can point to a specific legislative or regulatory change that would help address this issue for employees in the air sector.

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: We definitely have a specific regulatory change. The change is to implement full successor rights by changing the Canada Labour Code so that when a contract is flipped, the collective agreement goes with the new contract. That would mean any increases in pay, better benefits, scheduling issues, time off, vacation time, all of those different pieces that are in the collective agreement would move with the workers when they move to the new company.

It's not that workers are getting fired. It's that a company lost a contract. Often a contract is flipped because a company comes in with a lower cost, and that happens because they can lower wages and working conditions. If we amend the Canada Labour Code to implement full successor rights, that would eliminate those worst effects of contract flipping on people.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: You mentioned the idea of a minimum living wage at airports. We've heard from airport authorities that have implemented minimum living wages. Are you aware of these? Could you share your thoughts on how these stack up?

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: I absolutely can.

We've seen in a number of different locations in the U.S. that minimum standards for wages at airports can be increased quite dramatically, and that what happens is that the quality of work is better, airports become more efficient, there's less turnover and the customer service is of higher quality. There are all of these different pieces. That's been the case in Seattle. It's been the case at Newark, LaGuardia, JFK and LAX. LAX is actually a living wage employer.

In Toronto, the living wage is \$22 an hour. It's slightly different across the country, but there's a calculation that is done by many different communities across the country. That's something that could be implemented to quickly increase the quality of work at an airport.

• (1635)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Finally, Ms. Tiessen, this issue of technological change in the air sector is an interesting one. I think it's hard to argue with the point made earlier that technology has made air travel and the air transport sector more efficient. I think all of us have experienced that as air passengers.

From a labour perspective, what are the important things to consider as we see technology take on a larger role in that space?

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: We definitely want to see the people who do the job, those who use the technology or are having some of the tasks replaced by technology...they need to be consulted. What often happens is that technology is introduced and no one asks the people who have potentially 30 years of experience in doing the job what it's like to do the job and the challenges that come up and all sorts of things. That being said, those mistakes are embedded into a piece of technology, so when the baggage handling system breaks down or the customer service call lines.... When new technology is introduced, our members aren't consulted, and then the technology breaks and they have to fix it.

Another piece of the puzzle for customer service representatives is that a lot of decisions that airlines make are made in a black box. You go to the counter and you're told that you're on a flight two days from now and it's the only one available. This decision has been made in a black box. Our members don't have anything to do with that decision, but they take the brunt of the frustration and the harassment, and they don't get support from the industry, from their employers, in order to deal with the harassment that is coming at them. That is one additional piece of the puzzle.

I will say that we're not opposed to technological change. We want to work together to get the highest-quality technological change possible to make sure that we can deliver the best service possible.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

I'm going to shift to ask Mr. Morrison from the National Airlines Council of Canada a question.

The wage subsidy was really designed by the government as a tool to avoid the attrition of employees during the pandemic. Among airlines, I think there were different experiences. Some major airlines took the wage subsidy, and some didn't.

Could you provide some comment overall on the success of the wage subsidy in stemming the loss of skilled employees and on what were the experiences of those different airlines that took different approaches?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Very briefly—I know that I don't have much time—you're right in saying that different airlines used the different recovery programs in different ways. I can't speak to the individual experiences of all of them.

I can say, in fact, that a report I saw just this morning from StatsCan referred to those various COVID recovery programs as a lifeline for the airline sector, in that if it weren't for many of those programs, there would really be questions in terms of the viability of a Canadian airline sector today. They ensured that airlines could continue to operate in extremely difficult circumstances to get us to the point where again today we're back to or very close to 2019 or pre-pandemic levels. That's good news for the travelling public.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Morrison.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Mr. Muys.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all witnesses for your testimony here today.

My first question is for Mr. McKenna.

I forget the reference, but I read somewhere that you were quoted in November 2021 as saying that you're ready to go, and the government is the one that's holding you back. It's a year later, so I'd like to ask you, is this still true? What's better, if anything? How do we best fix what needs to be fixed in terms of holding back the sector?

Mr. John McKenna: It is better in that we have done away with COVID measures. To comment also on what my colleague, Mr. Morrison, was saying, the wage subsidy helped, but it doesn't keep an airline flying if there are no passengers. It just kept the lights on for many companies. What's better now is that there is a growth in demand, so there's a growth in service.

The government is not there yet, because the government is still working from home. The delays for getting service requests executed are extremely long, and that's postponing our recovery.

• (1640)

Mr. Dan Muys: Maybe you could elaborate a bit more on that, because that's a problem we have noticed elsewhere as well with the number of people in government departments working from home. It's delaying a lot of the things that need to get done.

How does that compare to pre-pandemic, a year now since, you noted, the government was holding you back? What do you see in the next year or two to get that backlog cleared?

Mr. John McKenna: Visa applications, rate card applications, timed certificate applications, medical approvals, licence renewals, professional exams, pilot proficiency tests, aircraft certification—all this stuff is taking three or four times longer than it ever has, and we don't understand why.

Transport Canada is short of resources, and it's short of competent resources, experienced people. They don't recruit from the air transport industry anymore. They have other standards now, but very few people have aviation experience, and it's causing great delays.

Mr. Dan Muys: Picking up on that, Mr. Donald, you gave a very detailed breakdown of 58,000 by 2028, which is an astonishing figure. I think you referred to a competence-based assessment process. You talked about the long bureaucratic processes that we have been faced with that are holding things back. Mr. McKenna just commented on that.

Maybe you can elaborate a bit further on how we get things moving. We're not going to get 58,000 people all at once, so how do we tackle that?

Mr. Robert Donald: As I alluded to in my remarks, we need to improve the process for bringing in foreign-trained workers, foreign AMEs. As I said, Canadian companies want to hire Canadians, but when we don't have them, we need experienced workers and better access to them.

Adding those two NOC codes I referred to will help. As well, we need what I was referring to about competency. Transport Canada follows a mechanical bureaucratic process comparing what an individual studied in India, Germany or any other country against what they set out in chapter 566, which Canadian colleges must teach.

That no longer makes sense. It never did, but it's even worse now. Transport Canada needs to move to a competency-based assessment for foreign AMEs coming to Canada. This individual can work on an Air Canada plane in Frankfurt, but can't work on it here. It doesn't make sense.

I could go on, but I will stop there.

Mr. Dan Muys: That makes good sense to us, too. Obviously, as you pointed out, trying to match those credentials from jurisdiction to jurisdiction has been cumbersome and has delayed the process.

Mr. John McKenna: Could I add something to that, sir?

It takes four years to train an AME in Canada. That's the training requirement by Transport Canada. That's twice as long as any other jurisdiction. Why is that? It's that the regulation has not been amended since the 1990s, and they are not taking into consideration new teaching technologies, the new teaching environment and the operating environment. That is a disincentive to get people to come to our industry.

Mr. Dan Muys: Certainly. As you pointed out in your testimony, that's a decades-old regulation that really needs to be updated compared to other jurisdictions like the U.S., U.K. and Europe, as you mentioned.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Muys. Your time is up.

Next we have Mr. Rogers.

You have five minutes.

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

Welcome to all the guests today.

We have heard many witnesses talk about the various reasons for labour shortages, but I was really intrigued, and I want Ms. Tiessen to confirm for me the numbers she talked about regarding Sunwing. If I heard her correctly, they had 800 applications for 100 jobs. Were these local pilots or were these international pilots?

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: The information I have from our members is that there were 800 applications for a pilot job posting and 148 people were hired.

I don't know where they were hired from. I don't know what their previous experience was.

● (1645)

Mr. Churence Rogers: That leaves a substantial number of people, 600-plus, who are still out there. I'm assuming they went to work for other airlines somewhere. I was amazed at that number when you said that, after hearing so many people talk about the labour shortages and the lack of pilots to fly planes.

Anyway, thank you for that. I appreciate the information.

I want to ask Mr. Donald a question.

Your organization states that "education/training programs have not kept pace with the rapidly evolving technological needs of the industry." Moreover, "sector-wide, there is a limited capacity to educate and train interested students."

Can you elaborate on these educational training shortcomings? Why haven't the aviation and aerospace industries amended the issues? What is preventing the industry from doing so?

Mr. Robert Donald: Thank you, Mr. Rogers.

I'm not sure what report you're reading from, but it is correct that colleges in Canada are required to teach what is mandated by Transport Canada. Transport says how many hours. It has to be in the classroom. It cannot be remote. There was an extension for the pandemic, but that has not been extended.

That curriculum is out of date. It still insists that students have a knowledge of cloth wings and wood structures.

We've spoken to Transport Canada. They have said they will update it, but they have not. We've been saying this for three, four and five years. It hasn't been updated since 1999.

They're requiring that students learn things that are no longer in airplanes. It defies logic. That's something an AME from Germany can be refused on, that they didn't study cloth wings and wood structures. They can't get their licence here. TC tells them to take a course on cloth wings and wood structures. Nobody will teach that.

I'll stop there.

Mr. Churence Rogers: I appreciate the information and the answer.

For Nav Canada, in your opinion, Mr. Girard or Mr. Bagg, what actions need to be taken to attract and retain more workers for your industry? I know you alluded to some things, but I'd like to have a detailed response, if you could.

Mr. Ben Girard: It is very hard, actually, to attract people for the simple reason we are all competing for the same people a lot of the time.

At Nav Canada, unfortunately, with the longer training programs, somebody has to very much make a time commitment and be in training for two or three years in order to get a job at the end. I'm not sure the government can do anything, but at Nav Canada we make the jobs very interesting in the working condition environment. We offer a lot of great opportunity inside Nav Canada.

We have been in the top 100 employers for a number of years in a row. We are very proud of that. We think this is attracting the right people into the business.

Mr. Churence Rogers: In your opinion, what actions can we take on the technology front to reduce the stress and workload for ATC workers?

Mr. Ben Girard: We're implementing a lot of things from a technology perspective. We've submitted a number of those to the NTCF and they've been approved. We thank the government very much for that.

We're looking at technology in line with what ICAO recommends that countries should move to in order to keep up with the great service that is delivered. Things like trajectory-based operations make it very interesting for controllers and increases safety and efficiency. It makes it very interesting for them by taking a lot of the more mundane tasks and leaving the tasks that are very interesting, when they actually sit in position and control airplanes.

We are—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Girard.

[English]

I'm sorry to cut you off, but unfortunately, Mr. Rogers' time is up.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor.

• (1650)

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

Mr. Roberts, I wanted to continue to talk to you about the difficulties in recruiting pilots. One of the ways in which we train new pilots is through flight schools. For example, it was mentioned that the Mirabel facility was the main place where pilots were trained in French in Quebec. Unfortunately, Aéroports de Montréal has increased landing and take-off fees astronomically. This amplifies the pilot shortage. Yet, unlike other places in Quebec where there are flight schools and people complain about the noise caused by

planes constantly taking off and landing, this was not the case in Mirabel. This forces schools to move or even close their doors.

Do you think the government should act to prevent this kind of practice? How do you see the situation?

Mr. Julian Roberts: You have to understand that a pilot who has just finished school is not a pilot I can hire tomorrow, because he doesn't have the required flight hours. For example, Sunwing has received 600 applications, but none of these people have the required flight hours or experience to fly. Perhaps that's why it ended up with only 150 pilots.

Our human resources department has received about 200 resumes, but we can't hire these pilots because they don't have enough hours in the commercial planes we use. If the government created a program that didn't cost \$70,000 or \$90,000 for a pilot to get his or her licence, a lot more people would choose this profession. Especially in the current context, given inflation, few parents will encourage their children to enrol in a flight school. It takes a different approach. Studying at CEGEP to become a mechanic doesn't cost anything; why isn't it the same for pilots?

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

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: All right.

Mr. Girard, according to Nav Canada, could the current labour shortage threaten some control towers in the regions where there is less traffic?

Mr. Ben Girard: No, not at the moment. We have 250 people in training and over the next two years we will have another 500 people added to that number. We hope to be able to fill the classrooms and as we recruit people, we believe we will be able to increase traffic where there is a need.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Girard and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

You have two and a half minutes.

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

I have a question for Mr. Girard from Nav Canada.

Mr. Girard, during the pandemic, the committee heard both from Nav Canada and from the union representing Nav Canada workers about the risk of losing skilled employees during the pandemic and the impact that would have on the overall operation, particularly in skilled fields where years of experience and training are required to perform really specialized roles.

At this juncture, in looking back, could you tell us a little bit about what actually transpired? Were these fears realized? I know that at the time Nav Canada was looking to the federal government for fairly significant financial support. I don't believe that was received in the amounts that were requested. Did we actually see this accelerated loss of experienced personnel during the pandemic?

Mr. Ben Girard: What I can share with you is that we did see people leaving. Some of it was through programs.

You have to understand that 66% of our cost is people. We had to take very hard decisions at Nav Canada to reduce our workforce by 12.7%. That didn't affect anybody directly in operations, other than we offered some incentives to retire early. Those people were going to retire anyway in a short time frame, or there were chances of their retiring in a short time frame. These people left. Other people who left through normal attrition, retirement, or things like that, we didn't necessarily replace at the time.

It is important to note that we have rehired lots of these people. We have called back and rehired 50 people, actually.

During that time period, what really didn't help us was that because of COVID-19, we were unable to train for a number of different reasons. The first one was for the safety of our employees and ensuring the service delivery. As you can imagine, a trainee and an OJI work very closely with one another. We didn't want to chance the spread of COVID-19. In addition to that, we had such a reduction in traffic that it was very hard to justify how we could qualify people with the low level of traffic. It was questioned both by the union as well as by Transport Canada.

Unfortunately, we had to let those trainees go. We didn't make any headway during that time.

We have since rehired most of these trainees. In the last year we qualified about 100 of them. As I said before, we still have about 250 trainees in the system.

Yes, people left, and then we—

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Girard.

Thank you very much, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Dr. Lewis.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Thank you.

My first question will be for Mr. Morrison.

You mentioned digitizing travel. I assume that would improve efficiency.

Do you believe that Canada has the capacity to adopt its own digitized platform? Do you believe that we would need outside companies to assist us, or international partners to do this?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: Thank you for the question.

I can't comment on the best platform or who could best deliver the platforms. What I can say is that technology, as was discussed previously, can play a role in improving and bringing efficiencies to

the travel system. Even with something like ArriveCAN, which has been hotly debated over the past several months, the fact that its purpose has now been transitioned to be a voluntary tool for customs purposes has proven to be, I think, more beneficial than it had been in its previous iteration.

I can't speak to the providers, but I can speak to the technology. It can absolutely serve a purpose in terms of improving efficiency.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: You don't have any specific aspects of travel that you believe would benefit from digitization.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: I think there are various points along the travel experience that could benefit. Clearly, baggage handling, although still requiring the human capacity, is something that we've seen has benefited from technology. Again, customs and security is something that we have seen benefit. There could be more done in that.

We're especially seeing currently a dispute with the United States on NEXUS. One of the easy fixes that we have proposed is the fact that virtual meetings could be held to replace in-person meetings. Again, it's another use for technology to improve things.

There are different points along that ecosystem. Again, we can talk further about that. It absolutely has a purpose.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Is the ArriveCAN app somewhat similar to NEXUS? Would it take on that function? Are you aware of that?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: ArriveCAN now is being used, I believe, in four Canadian airports for essentially customs and border services.

I recently came back from an international trip and used ArriveCAN voluntarily. It did help to accelerate my processing through the customs hall.

NEXUS is complementary. It, too, has benefited a great number of Canadians. We really hope that the American and Canadian governments can work together to make sure that the current disputes are resolved. There's now currently a backlog of over 350,000. They absolutely can work in tandem, and should. Until we get this problem with NEXUS resolved, we're not really at a point of discussing how the two can interact.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Girard.

COVID-19 and the reduced demand on air travel clearly had a severe impact on your operations and revenues. We heard from Mr. Morrison. He testified about the wage subsidy, and that it was a lifeline.

What happens if there's a resurgence of COVID? It seems imperative that postpandemic air travel must continue uninterrupted. How would you assess NavCan's operational buffer if there were to be a resurgence of COVID?

• (1700)

Mr. Ben Girard: That's really hard to say. You're asking me to speculate a lot here. It all depends on when it happens and it all depends on how much time we have to recover.

I think we've proven over the years, with the current model we have, that we have a lot of resilience in terms of how we answer to these crises. It's not a matter of if but a matter of when this is going to reoccur, because we all know that in the aviation business, every 10 years or so something happens that we have to recover from.

I believe Nav Canada is very well positioned to be very resilient in these cases. We've proven that over and over again over the years.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: I'm really glad to hear about that resiliency.

My question was more about helping the industry and making sure we can learn from the past lessons. As you said, the potential is there that it will happen again. What happens if we impose those same mandates and that same level of restriction? What would the impact be on the industry in terms of resiliency?

The Chair: Please give a 10-second response.

Mr. Ben Girard: Yes.

The impact would definitely not be good in the sense that our revenues would diminish and we would have to access money in other ways. We have a very—

The Chair: We have to end it there, unfortunately, Monsieur Girard.

Thank you very much, Dr. Lewis, for your questioning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Koutrakis, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for appearing at our committee this afternoon.

My first question is for Mr. Roberts from Pascan.

In your testimony earlier, you said that regional aviation is at risk, and that it needs help ASAP. I'm curious to know whether your company took advantage of the wage subsidy or any of the support programs that the government put forth.

Mr. Julian Roberts: Absolutely. It saved my business.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Were you able to maintain your employees, or were some employees let go and not rehired? I'm curious to know the number of employees you had prepandemic and what you're at right now.

Mr. Julian Roberts: Prepandemic, we were at probably about 140. Today we're at 200.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Great.

If you haven't already done so, can you suggest some specific recommendations that you would like to see this committee make in its report? You gave compelling testimony before us. I would be curious to hear, and would like to give you the opportunity to elaborate on, what you would like to see specifically included in this report.

Mr. Julian Roberts: I really appreciate that.

We have, as you know, a pilot shortage. It's not a surprise. It's been there for a long time. It's not going away. We're able to train new pilots. The problem we're having is getting those pilots qualified with enough hours to fly the main line. We're unable to replace the number of qualified pilots we're losing to the bigger carriers. Air Canada or WestJet can come in and hire our pilots. Our pilots will give us two weeks' notice. It takes me three months to train and replace that pilot.

The problem we're seeing is that the pool of those pilots to replace the experienced pilots is drying up. The barrel is almost empty. I don't know how we're going to find a way to replace those pilots going forward. If we're going to be missing 58,000 professionals in the next five years, then I don't know where they're going to come from. I really don't have any solution.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you for that.

My next question is for Ms. Tiessen.

You spoke about wages and compensation and employers perhaps not offering the work experience they should be offering to their employees. Perhaps this might help Mr. Roberts as well. Maybe together, with the unions and the employers.... There are some work things that need to be done together.

Ms. Tiessen, besides enhanced wages and compensation, what other things can be done to attract and retain workers? What kind of collaborative work has your union membership done with employers to address the labour shortages? Are you working collaboratively? Are you exchanging ideas?

• (1705)

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: That's a great question.

We are working collaboratively wherever we can. Ms. Dias would have very specific examples of exactly where we're working collaboratively with employers to fill positions.

A few that come to mind, for me, would be some of the baggage handlers and other groups we've worked with to make sure we're raising wages for workers. I'm specifically thinking about raising wages, working conditions and fair scheduling practices. Also, when new technology is being implemented, how do we make sure workers are consulted ahead of time? Also, when they are working with new technology, are employers still treating workers like humans, like people who are valuable to the business? We have agreements across all sectors, not just in aviation, where we specifically say that, when new technology is introduced, the union has to be consulted and there is a committee of workers who work with employers to implement that kind of technology.

If there are other examples, we'll get them together for you and send them off.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, through you, a number of our witnesses here this afternoon touched on the issue of immigration. On April 4, 2022, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announced new measures to address Canada's labour shortages. These measures included a temporary policy that would allow recent international graduates with expiring temporary status to stay in Canada longer.

I'm wondering if our witnesses feel the extension of a temporary policy allowing visitors to the country to apply for a work permit would be a solution. If not, what kind of changes to our immigration policies do they see or recommend, in order to help fill that gap?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds for your response.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: First of all, on the recognition of foreign credentials, this was discussed by, I believe, Mr. McKenna and Mr. Donald.

They may not be exactly the same as Canadian requirements through Transport Canada, but some form of more efficient recognition of foreign credentials would be helpful to ensure a stable supply of new immigrants.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Morrison.

Thank you, Ms. Koutrakis.

We have Mr. Strahl next.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Thank you.

I will follow up on that line of questioning.

The minister can announce that he's willing to allow people to come into the country or stay in the country. Mr. Donald, did I hear you correctly when you said that 99% of foreign AMEs are denied by Transport Canada when they apply to have their credentials recognized? Did I hear that number correctly?

Mr. Robert Donald: You did. That was in a report published about two years ago by CAMAQ, which is the Quebec sector council for the aerospace industry.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Having people come in but not letting them work in the sector is obviously not going to provide much of a solution.

I was interested to note, in comparing that testimony of yours.... Ninety-nine per cent of foreign-trained AMEs are rejected. Mr. Roberts referenced an EB-2 program in the United States that takes anyone and everyone who has been trained up to a certain level with no questions asked, and will bring them into the U.S. to work as pilots.

What can be done? Obviously, Transport Canada is the barrier in getting AMEs recognized. What needs to change there? How can we work on equivalencies among similarly skilled nations, if we can call it that? We do it in other sectors.

Have you heard whether Transport Canada even sees this as a problem? Are they working with the U.S. FAA? The U.K. and EU were referenced. What are we doing to ensure that we recognize equivalencies and that this problem of essentially banning everyone—99%—from working gets solved?

That question is for Mr. Donald.

Is there a solution there? Is Transport Canada working to improve this, or, from your perspective, are they satisfied with that 1% acceptance rate?

• (1710)

Mr. Robert Donald: I believe they think that the gaps in education can be filled more easily than they can. I don't believe they understand completely that you cannot take a short course on the missing academic credential. It does not exist, so I don't believe they're working on a solution to that problem.

I think the solution is moving to a competency-based system as opposed to simply comparing what was studied in Germany or India against what Transport Canada requires.

Mr. Mark Strahl: You've presented very compelling testimony in that regard.

I want to go quickly to Mr. McKenna.

This seems to be a theme we're hearing. We certainly saw it with the passport fiasco. We don't have enough people working back at their offices.

You said that it's taking three to four times longer to get things done than it used to, and you mentioned that is idling equipment. Can you give some examples? I know you listed a number of things for which it is now taking three or four times longer. It used to be 90 days. Three or four times longer than 90 days is now a year.

How is that impacting people staying in the industry? We're talking about a labour shortage. If it takes a year to get recertified or a year to get back to work, what impact does that have on the workforce?

Mr. John McKenna: As was mentioned with the visa applications, it's good to change a policy to allow immigration. Then again, the administration of that policy is something altogether different. You have a huge backlog of people waiting for processing, and it's not happening. Policy is great, but you have to be able to do it.

We have members who have purchased planes and can't fly them because they have not been approved or included in the operating certificate, so they're sitting on the ground until that's done, and that could be months. This is very valuable equipment that's just sitting there.

There are numerous examples that carriers can give you to that effect, so it's a question of delays. It's not a question of policy in many cases, except for, as Rob Donald referred to, certain regulations that really need to be updated. For those that have been, there are no boots in place to carry it out.

The Chair: Please give a 10-second response.

Mr. John McKenna: They've updated their regulations to make them more current and with modern technology.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Strahl.

Next we have Mr. Badawey.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming out today and giving us their testimony. As many if not all of you know, this study has been very in depth, and we've heard a great deal of testimony from many of the witnesses that we expect would be contained within the final report and would therefore be responded to by the minister and the department.

Where I want to go with this is to give each one of you an opportunity to give some testimony that would find its way into the final report, and again, be responded to by the minister.

I'm going to start with Mr. Roberts.

I want to give you the stage to provide us with anything that you haven't yet, and again, that you would like to see as part of the final report.

Mr. Julian Roberts: Thank you.

One thing that could help me fairly quickly would be to re-evaluate the flight and duty requirements for 703 and 704 operators and, equally, reviewing this new regulation for regional operators like Pascan Aviation.

A one-size-fits-all approach does not work for regional aviation today. The rules were put in place for companies like Air Canada and WestJet, and they are impacting us significantly. If that's something we could look at, that would be of greatest benefit to our company and possibly to many other smaller airlines in Canada.

• (1715)

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Robert.

Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Jeff Morrison: I'll mention one thing.

I would really encourage the committee to look at the new program that was introduced by the British government today, Generation Aviation. They're facing the exact same problem as Canada. They're tackling it with a federal program that works, by the way, with airlines and other employers to promote careers, to actually partner and to get skills training into the schools and make a career in aviation appealing to young people there.

I'd encourage you to look at the program. Let's look at potentially duplicating it here in Canada.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Morrison.

Ms. Tiessen.

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: I have three things.

One is that, when it comes to training, we need to make sure we're not just relying on experienced workers. An experienced worker doesn't become experienced without training and experience. We need to make sure we're moving with the whole pipeline. That includes making sure there are enough seats in schools so that people can get the training that they need.

Another one is thinking about the living wage piece. Airports are non-profit institutions that are mandated to contribute to community economic development. Paying people fairly would be one piece of the puzzle to building the community around the airport.

The final one—and with regard to the question posed to me earlier—is to always work collaboratively. We work collaboratively with our employers in all sorts of different situations. We'd be happy to make sure we're implementing the right solutions to retain workers who are hired and to attract the workers who need to be hired.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Ms. Tiessen.

Mr. Girard.

Mr. Ben Girard: Very quickly, there are three items that come to mind.

The first one is that we need to modernize how we train and license people, especially our air traffic controller group. We need to move to competency-based licensing as opposed to geographic licensing. It's something that we need to work on with Transport Canada.

The second one has been identified by others and affects us as well. Any help that we can get to bring in skilled foreign hires that require labour-intensive labour market impact assessment right now would be very beneficial for us. We've benefited from hiring somebody from Ukraine, actually, with the LMIA that the government gave us. Anytime we can bring in somebody with experience as opposed to somebody right off the street would help.

Finally, and a little more broadly, we'd be interested in discussing with the government its making an investment in the planned modernization of our training programs and supportive technology for them.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Girard.

Mr. McKenna.

Mr. John McKenna: I also have three things.

The first is to make sure that regulations reflect the reality that we live in, which is not the case right now.

Second, in the last 10 years, demand for our services has grown by about 5% a year, but Transport Canada's safety budget has been consistently cut. Actually, over the 1990s, it was cut by 25%, making it basically impossible for them to carry out their mandate, so the efficiency has dropped to historic lows.

Finally, we've been proposing for years that the government offer a loan guarantee program to help people access funds to train commercially. This is, basically, very low risk for the government, and a few hundred thousand dollars would help train many, many, pilots.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. McKenna.

Mr. Donald.

Mr. Robert Donald: Ms. Tiessen referred to having enough seats in schools to train people. Every college in Canada teaching aviation maintenance engineering programs has a wait-list, some up to two years—the only exception is ÉNA out of Quebec—yet they're not producing enough graduates. Nobody's going to wait two years to get into a program. They'll go into construction or other industries. That's a huge issue.

I don't believe it's realistic to believe that provincial governments will fund the massive investment needed in bricks and mortar institutions to bring that capacity up to what we need, although CCAAT just got a grant to increase its capacity, but it admits that's unusual. Therefore, we need new ways to train. We need tools for industry to train its own people off the street who don't have prior experience and who don't go through college programs.

I'll stop there.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Donald.

Mr. Bagg, I'm going to try to get to Mr. Gagnon in 30 seconds, so if you could make these comments quickly, that would be great.

• (1720)

Mr. Jonathan Bagg (Director, Stakeholder and Industry Relations, Nav Canada): That was covered by Mr. Girard previously.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you.

Mr. Gagnon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yani Gagnon (Executive Vice-President and Co-owner, Pascan Aviation Inc.): Thank you.

I don't want to be a wet blanket, but I think people don't realize how critical the situation is. It was urgent before the pandemic and it has become critical.

In North America alone, there will be a shortage of 65,000 pilots over the next 10 years. That means hiring and training 20 pilots a day. It's going to be a very difficult situation and something needs to be done.

For small carriers like Pascan Aviation, the situation is exacerbated because the large carriers are draining our pool of pilots. This is not just a North American phenomenon; it's a global phenomenon. We are competing with the entire planet.

My colleague Mr. Roberts talked about the possibility of changing the regulations that deal with the flight duty period. I think there are other things that can be done, particularly in relation to the retirement age in the major airlines.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gagnon. Unfortunately, time is up.

We will now turn the floor over to Mr. Barsalou-Duval for two and a half minutes.

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

We have heard Mr. Roberts and Mr. Gagnon talk about their concern that the pilot shortage will worsen in transportation, particularly with the regional carriers, which are on the front lines. There is a risk that the major airlines will dip into these carriers to get better qualified pilots.

It was also explained to us that a pilot with a solo pilot's licence, who comes out of a flight school, is still not qualified to fly a commercial aircraft. For a pilot who has just obtained his licence, there is a long way to go between flying a Cessna and a passenger aircraft.

Could solutions be put in place to help pilots move from this stage to the next stages?

Mr. McKenna, I didn't hear you on that question. I don't know if you have any thoughts on that. If not, it would be interesting to hear from Mr. Roberts or Mr. Gagnon in that regard.

Mr. John McKenna: Actually, I always prefer to hear from carriers. So I'd love to hear what they have to say about it.

Mr. Julian Roberts: Today, a pilot coming out of school is going to fly firefighting planes or small planes. He can also be a flight instructor. However, there is so much pressure on pilots, there is less and less access to these small companies. So, in the future, fewer and fewer young pilots will be able to do the number of flying hours needed to get into the big airlines.

As for solutions, we've been talking about them for years. It's not simple. I don't think there's a quick fix that can be put in place to address this. As for reducing the number of hours required to be allowed to fly or to obtain an airline transport pilot licence, or ATPL, I don't think that's a solution either. We need to have access to pilots who can do their hours in small companies. Unfortunately, there are fewer and fewer small companies that allow young pilots to gain experience.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Gagnon, you were interrupted earlier in your answer about possible solutions. I will give you the opportunity to conclude your remarks.

Mr. Yani Gagnon: I was going to mention the retirement age. For large carriers, the retirement age is 65. I think that could be reviewed.

There is also the whole question of funding. As my colleague was saying, \$100,000 to obtain a commercial licence is unimagineable for a young person.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gagnon.

[*English*]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to return to this issue of contract flipping and the impact it has on employees in the air transport sector.

I'm looking at a government press release from 2018. This was when Patty Hajdu was the employment minister. The release says:

Finally, the Minister will be recommending a regulation extending the protection of remuneration levels to workers covered by a collective agreement at airports and airlines following contract retendering. The practices of contract retendering or "contract-flipping" are serious issues at some Canadian airports and we are taking action. We will work with stakeholders during the regulatory process to ensure we get this right.

Ms. Tiessen, I'm curious. Did the government ever bring this regulation forward, and if they did, why does the problem associated with contract flipping still persist at our airports?

• (1725)

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: We've been advocating to end the worst effects of contract flipping at airports for a really long time. We made three recommendations. Two of the three recommendations have been implemented. They are slightly watered down, but they were implemented.

It's the third one that still needs to change. Now, a worker who is rehired will be rehired at the wage they had before with the previous contracting company. However, they're not guaranteed to keep their job, and they don't keep all of the other protections or benefits that were negotiated or earned, including vacation pay, potentially scheduling and those sorts of things.

We asked for three changes to be made. Two of them have been made, and the one to implement full successor rights is the one that's left. That's the confusion there.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: On that point, I'm curious. In your conversations with the government, have they told you why they did

not act on that third point? It seems like a fairly major one that you don't get to keep your job, necessarily, and that the other non-wage benefits aren't included in the regulation. Can you speak to what their rationale was there?

Ms. Kaylie Tiessen: I can't, but I can tell you that we're very hopeful that something like the change we're asking for could be made soon. All of the MPs may have seen our campaign on this topic. We'll probably be meeting with you—hopefully, in short order—to discuss this topic.

It's incredibly important to our members in the aviation sector and to those in other sectors as well who are impacted by contract flipping that the change is made so that we can protect the quality of people's work, particularly in a labour shortage environment where we need to be increasing the quality of work, not decreasing it.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Ms. Tiessen.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Strahl, you have five minutes.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you very much.

I thought we had some interesting recommendations during Mr. Badawey's intervention, but I did find it interesting to have one of the witnesses—I think it was Mr. Gagnon—say that we're competing against everyone else in the world. Certainly what we're hearing today is that the government isn't keeping up, and that we are actually letting down the industry by failing to recognize foreign credentials, failing to recognize people who want to come here to work in our industry. Instead, the government bureaucracy is set up and arrayed against those people.

I want to go to you, Mr. Morrison.

You mentioned in your testimony that there are obstacles to the recognition of foreign credentials and that the government needs to do more to promote airlines both domestically and around the world. We've heard about the Transport Canada obstacles. In your experience, are there other obstacles or other interests, perhaps, that are against recognizing those foreign credentials?

Mr. Jeff Morrison: First, just to reiterate, it's absolutely true that we are competing not just with other sectors within Canada but that this is an international competition. Countries around the world are all competing for the same pools of skilled labour.

I think Mr. Donald identified a couple of bizarre examples in some cases, yet they exist, of those bureaucratic requirements that Transport Canada has in place regarding training. It's not just that. As you know, I've talked a bit about the delays in pilot certification for health purposes and so forth.

I was recently with an airline employee who was giving me a tour of an airport. He couldn't actually get through parts of the airport because his employee certification had expired the day prior, and it was only good for one year. Quick examples like that show.... Why did he have to recertify every year for something that in other jurisdictions is good for five or 10 years?

It's little examples like that which add up and really put employees in a disadvantaged position.

Mr. Mark Strahl: We heard in previous testimony from Andrew Gibbons from WestJet, for example, about the instability in the industry caused by an “accordion” approach—I think he used that term—to regulation and what impact that has had. We've heard again and again how employees in the sector have left not just because of the mandates, but because of the insecurity of the industry as a whole.

I noted that when the COVID measures were lifted it was made very clear by the Minister of Health and by the Minister of Transport that this was simply a suspension, and that at any time the government could slam back into place those regulations that had punished the industry, depending on what they deem to be necessary at the moment.

Mr. Morrison, what impact does that have on your members and on the employees who have experienced a loss of income, a loss of security, over the last couple of years, whether they were subsidized by the government or not? What impact does that have by not having that security, in that these regulations, these restrictions, could be slammed back into place at any time without warning from the government?

• (1730)

Mr. Jeff Morrison: It's very difficult for everyone in the sector not having that certainty in terms of where we're going.

I'll give a very brief example. In the past several months prior to the pandemic restrictions being lifted, we saw a significant increase in the amount of harassment and abuse being faced by airline employees, particularly flight attendants, who were in the position of having to enforce the mask mandate on flights. It's one of the reasons we called so strenuously for that particular measure to be lifted. We wanted to protect the well-being of our workers in not having to enforce that particular measure.

If we had something like that reimposed, not only would we again be facing a significant increase in harassment and abuse of our employees, but it would destabilize a lot of the workforce, who frankly would not be certain whether they would have a job in six months or eight months down the road.

We very much hope that reimposition is not on the table for the travel and tourism sector, especially when we have evidence that, in fact, it did very little to nothing to curb community spread of COVID.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Do I have much time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I will generously give that back to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Strahl.

Next, and finally for today, we have Mr. Chahal.

You have five minutes.

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to everyone for providing testimony today.

I'll start off with Nav Canada and Mr. Girard.

I'd like to know a bit more on the shortages with the air traffic controllers. Are we seeing this around the world, and what are the impacts here in Canada?

Mr. Ben Girard: Wow, that's a loaded question. The world is a big place, sir.

In some jurisdictions, yes, and I would say probably in most with the people we're working with.... However, there are other countries that I would not have this data for.

I can speak from a knowledgeable place for Nav Canada. For air traffic controllers specifically, we're looking to hire about 150 people. I should say that we're short about 150 people, and there is attrition over the years that is going to add to that.

Air traffic controllers are obviously very important at Nav Canada. However, we have our flight service specialists who do about the same work, and we're short by about 50 of them.

We can have all of the air traffic controllers and flight specialists in the world, but if we don't have technologists to repair and install and maintain our equipment, then these people cannot do their jobs. In the next year, we're looking to hire about 187 of these people.

Mr. George Chahal: What percentage of air traffic controllers are successful in completing their training? You talked about the numbers there, but what is your success rate, and how can we improve things for the folks who aren't able to complete their training? What are the gaps?

Mr. Ben Girard: It depends. I can talk to you about success rates historically and it depends where you qualify. There are a number of different air traffic controllers, and they are not all created equal.

In the ACCs, we used to have a checkout rate, as we call it, of around 45%. In the towers, it was around 55%. I was talking about the flight service specialists. There is about a 75% success rate there, which was pre-COVID, in 2019.

As I said, we recalled a lot of the trainees, and we have a bit better success rate than we had pre-2019. We've done a bunch of different things, and making training a priority was one of them.

Obviously, we have our unionized employees as well, who are involved in the training and doing an excellent job in training and qualifying these people. There are a lot of different activities.

To answer your second question, I was talking about different areas where we can work with the government, with Transport Canada, to modernize our training and qualification model.

Right now, if you're a controller and you're qualified in the Vancouver tower and you want to train in Dorval tower, there is a lengthy training program. We retrain you. Even if you're a qualified air traffic controller, we retrain you on how to be a controller in Dorval. That's as opposed to recognizing, as part of the training program, that you're already qualified and have at least the basic qualifications to be a controller that you gained from another facility.

We have to modernize that training and qualification to be based more on competency, as opposed to geographic location. That is work that we need to carry on with Transport Canada. Any help that the committee can bring there would be most appreciated.

• (1735)

Mr. George Chahal: I want to go back to a comment you made. You talked about success rates of 45% and 55%. What are you doing to improve those success rates when you get those numbers higher, specifically on your training programs with your employees who are going through the program?

Mr. Ben Girard: There are a lot of different things we're doing. For example, one thing that we've done recently is we've established a group of senior managers and, on a monthly basis, we talk about every single trainee who has any difficulty.

One area where I think we've improved is that, at times, we would wait until there was a recommendation to cease training in order to take action. Now we get involved a lot earlier, and then we invest in helping the person in training as well as the person conducting the training. The team responsible for the training gets into coaching coaches and extra simulation runs into whatever the person needs earlier in the process.

I don't want to say that we've found the solution for everything, but, as I said, since we've started training again, we have seen a better success rate overall than we saw pre-COVID 2019.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Girard.

Thank you, Mr. Chahal.

On behalf of the committee members, I would like to thank all of our witnesses for giving us their time and expertise on this Halloween evening.

I wish a wonderful Halloween to those of you going out with your children.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

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