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SPEECH ON MOTION-465, AIRLINE PASSENGER BILL OF RIGHTS
APRIL 17, 2008

I want to compliment my colleague from Humber-St. Barbe-Baie Verte, because I think he presented his motion in a most precise, persuasive and, I might say, compelling fashion.

I note that in part of our discussion we highlighted some of the points by focusing on what happened in the beginning of March. However, I remind all colleagues who have made some very thorough and thoughtful presentations that the motion was actually presented before the events of the beginning of March which underscored the need for this motion.

I think that the motion has stimulated good debate. I want to focus on a couple of points, if I might, first, before I carry on.

This is a debate that has been long overdue. We have, from Canada's four major airports, at least 60 million passengers utilizing plane service every year. That is twice the population of Canada. So, as my colleague in his motion indicated this is not a service for the elite; it is for everybody. We have come to point where we need to address the specifics about good service. It is time, as my colleague from Windsor West said, that Canada get with the program.

The Europeans have gone through this kind of turmoil. They continue to go through turmoil, but they have recognized that what needs to be put in place is a rules-based system to which both the service provider and the client can point to for an appropriate level of service.

My colleague from Argenteuil-Papineau-Mirabel says more or less the same thing. He says what we need to do is point the finger at all of those who have a responsibility but the responsibility, first and foremost, rests with the regulator.

My colleague from Abbotsford pointed out that perhaps we might be moving a little too quickly on this, and perhaps unnecessarily so, because we have already passed Bill C-11 in this House after some thorough discussion in committee and that provides the bases for a bill of rights, that is, a series of services to be provided by the carrier to its clients whether they be passengers or material that needs to be transported. So, we are dealing with a system that is not only a transport system but it is a transportation system.

I dare say, if I might, that we can add that this is no longer just a service; it is in fact an experience with real live individuals. Roughly 60 million of them a year in Canada are engaged in just those four major airports.

Back to what my honourable colleague from Abbotsford indicated in Bill C-11. There is a clause, clause 27, that calls on the government to help put in place what we might refer to in this motion as a bill of rights, to work with the industry, to consult with all the stakeholders, and to come forward with a basic standard of service criteria to which everybody can point. The government has not acted on that, yet.

Furthermore, there is another clause in Bill C-11, and I know my colleague knows this for sure because he, along with me and the member for Windsor West and the member for Argenteuil-Papineau-Mirabel worked on this in committee, clause 64, that imposes on the cabinet an obligation to ensure that clause 27 is enacted. In other words, that those consultations take place and that the criteria, the regulatory framework, be put in place.

Not only has been clause 27 not been acted upon, clause 64 has virtually been ignored, and so, one should not be surprised that my colleague would present Motion No. 465 in order to address these issues.

It is important for us to get a handle on that relationship between carriers, for example, one of them, Air Canada, who last year reported operating revenues in excess of \$10.5 billion, and its vast clientele. There has to be a relationship where the clients, the passengers, can accede to a rules-based system that says this is what we contract to receive. I pointed out Air Canada perhaps unfairly. It is all carriers.

I point to Air Canada because my colleague from Windsor West and I both were part of the panel. I see that he pointed to it again today, that in response to the activities to the events of last March, instead of looking at how to enact some of these rules voluntarily, Air Canada came forward with a package that said “pay \$25 or \$35 and you can enhance your service”.

Now we are talking about increasing prices for a level of service that everyone expected would be part of the ticket price initially. I do not know whether that was good public relations or not. The people who we deal with at Air Canada are always wonderful people, but certainly the company in this instance made an error.

However, this motion is not in response to that error. It is in response to a genuine need, a get with the program need for Canada to join such other countries like those in the EU and the United States in coming forward with a bill of rights that says that passengers are entitled to this kind of service.

It cannot simply be case of *caveat emptor*. It has to be a case where there is a reciprocal obligation implied, understood and accepted by the carrier that receives the money as its part of the contract.

My colleague from Argenteuil-Papineau-Mirabel says we should include as well all the other service providers. He points to the fact that the Air Transport Association of Canada says it accepts this concept in principle. It does accept it, but we should bring into the equation all those other associations, many of which operate thanks to the regulator’s authority, for example, Transport Canada, and that is fine.

However, my colleague’s motion is very specific about what should be included. It does not necessarily point to what CBSA and CATSA and what anyone else might do. They have their responsibilities under a different set of regulations and they are held accountable for them. They should be held accountable for the service that they must provide not only to the airport authorities or to the carriers but to the passengers as well.

The most important thing is for this House to be seized with the thrust of the motion. The thrust of the motion says there are already models for us to follow. People have already gone to court to ensure that some of these be enacted, witness the example in the United States that my colleague so rightly pointed out.

However, there are also examples in Europe and 27 European countries are getting together and accepting it. All 27 countries and jurisdictions are in a position to adopt a bill of rights that addresses specific items. My colleague from Abbotsford said yes, but there are three specific areas. Three specific areas no doubt, but there are an addition 12 others that indicate the kinds of elements that must be addressed in this bill of rights.

We have models. We have American models and we have European models. There is no reason why we cannot adopt both. As the mover says, if everyone else can provide that service and constrain our carriers to provide that service when they fly over foreign airspace, why can those same carriers not be constrained, compelled and encouraged to provide a bill of rights for those same passengers over Canadian airspace?

That is the essence of this motion. Let Canadian passengers be treated on a par with Canadian passengers flying other carriers in other jurisdictions. We should offer no less and I encourage this House to adopt my colleague's motion.