



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

**THE HON. JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.  
SPEECH ON BILL C-310, AN ACT TO PROVIDE CERTAIN  
RIGHTS TO AIR PASSENGERS  
SECOND READING  
THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2009**

Mr. Speaker, I was almost encouraged by what I heard the parliamentary secretary say a moment ago. He talked about co-operation in this House and having governments reflect what the people actually want, especially when they have expressed it in this House.

Last June, not that long ago, 240 members of Parliament from all parties stood in their places and unanimously supported a motion by my colleague from Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, who said that what we need to do is respond to the needs of Canadians when they are consumers of a service that we in Canada have come to take for granted as part of the lifestyle and the standard of living that is demanded by a nation of our size in our part of the hemisphere.

What would a responsible government do when the unanimous voice of the people is expressed in a bill that is reflected in my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona today?

One would expect results immediately.

The parliamentary secretary speaks of all those indications, those motions, those brochures. In fact, some of the initiatives of his government resulted in a paper going forward as a recommendation to the airline industry in September.

That was in September. What did the people in the airline industry do? Well, in September they heard voices of elections, so they said, “Let us wait”. They waited and they waited. The member for Elmwood—Transcona can hardly be blamed for the lack of action on the part of the government.

We could be in an entirely different place if the government had taken the initiative given to it by the authority of a unanimous vote in the House and had said that this was what the public wanted.

There were not penalties of the nature that our hon. colleague calls for in Bill C-310. Now we are talking about making a comparison with what happens in the United States, what happens in the

EU, and what the economic and financial implications are for individual companies, collective organizations, airport authorities and tourist organizations.

We would not have to be in that kind of discussion if the government had just done what the parliamentary secretary said it would do.

Is it any wonder that members of Parliament, whether longstanding members of Parliament like my colleague from Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte or new members of Parliament like my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona, fill in the need because the Canadian public wants action?

What do we do? We agree in principle with the implied contractual arrangement that is inherent in this legislation. I say the “implied contractual arrangement” because someone who is providing a service wants a contented client, and that client wants a service for which he or she pays. Otherwise, there are consequences. Either there is delivery of service or there is an alternative.

The last motion in this House talked about that contractual framework. Our colleague, newly elected in October, said that we would like to put something else into this contractual arrangement. Nobody is doing anything on it. If it comes across now as being tough on the airlines or tough on the industry, it is because people are looking for an arbiter.

Who is that arbiter? The arbiters are right here. Members of Parliament from the other side are looking for the authority we had already given them in the last Parliament, but the last minister of transport chose not to act.

The current Minister of Transport may choose to act. A private member's bill is here before him. It has, I think, the same kind of support, unless a vote proves otherwise, that was shown for the last motion that was before this House.

A responsible and accountable minister would say that these ideas come not just from opposition members, but from a unanimous expression of the public view in the House of Commons of Canada.

Do we expect members of Parliament to do anything less than transform the frustration of citizens into a positive suggestion for change? Surely we want all stakeholders, all providers of that service to be at the table and work with members of Parliament, who are not the enemy. They are the carriers of the voice that cries for a service and a contractual arrangement that must be honoured by both parties.

Is the European experience the one to follow? Is the American experience the one to follow? Is it one that would nurture the business that would stimulate the Canadian economy and at the same time ensure we enjoy a level of service that everyone should take for granted?

We have demonstrated as consumers a willingness to pay. Perhaps we pay too much. For that willingness to pay, even the willingness to pay more than others, we expect a level of service commensurable, but no. We expect perhaps at least what everybody else gets for less, and I have become an editorialist when I say that.

The only editorializing that a member of Parliament should do in this place is to recall for all members that a unanimous expression of the House asked the airline industry, the business of travel, to respect what everyone in the country had already said was desired, was needed, and in fact should have been done.

Whom shall we blame for this lack of obligation? We cannot blame it on the weather. That is a hot topic today because the weather is blamed for everything. We have to blame it on the government.

The minister has a responsibility to the House and to everybody in Canada to come forward with regulations that would reflect the will of the House. He has a responsibility to put in place a system that would supervise the implementation of those regulations. He has a responsibility to put in place a system that would follow whether any breach of that relationship was modified.

Some would say that perhaps we are building a bureaucracy unnecessarily so, and I would agree. There has been a rupture of the goodwill that was expressed by a unanimous vote in the House. The industry saw that and the government realized it needed to have a working relationship. That goodwill was broken.

When that goodwill was broken, people came forward with compulsion. If people will not work, we will make them work. If they do not like the conditions, we have to come up with the reasons. Who needs that? A good business operation does not need that. A good business model that wants to be successful does not need that.

We used to have a quasi-monopolistic approach to the way the airline business was conducted. We have opened it up, and some people would say that we should not have done that. We have opened up the opportunity to engage in a contractual agreement freely and that the recourse to government, when it comes with a unanimous view of the entire House, is that partners to that contractual arrangement depart from consensus at their own peril.

What the member for Elmwood—Transcona, through Bill C-310, is telling the minister is that he should start fulfilling his obligations to the public. He should start being responsible and demonstrate the accountability about which he so frequently boasts. He should get busy because the House has already given him one chance.