

Ottawa again delays consultations on full disclosure of airline fares

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Transport Minister John Baird has reneged for a second time on a commitment to hold public consultations to move forward on a long-delayed plan to force airlines to advertise the full price of airfares.

Legislation to update key sections of the Canada Transportation Act -- including a requirement that airlines include all the extra fees, surcharges and taxes in airfare ads -- became law in June 2007 with the support of all political parties.

But a last-minute amendment in the Senate meant this provision would be delayed until the government held consultations with provinces and the industry to sort out how to move forward without harming domestic airlines.

The new advertising rules were then supposed to come into effect on a date set by the federal cabinet. After three years, consultations haven't happened, despite a government promise last December to hold parliamentary hearings in the current session to get the ball rolling.

Baird made this commitment to dispatch his parliamentary secretary, Brian Jean, to revive the three-year old law as an agenda item for the House of Commons transport committee after reneging on a similar pledge last June.

This session is winding down within days, and the transport critics for the Liberals and New Democrats say Jean hasn't pushed for committee consultations to sort out how the all-in-one airfare advertising rules can roll out in Canada.

"I don't think the government has any commitment at all to doing this.

"It's not following through on the promise that it made. You can throw your hands up in the air and say these people have no interest in consumer protection," Liberal MP Joe Volpe said Monday.

"They must be concerned with the reaction from the airline industry. They've certainly not delayed doing this because they're concerned about the consumer, so the government is going to be put in an embarrassing position here of not supporting what it put forward as a solution," added Dennis Bevington of the NDP.

James Kusie, a spokesman for Baird, on Monday said the opposition is wrong to imply all-in-airfare advertising is dead.

"Currently the minister is concentrating on dealing with other pressing matters such as aviation security and keeping Canadians who travel by air, safe.

"All-in-one airfare advertising remains a part of the government's agenda and will be brought forward for further discussion sometime in the future," said Kusie, pointing out Jean provided an opportunity for the transport committee to discuss the matter under the auspices of a sweeping private member's bill to bring in an airline passenger bill of rights.

MPs on the transport committee already studied all-in-one airfare advertising over a three-month period in 2006 and voted to make full price advertising for airline tickets the law in Canada.

The Commons unanimously accepted their recommendation in February 2007, and sent the bill to the Senate.

Following testimony by Canada's major airlines, senators added a clause to delay the coming into force of this provision to allow the government to further consult with provinces and carriers.

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