

[Translation]

AIRLINES

QUEBECAIR—GOVERNMENT POLICY

Hon. Martial Asselin: Honourable senators, my question is directed to the Leader of the Government.

Last week, the Minister of Transport revealed a plan apparently intended to rescue Quebecair by creating another company called Quebecair 2, which would be owned jointly by Air Canada and the Government of Quebec, with both parties investing \$15 million.

It seems the minister said that the new company would not be responsible for debts contracted by the old Quebecair company. Have we understood correctly the decision of the federal Minister of Transport, namely, that the former company's debts would not be honoured by the new company, Quebecair 2?

I also would like to know to what extent the Minister of Transport has guaranteed job security for Quebecair employees.

[English]

Hon. H. A. Olson (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, I have brought with me this evening a copy of the telex that was despatched to Mr. Michel Clair, the Quebec Minister of Transport, by the Honourable Jean-Luc Pepin, the federal Minister of Transport. It is in both English and French. It might be useful if I were to table these documents, which are about seven or eight pages in length. I believe they will answer completely many questions that my honourable friend might wish to ask. In any event, if he wishes more detail, after he has had an opportunity to read them, I will try to provide it or I will refer his question to the Minister of Transport.

If it is satisfactory to honourable senators, I will table these two documents.

[Translation]

Senator Asselin: I have no objection to the honourable minister tabling it. I agree to that—we are always most cooperative with government ministers.

Hon. Jacques Flynn (Leader of the Opposition): A bit too much!

[English]

Senator Asselin: We do agree that these documents can be tabled.

[Translation]

Apparently the main concern of Quebecair employees is that the minister's statement did not guarantee their job security, and we are told that since Minister Pepin made his statement, those employees are most nervous. They wonder why the minister could not reassure them by stating that their jobs will be protected. Could the Leader of the Government inquire with the Minister of Transport and ask him to make this commitment?

● (2010)

[English]

Senator Olson: I shall do that, but I can read one small portion of the telex. It says:

Another major social and financial aspect of my proposal is concerned with the welfare of the employees of Quebecair. I propose that our two governments develop a plan to ensure that all employees of Quebecair at the time of the creation of Quebecair 2 are protected from the negative consequences that might result.

So I am sure that my honourable friend understands that it is already clear in the telex that an attempt will be made to work out this arrangement. Until such time as that has been done, there is no further reply that I can obtain from the Minister of Transport.

[Translation]

Senator Asselin: Could the government leader tell us whether the Quebec government, through its Minister of Transport (Mr. Clair), has approved the terms put forward by the federal Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin)? We have been informed that the Quebec Minister of Transport was to give his reply on behalf of the Quebec government this afternoon. Could the Government Leader enquire about such a reply and tell us about it?

[English]

Senator Olson: I am not aware of whether a positive or a negative reply has been received to the proposal, but I will try to find out.

Senator Asselin: Can the minister secure for us the reply of the Quebec Minister of Transport, Mr. Clair, and will he table it, if it is possible, in the Senate in the near future?

Senator Olson: If such a reply exists I will attempt to obtain it. Of course, the usual courtesy must be extended, namely, the federal Minister of Transport will ask the Quebec Minister of Transport whether he wishes his reply to be made public.

Hon. Fernand-E. Leblanc: Honourable senators, I have a supplementary question with regard to Quebecair. Keeping in mind that the Government of Quebec is a separatist government, does the minister really think that that government will be interested in joining in a partnership with the federal government?

Senator Olson: I am not sure that my opinion on this matter is particularly valid at this time.

Senator Flynn: I am sure it is not.

Hon. Royce Frith (Deputy Leader of the Government): I thought you would be sure of that.

Senator Olson: As I understand the question, I am being asked whether I think the Quebec government will take one position or another. I have to say that I have not had a sufficiently close liaison with them recently to form that opinion immediately.

Senator Frith: They can flip-flop with the best of them.