

In a speech before the Canadian Club of Winnipeg on March 11 of this year the executive vice-president and chief operating officer of Air Canada said as follows:

The bottom line consequence of American Airlines acquiring a significant influence over Canadian Airlines International, would be the inevitable end of the Canadian airline industry as we know it.

For our part, we would have little choice but to succumb to a parallel strategy.

In other words, Air Canada is warning us that if American Airlines buys a chunk of Canadian Airlines it will have no choice but to allow U.S. Air or a similar American company to buy a chunk of Air Canada. Once that happens we might as well kiss a national airline goodbye.

Mr. Greg Thompson (Carleton—Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, I think this is a timely and important debate, and I am pleased to take part in it.

I know members opposite have great concern about the report that came down yesterday. The commission of inquiry released a report yesterday into the tragedy at Dryden. It is one we are all concerned about.

I would like to step through some of the government's response to and position in that regard. First of all, it was an inquiry into a human tragedy. I do not think any of us dismissed that. It was very much a human tragedy.

I want to stress on behalf of the minister that Canada's aviation system is safe. Since 1981—and I think it is important that Canadian people know this—there has been a 35 per cent decrease in accidents. That is significant, because we have to assure Canadian people that the Canadian aviation industry is safe. That statistic in itself indicates that we do have a very high degree of safety in the industry.

Another point I think worth stressing is that the government did not wait for the commission to be created by somebody else. The government created it. It initiated that response. The inquiry is very much independent and is a very critical approach to air safety and the aviation industry.

The first set of recommendations go back to 1989. Knowing that, I think most of us would agree that the department has been responsive and has been responsible to the industry.

Let us go through what has been suggested in the findings. We will go through some of them point by point. It is referring to new audit procedures and is

telling us that the department is now inspecting air carriers more often. It started auditing almost immediately after a merger of the start-up and Transport Canada inspectors are assigned to that operation right now. It has also stiffened regulations in many areas.

Again, it did not take long. In November 1990 Transport implemented what it called the clean wing concept in the form of new regulations prohibiting take-offs when there is any contamination whatsoever adhering to the lifting surfaces of an aircraft. It is important to consider that because we know what happened at Dryden and what happened last week in New York at La Guardia. Because of icing problems there was another tragedy in the U.S. That is the type of thing the department is very concerned with and has taken steps as early as 1990 to eliminate. The department has been working with industry on a number of regulations for that new type of safety which I think we all demand.

One point brought out was on the question of inspectors. The question was whether we had enough inspectors at the time and whether we have enough now. I think those are very legitimate questions because the underlying importance is safety. There is a very strong link between the number of inspectors and the safety of our airlines as a whole.

It is important to note that since 1985-86 there has been an increase of 100 inspectors. The most important thing to remember in this whole exercise is that more will be added as we go on. Most of us would like to see more of them on the job now, but it is important to recognize that we need more, that we should have more and that there will be more. However, that number has increased since 1985-86.

Procedures have been streamlined for getting safety audits done systematically and quickly. Even in the internal procedures within the department there has been some very significant changes in recent years. In addition, a new aeronautics code is being developed and will give more authority to aviation inspectors.

The question that comes to mind is: what is enough? Is enough ever enough when it comes to safety in the air? I do not know how much we can do or how far we can go to ensure the highest degree of safety. The answer to the question is probably that enough is never enough. It is constant. We continually have to put resources into the safety of the aviation industry. I do not think Canadian taxpayers are going to object to that.