

*Adjournment Debate*

of flights, many of those cities no longer have jet service so one can debate whether the quality of air service to those regions is getting better.

Therefore, the whole question of allowing cabotage for American carriers puts in jeopardy an industry that is already going through some difficult times.

I hope the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport will give his assurance on behalf of the minister and the government that when the minister talks about protecting the viability of the Canadian industry, we want to know what that means.

We believe that protecting the Canadian viability of our industry means being prepared to say and to have the courage to say to the Americans, no, to cabotage.

We want to improve our air treaty. We want to improve the access points between Canadian and American cities. We want to continue to do business with each other. That is fine. But if it is going to mean cabotage, then it means we are not interested and we are going to walk away from the table, not as sore losers, but in a very pro-Canadian industry way that says: "Our bottom line is the integrity and the independence of our own system. Cabotage would infringe on that, and therefore, we would rather make no deal than make a bad deal."

I hope the parliamentary secretary will give the House this assurance because it is certainly anticipated in the Canadian industry that if we enter negotiations and we are weak on cabotage, I think we are going to come out in a worse situation that we were in when we went in.

**Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I find it most unfortunate that my hon. friend opposite from York West would take this kind of approach to negotiations.

We were both members of the Special Committee on the Canada-U.S. Air Transport Services. We both participated in the preparation of the unanimous report of that committee. Indeed, the report of the special committee gave an endorsement to an early negotiation of a new liberalized air agreement.

I would have thought that my hon. friend would have left it at that, but he is insisting that we turn around put very strict restrictions on various things before the negotiations even commence.

The Minister of Transport has repeatedly said that he is committed to getting the best deal possible for Canada in the interest of the travelling public, communities that are served, airports, businesses, the airline industry and its workers.

The hon. member will also know that while he has been rehashing his arguments about cabotage over and over, the Minister of Transport has been meeting with, among others, the airline presidents of our two major carriers.

The meeting of Claude Taylor of Air Canada and Rhys Eyton of Canadian Airlines was part of the continuing consultations to ensure that the minister and the Canadian negotiating team have a full understanding of the concerns of the airlines, Canadian consumers, communities and business and tourism interests before entering into formal negotiations.

The airlines understand that we need a new agreement. Certainly the communities we hear from on our travels want a new agreement. Indeed, some presenters were quite aggressive in their demands for a new agreement.

The Minister of Transport has been very clear, whether in Washington, Ottawa, Edmonton or Toronto, that he is not prepared to sign a deal that does not ensure the continued viability of the Canadian airline industry.

We know these will not be easy negotiations. The special committee acknowledged that as well, when it refrained from "tying the negotiators hands", to quote from the report. Cabotage is just another market entry tool, as are gates and slots, et cetera.

I am sure that my hon. friend has not forgotten that the airlines will be at the table. I certainly do not expect them to sit passively on the sidelines.

We on this side of the House firmly believe, contrary to the apparent position of my hon. friend opposite, that through continued consultations, hard work and tough bargaining, an agreement can be reached that responds to the needs of both consumers and the aviation industry in Canada.