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Tuesday, March 8, 2016

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

Opposition Motion—Air Transportation

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House and support the motion that was put forward by my colleague from Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek. I will be sharing my time today with the member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Everyone recognizes that the Billy Bishop city airport is a major economic driver for the greater Toronto area. There are significant opportunities that can still be realized, and we should not lose this opportunity.

There are three pieces to this equation. The first piece is with respect to economics. The Billy Bishop airport's economic contribution to the Toronto area is significant. The airport is currently responsible for 6,500 jobs, over \$2 billion in economic output, and it also contributes \$71 million each year to taxes. If we look at how many jobs could be created and how much additional revenue could be realized for both the Canadian companies and Canadian taxpayers, that in itself is something to be looked at.

The Billy Bishop airport expansion opportunities would allow entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and provide a greater service to the customers who use the airport. It would also allow airline companies, such as Air Canada, Porter, or WestJet, to purchase additional aircraft and grow their businesses and their networks. This will support both Canadian manufacturers like Bombardier, and Canadian airline companies like the ones I just mentioned.

The second piece is around aircraft design and supply. The supplier of the aircraft would be the Bombardier C Series. The C Series aircraft is the quietest one in its class. It is exactly the kind of aircraft that a city centre airport like Billy Bishop needs.

If the motion passes—and I have heard that the motion will not pass—and the airport is allowed to expand, the C Series aircraft would be added to one of the airline fleets. It would not

only add significant economic benefits to the region, but would also assist in solving a significant problem that Bombardier faces with the recent announcement of the loss of 7,000 jobs.

Bombardier is currently looking for a bailout of approximately \$1 billion from the federal government. I am curious to hear if the government will support that. Also, the company presently has approximately \$9 billion of debt. Quebec has purchased a 49% interest share in the C Series program, and both Quebec and Ontario have asked the federal government to step in financially. They have asked the Liberal government to support Bombardier, to support the struggling aerospace sector, and to support the workers who will lose their jobs. The expansion of the Billy Bishop airport and the procurement of aircraft will go a long way in assisting Bombardier to deal with its current financial issues. This is not just a one-off, but part of a larger picture to assist Bombardier.

The third and last component that I want to speak to is with respect to process. An open and transparent process is what is required here. At a cost of \$4 million, the City of Toronto had ordered a full environmental assessment, an airport master plan, and a runway design plan. All three were 90% complete. They were under way, and the plans were ready for release.

The City of Toronto also had a list of 25 conditions to be addressed prior to any approval being given. These issues ranged from noise restrictions and mitigation, landing and take-off curfews, proper environmental assessments, and wildlife management plans. These are all important issues that need to be addressed for the community. However, the Liberal government has arbitrarily made a decision to restrict the expansion of the airport. This is most definitely a lost opportunity for economic development, job creation, and market support, for Bombardier and for the aerospace sector.

Bombardier has designed aircraft for all types of applications and is well suited for urban airports. The proposed expansion should go through an open and transparent process and should engage all stakeholders. This initiative should move forward and be given the time that it deserves.

I want to remind my fellow members that the Liberal government often talks about being a partner for municipalities and fighting for Canadian jobs. Well, here is a great opportunity for the government to step in to help a struggling Canadian company, and to listen, hear, and understand the needs of a municipality.

Both the Toronto City Council and the Toronto ports authority have a process in place for the potential approval of the expansion of the Billy Bishop airport, but the Liberal government has stepped in and decided to block the expansion and the process.

It is our duty as members of Parliament to support Canadians, job creation, and to try to meet the needs of communities. Therefore, I call upon my fellow members to support this motion, to support Bombardier, and to support the expansion of the Billy Bishop airport. I ask the government to reverse its decision and allow the process to continue.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, putting aside the fact that the City of Toronto never ordered an environmental assessment, nor would it ever pay for one; putting aside the fact that the port authority said it would not and could not meet most of the 25 stipulations put in place to even consider this issue; putting aside the fact that the City of Toronto had five opportunities to approve this application, including a deadline that it had to be done by July 3, 2013 or else the deal was off;

putting aside all of those factual realities not present in the speech that was just made, the member opposite raised the issue of Air Canada and WestJet having open access to this airport.

Have you ever met with Air Canada and WestJet to discuss the fact that they have completely limited access, that there is a near monopoly that has been granted to the operator of Porter Airlines? Have you discussed that WestJet and Air Canada have grave reservations about how Conservative appointees to the port authority configured this airport in a near monopoly setting, which is so restrictive that they are not allowed to compete with Porter Airlines with flights? In fact, the U.S. airline industry has refused to fly in and out of this airport because of the restrictive conditions put in place to benefit one airline over all others.

Are you aware of the fact that WestJet and Air Canada are silent on this issue and want nothing to do with this process?

The Deputy Speaker:

I would remind hon. members to direct their questions through the chair.

The hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts:

Mr. Speaker, the member raises an important question, because the other airlines have requested to have access as well.

I think it is important to look at an open process with open access, to ensure that the economic opportunities are realized. Through an open and transparent process, that would be a discussion that should be fully undertaken.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague about her reference to economic opportunities. Can she speak to the importance of the discussion around jobs, particularly in the aerospace industry, which we are talking about today? While I have heard from others that this is not on topic, I do not know what is more fundamental than the need to protect good jobs in our communities and to make sure that government policy is protecting those jobs.

Unfortunately, under the previous Conservative government, we saw thousands of manufacturing jobs, including in aerospace, bleed away across our country. Now we have a new Liberal government that is failing to do anything when it comes to living up to its obligations to Aveos workers, including in my home province of Manitoba, who have been negatively affected.

I think it is critical that we make a connection to the need for federal government leadership to support manufacturing jobs in our communities, in all sectors, and realize that government needs to be supportive of these industries as well.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts:

Mr. Speaker, I would agree with my colleague that it is important to work with different sectors and make sure that we are growing those sectors.

As a former mayor, I know it is very important to come together, especially in the aerospace industry, with the Cascadia Corridor, the expansion of aerospace supply chain jobs at the Abbotsford airport, in Richmond, in making sure that we work with all levels of government.

I think it is absolutely key and crucial, without a doubt, that we support our partners, ensure that there are good jobs, and grow the sector.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, just to set the record right, the Vancouver airport is not in New Westminster—Burnaby. It is in the city of Richmond. We see a lot of economic activity because of the former Conservative government's development in that airport.

Has my colleague learned or experienced growth in her communities because of the success of the Vancouver airport?

Ms. Dianne L. Watts:

Mr. Speaker, it is very important to really understand the growth of the sector, and I know that through the work south of the Fraser has done in my area with the Cascadia corridor that runs all the way through British Columbia and the United States. We have done significant work around growing that sector. The Vancouver airport has had significant expansions. Also, BCIT is there, the start-ups, the technology, all of that has expanded significantly.

For both my colleagues who have just asked questions, it is important that we support these industries and support the sectors in every way we can to ensure job growth.