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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Good morning to all. Welcome.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), we are resuming our study of Air Canada's Implementation of the Official Languages Act.

We are pleased to have with us this morning representatives of Air Canada, including Mrs. Chantal Dugas, General Manager, Linguistic Affairs and Diversity, Mr. Serge Corbeil, Director, Government Relations, Western Region, Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler, Vice President, Human Resources, and Mr. David Rheault, Senior Director, Government Affairs and Community Relations.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome.

We will give you the floor for about 10 minutes so that you can make your presentation, and then members of the committee will ask questions and express their comments.

Who will be making the presentation? Is it you, Mr. Rheault?

Mr. David Rheault (Senior Director, Government Affairs and Community Relations, Air Canada): Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will start.

On behalf of Air Canada, I thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee today.

[English]

We are pleased to be here today and to have the opportunity to speak to the committee on behalf of Air Canada.

[Translation]

We are here today to present to you the concrete measures that were taken by Air Canada in recent months to improve the delivery of bilingual services across its global network, as well as to reaffirm our commitment to Canadian bilingualism and to share our pride in this regard.

Today, I am joined by colleagues who all have an important role to play in Air Canada's implementation of its language policy.

Since our last appearance before the committee, we have met with a number of stakeholders, elected officials, members of francophone communities from across the country, representatives of the government and, of course, our employees, people who are all working to promote bilingualism.

We have also increased our efforts to improve the delivery of services.

We have prepared a short presentation today to give you an overview of our training programs, of our language tools and the efforts we are making to promote official languages at Air Canada.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler, Vice President, Human Resources and Labour Relations, who, as a member of Air Canada's senior management, is in charge of our official languages policy.

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler (Vice President, Human Resources, Air Canada): Thank you, my dear colleague.

Mr. Chair, thank you for the invitation.

[English]

Thank you for the opportunity for us to provide this update.

[Translation]

My presentation does not appear on a screen. I invite you all to follow my presentation on the hard copy, which is in front of you.

Let's go to page 2 to see the chart. As you can see, we have a complete linguistic services team. Let's start with me: I am the Vice-President, Human Resources and in charge of labour relations. I report directly to the CEO, Mr. Rovinescu. Below, you can see my team which is responsible for linguistic services and for the implementation of linguistic services. You can also see to the right that we have close ties with union committees on bilingualism. We work closely with them.

Now, let's move to page 3, in order to give you a little context and to relate to our last meeting. We are proud to be the national carrier, a leader in promoting bilingualism for all Canadian businesses. We have a legal obligation, but it is also our philosophy to offer the best services to the customers. Our obligations are therefore part of our policies and our programs.

Let's go to page 4. Our mission is to be a champion on a global scale. Our goal is to serve the travelling public in both official languages; to communicate with the general public in both official languages; to offer real opportunities to all of our employees in both official languages; and to ensure the engagement of our employees in each official language.

Let's go to page 5. It deals with our tools, both the existing ones and those that we have developed or improved since our last appearance. We have a linguistic policy, basically, to explain the why. We also have procedures to explain the how, the measures to be taken.

You can also see a few of our tools on page 6. You also have them in the folders in front of us and you can refer to them at your leisure. We have a brochure that explains everything, the why and the how. We distribute this brochure to new employees during all annual training, at all open houses, at every opportunity. We also have *Aerovocab*. It is a small dictionary available to our employees, and within easy reach. It is divided based on the operations, it contains terms for airports, terms for in-flight services, general air transport vocabulary and a small section on anglicisms to avoid, for example.

Let's go to page 7. You can see a small picture of the quick reference card that we created following our last appearance. We created this small laminated reminder that our agents at the airport can put in the pocket of their uniform. It contains short sentences that they often have to use during operations. There is also a phone number. If they are stuck, they can call colleagues who can help them and provide them with certain terms.

Let's go to page 8 and let me tell you a little about language training. You will notice that there is a menu of courses we offer. These are advanced courses for our employees who are already bilingual, but who want to improve their skills. They can take these courses as they see fit. You will see that, from 2015 to 2016, we provided 4,000 more hours to our employees. This means that our employees have had 4,000 additional hours to develop their language skills.

Let's now go to page 9. I want to talk to you about our awareness module. This video is on our portal. So all our employees have access to this video. Since we last appeared in the fall, we conducted an extensive campaign to make a larger number of our employees aware that this video is available. We are very proud to say that, in the fall, 4,000 more employees took this training.

•(1110)

On page 10, you see the percentage of all employees of the company who have completed this module. For airport baggage agents, the percentage is 95%. For airport agents, it is at 97%, and almost 90% of our flight attendants have completed this awareness module.

Page 11 is about communications. We have also increased our efforts in this area. Indeed, it is well known that, despite everything that we do, it is sometimes difficult to reach our employees because 85% of them are not office employees. It is not always easy for them to have access to our messages. We know that we must repeat them very often. What you see before you—also in your folders—is an example. This is our magazine *Horizon*, a monthly magazine that we distribute to all our employees, either online or in hard copy. In the fall, there was an article that spoke specifically of our linguistic obligations. We published it to ensure that our employees are aware of them.

Let's go to page 12. I wanted to talk a little about our partnership efforts. We also renewed our partnerships within communities to

increase our pool of bilingual candidates. For example, we had booths at Seneca College in Toronto, at the Université de Saint-Boniface and we participated in the bilingual jobs exploration day in Halifax in November.

Let's go to page 13. I also wanted to point out that we are proud sponsors of certain events that encourage bilingualism, such as the Rendez-vous de la Francophonie, for example. Here you can see several other examples.

On page 14, there are more examples that you can look at at your leisure.

Let's go to page 15. I would like to share some numbers with you. You will see that more than 50% of our employees across the country who are in contact with the public are bilingual. The majority of people we hire throughout the country are also bilingual. There is only one exception, that of aboriginal people. Diversity and the hiring of Aboriginal people are important to us. So there are cases where we are hiring English-speaking Aboriginal persons who speak an Aboriginal language, but who do not necessarily speak French or another language used during our many routes. However, we believe that this is a worthwhile exception.

Let's go to page 16. I'd like to show you the progression in the number of bilingual employees in our operations from 2010 to today. You will see that rates have increased by 50% to 80%, depending on the type of operation.

On page 17, you can see the progression in the number of bilingual employees between 2010 and 2017. Once again, the data is distributed by region or airport in our case. Of course, in Montreal, we remain committed to 100%.

Let's go to page 18. I wanted to show you briefly that our linguistic obligations are part of our collective agreements, as they should be. Here you see an excerpt from the collective agreement with our airport agents.

On page 19, you see an excerpt from the collective agreement with our flight attendants. Please understand that it is important to have the support of unions in an industry where seniority prevails.

Let's go to page 20. I wanted to share with you a few more creative measures we put in place to promote bilingualism this past summer and fall, since we last met. We have created a network of ambassadors. They are champions in the field, passionate people who act as ambassadors for our programs. They help us communicate our obligations and our programs. They also conduct informal audits in the field from time to time.

On page 21, there are other creative methods. This is already part of our culture, a culture of cooperation and encouragement. We have incentive programs that are dedicated to the recognition of bilingualism. For example, we held an internal competition in the fall and early winter to encourage our employees to recognize their peers who are making an effort in terms of bilingualism.

•(1115)

I will conclude by saying that Air Canada is proud to be the most bilingual company in Canada. There is no doubt that we have obligations and we take them very seriously.

Since our appearance in June, we have really doubled our efforts to mobilize, to recognize our employees, to communicate and to recruit. We have developed new tools, for example reference cards. We have improved our tools, which you can view in the folder that we have provided.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation, madam.

We immediately begin the round of questions with you, Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Hello.

Thank you for being here and for having given us these explanations.

On page 15 of the document that you have distributed, there are numbers on bilingual staff that I find a bit startling. In the table "Employees who deal with the public (March 3, 2017)", the number under the heading "Service at airports" is 36.46%. I find this percentage quite low. What is meant by "Service at airports"? Is it people who are in frequent contact with customers? If that is the case, in my view, 36.46% in 2017 is unacceptable.

For "Call Centres", it is 65%, and for "In-flight Service", it is 49%. 36.46% for service at airports seems low. Could you explain those numbers in more detail, please. I would like to better understand them.

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: Thank you.

They are indeed employees who are in contact with customers. I would like to tell you that it is a process of continuous improvement. We are doing everything we can to improve these numbers. As you have seen, from 2010 to 2016, the numbers have improved remarkably.

We are certainly continuing to work to improve the figure of 36%. I stress that it is still far more than the national average. This figure is for all our airports everywhere in Canada – from coast to coast.

Mr. David Rheault: Mrs. Boucher, I would also like to answer your question.

We are making efforts to increase the percentage of bilingual employees across the country, as are several government institutions.

Here is the difficulty with regard to service at airports. Call centres, for example, are located mainly in Montreal and New Brunswick. It is easier to recruit bilingual workers in those regions. As for flight attendants, we do a lot of recruiting in francophone regions of the country and we assign them to bases in the west. Because of their function, this is a category of employees who are very mobile. We can recruit across the country and assign these people to our bases in the west to improve the numbers with regard to bilingualism.

As for airports, we need to recruit more people within the communities. We have entered into many partnerships to increase these numbers. It is also why we have designed tools. Not everyone is bilingual.

I agree with you that, ideally, all employees should be bilingual. With the tools, they know they can consult a colleague or call someone as needed. Even if they are not bilingual, we provide them with the tools so that they can provide the service in French to passengers who request it.

Further, we are strategically deploying bilingual employees on flights where there is a greater concentration of passengers who prefer French. We try to organize shifts according to the demographic realities and the needs of our customers.

• (1120)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: The figure of 36.46% that I see here would be higher if we were talking about anglophones. It is the francophones who are a problem, because it is not easy to find people who speak French in the west.

Mr. David Rheault: That is a good question. I find sometimes it's hard to explain. When bilingualism is mentioned in the presentation, it is referring to French and English. Many of our employees are bilingual, but the languages they speak are English and Cantonese.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Right.

Mr. David Rheault: It could also involve English and Mandarin. The fact remains that, in general, most of the staff speak English.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's what I was saying. In other words, the figure of 36.46% represents employees who speak French and English.

Mr. David Rheault: It represents francophones who speak English or anglophones who speak French, who know the language.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, but between you and me, 36.46% in 2017 is not much. I see that you are trying very hard, but finding people outside Quebec or New Brunswick who speak French...

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): There is also Nova Scotia.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, but we have difficulty recruiting them.

Earlier, I went to see what were the percentages for Nova Scotia, including Halifax. I reviewed the charts containing codes such as YYZ.

Mr. David Rheault: This is part of our daily lives.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Perhaps, but I could see that the percentages were very low.

Mr. David Rheault: I'm sorry about that.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Here too, it is very low. I forgot on which page it appears.

Mr. David Rheault: It's on page 17.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It is very low.

Mr. David Rheault: The message we want to deliver is that the situation is improving.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I agree, but regardless, finding bilingual people is still a problem.

Mr. David Rheault: Yes.

It would be wrong to tell you that it is easy to hire bilingual people in some parts of the country.

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: Yes. It's a challenge for us and it is also the case for other companies.

Mr. David Rheault: The fact remains that efforts have been made. For example, there were recently six airport employee positions to be filled at St. John's, Newfoundland. We determined we had to hire six bilingual people. Finding six unilingual employees for the airport in St. John's would have taken us three hours, but in this case, we needed two days. We conducted interviews. The Regroupement de développement économique et d'employabilité helped us. I believe that the employees are newcomers. They are people whose first language is French and who have immigrated to Newfoundland. They are also proud to be employed by the national carrier. This experience tells us that it is possible to find bilingual employees when we make efforts to make it happen.

Mr. Serge Corbeil (Director, Government Relations, Western Region, Air Canada): If you allow me, Mr. Chair, I would like to add something.

I am from Vancouver and I live in British Columbia. I am involved in the francophone and Acadian communities. I am also on the Board of Directors of the Economic Development Corporation of British Columbia. Every day, we find that, for all employers—not only for Air Canada—finding bilingual workers is a challenge. We compete with the federal government, in particular. You have to admit, it probably faces the same challenges.

I can assure you that the will exists, even among representatives of the federal government with whom I deal as a member of the francophone community in British Columbia. Recruiting people is sometimes part of the reality on the ground. We have a partnership with francophone communities outside Quebec, including RDEE and ACFA in Alberta. We are confident, as this has already demonstrably helped us to recruit the manpower we needed.

Mr. David Rheault: I would like to add an anecdote. When we had to fill the post of director of government relations for the western region, we made an extra effort to find a bilingual candidate. That is how Mr. Corbeil joined us last October. His French is not bad.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Boucher.

We will now turn to New Brunswick and open the floor to René Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Long live New Brunswick!

What a great recruitment pool this officially bilingual province is for Air Canada.

•(1125)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you for being with us. I appreciate the tone in which questions are asked and answered. It is quite different from the atmosphere the last time we met representatives of Air Canada.

On page 16 of your presentation, in the first chart, entitled "Call Centres", we see that the number of employees has nearly doubled. The president of Air Canada did not seem too worried that the company was not meeting its linguistic obligations. But the fact that

this result could be achieved shows us that there was work to be done and that the Official Languages Act was not being respected.

Bravo. If this isn't the end, it is the beginning. There is still a lot of work to be done. I congratulate you. We cannot criticize the progression in a negative way. It is indeed a fine progression, even a jump. I would have liked to see the difference between 2015 and 2016, but that is just a comment.

My questions will rather focus on your relationship with the unions affiliated with Air Canada as well as with Jazz. I am completely ignorant in many ways. I would like to know how your relationships work with regard to language rights, how your union sees the situation and what is the difference between Jazz and Air Canada.

Mr. David Rheault: With regard to our unions, some of their members will appear following our presentation.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that clients and passengers benefit from a service in both official languages. We have developed a number of tools, and, together with the unions, we are working on the implementation of our language policy, on providing training sessions, on developing and distributing procedures.

Thank you also for your comment on the progress made by our employees. I must tell you that we have hired a lot of staff in New Brunswick in our call centres, which has allowed us to improve the statistics in this regard.

Since Jazz offers services on behalf of Air Canada, its staff must of course provide bilingual services. We are working closely with the Jazz team in terms of training their employees.

Mr. René Arseneault: Excuse me. Legally, is Jazz also subject to the same linguistic obligations as those that Air Canada must meet?

Mr. David Rheault: Jazz must offer services in both official languages, in the same manner as, and as if it were, Air Canada.

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay.

Do Air Canada and Jazz have different unions?

Mr. David Rheault: Jazz employees have their union and Air Canada employees have another.

Mr. René Arseneault: Which union represents Jazz employees?

Mr. David Rheault: I believe it's Unifor.

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: Yes, Unifor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Which union represents Air Canada employees?

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: The Canadian Union of Public Employees, or CUPE.

Mr. René Arseneault: That's what I thought.

In your view, are the unions reluctant to comply with the language requirements? Be honest, does Air Canada feel a reluctance on the part of its union representatives, or those of Jazz, with respect to the obligation to respect language rights?

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: I can't speak for Jazz since I don't negotiate with its union, but I can say that with regard to ours, we feel no reluctance. As you saw in the chart, we try to work very closely with our unions to maintain communication.

Mr. David Rheault: It usually works very well with employees and unions when the message is positive.

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay.

Who in the organization negotiates with Unifor for Jazz?

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: The Jazz management team deals with with its union.

Mr. David Rheault: However, we are the ones who develop training tools and give courses to Jazz employees. In that way, we help Jazz in implementing the delivery of bilingual services because passengers who travel with Jazz also have a relationship with Air Canada. It's a real team effort.

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: To answer your question as to whether the relationship is difficult with the unions, I would tell you that it is not. It is certain that unions have to take seniority into account as a matter of principle, but to comply with our linguistic obligations, we must sometimes override seniority and propose a bilingual agent.

Mr. René Arseneault: This brings me to my next question.

How can you manage to explain to your unions, Unifor or CUPE, that a legal obligation supersedes the traditions of operating by the principle of seniority? Who advises the unions? What do you tell them? How do they respond?

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: It is a legal obligation that we must respect, which is also set out in collective agreements, as I mentioned in my presentation. Unions understand the requirement and accept it.

• (1130)

Mr. David Rheault: Allow me to add that the allocation system requires that flight attendants must "bid"; I can only think of the English word.

Mr. René Arseneault: *Soumettre*.

Mr. David Rheault: I'm looking for another word in French.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): (*Soumissionner*)?

Mr. David Rheault: Yes, thank you.

Flight attendants must ask for blocks of hours, and the system assigns them to them on the basis of seniority. However, the system also includes criteria related to bilingualism requirements. For example, bilingual attendants will have their request processed on a priority basis, until a certain threshold is reached on the number of employees per plane. This threshold may be determined by the size of the aircraft: of the six flight attendants that a given plane should have, two must be bilingual. You will find the exact numbers in the presentation.

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: It depends on the size of the aircraft.

Mr. David Rheault: The requirements actually depend on the size of the aircraft, the flight, and so on. In the case of Montreal, there are clearly more flights.

We implemented this allocation system for the specific purpose of meeting our legal obligations, and this is done with the agreement of the unions. Without such a system, it would be impossible to achieve. There is a system that deals with assignment in our organization and another at Jazz.

Mr. René Arseneault: Do I still have time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, that's it.

The light is on again, indicating a vote in the House.

I must ask your permission, members of the committee, to continue for a few more minutes. We'll see if the bell continues to ring.

Can we continue for about 10 minutes?

A voice: Let's continue for 15 minutes.

The Chair: These are situations that we do not control.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Mr. Chair, if we are going to continue the meeting for 10 minutes, let's divide the speaking time in half.

Mr. François Choquette: Of course. I will use the time I have, and we will see later.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Oh, oh! You are going to use your time while we...

Mr. François Choquette: We will share the available time. There's no problem.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent to continue the discussion?

Voices: Yes.

The Chair: I will try to shorten each person's speaking time so that everyone can have a say.

So, you have the floor for three minutes, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: You know that bad news is going around regarding services in French at airports, not necessarily with Air Canada, but with security screening officers. It was included in the report by the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Bills have been proposed—you probably are aware of them—C-47, C-29, C-36, C-17. These are bills designed to clarify Air Canada's obligations. There have been changes to the way things work in the area of transportation.

Could you tell me what you think about legislation possibly being passed? Four times, in 2005, 2007, 2008, 2011, there have been attempts to clarify your obligations. What did you say in this regard, when you were consulted?

Mr. David Rheault: I will talk about two items: first, the report tabled by the Commissioner about the situation in the airports, which specifically affects CATSA; second, the legislative measures that have been proposed in the past.

As for the report tabled this week, we will not comment on the situation of other stakeholders. On the other hand, we note the challenge for federal institutions in recruiting bilingual staff across the country. We also share this challenge. So I think that this shows that the situation requires effort.

As for appropriate measures to help federal institutions to hire more bilingual employees and have a more bilingual labour force, we do not believe that the answer should be to pass legislation. The answer is to invest in official languages programs, in official language minority communities. For example, in yesterday's budget, measures were announced in that regard. It is not about a legislative solution, but, as a bilingual country, it is about facing the issue, taking up the challenge to expand the pool of bilingual employees. It is about cause and effect. The consequence will be that federal institutions, Air Canada, the government and others, will have a larger bilingual labour force. In that way, all organizations will improve their statistics.

• (1135)

Mr. François Choquette: Have you invested more money in training since we last met?

Mr. David Rheault: In 2016, we increased our hours of language training by 22%.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, you have the floor for two minutes.

Afterwards, I would like to make a comment.

Mr. Darrell Samson: To follow up on what my New Brunswick colleague said, your subcontractors have a responsibility, just as you do. In fact, there are several issues I would like to raise.

I will read a letter to you that was sent to the employees of Jazz, of which I received a copy. First of all, the letter is in English, which is a problem for francophones.

Moreover, the French version of the message says this: "Air Canada advised the CFAU [the union] that as of March 1, 2017, it must restore the levels of bilingual services that were in effect in 2006".

Someone is in fact admitting that service clearly had diminished, and that the service that was offered previously had to be restored.

The message continues as follows: "This is due to complaints received [...]" and "As a result, you will notice an increase in routes [...]" and then "The union is in discussions with the company on the effects [...]".

The subcontractor is thus admitting that the services being offered are at a lower level than those in 2006, and that they will have to go back up to the 2006 levels. In my opinion, there was clearly a lapse, and the negotiations are intended to allow you to reach that objective.

Mr. David Rheault: To answer your question, I want to describe the context in which that letter was sent to the Jazz employees. Pursuant to the regulations, high-demand routes were reviewed. In the course of that exercise carried out in 2015, we noticed that certain routes no longer met the 5% level of users the law prescribes to require a carrier to provide service in French.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I see.

Mr. David Rheault: In November 2016, the government announced a moratorium. It asked that those routes be maintained. And so, when the evaluations were published, Jazz reviewed its assignment system, and when the government stated that the company could not continue in the same way, Jazz informed the employees that those routes would be maintained.

What this means currently is that we now offer bilingual service on routes that do not have the 5% of users required by the regulation. If your question is was there less bilingual service prior to this, the answer is no, the service was simply deployed differently. We have always had bilingual flight attendants. We continued to train more.

Mr. Darrell Samson: But, sir, just...

The Chair: One moment, please.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The union told the employee that there was a negative aspect.

Mr. René Arseneault: He spoke of a negative impact.

Mr. Darrell Samson: A negative impact; that is unacceptable.

The Chair: I would perhaps like to hear Mr. Rheault's comments later, in reply to what you have just said.

For the moment, we are going to have to suspend the meeting, but I need the unanimous consent of the members first so that we can go and vote.

I believe the vote will take 20 minutes. It should end around 12:20 p.m. We can resume the hearing at 12:30 p.m., and we will hear the representatives of Air Canada again for half an hour. We will then give the floor to the union for a half hour, and we should end at 1:30 p.m.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: That's fine.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: There is no problem.

The Chair: So, we are going to suspend the meeting to go and vote.

We invite the witnesses to stay here.

Thank you. The meeting is suspended.

• (1135)

(Pause)

• (1230)

The Chair: We will resume our meeting.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to continue where my Acadian colleague Darrell Samson left off.

Before we went to vote, we were looking at a letter written by a Jazz union representative. The last sentence in the correspondence you have before you is extremely strong, I would even say humiliating, for a francophone, and I quote:

[English]

The Union is in discussions with the company on the effects this will have on the membership and the language training requirements needed to mitigate the negative impact.

[Translation]

That was said after a reference to the need to comply with the Official Languages Act and to the use of French by the company.

It's humiliating, there is no other way of looking at that. When a union representative sends a letter to the members to tell them that complying with a linguistic obligation creates a negative impact and that the union has to hold talks with Air Canada to see how to minimize that impact, there is good reason to find this somewhat bizarre.

First, were you aware of this correspondence? Secondly, what is the negative impact in question? Third, how did the negotiations go, and who took part in them on behalf of Air Canada?

Mr. David Rheault: Mr. Arseneault, I'm going to answer your question.

I am going to read the letter before you. It refers to the need "to mitigate the negative impact"; that is how the letter is drafted in French. You have to look at the entire letter. Of course I cannot interpret the intention of those who wrote it, since it came from the union. What I can say, however, is that from a union point of view, when you assign bilingual employees to certain routes, you bypass seniority. Some members can see that as being a negative effect. If they don't have the qualifications to be assigned to a bilingual route, they cannot be on that flight.

The letter says that people will be working together to mitigate the impact, that is to say by providing more training to people to bring them up to level and to allow them to work on those flights. We don't leave our employees and the union alone in this. We intend to work with them so that they can be given appropriate training.

The letter talks about mitigating the negative impact. For people who do not speak a second language, of course it is more difficult because they cannot fly certain routes. That is how people perceive this. We work with everyone to improve the provision of bilingual services. That was for your first question.

Secondly, you asked if we had taken part in the negotiations. When we make routes bilingual, it is to comply with the regulations and the law. We don't negotiate that.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine.

Mr. David Rheault: We tell the union that those routes must offer services in French because there is a demand for that service. It's not a negotiation, it is something we require.

Mr. René Arseneault: I'd like to go back a bit, Mr. Rheault.

Were you aware that this letter had been sent to Jazz employees?

Mr. David Rheault: No.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine.

The English version is the original version. I would ask you to read the English version. The French translation is fairly mild, but if I were a francophone working for Jazz, the English version...

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Who prepared the French version?

Mr. Darrell Samson: We sent it to the Translation Bureau to have it translated into French.

Mr. René Arseneault: Is there any way of knowing?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: It's important.

Mr. René Arseneault: What you have in hand is the original English version. The translation on the back was prepared by the Translation Bureau. Here we always have to present documents in both official languages. The one that was sent to the employees was the English version.

Is it possible for you to tell us who signed the letter from the union and who received it at Jazz? Could you send us that information?

Mr. David Rheault: We will check to see whether that is possible.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine. You can send the information to our clerk.

Secondly, who answered on behalf of Jazz or Air Canada? Ultimately, I suppose the same people take care of this, unless you tell me I am mistaken.

Mr. David Rheault: It is Jazz that...

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay.

● (1235)

Mr. David Rheault: It isn't the same people. Jazz deals with its union.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes, but at Jazz, who answered the letter? The union indicates that it will have to meet with the company to mitigate the negative impact of complying with the Official Languages Act.

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: We will look into that.

Mr. David Rheault: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine. Perfect.

In any case, I can't ask you questions about the union. I understand that.

To your knowledge, was a letter also sent to Jazz in French?

Mr. David Rheault: We will look into it.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine.

Mr. Samson, did you want to continue?

I replaced you because you were gone.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Serge Corbeil: Could I ask you for a clarification?

When you ask if a letter was sent in French, are you talking about a letter from the union?

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm talking about the same letter.

Mr. Serge Corbeil: You want to know if the person who wrote the letter also produced a French version of said letter.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I would like to clarify a point concerning the English version, which is the official version.

[English]

It says that "Air Canada is being forced to revert to the Bilingual Service".

[Translation]

What led up to this?

Mr. David Rheault: Since we are not the ones who wrote the letter, what I'm going to say is of course what I understand of it.

I can say, however, that this is about the governmental moratorium concerning the review of the error that meant that certain offices or routes, where Air Canada is concerned, no longer have the level of demand that is needed to be designated bilingual, that is to say 5%. The government issued a moratorium. And so those routes once again have to align with demand. That is what I understand, but there too, I need to verify the situation.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That is a good interpretation. I am not sure the moratorium was announced on February 8. Otherwise it would mean that this message was delivered very quickly and very efficiently.

When was the moratorium announced?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It was in November.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In November? That is possible.

The question is to see what measuring tools are in effect to ensure that the carriers under your purview respect the Official Languages Act, and to ensure that their services are at least comparable to yours.

Mr. David Rheault: They are our passengers. Passengers using a regional carrier that flies on behalf of Air Canada are Air Canada passengers.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Fine.

Mr. David Rheault: We have mechanisms. For instance, a complaint that originates with a regional carrier is managed by Air Canada. We talk with the regional carrier and see what the situation is.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay. Thank you. I want to talk about complaints now. This topic interests me.

What percentage of complaints relate to Air Canada, and what percentage are about Jazz?

Mr. David Rheault: I don't have that data to hand, but I could say that Air Canada transports many more passengers, since we have bigger planes. Since we have a much higher level of activity, the number of complaints we receive in absolute numbers may be higher. Consider, for instance, that an Air Canada plane may hold up to 450 passengers, whereas the largest Jazz airplanes can only carry 50.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Perhaps you could give us an example.

Could you send us that data?

Mr. David Rheault: Yes, we will make the necessary verifications and we will follow up.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The table my colleague referred to shows an interesting increase. However, I am concerned that from 2010 to 2013 there was little increase. I am happy with the current results. Obviously, something had to happen as there were indeed deficiencies between 2010 and 2013. The difference between 2010 and 2013 and the period from 2013 to today is enormous. I congratulate you; something needed to be done.

I would like to know what caused such an improvement. I'm referring here to the actions you took.

The Chair: Mr. Samson, I'm going to have to give the floor to Mr. Généreux if I want to respect everyone's speaking time. Perhaps the witness could reply to your question at another time.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also thank the witnesses for being here with us. I would like all of the witnesses to be able to speak when they come to meet with us.

Ms. Dugas, you have not had an opportunity to do so up till now.

Where is your name?

I have questions and I want to make sure I address them to the right person.

• (1240)

Mrs. Chantal Dugas (General Manager, Linguistic Affairs and Diversity, Air Canada): It is on the third line.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So your title is "General Manager, Linguistic Affairs and Diversity".

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You have a linguistic action plan for 2015-2017, and so it is being applied currently. I would be tempted to joke that the president's visit had an impact. I think that at the time a lot of measures were already in effect, or about to be.

I get the sense that he may have told you to make sure that he never again has to come before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, because he did not like his experience the last time.

I must congratulate you, as Mr. Arseneault did, for everything that has been put in place over the last months since your last appearance. We can see an obvious difference, especially in these tables, which are revealing.

There is an action plan for 2015-2017, but is another one already in the works?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: We have not begun drafting the plan but I would say that that is a continuous process. As you said, we put certain things in place. We are also able to measure what seems to work well and what functions less well. This tells us where we need to focus our efforts.

As the year progresses, we take note of all this, so that at the end of the year we have an updated plan that takes new realities and the progress we have made into account.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do you usually have two-year plans? Is that how you normally work?

Mr. David Rheault: They are three-year plans.

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: The standard plan is for three years.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do you have tools to compare the 2013-2015 and 2015-2017 plans? From one plan to the other, are you in a position to be able to make comparisons?

There are a few figures in there, but let's imagine that the employees are taking continuous training. I think you have continuous training plans.

If they reach an even higher level of bilingualism over time, does that allow them to access higher positions, or other types of positions?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Certainly, if a flight attendant or even a member of the airport staff becomes bilingual and qualifies, that will allow him or her to have access to certain work shifts they would not have had before had they not been bilingual.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Fine.

Are the courses the employees take paid for by the company, or do the employees pay for them?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: It varies according to the groups of employees. Some employees take training during work hours and are remunerated. Others take classes outside of their work hours. After they have accumulated a certain number of hours of training, they receive an amount of money. Things vary from one group to another.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: How come you have different groups?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: That is due to the agreements that are negotiated.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: With unions?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: How would you characterize the current union-management agreements? If I am not mistaken, the last time you said that an agreement had just been signed.

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Yes. We signed an agreement with the union that represents the airport agents in order to standardize the offer, or rather to see to it that in all of the airports across the country, according to the number of agents who need to take training, a minimum number of hours will be provided, and also to determine who should have priority when people want to take training.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you.

Mr. Rheault, when you accompanied the president during your last visit here, we found the tone of the meeting a little...

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Aggressive?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'm trying to find the right, respectful word. Be that as it may, the tone was different to what we might have expected. Today the tone is completely different.

Did you note that the committee was serious in its desire to apply all of the rules the corporation is subject to under the Official Languages Act?

Mr. David Rheault: We never doubted the committee's serious intent to apply the act and promote bilingualism in the country. We felt that for our next appearance, the committee would appreciate it if we submitted a list of the efforts we have made and the tools we have.

Today our presentation was content-based, so as to inform the committee of the efforts we have made. I am happy to hear that our presentation was of interest to the committee.

● (1245)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Généreux.

It is now Ms. Lapointe's turn.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you kindly for being with us today. Your appearance before the committee is appreciated and will build on the meeting we had in June of last year.

According to the 2015-17 linguistic action plan, the company is working to enhance the language of work policy in bilingual regions. What do you mean by "enhance"? Are you able to measure your progress? Can you capture it in charts like the ones we were looking at earlier? How do you implement these actions?

I would ask that you keep your answer brief because I have a number of questions.

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: We are actually broadening our system of communications. For instance, we have instant access to people's reactions on the ground through our ambassadors' network.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: How do you measure your success?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: We measure our success at different levels. We have a team on the ground measuring progress. Team members carry out sampling to see whether [*Technical difficulty*] in terms of the active offer of service, to check whether agents are doing it, but also—

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You said earlier that champions conducted audits. Is this along those lines?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Precisely.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: When people apply for a job in the government, they undergo testing to assess their language skills. Overall, do you test your staff to determine their bilingual capacity?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Yes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You are saying that testing has been done.

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Yes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You measure your staff's bilingual capacity, then?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: That is correct.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Wonderful.

Earlier, you talked about the great land that is Canada, but you said that you sometimes had trouble finding bilingual staff because of how diverse the country is.

Is there something you would suggest in terms of how the government could help you find people with the language skills you need?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Actually, the answer is education and training. It's necessary to introduce students to French and English language learning at a very young age and to give young people opportunities to continue speaking both languages. That also ties in with our community-based efforts. It's important to promote the importance of being bilingual and the added value it represents.

Mr. David Rheault: We took part in the consultation with official languages groups that was held here, in Ottawa, in December. I found some of the discussion forums very compelling.

I noticed that many of the people were involved in training and education. They were telling the government about their concerns and calling for more resources. I made the comment that I appreciated what they were saying and supported their request because we were at the end of the line.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Concrete steps have to be taken on the ground so that you won't have to spend two days looking for four people to work in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. David Rheault: Exactly.

We are at the back end of the process, but we have work to do on the front end. When I say “we”, I mean federal institutions as well.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: For instance, we want you to find bilingual staff, no matter where you are located, and the government can help you with that.

I'm going to switch gears. I heard that Jazz had hired a young man at the Quebec City airport. You do realize that Quebec City tends to be a unilingual French-speaking city.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That's what people think.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Having been a member of the National Assembly, I can tell you that's what people think.

The employee was sent to Toronto for English-only training, completely in English.

What do you say to that?

Mr. David Rheault: I would have to do some checking.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It pertains to Jazz.

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: At Air Canada, agents can take training in the language of their choice. I'm not sure why someone in Quebec City would be sent to Toronto. I would have to check with Jazz on that.

•(1250)

Mr. David Rheault: Do you happen to know when the training took place?

The Chair: You could check on that.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I'll send you the dates.

Mr. David Rheault: If it's an employee who works at the airport, we will check into it and do some follow-up.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I think he was a flight attendant.

Are your staff communications always bilingual, whether they are directed at senior executives or flight attendants? When you send an email to a co-worker, do you write it in both languages?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: If the email is going to only one person, we normally send it in that person's preferred language.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I see.

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: If the email is going to a group of people, it is sent in both official languages.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: That's a good answer, and I'm satisfied with that. What I care about are measurable results.

Looking at the tables and charts, I was surprised to see that employees in Montreal had not all completed the language awareness testing.

Mr. David Rheault: Actually, I am going to—

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Looking at one of your tables, you have to be an expert on airports to know what all the airport abbreviations are.

Mrs. Arielle Meloul-Wechsler: On page 17—

Mr. David Rheault: No, it's this other table. I will answer the question.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You do have to be somewhat knowledgeable. YUL is the only one I know by heart.

Mr. David Rheault: I'd just like to make a comment.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Only 87% of flight attendants in Montreal completed the awareness module. I thought Montreal would have a better showing.

Mr. David Rheault: The table you are referring to is on page 10. I don't want to extrapolate. We really want all employees to complete the training. All our employees in Montreal are bilingual.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay, but that doesn't mean someone can't improve their French or English skills.

Mr. David Rheault: Of course, but the awareness module is part of initial training on providing service in both official languages. Obviously, the module is less beneficial for bilingual employees than for unilingual employees.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: If they all have the skills, if they know they fall in category A, B, C, or E for exempt—

Mr. David Rheault: That's why I said that our objective is for everyone to undergo the training. The percentage in Montreal is 87%, but the goal is to hit 100%.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: As you know, we can all stand to improve.

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: We are continuing our efforts to that end.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, it is your turn.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I asked you this earlier when the microphones weren't on, but I will now repeat it so that all my fellow members are up to speed. Is it possible for you to send the committee the figures, or percentages, for what you spend on language training and bilingual recruitment efforts in official language communities? All the members could then benefit from the information.

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: I want to pick up on something Ms. Lapointe mentioned, something that also strikes me as important.

A few minutes ago, we were talking about the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority's problems with French-language services. The Commissioner of—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: —Official Languages—

Mr. François Choquette: —released a report Tuesday morning, if memory serves me correctly.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That is correct.

Mr. François Choquette: The story was in the media on Monday. The air transport authority seems to be having trouble recruiting people who can provide services in French. What you said is very important. What can the federal government do to improve things?

We are members of Parliament, and we know you have obligations to meet. Your most recent report to us is very positive and relevant, but what concrete measures can the federal government take to help you meet your official languages obligations? Do you have any suggestions as to what investments the government can make to support your training efforts? That means supporting official language communities as well as training. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr. David Rheault: As you saw in our presentation, as far as our recruitment efforts go, we always try very hard to reach out to community-based groups for help in recruiting staff. The government could establish some sort of list, broken down by region, of qualified bilingual workers who are looking for a job. A company like ours could use the list proactively to contact people, inform them of job opportunities at Air Canada, and encourage them to send in their CVs.

It's nothing major, but it would help to have a consolidated tool like that, a one-stop stop, if you will, providing a list of qualified people. If it could help us recruit 10 more people, that would be 10 more people.

•(1255)

Mr. Serge Corbeil: I just have a quick comment.

I live in a francophone community, and I have dealt with this issue. I work with many organizations facing the same challenge. Oftentimes, our bilingual employees are the product of immersion programs, which are extremely successful. Bridging the gap between the end of those programs and the job market can be difficult. Where can someone use their French skills in British Columbia, for example? We support initiatives like French for the future, which target this very thing.

It's worth the effort. If I can leave you with one message, it is to continue supporting forums that bring together the business community and bilingual and French-language education stakeholders—whether they represent francophone or immersion programs. These forums provide opportunities for the two to connect and plan for the future. People need to be told that it still makes sense to pursue a French-language education in British Columbia because jobs are available for them.

The Chair: Mr. Vandal, you can ask just one question. It will be the last.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Okay. First, I'd like to apologize for my tardiness.

Second, on page 17 of your brief, I see that the percentage of bilingual employees at the Winnipeg airport—I represent the Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital riding—sits at 50%.

Am I reading that correctly?

Mr. David Rheault: Yes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: How did you manage to achieve that?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: It was thanks to our recent hiring effort.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Recent hiring, you say?

Mrs. Chantal Dugas: Yes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Were any partners involved?

Did you reach out to the community?

Mr. David Rheault: Yes.

Mr. Serge Corbeil: I believe there were instances of community involvement. We worked a lot with the Société franco-manitobaine, as well as other groups, including Université de Saint-Boniface.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Very good.

Mr. David Rheault: We strive to recruit bilingual people all over, and we are happy those efforts are bearing fruit.

Mr. Dan Vandal: You saw a 28% increase in four years.

Mr. David Rheault: Yes. The Ottawa region has also seen a significant increase in recent years. Our efforts are bearing fruit.

The Chair: Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today. Your input is certainly very helpful to the committee members. That wraps up our discussion with the Air Canada officials quite nicely. On behalf of the entire committee, I want to extend our sincere thanks.

Before ending this half of the meeting, I want to make a comment that has nothing at all to do with Air Canada. The committee is in the habit of meeting publicly, and I think it is important that we continue to do so. In other words, I do not think that we should meet in camera very often and that we should favour public meetings.

That means, however, that those attending our proceedings have to be respectful towards members and staff. My comment is directed squarely at the journalist at the back of the room who showed disrespect for committee staff. I wanted to point that out and make clear that, going forward, I will not hesitate to turn out anyone who fails to treat members or staff with respect.

Consider yourself warned, sir.

Thank you very much. We will now take a short break.

•(1255)

_____ (Pause) _____

•(1300)

The Chair: The committee is now resuming its study on Air Canada's implementation of the Official Languages Act. We are pleased to have joining us, for about 25 minutes, Marie-Josée Pagé, from the Air Canada Component of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Ms. Pagé is a flight attendant and head of Air Canada's francization committee. Also with us is Francis Manfredi, in-charge flight attendant at Air Canada.

Ms. Pagé and Mr. Manfredi, welcome to the committee. You will have about five minutes to give your presentation. We will then move on to the question and answer portion. We have only 25 minutes in all.

I assume Ms. Pagé will be giving the presentation.

Please go ahead, Ms. Pagé.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé (Flight Attendant, Head of the Francization Committee, Air Canada Component of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 4091): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. This is a tremendous experience for me.

My name is Marie-Josée Pagé, and I have been a flight attendant since 1986. I was initially based out of Toronto but am now based out of Montreal. The year 2017 marks my 31st year of flying.

During that time, I have had many firsts, met numerous people, and experienced the highs and lows typical of an ever-changing industry. I have flown 21,700 hours, had five different uniforms, worn 60 pairs of shoes, and crossed paths with a wide array of passengers, from rock stars, movie stars, race-car drivers, and sports personalities to prime ministers, presidents, politicians, and the Dalai Lama.

Along the way, I have felt the impact of AIDS, the avian flu, SARS, the Ebola virus, and 9/11, not to mention put my self-defence training to the test.

It is with a positive attitude and all of that baggage that I appear before you in my new capacity as the head of Air Canada's francization committee, as well as a Montreal-based flight attendant. I will do my best to answer any questions you have.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Francis.

Mr. Francis Manfredi (In-Charge Flight Attendant, Air Canada): My name is Francis Manfredi. I've been a service director at Air Canada since 1998, based in Toronto, Ontario. I've been asked by my colleague Marie-Josée Pagé to accompany her today to answer any of your questions or concerns regarding the developments and efforts of my employer, Air Canada, in the past couple of years regarding the bilingual services offered on board and what I see on board. I come at this as a non-French-speaking person, so for today I'll be considered unilingual.

My expertise comes not only from my years of service but also from my day-to-day front-line experience in serving Air Canada customers and from the challenges that arise on board the aircraft. As a service director, I'm the on-board leader and I have a critical role and a sort of nexus of responsibilities on board the aircraft. I'm the conduit between the company expectations, the cabin crew that I'm leading that day, the captain and the first officer, and finally the operational realities present that day. As a service director, I must show leadership; plan; organize; coordinate; control; provide help, coaching, and guidance for the flight attendants; and sometimes stand firm when necessary. There are a number of protocols and targets to meet before the aircraft even takes off, with safety of course being paramount followed by on-time performance targets like leaving on time. Any failure or shortcoming of any of the above is ultimately my responsibility, and I have to answer for it.

Finally, I'd just like to thank the chair and the hon. members who invited me here today. I'd be more than happy to answer any of your questions to the best of my abilities.

• (1305)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

We'll start the comment period immediately with Bernard Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Pagé, your presentation was short, but powerful. It's interesting to see all the transformations you've experienced over 30 years, not to mention the risks involved in being in an airplane. People who have travelled can quickly vouch for this.

You're here to represent the union. Unions are necessary organizations in our society. They help move matters forward with regard to the wage conditions and conditions, in general, of all employees.

As a union representative, how do you find the relationship with your employer, Air Canada, in particular when it comes to the bilingualism issue?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: I must admit that it was difficult, especially with the former board of directors.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: In what way was it difficult?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: It was difficult to coordinate our people. It's very hard to explain. We aren't office people and we aren't there often. We go to the office for a few minutes to check our email, our correspondence and so forth. We don't really have direct contact with people, unless we're called to the office for something specific.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So the context, and not necessarily the company, is difficult?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Yes. The French priority was less important to the former board of directors than it is now. I think things have changed a great deal.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Since when have you observed this change?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: For us, the biggest impact was the "Hello, *Bonjour*". I wasn't involved in the union at that time.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: It was still fairly recent.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Yes. Exactly. In the past two years, I must say. Before, things were at a standstill. There wasn't much movement. Nobody was hired. The two near bankruptcies occurred. Not many new flight attendants were hired. We had to make do.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I also imagine that the aging workforce has inevitably resulted in a turnover of employees. People retired and needed to be replaced. You're telling me that the company made an effort to hire more and more people who are at the very least bilingual or open to learning either new language.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Yes. The company also tried to include the people who were already in place, despite the fact that much work needs to be done in this area. Many new employees were hired.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I imagine that, if bilingualism wasn't really a priority before, as you said, it's also a cultural issue. That's what you seem to be saying.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: It also stems from the employees.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: The issue is closely tied to the generations. For some former employees, it was never a priority. It wasn't a priority when we were hired either. It may have been more of a priority for me at the start. I was hired by CP Air. We were hired in Montreal to be assigned to Toronto because bilingual employees were needed.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: However, the people in place were primarily the people who spoke the useful language based on the route.

[English]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay.

Francis, do you work with customers every day? Is your job to work with the customers, because you are on the plane?

• (1310)

Mr. Francis Manfredi: Yes. For example, on Sunday I'm flying to London. I'm going to be the service director on the flight.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Okay. Are the routes you're doing unilingual routes or are they bilingual routes?

Mr. Francis Manfredi: The ones I do are international routes, to Santiago, Chile, or to London, England, or to Copenhagen, but they are bilingual routes, yes. There are bilingual people, French-English—a bilingual crew.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Of course, it's your right to speak only English if you want to speak only English, but have you been asked in your lifetime with Air Canada to learn French? Have you protested, or did you not want to learn, or...?

Mr. Francis Manfredi: I've been encouraged and approached to learn to speak French. Some people have asked me, "Why didn't you ever learn to speak French"? I speak Italian, so when I was hired, I was hired for my Italian. I fully recognize that my not learning French has somewhat held me back from certain positions that I wanted, such as training or this or that, but that was my decision. There have been opportunities for me to learn French, but I've had my focus elsewhere.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now with Paul Lefebvre.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

The Chair: Excuse me. I'm looking at the time, and I can see we have only four minutes left.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Ms. Pagé, I'm happy to hear you speak about your experience as a flight attendant. We can relive Air Canada's history through your experience.

You're here because the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada has released another report, which concerns the past 50 years. While Air Canada is subject to the Official Languages Act, there's a serious lack of compliance. Nevertheless, you told us

—and I think other witnesses from Air Canada have said the same thing—that improvements have been made.

You said that you still have challenges, even with regard to employees. Can you describe your experience? Now that you hold a position of responsibility with the union, what are the challenges, exactly? How do you explain to the members that the company has an official languages obligation?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: First, I think that, before the much talked-about "Hello, *Bonjour*", the flight attendants didn't know it was the law.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Then, it's divided in two, almost half and half. There are the veterans who were hired 20 or more years ago, and the new employees, who are almost all bilingual. This aspect is resolved. However, we need to make do with the people who are already there.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: We need to try to reach and include those who were already there. This part is difficult because the French language is a hot topic. It's cultural.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Why?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Because there's even—

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Ms. Boucher is not supposed to speak.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Yes, I know.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: We're dealing with this reality. We work with people from the west and with people who refuse to come to Montreal. Some flight attendants say, regarding their assignment, that they want to avoid Montreal at all costs. They don't even want to be exposed to French.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: You were in the audience when we presented the letter that my colleague, Mr. Samson, received from the union. I'll reread you the sentence that bothers us, and I'd like your opinion on it.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Okay.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The last sentence of the letter reads as follows:

[English]

The Union is in discussions with the company on the effects this will have on the membership and the language training requirements needed to mitigate the negative impact.

[Translation]

There are a number of things.

[English]

There is "the effects this will have". There is "mitigate". There is "negative impact".

[Translation]

This letter is from one of your unions.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Yes, we need to protect our members. Many of them are unilingual anglophones. At this time, 30% of positions on a flight are protected, in particular on an overseas flight.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I want to make sure I understand. It's not necessarily to protect their employment, but it's based on the routes that have already been established.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Exactly, because that's all that matters in the end.

Personally, I wouldn't start this job over again. I wouldn't be able to.

In my case, I have a specific assignment. Now, I'm a princess. When I arrive in Geneva, I eat lunch, then return to Montreal. It's my life. I do this once a week. I've been a flight attendant for 31 years. I've earned it.

If my flight to Geneva is cancelled because of a snowstorm, and I'm sent to Saskatoon or Regina via Winnipeg, I have a 13-hour day and a 10-hour rest period. It's very difficult to do this job.

So, people don't want to lose their privileges. We can't change things and say that we'll place three francophones on a flight instead of two because, at that point, one of them will lose their privileges. We need to try to work with the people who are already in place, and to see whether we can provide service at a functional level of French.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: What you're saying is very interesting. You're talking about the internal culture.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: I'll give you another example. In Vancouver, some people have a level four qualification. At that level, it's no longer necessary to requalify. At level three, you must take an exam every year to see whether you're using too many anglicisms, for example.

I'm thinking of certain people who reached level four 20 years ago, when they were married to a francophone. They then divorced, and they may not have spoken French in 10 years. It's now difficult for them, but they still have their French qualification.

•(1315)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the two witnesses for being here.

I know the “Hello, *Bonjour*” active offer exists. I also know that some flights and routes are bilingual, but maybe an anglophone—

I don't think a unilingual francophone exists. I don't want to say a unilingual anglophone, because, as you said,

[*English*]

you also speak Italian, so you're bilingual but not in French and English.

[*Translation*]

What happens when a client wants to be served in French? Is there a protocol to follow?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Yes, of course.

Mr. François Choquette: Can you explain it?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: It's very simple.

[*English*]

You go ahead, Mr. Manfredi.

Mr. Francis Manfredi: For example, I'm unilingual and just a week ago a passenger said, “I'd like to be served in French. I thought you were all bilingual.” The company has given me, as a unilingual person, a tool to say, “*Un instant, s'il vous plaît*”, which I think means “Just a moment, please”, so I would have to go the.... That particular day, we had one French speaker. He was working in a different part of the airplane, so I had to suspend service, call this person, and say, “Anthony, I'm really sorry. I need you to come up. A passenger wants to be served in French.”

A few minutes later Anthony came and I did something else. He took care of everything because we have good people and they know how to serve well, and then he went back to his position. When Anthony came, I made sure that I found out everything this passenger required from the menu, drinks, when he'd like to go to sleep, if he'd like to be woken up, so that the passenger felt comfortable and his needs were taken care of. If there was ever any other issue I would have to call Anthony to come, but there wasn't. There usually isn't. It's just that first time.

Mr. François Choquette: Does that happen often or is it rare?

Mr. Francis Manfredi: It is rare.

Mr. François Choquette: Why? Is it because the French-speaking people don't ask for the service? They start speaking English and—

Mr. Francis Manfredi: Is it okay if I give you another little anecdote that might help? On the Embraer aircraft there are only two crew members for about 100 people. There are two flight attendants, me and the French-speaking flight attendant. In J class, there are nine passengers. According to my company, the service director takes care of those premium passengers, nobody else. That day the vast majority of passengers in J class were francophones, so I thought it would be much more seamless and comfortable if I switched with the person in the back. There was more camaraderie, and it would go much better, but I took a risk on that because if any of those passengers complained about why the service director didn't serve them, I would be called into the office and have to explain why I did that. The good-natured part of me says they would have seen why I did that—

Mr. François Choquette: They would understand that, I hope.

Mr. Francis Manfredi: I would hope, but the fact is that I broke a rule, so to speak.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Manfredi: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

[*English*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Boucher, you can ask a question. I'll then give the floor to Ms. Lapointe.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We have the same question.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: We're in agreement.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Hello.

You surprised me, I must say. Ms. Lapointe and I looked at each other, and we had the same reaction.

Please explain to me how, in 2017, French is a hot topic. Everyone is connected to the Internet, and there are many ways to speak both languages. However, to avoid bothering the average person, you need to be careful. Of course you need to be careful. We've been here and we've been building this country for 400 years. I hope you'll be careful when it comes to French!

Why do people still have this mentality? I've never been a union member, and I don't understand this. I don't understand how, in 2017, things are still this way. Please explain to me how you see things, because it makes no sense to me.

• (1320)

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: When I said hot, I may have meant something else. I wanted to say touchy.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: "Touchy" and "hot" are basically the same.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Okay, we're in agreement.

As I said, the mindset in western Canada is different. I'm talking about people who were hired a very long time ago and who are now 50, 60 and almost 70 years old. I meant to say that, culturally, the need to speak French and so forth is fairly recent. We're working very hard.

I want to stay positive and to try to encourage people to get involved. They have skills, such as a level four in French. We can't, from one day to the next, remove them from the list of employees who speak French because their French is no longer good. The company pays for courses for employees, except they need to work fewer hours to be able to take the courses. Often, they have children and they need to pay for daycare, so it's not free.

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, I'll give you the floor to talk about the same topic.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I'll continue along the same lines.

Earlier, I asked the Air Canada representatives how the Government of Canada could help them recruit bilingual people in primarily unilingual areas. How can the government address this?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: I'm not sure the problem is that Air Canada has trouble recruiting francophones. There are people who speak French.

People have an idea of a flight attendant's job that doesn't mesh with reality. In the beginning, it's very difficult. A bilingual person may have more assignments. When you're a bilingual flight attendant, it's difficult to start with a very low salary, and to work on Christmas, New Year's Day, your birthday or your mother's birthday. In the first five years, you're never there. The young people who are starting today live with seven or eight other people in an

apartment because they don't have much money and they're always gone. I'm not talking about the ground agents, but about the people in my group. Bilingualism isn't the only issue. It's very difficult to recruit these types of people.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: How could the government address this?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: I don't know. It could create a pool.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay.

Mr. René Arseneault: Do you mean a pool of employees?

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Yes, a pool of bilingual people who are interested in working in the hotel or travel industry.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Recruitment or promotion could be done.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Yes. It would be good to have a pool of employees.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you for appearing this morning and for shedding light on the topic.

Mrs. Marie-Josée Pagé: Thank you.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you as well for your honesty.

The Chair: Before I adjourn the meeting, Ms. Boucher has asked to speak.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: An incident happened earlier that makes me a bit uncomfortable, but I won't go into the details.

Our committee works very well and we all work together. I would never allow our committee or a member of this committee to be verbally insulted. I want there to be a rule of conscience here stating that if this ever happens again, the people concerned must leave the meeting.

• (1325)

The Chair: Is that okay?

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, it's noted. In the future, I won't be as tolerant as I was today.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I hope so, because you'll see Ms. Boucher from up close, and I'll be the one who gets sent out!

The Chair: Wait a minute. We have a few motions to adopt.

Voices: We'll say hello.

The Chair: They aren't listening to me!

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Holke): These motions must be adopted because it's the end of the fiscal year. They have the copies of the motions on hand.

The Chair: What are the motions?

The Clerk: They are the budgets for Air Canada and the Canadian justice system.

The Chair: Okay.

Legal approval is required.

Please have a seat.

Ms. Lucie Lecomte (Committee Researcher): It's financial approval. It's even more important.

The Chair: Sorry, financial approval is required.
Since we heard Air Canada, the motion is the following: That the draft budget in the amount of \$6,800 for the committee's study of Air Canada's implementation of the Official Languages Act be adopted.

Do you agree?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The second motion is the following: That the draft budget in the amount of \$25,800 for the committee's study of the full implementation of the Official Languages Act in the Canadian justice system be adopted.

Do you agree?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Ms. Holke, is that all the motions for today?

That's it for the motions.

We'll see each other in two weeks.

Thank you everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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