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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1550)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

First of all, we hope that Mr. Morrissey has safe travels.

Welcome to meeting number 98 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on November 27, 2023, the committee is continuing its study on the subject matter of supplementary estimates (B), 2023-24.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of all participants.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation, those on Zoom have the choice at the bottom of their screen of either floor, English, or French. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

Although this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to interpreters and cause serious injuries. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to the microphone. We therefore ask all participants to exercise a high degree of caution when handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbour's microphone is turned on. In order to prevent incidents and safeguard the hearing and health of interpreters, I invite participants to ensure they speak into the microphone that the headset is plugged into and to avoid manipulating the earbuds by placing them on the table away from the microphone when they are not in use.

I will remind participants that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Now I would like to present the witnesses for today's meeting.

We have the Honourable Terry Beech, Minister of Citizens' Services, and the Honourable Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Labour and Seniors.

From the Department of Employment and Social Development, we have Sandra Hassan, deputy minister of labour and associate deputy minister; Cliff Groen, associate deputy minister and chief operating officer for Service Canada; Karen Robertson, chief financial officer; and John Ostrander, business lead, benefits delivery modernization.

Each minister will have five minutes to make statements.

Minister Beech, you have the floor.

Hon. Terry Beech (Minister of Citizens' Services): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good morning, everyone.

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today.

[*English*]

to discuss the 2023-24 supplementary estimates (B) as they relate to the Citizens' Services portfolio.

Before I start, since this is my first appearance, it gives me great pleasure to be at this committee, especially with a British Columbian in the chair. It makes me feel at home, so I'm happy to be here.

The creation of a new ministry to serve as the Government of Canada's champion for service delivery excellence comes with a mandate I take very seriously.

First and foremost, it's to place Canadians at the centre of how we design and deliver their services.

Business does this naturally. Competition ensures that products and services are regularly simplified and improved. We must eliminate repetitive paperwork and the need to stand in line or to wait on hold. We must adopt new technology to improve the customer service experience that meets the unique needs of Canadians, whether they are in rural Manitoba, the Arctic, P.E.I., or downtown Vancouver.

If I was to describe my mandate in the simplest possible terms, it encompasses dental, digital and customer service. “Dental” is code in some ways, as it includes not just the onboarding of nine million Canadians onto the largest benefit program in Canadian history but also the delivery of Canada's largest digitalization transformation project through the benefits delivery modernization programme, or BDM.

OAS, EI and CPP benefits represent \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years and 39% of the annual federal budget.

I'm also the minister responsible for Service Canada, as well as the Canadian digital service.

The government was pleased to launch the first phase of the Canadian dental care plan on December 11. As of this morning, more than 500,000 seniors are now enrolled in the program in every province and territory.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Chair, there is no French interpretation.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Madame Chabot.

Give us a moment here. We're testing this right now.

Do we have interpretation? Is the interpretation working in French?

We're going to suspend for just a moment.

Thank you.

• (1555)

(Pause)

• (1555)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): It looks like we now have interpretation working, so we'll go back over to you, Minister.

Hon. Terry Beech: Do you want me to continue from where I left off, Madam Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Why don't we go back just a few sentences?

Madam Chabot, did you hear any translation, or did you hear nothing from the minister? Can you please confirm?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Can we go back a few sentences, please?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

Go ahead, Minister. Go back a few sentences.

• (1600)

Hon. Terry Beech: As we last tuned in, we were talking about the 500,000 seniors who, as of this morning, have enrolled in the dental care program. Of those, 73% who applied did so without hu-

man interaction. Those who did contact the specialized call centre had waiting times of less than a few seconds.

When it comes to the passport program, we continue to encourage Canadians to apply for a passport as early as possible before booking a trip. In December 2023, 96% of passports were issued within one to 20 business days and the passport backlog of 313,000 from last year has been completely eliminated. Between April 1 and December 31, 2023, we issued more than three million passports.

We continue to drive innovation through the use of automation and artificial intelligence. Soon individuals will be able to renew their passports online, which will eliminate altogether the need to wait in line and will shorten the lines for those who choose to do it in person.

In the meantime, we launched an online passport application status checker, and 1.5 million people have utilized it to track the real-time status of their applications. Those are individuals who don't need to call the call centre or wait in line. It's an example of a government service that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You don't have to take time off work or pay for parking to use it. It is simply a better way of providing the service than was previously available.

We've also expanded the capabilities of the eSIN program. This is a digital program from start to finish that provides millions of transactions online. This is important, because every transaction is one less person standing in front of you at a Service Canada office.

Another example of improving our digital service delivery is the benefits delivery modernization initiative. In the past year alone, we've delivered \$147.3 billion in crucial benefits like EI, CPP and OAS to over 9.5 million Canadians. I am pleased to report that we successfully deployed the first release of OAS on BDM this past summer, and 600,000 Canadians are currently receiving their benefits through the new platform. The full migration of OAS remains on track for December of this year.

Since 2017, the BDM programme has spent \$817 million, while Treasury Board approvals to date amount to \$2.2 billion over a period of more than 10 years.

This leads me to the supplementary estimates.

For BDM, we're requesting an adjustment of \$54.2 million. This is a re-profile of funds that were approved to be spent in 2022-23.

Madam Chair, I'd like to thank all members of the committee for inviting me here today and for the work that you do every single day, not just at this committee but in the House and in your constituencies. It's a lot of work, and you often do it away from your families and with competing priorities. No matter how partisan discussion can become in the chamber or even at committee, I reflect often on the fact that we are all playing for the same team. We all want Canada to be successful.

That collaborative effort has made our country one of the best places in the world to live. Delivering a modern customer service experience is an important part of building on that legacy.

Thank you for having me today. After my colleague speaks, I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Minister Beech.

Minister O'Regan, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Labour and Seniors): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for having me. I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

[*English*]

I want to give you an overview of what I'm working on, and then I'd be happy to take some questions.

I work as the Minister of Labour and as Minister for Seniors, and really, if you look at what drives both of these things, it's dignity. It's making sure that Canadians have dignity in their work so that workers have not just jobs but good jobs—jobs they're trained to do, jobs that they're well paid to do and jobs that are good for them in mind and in body.

I want every senior to age with dignity. That means that they're not making hard choices at the checkout because their fixed income is too tight, and if they need new dentures, they can afford them. They can age where they want, surrounded by the community and the people who they choose.

As the Minister of Labour, I feel that the federal government needs to set the bar for workplaces. That means looking at employers and workers in federally regulated sectors and constantly asking them how we can do better.

In December 2022, we brought in 10 days of paid sick leave for these workers. Workers called for it and employers supported it. The Canadian Bankers Association, Via Rail and others spoke out in support of it, because no worker should have to choose between getting paid and getting better.

Last December we tabled legislation to ban the use of replacement workers during a strike or lockout. Replacement workers distract from the bargaining table, prolong disputes, and can poison workplaces for years. Our economy depends on employers and unions staying at the table and doing the hard work they need to do to reach a deal. Bill C-58 is not the same bill that's been brought to Parliament in the past. It was developed through tripartism with

workers and employers. Sometimes I was in the room with both of them at the same time. Conversations were tense, but the result was a bill that is going to keep the bargaining table fair and balanced. It also strengthens the maintenance-of-activities process, which is something both employers and workers asked for.

I will use this moment to say that I have the utmost respect for my NDP colleague Alexandre Boulerice and his partnership on this issue. I'm disappointed that after 75 days of tabling legislation, we haven't got the support where we need it, but we trudge on.

When we talk about the government setting the bar as an employer, that is right down to hygiene. As of December 15, all federally regulated employers must provide free menstrual products in the workplace. It's common sense. Workplaces provide toilet paper, soap and hand sanitizer, and it's past time we did that with menstrual products too.

Setting the bar means admitting when things aren't perfect. We have not reached pay equity in the federal sectors, but to close the gaps, we need to know where the gaps are. Last Friday we launched Equi'Vision, an online, first-of-its-kind pay transparency website. You can see—by industry and minority—rates of pay, and you can compare them.

● (1605)

[*Translation*]

As Minister of Seniors, I am responsible for ensuring that seniors can age with dignity.

[*English*]

That comes down to choice, affordability and community.

Last year, my predecessor and the former minister of health announced that the National Seniors Council would serve as an expert panel to examine measures, including a potential aging-at-home benefit. The panel has completed its work, and we are currently reviewing the findings.

We developed a federal policy definition of mistreatment of older persons. This is important for a culture change in public awareness regarding this important issue, although the federal policy definition will not replace jurisdictional definitions and will not be included in any Criminal Code amendments.

[*Translation*]

We need to do a lot more for seniors. That's the least we can do.

[English]

Finally, I'm working with my colleague, the honourable Minister of Health, to develop a safe long-term care act to help ensure that Canadians get the care they deserve, while still respecting provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

I'm also very concerned with defending and preserving the Canada pension plan. There is no one more dependent on our social security systems than seniors, and they deserve a government that is proud of the systems we have in Canada: GIS, OAS, CPP, universal health care and dental care. We are committed to protecting them.

[Translation]

Thank you.

I look forward to taking your questions.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): That's great. Thank you, Minister.

We'll go to questions now for six minutes.

I will have the first line of questions. My questions will be for Minister Beech.

Minister, I want to confirm that you were the lead on the development and implementation of the benefit delivery systems, which included the benefits delivery modernization programme, the largest IT project in Canadian history.

Hon. Terry Beech: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): That's great. Thank you for confirming that.

Minister, the original budgetary estimate for the benefits delivery modernization programme government IT project was \$1.75 billion. Is that correct?

Hon. Terry Beech: The original estimate of the budget was made several years ago, at the beginning, and it was exactly that—an estimate.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Great. Thank you for confirming that.

Minister, in November 2023 it was reported that sources in your department, ESDC, suggested that the new price estimate on the benefits delivery modernization programme was almost \$8 billion.

Can you confirm this?

Hon. Terry Beech: I can confirm that we have spent \$853 million to date and that we have Treasury Board approval for up to \$2.2 billion.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Minister, the recent Auditor General's report on the benefits delivery modernization programme stated that the cost could go as high as \$3.4 billion. Isn't that correct?

Hon. Terry Beech: I can only confirm what the Treasury Board has stated. What I will say is that when it comes to the provision of a program like this, which is so technically large.... In fact, you de-

scribed it as the largest digital transformation project in the history of the country, encasing not just OAS but EI and CPP as well. We need to be agile, and there is a lot of learning that we're doing along the way.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I have a point of clarification, Chair, to understand the order of business today. You're starting questions.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Yes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Which side is next?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): As always, we're following all of the normal procedures.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Okay. What does that mean, exactly? Does it come to the Liberal side?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Absolutely. Yes. It's all the normal procedures.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Okay, so the next round of questions goes to the Liberals. Okay. I just wanted to clear that up.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Yes. Absolutely. Thank you.

Going back to you, Minister, the last budget that was approved was four years ago, in 2020. When would we expect to see a new budget?

• (1610)

Hon. Terry Beech: Do you mean for the BDM programme?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Yes.

Hon. Terry Beech: As of right now, I can only share with you what has been approved, which is the \$2.2 billion. Of that, we've spent just over \$800 million.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Minister.

One of the things I'm looking at is the overall budget for this. Can you give us a date for when you expect to have a new budget developed?

Hon. Terry Beech: I can't give you a specific date. I know there was an inquiry made by a number of my colleagues who are at the table here for a report back by January 19. I think that was received by you and others.

I'm happy to turn to my colleagues, if there's anything.... Perhaps the head of Service Canada, who was the previous business lead for BDM, or the new business lead for BDM, have something to add.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Minister. We can have the officials come back at another time, so I'll just continue on with you.

Hon. Terry Beech: Certainly. I would then point to the documents that were handed to you on January 19.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Great. Thank you very much. The estimates aren't very clear on when a new budget will be tabled.

The next question is also with regard to the benefits delivery modernization programme. Does the Government of Canada have the capacity to do the project on its own, or is the plan to have a number of consultants working on this?

Hon. Terry Beech: I think this is a really good question, not just for BDM but in terms of advancing digital services generally.

There is no doubt that the Government of Canada needs to develop its core strength when it comes to the technical leadership that exists within the public service. At present, this program is being developed through partnerships with both the public service and private contractors.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): On that note, Minister, what is the value of contracts so far for the benefits delivery modernization programme?

Hon. Terry Beech: I have a thick document at the back of my binder here that details that information. I think that this information was also included in the January 19 submission. I'm happy to table that information in detail with the committee as well.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Great. Thank you, Minister. If you could, please have that tabled for the committee.

The information I have is that it's \$669 million to date. Of that, it's really interesting who some of the contractors are in there.

Specifically, I want to bring to light that Public Services and Procurement, PSPC, is investigating ArriveCAN contracts given to Dalian and Coradix. What did you do when you found out that PSPC was investigating contracts for these vendors, which are also listed on the benefits delivery modernization programme?

Hon. Terry Beech: Specifically with regard to the benefits delivery modernization programme, I can tell you that we followed all procurement practices, and you can rest assured that any contract over \$40,000 has been competitively bid on.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Minister, before I get into that, my follow-up question is this: Did you also launch an investigation into your department after you heard that the same vendors that were involved in the benefits delivery modernization programme were also being investigated under the ArriveCAN app right now?

Hon. Terry Beech: My understanding at present is that all procurement processes were followed, but if there are concerns that you'd like to raise, I'd be happy to follow up with you on them.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Minister, on that note, in fact there is a limit. My understanding is that it's \$40,000, and when looking at the list and what the values are, there are several that have been over that amount. Are you aware, Minister, of those that did not go through the formal procurement process, the RFP?

Hon. Terry Beech: My understanding and my information are that every contract amount over \$40,000 for the entirety of the \$852 million that has been spent has gone through the appropriate competitive practice. If there's an incident that you're aware of in which that didn't happen, I'd be happy to look into it for you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Minister.

That's time, and now we'll go over to Mr. Van Bynen.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister O'Regan, I was quite taken by your focus on dignity, both in the workplace and for seniors, particularly in relation to allowing seniors to age with dignity. My question is with respect to NORCs, naturally occurring retirement communities.

Are there any projects that explore the benefits or the merits of developing programs that would support NORCs, naturally occurring retirement communities?

• (1615)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Van Bynen, I'll give you 10 points for consistency, because I don't think you said, "Merry Christmas" to me but you do ask, "How are NORCs?" every time we bump into each other. That's a blatant exaggeration, but this is something I know you're very passionate about.

The comments that I made about dignity directly tie into that. Seniors need to be able to age in their communities where they can. Until I became Minister for Seniors, I must admit that I hadn't heard of NORCs, but thanks to your lobbying and also hearing about them through officials, now I know. These are naturally occurring retirement communities. They do incredible work, and they don't have that clinical feel that you feel in many retirement communities, which is like you're in some sort of semi-hospital.

These are places where people live. They feel like homes, and the great thing about programs like New Horizons for Seniors or the age well at home program is that they create opportunities for these innovative approaches like NORCs that allow people to age with dignity.

Specifically on the age well at home program, we invested \$1.8 million to scale up Queen's University's Oasis NORC-based program. Oasis meets seniors where they are. It helps to prevent social isolation, which is a big thing. It helps promote physical fitness and injury prevention, and it facilitates better nutrition for seniors. It's expanding now to 12 locations across Canada. It's an excellent example of how we're moving on with this.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you very much.

I have one additional, quick question, again staying with dignity for seniors.

We've seen conservatives down south constantly attacking retirement programs. In fact, we've seen the age of retirement go from 65 to 67, and we're seeing echoes of what's going on south of the border. What are your worries about this?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I tend to give people the benefit of the doubt here. It's not like anybody, I think, has a personal vendetta against the Canada pension plan, but we have to be vigilant about these things.

When we improved the CPP, we knew that we were making an investment in seniors. We knew we had to protect its solvency. We knew that it had to be there for people. You want to make sure that you protect CPP at all costs. It's not something that we should ever take for granted. I would like to believe that most people—and I think everybody in this room—would want to see that its integrity was protected.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you. I'll pass it over to my colleague.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you.

Good afternoon, colleagues. Thank you, Ministers, for coming.

My beautiful riding of Saint John—Rothesay is a strong union riding, very proud of its union heritage, whether they are Saint John firefighters local 771, the Saint John police force union, CUPE local 18 for outside workers or ILA longshoremen's union local 273. The list goes on and on.

One of the first things I heard in 2015, not really knowing that much, was about Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. It was like, "If you guys get in, you have to repeal Bill 377 and Bill 525." I did some research. It was the Conservatives. They were basically union-busting bills that made it very difficult for unions to certify, and every union that I came across was against them.

I know that the Conservatives at times like to paint themselves as friends of unions. I would say that it's the exact opposite. Unions built the middle class, with five-day work weeks, eight-hour days and safe work environments.

We've done a lot of great things for unions. As you said, Minister, we've banned replacement workers.

I am going to put a motion on notice to study how unions deliver powerful paycheques, better benefits and safer workplaces for all Canadians. I'll be moving that motion very soon and I hope to have support from everybody around this table.

Minister, if you can, I'd like you to share your efforts with respect to being Minister of Labour in delivering for Canadian workers and for unions.

Thank you.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Thank you, Mr. Long.

I know Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 caused a lot of damage in the relationship between the federal government and working men and women across the country. They were undermining unions and making it difficult for them to form and forcing them to show their cards financially at a pivotal time at a negotiating table. Anyway, we ripped them up.

I look to Mr. Aitchison, because when we were working on 10 paid days of sick leave, we got unanimous consent. I think things have changed demonstrably in this country. I think we have a significant labour shortage and I think all parties recognize this, but

we have gone the extra mile for workers because we sit down and we listen to them. We listen to what they have to say. We have a union-led advisory table, for instance, that is coming up consistently with good ideas, and they are the ones who know their membership.

A lot of the membership have significant concerns right now about artificial intelligence and about automation, but one thing they have asked for since before Canada even became a country was a ban on replacement workers, for anti-scab legislation, and we're going to deliver on that. I have sat down at very difficult negotiations with employers and with unions trying to sort out the best way to do it. We feel we've landed on it and we will be making the case to the House. I'm looking forward to support from all members, hopefully, as we had before.

• (1620)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Minister.

It's over to you, Ms. Chabot.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, ministers. Thank you very much for being here. I'm sorry I have to participate in the meeting by video conference for health reasons. I still want to welcome you.

Mr. O'Regan, I would like to talk to you about Bill C-58, which concerns replacement workers and is known as the anti-scab legislation. You actually talked about it. You said, rightly so, that the fact that the federal government is still allowing the use of strikebreakers in 2024 is disrupting working conditions and labour relations. In fact, we have a flagrant example in Quebec: Longshore workers at the Port of Québec affiliated with the Canadian Union of Public Employees have been locked out for 500 days. For 500 days now, the employer has been using strikebreakers with impunity. This puts workers in an extremely difficult financial situation. It also takes away their ability to negotiate their employment contract in good faith, since the employer has the upper hand.

When you introduced this bill last November, it was welcomed by everyone—both the unions and the Bloc Québécois. In fact, since 1990, the Bloc Québécois has introduced 11 bills on this issue.

This bill was introduced as a result of a joint agreement between the Liberal Party and the NDP, but it still has to be passed so that it becomes law and so that the use of replacement workers is banned once and for all. The unions are calling for the bill to be passed more quickly. Will you commit to speeding up the process to ensure that the legislation sees the light of day in this Parliament?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: The lockout at the Port of Québec shows why legislation banning replacement workers is needed. With all-party support, we can do that.

We support the parties in the negotiations; we're there to help.

[English]

As we speak, workers in the port of Quebec are on the front lines of this issue. They have been replaced. As Lana Payne said yesterday in a statement that was in the media today, there's nothing more demeaning for a worker than to be on strike or locked out while knowing that your work has been replaced.

They have been on the picket line for over a year. Their every day is ongoing proof of why we need to pass legislation in order to ban replacement workers. I think with the support of all parties in this House, we could prevent this from happening again.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Minister, but my question was simple: How can we be assured that you will act diligently, that this bill will be a priority for you and for the government and that it will become law? Forgive us for doubting that. The bill includes a provision whereby it would not come into force until 18 months after royal assent. Given this time frame and the journey of the bill in the legislative calendar, there is a good chance that this legislation will not see the light of day.

I have two questions for you. Will you commit to making the passage of the bill a priority and speeding up the process? Will you support the proposal to remove the provision whereby 18 months need to pass after royal assent for the bill to come into force?

Please be brief, Minister, as my speaking time is limited.

• (1625)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I understand.

We need time; the experts need time.

[English]

Our federal mediation and conciliation organizations are some of the best. I would argue that one of the best in the world is the FM-CS, the federal mediation and conciliation service.

We also have the Canada industrial review board. These are the people who ultimately help parties negotiate an agreement or help them achieve one. We have a 96% success rate in this country. It is astounding. These are the best.

I've had the pleasure of meeting so many good public servants. This team is so effective. They've said to us that they need 18 months, for exactly the reason that we've just said. This is one of the most transformational changes to happen to labour relations in Canada in our history. It is precisely when people say that and then say "Well, can you rush it?" One answers the other. The reason we can't rush it is that it is so big. When the people who are at the table and are achieving the deals consistently, 96% of the time, say to me, "We need 18 months", I listen to them. We are taking our time to make sure that we get this right.

Madame Chabot is absolutely right: There is a time when you pass it and there is the time that it goes into effect, but we need not

only to make sure the people are properly trained for what would be a different negotiating environment: We're going to need more people. We're going to need more people to make sure that the supply chains in this country are protected and that workers' rights are protected. That takes good people, smart people, who are trained very well.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Minister, this is really worrisome. The 18-month time frame is already—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: We understand that there is no desire on your part to speed things up.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Ms. Zarrillo, we'll go over to you for six minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you so much.

Welcome to the committee, Minister. It's nice to see you for the first time at committee, Mr. Beech.

I wanted to talk a bit about the service delivery excellence that you speak about. I raised this with you initially in terms of my concern about the CRA's capacity to reach people with disabilities who are living in poverty and to get them the Canada disability benefit when it becomes available.

My concern was realized when I received a response back on an Order Paper question that was asking the CRA to give me the information on the cross-reference between disability tax certificates and income. This is relating to the disability tax credit. What came back was this answer:

The one-to-one relationship between claimants and certificate holders is difficult to ascertain, with the possibility of more than one individual being a claimant on the same certificate. For this reason, CRA is unable to provide the income breakdowns of certificate holders (the beneficiaries) and is not in a position to respond in the manner requested.

My question is for you, Mr. Minister. How will the government ensure that those living in poverty who need the Canada disability benefit will get it, and does the government accept that the disability tax credit system cannot be the only entry point for the disability benefit?

Hon. Terry Beech: First of all, thank you for the question.

Although this is my first time appearing at committee as a minister, I certainly lived at committee for the last number of years.

First of all, I'd like to express, given the conversations we've had, how important the Canada disability benefit is. I recently met with my equivalent minister in Australia, a country that went through this and basically transformed their own system a number of years ago. The impact that's had on their citizens has been dramatic.

Part of the reason that we are embarking on the modernization of our benefit delivery systems is that we are dealing with old technologies that in a lot of cases. It's 60 years old for OAS, 50 years old for EI and 25 years old for CPP. Also, siloed departments don't necessarily speak to each other.

In order to tackle the problem that you're specifically talking about, we need to empower the de-siloization of departments so that we can actually have them share information among each other in a secure way and have the flexibility to make sure the policies that elected members of Parliament want to implement are actually implementable once that policy hits the ground.

The kinds of frustration that you talk about, especially if they affect vulnerable Canadians, disabled Canadians, are completely unacceptable. Sadly, we're in a position of making up for generations of technical neglect all at once, but I am certain that, working together, we're going to be able to overcome that and provide a benefits system that delivers to everybody who needs it.

• (1630)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

Minister, this committee did bring a report to the House on having CRA explore this. This is something that the committee has been seized with for almost two years.

I guess it does play into the dental program that's rolling out. Knowing that the government cannot cross-reference at this point in time a disability certificate with a person's income, is everyone with a disability tax credit certificate eligible for the new Canada dental care program?

Hon. Terry Beech: Starting in June, children and individuals with—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm sorry. I don't have much time.

Is it going to be income-tested? What I understand is that the CRA can't income-test—

Hon. Terry Beech: It will be income-tested as well, and you will need a certificate.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: We're going to need to resolve that, because the CRA is saying that it cannot do income tests of the disability tax credit claimants.

Can I get your commitment that this will be prioritized?

Hon. Terry Beech: It is a challenge that we must overcome.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Okay. Thank you.

I'm going to move to Minister O'Regan.

We have also spoken about the care economy, I know, and I appreciate your reaching out to me in some of your busiest times to talk about this.

However, as we look at the seniors portfolio specifically and as we talk about long-term care, nursing, personal care aids, home care aids, and even federal nurses—we have a whole health care division federally—I want to know about collecting data.

When we were doing the care economy study a couple of years back, there was a real lack of pan-Canadian data to do HR planning in this space. Has there been any movement on being able to gather data on these workers in the care economy?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Thank you for the question and, clearly, Ms. Zarrillo, your commitment to it.

The care economy is something that came up as a priority too at the union-led advisory table. We are working with provinces and territories to acquire more data. You can't do anything without good data. We need better data on the care economy. We need to make those connections within the care economy, which is a broad umbrella and affects more than just seniors. You're talking about 20% of our workforce, really. They do the work so that we can go to work.

I think that there's an increased focus on this. Although this is under provincial and territorial jurisdiction for the most part, I think the federal government can play a real role in bringing all bodies together and collecting better data and making better decisions on this area.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

I think it's gendered, in that it wasn't something that was focused on, so data wasn't gathered. I really appreciate the movement on that.

I have one other question, but I'm going to wait until my next round. It has to do with the dental care for seniors. However, I do want to thank you for the menstrual products. That's very, very exciting around equity, and it certainly is something that they care about in Port Moody—Coquitlam, in Anmore and Belcarra. Thank you so much for that.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

Now we'll go on to the next round, and I will lead this one off as well.

At the public accounts committee on December 14, which I did attend, I asked officials for the metrics and scoring criteria used to determine contracts. In that discussion, an official at the meeting stated that “the commercial confidence of which suppliers won and didn't win may be more commercially confidential.” I was asking what the metrics and scoring criteria were, and that seems very subjective.

This is for you, Minister Beech.

You referred to the competitive process. One of your officials at that same meeting confirmed that the amount was \$40,000 in order to trigger a competitive process. Your department provided a document that I requested when I was questioning them. Going through it, I saw that there were numerous anomalies listed over \$40,000 and called “Non-Competitive”, “Sole Source” or “Competitive” or “Selective Tendering”.

Minister, can you explain these anomalies?

Hon. Terry Beech: I will repeat what I stated before with regard to the BDM program: My understanding is that all contracts over \$40,000 were competitively sourced. However, if you want to highlight those anomalies, I'd be happy to get you a fully sourced answer.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Great.

Minister, this is in a document that was provided to that committee. It is a quite detailed document. There are numerous ones in there. I'm just surprised that you're not familiar with it. However, I will move on.

When we're looking at the benefits delivery modernization programme, we see that this is on track to be billions of dollars over budget. You already admitted that you weren't aware that contracts were potentially not following procurement rules. There are IT middlemen with ArriveCAN, so there's real concern that this could potentially be happening again.

Are you concerned about this, and would you welcome a review by the procurement ombudsman, Minister?

• (1635)

Hon. Terry Beech: I'd be concerned about any anomaly. Anything that doesn't follow the procurements policies that we've set in place, especially on such a large project, especially with \$852 million already procured, yes, would concern me. I would like to look into it. I would highly recommend highlighting that for my attention.

I am getting a note from the business lead with regard to two exceptions. If you want him to comment, he's here. Otherwise, I can follow up with you outside of the committee.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Minister.

Yes, your time is very limited while you're here. You're only here for an hour and you've been minister for seven months, so we want to ask you questions directly.

I'll go back to the question. Would you welcome a review by the procurement ombudsman on the benefits modernization delivery programme?

Hon. Terry Beech: I'm not against it.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Would you be in favour of that? Is that something that you would give a directive on?

Hon. Terry Beech: I'd have to go look. You're making some accusations that I would like some more details on, so before I express any opinion, I think I'd like to look into it. If you have details, please present those details. I'd be happy to look at it.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Minister, there are a lot of questions here. If you believe that there's not a concern, then I would think that you would welcome a review by the procurement ombudsman.

Hon. Terry Beech: I can share that in all my briefings, I've been advised that we followed our procurement processes correctly. You're being incredibly vague, unfortunately, about exactly what you're concerned about. If you make it available to me, I can give you a very detailed answer.

Despite the fact that I'm only here for an hour, I'm a floor across the way and a text away. I'm happy to get back to you at any time. We're in the same province. Whatever you have concerns about, I'm happy to get back to you in short order.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Minister, you referred to the briefings that you're receiving. How many briefings have you received on the benefits modernization delivery programme since you've become minister?

Hon. Terry Beech: That would be hard to quantify, but I'm happy to give you an estimate, if that's satisfactory.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Actually, this is one of the things that I had requested at the procedure committee back in December. The officials from your department were good enough to provide that information.

Hon. Terry Beech: Perfect. I'd love to know. I imagine it's.... Can I guess and see how close I am?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Minister, I am surprised. This is the biggest IT project in Canadian history. Based on the information that came from your department, you had four briefings on this.

Hon. Terry Beech: No.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): That is the information that was provided by your department, so—

Hon. Terry Beech: Well, I'm happy to share with you that I've had many more briefings than that on the BDM program.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Great.

Minister, could you table for this committee a list of all of the briefings you've had? It might be different from what the department has provided, which would be interesting.

Hon. Terry Beech: Well, they were there, but—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Can you commit to doing that?

Hon. Terry Beech: Sure.

You're looking for dates when I was briefed on the BDM project, correct?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Yes, those would be the dates that were provided at the other committee.

My time is up, so now I will go over to Mr. Collins.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair.

Welcome, ministers and guests.

Minister Beech, can I start with you?

I have a quick question about the “digital first” initiative. You're charged with the responsibility of changing government services and making them more efficient and more accessible to our constituents. My kids have grown up with a phone in their hand. They do all of their shopping and banking online, and their entertainment's online. They expect innovation, certainly. They're the young voters of today. We have a bigger crowd, of course, that expects the same.

At the other end of the spectrum is my 91-year-old mother-in-law, who is used to dealing with brick-and-mortar facilities. She doesn't own a phone. She's not online. As part of that, her daily routines are social events for her. With English as her second language, it's very important for her to deal with whoever she's dealing with face to face because of some of those communication issues.

How do you balance that? You've emphasized today, and outside of this committee room, the government's quest to make those government services much easier for our constituents to access. That means pushing things online. However, we also have a big constituency. A lot of my seniors in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek still want that brick-and-mortar facility. They still want that personal interaction.

Can you advise us in terms of how we balance the needs of those two distinct constituencies?

Hon. Terry Beech: I think that's a very fair question.

I'd start by highlighting that “digital first” does not mean “digital only”. This is the provision of a new service that for a lot of people is a lot more convenient and cheaper. It saves them time and energy. Frankly, I think millions of Canadians would like to utilize those services.

However, if you look at something like the rollout of the enrolment program for dental care, we know that, especially for the oldest seniors in Canada, the preferred method for enrolling into the program was via telephone. We made that service available.

One of the best ways to articulate how good this service will be—whether it will be for a relative of yours or for any seniors that we represent—would be that the ability to provide these services online actually takes a person out of line for the other channels that are being utilized. A lot of people in those lines at a Service Canada centre don't want to be there. They would have much rather done it at three o'clock in the morning at their home, or after work or in the morning. They don't want to take time off work. They don't want to have to find child care or pay for parking.

When it comes to even the telephone program, I think there are opportunities that we should be looking at that are becoming available in the private sector, especially with regard to technology. For example, for any of the millions of Canadians who have waited on hold on the line, you've memorized the music. Having the ability to be called back so you can go about your day is useful.

I also think it's interesting that there are new AI services that actually interrupt the conversation to say, “Hey, somebody is several minutes away, but I can handle 80% of inquiries. Would you like to try me?” That's another way that we can get more people out of line.

• (1640)

Mr. Chad Collins: Madam Chair, I cede the rest of my time to my friend and colleague Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much. I'll continue with this theme around the physical location and how important it is for many communities.

Recently we saw a different model approach in Ontario. I'm an Ontario MP. I know you're from out west. I'm not sure if the department has been following this issue, but with Service Ontario in Ontario, the provincial government has decided to go into big American box stores to deliver their services. Can you reflect on what the future of that physical location looks like for the Government of Canada, and do you have any comments on that specific model?

Hon. Terry Beech: I recently had the opportunity to visit the flagship office in North York and look at some of the more modernized services that they're providing, and really, it is an inclusive space where people are being handled in a very convenient way with technologies that weren't available even a number of years ago.

I won't prejudice what the Government of Ontario is doing with their service provision. It's possible that these kiosks will be well utilized and provide an extra bonus of service delivery and another point of contact. Even within Service Canada, we have over 300 site locations, but we have over 600 points of contact, and in a country that's as vast and diverse as ours, it's important for us to customize how we provide those services, depending on where you are in the country and who your customers are.

It will be interesting to see how these new kiosks play out, and we'll watch it closely.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

We'll go over to Ms. Chabot for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister O'Regan, as you said, you are also the Minister of Seniors. In your presentation, you talked about the importance you attach to the principle of aging with dignity, and we fully agree with that. However, your government made a decision concerning seniors in 2022 by giving a 10% increase in old age security only to seniors aged 75 and over.

This week, we are going to start studying Bill C-319, sponsored by the member for Shefford, meant to address this inequity and to grant a 10% increase in old age security to seniors starting at age 65, which is the age of eligibility for this program.

Will your government support that bill?

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I stand by the decision that we made on seniors 75 and older, because I think older seniors are more financially challenged. They are more worried about outliving their savings, and as they age, seniors face more health issues. Their health care expenses rise due to illness or disability. In fact, on average, the out-of-pocket health expenses of those aged 80 and over are over \$700 a year higher than for those aged 65 to 74.

At the same time, most older seniors can no longer supplement their income with paid work, with few seniors working beyond 75. Passing spouses adds to that pressure. Among seniors, almost twice as many over the age of 75 are likely to be widows or widowers. With women living longer on average than men, it's no wonder that many senior women slip into poverty after losing their life partners.

I think our OAS increase, as we have done it, has strengthened the financial security, I'm told, of 3.3 million seniors, the majority of whom are women. sncmfmrht

• (1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: However, many seniors are being left behind, Minister. As you know, a large percentage of seniors rely solely on their old age security pension starting at age 65. However, that income is completely insufficient to cope with the current cost of living.

So this is an important bill for us because it seeks to address this inequity. It is important to be able to buy a dental prosthesis, but it is even more important to have a decent income so that you can live out your retirement and your old age with dignity and security.

Thank you, Minister.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you.

Ms. Zarrillo, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

Minister O'Regan, thank you for your comments around women and gender. This is an area of work that hasn't been covered equitably since the beginning of recognizing work and EI.

I was actually going to ask you a question about dental care, but it probably should go to Minister Beech.

I understand that Service Canada is visiting seniors homes across Canada in connection with the implementation of the dental program that the NDP spearheaded.

Can you share the rollout plan? Will Service Canada be visiting long-term care homes and seniors homes in the riding I represent, Port Moody—Coquitlam?

Hon. Terry Beech: We reach out in all kinds of different ways. Service Canada is very active and on the ground. We also partner with service organizations. Individuals have been meeting at various venues. If you're making a formal request, I'll look into that for you.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I am making a formal request, because it would be wonderful to have the CRA or Service Canada at some of those events and to be there to support us in the riding.

Hon. Terry Beech: I'll be happy to get back to you on that.

In terms of the rollout, we made an announcement earlier with regard to the letters for people 70 and over that have already gone out. We will move to an online platform in May. We will also commence our first services for people who have already received their sign-up package.

In June, we will then transfer to children and to individuals with the disability tax credit certificate. The remainder, 18-year-olds to 64-year-olds, will be able to sign up starting in 2025.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so very much.

I will revisit that whole concept of the disability tax credit and the claimant of that tax credit. I'm referring to the certificate and the claimant versus who would be eligible for the dental work.

Could you potentially follow up with me? If that rollout is happening with persons with disabilities, how is their income being tested?

Hon. Terry Beech: I will endeavour to do so.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you very much.

We're just about at time here. We did start a little bit late because of votes.

I want to thank everyone for being here. Minister Beech, it's the first time that you've been to this committee. I'm taking the chair's prerogative right now to make a statement. We do have a lot of work at this committee that's within your portfolio, so hopefully we can see you again soon. I hope you'll make that commitment.

You had also requested to me to see the documents I was referring to. I will forward to you the documents that came directly from your department. I am disappointed that some of these issues weren't being addressed as seriously as they could have been. Hopefully we'll see you again soon and we can question you further on this.

We have another part of this meeting, so we'll suspend for a few minutes while we prepare for the second panel of witnesses today.

Thank you so much, everyone.

• (1645)

(Pause)

• (1655)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): I call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on November 8, 2023, the committee is hearing from Air Canada on services offered to travellers with disabilities.

Present for the meeting, all by video conference, are witnesses from Air Canada. We have Michael Rousseau, president and chief executive officer; David Rheault, vice-president, government and community relations; Tom Stevens, vice-president, customer experience and operations strategy; and Kerianne Wilson, director, customer accessibility.

Mr. Rousseau, you have five minutes to make an opening statement.

• (1700)

Mr. Michael Rousseau (President and Chief Executive Officer, Air Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you and good afternoon.

[English]

Let me assure the committee, people with disabilities, and the Canadian public that Air Canada takes very seriously its obligations to ensure our services are accessible. Equally important to us is that our objective is to be the preferred airline for people with disabilities.

[Translation]

We are already investing significant resources in accessibility, but we will do better.

[English]

Each year Air Canada successfully carries hundreds of thousands of customers who require mobility assistance or other accommodation. We invest significant resources in accessibility. We have been, and will continue to be, a leader. We were a key participant in drafting the CTA's "Mobility Aids and Air Travel Final Report". Air Canada was one of the first airlines to waive liability limits in international treaties to pay the full cost for damaged mobility equipment.

I sit on the board of the International Air Transport Association, which represents 250 airlines worldwide. Air Canada was a key member of this Mobility Aids Action Group.

In 2023, across our network we had nearly 1.3 million special assistance requests related to accessibility for more than 500,000 customers. The vast majority had a positive experience; however, we know we must get better to reach our goal of offering a positive and respectful experience to all passengers. To this end, we endorse the Accessible Canada Act and its goal of a barrier-free Canada by 2040.

As part of this, we publicly filed a three-year accessibility plan, with far-ranging initiatives. It includes 144 initiatives based on a year of research, extra consultations and feedback from travellers with disabilities, who took over 220 flights. Recent announcements, such as becoming the first North American carrier to join the global Sunflower program for non-visible disabilities and the creation of a customer advisory committee composed of representatives from four Canadian accessibility groups, are examples of the initiatives we are executing to improve.

People with disabilities make up a significant segment of our customer base. We are very proud of this. We have high awareness, a strong work ethic and deep empathy among our employees and contractors. Our processes generally work well. Hundreds of thousands of customers requiring assistance successfully travel each year. Still, despite this, accessibility issues, while remaining the exception, do arise, and we understand the impact in terms of how difficult the disruption is for our customers with disabilities.

While the causes behind these negative experiences differ, we have concluded the chief issue is inconsistency. The best remedy for this is to provide our people, who all want to do a good job serving customers, with more and better tailored training and tools so they can succeed every time.

Our November announcement about improving accessibility contained programs to achieve this greater consistency. For example, our 10,000 airport employees will receive extra disability-related instruction as part of a new, recurrent annual training program. Apart from reinforcing processes, it will promote better understanding.

It is a challenge; however, a good parallel is airline safety. Instances still occur, but aviation today is the safest mode of travel. This was achieved through our industry's willingness to examine and learn from mistakes, constantly refine processes, adopt new technology or add redundancy, and provide continual and better training.

We are well aware of the disruptions customers with disabilities can experience. When we fail, we are incredibly disappointed, because it affects a person's quality of life. In these cases we apologize and take responsibility. However, what we hear is that our customers' overriding concern is always that we act to make sure whatever happened to them does not happen to others. This is why our leadership team, and all employees at Air Canada, are committed to improve. We are striving every day to deliver a positive experience for every customer.

[Translation]

We are now available to answer your questions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you very much, Mr. Rousseau.

The first rounds of questions are six minutes. I will be leading us off on behalf of the Conservatives.

First of all, I want to start by saying that the treatment that many persons with disabilities have had from Air Canada has been shocking to hear and completely unacceptable. We've heard of horrible situations of mistreatment reported by persons with disabilities. These are experiences they've had with Air Canada, including recently, from October to November of 2023 alone.

There have been headlines about an Air Canada passenger who had a lift fall on her head and her ventilator was disconnected. Air Canada left Canada's own chief accessibility officer's wheelchair behind on a cross-Canada flight. A passenger was forced to drag himself off of an Air Canada flight, and a man was dropped and injured when Air Canada staff didn't use a lift as requested.

Can you confirm that these are the types of situations that persons with disabilities are experiencing at Air Canada, Mr. Rousseau?

• (1705)

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Thank you for the question.

What I can confirm is that the vast majority of customers requesting accessibility help from Air Canada are having good experiences. There are exceptions. We take responsibility for those exceptions.

The primary intention or objective of the plan that we published in June is to ensure that all customers are in fact treated with respect and have a positive experience flying Air Canada.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Mr. Rousseau, I don't think that gives comfort to the people who had those experiences.

I also would like to confirm that Air Canada was fined \$97,500 recently by the Canadian Transportation Agency for several violations of the accessible transportation for persons with disabilities regulations.

Isn't that correct?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Thank you for the question.

I believe that is correct. I'm not aware of all the details, but if I can, I'd like to turn the question over to Kerianne, who could provide more details.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Mr. Rousseau, I'd like to keep my questions with you, if that's okay. Perhaps that information could be tabled for this committee.

As the next question for, would you say that it's a priority for Air Canada to serve passengers with disabilities well and to follow regulations?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Thank you for the question.

As I said in my opening comments, it is a priority for us. Our objective, aside from meeting the regulations, is to be the preferred airline for customers with disabilities.

We know we have to improve. That's why we put in place a plan with 145 different initiatives, many of which are being executed at this point in time, with good feedback as well.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Mr. Rousseau.

Mr. Michael Rousseau: We'll continue to add initiatives over the next two and a half years.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Mr. Rousseau.

Would you say, at a high level, that a corporate annual report reports on the activities, priorities, operations and financial performance of an organization? Would that be a fair assessment of what an annual report does?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I think that would be a fair characterization or description.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): The 168-page 2022 Air Canada annual report and the 180-page 2021 Air Canada annual report mention "disability" or "disabilities" only a couple of times, and it's exclusively around hiring. I think that people hearing that would find it difficult to believe that this is a priority for Air Canada. I'm not sure how Air Canada can be taking improving its service levels seriously when it's not even mentioned in your annual reports.

I want to go ahead here because my time is limited. We only have an hour with Air Canada, with no other witnesses being called.

I have approval from the chair of Disability Without Poverty, Michelle Hewitt, to bring forth her comments today. I will read some of them into the record:

One of the areas that concerns me is what happens when flights are delayed. The burden is heavy on disabled travellers who have often chosen the time and route with great deliberation so that it fits with medication schedules and other bodily needs. If a connection is missed, disabled travellers need more support than is typically offered if meals and accommodation are needed.

Mr. Rousseau, would you agree that persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by travel delays?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I think that's a fair assessment. Our initiatives will be executed over the next couple of years to help alleviate that concern.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Mr. Rousseau, Air Canada was rated as having the worst on-time performance among large airlines in North America in 2023. Isn't that correct?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: That is a correct statement. Of the 10 that were measured, that's correct, although I would say on-time performance is not an absolute indicator of missed connections.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Although there may be many factors for delays, it was reported that you pointed to a few primary factors in media reports. These were "air traffic controllers, bad weather and a network running at full tilt amid high demand". Is that correct? Were those comments that you made?

• (1710)

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I didn't make those comments myself, but our spokesperson may have made those comments. I'm not aware. Certainly, weather and other factors do influence performance.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Since you have the worst on-time performance, are you saying that weather only affects Air Canada and not all the other airlines in North America?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I didn't say that at all. I'm saying that, given that we're in the northern part of the continent, weather is typically worse than in the southern part of the continent. That would be one factor that may be different between our performance and others' performance.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Mr. Rousseau.

We'll now go over to Mr. van Koeverden.

Welcome to committee. It's over to you for six minutes.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's a real privilege to be here at HUMA. I've never appeared at this committee before, but I thank the members of this committee and the chair for allowing me to be here on behalf of one of my constituents.

Mr. Rousseau, thank you for joining this committee today. As CEO of Air Canada, it's your responsibility to be accountable for Air Canada's failings as a company.

Today I'm going to refer to a CBC article about the father of one of my constituents. He was an 83-year-old man who, while on board a transatlantic flight, "developed severe medical symptoms", including "chest pain, back pain, vomiting, loss of bowel control and the inability to stand up."

I'll acknowledge that this meeting today concerns how those who are disabled are treated on your airline, but given this man's age and his condition, I think it is pertinent. I've had conversations with this man's family, as they're my constituents, and I can tell you that they continue to be in a deep state of trauma after what they experienced.

I believe that you're probably familiar with this case. I'm referring to a flight that left Delhi in the late summer of 2023 as Flight AC51. While over Europe, my constituent's father experienced a severe medical event that has been referred to by some physicians who have been consulted following this tragedy as one that warranted landing early or turning around. They would have expected the Medair consultants who were contacted to have made that recommendation.

My constituent tried to make this situation abundantly clear to the inflight staff on board. They asked for a physician. That wasn't provided, or nobody came forward. Unfortunately, my constituent's father passed away shortly after the flight landed in Montreal. I'll say on their behalf that they have not felt adequately reassured that anything has changed at Air Canada since this or that Air Canada took all precautions necessary to keep this gentleman alive.

Mr. Rousseau, when Air Canada performs well financially as a company, you personally benefit as well. Your compensation more than tripled in 2022, to \$12.4 million, compared to \$3.7 million in 2021, according to documents released by the airline. The stock price reflects similar performance over that period of time. Do you feel that being called to this committee today, given that people experience things similar to what my constituent has experienced, is reflective of great performance by your airline?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I am very aware of the situation. We've provided our condolences to the family and we've reached out to the family to speak to them about the situation.

As you probably know as well, the situation is in front of the courts at this point in time, and it's very difficult for me to expand on any aspect as to what happened. We believe, based on our investigation, that our crew followed all the right procedures; however, again, this is in front of the courts, and it's difficult for me to expand on the situation.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I appreciate that this is still before the courts and that for legal reasons it's impossible to comment. Nothing can bring this gentleman back, and the family acknowledges that, obviously. It's a tragedy and it is something that the family will continue to endure.

However, going forward, perhaps changes can be made to ensure that better care is provided for people who are experiencing traumatic health-related events. Perhaps it could be better training or better resources on board.

What have you considered in order to ensure that while this might not be entirely preventable in all cases going forward, lives can be saved if proper life-saving care is available on board? What changes have you made?

• (1715)

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Again, thank you for the follow-up comment.

We're still studying and still investigating the situation. Our procedures are followed by many different airlines around the world. There are cases in which we do divert if recommended by the doctors. In this case, as you know, that wasn't recommended. Again, we will continue to learn and investigate, and if it's required, we'll modify our procedures.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Well, on behalf of my constituents and their family, I sincerely hope that happens. The only legacy that could potentially come from such a terrible tragedy is that fewer of these events are experienced by families in the future.

I would just add, on behalf of my constituents and their family, that they don't feel as though Air Canada has done a great job in terms of their accountability since this tragedy. I would request that you and Air Canada do better.

Thank you, Mr. Rousseau.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Mr. Van Koeverden.

We'll go to Ms. Chabot for six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Rousseau. I also thank all the other witnesses.

We all know what led to this motion. There was a very unfortunate, if not shocking, incident in Prince George where a disabled man in a wheelchair had to drag himself out of the plane owing to a lack of assistance. That is inexplicable and appalling.

We know that Air Canada sent a letter of apology, but beyond apologies, how can such a situation be justified?

In your opinion, is this an isolated case or are there other similar situations that occur and that should never happen again?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Thank you for your question.

[English]

I'm aware of that case of Mr. Hodgins, who was arriving in Las Vegas. Kerianne may provide more details a little bit later. We are very sorry for what happened. Our contractor in Las Vegas didn't show up to help Mr. Hodgins off the plane to his mobility aid. That is our responsibility. We have dealt with that third party.

To my point earlier, it was a mistake on our part. The training we're putting in place and all the different initiatives we're putting in place will hopefully reduce the number of these mistakes. Again, we did successfully help the majority of the 500,000 people who travelled on our planes last year who required assistance regarding disability.

Kerianne, do you have anything to offer on Mr. Hodgins?

Ms. Kerianne Wilson (Director, Customer Accessibility, Air Canada): Thank you very much, Mike.

[Translation]

Thank you for the question—

Ms. Louise Chabot: Training is a major issue.

I'm sorry for interrupting you.

The Auditor General's latest report focused a great deal on the issue of training. We know that there are a lot of employees, but management also has a huge role to play in these matters.

You adopted Air Canada's accessibility plan 2023-26. What has changed in your practices since you did that?

• (1720)

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Thank you again for the question.

[English]

A number of initiatives have been introduced in the last several months as part of our three-year plan. For example, customers with disabilities who require a lift are put on the plane first. In fact, we will delay a plane to ensure that they go on first before any other customer goes on.

Second, we try to put customers with disabilities at the front of each of the cabins they're sitting in, again for a greater degree of respect.

As for their mobility aids, which are obviously critical to them, we are putting as many as we can in the cabin. Obviously there are certain restrictions with regard to size, but we will put as many mobility aids in the cabin as we possibly can. If we can't put it in the cabin—for example, if it's too large—we'll put it in the cargo bay, but we have special procedures that we've put in place to ensure that it's protected. It's packaged differently and it will come off as a priority item, so it will come off first when the plane arrives.

More importantly, we have put a process in place so that if a mobility aid goes in the cargo bay, we will in fact ensure—double-check and triple-check—that it is in the cargo bay. There is an app that customers can access that shows them that to give them comfort that their mobility aid will be at the destination when they arrive.

In this last case, with regard to this process that we have just introduced to ensure that mobility aids are in fact in the cargo bay if they're too large to fit in the cabin, we will delay a plane until we are certain that the mobility aid is in fact in the cargo bay.

With regard to your point about training, we have always had training, but we've retained some expert consultants who have looked at our training and have enhanced our training. We will be putting in annual recurring training for our 10,000 airport employees, one segment on processes and a second one on attitude, to a great degree, which is also very important.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: You are talking about consulting experts, but will we see, in your practices—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Ms. Chabot. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Rousseau.

We'll now go to Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Rousseau, for being here today. My questions are for you and not for your staff.

Mr. Rousseau, have you ever been deplaned physically by a baggage handler?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: No, of course not.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Have you ever been deplaned on a catering cart?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: No, I haven't.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Have you ever been forced to get on your hands and knees to deplane?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: No, I have not.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: This is the reality of people with disabilities who have shared some of their stories with me.

When you and your executive team consider savings and profits by balancing what is regulated and what you are willing to give in goodwill—and I quote that from your conference calls—in which category do you put human rights for persons with disabilities?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Human rights are critical, and the whole purpose of our accessibility plan.... In fact, one of Air Canada's core values is respect of its customers. That's all customers—customers with disabilities and customers without disabilities.

We carry many, many customers every year. I mentioned over 500,000 customers with disabilities—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm sorry, Mr. Rousseau. My question is this: Do you feel that is regulated, or is that goodwill? I ask this question because.... Is there a federal regulation that holds you to human rights, or is this goodwill that you're doing on your part as the CEO of Air Canada?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I'm going to have to get back to you on that question. I don't understand the intent of the question.

Human rights to us.... Regardless of whether there is a regulation or whether, it's a value, it's critical to us that we treat all our customers with respect.

• (1725)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Okay.

Mr. Rousseau, I want to understand the corporate culture that would allow for dehumanizing passengers and violating their human rights. I'm sure that you've heard that the corporate culture of an organization will eat any strategy for lunch. It's regular business jargon. That's why I wanted you to come to this committee: because I really want to understand the corporate culture, because any accessibility strategy, any accessibility plan, will not be successful if it's not important to you.

The PBO report on accessible transportation for persons with disabilities, published March 31, 2023, shared that only 31% of managers and executives completed their mandatory accessibility training.

Since Air Canada did not have to report in that study, I'm interested to know if you have taken any accessibility training yourself. I know that you referenced today some increased accessibility training for your staff, but have you taken any accessibility training yourself?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Yes. We have some modules for leaders that provide a framework for us to do better on accessibility.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: You said "leaders", so you're saying you've taken them.

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Yes. I've taken the module to give me a better sense of accessibility issues.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: What percentage of your executive has taken those modules?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I don't have that information available right now.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: If you could report that back to this committee, that would be great.

Have the board members of Air Canada taken accessibility training that you're aware of?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Again, I'm not aware of whether they have as part of Air Canada or some other organization that they're associated with.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Would you be willing to approach your board with a request for them to take your newly revised accessibility training?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I'll speak to the board about that, yes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Would you be willing to mandate that all the leadership take the accessibility training at Air Canada?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I think that's a very good idea.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

Mr. Rousseau, I've seen many photos of your government relations people having drinks with the Liberals, with the Liberal government. I've seen it on Twitter. I've seen many receptions where they've been there. I'm wondering what value Air Canada gets from these relationships and these events that they go to with Liberal MPs.

Mr. Michael Rousseau: David Rheault is on the call. He's in charge of government relations at Air Canada.

We run a very complex business. Our government relations people speak to different government parties and individuals to explain our challenges and issues and to provide updates as to how we're doing.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm going to get cut off here, Mr. Rousseau, so I'll just let you know that I've never been invited to any kind of information session from any of your government relations people.

I might not get another opportunity to talk, so I want to mention that I do take into consideration that it took two months to get this meeting with Air Canada, even though we had requested it before the Christmas break.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Great. Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

Just before we go into the next round of questions, I want to say that in just about a minute we are coming up to 5:30. We did start late because of the vote. My intention would be to give the full two hours, which would mean we'd go to 5:50. That would be the full two hours. We do have interpretation.

It's over to you, Ms. Falk.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Following up on MP Zarrillo's last comment, the request was given months ago for you to attend our committee. It's kind of ironic that all are virtual. I'm wondering if this speaks to a testament of Air Canada's service delivery and flight availability. It's unfortunate that we don't have you here, given the fact that this request was given so long ago.

As has been said, many news reports have emerged about the discrimination and the mistreatment experienced by persons with disabilities travelling by air. It's disheartening and truly unacceptable. Air travel should not be a demoralizing experience. I can only begin to imagine the hardship that individuals have experienced. Of course, these just are the experiences that attract news attention.

Mr. Rousseau, I will presume that you would agree that Air Canada still has a way to go to consistently meet its commitment to "offering a high level of customer service and providing a dignified, positive and safe flight experience for all passengers".

Would it be your assessment, however, that Air Canada is in compliance with the Accessible Canada Act and the Canada Transportation Act?

• (1730)

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Certainly, as I said in my opening comments, our objective is to provide a positive experience for all customers with disabilities.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Would you say that Air Canada is in compliance with the Accessible Canada Act and the Canada Transportation Act?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I can't respond to that question at this point in time. I'd have to speak to our—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: As the CEO for Air Canada, you cannot say if Air Canada is in compliance with the Canada accessibility act or the Canada Transportation Act?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I believe we are in compliance.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Then if Air Canada is in compliance—

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Your question is a broad one, and I would have to—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I don't know how it's broad. You're either in compliance or not in compliance.

Mr. Michael Rousseau: We are compliant with every regulation that impacts Air Canada.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: The fact that this is what air travel looks like for persons with disabilities, when an airline is in compliance, points to major flaws in the legislation and regulations.

When this committee studied the Accessible Canada Act, we heard from witness after witness that this bill lacked clear and consistent requirements, that it used permissive language and that it lacked any teeth for enforcement.

Conservatives brought forward more than 60 amendments to address the concerns raised by the disability community and advocacy organizations, and the Liberals rejected amendments that would have strengthened this bill. Without rectifying holes in the Accessible Canada Act, it's impossible to have confidence that we will achieve the goal of a barrier-free Canada. Because this committee is tasked with the status of persons with disabilities, I hope that all my colleagues around this table are equally gripped by this.

Madam Chair, I move:

That the committee express its concern about the progress made towards the goal of a Canada without barriers by 2040, and that it report its opinion to the House.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Mrs. Falk.

Since a motion has been tabled, we do have to address this, and the clock does stop.

We can nod with consent. I'm getting a lot of nods around the table.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can we hear the motion one more time?

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: It is:

That the committee express its concern about the progress made towards the goal of a Canada without barriers by 2040, and that it report its opinion to the House.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Chair, can we suspend for a couple of minutes?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): We will suspend for two minutes.

• (1730)

(Pause)

• (1730)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Now we have resumed.

We have a motion on the floor. We'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos.

• (1735)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thanks, Chair.

I think the member raises a very good point. I would, from our side, put forward an amendment that we extend the rationale of the motion and turn it into a focus for the committee to do a study over three meetings. We could bring in witnesses, get to understand the issue in a very thorough way and think about it from various perspectives.

I think that would be much more beneficial than simply passing a motion. If we're going to truly understand where we are, we could do it in the way that Mrs. Falk has proposed, but why not have a study and go a little deeper over three meetings?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Go ahead, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I have a question for the amender of the original motion.

Is the purpose of the study to listen to witnesses in order to get some more information that speaks to Mrs. Falk's intention behind moving the original motion, and using that document to report back to the House with our findings and recommendations?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It is exactly as my colleague describes. We want to understand the issue in its various aspects. These are really important and substantive matters. For the committee to just agree to a motion is not something that I think aligns with the seriousness of the issue.

That is the amendment that we are putting forward. It would be for three meetings.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Just so that we are clear, could you read the amendment? Do you have it, clerk?

We are talking about the amendment. Could we clearly have what the amendment would be?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Sure. Because the motion was just presented, I'm happy to work with Mrs. Falk on wording. I know that there is still an interest in talking with the witness from Air Canada—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: What was the suggested amendment?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It was that we have three meetings. You can easily add three meetings in there, however you wanted to word it—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Could you—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: —or I could word it for you.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Mr. Fragiskatos, you're the one putting forth the amendment, so the wording is—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Let me work on the wording. We don't even have the original wording at this point. If we can have the original wording distributed, then we can work on it and we can amend accordingly.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): After consulting with the clerk, one thing we could do is suspend debate on this motion and bring it up at the top of the next meeting for discussion. At that time, everyone can have their translated motion. It would be up for debate at the beginning of the next meeting, the meeting that we have on Thursday.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Chair, could the wording be circulated—I'm sure it will be—between now and then? It's a simple.... I will add the words that I want about three meetings, and I think everybody's on the same page.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you very much. That would be the intention. I'm seeing a lot of nods. It doesn't appear that we need to go to a vote.

I'll go back to you, Ms. Falk.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr. Rousseau, in what way does Air Canada work proactively with the Canadian Transportation Agency to ensure accessible air travel?

• (1740)

Mr. Michael Rousseau: We work with many different parties, including the CTA. I think I mentioned in my earlier comments that we were a main contributor to the work put out by the CTA on disabilities. However, we work also with other experts in the area. We just recently put together an advisory committee of four groups representing different disabilities to help us to get better.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: In December, the CTA issued a monetary penalty for contraventions relating to subsections 35(f), 35(h) and 37(b) of the accessible transportation for persons with disabilities regulations. What specific steps has Air Canada taken to address these violations?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I would like to refer this question to Kerianne or Tom, who may have more details as to the references you mentioned and our reaction to them.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

If that could be tabled to committee, it would be appreciated. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Ms. Falk.

We'll go over to Mr. Collins.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I think it's me.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): All right. We'll go over to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for being here today, to those from Air Canada who did eventually respond to the call initiated by our colleague Ms. Zarrillo, which was supported unanimously by this committee.

Sir, I've noticed, and it's no surprise.... Anybody who's a member of Parliament develops relationships with their constituents. Very profound relationships are those that exist with members of communities that advocate on behalf of those who are disabled.

In my community in London, Ontario, Jeff Preston is a professor of disability studies at the university. He and I have known each other for a number of years. I did reach out to him in advance of the meeting today to ask what he would want to come out of this meeting and if he wanted to say anything to you through my questions.

In December, Jeff travelled. His wheelchair was broken. He was in touch with Air Canada well before the flight to make sure that there would be an understanding at the arrival airport that there was a wheelchair on board, to make sure everything was smooth. Clearly, it was not.

His question, though, is not to delve too much into the unfortunate incident—which, by the way, took away from his Christmas because he had to resolve the matter with customer service instead of enjoying Christmas with his family. He wanted me to ask the following question:

A big part of the problem here isn't that Air Canada is missing important policies or procedures. It seems to be that none of these policies or procedures are being adequately downstreamed from corporate legal to the front line. How do you plan on actually fixing this problem, when obviously your current approach or methodology of training and communicating that through your system is an abject failure?

That's a direct quote from my constituent, Jeff Preston. What do you have to say to Mr. Preston?

By the way, I think his story is not unique.

I will end the question with this. I do notice, sir, that in your testimony you talked about the policies and procedures in place and how seriously you take all of this. I take you at your word on that. I'm not going to question that. However, it's clearly not finding effect. What is your plan for a substantive change going forward?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I'm sorry to hear that your constituent had a bad experience with us.

We do have policies and procedures. We do have training each year. I believe the vast majority of our people have empathy and understand the processes. I think that's evidenced by the fact that we do successfully move the vast majority of the 500,000 customers with disabilities that we carry on an annual basis.

As we've said, we do make mistakes, so we have to improve. The way we're going to improve is we're going to double down on training, to start with. Our 10,000 airport employees will receive an enhanced training program that's been put together with the help of disability experts to ensure, first, that processes are followed, and secondarily and equally as importantly, that there's a better understanding of the needs of a customer with a disability.

Just recently, we put in place the Sunflower program for customers with non-visible disabilities. We're the first airline in North America to do so. If the customer chooses to wear the sunflower lanyard, that will be an indication to our staff that this customer has a hidden disability and that they should therefore act accordingly.

I think those are all concrete steps forward to improve the situation. Again, it's all outlined in our three-year accessibility plan that we're currently executing to get better and to achieve what I said in my opening comments, which is to make every experience a positive experience.

• (1745)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: My time is limited. The final question I have, Madam Chair, is—

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Actually, Mr. Fragiskatos, your time is up. Thank you anyway.

We'll go over to Madame Chabot for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I didn't have time to ask my questions earlier.

Mr. Rousseau, you said that you consulted a number of experts when developing the accessibility plan. But, in concrete terms, who is sitting at the table permanently? How do you ensure that you consult disability groups on a regular basis?

In your accessibility plan, you mentioned that you wanted to put these types of measures in place by 2023. Why wait? What has been done? In concrete terms, are there groups of people with disabilities who act permanently and regularly as advisors on your policy?

Mr. Michael Rousseau: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

We had experts consult with us in the year leading up to launching our accessibility plan in June 2023. It's a three-year plan.

Just last week, we informed the market that we've executed another step in one of our initiatives, which is the formation of an advisory group, represented by four leading disability advocacy groups. It will provide input to us on an ongoing basis on things we can change and things we can accelerate and a number of different initiatives.

I think we have a very strong plan, with 145 different initiatives. Several important ones have already been executed, but this advisory group is about continuous improvement. Kerianne will be working closely with it to provide input on our decisions and our priorities regarding this critically important area on a go-forward basis.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: You said you believed you were in compliance with legislation on accessibility—

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Ms. Chabot, I'm sorry for interrupting you, but your time is up. Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

Mr. Rousseau, I want to be clear that I am putting the problems that are happening with persons with disabilities squarely with you as the leader of this organization. I want to be clear on that, because there's been a lot of talk about training, other staff and things like that. I want to be clear that the culture of an organization flows down.

I want to ask you if are you aware of the Unpaid Work Won't Fly campaign by flight attendants, who say they work up to 40 hours a month unpaid.

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I'm aware of that campaign. Yes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: What do you think about that? What do you think about the fact that flight attendants work 34.86 hours unpaid per month; that they're not paid for boarding; that they are not paid for their pre-flight prep and safety checks; that 99.5% of flight attendants aren't paid when they're checking in through security; that 98.6% of flight attendants aren't paid while passengers deplane after a flight; that 75% of flight attendants are only paid a partial wage for mandatory regulatory training, even though airlines and the federal government require those training days per year; and that 98.4% of flight attendants are not paid when the plane is being held at the gate after landing?

As someone who makes \$12.6 million a year, Mr. Rousseau, what do you think about that?

• (1750)

Mr. Michael Rousseau: I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment on that.

We have a contract with our flight attendants, as most airlines do. That was negotiated in good faith, and when it comes up for renewal, we'll discuss different aspects.

There are many different ways to look at this and different balances that you may not be considering, which I really don't want to get into at this point in time.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Rousseau, I'll leave you with this comment as a woman who is a member of Parliament in Canada: Women have been undervalued, underpaid, and underappreciated since they started working in the economy.

We know that the role of a flight attendant was initially gendered work. I know that has changed over time, but there is a real issue with taking advantage of work that was gendered. It's happening in other areas of the economy, I'll admit, such as nursing—we know that right now—but I wanted to put it in your ear that this has been an issue from inception.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Tracy Gray): Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

We're at the end of our meeting. Our next one will be on Thursday, February 8.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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