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Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

Before giving way to government Members, I would like to apologize, on behalf of all Members, for this unfortunate situation. I feel that my rights have been completely breached today.

I do not have any questions to ask. I will give up my time, regardless of what becomes of it. There is nothing else for me to say today.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

Mr. Badawey, you have six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate the opportunity to get back on track here. I am going to pass on some of my time to Mr. Tootoo.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Ferguson, I'm very happy to have this opportunity to take advantage of your valuable time.

One of the things you talked about was the ACAP. It's well known that these national programs like ACAP, social housing agreements, and health funding don't fit or work for the north.

Do you think that a specific northern ACAP would help the government and the Department of Transport address some of the critical needs of airport infrastructure in the north?

Mr. Michael Ferguson: That's a policy decision that the government has to make. Certainly what we noted was that when you look at the ACAP, when you look at the number of projects that have been identified that need to be done in the small airports, including in the northern remote airports, the demand for safety-related projects is significantly larger than the amount of money that has been in the ACAP in the past.

There have been other ways of funding some of these types of programs, so how that is done is something the government would have to decide. Fundamentally, our overall recommendation was for the Department of Transport to have a plan that identifies the needs in the remote northern airports and what needs to be done, for example, the resources needed, how those would be identified and found, and then how the issues would be dealt with. In the context of that plan, the government would have to make a decision about what tools could be used to implement the plan.

● (1255)

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Thank you, Mr. Ferguson.

Another thing you mentioned in your report is that if the infrastructure is not maintained, it becomes very costly to repair and upgrade. If memory serves me correctly, it's actually through the Government of Nunavut that funding is flowed, through its territorial formula financing agreement with the Department of Transportation and the Arctic airports to maintain those airports.

In your work as auditor for the Government of Nunavut and with this report, do you think there may be issues with providing adequate resources to the Government of Nunavut to maintain the existing infrastructure that's in place?

Mr. Michael Ferguson: As you rightly point out, we have a role not only as Auditor General of Canada but also as auditor general of each of the three territories. We prepare audit reports for the Government of Yukon and report those to the legislature of Yukon. We prepare reports for the Government of the Northwest Territories and report those to the legislature of the Northwest Territories. It's the same thing for the Government of Nunavut. We always have the pleasure of doing a number of performance audits in Nunavut that we report to the legislature in Nunavut.

Regarding the level of funding, overall that's not something we've looked at in terms of how the federal government provides funding to the territories individually. Again, I think I would go back and say that in this audit we specifically identified the problem of the quantity of projects that have been identified as needing to be done for safety-related issues as compared with the funding that is available through the capital assistance program. There have been other ways of funding some of those types of improvements, but not through the regular program that exists to fund those types of issues. Certainly we have identified that within ACAP itself there is an issue between the identified need and the amount of funding available based on historical funding levels.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Thank you, Mr. Ferguson.

You also noted in your report that just in Nunavut alone, with its 25 airports, close to \$500 million in 2014 dollars is needed, and a little over \$75 million is needed to relocate two airports in order to meet Transport Canada safety regulations.

With all these deficiencies that you pointed out in your report, and the quality of infrastructure and information that's there for pilots, if those conditions existed in an urban airport, for example, do you think they would still be allowed to operate?

Mr. Michael Ferguson: I think the issues that we've identified in terms of infrastructure at remote northern airports are very concerning. Again, when flights are authorized to fly, that's done within all of the safety approaches to authorizing flights, but in terms of remote northern airports, because of the problems with lighting or navigation systems or having accurate weather information, it means that they may not be able to operate as often.

When you're talking about airports in the north having appropriate lighting at certain times of the year, that's extremely important. I think all of the issues we've identified here are important. Regardless of how you would compare that with any conditions anywhere else, we've made the recommendation, and the Department of Transport needs to have a plan that identifies what needs to be done and then how those problems will be rectified moving forward.

● (1300)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Tootoo.

Mr. Ferguson, I thank you and your team for participating at today's meeting and having shown such great patience. In the parliamentarians' world, we know when we start, but we do not know how things will unfold. I thank you again for being with us.