

## **MLA JULIE GREEN – YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE – IN THE MEDIA**

### **‘A big, fat problem’: NWT MLAs call for meeting with struggling small airlines**

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On March 27, MLAs urged an emergency meeting of NWT airlines to save a crucial link in the Northern supply chain.

Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green tabled a motion in the legislative assembly that aims to gather the airlines and resolve how they can continue supplying communities as they face collapsing revenue and passenger loads.

However, the substantial costs required for keeping the airlines afloat would mean the federal government would have to get involved, according to Green.

“That’s just not a sum of money that the territorial government has lying around,” she said, adding that the costs for offering relief to Air Tindi to the end of June alone could outstrip the territory’s resources.

“If you multiply that by all the regional airlines – North-Wright, Northwestern, Aklak – suddenly, you’ve got a big, fat problem,” she said. Canada has “the deep pockets and the territorial government doesn’t.”

Waived landing fees and the federal wage subsidies may help, but much more is needed for the airlines to survive, she said.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president Natan Obed recently called for the federal government to deem flights essential to areas like the fly-in communities of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in NWT.

Premier Caroline Cochrane told NNSL Media she asked for just that in recent talks with the Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

He didn’t commit to bailing out struggling Northern airlines, she said.

Cochrane said the provinces and territories are submitting lists of projected needs to Ottawa.

Trevor Wever, vice-president of business services with Air Tindi, said the airline supported the MLAs' motion and was ready to participate in future discussions.

Many federal relief measures for small and medium businesses have fallen short for northern airlines, he said. Wever said the airline looked forward to helping Ottawa change it plans so more northern regional carriers would benefit.

"Northern businesses are hurting, Air Tindi has not been spared from the impact. We are doing what needs to be done in order to protect the business," he wrote in an email.

"More importantly we are taking all steps necessary to protect our employees, our local stakeholders and the people who, everyday, rely on us to provide essential and critical services across the NWT."

Among those services, he pointed to emergency medical care, supply chains, and assisting the government's emergency response planning.

### **Airlines facing financial struggles**

Those services have faced major financial hurdles over the last weeks.

On March 20, Air Tindi president Chris Reynolds wrote that the airline laid off 35 per cent of its staff, reduced its fleet by 40 per cent, and cut its flight schedule by more than half.

The airline maintained its medevac and community services, he wrote, but added that "(a)viation is particularly exposed and Air Tindi is not immune."

Ken Dalton, general manager of Aklak Air, recently announced similar schedule reductions.

"Without government and business travel the current passenger loads are unsustainable for Aklak Air and we may be required to reduce service further if flight demand does not return," he wrote in a letter to customers.

In the letter, he said the airline ran on a thin margin, relying on charter and other services to help support its scheduled flights.

With less demand, "Aklak Air does not have the required cash flows to continue to operate over the medium term," he wrote.

On March 23, North-Wright air suspended Sahtu passenger flights from March 25 to April 13 2020. It continued to offer mail, cargo, and charter flights.

The decision came with "extreme business implications," it said, but by doing so it aimed to protect the health of small communities in the region.

Northwestern Air, in a series of updates on social media, also indicated it was going through a drastic drop in demand, leading to layoffs.