



December 18th, 2023

**To: REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENTS
BRANCHES & FACILITIES**

YEAR-END MESSAGE

Millions of Canadians will soon be boarding planes and heading to family reunions or warmer climates for the holidays. As they anticipate flying during the busiest time of year for air travel, they'll probably fret about the potential for airport lineups, flight delays, and lost luggage.

Few, if any, will give a second thought to you, the 2,000 air traffic controllers who will be working overtime, often short-handed, sacrificing your own family time to make sure all those passengers arrive safely at their destinations with minimal delays. That's a testament to your dedication and professionalism, which have made Canada one of the safest and most reliable airspaces in the world.

That dedication was on display last summer when some air traffic controllers in Kelowna and Yellowknife refused to leave their posts as wildfires threatened their cities and homes. I have rarely felt so proud of the people in my profession. This same dedication was evident day to day as many units kept planes moving through the busy summer period while working severely short staffed on a regular basis.

There are challenges that must be addressed if we are to maintain our world-renowned reputation for safety. Having been an air traffic controller for 25 years, I understand the pressure many of you feel. Working short-staffed day after day with little relief in the foreseeable future is both frustrating and demoralizing. Despite the adversity, CATCA is ending the year in a good position to make progress on some of our challenges.

Our new collective agreement with Nav Canada gave you protection against inflation and made advancements on job security. I know the agreement is not perfect, but we managed to reach it without souring relations with Nav Canada, which had pretty much hit rock bottom two years ago. We've worked hard at improving our relationship with the company and I think that will bear fruit in the coming years. We aim to make it easier to work collaboratively with the

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company outside of the bargaining cycle, in order to find constructive solutions to the ongoing issues facing controllers.

We also renegotiated our merger agreement with Unifor on new terms. Among other things, that includes a substantial sum of money from Unifor to support our branch executives and stewards, the bedrock of our union, who work for no pay, sacrificing breaks and days off to advance the union's goals. Additionally, finding ways to better support our volunteers, which ultimately benefits us all, was a major priority for your executive. Some well-deserved time off, as well as upcoming regional training seminars in all regions this winter, are intended to reward and equip our most valuable resource (*our volunteers*) to continue to support our membership.

In the coming year, we will keep pushing our agenda with Nav Canada and beyond, engaging with Transport Canada, the Minister's office, members of Parliament, and the Senate to ensure the decision makers understand what we need in order to keep Canada a world leading ANSP. We will continue our efforts to develop relationships throughout the entire aviation sector, both nationally and internationally, to ensure international standards and policies are developed that support our profession and Canada as the industry evolves.

There are some significant issues on our agenda. We're going to address the classification structure head on. That will be contentious but it's high time we tackled it and we are committed to following through.

We're also going to push hard on training, to make sure not only that we get more good people into the system, but that we get meaningful recurrent training throughout our careers, so we are prepared for the demands of our work. We'll be pushing for common sense fatigue rules that actually benefit our members and a plan for implementation of those that makes sense in the circumstances.

Canadians flying off for a happy holiday with family or some sun may not think twice about air traffic controllers, but rest assured I and the executive team at CATCA do. We know many of you will miss out on family time while you keep the aviation system moving and you keep it safe – and that's the best gift you could give air travellers.

It's one of the most difficult, stressful jobs in the world and we will continue fighting to create the best working conditions possible for those who do it. Thank you all and happy holidays.

Sincerely,

Nick von Schoenberg
President