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—
Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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•(1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to order and to let everyone know that this meeting is televised.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study on policies and priorities of the Department of Canadian Heritage, appearing today is the Honourable Bev Oda, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women.

As witnesses, we have Judith LaRocque, deputy minister; and Bruce Manion, assistant deputy minister of planning and corporate affairs. Thank you very much for coming today.

I will advise everyone that the minister is here from 3:30 until 4:30. I will respect the five-minute questions today and we will carry on that way.

Without much more ado, I would ask the minister whether she has any opening remarks.

[Translation]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women): Mr. Chairman, honourable members of this committee, thank you for this opportunity to meet you today.

[English]

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage, I look forward to working productively with you to deliver real benefits to Canada's cultural and heritage communities. I share your commitment to making sure our culture is strong and vibrant and that Canada's diverse communities fully participate and are reflected in our culture.

It has been just over 100 days since our government took office. In that time we have already made some significant moves.

[Translation]

My first initiative as Minister was to begin work to establish a Francophone Secretariat at the Department of Canadian Heritage. This project recognizes the fundamental role of Francophone communities in our country. In only three months, I have already met more than 50 representatives of Francophone arts and cultural groups in Quebec. These groups represent the richness of Canadian culture in all its forms, from the National Circus School to the Montréal Symphony Orchestra.

This cultural community is vibrant and innovative. In fact, the circus is a good example of a new art form developed in Canada. The

Francophone Secretariat will ensure that my Department offers appropriate programs for Francophone communities in Canada. This demonstrates the commitment of our Government, which recognizes the specific cultural realities of Francophone communities, including the uniqueness of Quebec. That is why we have signed an agreement that ensures Quebec a place within UNESCO.

What's more, we are deploying all our efforts to ensure that the UNESCO Convention for the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions is ratified.

[English]

It is important for our artistic community to achieve excellence both internationally and domestically. As minister, I am committed to ensuring that our investment in our cultural communities reaches the artists and creators. That is why I am extremely happy that the budget included real investment in the arts.

Our government committed an additional \$50 million in funding over two years to the Canada Council for the Arts. The funds will support artistic creation in all disciplines and will benefit Canada's outstanding artists and arts organizations.

[Translation]

Following the tabling of our budget, I was pleased with the reaction of the Vice-Chair of the Canada Council for the Arts, Simon Brault. He said that the budget showed that the Department of Canadian Heritage was ready to engage in dialogue with the Council.

[English]

Our budget also included tax measures that have already realized significant benefits. Donations of publicly traded securities to public charities will no longer be subject to the capital gains tax. I have been keeping an unofficial count and have heard of about \$85 million that has already been donated by private sources to cultural industries. The Department of Finance estimates that this move alone can result each year in up to \$300 million in donations. I believe this may be a low estimate.

These are examples of how this government intends to deliver focused investment in a way that will be realized in real benefits to Canadians.

Another major area of my responsibility is Canada's media industries. In today's media world, technological changes are presenting traditional broadcasters with significant challenges. New technology has fragmented the market and introduced new competition. Who would have guessed, even a short while ago, that major networks would release their programs for download the next day, or that in the space of a few months webcasts and mobile video would become increasingly popular? Young people have found alternative ways of listening to music, such as over their iPods and the Internet. They have numerous choices and ways of getting their music and entertainment.

Other nations began to build the policy framework for the new digital world decades ago; Canada did not. I am committed to working with our broadcasting and media industries to make sure we are not left behind as the 21st century develops.

I am committed to ensuring Canada's broadcasters, both private and public, are strong. This means we need a strong production industry to generate unique Canadian programming.

As Minister of Canadian Heritage, I can tell you that this government does support the CBC/Radio-Canada. It is the largest cultural institution in this country. It receives approximately \$1 billion in public support, and we have to ensure that it is relevant to the public it serves. The corporation has a very broad mandate, and that brings challenges in the new broadcasting and technological environment. We are presently looking at options on how we might support the CBC/Radio-Canada as it looks to its future stability and continued service.

Time does not permit me to present in detail the many other areas in which the department is moving ahead. For example, I am working with our museums community to ensure we have a strong museums policy. We are reviewing our feature film and national training school policies, as part of a complete review of all the department's programs.

This past spring, along with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, I met with Chinese Canadian communities from across the country to hear about the Chinese head tax. We have listened and developed a better understanding of the issues and feelings of the communities. The government will deliver on its commitment to apologize and respond appropriately.

Mr. Chair, as you know, the heritage department is responsible for both multiculturalism and citizenship. Yes, we support Canada's diverse communities, and we believe it is our responsibility to encourage them to bring with them, and celebrate, their arts, traditions, and celebrations. This is what a democratic country is about. Our responsibility regarding citizenship is to recognize that all Canadians, equally, have equal opportunities in all aspects of Canadian life. We understand that these are dual responsibilities. We believe that it is important to recognize the purpose and the objectives of the multiculturalism policy while, at the same time, taking very seriously our responsibilities regarding citizenship.

• (1540)

I am also pleased that the government was able to bring a just resolution to the former students of the Indian residential schools. I announced recently, along with the Minister of Indian Affairs and

Northern Development, the approval of a final Indian residential schools settlement agreement and the immediate launch of an advance payment program.

I am also proud that my department has delivered for aboriginal Canadians in so many other ways too. Recently I announced funding of nearly \$77 million over four years for the National Association of Friendship Centres. This funding will give the friendship centres multi-year stability.

The aboriginal languages initiative has been extended for one year; as a result, \$5 million will be available for community language projects in the 2006-07 fiscal year. We are now working on a long-term plan that will allow aboriginal communities to preserve their linguistic heritage.

Our government has only been serving Canadians for a short four months, and we are proud to have made significant strides in several areas relating to arts, culture, and heritage. I look forward to continuing to work with you and committee members to help strengthen this vital, dynamic, and exciting sector, and Canadian society as a whole.

As you announced, I have departmental officials available with me to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for this opportunity. *Merci beaucoup.*

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Our first question will be by Mr. Bélanger, for five minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Madam Minister. I'm sorry you can only stay an hour. I'd be pleased to have you for longer or even more often.

I listened to your comments. I'm going to get the written version and analyze them in depth. For the moment, allow me to state more of a comment than a question.

Some were very surprised that your government had decided to invest a little more money in the Canada Council for the Arts. There were zero expectations in that regard. However, others were very disappointed. You were critical during the election campaign, and you said that, if your party formed the next government, you would respect the previous government's commitment to double funding for the Canada Council. But that's not at all what you've done.

With regard to the government's decision and the House's agreement that the capital gains deduction credit will be raised to 100 percent, you're suggesting that will represent \$300 million. However, I believe it represents \$100 million more. I believe there are about 160,000 foundations and charities in the country that benefit from that money. Before suggesting that all those funds will be allocated to the arts, matters should be considered and statistics determined stating which proportion of that amount will indeed be allocated to the arts and how much money will be allocated to large artistic corporations, relative to small ones, which the Canada Council of the Arts supports. But we'll keep this question for another day.

Approximately two weeks ago, the committee unanimously passed a resolution that this committee take part in any review process that you could undertake with regard to the mandate of Radio-Canada or the CBC. I asked you the question in the House, and you seemed to be in agreement.

I'd like to know when your department intends to call on this committee to prepare for that exercise.

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

[*English*]

We've discussed this in the House and we've discussed this in meetings as well, initially, the commitment made by the previous government on funding for the Canada Council for the Arts. I will point out that the commitment, as I see it, is a real commitment, and indications of how real that commitment were sought, certainly. One of the major indicators would be that the money was there, clearly earmarked, as the increase was promised during an election campaign.

I've met with the Canada Council and with various organizations that would benefit from any increase to the Canada Council's funding. They are very excited that there is a firm commitment over two years. They understand that it's a stable commitment. They understand and are very positive about the opportunity of working with the new government on making concrete plans, so that the public can understand how they're going to benefit. The artistic community will also benefit.

In fact, I will relate to you that comments were that the expectations from that community may not have been as real as portrayed. They realized that those commitments by the previous government were made just days prior to an election.

As to the new tax credit measures, as we said, we asked the finance department and the Minister of Finance, in preparation of his budget, for the finance department to make an estimation. The estimation given by the finance department was up to \$300 million.

The real facts are that just within the arts community, as reported back to me, as I said, it was \$85 million to arts and cultural community organizations. That's just within a matter of a couple of weeks of that budget. That is not to say that we are saying all the money will go to the arts communities. We believe that the tax measures should help all non-profit. We have nothing against hospitals. We believe that the private sector should be able to choose to support the non-profit organizations in whatever areas of Canadian life they wish, but I'm very encouraged that just within a

matter of a few weeks, we've already heard of direct contributions and commitments of over \$85 million to the arts and cultural communities. And I believe, and I hope, that all sectors of the non-profit world will get their fair share.

In response to your inquiries about CBC/Société Radio-Canada, I am looking forward to the fact that this committee is eager to take a very positive and contributory role to our review of looking at this, and the opportunity that CBC will have as a corporation to put before the Canadian public—and to hear from the Canadian public—the role and the mandate they believe the public broadcaster should play in the future.

As you know, Monsieur Bélanger, through your chair, I have discussed various options on the ways and the means that this committee may participate and provide its input to this government for consideration in a very positive, effective, and time-efficient manner.

• (1550)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, I didn't get an answer to my question. The question was very straightforward.

This committee accepted unanimously a motion asking to have input and the terms of reference of whatever the structure is that the government wishes to choose to do the mandate review. When will we be involved in that?

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger, we're at six minutes. Again, I've overshot the time. There will be an opportunity to ask next time.

Mr. Kotto, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here with us, Ms. Oda.

First, I'll say that I don't recognize the federal government's jurisdiction over culture and communications. As you will no doubt understand, this is a constitutional dispute that we've had with the federal government for about 40 years.

Having said that, I have a concern for transparency that's inspired in me by your sense of responsibility. That's a message that your government conveys. I'm relying on your cooperation to get an answer to each of my questions. However, if you're short of time, I'd like to have those answers sent to me in writing at a later time.

First, I'd like to put matters in perspective. The Department of Canadian Heritage Act provides that the minister shall have the following duties: [...] the

Minister shall initiate, recommend, coordinate, implement and promote national policies, projects and programs with respect to Canadian identity and values, cultural development and heritage.

Your areas of responsibility are the policies and programs concerning broadcasting, cultural industries, the arts, heritage and so on.

In addition, in the Throne Speech of March 2006, your government made a number of commitments to citizens. However, support for the arts and culture was not one of them.

First, I'd like to know whether your government intends to make additional funding cuts to arts and culture programs, which are already under-funded.

Second, I'd like to know whether you intend to renew the Tomorrow Starts Today program, which was unanimously approved here in this committee last year. You were a member of this committee at the time, and you supported it enthusiastically. You recently wanted to re-evaluate that program, and that has now been done. The result of the evaluation was positive. Consequently, we can't wait to know when you'll be presenting the terms and conditions of implementation to your Treasury Board colleague for approval so that cultural organizations that rely on that financial support can finally receive the money they so need in order to exist. In the same vein, I'd like to know whether you would or wouldn't be inclined to make the Tomorrow Starts Today program permanent.

Further to what my Liberal colleague said, I would recall that your government announced additional funding of \$50 million rather than the \$150 million that has been sought for so many years. Here we're talking about enabling the community of creators and cultural sector workers to have a more or less decent life.

Do you seriously and sincerely believe that \$50 million is enough? You mentioned Simon Brault's reaction. I have nothing against that person, but I rely more on the reaction of those who benefit from these programs.

I have before me a letter from an excellent musician who, having been admitted to a prestigious circle to perfect his art, had to return to the United States. I'm going to read you part of the answer that the Canada Council sent him.

• (1555)

[English]

The Chair: Just to remind you, you're almost at four minutes. The minister will only have a minute to respond. Again, if you want a response at this meeting, please conclude.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chairman, it was customary in the 38th Parliament to have five minutes to ask questions. Then it was up to the minister to answer. We can't include the minister's answers in my questions.

[English]

The Chair: That's not necessarily the way I understand it. I don't think it was ever that way. Lots of times in previous meetings, we tried to have a response from the minister the same length as the question. But we only have five minutes, and that's the way.... I just thought I would let you know. I'll extend it a little wee bit, but please come to a conclusion on the question.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: With all due respect, let me tell you that, in these circumstances, I consider this exercise futile. Considering all the questions we have to ask and the fact that we only have one hour, there's no point. So I'll stop here.

Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will try to cover as much as I can and will make the commitment to respond in writing to the questions.

Are there plans for further cuts to arts funding? There are no plans currently to cut further arts funding. Many of these programs have served the artists community, the cultural community, very well for many years, and we want to ensure when we start reviewing them that they are still many aspects of them and that every aspect of them is the most effective way in today's world.

We see now greater opportunities of moving across the country for greater tours. We've seen where the hardship is, that many organizations aren't able to do as much touring as they'd like to do. I've heard reports of necessary cutbacks because of unstable funding and never knowing from one year to the next if the previous government was going to commit its funding to the arts.

These are things that we want to talk to the artistic community about and to ensure that they can now operate on a realistic basis on a year-by-year basis so that they can plan their growth, so that they can plan their futures. We know that for major exhibitions, major touring, major long-term planning by any organization, it does not help if it's purely on a 12-month basis, and we believe fundamentally it was unfair for every arts organization in this country to have to worry about whether on April 1 they were going to get the funding and what amount of funding they were going to get the following year.

That is one thing we are committed to do, but we're committed to doing it responsibly and accountably and in cooperation with the organizations involved.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you.

Madam Chair, I'm going to keep my congratulations on having you in this position very short because I don't want the clock to run out on me, and I do not want to seem rude at all, but I will be hurrying along in my language and making lots of motions with my hands to hurry you along with your responses.

With the ongoing GATS negotiations, in regard to the plural-lateral request on telecom and the request that we received on audiovisual services, will your ministry be ensuring that senior staff are brought before us so that we can be updated on what's happening and what Canada's position is in terms of those and how they affect our cultural industries?

• (1600)

Hon. Bev Oda: My response to that is, first of all, it's nice to see you again, Mr. Angus.

Regarding the international negotiations that are happening, I can tell you sincerely that I've spoken to the Minister of International Trade. I've clearly outlined to him what's involved, and my department has given him a full briefing on that aspect of the negotiations that would impact on the cultural industry. He's made a firm commitment that it is not the intent of our negotiators, it is not part of, and would not be part of, negotiating instructions, and he said that we would be fully informed as the talks go on and as any steps are taken.

If the committee so chose, Mr. Chair, to make a formal request, of course, we would cooperate with the committee as far as staff representation and reporting are concerned.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you. I have two housekeeping items to ask about.

[Translation]

I had the opportunity to meet people who belonged to Franco-Ontarian organizations working with isolated northern communities.

It's perfectly clear that there are problems between the Department of Canadian Heritage and the organizations working in the field. A number of issues remain unresolved. I tried to organize a meeting between those organizations and your office.

[English]

I was told by your assistant after three months that we should try our hand at the Official Languages Commission rather than speak to you, that you would not be speaking to us even though these are heritage issues. So I wonder, is that just a very zealous and hardworking assistant who's trying to keep you away from all the punters, or are you not willing to meet with us?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Angus, as you know, there are very few things I'm afraid of in this area of culture and the arts. I'm always willing to meet with those who have expressed a desire to meet with me.

I must explain that I've been working with Madame Verner, Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, and she has asked to have a great hand and a large participation within the francophone communities and the arts and heritage committee. Working cooperatively, we had agreed that, if that was her choosing, certainly we'd be pleased to be able to give her the opportunity to demonstrate and to work with the community she was interested in. In fact, just recently Madame Verner made a major announcement in support of the franco-Ontarian community regarding that.

But more specifically to your question, I am certainly very sensitive to the francophone community outside of Quebec. Consequently, when we're looking at the parameters of the francophone secretariat, it is very important that we recognize that francophone community and their special needs and special circumstances.

Mr. Charlie Angus: My question is, as the critic for our party, if I brought forward a number of people to meet with you just to talk about ideas, would you be willing to meet? It's great that you have a commitment to the francophone community, but are you committed to meeting with us when we request that?

Hon. Bev Oda: I will make the commitment here today that I look forward to a round table with the committee communities in the cultural and arts fields and the franco-Ontarian community.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

I'm going to ask a question that can be responded to in writing, because if I don't get all my culture groups represented, they'll be so angry with me.

In terms of preparing us for the digital future, a lot of questions have been raised about the inappropriate use of digital rights management and technical protection measures that we've seen in the United States, the spyware that has gone into CDs, the sterile CDs that consumers haven't been told about.

In developing new copyright legislation, will you be able to respond to what protections consumers will have from this kind of abuse of technical protection measures?

Hon. Bev Oda: In fact, I'm very pleased that you brought copyright up, because it is something we are working very diligently on.

As you know—we served together on this committee—Bill C-60 was introduced by the previous government. The bill fell when the House fell. The benefit from those unfortunate circumstances is that we got very vocal and very informed comments on that draft bill. We are now undertaking a review of those comments, and we will be tabling new legislation for copyright, most likely in the fall. We will then be able to take into consideration those comments and even more recent developments in the technology, as well as internationally, on how they're handling copyright.

• (1605)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

The other question I have is in terms of the CBC review and discussion that has happened and speculation from you and other members of your party about the CBC not competing for advertising dollars, given the limited funding we have and given the fact that we've lost our design production abilities out of Toronto because of budget constraints. What direction do you see if English Canada CBC no longer has the ability to compete for advertising? How are they going to be able to pay for programming?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Angus, fundamentally the government has to ensure that a strong public broadcaster is providing the service and the programming that Canadians want of a national public broadcaster.

First, I'll have to establish what the mandate is, what the service is, and on what platforms the CBC should be doing its work. Once we establish the mandate, the services, and the platforms, then and only then can we establish its resource needs. To do that in the opposite way, to me, is not the responsible way to do it, to give Canadians the opportunity to say this is what we want our public broadcaster, in both languages, to provide to us.

We believe Canada needs and should have a national public broadcaster. We want to make sure that the service being provided by the CBC/Radio-Canada is the service that is wanted by all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister. Congratulations on your appointment. I know this committee is going to work closely with you, and I hope we'll achieve some results.

I was pleased to hear you acknowledge your support of the richness of Canadian culture and a strong public and private broadcasting system, your strong support of CBC and Radio-Canada, and the financial support included in our budget. It's pretty clear this government isn't going to be abandoning arts and culture.

First, I'd like to help my friend across the way, Mr. Bélanger, who asked a question. I don't think he got an answer, and I think there's a very simple answer. It's a gentle question: whether the minister would offer this committee an opportunity to review and offer modifications to the terms of reference of the CBC/SRC mandate review prior to the commencement of the review.

It's not compulsory. You don't have to accept our recommendations. It's simply an opportunity to review the terms of reference and make some comments, make some suggestions to you.

Hon. Bev Oda: May I respond to that?

As you know, there is a process, because any action taken by our department and me as the minister is a government action. I would like to ensure that this committee has an opportunity to review the terms of reference and make recommendations, and I will then ensure that those recommendations are considered.

Mr. Ed Fast: Thank you. That's the answer I was looking for.

My most important question has concerned a number of us on this committee, including the chair. That is the whole issue of museum policy, and as I understand it, the department has, somewhere along the line, proposed a complete review of our museum policy. I'm wondering whether the department and the minister are still considering a new museum policy, and if so, can you give us some details about that policy? I'm concerned that small museums in communities throughout Canada have felt as though they're the odd men out. I'm wondering whether a review will be coming, and whether that review will pay special attention to the needs of smaller museums across Canada.

• (1610)

Hon. Bev Oda: Certainly we have initiated looking at the museums in Canada. Our first responsibility is to the national museums under the purview of Canadian Heritage, and in that regard we've also looked at the Auditor General's report and the recommendations she has made regarding those museums, and I've asked the department to prepare responses to those recommendations.

I've had the pleasure of visiting hundreds of museums as I've travelled across the country. As you know, many of those museums, small or large, are private. Some are provincial, some municipal.

We want to make sure the culture and the heritage of the country are maintained and respected. So part of the question is—and I don't have a response yet—how can we help the museums outside the federal purview, and to what extent.

Historically, different programs have come along depending on the needs of specific museums, and a great effort has been made to try to help every community, but I can't give you any specifics, because we intend to look at the traditional way the department has supported museums that are not federal. At this point we're at a very early stage in that review.

Mr. Ed Fast: Do you have a timeframe within which you expect to complete this review?

Hon. Bev Oda: If we were in a position where we had some stability, I would be better prepared to give you a timeframe as to how long this government may be in a position to undertake a review and come back with a finalized museum policy. I am going to propose that it might take longer than one would suspect, because I believe truly that we have to confer and meet with as many representatives.... We've met with the museum associations. I've asked some of my colleagues to talk to the local museums to see what, from their perspective, are their greatest challenges right now. When you try to undertake this kind of in-depth, in-community consultation without undertaking a very costly and lengthy process....

I'm trying to expedite it, but I think the reality is that it will be longer in coming than in the near future.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Fast. Your time is up.

Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Minister, can this committee presume that it will be offered an opportunity to have a go at the terms of reference of the CBC/Radio-Canada mandate before the summer recess?

Hon. Bev Oda: *Monsieur Bélanger, je travaille très forte.*

As you know, we're nearing the end of this session. As to the actual scheduling, I'm not aware of your committee's schedule, etc., but I will be going forward shortly to cabinet to get their authorization to proceed. We're finalizing our presentation to cabinet as to the options on the process that we might suggest undertaking.

So I cannot make a commitment on a timeframe as to when you might have an opportunity to look at the terms of reference.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Is it the intention of your department to keep funding the court challenges program beyond the next fiscal year?

Hon. Bev Oda: I can't speak to this beyond the next fiscal year. As you know, we have just completed our input on the budget that is now before the House, and we will then proceed to do work on preparing for input on the next budget. Just check with my officials regarding the year to which the current funding extends.

• (1615)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I believe it's until the next fiscal year.

Hon. Bev Oda: It ends this fiscal year?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No. I believe it's funded until the next fiscal year. The question is, would it be the intention of your department and your government to keep funding it beyond that year?

Hon. Bev Oda: It's there for the year 2007-08.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes, that's what I've said. Would it be the intention of your department or of your government to keep funding it beyond that horizon?

Hon. Bev Oda: I'm not prepared to make a commitment beyond that horizon, only because we have not undertaken any review of this program. Again, this government was elected to ensure that all public funds are being used accountably and effectively, which is not to say that this program isn't valuable, but that we have not received a report on the review of the program.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

On another matter, I believe that in response to a question in the House from one of your colleagues, you confirmed that the government would keep funding Encounters With Canada, the program that was funded by your department via the Canadian Unity Council. However, I did alert your parliamentary secretary earlier this week that this may come up, because it is my understanding that the council may be forcing the program to dispose of the property it currently uses.

Is it your intention or the intention of your government to intervene so that the Terry Fox centre, which is used by Encounters With Canada, will be kept for that purpose?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Are you aware that an ultimatum or a deadline that's been given to the Encounters program is looming? Should a solution not be found, we could be in a situation where the program, which you've allowed to continue, may not have a place in which to carry out its welcoming of the students from across the country. Are you aware of that looming deadline?

Hon. Bev Oda: Yes, I'm very aware of that looming deadline, and I would report back to you that we are working very cooperatively and would ask any who could also support very positive relationships so that we can ensure that this deadline... We will meet the deadline. We know that the deadline is there and we're trying to work very diligently.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The final question, Minister, concerns the whole industry of magazines in this country, for which there is a very valuable program in your department. However, it seems that Canada Post keep ratcheting up rates for magazines much faster than the program funding increases. The whole industry is faced with a situation now that is becoming less and less tenable. Is this situation being addressed, and if so, how?

Hon. Bev Oda: Let me say that one of the first conversations I had with the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was regarding PAP, which, as you know, works in cooperation with Canada Post. It's his responsibility. We've certainly agreed that the program and that relationship would continue for one more year. He asked for time to review Canada Post overall and is aware now of those actions being taken and the effect it has on our magazine industry. We have committed to work together to ensure that our magazine industry continues to be supported in whatever way is necessary going forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Malo.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Minister. As you only have a few minutes left with us, I'll try to ask my questions succinctly, to enable you to answer them as fully as possible.

I was pleased to hear in your address that the Convention for the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions was very important for you, as it is for us. I'd like to know what concrete measures your government will take to ensure that a majority of countries sign that convention and that it enters into effect as soon as possible.

• (1620)

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Thank you for your question.

As I said, we do truly support the declaration and the ratification. As you know, we supported the previous government in the ratification of the declaration within the House in the last session.

First of all, on the concrete steps, I'm proud to say that I've met with the Coalition for Cultural Diversity and believe that group does very effective work, because it is able to work with groups within every one of the countries that are part of the declaration. It tries to use their domestic creative communities to work with their governments so that their governments will ratify the declaration as well.

The other efforts are in my meetings with foreign representatives from other countries. I ask them if they have plans and encourage them to ratify the declaration within their countries. It's important.

I assure you that I have also asked our foreign minister and other ministers who are going to international meetings if they can ask the same question of their counterparts. It's very top of mind and I'm using not only my own efforts but I'm asking my fellow ministers to use their relationships as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: The Francophone Secretariat will clearly have to respond to the aspirations of Quebec organizations while taking into consideration the specific needs of the artistic and cultural organizations in French Canada.

Can you assure us that that will in fact be the case?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Yes, I want to ensure that the department and the work we do regarding cultural and arts policies, and the programs we institute, are going to meet the specific needs of the francophone artistic and cultural communities.

I also want to make sure that within our programs and policies the different realities are recognized. As many of you will recall, in the report we did in the last session on feature films, there was a great discrepancy between the success of Quebec and the French-language films versus the English-language films. I think the thing is that, in one way, to applaud Quebec for the success its films have had does not mean that further support and further promotion of Quebec film should be abandoned. I think a greater success is always welcomed, and greater support is also welcomed. But they have to be addressed in two different ways, and maybe some different programs, because one program may not be appropriate for the other community.

That is why it was very important for us to establish the francophone secretariat. In order to make sure that it's going to be effective and undertake the appropriate work we would like it to do, I've held three round tables. I've met with over 50 organizations in Quebec and I've asked them to work with me so that we get input from them as to where and how the francophone secretariat could work effectively in their interests.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: You said earlier that we had to keep up with developments in new technologies. Have you had the opportunity to meet Mr. Sirman, who was recently appointed to the board of the Canada Council, to look with him at the new technological possibilities that can support artists in their creative activity?

• (1625)

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda: In fact, I just placed a call this afternoon to Mr. Sirman to congratulate him on his appearance before the committee. I thank the committee for your unanimous endorsement of Mr. Sirman. As you saw for yourself, he's highly qualified and very enthusiastic to take on his new role. I also had the opportunity over this past weekend to meet with Madame Karen Kain, who is the chair of the board of the Canada Council. I've asked Mr. Sirman that upon his confirmation we would meet and then start talking about the plans going forward.

So yes, I have met with Mr. Sirman. I am very supportive of him. I understand what his vision of the arts and culture is, and I also recognize his commitment to the arts and the cultural field.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Minister, for coming today. I appreciate your honesty and your forthrightness in answering the questions.

One of the things I've noticed over the last number of years certainly is the nature of our consumption of media. Our consumption of culture is changing. It seems that my generation and the generation that's following my generation are consuming culture far differently from my parents' and my grandparents' generations. You mentioned that our country is lagging behind other nations in terms of preparing our different departments for this emergent technology. I'm wondering if you would identify some of the challenges that you consider would be important for us to deal with in the near future, and what policy changes we might see as a

result of that. I don't want you to speculate on certain policies, but to talk about where we see challenges, and where we see other countries going to address this.

What I'm wondering is, how do we regain the ground that maybe we've lost by not considering these new technologies as part of the policy framework?

Hon. Bev Oda: It's essential to understand the new technologies and the different ways Canadians are receiving and consuming their entertainment, their information programs, and services. If we are not where Canadians are going to be, if our Canadian products, our cultural products, our programs, our films are not going to be where Canadians are accessing those products, then we will have done a disservice to Canada's culture, and to our artists, our creators, and our production sector.

That is why the broadcasting industry and the media industry have clearly indicated that they need a framework that recognizes that the digital world is a different world. Even the private broadcasters, in many public statements, at their conventions, etc., are looking at the impact of the new technologies on their businesses.

The business models were based on traditional models. I say as a former vice-president of programming that to know the program you paid dollars for is available within hours on the Internet devalues the program; it just changes your entire business model.

What is the new business model? We see now that the Internet providers, etc., and the websites are looking for where the business is. We've talked for two decades about convergence and about the Internet and all these technologies. Until the industry finds the business model there, we are going to be left behind. That's why I'm very supportive of hearing from those industries and hearing from the sectors.

I had a demonstration at Concordia University last week from Hexagram on the developments and the new technologies they're taking advantage of. I had a round table with new media creators. These are successful companies. We have the talent here and we have the ability. We have very successful new media companies, and that's what motivates me to look at all the new media programs we have and to ensure that we are supporting that sector adequately and in the right way. This is why I say that in many of our reviews we're looking in the new media area at how we can do this effectively.

You're quite right, new technologies and new media are creating some very interesting challenges. I would suggest they are not challenges; they are new opportunities.

• (1630)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Have I run out of time?

The Chair: Yes, you have, and we have run out of time.

I would be more than willing to go part of a round more, but it wouldn't be fair. We have done the two rounds we agreed to.

Again I thank you, Minister, for being here today, and your staff, and I thank everyone for the questions for the minister today.

Let's take a two-minute pause—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: If I may, on behalf of my colleagues here, I would also like to thank the minister, but also reiterate our desire that if she can make herself available again before the summer recess, we'd be delighted to continue this dialogue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

We'll have a five-minute pause before we go back into our meeting again.

Thank you.

• (1631)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, everyone, for getting back to our meeting.

I would like to say, first of all, that I was at the Liaison Committee today with the request for our funding for Banff. I'm batting a thousand at the Liaison Committee, as I was turned down again, just as I was turned down last year. I was turned down for various reasons, and there was only one person in support of our going to Banff—me, the person making the motion. So it was turned down, and we will not be going to the Banff World Television Festival.

It was suggested that maybe a smaller contingent of one person from each party go. It was also suggested that it might be a good idea next year, so that we have more time to organize it a little bit better. So those were some of the questions, but it was both the Liberals and Conservatives who turned me down, so I got it full throttle.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Shame on them all.

The Chair: Shame.

But anyway, that's my report.

Yes, Charlie.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I'd like to put on the record that I do believe that if someone were going to fight for us, it was you. So I know you put up a valiant fight.

The Chair: Thank you, I appreciate that. It's on the record.

Yes, Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): I have an issue that I want to draw to the committee's attention—and hopefully I'll be very quick with this—and I want to do it in as constructive a way as I possibly can in spite of the fact that it appears to me to be a little on the negative side.

As everyone on the committee is aware, I have attempted personally and on behalf of the minister, who was just here, to be helpful, to try to make sure that the committee will be effective. Unfortunately, we have done very little. At this point, we have been debating motions and talking about tabling reports, and all sorts of things. As was pointed out by Mr. Fast, we have museums, the archives, the library, the art gallery, the National Arts Centre, aboriginal programs, youth at risk, the Canada Council, all sorts of things that this committee really should be dealing with, along with the other things we've been discussing.

The committee will recall that the other day I was quite adamant in regard to the motion—although I'm sure it was well intended—

that we should be calling witnesses with respect to UNESCO. It was my position, and I believe the position of my colleagues and the minister, that this was really superfluous and not really a good use of time. That was the specific perspective from which I was arguing.

Mr. Bélanger will recall that during the course of debate on his motion on Tuesday, I asked a question and I made very clear in the debate that I had fully supported Minister Copps with respect to the instrument, that the government was in favour of the instrument. The committee will recall that I have repeatedly said that the government is in favour of the instrument.

Some of you may have noticed—I think it was fairly obvious—that the Prime Minister himself, on the amendment to Mr. Bélanger's motion, made sure that he conferred with Minister Oda in the House—this was all done in public; there was nothing secret about this. He went to the whip, and our party agreed to the inclusion of the clause in the motion as proposed by Mr. Bélanger that said we were absolutely standing behind the whole issue of protecting culture in the GATS talk.

Further—and I really can't think of anything that could be any clearer as to what the party position is—I'd like to read what the minister answered during the course of question period, in response to Mr. Kotto's question on the WTO.

Minister Oda said: I want to be clear to the House and to all Canadians. The government has supported in the past and will continue to support the UNESCO declaration for the maintenance of diversity in cultural expression. I am proud to say that I have met with the Coalition for Cultural Diversity and we have just authorized more funding so it can continue the work. As well, I will do what I can with the other countries as I meet them.

You can imagine, then, that I find myself somewhat perplexed and candidly disappointed upon my return from the House of Commons—Mr. Chair, I think you will find that in committee, when a person has the floor they have the floor—particularly after all this had taken place, to see an immediate release from Mr. Bélanger entitled “Harper Government Votes Against Protection and Promotion of Canadian Cultural and Artistic Identity”.

His quote in his release is: The reason this motion was brought forward at this time is because we had reason to doubt the Harper government's commitment to protecting and promoting our Canadian cultural sovereignty. Yesterday's vote proves our concern was justified.

I must say, I find that perplexing and disappointing for all the reasons that I've outlined, and I wanted to put that on the record, Mr. Chair.

• (1645)

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: This has been a long, drawn-out explanation of his hurt feelings. I don't know that it was on the agenda. So I would suggest that he bring it back, we'll put it on the agenda, and we can talk about how to make him feel more included. I don't know what else to do. But I would like to get on to what's on the agenda—that is, our motions—and move on.

The Chair: Okay, it's on the record. And what we'll do is we will take that to heart and we'll move on to our agenda.

Again there's a motion by Charlie Angus, Friday, May 26, 2006, on CBC design team layoffs:

That the committee should call on the Minister of Heritage to intervene in the scheduled layoffs and closure of the English-language design team at CBC Toronto, and that she should also require that this decision and other significant structural decisions be deferred until the renewed mandate of the CBC is established following the full review that is expected to take place this fall.

That is the motion. Is there any discussion?

Yes, Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I unfortunately didn't have an opportunity to raise with the minister the question related to this particular motion, and I think it's a very relevant one. The reality is that you have a minister who feels very strongly about having a mandate review of the CBC, and what all that really means we're not sure. At the same time, we have certain actions being taken by the CBC, such as the closure of the design department, that are quite important. Obviously most of us are very concerned about what has taken place. In many ways one would argue that it undermines this whole notion that the minister wants to go forward with this review.

I think if the review is going to happen, as the minister has stated, then it would seem that the only course of action would be in fact to have a revisit of the situation when the full review has taken place. To take an action like that in many ways undermines the whole review process, if that's the route that this committee and the minister are going to go.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

On the motion itself, I've indicated to Mr. Angus, *par personne interposée*, that I have a concern that we should not be meddling in the internal affairs of CBC, and I will certainly maintain that position. That does not mean we cannot express concerns and these can be relayed, as they would be by simply being on the record or through a motion that is somewhat modified from what we have. And I'd be open to that.

But this motion, as it is, calling on an intervention into the affairs of the CBC, Mr. Chairman, would be tantamount to substituting ourselves for the board of CBC, which I don't think is appropriate.

Now that I have the floor, and also for the record concerning the previous intervention by the parliamentary secretary vis-à-vis the debate on Tuesday in the House on the motion.... Mr. Chairman, I believe that you've already ruled that someone who has the floor keeps the floor.

• (1650)

The Chair: Have your say.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, sir.

Indeed all kinds of members, including the Minister of Heritage, have put out press releases on that vote, explaining why they voted against it. This is a matter of perception, and there are concerns among Canadians in terms of having the government vote against maintaining Canadian content, especially in view of the debate, where it was very clearly indicated that we're not asking for things to

be fixed as they are, but there's room for strengthening and innovation, and we shouldn't be going backwards.

It's the same thing with maintaining the restrictions on foreign ownership in cultural industries. I think there is a great deal of concern about that in the country. It's the same thing with the maintenance of financial support for public broadcasting, especially in view of what's on the record, Mr. Chairman, in terms of the dissenting opinion for the Lincoln report on public broadcasting in this country and on broadcasting, public and private, where the current parliamentary secretary to the minister basically advocated for the privatization of the CBC.

In view of the concerns out there, Mr. Chairman, as the spokesman for the opposition, I have the right to point out that the government voted against. That's what I did, and for them to take offence at that baffles me. Mr. Abbott is baffled as to why I would put out a press release; I'm as baffled as to why he would take offence that I may have an opinion that differs from his.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to Mr. Fast, and then we're down to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, the reason I wanted to ask for a point of order was simply that we're dealing with a motion that's on the floor, and the honourable member is addressing a totally different situation. It's really inappropriate.

I could respond to that—

The Chair: Okay.

Oh, do you still have a question?

Mr. Ed Fast: Oh, absolutely.

You didn't accept my point of order, Mr. Chair, so I just wanted to lay that on the record.

I will say this, though. I agree with Mr. Bélanger. He's entirely consistent with the position he took at our last meeting, when Mr. Sirman was here to be examined as the new director appointee for the Canada Council for the Arts.

Mr. Bélanger in fact asked Mr. Sirman that very question: are you prepared to defend the autonomy of your crown corporation? In fact, he want so far as to ask, are you prepared to resign if there's interference? Of course, we didn't get an answer, quite appropriately.

In this case, Mr. Bélanger is consistent. I agree with him, crown corporations are supposed to have a great degree of independence from the government. There are two functions that the government performs. One is the appointments to the board; the second is to approve budgets. Beyond that, there should be a significant degree of autonomy. For us now to interfere in what are day-to-day management issues is inappropriate. I certainly intend to vote against the motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus, then Mr. Kotto.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I fully recognize the issues being brought up here, and I am more than willing to put on the record that I believe it is a slippery slope when politicians intervene in decisions.

I believe there's an issue here that's unique. Perhaps it's a question of language, then, and how we phrase it. The decision to shut the design team down means the end of in-house production at the major centre, in Toronto. It means that if the review is done and it comes back with a very different sense of where the mandate of CBC should go, we can't suddenly bring it back. It's lost.

My concern would be to try to find a way to ask the minister, perhaps, to seek assurances on this, because there is a major issue here. We are seeing the end of the ability of the CBC English network to do in-house production. It's gone because of this. It's gone because of the funding limits on CBC and the problems they've faced.

I would not normally have a position on other issues in terms of the management structure, but when CBC cut regional broadcasts across this country, Parliament felt it was an issue. Parliament asked for an intervention. Parliament agreed around this table that we wanted a strategy to address the fact that they had taken the decision to make those cuts, because we felt it wasn't in the national interest.

At this point, perhaps my colleague from the Bloc or someone would like to talk about some alternative language. I've thought about it a lot, and if we can find the language, I think we need to ask the minister to seek assurances just to wait and to let this review go through. Then CBC is more than able, and will have a clear mandate given by the government, to make that radical change.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I had reservations as well. The Guide for Ministers and Secretaries of State provides at page 63 that:

[...] neither the minister nor the minister's staff shall intervene in the day-to-day activities of the corporation.

And on page 9, it states:

A Minister's degree of control and responsibility for a non-departmental body is defined in the Act that establishes that body. While a Minister's relationship with a non-departmental body is at arm's length, the Minister shall provide the organization with general guidance on the government's objectives and expectations.

That has inspired me to write an amendment which I'm going to introduce and which reads as follows:

That the committee should call on the Minister of Heritage to intervene in the scheduled layoffs and closure of the English-language design team at CBC Toronto, and that she should also require that this decision and other significant structural decisions be deferred until the renewed mandate of the CBC is established following the full review that is expected to take place this fall.

I believe that, with this kind of proposal, we could find grounds for agreement, without getting all worked up.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Kotto, I'm going to ask you a question.

I'd be much more comfortable if the motion asked that the committee invite the minister to share with the management of the CBC/Radio-Canada the committee's concerns about...

However, to ask the committee to invite the minister to seek assurances or some certainty is to ask her to intervene. I don't want to split hairs here either, but it seems to me that could be interpreted as ministerial intervention. I don't believe we should put any minister in that kind of situation.

The motion could state instead that the committee calls on the minister to share with senior management — which is perfectly legitimate — committee members' concerns about certain decisions, and asks that the CBC consider deferring this decision until after a review of its mandate. That kind of motion would suit me.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin, please.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I just need some clarification.

Mr. Bélanger, I was agreeing, and then I was just curious as to the exact wording you had suggested. I'm very concerned. Maybe we can talk about that. I don't want to split hairs, because obviously this is an important issue. I actually met with some representatives from the Canadian Media Guild. I understand this is a very important issue, and I think all Canadians should have their say on this issue.

I am concerned, however, that if we do ask the minister to intervene in any way, shape, or form, if we ask that there be action taken by the minister on behalf of this committee, we probably will have gone too far.

I do think it's very important that we put on the record our beliefs about this situation here in this committee. If individuals from this committee feel it is important, I think we should lobby from our position as members of Parliament. I don't know if we should be asking the minister to intervene in any way, shape, or form. If we ask for assurances or whatever, I think it's all the same. It's just semantics, and we're really asking for the minister to do something.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In English, what I was saying was that the committee call on the minister to share with CBC management the concerns of the members of the heritage committee. That is perfectly legitimate, because the minister is the liaison between Parliament and the CBC. For her to share concerns of the committee is a perfectly legitimate thing, and it is not an intervention. In that sense, I'd be comfortable. To ask the minister to seek assurances—that's almost asking her to intervene, and I think we should be careful about that.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Without wanting to justify myself in Mr. Bélanger's opinion, I have moved this amendment which has been toned down from the original version first because CBC/Radio-Canada is no longer carrying out its mandate. The current structural changes will only worsen the situation. Once she realizes that its mandate is no longer being carried out, as the minister responsible for that Crown corporation, she can intervene and give her opinion. However, conciliatory as I am, I'm going to support Mr. Bélanger's proposal.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're working out some details up here.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Can we put this forward? Then we can say whether I've made a dog with six legs here or whether something is actually workable.

The Chair: Just one second, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: It is that the committee should recommend the Minister of Heritage share with CBC management its concerns that the currently scheduled structural changes be held off until the review mandate of the CBC is established, following the full review that is expected to take place this fall.

The Chair: Ms. Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): In my view, the word “recommend” involves the minister too much. No one should feel uncomfortable in this situation. Action has to be taken, of course, but recommending that the minister do something is still intervening.

I'd like to change the word “recommend” because recommending means intervening. We shouldn't get the impression this is interference.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus: We ask the minister to share our concerns—

The Chair: I would just like to explain “recommend.” “Recommend” is a word used by parliamentary committees quite a bit. It suggests; it doesn't demand. It recommends. I have been advised by the clerk that it is a word used quite frequently in these committees.

Just a second now. I think Mr. Angus had his hand up again.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I was responding to that clarification. I feel the question is, is this what the committee feels is important? Do we feel this, yes or no? At least we have a clear sense we're not overextending our mandate. This is our right as a committee: to ask the minister to share that with the CBC.

So the question is, do we vote yes or no? I think it's fairly straightforward.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I don't want to get caught up in procedure, but there is one called “substitute motion”. I think it may be helpful, and if it's not helpful, I'll withdraw it, if I may.

The wording I suspect we may be looking for would be more along the lines of the following: that the committee ask the Minister of Heritage to share with CBC/SRC management its concerns vis-à-vis significant structural changes before the currently scheduled structural mandate review is completed.

• (1705)

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chairman, I think there are a couple of very serious principles that we have to be taking a look at here, and I'm going to offer a suggestion as to how members of this committee could fruitfully engage themselves in this issue if they wanted to.

First, I know that Mr. Bélanger and I, from time to time—perhaps more on my part than his—end up crossing swords. But the fact still is that I can't agree—and I'm not saying this in a barbed way at all—

that the minister is the go-between between this committee and the CBC. I would suggest that this committee has every right in the world, if the committee should decide to do so, to write directly to the CBC. There's no reason to engage and potentially compromise the position of the minister, as she may or may not see it. That's suggestion number one.

Suggestion number two is that I think there is a more constructive way to do it. There are many of us—myself very much included—who would agree that anybody has to have a tremendous amount of respect for the position that the workers are in individually and collectively, and for the concerns of the union; we wouldn't be human if we didn't have that concern. Nonetheless, there is again the principle that it becomes interference from parliamentarians if a formal committee is interfering with what is supposed to be an arm's-length organization. The whole purpose of the CBC being an arm's-length organization is so that the government can determine what the corporation's mandate is, can provide the funds for them to do the job, and then it's up to the management on a day-to-day basis to do that job. If the management, at the end of the day, is doing an inadequate job, or whatever the case may be, then at that point the minister or the committee has every right to call them on the fact that they clearly are not carrying out their mandate.

I have a suggestion, and this is based on my own experience when the CBC was planning on shutting down *The House*. Some of you may recall that *The House* is on CBC radio from 9 to 10 o'clock every Saturday morning. I thought that closing it down was the stupidest idea in the world, because for the people in Canada who are concerned about politics, it is one heck of a vehicle. As a member of Parliament, I happen to have a title, but I chose to speak up individually; it had nothing to do with the committee. Well, I got a little bit of heck from one or two people in my party, but that's an aside. I just thought it was a crazy idea.

If the members of this committee want to be effective, if they were to campaign on it or to do whatever they wanted, this is a free democracy and we can do whatever we want—and it may well be effective. But again, if I may circle back to the question of passing a motion on the part of the committee, I would really quite insist, within whatever the motion is, or within this motion being portrayed to the CBC—should this be the decision of the committee—that I be counted and identified as not supporting the motion, because I think the committee is getting far outside of where it should be going.

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin, do you have a question?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Well, I think Mr. Abbott covered a number of the issues that I had, but I certainly believe it's important for us not to get ourselves into a situation that we don't want to get ourselves into. We shouldn't involve ourselves in a crown corporation's activities, because I'm concerned that if we do it this time, are we going to do it every week? Do we do it every time someone is being fired or being laid off? It's just a concern I have, and I go back to say that it's important that we, as private members, do support these types of things and get involved in these types of things, but I'm just not sure that it's the committee's responsibility to speak on behalf of an official committee, or that we ask the minister to supplement our views.

• (1710)

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I feel we should put it to a vote, but I would just like to clarify what the role of this committee is: the role of this committee is to examine how broadcasting works. That's one of our mandates. So when the CBC cut regional funding across this country, I'm glad that private members stood up, but we had an obligation as a committee to ask questions. Is that intervening? Yes, it is; that's our job.

When the lockout happened and seven weeks of service was cut off to Canadians, our committee wanted representation from management to explain why that was done. That was an internal management decision, but we took a stand.

So at this point, I think we know where our philosophical differences are; I would just like to know if it's a yea or nay. It's simple. I'm perfectly satisfied if Mr. Abbott and Mr. Warkentin say no. That is their view. That's what we're here for, but I don't think talking about it much more is going to get us anywhere. Let's just put it to a vote.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger is going to read the motion.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: What I had written, Mr. Chairman, at your suggestion, is "that the committee recommend that the Minister of Heritage share with CBC/SRC management its concerns vis-à-vis significant structural changes before the proposed CBC/SRC mandate review is completed." That's the essence of what it is.

If I may say so, although it may not be necessary, I have a couple of disagreements with some of the comments Mr. Abbott was making. I don't have a problem, whether we ask the minister or not. She may or may not wish to, but if she doesn't, then we can express it ourselves.

It isn't the government, necessarily, that sets the mandate. Parliament will set mandates quite often, by legislation, as is the case with CBC. So we have to be careful here. And Parliament has a role in reviewing mandates and in criticizing government actions in reviewing mandates. So it's not just government, with all due respect.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, can I just have 30 seconds, please?

I'd like to point out the fact that the government establishes the president and the board of directors of the CBC. This particular decision, as regrettable as it may be to some people in this room and others who are involved with it, was referred to the board of directors, who on behalf of the CBC management made this decision. It was not just a management decision; it was a decision by the directors of the CBC.

So they have followed all of the order right through, and I'm asking again that we seriously consider...that we have to make sure we are maintaining order in what we're doing with respect to this committee. Otherwise, quite frankly, we will really create a situation of having people legitimately asking whether we have the competence as a committee to consider an awful lot of these matters.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, what we're doing here is stepping on that very slippery slope. In fact, we're starting to slide. What this motion effectively will do is send a message to CBC—if in fact the minister

passes on that message, which I expect she would not, but if in fact she does—that until the next mandate review, really nothing of significance is going to happen within CBC: no layoffs, no hires, no significant contracts to be signed. Quite frankly, I don't recall government ever acting in that way.

Until the review is completed, you allow the crown corporation to carry on business in the usual course. We can't support this. We cannot support a motion like this, and quite frankly, Mr. Chair, if Mr. Bélanger were on this side of the table, my guess is he wouldn't be putting forward this motion.

The Chair: I think we've debated this enough. It has gone back and forth and back and forth. Let's bring it to a vote.

An hon. member: Can we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: We can have a recorded vote, yes.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

•(1715)

The Chair: Okay, there's something we have to do. We've dealt with a lot of motions; we've spent a lot of time debating motions. One thing we have to do is think of our staff and how we're going to work till the end of this session.

We have a proposed committee schedule in front of us. Was this circulated? Everyone should have it.

We also have a request to appear, from Canadians Against Propaganda. It's a motion on the application to the CRTC by nine Chinese state-run television services to enter the Canadian broadcasting system. This is something that was brought to my attention and has been brought to the attention of the committee. These people would like to appear before this committee.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: No, I'll let you speak. I just want to make a...

The Chair: My thing is that we want to make sure we get something here, because we have to have witnesses come. Of the proposals that have been made here, some have been requests, and we want to make sure we can line up witnesses to go forward and that we have productive meetings.

On Tuesday, June 6, it has been suggested that the committee review the Canada travelling exhibitions. We can have departmental officials here to go over that particular issue.

On Thursday, June 8, it would be meetings on GATS negotiations. That would be an in camera session, as requested. I think the minister answered that question today. We could have that, then, for June 8.

On Tuesday, June 13, we can either have reports of the Auditor General of Canada or CBC/Radio-Canada. Maybe having the Auditor General's report first might help us when we meet with CBC. If we have that on Tuesday, June 13, then hopefully on June 15 we could have the CBC here.

Those things could happen. Again, if there were some way we could put in this request that has been made of us, I would suggest that maybe....

I'm just going to ask one question. Our funding was not available for Banff, but I understand some of our members may be going to Banff anyway. Would you be back for June 13?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No.

The Chair: Well, what I would suggest is—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Not the CBC folks.

The Chair: Okay, that's why it's a good time to have the Auditor General here, I guess, for that meeting. If we do that, could we make some time some place along the line to work in this request about the decision before the CRTC?

Mr. Angus is first.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

Because it usually takes us about an hour to figure out the order of the table we're going to sit at each day, I would say I'm very pleased. I think we have something that will get us through.

I'd like to make just a couple of suggestions. If we're going to meet CBC, I'd like a full two hours. If we're going to meet the Auditor General, I'd like the full two hours, or as much of it as we can get.

We have requested that the minister come back. I think it would be really important. I don't think we got to hear very much today, and there are a lot of issues, and it would help us. So let's bring the minister back.

I have a question on Canadians Against Propaganda. I wrote a letter to the CRTC opposing—or raising questions about—Chinese communist state television coming into Canada. But I would respectfully submit that I would be very wary about just having a group come before us until we know who this group is.

We have to be very careful about the platform. We normally choose who the witnesses are going to be, and if there are going to be discussions about bringing the Chinese licence forward, then I would ask that we put our researchers to this, as opposed to just saying that Joe Blow group coming off the street wants to have an hour to have a mandate.

I say this with no disrespect to whatever this group is, but I would like to know who they are, what they've done. Otherwise, our credibility would be very much on the line.

• (1720)

The Chair: Yes, okay. Thank you, Charlie.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Those are my suggestions.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I think we should put as a priority the one you've suggested for June 6 in the order of reference.

Concerning the meeting on GATS, we've already agreed. There's no problem there.

Yes, I'd suggest the Auditor General before CBC, and also the fact that even though this committee as a group may not be going to Banff, the entire industry, including the CBC, will be in Banff. So perhaps that week might even be difficult for the CBC management.

I may add a suggestion that we indeed invite the minister to come back, but also we may want to add Madame Verner to our list of guests, because even Madame Oda today was making such suggestions, that we need to ask questions of Madame Verner vis-à-vis the francophone secretariat in the department.

Finally, there may be a need to add a meeting on Thursday, June 22.

As far as the request to appear is concerned, I would certainly discourage this committee from accepting that request. My information is that this application is still before the CRTC, that the CRTC has not made a decision. For us to step into a process that is arm's length, quasi-judicial....

I suppose most of us have been approached by representatives of these groups to meet with them. I think we cannot entertain that here until and unless a decision by the CRTC has been made—which can be appealed to the cabinet, incidentally. So until that process ends, we have to be very careful about entertaining witnesses on a matter that is currently before the CRTC.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Well, it's not Friday, but it is frosty, because I just agreed with Mr. Bélanger. That's with respect to the fact that this is before the CRTC. As a matter of fact, my understanding is, further, that they've actually extended the time for commentary. So they're obviously seriously working on this.

I'm really wondering what the value is of having CBC/Radio-Canada come before the committee at this time. What are we going to discover in two hours? I know everybody jumps on me because I'm always talking about the amount of time it takes for a minister or a ministry, or whatever, to come up to speed, to respond to a report, or to appear before a committee, but it's a fact of life. What are we going to be discovering with the CBC? They're going to have to be very circumspect, particularly going into the mandate review.

I remind the committee that we have museums, the archives, the library, the art gallery....

The art gallery, for example—something that I discovered as a result of the cooperation of the department, for which I was very grateful—is looking at the fact that they may be needing over \$100 million in terms of their requirements. Certainly the Museum of Science and Technology is on the front page of the *Ottawa Citizen* today. The archives, I've indicated, are very interesting. There are any number of things we could do on a one-off basis where we would end up adding to our collective wisdom about this humongous department called Heritage Canada.

So perhaps reports to the Auditor General might be of value, but continuing to focus on the CBC when I don't know what we would accomplish with two hours with them, when there are all these other things...I don't think there's any real value.

The Chair: Before we take the next two questions, there's one thing I want to say. We have had discussions on some of those issues you just mentioned, the museums and so on, and I have instructed the clerk to send out a list of things that we have on the agenda or that we think we can talk about in the fall when we start deliberations.

Hopefully before we have our last meeting before summer break we can pick out two or three things that we can do, that our staff can work on, can research, can get ready, so that we can be more productive in the fall than maybe we have been here so far this year. So those things will be coming out. We can talk about that.

Mr. Kotto.

• (1725)

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It would probably be wise for us to send them a list, by party, of proposals by thematic priority. That could help us advance more quickly.

On the other hand, I'd like to go back to what Mr. Bélanger was saying. I too am frustrated with the short time the minister spent here this afternoon. I'd like to see her again as soon as possible because an enormous number of issues remain outstanding. Personally, I was frustrated by most of the answers she gave us.

As regards calling representatives of CBC/Radio-Canada, Mr. Angus spoke about that earlier. We invited them about the lockout; you were present, Mr. Chairman. We're entitled to ask questions in our role as sounding box of the population. This is a public entity. These are public funds that are invested and, when those public funds are no longer being used to serve the mandates they are supposed to serve, we're entitled to ask ourselves some questions, because the voters in our ridings ask us questions. Consequently, if it doesn't trouble Mr. Abbott, I'd be willing to invite them, apart from their activities in Banff.

The minister would be welcome as soon as possible before them.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: It seems to me that every time we start to move forward on trying to address issues, it's a question of what

could we possibly learn by looking at these issues. I mean, we had the suggestion of spending the first session visiting all of the museums across Ottawa.

When we came to the 38th Parliament, the CBC was an issue we had to deal with. We asked for a plan on regional broadcast and drama. Midway through the session we had Mr. Rabinovitch come. We had CBC again. We had the issue of a lockout. Here we are at the beginning of another session, and CBC is one of the major issues that we deal with.

So what could we possibly learn? Well, I would invite them to show up for two hours and we might find something. I think to say that there's nothing to be learned, so why do it.... That's why we waste so much time here at committee, because it happens every time we try to move forward.

The Chair: I'm just going to go over what we have here.

Are people satisfied then that on Tuesday, June 6, we do a committee review on Canada's travelling exhibitions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: On Thursday, June 8, we meet on GATS negotiations in camera. Is that satisfactory?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: On Tuesday, June 13, we have reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

On Thursday, June 15, I'm going to make the suggestion that we have CBC/Radio Canada.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, you may want to check with them, because the Banff World Television Festival goes on until, I believe, June 14.

The Chair: Let's try to get Madame Verner here on Thursday, June 15, and we'll move the CBC then to Tuesday, June 20.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: On Thursday, June 22, Madame Oda again as a send-off for the summer?

The Chair: Maybe we can get her back.

Thank you for your time and your cooperation.

This meeting is adjourned.

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