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Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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•(1015)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): Let's get back to business here.

As we go down to Mr. Scarpaleggia's motion, I'd just like to make a statement on that motion. I think it was on November 1, 2006, that this motion was brought to this committee. At that time, an amendment was adopted by the committee, and it stated the following:

That the motion be tabled until such time if a report is considered by the Committee.

This amendment was adopted by a show of hands, by a vote of eight to three, so we're not bringing in a report at this particular time. Until that report comes in, I feel we have to respect the vote that we had on that particular day, November 1.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): But the committee has no plan to present a report.

The Chair: Not right at this particular time, and until that report comes in—that would be a museum report—I take the vote from that particular day to be what we're going under on this committee.

We move on to Mr. Angus.

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

As you know, over the last two weeks there has been a great deal of uncertainty about the Canadian Television Fund. The position taken by Shaw and Videotron has been that they are pulling out of the Canadian Television Fund, which very much puts the future of the fund at risk.

The terms of their licences state that they're obliged to pay in, going back to the 1993 CRTC decision in which the cable firms were allowed a major increase in subscriber rates in order to prepare for penetration of market against satellite. They succeeded. They were given an option at that point. The CRTC gave them the option to lower their rates to their subscribers or to keep those rates high but put part of that money into a fund, which was initially the Cable Production Fund. When the government stepped in, that became the Canadian Television Fund.

As you know, the minister is meeting with them today, so in some ways this should alleviate some concern. However, what is on the table now—and this is where I think it ties in with what we're dealing with in regard to the CBC. They've made it very clear that they will not continue to pay into CTF if the CBC is able to access funds. Such a position would have profound implications for the

CBC's ability to run drama in English and in French markets, because it's all independent production now.

I think this is probably the most serious threat we've seen. There hasn't been anything even close to this when you have giants like Shaw and Videotron both saying they're now going to dictate the terms. The issue of CBC being able to access CTF certainly will impact on our study.

So I completely agree about our need to stay focused on CBC, but I think this is now part of the puzzle. This wasn't a piece of the puzzle two weeks ago, and it wasn't a piece of the puzzle three weeks ago. It's definitely a piece of the puzzle that we're now having to look at. I would recommend that we can do it within the mandate review of the CBC. We can draw witnesses, but we need to have this on the agenda as something to be dealt with.

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Taking a look at the specific wording of the motion, “Due to the ongoing uncertainty of the future of the CTF...” This, I believe, was a motion immediately prior to the announcement of the minister, even before the federal budget has been announced, that the government has committed to the continuation of \$100 million a year for the two years, so I'm a little concerned about this ongoing uncertainty.

The second thing is, I have to expect that the minister will likely be pointing out to Shaw and Videotron that they can make these public statements that they aren't going to live up to the terms and conditions of their licence but that they nonetheless have those licences and the terms and conditions are very clear.

I have not spoken directly at all with the minister. But a person would have to have the expectation that the government would expect anyone who has a licence, who has specific terms and conditions, to live up to them. If there cannot be some meeting of the minds in the meeting between Shaw and Videotron and the minister today, I would guess the government would be prepared to take whatever legal remedy is necessary. I'm not making an announcement on behalf of the government; I'm just speaking logically. None of us, as individuals, nor corporations, can just arbitrarily say, “Well, I've got my licence and now I'm not going to pay the bill”.

I appreciate what Mr. Angus is saying about this being part of taking a look at the CBC, but I'm wondering about the value of the specific wording of this motion, particularly working in the vacuum of understanding what future events will be unfolding as early as this afternoon. I'm just wondering what the value of going ahead with this motion is.

I'm not going to move to table the motion at this point because that would create a vote; however, I am thinking of that.

• (1020)

The Chair: Something that I thought, too, on this particular thing was whether this motion might be a little premature. You expressed earlier that it could probably be brought up within the mandate review of the CBC. We do know, with respect to the future of the Canadian Television Fund, that the government is behind it. My suggestion would be that we hold off on this motion, at least until after these people have met with the minister. Maybe that could be answered later on today, or tomorrow.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that advice.

Certainly we have uncertainty about the fund today. Even though we have the government element, we have the two big players saying they do not want CBC to access the independent production that's done from that.

I agree that we should hear whether that uncertainty is going to be cleared up. I would say the meeting is going to happen today. The minister should come out with a very clear message. If the minister doesn't have a very clear message about how these terms are going to be laid down, then Thursday morning I would fully expect us to follow through with this. If the issue of uncertainty remains, we would have to address it at that time. But I would be more than willing to give the minister this afternoon to make it clear that the

terms of the licence are very clear and that independent production that goes to CBC will continue.

The Chair: Mr. Scott.

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Independent of the current situation, I think it's part of the discussion of the role of the public broadcasters to look at how the public broadcaster intersects with non-public broadcasters. It would be insufficient work if we didn't do that. My sense is that we're going to be looking at this as a point of intersection anyway. In the event that in the course of that exercise the timing is right to pull that work outside of the review and say something in the House about this, if that were the will of the committee, then it would make sense. But I think the fundamental questions about this are larger than the circumstance of today. Therefore, we're going to be touching on it in any case. We have to. I would agree with Mr. Angus that it may become more important and it may become very specifically something the committee might wish to do, but that's too early to tell.

The Chair: So we'll withhold the motion until Thursday.

Mr. Charlie Angus: It will either die on the order paper or it will be dealt with as part of the larger issue.

The Chair: There's no other business?

The meeting is adjourned.

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