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Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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● (0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the 50th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in this 39th Parliament.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are undertaking a full investigation of the role of a public broadcaster in the 21st century.

For our first set of witnesses this morning, we have the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council. We welcome you here this morning.

Mr. Ronald Cohen, the national chair, would you please make your presentation and introduce the rest of your entourage?

Mr. Ronald Cohen (National Chair, Canadian Broadcast Standards Council): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, good morning. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today.

As the chair said, my name is Ronald Cohen, and I'm the national chair. With me are John MacNab, CBSC's executive director; Teisha Gaylard, our director of policy; and Burhaan Warsame, the manager of the CBSC's ethnocultural outreach project.

While we appreciate the invitation to appear before you, we are acutely aware of the fact that the CBSC's role is in the area of private broadcasting, and of course your investigation focuses on the role of the public broadcaster. Our members are Canada's 609 private broadcasters, covering conventional television, specialty services, AM and FM radio, and satellite radio—effectively about 95% of the commercial private broadcasters who are eligible to join the council.

Although it does not fall within our mandate to comment directly on issues involving public broadcasters, what the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council does is so unique and central to the Canadian broadcasting system that you may find elements of what we accomplish at least indirectly worthy of consideration in your deliberations.

There are two major aspects of our work that are unique—and, you may conclude, worthy of replication in the public broadcasting area. The first is the breadth of public concerns to which we are responsive, and the second is the extent of our outreach into all Canadian communities.

[Translation]

The council's mandate is to oversee the administration of the Canadian private broadcaster codes. These currently include the CAB Sex Role Portrayal Code and the CAB Violence Code (both of

which are imposed by the CRTC as conditions of licence for Canadian broadcasters), the CAB Code of Ethics and the Radio and Television News Directors Association of Canada (RTNDA) Code of (Journalistic) Ethics.

[English]

I should add that last week the CRTC issued a public notice calling for comment on a new CBSC code, the journalistic independence code. It will also be administered by the CBSC and be a CRTC condition of licence on Canadian broadcasters with ownership interests in both print and broadcast areas.

There is also another code, the equitable portrayal code, in the offing. In due course, it will extend to all communities the benefits hitherto available on the basis of gender alone, under the terms of the sex role portrayal code for television and radio programming. It should be the subject of another CRTC public notice this year.

It is essential to note that the codified standards reflect Canadian values. The enforcement tools are also Canadian—that is to say, effective without being heavy-handed, and industry-driven rather than government-driven.

This is particularly pertinent as we have watched the unravelling of the Don Imus debacle in the United States in the past couple of weeks. The concerns of the American regulatory system are limited to nudity and coarse language—not violence on television, human rights, portrayal issues, nor respect for the dignity of individuals on the basis of their race, ethnic origin, colour, sexual orientation, religion, and so on. Those are Canadian values and central to our standards and enforcement system. Canada does not depend on advertisers to force program change on an ad hoc basis as in the United States. We have rules that broadcasters willingly accept.

● (0910)

In the exercise of our mandate the CBSC has since 1991 received complaints from tens of thousands of Canadians about all forms of programming, whether in the news and public affairs area, drama, comedy, talk radio or television, reality programming, entertainment, news magazine shows, feature films, children's programming, and so on.

[Translation]

The CBSC has quite a comprehensive knowledge about the subjects of complaint. Moreover, it receives the expression of those concerns directly and indirectly. Even those which are initially sent to the CRTC are, with rare exception, forwarded to the CBSC for resolution. We deal with approximately 2,000 complaints every year from Canadians who are unhappy about something they have seen or heard on the airwaves.

[English]

I should add parenthetically that a number of these complaints concern the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Ironically, since the CBC does not have an equivalent system of our own, we forward these to the CRTC to deal with.

In fact, having just mentioned the subject of children's programming on the one hand and audience complaints about many subjects on the other, I note that tomorrow you will be debating a private member's bill on the subject of violence in the media, Bill C-327, proposed by the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[Translation]

You should be aware, first of all, that as a percentage of complaints, those relating to violence on television have been steadily declining, by a huge margin, namely, 37%, between 2001 and 2006. Moreover, the Bigras bill's proposals would add nothing to the panoply of tools we have to deal with the subject, since issues relating to violence on television are already thoroughly covered by the combination of the CAB Violence Code and the CAB Code of Ethics, and rigorously enforced by the self-regulatory system solidly entrenched in the Canadian broadcasting system.

[English]

We already have a watershed hour that is not limited to violence intended for adults. It restricts violence, to be sure, and all forms of adult content to the post-9 p.m. period. We already have provisions for ratings and viewer advisories that apply well beyond the violence-on-television area.

Also, we already have the most detailed provisions to protect children from inappropriate television programming that you can find anywhere in the world. If passed, Bill C-327 would deliver less to the Canadian public than we already have.

Our process encourages the resolution of complaints by meaningful broadcaster dialogue with the complainants. When this does not lead to complainant satisfaction, the CBSC rules on those complaints via adjudicating panels made up of equal numbers of public and industry adjudicators. There are five regional panels, dealing with the Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia. There are also two national panels, one of which deals with conventional television and the other with speciality services.

Biographies of every public and industry adjudicator are available on the CBSC website. They include former members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, a lieutenant governor, a provincial premier, CRTC commissioners, and Canadians of many walks of life who have manifested their concern about the public good.

The private broadcasters' self-regulatory process is predicated on full disclosure and the publicity of all formal CBSC decisions, whether rendered for or against broadcasters. Consequently, the press release announcing every decision is forwarded to the print media, broadcasters, and any person in Canada or elsewhere in the world wishing to be on the recipient list. The nearly 400 decisions rendered since 1991 are posted on our website with their full written reasons. They form an extensive and thorough body of jurisprudence, dealing with and defining for the future the widest possible range of content issues.

We deal with all forms of content in all kinds of radio and television programming, period. We also do this in an independent, arm's-length fashion, with considerable public involvement in our deliberations and decisions.

With the exception of the CBC's ombudsmen, who work in the narrower area of news and public affairs, Canada's public broadcasters have no equivalent process.

The council is also proud that it reaches out into all corners of Canada's great multicultural environment, by informing citizens of Canada's broadcast standards and the self-regulatory system in English, French, and forty other languages, both in print and on this CBSC website.

Two sets of all of these foreign language versions of the brochure have been deposited with the clerk. We would certainly be delighted to provide any of you with a set, and/or any individual language of interest to you or indeed to your constituents.

I should have added earlier that our adjudicating panels reflect that diversity as well. It is also worth noting that 13.9 million Canadians—not out of the last census, the result of which are just available, but from a couple of years ago—speak one or more of the forty languages. There are programs broadcast in all of these languages in Canada.

● (0915)

May I clarify that the forty languages of comfort reflect Canada's Latin American hemispheric communities; Canada's indigenous communities, in Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Cree, Ojibwa and Mohawk; Canada's eastern and western European communities; Canada's African communities; Canada's Near and Far Eastern communities; and Canada's South Asian communities, in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Tamil, and Sinhala.

The CBSC works very hard to ensure that the results of its decisions are known to all who are affected by them. Its volunteer adjudicators, on both the public and industry side, are dedicated to the emergence of a set of principles that will fairly circumscribe public expectations. It is a mark of the thoughtfulness and impartiality of the adjudicators, both public and industry, that all but five of 398 decisions have been rendered unanimously, whether for or against broadcasters.

It is a mark of the success of the Canadian private broadcasters' self-regulatory system that it does not require the huge financial penalties of the American regulatory process in order to work.

The system works because the private broadcasters have committed themselves to the process. They created it; they support it financially. More importantly, they support it morally. After all, they live in the communities in which they broadcast. They want us to deal with all substantive public concerns about content, not just some of them. They also want us to tell all Canadians, in their languages of comfort, how to assess the self-regulatory process. It makes good sense, good Canadian sense. It's good for every corner of the Canadian broadcasting system.

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention. We are now available to answer your questions.

● (0920)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll turn to questions.

Ms. Keeper.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much for your presentation.

Part of our work is to assess how we're serving Canadians, and certainly within the Broadcasting Act we see that over and over again, as you mentioned in your presentation. We're talking about Canadian values, and I think that's what's at the core here. When you talk about codified standards that reflect Canadian values, I think that's critical, because one of the things we've heard over and over again throughout our series of hearings is that we're up against big American television programming. How can we continue to move forward to ensure that we keep the integrity of our Canadian television programming?

So I'd like to ask you about your role. Within your presentation, you mentioned that you receive complaints regarding the CBC and forward them to the CRTC. Could I ask you to clarify that a bit more? How is it that you might see the organization serving the CBC and its mandate in a stronger role?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: That's an excellent question, Ms. Keeper, and a difficult one to respond to in some respects.

Basically, we began as a creature of the private broadcasters in 1986, with the idea that we might go forward in 1988. This began to take some form, and by 1990 we had the shape that was created and proposed by the private broadcasters. So at that time, and ever since, the private broadcasters have put a lot of resources, support, and effort into ensuring that the system would be as effective as they could possibly make it.

The CBC had no involvement with it, even from the earliest days. I think it's fair to say that they have their own system, which to some extent must be confusing to the public. After all, if we at the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council are receiving complaints about the CBC, we don't expect that the public knows to make a distinction: if it's this station, send a complaint there; or if it's that station, send the complaint here. We don't expect them to know what to do. Nonetheless, the system we have at the moment reflects the distinction between the two.

So we really don't have much choice. When we receive those complaints, we send them along to the CRTC, which has the responsibility of dealing with any complaints relating to the CBC.

● (0925)

Ms. Tina Keeper: You talked about the 1990 time period, and part of the history of the creation of the organization was to deal with issues around violence, sex, and their portrayal on television. In terms of the complaints, have you seen a change in the types? What are Canadians concerned about, in terms of what's on television from the early 1990s to now?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: At least one aspect is quite telling. From the time Virginie Larivière presented her petition to Prime Minister Mulroney, when violence on television was a fairly significant concern—and when there were a lot of children's programs containing violent elements, including *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, *G.I. Joe*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and programs of that genre—violence was a concern.

After the petition was presented, broadcasters took an active position in revising the violence code of 1987, frankly in order to make it more effective and focus more on children.

I find it interesting that one of the things noted in Bill C-327 has been in existence since January 1, 1994. This is very specific, and the most advanced provisions anywhere in the world, I suggest, for dealing with children's programming.

This is only a partial answer to your question, but the point is that since that code has come into effect, the number of complaints relating to violence on television has actually decreased significantly.

We noted that in going back to 2001, there was a diminution of about 37% in the number of complaints relating to violence on television.

I suggest that it's a diminishing problem in the television area, which is a very specific answer to what you're asking. It has become a less important issue, because honestly it's so well dealt with by the system that we now have in place.

To complete the answer, I should say that other issues are rising a bit more. I think that the presence of sexual content on television and coarse language on television and radio are issues on the increase.

Teisha, I don't know if you have any disagreement.

Those tend to be on the increase a bit, but again one of the important protections we have is the watershed hour. It was originally created in the violence code to deal with violence intended exclusively for adults. We have expanded this, so that all forms of programming, including sexual content, coarse language, and adult themes, are relegated to the post-watershed hour and must be accompanied by viewer advisories, and so on. But there are increases in that.

Ms. Tina Keeper: I have one quick question.

The Chair: You'll have an opportunity in the next round.

Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Good morning and welcome.

I'd like to go back to the issue of violence on television. You say that we have a panoply of tools to deal with issues relating to violence on television and you point out that complaints on this issue have declined by 37% between 2001 and 2006. Furthermore, you have just reminded us that the strategy to reduce violence on television was adopted on January 1st, 1994.

Complaints have decreased by 37%, but has the violence itself decreased? Have you measured that?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: No, we have not measured the violence nor any other kind of content on television. We do not have the means to do so. I have not seen any study or survey that clearly indicates what is happening on television. It must also be said that violent content is not necessarily problematic. For example, the kind of violence that would be in some cartoons can be completely unrealistic, but it is violence nevertheless. Is it a problem? Not necessarily. It is very important to carry out studies similar to those done by UCLA, in California, for the United States Congress. These studies analyzed the type of violence in order to determine whether or not it was of a nature to cause a problem. There is not necessarily an increase of problematic violence on Canadian television.

● (0930)

Mr. Maka Kotto: Others hold a contrary opinion, but I respect your point of view. Bill C-327 is intended to counter the presence of violence on television, and not to diminish the number of complaints on the subject. I want to be fair and balanced. Do you understand? The intent of the bill is not to decrease the number of complaints concerning violence on television, but to decrease the violence in televised newscasts, particularly those showing events in Afghanistan or in Irak, at times when children would still be watching television.

You spoke of cartoons that have violent components. We could potentially discuss classification in order to assess the scope or the significance of the violence. And yet, current studies show that as far as video games are concerned, whether it be Nintendo, Xbox or others, children who are naturally non-violent develop an aggressive behaviour after having been exposed to these games. This violence may not go so far as to result in criminal behaviour as we have just seen in Virginia, in the United States, but it does exist. It is the parents who are complaining and who have always complained about this violence. That is in fact what inspired the bill. In any case, that is not the issue.

Returning to the CBC: are you aware of the substance of the Convention on Cultural Diversity passed by UNESCO and which Canada was the first to ratify?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: I do not know it in detail, but diversity is very important to us.

Mr. Maka Kotto: In a word, it addresses the need for countries to promote diversity both domestically as well as abroad. What does that say to you, for example, about the representativeness of television hosts, of commentators or of any model of representation on public television?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Our problem, of course, is first and foremost the issue of public television versus private television. I understand you completely. You are here to study public television. Unfortunately, we only represent private radio and television. Furthermore, our mandate does not include diversity on television. Positive presentation, diversity on the airwaves, the number of coloured people on the airwaves or who sit on boards of directors are not issues that concern us. We deal mainly with more negative issues, with problems regarding the ways in which people are represented. That is the most important thing for us.

● (0935)

[English]

Mr. Chair, perhaps I will respond to Monsieur Kotto's earlier comments.

[Translation]

Mr. Kotto, a few minutes ago, you mentioned violent games. That does not come under our jurisdiction, nor under the CBC's or the CRTC's.

Mr. Maka Kotto: No, I will stop you there—

Mr. Ronald Cohen: But you mentioned—

Mr. Maka Kotto: That was not the objective.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: It perhaps was not the objective, but—

Mr. Maka Kotto: Comparative studies have been carried out on the kind of violence that children are exposed to. We also see that kind of violence on television.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Yes.

Mr. Maka Kotto: It is only to make you temper your comments

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Mr. Ronald Cohen: I understand you, but the nature of—

Mr. Maka Kotto: —which were quite radical concerning Bill C-327.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: The nature of the violence in some video games gives an indication of what needs to be done whenever children are exposed to children. That of course is under the control of the parents.

Mr. Maka Kotto: The parents are not always there.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: The problem is that television no longer broadcasts that level of violence. If anyone wants to do so, they do it through the means of violent games like those.

You say that there is a difference between the complaints and the content. The complaints represent a sort of poll.

Mr. Maka Kotto: At some point, people throw in the towel; you are well aware of that.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: A survey like this is not official because anyone is free to lodge a complaint.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Because they are not being heard, that is why sometimes people throw in the towel; you know this.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: That shows that we are mitigating the problem in this area.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you for your presentation this morning. It was very interesting.

The other day at the hearings I said that I find news reporting in all private broadcasting to be at a very high standard. When I watch, I see a level of journalistic independence and impartiality.

I am interested in this discussion of violence. You referred to Bill C-327, and I had spoken to it. The example you gave was the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. I have to confess that all my daughters went to see the movie the other night. They're big fans of the ninja turtles. Growing up, they watched the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* all the time. I never thought that watching it would turn them into gangbangers.

So when we talk about what kind of violence there is on television, there are issues of degree. So we take a stand on ninja turtles, and yet to use the example in Bill C-327, *Fear Factor*, I was watching it with my daughter. The scenario was that a little girl was chained up and covered in Moroccan hissing cockroaches. The mother had to bite off the cockroaches with her mouth while the kid screamed.

That was in prime time, but it's A-okay, because at the end of the show, if the mother gets enough cockroaches off in time, she wins—I don't know—a Mazda, a ten-speed bike, a plasma television, or something. So child abuse for entertainment in prime time is okay, as long as the mother wins a prize at the end.

Fear Factor shows on Global, which is a Canadian network. What standards do you have for dealing with shows like that?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: First—and believe me, no pun is intended, Mr. Angus—that may be a question of taste, to a considerable extent. I couldn't imagine watching the circumstances that you just described.

We have provision in our Broadcasting Act and regulations that deal with simultaneous substitution. It may be that *Fear Factor* comes in on a simultaneously substituted basis. I don't know the answer to that, but it may be that it does. If so, it may come in at an earlier hour than if it were not benefiting, as it were, from simultaneous substitution.

This is a very important consideration, and the issue is bigger than all of us, in a way, at this point: to know whether it arrives on that basis. Otherwise, it would probably be post-nine-o'clock, with content that's inappropriate for pre-nine-o'clock.

● (0940)

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a concern about simultaneous substitution, if it's bigger than all of us. Is it a factor that as long as Canadian broadcasters are getting U.S. programming—which seems to be increasingly predatory and degrading—on simultaneous substitution and putting our advertising on, there's very little we can do in order to say wait a minute, this is not in our Canadian interest? That leaves you to relegating the one or two Canadian shows, such as Ben Mulroney's *eTalk*. I don't think there's too much violence on that.

What role do you have in a world where shows come in through simultaneous substitution?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Basically there is a role that we have: we can indicate that something is problematic and draw conclusions, and we have done that on numerous occasions. There is a protection in terms of content that might be described as violent content intended for adult audiences. There would be a permission, as it were, for a program to be broadcast prior to nine o'clock; otherwise, if it's broadcast by a Canadian private broadcaster, it is subject to all our rules.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay. I don't want to put you on the spot by giving you examples, but I'm trying to find my way through how we would regulate this. I think it is very good to have your system in place, and I support that.

I'm thinking of the example of Kit Kat Blizzard ice cream from Dairy Queen. There's an advertisement out—I don't know if you're aware of it—in which a boy is hanging on a hook while his brother taunts him and eats ice cream. Then a man comes into the room, and in the next scene we have the two boys hanging on hooks while the man taunts them and eats ice cream. Now that particular ad has very much upset the family of Myles Neuts, who was hung on a hook and taunted to death in the Windsor area just a few years ago. The families tried to have that ad pulled. Apparently Dairy Queen said they wouldn't run it in Windsor, but of course in an age of cable and satellite that's not doing much.

First of all, do you deal with advertising? Second, how does a family take a complaint like that so they can actually get a very questionable ad like that off the air?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Advertising is dealt with by Advertising Standards Canada, and it can easily be found either through our website, where it is linked, or directly, of course, quite easily. Advertising Standards Canada is very good and very experienced and deals with most advertising issues in broadcast as well as print.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Fast is next.

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

Thank you for attending here, all four of you.

I'd like to take off on what Mr. Angus touched on a few minutes earlier. He referred to simultaneous substitution, an arrangement whereby our Canadian broadcasters are essentially compelled, contractually or otherwise, to broadcast American programming in a time slot they normally wouldn't broadcast in.

Are you saying that effectively American programming can preempt our Canadian broadcast standards, and does the Broadcasting Act actually allow that to happen?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: No. What I'm saying is that there is, as it were, a bye, in the best competitive sports sense, for programming that may contain violence intended for adults that comes in prior to the watershed hour of nine o'clock, so that programming has a benefit from the point of view of the violence-intended-for-adults issue only. It's subject to all other provisions in the violence code and in all the other codes.

Mr. Ed Fast: Are you telling me the broadcasters actually make a contractual choice to allow American programming to pre-empt some of our standards in Canada?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: No. I'm saying that only in the violence area can they benefit from any advantage, if you wish to call it that, with respect to the adult nature of the violence. It is only that issue; something may come in, let's say, an hour earlier because it comes in that way from the States.

They are subject to all other provisions of all our codes. The problem is—and I think this was anticipated in the first place, when those rules were created—that if programming is going to come in on the American channel an hour or two earlier, people will watch that anyway. There are no controls in place for programming that comes in on American channels, and the Canadian channel would, in a sense, lose whatever commercial benefits it might have coming in later in that evening.

It's only that issue. It's only the issue of being earlier—

• (0945)

Mr. Ed Fast: I understand that, but making it earlier exposes a greater number of Canadians to violence, while from a Canadian broadcaster, they typically wouldn't be.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Yes, that might be the case. The question is how much of that even occurs.

Mr. Angus has raised an issue. I haven't seen that program. It's a general principle at the Broadcast Standards Council that we don't make judgments about a particular issue when an issue has not been weighed by all the members of a panel sitting on it, so I'm giving Mr. Angus the benefit of the doubt. He's raised one example. I don't know if it would be found to be problematic in that regard.

Can it occur? In theory, it can occur. Does it occur? Does it occur with any frequency? I would suggest to you that having a program coming in earlier likely doesn't occur with great frequency at all. Theoretically, it is undeniable that something could, but I suggest to you that the problem is not as great as a single example may suggest.

Mr. Ed Fast: If this became a problem, would your organization consider reviewing it?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: We can't. Simultaneous substitution does not fall within our jurisdiction. It falls within the jurisdiction of the CRTC.

Mr. Ed Fast: All right. Thank you.

I have a follow-up question.

You also referred to viewer advisories as providing some level of protection so that parents can exercise some control over what their children watch. However, many families are under a lot of stress. We have working hours that are not as traditional as they used to be. We

have families that are often under siege, and children who are often left unsupervised.

We find that on the Internet. I brought forward a bill that is hoping to toughen up sentences on those who use the Internet to lure children, and often that happens in a context of a lack of supervision. The same would be true for television.

You've mentioned that the incidence of complaints regarding violence on television has gone down. Is that right?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: That's right.

Mr. Ed Fast: In the area of sexual content, adult content that is probably not suitable for children, do you find the same kind of reduction in complaints, or is that area still a bit of a struggle for your members?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: I don't have a comparable statistic with me, but I just checked with our director of policy, and I expect that area is probably, generally speaking, on an increase—has been, over a period of time—with more adult sexual content raising concerns for some Canadians than has previously been the case.

Our executive director is making a very important point: that is probably only true in the post-watershed hour. You have to appreciate the kind of balance that exists. When you look at what's happening in the United States, in a sense almost anything goes, with the exception of coarse language and a Janet Jackson type of circumstance. Otherwise violence and almost anything goes. In Canada, we don't have much of a problem, if any, with adult sexual content being on the air before nine o'clock. That's one very important issue.

The other thing is that in Canada we balance broadcasters' freedom of expression, on the one hand, with the information they're prepared to provide and must provide to members of the public in order for members of the public to make informed choices about what they see—so there is no adult content before 9 p.m., and when there is adult content, even after 9 p.m. the broadcaster has the obligation to provide ratings icons, detailed viewer advisories in words at the beginning of the show and coming out of every single commercial break, and coding of the program so that the V-chip and other such devices can pick up and eliminate adult programming. All these tools are provided so that we can balance freedom of expression, on the one hand, with the right of audiences to avoid programming that they don't want to see on the other.

• (0950)

Mr. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Fry is next.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): I am having a bit of a difficult time understanding some of your responses to the questions Mr. Fast asked. You are only acting in a reactive manner—is that it? You're just reacting to complaints. You don't take any kind of proactive stance or position on the violent content—and it's only violence you're obviously dealing with—or actually have people who watch programs to ensure that the broadcast code isn't being violated; before you go to the CRTC, you are not able to be your own watchdog.

You're just being reactive. Is that my understanding?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Well, not only is it a correct understanding, but I also think it's very important that it be emphasized. We don't have censorship in Canada. The CRTC reacts to complaints and the CBSC reacts to complaints. It is absolutely the case that we do not take the initiative to, as it were, vet programming before it's on the airwaves. We are absolutely reactive. We are proud of the fact that we are reactive, because we don't assume Canadians have a problem if not a single Canadian has a complaint to raise about a program. I think it's very important that the process work on that basis.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I understand that.

Do you think there is a place for some sort of media watchdog in this country to look at whether there is the kind of programming that we want to be on the air? Whether we wait only for people to complain or not, there needs to be some form of standard, some sort of ability for people to suggest that this is the kind of programming we would like to see, especially when children are watching television.

I know there's a V-chip and I know there are all of those things by which parents can act as watchdogs. The reality is that there's a great deal of violence on television, a great deal of violence against women. There's a great deal of stereotyping on television, and this is not just aimed at small children; young people tend to watch that violence, and it does tend to reflect in the way they behave.

I'm asking if you think there is a role here for some sort of media watchdog. I know there are many of them that are purely NGOs acting on a voluntary basis. I just have a little bit of a problem with thinking that unless we get people complaining, everything is fine.

Do you see a role for a watchdog body in Canada for the media?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Do you mean a watchdog body that is not an NGO? Is that what you're saying?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: No, not necessarily. I think there is ample opportunity and freedom in this country to create bodies that deal with concerns of this nature. Media Watch was one such body for a good period of time, run for quite some time by Shari Graydon, who was originally from your area of the country—

Hon. Hedy Fry: I know Shari; yes.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: —and, as you know, is now in Ottawa. My point is that Media Watch was such a body.

Is there a place for bodies of that kind? There is, absolutely. I think it's a great free society in which opportunities like that exist when there are problems. I don't begin with the assumption, as you appear to, that there is a problem with quantities of violence on television. I don't begin with that assumption, and I don't know that there is any hard evidence of it whatsoever.

• (0955)

Hon. Hedy Fry: I disagree with you. There is hard evidence of it, but that's fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Kotto.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Cohen, in the panoply of tools you are saying are available to you to deal with the issue of violence on television, is there a law?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Why?

Mr. Maka Kotto: Please answer me with a yes or a no. I would like to know if, in this panoply of tools, there is a piece of legislation people could resort to.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Are you talking about legislation that deals with violence per se?

Mr. Maka Kotto: You said that you have available to you a panoply of tools to crack down on violence on television. Among those tools, is there a law?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: No, our tools do not include legislation. We have codes, remedies, but no legislation.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Are some people worried over the restrictive nature of the potential legislation?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Legislation is not created for theoretical reasons but to deal with a problem.

Mr. Maka Kotto: As to determining whether or not violence on television is a theoretical issue, is something we are not quite in agreement. I agree with Ms. Fry on that point. We receive a good number of complaints in our riding offices. These complaints are forwarded to us, combined with insults sometimes. If we were to introduce legislation, we would be protecting ourselves somewhat from these insults. People would therefore be able to act on their own and refer matters to the courts, or some other authority to speak against what they consider as an infringement on these young people's integrity.

You talked about multiculturalism.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: Before you continue, Mr. Kotto, I would like to qualify something: the Code concerning violence on television is a condition of the granting of a licence—

Mr. Maka Kotto: We hear you.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: .. to each broadcaster, and in fact, this is an act. If you want to be protected by the Broadcasting Act, you can indeed invoke this licence.

Mr. Maka Kotto: There was a 37% drop in complaints over violence on television between the years 2001 and 2006. Is that enough? If there were a law, would the drop not be greater?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: There wouldn't be any change. Why? Because a law doesn't change anything.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Time will tell. If this bill is adopted, I think there will be a difference. That is my opinion, and you have yours.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: It is not a matter of opinion, but in this case it is an opinion that we do not share.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Absolutely, we live in a democracy, after all.

Earlier, you talked about multiculturalism. To your mind, does the promotion of multiculturalism within the broadcasting sector help people live together, share a common identity and common values?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: I think that the various communities in Canada do not necessarily share the same values, the same traditions, but generally speaking, the traditions of each of these communities should be promoted. There are certain exceptions when it comes to law and order that have to be made in certain areas. But generally speaking, multiculturalism should include the protection of communities' traditions.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Television is an overly powerful media instrument that affects the individual and collective psyche; it shapes behaviour. Are you not afraid that by promoting multiculturalism within the audiovisual space, we are leading people into a form of cultural balkanization which over the long run, may shape up to be a situation similar to the one prevailing in England currently, whereby there is ethnic confrontation and conflicts between ethnic groups and the host society?

• (1000)

Mr. Ronald Cohen: I'm not a sociologist, but I would say that generally speaking in Canada, this is a good thing. To my mind, the way multiculturalism is practised is a good thing for society, and I do not see how it is tantamount to the balkanization of communities.

I believe that traditions are preserved to a certain extent, but there's also a general approach of canadianizing our communities. It's quite different from the notion of the melting pot in the United States. This way, I believe we can slowly reach our goal.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): This has been a very productive day, and I thank you for your testimony, particularly with the debate on Bill C-327 coming up tomorrow.

If I may, I'd like to return briefly to the actual purpose of our hearing today, which was the "full investigation of the role of a public broadcaster in the 21st century", and that is certainly not a criticism of your response to the questions; your response has been very helpful.

My question is whether, in your judgment, it would be of value for the CBC to join the other 690 stations and become a member of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council—not under the control of it, but taking some direction from it.

I realize your answer could be taken and construed as being self-serving, and I hope that readers of this transcript will not take it that way. I'm asking that question because it seems to me that if there are standards on public broadcasters, they have the eyes and ears of exactly the same people as would be watching the CBC, and it strikes me that we might be lacking some continuity here.

Mr. Ronald Cohen: I think the question is a very good question. I don't know that it would be up to us in any way to advise the public broadcaster of what it should do, but what might be important, Mr. Abbott, is to look at it from the point of view of the Canadian people, of the population of this great country. There's necessarily some confusion when they don't know where to go and when they don't know if there is a standard set of rules that applies across the country. It would seem to me—and it was one of the two points I had hoped to make regarding the contribution that the CBSC makes—that it

would be less confusing, and useful, if the CBC were to have and follow rules such as those that we apply, and had an independent body to deal with them.

At the moment, every decision taken by the CBSC is taken by a panel of no less than 50% members of the public. It may, in some cases, be slightly more. It would seem to me that it would be very useful from a public perspective for the CBC to have an equivalent system in place, whether it was a part of our system or an equivalent system that it set up both as to content and as to procedure. I think that that would be a useful thing.

Mr. Jim Abbott: That's really very helpful, because not infrequently we have complaints—at least I certainly have complaints in my office—from people who feel that the CBC considers itself to be above their perspective. You're suggesting that the idea of having at least 50% on a board or on some type of recognized organization to receive complaints about the CBC and their broadcasting standards is a good idea. However, I think it's pretty obvious that for the CBC to duplicate something you already have in place would be an extra expense and really quite unnecessary. That's the implication I'm taking from what you're saying.

• (1005)

Mr. Ronald Cohen: I would prefer to leave you to take such an implication, if I may. I can speak to the validity of the system, and so on; whether it should be we who undertake such an activity on behalf of another broadcaster, the public broadcaster, is not a decision for us to initiate.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

I always try to leave myself a little time for a question before we close.

One thing you talked about was the news, and that there might be some complaints about some news. The biggest complaint I've had was about some of our news specialty channels that have come in from, say, China. I don't know how many questions or problems you receive with that, but I've received quite a few that some of these new channels that have come in are propaganda channels, and I don't know how you police that. Is there a way to police any of it?

Mr. Ronald Cohen: There is. We use, first, the CAB code of ethics, which in clause 5 deals with news and in clause 6 deals with the full, fair, and proper presentation of news, opinion, comment, and editorial. We also use the Radio-Television News Directors Association of Canada code of journalistic ethics, all of which require balance, fairness, and a number of other issues—non-mixing of news and editorial, for example.

How do we deal with it? Assuming that the news services in question are Canadian licensees—and they may well be members of ours, as most stations are—we would deal with any such complaints under those codes without any difficulty.

If, on the other hand, the undertakings fall on the list of basically exempt broadcasters—broadcasters that are foreign and remain foreign—then there is no way for us to deal with them, any more than there is for the CRTC to deal with them. There's just no way to cope with services that are and remain foreign; it's only if that programming comes in on a Canadian licensee.

You may remember the case of Al Jazeera that the CRTC was called upon to deal with. They set up very special circumstances in order for that particular service to be imported into Canada. Otherwise, if they are, as you say, a Chinese service coming into Canada, all one could do would be to apply in due course to the CRTC to suggest that they aren't entitled to continue on the list of services.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I really appreciate your presentation and your answers this morning. I thank everyone for the questions around the table.

We'll recess for five minutes before our next witnesses. Thank you very much.

- _____ (Pause) _____
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- (1015)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

I'd like to welcome our next witnesses, who are from the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française. We have Mr. Pierre Bourbeau, director general, and Ms. Annick Schulz. Welcome this morning. We'll welcome your brief and then we'll take questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau (Director General, Fédération culturelle canadienne-française): Thank you.

Firstly, I wish to thank you for allowing us to appear before you. It is a great pleasure, and it is very important for us to be here. Through our presentation, you will be able to see that the SRC indeed plays a very significant role in shaping Franco-Canadian identity.

From the outset, I would like to ask exactly how much time has been allocated to me, in order to properly organize my presentation. Is there a time limit on presentations?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 10 or 15 minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: Since this is the first time the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, or FCCF, appears before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, I would like to give you an overview of who we are. I will then present our brief.

The Fédération culturelle canadienne-française has been in existence for 30 years now. In 2007, we will be celebrating our 30th anniversary. The mandate of the federation is to strengthen the arts and culture sector in a more global perspective, which is to promote the development of the francophone and Acadian communities of Canada. Since our organization was born out of the existence of official languages, our scope of action focuses primarily outside Quebec.

To fulfil our mandate, we have the support of 20 members. Thirteen of them are provincial or territorial members, meaning that we have members throughout Canada, from British Columbia and the Yukon all the way to Newfoundland. These provincial and territorial organizations work in the area of cultural and artistic development. Added to these are seven national members, who specialize in sectors such as media and visual arts, song and music, publishing and theatre.

We have two members in some disciplines. For example, in media arts, we have an association of francophone producers in Canada that appeared before your committee in Winnipeg. We also have the FRIC, the Front des réalisateurs indépendants du Canada. We therefore have two stakeholders in the area of media arts. With regard to song and music, we have the ANIM, the Alliance nationale de l'industrie musicale. We also have the Réseau national des galas de la chanson.

That gives you some idea of our network.

Through our 20 members, we reach over 250 provincial, regional and local organizations that work in cultural and artistic development. According to statistics of Hill Strategies Research, we also reach about 3,200 French-Canadian artists outside Quebec.

You've received a summary of our brief. I'm pleased to hear that it has been translated. I'd still like to highlight the main points.

The primary goal of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française (FCCF) in submitting this brief to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is to show that now, more than ever, Canada needs a strong, more structured public network that will broadcast high-quality programming that reflects our cultural and linguistic identity. This is a societal choice that we must make together, with pride and conviction.

To this end, Canada's public broadcaster must focus on fundamental principles which, although defined long before the proliferation of channels and the era of specialization are still relevant today. Accessibility, diversity and independence are still as important today as they were in the past. A fourth principle—one that is especially important when the public broadcast must coexist with commercial broadcasters has been added to these three: the principle of specificity. In our opinion, the management of Canada's public broadcaster must redefine these principles. These principles must be reinterpreted in a world that is now dominated by what many refer to as media fragmentation.

For the sake of Canada's French-speaking community and for the sake of our artists, creators and cultural players, the SRC/CBC must assume and continue to play a leading role in promoting Canada's francophone identity. The SRC/CBC must be given the means and the framework to carry out this mandate. To ensure that it remains relevant and to protect its *raison d'être* among Canadians, the SRC/CBC must become a truly francophone, distinct and unified media space that is accessible to everyone. It must become a citizen's forum, a place for open dialogue and free speech, a space that reflects a sense of identity and belonging. It must ensure the continued existence of Canada's linguistic, cultural and social networks, while at the same time maintaining a balanced representation of the various components of our society.

•(1020)

In closing, we believe that we must bring together and obtain the support of all the players in our civil society to prove the pertinence of a new concept of public broadcasting in Canada and to ensure its ongoing existence amid the new paradigms that are emerging.

Moreover, we must do so as quickly as possible. I'd like to open a parenthesis here. I've presented the mandate and scope of action of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française. You will understand I'm sure that we're talking about CBC/Société Radio-Canada. Our intervention focuses more on the francophone side, namely the Société Radio-Canada.

With 28 services offered on platforms such as radio, television, the Internet, satellite radio, digital audio, not to mention its recording and music distribution service and its wireless messaging service, there's no doubt that Radio-Canada is indeed a national institution, which is influential throughout Canada.

Having said that, here's the question we are asking. In fact, and more specifically for the francophone artistic and cultural communities throughout the country, has the Société Radio-Canada really assumed its responsibilities towards each aspect of its legislative mandate?

At the outset, I must tell you that we greatly appreciate the cooperation that exists between the Canadian francophone community and the Société Radio-Canada, but we firmly believe that the corporation has to be given better means to fulfil its mandate toward the francophone community in this country and as a public television service.

As a public broadcaster, it is important that the Société Radio-Canada be accessible to everyone throughout the national territory. That is a profoundly egalitarian and democratic objective, in so far as it puts all citizens on an equal footing, regardless of their status or income. It's high time that the CRTC address this problem and force cable companies and satellite broadcasters to give space to SRC signals so that all Canadian francophones have equal access.

In this regard, the labour dispute at the Société Radio-Canada in 2006 highlighted the weakness of its distribution networks and demonstrated the fragility of access to television services in French for a significant number of francophones in this country. The time has also come to eradicate once and for all inconsistencies in certain situations such as that which exists in Ontario, for example, where some francophones only have access to the Radio-Canada channel from Montreal, or in Western Canada where Saskatchewan receives the news programs from Alberta.

The public radio and television program must be popular, not in the pejorative sense of the term, but rather that the public forum, the citizen's agora which it represents, not be always reserved for an elite group. In our communities, we say that Radio-Canada must not always be Radio-Montreal; it must genuinely be Radio-Canada.

The Société Radio-Canada must aim for the entire public in the final analysis, not with every single one of its programs but through its overall programming in terms of diversity. When watching the programming of this public service, the quality and the uniqueness of its programs, the public must recognize what makes it distinct

from others. Without excluding any particular genres, the point is to do things differently. This principle should lead the Société Radio-Canada to innovate, to create new niche markets, new genres, to play a role as a driver in Canada's audiovisual universe and—why not?—thus encourage other radio and television services to follow suit.

Lastly, while the public broadcaster is a forum where ideas must be expressed freely, and where information, opinions and criticism circulate freely, its independence must be preserved; that is its independence in the face of provincial pressures and political power.

As we've said, the Société Radio-Canada must do things differently. Its mission must also be seen to include concurrent objectives which allow citizens to gather information on various subjects, acquire new knowledge, always within interesting and attractive programming. But it would be to deny the corporation's vocation to try to limit its mission as a public broadcaster to solely educational and cultural programming in the narrow sense of the term.

With regard to governance, one of the other aspects that is of great interest to the FCCF—and it doesn't involve only Radio-Canada, but all federal cultural agencies—is that the Canadian francophone community be represented on the boards of directors.

•(1025)

We've noted that right now, on the board of directors of the Société Radio-Canada, no one represents the Canadian francophonie, meaning the francophone community outside Quebec. We firmly believe this must be corrected. This situation should be directed not on an ad hoc basis, but permanently.

With regard to the challenges and issues at stake in funding the public broadcaster, we want to state in this brief that we believe that the cutbacks to which the corporation was subjected has unfortunately led it to become more and more a commercial television service and to resemble TVA and TQS more and more. If we really want to have public television, we have to give the Société Radio-Canada the means to play that role as a public broadcaster, and therefore to present programming that is specific and that can be distinguished from that of others. That will allow it to stop playing this game that it has had to play the past few years, namely to worry about its ratings and build its programming in order to obtain higher ratings because it depends increasingly on advertising revenue that it can only earn through higher and higher ratings.

In order to give it increased funding, we are suggesting certain solutions, because many debates can take place on that subject. We have to find a way to encourage the public to subscribe to public television. Many studies have been conducted. One study that took place in 2005 regarding radio and television indicated that among the 10 countries examined, Canada is seventh when it comes to investment in public television. The other countries under investigation were among others Germany, Sweden and Norway, if memory serves me.

These countries have found different ways to ensure strong public television service, and we should be inspired by these models which in some cases combine public funds, that come from the government, and a royalty system. This is a debate that could be launched, and we could discuss it further, but always with the objective of ensuring that we have public television that offers specific programming that reflects the specificity of Canada.

In that regard, I should like to mention—although I don't have the sources in front of me—a study that was conducted and which demonstrated that Radio-Canada can be a very strong tool to develop identity. Around the late 60s and early 70s, Radio-Canada decided to start its *Téléjournal* by presenting what was called the Quebec news and then go on to national and international news. It has been proven that the fact that Radio-Canada carried out this project enabled it to be the vector of a strong identity for Quebec society.

If that foundation is correct and true, Société Radio-Canada must become a strategic and strong instrument to develop a Franco-Canadian identity which will reflect its specificity, its regional diversity and the increasing multiculturalism that it reflects and that has become a force from a demographic standpoint. We must also give it the means to reflect that image.

There you are. I think I've taken up about 10 minutes so I will now conclude my presentation.

• (1030)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

If we can hold our questions and answers to five minute, maybe we can get more questions and answers in.

Mr. Scott, you're first, please.

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): I won't take that personally.

[Translation]

Welcome. Is this the first time you've appeared before this committee?

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: I've been the executive director of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française for three years now and it is possible that the federation appeared before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in the past. I know that we appeared regularly before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, but this is possibly the first time we appear before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

[English]

Hon. Andy Scott: I know your particular interest, and you have spoken to the fact that it is what you've presented here. I think you can be very helpful to us, because I think we have common cause. I know how important Radio-Canada and other francophone expressions have been across the country.

[Translation]

I come from New Brunswick, where this is very important.

[English]

I think your experience in recognizing how important it is in the context of minorities within Canada and various parts of the country is an experience that Canadians in the continent have, being overwhelmed in the same way with American cultural and values expression. Francophones, Acadiens in New Brunswick, would have the experience of being overwhelmed with anglophone influence, and it is a very difficult balance to find.

You were here for the last two witnesses. To some extent I'm struggling with an instinct to try to isolate ourselves by restricting what's incoming. I don't know the level of possibility of restricting it.

I've got two kids, 20 and 22, whose world is just completely different from mine in the context of inputs. I don't know if it is trying to bail out the boat with a teaspoon. The reality is that maybe what we really have to do, and I think that's been the experience, is to use your experiences in analogy for ours. I think that's been the experience. It has not been that we're resisting as much as we're building alternative opportunities.

Because we have new technology, perhaps we can embrace that new technology to build alternatives, which is not to say that I find some of the stuff I see any more deplorable than Mr. Angus does in terms of some of this programming. I just don't know that...what we really need to focus on, in addition to restrictions, as much as you can restrict it, is good solid alternatives, so that Canadians can see expression. The former witnesses talked about Canadian values in the context of all the lists they presented in their presentation, but in reality that isn't just a matter of measuring what's coming at us in the context of those things, but offering alternative content that contains those values.

Am I on the right track in this?

• (1035)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: The word "protectionism" has a certain negative connotation in this regard. In my opinion, Canadian society must above all refer to a principle which is more and more present, that of cultural diversity, following the signature of the convention.

I think that from an international standpoint, we recognize that every country must have the means to have artistic and cultural production reflect its specific nature. It must also have the means to protect that uniqueness. There are societies that are stronger than others, and we have to prevent this homogenization of everything world-wide rather than promoting diversity. Instead, we should engage in positive discrimination. We have to make choices about the values of our own country.

In my opinion, we have to establish foundations with regard to regulation. Some will say that this is protectionism; I would qualify it as positive discrimination in order to protect this diversity and to avoid promoting homogenization. From that starting point, we can open up to the world to offer choices to our citizens so that they can be informed of what's going on in the world.

I think this is regulation that must be based on values. In my opinion, the Broadcasting Act in Canada already expresses that very well. On that basis, we could open up to the world. Personally, I think that we are already very open to the United States. It is not necessary to be even more open than we already are. As a matter of fact, I think that we should be a bit more open to countries other than the United States, all the while protecting who we are, without forgetting that we have challenges too, as I mentioned earlier. However, Radio-Canada was forced to play a role as a commercial television service rather than a public broadcaster. I believe that that has forced Radio-Canada to close in on Montreal. We must therefore give it the means to open up to the entire Canadian francophone community.

[English]

Hon. Andy Scott: This is a powerful argument. This is a powerful argument, I think, for resources, and I think we agree on that point. A lot of the success of the renaissance among Acadians in my part of the country over the last 30 or 40 years has to do with duality in the education system, and so on.

I'd like you to respond to questions about crossover between Radio-Canada and CBC. When does it become unhealthy to do that kind of crossover, or have we matured beyond that?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: Are you talking about promoting greater cooperation between the CBC and Radio-Canada? Is that the crossover?

• (1040)

Hon. Andy Scott: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: I would tell you that it would certainly be to the advantage of Radio-Canada to do so. I lived in Alberta for 4 years and in the Yukon for 12, and these are two places where I saw very good cooperation between the CBC and Radio-Canada. In the North, among others, when I was Director of the Association franco-yukonnaise, in the case of CBC North and Radio-Canada, we fought to obtain a bilingual journalist, quite simply, who could serve both communities very well. In that manner, we managed to have a win/win situation. Earlier, in Alberta, when Mr. Denis Lord was the Director, there was a great deal of cooperation between the CBC and Radio-Canada, among other things for capturing images or things like that. In my opinion, that was very beneficial.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bourgeois is next.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning sir, madam.

In your brief, you state that the Société Radio-Canada has played a crucial role in building our Canadian identity. Can you tell us how it played that role?

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: It is because of the regional services. What differentiates Radio-Canada from other networks are these regional services. When you look at what is going on in the provinces, the

regions, the Atlantic and in Ontario, it is very difficult to point to strong trends, but francophone and Acadian communities are generally satisfied. At least we are satisfied with the work done by Radio-Canada. At the regional level, Radio-Canada bears witness and reflects the francophone reality. People see themselves on television and hear their voices on the radio. I think the work being done with the radio is very much appreciated, because it is a medium which is very inexpensive and because morning, noon and late afternoon shows, or prime time shows, focus on local and regional issues. I think people appreciate this a great deal.

When it comes to television, there is one issue. We are only covered for 30 minutes per day, in the news, and during this half hour, only 2 minutes are spent covering the arts and culture. So there is some discontent in that we feel it is not enough. The bases are covered, but it is not enough. Why not? Because of limited means. It is expensive to maintain such regional infrastructure, but then again, it is a matter of values. If you want to reflect the regions, for people to relate and for television to bear witness, you have to provide the means for it to do so and do it well. In the Atlantic region, for instance, we find that a television show like *Brio* is a great idea, but this program does not have the means to fully meet its mandate.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You're touching on—

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: We can say that the bases are covered, but we must now do more, at the regional level.

The weakest link is at the national level. As I've stated, people now see Radio-Canada as being almost Radio-Montreal. Radio-Canada needs to pull away from its Montreal central clique, it needs to get rid of the perception that the best in arts and culture can only be found in Montreal, within a 10-kilometre radius from CBC's head office. They have to look beyond and see what is going on elsewhere in Canada.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I do not want to be mean, but committee members have gone across the country; we went to Yellowknife, Vancouver, etc. Almost all francophone groups expressed disappointment. They cannot criticize the CBC, the fact that they are not getting enough services from the Corporation, because it is all that they've got. That said, they all said they were disappointed with Radio-Canada's local and regional coverage in their communities, specifically in Yellowknife where Radio-Canada is using a francophone group's antenna to offer its broadcasts, without spending a single penny.

You say that the CBC needs to have the means to operate, yet that the Corporation should forget about commercial considerations.

Do you think there are alternatives available to deal with the revenue shortfall the CBC would experience if it set aside commercial considerations?

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: This is why in our brief we mentioned the idea of a royalty, which exists in France, for instance. In other words, it is a type of tax worth 500 or 1,200 francs or euros per household, to fund public television. There are other countries using this type of system. That is why we suggest this as a possible solution. Obviously, when you start considering new taxes, you generally get a rather negative reaction. But we believe it is a fundamental way of maintaining strong public television, it is a possible alternative.

•(1045)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: But Canadians are already paying a certain amount of money in taxes, up to \$1 billion, to fund the CBC. You would consider adding another tax?

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: That is a possible solution. If this were to happen, we would be looking for people to buy into public television, to give people a sense of responsibility for public television. Conversely, public television will feel beholden to Canadians, more so than it would having to focus on commercial interests.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I do not have much time, but perhaps, during the next round, we could discuss governance.

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: Very well. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Angus.

[Translation]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

Thank you for being here with us today. Last week, we had a meeting with Franco-Manitoban organizations, and I think next week we will be meeting with the ACFO from Timmins. Their message is quite similar to yours. We have heard that the SRC does a good job of promoting Quebec culture, but that it is not the voice of francophones in other provinces of Canada, nor does it reflect their experience.

Do you have a concrete recommendation to make in order to improve this situation?

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: Yes. This is a process which I think we began over one year ago. We met with CRTC representatives in order to see what type of consultative mechanism the CRTC could use to meet its obligations under sections 41 and 42 of the Official Languages Act. One recommendation was for a position to be created specifically to deal with sections 41 and 42, and for the CRTC to gain a sense of responsibility, internally.

So far, we have learned that the person who is responsible for Canadian francophone issues at the CRTC was also responsible for a dozen or so other issues, francophone issues being one of many. Moreover, because of a rotation, the file gets transferred from one person to the next on a regular basis. That is why we recommended the creation of a core position for someone to deal exclusively with section 41 and section 42 related-matters. We also recommended setting up a consultative process between the CRTC and Canadian francophones.

That was a long time ago. Unfortunately, I have not seen a written report. You have taken me somewhat by surprise this morning. I do not have up-to-date information, but I believe a specific position was created to deal with sections 41 and 42 issues. With respect to consultation, I think that is something that is being set up.

Mr. Charlie Angus: At the moment in Northern Ontario, francophone culture is quite vibrant. A number of organizations, including the ACFO, support the development of artists, festivals, schools and the public radio. With respect to television however there is a lack of resources. This is a serious problem in my region.

The role of francophone television is quite limited. I also think there is a lack of resources for regional production.

Do you have recommendations to address this situation and support the development of francophone programming in the North and the West?

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: Like the APFTQ, we believe that there must be increased funding for the Canadian Television Fund. The work that has been accomplished in collaboration with the APFC has been a success, but more must be done. As you know, from the Canadian Television Fund \$200 million go to anglophone production and \$100 million to francophone production. Under the contribution agreement between Heritage Canada and the Canadian Television Fund, 10% of the \$100 million set aside to francophone production must be dedicated to Franco-Canadian production. To our mind, this is a beginning, but the amount should certainly be increased to 15%. Indeed, for a national envelope targeted specifically to the francophonie, one should consider that francophones represent 15% of the population in Canada. Therefore, 15% of the national envelope should be set aside for the Canadian francophonie.

What we are talking about, then, is increased funding for the Canadian Television Fund and an increase from 10% to 15% for Franco-Canadian production. I feel that Louis Paquin, from Winnipeg, has already described in detail the kind of limits the 10% proportion poses to producers. I would also say that the figure restricts possibilities of co-production between Franco-Canadians and other partners. Yet, co-production is one way to increase the number of productions. Rather than relying on one single source of funding, there would be several.

•(1050)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Go ahead, Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to go back to something Madame Bourgeois raised earlier, the whole issue of funding. One of the suggestions you made was that perhaps we could use royalties in order to provide additional funding to the CBC, which is essentially just more taxation, government money, to do that.

There are other funding models that could be used. Earlier we heard witnesses suggest that private broadcasters should no longer receive any public money; however, the trade-off would be that the private broadcasters would receive the benefit of relaxed Canadian content regulations. Another suggestion was that there is a role for private broadcasters in strengthening the CBC, and in ensuring there's a robust public broadcaster in Canada.

First of all, are you supportive of additional creative ways of finding funding to ensure that the CBC has a long-term future? Second, could we have your comments on some of the proposals other witnesses have made as to getting the private broadcasters out of the public funding business and also perhaps contributing to a public broadcaster?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: I will try to answer your question in two ways.

Firstly, one basic principle is that a public television broadcaster such as SRC/CBC, should receive greater government financial support if we want it to fulfil its role as public television. If this were done, the broadcaster would be significantly less reliant on advertising income. This would also have a beneficial effect: since there would be competition to receive advertising income, private television would have more leeway. In our opinion, SRC/CBC has all the resources necessary, and the freedom to develop the specific programming we are looking for. Funding is at the heart of the issue.

As regards the means to reach that goal, should public funds be increased? Should we consider what other countries are doing with respect to royalties? Should we combine the two systems? That is an entirely different debate, but the goal is to give better tools to the public broadcaster.

Secondly, in order to promote Canadian content, it is very good that private television broadcasters continue to have access to funds such as the Canadian Television Fund. This allows for more diversified Canadian content.

[English]

Mr. Ed Fast: So you're suggesting there's still a role for public money to be given to private broadcasters to ensure there is ongoing Canadian content?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: Yes, with the tools that we currently have, such as the Canadian Television Fund. I think that it is a good thing that commercial television can dip into those funds to produce Canadian content.

• (1055)

[English]

Mr. Ed Fast: I have just one other question. You mentioned, and I think I'm quoting you correctly, that "SRC should not be Radio-Montreal". That's something we've heard not only in Yellowknife and Vancouver, but also in Winnipeg—that people in *la francophonie* around Canada are saying they don't want to simply see the face of Quebec; they want to see their faces as francophones in the rest of the country. Do you have any suggestions on how to better achieve that, aside from the additional funding we've just talked about?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: Over the last 10 years, we believe that Franco-Canadian producers, directors and actors have been working in a area that has undergone a rather interesting professional development. And yet, these people are unknown. For a variety of reasons—reasons which would constitute a different submission on the subject—the entire pool of professionals is not at all well-known like people working at Radio-Canada in Montreal. Knowing what we know about the artistic and cultural environment, networks have to be formed. People working at Radio-Canada in Montreal often come from the very city. When seeking people, the first reaction is to go and get these resources, these people in a pool we know.

Indeed, we must work with Radio-Canada to become more familiarized with the existing resources across the country. That is why shows such as *Tout le monde en parle* and *Bons baisers de France* are clear examples of why there is absolutely no reason why Canadian francophones should not be represented. It is very good to be regionally present; however, Radio-Canada has the important responsibility of showcasing multicultural and diversified examples of Canadian francophone culture at the national level. We have to move in this direction. Often, it is by becoming familiar with the resources that exist that we can succeed. The Franco-Canadian community can work in collaboration with Radio-Canada to get there. However, Radio-Canada given its existing national infrastructure, can certainly make sure that there is better collaboration between Radio-Canada in Montreal and its regional television stations.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm allowing Ms. Keeper to have a very short question and a very short answer, because I have two minutes.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Thank you.

You mentioned Mr. Paquin. I heard his presentation and I know his work. He had talked about the increased funding through the CTF being critical to ensuring that a regional voice and those types of programming could be created. That's part of what the Broadcasting Act stipulates—that we should encourage a pool of professionals.

Can you talk about the types of partnerships that you see maybe your organization and the CBC would be able to work with? Are there partnerships within the francophone community that CBC should be participating in to fulfill its mandate?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bourbeau: Currently, there is an agreement to develop Franco-Canadian arts and culture. This agreement was entered into by seven cultural and artistic agencies, the federal government, and the French-Canadian Cultural Federation. Originally, the agreement sought to garner the commitment of not only Heritage Canada, but other agencies in order to develop francophone and Acadian communities. Because SRC/CBC is a signatory of this agreement, there are what we call bilateral relations between SRC and the FCCF, the French-Canadian Cultural Federation. As it stands, we meet once a year, and we want our meetings to become more frequent, a suggestion that has been accepted, so that we can further talk about ways to meet this goal and to raise the profile of the Canadian francophonie on national airwaves, and elsewhere.

I would also tell you that there is a good level of awareness and openness. Unfortunately, we are dealing with yet again, a major hurdle concerning audience ratings. Because of this problem, there is the perception that we must present Quebecers and Montrealers with a content that is of interest to them. Often, there is fear that if we turn to what's going on elsewhere, our audience ratings will drop. Indeed, as I was saying earlier, the people who work at Radio-Canada in Montreal are from Montreal. But within the senior management of Radio-Canada, we see more and more key players from the Canadian francophonie. We are beginning to take note of the direct effect of this. I can also tell you that Radio-Canada's strategy to integrate radio, television and the Internet had also very

beneficial effects which could have a positive impact on Canadian francophonie.

• (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I think our time is up. I thank you for your presentation this morning and for your answers to the various questions.

The meeting is adjourned.

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