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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 this morning to meeting 53 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a full investigation of the role of a public broadcaster in the 21st century.

For the first hour, until 10 o'clock this morning—I'm sorry, we're running a little late—we have Our Public Airwaves as witnesses, Arthur Lewis and Paul Gaffney.

Mr. Lewis.

Mr. Arthur Lewis (Executive Director, Our Public Airwaves): Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I'm Arthur Lewis, executive director of Our Public Airwaves. We're a voluntary organization devoted to revitalization of public broadcasting in Canada.

In the interest of full disclosure, I should confess that I worked for CBC for many years as a reporter and producer in TV news and current affairs.

With me is Paul Gaffney, a member of our coordinating committee. I'll introduce him more fully in a minute.

Obviously, your study of CBC and its mandate speaks to the very issues that concern us the most, and we very much appreciate the opportunity to participate in this very important discussion.

Our Public Airwaves believes that CBC's current legislative mandate is as relevant today as it was when that act was first written.

To fulfill that mandate, we believe that CBC needs a long-term agreement with the government, increased multi-year funding, new funding for expansion of regional programming, access to additional TV channels, wider cable and satellite distribution of existing specialty channels, a reduction in reliance on commercial revenue, greater access to cable and satellite subscription fees, and major reform of the CBC's governance.

The past two decades have witnessed explosive growth in the number of new television channels available to Canadians. This growth has created a serious imbalance in our broadcasting system because the vast majority of those new channels have been private commercial services delivering heavy doses of American programming. During the same period there was almost no growth in the number of public broadcasting channels delivering predominantly Canadian programming.

As your committee noted in its 2003 report, CBC/Radio-Canada was badly served by the CRTC's repeated refusal of licences for new specialty channels, while private sector competitors greatly expanded their array of specialty channels.

In a recent brief to the CRTC's TV policy review, Our Public Airwaves recommended that the commission attempt to right this wrong by requiring cable and satellite distributors to provide carriage in their first tier of all of CBC/Radio-Canada specialty channels. This is in keeping with one of the basic tenets of public broadcasting: universal accessibility.

As first proposed by this committee in its 2003 report, CBC should also be encouraged to apply for additional licences in order to return our broadcasting system to a better balance of public and commercial services. This would provide CBC with substantially more shelf space for the display of Canadian programming, something akin to the multiplicity of channels provided by the BBC.

At this point I'd like to more fully introduce my colleague, Paul Gaffney. Paul spent many years working for CBC, starting as a TV production assistant and later as a producer and director of news and current affairs, and then TV program manager here in Ottawa, where, parenthetically, he was my boss. More recently he was director of strategic planning and senior director of corporate affairs for CBC. He also served as executive director of the office of the president.

•(0910)

Mr. Paul Gaffney (Member, Coordinating Committee, Our Public Airwaves): Thank you, Arthur.

Ladies and gentlemen, while the question of adequate funding for the CBC is obviously a very serious one, we believe that the premise for any such funding of national public broadcasting has to be an understanding of what the broadcaster's job is and a mutual agreement on how the job is going to be done. These qualifications, we would submit, are not in place now, and indeed they have barely existed for the better part of the last two decades. Yes, there's a mandate spelled out in the Broadcasting Act, but as we all know, that mandate is intentionally broad. It lays out basic principles, sets the outlines of what's expected of the broadcasting system and of the CBC as a central part of that system, but it's far from precise.

In a broadcasting environment as turbulent as the one we've been experiencing ever since the current legislation was enacted in the early 1990s, we think that's not good enough. The fact that your committee is once again addressing the role of national public broadcasting serves to underline the harsh reality that the existing processes haven't worked very well. We would in fact submit that the role of the CBC as a critical instrument of national cultural policy has been sadly neglected.

In the public interest we think that has to end, and we believe the very first step toward accomplishing that is for Parliament to forge a new relationship with the CBC, a relationship in which both parties are fully aware of what's expected of the other, binding them in a negotiated covenant based on the Broadcasting Act to achieve those expectations.

We recommend this take the form of a memorandum of understanding between the parties, entered into for a renewable period of five years. The understanding would, at the very least, lay out the agreed-upon tasks to be undertaken by the broadcaster. It would establish the standards and benchmarks by which the achievement of goals would be measured. It would provide a mechanism for addressing amendments to the agreement that might be made necessary by unforeseen changes in the environment, and it would assure comparability in reporting results by establishing a template to be followed by the CBC in compiling its annual reports to Parliament. This, by the way, is not a new recommendation. It was in fact proposed by this committee in its 1995 report on the future of the CBC.

The next really critical bit is that the memorandum of understanding would also guarantee the public funding to be allocated over the lifespan of the agreement. This too is hardly a new recommendation. It's been made by virtually every investigation into the handling of public broadcasting since the Aird commission first made it in 1929. It's hard to know what more we could add to support the overwhelming logic of the idea, except to say that condemning the CBC to the uncertainty of annual funding both demeans the political process and, because of its negative effect on the long-range planning the broadcasting business demands, it inherently wastes taxpayers' dollars.

Regarding what an MOU between Parliament and the CBC would say, we take it as given that everything would be on the table. Some parts of the broadcasting environment are in flux; some aren't. That should be recognized by both parties through a willingness to change or not change with the times. The objective, after all, is to serve the Canadian public, and there's no hard and fast rule that says what

should be done in 2007 should be done in the same way it was done 50 years earlier or even five years earlier.

We're obviously not in a position to be definitive about the terms of an MOU. Developing such an agreement would take some significant effort and detailed consultation as well as the determination to recognize that there are no easy common sense solutions to a dilemma that's taken decades to reach the point it's at today.

As my colleague, Mr. Lewis, indicated at the beginning of this presentation, we do have ideas about some of the CBC's problems and about some approaches to solutions to those difficulties. We're very pleased to have this opportunity to discuss them with you. But so you know where we're coming from, we should tell you something about our values.

While we believe the marketplace can go a significant way toward meeting our cultural and industrial goals in the broadcasting sector, we don't believe it can go as far as we need it to, especially given the overwhelming presence of our next-door neighbour. In Canada's unique circumstances, there are things we want as a society that simply aren't going to arise from the commercial market largely because there's no business case for them. If there were, the private sector would long ago have replicated CBC radio's style of broadcasting. It would have developed hours and hours of commercial-free children's programming on television. It would be giving us a steady diet of purely Canadian drama and entertainment, rather than relying on high-profile U.S. programming to populate prime time schedules. The list could go on, obviously, but the point to be made is that there is a role for public involvement in broadcasting to provide us with the things that speak to us as citizens rather than just as consumers, the things that speak to us as unique in our sphere rather than as members of an undifferentiated North American mass.

● (0915)

We believe the CBC remains the ideal vehicle to achieve those objectives, but we also believe strongly that year-over-year funding and year after year of underfunding the CBC amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy for those who think there is no role for public broadcasting in a market-driven economy. You simply can't expect miracles from an organization that has something on the order of \$400 million less spending power now than it had 20 years ago.

Indeed, it may be argued that the people of Canada are getting a much better deal from the CBC than they have any reason to expect, on the basis of what they're paying for it. But the price has been that the company has arguably been forced to focus more time and more effort on saving and making money than it has on providing public broadcasting services so good that the question of what to do with the CBC wouldn't even arise.

The fact that CBC television has recently taken to describing itself as a publicly subsidized commercial television network is either a deeply ironic comment on their state of affairs or an abject admission of failure. Either way, we're all losing.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: Your committee has already heard many voices calling for increased government funding for CBC, and you are certainly aware of concerns about the degree to which the need for advertising revenue is at odds with the CBC's public service mandate. While we are distressed by the degree to which CBC television has become focused on generating advertising revenue, we want to make it clear that under present circumstances, any new government funding—and we certainly hope your report will call for increased funding—must be allocated to more and better Canadian programming rather than to a reduction of advertising.

There is, however, a suggestion, which we recently made to the CRTC, that your committee may wish to consider. As part of its TV policy review, the commission is examining proposals to allow the over-the-air broadcasters to charge cable and satellite subscription fees. Should the CRTC decide to allow such fees, we recommended that it give preference to CBC.

Again, first call on any such new revenue should be for programming. But we also suggested that a portion, perhaps one-third, should be allocated to removal of TV advertising, particularly during news, current affairs, and documentary programming. That would help reduce the commercial character of our public networks.

On another topic, Our Public Airways believes the current governance structure of CBC/Radio-Canada is dysfunctional. First and most important is the need for a president who is selected by and responsible to the board of directors. The current process, whereby the president is appointed by order in council, seriously undermines the ability of the board to provide adequate oversight to the administration.

To do that, the board must have authority to hire and the power to dismiss the corporation's chief executive officer. Because the president is appointed by the government, it has been deemed necessary to protect CBC from undue influence by appointing the president for a fixed term during good behaviour. In practical terms, this means the CBC president is responsible to no one and can't be removed from office, no matter how poor his or her performance. Surely this is not acceptable.

We also find it unacceptable that the president is not only a member of the board but serves as its chair when that position is vacant, as has now been the case since last September. Until a new board chair is appointed, the current president is, for all practical purposes, his own boss. What kind of oversight can that possibly provide?

Also of great concern is lack of transparency in the process for appointment of the board itself, as well as the board chair. Over the years, this has resulted in numerous appointments of dubious merit.

While the issue of governance is vital, action on this must not be used as a cover for inaction on the more important issue of financial support. That CBC/Radio-Canada must be supported with public dollars is a price we need to pay to provide a modest reflection of our country in a TV universe awash with high-powered programming from across the border.

It is in this spirit that we call on your committee to enthusiastically support renewal of Canada's 70-year tradition of public broadcasting.

Thank you.

• (0920)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll go to questioning now.

Andy, or Mr. Scott—sorry.

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Andy's fine, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much. I appreciate it very much. I read your brief.

I'd like you to elaborate a little bit on the BBC process for appointing the board to make it more transparent and less subject to political considerations, for one thing.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: In Britain they use something called the Nolan rules, and I won't claim to be an expert on it, but it is a process—as I understand it, and my colleague may have more to add on this—that involves a non-partisan appointments board that reviews nominations. The nominations are public. It's not that you get an announcement from the PMO that somebody has just been appointed. There is a process. It's public. It's open. Anybody can be nominated, and the final result is a board that is generally considered to be non-partisan and not somehow connected to the political party in power.

Hon. Andy Scott: On the question of the balance between the public contribution and advertising revenues, we'll accept—or I certainly would accept—the fact that they're underresourced. That's caused them to be more advertising conscious than we would want a public broadcaster to be. I accept all of that. I'm trying to get to the question of the balance, because you don't rule out the idea of advertising. You're simply saying that it is out of balance. You talked about new funding maybe being allocated on a two-thirds, one-third basis—two-thirds for new programming, as the first, most important piece, and then perhaps one-third being applied to advertising.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: More or less. I just want to clarify, because we're looking at two different pockets of new funding.

We think there should be new funding from Parliament. We think it should all be primarily devoted to new programming. We don't think the Canadian public have a toleration for enormous amounts of money going to the CBC for nothing that achieves new programming. However, should the CBC be able to achieve the subscription fees from cable, we think it might be reasonable to put a modest amount of that towards production.

Ultimately, we believe—and I'll just try to sum this up in one sentence—the CBC should not be dependent on advertising revenue and that it should not drive programming decisions.

Hon. Andy Scott: But the idea of some advertising revenue in and of itself isn't conceptually an automatic negative to you.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: Absolutely not, and we don't see any problem with, for instance, advertising on *Hockey Night in Canada* or other professional sports programs. We just think it's a little overdone, and at this point it drives a lot of programming choices. The example that's been given over and over again is that of the American movies shown during the hockey lockout. While I'm sympathetic to those who put forward the argument that CBC should be running Canadian movies, the reality is doing so wouldn't have brought in enough advertising revenue, and the CBC was driven to running American movies. It shouldn't be in a position of having to make that choice.

Hon. Andy Scott: In terms of the five-year MOU, how do you envision this process playing out? I can understand how it would begin. I'm a little less sure, in year three and a half or year four, what the discussion or the debate is. I think we need stable and adequate funding, and I do think we need to re-establish purpose so that everybody's on the same page on that. How do you see that process sort of playing out, and why would that be anything better than simply establishing the responsibility, making it clear, making it transparent, doing all the other things you speak of, and then simply having an adequate budget allocation? How would that be any different?

• (0925)

Mr. Paul Gaffney: I think what it really comes down to is taking the view that when you spend money, you have a right to know what you're getting for it.

The Broadcasting Act, as we all know, provides the basic guidance. But the process of interpreting the CBC's mandate has been a pretty random affair over the years. It's been a matter of decisions arising from committees such as yours; decisions or recommendations arising from royal commissions; decisions and recommendations and conditions of licence arising from licence renewal processes undertaken by the CRTC; and so on and so forth. That's been the way the mandate has been interpreted, if you will.

We have before us an example of what we think is a better system—namely, the charter and agreement system that's used by the BBC. It has been for some years. It allows for the public, through its elected representatives, to say this is what we want our national public broadcasting system to do, in some detail. This is bearing in mind that the most critical thing that you guys have to deal with—I think—is the continuing question of the arm's-length relationship. We don't want a state broadcaster in Canada, we want a national public broadcaster. It's that arm's-length relationship that makes that critical difference.

So bearing that in mind, you still, we think, need to be in a position where you can reasonably say this is what we want this outfit that we're paying a big chunk of money every year to do, and we want to talk about it in some measure of detail, but we also want to reduce that incredible and persistent gap between the expectation of service and the payment for service.

I mean, that's been the problem with the CBC for a very long time. So the recommendation is a two-part one—that there be a process in place that says this is what we want from you, this is how we're going to measure whatever it may be, this is the amount of money we're willing to put forward to do that, and this is what we're going to commit to doing over a period of time.

You know, it truly is amazing that this has been recommended so many times, literally beginning with the Aird commission report, which started the whole affair in 1929. It's there, in big black and white letters.

That talks to the principle. It doesn't, I fear, address the specifics of your question—namely, how you go about doing it. That's process. I don't know exactly how you go about doing it, but we have the example of the BBC. It's all there in black and white.

Broadly speaking, we all, or many of us, have the business experience that guides us in what an MOU really means. You sit down, the two parties, and you say, okay, folks, where are we going? What are we going to try to achieve over the next period of time? We come to an agreement on that and we write it down—along with some of those process things we talked about before.

That's the principle of the thing that we're talking about.

Hon. Andy Scott: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Kotto.

[*Translation*]

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

Good morning gentlemen, and welcome.

You spoke of the need to increase funding, particularly targeting programming. Did I understand you correctly?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Gaffney: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: From the perspective of including that in our recommendations, it would be appropriate to point to the need for a more detailed and more transparent accountability, because these programs involve craftsmen, stars, and hours of creation and production. Up to now, we have pointed to the need for a much more transparent and detailed accountability.

In your opinion, would it be inappropriate for us to make this a requirement or would it simply be good common sense?

• (0930)

Mr. Paul Gaffney: May I answer in English please? My French is a trifle shaky.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Please. We can accommodate you in that respect.

[English]

Mr. Paul Gaffney: It's a very difficult issue. I come back to the arm's-length question. I think what you have to do is be prepared to say we're setting up a process and a system. We have appropriate and reasonable oversight over that system. The system is equipped to hire and fire the right people. Those people have to be left to determine what is and what isn't good journalistic practice, if I can pick on that particular aspect of things.

I would submit to you the minute anybody outside that ambit becomes involved in what is and what isn't good journalism, you're on a very slippery slope. You're getting to the point where you're putting yourself in a position to deal with things that you really don't want to deal with in the final analysis. You have to let people do what they do, if I'm interpreting your question correctly.

I don't think you want to make recommendations about details at that level. I think you want to stay at a higher level than that when you talk about this kind of thing.

[Translation]

Is it sufficient?

Mr. Maka Kotto: We can hear you.

You also mentioned a new source of funding by alluding to a proposal you had put forward to the CRTC. You were talking about a levy on wholesale satellite services.

Who is the target in this case? The consumer or the carrier? I would like you to give us more details on the subject.

[English]

Mr. Arthur Lewis: At the moment, there are satellite subscription fees. They are collected primarily by the specialty broadcasters: Newsworld, RDI, The Sports Network, and MuchMusic. All these specialty channels, essentially delivered by cable, now collect from the cable company a subscription fee that is passed on to the public.

At its TV policy hearings in November and December, the CRTC looked at many issues. One of the hottest issues was this question. Should over-the-air broadcasters, CBC, CTV, Global, CHUM, TVA, and so on, be allowed to say to Rogers or any of the cable distributors that they can't have the programming unless they pay a fee? We haven't yet heard from the CRTC on that.

By the way, Ted Rogers, the pre-eminent cable czar in this country, before the CRTC, opposed the idea. But he said if we're going to do it for anybody, we should do it for the CBC, and we shouldn't do it for the other guys because they make lots of money. We would endorse that. We think this is another way, a reasonable way, to help fund our public broadcaster. For instance, adding \$2 or \$4 to a cable bill or satellite bill is certainly not going to be thrilling for consumers. But it would provide a new source of additional revenue to help pay the cost of public broadcasting. We're saying some of it could be used to reduce advertising.

We would certainly hope this committee would not say all of the new funding for the CBC should come in that way. We think some of it needs to come from Parliament. The government of this country has to step up to the plate and start properly paying for the delivery of our public broadcasting service.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): This is a very interesting presentation. I think it would be fair to say that at this point in our study we're starting to see a number of common themes emerge.

There is certainly some consensus on certain areas. The issue of governance structure and the desperate need to deal with this has obviously come up again and again. I think it's a fairly straightforward recommendation we can make as a committee.

The other issue that comes up again and again, which is a little more difficult, is the need for increased funding. Everywhere we go, we hear there's not sufficient funding.

I'm interested in the alternative ways of funding. The more we get into the study, the less I am convinced there are alternative ways, other than an increased fund from government.

For example, on lessening the reliance on commercial advertising, as you said, we've lost \$400 million in the last 20 years out of what we normally had as a pot. If we take any advertising dollars out of CBC, I would imagine they're probably paying somewhere in the range of \$300 million to \$400 million. Can we reasonably expect the government to step into the breach at this time?

● (0935)

Mr. Arthur Lewis: We don't think so. We don't think it's politically saleable for government to put \$300 million or \$400 million into the CBC to remove advertising, and we don't think there's a necessity for that. If the government were to say it was willing to do that, we would, first of all, say put it into programming, and then if they said okay, then we're going to give them another \$400 million, we wouldn't be adverse to seeing most advertising off the CBC, although on commercial sports and so on it doesn't offend anybody. I don't know anybody who is bothered by commercials in the hockey game; they have to take breaks in the game anyway, and there is time between the periods. How much Don Cherry can you take? A few commercials are probably—

Voices: Oh, Oh!

Mr. Charlie Angus: Ah, he's gone to the States.

So it would be a possible mixed system, with the reliance on advertising in sports.

The issue that came up the other day from some of our creative people is that getting an advertisement for a new program on *Hockey Night in Canada* or during *American Idol* actually drives viewers to more obscure CBC programs that would not have an audience anyway.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: Absolutely.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay.

The question is on the carriage fee. I like the idea of it in some ways, but it strikes me that we're talking about basically a TV tax on consumers and whether or not that's going to create much more resentment than simply increasing that amount through augmenting from the government. In light of what we just saw with the CTF, and because we had a national hissy fit from Shaw Communications Inc. about having to even pay into the CTF, how do you think we can sell the idea of a TV tax to consumers to pay for CBC?

Mr. Arthur Lewis: They're paying it now. They're paying for Newsworld, they're paying for RDI, as I said, and they're paying for The Sports Network. It's a hard, cruel world, and I'm sure this is going to come back to bite me, but the reality is that consumers don't get a lot of say in the matter. Nobody asks me whether I want to pay for MuchMusic; nobody asks me whether I want to pay for some of the other specialty channels. If I want certain tiers of service, I pay for programming that I don't necessarily want.

If the average Canadian has to pay a few dollars to help support public broadcasting, I don't think that's the end of the world. There's a limit to what's acceptable, and I would certainly hope the committee would not see that as the prime way of increasing funding for CBC, but it could be \$2 to \$4 perhaps staged over a period of time on the cable bill. I'm already paying Rogers \$150 a month for all the things I get from them, and it just went up another \$2. Who is going to notice? People will complain and then life will go on.

Mr. Charlie Angus: This is where we have different opinions that are starting to bump into each other. There is a view out there in the analog world that rabbit ear service must be maintained, that every Canadian gets free television for CBC and that's part of our social contract. If we're moving towards carriage fees and subscription fees, basically treating CBC as a specialty service, are we not then disenfranchising the people who watch the Montreal Canadiens back home on Saturday night with the rabbit ears?

• (0940)

Mr. Arthur Lewis: That's a difficult question, but as I'm sure you're aware, the CBC is already proposing 44 transmitters that would basically limit its over-the-air high-definition transmission to major cities, and everybody else would be experiencing what the people of Kamloops, British Columbia, are already experiencing: get it on cable or satellite or you don't get it. We think that's wrong, but that may be the only practical way in the future, given the, I would suggest, highly unlikely circumstance that the government is willing to put up hundreds of millions of dollars to replicate the existing CBC transmission system. In an ideal world, yes, let's do it, but I just don't see the money forthcoming. Certainly in a balance of lesser evils, I'd rather see the money go into programming than towers, and there's always a limit to how much is available.

Certainly, we have said to the CRTC, and I would say to you, that as the Kamloops situation spreads across the country and in small

town, rural, remote Canada there are no longer TV transmitters for the CBC, and probably the private broadcasters as well, there should be a minimum cost, a basic service that everybody should be able to get. As to whether you waive the subscription fee on that service, probably yes, and only charge it. Most people, in reality, take additional services and pay Mr. Rogers and others a lot of extra money for movie channels, American channels, and so on, but I wouldn't feel any qualm of conscience about hitting them with another \$2 to \$4 for public broadcasting.

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing before us today.

When I go into my communities, I don't hear about governance. My residents don't talk about funding and they don't talk about advertising; the one thing they talk about is relevance. Is CBC relevant to them?

It's the one issue you haven't touched on in your presentation to us today. When I go into my community, which is Abbotsford, when I talk to people from surrounding communities, typically when you talk about CBC, you're going to be talking about whether it's relevant to them as families, as individuals. Do they see themselves on CBC? There are many Canadians who do, but increasingly, I hear complaints that my residents don't see themselves in the programming that CBC provides.

It's been said that CBC is supposed to be the face of Canada that we see reflected back at us. I think there is an assumption that there is one face of Canada we all agree on. I would suggest to you that's not the case. In fact, Canada has many different faces, although we may have a defining set of underlying values, given our multicultural society, our pluralistic society, something we pride ourselves in.

What suggestion can you make that is going to make CBC more relevant to the average Canadian? Let me just point you in a direction. I believe the appointment of an ombudsman was a good first step, but I suspect there's more we can do to make sure the programming we show on CBC attracts Canadian viewers who are looking for Canadian content, and not only Canadian content, but content that speaks to them and reflects their face back at them.

Your comments.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: I think your concerns are well-founded, but I would throw back at you—this may sound like a trite cliché—that relevance costs money, and if you want the relevance, you have to pay the bill.

In terms of regional programming—and you've heard many calls already for increased regional programming—the CBC came to the Liberal government of the day about two years ago and said they wanted \$87 million to increase their regional programming in television, radio, the Internet. They got no take-up, no interest. This committee heard the presentation. A lot of it came in response to recommendations from your 2003 report. The government of the day wasn't interested.

Because of that, the CBC went back informally some months ago—I believe it's probably coming up to a year now—and raised something they called the 20/20 plan, which was going to cost only \$20 million a year, was only going to deal with radio, and was going to deal with mainland British Columbia, the London-Kitchener-Waterloo area, and the Hamilton area. You heard from those people in Hamilton the other day. CBC wants to provide service to those areas but doesn't have the money. So show them the money and they'll deliver the relevance.

Now, if you want to talk television, drama, and other types of programming that reflect Canadian realities, again, the CBC—and you heard all this on Friday in Toronto—is not doing enough. Give them the money. They want to do a lot more drama. Drama is what primarily reflects back our lives. It's what CBC is trying to do with *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, and would be doing, I'm sure, in a multitude of ways, if it had the money to do it.

• (0945)

Mr. Paul Gaffney: Can I give you a little background to this dilemma? It's one the CBC has faced for a long time. When the cuts began to get serious in the early 1990s, one of the great dilemmas that was debated internally was this. How do we reconcile the need to be a national public broadcaster with roots out there in all the communities of Canada and a network service as well?

The hard reality is that—I'll pick a weird number—I can make a program for, say, \$100, and I could put it on the network and it covers everybody. If I make the same program, or some variation on a theme, in each of 15 or 20 regions, it costs me 15 or 20 times \$100. When money is tight, you begin to say to yourself, economically speaking, it makes more sense to try to make the program at the network level for \$100 rather than at the regional level for \$2,000, to pick those numbers. Now, what I can also do is maybe reach out a bit into the communities and put a little content into that \$100 program and maybe spend \$200 on it, but I'm still much further ahead. The problem is, I get to a point where I can't maintain any reasonable semblance of regional production facilities because money is getting too tight. If I'm going to protect the organization itself, I have to protect the core, which is the network service. So, by way of background, the struggle went on at that level.

I would argue, however, that compared to every other television service and radio service in the country, CBC provides a great deal more regional content than anybody else. CBC radio, certainly, is rooted right out there.

Mr. Ed Fast: I'm not only referring to regional programming; I'm also talking about people who are complaining about media bias, who feel their face is not reflected back to them.

We've heard from aboriginals, we've heard from francophones, and just last week in Toronto we heard from people who want to articulate a Conservative voice, that they're not being represented. They're frustrated that this publicly subsidized public broadcaster is actually not serving the needs of Canadians as broadly as it should. I think that's the struggle you're going to find out there. If in fact the CBC becomes increasingly irrelevant to Canadians, it's going to have a tough time sustaining support within Canadian society. That's a challenge for you to look at more specifically as you put forward resolutions to this problem.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: I have to say, I don't want to dump on another witness, but I read the transcript of Ms. Landolt's testimony and I thought a lot of it bordered on the absurd.

There was an idea put forward—I think it was on Friday—that the ombudsperson at the CBC should perhaps not be a CBC employee or a former CBC employee. I think that's an idea that perhaps has merit and should be looked at. And this person should be seen to have completely clean hands, no bias, no influence. I think that's something you might want to consider.

I used to work in the CBC newsroom, and you get into the middle of an election and the phones ring off the hook, and the Conservatives call up and they tell you you're biased in favour of the Liberals, and the Liberals call up and tell you you're biased in favour of the Conservatives.

You, obviously, by the fact that you're here, reside in a riding that has a predominance of Conservative voters, so I would expect you to hear that from the people in your riding. I wouldn't be surprised if some of the Liberals hear that the CBC is biased in favour of the Conservatives—they can speak for themselves.

• (0950)

The Chair: We have to move on.

Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you very much.

In the case that you've been presenting here, are you talking mostly about television, or are you including the radio component of it, in the general sense?

Mr. Arthur Lewis: Television is a money-eater. There have been a lot of cutbacks in radio, but they're not as noticeable. As long as you have a voice—into a microphone, as I'm doing here now—you don't see the fact that a lot of the people working behind the scenes have been cut and the quality is reduced, the research is reduced, and so on. Good radio takes a lot of money. Good television takes a lot more. Television, we all know, is the problem child. We're concerned about both.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: In the report we have, it says:

With respect to regional and local programming, the Task Force noted that budget reallocations had begun to degrade the CBC's capacity to reflect the regions to themselves and one another.

I'd noticed this in my area particularly, which is Thunder Bay—Rainy River and northwestern Ontario, and the parallel exists for northeastern Ontario. We're talking about a riding that goes from Minnesota to Hudson Bay and James Bay, from Lake Superior to the Manitoba border, has two time zones, and is larger than France. All of northern Ontario is larger than many European countries put together. It's huge. I can see the physical evidence—the reduction in staff, the vacant offices, and those types of things—from the local bureau, and when I hear about that, I wonder if it is a trend that we should be concerned about: the reduction, the diminishing, the phasing-out of those kinds of operations. It seems to be an incremental thing whereby you don't hire a regional manager and you don't replace a reporter. It's done by attrition and other means, but certainly it becomes something that's plainly evident.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: That's how the CBC has stayed on the air. I worked in Ottawa at the supper hour program for many years. I left in 2000, just at the point when they cut the supper hours back to half an hour and they cut the staff by 40%. One of the reasons I left was I thought this is not what I want to do. This is going to take all the fun and pleasure out of it, rushing to, as we say, feed the goat, get something on the air.

Recently, when the CBC went back to a full hour, there was no increase in staff, so the same people who were barely hanging on producing a half-hour program are now expected to produce an hour. The same thing happens in radio.

Certainly you should be concerned. That's why the CBC needs more money.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: And those issues of local news or regional issues, the placement of regional stations from coast to coast to coast, to me, are the nature of a public broadcaster, whether it is radio or television, so you're making a very strong case for it.

How do we engage the public to support that? Even though many of the places these regional stations reach are often the only Canadian radio or television, it's still a matter of finding public support for it, and as has been mentioned earlier by the Conservative side, there are people who would rather not have this happen.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: Strangely enough, this circles back to the issue of governance, because I think—and I don't want to turn this into a heavy attack—one of the largest failures of the current president has been in selling the CBC to the country. I think the president of the CBC should be on the hustings. He should be out there telling Canadians why they need to invest more in public broadcasting and what public broadcasting could provide to them. But when your appointment and your reappointment is determined by the government, when you have to go cap in hand to the government every year for that \$60 million—It started with the Liberals and now the Conservatives are playing the same game. We give it to you—actually the Conservatives gave it to the CBC for two years—but it's a short leash and it restrains the CBC. I think some of the onus is on the CBC to go out and do this, but it has not unfortunately been making its case to Canadians in nearly a forceful enough way.

● (0955)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Then it all comes down to the question of whether it is a legitimate concern for regional broadcasters. Should we as elected representatives be engaging our constituents to support the local programming in a more active way? Is there a role for the elected representative?

Mr. Arthur Lewis: Well, hear, hear! I'd love to see the CBC doing it, but I'd also love to see MPs getting their constituents in Hamilton, London, Guelph, the mainland of British Columbia, and several other areas out there beating on the doors of the CBC and the government—there's no point beating on the doors of the CBC actually, because they want to do it, they just don't have the money—and saying, we want this service. So I would encourage you to agitate and advocate. The more voices the better.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

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

I'm going to move away from the current discussion to bring us to a more—how would I put it?—philosophical debate. Today, is it the responsibility of the public broadcaster, like the CBC/SRC, to act, as is the case in some eastern countries, as a sounding board for the policies or the ideology of the government?

[English]

Mr. Paul Gaffney: Absolutely not.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Is it the responsibility of the public broadcaster to promote a political option, in this case to push federalism at the expense of sovereignty? Is it the responsibility of a public broadcaster to take a stand in such a debate?

[English]

Mr. Paul Gaffney: I think the hard reality we all have to face with the public broadcaster is that the responsibility of that broadcaster, very simply put, is to reflect the reality of the nation. We know that the Broadcasting Act of 1968, for example, contained a clause that was intended to cast the CBC in the role of promulgator and booster of federalism in this country. That was subsequently changed in the 1991 act, and there was much consternation about it at the time.

I'm one of those people who feels that the change, however motivated—and I have to tell you that I strongly suspect the motivation for it—was the right thing to do. We're back to this distinction between a state broadcaster and a public broadcaster. Citizens in a free and open democracy such as ours have the right to expect of its national public broadcaster, and of any broadcaster, balance in coverage.

I'm addressing, in a certain way, the question Mr. Fast raised as well. It's difficult to do. It's immensely difficult to do, to stand above the fray, as it were, and try to be objective about it. We're all human beings. We're going to make mistakes every day of our lives trying to do that. But I think that's what the striving has to be. The minute CBC/Radio-Canada becomes an instrument of the government of the day is the day we might as well fold its tent and say goodbye to it, very simply put.

Mr. Arthur Lewis: I'd just like to add—I hate to keep going back to governance, but there's a governance issue here too—that the very fact that the board and the president and the chair are appointed by the government of the day does create a public perception of a broadcaster under the thumb of the government. And I think that's very important.

As a former CBC employee, I can tell you that I never felt the hot breath of the government on my back, and I never felt that I was constrained in any way. But there's a public perception that I think is very dangerous. And I think it's very important that the CBC be further isolated, be further removed from the government, through a better, more transparent appointment process.

● (1000)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings this part of our meeting today to a conclusion. We'll recess and ask our next witnesses to come forward.

Thank you.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (1005)

The Chair: We will bring the meeting back to order again.

We welcome our next witnesses, from Francophonie de Timmins. Pierre Bélanger, chairman of the board, please introduce the person with you, if you would, and bring your presentation forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bélanger (Chairman of the Board, Alliance de la francophonie de Timmins): First of all, I would like to thank the committee for accepting our brief and for allowing us to make a presentation intended to further clarify our position. I am the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Alliance de la francophonie de Timmins. Sylvain Lacroix is the Alliance's Executive Director.

Our organization serves the 19,000 francophones in Timmins and the region. Essentially, our work is to promote the development of the Francophone community of Timmins through partnership involving the health, education and social services sectors as well as the economy and cultural development.

Radio-Canada is obviously one of the organizations with which we often have to work when we want the public to know our reality, our problems and our positions on some issues. This corporation plays a key role in the development of francophone communities outside Quebec. I'm going to be quite brief on this subject because you have perhaps already read our brief and furthermore, we would like to be able to answer your questions.

Without Radio-Canada it would be almost impossible for our communities to fight assimilation, but above all to develop a Franco-Ontarian culture that is truly dynamic and to ensure that there is appropriate socio-economic development in our communities. What we really want to emphasize here is the perspective of francophone communities outside Quebec. We believe we have demonstrated that the disappearance or partial privatization of the public broadcaster would be disastrous for our communities.

The cutbacks in the 1990s have already had a real and very negative impact on our communities. On the radio side, the corporation has in fact kept up suitably. In fact, we are very well served in that regard. Sylvain will speak to that issue. However, the same thing cannot be said for television.

In the past, we had production capacity in Ontario and the studios were in Toronto. We were appropriately served in that way. Now, it is done through Ottawa, and it is obviously the needs of the francophone community of the Outaouais that has become more important. We are an epiphenomenon, both on the news coverage side as well as reports on what is happening in northern Ontario. We have become much more marginalized than should be the case, given the percentage of population that we in fact represent of the population. I will now give the floor to Sylvain.

•(1010)

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix (Executive Director, Alliance de la francophonie de Timmins): In Timmins, the broadcaster offers us four services. We have *Première chaîne*, CBON, which is from Sudbury. We have the SRC television which is broadcast over the public airwaves as well as by cable. We also have the *Réseau de l'information*, which is a cable channel, and we have Radio-Canada.ca, which is the Internet service.

The francophone services that we do not have access to are the SRC's *Espace musique* and ARTV. For the latter, one would have to have satellite service because it is not available to us by cable.

In our brief, we make a very important recommendation, in our opinion, concerning the lack of vision. Francophones outside Quebec are not represented in the national programming of Radio-Canada, whether we are talking about radio or television programs. Therefore, we recommend that there be a content requirement, for example the 10 o'clock news show the *Téléjournal* or *Christine Charette's* excellent program broadcast on Radio-Canada *Première chaîne* which deals with social issues. This is to say that for a certain number of minutes, they should deal with francophone communities outside Quebec, whether it is about culture, our achievements or our concerns. In our opinion, Radio-Canada would therefore become a much more national channel.

We have indicated in our brief that we appreciate the fact that the majority of francophones are in Quebec, but we also wish to remind you that there are a million francophones outside Quebec as well as almost six million francophiles. Radio-Canada therefore has a role to play in this regard.

We have a final message. We believe that francophone communities that are not in major centres, like Timmins, are often treated like second-class communities by the SRC, because little time is spent talking about us, our achievements and our feelings.

I thank you for having given the opportunity to an organization like the Alliance de la francophonie de Timmins to come and meet with you. We hope that we will have a fruitful exchange and that in the end, Radio-Canada will be much more faithful to its mandate and more representative of the Canadian population.

Thank you.

•(1015)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

You heard my initial question about the budget reallocations. Clearly northeastern Ontario, which is the prime area for the *francophonie*, would be more or less subject to the same situation that is happening in northwestern Ontario.

Are there visible signs of the reduction, the phasing out, the diminishing, on the radio side?

And what would give you your main cause for concern about privatization on the television side?

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: I will answer in French because I am not really fluent in English.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: I'm ready.

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: As far as radio is concerned, the cuts were less perceptible, we still hear talk about ourselves and what we do, but it is always at the regional level and not at the national level.

As far as television is concerned, on the regional French Ontario newscast at 6 p.m.—I watched it for the last two weeks in order to be ready for my appearance here—in one hour, there are approximately two or three stories about the Franco-Ontarian community. The rest dealt with national or provincial events that do not necessarily affect the francophone community.

The cutbacks to television did hurt us very badly. I would even go so far as to say that we have almost no presence on television.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: I would like to add something on that subject.

I am a career teacher. In the past, 20 years ago, when the severe cutbacks started and the cuts became even worse, the television production centre in Toronto was closed and was amalgamated with Ottawa.

Television as a medium is very important because it allows our young people to see themselves, to see their community, and you made those same comments for other regions of Canada.

Take for example a program like *Génies en herbe*,

[English]

which is basically the equivalent of what existed at the CBC, *Reach for the Top*.

[Translation]

Seventeen or twenty-four French high schools in Ontario participated. The entire event took place in Toronto. There was a tangible increase in the television youth audience in our communities. Everyone went to Toronto, and everyone could see that we existed. This is important, because we are scattered over a large territory. We were competing against each other. It was of a high calibre and really robust.

All of that disappeared from one day to the next, because it was reduced to four schools. When the regional centre was dismantled, it became national. Following that, there were only two schools participating. At some point in time, it simply died out. For a small community like Kapuskasing or Hearst, with populations of 10,000, 12,000 or 15,000, it was dramatic.

It reminded me somewhat of McLuhan's theory according to which we did not exist if we did not see ourselves on television. It was a shock, because afterwards, we became more isolated. From now on, we only exist when disastrous or exceptional events occur. We are talked about on the news, but in terms of our daily life, culturally speaking, we are literally disappearing from the airwaves, with the exception of radio. This does not encourage students to seek information from the television station. Adolescents want to see

themselves somewhat on television. Afterwards, they might wish to listen to the newscasts.

[English]

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: With this increasing marginalization—and we heard mention of the Kamloops situation, but in much of rural Canada and the small communities that are compelled by having no choice to use satellite or cable, so that you may be receiving your news from Detroit or, depending on what part of the country you're in, Seattle or Boston—what has happened in northeastern Ontario with the diminishing of even the English language television must be severely compounded on the French side.

Can that ever be addressed by having regional desks, or some other format, at CBC?

• (1020)

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: Yes, part of the solution would be to bring back Radio-Canada's regional offices, but we also believe that there should be local programming, as well as regional offices. That is to say that air time should be set aside for local news where people from the community would have the opportunity to discuss amongst themselves. At the same time, the local office should be used to provide news to the national office.

We believe that could be part of the solution. It is important, and it should happen quickly. I remind you that every day, we are losing many francophones outside of Quebec. One of the reasons for that is that they do not see themselves reflected in their own community.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Bourgeois.

[Translation]

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

Good morning gentlemen, and thank you for speaking French at this committee meeting. It is important, because we have interpretation services and as we are francophones, we must show that we express ourselves in that language.

I did read your brief, because everything that affects francophones outside Quebec is of great interest to me. On page 4, you talk about national identity;

In our opinion, the government should, through the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, impose a requirement for content targeted to communities outside Quebec [...] in order to promote the development of national identity [...] and help promote national unity.

What do those statements mean to you?

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: National unity is not an issue of sovereignty, of separatism, of federalism or of autonomism. We believe that it is through talking to one another that the country will be able to understand itself. We will be able to speak to each other if we have air time within the national service of Radio-Canada.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Broadcast time for francophones? There is already air time for anglophones.

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: Yes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You mainly get English television.

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: No. In Timmins, we get all the French TV channels. We also have a private French radio station. We are referring specifically to the francophone section of Radio-Canada. If they were to promote our francophone artists outside Quebec, our francophone reality outside Quebec, there would be a better dialogue between us and our Québécois brothers and sisters.

We do not want to get into a constitutional debate or a discussion on the future of Quebec. Currently, there is a Crown corporation called Radio-Canada which, at the moment serves the province of Quebec and the French network to the tune of 90 or 95%. We get about 5% for regional programming. It is not even local programming, because it comes from Ottawa. There is absolutely nothing. If you have had the opportunity to listen to Christiane Charette's excellent program, you would realize that we could get her to play Franco-Ontarian music. The Franco-Ontarian artists would then sell records in Quebec, would become known and would be able to make a living from their art.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I understand, but the fact remains that the expressions "national identity" and "national unity" do not have the same meaning for you as they do for some members of this committee. You must be very careful. That is why I asked you for some clarification.

I understand your frustration. When members of the committee travel to other Canadian provinces—and I have often said this—the cable services available in hotels, for example, will be showing cartoons on the French television stations in the morning, whereas on English television there will be a general information program on what's happening in Canada.

Having said that, if you did not have Quebec television or programs produced in Quebec, you would have practically no French programs at home at all.

• (1025)

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That is correct, we would have practically nothing.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Nothing in French.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: To come back to your question on identity, it is very important, both for francophones outside Quebec and for francophones in Quebec, to understand the reality of different groups. Many Quebecers believe that outside Quebec, forget it, there are no francophones. It is sad, because we would have the means to get to know the various francophone communities. We could understand our difficulties and we would be much more effective when the time comes to stake our claims.

Your problem is one that we often experience when we travel, obviously. It comes under the jurisdiction of the CRTC. The heart of the debate is really whether or not we want to have a national broadcaster that will allow us to understand not only the different realities of the francophone communities but also those of the anglophone communities.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I can tell you—

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: At this point in time, we have the French Ontario television, TFO, that produces Franco-Ontarian dramas and Franco-Ontarian newscasts. We can however say that the bulk of francophone programs come from Quebec.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Generally speaking, Quebecers are quite familiar with the problems that francophones outside Quebec are facing. Quebecers wanted to protect Québécois television precisely because they wanted to avoid what is happening to you. We did establish the Société Radio-Canada so that it would reflect Quebec. Fortunately, Quebec is reflected in your area.

Both financially speaking and in terms of your francophone identity, you very badly need for English Canada and English television to recognize that you exist, and particularly as English television is facing a problem. It is more and more invaded by American television. You will no longer recognize yourselves if francophones from Quebec do not help you in obtaining this recognition.

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: That is where opinions differ. We are not asking anglophones to produce television programs for us. We are asking Radio-Canada's French-language television to support us and to play its role by helping us produce our own television shows.

I agree that we need to protect the institutions. However, Radio-Canada remains a federal institution, and it must start protecting francophone communities outside Quebec.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

[Translation]

I thank you for your presentation this morning. I agree that Radio-Canada plays an essential role for Northern Ontario communities. That said, today I am interested in the SRC's need and obligation to represent the Franco-Ontarian community.

How many francophones live in the region covered by CBON/Radio-Canada in Northern Ontario?

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: CBON covers all of Northern Ontario as of Mattawa, east to west. Approximately 150,000 francophones.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Are there as many Franco-Ontarians in Northern Ontario as there are people in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region of Quebec?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Yes.

• (1030)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Do you believe the SRC has defaulted on its obligations towards the region?

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Yes, I believe so, and not only with respect to our region. In fact, the SRC's problem is that it is increasingly resembling the CBC, which is mainly focused on Toronto; Radio-Canada is mainly focused on Montreal.

As far as we are concerned, it is clear that because of cutbacks and the elimination of the regional broadcasting centre we once had, we have ended up with minimal coverage, which of course you are well aware of. Events are covered only when something catastrophic or exceptional occurs.

I am well aware of the fact that even in Quebec, many regions like the Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and the Gaspé have problems with Radio-Canada. Indeed, these regions have also suffered from cutbacks to regional coverage. They do not necessarily feel that the SRC represents their reality, their challenges, their hardships, their cultural reality. In fact, they feel increasingly less represented by the SRC, because it is more and more focused on Montreal.

Mr. Charlie Angus: When we studied the future of the film industry, we heard from many people that the SRC's role was to promote the Quebec artists star-system. In Northern Ontario, we have many artists working in the fields of dance, theatre, comedy, music.

Do you think the SRC should play a similar role in promoting francophone artists from across Canada?

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: We believe it is important to find a way to do so. How, I cannot say how, Mr. Angus, but there needs to be a way for the Société Radio-Canada to promote all francophone artists from across Canada.

In Timmins, we have a theatre troupe called *Les maringouins du Nord* which produces two plays per year. The actors themselves write the play and build the set, and perform in a 160-person capacity room. There are eight performances of each play and they are always sold out. If the SRC were to give them a hand, perhaps they could be in a 250-capacity room where they could finally cover their costs rather than being forced to pay out of their own pockets in order to do what they love, in other words, theatre.

Mr. Charlie Angus: You have made recommendations to improve the relation between the SRC and Franco-Ontarian and Franco-Manitoban audiences. Could you explain your recommendation regarding the need for a quota?

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: I do not much like the idea of a quota. We believe that when it comes to national programs as opposed to regional programs, whether it be the 10 o'clock news or Christiane Charette's morning show, there should be a period set aside for what is going on in the francophonie outside Québec, with respect to the Franco-Ontarian reality, the cultural reality, and not focused on tar sands or pollution.

We believe that in this way we could create a solid relationship between the Québécois, Acadian, Franco-Ontarian and other cultures in Canada. We are not saying that we urge the government to tell Radio-Canada what to do and what to say. We are simply saying that since this corporation is funded by government, the CRTC should ask it some questions. And it should say that the CBC will have to, in its own way, for 20 minutes out of a 3-hour program, focus on Franco-Ontario artists and on the cultural and social reality of francophones outside Quebec.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Mr. Angus, I would like to follow up on Sylvain's comments.

In the days when we received better TV media coverage, we produced extraordinary artists, known not only in Quebec but also in English-speaking Canada. We only need to think of CANO from Sudbury, there are many artists, for instance Robert Paquette, as well as modern artists like Damien Robitaille. Thankfully, in Damien's case, CBON radio was there and thanks to competitions, including in

Quebec, his songs got aired. But there could be far more opportunities available to artists.

Some of our theatre troupes have a hard time getting exposure because we do not exist in that media universe. In that regard, there remains considerable work to be done. The Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario, the Théâtre de la Vieille 17 and Nouvelle Scène, in Ottawa, are having difficulty making it to the next level. We have poets like Patrice Desbiens, from Timmins, who is now very well-known in France, in Quebec and throughout the world. Had it not been for the SRC he could never have gotten the recognition he so rightly deserves. There is also Jean-Marc Dalpé, a playwright, who now lives in Montreal and has made a career for himself in Quebec. Those are all Franco-Ontarian artists.

There is a new generation, but as far as we are concerned, we cannot rest on our laurels. We must keep fighting for programs and competitions like Ontario Pop, set up by radio, for them to be renewed each year, in order to give artists a stage to perform on.

Earlier on, you were referring to star-system. We find the situation incredibly difficult to deal with. In fact, what we have should rather be referred to as the no star-system. We would like there to be a forum for francophone artists outside Quebec. They have the talent, all they need is an opportunity to be heard.

• (1035)

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Warkentin is next.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much for coming this morning and giving us your perspectives.

Representing some French-speaking communities in my riding in northern Alberta, I can relate from my constituents that they have expressed the same concerns you're bringing today—that it's great to have a bilingual broadcaster or a French broadcaster in their communities that they can get if they subscribe, but unfortunately it doesn't reflect who they are; it reflects a Quebec reality.

I'm just wondering if we could talk about it a little more. Obviously the current mandate really outlines for Radio-Canada and for the CBC that they should reflect the linguistic minorities and the circumstances of those minorities. It doesn't say there should be a provincial boundary to that expression, but only that it should be an expression of those linguistic communities. Obviously you've expressed that there is some concern with regard to your community, and I would say that the same expression is also coming from my own constituents.

In the Broadcasting Act it is very clear. I will just read it: they are to "contribute to shared national consciousness and identity". I would suspect it's maybe a coded way of saying they should promote a national feeling of camaraderie between communities of a particular language, and probably even across linguistic lines as well.

Do you believe the original intent of the act was to cross those boundaries as well? Could you talk about how working to this direction might help with the whole issue of national unity and the whole issue of unity across the country between communities?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Indeed, it was part of the corporation's mandate. That said, the best way of doing this is to provide a voice to the various communities. We are not saying that what is being done in Quebec is unimportant or that it should be scaled back.

In actual fact, Radio-Canada suffered egregious cuts and salvaged what it could, but it did cast aside some things. We absolutely need Société Radio-Canada to be very strong in Quebec. There is some creativity in all of the fields; we only need to look at film and publishing, for instance. That said, without Quebec, we would not exist. For there to be real dialogue between the regions of Canada, they need to be given real voices.

It is very important for Franco-Ontarians to know that anglophone communities are experiencing the same challenges they are. It is a reality. Because of cutbacks, television has gotten more commercial, more profit- and production-cost based. Getting the same service throughout Canada is not as obvious as it should be. Cable operators do not all provide access to the same products throughout the country. To really play its role as our national broadcaster, the CBC should guarantee access throughout this country.

Through an honest discussion giving voice to all regions of Canada so they can project their reality, the good things they've done, the grievances they've had and the challenges they've experienced; that is how we can strengthen national unity. It is not by using Radio-Canada as some sort of propaganda tool, as Mr. Chrétien often wanted to do, that you can promote Canadian unity. It will always reflect diversity. That is the very nature of this country. Perhaps we are a challenge or a historical bleep, but that's exactly what it is.

In the field of news, Radio-Canada has always done a good job in that it was despised both by federalists and sovereigntists. During the most recent referendum campaigns, both factions despised Radio-Canada. That must mean that journalists managed to maintain a level of objectivity and to strike a balance.

I think you understand what I'm saying. That is how we can really talk about national unity.

• (1040)

[English]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Barring sponsorship, Prime Minister Chrétien probably lived that out in every other capacity of his life.

Maybe it's not the mandate that needs to be changed; maybe it's the carrying out of the mandate when it comes. It seems to me there's a clear expression of intent here in the mandate that this be the reality. The concerns that you and my constituents have should be addressed quite easily within the mandate. I think there's ability for that to happen.

I'm just curious if you think there's anything that needs to be added to the mandate that would be essential to ensuring this type of movement going forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: I share your opinion. We believe Radio-Canada has all the tools it needs to carry out its mandate, except for

substantial additional funding. We do not believe that it is a ratings- or mandate-related issue. There is a real problem on the CBC side.

[English]

On the CBC side, when I hear that they're going to cancel a show because there are only 500,000 or 600,000 people watching it and there are two million Canadians watching *American Idol*, I don't think that's an excuse. When that show was produced, the artists of English Canada

[Translation]

or of Quebec and French Canada.

[English]

had the chance to show what they could do in front of 600,000 people. So we have to stop thinking that everybody should be watching or listening to the CBC, and if we need to have a greater sense of who we are as Canadians, we should be able to go to the CBC.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I think it comes back to the issue of relevance. Of course, there's the issue of the chicken and the egg—the funding and the relevance. Certainly I think there's going to be debate on what comes first, or how we can ensure that if one comes the other will follow.

We appreciate your coming here and testifying this morning.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Scott.

[Translation]

Hon. Andy Scott: Hello and welcome.

I come from New Brunswick, and I understand how important Radio-Canada is for francophones outside Quebec.

[English]

I think there's also an alliance we would have as New Brunswickers, independent of just the language question. Absent the CBC, even in the capital of the province of New Brunswick we would not see ourselves on the supertime news; we would be watching ATV out of Halifax. It would give us some coverage, but certainly not what we have come to expect from the CBC.

So I think there's a broad question about not only seeing ourselves on a national public broadcast, but also wanting the rest of Canada to see us in ways that are unique to our regions. In the example from Acadie in Moncton and Radio-Canada, that's obvious, but it's not unique to that. I think there's a broad issue there.

The problem we will have is how to deal with the arm's-length relationship with a public broadcaster. I think we share a view that resources are a problem. It's less difficult for me perhaps than for some of my colleagues, but in order to generate consensus in the country to support the CBC to the extent necessary to meet the mandate spelled out in the Broadcasting Act, there are certain expectations.

In our case it would be regional. The Radio-Canada side should have many of the same concerns—perhaps not as vividly as you would express them. Because Radio-Canada has a presence in Moncton, Acadie is served the best, outside of Quebec, in French-speaking Canada. Regardless of that, there would be certain expectations for that expenditure. Yet because we're politicians and there's an arm's-length relationship, it's hard to say, "We will increase the budget of CBC, but here's what we expect for that." What happens if we don't see it? What happens if we don't have an increased budget for local supertime news or the kind of service you expect?

• (1045)

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: That is a complex issue and debate. I do not believe politicians should tell Radio-Canada what to say or what to do. I understand that. I believe that, given the fact that Radio-Canada is a Crown corporation without necessarily being state controlled, but it is state funded, we should set out clear guidelines.

For instance, out of a \$1 billion-budget, Radio-Canada should be compelled to invest \$100 million in local programming, like TV films or news. In telling Radio-Canada to invest locally and regionally, we are not telling the corporation what it should do; we are simply creating guidelines to make sure it serves the communities.

There is another distinction to be made. Radio-Canada directors are not necessarily artists; they administer budgets. Politicians do not tell artists what to do nor what to say. They tell directors should to spend the funds. I believe this would somewhat address the regional service issues for Radio-Canada.

I would be surprised to see this happen over the next few years. Perhaps Radio-Canada's mandate as to what it has to offer all Canadians should be clarified. That said, the current political situation will probably not be easily resolved.

[English]

Hon. Andy Scott: You mentioned artists. Most of the interventions so far have been around information programming—news, seeing yourself in the.... What about drama? Expand a little, just for the record, on the importance of the role of drama in telling those stories, in addition to information.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: TV drama is extremely important, specifically on the francophone side, because it is a reflection of our reality. Some Radio-Canada TV movies changed people's lives because they were a reflection of our past. I'll give the example of *Séraphin*, in *Les belles histoires des pays d'en haut* and *Temps d'une paix*. These two telefilms were very important for Quebecers and for people outside the province. They explained how we became who we are today.

Why do people say that you cannot produce a good francophone TV movie in Toronto or in Vancouver? TFO did. It is currently working on a 12-episode TV movie in the Sudbury area, with Franco-Ontarian and Quebec artists. This type of thing will lead to the development of relationships between Quebec artists, who are exceptional, and newer artists from francophone minorities in other

parts of the country, and we could help in the development of these newer artists.

Mr. Scott, does that answer your question?

• (1050)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bourgeois.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In your brief, you said that when it comes to funding the public broadcaster, you would like the corporation to continue to sell advertising to fulfil its mandate, knowing full well that they have a small budget.

In Northern Ontario, would you be prepared to pay more for cable operators which broadcast francophone programs, or would you be prepared to pay more for the SRC?

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: That is an interesting question. The people who spoke before you gave me some food for thought. I don't understand, I must say I am astounded. I pay \$54 per month and out of that I am being told that no money goes to the Société Radio-Canada, which is the francophone network I watch most often.

I do not think that we should have to pay more. Rather, this money should be redistributed to those who are entitled to it. I watch Radio-Canada 80% of the time although I get almost 40 channels.

Why wouldn't \$21 out of the total amount go to the Société Radio-Canada? I know that I may seem a bit excessive and that my examples are a bit simplistic, but the money is there, it is just not being redistributed properly.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: This leads me to the issue of partnerships. You supported creating partnerships, specifically when it comes to Franco-Ontario educational television. You would like to see more partnerships with the Société Radio-Canada.

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: Before I defer to my chairman, I will give you an example. Francophones outside Quebec have a religion: the Montreal Canadians. Radio-Canada would lend its time and RDS would broadcast Montreal Canadians hockey games to francophones outside Quebec. Today, they are no longer being broadcast outside Quebec.

The upcoming Vancouver Olympic Games will be rebroadcast by TQS. Francophones who do not get that signal will not be able to watch the games. Should Radio-Canada not, as the national broadcaster, lend its signal without charge to francophone regions where TQS is not broadcast? These are important events. Young Franco-Ontarians will be participating in the Olympic Games, yet if you live in Sault Ste. Marie or in Vancouver you will not be able to watch them on a French channel. That is one of the main partnerships.

Pierre, I'll let you talk about our education-related partnerships.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: Our educational programming in Ontario could certainly work with Radio-Canada in several areas. It has won international awards and has produced excellent teaching material.

Clearly, we have to be creative and increase direct state funding, while ensuring that we do not increase advertising-related funding. The danger is to go for short-term gain. If we do not start thinking medium and long term, we may well kill off cultural partnerships, like film partnerships in Quebec. That would be setting a dangerous course.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I have a really hard time following you. What I am hearing does not make a whole lot of sense. At times, you seem to be taking a step forward and are requesting measures to protect your francophone identity. To do so, you need French-language television shows produced by Radio-Canada in Quebec. However, you want to have—

• (1055)

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That is precisely the issue: shows should not be solely produced in Quebec.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You spoke about the series *Un homme et son péché*, which is a typical Québec television series.

Mr. Pierre Bélanger: That is an example from the past. Franco-Ontarians also produced the *FranCoeur* television series, which was a great success. The series was so good that it was even broadcast on the national network.

Quebec productions, such as *Les Beaux Dimanches* or other shows, have played a very important role. What we are proposing is that we be given the room to develop our industry. We want to be partners, not just consumers. Like the people in the Rouyn-Noranda and Gaspé regions, we do not want to simply receive things that are developed in Montreal; we want to become stakeholders. There are

also people with things to say and gifted artists in the regions. Victor-Lévy Beaulieu has been a champion of this cause.

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: It was simply—

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You have to be careful when talking about Victor-Lévy Beaulieu.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have another committee following us. Mr. Abbott will have time for a short question, because we have to wind up by 11 o'clock.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): I have a very quick question, and it was prompted by my friend Mr. Scott asking about taking into account the Acadian community in New Brunswick.

When we did the study on broadcasting I was very interested in the facilities Rogers had for their nightly programming. It seemed to be well-developed programming.

Have you had any input from or discussions with Rogers about that nightly programming—which to the best of my knowledge is in English—and the possibility of getting French programming?

Mr. Sylvain Lacroix: First of all, we don't have Rogers in northern Ontario; we have *Persona*, and it's only in English. They focus on what we do, but they don't give us any time.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We will adjourn.

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