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—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I want to welcome our witnesses who came in today.

The witnesses are the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the Association de la presse francophone, and the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada.

We will begin with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

Ms. Lanthier.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier (Chair, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I would like to thank you for inviting us to appear today as part of your study on the media and local communities. My name is Sylviane Lanthier, and I am the chair of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. With me today is our director of communications, Serge Quinty.

In nine provinces and three territories, 2.6 million people chose to live part of their lives in French. We can truly talk about linguistic duality because there are dynamic and diverse francophone communities in every region of this country. They embody one of our basic Canadian values. The FCFA is here today as the main advocate for these communities and the people who live in them, people who are determined to live in French.

We are honoured to share this table today with the Association de la presse francophone and the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada or ARC. The presence of these two organizations in particular very clearly illustrates a fundamental reality of our communities: if we wanted to have local media in French, we had to create them ourselves, for the most part. Developed by and for our communities, our community newspapers and radio stations are the only media, aside from Radio-Canada's regional stations and a few private-sector media, that talk about the daily reality of Canada's francophone population in various parts of the country.

However, our media are suffering today. Last year, one of our newspapers, *L'Express d'Ottawa*, folded and another, *L'Eau Vive* in Saskatchewan, suspended publication for a few months. A benefit concert for this newspaper will take place next week, in fact.

When it comes to radio, three of the ARC member stations no longer have paid staff. In places like Halifax and Peace River, the problems are so serious that the station's survival is at risk.

How did we get to this point? The digital shift certainly played a part. When the federal government made the shift to using the Internet for all communications with the Canadian public, advertising in our media suffered. The drop in advertising had a major impact on many of our radio stations and newspapers, as it prevented them from conducting the day-to-day activities that benefit the community they serve. Like the APF, the FCFA filed a complaint with the Commissioner of Official Languages over the government's decision on advertising.

More broadly, government support for community media is still seriously lacking. Many media outlets are located in places where the advertising market alone is not enough to support a French-language outlet, and that is why the private sector does not have a presence. However, even though these radio stations and newspapers have significantly reduced financial viability, their cultural and social viability is not in doubt. The very existence of these media shows how important they are to the community they serve. Conversely, if they don't receive better support, they will disappear, which will be an irreparable loss for Canada's francophone population.

People will talk about how technology has changed, and we recognize the growing importance of digital technology and social platforms in the consumer habits of Canadians, including the francophones who live in our communities. However, I would like to draw your attention to three considerations.

First, we live in a time where the vast majority of television, radio, and news content on digital platforms is produced by the traditional media. As our colleagues from the ARC will tell you, radio has never stopped being popular, even among young people.

Second, high-speed connectivity in Canada has not yet reached the point where everyone can easily access online media products. It is difficult for an Acadian in Nova Scotia to listen to the radio online when he has a dial-up connection rather than high-speed Internet. You can't expect a francophone in the Yukon or the Northwest Territories to watch videos online when he pays an exorbitant monthly price for bandwidth. As we told the CRTC a few weeks ago, there are still many places in Canada, especially rural and remote areas, where the government needs to invest in infrastructure so that francophones can fully be part of the digital world. In these places, radio, television, and newspapers remain the tools of choice.

●(0850)

The third consideration I would like to draw to your attention is as follows. In a multi-platform world where some people choose to read their newspaper online and others in print format, where some listen to the radio over the airwaves and others on a mobile device, content is king. Of course it is important to invest in digital technology, but it is even more important to be able to gather and deliver that content. That is why I encourage this committee and the federal government to support the ability of our media to talk about everyday happenings in our communities.

With that in mind, we would welcome a program to support community media and provide our radio stations and newspapers with the minimum resources they need to do their jobs. This program could also support our community media as they adapt to the digital environment. Many major media outlets are having a hard time making this shift, so imagine what it is like for our newspapers and radio stations.

Basically, as we see it, we have two choices as a society. We can let market forces take their course and run the risk that with the continued erosion of resources, even more media will stop broadcasting or publishing. In that case, we can wait and see whether or not appropriate alternatives emerge from the digital shift. Alternatively, we can invest to strengthen the ability of our media to do their jobs and operate in a digital, multi-platform environment. In that way, our media will remain rooted in our communities.

I would now like to talk briefly about Radio-Canada.

The FCFA estimates that the public broadcaster's regional stations are the only source of local French-language television content for 58% of francophones living outside Quebec. Since these are provincial stations, you will understand that I am using the word "local" pretty broadly.

You and I know the situation Radio-Canada is in right now. In recent years, our communities and the rest of Canada have seen whole swaths of the Crown corporation's programming disappear. Since the CRTC did away with the Local Program Improvement Fund, the regional stations outside Quebec produce almost no television programming aside from news. Youth programs, cultural magazines, and variety shows have all but disappeared. News programming has even been cut from 60 to 30 minutes everywhere except in Ottawa and Moncton. Once again, there are fewer opportunities to talk about day-to-day events in our communities on television and fewer human and physical resources to do so.

The Government of Canada will announce new funding for CBC/Radio-Canada in the upcoming federal budget. At least that is what we hear. That's wonderful, but there is absolutely no guarantee that that new money will benefit the corporation's regional French-language stations in our communities. For one thing, after years of cuts, many areas badly need to make up for lost time. For another, as the chair of the CRTC said at the recent public hearings about local and community television, it is the board that makes the choices that guide the corporation, a board that does not include any representation from our communities, I might add.

In his report on CBC/Radio-Canada funding, commissioned last year by the governments of Quebec and Ontario, consultant Michel

Houle recommended that the government reinstate an annual subsidy, over and above basic parliamentary appropriations, to be used exclusively to enhance locally relevant programming on CBC/Radio-Canada radio and television stations outside metropolitan areas. That is something worth exploring. We also recommended to the CRTC that a fund be created to support local French-language television programming outside Quebec.

We urge the federal government to ensure, one way or another, that the money invested in our public broadcaster is used, at least in part, to enhance the French-language television and radio stations that serve our communities. We ask that the government require CBC/Radio-Canada to meet this condition in order to obtain new funding.

In closing, when we think about newspapers and local radio and television stations, we most often think in terms of markets, but when we do we lose sight of two important facts. First, in most of our communities, francophones lack the critical mass for a truly viable advertising market. Second, our French-language media exist to serve not markets, but communities made up of people who are determined to live in French and need these media to find out, in French, what is going on where they live.

●(0855)

We, the 2.6 million francophones living in nine provinces and three territories, need our community newspapers and radio stations. We need Radio-Canada's regional television and radio stations. Even in a digital world, these media have the know-how and the presence in our communities to tell our stories and reflect our realities.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was very good.

Now, we will go to the Association de la presse francophone.

Monsieur Sonier.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Sonier (President, Association de la presse francophone): Ladies and gentlemen of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, thank you for inviting us to appear here today.

My name is Francis Sonier, and I am the president of the Association de la presse francophone. Today I am accompanied by the executive director of the APF, Jean-Patrice Meunier.

The Association de la presse francophone is a group of French-language minority community newspapers. We currently represent 22 newspapers in eight provinces and two territories. French is one of Canada's official languages and an important part of our national identity.

There are francophone communities all across the country. Some are large concentrations of people who speak French, while others are small groups.

Manitoba is an excellent example. It includes Saint-Boniface, the real capital of Manitoba's francophone population, and other smaller francophone communities.

[English]

Community newspapers act as hubs for these communities. They are channels through which these French identities assemble and become informed about their own communities. Community newspapers are often the only direct link between these people.

The digital age has brought many people closer together, but reliable high-speed Internet connections are not available in all communities. Access to digital information can be difficult in places where the infrastructure is not present, such as northern Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, or even some areas of Newfoundland and Labrador.

[Translation]

These francophone communities often came out of the history of Canada. As we prepare to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation, it is important to note that community newspapers have chronicled that history.

Le Moniteur Acadien, based in Shediac, New Brunswick, will also celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2017. Winnipeg's *La Liberté* recently marked its centenary. Their respective archives reflect the events, the struggles, and the successes that these communities have seen over the years. Women in Manitoba won the right to vote in 1916, and *La Liberté* was there. These archives show the unique perspective of a francophone minority community.

Community newspapers bring these communities together and contribute to their vitality. They contribute directly to the local and regional economies by creating jobs, promoting local businesses, or just talking about them.

It would be a mistake to compare a community newspaper, which talks specifically about a given region, with a larger, more general newspaper, which has a broader scope and mandate. *La Presse* covers all of Quebec. *The Globe and Mail* is a national newspaper.

A community newspaper has a more limited scope. Certainly, it may talk about the larger francophone population, but only because that affects the local community. That is its mandate, its purpose. The major media and daily newspapers will not cover the lobster festival in Shediac, New Brunswick, or run stories on local issues in Hearst, in northern Ontario.

Community newspapers have news teams on the ground. Over the years, the publishers have learned what people want to know about their communities. These newspapers have a much greater presence than any other existing news infrastructure.

I would also mention that a community newspaper costs very little compared to other news infrastructure, considering its impact on the community.

Not all minority official language media can be compared to media in majority communities, where multiple infrastructures exist. If a newspaper, a radio station, or even a television station were to disappear from a majority community, the impact on the community

would be minimal compared to the impact it would have on a minority community.

In a majority community, there is a whole range of alternatives. If the *Toronto Star* folded, that would have a huge impact, of course, but people would have a number of alternate news sources.

In a minority community, though, the situation is not the same. If *L'Aurore boréale*, the only French-language newspaper in the Yukon, were to fold, the community would have no way of getting local news.

That is the reality. If community newspapers disappear, who will talk about the latest municipal council decisions, the innovative projects done by local francophone students, business start-ups, works by local artists and the results achieved by young francophone athletes?

These are the things that help build a francophone identity and francophone pride.

● (0900)

[English]

Another important and worrisome aspect of our industry can be found in the consolidation of media by large corporate entities. Through happenstance, both APF and QCNA currently represent only newspapers that are not corporately owned. We have observed that when it comes to our particular paradigm of official language newspapers in minority situations, this is the best structure to guarantee access to information in our communities.

Corporations have a duty to their shareholders and not to their communities. Decisions are made on the basis of balance sheets and numbers. *L'Express d'Ottawa*, for example, our last corporate member, stopped its print issue as a business decision. In Quebec, *The Westmount Examiner* was shut down in October 2015, after 80 years of existence, as well as its sister publication, *The West Island Chronicle*. All three closures stem from business decisions by Transcontinental.

[Translation]

On the other hand, when *L'Eau vive*, the only French-language newspaper in Saskatchewan, announced that it was in financial difficulty and had to stop publishing its print edition last November, it did not disappear for good.

The APF met with the newspaper's managers and offered its advice. The community pulled together, and the newspaper will resume printing this week, which is good news.

Minority newspapers are in crisis. Some publications are in a very precarious situation, as the case of *L'Eau vive* showed. The decline in federal advertising hurt these publications badly, because revenue dropped very quickly, with no transition period.

The newspapers that belong to the APF have seen their advertising revenue from federal departments and agencies decrease by 73% since 2006. That's right, 73%. Together, the newspapers represented by the APF have lost \$1.5 million a year in federal advertising. That total hides the fact that some newspapers have seen their advertising revenue fall to zero or close to zero as a result of these decisions and policies.

What is more, that is not the only source of lost revenue for community newspapers. The new formulas for the aid to publishers program and the Canada periodical fund have also affected the newspapers in the APF. Although some newspapers have seen their funding increase, others have suffered significant losses, and the APF has seen an overall reduction of more than 20% over the years. Four newspapers alone have had to absorb losses of roughly \$178,000 a year.

Every drop in revenue has a serious impact on these communities. It may mean one less journalist, contributor, or proofreader. Advertising revenue and financial assistance programs guarantee quality editorial content.

The government mentioned the broader reach of television and the Internet to explain the reduction in advertising spending on minority community newspapers. However, statistics show that people in communities read their community newspapers. As was mentioned previously, not everyone has access to the Internet. Large regions of the country served by our publications have little or no Internet access. How can the government reasonably show that Internet advertising reaches these communities?

According to a study that community media conducted with the support of Canadian Heritage, community newspapers have an average readership ranging from 54% to 83%, depending on the region; 71% of communities appreciate their newspaper and consider it important. Community newspapers have an 89% credibility rating. Even though they may seem pervasive, the Internet and social media do not enjoy such credibility.

For example, in 2009, when the government wanted to tell Canadians about the dangers of H1N1 flu, it published notices in the newspapers, in the midst of the decline in advertising spending.

We are not here just to tell you about problems, but also to offer solutions. Regardless of its purpose, a minority community newspaper is first and foremost a cultural element of that community. It is a reflection of the community. In these newspapers, people in the community express themselves in stories, editorials, and opinion pieces.

We have come up with a few suggestions that are in the document you can read. Don't forget that newspapers are cultural businesses and should be considered as such with Canada Post's help. Canada Post offers preferential rates for books. We would like newspapers to benefit from such rates as well. In addition, we would like to have a fund equivalent to 1% of CBC/Radio-Canada's budget for community newspapers and media.

Thank you.

• (0905)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we have the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. François Côté (Secretary General, Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada): Good morning, Madam Chair and committee members.

My name is François Côté, and I am the secretary general of the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada. With me this morning is Simon Forgues, who is our development and communications officer.

First, we would like to thank you for inviting us to appear. We are with you this morning to show you that more than 20 years after the Internet entered our lives, radio is still the local medium par excellence, especially in communities like ours. However, even though our radio stations play a major role in preserving our language and culture and enhancing the social and economic vitality of our communities, they are going through a difficult time right now, and that is very worrisome. The same is true of our colleagues at the newspapers, as you have heard.

At the ARC, three of our radio stations no longer have paid staff. Five have only one half-time employee, and four others have only one employee. Under the circumstances, it is difficult, if not impossible, for them to carry out the mandate they were given.

How many times have we heard that our French-language community media are perfect indicators of francophone linguistic vitality in Canada? It is often said that if there are French-language radio stations and newspapers like ours in our communities, then they must be alive and well.

Ladies and gentlemen, these indicators of linguistic vitality are increasingly fragile, basically because of a lack of financial resources. At the rate things are going, soon we won't be able to talk about our radio stations and newspapers as proof that French is alive and well in Canada if nothing is done to help them.

Nearly half of our members are in a precarious situation. Many have posted deficits in recent years, largely because of the lack of stable funding and the decrease in federal advertising.

Mr. Simon Forgues (Development and Communications Officer, Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada): Ironically, despite the virtues that are generally attributed to the new digital platforms, no other medium—I want to stress that—has yet succeeded in reaching our local populations as easily and quickly as radio. All the other media platforms, without exception, require much heavier infrastructure than traditional terrestrial radio and often come with very high production and use costs.

With radio stations such as ours, there are no worries about data packages or amount of bandwidth and no connection speed problems. There is a microphone, a transmitter, a sending antenna, and, at the other end, people who listen while they go about their daily business, wherever they are and whatever they are doing. People just turn the dial and tune in their local radio station. They don't worry about whether they'll have enough data. It's easy. In fact, radio is the one and only medium that enters people's private lives so easily. You can listen to radio in the car, in the shower, on a boat, or at home in the backyard.

The Internet is not a universal cure for all the local news problems. The Internet is one way to get news, but it isn't the only way to do so or to stay in touch with the local community. It complements traditional media.

Every country in the world recommends keeping a battery-powered or crank radio in an emergency kit in the event of a disaster because no other medium holds up in such circumstances. This is one small example of how useful radio is to people. The CRTC decided that Canadian radio stations and television channels should be equipped to transmit alerts to the public in real time because it recognized the importance of traditional media.

Mr. François Côté: In Europe and Asia, the transition from analog to digital has sped up in recent years. In some countries, all radio stations will soon be converted to the digital band and there will be no more analog stations. Norway is one such country. These countries still believe in the potential of terrestrial radio.

In a country the size of ours, where mobile Internet packages are sometimes prohibitively expensive, how can we believe that cellphones, tablets, and laptops are the only ways to share local information? We aren't saying we shouldn't embrace the Internet. All we are saying is that the Internet is not the one and only solution. Universal access to information depends in part on free media such as radio.

Many other countries around the world are similarly working to modernize radio, and for good reason. In 2016, terrestrial radio is still the easiest, fastest, and least expensive way of reaching people as they go about their daily activities.

● (0910)

Mr. Simon Forgues: Why do industrialized nations such as Great Britain, Norway, and Germany still believe in free terrestrial radio while here in Canada, we think that the answer lies in wired or mobile Internet?

While we are on the subject, it is important to stop thinking that young people are interested only in online radio and don't listen to so-called traditional radio anymore. In Europe, just last fall, a study by Médiamétrie revealed that three-quarters of 15- to 24-year-olds listen to a radio station every day. To the south of us, according to figures from the Pew Research Center, which cites Nielsen, nine out of 10 Americans over the age of 12 listen to AM and/or FM radio every week.

Yes, these people also go online and watch YouTube videos, but they haven't abandoned radio, because they are attached to their favourite station and their community, because radio keeps them informed about their community better than anything else, and

because it was recently proven that traditional radio is still the best way to discover new music. All that is primarily because radio is a medium that is both deeply intimate and unifying, a medium that no other has yet been able to supplant when it comes to local impact.

That is why, in communities like ours, it is critical that we not waste such valuable resources that help bond communities together. That is why it is critical to invest in safeguarding our local community media. They are tools that still play a vital role in communities like ours.

Mr. François Côté: How can we do that? We propose that a program to support minority media be set up. The purpose of the program, which would be modelled on the one created by the Government of Quebec, would be to provide basic financial support for minority radio stations and newspapers. The support could range from \$40,000 to \$60,000 per medium. It would be an operating subsidy that would allow us to carry out our mission in keeping with the station's or newspaper's priorities and goals: hiring or retaining staff, buying equipment, and so on. We are talking about a recurring annual subsidy, core funding that we could count on to keep pursuing our mission.

If we want our radio stations and newspapers to continue to enhance the vitality of official language minority communities, and if the federal government wants to keep using them as proof of the vitality of bilingualism across the country, action must be taken now.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: My goodness, that's great. We're two minutes under. Thank you so much. That's very efficient. That's proof that radio is efficient.

We're going to go into what is in effect a seven-minute-per-questioner period. Those seven minutes include answers. I would ask everybody to be as tight as you possibly can.

We will begin with Mr. Samson for the Liberals.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will try to do justice to the issue.

The presentations certainly gave us a broad overview of the media. Listening to them, I wondered whether I was still living in the 1970s or 1980s. I remember my parents having the same discussion around the table at home and talking about how important it was to have French-language stations and newspapers and access to information in their language at a much more local level.

It makes me sad to hear that we are once again at this same crossroads, to some extent. That worries me. Thank you very much indeed for giving us that information. We need to discuss this issue and make decisions to ensure that minorities will be well represented and have the latest information.

I will start with a question for the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

Mrs. Lanthier, you said you had filed a complaint about advertising placement. Have you received a response? What is the status of that complaint?

• (0915)

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: The investigation is under way, so we have not yet received a response.

Mr. Darrell Samson: The investigation is under way, but what did you ask for? Do you expect to receive a favourable response?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: The complaint has to do with the government's decision to stop or reduce its newspaper and radio advertising. In this complaint, we are asking the government how it made that decision, that is, whether we were consulted and whether any directives were issued that meant that our communities' needs were not taken into consideration when the decision was made. We are therefore asking for reparations and for community newspapers' and radio stations' needs to be taken into consideration.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You are talking about a subsidy. There is certainly a huge need for such support.

You also talked about high-speed infrastructure. You represent all the communities across Canada. What are they saying? If you had to describe the message they are sending your association in 30 seconds, what would it be?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: The communities across Canada want their realities to be reflected in media that they can identify with and that are interested in what they are doing. Radio-Canada has regional radio and television stations, but the community newspapers and radio stations do things no one else does. They cover things no one else is interested in. Sometimes they are the only ones that cover things.

As my colleagues said earlier, radio plays a very important role in helping people discover new music. Without community radio, artists in our communities have no outlets for their music. Community radio stations really provide that outlet. Our children have no way of seeing themselves and promoting their cultural identity when the media are not there to cover what they are doing.

The media play a very, very important role. They enable organizations and people planning events in French to convey information through advertising. That information may be about cultural and community events going on here. People also place ads in our community media.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much for that information.

I now have a question for the representative of the Association de la presse francophone. You raised two points that really interest me.

First, you said that community newspapers cost little and have a great deal of impact. I am very interested in that. Second, you defined the words "minority" and "majority". I associate the loss of a radio station or a newspaper in a majority community with education. There is a definite connection. Minority communities are in dire straits, and there should be a minimum.

All three of you talked about a fund to at least help you survive. You are not asking for the earth; you are asking for enough to survive, at a minimum. Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Francis Sonier: Newspapers don't need fabulous equipment to operate. They mainly need human resources that produce content that is printed on paper or posted on a website, for example. They don't need a lot. It takes human resources. That is where investment is needed. We don't have an antenna or anything like that.

It has been proven that a newspaper is read by two, three, or four people. It passes from hand to hand, and people see themselves in its pages. A newspaper is a living thing. It sits in public places, a school or a lobby, and people read it. It isn't ephemeral, because a newspaper lives on. That is its impact. It costs very little, but it requires human resources.

When the federal government doesn't publish notices in the newspapers, the impact is twofold. First, the notices are not seen by the public and the people are not served. Second, the newspapers suffer a financial hit. Without that advertising revenue, we can't invest in editorial content. There is a dual effect.

Everyone suffers. I don't believe the government is serving the public, especially in minority communities. Newspapers are a good way of reaching those people.

• (0920)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much. I appreciate your answer.

I have a very brief question for my radio friends.

Could you please tell me more about the consequences of the concentration of two or three large media companies across Canada?

Mr. François Côté: It affects us because the mandate of these companies eventually fell to the communities. The problem is that we were not given the resources to fulfill this mandate. We are therefore stuck with a very broad mandate, but without any financial resources to be able to give people the information or service they should get. The large players concentrated in large markets and dropped the small markets, which then fell back to us.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

Now we go to Mr. Waugh, for the Conservatives.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Good morning. Thank you to all three of you for your presentations here this morning.

I'm from Saskatchewan. We have pockets of French, as you know, highly concentrated in some areas like Gravelbourg, Zenon Park, Arborfield, and so on. It's reassuring, I guess, that *L'Eau vive* will hit the stands once again on Thursday.

We talk about federal funding. It's interesting, because I think French immersion has really picked up steam. I used to be a school board trustee, up until October 19. We've exploded in our province with French immersion.

I have a couple of questions for you. You talked about federal ads and all that. I don't see any support from provincial bodies toward French. French education we struggle with, so I'm assuming we're going to struggle with the television, with the radio, and I know we're struggling with newspapers in our province. While you can throw some darts at the federal government from 2006 on...and I see court cases in our province, French schools against the provincial government, so let's talk about this. You said you had 2.6 million throughout the country, yet I don't see—other than maybe in Quebec, Ontario a little bit, and New Brunswick—support from provincial governments here, stepping forward in the ad situation.

Let's open this can of worms, because provincial governments spend a lot of money from coast to coast to coast. I don't know your source of revenue. I assume you get enough funding here from Canadian Heritage under the APF. We'll ask questions here in the next seven minutes about that.

But I want to know a little bit about provincial. Can you share some of that with me?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Your question is—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Let's start with the provincial end of it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Thank you for your excellent question.

In another stage of my career, I headed a French-language provincial newspaper in Manitoba. The province runs a lot of ads in this newspaper, in particular. Immersion schools are also partners of this paper in terms of content and advertising. The provincial and local newspapers have various other ways to generate revenue rather than just resorting to the federal government. They can diversify their sources of income. However, this is not an option for all newspapers, and not all provinces have that level of commitment towards their francophone communities. This varies, depending on the community. My APF colleague could probably say more about it than I can.

Mr. Francis Sonier: Indeed, not all provinces provide that much assistance to their minority community newspapers. Take Manitoba, for example, where French immersion classes in English schools have a subscription to *La Liberté*, a French-language newspaper. The subscription was purchased by the school. Could other provinces make other such efforts? I think so. I know that it is not your mandate, but if openness is the goal, provincial governments could adopt this approach.

• (0925)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: *La Presse* doesn't produce a hard copy anymore until Saturday. We are in this digital world. I'm sorry, but we are. You look across this country...and I've just pointed out in my province where there are pockets. Digital is going to play a huge part. Whether you agree or not, it's going to play a huge part in any media. *La Presse* shut down hard copies Monday through Friday. They produce only a Saturday hard copy. We thought about that for community newspapers. I know *La Presse* has probably struggled since they've done this, but I want you to....

What's your impression of *La Presse* stepping out? It's the first newspaper in Canada doing this digitally, by the way.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Sonier: The newspaper *La Presse* had to factor that in and crunch the numbers. I do not have those figures, but I know that distribution and printing were very expensive. Let us keep in mind that *La Presse* still has a concentrated central market, namely the greater Montreal area, with over two million people.

In the case of small newspapers, the concentration is not the same. Readership is widely dispersed over a given area. Take for example *L'Acadie Nouvelle*, in New Brunswick. We have to travel 10,000 kilometres every day to deliver the newspaper to people's homes. In 2012, we had to go to our competitor and sign a business agreement to print and distribute the newspaper. Fortunately, that was a win-win agreement.

Since francophones are scattered throughout most areas, delivering a newspaper becomes extremely expensive. Canada Post could help us, and in some areas the Internet is not available at reasonable prices. It is just not accessible or not accessible at a reasonable cost. We must therefore maintain this delivery.

You are talking about the media and the Internet. Where do you think credible online content comes from? The newspapers produce that content—not Facebook, not Twitter. The verified and verifiable information is produced by newspapers, by journalists. As I said earlier, we need human resources. When there is no revenue, we cannot invest in content.

Did I answer your question?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It says here that Canadian Heritage is the main funder of APF, so what are your administration fees, what is your readership, and how many papers do you have?

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Sonier: Our weekly circulation is approximately 200,000 copies. There are several readers for each copy, specifically about three readers per copy.

Our administration budget is \$357,000.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Are you high on administration, or do you actually have feet on the ground doing the work?

Mr. Francis Sonier: We have feet on the ground.

The Chair: You've answered that quickly—feet on the ground—good. Thank you very much.

We move to the next one, Mr. Nantel, for the NDP.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you. I would like to thank all the witnesses for joining us today.

All committee members have received calls. The media are very interested in the study. I have been a member of this committee for four and a half years and I have never seen such excitement over a subject. I think that people feel this is their chance to speak. I commend you all for participating in this work. I hope to have the opportunity to ask Mr. Sonier to talk some more about the solutions he wanted to present and what he would like to see in the report.

Let me talk a bit about the situation of a newspaper like *L'Aurore boréale* in Yukon. This paper is in a desert, in terms of Internet service. It is located in a remote region and of little interest to advertisers. A car dealer is certainly not selling 25 cars a week there. Moreover, the paper is in a minority situation in both French and English. Regional and traditional print media outside of major centres are facing an environment where advertisers are less interested in traditional media than in the past. This is the source of the problem. There are traditional issues and new issues in Canada. We seek to nurture these two cultures, two languages. This shortage of government advertising that affects you all is paradoxical.

Mr. Forgues, you said earlier that the CRTC asked you to acquire a telecommunications system that cost you nearly \$10,000 for each of the stations to broadcast emergency, disaster, public radio and service messages. The government asks you to make an investment but no longer buys advertising from you. It tells you that your radio provides essential services, but it does not give you money every week to supplement your budget. However, the transmitter has to work and you have to pay \$10,000. It is a bit of a paradox.

There is the notion of reaching a particular audience. This is a niche service, and it is hard to sell advertising in that context.

Would you find it useful for the committee to receive people involved in media placement so they could tell us about the choices they make with their clients? We heard several accounts about publications that are doing well and have excellent readership. They are selling a lot less advertising, as if suddenly it became worthless to advertise anywhere other than the Internet.

Do you think—I would like to hear your comments and I really want to leave time for Mr. Sonier—that it would be appropriate to receive representatives of major telecommunications companies? One might ask where are the signals that work and where are those that do not work and what are the facts about the Internet. It would also be good to talk about media placement. How do they explain referring clients to all kinds of other options online instead of traditional media?

Ms. Lanthier, I would like to hear your thoughts on the subject.

● (0930)

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Any information that the committee can get to help members understand the media environment will be beneficial for you and for us. That could certainly be useful. It is also important that you understand how ad placement works from a media insider's perspective. That is also very important.

Take a newspaper like *L'Aurore boréale*, a provincial newspaper like *Le Franco* in Edmonton, or a community radio station that broadcasts across the whole province. When you go see the IGA in your city, the manager does not want to buy ads in your media venue

because he wants to reach the people of his small community who shop in his store. The manager is not interested in the rest of the province. It is hard to find a win-win situation when it comes to private markets. That is not always easy.

Understanding precisely how selling advertising works in our reality will enable you to balance the two. You will also need to understand how ad placement works over the Internet. This way you will have a good idea of the whole situation.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Since there is a problem with government disinvestment from advertising, one can well consider that this is a multi-headed monster. Administrative heads will say that they do not want to go in that direction because there is no return in terms of the readership.

Mr. Sonier, I see that you are reacting. You have the floor.

Mr. Francis Sonier: You have opened a door and there are two minutes remaining. I will tell you this.

In 2014, an official from Public Works and Government Services came to our annual general meeting and informed us that it was not up to the agencies to decide, but rather to Public Works and Government Services Canada. That was the substance of our complaint to the Commissioner of Official Languages. The orders come from the top, specifically from the Department of Public Works and Government Services. That is what happened, and we saw our revenues drop. We lost \$1.5 million every year. That is the reality of it. The orders do not come from the agencies. Invite agencies to come before you and they will probably tell you the same thing, namely that the orders come from elsewhere and they are not necessarily the ones who make the decisions on buying ads. When we say that the government targeted television and the Internet, that was a top-level decision.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Is that a political or operational decision?

Mr. Francis Sonier: That is what we understood.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Okay.

Mr. François Côté: We had the same information that the APF did.

Mr. François Côté: I would add that it would be interesting to look into advertising because in almost all countries, the studies that are being published show that online advertising is not working. People are not getting their money's worth. When people see an ad, they close it. Online ads are irritating. Why is the government investing all its money on those ads when it has been proven that advertising in traditional media works and provides a return? That is what I have been wondering.

● (0935)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the other Liberal, Mr. Vandal, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you so much for your excellent presentations.

I will continue with Mr. Sonier.

You mentioned the drop in federal revenues. What is the total amount you are currently receiving from the federal government?

Mr. Francis Sonier: Are you referring to our association members?

Mr. Dan Vandal: Yes, I mean the 22 member newspapers.

Mr. Francis Sonier: Are you talking about the advertising?

Mr. Dan Vandal: No, I am talking about the total amount.

Mr. Francis Sonier: In terms of support programs for newspaper operations, we are talking about \$490,000. For advertising, the amount comes to around \$430,000. I do not have the exact figures.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

What was that first figure?

Mr. Francis Sonier: That was \$490,000 for 2013-14, under the aid to publishers program.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Was that for advertising?

Mr. Francis Sonier: No. That was for operations, for assistance to publishers.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I understand, but what was the sum for advertising?

Mr. Francis Sonier: For advertising, it was about \$430,000.

Mr. Dan Vandal: If we go back, over the last five years, was there a decrease?

Mr. Francis Sonier: Yes. We went from \$1.9 million to around \$430,000.

Mr. Dan Vandal: The MP who spoke before me often mentioned that one impact of digital media is that you are being asked to do more. Can you comment on this?

Mr. Francis Sonier: We can see the impact of digital media.

I have a very effective website and I have not seen any federal advertising either. We therefore need to rely on newspapers, newspaper news sites and radio. We will then target the people. Indeed, these news sites have gained credibility and already reach francophones in the various communities. If the government decides to advertise online, it should do it with fixed amounts; it should pay fixed amounts to post ads on such sites or digital platforms. However, we are not seeing, right now, any of that federal advertising. We are not seeing it at all, even online, and even if that is the directive, we are not seeing it.

Mr. Dan Vandal: For Manitoba, I often see provincial government ads in *La Liberté*.

Mr. Francis Sonier: That being said, I think there has been a decrease there too.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Yes, probably.

Mr. Côté, from the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, I am going to ask you the same question. How much do you receive from the federal government?

Mr. François Côté: For our radio stations, we get nothing. With regard to federal advertising, we received \$110,000 this year. We went from \$750,000 in the year H1N1 hit to \$100,000 today for 27 radio stations. You can do the math. That is not much.

Mr. Dan Vandal: You went from receiving \$750,000 to \$100,000. That has tremendous impacts.

Mr. François Côté: Yes, they are tremendous. A total of \$100,000 for 27 radio stations, that is peanuts.

Mr. Dan Vandal: It is not much.

Mr. François Côté: It pays the power.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

You have clearly described the impact of digital media on radio. Therefore, I will not ask any questions on that topic.

Ms. Lanthier, you mentioned the changes made by the CRTC that affected the CBC. Can you repeat what these changes are? I did not quite grasp it all.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Recently, we appeared before the CRTC because it was looking into concerns about local television, and therefore about local regional stations.

We told the CRTC that regional and local CBC television stations were still very significant players in francophone communities and that these stations were often the only ones available in our communities. We also reported that the CBC's ability to serve our communities in terms of delivering news and non-news programming had greatly decreased. We therefore proposed a local television fund to reinvest in the CBC and in our communities' regional stations.

● (0940)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Did the CRTC make any policy changes that affected you?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: My colleague knows more about that than I do. I will let him answer your question.

Mr. Serge Quinty (Director of Communications, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): When the media crisis hit in the wake of the 2008 recession, the CRTC established the local programming improvement fund, which was financed from a certain percentage of cable companies' revenues. The purpose of this fund was to strengthen the local programming of television stations, and CBC received some of this funding as well. In 2012-13, the CRTC decided to eliminate the fund, which has resulted in the disappearance of almost all non-news programming, including youth, cultural, and variety programming.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Time is short. There is so much information. There is only about a minute and a half remaining.

Ms. Lanthier, do you have any suggestions or solutions to propose?

I will give you the last word. What can this committee do to improve the situation in francophone minority communities?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: It is very important for us that members of our communities have access to information that resonates with them, that is, that reflects their reality and is channelled through community media venues that are there to serve them. However, community media organizations have financial problems and sometimes have to close down.

In the past, federal support has always helped the media to at least stay afloat. We believe it is important that the federal government reinvest in our community media organizations to ensure that they can continue to produce content and to help them make the digital shift they want to make, but without losing their funding and their current capacity to fulfill their mandate.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Congratulations, Mr. Vandal, we covered a lot in that time.

We now have another group coming in, so thank you for your presentations, witnesses. It was interesting.

Thank you, colleagues, for your questions.

• (0940)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (0945)

The Chair: Shall we begin?

Good morning, everyone. I'm afraid that you only have nine minutes for presentations, witnesses, or we're not going to be able to finish our time. I'll give each of you nine minutes for your presentation, and then we will have a question and answer period where my colleagues in the room here, the MPs, will ask you questions for seven minutes. I would like to ask you to be as concise as possible so we can have an interactive piece here. Thank you very much.

Now I will begin with Quebec Community Newspapers Association, and Richard Tardif.

Mr. Tardif.

Mr. Richard Tardif (Executive Director, Quebec Community Newspapers Association): Thank you very much, honourable members, my colleagues who presented before me, and my colleagues at the table around me. Thank you for inviting the Quebec Community Newspapers Association to these very important proceedings.

Quickly, our English and bilingual publications—we have 30—are independent of any corporate influence and are distributed to 770,000 citizens across the province of Quebec. Our numbers also tell us that eight out of 10 residents read their community newspaper—that's not too bad. We exist to serve this community. We are funded by Canadian Heritage for one-third of our revenue. The rest comes from our classified advertising, display advertising, and sponsorships for annual galas.

Let me get right to the point. The popular mantra among newspaper publishers in the last 20 years has been that a perfect storm has occurred. Unforeseen consequences have led readers to abandon newspapers for quicker news online, thus dragging our legacy advertisers away from a so-called dying media. This was in the chase for customers, and they moved, presumably, to find these customers online.

In reality, in the last 30 years, corporations disguising themselves as newspaper chains scooped up our once independent newspapers. This is referred to as media consolidation or media convergence.

These corporations owe allegiance to shareholders and less and less to readers, all the while steadily cutting back on journalists' resources, column width, and line rates and shutting down their newspapers. Then, in an attempt to generate profit, they turned over and devalued their most valuable resource asset, content, by providing journalism and everything else free online. They simply gave it away. I would know. I was a journalist in that time. I had a bird's-eye view. I believe these were called unintended consequences.

By consolidating, the corporate hope was to attract advertisers to online news platforms, but as it turns out, the method of click per thousand across the Internet generated a few cents of revenue. In the end, it was an insurmountable disaster, with no turning back for them.

Did you know that for every dollar generated in online revenue, seven dollars were lost in print? That's a big gap. How do you pay the bills? Well, you have a hard time doing that, as a lot of my colleagues have suggested.

Let's just look back a little bit. I put it before the committee. The Royal Commission on Newspapers in 1981 included in its recommendations: one, prohibitions on further concentration of media ownership; two, tax incentives for wider media ownership; and three, tax breaks to newspapers that devoted more space to local news coverage. For whatever reason, the committee recommendations were not put in place or were ignored, so as a result, the 150-year-old *The Gleaner*, serving an English minority in Huntingdon, Quebec, closed. *The Chronicle*, an English newspaper, where I published in my career, closed in December, along with *The Westmount Examiner*. They were all minority newspapers, all QCNA newspapers, all whittled down to a skeleton of their former pride, all shut down by their corporate owners, one corporation, TC Media, last year, in 2015. This consequence of media concentration, less control by owners, repeats itself on a monthly basis across this country—newspapers that are irreplaceable.

This paradigm change that we're undergoing today has killed interest in many metro dailies, but not so in our local weeklies. Although there's very little in a daily that a reader has not already seen or heard on their phone, tablet, computer, television, or radio, this is not so with community weeklies. Dailies write about breaking news, which has already broken: the stock market, which followers now have instantaneously; sports, where results are pinged as they happen; or even obituaries, where funeral websites are in everyone's bookmarks. What is left for them to report?

On the other hand, community weeklies cover local and often isolated communities that are too small to be covered elsewhere, such as what happens in Hampstead, Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Aylmer, Mont Saint-Sauveur, Whitehorse, or St. Boniface, Manitoba, where local city councils are not reported on or followed elsewhere. It is the same for amateur and high school sports. People care more about things that happen in their local community.

Then there are the opinions of editors, local politicians, and citizens. Local community papers have a unique understanding, perspective, and sense of community, which a daily or large corporation can never have. For example, we know Mrs. Wilson, who's been teaching at the school for 25 years and just retired, or Mr. Grant, who served his country with distinction in two wars. We know who is on his way to the NHL, even though he is nine years old. The hyper-local content and community reflection offered in community weeklies are not replicated anywhere else.

• (0950)

Honourable members of this committee, this is a treasure to be protected, yes?

Isolation is the problem our weeklies address. We reach minority citizens and break isolation in a way no other media can, so I urge federal agencies to use community papers to communicate with minority citizens, because, as I stated, we are here to serve our English-speaking communities.

Since we've lost classifieds to the Internet and we have lost many other ads to Facebook and Google, the government should at least have an interest in maintaining a fraction of their commitment to community weeklies. The QCNA—as with most newspaper associations—has seen a decline of 98% in federal advertising since 2010, yet in 2015 Elections Canada used QCNA papers to reach its minority population in Quebec, as well as across the country.

In 2010 during the H1N1 crisis, we delivered, as did my colleagues. The talk among some of my colleagues is whether we need to have a crisis to get your attention. We didn't deliver on Canada's economic action plan because we didn't have the opportunity. However, reaching citizens, for the most part, failed after it was reported in 2003 that adult Canadians were not going to the economic action plan website. I have to say, there's a difference between honouring government commitment and actually reaching the citizens it serves.

I have a few words about the CBC to follow up on some of my colleagues from this morning. There's quite a bit of money heading in that direction, and I think a fraction, 1%, for minority community newspapers would be great. We have often talked with our colleagues, the Association de la presse francophone, about collaborating and developing something. If it is going to be web advertising—and no one's saying we cannot try—we have to have some sort of other formula and some sort of forward funding and support to get there.

We have proven citizenship, readership, and engagement of the community. Any plan that comes our way will be money well spent. We believe that television and social media is one way to go, and newspapers are a way to go. Why can't we collaborate with all three? We call it bundling, and it makes sense.

I have one last note. Our national association, Newspapers Canada, is embarking on a new centralized sale model of representation, one that actually excludes associations representing Canada's official languages. Who then represents our language newspapers and their citizens, or is the question moving towards when we fade away? Well, that seems to be the choice.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present to members today. I do look forward to all of your questions.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tardif.

Monsieur La Rose, from Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, you have nine minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean La Rose (Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network): Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I am Jean La Rose, the Chief Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. I am an Abenakis citizen from the Odanak First Nation. With me today is Joel Fortune, our legal advisor on broadcasting regulatory matters.

[*English*]

The purpose of this committee's investigation, we believe, is to better understand how Canadians are informed about local and regional experiences through their news media, and the consequences of news media concentration and new digital media on local news reporting.

APTN is a national Canadian television network. We broadcast programming in English, in French, and in aboriginal languages. While we have broadcast in 32 of the 52 aboriginal languages over the years, we broadcast in at least 15 different languages every year.

APTN is a real success story for aboriginal peoples. Before the launch of APTN in 1999, there was very little, in fact almost no aboriginal reflection on Canadian television. When we looked at this issue before we launched APTN, one young person commented that he saw more aliens on TV than aboriginal people. APTN's role is to address this problem. Our main mission, as described in our most recent CRTC licence renewal, is to provide programming that reflects the lives, cultures, and diverse perspectives of aboriginal peoples, as well as a positive window on aboriginal life for all Canadians. We describe the mission a little more succinctly as “sharing our Peoples’ journey, celebrating our cultures, inspiring our children and honouring the wisdom of our Elders.”

We are licensed by the CRTC and distributed on cable and satellite throughout Canada as a basic-level service. APTN is included in the new skinny basic package that you have undoubtedly heard of. APTN is not funded—and I emphasize the “not funded”—by government sources in any way that is different from other broadcasters. We derive our revenue from the wholesale fees paid to us by cable and satellite distributors, and to a lesser extent, from advertising. APTN does access some of the production funds available to other broadcasters, but not the local programming improvement fund, LPIF. APTN is a non-profit, charitable organization, so all of our revenue goes to support our programming and mandate.

At APTN, we are deeply engaged in producing and broadcasting news programming. We have approximately 60 staff in our news and information programming department, and these staff are located throughout Canada in 14 cities and remote areas. APTN is a national network, but in many ways we play the same role for aboriginal peoples that local television plays for Canadians in communities with local TV. Aboriginal peoples tune in to APTN to see news stories that reflect their day-to-day lives and other broader stories that impact them directly.

Just to give you a better sense of our news coverage, for example, we provided here a series of stories from last Thursday, March 3, for you to read. Given the time I won't read them all, but it gives you an idea of how we balance local, regional, and national news in our news content every day. The stories are wide-ranging, topical, and reflect aboriginal concerns and perspectives at the local, regional, and national levels.

I want to point out as well that if you were to watch our newscasts, from time to time you might see footage from a journalist from CTV feeding a story to APTN, and vice versa. APTN tries to work closely with other broadcasters to expand our news capabilities, and hopefully theirs too, to get our stories out.

In addition to our daily newscasts, we also provide regular, in-depth public affairs programming, which includes *InFocus*, with our host Cheryl McKenzie; *APTN Investigates*, featuring investigative journalists looking deeply into aboriginal issues; *Face to Face*, an interview program featuring people in the headlines and those with direct experience facing various issues of concern to indigenous people; and *Nation to Nation*, APTN's national political program from Ottawa. I'm sure some of you have had the opportunity to be on *Nation to Nation*, hosted by Nigel Newlove. Finally there's *The Laughing Drum*, which is a panel program looking at current indigenous issues from a grassroots perspective. The panelists include well-known aboriginal comedians Candy Palmater and Jerry Barrett. This show looks at serious issues, but in a very down-to-earth way.

• (1000)

All of these programs, including the national news, are available on APTN's website and can be watched on virtually any digital platform. You can see that APTN offers deep and wide-ranging news coverage for aboriginal peoples, and for all Canadians who want to know us better.

As former prime minister Paul Martin once wrote that he was often asked by senior industry leaders in Canada what aboriginal people wanted. He had but one answer for them, "watch APTN and you will understand".

In a similar vein, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognized the important role that APTN plays as a vital communications link between aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians. The TRC states this in its final report, and I will read recommendation number 85:

We call upon the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, as an independent non-profit broadcaster with programming by, for, and about Aboriginal Peoples, to support reconciliation, including but not limited to:

- i. Continuing to provide leadership in programming and organizational culture that reflects the diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples.
- ii. Continuing to develop media initiatives that inform and educate the Canadian public, and connect Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

[Translation]

We at APTN are grateful and encouraged by this kind of recognition and support. We are also daunted by the responsibility we have to reflect the true nature of aboriginal peoples to the best of our abilities.

The committee is looking into the current state of local news in Canada. For aboriginal peoples, APTN really is the same thing as their local television news. However, you can see that we are much more than that. In some ways, we act as a window for all Canadians to see into the lives of indigenous peoples.

Looking at the state of broadcasting as a business, APTN is fortunate because we are not dependent solely on advertising revenue. Subscription revenue paid by cable and satellite providers, which is regulated by the CRTC, has provided us with relative stability over the past few years. For that, we are very grateful, and we are aware of our responsibilities.

Furthermore, APTN has access to the Canada Media Fund (CMF), in a limited way, to help fund programming and to a small fund under Canadian Heritage, the aboriginal languages initiative (ALI), to help fund some programming in aboriginal languages. However, given our mandate from a programming and news perspective, these funds are not sufficient to meet the wide expectations of our peoples and of Canadians who have been tuning us in in growing numbers over the years.

[English]

We are well aware that the communications industry is facing a shift in how people view media and how the business model works. This is why we are aggressively pursuing all media platforms that we can with our content.

It must be emphasized that the revenue generated from television supports almost all of the content we produce. Without APTN on TV—which remains highly relevant to our viewers—I don't think there would be anywhere near the amount of professional, high-quality audiovisual news content available to Canadians about indigenous peoples as is currently available. No matter the media on which it is aired, content is what audiences want, and to date, television remains the industry that provides the lion's share of content.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our perspective to this committee of the Commons.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur La Rose.

Now we have the Canadian Media Guild and Ms. Smyth.

Ms. Carmel Smyth (President, Canadian Media Guild): Thank you.

Madam Chair, vice-chairs, members of the committee, thank you for giving us the opportunity to appear. We appreciate your interest in this very important subject.

I would just like to take a minute to recognize International Women's Day, and to say how nice it is to see women on committees of this sort.

To Ms. Fry, a long-time role model for women in politics and leadership, thank you.

My name is Carmel Smyth. I'm a long-time television reporter, at the moment released to be president of the Canadian Media Guild, a union that represents 6,000 people working at about a dozen media organizations in Canada, from CBC/Radio-Canada, Canadian Press, Thomson Reuters, APTN, Shaw Media, and ZoomerMedia, including freelance workers and people who work in factual television. Factual or reality television employs probably 2,000 or 3,000 people across Canada. These are the people who create the news and the content you watch every day.

As you are aware from my colleagues, from the gentlemen we heard before us, it seems as though every second week a newspaper closes in Canada. Recently in Ottawa, amazingly the Sun and the Ottawa Citizen newsrooms merged, which will obviously significantly impact the coverage on the Hill. You'll see that in a personal way I'm sure, unfortunately.

In Alberta, the Calgary Sun and the Calgary Herald were once proud competitors. Now the two papers will be produced by the same staff. That's amazing in a city of a million and a half people.

We at the CMG have been sounding the alarm about this crisis in local news for many years. We know the devastating impact that funding and staffing cuts are having and continue to have on reporters' ability to cover or investigate stories and to deliver the reporting that Canadians rely on to fully participate in a democracy. Our own research shows that since 2008, in the media, 16,000 jobs have been lost, and the actual numbers are probably far higher. Needless to say, this situation is having real consequences on journalism in Canada as well as on the people who work in the media industry and—as you're hearing today—on their communities.

[Translation]

Ms. Jeanne d'Arc Umurungi (Communications Director, Canadian Media Guild): The situation is even more dire when we look to the future. Indeed, according to a recent study that the Canadian Media Guild participated in, 15,000 Canadian jobs will be lost and \$1.4 billion may be removed from the economy by 2020 as a result of the changes made by the CRTC as part of its "Let's Talk TV" study.

[English]

According to a CRTC survey, more than 80% of Canadians value local news, yet, increasingly, many find themselves without local coverage. Media workers as well as other Canadians are experiencing the crisis first-hand. For example, Saskatchewan resident Marc Spooner wrote the following just last year:

Indeed, there is a budgetary breaking point in any organization—however efficient and exemplary—when it can simply no longer “do more with less”; when no amount of duct tape, patch work, or employees’ giving “110%” can keep it running as it should, as we remember it, as we desperately need it to be in a healthy democracy...

Sadly, we have reached that point in my home province of Saskatchewan. Our province, in the last few months, now has the dubious distinction of having not

one reporter assigned on a full-time basis to cover provincial politics for our entire province; not one reporter, from either private or public news outlets now covers provincial Legislative politics on a full-time basis....

Clearly, our fragile democratic health is in peril when not even our public broadcaster has the will and resources to cover the politics of the day on a dedicated, full-time basis....

Of course, we can appreciate that in the ever-changing media world new initiatives such as the digital-first news service, and other such trends and modifications to media format and delivery method cannot be overlooked. However, it is at precisely such a time when we need our public broadcaster to keep its mission...firmly in mind; to not simply follow current trends, but rather to aim higher with purpose, vision, and the greater good in mind.

Tweets and press releases simply won't do in a democracy. In fact, in our hurried, digital world, we need news agencies to shed more light and transparency, not less, on our democratic governance; we need more substance, more context, and more credible political analysis.

Dedicated, full-time reporters are best positioned to research stories, provide in-depth coverage from multiple perspectives, and get as complete a backstory and picture as possible. In fact, transparency, accountability, and participation are the very foundation upon which rest our democracy itself."

I'm just going to give you another example from one media worker in Nova Scotia:

If someone locally is being taken advantage of, or is not being treated right by their government, there may be no one who will tell that story because you just don't get as much coverage....

Is your politician representing your interests or his own [or her own]? That's as important to know in our communities as it is on Parliament Hill.

● (1010)

Ms. Carmel Smyth: It's also important to remember that news gathering at the local level can often uncover stories that take on national significance, and I would say this happens frequently. In my own personal example, as a young reporter in Saskatchewan I was doing a story with young hemophiliacs and how difficult it was to deal with their condition. Throughout the course of the discussions, they revealed that many of them were HIV positive because of their frequent use of blood products. At the time that was shocking; we didn't know then how HIV was transmitted. But in any case, I like to think that the early attention, often discovered at the local level, could have significant impact on the lives of Canadians.

Here's another example many of you will probably be more aware of. When the *Ocean Ranger*, the largest floating oil rig in the world, sank in 1982 off the coast of Newfoundland, the impact on the local community was devastating. Fifty-six of the people who died were Newfoundlanders. But long after the national media left, the local newsroom assigned someone to cover the hearings permanently on an ongoing basis, and we think it's clear that the royal commission's 66 recommendations were implemented afterwards as a result of that continued coverage, again, by local media.

These are just some examples of how important it is for the media to have feet on the ground. Time and time again, intriguing stories are uncovered because people, as my colleagues have said, come to know and to trust local reporters.

The crisis is not only around decreased coverage, but also in the trends that undermine the quality of information. Industry research shows that in digital news coverage, the overlap between public relations and news is increasingly pronounced. For example, branded content or advertorials are increasingly common, and journalists are often required and pressured to present this content, which obviously makes advertisements look like news stories.

Because of the time I'm just going to skip quickly to some of the things that we think could help resolve some of these issues, one, predominantly, is the role of CBC/Radio-Canada.

It's a leader because it serves in 54 communities, in French, English, and aboriginal languages. It's the largest news organization in the country, and we know that it is popular and trusted by Canadians. Yet it's been crippled by devastating cuts impacting, obviously, local news, programming, and original Canadian production. There are 3,000 fewer workers at the CBC since 2006. You're seeing more repeats on television, less original news, less connection in the community. We would like to think that a solution could be following a recommendation of a 2008 heritage committee report—Ms. Fry, you'll be aware of that—recommending that CBC funding be increased to \$40 per capita. We think the time has long come for that, and it would help go some ways towards alleviating the current local news media crisis.

Other public service media such as provincial broadcasters TVO and TFO in Ontario, Télé-Québec, and Knowledge Network in British Columbia also make a vital contribution to the media environment. Yet they too are drastically affected by funding cuts and need to be restored.

APTN, the only aboriginal network in North America, deserves special consideration for its unique role in the system. CMG supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendation that recognizes APTN as a leader in indigenous programming and its key role in education.

To support local news as well, we are urging the CRTC to establish a public service media fund that could be accessed by all local news services on any platform—provincial education broadcasters, APTN, private networks, the CBC, the public broadcaster—to do local news. That fund could come from a small per cent of the profits large cable and satellite companies make from the system. We, like many others, continue to recommend that the funds should also come from Internet service providers.

The Chair: Ms. Smyth, I'm sorry. Thank you very much.

We will get to our questioning with Mr. O'Regan, for the Liberals.

• (1015)

Mr. Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): You mentioned the *Ocean Ranger*. That hearing took place in a church hall off my backyard when I was growing up in St. John's, and the reporters there were willing, and able, more to the point, to dedicate a certain amount of time. Quite rightly, as you mentioned earlier about parliaments and parliamentary business, without having a dedicated reporter in those fields, if they are here—and even that's waning—you're unable to build the contacts that you need. Anyway, I think I'm talking to several veterans of the media war here, so we all know about the limitations.

Let me take some of my time here to allow you, Ms. Smyth, to continue on with some of those solutions that I think you probably have, and I'm sure that you've heard from your membership.

Ms. Carmel Smyth: Thank you, that was very nice of you.

Now on funding, and Mr. La Rose referred to it earlier, there had previously been a fund—the local program improvement fund—that provided money for original Canadian productions, and that fund worked very well. It's been discontinued for various reasons, but I think the consensus among the users is that it worked well.

We think a similar kind of fund could be established now for anyone willing to do local news. We would hope that would be professional organizations of varying sorts, if they're willing to work in the community where lots of statistics show you can't make a profit, that it's not profitable. Unless there's an incentive, we see decreasing service. So why wouldn't we have the cable companies who make millions, billions of dollars off a public good, the spectrum, the airways, if you will, that belong to all Canadians.... If they're making millions of dollars off that why wouldn't they pay a small fee to help support and make the industry healthy? We would ask that this could include support for local news.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. La Rose, I wanted to ask you about APTN. I've watched APTN frequently as somebody who is distinctly interested in aboriginal issues, and I've often wondered about how much pressure there is on you. You represent such a wide variety of nations right across the country in so many different regions. Not only that, but in many isolated regions. I know somebody who worked in national news. Their ability to tell those stories in Canada's north and other isolated areas was significantly hampered by costs. We simply couldn't get up there. It was very difficult to do that. What do you see as your mandate to represent those voices, and how are you able to do it?

Mr. Jean La Rose: Obviously we're not fully able to do it, especially with the travel costs in the north, which are horrendous. We do have bureaus in the three territorial capitals: Whitehorse, Yellowknife, and Iqaluit. From there we send our staff to cover stories in remote localities. When something major happens we can't obviously cover the local to the extent that we wish.

We have started a test pilot over the last two years. We are closing some of our physical locations. For example we closed the Toronto bureau, and the money we saved from paying for infrastructure for a building, for all the services, has allowed us to send VJs, video journalists, into two more cities. We now are covering three cities instead of one, and that's avoided some of those travel costs. We're looking at maybe expanding that to other regions. We've also closed the Edmonton bureau to allow us to have a VJ in Calgary and Edmonton, and we will be replicating that throughout the country to the extent that our resources permit.

The pressures on the network are huge with 633 first nations, 400 or 500 Métis settlements; add to that also the remote Inuit communities. Everyone wants their stories to be told, and they have a full right to demand it. We don't have the resources to fill that demand, but at the same time I think there is a recognition by our audience that what we are doing is the limit of what we can do, and as resources have become available and we've been able to expand a bit in those areas I think the support that we're getting from our communities has been growing.

The one area that we would like to devote more resources to over time will be aboriginal languages. As we know many of our languages are at risk of disappearing, and we're trying to really push the opportunity to expand language programming to more than the 15 that we can usually manage every year. As well over time we would like to be able to offer some of our news coverage in languages as well with possibly English subtitles, but that will mean training more people with a lot of time and effort and resources devoted to creating a whole new generation of language speakers who can also report for us. Often our biggest challenge right now is to find the staff for a lot of the positions we have.

• (1020)

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: I want to ask you about your ability to Skype guests in isolated areas. Obviously that's limited by Internet and the quality of Internet availability in those communities.

Mr. Jean La Rose: Exactly. The challenge we have even in sharing our news stories when we put them online is that anywhere in the north or remote communities they just don't have the bandwidth to be able to download them.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: An increased bandwidth would be essential to those voices being heard.

Mr. Jean La Rose: Absolutely. Increased bandwidth would make an incredible difference in connecting many of those communities, not only to us but to each other. Right now they can't even download a news story that we have unless it's strictly audio.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Thank you.

Mr. Tardif, or Ms. Smyth, maybe I can just quickly go back to you.

Are there any other recommendations that you're hearing from your membership?

You have the 40 seconds that are available, if there's anything you would like to add.

Ms. Carmel Smyth: In your discussions, give a thought to how difficult it is for young journalists trying to get a job. They're in school, they're finished, and their prospect of getting a decent-paying

job with permanent conditions or hours is very low. The work tends to be precarious and low-paid. For all that people think journalists live the glamorous life and make a lot of money, that's just not the reality. Most journalism jobs—newspapers and radio for sure, but even television, especially in small communities—are low-paying. They don't pay that much, you work weekends, you work every holiday, you work shift work constantly—sometimes you can't get off shift work—and then you lose your job and can't get another one, because everywhere you look there is downsizing and there are places closing. It is a significant issue.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: As far as I'm concerned you couldn't have used that 40 seconds more wisely.

Thank you very much, Ms. Smyth.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have Mr. Maguire for the Conservatives.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the presenters here today for your presentations in all three areas.

Mr. Tardif, one of the things that Heritage has indicated to us is that the local community newspapers have been holding their own in readership, mostly, for the last 10 years or so, as compared with the dailies. The Internet may be digitally impacting them more than it does at the community newspaper association level, because—you're right—people associate themselves to those things in their local communities. I come from a small community as well, and the people are attracted by what's going on in their local community at that level. Advertising, then, is maybe more well read on a “per reader” basis than it is in some other areas.

You've indicated that about one-third of your funding comes from the government. How is that judged and how do you see it? Are there incentives put in place for you to look at making changes into digital, or...? Maybe that's open to all of you, but could there be incentives for generating further revenue or for going into areas that you could look at to be more sustainable?

Mr. Richard Tardif: That's a good question. Our local readers are loyal, to answer the first part of your question. That's what keeps our numbers at that level, except when we have three newspapers shut down by corporations. Then we drop in our readership.

For incentives we get zero funding from Quebec, period—zero; there's none. The Canadian Heritage funding we get, which is \$120,121 annually, remains. We've been told by Canadian Heritage that there's no new money but that we're not going to lose the old money.

As for incentives for digital, in our papers we have journalists who use social media. They all have Twitter, they all have Facebook, and our members all have websites. As Carmel has pointed out, they're strapped. They're doing everything. They're called multimedia journalists.

I have ideas about incorporating a digital-made bundle, but I have to worry about the immediate, present situation of retaining English language-writing journalists in Quebec, because if they keep losing money they'll shift, for one thing, to another trade, which is not uncommon, or they'll find work on a daily, which might last them six months but would give them more money, but in the end is the same kind of thing.

I offer for my members a centralized digital offering to advertisers whereby they can use the QCNA website to advertise to all the other members in our network, if my members don't have a digital platform, which none of them has. However, they can advertise. I can offer corporation A \$900 for a full page, but say that if you would like to be in our network we can do it for \$60 more per issue, or whatever. Now, I split that with our members, because we have an operating budget as well, but they have an offering. It is working so-so.

That's the furthest I can go at the moment, because I have no other resources available.

•(1025)

Mr. Larry Maguire: The follow-up question would be, if a third of that funding comes from Canadian Heritage, can you give me a percentage breakdown of how you generate the rest of your revenue? Does it come from advertising or other areas?

Mr. Richard Tardif: Yes. I anticipated that question.

We have a low membership fee. In return for that, we require that each newspaper donate four pages to us. I get to use that member-donated space to advertise our membership in the papers, or I get to use that space for advertising that the QCNA has brought in. That keeps it low.

Also, we have a thing called "blanket classifieds". As you know, classifieds have dramatically declined in the last 20 years, but these classifieds, as part of membership, go from our customers to all in our network, in one shot. It's one clearing house. They send us the classified ad every week, and boom, it goes to our papers. Through arrangement, we take that money for our operating costs.

Federal advertising dropped by 98.5%. This year, it went up with Elections Canada. The year before, it was \$54,000. The year before that, it was \$1,500. I had to adjust my budget four times last year when that came around. There are also sponsorships and advertising in our awards newspaper every year, which is one part of our big gala.

I do have to say that it's becoming increasingly difficult. When I came to the role in 2012, I had a \$700,000 budget. My proposed budget for the new fiscal year coming up is \$385,000. It's the bare minimum. In terms of the cut back to federal advertising, to follow up on this question that we had, we've worked on Public Works and media monitors in government departments, and we've harassed—it's part of our job as salespeople, I guess, to harass—but we've had no luck or success.

Quite frankly, I'm considering what I'm going to do with some of my staff. It's a hard situation.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I wanted to allow my colleague Mr. Waugh to ask a question.

The Chair: You have one minute, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: One minute...? I have to be quick.

I just wanted to say to the APTN that I've been a big fan since 1990. You've come a long way. Thank you for shutting down the bureaus. You only need a bit of room now for a reporter. You've showed that in Saskatoon.

You've come a long way, and I want to say this. The basic level service was supported by the CRTC. You're one of the lucky ones. Each and every Canadian pays for APTN, whether they watch it or not. While we can sit here and point to the CRTC, you're one of the lucky ones.

But what I am going to ask you about is that I only see 28% in aboriginal languages. You've touched on that. You need to do better. How are you going to do it?

Mr. Jean La Rose: Those numbers are set by the CRTC. They are the ones who have set the percentage of English, French, and aboriginal languages.

Every year, in a certain way, we exceed that 28%, because for a lot of the programming that is in languages we will play it on the different channels, and then we even it out to manage to get to that point. But when you look at the northern channel, you will see that about 60% of the programming is in aboriginal languages, and that's the one that reaches into our communities in the north, as well as the more remote areas of central Canada.

I think that as a network we've been doing more, and we want to do even more, but that will need the co-operation of the CRTC and Canadian Heritage. We can't change our conditions of licence. You know that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, for seven minutes, we have Mr. Nantel for the NDP.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also thank the three groups for joining us this morning.

First, I would like to ask Mr. Tardif a question about the situation of the *West Island Chronicle* or the *Westmount Examiner*.

Can we compare the situation of either of those English-language weeklies with that of a French-language minority weekly elsewhere in the country? Are there any parallels we can draw regarding the resources granted to each of these weeklies? Can we do that?

•(1030)

[English]

Mr. Richard Tardif: Yes, I can, and quite elaborately, as a matter of fact. *The West Island Chronicle*, *The Westmount Examiner*, and *The Gleaner* belong to Transcontinental, or TC Media, which operates in part of Ontario and most of Quebec. They presently have 109 francophone newspapers.

The West Island Chronicle is now called *The Chronicle*. I started my career there many years ago. I wrote articles when that paper was like a book every Friday. I was a young reporter learning and I had so much to do. We had so many inserts and so much advertising. Everybody came. Those were my glory days.

That was bought up by TC Media, and I remember in our association that it was down to eight pages, with no advertising.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Do you get the same support as a French comparison in Edmonton or St. Boniface in Winnipeg?

Mr. Richard Tardif: No, I get \$121,000 from Canadian Heritage. I get nothing from the ministry of communications and culture in Quebec, nothing, zero.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Do they receive from the provincial level?

Mr. Richard Tardif: They receive \$40,000 to \$60,000 per media. This is done through TC Media influence. I don't get that support.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I have a simple question for Mr. La Rose.

Obviously, I think that everyone is happy with the high visibility afforded by the presence of APTN in the basic package. In terms of the population you would like to serve, what percentage do you fail to reach for technical deployment reasons, either through cable or via the Internet? In your opinion, what percentage of the people you mentioned are you not reaching?

Mr. Jean La Rose: Currently, there are very few people we are not able to reach. We are part of the basic package offer and, of course, about 97% to 98% of Canadian homes are wired. In this respect, we are able to reach as many people as CBC/Radio-Canada does. Our greatest problems are in our northern communities, when it comes to digital distribution. In the North, there is absolutely no infrastructure like that in southern communities that would allow people to consume news or programming on a digital platform, regardless of our offer. In the North, it is almost impossible to receive those services. We regularly receive complaints about it.

At this time, one of the worst places is probably Nunavut. We have not yet managed to find a way to bring fibre optics into that region of the country. Everything that the population receives is via satellite. Often, when an entire community relies on one or two satellite receivers, there is not enough capacity in what is called the "pipe" to enable everyone to get information, or view movies or anything else. Therefore I would say that about 40% of our population is not getting the same level of service on a digital platform as the rest of Canadians probably do.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Then, 40% of that specific target population, the people we are talking about, has no access to that signal.

Mr. Jean La Rose: That is probably—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That is quite significant.

Mr. Jean La Rose: It is probably up to 40%. If we look at all our communities that are not near urban centres and are in remote areas, they often do not have access to this service.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That is staggering.

Mr. Jean La Rose: It is still necessary to go via satellite. Often, the community cannot afford more than one receiver for all of its

people. Anyway, we all know that the North has an entirely different dynamic.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you for doing a great job.

Ms. Smyth and Ms. Umurungi, I would like to ask you a question.

You mentioned that in the Saskatchewan legislature, there is no regular reporter that covers provincial politics on a full-time basis. That is what you said.

Ms. Carmel Smyth: Yes, that is exactly it.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Personally, I find that absurd.

I am not sure whether any of the committee members tried to see the Oscar-nominated films. Many films co-produced or produced in Canada were in the running. One of the movies that won, other than *The Revenant*, is about the investigation of Catholic priests in Boston and is entitled *Spotlight*. You just spoke about your example concerning an HIV investigation in your home province. This is a really serious situation, and it is sobering to realize that, in Canada, a provincial legislature has no media coverage. Reporters are sent there just as they could be sent elsewhere. Nobody is there to regularly cover the news. You are positive about that.

• (1035)

Ms. Jeanne d'Arc Umurungi: There is no one. A teacher from Saskatchewan wrote that. He even started a petition because of this situation. Nearly 690 people signed the petition at the time. In fact, CBC/Radio-Canada still had someone there, but that position was just recently cut. We realized that no one from the private sector had ever been assigned to this work and that the only person who covered the news was a CBC/Radio-Canada reporter, whose position had been eliminated.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: One position, meaning 100%.

Ms. Smyth, would you like to say anything else on the subject?

[English]

Ms. Carmel Smyth: Can I add to that? Regina is not that small a city. Let's be honest. As I look around, you are all from different provinces with cities of varying sizes often significantly smaller than Regina. If that's happening in Regina it's going to happen where you're from. It's going to happen in hundreds of Canadian cities that are smaller than Regina. It's happening everywhere. I'd like to make a plug that the solution is not moving everything online because it's cheaper. This idea that we can have news online—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: But content is content.

Ms. Carmel Smyth: —and it won't cost as much as television, let's go there; but that's not really the problem. There's incredible information online. But if you don't like what the press writes about you now, how are you going to like it when they're getting that information from bloggers, for example, or from your neighbour next door, or from the guy up the street who saw you leaving the house doing whatever? That's what it is online. It's absolutely unfiltered.

The issue is that you have to have professional journalists who are accountable, who have integrity, who have training to provide news that you can trust. That's the issue, and that has a cost.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Of course.

Ms. Carmel Smyth: It doesn't matter if you're watching it on television. People will say that no one's watching television, but that's not the point. You have to pay to have quality news that you can trust and rely on.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Up until now, advertising has paid for that.

Ms. Carmel Smyth: That's right.

The Chair: Your seven minutes are up, Monsieur Nantel.

Monsieur Breton and Ms. Dabrusin for the Liberals will be sharing their time. They will have three and a half minutes each.

Monsieur Breton.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I am truly pleased with the presentations made today.

I will be quick because I only have three and a half minutes.

Ms. Umurungi, you mentioned earlier that we will have 15,000 fewer journalists by 2020. This is a rather striking and major announcement.

Ms. Jeanne d'Arc Umurungi: To be accurate, that is 15,000 workers in Canada. Specifically, that means 7,000 media workers and 15,000 workers if we include all connected industries and other jobs.

●(1040)

Mr. Pierre Breton: Very well. In my view, that is major.

The digital space continues to grow. Obviously, we cannot do anything about that for the time being. There is a lot of practical information available on the various social media platforms, but you, the media workers, are the ones who produce the news. You cover events.

In my region, our local media venues are important. They have deep roots in our community. They are community partners. Who will produce our news in the future? Who will cover our events? Who will make sure these regional communities do not become isolated? I am simply asking the question.

Ms. Jeanne d'Arc Umurungi: Those are very important questions. That is what worries us as well, and that is why we are discussing it. That is why we went before the CRTC to talk about the public service media fund that our president mentioned earlier.

For us, that fund would be financed by 1% of the profits of cable and satellite companies. We went before the CRTC recently to talk about television, but we also said that this must apply to all platforms. For us, that is very important. We also said that the money would not come just from cable companies. Indeed, the large companies that provide Internet services are among those raking in enormous profits from all these changes that we are talking about and that affect us—changes that are of benefit to us too, to some extent.

At this time, they cannot contribute to such funds because they are not supposed to be content distributors. However, in actual fact, they are. I hope that you will have the opportunity to look at the revenue growth curve in this area. You will see what part is super-profitable right now. When I watch videos on my phone or at home, or especially when my daughter does, that is Rogers. That is where revenues are growing and these companies are not contributing.

It is true that the legislation does not allow it at this time, but someone will have to see how these people can contribute, because that was how we were able to finance Canadian content and the production of news and other things in Canada at a time when those companies were not there yet. They are there now and they are benefiting. There should be a way to make them participate in our broadcasting system.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Thank you.

Ms. Smyth, I want to thank you for flagging International Women's Day. My first question is for you.

When we're looking at media consolidation and the changes that are happening in the media industry, do you have information on any changes in the number of women in leadership positions or in the number of women working as journalists or in the media industry?

Ms. Carmel Smyth: Sure. That's a very good question, and there's some very positive...and I guess maybe not as much progress. You won't be surprised.

In a general newsroom—I'll give the CBC as an example because I worked there for many years and because, as a crown corporation, it tracks gender parity amongst its staff—it's 50%, 53% or 47%. On the main floor there is equality. Because we have a union that is very strong, there's equality of pay, and it's something we monitor. That's at CBC.

In the private companies, it isn't tracked as strictly, I don't believe, but I also think it's pretty much equal, because in any newsroom—Seamus could talk about it—there's pretty much an equal male to female ratio, right?

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: Yes.

Ms. Carmel Smyth: It's a job where it doesn't matter. Gender isn't an issue. But I will say—and maybe, Seamus, you could weigh in—at the very senior levels it's still overwhelmingly male. Once you get to the VPs, the directors, the presidents, and the money people at the top, it's still unusual to find women.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan: If I could just add briefly, Wendy Freeman is the president of CTV News, and has been for quite some time. She is a very able president, I may add. But, yes, I think overall in the broadcast industry, just stepping outside of news, but looking overall at the people who make the decisions, I think it's still—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Dabrusin, you're down to just one and a half minutes.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Thank you.

Just as far as trends go, though, when we're talking about media consolidation changes, have there been any changes that have been happening or is it pretty much static?

Ms. Carmel Smyth: No, it's worse. Many years ago, maybe in the 2008 heritage committee, concentration of media was flagged as a problem. It's a huge problem. Do you want just one person's opinion in the newspapers in a whole province? I mean, there is something to be said for having a more left, a central, and a right version when you have many players who influence opinion. In the end, having one view—and that's where we're heading—means that it's the opinion that you'll have in that province. It's scary. It's just not right.

Ms. Jeanne d'Arc Umurungi: If I may just add, concentration of media most of the time happened where I think there was always an idea that there would be public interest served, and what we've seen is that we're just losing. They're cutting, losing jobs, losing programming, and losing obviously all kinds of outlets. It hasn't

really served that part of the bargain well, and I think that has to be reviewed.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: It is a problem.

The other question I had is that you talked about opportunities for new—

The Chair: Ms. Dabrusin, I'm sorry. You don't have time for one more question.

I will remind members that when one person is asking questions, it's not a free-for-all. You're not allowed to jump in. You just have to let that person have their time.

Thank you.

I want to thank the panel, the witnesses, for coming, for sharing with us, and for answering the questions.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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