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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.)): Hello, everybody. Thanks for joining us. Sorry for the technical difficulties at the beginning.

Now that we have everybody, I'm going to start by saying that we are now doing our pre-study on the subject matter of Bill C-10, which is currently in the House of Commons where second reading debate has begun. We are going to consider all themes and elements from Bill C-10 throughout this study. This is our first day of the study.

Before we start, I want to say that there have been some issues with simultaneous interpretation noted in other committees last week. Should any of you encounter a problem, please flag it immediately by raising your hand or saying something to the effect that you cannot get the interpretation. Please do not yell into your microphone if you're not getting interpretation; just repeat the words "excuse me" or whatever. We need to be sensitive to our interpreters. As you can well imagine, they have large earphones and, of course, it can be very loud when you shout into your microphone.

There is only one other stipulation about interpretation. If you do not have a headset with a microphone.... Let's say that you're using the Apple headset, where there's a cord with a microphone on it. Please place the microphone close to your mouth. That way, interpretation is able to hear you. We really appreciate this.

We're a little bit behind, so let's get started.

On the subject matter of Bill C-10, we have, to start, three groups with us in the first hour.

From the Association québécoise de la production médiatique, we have Hélène Messier, president and chief executive officer. From the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, we have Martin Thériault, president; and Marie-Christine Morin, executive director. Finally, from the Quebec English-language Production Council, we have Darius Bossé, a lawyer with Power Law; Kenneth Hirsch, co-chair; and Eva Ludvig, member of the board of directors of the Quebec Community Groups Network.

Thank you, one and all.

We're going to start with Madame Messier.

[Translation]

Ms. Messier, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Ms. Hélène Messier (President and Chief Executive Officer, Association québécoise de la production médiatique): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, the Association québécoise de la production médiatique, or AQPM, advises, represents and accompanies more than 160 independent film, television and web production corporations in Quebec. Thank you for inviting me here as the work on Bill C-10 begins.

In 2018-2019, Quebec's independent production companies generated a volume of \$875 million in producing feature-length movies, television programs and web content, thereby creating the equivalent of more than 16,000 full-time jobs.

For more than 50 years, Quebec's independent producers have been able to provide audiences at home and abroad with original content in French and English. This is because of the determination of a few pioneers like Graham Spry and Alan Plaunt. Their work resulted in the Aird Commission, whose 1929 report led to the passage of the first version of the Broadcasting Act in 1932.

The government thereby recognized that it was essential to strengthen national identity and to affirm Canada's cultural sovereignty by providing local programming to Canadians who, at the time, were overwhelmed by radio programs produced by American stations. Those are the principles that led to the adoption of the first version of the Broadcasting Act and it seems important to me to recall them as the preliminary study of Bill C-10 begins.

This bill represents the first major reform to the Broadcasting Act since the one in 1991. It seeks to integrate online transmission services, both Canadian and foreign, into the regulatory framework so that they can all play a role in funding and promoting our national content. It also seeks to give the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, the power it needs to ensure that the rules are followed by these new players. The AQPM is delighted with this historic step forward.

Since the first act in 1932, the landscape has changed greatly, with the arrival of our public broadcaster, with the creation of institutions such as the National Film Board, the NFB, Telefilm Canada, the Canada Media Fund and the establishment of fiscal and financial measures to support the Canadian audiovisual industry. The industry now has reached an annual production volume in excess of \$9 billion. This substantial figure seems to show that the industry is doing well, but it hides a troubling reality. In fact, 52% of the audiovisual content produced in Canada is not Canadian. It is made in Canada by foreign companies.

The rest of the production volume is divided between the broadcasters' internal production, at 13%, which includes sports, news or public affairs, and independent production, which comes to 35% of the total. So, independent Canadian content, which alone ensures the diversity of television broadcasts or feature films, represents only a little more than one third of the production in Canada each year. Can there be any question about the need to better support the creation, production, distribution and promotion of Canadian content?

The AQPM sees that urgent action is needed. Traditional sources of funding are declining, as are the production budgets for original content in French. The whole ecosystem must be overhauled so that production companies can develop, our creative resources can be fully deployed, and our cultural identity can live on. In addition, mass media like cinema, television and music are essential for protecting French and the indigenous languages.

However, Bill C-10 lacks some fundamental items, particularly in terms of adequate protection for original content in French, for Canadian talent, and for the intellectual property of Canadian production companies. Canadian content means ensuring that the bill focuses squarely on Canadian creators, that the content belongs to Canadian companies and that original content in French has a major place.

Bill C-10 excludes some critical players in the new media reality, such as social media, online distribution companies and the companies that provide Internet and cell phone service.

The task of implementing Canadian broadcasting policy rests with the CRTC. It is therefore the guardian of the objectives set out in clause 3 of the bill and in translating them to the requirements to be imposed on broadcasting companies. This fundamental role must be set within a serious framework provided by the government, something that is lacking in the current bill.

• (1110)

The Minister of Canadian Heritage would like the bill to put an end to the lack of regulatory symmetry between traditional broadcasters and online undertakings. Bill C-10 provides for fair and equitable treatment for the broadcasting companies that provide services of a similar nature. The AQPM is afraid that traditional broadcasters may see that as an opportunity to decrease their existing obligations.

If our wish is that bringing new players into the broadcasting ecosystem will result in new sources of revenue to produce and promote more original Canadian content in English, French and indigenous languages, and in content that is better financed and more

diversified in genre, the government should quickly state its intentions in that regard.

The AQPM would like to point out that it is a member of the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. We therefore support the coalition's proposed amendments. But we will be producing our own brief, which will be sent to the members of the committee in the coming weeks.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Messier.

We now move to the representatives of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française.

[*English*]

We have Martin Théberge and Marie-Christine Morin.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Morin, can you start?

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin (Executive Director, Fédération culturelle canadienne-française): Mr. Théberge will start.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Théberge, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Martin Théberge (President, Fédération culturelle canadienne-française): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Martin Théberge. I am the President of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française, the FCCF, and I am accompanied, as you have just said, by Marie-Christine Morin, our Executive Director.

This is a pivotal moment for the Canadian broadcasting system. We welcome the introduction of the bill, which, in itself, represents an essential advance in modernizing Canada's Broadcasting Act. This is crucial in maintaining our country's identity and cultural sovereignty.

Thank you for inviting us to appear before your committee today to present to you the key points of our thinking and our main requests about the bill you are studying, in terms of the issues and the particular needs of official language minority communities.

As well as being the voice of the ecosystem of French-Canadian and Acadian arts and culture, the FCCF is proud to present requests that reflect a broad consensus. Our efforts in horizontal collaboration have borne fruit. Like our members, our partners in the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA, and in the Quebec English-language Production Council, the QEPC, formally support our position. It is also important to note that the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française has also allied itself with the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, of which we are a member. Finally, to the quality process of our internal work, the FCCF adds assistance from external legal and institutional services that support our position.

The amendments that the FCCF is requesting have four main objectives. First, Canadian broadcasting policy must take into account the particular situation of official language minority communities, or OLMCs, and the unique linguistic challenges and issues of Francophone minorities, through specific objectives specifically set out in Canada's legislative framework for broadcasting.

Second, the mission of the CRTC must be made more specific in order to include the needs of the OLMCs and their particular realities.

Third, the objectives for original content in French must be strengthened in order to take into account the unique situation of French in the country.

Fourth, the FCCF seeks to ensure that online distribution companies are established in such a way that the CRTC may issue orders to them requiring mandatory distribution and an equitable proportion of Canadian content. This must include a significant amount of original broadcasting in French, and a guarantee that it can be viewed in an optimal way.

The FCCF sees the significance of our requests to you in terms of support, in the broadest sense, for the development of our fragile artistic and cultural ecosystem. The broadcasting choices that are about to be made will be critical for our ability to see and hear ourselves, and to create and produce in French. The result will be nothing less than the protection of our country's cultural sovereignty.

The FCCF is adamant about the need for Parliament to clearly state its intentions for official language minority communities in Bill C-10. Our experience has shown that, only when OLMCs are specifically mentioned, will we be able to work towards the full and complete participation of our communities in the Canadian broadcasting system.

Before our appearance, the FCCF provided the clerk of the committee with a statement of our position. We have proposed specific wording for the amendments we are putting forward and have provided detailed explanations in support. We are convinced that including the points we are raising as amendments to the current version of Bill C-10 will allow official language minority communities to participate better in the Canadian broadcasting system and will foster their cultural development in the long term.

Thank you for your attention, we will be pleased to answer your questions.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Th  berge.

[English]

Next we have the Quebec English-language Production Council.

Madam Ludvig, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Eva Ludvig (Member of the Board of Directors, Quebec Community Groups Network, Quebec English-language Production Council): Good morning, Chair Simms and members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. My name is Eva Ludvig, and I am a member of the executive committee of the Quebec Community Groups Network, QCGN. I am accompanied by Kenneth Hirsch, co-chair of the Quebec English-language Produc-

tion Council, QEPC, and our counsel, Darius Boss   from Power Law. We represent Quebec's English-speaking community, more than one million people, half of all Canadians living in French or English official-language minority communities, OLMC.

Like everyone, we need to know who we are. That means seeing ourselves when we look in our cultural mirrors, not seeing someone else. Like everyone, our language is a key part of our identity, our history, and, we hope, our future. The English-speaking minority in Quebec is a unique community, not simply an extension of the English majority in the rest of Canada. We are not Americans, any more than the Swiss, Belgians or Qu  b  cois are French.

• (1120)

Mr. Kenneth Hirsch (Co-Chair, Quebec English-language Production Council): In Quebec, we are an increasingly vulnerable minority. There are fewer and fewer bilingual municipalities. Our school boards are under attack and our schools are closing. Our population is aging. Our jobs are leaving Quebec, and our children are following.

Over a generation, English language film and TV production in Quebec has fallen from 25% of total English language production in Canada to just 7%. On our current trajectory, we can foresee the end of OLMC production in Quebec, and the jobs that such production represents.

Worse, the loss of OLMC production in Quebec will drastically reduce our community's ability to share our distinct and diverse stories with one another, with other Canadians and the world.

Our communications system, indeed our cultural sovereignty, has never been under greater assault from foreign streaming services than it is now. It has never been easier to be a cultural consumer, streaming more and more content, paying for more and more platforms to deliver it: someone else's content, someone else's platforms.

Bill C-10 legislation you are now considering is more desperately needed than anything Parliament has enacted for broadcasting since the establishment of the CBC in 1936.

Yet Canada's official language minorities are totally absent from this draft of Bill C-10. Despite the parliamentary mandate to support the vitality of official language minorities in the Broadcasting Act and the Official Languages Act, the draft legislation before you fails to even mention us. We ask you to reconsider and to rectify this regrettable oversight. Canadian broadcasting policies must consider the needs of the official language minorities and help us secure our future.

Ms. Eva Ludvig: To that end, the English and French minorities agree on their approach to Bill C-10.

[Translation]

The F  d  ration culturelle canadienne-fran  aise,

[English]

as you heard, said in its letter to the minister:

[Translation]

In addition to those francophone alliances, we are proud to confirm the support of English-language organizations in Quebec... for the FCCF's position papers and for all the amendments we are proposing.

[English]

QEPC, ELAN—the English Language Arts Network—and QCGN said in our letter to the minister:

...we wish to stress that we support the amendments to Bill C-10 put forward by the [FCCF] on December 2.... These proposed amendments to Bill C-10 are aimed at ensuring that Canadian broadcasting policies consider the specific situation of [official language minority communities]... an objective also pursued by QEPC, QCGN, and ELAN.

When tabling Bill C-10, the minister said, “With the modernization of the legislation, Francophone, Anglophone, Indigenous, people with disabilities, racialized and LGBTQ2+ creators will have the means to tell their own stories.”

As the bill is now written, that is simply not true. Anglophone and francophone minority-language creators have been excluded.

To include us, we respectfully request, one, that the Broadcasting Act's interpretation clause be expanded to expressly include and support French and English minority-language communities; two, that the CRTC's and the CBC's obligation to ensure that positive measures are taken to enhance the vitality and support of the development of the OLMCs be expressly stated in the Broadcasting Act; and, three, that an obligation for the government to consult both official-language minority communities be included in the Broadcasting Act.

Thank you.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ludvig.

Now we go directly to questions. I remind my colleagues to please point out who your question is addressed to.

We're going to start with the Conservatives.

[Translation]

Mr. Rayes, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses for joining us today and for giving us their time to help us determine how we can improve Bill C-10.

I have had the opportunity to meet representatives from a number of organizations across the country, some of whom are here today. They have told me about their concerns with Bill C-10.

First of all, I have to say that everyone agrees that it is time to get down to the task of modernizing the Broadcasting Act. The minister chose to divide his bill into three parts. Naturally, this does not address everything, thereby creating some dissatisfaction.

In the course of the various consultations that I have personally conducted, I have been told about concerns about the production of

francophone content. People want to make sure that the bill will accommodate that in order to protect minority French-language communities all across the country, not just in Quebec.

My first question goes to the representatives of the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française and to the representative of the Association québécoise de la production médiatique.

In your opinion, what are the key points, the amendments that should be made to the bill, in order to really take French into account. Should it be with quotas or should it not? I do not want to get into a debate about quotas but I would like to know whether you have any recommendations.

The people from the FCCF can answer first, followed by the AQPM.

Mr. Martin Théberge: As I said in my opening remarks, we focus on four points. I won't repeat them, but I will invite my colleague Mrs. Morin to present those amendments in more detail so that everyone can fully understand them.

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: The amendments that the FCCF is proposing in terms of the promotion of francophone content have two objectives. First, it is not only about encouraging the production of francophone content; it is also about obtaining guarantees with respect to the production of French-language content by French-language minority communities. This is to ensure that our ecosystem, which is particularly fragile and which needs a helping hand, can count on specific protection. Essentially, we are proposing three amendments to that end, some of which match the proposals made by the Coalition for the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Our colleagues in Quebec and in the Canadian francophonie have worked together well for the francophonie in its broader sense. We are proposing amendments to the bill that would amend the wording of clauses 3 and 5. These provisions deal with recognizing the importance of producing and distributing original content and programming in the French language. The amendment to the wording of clause 5 deals with the creation and production of content in both official languages.

In essence, those are the amendments that we are proposing. The FCCF also proposes the addition of a specific provision to clause 9 to ensure that our ecosystem is recognized as a minority.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

Ms. Messier, the same question goes to you.

Ms. Hélène Messier: Too often in the past, the CRTC has interpreted the recognition of linguistic duality as the provision of content in French, with no concern for whether the content consisted of programs translated from English, with subtitles or dubbing. That is why we are arguing for the creation of original content in French.

As Mrs. Morin emphasized, we want this requirement first and foremost to be established in subsection 3(1). Section 3 is the foundation of the Broadcasting Act. It contains the objectives of the act, with which the CRTC must ensure compliance. In our view, it is important that the requirement be established in that section. Of course, original content in French includes production both from Quebec and from official language minority communities.

We want it in section 5 because it is the CRTC's mission. We also want it in subsection 9(1), because it is one of the factors that the CRTC must consider when it makes orders establishing service conditions for all the industry's players, traditional and digital broadcasters alike.

We want to ensure that the CRTC remembers this and enforces it. In the past, it did not do so and we have had to appeal CRTC decisions in order to remind them of the importance of French-language content being original, not simply in French. With online service providers like Netflix providing content in 30 languages, it is an even more important reminder that French-language content be original.

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Alain Rayes: My next question is for the Quebec English-language Production Council. Madam Ludvig or Mr. Hirsch, if you had just one element to improve in Bill C-10 what would it be for you?

Mr. Kenneth Hirsch: I would just make the point that we're seeking to be recognized under Bill C-10 for very similar reasons in that we're a minority that is now threatened in terms of production quantity and we're looking to ensure the vitality of our production community. I'm going to defer to Maître Bossé to answer your specific question as to which one is most vital to us.

Maître Bossé.

[Translation]

Mr. Darius Bossé (Lawyer, Power Law, Quebec English-language Production Council): Thank you, Mr. Hirsch.

Thank you for the question, Mr. Rayes.

In general, the amendments to Bill C-10 that QEPC, ELAN and the Quebec Community Groups Network, the QCGN, are proposing are intended to ensure that the use of the discretionary power that the Broadcasting Act provides is well established.

Too often, we see that, although the CRTC and CBC/Radio-Canada must comply with the requirements set out in the Official Languages Act—

[English]

The Chair: Very quickly, Mr. Bossé.

[Translation]

Mr. Darius Bossé: The objective is to restate the CRTC's commitments and requirements and to strengthen them in the Broadcasting Act so that official language minority communities are taken into account.

The Chair: Mrs. Bessette, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses joining us today.

My first question goes to Mr. Théberge and to Mrs. Morin, from the Fédération culturelle canadienne-française.

Compared to English-language producers, the French-language cultural sector outside Quebec has to confront particular challenges, as you told us earlier.

Can you tell us about those challenges more specifically and about the measures that must be taken to promote content from official language minority communities?

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: There are many challenges. In terms of production, very specific commitments have to be made in order to stimulate the production and creation of francophone content in minority situations. We have an ecosystem of artists, technical crews and producers who can certainly produce and create that content. The industry must be specifically encouraged because it is evolving in an English-speaking sea, and is in competition with markets that are also English-speaking.

The discoverability and promotion of the content are also challenges. Some amendments to this bill that we would like to see deal with stimulating the production and the promotion of those talents, especially in French. Very little original French-language content is on offer. We want to make sure that everything that is on offer can be seen.

The amendments are specifically to do with mandatory carriage. We want to ensure that the supply of that content is maintained so that francophone culture remains accessible from coast to coast.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: Thank you very much, Mrs. Morin.

Your organization has long been seeking better regulations for the tech giants, to make the rules of the game fairer. The new act could meet that objective.

What changes would those new regulations represent for those working in French-language culture?

• (1135)

Mr. Martin Théberge: I will let Mrs. Morin finish my comments but I would suggest that the answer in this case is practically the same as the answer to the previous question. It is discoverability, to which one could add distribution. People no longer watch television as we did in the past. So we have to find a way to make that content accessible.

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: Of course, you are alluding to all the tax changes that have to be made because of those players. We have to make sure that the rules of the game are the same.

The bill does not solve all those issues, although they were brought up in the Yale report. I feel that the intent is to settle some of them in other bills to come.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: Thank you very much.

I have one last question for you.

This modernization of the Broadcasting Act is actually likely to bring about a number of positive changes for the Canadian cultural industry. As you see it, how do those in the French-language cultural sector outside Quebec view the new act?

Mr. Martin Th  berge: As I said in my opening statement, we did a lot of very good work with anglophone partners in Quebec and across Canada and we cast our net wide. Nothing indicates any animosity or any comments contrary to those we are putting forward.

We recognize that players such as ourselves have a unique and specific realities. That does not seem to be a problem. The consensus and collaboration actually seems to be very strong.

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: Let me quickly add two points to the answer.

The first concern is that we are not specifically named in the bill. As Mr. Th  berge said, some very good collaborative work was done precisely in order to reach a consensus on this issue. Clearly, it must be solved because there is specific concern about it.

From what we hear on the ground in the francophone arts and culture sector in Canada, there is a recognition of what this legislation means for cultural sovereignty and for access to culture in French all across the country. What you are preparing to do in modernizing the act is crucial for the long-term survival of the French language and of all our artistic and cultural ecosystems.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: Thank you very much.

My next question goes to the representatives of the Quebec English-language Production Council.

English-language production is a significant part of Quebec's audiovisual industry, but we know that the sector has seen a drop in its funding for several years.

In your opinion, what steps are necessary in the long term to help English-language production in Quebec be more competitive with the major players in the industry?

Please provide a short answer.

[English]

Ms. Eva Ludvig: Kenneth.

Mr. Kenneth Hirsch: I left the film board about 20 years ago to set up in the private sector. At that time English-language production in Quebec represented about one-quarter of production across the country. Now we represent less than 7% of English-language content production across the country. If regulation is not in place, the broadcasters, who are mostly based in Toronto, just don't think about us. We're a diverse and a distinct community, and in order to ensure the vitality of our production community, we need to see that recognized in Bill C-10.

Mrs. Lyne Bessette: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Bessette.

Mr. Champoux, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us.

Mrs. Morin, Mr. Th  berge, it's always a pleasure to see you.

Let me start with you, Ms. Messier. Earlier, we talked about the tech giants, who will also have to contribute to the production of content one of these days.

Could we talk about how you would proceed and about the model you would advocate for distributing the additional money to be collected from the tech giants for production?

Do you have a model in mind? Do you have an idea of the way in which that money could be fairly redistributed?

Ms. H  l  ne Messier: It is difficult to answer that question because it's the CRTC that will decide how that money will be distributed. Of course, I hope that French-language production will receive its fair share.

The francophone music industry has about 40% of the funding in Canada. Generally, institutions like Telefilm Canada or the Canada Media Fund have to make do with one third of the funding. I don't see why that should remain as it is.

It will certainly depend on the type of platform. If we are talking about platforms that are aimed more to a francophone market, I imagine that the requirements will be greater. For traditional broadcasters, we are asking that 75% of their production be in French.

For the tech giants, I would really like their requirements to be a minimum of 40% or even 50% of the amounts, the expenditures, we require of them, for example. It is true that French-language production in a minority setting is in a unique situation, but all French-language production in the same ecosystems as the tech giants is in a difficult situation.

Production in Quebec is too. For example, current production budgets for a drama series are less than \$500,000 per hour whereas English-language production can count on a budget that easily averages around \$2 million.

So it is already uneven. With our current budgets, it is difficult for us to take our place and to attract public attention. So it is important for original French-language production to be funded adequately.

• (1140)

Mr. Martin Champoux: Of course, the CRTC has to regulate it, but don't you think that we should write provisions into the act that would better guide the CRTC towards the criteria that we want to impose, so that they cannot be revised up or down on a whim in the next few years?

Ms. Hélène Messier: I've studied the legislation passed in France, Spain and Australia. I've looked at just about every model. The challenging thing about the Canadian Broadcasting Act is the difference in the players. There are traditional players and new players. Of the new platforms, some are Canadian and some are foreign. Some platforms are aimed at a more French-speaking market, and others at a more English-speaking market. It's quite difficult to establish quotas directly in the legislation, as was done in France. Of course, it would be reassuring, because the CRTC is given a great deal of power. As a result, we believe that it's imperative to remind the CRTC, through the objectives of the act, of the importance of French-language original content. This would ensure that the CRTC allocates a significant portion to French-language original content and that it adapts this content to the style of service.

What you're talking about would be possible. However, in my opinion, it would require a complete reworking of the bill to create very specific categories of players based on the market, the amount of revenue, and so on. It would be a complex and unprecedented process. This system wasn't chosen for legislative implementation. Instead, the CRTC was given the opportunity to tailor its regulations to the market players.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Do you think that a reward system for the best players in the field—the top students—could be effective?

Ms. Hélène Messier: In what way?

Who would be the top students? Are you talking about incentives for broadcasters?

Mr. Martin Champoux: Yes. That's exactly right. Those who produce more would see their portion increased according to the surplus that they produce.

Ms. Hélène Messier: I don't know about that. We must see how this would be addressed in the act. As I said, for the new players, it would be possible to develop something very specific that imposes obligations that are a little more restrictive than what already exists. It would be a new way of thinking for the Canadian legislator.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

I'll speak briefly to the FCCF representatives.

In your opinion, Mr. Thériault or Mrs. Morin, how can we establish the right proportion of language representation in official language minority communities?

Do you know what type of model we could use to ensure this representation, by including criteria directly in the act?

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: I agree with my colleague. It would be somewhat difficult to include quotas in the act. In any event, it would perhaps be a little too rigid, since the legislation isn't often amended.

In our opinion, it would be beneficial to clearly state the legislator's intention for the representation of French-language content that also comes from official language minority communities. The criteria established by the CRTC could then reflect this. It would be difficult to give you very specific criteria.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Morin.

[*English*]

We'll go to Ms. McPherson, for six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses for joining us today. This is very interesting.

Similar to all of my colleagues I'm sure, I have had many meetings about Bill C-10, and I'm excited that we're starting the process of looking at it.

I represent the riding of Edmonton Strathcona. Many of you may not know, but in Alberta, it is one of our strongest francophone communities, one of the strongest OLMCs we have in Alberta, and a very important part of my riding.

I want to ask some questions of the FCCF, Mr. Thériault and Madame Morin. I know we've talked about this already, but I want to give you a bit of an opportunity to expand. You spoke about the importance, from your perspective, of the bill, ensuring that broadcasters, online or not, promote the French original content, especially in our linguistic minority communities.

Can you talk a bit more about how that could happen?

Madame Morin.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: We recommend an explicit reference to language minority communities in section 3, which lists the objectives of the act. Our proposal stems directly from recommendation 53 in the Yale report, which seeks to update the set of objectives arising from the act and to make an explicit reference to OLMCs. I'm saying "explicit reference" because, according to a fairly simple principle, if you aren't identified, you don't really exist.

The legislator's intent in this regard must be clarified. To this end, we'll be proposing a very clear amendment that refers to us, so that there's no hiding behind the words "ethnocultural backgrounds", which are currently in the bill. This is really about giving special consideration to language communities.

As I said earlier, this legislation is important to us. It allows for cultural sovereignty and the development of French-language culture across the country. This aspect is particularly important for our groups. This legislation is important for the survival of the language and cultural identity across the country.

Mr. Martin Th  berge: I want to quickly add that we mustn't forget that the review of this act will affect several other legislative reviews and many future decisions. It's important to set an example, to clearly state the goal and to identify, as my colleague Mrs. Morin said, the OLMCs as stakeholders in the ecosystem.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Wonderful.

Can I assume then that our representatives from the Quebec English-language Production Council would also agree with that explicit naming within the act?

Mr. Kenneth Hirsch: One hundred percent.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I thought that would be clear.

The next question I have is for Madame Messier.

We all understand that for everyone here it's essential that this bill include every major player of the cultural ecosystem in Canada to financially take part in the original Canadian content production. I know you've touched on this already with my colleagues, but could you speak a little more about why you think the Internet distributors have been left out? Should they be asked to contribute to the public programs, such as the Canada Media Fund, especially considering their important role in providing the public the very content we are currently debating?

• (1150)

[Translation]

Ms. H  l  ne Messier: I think that there are some major exclusions in the bill. We talked about social media, such as YouTube and Facebook, which broadcast a great deal of professional music and audiovisual content. We talked about digital distribution, which would make it possible to protect, for example, the broadcasting of TV5 and Unis TV on digital platforms. This would help OLMCs in particular.

There are also the services of Internet and mobile phone providers. We know that people now consume a great deal of audiovisual content on their phones and computers. They use a significant amount of bandwidth. The cable companies are already helping to fund programs. We know that there's an increasing amount of

[English]

cord-cutting.

[Translation]

People are currently consuming this content through Internet services or through their phones. We think that these providers should make a contribution. The Yale report said that they should be excluded. We don't agree with this. We think that they should be included, even if the CRTC were to decide, for example, for a few years only, to take information, to impose accountability obligations or to impose minimum obligations a little later.

I think that the act must cast the net wide. It must also look ahead and guide all the players in the field so that we can obtain the proper information and, ultimately, regulate their activities.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Going to our second round, we're up against the clock, so I'm going to have to go into overtime for a few minutes. I'm going to be fairly strict during this five-minute question round.

Mr. Aitchison, please go ahead, for five minutes.

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I actually don't have questions about the specific presentation. I think it's well laid out, and your recommendations are very clear. As I have been listening, though, I've been thinking more and more about the digital age and what that means for Canadians and their choices. I'm not too sure which presenter would like to speak to this, but I guess it's going to give you an opportunity to make a few points that maybe you haven't made.

Are Quebecers in general choosing fewer original French productions when it comes to consuming their media? Is there a general trend there, and can you speak to what's actually happening?

[Translation]

Ms. H  l  ne Messier: Quebecers still watch a great deal of linear television and regularly tune in to their programs. As a result of the pandemic, significant audience records have been broken. We tend to think that television is dead and that everything will now be on digital platforms. I don't subscribe to that school of thought.

The CEO of Netflix said that his competitors were video games, social media and linear television. Netflix even created a live television channel in France because it had trouble attracting French-speaking audiences. I think that it's worthwhile to focus on platforms, which are major players in the field. However, I don't think that we should abandon television. Quebecers still consume a great deal of their national productions.

[English]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Go ahead, Ms. Morin.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: In terms of the francophone communities in Canada, many people watch content on traditional television, especially since broadband isn't available everywhere. During the pandemic, all these issues made headlines. Some minority communities are unable to access broadband to view the content online.

[English]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: That point, Ms. Morin, is a very good one. I wonder if you can speak a little bit more to that. As we try to rapidly expand broadband Internet access across rural Canada, do you see this problem being exacerbated? Does Bill C-10 go far enough to address that?

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: Broadband investments are certainly welcome. I think that we'll see this situation improve over the years. Clearly, people want to consume content online. We're seeing this with younger customers. Canadian francophone youth are no exception. They're also part of this strong trend.

To ensure a shift and access to digital content across the country, broadband investments are essential.

[English]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I don't really have much more than that. I really appreciate it. Maybe I've saved you a bit of time in your scheduling here.

The Chair: Yes, blessed is your soul, sir, as I'm running short on time.

Mr. Housefather, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the people who are appearing before us today on behalf of the three invited groups.

You represent a vital part of Canada: linguistic duality and the importance of producing original content in French in Canada, in Quebec and, more specifically, outside Quebec.

[English]

Also, there's the importance of producing original English-language content in Quebec, because we have two official language minorities in this country, which people are forgetting too often these days.

I just want to assure the groups that I do support many of the amendments you have proposed and I will put them forward when it comes time for amendments.

I'd like to ask a couple of questions.

In the brief from the Quebec English-language Production Council, you mentioned that CRTC decisions have historically had very negative impacts on Quebec's English-speaking communities, and the trend is getting worse over the years.

Could you just give me a few sentences about that?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm sorry for interrupting Mr. Housefather. However, there isn't any interpretation. I believe that there's an issue with the equipment.

[English]

The Chair: I agree. It seems we're having a few issues. Everyone, just hold on one second.

I'm going to ask the interpretation to just interpret me as I speak. I'm assuming we're missing the French interpretation, or perhaps both, but certainly in the French because the conversation was happening in English.

Is it good now?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Chair, based on what I heard from the interpreter, it was an equipment issue.

[English]

The Chair: I am not getting interpretation right now.

[Translation]

Please wait a moment.

[English]

Apologies, everybody.

It appears the sound quality wasn't great enough to hear Mr. Housefather.

Right now, the interpreters are getting a high-pitched sound and therefore we can't move on with the microphone you have. Our IT person here is going to call you.

• (1200)

In the meantime, because we're always up against time, I'm going to ask Monsieur Champoux to proceed until we come back to you to see if we can find a solution.

[Translation]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sorry about all that.

Mrs. Morin, I think that you were the one who spoke about the discoverability issue earlier. I'd like you to elaborate on this issue. For official language minority communities across the country, I think that it's a sensitive and pressing issue.

How would better discoverability rules affect both online and traditional broadcasters?

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: I'd say that discoverability and content development are related to the possibility of finding this content on the platforms. The major online platforms are making efforts. However, I think that close attention must be paid to the original French-language programs available here, if the goal is to promote them. Additional efforts must also be made to develop the programs and to make it possible for people not only to discover them, but also to access them more directly.

The amendments that we're proposing seek to add a reference in the act to this sensitivity, which must be taken into account in the broadcasters' conditions of licence. The content must have a place where it's easily identifiable and indicative of the situation in the ecosystem. This is important, because it will give us full access to this content. This must be taken into account. This aspect is part of the new environment in which we live. In other words, this content must be produced, but it must also be available for people to discover.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Do you believe that the cultural distinctiveness of Canada's French-language minority communities isn't well represented?

Is this also what you want to show all Canadians?

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: It's certainly a concern in terms of the diversity of content.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Morin.

[English]

My apologies. I have to go to Ms. McPherson now for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all our witnesses again.

I would like to ask that perhaps Madame Morin could continue and answer that question on which we, unfortunately, had to cut her off.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-Christine Morin: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

It's necessary to have a diversity of content. When we say that we want to see and hear each other, this goes to the heart of broadcasting. There must be original French-language productions that feature talent from French-language minority communities. These productions must also be brought to the attention of Canadians. This is obviously the ultimate goal.

• (1205)

Mr. Martin Thériège: I'd like to make a comment.

The whole issue of distribution is related to this. There's a production and development issue. However, Unis TV, for example, must be included in the basic package of all cable companies, whereas online broadcasters—such as EBOX and Apple TV—have no obligation to broadcast this channel or its content. Legislation is also needed in this area.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes.

I have so many questions to ask about OLMCs because they are so important to my community. Knowing how short we are on time, Madame Messier, is there anything else that you'd like to add as the last takeaway for this panel?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Messier: We haven't talked much about the CRTC's oversight. We think that it's important. The CRTC has a great deal of power. It's necessary to restore the possibility of appealing the CRTC's decisions to the Governor in Council. This possibility was removed in the current bill regarding the terms and conditions for orders that will be issued to programming undertakings, whether they're online or traditional.

We believe that the political community must have the final say to ensure that the objectives of the act are fulfilled by the CRTC. This is one point that I wanted to make.

Thank you for the question, Ms. McPherson.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Messier.

[English]

Folks, before I draw to a close, I had one minute and a half for Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Housefather are you there? Do you want to try this one more time?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, I'm trying again with the headset that I can't hear from.

I believe maybe they will be able to hear me better with the House of Commons headset that they wanted me to use.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half, sir. Go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I don't think I took up three and a half minutes, but thank you.

I want to come back to my question to Mr. Hirsch. Can you give me an example of where the CRTC has made a ruling that has had a negative impact on the English-speaking community of Quebec?

Mr. Kenneth Hirsch: I'll defer again to Mr. Bossé for specifics of law, because I'm not a lawyer.

In general, and I know it may or may not be explicit in Bill C-10, quotas are very helpful to our production community, so we ask that CBC spend a minimum of 10% of its English language production content in Quebec.

We would ask the same thing of the big streamers that sell content to Canadians as well, and 12% of their development budget, but I'll leave specifics of how CRTC changes have hurt us to Maître Bossé.

Mr. Darius Bossé: I'll quickly add that this is the whole point of the provision, the amendments that are being put forward. It's to regulate the exercise of discretion by the CRTC, for example, by explicitly having in the statute that broadcasters have to promote the vitality of official-language minority communities. Other submissions, for example, that QEPC, ELAN and QCGN are putting forward is a duty to be consulted when a decision can have harmful impacts. By doing that, we are prospectively trying to avoid harm instead of having to fight down the line.

Mr. Housefather, you're a lawyer, so you know how that works. If you can avoid the harm, then you avoid litigation altogether.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Agreed.

The other question I wanted to ask, and I think it's a very important, is on the duty to consult. You have asked for the official-language minority communities to be consulted not only when there's a CRTC issue but also when there's a CBC issue that could potentially impact the official-language minority communities.

I know that in your first reference on the Broadcasting Act, you mentioned that the Immigration Act had a similar provision requiring us to take into account the linguistic duality of Canada.

Mr. Bossé, can you point to any other examples where this is found in legislation?

Mr. Darius Bossé: The duty to consult is jurisprudential. There's definitely a legal foundation for this, but you have to find it in case law. You have to read, for example, the DesRochers or the Haida Nation decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The amendment is drafted to reflect what the Supreme Court of Canada explained in those decisions. It's not invented. It definitely has a legal and constitutional foundation, in fact, but it's novel in the sense that there is no amendment of this type elsewhere.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you to our guests who came here today. It's been very informative.

We've got to suspend very quickly, and get to our next group.

Godspeed.

• (1210)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1220)

The Chair: We have to move very quickly as we are extremely pressed for time. We will go into overtime, past one o'clock Eastern. I'll try to keep that to a minimum.

Once again, there have been some issues with simultaneous interpretation, and should anyone encounter a problem, please wave your hand or say something. If you say something, please don't raise your voice as this is a very sensitive interpretation issue.

We have three guests with us. I'm going to introduce each of you guests and then get right into your five minutes. I'm going to be very strict on time. I apologize in advance if I interrupt you.

First off we have, from Alberta Newspaper Group, Ryan McAdams, group publisher.

Mr. McAdams, go ahead. You have five minutes.

Mr. Ryan McAdams (Group Publisher, Alberta Newspaper Group): Good morning.

I want to thank everyone on this committee for inviting us to speak today. I think it's an important factor that we all face and are challenged with. I look back on my 35 years of working in and consulting with media. I am quite concerned with where we sit today but, more importantly, with the public perception of media. What was once a respected and fact-based pillar of our past generations is now not much more than a punchline in pop culture. To illustrate that point, I'll speak to a comment that I heard yesterday, which was, "I'm now old enough to remember when the only fake news around was the National Enquirer."

I'm here today, with respect, in an effort to try to appeal to the common sense of this committee's members with respect to my desire to stop this slide into a more out-of-control media sphere. My talk today is really about the lack and loss of local journalism. We have seen the decline and erosion of this over the years, and that has been escalated obviously in the last 12 months because of COVID. We've seen many newspapers, broadcasters and radio stations alike disappear in recent years. That's concerning and it's creating areas of news deserts. There are vast and growing areas in which local news is no longer represented, and we are losing the ability to communicate to our communities. It is essential, I believe, that we have a functioning broadcast act and CRTC, with controls over what is replacing what we once knew as the news.

We sit in a shifting media landscape in which the function of local news production has been narrowed, as I mentioned, by the erosion of advertising dollars. We look at the impacts of the tech giants and how they siphon off local and national advertising. You don't need to look any further than at what the federal governments used to spend on newspapers, TV and radio stations. Those dollars are now spent largely on digital and media campaigns that are Internet-based.

The problem with that is that the Internet giants, the tech giants, are all U.S.-based. That money leaves the country. It doesn't get reinvested. It doesn't employ local people or Canadians, and the tax dollars themselves go away.

This loss of fact-based communication and reporting began with the disappearance of all of our local stations and written newspapers. I think one of the things we need to understand is that the majority of local journalism is produced by community sources, not the national media. We owe our nation and citizens better. The communities across Canada and your constituents want assurances that Canadian content will be available and that the digital players will be as responsible for their contribution to the creation of home-grown content.

We've seen recent decisions in France and Australia that began the process of holding tech giants accountable by regulating them and putting in place penalties and costs for them to do business. It's important that we as a newspaper industry feel that the Broadcasting Act is holding social media and the Internet giants accountable for what they produce, what they distribute and what they disseminate. I know that the act is looking to make more inroads with respect to the Internet but I also realize and agree that it is not taking on any proactive statement with respect to social media. Social media is becoming a greater player in terms of information, particularly. That is, in my opinion, a very big, severe concern with respect to where people get what they want to call news from. The fact that social media is really unpoliced is my biggest and strongest concern.

I have provided attachments for the members to read, and that ends my time.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McAdams.

We now have Mr. John Petrie, retired broadcaster.

Mr. Petrie, you have five minutes. Thank you for joining us.

Mr. John Petrie (Retired Broadcaster, As an Individual): Good morning. I'm John Petrie and I worked in local radio for over 40 years. My theme will be focused on radio and regulations affecting it as it evolves into new platforms.

I know the importance of local radio and connecting to the community from reporting local news, covering local sports teams, doing play-by-play, and especially during critical times such as winter blizzards, knowing which roads are open and closed and what schools are open. It's the same in the summertime when there are tornado warnings or thunderstorm warnings.

While you can get a lot of that information on your cellphone, people still turn to traditional media, which gives them assurances of credibility. I know the importance of local radio or media for local business and non-profits to get their message out and to advertise. I want to cite you a few examples of the importance of local radio. Back in December, the radio station in Brooks here raised \$36,000 in one day for the food bank, and over the last 30 years, the local station has held a Rotary Radio Day helping the Brooks Rotary Club raise \$300,000.

Local radio gives us a sense of community. When I say community, that doesn't necessarily mean just people, but it's more of a feeling of common interests, goals and supports. You can translate that provincially and nationally, too.

The CRTC has controlled the licences of radio stations, which has limited the supply. Unfortunately, the supply has been taken over by larger companies. That might produce a better product, but in most cases now the cutbacks have reduced the amount of local programming and jobs.

Radio delivery is moving to the Internet and other formats. I still listen to a lot of traditional radio but I listen to it in a new way, either through my cellphone or Bluetooth. Norway, by the way, is a nation of five million people and has become the first in the world to phase out analog signals in favour of digital audio broadcasting, which means the FM and the AM signals are gone. Switzerland and Britain are both considering a switch to digital networks. Norway claims the move will free up some cash for broadcasters to invest in programming, while providing a clear and more reliable network.

Canada will eventually get there. We don't know when that will happen, but it will eventually go that way. What happens with our traditional radio stations that are broadcasting through transmitters, especially when cars no longer carry an FM or AM radio? Will anybody be able to start up an Internet radio station and not worry about a transmitter or call letters or frequency? Will they need a licence or can they just start it up on their own?

Traditional radio, as you know, has to follow certain rules, such as playing 35% Canadian content, paying SOCAN fees, following the Canadian broadcast standards and playing the music that they're licensed to play. Of course, they have to have a logger and they have to keep everything for 30 days for music audit or in case somebody is slandered.

As radio moves to the Internet, and most stations now stream through an app such as the Radioplayer Canada app, what will the rules for the Internet be? Will they still have to play 35% CanCon? Does Spotify or Apple Play or Google Music play 35% CanCon?

What about standards for announcers or talk show hosts? On traditional radio, they have rules, but a broadcast on the Internet has no rules and few regulations. On the Internet, if you listen to podcasts, crude language sometimes has no restraints. Who's going to monitor this and who's going to control this? Is it even necessary to do so?

Governments like to think they're the arbiters of regulations and rules, but we saw in the U.S. election big companies such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube were making up the rules, deciding what content could be shared. Also when a rival to Twitter came along, the major tech companies would not allow them to operate on their platform. Then who decides what can be talked about or played on Internet radio? Do we need controls or do we let people decide for themselves what they want to hear and listen to?

If you have an online radio station, you need to run it through a provider such as Rogers or Bell. Could they shut you down if you were becoming too competitive to them, reduce your bandwidth or up your price? What will the rules be if I run an online radio station through a platform such as Facebook or YouTube? Who would own the data coming from that, and what would the rules be on foreign ownership? What about paying into the Canada Media Fund? Would there be any requirement for Canadian employment, or could these companies operate outside of Canada?

• (1230)

In the end, though, the question is this: What do Canadians want from the media? They want to be informed. They want to be entertained. They want the freedom to choose where they get their information and entertainment from. Now, if you pay for it via a subscription, should there be rules imposed? If you—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petrie. I apologize for that. You can probably work the rest of your speech into the questions and answers.

Now we go to Global Village Centre.

Mr. Ahmed Kassem, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Ahmed Kassem (Executive Director, Global Village Centre): Thank you very much to the committee for inviting us. I fully agree with both Ryan and John.

My name is Ahmed Kassem. I have been producing and hosting cultural community television shows for many years in the past decade. In addition, I am the host of a local community radio show that focuses on intercultural relationships in rural communities. All programs are intended to increase awareness and understanding of many cultures and languages in the Brooks area, to indicate to newcomers their rights and responsibilities in Canada, and to increase newcomer knowledge about the community they live in through interviews with key community leaders and service providers.

Bill C-10 is helpful to that if it goes hand-in-hand with the Canadian Broadcasting Act, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] broadcasting. At the same time, we should impress the [*Inaudible—Editor*] digital world. It's more difficult than it used to be for families to come together to watch one TV screen; you can all watch the same thing on different devices. The online world should pass the same scrutiny as the Broadcasting Act, in that the contents should not be produced by someone from their home, which enables individuals and groups to spread misinformation, which can be harmful and sometimes dangerous.

The bill also helps visible minorities be a part of the broadcasting world because the voices of all Canadians matter, not where they come from. It could be said that the bill seeks to even the playing

field, so to speak, for content disparities all over Canada. The bill would have them all operate under the same regulatory guidelines.

I believe it is critical to ensure that any legislation does not result in earlier streaming services pulling out of Canada. The proposed heightened guidelines as to what they are required to follow could drive the services out of Canada, therefore narrowing the scope of media and content available in the country.

• (1235)

I am personally in favour of the bill, with the caution that I mentioned before: Having all media providers in Canada under the same guidelines makes it fairer for smaller broadcast hosts to operate. It also safely [*Inaudible—Editor*] and ensures Canadian content availability in Canada, keeping us close to our roots—while also avoiding promoting harmful content—to ensure the protection and support of local broadcasting and newspapers, especially in our rural communities throughout Canada.

The discussions on this topic raise four main questions for me. One, how exactly will this be protecting Canadian content? Two, how will the content be vetted? Three, where will it come from? Finally, will this create any new employment opportunities for Canada?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kassem.

I'm sorry for the difficulties there.

We're going to go straight to questions now. We're going to start out with six-minute questions from the Conservatives.

Mr. Shields, you're up first.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate all three witnesses today.

Mr. Petrie, you were about to expand a little bit at the end. Would you like to complete that?

Mr. John Petrie: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Shields.

I just wanted to finish off. When we're making rules, we have to have a level playing field. What I mean by a level playing field is we have to make sure whatever happens online happens with traditional media as long as it's around here.

If we start to license Internet radio stations, I think it would be nice if they were licensed to Canadians, and there's no limit on that. Take our community, for example. We're a community of 100 different voices. With larger cities, you could have an ethnic radio station. You could have several ethnic radio stations in Toronto or Vancouver.

The other thing I wanted to bring up is content rules. Who decides on content? If you bring in content rules, does that stifle any creativity?

The bottom line is taxing streaming services like all other businesses. I think we're all in agreement with that, because there are big giants from the United States and they're using our infrastructure. We're paying for it and they're getting off scot-free, so I think most of us are in agreement that there should be a way they are taxed.

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Kassem, in the sense of this bill and it has to do with ethno, how critical has it been in the community, to the messages that you are providing to a wide range of ethnic groups within this region, in rural Canada?

Mr. Ahmed Kassem: It is very critical.

Brooks is the “City of 100 Hellos”, and we do have a large number of different ethnic groups from all over the world.

It is a very big challenge when it comes to a lot of messaging. That has been proven during the COVID-19 pandemic, a public health nightmare. As well there's the difficulty of racial conflict, anti-Semitism, racism and Islamophobia.

The messaging, as John just mentioned, the way that we broadcast through the podcast, we reach out to every community through their own language, through their own culture. That reaching out helps the communities to stay in the rural area with their families, and to work and be part of the community they are in.

It is very critical to have that voice from newcomers, and the value added to the economic development of Canada in general, and all rural areas of Canada. It's very critical to have the voice of small services. It's very important to have the voice of every Canadian added to the value.

I would encourage the committee to look into community radio, or any other means so that every voice from the Canadian perspective can be heard in a very effective manner.

• (1240)

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Petrie, if there was one recommendation that you think is most important above others, what would it be?

Mr. John Petrie: I don't really know, but I'm just going to deviate a little bit here.

I was listening to the last hour here, and one thing people haven't talked about is the collection of data. When Facebook and Google or... This data becomes so important for advertisers. Who owns that data? Who owns the information about me?

I think we have to look at that as a nation, because right now Google or Facebook owns that data, which is important for their ad-

vertisers. They can target their advertisers in Brooks or Chicoutimi or Saint John.

I think we need to take a look at that. I don't know where this all fits into this area, but I think that's key too.

Mr. Martin Shields: That's a good point, thank you.

I'll go now to the newspaper association.

You moved into local media, and you talked about where the closest media is, and probably the most factual in a sense, because it has to be local. How are we going to do that in rural?

Mr. Ryan McAdams: Sorry. You broke up there, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: You talked about the accuracy of rural radio and newspapers, how important it is in rural, and how accurate it is. How are we going to maintain that?

Mr. Ryan McAdams: As you are aware because of your riding, we have growing gaps of news deserts. The only way we can do it is through support and a growing level of coordination for taking the tech giants to task with respect to how they create and I'll say “scrape content” from the local sites. If they don't participate at some level and contribute to our challenge, we will see an increasing decline in local reporting.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you. I appreciate your responses.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Louis, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank all of the witnesses for being here. This is an amazing opportunity. I hope I get a chance to talk to each of you, so I'll dive right in.

Mr. Kassem, I'm very interested to hear more. The smaller the communities in Canada, I find, the more challenges you have promoting diversity and inclusivity. You seem to be doing an amazing job. I looked up your organization—the insights, the advice, the promoting of community events, the diversity awareness, the empowering of newcomers—you're doing a wonderful job and I appreciate that.

I know that one of the clauses of the bill outlines in section 3 of the Broadcasting Act to emphasize that the Canadian broadcasting system should “serve the needs and interests of all Canadians—including Canadians from racialized communities and Canadians of diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, abilities and disabilities, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and ages”.

I wonder if you could comment further. It's always wonderful to hear a success story—one of the local stories that you hear on your show promoting people feeling comfortable in a small community.

Mr. Ahmed Kassem: Thank you very much, sir. I appreciate it.

We've been working very hard to have the newcomers integrate to the rural area as part of the rural immigration policies of both the federal and provincial governments for many years.

When someone comes from overseas, they will be coming to a country where they have no connections, they will be running away from problems or they'll be coming of their own choice. There is always difficulty in leaving your social net or your family social net and coming to a new culture, a new language and a new and different environment. That alone will put stress on many of the newcomers or immigrants.

On our show we highlight the success stories of immigrants who have contributed well and have businesses in the country. When they come to Canada—we all call this country “a paradise”, we really like to be in Canada—they are very excited to be here. Some of them are successful due to their hard work. Most of them are very business-minded.

We invite those business entrepreneurs to the show so the rest of the people will see that hard work and dedication will pay off in the long run. We always try not to entertain the notion of victimhood or of blaming others for your shortcomings. That is the way that you can empower individuals.

Educate them and give them the tools to succeed rather than having them depend on you. We help them by giving them the tools to succeed in Canada and to open up a new life, but they have to be hard-working, honest, dedicated and willing to contribute to the society they are in.

The show is dedicated mostly to newcomers and immigrants who have businesses and who are professionals. Most of them are from South Africa. Most of them are medical doctors from South Africa. We invite them to talk about their successes, their difficulties when they came to Canada and the challenges they faced. The listeners will see how difficult it was for them, but how they achieved success despite those difficulties. There's always a light at the end of the tunnel.

Those stories are all on our website. Anyone can link to it and watch these nice stories.

● (1245)

Mr. Tim Louis: I did, thank you. It has that feeling of “success breeds success”... and for people watching, “if you can see it, you can be it”. I thank you.

I'm going to keep moving on.

Mr. Petrie, I know the importance of local radio. I myself was a host of a local radio station. I volunteered and served for seven years on local radio. I understand the need right now is to balance how digital technologies have changed with how we can protect our cultural environment, promote our artists worldwide and still protect our identity here.

You also work with Stingray Music.

Mr. John Petrie: Yes, I did at one time. I'm retired now.

Mr. Tim Louis: Okay. I see.

We're talking about 40 million viewers in about 50 states. We want to promote Canadian music and Canadian stories outside Canada, but we want to protect our local stories. Can you tell me a good way to try to strike that balance, in your opinion?

Mr. John Petrie: You're talking about the CanCon regulations, then? Is that it?

Mr. Tim Louis: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. John Petrie: CanCon is a tough one, because I'm a firm believer in Canadian content and promoting local artists, and I think you can do that. A lot of our radio stations were restricted—I think somebody brought it up before—by the programming out of Toronto. If I have a guy playing a nice song around Brooks here and it doesn't appeal in Toronto, I don't have much leeway anymore for that music to get on the air here. We have to open up that too.

The other thing I'll mention about CanCon is that I think it was in the seventies—you or somebody might be able to correct me—that CanCon came up here, and this is where we have to challenge ourselves. How important is that 35% Canadian content anymore? Would Justin Bieber have made it without that? Would Drake have made it? Would The Weeknd make it?

Would Céline Dion and all of those have made it without that 35% Canadian content? I don't know, but yes, I think we all want to promote our local music. We want our stars to be big because they do represent us on the world stage. We're proud of The Weeknd at the Super Bowl. That's Canadian. We're proud of that, and we have to promote it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, everyone.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have other questions for Mr. Petrie.

Mr. Petrie, I'm a former radio host. I must say that, when you talk about old technology that young people don't know about today, it's music to my ears. I'm thinking of call letters and digital indexing.

I was recently talking about power with a young host who started his career just a few years ago. I was talking about 50,000 watts of FM antenna power compared to 150,000 watts or 200,000 watts. I seemed to be speaking a language that he had never heard before.

You said that you have 40 years of experience in radio. I have nearly 30 years of experience. If we add Kevin Waugh's experience, we must have 150 or 160 years of experience around the table today. I'm saying this with all due respect, Mr. Waugh.

I mainly wanted to talk about how quickly this industry is changing. This has been particularly noticeable in recent years. During your career, did you feel that concerns such as the ones discussed today were being raised? I'm no longer talking about technology. I'm talking about protecting content and protecting cultural identity. We talk a great deal about Quebec and francophone culture, but this also involves Canadian culture in general.

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. John Petrie: I've always been a proud Canadian, and when a show like *Corner Gas* comes on, or *Schitt's Creek* or whatever, I always make a point of watching them. I was probably one of the first ones to watch *Corner Gas* or *Schitt's Creek*.

I was a fan of *Schitt's Creek* even before it became famous like that. Did I see it going and evolving that way? I think we've always been influenced by the Americans. Their production house is so big. I look at the time when shows started to come out of Canada. We didn't make them Canadian. When they filmed something in Toronto, they tried to make it Los Angeles or New York.

I think we have to promote more shows like *Corner Gas* or *Schitt's Creek*. Canadians will watch them, and so will Americans, and so will the world, if it's a good production.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: If we don't strengthen the regulations, do you think that we may be left out in the cold?

[English]

Mr. John Petrie: In a way, but how do we get there? We can produce more local content, but the problem is, how do we promote it around the world? I could produce a program here, and I think Ryan.... A lot of people will open up a business and open up a website thinking that everybody is going to go to that website. The problem is, there are three billion websites in the world.

The issue is, how do you promote it? The giants do. Netflix has the ability to do a lot of promotion, whereas I produce a movie here and I don't have the background to promote it. We can produce it here, but promotion is the other thing we have to work on.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: According to a current school of thought, we should lighten the responsibilities and demands with regard to traditional broadcasters rather than imposing the same constraints and rules on new technology.

What are your thoughts on this? Should we maintain the current regulations and impose them on new players in the field or should we lighten the load?

[English]

Mr. John Petrie: I think we have to lighten it up there. Like I mentioned before, if the traditional broadcasters are forced to play 35% CanCon, do the online radio stations have to play 35% Can-

Con? I think we have to lighten it up because it does open up the field here. We don't know where this is going to go. A lot of this has happened pretty rapidly in the last almost five years.

We have some former radio announcers on here. I've seen, even in this province, where one broadcaster lost his job at a radio station. He's doing YouTube now, streaming his stuff and getting a lot of listeners. He's not going through any other channels.

A lot of people can do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: We saw the implementation of the 1991 regulations. Thirty years later, we're working on a reform of the Broadcasting Act.

You must admit that the development of this industry has proceeded much faster in recent years than in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

In your opinion, should we review the Broadcasting Act and require frequent reviews? How often should this review be done?

[English]

Mr. John Petrie: One thing people talk about is Moore's Law—the exponential growth of technology. We almost have to review it every three years because if you look back in the last year, what we're doing today probably didn't exist 18 months ago, before the pandemic. With the way we're communicating through Zoom and technology like that, the growth is phenomenal. I think it should be reviewed more often.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Before I get to the last question for this round, it looks like we could extend to 10 minutes, given the issues that we had earlier. That takes us to 1:10 eastern time,

I'm now going to go to Ms. McPherson. Before I do, though, I'll say that January 18, 1971 was the introduction of CanCon rules.

Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, for your detailed knowledge of the subject matter and dates.

The Chair: It's Google, ma'am.

• (1255)

Ms. Heather McPherson: You don't have to admit it.

It's lovely to see so many members of the community from Alberta. I am not an old radio host, so I don't come with that expertise, but I have an awful lot of interest in the vital importance of local media and how we are watching local media disintegrate.

I might ask the same questions to many of you, but I'll start with Mr. McAdams.

You spoke a lot about local media and what we stand to lose. One thing that's been brought up to me time and again as I've met with stakeholders is that our local media is often a place where our journalists begin their careers. It's often a training ground for local media.

Could you talk about the impact on journalists' development and what that looks like in Canada, considering the attacks on local media?

Mr. Ryan McAdams: That's an interesting question. It's one of the areas where we struggle more than we even want to acknowledge in our own industry.

The area of recruiting new reporters is at the point where they don't apply. We continually look forward. We're continually in contact with journalism schools, newspapers and local radio stations, for that matter. The number of reporters we have today compared to even five years ago would be fewer by roughly a third to a half.

When we do get people to apply, we ask them what else they were looking for or what brought them to this. It's rare that they say they have a passion for newspapers or for local media. The younger generation is looking for digital-based environments for careers. It's not something that they look to as an area to consider.

Ms. Heather McPherson: There aren't the opportunities for them to thrive in that area.

Mr. Ryan McAdams: There aren't the opportunities and also there is not the cool factor in newspapers or local media that there is for digital. That's the reality.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, of course. I think it's true that we've also seen the diminishment of local content even within our larger publications. So for example, there's much less local content in the Edmonton Journal.

One of the other things you had spoken about, Mr. McAdams, was the imbalance of revenue. We've seen drastic cuts to revenue for some of our local media. Are the current programs working? From your perspective, what would you like to see in legislation to correct some of that imbalance of revenue?

Mr. Ryan McAdams: One of the things we've seen in the past decade is the virtual disappearance of government advertising as the changes have been permitted, or with the Municipal Government Act where the municipal governments now can advertise local bylaw changes to their digital platforms or their own websites, and I question whether the message is being seen by the majority of the population as it once was. Even when you get into provincial and federal politics it's the same thing. The proliferation of advertising that once was spent in traditional media, whether print, radio or TV, has now gone digital, and as I mentioned in my presentation, the

digital portion of that dollar is largely leaving Canada and it has no lingering job impacts or tax impacts.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Petrie, could you comment on that as well? Do you have anything you'd like to add in terms of the revenue and the imbalance we see in revenues for local media?

Mr. John Petrie: Yes, I agree with Mr. McAdams. We have to find a way to get that revenue back into our country. Use Netflix for an example. Where's Mr. Google here? I think they've got about eight million subscribers in Canada. Even at a low rate of \$10, and it's up to about \$16 now, they're making \$80 million a month. Translate that over a year. How much tax revenue are we getting from Netflix? GST is a bit different on that, but we have to find a way to get it back.

I'll give you another example and I'll refer to the former mayor of Brooks, Martin Shields here. We have Amazon delivering packages into our community every day. We have SkipTheDishes. We have all these other ones. They're taking a ton of money out of our community. We're paying for the infrastructure and everything else and we're not getting anything back.

So there's an example of SkipTheDishes or Amazon and Netflix and Facebook and Google and all that. We have to find a way to get it back.

• (1300)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, absolutely. Thank you for that.

My last question is for Mr. Kassem. I know I'm running out of time.

Thank you very much for everything that you've done and all your information about the diaspora and cultural community content.

One of the things you talked about was the accuracy of content. Could you talk a little about what you'd like to see in Bill C-10 to ensure we are getting accurate content to audiences, particularly online?

I think we've lost Mr. Kassem. If he comes back, if I get a second stab, I'll try to get his answer at that point.

The Chair: Thank you.

There's an expected 7.9 million Canadian subscribers to Netflix.

We now go to Kevin Waugh, from one old broadcaster, myself, to another radio broadcaster, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you.

Good to see everyone.

Broadcasting has changed. I just finished *The Tangled Garden*. It's a fascinating book. I would think everyone on this committee should read it. The Broadcasting Act does not pertain to newspapers today, so, Mr. McAdams, you're right. Governments across the world are pulling ads from newspapers, not only in Canada. I have PressReader and I read a lot of newspapers worldwide. Governments are no longer going to subsidize newspapers. I see it. That's just the way it is. That's the big change. It started with the Harper government in 2010 and it has continued. I'm not saying it's right but if you think you tell us in committee that governments across the world should spend more on newspapers, it's not going to happen.

The shift has happened and it's going to continue to happen and I don't know where you're going to find your revenues. We did ask Facebook on Friday, because they are taking a lot of content from newspapers in this country. They're not paying for it. They don't want to pay for it. We've heard that loud and clear from Mr. Chan. Your newspaper group should start there. Put the pressure on these tech giants like Facebook and see if you can get anything from them because the day of the federal government subsidizing newspapers is all but over.

Mr. Ryan McAdams: I think you will find, if you read the attachments I have included in my speaking notes, that there is a series of campaigns the industry has run and is continuing to run—in fact, we are launching another one this week—with respect to the tech giants. The challenge we face with them stealing content and looking for the government's coordinated support—and we realize they are not going to spend the dollars they used to, Mr. Waugh—is in looking at ways to police the tech giants, similar to what Australia and France have done.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, France did get an agreement. Australia didn't get an agreement from them.

Mr. Ryan McAdams: Not yet.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's the sticking point in my mind, because I think if Australia would get an agreement, then Canada would soon follow. Right now, from what we heard on Friday anyway, I think that Facebook is digging in their heels.

Mr. Petrie, it's good to see you again.

It's interesting. You talked about Rosetown radio, CJYM. Like your stations in Brooks, they are owned by Stingray—Rosetown, Kindersley. I can say that Humboldt, Moose Jaw, Estevan, Weyburn are no longer owned locally. Golden West broadcasting out of Manitoba owns all these rural radio stations, and that's a disconnect at times, there is no question. You can't go to “coffee row” and talk to the owner of the radio station anymore, because he or she doesn't live in that community. That's the way it is.

Unfortunately, radio is hanging on.... They have done it to themselves at times. I agree with you, Mr. Petrie, that they do need the help. However, the big conglomerates like Jim Pattison are buying up everything in the province here. You see it with Stingray in your community, and that's not good, is it?

• (1305)

Mr. John Petrie: You can get around that by loosening up the licences on that, because if the big giants aren't going to do any lo-

cal programming, maybe somebody else will come along and start up a small....

The licences were brought in at one point basically because the capital cost to start up a radio station was so high and you wanted a certain amount of longevity in that.

For you or me or Ahmed to start up a community radio station, the capital cost nowadays is minuscule. In most cases, like I say, you just need a \$1,200 laptop and you can start up a radio station in your basement. If you loosen up the licences on that, then maybe we can get back our local programming.

I'm not asking for any government help; I never really believed in that. However, I believe if you have a good product and you have advertisers who are listening, or you have an audience and you can direct that advertising to them, they will pay for that content.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes.

Mr. Kassem, I looked at your website. You're into podcasts, which I think are the way of the future.

How is that going for your organization?

Mr. Ahmed Kassem: I'm sorry, sir. Can you repeat the question?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I see on your website that you do a number of podcasts. How is that going in your community, because that seems to be the future here?

Mr. Ahmed Kassem: It's going very well, especially during the pandemic. During the racial conflict, the podcast was very effective in terms of the newcomers, because we provide it in different languages.

It's mainly English. We have guests in English, and the reason is for the people to understand the language and—

The Chair: Mr. Kassem, I'm sorry; I have to interrupt. I'm really pressed for time. I apologize.

I have to go Ms. Ien, another former broadcaster.

Ms. Ien, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Marci Ien (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses today. We really appreciate your perspectives.

Mr. McAdams, I want to start with you quickly if I might. Have you delved deeper into your concerns as to the perception of media, and the whole idea of what is news and what is real journalism?

Mr. Ryan McAdams: Delving into it, we hear a lot of comments from community citizens and readers that the news they receive has obviously diminished. They believe there's less value, less truth in it, and that's a function of where they are also getting their news from social media feeds.

That's where the inaccuracy or discrepancy between one story and the other.... We spend the time, as a reporting organization, to do fact checking, and we see the competing feeds we have with the stories that are significantly different in content. That's where we have a perception of discrepancy between the different types of news being reported.

We spend the extra time...and therefore have less news to be able to report, based on doing fact checks.

Ms. Marci Ien: Given the general landscape right now and the challenges that abound, how can we better attract young talent?

Mr. Ryan McAdams: One of the programs we had throughout this pandemic was the local journalism initiative. We took advantage of that. We were able to get some new blood into our newsrooms. It has been a refreshing perspective to not only see the difference in terms of how they approach news, how they consume news....We've learned from them in terms of how to approach it, how to report it, and how to package it in different fashions.

Ms. Marci Ien: Mr. Kassem, as we continue to navigate this pandemic, isolation and mental health are huge factors right now. We know this.

Can you tell us a bit about the role of radio as a connector to a community of new Canadians, the people you serve, in particular, and how radio can act as a lifeline?

Mr. Ahmed Kassem: For now, we use broadcast more often. The pandemic not only had an effect on many Canadians. There has been a huge impact, due to many factors that play into the economic situation, especially for newcomers, people of colour and minorities.

Isolation is a huge factor. In our broadcast, we have a psychologist in our office who talks about the importance of having time to yourself. There's a light at the end of the tunnel.

One of the main challenges we're facing is the problem of the vaccine. Most people, if the vaccine were to be available, would not be taking it regardless if they are newcomers or local people. That's the challenge we are facing now. We hope to come up with something some time this week or next week.

JBS Canada is one of the largest beef-processing plants in Canada. It employs about 3,000 employees, and 90% of them are immigrants or newcomers. It is having a problem convincing people to take the vaccine. We're hoping, by communicating via radio or broadcast with a video clip, to encourage people to take the vaccine.

More importantly, the mental health issue for newcomers is huge. They have flashbacks from where they came from or from where they were running away from, and the problems they faced. There is an increase in isolation, anxiety and depression. On top of that, this increase also has an effect on domestic violence. Domestic violence is increasing now in our area and throughout Canada. If people are staying in their houses all the time, that will also affect their mental health and wellness.

• (1310)

The Chair: That's all the time we have, I'm afraid. I apologize to my colleagues from the Bloc and the NDP who didn't get their second round in. Perhaps we can work something out in the future.

To our guests, Mr. Kassem, Mr. McAdams and Mr. Petrie, thank you for your insights and experience. Well done. I was not aware that Norway is all digital, for example. We learn something new every day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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