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• (0815)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to the 96th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Welcome to all of you. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

While public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer require masks to be worn in or at the House of Commons, masks, including N95 masks, remain excellent tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. Their use is strongly encouraged.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants and observers in this meeting that screenshots or photos of your screen are not permitted.

Our meeting room has a very good audio system, but audio feedback is possible, which can be extremely harmful to the health of our interpreters. Please be extremely careful: when you are handling your earpiece, for example, make sure that it is not near a microphone that is on.

We will obviously hold the meeting in both official languages. The work of the interpreters is extremely important. Hello to the interpreters.

The first part of this meeting is the order in council appointment of Ms. Catherine Tait to the position of president of CBC/Radio-Canada.

Ms. Tait, the members around the table will be able to ask you questions in a few moments. Beside you are Barbara Williams, Executive Vice-President in charge of CBC, and Dany Meloul, Interim Executive Vice-President in charge of Radio-Canada. Welcome to all three of you.

Ms. Tait, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. You now have the floor.

Ms. Catherine Tait (President and Chief Executive Officer, CBC/Radio-Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable committee members, thank you for the invitation to meet with you today. I am indeed accompanied by the two executive vice-presidents of CBC and Radio-Canada to help answer any questions you have.

[*English*]

Since the committee's motion states that this invitation is to discuss my mandate following my reappointment, I feel that it is important to start by clarifying that the president and CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada does not receive her mandate from the government.

As many of you know, CBC/Radio-Canada, as an independent Crown corporation, has its mandate set out in law in the Broadcasting Act. It is to provide “services incorporating a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains”. That law also protects the corporation's “freedom of expression and the journalistic, creative and programming independence”.

I mention this because that independence is essential to our existence. It marks the fundamental difference between a public broadcaster that serves citizens and a state broadcaster that serves the government. CBC/Radio-Canada is accountable to the public.

I mention this because I am concerned by some views expressed that the power of a parliamentary committee could be used to summon employees who make day-to-day decisions about our journalism. Political interference in journalism is precisely why the Broadcasting Act protects journalistic independence in law.

As president and CEO, I'm also responsible to parliamentarians for CBC/Radio-Canada. That is why I am here today. The heads of CBC and Radio-Canada are here with me to provide accountability to you and to Canadians without threatening that independence. I trust that you will support me in that effort.

I am proud to be able to lead this public media service that touches the lives of Canadians every day. The public money invested in CBC/Radio-Canada ensures that everyone can get not only the best-quality news and information in the country but also the very best in Canadian drama, comedy, music, podcasts and so much more.

Before we take your questions, let me tell you about a few of the priorities for my second term as president and CEO, developed with the support of our board of directors.

The first is the launch of the national indigenous strategy at CBC/Radio-Canada. This is a first for us, a first strategy developed and led by indigenous employees and leaders in concert with indigenous advisers, stakeholders and communities, a first framework for the public broadcaster to deliver on its promise to serve all Canadians and all indigenous peoples.

• (0820)

[*Translation*]

My second priority is to ensure the importance of the public broadcaster in our news ecosystem as well as our creative sector, particularly as the CRTC considers how to implement the Online News Act and the Online Streaming Act.

[*English*]

My third priority is to work to secure recognition of journalists as essential to the protection of our democracy. Journalists are disproportionately targeted by online harm and physical attacks on a global scale.

[*Translation*]

Finally, there is much to do to prepare CBC/Radio-Canada for an uncertain future. We are also experiencing the same challenges as other media here in Canada and around the world. Fierce competition from the global giants has upended our domestic industry, both in terms of news and entertainment programming.

[*English*]

Our new corporate strategic plan will focus on trust—earning, maintaining and building trust. We will do this by doubling down on our strengths—proximity, relevance and inclusion. This issue of public trust is the most important priority of all. It's an issue every western democracy is facing, and one that all my public broadcasting counterparts are committed to addressing, because a strong public media is undeniably one of the most important tools a country has for building trust.

In brief, those are my current priorities. With that, I welcome your questions.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you very much, Ms. Tait.

We will now proceed to questions from members. I remind members that I will hold up a card when you have about 30 seconds of speaking time left so as not to interrupt people. I would obviously encourage you to look in my direction at some point to make sure you still have some time. In short, we will try to do that as clearly as possible.

Mr. Berthold, you will begin this round of questions, and I understand that you want to share your time with your colleague Ms. Lantsman. You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Ms. Tait.

I wanted to take this first opportunity to ask you an important question. I am the son of a proud mother from Beauce and a father

from Sherbrooke. I am proud of my Quebec roots and heritage. Do you find my accent offensive or incomprehensible?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's not the case at all, sir.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Can you explain to me why the CBC wanted to avoid the Quebec accent and chose to turn its back on Quebec artists by having the English podcast “Alone: A Love Story” translated in Paris, which was produced here with Canadian money?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I want to clarify something. As soon as I became aware of this, I immediately called the president of the Union des artistes québécois to apologize. That was a mistake on our part. I apologized, and we, including Ms. Williams, reviewed our practices in that regard. We've corrected that. It won't happen again.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

I now turn the floor over to Ms. Lantsman.

[*English*]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Thanks, Ms. Tait.

You mentioned in your opening comments that public trust was the most important, so I want to speak to this notion.

On October 17, the CBC published a false headline based on dangerous disinformation that incorrectly stated that Israel was responsible for the explosion at the hospital in Gaza that resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. If you don't have it, I have it right here. That is the headline. It says, “Hundreds killed in Israeli airstrike on Gaza City hospital, Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza says”. That was since changed—if you don't have this—to “Palestinians say hundreds killed in Israeli airstrike on hospital; Israel blames Islamic Jihad”. This still lives on the CBC website. This headline is still there. It remains on the website.

I would hope you would agree with me that in fact the Palestinian health authority is controlled by Hamas. I think that is a fact.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence and the governments of the United States, Britain and France all have definitively said that the attack did not come from Israel, so why won't the CBC?

• (0825)

Ms. Catherine Tait: If I may bring the member's attention to the facts and correct the record, CBC first reported on the terrifically horrific attack or bomb on the hospital in the Gaza Strip based on an Associated Press report, which is a trusted source of news for us. You'll notice, if you go to CBC.ca or Radio-Canada.ca, that we often use news feeds from other trusted, reputable news organizations, and we cited the source of that information, as Ms. Lantsman has just pointed out. Ninety minutes later, when we received the corrected information, we updated the site.

I would just like to say that we stand behind our journalism. In conflicts and in war, news comes at a very fast rate and people are claiming on both sides of the story. Our journalists on the ground and in our newsrooms are obliged to measure and take account.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I appreciate that it's an Associated Press article. In your mandate, you are responsible to Canadians. It's \$1.4 billion of taxpayer money.

You said that you stand by the statement "Palestinians say hundreds killed in Israeli airstrike on hospital; Israel blames Islamic Jihad". That still exists. It is a headline that has been debunked by governments across the world, including even our own Prime Minister, albeit seven days late.

I want to know if you'll apologize to Jewish Canadians. I want to know if you'll apologize to Canadians, and I want to know when we can expect a retraction from CBC.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Mr. Chair, I will not apologize, because the journalism is among the finest in the world. Our journalists operate in an independent fashion, independent of management, independent of the board of directors, and independent of government and political influence. They are guided by their journalistic standards and practices, and I invite any member and any Canadian to refer to these practices on our website. They are transparent and they are public, and if you have a concern, if anyone has a concern, with our journalism, I invite you to address it to the independent ombudsman, in French or in English, in order to have them independently investigate and review the application of our journalist—

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I understand that you're not going to apologize for printing disinformation.

How can the CBC, which is committed to truth, committed to standards, not call Hamas terrorists? We saw a leaked memo from the director of journalistic standards, Mr. Achi, who sent a directive to journalists not to describe Hamas as a terrorist group. You do agree it is a fact that Hamas was listed as a terrorist organization in 2002 in this country. Is that correct?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I will address the issues as follows, Mr. Chair.

There's a fantastic blog by our head of news, Brodie Fenlon, which you can refer to. He does this very often to comment on making journalism transparent, explaining to Canadians how we do the journalism. In the case of the attribution, this is a policy that we have had at CBC/Radio-Canada for several decades. It is shared and mirrored by many other reputable news organizations, including The Globe and Mail, the BBC, Agence France-Presse, Reuters, and any number of other agencies.

I would just say on the attribution that we use the words "terrorist" and "terrorism" and acknowledge that Canada, the U.K. and the U.S. consider Hamas a terrorist organization, but we as journalists do not make that attribution.

• (0830)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Ms. Lantsman. Your time is up, but you will have an opportunity to speak again in the next round of questions.

I will now go to Lisa Hepfner for the Liberals for six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today to explain the journalism process to people at this committee.

I'll go back to your last point, because people keep saying that this was a leaked directive from the CBC, but in fact it was just a note pointing to the CBC style guide, which, as you mentioned, is in accordance with other journalism organizations that have style guides. Could you maybe explain in a bit more detail to this committee why we have style guides in journalism and how they help journalists be more independent? You know what I'm trying to say.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Thank you for the question.

The journalistic standards and practices have been developed over many years. They are under regular review. With social media and different things changing in our industry, we have to constantly make sure they're up to date.

They are founded on five critical principles: impartiality, fairness, balance, integrity and accuracy. These are absolutely fundamental. They are common to CBC and Radio-Canada newsrooms and they inform everything we do.

Today is our annual public meeting. I have to mention that Adrienne Arseneault said in a clip the most moving thing I've ever heard. She said that of all journalistic practices, it is integrity that informs everything our journalists do. The integrity speaks to balancing the impact of a story, trying to understand the source, trying to make sure we acknowledge sources, and being as fair as possible so Canadians receive the best possible fact-based information. They can then judge the news as they see fit.

To the question of how that works.... I'm not a journalist. I was a producer before I had the privilege of serving in this role. I've had the honour of witnessing an assignment room at CBC/Radio-Canada. That's where, every morning at 80 stations across this country, managing editors are sitting down with their teams of journalists, producers and researchers. They talk about the news: fast-breaking news, hard-issue news, investigative news and international news. They discuss, balance and consider, and that's where the integrity comes in. They determine what they feel they must be focusing on for that particular day.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: I listen to CBC coverage all the time, and I regularly hear CBC say that Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by Canada. It's simply that the journalist isn't making that distinction. Is that right?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's correct.

The determination, as mirrored in other news organizations, is that the word is extremely politically charged. If journalists use the word, it causes them to enter into a debate that is not our business. Our business is to remain independent and fact-based.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: You're the head of CBC as a whole, so you really don't have any say in the newsroom.

I've worked in many newsrooms. There's a line that separates management from the newsroom, so you're not part of those conversations in the morning, are you?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, absolutely not.

In fact, it's not only that we have an independence from government through Broadcasting Act, but we have an independence from the board of directors, which has an oversight role. There is this team you see in front of you; we have an oversight role. Then there is the journalism. The journalism is entirely independent.

It's extremely important for Canadians to understand there are three layers of independence. We do not interfere in, direct or try to influence the news.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: I'm sure you were kept apprised of this committee and the last few meetings we had. How did you feel about politicians or members of this committee trying to tell CBC how to tell the news, how to tell the stories and what words to use?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Very honestly, I'm disturbed. I'm disturbed by political interference. I worry about our journalists.

We're living in a world where.... The world press freedom index, in its annual survey, which they've been conducting for many years, concluded that over 80% of the population on this planet is living under authoritarian regimes where there is limited to no press freedom or independence. We are the minority. This is a precious asset. This independent journalism is the pillar of our democracy. If we try to influence it on any side of any particular debate, we are threatening the fundamental building block of this country's democracy. That's why I speak with the level of passion I do today about this subject.

• (0835)

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: How would you say CBC journalists reacted to hearing a parliamentarian accuse the CBC of being on the side of Hamas?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Again, I do not speak to the journalists about how they feel or react; I respect their independence.

I can only imagine they are concerned, mostly because we have spectacular teams on the ground in Israel right now who are putting their lives in danger bringing the news back to Canadians. Any conversation that foments division or a suggestion that they are on one side of a war puts them in danger.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you very much, Ms. Hefpner.

Ms. Tait, normally, it would now be the Bloc Québécois' turn to ask questions, but since all the members of that party are busy chairing the meeting, I am going to propose that Mr. Julian from the NDP take the floor for six minutes. Afterwards, I shall ask you some questions as well.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have no problem with you asking a few questions now.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): No, go ahead, please, Mr. Julian. You have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Thank you very much.

Thank you for being here at this important discussion.

As you cited—and I think Ms. Hefpner asked the question—a Conservative member of this committee stated, in the most irresponsible and incendiary way possible, that CBC journalists were on the side of terrorists. She has not apologized. She has not in any way taken responsibility for those appalling comments.

I note that 33 journalists or members of the media have been killed so far in Israel and Gaza. They were covering the war. You mentioned, in your opening statement, the issue of the physical safety of your journalists. Do you feel comments like that in any way contribute to an environment where journalists' safety may be put in peril?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely, Mr. Julian.

The reality is that 363 journalists were imprisoned last year around the world. Eighty-six were killed last year alone, according to the UN. As you said, 33 have been killed just in this conflict.

We know that, here at home, we are not immune. We have the highest incidence of online attacks, which have knock-on effects in the physical environment. We've had to remove logos from our trucks. We've had to protect our journalists during demonstrations. We've had to begin domestic war-zone training. We've always had training for journalists who go into war zones or conflict areas, but now we do it domestically. It is an extremely serious issue.

It's why, last year, we launched the online harm initiative called #NotOK or #CestAssez. I invite you to visit it. It's an open-source platform. We are developing, along with all our news colleagues here in Canada, a guideline for newsrooms to manage the post-traumatic stress syndrome that many of our journalists are suffering from.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that. I certainly hope the member of the Conservative Party will apologize for what are appallingly irresponsible comments.

I want to come back to Ms. Lantsman's questions.

The Conservatives have been spreading disinformation. They've never apologized. They've never retracted it. They've never clarified their remarks. The attribution of the word "terrorist", as you correctly pointed out, has been used consistently in CBC coverage. There is the appalling, horrible terrorist attack that killed over 1,400 Israelis. We're now seeing the horrible civilian casualties in Gaza. I have been watching CBC coverage, and the word "terrorist" has been used. It's always attributed, of course, but it's used consistently.

Can you, in a sense, refute Ms. Lantsman's contention that the word "terrorist" has not been used on the CBC network? When it has been used—and it has been used frequently—it has always been attributed.

● (0840)

Ms. Catherine Tait: That is correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: I want to come to the other bit of disinformation, which is regarding the Associated Press article. Ms. Lantsman correctly identified what the headline said. The CBC also ran stories that updated the horrible situation that existed with the hospital in Gaza.

How many articles have been updated and provided with more information, as more information came out about the role that Islamic Jihad's failed rocket played in killing those people?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It was several times, attributing the UN conclusion and other sources, I would say.

It's important to understand that, in any conflict, context is extremely important. That's why we cited the source in the case of the Palestinian health authority, and then according to the Israeli government, or according to the UN. It's extremely important. Context, especially in a fast-moving situation, is critical. You cannot look at an article in isolation. You have to look at the body of work, which is what you're suggesting. There are many articles that point to a bigger story.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that.

It's disinformation to point to one article when there's a series of other articles.

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: If Ms. Lantsman was being honest, she would show the evolution of the reporting from CBC on that issue as more information came out, as we've seen with CNN and with BBC.

You mentioned foreign interference. This is profoundly disturbing. Last weekend, we learned through Canadaland, which has done terrific work, that a lot of the Conservative material and videos don't come from Canada; they come from a shop in Egypt that is financed, apparently, through the United States. We also know about the Putin regime and its use of the Internet Research Bureau to spread disinformation, false information.

You mentioned foreign interference. To what extent is that part of this sort of coordinated attack on institutions like the CBC? Have you been able to determine where this foreign interference is coming from that seems to be targeting CBC journalists?

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Please give a short answer, Ms. Tait.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'll do my best.

[*English*]

The reality is that our world has changed. Every day there are fake CBC and Radio-Canada websites being put up. Every day we have deep fakes, having a journalist like Ian Hanomansing selling health food products. Each day we have this kind of infiltration, whether it's from foreign actors—and our particular concern is during federal elections—or people seeking to make money on the Internet.

These bad actors have targeted the most trustworthy... I really want to underline for the record that CBC/Radio-Canada remains, according to 75% of Canadians, the most trustworthy source of news in this country. We are spending money on cybersecurity. We are joining our international colleagues at the BBC, at Reuters and all over the world in a trusted news initiative to try to combat an absolute tsunami of disinformation. What is truly disturbing is when the disinformation is coming from our own country. That is the worry. We really need to stand united, arms linked, to fight what is an extremely disturbing trend.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you very much.

Mr. Julian, your time is up.

Ms. Tait, I would like to ask you a few questions on a topic that many people are talking about this morning, i.e., comments made by Ms. Thomas in committee. Last week, she said that if CBC/Radio-Canada did not directly associate Hamas with terrorism, it was because the CBC was siding with the terrorists.

Shortly thereafter, people on the ground in Israel reported that a Radio-Canada journalist, Jean-François Bélanger, had his camera literally ripped off him. The camera's memory cards were taken out. That's pretty aggressive.

If this kind of narrative is kept up and not eliminated, do you fear that journalists on the ground will be faced with increasingly hostile conditions?

• (0845)

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You made a connection earlier, which I thought was very relevant, with what happened during the trucker convoy two winters ago. During that period, journalists had to erase any text or logo from their vehicles indicating their media outlet. Otherwise, depending on the media they belonged to, they ran the risk of being attacked by demonstrators.

Ms. Catherine Tait: If I may add something else, we not only have journalists, but also producers, cameramen and fixers or interpretive guides, the people on the ground who provide interpretation or identify contacts for us. It is a team, and a number of teams are working on the ground, whether it is in Ukraine or in Israel.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): We obviously recognize that politicians have a duty to be responsible in the comments they make.

That said, do you not get the impression that journalism today, as it has evolved over the past 20 or 30 years, with the live coverage that CNN has introduced, among other things, means that journalists probably spend much less time doing research? The work takes place in real time, as it were, in close proximity to the events being covered, which leaves little time to check sources in certain cases, particularly in conflict situations.

Do you feel that journalists themselves are contributing to the fact that people have slightly less trust in the news media? I do acknowledge that politicians have to be careful about the language they use when talking about news media, particularly CBC/Radio-Canada, but do you think that journalists should take a good hard look at themselves and their practices in order to restore citizens' trust?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We know very well that trust in traditional media, social media in particular and public broadcasters is declining.

We know very well that trust in governments, politicians and airlines, among others, is also on the decline. Trust is receding everywhere, and it's not because of journalism. It's a social phenomenon—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I would say that news journalism has an important role to play in democracy, which airlines do not. The role of the news media in this regard should be taken much more seriously. Would you agree?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I agree with that, of course, but I don't want to draw a direct link between a very busy news cycle and an erosion in trust that undermines journalism. That's why we have journalistic standards and practices that guide us in all our actions and in all our reporting.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I would now like to move on to another issue.

We talk a lot about the CBC, but a little less about Radio-Canada. And yet Radio-Canada is on my mind a great deal, because there are differences of opinion between the CBC and Radio-Canada. There are differences between the CBC and Radio-Canada. I'm talking about cultural differences.

In fact, we were all shocked by the departure of Michel Bissonnette. We were also left wondering why he left. We've heard rumours of tension within the organization. As I referred to earlier, we also heard that there were differences of opinion, particularly with regard to applying equity, diversity and inclusion criteria.

Do you have the impression that everything is hunky-dory within the organization at the moment?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We know very well that there are significant cultural differences in Canada, and not only between anglophones and francophones. That is what is interesting and exciting for Canadians.

I can tell you that everything is going very well. We agree on our journalistic standards and practices, and the two people in charge of journalism, Brodie Fenlon and Luce Julien, work very closely together.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You are referring to news, but I'm talking about the organization as a whole.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I can ask Ms. Meloul to comment.

Ms. Dany Meloul (Interim Executive Vice-President, Radio-Canada, CBC/Radio-Canada): Since my arrival at Radio-Canada, not just in my current position, I have personally always enjoyed an excellent atmosphere for cooperation with my counterparts at the CBC, with whom we work closely. We share a lot of content. We always have good discussions, and I'm sure that will continue.

• (0850)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you. My time is up.

We're going to go to the second round, which is five minutes for the Conservatives and the Liberals, and then two and a half minutes for the Bloc and the NDP. Then we'll go back to the Conservatives and the Liberals for five minutes each.

Ms. Thomas, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Tait, just a moment ago, you said that integrity is of utmost importance to you, and you've referred to it in the journalistic standards as well.

I would just return to my colleague's question. You'll see here that this is the article when it was originally published by the CBC. You claim that 90 minutes later it was changed. I have that article title. It's here. This is after 90 minutes. In your journalistic standards, you say, "When we make corrections and clarifications online, we should include on the story page an explanatory note to the audience." Again, I have this article right here, and I don't see an explanatory note.

With the journalistic standards and integrity being so important, why wasn't this done?

Ms. Catherine Tait: In my understanding—and, again, as Mr. Julian pointed out—there were several other stories that followed those two. If you read the entire thread—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm not holding those other folks accountable. I'm asking the CBC.

With regard to your journalistic standards, you say that you're supposed to offer a correction notice. That didn't happen. Why?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Again, I defend the journalism and its independence.

If I may answer, our journalists conduct themselves in an independent fashion. I cannot answer the question as to when they post a correction or when they do not. That is their business, and they conduct themselves according to the JSPs. I'm not here to answer on whether or not they corrected a piece of journalism.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait, you—

Ms. Catherine Tait: Again, if you are concerned about the journalism, I invite you to reach out to the ombudsman, just as every Canadian has the right to do, if you do not feel that the journalism has been adhered to.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Chair, I would ask that Ms. Tait speak to you directly, and not to me, and perhaps to refrain from raising her voice toward me.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Ms. Thomas, I don't think Ms. Tait raised her voice. However, I agree with you that Ms. Tait's answers should be addressed through the chair.

I'll turn it back to you.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: When an article is written blaming Israel for an air strike it did not commit, and this has been confirmed by countries around the world and intelligence agencies from around the world, and the CBC still insists that it stands behind that article professing that the attack did come from Israel, that is, in fact, the spreading of dangerous disinformation.

We are inviting you, Ms. Tait, through the chair, to offer an apology to the Jewish population in Canada, and I daresay to all Canadians, because they have \$1.4 billion invested in this public broadcaster. You are right: They do depend on you to tell the truth. When the truth is not told, when a mistruth is spoken, when disinformation is spread, especially dangerous disinformation like this, an apology seems right—if not an apology, then, at a bare minimum, a correction. Neither of those things has happened.

Again, would you apologize to the Jewish population and all Canadians?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No. What I will say, though, is that I'm going to quote from the article, just for the record. After the first piece, there was a second piece, updated, that said:

Gaza's Hamas-run Health Ministry said an Israeli airstrike Tuesday hit a Gaza City hospital packed with wounded and other Palestinians seeking shelter, killing hundreds. However, the Israeli military said it had no involvement in the explosion, which it says was caused by a misfired rocket from the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad.

I think it speaks for itself.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes. Ms. Tait, thank you. Thank you for again admitting that there was dangerous disinformation spread in that article. I would note that you—

Ms. Catherine Tait: I have not admitted that. I'm sorry. I'm correcting the record.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian, you have a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian: This is a most profoundly dishonest line of questioning.

I would ask you, Mr. Chair, to enforce the rules we have at committee.

• (0855)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Ms. Thomas, I would ask you to refrain from putting words in Ms. Tait's mouth. You have 45 seconds left.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Chair, I would give the floor to Ms. Lantsman, please.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Ms. Tait, Hamas itself admits that it uses terrorism to further its goals. Those facts are not disputed. The choice not to call Hamas "terrorists" is wilful obstruction of the facts. It is biased and it does help Hamas.

That said, your funding has increased 21% since 2016. The prime-time ratings have dropped 7.6% since 2018. Trust is down to 40%. That's 60% distrust. I will never apologize for holding the CBC to account for \$1.4 billion of taxpayer money that you receive. The NDP used to be an opposition party. They used to do that in committee. They used to do that in the House. I will never apologize for that.

Can you tell—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Ms. Lantsman, your time is up. Actually, we're well over the five minutes. Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Noormohamed from the Liberal Party for five minutes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Tait, you are here today to discuss your mandate and its importance.

On a number of occasions, the Leader of the Opposition and the Conservatives have promised to cut funding to the CBC and gut it. What impact will this have on your mandate, particularly in journalism, and particularly on Canadian content and priorities?

[English]

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'm not sure I entirely understood your question. I beg your pardon.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I will repeat it in English.

The Conservative leader has promised to defund the CBC, to get rid of its funding. What impact would that have on the delivering of your mandate? What impact would that have on journalism and on Canadian content?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I understand. I got it. Thank you so much. I beg your pardon.

To be clear, over the last 30 years, CBC/Radio-Canada has not had a real increase in its budget, real dollars aside. We are flat. Yet today, as opposed to just providing traditional, linear television and radio, we are providing service across a number of digital platforms, because that's where Canadians are. Here is an interesting fact: When I started at CBC, the number of people watching traditional television was at about 28%. It has now dropped to 14%. The number of people watching only digital was at about 14%, and now it's in the high thirties. What we're seeing is a shift to digital.

To defund this organization in a world of extreme polarization... We are the only national news media organization in the country with a mandate to serve all Canadians. Therefore, should we be defunded, we would no longer be reaching all of those Canadians.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Could you briefly tell me what impact that would have, in particular on rural communities?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It would be devastating. We already have, in English Canada, 33 communities with populations of over 50,000 that have no CBC presence.

I just flagged to MP Thomas that we were delighted to open a one-person bureau in Lethbridge last year.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

I have a quick question for you on this.

I'm looking at some of the headlines on CBC over the last little while, and one of the headlines reads, "Pierre Poilievre's inner circle divided over how to tackle gender issues, sources say". Does that mean that the CBC is saying that the inner circle is divided, or is it saying that sources are saying that?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Sources are saying it.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: There's an article with a headline that reads, "Ed Fast says Poilievre supporters tried to 'muzzle' him

on monetary policy". Is that the CBC saying that Poilievre supporters tried to muzzle Ed Fast, or is it Ed Fast saying that?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It's Ed Fast saying that.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: If I were to read the totality of all the stories that were written in respect of the tragedy at the hospital in Gaza—I would start with the letter that Ms. Thomas and Ms. Lantsman referred to and then continue to read all of the articles that have been written—what conclusion would a reasonable person reach?

• (0900)

Ms. Catherine Tait: It would be that the CBC and Radio-Canada are reporting on the facts and on the sources that they have received on the ground or through other reputable news organizations.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Why does the CBC—why does any credible journalist—indicate who their source is?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It's because otherwise we would be in the business of opinion.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: If you were in the business of opinion, how would that make you different from journalists?

I'm asking these questions because I think it's really important for Canadians to understand the difference between presenting facts or sources and presenting opinions.

Ms. Catherine Tait: It is extremely... I go back to the five guiding principles: impartiality, fairness, balance, accuracy and integrity.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: With the time I have left, which I believe is 40 seconds, I would like to talk about accuracy for a moment.

What is the degree of confidence that you have in the accuracy and quality of the work of our journalists at CBC and Radio-Canada, particularly in areas of conflict?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I think we are the most outstanding, high-quality journalistic organization in this country. I have enormous pride in the work that our journalists do. We are the only journalistic organization that has any level of presence internationally, and even then, it's rather inadequate.

We do that work with extraordinary care. Our purpose is the public interest, first and foremost.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

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

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, we find ourselves in a situation where the Conservatives' inappropriate comments are putting our journalists in jeopardy. What measures have you taken to further protect journalists who are currently in the line of fire in the Middle East?

Secondly, how many awards have CBC journalists won in the last five years? I'm talking about awards from other journalists.

Ms. Catherine Tait: It would be hundreds of awards. I can give you a more precise figure if you want, but we are recognized by our peers here in Canada and around the world.

[English]

We were the first Canadian journalist organization to receive the trusted news certification by Reporters Without Borders.

What was the first question?

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: It was about threats to journalists. I invite you to answer in French.

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I was saying, we have an enormous amount of work to do to protect and train our journalists. In fact, we provided training to journalists from other news organizations in the private sector who couldn't afford it. We provide training to both CBC/Radio-Canada and private sector journalists to prepare them for reporting in dangerous situations.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for that.

You pointed out—and the Conservatives have to admit—that there was a series of articles in the evolution following the explosions at the hospital that clearly indicated, as more information came out, where that information was coming from, whether it was the U.S. or the United Nations.

However, if somebody says they still don't like seeing that CBC article in the archives, even though CBC has updated it with new articles, what is open to that Canadian to do? With Fox, they can't do a thing, because Fox has no ombudsman process, but what can somebody who's concerned about something like that, an older article that they don't like—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Time is up. Please provide a 10-second answer, Ms. Tait.

[English]

Ms. Catherine Tait: There are a number of things a Canadian can do if they don't like anything they see in any of our journalism, but first and foremost, they can reach out to the ombudsman, in French or in English, and indicate their concern. The ombudsman operates independently from management. In fact, the ombudsman reports directly to the board and the public on a biannual basis, and reports on any errors or concerns in the journalism. That is entirely public.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Ms. Tait.

I would like to ask you a question about the processes around ensuring independence and protecting newsrooms from any influence that might come from CBC/Radio-Canada management, but also from the political community and lobbies. I believe that is a principle that you defend very fiercely. I want to know how far this “Iron Curtain” between newsrooms and senior management at CBC/Radio-Canada extends.

I'm thinking, for example, of a senior management meeting that brings together all department representatives, as well as the news branch. Is it possible that as a result of these senior management meetings, some sort of trend or ideological viewpoint from within CBC/Radio-Canada could seep into the directives that are then given to the newsrooms? How do you prevent seepage within the organization?

• (0905)

Ms. Catherine Tait: That responsibility lies with Brodie Fenlon and Luce Julien, and I can tell you that they fiercely protect that independence. I very rarely meet these people, unless they make a presentation to the board of directors. There is no daily contact at all. We respect the distance between us, and if ever a comment is made, Ms. Fenlon and Ms. Julien rectify things immediately.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Okay. Thank you, Ms. Tait.

We're moving to the Conservatives.

Ms. Thomas, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It's Melissa Lantsman.

[Translation]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I will be speaking. Thank you.

[English]

I'm going to go back. The funding increases for the CBC have been 21% since 2016. That's \$1.4 billion of taxpayers' money. The trust score has gone down, and by your own principles outlined on the CBC website.... You discussed impartiality, fairness, balance and integrity. Can you tell Canadians, who expect those principles to be upheld, why the state-funded broadcaster sued the Conservative Party in the middle of the 2019 election, while it was covering that party? By the way, it lost the lawsuit and our taxpayers are on the hook for the costs.

Why should Canadians trust you?

Ms. Catherine Tait: If I may, Mr. Chair, I just want to correct the record on our budget of \$1.4 billion.

It's a very significant sum of money, but I just want to put it into perspective. France Télévisions and Radio France received four billion euros for a population of 67 million or so, one time zone and one language. We are providing service in two official languages and eight indigenous languages across six time zones with a funding of \$33 per capita per year. That's less than a dime a day, and we also earn commercial revenue.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I understand, Ms. Tait. You don't believe that you get enough money.

My question is about why you sued the Conservative Party in the middle of the 2019 election. If you have an answer, that's fine. If not, I'll pass the time over to Mrs. Thomas, who maybe can ask you that same question that you won't answer.

Ms. Catherine Tait: It's not that I don't want to answer. I wanted to correct the record on the funding.

The purpose of the public broadcaster, as you've heard, is to present all news in the most fact-based, accurate and balanced way possible. We object to the use of our journalism—whether it's clips, sound bites or photographs of our journalists—when it is manipulated and used by political parties for their political ends. That was the substance of our concern. It continues to be a concern.

Do we wish to sue any political party? Absolutely not. However, we absolutely have to protect not only the appearance of independence but also the reality of independence. Therefore, we will always protect that journalism.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Well, it's not all political parties, just some.

Mrs. Thomas, go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Chair, Ms. Tait seems to like to correct the record here but unfortunately doesn't ensure that the record is corrected for the sake of the Canadian public, who are investing \$1.4 billion of taxpayer money annually in the CBC and, of course, wanting unbiased and reliable news coverage.

She stated that trust is of utmost importance. However, obviously, telling the truth doesn't fit into her definition of gaining Canadians' trust. My question for Ms. Tait is this: We know that—

• (0910)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I just want to be clear on what I heard. I believe that Mrs. Thomas accused the witness of lying. I just want to make sure that that's not what happened, because if it is, I would humbly request that you, as the chair, perhaps ask Mrs. Thomas to take back her words and reconsider what she is saying.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Ms. Thomas, did you hear your colleague Mr. Noormohamed's request?

Do you intend to take back your words and reconsider your approach?

[*English*]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The question I have for Ms. Tait has to do with—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian has a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mrs. Thomas has a long experience. She knows that what she just said was incredibly unparliamentary and inappropriate for this committee, inappropriate in every way. You have asked her to retract, and I believe she should. This is a parliamentary committee. It's not some kind of street brawl. It is really unfortunate.

I know that the Conservatives are frustrated because they've been saying things that are not true—

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Julian. I think we're getting into a debate here.

Ms. Thomas, I would ask you to watch your choice of words with our guests. You seem to be hinting that Ms. Tait had ill-intentioned motives, which is not very parliamentary. I am cautioning you.

You have one minute and 15 seconds remaining.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Of course, that was not what I was intending to say, but the censorship coalition, of course, will try to silence my voice and interrupt as much as possible.

With regard to Ms. Lantsman's question concerning the lawsuit that was undertaken by the CBC toward the end of the 2019 election, it seems like a bit of a suspicious time to launch that. Nevertheless, it was unsuccessful. The courts did, in fact, determine that it was within the right of the Conservative Party of Canada to take footage provided by a public broadcaster and use it within its frame of reference. I wonder, then, why on earth the public broadcaster, the CBC, would undertake this case only a few days before the end of an election—I mean, it was right in the middle of a federal election—when in fact the CBC claims to want to be independent and truthful and to function with integrity. That doesn't seem to be the case in this instance.

Again, the court determined that the CPC, the Conservative Party of Canada, was in the right to use this footage. Was this just gamesmanship on behalf of the CBC?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I would like to clarify that this is not the only political party that we have had to take action on. It went further than—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Chair, I would ask that you kindly ask the witness to answer the question.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Ms. Thomas, I'm going to give Ms. Tait a few more seconds, but your time is up.

Ms. Tait, please answer in a few seconds.

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I said, the legal case in the case of the Conservative Party is not the only time we've had to take injunctions. We've done that to the NDP and to the Liberal Party as well. We are here to protect our journalism.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Chair, it was in the middle of an election.

I didn't hear an answer.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you. Your time is well over, Ms. Thomas.

We will now begin the last round of questions.

Over to Ms. Gainey, from the Liberal Party, for five minutes.

Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Tait, thank you for being here.

I would like to come back to your strategic plan.

[*English*]

I believe you did an interview in February 2023, just earlier this year, signalling plans to shift your content to digital services. I believe that's what you were referencing in your three priorities as well with respect to your strategic plan.

I'm curious: Could you unpack that a bit more for us on the three commitments? If we have time, I'd also be curious to hear about the first one, regarding the indigenous framework that you're also working on.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Well, that's a big morsel to unpack.

What I would say on our strategic approach... As Canadians have shifted to digital, we have followed them as best we can. We are not leaving behind any of our deeply devoted television and radio users, watchers and listeners. Obviously, radio is a hugely powerful connector in this country, especially during times of climate emergencies, as we saw this summer with the fires.

That shift to digital takes a great deal of investment, and it also allows us to reach younger audiences, which is extremely important for the future of democracy in this country. We need young people to be engaged in civics, civil discourse, and that is what the public broadcaster is trying to promote.

With respect to the indigenous framework, as I said earlier, we have an obligation to serve all Canadians, and that includes the first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of this country. What is fantastically exciting about the work we've done over the last two years is that we've come to a place where not only will we be increasing the amount of indigenous-created and indigenous-produced content on our network, but we've made a commitment to ensure that our em-

ployee base and our leadership teams have greater representation from indigenous peoples.

• (0915)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You have two and a half minutes, Ms. Gainey.

[*English*]

Ms. Anna Gainey: I lost my thought there.

Did you have another question?

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you.

I would like to go back to where you started talking about foreign interference and the implications of that for journalists on the ground. I'm wondering if you can expand on that a little more. Also, do you know how many other Canadian news organizations are actually on the ground in the Middle East right now? Is it just CBC or are there others?

Ms. Catherine Tait: With respect to others on the ground—maybe Barb could provide it because of her background with Global—I know that Global and CTV have people.

[*Translation*]

On the French side, I don't know.

Ms. Dany Meloul: At the beginning of the conflict, Noovo, which is part of Bell Media, had a few people on the ground, but I don't think that's the case anymore.

[*English*]

Ms. Barbara Williams (Executive Vice-President, CBC, CBC/Radio-Canada): You're right. On the English side, Global and CTV are there. There are others there.

I think we've been able to have a longer and more dedicated presence in the Middle East, as well as in Ukraine, and we have formed bureaus in other parts of the world. Other English news organizations haven't been able to be there in as permanent or as widespread a way as we have.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: What are the risks to Canadians if CBC/Radio-Canada's funding is cut?

What are the risks to our democracy, for example?

Ms. Catherine Tait: The risks are significant, because without CBC/Radio-Canada we would live in a disconnected society. In such a vast country, it is very difficult to have common ideas and values. Francophones in minority communities especially will not have access to local news services in French. The same is true for people who live in the north of the country; there will be no more ties. We are an essential part of these people's lives. Our role, that of connecting communities, is very important.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You have 20 seconds, Ms. Hepfner.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Hefner: You mentioned that you now have a reporter on the ground in Lethbridge. I know that in Hamilton, our town, there is a really strong CBC team that is fully digital and that is able to transition to other platforms as well.

How important are those digital teams to Canadians?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It's the future.

Coming out of COVID, we had some savings from travel because no one was travelling, and we put it right into local journalism. We sent Juanita Taylor to represent *The National*, a national show, and now she's in Rankin Inlet reporting from the north. Lethbridge, Cranbrook, Grand Prairie, Nanaimo, Hamilton.... We have a digital studio in London, Ontario. This is the future. It's much more mobile.

[Translation]

On the francophone side, we have video newscasts, which people can watch on their mobile devices.

[English]

It's the future, and it allows us to be so much more flexible in getting out of the station and getting close to Canadians. That's what matters.

• (0920)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you very much, Ms. Hefner.

Ms. Tait, if you have a few more minutes to give to the committee, could you stay for another round of questions? It's 9:20. Can you stay a bit longer?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Until maybe 9:30.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Okay. Are our Conservative colleagues willing to do another round of questions?

Ms. Thomas, are you ready to go for five minutes?

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry, Chair. Did you say five minutes?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Let me just confirm with Ms. Tait that we do have time for a full round.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, absolutely.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): That's perfect.

We have time for a third round. The Liberals and Conservatives will have five minutes each, and the NDP and the Bloc will have two and a half minutes each.

Ms. Thomas, you have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

In the spring, Twitter determined that it would attach a label to public broadcasters, and it did that across the board. The CBC had

that done to its profile, so it had a label that said “government-funded” broadcaster attached. When interviewed, the CBC said that this was a threat to journalistic independence.

It is curious to me how announcing that public dollars are being received and are being used by the CBC is somehow a threat to journalistic independence, yet Ms. Tait is contending here today that receiving government money is not a threat to journalistic independence. I'm confused as to which one it is. On the one hand, when Twitter makes it public that government dollars, \$1.4 billion, are being received by this organization to put out news, it is all of a sudden a threat to journalistic independence. If a Conservative were to bring that up, then it is not a threat to journalistic independence.

If the CBC was given the opportunity to be truly independent and to be set free from the shackles of government money, would it be okay? Would it continue to provide Canadians with news?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It would be extremely difficult to provide news to many of the underserved communities: rural communities, your own community of Lethbridge, the north, francophones living in minority communities across the country. We would not have sufficient funding. The reason there is no commercial, private news in those communities is that it's not economically viable. We have the privilege and the honour of serving Canadians in those communities by using the public funding we receive.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: When 100% of the CBC's budget is dependent on dollars being given out by the federal government, that would mean there is dependence there, which is to say it's the opposite of independence. When the CBC CEO, the president, Ms. Tait, just said to me that it would not be able to provide the coverage without that money, again, that says it is beholden to the government. It cannot survive without the government dollars, which means, then, that it's hard to believe that the news coverage is entirely independent.

I'm curious, again, as to how the CBC can then claim to be independent if it can't survive without the government dollars.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I should just correct the record. Our funding is not 100% from government. We also have a—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I didn't say “funding”; I said “budget”. Your budget is 100% dependent on—

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, it is not. Our budget is \$1.8 billion. The balance is earned revenue from advertising and subscription.

We have a—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It is 1.4 billion taxpayer dollars—

Ms. Catherine Tait: Plus another \$400 million in earned revenue....

We manage that budget as best we can to deliver the maximum service across the country.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry, but the question was this: How can you assure Canadians that you're functioning independently when, in fact, the CBC is reliant on government dollars?

The CBC took offence to Twitter's attaching this label that they do, in fact, receive government dollars, and the CBC admitted that receiving those dollars threatens journalistic independence.

● (0925)

Ms. Catherine Tait: If I may on the Twitter issue, Mr. Chair, it was the accompanying Elon Musk diatribe that described that government equals state-funded. In the global environment that I have described, where 80% of the population of the planet is—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Just to be clear, Mr. Chair—just to clear the record, because I know Ms. Tait appreciates clearing records—the label attached was “Government-funded”.

Ms. Catherine Tait: That is correct, but if you read the diatribe of Elon Musk, you would know that what he was talking about was state-funded, and CBC/Radio-Canada—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian has a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Badgering the witness, not allowing the witness to answer the question, is, again, very unparliamentary. Mrs. Thomas knows this.

Would you ask, Mr. Chair, that she respect the parliamentary rules?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Ms. Thomas, perhaps Ms. Tait could finish her answer? You have 30 seconds.

[English]

Ms. Catherine Tait: CBC/Radio-Canada was not the only broadcaster to object to this labelling. It was a move and a campaign on the part of Elon Musk—talking about badgering—to call any public broadcaster and all our colleagues, including ZDF, BBC, France Télévisions, New Zealand, Australia.... All of the public broadcasters were attacked in this way.

It was extremely important for us to clarify, which we—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: [Inaudible—Editor] government-funded, isn't it?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Ms. Thomas. Thank you, Ms. Tait. The five minutes are up.

Next, for the Liberals, we have Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Noormohamed, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Ms. Tait, I have a couple of questions for you, and then I'm going to share my time.

My first question is this: Are you aware that other media outlets in Canada, like the National Post, receive a government subsidy or government funding?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Does that make them beholden to the position of the Government of Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Can they maintain whatever independence they feel they are maintaining and still receive government funding?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Did you know that the Conservative Party received Government of Canada COVID subsidies during COVID?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Do you think that it makes them beholden to the point of view of the Government of Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Is it fair to assume that a logical person could say, then, that while CBC receives money from the Government of Canada, it could also maintain its independence? Is that a reasonable assumption that Canadians can make?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's correct, especially with the protections that we have in place, the JSPs, all the levels of management up to the government, all of those checkpoints for independence, and the existence of our ombudsman.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: For avoidance of that, is it possible for organizations to receive government funding and still be independent?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's correct.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I will share my time with Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian, you have three minutes and 45 seconds from Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I thank my colleague.

It has recently come out, of course, that Meta and Google receive over a billion dollars of indirect subsidies. The Conservatives have never said a word about that. Over a billion dollars is a ton of money.

Are you aware of that? Do you think that Meta and Google in some way bend to government will, with over \$1 billion in indirect subsidies?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I think they're demonstrating quite the contrary.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, so I think what is clear, Mr. Chair, is that the Conservative attack, or rage machine, fell on the rocks today. They ran out of questions and simply were not able—

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): I have a point of order.
[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Shields has a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: I object to the statements that he's making and the words he is using about labelling the Conservative Party.

Thank you.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, I respect Mr. Shields, and I will withdraw this. Mrs. Thomas should be doing the same thing with her despicable attacks against CBC journalists and some of her comments today.

Mr. Chair, given that we are nearing the end—and I certainly appreciate the extra time that was given—I want to move the following motion. It was circulated as a notice of motion. I move:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage affirms:

That CBC/Radio-Canada journalists and crew members are risking their lives every day in the Middle East covering the Israel-Hamas conflict and the horrific events impacting Israelis and Palestinians.

That CBC/Radio-Canada journalists have received or been nominated for over 200 prestigious national journalism awards in the past five years, such as Canadian Association of Journalists Awards, Radio Television Digital News Association National Awards, National Native Media Awards and National Association of Black Journalists Awards.

That the independence of CBC/Radio-Canada journalists from political interference, is protected in the Broadcasting Act Sec 46(5), which states that—The Corporation shall, in pursuit of its objects and in the exercise of its powers, enjoy freedom of expression and journalistic, creative, and programming independence.

• (0930)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Julian. Before debating your motion, I respectfully ask the committee's permission to thank Ms. Tait, Ms. Williams and Ms. Melouf for coming here today.

Dear witnesses, we are going to debate a motion. I think we're getting to a point where no questions are going to be directed to you. I want to thank all three of you for being here this morning. Thank you for your candour and for answering all the questions, even the most difficult ones. We appreciate you being here.

We can start debating Mr. Julian's motion.

Mr. Julian, I'll turn it over to you.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's very clear from the testimony today... I will say again that the Conservatives just basically ran out of speed, given that the facts were very clearly affirmed—

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): I have a point of order.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian, Mr. Aboultaif has a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think you should suspend until the witnesses leave the room. Then we can go in camera. That's reasonable.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You're absolutely right, Mr. Aboultaif.

We'll take a short two minute break.

• (0930)

(Pause)

• (0930)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Julian has the floor to discuss his motion.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I don't intend to go long on this. We've been experiencing a Conservative filibuster for the past month. You'll recall that Conservatives were saying we needed three hours with the CBC president on Israel-Hamas, and after half an hour they stopped asking questions about Israel-Hamas. Very clearly, that was wasted time.

I believe we need to come back to the important committee report, which is on safe sport. Witnesses believe that we need to move forward on that. It's been delayed for a month because of these incessant filibusters from the Conservatives.

I'm not going to take a lot of time on this. The Conservatives gave up asking about Israel-Hamas after half an hour. The reality is that, I think, it's because of the strength of the facts that are on CBC's side. The facts are that they are risking their lives every day in the Middle East, covering the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The facts are that CBC/Radio-Canada has received or been nominated for over 200 prestigious national journalism awards in the last five years. These are the top journalist prizes. They have received prizes because the journalism has been factual and it has been updated. The CBC News organization does everything that a news organization should do and upholds the international standards that we also see reflected in CNN, BBC and Agence France-Presse.

It's not at all the approach of the Fox Entertainment network, which makes things up. They've admitted in numerous court cases that they just make up stuff, yet that seems to be the model that some members of this committee want to see.

Most importantly, Mr. Chair, the final clause on the independence of CBC, and protecting that from political interference, is actually something that was adopted by Parliament. Subsection 46(5) of the Broadcasting Act states:

The Corporation shall, in the pursuit of its objects and in the exercise of its powers, enjoy freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence.

That is vitally important. The idea of the Fox Entertainment model, where you can make stuff up all the time, is not the approach that Canadians want to see. They want to see a profound journalistic endeavour.

The reality is that if anybody in Canada doesn't like something, like an article that is archived on the site—it has been updated by numerous other articles but they don't like the original article—they can appeal to the ombudsman. There is a process. That journalistic independence is protected, but the public can weigh in. Canadians can weigh in.

As we've heard, over a billion dollars in indirect subsidies go to Meta and Google. We've seen numerous subsidies going to big business. What CBC does in return for the public subsidies is ensure the top level of journalistic credibility. Over 200 prestigious national journalism awards attest to that.

• (0935)

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, given that CBC/Radio-Canada has indeed received more than 200 prestigious awards; given that everyone, including all parliamentarians, should protect it from political interference; and given that we know full well that these journalists are risking their lives every day right now to cover the conflict between Israel and Hamas, I hope that this motion will be passed unanimously.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Before moving on to the next speakers, I would like to point out, to dispel any lingering doubts, that the meeting has remained public. We are not in camera right now, because we're debating Mr. Julian's motion. We're not yet on the report item on the agenda.

For those who were wondering, the meeting is still public.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Thomas.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you very much.

I would simply offer an amendment to Mr. Julian's motion, an addition, which is that at the end of his motion, it would read:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage affirms that the CBC published a false headline based on disinformation from Hamas, a criminal terrorist organization, that incorrectly stated that Israel was responsible for the explosion at al-Ahli hospital in Gaza that resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians.

And that, the committee call on the CBC to apologize to the Jewish community and all Canadians for spreading this dangerous disinformation and to publicly correct the record and to report this finding to the House of Commons.

I am happy to send that amendment to the clerk for it to be translated into French and made available to the members at the table.

• (0940)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Ms. Thomas, while you do that, we will suspend the meeting for a few minutes. Let's try to do this as quickly as we can.

• (0940)

(Pause)

• (1010)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I call the meeting back to order.

Please note that we are still waiting for the French translation of the amendment. We have the room until 10:30. If we receive the translation of the amendment before then, we can decide whether to suspend or adjourn the meeting.

• (1015)

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I have another committee meeting to go to. I move to adjourn.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You can't move to adjourn on a point of order, Mr. Julian.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): I have a point of order.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): The clerk of the committee is telling me that I am right. I'm still not used to being right as often as this, Mr. Julian.

I'm sorry. You can't ask to adjourn on a point of order.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I have a point of order.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Ms. Gladu, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Chair, I had my hand up to speak to the motion. Then I wanted to speak to the amendment, so I lowered my hand and raised my hand. It's kind of hard, virtually, to be sure that I'm getting on both lists.

I just want to make sure I'm on both lists.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Ms. Gladu, you're quite right to make that comment.

I was going to say, if we receive the French translation and resume debate on the amendment, that there will have a new list of members who wish to speak. Your name is on there. And Mr. Noormohamed's.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I would like to clarify one thing, Mr. Chair.

[English]

If we suspend the meeting, we come back to where we were, when we come back. If we adjourn the meeting, we go back to committee business.

Is that correct?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You're absolutely right.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: If we are currently suspended... Mr. Julian has to go and we also have to go to other committees and meetings. Can we adhere to the time of the committee, suspend this meeting, depart and then recommence where we were?

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I have a point of order.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Aboultaif.

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: If you'll allow me to explain this, the meeting was suspended, basically. The chair came and called the meeting before the clock ended and there's a motion to adjourn from Mr. Julian.

That's basically what's taking place.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): On that, Mr. Aboultaif, I must correct you.

Mr. Julian has moved to adjourn on a point of order, which he cannot do. There is no formal motion to adjourn at this time.

We will suspend the meeting until the translation of the amendment is made available to all members.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, before you do that, I have a point of order.

You're an excellent chair, but with all due respect, I'm going to challenge your ruling. We regularly move to adjourn a meeting during points of order.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I'm not denying your right to challenge my ruling.

I am informing you that I made this decision based on the recommendations and advice of our clerks. I would like to point out that our clerk, Jacques Maziade, is celebrating his 33rd anniversary today. He was sworn in as a lawyer 33 years ago today.

So you are challenging my ruling and Mr. Maziade's ruling, Mr. Julian. You have every right to do so. I will therefore ask the clerk to proceed with a vote.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Desjardins): The chair asks if his ruling shall be sustained.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 8; yeas 2)

• (1020)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): The chair is overruled.

This is a very sad way for me to end my role as alternate chair of this committee.

I want to thank all of you, colleagues. You've been amazing. You have provided tremendous support. Ms. Desjardins and Mr. Maziade, our clerks, have been fantastic, as have the analysts and the team of interpreters.

The meeting is adjourned.

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