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# Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry





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Tuesday, February 13, 2024

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 110 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*English*]

The meeting today is, of course, in a hybrid format. We have a lot of people appearing virtually. I want to remind you of some rules we follow when we have virtual meetings.

Pursuant to the Standing Orders, one thing I'm going to ask you to do is not take photographs of the meeting, please. Screenshots and photos are not permitted, but you can get them online later on after the meeting.

As to public health authorities, for those of you not wearing masks, we are not mandated to wear them, but some of us should wear them in order to not get the flu and the new COVID virus.

Just to remind those of you online and in the room, we have powerful microphones. If you have any devices sitting in front of them, they can give feedback. That can hurt the ears of the interpreters, so be careful about those things. When you are speaking, please address your questions and responses through the chair.

That's about it. I don't think there's anything else I wanted to say.

Today is our first meeting on the study of the national forum on the media.

Thank you, Mr. Champoux, for this study.

We have, virtually, April Lindgren, professor, Toronto Metropolitan University, and Jen Gerson, co-founder of The Line and independent journalist.

From Centre d'études sur les médias, we have Colette Brin, professor, department of information and communication at Université Laval.

We have Jaky Fortin, assistant director of studies and student life, École supérieure en Art et technologie des médias du Cégep de Jonquière.

We have Annick Forest with us from the Canadian Media Guild.

You all have five minutes to present. I will give you a 30-second shout to tell you when you only have 30 seconds left. Remember, if you don't finish everything you want to say, you can elaborate on it when you get questions. Don't be worried if you don't finish in five minutes.

I will begin with Ms. Gardner's opening statement.

You have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Sue Gardner (McConnell Professor of Practice (2021-22), Max Bell School of Public Policy, McGill University, As an Individual):** My name is Sue Gardner. I am the former head of CBC.ca, the English language website of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I am also the former head of the Wikimedia Foundation, which is the San Francisco-based 501(c)(3) non-profit that operates Wikipedia. I have been dabbling recently in public policy, including a recent stint as the McConnell professor of practice at the Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University.

Further contextualizing myself, I started my career three decades ago as a journalist. I've worked in radio, television, print and online. I've been a practitioner. I was a working journalist for a long time. I was also a boss of journalists, and a critic and observer of the news media.

I have researched and written pretty extensively about public media specifically in Canada and elsewhere around the world. I have been working in the digital realm since about 1999, and very much my whole career has been part of what we sometimes call the digital transition. So that's me.

I am here representing only myself. I see your role as trying to advance the public interest, and I see my role as trying to help you do that.

You are here, I think, considering whether to provide support or encouragement to the news industry to stage a forum of some kind on the news media—what it needs in light of the crisis. I want to start by agreeing that there is a crisis, and I think you have a role to play in helping to solve it.

I have three quick thoughts for you on how I think you can approach that. This is in the nature of opening remarks, so my goal here is to lay out areas that maybe we would want to talk more about.

First, I think whatever you end up doing, it's really critical for you to be extremely precise about the nature of the problem you are trying to solve. I think the problem is not that legacy media organizations are having difficulty or are going out of business, and I think the problem is not that journalists don't have enough job security or cannot pay their rent or their mortgages.

The way I see it, the problem is that this country right now is not producing enough depth and breadth of journalism to the point where the citizenry can be appropriately informed and power can be appropriately held to account. That's the problem that I think you should be aiming to try to solve. How do you support the conditions in which good journalism can be made?

Second, I've had the sense that the digital policy that's been developed over the last couple of years has been driven perhaps too much by the needs and interests of industry. I decided to run the numbers to see if my sense of that was correct, and I think I am right. I looked at the current Parliament witness appearances to this committee, and by my count 77% of those appearances have been people who represent industry or industry workers. That's people who represent media companies, unions, trade associations and professional associations.

If you look at the Senate committee, you see their numbers are pretty similar, and if you look at lobbyist communications with the heritage department, those numbers are also pretty similar. I have the sense, from watching your previous meetings, that you may have general agreement that you should stay out of the driver's seat and should let the news media drive when it comes to solving these problems.

I want to inject a note of caution into that. I can see why you would believe that—to let the experts handle things—but I think it is actually a mistake, because I think you have different roles and you have different goals. If the industry leads, it is going to centre its own interests, and that is not what you want. What you want is to centre the public interest, so it's important that you guys keep the authority to do that. I think it's your job.

My last point is that until pretty recently, it's been the case that digital players have been largely invisible to you, and vice versa. I feel like we saw this in the Bill C-11 and Bill C-18 hearings, where digital first creators were turning up at committee meetings for the very first time.

During the current Parliament, by my count, only 12% of witness appearances to this committee have been digital players. What that means is people from companies like Google, Netflix and Apple, digital first creators, people who do YouTube and Twitch, academics who study digital stuff and people from digital-focused civil society organizations like OpenMedia or the Internet Society. That's a lot of people and that's a broad array of digital players, but all of them put together count up to only 12% of the people who have come to speak with you here.

I would urge you, when you're considering these questions, to rebalance where you're putting your attention.

I'm going to wrap it up there. I look forward to your questions.

• (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gardner.

The next witness will be Jen Gerson, co-founder of The Line and an independent journalist. Ms. Gerson is online, I think.

You have five minutes. Please begin.

**Ms. Jen Gerson (Co-founder of The Line and Independent Journalist, As an Individual):** Thank you very much for having me at this committee. I'm a bit of a problematic creature and one of those persnickety digital first creators Sue was referencing.

Just to follow up on Sue's comments, I agree with what she said, and I think people who are trying to fix these problems and regulate in the space are often conflating the difference between the business of journalism and the act of journalism. They're related problems, but they're not the same problems. If you can't fundamentally understand why the businesses failed, you're going to fall into the trap of trying to throw more money into a failing industry or problem as opposed to thinking from the public interest perspective: How can we improve the acts of journalism to ensure the public interest is being served here? It's a very different framing of the problems we're facing, and I think it requires a very different mindset.

Further to what we're here to discuss, I feel like I'm at a bit of a disadvantage, because when we talk about a national forum on media, I'm not strictly sure what's being proposed. I find myself, as a result, in a very rare position of not having a strongly held opinion on it. That's very unusual for me, so you're going to have to forgive me.

I think that, in principle, having a national forum to discuss the issues facing news media and the democratic deficit that's going to come from that crisis and is coming from that crisis could be a really great thing. I'm not sure why this committee needs to approve that if what we're proposing here is that the news industry itself forwards such an idea, which members of the government would be a part of, or who should be putting it together. That strikes me as a fairly logistical challenge to solve. My ideal for that kind of forum would be that it has a really wide diversity of opinions, brings a lot of different ideas to the table from a public interest perspective and is open to a lot of different potential solutions for which the government could be helpful.

My fear is that a national forum wouldn't really be used as a forum to discuss these things in an open way, but would be used as a PR exercise to drum up public support for a foregone conclusion. If you're going to create a national forum to create support or to manufacture the concept of support for writing legacy media organizations ever-bigger cheques, that would be a waste of time. If that is the conclusion everybody is working toward, then why are we wasting our time here? Just write the cheque. That's my concern with where this is going to go.

That being said, I think it's about having a really open discussion about the problems facing media. Talk about those business issues and where the public interest factors are. If you want to have a discussion about further public funding for media or turning the private media into the public media—which is essentially the path we're on right now—then let's have a really candid, open conversation about what that's going to cost the taxpayer and over what time frame. A forum could be a great opportunity to do all that, provided it's being done with a really open spirit and in a good-faith way.

I don't have anything else to add there.

• (1615)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Gerson.

I'll go to April Lindgren, a professor at the school of journalism in Toronto. Ms. Lindgren, go ahead.

**Professor April Lindgren (Professor, Toronto Metropolitan University School of Journalism, As an Individual):** Thank you.

I'm a professor of journalism at the Toronto Metropolitan University. Thank you for inviting me here.

I run something called the Local News Research Project. In that capacity, I've been tracking developments in local journalism since about 2008.

I'm not going to list all of the recent announcements that add up to bad news for people counting on local journalism to keep them informed. I think everybody has a pretty good idea of that.

I will say that there's no obvious silver-bullet solution to the challenges that news media in Canada—or anywhere else, for that matter—is facing. News organizations are casting around for alternative business models at a time when people are disengaging from news, when social media outlets are playing a lesser role in referrals to news organizations, when advertising is down and shows little sign of recovery and when Canadians' willingness to pay for digital news has actually been declining. I think this is in large part because what they're being offered is not great, so why would you pay for it?

Like Jen, I'm a bit confused about the nature of the forum. I thought I would focus my comments on the appropriateness of the government providing support for the news sector, how that might play out in a discussion and what should be talked about.

I do think that there is a role for this conversation, if only to help Canadians understand that they are getting less and less access to the news they need to effectively participate in the democratic process, engage with their communities and navigate daily life. The government's own polling last summer showed that more than half—I think about 56%—of people surveyed thought the number of news media outlets has stayed the same over the last 10 years. This changed when participants were presented with some data on how many outlets have closed. When they were armed with that knowledge, 47% of people said it was a matter of some concern.

That data, by the way, came from the Local News Map, which I run. Our most recent report showed that more than 500 local news outlets have closed in the last 15 years. Three-quarters of them were community newspapers. Only half as many have launched

over the same period, most of which are, not surprisingly, digital players. I think they're playing a growing and important role in the news landscape—the local news landscape in particular.

Another issue that I think needs to be talked about in the context of what role government has in supporting local news is to ask if government actually has the information it needs to make informed decisions about the policies it's adopting. For instance, we don't really know where there are true news deserts where no local news is available in Canada, despite all of the conversations about that. How is good policy going to be developed out of that if we don't actually know where the needs are the greatest? How can that situation be rectified? I think that's a headache for news organizations.

We also don't know what news organizations exist at the community level across the country. Pick a place on the map. We have no idea what's going on there in terms of the providers of local news. Again, could we create a searchable directory, first of all for the purposes of policy-making, but also, even more importantly in an increasingly complex world, so that local people can go somewhere and find out sources of local news that they can go to directly?

My next suggestion is that whatever form the forum takes, there should be a serious conversation about the role of the CBC at a time when news outlets are closing shop, scaling back services and telling Canadians that they can't afford to cover news in their communities while also satisfying the needs of their shareholders. What will the local landscape look like if the CBC English-language service is defunded in the way that's being proposed by the Conservative Party of Canada? Do we think that for-profit media is going to go on a massive hiring binge in that aftermath to fill in the gaps?

Also, what does cutting millions of dollars from the CBC budget—as is currently under way—mean for local coverage? We have yet to hear that from the CBC.

When I talk about what I mean by an informed discussion about the role of the public broadcaster, I'm talking about a place where we can actually talk about the growing body of academic literature that links strong public media to a bunch of benefits. They've been shown to produce news that's more diverse and has more substance than their commercial counterparts. Public media also tends to produce programming that more broadly serves poorer communities and more disadvantaged populations that for-profit media tend to neglect.

• (1620)

There's research showing that public media and government-subsidized private media are actually no less critical of government than non-subsidized, privately owned media. Have a look at the National Post.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds, Ms. Lindgren.

**Prof. April Lindgren:** Postmedia has received lots of money from the federal government in recent times, and I think you'd be hard pressed to argue that it's a friendly partner to the active Liberal government.

I don't have any sweeping suggestions for solving the problem of media, but I do have some specifics we can talk about later on in the question period that are at a more granular level.

I'll just leave it there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Lindgren.

I'll now go to Colette Brin, who is professor at the Centre d'études sur les médias.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Colette Brin (Professor, Department of Information and Communication, Laval University, Centre d'études sur les médias):** Thank you for inviting me to contribute to your reflection on the state of the media in Canada and their future. This issue has been at the heart of my work as a scholar and educator at Université Laval for over 20 years now.

Since 2020, I have chaired the Independent Advisory Board on Eligibility for Journalism Tax Measures with the Canada Revenue Agency. This experience has enabled me to become more familiar with the diversity of the Canadian media landscape and to participate in the implementation of an innovative public policy measure to help traditional print media that is fully digital.

Today, I am speaking to you in my capacity as Director of the Centre for Media Studies, a non-profit research and knowledge transfer organization founded in 1992.

I will reiterate what others have said, that this debate you are having with us and with Canadians, on the issue of news and media, needs to be focused first and foremost on the public, on its needs and interests. That may seem simple, but it bears repeating.

Access to reliable, comprehensive and quality news on public affairs is a fundamental condition of democracy — again, simple — but it is also a very old problem. I think we can all agree that the current situation is quite dire. Today, we are facing a crisis that is unprecedented in terms of the speed and complexity of the transformations under way, whether technological or economic, not to mention malevolent interventions into news content.

It is first and foremost an economic and structural crisis, but also, and increasingly, a crisis of confidence and a crisis of the relevance of journalism to the daily lives of citizens. It is probably this last point, the relevance of news to Canadians, that concerns me most. Why bother trying to rethink the business model or rebuild public trust if information isn't present in their everyday lives, if it's not really important to them or, worse, if they actively seek to avoid the news?

May I suggest, then, that you consider citizens as the starting point and the end point of this discussion. This is not to minimize the precarious situation of journalists, companies, unions and the journalistic community as a whole over the past few years, and particularly over the past year. Cuts have been made in the thousands. On the contrary: the working conditions and financial health of the

media have a direct impact on the quality and quantity of news. We must support them, but by keeping the needs and interests of citizens in mind first, I believe we can more clearly target the best means of action.

Since 2016, the Centre for Media Studies has been the Canadian partner of the Digital News Report, an annual international survey of news practices and perceptions on various platforms. We have also produced a number of qualitative studies on citizens' information practices, particularly those of young adults. You are likely aware of the trends that have been observed through this work.

Over the past ten years, digital platforms have overtaken television as the main mode of news consumption, and social media have become the default source for many people, even if the majority of respondents have a rather negative perception of these platforms when it comes to news.

We also published a survey conducted last September among Quebecers on the suppression of news on Meta platforms, following the enactment of the Online News Act. This study showed that most people were aware of this measure, that they were affected by it, and that a third had already adopted different practices for keeping informed. Respondents also felt that government had an important role to play in ensuring access to quality information.

What, then, might measures geared to citizens' information needs look like? Increased support for local news media—

• (1625)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Brin...

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Colette Brin:** Do I still have 30 seconds left?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have 43 seconds.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Colette Brin:** Okay.

This could be increased support for local and regional news media, including community media, both print and broadcast, to ensure that everyone has access to local information. It also takes targeted support for efforts by the media and other civil society organizations to bring information closer to the interests and consumption patterns of target audiences, especially young people.

I will refrain from commenting on tax credits, since I am directly involved in that. However, for my students and journalists, I would add that continuing education and paid internships aimed at developing the relevance of journalism to citizens are needed.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you. You can elaborate as you get questions, Ms. Brin.

I'll now go to Jaky Fortin from the École supérieure.

Go ahead, Mr. Fortin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jaky Fortin (Assistant director of studies and student life, École supérieure en Art et Technologie des médias du Cégep de Jonquière):** Good afternoon.

Since 1967, Cégep de Jonquière has been a pioneer in technical training in communications and media. We introduced a three-year college degree offering a choice in three fields: journalism, radio and television production. It is all offered under the same roof in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, at École supérieure en art et technologie des médias. Some 50 years later, the programming has evolved with Quebec's media industry. For the current 2023-24 school year, there are 850 students in all three of our programs.

We are training the talent of tomorrow. École supérieure en art et technologie des médias is the largest French-language media technical training school in the country. The current upheaval in the media world certainly has us very concerned, since we work in this field. Our media represent our culture, our identity and our democracy. They tell our stories, reflect the greatness of our country, challenge things and help develop free and critical thinking for our democracy. In an era of disinformation and globalization, our mission to train the next generation is even more important. Cégep de Jonquière is rooted in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, which is known for its strong journalistic presence. We have many writers, television and radio media.

I will give you a tangible, recent example of the effects of the crisis in the wake of Bell's decision, announced last week, to cut broadcasting positions. On Monday morning, when I was driving to work, on one of the two Bell stations, the regional news update had been replaced by a "local" update from the Montreal network. The three news headlines of the day were about Trois-Rivières, which is 330 kilometres from Saguenay, a trial in Chicoutimi, which affects us, and the variation in temperatures in Gatineau, Montreal and Sherbrooke. There was nothing about the ice fishing situation in La Baie, or the wind park in Mashteuiatsh. These stories were in the daily morning newspaper, but no one was talking about it on the radio.

It is true that the media is suffering the effects of the current crisis nationally, but it is local news that will be affected the most in the short term. That is already the case. On February 29 and March 1, we will be rallying all the media players from the 11 regions of Quebec at a summit to reflect on solutions for the future of regional news. We will talk about funding, options and the role young people can play in the media industry. We believe that as a higher education institution we can play a leading role in hosting all the parties to discuss this together: employers, employees, unions, government members, students, stakeholders, and more. Ultimately, quality news will benefit everyone. That being said, will this summit on the future of regional news solve everything? Even with my usual

optimism, the answer is no, but it is a small step in the right direction.

In the face of the current crisis, we need to be able to establish a dialogue and propose innovative and sustainable solutions. What is more, there needs to be a shift from the quest for higher profits and the rhetoric that prevents any progress or change. Our media will have no choice but to change their approach to move forward. Doing more with less is good in theory, but not likely viable in the long term for our society. We need to use the necessary changes as vectors for developing and doing things differently together because we are strongest when we come together, not when we are isolated. This is not just an issue for the company leaders or for their employees or the government.

News is a fundamental right in our democracy. It is incumbent on everyone to be behind this idea. In a discussion with a teacher last week, she reminded me that the most democratic countries all had plenty of active media that is free to question things. When media is limited and discreet because the press is not free, that is a sign that the country is not very democratic. Is that where we want to end up?

• (1630)

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jaky Fortin:** We are proud to say that we live in a democratic country where every voice can be heard. That is lucky, but it is also a common responsibility. It is important to act now, to support our media and ensure a future for our international, national and regional news. We need to preserve this freedom of thought, freedom to question and criticize based on our values and heritage. We need to restore journalism's reputation.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Our final witness is Annick Forest, national union president of the Canadian Media Guild.

[Translation]

**Ms. Annick Forest (National Union President, Canadian Media Guild):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. My name is Annick Forest. I am a francophone, an Acadian and a Quebecker. I am the National Union President of the Canadian Media Guild, a union that represents 6,000 media employees across the country.

[English]

**Ms. Annick Forest:** The Canadian Media Guild is grateful for the opportunity to address this matter of great significance to Canadians and a pressing concern for its members, who are media workers. It is the crisis in the Canadian media sector stemming from the dominance of foreign digital companies.

The CMG believes that safeguarding Canadian media jobs, protecting quality Canadian journalism and guaranteeing the availability of Canadian content will ensure the vitality of the Canadian media sector. As a cornerstone of our democracy, Canadian media plays a crucial role in informing, engaging and empowering citizens, but this mission can only be realized with a robust and resilient workforce. Media workers are the backbone of our information ecosystem, tirelessly researching, reporting and disseminating news and stories that shape public discourse.

I am a media worker with 30 years of experience. I started working when we were cutting tape to do radio, and I finished, before I started this job as president of the CMG, doing digital news editing. In a sense, I was the person editing the stories that went online on the Radio-Canada website in the west of Canada. I have, we have and media workers have gone from one type of media to the next type of media to the next type of media. These are different mediums. What's important is the message. The mediums will keep changing.

As president of a union representing Canadian media workers, I believe that protecting our labour rights within the media industry is paramount. Safeguarding media workers' rights to fair wages, safe working conditions and collective bargaining upholds the dignity and well-being of these workers and fortifies the integrity of our media institutions.

Misinformation and disinformation pose profound challenges to the integrity and credibility of Canadian media. They erode public trust, disrupt democratic discourse and undermine the credibility of legitimate news sources. We believe that by fortifying the resilience of Canadian media against the threats of disinformation and misinformation, we can safeguard the integrity of our democratic institutions and ensure that Canadians have access to reliable, trustworthy Canadian information.

The CMG believes that to preserve and celebrate their culture, Canadians must have access to stories told by members of their communities. Bringing Canada to Canadians is the mandate of some public broadcasters, but it's the daily goal of all Canadian media workers. Media outlets such as TVO, APTN and CBC/Radio-Canada play a vital role in shaping and reflecting the unique identity of our nation by offering platforms for Canadian voices and perspectives.

• (1635)

[Translation]

A Quebecker and Acadian, I grew up in Dieppe, New Brunswick. Our culture was fuelled daily by the media that talked to us about us and did so in our language. It is a gift that is still not offered to all Canadians.

[English]

I had hoped that Bruce Spence, the president of our APTN branch, would be by my side today, but that was not possible. I humbly speak on his behalf and that of our APTN members, whose job it is to report on events and issues relevant to their audiences from a perspective they cannot get from mainstream news media outlets.

The CMG supports Bruce's belief that every tribal group in the country should have its own APTN—its own media network—regionally and locally so that languages of every tribal group and the societal concepts that go with them are spoken and learned in the home of its members no matter where that home may be. The work done by APTN is essential to supporting aboriginal culture and ties into the recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Ms. Annick Forest:** Okay.

I'm not going to talk about securing funding sources for Canadian media, as that is vital for a diverse and vibrant media landscape.

I'll go right to our recommendations. I ask that the forum explore public funding mechanisms, innovative financing models and partnerships for public and private media; that the forum explore avenues to protect each community with the media workers and mediums they need so that their voices are heard and their stories are told; and that the forum examine possible avenues to uphold quality Canadian journalism, including media literacy, education and how to impose greater accountability on creators and distributors of information. The CMG further recommends that the forum examine how to best support aboriginal Canadians who wish to become media workers.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you and present you with our thoughts.

I'll leave you with one last thought that I think is very important. It's not just about the medium. It's about bringing a message to Canadians. When you make rules, laws or whatever decisions you might make, don't think about only television and radio. It's not about airwaves. It's about bringing a quality message to Canadians. The way that message is brought to Canadians will change, and right now, people are looking at different sources.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Forest. You can elaborate later on when you're asked a question.

**Ms. Annick Forest:** I will be happy to do so. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.



Now we'll go to the question-and-answer component of the meeting, and we will begin with a six-minute round. Those six minutes, everyone should know, include questions and answers, so please be as concise as you possibly can with your questions and, similarly, with your answers.

We'll begin with the Conservatives for six minutes.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for taking the time to be with us today. Some of you, I know, came on quite short notice, so we very much appreciate the efforts you've put into arriving.

My first question has to do with some of the things we've observed of late—just in the last few days. We know that Bell made the determination to lay off about 4,800 employees and that they purported to make this decision based on government regulations. Bill C-18 and Bill C-11 were detrimental to them, but so was the requirement to share spectrum they had built infrastructure for. The policies that came from the federal government were actually incredibly harmful, not only to Bell but also to the news industry. We know that 600 of those employees were journalists.

That being the case, here today we're discussing the federal government extending its hand again by being involved in a forum—or at least the terms of a forum—and whether or not it would be appropriate for news outlets to host such a thing. It seems like a bizarre question to me that the government would somehow determine whether or not it is even appropriate for news businesses to meet, as if it's the government's decision. Why can't news businesses meet all on their own accord, have a fruitful discussion and, should they wish to, invite government stakeholders to the table to listen to what they have to say?

Nevertheless, I would also highlight the detrimental effect Bill C-11 and Bill C-18 have had. Bill C-11, of course, built walls around digital first creators. To the point raised by Ms. Gardner and Ms. Gerson—and I believe one other witness raised this point as well—really, so many people are obtaining their news from digital first creators and digital platforms. Through Bill C-11, walls have been built around them, therefore stifling their reach. Furthermore, Bill C-18 has prevented Canadians from being able to access news. It has not generated more for the public good. Rather, it has taken away from the public good.

Further to that, what was supposed to be about \$300 million to \$350 million given to the news industry to help prop them up, and in particular was touted as something that would support newspapers.... In fact, Facebook said no to being regulated. Then Google went behind a closed door with the government, entered into a shady backroom deal, actually got an exemption from Bill C-18 and instead created some other contractual deal in which they're giving \$100 million to the news media of, really, their choice. Further to that, the \$100 million isn't actually a full \$100 million because supposedly \$25 million of that was already granted, so it's really only a new \$75 million. All of that is to say there's been a lot of over-promising and under-delivering when the government gets involved.

My question will be for Ms. Gerson first. If the government is not to be involved—I believe I've laid out a few points as to why that would be a bad idea—then what are the alternatives so the news industry in Canada has longevity?

● (1640)

**Ms. Jen Gerson:** There are two points I would make in response to that question.

The first is that if we're sitting here at the heritage committee deciding who's going to cover the drink tab of the national forum, I'm all for it. If you're going to have a collection of journalists, we would expect an open bar.

Second, if I'm the federal government and I'm concerned about the democratic deficit this country is facing as a result of a decline in media or the collapse of the business model in media, I already have two extremely big sticks that I can use to start to bring things into a more proper balance without talking about Bill C-18, without talking about Bill C-11, without talking about new legislation and without necessarily talking about new funding from taxpayers.

The first stick is the CBC, and I believe Ms. Lindgren already made this point. If we are concerned about local news and we're concerned about news deserts, it seems to me that the place where the federal government already has an enormous impact on this industry is through public media.

I had some very interesting conversations with Conservatives, who are very angry with the CBC and perceive the CBC to be very biased, which is—rightly or wrongly—where I think a lot of Canadians are positioned across the political spectrum. I think the CBC in its current formation can't serve the function it needs to serve to try to fix a lot of the democratic deficits we're facing.

I think you need to look at a fundamental reimagining of what the CBC is, and also to reimagine it as a much more locally focused news outlet, potentially one that is not competing with private outlets and potentially one that has, for example, mandated reporters in every town of about 100,000 people. It's potentially a CBC that sees itself less as a private broadcast competitor and more as a public library of journalism. It may be a CBC that sees itself as providing news, video and audiovisual content to all Canadians to do with as they wish so they can use that to create their own local journalism practices, podcasts and so on. I think there is an obvious place for the federal government to focus its energy here.

**The Chair:** You have 11 seconds.

**Ms. Jen Gerson:** The second one is, obviously, regulatory. We have an oligopoly in telecommunications, and this comes with extreme regulatory pressure on existing highly profitable major telecommunications companies. Force them to spend their money on journalism as part of their broadcasting licences, and enforce those heavily and appropriately.

These are the two big sticks you have right in front of you that I don't see the federal government stepping up to use.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gerson.

I'll now go to the next question, which is for the Liberals, with Anna Gainey for six minutes.

Before I turn the clock on for Ms. Gainey, I would like to clarify something. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is not a government committee. It's a committee made up of all political parties—the NDP, the Bloc, the Conservatives and the Liberals.

The committee made up of all those parties voted for this particular study. We are not a government body deciding what government should do. This is a study brought about by one of our members, and everybody thought it was a good idea.

I just wanted to clarify what's going on here. Thank you very much.

Ms. Gainey, you have six minutes.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank all the witnesses who are here with us today. We very much appreciate their comments.

Ms. Forest, what interest do you think there is in ensuring that the discussion on this important issue before us is held by the sector itself? What perspectives or contributions can the sector bring to framing the debate?

**Ms. Annick Forest:** I think it is important not to limit this to the sector. In fact, we need to call on everyone to participate. I agree with many of today's witnesses that we need to think of the public first. Journalists do not work in a vacuum. They work to bring news to Canadians. They are not there to make money because no one gets rich doing this job. People do this job because they want to inform their fellow citizens because they want to share the news with everyone.

It is important to know what Canadians want and what they are looking for and what we, as members of the media, can give them. We can talk about funding and all of that, but at the end of the day, Canada absolutely needs top-quality journalism by and for Canadians. The important thing is not to be subject to news from elsewhere.

It is also crucial to have journalists in the regions, close to the public; people need to see themselves and recognize themselves. I am not just talking about francophones in minority communities or outside Quebec and anglophones in minority communities in Quebec, but also First Nations throughout Canada. In fact, CBC/Radio-

Canada, where I worked for 30 years, has just started to increase its presence in the North. However, it is important that this presence be made up of members of the northern communities, who can talk to their colleagues and to the people of their community.

On top of that are many other facets, such as the level of education, in other words the journalists' education, and the sharing of information in the communities. How do we ensure that the media landscape in the country has several facets? We cannot have just one, two or three news media. As someone else mentioned, we need to have multiple sources of information. No journalist will publish news based on just one source; they will seek out two or three sources. The same goes for the media. The public needs to have access to many sources to have better information and to make informed decisions in a democratic country.

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** Thank you.

Madam Chair, I cede the remainder of my time to my colleague. Mr. Noormohamed.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Noormohamed, you have two minutes and 55 seconds.

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

My question is for you, Professor Lindgren. We talk about the importance of this sector, the importance of journalism and the importance of being able to have conversations about independent media and journalism in this country. Yesterday, Canadians witnessed an attack by the Leader of the Conservative Party, Pierre Poilievre, in which he discredited a journalist. He attacked the journalist. He used all manner of tactics to evade and avoid answering a simple question by attacking the integrity of a journalist.

As somebody who teaches journalism, what message do you think that sends to young people who want to enter the sector of journalism? What message does it send to those who believe in a free press in this country?

**Prof. April Lindgren:** I think those sorts of responses to legitimate questions seeking information on the public's behalf—because that's what journalists are doing—harm journalism as a whole and erode the notion of trust we have, and we've seen it eroding over time.

Journalists aren't perfect. We make mistakes, and we shouldn't get away with them, but I think pushing back and questioning the integrity of a journalist when the journalist is basically doing their job is really problematic. It erodes the whole process.

Journalists are out there doing the job that people can't do as part of their regular life because they're working; they're raising their kids. Journalists are playing the role of being present to ask those questions on behalf of the public.

The message I give to my students is not to be cowed by this. We can't give up. We have to stick with it, even though at times it seems like it's a really difficult battle, as we're seeing from these types of responses. Also, the attacks, verbal and otherwise, on journalists as they go about doing their jobs—like TV reporters who are harassed in the field—are all part of an erosion of the democratic process, which makes it difficult for people to get the information they need to participate in local democracy.

• (1650)

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you very much.

I simply want to say that I know many Canadians across this country value the work that journalists do, especially when they are trying to get difficult questions answered and holding government and the opposition to account. Their job is to ask questions.

On behalf of this side, and many other members I know in this room, I just want to say thank you to journalists, who do the work they do in the face of nonsense like we saw yesterday.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'll now go to the Bloc Québécois, with Martin Champoux.

You have six minutes, Martin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will start by correcting the record. I heard many comments, questions and concerns about the participation by this government and this committee in summits on news media.

The purpose of the study we are conducting is to determine who is best placed to do this type of study and what are the best ways to do so. It is certainly not up to the government to get involved, to dive right in, but I think that our committee can, as it is doing today, convene people and ask questions that will lead to summits that will be held in an objective, constructive, non-partisan manner. That is the purpose of today's meeting.

To respond to Ms. Gardner's concern from earlier, I do not think that the media should be the only ones to take charge of this study. A whole host of players from different horizons in the news community need to come together and take charge of this study. That is why I am pleased to have Mr. Fortin with us today.

Mr. Fortin, École supérieure en art et technologie des médias at Cégep de Jonquière published an insightful letter in November, with 67 signatures, including from teachers at the École, wishing to express their concern over the future of media. This letter led to the summit on regional media that you are organizing for February 29 and March 1.

Who do you think should be at the table to discuss the future of media? Is the media or experts? Who do you see around this table and who have you invited to this event?

**Mr. Jaky Fortin:** In fact, everyone is concerned and I do not think the right solution will necessarily come from a single person. The media must be present, because they are the ones who are going to have to make the decisions and choose the direction of their

work. Journalists, who are employees, also have to participate. The unions and people in the communities have a place at the table too. This meeting is as much for the political actors as for the community actors.

I am going to reiterate what was said earlier about local journalism outside urban centres. Quite often, people in the community sector are the ones most affected by the crisis in the media. When they need to inform the public about something, but they have no local media because local media have disappeared or been moved to the major centres, these people are no longer able to get their messages to the public.

Everybody has to work together. Everybody has to pull in the same direction, and this is somewhat why we chose this approach. We believe it is important to support media education and to pull in that direction. Essentially, we are training young people who are going to be working in this field. We really want to get everyone's support for this idea.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I find that interesting, Mr. Fortin, and you and I have had the chance to talk about it before.

Ms. Brin, I would like to ask you the same question, since you also work with students. How do the students see the future of the media? I think they too have something to say about this study, because they are the ones who are going to be doing this job later. What do they foresee for the future? Are they worried? Is their vision different from the vision generally held today? Do you hear your students talking about this?

• (1655)

**Ms. Colette Brin:** Yes, certainly. I see my students every week and we discuss these issues. They are of their generation, they are looking to the future, and they have all sorts of reasons to be optimistic and interested in the transformations of the digital media environment.

Obviously, they are worried about job prospects, because, as I was saying earlier, even paid internships are getting harder to find, particularly outside urban centres. We know that a lot of media need young workers, they are looking for people, but they are not able to pay them.

Students are passionate. I think Mr. Fortin and Ms. Lindgren would agree with me that students give us a lot of hope for the future, because they are in that universe. They have all sorts of creative solutions for doing journalism on the new platforms, for example, and working with these young people gives us a lot of energy. We have to listen to them; we have to give them a role. They may not know how important their role is. We have to listen to them, certainly.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Mr. Fortin, in the reflection and discussion that has to take place about the future of the information media, there are certainly observations that are hard, and sometimes painful, to make.

Do you think it is possible for the traditional media, the ones that are most vulnerable at present, to be optimistic about the future; do you think they are prepared to take it if the conclusions stated by the experts consulted in the course of these discussions are not at all what they hoped for?

Are we able, are we prepared, in your opinion, to write a report that would call for the entire media industry to completely redefine and reinvent itself in order to face the future?

**Mr. Jaky Fortin:** My answer will undoubtedly be disappointing, but I do not believe that is the case. Essentially, any change, in any sphere of society, involves adaptation problems. There really has to be a desire to move forward and change things.

My opinion is the same as the opinion that Ms. Brin stated on the subject just now. Young people do have the desire to change things and do things differently. The reason we are having problems in the media today may be that our young people are not consuming those media. So we may also have to look to young people who are not yet at the college or university level. I am thinking of young people in elementary and secondary school, whom we need to get to look critically at news and information. These are the young people who will make up the society of tomorrow. We have to trust them and push them in that direction.

Certainly, the change is going to be difficult. However, I think that if we do not deal with the situation and do not consult young people, to have them propose new ideas and new solutions to the industry, the industry is not going to change by itself overnight.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Do you think we are starting too late at getting young people curious and encouraging them to seek out other sources of information, rather than swallowing everything sent at them? Should we be starting in elementary school?

**Mr. Jaky Fortin:** I think there is work to be done, that this is part of the education to be done if we want a society that is able to take a critical approach to the information and images presented to it.

The presence of artificial intelligence will also do nothing to help solve the problem of disinformation. We must therefore persuade young people to be critical and become good citizens.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Martin.

Now I'll go to the New Democrats, with Ms. Ashton.

Go ahead, Niki.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses who are joining us here today.

In recent years, it's become clear that Canada has continued to have some of the greatest media consolidation in the world. We know that in recent years this has only become worse. At this point,

Postmedia owns more than 80% of the newspapers that operate in Canada—I believe around 110 newspapers.

We know that the merger between Rogers and Shaw has led to the closure of media stations across the country. The most recent devastating announcement by Bell Media has led to the cancellation of local and regional newscasts in all mediums.

I've often said that Canada is made up of three media conglomerates in a trench coat. The reality is that Canada has a role and the federal government has a role not just to keep tabs on what's going on, but to put a stop to the entrenchment of this oligopoly, which has clearly only led to the shutting down of local news media, the laying off of thousands of reporters, journalists and people who get us the news and a limitation in the perspectives that we all expect to hear when we are accessing media. There's a need for diverse perspectives.

My question is for a few of the witnesses. Because I want to make sure we hear from a number of you, please keep your comments brief, if you can.

Is media consolidation in Canada a problem? Is there a role for the federal government to rein in the kinds of mergers we've seen recently, the buyouts we've seen recently and the kind of corporate expansion of media conglomerates that has led to the cuts we've seen in local media and beyond and has led us to the crisis we're facing right now?

First I'll go to Ms. Gerson. I think you mentioned the word “oligopoly”. I'd love to hear your thoughts.

● (1700)

**Ms. Jen Gerson:** Yes, I totally agree.

It's a media oligopoly. It's a grocery oligopoly. It's a telecom oligopoly. Break it up. I completely agree with that. At the same time, as I tried to point out in the last question, use the regulatory powers you have in order to control and dictate some of the content coming out of the major broadcast organizations, which are making billions of dollars in profit, and require them to put some of that money into journalism as a condition of their broadcasting licences. This is an obvious place to start.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

I will go to Madame Forest.

**Ms. Annick Forest:** As I've said before, it's very important to have lots of sources of information, and I agree that consolidation of any industry is never a good thing. We have to ensure media diversity across Canada, and any way the government can support that, while being creative in the ways it makes sure that the different media organizations have mandates to serve Canadians across the country, is something we have to look at and study.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

I will go to Ms. Lindgren for her thoughts.

**Prof. April Lindgren:** I think in some ways the horse has left the barn. To force them to break up, I'm not sure.... There's not much left there.

I look at the newsroom I used to work in, the Ottawa Citizen. Back in 1990, they had 190 people in their newsroom. Today there are fewer than 20.

I think I would err more on the side of asking what we can do to create an environment for viable competitors, new digital start-ups. There are some that are effective models we could look at. Are there ways to encourage more of that?

I think creating opportunities for real competitors is probably a more viable way to do this than trying to breathe life into semi-comatose traditional newsrooms in many cases.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

I want to shift a bit to focus on rural media and the immense ground we've lost there.

I represent northern Manitoba, where our local media is literally hanging by a thread. Our newspapers have fewer than 10 staff, and even that's a lot. They're certainly facing all sorts of economic challenges.

Our public broadcaster, the CBC, which has a mandate to provide news to Canadians and has a station based in my hometown of Thompson, has not filled this job in a sustainable fashion for at least the last five years, despite many of us saying that it simply isn't right.

Many of the communities in our region—indigenous, northern and rural communities—are not having their stories or perspectives shared, simply because there is nobody around to do that work, and those media that do exist have very little to no budget to cover these stories. Unfortunately the CBC has been missing in action despite their obligation.

Ms. Lindgren, I was very interested in hearing your proposal around mapping the media desert that exists in northern and rural Canada. I'm wondering if you could share with us how important this work ought to be for the federal government. Is this work we need to be doing right now?

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Niki, your time is up. Can we get you to ask Ms. Lindgren that question again in the next round, please?

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I am going to go to the second round. It's a five-minute round, and I'll begin with the Conservatives.

Jacques Gourde, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being with us.

I would first like to congratulate the Cégep de Jonquière on its reputation for excellence in media. I would also like to thank Université Laval for its programs that focus specifically on communications and information, as well as the Université du Québec.

I have two daughters who have had the good fortune to find good jobs in communications and production. They have given us a lot of hope. I think that is the case for our young people today. This industry is very competitive. We really have to be aware that the digital platforms have completely changed the environment for the future. In Canada we are losing media revenue, which is going overseas, in social media, and this is a major challenge.

Mr. Fortin, I am going to come back to our young people, who really are full of hope. The way they see it is that they have their whole lives ahead of them. That said, are some of them getting discouraged? Is the placement rate still worthwhile for them, despite the number of students going through the Cégep de Jonquière?

**Mr. Jaky Fortin:** Are they all positive? No, they are not. I think there are some who are and who are confident about the future.

Regarding the placement rate, I can't answer you for this year, because we do not yet have the figures. In recent years, the rate was excellent. We are now seeing that there are more problems relating to internship applications because of the cuts happening left and right. This is something we are observing this year. I think these young people want to change things and progress. The ones who stand out will be able to overcome the problems.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** What I consider to be unfortunate is that we will really need these young people in the information landscape in the future. It is hard for young people to find internships, particularly during a period that is seeing cuts in the market. Might there be a way to encourage media companies to keep hiring them anyway and find innovative ways of going about this? We really will need these media workers in the next 15 to 20 years, and losing a generation of these future workers, especially our young people, would do enormous harm. What do you think, Mr. Fortin?

If other witnesses want to answer, feel free.

**Mr. Jaky Fortin:** I think that right now, the media are not doing a lot of information for young people. That is an observation. CBC/Radio-Canada is doing interesting things with articles on line that are shorter and are more effective for young people, and that is of more interest to them. However, would it necessarily be viable in the medium term if everybody went on TikTok? I am not sure. I get the feeling that we would be doing what Facebook was three years ago all over again, and ending up back at the starting box. That is a personal comment.

I think that the fact that employers are hiring young people is going to help develop this niche, which may be sustainable in the long term. I think there is a crisis right now. We are in the middle of the crisis, we are feeling it and we are living it. It is more difficult. Things are going to get back to normal soon and internship places are going to be available shortly.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Do any other witnesses want to answer?

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Lindgren, go ahead and jump in.

**Prof. April Lindgren:** I'd like to point out that an existing government program, the local journalism initiative, has placed, I think, close to 1,200 people—journalists—at news organizations across the country to fill what are described as under-covered topics, areas or groups.

I think that is an opportunity for early-stage journalists. I think it's coming up for renewed funding, and it's a possibility for this and one way forward.

I would add that the way forward should include additional training for the people hired into these positions, because the content, from what we've seen, can be quite uneven. There's an opportunity for professional development there, as well as getting young people through the door, covering communities, people and issues that really need to be written about.

The second point I would make on this—

• (1710)

**The Chair:** You have 17 seconds.

**Prof. April Lindgren:** —is that there's an opportunity to talk more about a greater role for journalism schools in covering communities that are underserved by local media. We can talk more about that if anyone's interested.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'll now go to the Liberals.

Ms. Dhillon, you have five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses.

Ms. Brin, I want to address a subject that I think interests everyone here: misinformation and disinformation. Based on your experience at the Centre d'études sur les médias, can you tell us about the need for regulation to combat disinformation in the current media landscape?

**Ms. Colette Brin:** In fact, I do not think that regulation in the form of oversight or censorship would be the solution. I think we have to work upstream, which the government has been trying to do for several years, to support a quality information ecosystem, rather than trying to silence or censor voices that we may view as problematic. In any event, disinformation sources are very agile and numerous. They are like the eight-headed Hydra: we cut one off and another one grows back. It is a virtually pointless operation.

When we do journalism, we have to verify the facts, among other things. We have been talking about media literacy. I think that must be taught in the schools, but not just there. Quebec is setting up the Quebec culture and citizenship studies program, which has a digital literacy component. Non-governmental organizations like HabiloMédias are doing a lot of very interesting work in the most vulnerable communities and among the most vulnerable populations. However, this is a battle that has to be constantly started over.

We are talking about the information media. I think that a weak information media ecosystem is fertile ground for disinformation. In addition, disinformation will also erode people's trust, since all sorts of conspiracy theories circulate concerning the media and journalists. For example, during the pandemic, a lot of people believed that the media were complicit with the government, even though reporting and investigations criticizing the government were being published. I think disinformation is a symptom of the crisis we are talking about, not an isolated problem.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** What we are seeing is that young people trust the news less and less. Do you think this is because of all the misinformation they consume on social media?

**Ms. Colette Brin:** Young people consume social media because they grew up with social media and digital media. They never knew the era when television, print media and radio were the main sources of information. Social media make up the environment their generation lives in. So it is entirely to be expected that they will turn to those platforms.

When we talk about assessing the reliability of information, the Digital News Report survey we did shows that the youngest adults distinguish very much among the sources or platforms where they consume information. Older adults themselves have retained their trust in the traditional media.

We have to take notice of this. We must not blame young people or point fingers at them. Instead, we have to understand their reality. I have two children who are young adults, and I ask them about how they get information and their relationship with the information on these platforms. I think people really can use non-traditional platforms critically and intelligently. So the problem is not the platforms.

The behaviour of corporations like Meta when it comes to information is problematic. I think Meta's response to Bill C-18 was extreme and problematic. I say that with all due respect for the Conservative member. These platforms also have a very useful role to play in democratic life. It is not all black or all white.

• (1715)

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Thank you for your amazing answer and the study you did on this subject.

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds left.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Keep up your work, Ms. Brin.

Thank you.

**Ms. Colette Brin:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'll now go to Mr. Champoux.

You have two and half minutes, Martin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Ms. Brin, the World Economic Forum recently published a major survey on risk perception. I don't know whether you are familiar with that survey.

**Ms. Colette Brin:** Yes, I am.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** One of the survey's subgroups reported that one of the major concerns, one of the major global challenges, in the next ten years will be precisely disinformation.

You say that education is a way of combatting disinformation. Do you think we are capable of combatting disinformation as things now stand, without there also being regulation or some kind of oversight by governments? I am talking about not just here, but everywhere in the world.

**Ms. Colette Brin:** There are measures that depend more on regulation in Europe, in particular, in other contexts that you are certainly familiar with. In those cases, they tend more to address the role of the major platforms, rather than trying to legislate in a specific way. Germany, for example, orders that content be removed. However, we can see that there are all sorts of problems associated with enforcing those laws. Just like for the platforms' moderation policies, there is always the risk of doing too much and censoring legitimate, useful content, or of acting once the harm is done.

I think we have a problem that we cannot solve in a debate like this. There is a more fundamental problem of trust and ecosystem. I quite like Ms. Lindgren's idea that people have a directory of sources in their community. It is not a matter of just saying that if you want information, there are these sources, and assume that people are aware of them. The idea is to support sources that are doing rigorous and complete work, whether in journalism or other types of information. I think we need to be open to a variety of scenarios like this.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Mr. Fortin, it has been said several times that we have to make sure that Canadians, the actual users, are central to our concerns. Do you have any solutions that might work for how to go about getting people interested in quality information again?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have six seconds.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jaky Fortin:** The people would have to be part of the information, that is, they would have to be offered information that relates to them personally.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I didn't think you would be listening so closely to the Chair's directions. That was very concise. Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Fortin.

I will go to Niki Ashton for two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

I will be following up on the question on media deserts, I hope, in my next round.

I want to go to a question for the Canadian Media Guild on journalists and media workers who have lost their jobs.

We know, of course, that the Canadian Media Guild represents 6,000 workers in the Canadian media, and with the recent layoffs announced by both the CBC and Bell, your work couldn't be more vital.

When Catherine Tait, the CEO and president of CBC, visited our committee recently, she mentioned how the across-the-board 3% cuts directly contributed to the job cuts the CBC has been implementing. If the announced job cuts go through as proposed, there will be fewer people working for the CBC than even in the darkest days of the Stephen Harper government.

What role do you believe cuts to the CBC by the Liberal government have played in the loss of jobs for journalists?

**Ms. Annick Forest:** Governments throughout the years, whether they're Conservative or Liberal, have made cuts to the CBC at different times. The Canadian government likes us when they're not in power. They don't like us when they're in power because journalists criticize or shed light on the work that's done by the people in power. Of course, there's a lot of stuff being done.

I want people to remember that it's not just CBC; it's CBC/Radio-Canada, so if there are any job losses, they will be on both sides. Our members at CBC/Radio-Canada have a job to do. They're trying to fulfill the mandate given to them by the Canadian government, and they cannot do that work if they don't have the tools or numbers to do that work. If there is a mandate and we want people to fulfill that mandate, we have to give them the tools to do the job.

We do advocate for good, stable, long-term financing for CBC/Radio-Canada, for sure. They cannot plan long term, and they cannot continue to do the very important work they do if they don't have stable financing. Media workers need to be remunerated at the level of the important work they do. Like any other Canadian across the country, they have been taking a salary decrease throughout the years.

● (1720)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Forest.

We'll now go to Kevin Waugh from the Conservatives.

You have five minutes, Kevin.

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

There is no trust in the media today. I'm going to be honest. I was a broadcaster for over four decades. It's lost today, Ms. Gardner. We've even seen the president of the CBC hold her own forum in Toronto talking about a lack of trust in her own organization, along with Torstar.

The public has lost faith and confidence in the media. I don't know if they will ever come back, but once you lose them, people go elsewhere for their information.

Would you care to comment on that?

**Ms. Sue Gardner:** I would, and I really appreciate what you just said. I found it very refreshing because it's extremely true.

When I was planning to come here, I had to cancel an appointment with my audiologist. I ended up talking to the receptionist about why I was cancelling, and she told me that she thinks the government being in any way involved with the news media completely destroys her trust in it. She is no longer interested in the news media at all and does not listen to the news or follow the news in Canada.

That's a random person, but I think the stats are that a bit more than 50% of adults in this country don't trust the news media. There are reasons for that lack of trust, and the trust has to be earned back.

I think we are talking a fair bit about the supply side of the problem here and in general. In these conversations, we talk about how we can ensure that enough good-quality journalism is made and that conditions are such that it can be made. I think that is a worthy conversation, but there's also a really deeply interesting conversation to be had about the demand side.

Why aren't people consuming the news? Why are they turning away from consuming the news? I think there are many reasons for it. Some of them have nothing to do with problems inside the news industry itself. Some of them have to do with the explosion of consumer choice. There are many options and ways you can spend your leisure time, and consuming the news is no longer a shared thing we do together. It's not modelled for us in the same way that it used to be. It's just on your phone now. Your kids may not know that you're consuming news, so maybe they don't pick up a news habit, and so on.

There are many contributing factors, but we know that people feel alienated from what they perceive as people in positions of power and authority, which include the news media, politicians and elected representatives. They don't feel like those people have their backs and are acting in their interests, and that's why they don't consume news media. That's a really serious issue.

You can build it. If they don't come, what good does that do anybody? We all have an interest in an informed citizenry, a population that understands what's going on around it. That's to everybody's benefit. When a whole slew of people—half the people—are falling away from that and not participating in it, that's a society-wide problem.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Let me add this. Statistics Canada released today that 13% of English speakers have a high trust in media and 23% French speakers.

Anyway, in June, when Bill C-18 passed, I knew right away that Bell Media was going to cut. I'd worked for them. I knew their strategy. That same day, they went to the CRTC and said they wanted out of local news. It was that same day. I was criticized by the Bloc in the House for that comment. When I went out, I explained my position on Bill C-18 with the three or four cameras outside the House.

Mr. Champoux took a shot at me in the House about Bell Media. Ms. Gardner, you support me. You made a comment here that Bill C-18 would also reduce Canadians' access to journalism. Bill C-18 was a bad idea from the start.

Can you expand on the article you wrote to support me in June when I predicted that Bell Media would no longer exist?

• (1725)

**Ms. Sue Gardner:** I did not write that article to support you, but yes, there were a number of people—me included—who did think Bill C-18 was misguided from the get-go, for many different reasons. I think I said early on, as a lot of people said early on, that Facebook was not bluffing; Facebook was going to stay out. They did stay out, and that reduces Canadians' access to news.

Bill C-18 will not bring into the industry the money it was originally predicted it would bring into the industry. I think one of the estimates was \$100 million from Google, minus whatever administrative costs are involved with that and minus whatever the value of the deal is they currently have, which people are guessing is something like \$25 million.

It's going to bring in a bit of money to the industry but nothing on the scale of what was originally envisioned. The cost of it is very real. People here have alluded to the idea that Facebook is a wasteland. Well, that is part of why Facebook is a wasteland, if in fact it is. They felt they had no choice. If you want to see less of something, you tax it, and Bill C-18 brought you less of things for that reason.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Gardner.

I'll now go to Patricia Lattanzio from the Liberals.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

First, thank you for your presentation, Ms. Brin.



You spoke about the Canadian component of the Digital News Report 2023 survey. Could you forward your report to the committee, and can you give us a few of your conclusions?

**Ms. Colette Brin:** I gave a few of my conclusions in my opening remarks, but I do not have the document with me. This annual survey, which contains a lot of data, is carried out in collaboration with the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in Oxford. From year to year, we see a decline in people's trust and interest in the news, as your colleague said. This year, the aspect that struck me was really the decline in interest in the news, which was somewhat the subject that Ms. Gardner discussed earlier with Mr. Waugh. People are turning their backs on the news. It is not so much that they are getting news elsewhere as that they are completely switching off from news. There are really no new sources replacing the traditional media.

In 2022, we saw an increase in this active avoidance of news, not just in Canada, but in several countries. Certainly, we are overloaded with news and 2022 was a very difficult year for news, with the war in Ukraine and the end of the pandemic. We were all gutted, if you will forgive me for saying that. We see that people are turning their backs on the news. Why? That is what I was trying to say in my presentation. I think that is really the most important question.

There are practices it is worth considering that can be used to give people local information, information that offers hope and solutions. Certainly the most productive forms of journalism are also the forms that are expensive and complex to implement. People like scientific information, explanatory reporting that helps us understand things and—forgive me—goes beyond politicians insulting each other. People like reporting that helps us understand the world we live in, that helps us work on solutions together, and, of course, that relates to people's daily lives. There are things that are hopeful. There are formats on the new platforms that seem to work well, that we therefore need to continue exploring.

• (1730)

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Your organization works mainly with the Quebec actors. What do you think the challenges are that the Quebec media are facing? Are those challenges different from the ones facing the national media? If so, how are they different?

**Ms. Colette Brin:** The Quebec media were protected from the crisis for a long time by the size of the market, by a combination of assistance programs, and, in particular, by the language barrier and cultural identity.

However, we are increasingly seeing that changing; I would just mention the use of the big streaming platforms, for example. Here, we are not talking just about information, but about media content in general. People are turning to other sources, or rather, turning away from traditional sources. We see how trust in the information sector is also declining in Quebec, while it is traditionally higher among francophones than among anglophones.

There are unique challenges in Quebec. I am a Quebecker by adoption, but I too am Acadian, and I was Franco-Manitoban in my youth. I think that Quebec has a lot of resources and creativity for coping with this. We have a provincial government that is very committed to this issue.

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

**Ms. Colette Brin:** However, that is not necessarily the case in every province and I am more concerned for other regions of the country.

I do not want to say that everything is fine in Quebec and you should not help us. That is certainly not what I mean.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Thank you, Ms. Brin.

[English]

Madam Chair, I'm going to cede the few seconds I have left to my colleague.

**The Chair:** Mr. Noormohamed, you can do it in two seconds, but I'm going to cut you off in two seconds.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair.

With the time left, I would like to table the motion that I circulated to all in this committee. It's been circulated by the clerk. I would like to read that motion. It has been presented already.

**The Chair:** Yes, I understand it has been circulated. Would you like to read it for the record?

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** If you'll permit me, I will do that, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you. Regrettably, it was not printed. I have it here in electronic form. I will read it now.

Given announced plans to layoff 4,800 employees, Bell Canada Enterprises' largest such set of layoffs in nearly 30 years, directly impacting a minimum of 4,800 families across Canada and significantly harming access in Canada to local journalism and thus significantly damaging the democratic discourse, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee call on the executive leadership of Bell Canada Enterprises (BCE) to testify for a minimum of two hours to discuss the announced cuts.

The meeting should take place no later than March 1, 2024, and witnesses called are Mirko Bibic, President and CEO, BCE Inc. and Bell Canada; Sean Cohan, President Bell Media; Blaik Kirby, Group President, Consumer and Small and Medium Business; Curtis Millen, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, BCE and Bell Canada; Karine Moses, Senior Vice President, Content Development and News, and Vice Chair, Québec; and Nikki Moffat, Executive Vice President, Corporate Services, and Chief Human Resources Officer.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** We support this motion. I would also like to propose an amendment to the motion.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** It's also been circulated.

The committee also calls on the Minister of Heritage and the Minister of Industry for one hour each to explain their response to these devastating job cuts that will affect thousands of workers, the fight against disinformation and access to local news for communities across the country.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we will discuss the amendment.

Go ahead, Martin.

[*Translation*]

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

I do not support the amendment proposed by the NDP. First, it is not related. We want to meet with the representatives of Bell and get answers from them. We want to devote a session to this meeting with the executive leadership of Bell. There are going to be a lot of people around the table, in particular Bell people in Toronto and Bell people in Montreal. We are going to be able to talk about the cuts outside the urban centres and the impacts of those cuts.

If we also invite the ministers to join in, the meeting is never going to end. As well, if we want to do a study on everything that led to the cuts, that is different, but it is going to need more than one meeting. As a result, if the NDP wants to move a motion to ask the ministers to appear on that subject, I see no objection to that, but we can discuss that in connection with a separate motion.

In the case of this motion, we want a meeting with Bell executives to get an explanation of this decision. I do not think there is room to invite more people.

• (1735)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Martin. You're speaking against the amendment.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** That's correct.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is there any further discussion?

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I'd like to echo what Mr. Champoux said. The purpose of the motion we put forward was to be non-partisan, clear and concise, and to remove the politics from this and put Bell in the hot seat.

As Mr. Champoux said, I'm not sure bringing the minister in to answer questions on corporate decisions is particularly helpful at this time on this particular issues.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there any further discussion?

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** We are actually in support of the NDP's amendment. I haven't seen it, so I'm just wondering if it has been circulated.

**The Chair:** I haven't seen it either. She read it out.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** The Liberals often ask if they can have a couple minutes to confirm. Before we go to a vote, I would ask for the same courtesy.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We're going to suspend for a few minutes—

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Martin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Madam Chair, we evidently do not have time for a new round of questions with our witnesses. It would therefore be polite of us to release them and thank them for being generous with their time today with us. We can then continue the discussions about the motion and the amendment.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes, we only have 20 minutes left and this might go on for a while.

I would like to thank the witnesses for coming. I'm sorry that your testimony was cut short. You may leave anytime you like.

We are suspended.

• (1735)

(Pause)

• (1740)

**The Chair:** Mrs. Thomas, you had the floor when asking for the suspension.

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

I'm okay with proceeding to the vote.

**The Chair:** All right.

Is there any further discussion?

I will call the vote on the amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** We shall move now to the motion. Is there any further discussion on the motion?

Yes, Martin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I have a concern about the motion, Madam Chair, and I would just like to get a clarification.

Concerning the study we are currently doing, there have to be three meetings between now and the end of February. The last time we discussed the timetable, the February 29 meeting was to be devoted to training for committee members. Today's Liberal motion is asking that this meeting with the Bell people be held before March 1. I would therefore like the clerk to tell us whether that fits into the timetable.

• (1745)

[English]

**The Chair:** Martin, if you recall, we were going to do your media study for four meetings. You cut one out, so that's only three. That may buy us time so we don't change the whole thing, except maybe to get that to be the extra meeting, if everyone is in agreement. That would be the change, basically.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** So the meeting with the Bell representatives would be held on February 29, to abide by the motion.

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, it would have to be.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** That's perfect. Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** It gives the clerk time to call the witnesses in.

All right. I shall call the vote on the motion as presented.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 0)

**The Chair:** The motion carries. We will be bringing that meeting, that two hours, on February 29.

The witnesses have left. We have one thing to bring to you. We have 10 minutes left, guys.

The clerk was going to bring us back a travel itinerary with the costs attached to it. I just want to remind everybody that we need you to say yea or nay, because it has to go to the Liaison Committee soon.

What I'm going to put to you before the clerk presents it is simply this. You've heard everybody say that we have to start talking to ordinary Canadians in this country. That's what this is about.

Go ahead, Clerk. Have you distributed anything for us yet?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Desjardins):** I have distributed a proposed itinerary. The budget is not complete yet. We're still waiting for quotes, but just to give an idea to committee members of the different locations, we did distribute a copy. I have hard copies for those who prefer to have paper.

**The Chair:** Yes, please. I'd like a hard copy.

Is there any discussion? Do you want to take time to read it quickly? I'm not going to suspend. I'll just give you three minutes or two minutes to read it—or even one minute to read it.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** As you can see, it would be in the spring of 2024, and you have a western travel itinerary and an eastern travel itinerary.

The clerk would like to clarify some of the information you received.

Go ahead, Geneviève.

**The Clerk:** Just to clarify, because there were many locations since it is across Canada, we were looking at non-sitting weeks. The budget was split in two: east and west. That's why you have two budgets. It would be on two non-consecutive weeks.

• (1750)

**The Chair:** As you can see on the itinerary, we're not only going to big cities, because one of the things we're trying to find out is what people in suburban and rural areas think. What are their comments? What do they have to tell us about what's going on in their regions with regard to access to news, culture, hearing their own stories and understanding what's going on in the rest of Canada?

Mrs. Thomas, I think we're going to your part of the world as proposed—Lethbridge.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** I'm sorry, but just for further clarification, then, the proposal on the table is that about half a million dollars would be spent on travelling within Canada by this committee in order to look at the diversity of Canada's culture, arts and heritage. Is that correct?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** What would be the hoped outcome or the desired outcome?

**The Chair:** The hoped outcome is going to be exactly what a lot of people pointed out in this meeting today: that we listen to ordinary Canadians. We hear from organizations, groups, unions and industry, and we don't hear from Joe Schmo in our part of the world, who is saying, "This is what's going on. This is what we're thinking. This is how we're feeling. We don't think that we get a piece of the action. We don't think we're getting the news. We are not getting access."

Rachael, I'm sorry, but have you finished?

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** I'm seeing this for the first time. What would assure me that we are hearing from ordinary Canadians during this tour?

**The Chair:** We would not hold a standard meeting where we bring in witnesses. There are different ways to do this.

We could have a round table, where people come in and it's like a town hall meeting. People stand up and we'll hear from them. We ask questions of the ordinary people in the room. That's one way we could do it. Another way we've done this in the past is to invite groups and people who say they want to come. We could publicize it. People might say they want to come.

A more efficient way to do it is kind of like a town hall.

Go ahead, Jacques.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am still rather surprised at the cost. That said, the leader of the New Democratic Party announced today that he would undoubtedly be withdrawing from the agreement to support the Liberals. So we could find ourselves in an election campaign in the spring. I do not agree with incurring half a million dollars in expenses if we then do not make the trip. I would prefer that we not buy airline tickets in advance and then ask Canadians to pay for a trip that doesn't happen. So I am voting against this trip.

[English]

**The Chair:** There are ways for the House of Commons to set up trips that exclude an act of God or unforeseen circumstances, in which case you're not having to pay for the stuff you've booked.

I think that's it. We shouldn't presume anything to happen or else we would not plan anything at all. Every other committee is bringing in their budgets for travel. Let's not jump the gun on this one.

Are there any other comments?

Michael, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Are we asking them to bring it forward and come back to us? Or is it that once it goes forward it's a done deal?

**The Chair:** No.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** How does it work?

**The Chair:** When it goes forward, the Liaison Committee, which is made up of the chairs of all the committees, decides if they want to fund it. They may say no.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Okay.

**The Chair:** They've said no to lots of budgets that have come to them. We're just submitting something. It's not a given at all.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Okay. Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Is there anything else? No.

I'm sorry, Niki. I didn't see your hand.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

I don't think there's any harm in asking if there's an openness to this on the committee. I'm also on another committee, and every trip we've proposed in the last couple of years has been rejected, so I don't have much hope.

I also have some concerns around the cost and, frankly, the timing as things move forward, but I think expressing an interest in finding out what's going on in arts and culture to those who review travel plans is not a bad thing. If they say no, then I think that's it, and perhaps we can look at other travel studies down the line if in fact we're still here.

• (1755)

**The Chair:** Okay.

I belong to another committee that has had a rejection each time by the Liaison Committee. They wanted to travel to Africa and they wanted to travel to Ukraine—this is the foreign affairs committee—and have been told no each time.

This is not a guarantee we're going to be told “yes”. It definitely isn't. It's just a submission. We're saying that we'd like to do this, and they could come back and say no.

Shall we call the question on sending this off to the Liaison Committee? This is the proposal. Maybe they won't like some of the communities we say we want to go to and will want us to go somewhere else.

Are there any changes to the proposal?

Yes, Ms. Lattanzio.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** I just had a question on this draft. Is my understanding correct that we want to submit this right away, or are we waiting for you to fine-tune the details—for example, the price and the dates—of the information missing in these documents?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Geneviève.

**The Clerk:** Yes, you are correct. It's more to give you an idea of the destinations, as well as the different site visits.

If you have anything you want to cut or if there is anything you absolutely want, we can adjust that. Then, on Thursday, we would bring you a detailed budget to adopt. We are waiting for a few quotes, so some of these aren't exact. They're high-level estimates.

**The Chair:** Yes. This is a high-level estimate, as the clerk said.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Madam Chair, can I have a follow-up?

**The Chair:** Yes. Go ahead.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Would it not make more sense that we obtain more information before we move on to consider the draft? I would suggest that perhaps we wait until Thursday, when we get more information, and then we can make a decision.

**The Chair:** We have a deadline to present. It needs to be adopted on Thursday or not, because we have until Friday to send all submissions to Liaison.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Will we have all the information by Thursday?

**The Clerk:** Yes.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Anna.

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** I had a similar question. I thought perhaps we could have more time and get more information before supporting or not supporting the proposal. If we could submit feedback over email or something between now—

**The Chair:** I think you can let the clerk know.

How do they contact you, Geneviève, other than on the website?  
Is it by email?

**The Clerk:** Yes.

**The Chair:** If you have her email, just send her any changes. These are changes in terms of venues, spaces we want to visit or places that we feel we should visit instead of the ones we have here. The cost, remember, is a high-level estimate.

If there are any additions, we need to add them by noon tomorrow.

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** Okay, so our deadline is tomorrow.

**The Chair:** Yes.

There being no further discussion, I will entertain a motion to adjourn.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I move to adjourn.

**The Chair:** We're adjourned.

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