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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1715)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. Good afternoon, everyone.

I acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples.

I welcome you to the 22nd meeting of House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

[English]

Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, March 1, 2022, the committee is meeting to study the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely, using the Zoom application. Per the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on March 10, 2022, all those attending the meeting in person must wear a mask.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference—

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Kevin.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm sorry, Madam Chair.

It's only been five minutes and 14 seconds since the recorded vote in the House of Commons. We wish to inform the chair that we're still missing one member on our side, who has up to 10 minutes after the vote to get here.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Waugh. We were going according to the clerk, who said that everyone was here, but we will wait until your member comes in.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

• (1715)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1720)

[Translation]

The Chair: As I was saying, I acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples.

I welcome you to the 22nd meeting of House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

[English]

To pick up where I left off, for those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon at the bottom of your screen to activate your microphone, and please mute it when you are not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of the floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I would remind you that all comments should be directed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For those on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” icon.

I now would like to welcome our witnesses.

For the first hour of this meeting, our witnesses, from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, are Ian Scott, chairperson and chief executive officer; Scott Hutton, chief of consumer research and communications; Claude Doucet, secretary general; and Valerie Huot, director general of finance and administration services.

You have five minutes to present, and then there will be questions and answers from the members of Parliament.

Whomever you have chosen to present has the floor for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, before we start the meeting, I would like us to address one issue so that we know where we stand and how much time we have. I'm told that committees can use the two hours allocated for meetings, as long as they don't end after 8 p.m.

That's the information we've received.

Am I right, Madam Clerk?

Madam Chair, should we not make a decision to determine if we—

[*English*]

The Chair: We have this room until eight.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Okay.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Martin.

We should begin. Whoever will be speaking for the CRTC, you have five minutes.

Please begin.

Mr. Ian Scott (Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for inviting us to appear before you.

You have already introduced my colleagues. I would like to say that we do, indeed, welcome the chance to appear here as part of your study of the main estimates for 2022-23 as they relate to the CRTC and to Bill C-11.

Before we address the specific element of the main estimates, I thought it might be helpful to provide a little context for my remarks. In particular, I want to offer a quick overview of how the CRTC is funded and how the monies assigned to implement our new responsibilities under Bill C-11 would be used.

The commission has access to two sources of funding: appropriation and revenues. On top of that, there is some statutory funding that is allocated to the commission to cover certain employee benefit plans.

The first category, appropriation, is earmarked for expenses related to Canada's anti-spam legislation and the voter contact registry activities. In addition, the CRTC was granted temporary appropriation funding for expenses related to Bill C-11's implementation, on a preliminary basis. Appropriations, however, represent only about 13% of the CRTC's overall funding.

The bulk of that funding, 87%, comes from fees paid directly by the companies it regulates. I am sure they feel a great joy in paying for their regulation. The commission collects fees under the authority of the Telecommunications Act, the telecommunications fees regulations and the unsolicited telecommunications fees regulations, as well as under the Broadcasting Act, as set out under the broadcasting regulations. The Treasury Board authorizes the CRTC to use revenues from these fees to offset operating expenses incurred in the same fiscal year.

I should note and clarify that broadcasting part I licence fees, telecommunications fees and unsolicited telecom fees are used to cover expenses related to our regulatory activities. However, part II broadcasting licence fees accrue to the government's consolidated revenue fund. They do not come to the commission. They do not fund our regulatory costs for broadcasting-related activities or support the commission's activities in any other way.

The committee, I am sure, will have an opportunity to conduct a study of Bill C-11 in the near future. We very much look forward to appearing before you again to speak at a greater length about the legislation. For now, I'd simply like to say that we, as a commission, certainly welcome the tabling of the bill, given the pressing need to modernize the Broadcasting Act and the CRTC's powers, and to clarify the commission's jurisdiction regarding online broadcasters.

[*Translation*]

Budget 2022 proposed to provide the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, with \$8.5 million over two years. This amount is necessary to establish a new regime to ensure that Canadian news outlets are fairly compensated by digital platforms.

Madam Chair, Bill C-18 proposes a mechanism to ensure that Canadian news outlets receive fair compensation from the digital platforms that share and distribute their work.

• (1725)

The legislation would require platforms that generate revenues from the publication of news content on their sites to negotiate with news businesses and reach fair commercial deals.

Bill C-18 proposes to entrust the CRTC with five main functions in overseeing this activity.

First, the CRTC is asked to play an administrative role, registering news businesses that meet the legislation's eligibility criteria and assessing whether digital platforms meet the act's exemption criteria.

Second, it is asked to oversee negotiation and mediation and maintain a public list of external arbitrators agreed upon by both the platforms and publishers.

Third, it is asked to deal with complaints of undue preference or unjust discrimination filed by news businesses against platforms.

Fourth, it is asked to contract an independent auditor to publish an annual report on the total value of commercial agreements and other key information.

Fifth, it is asked to establish regulations to collect fees, similar to those paid by broadcasters and telecommunications service providers.

The commission requires additional funds to prepare for these new responsibilities, so that we are ready to implement the legislation in an expedient manner should Bill C-11 and Bill C-18 receive royal assent.

• (1730)

[English]

Further, should either bill receive royal assent, we will move quickly to launch public consultations to gather views and evidence from Canadians and stakeholders. CRTC staff will need to develop consultation documents and tools, analyze the public record and develop a regulatory framework.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Ian Scott: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That work will be in addition to the proceedings currently planned for 2022-23. With the benefit of the allocation identified in the main estimates and budget 2022, the CRTC will be well positioned to achieve Bill C-11's goal of developing a new regulatory framework for online broadcasters, as well as Bill C-18's goal for a fair and sustainable Canadian digital news marketplace.

I trust that very broad overview is useful to members, and my colleagues and I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

I will begin now the questions and answers. The first round of questions is for six minutes, but that includes the answer. We will begin with the Conservative Party, and I do not know who will be asking the first round of questions.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): That would be me, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Nater, begin for six minutes.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Mr. Scott, for joining us this afternoon, as well as your counterparts from the CRTC.

I'll open on something you mentioned in your opening comments about part II licence fees. I just want to make sure I understand this correctly. Effectively, part II licence fees are a tax on broadcasters that goes directly to the government. The CRTC doesn't keep any of the part II licence fees, and 100% goes to the government's consolidated revenues. Is that correct?

Mr. Ian Scott: Yes, other than, perhaps, the use of the word "tax". Obviously, it is meant to pay for the use of spectrum, fundamentally, and has been there for a long time. But you're absolutely right: We collect it on behalf of the government, but it's a flow-through, and goes to consolidated revenues.

Mr. John Nater: So, effectively, if we were to eliminate part II licence fees altogether, that would be a benefit to broadcasters and would have no effect on the CRTC's daily operations or financial liability.

Mr. Ian Scott: I assume that companies would always prefer to pay less to government, and it would have no effect on our operations.

Mr. John Nater: I think someone promised that in the last election. I can't remember who.

Moving on, the CRTC's 2022-23 departmental plan gave some foresight into the work that it would be undertaking in preparation for Bill C-11. Again, you've noted some of that, such as preparing for public consultations. Where some of our concerns lie is that

CBC licence renewal is at 17 months, for example. It's been over 500 days now since the three-digit suicide-prevention line was unanimously adopted in parliament.

I'm concerned about where the CRTC is in terms of its staffing, its capability, its competency, to implement Bill C-11 first, and then Bill C-18. I'm curious as to what timeline you see from the time that Bill C-11 is passed and receives royal assent to when it is fully implemented. What's the best case scenario from the CRTC to have that fully implemented?

Mr. Ian Scott: That's a complicated question. It's a fair one, and I can certainly speak to the time it takes for certain types of proceedings. I understand that the point of your question is looking forward. One, it will obviously depend on exactly what is the content of the legislation ultimately passed by Parliament and what might be the nature of any policy direction that the government puts to the CRTC. Those would be factors.

What I can say is, I have had more than 100 staff working in a series of working groups for well over a year to prepare. To their credit, they've been doing this at the same time as their other work, and we have done a great deal of preparatory work. To say when it'll be fully implemented is very difficult. I think the first stages of setting up the broad parameters of the regulatory regime—who will contribute; who is caught, how much, and major definitions—should be done reasonably within a year. There are many other more technical aspects such as transition—we have licences and some are for five years and some are for seven years. They will all need to be changed. There's a set of regulations that need to be passed that are beyond the control of the CRTC.

If I had to put a number on it, I think it could be fully implemented in two years.

• (1735)

Mr. John Nater: Thank you for that.

You mentioned policy direction from the government. In advance of Bill C-10—well, I guess Bill C-10 never did pass, but in advance of the committee's discussions of it, there was a policy directive issued. I just want to confirm that you have not yet received a policy directive from the minister in relation to Bill C-11.

Mr. Ian Scott: No.

Mr. John Nater: Okay.

You mentioned you had a number of working groups working towards different aspects of this. One challenge that we've heard a lot about is the concept of discoverability and how that might be implemented for the major web giants.

I was wondering if you could commit, today, specifically on the concept of discoverability as to whether the CRTC could commit that no Canadian content would be boosted up or boosted below other Canadian content. What I'm asking is if you could commit that no one piece of Canadian content would take priority over another piece of Canadian content or lack priority over that.

Mr. Ian Scott: I understand and appreciate the essence of your question, but I would struggle to simply respond using those terms. Obviously, we prioritize. We prioritize French language content. We prioritize indigenous content, news, and so on. There are prioritizations, but we don't control what content broadcasters, or platforms in the future, put on. Let's be very, very clear about that. That has never been the role of the CRTC, to tell firms, whether the public broadcaster or the private ones, what they should be putting on.

My view or my explanation when asked to address discoverability is about making sure Canadians are aware and have access to Canadian stories. That is an outcome and we currently have a variety of tools to encourage regulated entities to make Canadians aware, and we would do that in the future.

Mr. John Nater: I just have a very few seconds left—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To that end, has the CRTC undertaken any analyses of the platforms as they are today in terms of their Canadian content, in terms of how they may promote or not promote Canadian content as of today. Has there been an audit or a study or an undertaking to see what is the state of play today of the major platforms?

Mr. Ian Scott: We have been very busy gathering data and studying them, and I'm sure we'll come back to whether the commission is qualified, which is a question I get somewhat a little more challenging about. We are studying it, but not in terms of a specific percentage. We have not asked for that type of data, but we have met with them and learned a lot about how they already prioritize Canadian programming and make it available.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Perhaps you can address that in the next question asked of you, if you want to continue with that line of thought.

The next person up is for the Liberals, Anthony Housefather, for six minutes, please.

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

First of all, thank you for your service. I appreciate the work all of you have done.

Mr. Scott, thank you for your service as chairman.

Recently, as you may recall, the CRTC was able to order the removal of RT from Canadian airwaves. Given what Russia was doing in Ukraine and the use of RT as a propaganda arm, it was a good decision.

Could you explain to us the process that you used to make that decision? Did you receive submissions? How did you use the act to be able to do that?

Mr. Ian Scott: I may ask my colleagues to join in in a second.

First of all, I should start by saying that we were very aware of the circumstance, and we were looking at the issue independently. The government asked us to examine whether or not their actions were consistent with the Broadcasting Act and set a defined period in which they wanted a response. They have that ability to ask us to act—albeit not to make a decision, obviously.

The content of the decision is entirely up to the commission as an arm's-length agency. We did that. We issued a notice. We sought comments, staff analyzed them, and we rendered a decision in a very short period of time, as we were asked to.

The circumstances were very clear and the weight of the evidence told us that RT was, in fact, not consistent with the objectives of the Broadcasting Act; therefore, they were removed from the authorized distribution list.

• (1740)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you very much. I raise that because this was an issue that was raised the last time we looked at Bill C-10.

If the government hadn't asked you to look at a channel within a certain amount of time, do you have the powers to, for example, say, "There is a Chinese state broadcaster. We're concerned about it. We are proactively looking at it"?

Mr. Ian Scott: If I may take a quick step back, it's not that it's overly complicated. There are often comparisons made between Canada and other countries. The U.K. is one example. They license foreign services. We do not license foreign services in Canada; we authorize their distribution. In effect, the distributors, the cable companies and so on, will come and say that Canadians are asking for a particular service and that they'd like to carry it. Then it gets authorized.

In order to take it away, so to speak, we need to remove them from the authorization list. That has been a relatively rare occurrence, but it is increasingly a concern, and we do have the ability, as we just did. Typically it would be driven by a complaint from the public or an enterprise, a person in a legal sense registering a complaint, and then we would examine it, determine whether the matter needed action, get comment and ultimately render a decision.

I'm sorry that was a very long answer.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It was a very helpful answer.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have three minutes and 35 seconds.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you very much.

Let me come to you on Bill C-11 for a second, which was previously Bill C-10. There have been a number of people commenting in various places that somehow this bill and then the CRTC would choose to regulate social media posts of non-commercial, individual users.

Could you clarify whether the CRTC has that nefarious intention?

Mr. Ian Scott: We do not. If I may say, by way of introduction, we have that jurisdiction today. Some might argue that it could be challenged in court, but the act as it is written relates to programming delivered over any means and we do not regulate it today. Most of those services are subject to an exemption order. The challenge for the commission is that we really only have two tools, which are outdated. We have the ability to license and the ability to exempt. You can't license a non-Canadian, for example. You can see that we're very limited in what we can do.

The commission's broadcast regulation is not focused on user-generated content. It's focused on the objectives of the Broadcast Act. What we are interested in is what will have an impact on the system.

More than 20 years ago the commission looked at this and said that for services delivered over the Internet, their regulation would not contribute significantly to the objectives of the act. They looked at it again a little over 10 years ago and reached the same conclusion. I think we could probably all agree that it's not a reasonable conclusion now. It is a significant impact on the system. That's why I've said that we need the flexibility in order to do that.

But the focus is not on user-generated content. It is on the content broadly, provided by programmers, platforms—Canadian or otherwise—and so on.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you so much.

I see I have a few seconds left, but I'll give that back to the chair.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Housefather.

I will go to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux for six minutes please.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Scott, I will continue in the same vein as my colleague Mr. Housefather.

You were saying that the CRTC could be regulating digital media right now, but that it doesn't.

Does Bill C-11, as presented today, give you more powers or does it limit the powers you would have to regulate the internet?

• (1745)

[English]

Mr. Ian Scott: It's a difficult question to answer. It is absolutely necessary.

If I can answer it in a slightly different way, there are three elements that we have emphasized that we need. We need clarity about our jurisdiction. There is an argument that it may or may not be covered. We need the ability to obtain data. We need the ability to have an enforcement tool that matters. There are many other aspects, but those are the three fundamental things we need. They are all contained in the legislation.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: We have regularly heard criticisms that the CRTC does not necessarily have the competence to regulate the digital universe. I see that you are smiling as I am.

I think you've probably reacted to that criticism. Have you taken any action? Do you see the CRTC as the ideal regulator? Have you had to reorganize?

Mr. Ian Scott: We're ready and able to do that. The CRTC has been the agency responsible for broadcasting for 50 years.

[English]

It doesn't matter what platform it comes on. Broadcasting is what we regulate and it is irrelevant whether it is delivered by a TV transmitter over the air, or by cable television or by the Internet.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: You were talking about traditional broadcasting, which you've been regulating, or rather the CRTC has been regulating, for 50 years.

I wouldn't expect you to have been at the helm of the CRTC for that long.

Mr. Ian Scott: It's because of my grey beard, isn't it?

Mr. Martin Champoux: I worked for a number of years in the field of traditional radio and television, and I know that it was often very complicated for broadcasters to make presentations to the CRTC during licence renewals or with regard to quotas, for example.

Have you often been told by broadcasters that imposing quotas—let's call it that, since that's the name we've been using all this time—meant imposing on citizens or listeners what they could or could not listen to?

Have you ever been accused of this in the past, to your knowledge? Was this an argument that came up often?

Mr. Ian Scott: I would ask Mr. Hutton to answer the question.

Mr. Scott Hutton (Chief of Consumer, Research and Communications, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission): Good afternoon, Mr. Champoux.

Are you talking about quotas or...?

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'm talking about discoverability.

Mr. Scott Hutton: Yes, that's what we call it today.

To repeat what the chairperson said earlier in his answer, the CRTC has never chosen the programming. It sets out certain objectives, for example a quota for radio or television, whether for local news or for Canadian, francophone or other music programming. These are things we do. We provide a regulatory framework, but we don't choose the programming.

Yes, people may believe that, as you say, we choose the programming, but we don't choose it.

Mr. Martin Champoux: On the one hand, the broadcasters come to you to present their arguments, but on the other hand, the organizations that represent artists, creators and musicians, among others, also come to you to present their arguments.

Has it been demonstrated to you clearly enough that this system keeps our cultural sector strong and that it actually helps artists get the visibility they need?

Mr. Scott Hutton: Over the last 50 years, Canada has built a system that relates to the audio market, the audiovisual market, our cable system, satellite distribution, and now all the Canadian operators who come online.

The system is built on a set of government programs that include regulation by the CRTC.

Mr. Martin Champoux: There is a concern that is often raised by digital companies, namely the sacrosanct algorithms. They must not be touched, because they are state secrets, industrial secrets.

I understand that it may be very delicate, because these are their own tools that they use to operate their business model. Having said that, we still need to have means of verification. If you impose targets, you have to have a way of regulating them.

In the copyright sector, it has been extremely complicated to succeed in obtaining distribution reports to check whether the objectives are being met.

Do you think you will have the same problem? Do you already have in mind ways of checking the targets?

Mr. Scott Hutton: There are targets, but there are also algorithms.

As our chairperson has explained a couple of times, we're not here to regulate algorithms or to butcher them. We're here to make sure that the objectives of the act are realized. We want to make sure that Canadian productions are accessible and that they are shown here and around the world.

• (1750)

[English]

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

[Translation]

Mr. Scott Hutton: We also need to ensure verification.

Certainly the companies are very focused on data. Is that data going to be passed on? Naturally, one of our big requests is to ensure that Bill C-11 gives us the tools to go and get this data. In cases where there is a compliance issue, we must have a mechanism that allows us to impose administrative penalties.

Mr. Martin Champoux: One can expect that, with a minimum of goodwill, these organizations—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux. You have 12 seconds left.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: One might expect these companies to show a little imagination. If they do not want to share their algorithms or give access to them, there must be other means of verification. We are very open.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

I'll now go to the New Democratic Party for six minutes, with Mr. Peter Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

We hope your families are healthy despite the ongoing pandemic.

[English]

I want to start with Mr. Scott, and I appreciate all of your being here today.

You were quoted in the National Post as saying that if we were designing a regulating system today, "you would probably design a regulator very differently".

What did you mean by that? Are you referencing things like what you've just given us in testimony? You said currently the CRTC has the ability to license and the ability to exempt. Is that part of what you were referring to when you talked about designing it differently?

Mr. Ian Scott: No, not specifically. The context of that was about the accomplishments over the last five years and what the challenges were moving forward. They specifically asked, "Would you make major changes?" My point was simply that change will come incrementally, and we are absolutely ready to make the necessary incremental changes to implement prospective legislation.

My point was simply that if you truly started with a clean slate, which is rarely the case institutionally, as the world has changed dramatically, you would probably start with a transport layer, with facilities that have poles, wires, spectrum and the like, and then you would have a service layer. The point was not that the current structure of the commission doesn't work, but rather that the world has changed so markedly that if you started with a clean slate, you would probably design the agency differently. Statutes are what we fulfill and they're in your hands. Whatever the statutes say is what we will address, whatever the structure of the agency.

Mr. Peter Julian: I guess my question is are the statutes adapted to the needs of responding to—

Mr. Ian Scott: The Broadcasting Act is not adapted, and the three principal areas that I've pointed out are the ones that we are particularly concerned about. As I said, the clarity, the ability to gather all the necessary data, and enforcement tools—

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

Mr. Ian Scott: —to make sure people listen.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

We're talking about Bill C-11. In terms of the timelines, you have referred to it potentially taking a couple of years.

Mr. Ian Scott: I may regret that, but I've tried.

Mr. Peter Julian: We'll hold you to it.

In financial terms—because we are talking about the estimates—what does this mean for the CRTC, from what you have looked at so far? As part of that question, you mentioned launching public consultations on Bill C-11. What would that mean in terms of the CRTC's reaching out to Canadians?

Mr. Ian Scott: If I do the latter, it's so important that members and the public understand that we are quasi-judicial, and so we rely exclusively on the record of proceedings. The key to that is to get quality interventions and to reach out to all Canadians. In fact, part of that work—I was talking about preparatory work—is also studying and exploring ways that we can reach out to all Canadians better, including racialized communities and indigenous peoples, that is, to those who have traditionally perhaps not paid attention to the regulatory agency. That is part of our regular work.

I've lost the first strand of your question. Was it in terms of the resources?

• (1755)

Mr. Peter Julian: It was about the financial end and public consultations.

Mr. Ian Scott: Financially, the government gave us two years of funding to implement Bill C-10, now Bill C-11, to do the preparatory work. We've had the first year's funding and will receive the second year's funding shortly, I anticipate, and that is adequate to do the preparatory work. Thereafter, there will need to be a review of the precise budgetary requirements, but it will largely get collected from the fee-payers. That's why I described the regime.

So, yes, we have the necessary funding to do the work we must do right now. I don't know if I've answered your question well.

Mr. Peter Julian: You've answered it well, but not specifically.

Mr. Ian Scott: Okay.

Mr. Peter Julian: If internally the CRTC is putting together a scope around public consultations and has financial estimates, perhaps you could provide that to the committee after this appearance.

I'm going to move on, because there are lots of questions I have for you.

Mr. Ian Scott: I will just say that we don't do that, but I can come back to that, if you would, in terms of our putting out notices. That is how we do business. Then we will make determinations

whether there's a public hearing required, a paper process, and there will be numerous notices. But our budgeting is one envelope and then we do what we need to do to fulfill our mandate, and part of that is running those proceedings. But we have the resources to do that.

Mr. Peter Julian: We talked about enforcement, we've talked about the web giants and the issues of—

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Peter Julian: —things like algorithms and discoverability. Obviously they're linked. What are your thoughts on achieving enforcement if there is not co-operation, and if there are lines in the sand that we've seen from some of the companies, for example, around algorithms, which are an issue worldwide? There are bills before the U.S. Senate that touch on this whole issue of algorithm transparency because of the obvious implications.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Peter Julian: How does the CRTC approach that?

Mr. Ian Scott: Not specifically for algorithms, but in terms enforcement, we have this on the telecom side. You make regulations, you make rules and they must abide by them. If they don't, we have the ability to proceed with administrative monetary penalties and that's what I envisage our doing on the broadcasting side.

Right now, ultimately the only tool we have is to withdraw someone's licence, which is a crude and ineffective instrument. We will have the ability to “encourage”—I'll call it that—parties to comply with our regulations, because we will fine them, so to speak, using administrative monetary penalties.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would encourage us to wrap this round up, please. The time is up. Then we are going to move into a second round. I think starting that round for the Conservatives for five minutes is Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: No, it's Rachael.

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

On the topic of Bill C-11, I see that part of what's in front of us with regard to these estimates is an increase in spending allowance of 5.5% in order to bring amendments into play with regard to the Broadcasting Act.

Do you find it odd that the terms “program” and “programming”, which give the CRTC the ability to regulate of course, are not clearly defined in Bill C-11?

Mr. Ian Scott: I did not bring one of our legal counsel with us today—and Scott may want to add to this—but they're defined, so to speak, as well as they are in the Broadcasting Act today.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay, so you would take the definition that exists in the current Broadcasting Act and apply it to Bill C-11.

Mr. Ian Scott: It depends on the ultimate content of the legislation. That's in your hands, not ours.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Are you comfortable with the amount of discretionary power that would be put in your hands with regard to Bill C-11 and regulating programming?

Mr. Ian Scott: To be honest and sincere, yes, we are.

We're a regulatory agency. We're an experienced overseer, if you will, of the broadcasting sector, and it's a successful sector. I honestly and earnestly don't accept the criticism that we're not prepared or able, because it's simply not true, in my view.

• (1800)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: But Mr. Scott, there is a new chair being searched for right now because that is deemed necessary to modernize the CRTC. Is that not correct?

Mr. Ian Scott: No. With respect, a new chair is being sought because my term ends in September. It's a five-year term and no—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: But it has been stated by the minister that it's necessary in order to see the modernization of the CRTC.

Mr. Ian Scott: I'm not quite sure—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It would seem that the minister sees the need for the reform.

Mr. Ian Scott: I am not going to comment on the minister's terms, but my term was always to end in September of this year. To my knowledge, no chair has ever been reappointed in the history of the CRTC, and it is the government and the minister's right to begin the process to find a new—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Scott, I'm just going to continue here.

Bill C-11 does, in fact, leave user-generated content open to being regulated by the CRTC. I recognize that there have been arguments against this. However, Dr. Michael Geist has said, "The indisputable reality is that the net result of those provisions is that user-generated content is covered by the bill."

Jeanette Patell from YouTube Canada has said, per The Canadian Press, "the draft law's wording gives the broadcast regulator"—in other words, you—"scope to oversee everyday videos posted for other users to watch."

Scott Benzie from Digital First Canada has said, per the National Post, "while the government says the legislation will not cover digital first creators, 'the bill clearly captures them.'"

All these individuals are individual users generating content. It would appear that the bill does or could, in fact, capture them. Is that correct?

Mr. Ian Scott: As constructed, there is a provision that would allow us to do it as required, but if I could just quickly respond to the general tenor of those comments, that's all true today. We could do any of those things today under the Broadcasting Act.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: My question for you, then, is this. Isn't the point to modernize it? Why would we keep that so broad by keeping proposed section 4.2 in the current bill? Why wouldn't we remove that?

Mr. Ian Scott: With respect, it's not our place to make recommendations about the definitions in the legislation. What I would answer is that there should be a higher degree of trust in relation to the commission's future actions. It's demonstrated, as I said, by 50 years of broadcast regulation. We have never interfered in individual content.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: However, I guess what we're faced with today—and you discussed this earlier—is that the CRTC traditionally exists to—

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —or, the Broadcasting Act looks to oversee a very scarce resource, namely radio and television. With the Internet, there's no problem with scarcity. There's an endless number of websites available to an individual. Any Canadian who wants to set one up can do so.

In my estimation, then, why would we need the CRTC to make sure that certain content gets forced in front of Canadians versus other content? You said earlier that part of the CRTC's role is to make sure that Canadian culture is celebrated or that content is put in front of Canadians—

Mr. Ian Scott: So that it can be found.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: However, that's if TV stations and radio stations are limited, so you have to give a certain percentage to French or indigenous etc., but we don't have that problem with the Internet, so how is this a modernization?

Mr. Ian Scott: The modernization is that it will allow us to deal with broadcasting, whatever form it takes and in whatever form it's delivered. It is, as you've just pointed out, a very significant portion of the broadcasting system today.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Do you feel that people don't have adequate access to different resources on the Internet right now and that it's up to you and the CRTC to determine what they watch?

Mr. Ian Scott: Not at all. Again, I would take issue with the premise. We're not regulating the Internet. We're talking about regulating broadcasting, whatever platform it comes on, in order to achieve the objectives of broadcasting.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: What is broadcasting?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, please.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: What is the definition of broadcasting?

Mr. Ian Scott: We're back to your first question, as defined in the Broadcasting Act.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: No, I asked about programming. What's broadcasting?

Mr. Ian Scott: Well, the objectives are set out in section 3, and they are—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Are you telling me that, as the chair of the CRTC who has a renewed term, you cannot define the very basic thing that is your job?

What is broadcasting?

The Chair: The time is up. I'm sorry.

We have to go to the next witness, Ms. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Wow. Competence.

Mr. Ian Scott: Thank you.

The Chair: Badgering the witness is not a necessary part of questioning. Let's be respectful to each other.

The next person up for the Liberals is Lisa Hefpner for five minutes, please.

• (1805)

Ms. Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really want to thank the witnesses for being here and putting up with our questions.

I would like to take you back. You've touched on this a little bit already, but the CRTC has seen massive changes in broadcasting over the past decade or so. I'm wondering how the CRTC was able to pivot with any of those changes, if at all. As more and more broadcasting went online, what was the CRTC able to do to deal with those changes and still fulfill its mandate?

Mr. Ian Scott: It's a great question.

It is a challenge because of the uncertainty and the limited flexibility we have, having only a licensing power. We've certainly kept track of it. We do data analysis. We're aware of the role. The big impacts, however, have been on the regulated entities, the Canadian broadcasters whose business models have been fundamentally changed because they're losing subscribers or losing advertising revenues and so on.

The focus, I would say, has been on assisting them in fulfilling the objectives of the Broadcasting Act.

A note was made earlier about how long it's taking to do the CBC's licence renewal. Part of the challenge with that is exactly that—operating in two spheres. We can issue a condition of licence with respect to the traditional sector but no condition of licence with respect to media distributed via the Internet.

Those are big challenges, and that is why we need the flexibility that is offered by the proposed legislation.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Just so we're all clear around the table—and I know it's a basic question—why do we need a CRTC in Canada going into the future?

Mr. Ian Scott: I assume we're referring here to broadcasting. On the telecom side, it is predominantly for economic regulation. On the broadcasting side, it's predominantly public good regulation. You will not achieve the objectives of the act absent a regulatory framework that encourages it, whether it's through incentives, which I hope should be the case more in the future, or whether it is through prescription. Without it, you will not achieve the results.

We will not have original French-language content, and we will not have indigenous content or racialized content because economically it doesn't make sense in a North American market.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: I believe I understood from your opening statement that you feel, from your experience, that bills C-11 and C-18 are necessary in Canada. Can you go into that a little bit more?

Mr. Ian Scott: As I said with regard to Bill C-11, the necessity is that we need modern tools. The entire broadcasting ecosystem, if you will, has changed. The traditional model, if you wish, is a walled garden. You can come into the garden and here are the rules for you to participate. That's no longer the case because there are a whole bunch of platforms. They are wonderful and are offering Canadians a plethora of content, which they're consuming with vigour, but we've now created these asymmetries. We don't have the tools to address that in the changing marketplace.

On remuneration, it is a question that news is the most costly element of broadcasters' productions. It is a challenge, as you all know, for the print press. Their advertising revenues have largely gone to those platforms. The government clearly is seeking a way of ensuring that they receive remuneration for it. Our role will be to establish the regulatory framework to allow that to happen, hopefully, through commercial negotiations.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: If you have any opinion, I'm wondering if you can share about why it's important to have local news and broadcasters in Canada.

Mr. Ian Scott: No one would know that more than those in this room.

If you don't have reliable sources of news that are trusted by Canadians, that have the ability or wherewithal to cover local, regional and national issues, as well as provide international coverage and ethnic programming from a perspective of Canada, not simply a foreign perspective.... These are all critical elements to a functioning democratic society.

I can't say that there's anything more important in what we do than the support of news.

• (1810)

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Thank you.

Is there another minute or so left?

The Chair: No you don't have another minute. It's a five-minute round, Ms. Hefpner. I'm sorry.

I'm going to have to go to Mr. Champoux for two and a half minutes.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

This is a very interesting debate we're having today. The questions and comments are particularly relevant.

Mr. Scott, two important bills are currently under study: one is already before the committee, and we hope that the other, Bill C-18, will be before it by the end of the current session.

Before we get into the details of that bill, I wonder if both bills will be passed by the end of the session and if they will find their way before the CRTC. They are both important bills for their respective industries.

How soon do you think we can expect the CRTC to complete its work on these two bills?

Mr. Ian Scott: On Bill C-11, I mentioned earlier that it would take about two years to implement.

With Bill C-18, it's harder to say.

[English]

There's the development of regulations as a statutory instrument and the timing of that is not in our control because it has to go through justice. I can't easily estimate how long it will take to do the regulations that we need to do to establish the framework. Bill C-18 is very new and we're just getting our heads around it.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: If I understand correctly, Bill C-11 must be implemented urgently, since the industry has been waiting and struggling for a very long time.

Mr. Ian Scott: That's right.

Mr. Martin Champoux: On Bill C-18, I have to say that I'm concerned about the eligibility of businesses and the effectiveness.

If I understand correctly, one of the purposes of the bill is to protect local news. As we know, local news has been hit hard by the pandemic and by the fact that the big platforms are taking over the advertising revenues.

The size of the company is a criterion for negotiating with the web giants. Smaller media are also struggling. I am thinking in particular of regional coverage, especially in the more remote regions of Quebec and the rest of Canada.

How can we think that Bill C-18 will support regional coverage if the smaller media are not eligible because of their size and their impact?

[English]

Mr. Ian Scott: I'm not sure why they would not be admissible. Part of the role of the CRTC will be to identify who would be or should be the recipients.

Where they may have more of a challenge is reaching a commercial agreement. It's a hypothetical situation, but one assumes that the larger news organizations—and this is evidenced in Australia for example—will be the first to reach a commercial agreement. Smaller players may have more difficulty, but that's where the regime allows for arbitration. The commission will be able to assist in that.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Have you seen—

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Champoux, I think we have ended your time period.

I will now go to the NDP.

Peter Julian, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

I'm going to continue in the same vein as Mr. Champoux.

When we talk about Bill C-18, the finances and the public consultations you're planning, what does the Australian example tell us?

I'd especially like to hear your thoughts and concerns about the local media. In my community of New Westminster—Burnaby, we've lost half of our newspapers. This problem is happening all over the country. What do you plan to do to ensure that the local media have the ability to negotiate?

My last question is, when do you think this process will be completed?

• (1815)

[English]

Mr. Ian Scott: Maybe I'll start, and Scott might want to add to it.

The essence of the legislation is to provide remuneration—unless I'm misunderstanding the essence of the question—that they need. With that remuneration, they will be able to invest further in local journalists and—

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: I was thinking more about the financial impact on the CRTC.

Mr. Ian Scott: I'm sorry. I misunderstood.

[English]

The monies identified in the budget I believe will be sufficient. There are elements of the legislation for which it remains to be seen exactly what the final form will be. On things like the cost of an external audit, I'm not sure that we know yet the exact cost, since it's only been a matter of weeks since we saw the legislation. The idea is that the approximately \$8.5 million will allow us to put the regime in place. Thereafter, it will be paid for by the participants through cost recovery.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

What about the other three questions, that is, public consultations, lessons learned from Australia and ensuring the ability of local media to negotiate within a reasonable timeframe?

[English]

Mr. Ian Scott: Just quickly on the first one, and then I'll turn to my colleague, we always do it through public consultation—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have 12 seconds left, Mr. Scott. Please answer in that time.

Mr. Ian Scott: Pardon me, Madam Chair.

We will use public, transparent processes. That is how we regulate. Parties will be able to assist us in developing that record on which we'll rely to set up the regime and raise those very concerns.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Waugh or Ms. Thomas, whomever is the person up for the Conservative Party, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Chair.

Let me get my head around this. The CRTC has never regulated newspapers. You have never, in 53 years at CRTC, regulated newspapers in this country.

Mr. Ian Scott: Correct.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Now, with Bill C-18, you're going to be asked to regulate newspapers—for money, because of the Internet. I was a broadcaster for over 40 years, and when I heard this, it was like, “whoa”.

You made a statement, Mr. Scott, that without the CRTC, there would be no francophone content because it does not make sense economically. You also talked about indigenous content. Yet in terms of broadcasting, I would say that the French and the indigenous have been shortchanged for 53 years by radio and TV in this country. Thank god we now have APTN, which has filled some of the shortcomings in this country. I can't—

Mr. Ian Scott: Created by the CRTC, and mandatory carriage demanded by the CRTC.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Exactly. But why are you looking after newspapers? For 53 years that wasn't your mandate, and it shouldn't be your mandate to look after newspapers in this country.

Mr. Ian Scott: My understanding of the intent of legislation is not for us to regulate newspapers, and certainly not the content or publication or distribution, but rather the remuneration. Even at that, as I understand the model, we are there to deal with situations where there's a failure to reach commercial arrangements between the supplier, so to speak, of news and those who are redistributing it and profiting from it. Our role will be to set up those regulatory parameters in the face of situations where commercial negotiations aren't successful.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Really, it's totally outside—today—your realm of responsibility—

Mr. Ian Scott: No. I mean, you just pointed out that broadcast news, which we've been regulating for 50 years, is news, and that is part of it, and it is a challenge for Canadian broadcasters to properly fund and support news.

We also do a great deal of mediation and arbitration in all sectors, but particularly in broadcasting, largely between distributors and suppliers—suppliers of programming and those who distribute it—so we have extensive experience in both areas.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: When you look at the broadcasting field today, has it failed under the CRTC? We have fewer stations and more black stations, dark stations, that have just simply turned off the radio dial, and fewer people in newsrooms in this country.

When you leave in September, do you look back at the last five years and say: “God, we have lost x number of radio stations in this country. We have lost hundreds—if not thousands—of broadcasters in this country.”

When you leave in September, what do you say to your leadership on the CRTC when we see that in this country today—and I'm part of it, local news, and Lisa was part of it—that has diminished to next to nothing in this country? What would you say to that?

• (1820)

Mr. Ian Scott: I would fundamentally disagree with the premise of your question.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: How can you say that? The numbers support what I have just said.

Mr. Ian Scott: If you'll allow me to try to answer, I'll try to answer.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes.

Mr. Ian Scott: First of all, hundreds of stations have not gone dark, and in fact—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Radio stations have.

Mr. Ian Scott: Very, very few stations in Canada have gone dark, and the fact of the matter is that the Canadian broadcasting system is quite successful. We do have—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It's successful when you turn on a radio station for 6 hours and the rest is satellite for 18 hours of the 24 hours...? In my city of Saskatoon right now, there are three announcers at one station. They do a three-hour shift and then they go ahead and do Calgary radio. Then they do voice track for Edmonton radio. That's successful...? Do you even know that's happening in this industry right now?

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Ian Scott: Thank you.

Yes, we're quite aware of what's happening in the—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What are you doing about it?

Mr. Ian Scott: Would you like us now to regulate the content? Is that effectively what you're saying, that now we should determine—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Oh—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Scott, you are in charge.

Mr. Ian Scott: No. As we said earlier, no, we do not tell broadcasters what to broadcast.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You give them the licence—

Mr. Ian Scott: Yes—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: —and if they don't follow the licence, you should be able to step in on a five- or seven-year deal and say, “Look, I didn't get my news out of Toronto and Saskatoon.” Global Saskatoon should have a TV station servicing the community of Saskatoon instead of getting our news out of Toronto at 10 o'clock, which they say is local.

Mr. Ian Scott: The regulated firms have to respond to and abide by their conditions of licence. The conditions of licence are set when they are granted their licences and we enforce them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scott. You may want to continue that thought with the next witness. It will depend.

For the Liberals, for five minutes, we have Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Would you like to continue that thought, Mr. Scott?

Mr. Ian Scott: If I've answered the question...we set conditions of licence when we license, whether it is radio or television, public or private. Those conditions are public. They're published and they're enforced. We don't add to them or change them midstream. We take complaints. We review them comprehensively when the licences are renewed, and we enforce it through those licence conditions.

I'm sorry, Scott. Did you want to add something?

Mr. Scott Hutton: I think, having chatted with Mr. Waugh about the situation in Saskatoon a couple of times at committee here, too, I think that's what you're referring to. Since that time, the commission has taken certainly a lot of actions with respect to local television news. It's undeniable that the revenues of these stations have been declining over the years and that the market has changed.

We cannot generate those revenues for them, but what we have ensured and what we have put in place is that, certainly considering the companies and their ensembles, we have introduced a group-based licensing approach, so that we can look at all of their revenues and ensure they make contributions to all of the markets across the country. We have imposed specific requirements as to—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hutton. We have some timelines here, so I would—

Mr. Chris Bittle: I have a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Who raised the point of order?

Mr. Chris Bittle: I know that with people asking questions, we don't have a good sense of how long we've been going, but I don't think that was five minutes.

The Chair: Mr. Bittle, I apologize. *Mea culpa.*

Mr. Peter Julian: On a point of order, it was about a minute and a half.

The Chair: I had you on the two-and-a-half-minute time slot.

You have another two and a half minutes left.

I'm so sorry. It was my fault.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Could you discuss the independent news fund and what the CRTC is doing with respect to that?

Mr. Scott Hutton: That was probably where I was going with my previous response.

We've also found ways to ensure that smaller independent stations that operate in markets that are not the major metropolitan markets receive a contribution. This is essentially paid by distributors that help subsidize local news. There are requirements imposed on them to ensure that they deliver those requirements.

We have created the independent news fund, which contributes about \$20 million towards those objectives.

We've also ensured that for part of the cable company local contributions there is some flexibility that also allows for another \$60 million to be contributed towards local news in the major markets that the large companies serve.

• (1825)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Ms. Thomas talked about the endless supply of websites. I do agree with her that the Internet does have an endless supply of websites.

Would you agree that in terms of how Canadians absorb their content there are really only a handful that represent the bulk of what Canadians consume? In many cases we have monopolies or near monopolies in those types of products being produced.

Mr. Ian Scott: I appreciate the sense of the question.

Obviously, there are certain platforms that are dominant or much larger than virtually any Canadian domestic player, but I think that's not the issue.

Ms. Thomas is right. Canadians have access to an absolute plethora of content, and that's a good thing. No one is disagreeing with that. We did the report "Harnessing Change" going on three and a half years ago, and one of the first points made was that we are in the wonderful situation of having sources of entertainment, news, sports and so on from around the world, but fundamentally the Broadcasting Act is about ensuring that those Canadian stories get told, distributed and found, and perhaps that's the definition of broadcasting that Ms. Thomas was looking for rather than a technical one. I'm not sure.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Okay.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Chris.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you so much for the opportunity to ask questions.

The Chair: I'm sorry for making that mistake with you earlier on.

Mr. Chris Bittle: No problem.

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My question is for Mr. Scott or Mr. Hutton.

Part II is one of the concerns of broadcasters in general, in that we are talking about regulating digital businesses and traditional broadcasters feel that they have very heavy obligations. Licence fees are obviously part of that.

If, in Bill C-11, an amendment were proposed to abolish part II fees, how would that be handled? How could this shortfall be offset? Would the new funds that would be generated by the contribution of online businesses be sufficient?

Mr. Claude Doucet (Secretary General, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission): In fact, when we talk about part II licence fees, we are talking about funds that go directly to the government, as my colleague the chairperson said. This is a matter for the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Finance, because it is a source of revenue on that side.

The CRTC is the intermediary. That's the role we play.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Okay. So you don't necessarily have an opinion, because it wouldn't affect the way we regulate.

Mr. Ian Scott: It wouldn't affect our work, no.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Okay. That's fine.

Earlier, I started talking about Bill C-18, and you told me that you were beginning to form an opinion on this bill. I imagine that you have studied it enough to tell us a little about eligibility. I had started to tell you about it earlier.

We get a lot of calls from companies that define themselves as news companies, but which are, apparently, excluded from this bill because they have somewhat more specialized fields of activity and journalistic coverage. Let's take the example of consumer magazines.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Do you find that the current framework of the bill is fairly well defined or do you feel that there is room for manoeuvre in admitting businesses that might not entirely fit the description we have in mind?

• (1830)

Mr. Scott Hutton: We too are still in the early stages of analyzing the ins and outs of the new legislation. However, there is a general definition that says it is to produce news and general news. This is in the bill at the moment. So it's essentially directed at that purpose.

As time goes on, as well as with open processes and public consultations, it's up to us to see and define what is general and what it refers to. Our analysis so far suggests that we are talking more about traditional news, as is generally accepted, and less about consumer-oriented information, as you were giving as an example.

There are also many programs in the Department of Canadian Heritage that subsidize periodicals or other forms of publication.

I think the interest here is in news, because it has never been subsidized by these other programs.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Absolutely. However, this has opened the door to a large number of companies creating pseudo-journalistic or somewhat specialized content that say they are experiencing the same problem and seeing their advertising revenues being sabotaged.

Don't you think this bill could have been a little broader and allowed for different categories?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, I'm sorry. The time is up.

[Translation]

Mr. Scott Hutton: That's not our role.

We regulate local news. That's our area of expertise. We've explained that—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry.

I will go to Mr. Julian for two and a half minutes—

Mr. John Nater: A point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: —and then this is ended.

Yes, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, I think we got out of the rotation for questions. I didn't want to interrupt Mr. Champoux—I would have felt like I was photobombing his questions—

A voice: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Nater:—but I do think it should have gone to two five-minute slots for the Conservatives and Liberals before going to 2.5 minutes for the Bloc and NDP. I'm happy to carry on with the 2.5-minute round and then come back to the five minutes for the Conservatives and Liberals.

Maybe the clerk could clarify that. I just don't want to see our members lose out.

The Chair: If the committee is cool with that, I am fine to go for another 10 minutes after Mr. Julian is finished. We do have this room for an extended time to move into committee business.

Thank you.

Mr. Peter Julian: It goes to me, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, it goes to you.

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

Mr. Scott, let me follow up questions that you didn't have time to answer the last time. First off, what lessons can we pull from the Australian example for Bill C-18? Second, how do we ensure that local media really benefits? Third, with regard to the process of negotiation, mediation and final offer arbitration, how long do you see that period, expecting that there is not necessarily a lot of co-operation from the web giants on that?

Mr. Ian Scott: The best way for me to answer that is that I have had considerable dialogue with my Australian colleagues. I'd suggest that their news environment is perhaps simpler than ours. It's certainly more concentrated than ours. It appears that it's been quite successful in driving players to commercial agreements, but a lot of the work that remains to be done is, if you will, preparing the sword in case negotiations don't work. They haven't had practical experience yet with arbitration and how long it takes where, as you described, commercial negotiations fail.

So we don't have a lot of information about that yet. We do know it well from the broadcasting side in terms of mediation and arbitration. Mediation goes on a long time, but that is because we're trying to avoid arbitration. Once we actually engage in arbitration, the processes are fairly efficient and straightforward. It's final offer arbitration: Put in your best offer and we choose one.

Mr. Peter Julian: How long is that process? If you're a local newspaper in Burnaby, how long is that process?

Mr. Scott Hutton: We can only use our current experience in broadcasting, where we do have set standards of service. I can't remember it exactly, but it is in the realm of 55 or 65 working days.

Mr. Ian Scott: For a final offer arbitration process.

Mr. Peter Julian: Is it 55 or 65 working days from the outset of negotiations to final offer arbitration, or—

Mr. Scott Hutton: No, that's for the final arbitration process. So when there's a conclusion that a deal cannot be reached in our domain, then one of the parties would claim and ask for final arbitration. That's when it starts ticking.

• (1835)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you. That's helpful, but for the mediation process then, what is the ballpark the CRTC is looking at?

Mr. Ian Scott: As long as the parties are making progress, it's not time delimited in that sense. Obviously the legislation speaks to legitimate efforts to reach agreements. Our experience on the broadcasting side is that mediation can take a long time, particularly if they're making progress. If they don't make progress, it's shorter, and one of the parties moves to ask for binding arbitration.

Mr. Peter Julian: Would it be fair to say you'd be looking at a six-to-eight-month process for negotiation, mediation, final offer and arbitration?

Mr. Ian Scott: I think it will vary depending on the complexity and the size of the players. The first premise of the legislation is that hopefully that there will be very little arbitration and that most of it will be driven to commercial agreements.

Mr. Peter Julian: The chair has been very generous, so I'm going to come back on that, and that is—

The Chair: No, I'm not going to let you be—

Mr. Ian Scott: You spoke too soon. Sorry, Mr. Julian.

The Chair: I'm sorry, your time has ended.

Now, Mr. Nater asked, because I goofed—I'm sorry, I was distracted and I goofed on this round—so perhaps we can have Mr. Nater and then a Liberal, and that we will end this particular meeting with the CRTC.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay, Madam Chair, thank you. It's going to be Kevin for the Conservatives here.

The Chair: It's for five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Mr. Scott said that broadcasting has been a successful sector, and it's for the public good. The CRTC, I think, on the Rogers-Shaw deal, the initial one.... And here I'm only going to talk of broadcasting, not about the spectrum and all the industry.

Did you think it was a good deal?

Mr. Ian Scott: The issue for the commission in our policy is whether or not the transaction ultimately makes a positive contribution to the objectives of the Broadcasting Act, and with the concessions, if you wish to call them that, that we drew from the participants, yes it was. Otherwise we wouldn't have rendered that decision.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Does it bother you that the Competition Bureau on the other side, the industry, did not like the deal?

Mr. Ian Scott: I don't—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Just for your sake, we also submitted in Parliament that we did not like the deal. The heritage committee did a study on Rogers-Shaw and the chair presented it on Tuesday in the House of Commons and said that we did not like the deal between Rogers and Shaw, just to be upfront.

Mr. Ian Scott: I'm aware of that. I did look at the recommendations.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What did you think of those recommendations?

Mr. Ian Scott: The committee heard witnesses and formed a view. A number of them related to prospective proceedings. We don't deal with things in theory or hypothetically; we deal with those as they come. But the fundamental view, that there's not enough benefit, I disagree with. It is fundamentally a horizontal merger on the broadcasting side. The parties did not compete directly with one another, so the issues were largely related to how to ensure that independent news, independent broadcasters, would be successful, along with measures to protect programmers because of the increased size and market power of Rogers, protections for local news and so on, and we did address those.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I think that around the committee we thought, to be honest with you, that Rogers did cherry-pick with extra resources, people, in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, and even here in Ottawa, but there were no resources for the middle- or lower-class stations like Halifax, Peterborough, Lethbridge, Kelowna, Saskatoon, Regina and so on. Those are the stations—and you've mentioned that here—are the ones that are really in trouble in this country right now. It's not CTV Toronto. It's not CTV Calgary. The ones that are in deep trouble right now—and, I'll tell you, I've worked at CTV Saskatoon. We have one stringer now in Prince Albert. We once had 85 people in Prince Albert. We had a television station in Yorkton with 50 people. They have one person now. Swift Current is dark, and this is in my time—in my own province I've seen it.

You can see why I was really concerned in this case for Global/Corus because I can see what's going to happen to the so-called middle and lower class.

• (1840)

Mr. Ian Scott: As we indicated, you are speaking about Global, Corus's property—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's right.

Mr. Ian Scott: —and Corus will not receive certain funding.

We've indicated in that decision that there will be a review of the availability of further funds, because if all of the money went to Corus, that would be a very negative outcome for some of the smaller players who are currently deriving a significant benefit from the fund. That will be reviewed by the commission. We've indicated that in our decision.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thoughts on four months left...? I mean, we're hitting you with Bill C-11 and Bill C-18 and Rogers/Shaw, and you have one foot out the door.

Mr. Ian Scott: Not at all, and that would not be a good description of how I view my role, certainly, in the coming months.

No, it's the institution. I regret the focus on the chair, to be honest. It's the institution. We have almost 650 excellent staff. They do the analytical work. They identify those questions. They help us produce the record upon which members make decisions, and they will continue. I have eight other colleagues. They are all in their own way contributing significantly, but most importantly, frankly, staff, who are the experts, will continue to do their work no matter who chairs the commission.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Would you like to see an administrative change in the CRTC since you seem to be the one who gets the credit or the bouquets? How would we change that? Or would you?

Mr. Ian Scott: I think that's just a lack of understanding of how the commission works.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay.

Mr. Ian Scott: Nine members make decisions on the advice of expert staff, exclusively on the record of the proceedings.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's good.

Thank you. All the best to you. We will probably see you for Bill C-11 too.

Mr. Ian Scott: I certainly hope so—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Ian Scott:—because I think that perhaps we only scratched the surface of some of the committee's concerns, and we'd be happy to return and speak to it at length.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Waugh.

Thank you, Mr. Scott.

The Liberals have ceded their place, so I want to thank the CRTC and all of the executives who came to present to us today.

You had a bit of tough time, but thank you very much for the information and the goodwill that happened today.

The meeting will suspend before we move to the committee business meeting.

• (1840)

(Pause)

• (1845)

The Chair: Now we are into a business meeting. We have unfinished business. We have to decide, as a committee, how many meetings we will dedicate to public hearings with witnesses.

We also have to set a deadline for witnesses, which I think we had been discussing as being this Thursday. If you've already sent your witnesses, then it would be up to the clerk to tell me if she is missing a list or still needing to get a list of witnesses, which I will ask her in a minute.

Clerk, go ahead. Do we need to get a list of witnesses from anyone? Have you received all of your witnesses?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore): No, I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I haven't received all of them.

I see Mr. Julian has his hand up.

The Chair: Peter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Our party has already submitted its list of witnesses.

• (1850)

[*English*]

As far as witnesses are concerned, I think we had an initial conversation on Monday. It seems to me that 20 hours of witnesses is a good start. I don't think anyone would object to that. My suggestion is that we have four meetings of five hours each. I would suggest we use the break week, because of course with translation it is a lot easier during a break week to find that space. That's what I wanted to put back on the table. Generally, 20 hours of witnesses seemed to be a compromise folks were okay with, so I think that would get us started certainly in terms of witnesses and in terms of Bill C-11.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, I will ask the clerk to comment on this, but I don't know that we can get 20 hours of meetings in the constituency week—next week. It all depends on the availability of resources. Maybe the clerk can tell us what we may be able to accomplish next week.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm sorry, but on a point of order, Madam Chair, I was suggesting Tuesday and Wednesday next week, with five hours on each of those two days, and then the following Monday and Wednesday.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Peter Julian: That would be 10 hours next week and 10 hours the following week.

The Chair: If I may be so bold as to translate, 20 hours is the equivalent of 10 normal meetings. Is that what you're saying, Mr. Julian?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Clerk, what does it look like for the constituency week?

The Clerk: I have it under authority that the services are available to provide meeting time between the hours of 11 and 4:30 on Tuesday, May 24, and Wednesday, May 25. Again, that would be two meetings from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The Chair: Thank you, Clerk.

Are those the only two days available? Have we explored other days in case members can't make either of those two days?

The Clerk: There are other days currently being explored. I am told Thursday is quite full, but it will take another 24 to 48 hours before we have a response from the services as to whether or not they can accommodate alternate days. We do know that we have Tuesday and Wednesday.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for that.

Obviously this is not something we can decide on until you get that information.

Yes, Clerk.

The Clerk: Mr. Coteau had his hand up.

The Chair: Yes, Michael.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): I have just a quick question in regard to four meetings. Can we accommodate two five-hour meetings past the constituency week? Would that be possible? It just seems like a big time slot. Is that easy to do or is it possible to do?

The Chair: It's not easy, but the clerk can tell you if it's possible.

The Clerk: I wouldn't be able to tell you if it's possible. If you speak to your whips, and they determine that that's what's happening, then that's what will happen. Beyond that, no, we don't ordinarily sit outside of our time slot.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Basically what we are told is that we could have two blocks of five and a half hours—are they, Clerk?—on Tuesday and Wednesday of next week, and you are exploring other days in case those days are not acceptable.

The Clerk: For the constituency week, yes, it's five and a half hours. I believe there's the understanding that we will be taking a half-hour break in order to give the interpreters a moment. It's more of a health break in between. So it would be five hours of sitting over five and a half hours.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian, you are talking about the following week, the week that we get back, and whether there is an ability to also make up another 10 hours during that week.

It's my understanding, Clerk, that to do so, we would have to have hours extended onto our time. I don't know if you have explored that and what you've found.

Mr. Peter Julian: On a point of order, Madam Chair, before you go to the clerk, I should mention that I know that the whips are

working on supports for interpretation. That's been a problem. I think it's quite likely that this will be resolved by the time we get to the first week back after the break week.

• (1855)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian, for that information.

Obviously, we will have to try to find a time that's acceptable to everyone else, but the question of devoting the equivalent of 10 two-hour meetings for public hearings, and to do so within two weeks, is what Mr. Julian is suggesting.

So if I don't hear any....

Yes, Clerk.

The Clerk: Mr. Champoux has put his hand up, and then it's Mr. Nater.

The Chair: Okay.

Yes, Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I don't know how recent the information from our clerk is. For my part, the information I've received in the last hour indicates that the time slots available in the next week have already been booked by other committees. In particular, I understand that the Standing Committee on Finance will be sitting all of next week.

So it seems that it is impossible to reserve five-hour time slots next week, but I would like to validate that information so that we do not go down either road without the most up-to-date information. I understand that the available time slots are going quickly and may already be gone.

[*English*]

The Chair: Perhaps the clerk can respond to that.

The Clerk: I had confirmation from my manager earlier this afternoon that those spots were reserved for us. I haven't heard anything different.

The Chair: That clarifies again the Tuesday and Wednesday spots for five and a half hours each.

Does that answer your question, Mr. Champoux? Okay. Thank you.

Go ahead, John.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the members of the committee for their insights so far.

First, in terms of the deadline for the witness lists, I think that's entirely reasonable. I don't see any reason why we can't have our witness lists in by the end of—

The Chair: Tomorrow?

Mr. John Nater: —today, frankly; or tomorrow, yes. I'm not concerned about that. I think we can go ahead.

As for Mr. Julian's suggestion of 20 hours for witnesses, I think that's reasonable. I think we can work with that. We'll see what happens towards the end of that period. I'm trying to be reasonable. I think the equivalent of 10 meetings is reasonable. I'll leave it at that.

I'm a little hesitant about devoting the equivalent of 10 hours on a constituency week next week. Speaking for our members on this side, we have made commitments in our constituencies. We are ending up a four-week session. We have four weeks after this. I know that my colleagues and I have commitments in our ridings, and many school visits, which can only happen on so many days. It's nice to see that they're happening in person again.

I would be hesitant to commit us to 10 hours during the constituency week. If we can find the resources during the following sitting week, I think that would be preferable from our point of view. To ask the other three members of this committee to give up or cancel what they've already got planned, or to ask non-members of this committee who may not have a background in terms of what the legislation will be, I think is asking a lot.

Again, we'll see what other people think, but it would be my preference to do this during a sitting week. I think it is reasonable to go with longer meetings. I think Mr. Julian has made a kind compromise. If we can work towards something on that, I think that's reasonable.

The Chair: Just to clarify, you are agreeing to a deadline for witnesses by tomorrow, Thursday, at four o'clock eastern time, yes? That's fine.

I understand that the clerk—and she can clarify this for me—has a list of witnesses from the other parties. Would the committee like that list to be shared? If no one opposes the idea, we'll go ahead and have the clerk share the list that she has and then add Mr. Nater's list by tomorrow at four. Is there opposition? Seeing none, then I think we have accepted two very clear things.

The only thing we need to discuss now is what Mr. Nater is suggesting. John is suggesting that we can't do 10 hours next week. Again, the committee will have to discuss how to do this. We now have had the clerk tell us that she has managed to confirm Tuesday and Wednesday for five and a half hours, with half an hour being the break in between for a change of interpreters, etc., I gather, so we do have a bird in the hand.

I don't know about the following week and what we will get if we try to find the equivalent hours in that time. Again, as Monsieur Champoux pointed out, we're seeing many committees trying to grab whatever time and resources there are. That's one of the reasons why I would like us to make some decisions today. If we don't, if we snooze, we will lose the ability to get any extra time at all. I would like to hear this being discussed.

I have Madam Clerk.

• (1900)

The Clerk: Mr. Julian has his hand up, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I certainly understand Mr. Nater's concern, but we do have these spots available. We do have interpretation lined up. We've heard from I think all four parties that there are witnesses who are eager to come forward, so I don't think that time frame is unrealistic.

I will have to adjust my constituency week accordingly, and I probably will have people in my caucus replacing me from time to time, but it seems to me that if we don't start with the blocks that are already available to us, given what we've seen over the course of the last few weeks, particularly on Mondays and Wednesdays, that's just delaying the legislation until the fall.

It seems to me, as people pointed out, that we need to jump on this, hear from the witnesses and make decisions around Bill C-11. It would seem to me that the best way to do this is to take two time slots that are already available to us. In my case, if I absolutely can't change local events, I'm going to make sure I have a good replacement who's well briefed and available to ask the questions of the witnesses.

The witnesses have been waiting for some time to come forward. I think we should accommodate them. We have these spaces, so let's start next week when we have that availability so we can get a jump on this and finally respond to the witnesses' needs.

The Chair: Thank you.

I am entertaining discussion on what Mr. Julian has just said.

Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Mr. Waugh has his hand up.

The Chair: Kevin, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On Tuesday, I have the eye surgery that I've been waiting the last six months for, so that's not good for me. As you all know, when you schedule a specialist, it can take eight to 12 months. It just so happens that Tuesday is my day, but I understand.... I just couldn't make Tuesday. I have to be honest with you. After surgery, I am not to drive and I am not to look at a computer screen. That would not work for me, but I am one person in this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Kevin.

Are there any other hands up, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Mr. Julian has his hand up.

The Chair: Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'd like to move, Madam Chair, through you, that we have the five-hour meetings on Tuesday and Wednesday of next week to start things off. The witness lists are submitted. The witnesses are eager to appear, so I would move that.

The Chair: Thank you.

There is a motion on the floor. If anyone wishes to discuss this motion, please raise your hand or speak now.

I can see the floor and I don't see any hands raised.

Clerk.

The Clerk: Mr. Nater has his hand up.

The Chair: John.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do have to push back a little on doing 10 hours' worth of meetings next week.

Our role as Parliamentarians is multi-faceted. We have commitments here in Ottawa, we have commitments legislatively and we have commitments in our ridings. I have a real trouble with devoting two days'—five hours—worth of meetings during the busiest times of the day, when we have other commitments. I'm not saying I'm opposed to any meetings next week. I think we can be reasonable.

My own schedule is to meet with stakeholders, visit school groups and do that role as a representative of our constituents. I'm also dealing with the case work that has been piling up for the four weeks we've been here and the four weeks upcoming. I don't think it's practical for us to do that.

I'm open to compromise on that. I don't want to see us not move forward. We have witnesses. All of us around this table want to hear from them, but I would much rather see the bulk of this discussion take place during our regular sitting weeks when we have time here blocked out.

We've been planning for this constituency week for many weeks. Like Mr. Waugh said, we have medical appointments, family arrangements and family commitments. I have three young kids who need people to get them on and off the bus when my wife is working as a nurse. There are obligations there. If we're willing to have half-hour breaks while I run down to the bus stop and half-hour breaks while I prepare the youngest some "cheesy noodles", as she calls them, we can make something work.

I just can't commit, on behalf of not only the three members here, but the members who aren't on this committee who are going to have to give up their own engagements, to five and a half hours straight with a half-hour break for interpretation changes.

I don't want us to have to leave this committee without having made a decision. I want to be able to move forward. I don't want to be here talking about this for the next two hours.

I see some staff looking surprised by two hours. I said that metaphorically. If we can come to a compromise, I'd be willing to entertain that. For the sake of our members, families and work commitments in the ridings...

Perhaps, Madam Chair, if you would be entertaining an opportunity to suspend for five or ten minutes, we could have some discussions off line here among different parties. There might be a compromise we could come to, if it's worthwhile. If it's not worthwhile then we can discuss it further.

• (1905)

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

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I think we should take a cheesy noodle break.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: All right. We will suspend for five minutes.

We only have an hour left, actually, John. We don't have two hours left.

• (1905)

(Pause)

• (1920)

The Chair: I think we can begin, because we don't have very much time left in this room, and we need to get some of this work finished.

Mr. Nater was the last person with the floor. If we can get an agreement on these public meetings with witnesses, I would love to hear that right now from someone.

The Chair: Mr. Nater, go ahead.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There is an eagerness in the room to get going. I believe it's Niagara day on the Hill, so I don't want to keep Niagara Falls from waiting.

We've come up with a compromise, so I'm going to state what has been agreed to, and if I state anything wrong, Mr. Bittle will throw a computer cable at me.

We've agreed that we will have our witness lists in to the clerk as soon as possible, by tomorrow at the latest. We would like to do a one day five-hour meeting on Tuesday of the constituency week, and there's agreement that the Tuesday meeting would be on autopilot, so it would not be acceptable to move motions during that meeting.

We would then request that the clerk, with her very best resources, schedule meetings in that first week back to the best of her ability, and to have the remaining meetings that week, whether they are for five hours on Monday or three hours. This isn't in a good motion form, but the direction is hopefully clear on that sitting week back for a total of 20 hours of witnesses.

• (1925)

The Chair: I wish to clarify. We do have a motion that has not been voted on. It's on the floor, so are you amending that, Mr. Nater?

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

The Chair: Mr. Julian, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Nater is offering a friendly amendment, which I accept. The friendly amendment would be to meet for five hours on Tuesday, and we would eliminate the five hours on Wednesday, so we'll have five hours on Tuesday on autopilot, and then the following week, which is May 30 to June 2, up to 15 hours of committee time, preferably Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday evening, or whatever the clerk finds available in that period.

The Chair: Are you suggesting the 30th, when we return, the 31st, and I didn't get the last one.

Mr. Peter Julian: It was the 1st or 2nd of June. Of those four days, preferably five hours on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or whatever the clerk can scrape up, hock, find, and steal over that period of committee times.

The Chair: You kind of cut out there, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: I propose Tuesday for five hours on autopilot. That's on May 24, and then on May 31, June 1 and 2, it would be up to five hours according to the availability of rooms each day.

The Chair: Is everyone in agreement with this? Is there anyone in opposition to this motion?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Good work, guys. There was very good will, as well.

I just want to say that I don't know, because only the whips can say whether or not we can get three days in one week of five hours each. It's going to be up to the clerk. We will go with that at the moment.

This motion passes, obviously, so as I said, congratulations for the good will and good work.

The next thing I have to find out is if we need to have witnesses for this meeting on Tuesday. The clerk will be working on Thursday with what she's got to move forward. I was wondering if the department would be one of your first witnesses. At least that would give us witnesses for a certain period of time while the clerk works on what she can get.

Is there any opposition to that idea?

The Clerk: I think Mr. Nater has his hand up, Madam Chair.

The Chair: John.

Mr. John Nater: I was really just heckling, but it would be nice to have Minister Rodriguez there as well. I'm sure he would be eager to join us and present on his bill.

The Chair: That may be so. We'll have to see. One cannot tell what ministers' schedules are like, but if the minister could come, that would be great. If the minister cannot come, shall we just go with the department officials? Is that acceptable to everyone? It's just a plan B.

The Clerk: Mr. Champoux has his hand up.

The Chair: Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I believe we're unanimous, Madam Chair.

If we can welcome the Minister of Canadian Heritage and his officials, so much the better. If the minister is not available, we'll

gladly have his officials. I think we're all in agreement on this point.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

If I may just recap—

Yes, Aimée.

The Clerk: Mr. Bittle has his hand up, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Chris.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We sent in a prioritized list of witnesses, and I know it's usually officials and minister first. We're proposing officials and minister last, as the final witnesses after all of the testimony has been heard, as I don't believe the minister is available on Tuesday, but he is eager to appear before this committee.

● (1930)

The Chair: Thank you, Chris.

Just to recap, we have a deadline of Thursday, tomorrow, at four o'clock eastern time for anyone who has not submitted witness lists to submit them. We already have quite a long witness list, and some of them may actually be duplicates, but I think the clerk would send those lists for you to look at.

Mr. Bittle said that the Liberals have sent in a prioritized list. I think if we all agree to those things, then maybe the clerk can begin on Thursday to try to get witnesses in, but if she cannot—because, don't forget, Monday is a holiday and talking to people on Monday would be pretty difficult—I know she will do her best to get hold of witnesses and bring them in. We will then be meeting on Tuesday for five and a half hours with a half-hour break. There will be no meeting on Wednesday, no further meeting during that constituency week, and then the following week we will have extended meetings, beginning with Tuesday for five hours when we get back. We're going to have May 31 and June 1 and 2 for five hours each, contingent upon the clerk's ability and maybe the whips' ability to try to find us that time.

I would entertain a motion to adjourn this meeting.

Mr. John Nater: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Good work, everyone. I really am so proud of the way everybody worked well together.

Thank you. Have a good day, whatever is left of it.

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