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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 137 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

[*English*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. It's a truly hybrid format. It's interesting to see Mr. Champoux sitting there. I don't usually see him in the hybrid format.

Just to remind you all about the rules, please do not speak until the chair recognizes you. Please make sure you don't take photographs of what's on the screen. You can get the shots later on from the public website. Also, remember to put your hand up by using the little hand sign on your computer.

I think that's it. I think I've reminded you of everything I should remind you of.

Everyone has had their connection done properly, so we're going to begin the meeting.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Tuesday, October 29, 2024, the committee will commence its further consideration of the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Today we're meeting with the Minister of Canadian Heritage, as required by the motion from the House of Commons. The Honourable Pascale St-Onge is here.

This meeting will be for one hour.

The minister is accompanied by Isabelle Mondou, deputy minister of Canadian Heritage, and Joëlle Montminy, senior assistant deputy minister of cultural affairs.

Minister, welcome. Thank you for taking the time to come. Knowing what's going on in your life at the moment, we appreciate your coming. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Committee members, we're all here to talk about CBC/Radio-Canada, so let's do that.

I want to make it clear to everyone in this room and to the people listening to us that the Conservatives are using anything to do with CBC/Radio-Canada to undermine the credibility of the public broadcaster. The reality is that they have no interest in the good of this institution at all and are working tirelessly to obtain a licence to destroy it. So these are two competing visions today.

First, the Conservatives claim to be concerned about jobs and the people involved. They're not. Their record of decisions during the Harper-Poilievre government tells a much darker story, and their slogan "Defund the CBC" threatens 8,000 direct jobs and tens of thousands of indirect jobs.

Let's review the facts. Every year after 2012, the Conservatives cut \$115 million from the CBC. As a result of successive cuts by the Harper-Poilievre government, more than 1,700 Canadians lost their jobs. Therefore, I find their sudden interest in preserving jobs hypocritical and misleading.

With respect to pay for performance, we understand the issues around that. We, too, expect public money to be well managed at all times. We will therefore be closely following the study announced by the board of directors, which says that it wants to review this compensation method and explore better ways of doing things.

However, once again, the Conservatives' doublespeak is dishonest. I would remind you, members of the committee, that it was under the last Conservative government that performance pay was increased by over 65%, including for the person selected as president of CBC/Radio-Canada at the time, Hubert T. Lacroix.

You will therefore understand that it is pointless to pretend and engage in false debates. The reality is that the Conservatives are constantly campaigning to destroy CBC/Radio-Canada. We can't let them do that.

The truth is that they no longer want the independent public broadcaster to play a major role in informing our communities across the country. They no longer want CBC/Radio-Canada to be a driver of our cultural and artistic community. They tell us that they will erase nearly 100 years of history of one of the most established and recognizable Canadian brands from coast to coast to coast in both official languages.

• (1110)

[English]

In seeking to destroy the public broadcaster, they are showing a total disregard for reconciliation and telling us they no longer want CBC/Radio-Canada to keep producing content in eight indigenous languages.

[Translation]

With their slogan “Defund the CBC”, the Conservatives are telling us that they no longer want a public broadcaster that is there for francophone communities across the country. Let's be very clear about this: whatever their empty slogan is, it's impossible to “defund” the CBC without having an irretrievable impact on Radio-Canada. To say otherwise illustrates the incredible level of improvisation and lack of vision on the part of the Conservatives when it comes to the public broadcaster. In fact, the story they tell about CBC/Radio-Canada is false and out of touch.

Let's continue with the facts. Polls have shown for a number of years that, despite criticism and a desire to see an improvement, the public largely supports the existence of CBC/Radio-Canada. For example, the most recent study, released just three weeks ago, pegged public support at 78%. It's time for the Conservatives to take note of this.

[English]

What is the real motivation of the Conservatives? Could it be that they want to undermine the credibility of CBC/Radio-Canada because they prefer a digital universe flooded with less credible self-proclaimed influencers, disinformation and even foreign interference orchestrated by states hostile to Canada?

[Translation]

I remind you that, when it comes to journalism, CBC/Radio-Canada employs nearly a third of the country's journalists. By wanting to “defund” the institution, what the Conservatives really want is to deprive Canadians of professional journalistic information based on facts and produced under a code of ethics. For example, do they find that shows like *Enquête* or *The Fifth Estate*, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, no longer have a place to shed light on the problems we are concerned about?

Attacking the public broadcaster is above all a way to weaken us collectively. This Conservative relentlessness is dangerous. The Conservatives claim to be in favour of freedom, while working to deprive Canadians of their public broadcaster. Is that the Conservatives' game plan, to destroy CBC/Radio-Canada in order to give foreign platforms free rein?

[English]

As I was saying earlier, there are two opposing views here.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: Thank you.

There is a Conservative vision that puts Canada 100 years back in progress and makes us the only G7 country without a public broadcaster. Then there is our vision, one that recognizes that we must invest in our country in order to equip ourselves with the tools

and means to keep being unique, autonomous and proud of Canada's stories.

• (1115)

[Translation]

To my NDP and Bloc Québécois colleagues, I propose that we work together to improve our public broadcaster without playing the Conservatives' dangerous game. They are not interested in dialogue, and they have only one goal at the end of the day—to shut down CBC/Radio-Canada.

Thank you for your attention.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Now I'm going to the question-and-answer period.

Please remember that I'm trying to keep you on time, guys. I will give you the 30-second heads-up when you're finishing up your time. All of the time limits include questions and answers, not just questions.

We'll begin with the Conservatives and Mr. Kurek for six minutes.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just to let you know, I will be splitting my time with Mr. Gourde. I'll let him know when that time comes.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

When Ms. Tait, the CEO of the CBC, and the board appeared before this committee, the board made it clear that it approved of her performance as CEO of the public broadcaster. However, it also made clear that whether or not she gets a bonus is your call. The board made it clear that it approved of her performance.

Are you planning on awarding Ms. Tait a bonus?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: At this point, I can say that the decision on that has not been made yet. I would also remind you that the Privacy Act means that details of people's pay and contracts cannot be disclosed.

So the decision has not been made. We will continue to study the issue in light of Ms. Tait's performance.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much, Minister.

However, it has been made clear that both Ms. Tait and the government.... There are no privacy laws that prohibit disclosure of this important information, which many taxpayers certainly want to know.

Minister, will you commit to this committee today to ensuring that Ms. Tait does not receive a bonus for this year and also to ensuring that she does not receive a generous taxpayer-funded exit package, such as a severance, when she completes her term as CEO of the CBC on January 4?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: I remind you that there is no severance package. It just doesn't exist. So the suggestion that it exists is false. Also, as I said before, the decision has not yet been made with respect to Ms. Tait.

However, you will recall that one of the first things the Harper government did when it came to power in 2006 was to significantly increase—by 65%—performance bonuses for Crown corporation and public service executives. The Harper government said that was done in part to prevent senior executives—

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Minister.

Do you know who the highest-paid CEO in the history of the CBC—the public broadcaster—is?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: What I do know is that the Conservative government increased the performance bonus for Hubert T. Lacroix, whom it appointed—

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek: That individual, Minister, is Ms. Catherine Tait. Certainly the board seems to approve of her performance. It appears that you're unwilling to rule out giving her a generous bonus and a generous exit package.

I think Canadians demand more respect for their tax dollars.

Madam Chair, I would hand the rest of my time over to Mr. Gourde.

The Chair: You have a little under three minutes.

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the minister for being here today.

I would like to provide a brief historical overview. During the Liberal era of Jean Chrétien, CBC/Radio-Canada suffered budget cuts of more than \$400 million, even though its budget was about \$950 million. That was a budget cut of nearly 45%. I would remind you that, when times are tough, everyone must do their part. Under the Conservative government, the cuts were about 10%, instead of 45%.

Minister, you gave more money to CBC/Radio-Canada in the last budget. I think it was about \$40 million or \$45 million. Is that correct?

• (1120)

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: If I remember correctly, the amount in the last budget was \$42 million.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Minister.

How many employees lost their jobs at CBC/Radio-Canada after the restructuring that was necessary because CBC/Radio-Canada was operating at a deficit?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: To my knowledge, a few positions were eliminated through attrition. I don't have the exact numbers.

What I can tell you, however, is that there were no massive job cuts as was the case under the Harper government, when more than 1,700 CBC/Radio-Canada employees lost their job, which affected the quality of content and news across the country.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Minister. Please send us the exact number of jobs that were cut at CBC/Radio-Canada.

Concerning the \$18 million in performance bonuses, how many jobs do you think could have been saved if that money had been spent on saving jobs rather than on performance bonuses?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: As you know very well, those decisions are made within CBC/Radio-Canada itself, and the government has no oversight over the internal administration. You've asked management these questions before, so I'm going to stick to the answers they've given you.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Minister, are you more on the side of the CBC than you are on the side of Canadian taxpayers? You can choose one or the other, or both.

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: That is not the case at all. I agree with the board's decision to review the compensation method at CBC/Radio-Canada. We expect public money to be administered responsibly.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Minister.

Did the model that will be presented stem from pressure from the Conservative Party or did you yourself think that the performance bonus should no longer be paid?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Gourde, you have 15 seconds.

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: I have no idea what you're referring to when you talk about the model.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I'm talking about performance bonuses. You're talking about reviewing how executives are paid as a result of pressure—

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Gourde. Thank you.

We'll go the Liberals and Mr. Charles Sousa for six minutes, please.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here and for your opening remarks.

Minister, can you talk about the role that the CBC and Radio-Canada play in promoting and strengthening Canadian culture and the audiovisual sector? Can you share with us why it's important for it to continue receiving support rather than to be gutted, as the Conservatives threaten to do?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: Thank you very much for the question.

I would remind all Canadians and my Conservative colleagues that the public broadcaster is dedicated to being a reliable, sustainable and independent source of information across Canada, from coast to coast to coast. It's the only news outlet that has that capacity and mandate. It is also the only broadcaster that serves Canadians in both French and English, in addition to eight indigenous languages.

CBC/Radio-Canada is also a media outlet that invests in Canadian creation and creators.

As we saw during the pandemic or in emergency situations, CBC/Radio-Canada is always there to shed light on our point of view.

Moreover, the majority of Canadians feel that CBC/Radio-Canada's contribution is really important. Seventy-four per cent of Canadians believe it is a reliable source of information. Seventy-one per cent said that CBC/Radio-Canada reflects a diversity of opinions on a wide range of subjects.

A majority of Canadians—73%—feel that CBC's English-language news and information services help them understand what's going on in the other regions of Canada. Seventy per cent of the population also say that they are reliable sources of information.

Lastly, francophones give Radio-Canada the highest confidence rating of all Canadian news channels. Radio-Canada's French-language news and information is a reliable source of information according to 85% of the francophone population, while news is independent and impartial according to 72% of that population.

This clearly shows how important Radio-Canada is to Canadians. It is strange to see that the Conservatives want to destroy such a Canadian jewel.

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you for that, Minister.

To add a further note, the Conservatives said they want to dismantle the CBC while leaving Radio-Canada largely intact.

Would that even work? Is that possible?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: We have to be very clear about that. Whatever the meaning of the Conservatives' empty slogan may be, it is impossible to “defund” the CBC without that having irreversible consequences for Radio-Canada, for several reasons.

First, we know very well that, at a number of regional stations, the technical teams are integrated. In fact, Radio-Canada's management explained it to this committee.

Second, when we talk about cutting public funding to the CBC, we're talking about cutting two thirds of public funding and eliminating thousands of jobs. In light of all this, it is impossible for CBC/Radio-Canada's private revenues not to be affected. Therefore, the cuts would be much greater than we think. I don't see in

what world there would be enough resources for Radio-Canada to continue to fulfill its mandate to francophone communities, both in Quebec and outside Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Charles Sousa: The Conservative MPs have also expressed concern over job reductions at CBC/Radio-Canada, yet they simultaneously proposed defunding the organization. It seems contradictory to oppose job cuts while proposing a plan that would cause thousands to lose their jobs.

Minister, in your mind, how would the Conservative plan to defund the CBC impact the jobs of the everyday Canadians who would be most affected?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: Shutting down CBC/Radio-Canada or “defunding” the corporation would have devastating consequences. Thousands of jobs are at risk. Approximately 8,000 jobs will be lost as a result of CBC/Radio-Canada being defunded. So hearing my Conservative colleagues get upset today about jobs at Radio-Canada is not credible.

In addition, many indigenous communities in Canada would lose the only media outlet that provides information and content in their indigenous language.

Let's not forget that CBC/Radio-Canada's investments in production and news have an extremely positive impact on our economy and on the Canadian cultural system as a whole. According to some estimates, every dollar invested in the corporation generates \$2 in economic activity. It is also essential support for artists and creators, among others, who contribute \$58 billion to our economy. The audiovisual cultural sector accounts for approximately 673,000 jobs in Canada.

Therefore, significantly cutting CBC/Radio-Canada's funding, directly or indirectly, will have a devastating impact on our economy and the entire audiovisual sector, in addition to depriving Canadians of their public broadcaster, which has been around for nearly 100 years. I don't understand why such an important jewel of our country is being attacked.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

You have seven seconds, Mr. Sousa, if you wish to do anything with that.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now go to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux.

Martin, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

Minister, thank you for taking time out of your schedule, which I suspect is full of emotionally charged files these days. So I'm very grateful to you for being here, especially since you've come to talk about a subject that affects us, that worries us and that worries Quebeckers and Canadians everywhere, as you said earlier in your opening remarks. I think that about 80% of Canadians who were asked the question said they wanted a healthy and high-quality public broadcaster.

That said, I think you will agree that not everything is perfect, that not everything is rosy and that there are indeed criticisms that can be levelled at CBC/Radio-Canada and at Ms. Tait's management over the past few years. We can come back to that.

I agree with you that we must also start looking for solutions, first to ensure the survival of the public broadcaster, but also to ensure its future.

You've already talked about the impact of the threat the Conservatives are putting on Radio-Canada's French services by wanting to "defund" CBC. Let's go back to that.

In your opinion, how serious would the impact on francophone culture in Quebec and Canada be if only the budget currently allocated to Radio-Canada were cut?

• (1130)

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his very relevant question.

We both know how much of a flagship institution Radio-Canada is for Quebec, for francophone communities outside Quebec and for the survival of the French language in a virtually anglophone North America.

We're talking about eliminating two thirds of public funding, the portion that goes to CBC. Obviously, that would leave very little money for Radio-Canada's mission. In addition, so many jobs could be lost that the technical production capacity of our public broadcaster's francophone activities would also be compromised.

I think the impacts are obvious. I fail to understand how the Conservatives can make such a proposal while claiming that Canadians will agree to fund a public broadcaster only in French and while the rest of Canada would be deprived of access to a public broadcaster whose services are really provided by and for Canadians. That seems completely inconsistent and impossible to me.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Allow me to make an aside.

If Radio-Canada's production services—in this case French-language services—were cut, that alone would have a very significant impact on the entire television industry in Quebec. As you said a little earlier, Radio-Canada plays a huge role, but it also has an impact on the entire ecosystem. A healthy ecosystem must also include Radio-Canada's presence as a producer, broadcaster and content generator.

I also want to talk about the costs involved. We discussed this with Ms. Tait when she last appeared before this committee. The Conservatives paint these costs as excessive or prohibitive. I, too, question the relevance of performance bonuses. I think it's a formula that needs to be reviewed, but that's another topic. The fact re-

mains that the Conservative discourse promotes the message that it costs us a fortune to run a quality public broadcaster.

Obviously, there are different challenges here, in Quebec and in Canada. The territory to be covered is huge, and that comes at a cost. Despite everything, it costs approximately \$33 per capita per year to have the CBC and Radio-Canada, which provide services in each of the two official languages, respectively, in addition to covering certain indigenous languages. By comparison, do you have an idea of what the costs are in other countries, Minister?

In addition, do you have an idea of what Quebeckers and Canadians would be prepared to pay to have a public broadcaster with no subscription fees for various services or without the advertising we see on just about every program and platform? Do you think Canadians would be willing to pay a little more than the small amount of \$33 or \$34 a year they currently pay, so that the public broadcaster would pay its employees out of government revenue, so out of its public revenue, rather than having to offer performance bonuses to try to attract people with competitive wages?

What do you think about the option of increasing not the burden—as \$33 isn't really a burden—but the annual cost per capita?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: We're doing poorly internationally, at least among countries that claim to be democratic. In Canada, the public broadcaster's funding level is \$33 per capita per year, while the average for G7 countries is \$86. So, as you can see, we're far below other countries. In addition, countries that experienced propaganda, like Germany did during the Second World War, invest hundreds of dollars per capita in their public broadcaster each year, because they fully grasp how important it is to have a public service that is a news source of at arm's length from the government.

Yes, I think there's a way to look at CBC/Radio-Canada's funding model. Currently, CBC/Radio-Canada's funding amounts to \$33 per capita per year, but I would remind you that, as a result of the \$115 million in cuts made under the Harper government, it dropped to \$29. At that level of public broadcaster funding, we're really getting close to the worst of the G7 countries in this area, that is to say the United States, which invests \$4 per year per capita. However, we know what the Americans think of public broadcasters in general.

In my opinion, there's some leeway to better fund our public broadcaster and to find formulas that allow for predictability and stability. This is important to ensure not only jobs, but also the development of our distinct culture, both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada, not to mention indigenous communities.

Mr. Martin Champoux: However, that formula has to be accompanied by a—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Martin. I'm sorry, your time is up.

Can I ask everyone to please mute your mics when you're not speaking? The interpreters tell us we're getting some feedback. Thank you very much.

I'm going now to the New Democrats and Niki Ashton for six minutes.

Niki, you have six minutes.

• (1135)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Minister, I recently proposed a motion that was blocked by Liberal and Bloc Québécois colleagues, which dealt with some pretty serious issues at Canada Soccer. Now news has broken that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Let's be clear on what we're talking about: It's a culture of pervasive cheating and pressuring at the top of our national soccer sporting organization and our national teams.

Players have been quoted as saying, " 'No' wasn't an option. John Herdman put his staff under a lot of pressure. If his assistants refused, they were put aside", and "You could be blacklisted, which would change your entire career."

You are the former sports minister and the current heritage minister. Were you aware of this pervasive culture at Canada Soccer?

More importantly, what did you do, if anything, recognizing that the federal government funds Canada Soccer?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: Thank you for your question. However, I invite you to put it to my colleague, the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity. That's no longer my portfolio.

I want to remind you that I'm here because a motion was passed in the House of Commons to discuss CBC/Radio-Canada on an urgent basis, it seems. So I came out of parental leave to be here with you today, but I'm here to talk about CBC/Radio-Canada.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, I appreciate that, Madam Minister—

The Chair: I remind members that we need to keep to the orders of the day. This meeting is specifically for CBC discussions.

Thank you.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Well, we also have a minister who was the former minister of sport, and the CBC has covered extensively, in the last few days, the scandal at Canada Soccer.

I would like to pass on to the Minister of Heritage to perhaps work with her colleague, the Minister of Sport, from whom we've heard nothing on this scandal, to table how much money from Own The Podium went to funding spying-related activities, like the purchasing of drones.

How much money was spent on surveillance, travel for coaches or equipment used for spying—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Chair, I have point of order, please.

The Chair: Excuse me, there's a point of order. I cannot tell who it is because there's a light shining right on the screen and I cannot see a few of you.

Is it Mr. Sousa with his hand up?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Yes.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Sousa.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I want to raise a point of order because, as you know, the minister is here on a constituency week. There are a number of issues at play. Let's stick to the orders of the day in regard to the purpose of this meeting.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Ashton, please be reminded of the orders of the day.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

In my speaking time, I am speaking to something that the CBC has covered, and I believe Canadians deserve accountability.

I'm actually quite concerned to see the extent to which Liberals do not want to talk about the scandal unfolding at Canada Soccer. I remind us that Canada Soccer is federally funded. I'm very disappointed to hear the lack of transparency from the Liberals on this issue. I certainly hope to receive documentation regarding Own The Podium's spending when it comes to Canada Soccer's spying-related activities.

Let's move on to the CBC.

Catherine Tait is wrapping up her time at the CBC, and between her leadership and the Liberals' running of the CBC, we've seen some serious damage to the CBC's reputation.

Let's look at the record. I'm proud to say that the House recently recognized that the threat of Liberal cuts led to one of the largest reductions of jobs in the CBC's history. Because of the Liberals, the CBC is now looking at a smaller workforce than even during the Stephen Harper years, and that's before the former Conservative leader made his own cuts.

There are numerous communities, including my own region here in northern Manitoba, that still do not have a CBC presence, which they are mandated to have, according to the CRTC. Meanwhile, we know the CBC is spending an exorbitant amount of money on executive bonuses. All of this has contributed to a movement we've seen from the Conservatives to destroy the CBC.

Canadians need the CBC. They need Radio-Canada. They need a strong public broadcaster, but not one that doles out executive bonuses while cutting jobs, and not one that leaves entire swaths of the country without a CBC presence, as it was mandated to provide.

How will you work with the new CEO to change the mandate of the CBC to ensure that the commitment to local journalism is prioritized over executive bonuses?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: First of all, I want to correct the record, because what my colleague is saying is totally untrue. Under the Conservative government, nearly 2,000 jobs were lost. We restored all the funding that had been eliminated, and we made sure there was money so CBC/Radio-Canada would not have to cut any jobs.

As for the future, my goal is obviously to ensure that CBC/Radio-Canada has the means and the capacity to provide news and information in all regions of the country, including Manitoba, indigenous communities and francophone communities outside Quebec. It's crucial. I'm very much looking forward to working on that with my NDP colleague and my Bloc Québécois colleagues. I think we share the same objective: We want to ensure that Canada has a strong, viable and stable public broadcaster that is at arm's length from government.

• (1140)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Ashton, you have 20 seconds left.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I will start by saying that we've been raising the lack of a permanent CBC presence here in our region for years, and we've seen no effort from the Liberals to address this. It's very concerning, and once again, it's more of an example of public relations from the Liberals than of actually making our public broadcaster live up to its mandate, which is a commitment to local and regional journalism on the ground, not in theory.

I look forward to some real leadership from the new CEO.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

I now go to the second round, which is a five-minute round.

I will begin with Mr. Waugh for the Conservatives.

Kevin, you have five minutes.

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

Thanks to the minister for coming today.

Minister, you and your department gave an extra \$42 million to the CBC earlier this year, and it was to save journalism. We found out that half of the \$42 million went to bonuses. How do bonuses, in your opinion, save journalism, when out of the extra \$42 million that you handed over to the CBC, \$18 million went to the bonuses? How did that save journalism in this country?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: That's totally incorrect. After the Harper-Poilievre government cut \$115 million, the government reinvested money so that CBC/Radio-Canada could maintain quality news coverage across the country. The \$42 million was precisely to counter the media crisis in Canada. Everyone knows that Canada is facing a media crisis and that tech giants like Facebook and Google are taking more and more of the private advertising spends, including CBC/Radio-Canada's share. These investments were to avoid job cuts and maintain quality news coverage. We made sure there would be no cuts and no jobs lost.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Minister, you gave an extra \$42 million, and it was supposed to help journalism, but instead it helped with the bonuses, with \$3.3 million going to the executives, while the rest was spread around.

As a former union rep—and a very successful union rep, I might add—I'm asking what you would have told your members in this situation. They're cutting massively in jobs on the ground, yet the bonuses went to executives.

As a former union rep, what would you say to this?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: First, I refute my colleague's assertion that CBC/Radio-Canada has undergone massive cuts. That's not true. The jobs were maintained at CBC/Radio-Canada, except those that ended through attrition. Our government supports CBC/Radio-Canada.

If it were up to the Conservatives, 8,000 jobs would be at risk. I hear you talking about jobs today, but as a former union representative, I remember very well what the Conservatives did to the CBC/Radio-Canada union, and the job cuts too.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Does this sit well with you? Does it sit well with you as the minister that the rank and file in this case paid the price? Does it sit well with you with regard to the bonuses that your department gave, when \$18 million of that extra \$42 million went to the executives? Does that sit well with you today in trying to save journalism, as you said?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: As a former union representative and the current Minister of Canadian Heritage, I'm very proud to fight every day to keep the Conservatives from destroying our Canadian institution, which is nearly 100 years old and has invaluable served the Canadian public and the French fact. Without Radio-Canada, French might not even be spoken anymore outside Canada. I will fight every day to stop the cuts the Conservatives want to make to our public broadcaster.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I have one quick question for you, Minister.

Was Tait's tenure at CBC since 2018 a success or a failure, knowing today that viewership is in decline, that ad revenue has plummeted and that trust in the public broadcaster has declined in this country?

With regard to Tait, I want your opinion as minister: Has it been a success or a failure since 2018?

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: All the Conservatives do is attack people to garner social licence to destroy CBC/Radio-Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I want a yes or a no. Has it been a failure or a success?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: We may disagree on certain decisions, but the truth is that, every month, more than 50% of Canadians visit the CBC/Radio-Canada site and cite CBC/Radio-Canada as a credible news source.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I know that, but—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: It's also the only broadcaster—

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm going to interrupt you, Minister.

I'm going to share my time with Mr. Kurek.

Go ahead, Damien.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Kurek. You are going to have only about 50 seconds. Actually, it's less than that. I just wanted to let you know.

Go ahead.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I just want to be clear, Minister. Earlier you refused to rule out a big taxpayer bonus to the scandal-plagued, jet-setting and recently revealed conflict of interest CEO of CBC, a CEO who makes more than the Prime Minister and more than double your salary as a minister. Eighteen million dollars went in fat bonuses at a time when Canadians are visiting food banks in record numbers.

For the sake of taxpayers and all Canadians who are struggling, let's agree that while we may disagree on the future of CBC, we can agree today to defund bonuses at the public broadcaster.

Minister, will you today commit to reject any request for bonuses that ends up on your desk and commit to issuing a cabinet directive of that nature?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: I'd like to remind my Conservative colleague of the Harper-Poillievre government's attitude at the time. To do so, I'm going to quote Rachel Curran, Prime Minister Harper's former director of policy, who explained how performance pay worked under Harper in Policy Options magazine in 2019. If you were a senior executive, like Hubert Lacroix at CBC/Radio-Canada, the more you cut, the more money you got. Senior management compensation was tied to that performance indicator. She recommended that the Ford government do the same thing. She wrote that, at the federal level, the Harper government made deputy ministers' compensation dependent on how well they achieved a department's budget reduction targets.

Therefore, I will not be lectured by a party that used performance bonuses as a tool to entice executives to implement Conservative cuts.

I would remind you that the Conservatives want to completely defund CBC/Radio-Canada, which will lead to the closure of an institution that is over 100 years old. So I'm not going to take any lessons from the Conservatives.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We've gone over time on that one, guys. I'm going to go to the Liberals now.

Wayne Long, you have five minutes, please.

I mean five minutes, guys. We're going to run out of time.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to my colleagues.

Minister, thank you so much for taking the time today.

I want to pick up on MP Waugh's comments first.

He was just saying—and you hear it from the Conservative playbook all the time—that viewership is down. What does that really mean? How is viewership measured, Minister? Do these viewership measurements actually take into account how Canadians are consuming media in 2024? By my read, it's largely through streaming.

Before you answer, I also want to quickly comment on my riding of Saint John—Rothesay.

People in this riding love the CBC. They love CBC Radio. They love CBC New Brunswick. They love the Canadian content. They love the fact that the CBC ties our community together. In fact, you know, if the Conservatives want some free advice from me here in southern New Brunswick, it's that I think it's a wrong play to constantly talk about defunding and dismantling the CBC. I think it's a major mistake, and I think Canadians will rally, as they did in 2015, 2019 and 2021.

Anyway, Minister, I'll go back to you. I want to get your comments on Conservatives saying that viewership is down.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: I think the Conservatives are stuck in the 1980s, when there was no Internet.

Let's look at the facts.

As you clearly heard me say, more than 21 million Canadians use the services of CBC and Radio-Canada every month. That's more than half of the adult population. Every month, nearly 50% of Canadians use CBC/Radio-Canada's websites and digital services, 17 million Canadians in the case of the CBC and 8 million Canadians in the case of Radio-Canada. There are 10 million podcast downloads per month, as well as millions more downloads on other apps and platforms, including streaming services.

The CBC also operates Canada's number one digital news service in terms of the number of users. CBC Radio is number one in 17 of 22 markets for listeners, including Toronto, but also Calgary and Edmonton.

In addition, five CBC/Radio-Canada podcasts were among the top 15 podcasts in Canada in 2023.

When we look at reality and the facts, we have to wonder why the Conservatives want to eliminate such a valuable source for Canadians and Quebecers.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Wayne Long: I wonder why too, Minister. I would agree with you.

Minister, we know that public service media organizations have responsibilities that are different from those of private media because they have a mandate to serve all communities from coast to coast. What potential effects would defunding CBC/Radio-Canada have on indigenous communities and their access to indigenous language stories, news and information?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: I'll say it again, when the Conservatives talk about “defunding” the CBC, they forget that CBC/Radio-Canada is one of the only public broadcasters that provides information and content in eight indigenous languages. Members of Inuit communities with whom I spoke recently did not understand why the Conservatives wanted to abandon them. CBC is one of the only broadcasters that produce content in Inuktitut for Inuit people. CBC/Radio-Canada has an invaluable role to play in revitalizing Inuit, indigenous and Métis language and culture.

It's really unfortunate that when the Conservatives talk about “defunding” the CBC, they don't take into account that reality and all the effort we're putting in to support indigenous communities in the spirit of reconciliation and partnership.

[English]

The Chair: You have 50 seconds.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Minister, I want to follow up on another issue. You obviously just talked about impacts to indigenous communities, but how would cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada funding—obviously, the Conservatives want to dismantle and defund the CBC—also affect other underserved populations, such as rural, minority language and newcomer communities?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: Let's talk about rural Canadians. I'm thinking, among others, of the people in your riding you told me about. Most rural Canadians, 72% to be exact, say that CBC and Radio-Canada news and information services help them understand what's going on not only in their communities but also in other parts of the country. Many rural Canadians are not served or are underserved by private media. That's even the case in 34 Canadian cities with a population of over 50,000. Many rural communities across the country want more local news and information. So this is an area in which CBC/Radio-Canada could, and even should, significantly improve its role across the country.

We mustn't forget that Radio-Canada serves one million francophones outside Quebec. Its extensive presence provides access to language and culture, but also to the community.

I will conclude by saying that Radio-Canada International also offers news online in seven languages, English, French—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Can you wrap up your answer, please?

[Translation]

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: Yes.

So those seven languages are English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Punjabi and Tagalog. It's important for diaspora communities established here in Canada.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll go to the Bloc and Martin Champoux.

Martin, you have two and a half minutes.

Everybody seems to be going a minute over their time, so I will forgive you if you move a little bit over your time.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'm going to take advantage of your leniency, Madam Chair.

Madam Minister, once again, I'm going to make an aside. I always wonder what the real motivations of the Conservatives are when they criticize the CBC/Radio-Canada CEO's salary. I find it curious coming from them, because they generally advocate the free market and are aware of market realities in general. It's not that I think Ms. Tait deserves a salary like this or that she was worthy of this position; that's not the issue.

I want to come back to the idea of comparisons. Let's take the case of Australia, since the figures for that country are available. Australia has 27 million people. The CEO of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which is the Australian public broadcaster, earns \$820,000 annually in Canadian currency. We can also compare apples to apples, so that our criticisms are as fair and appropriate as possible.

That said, I want to talk to you about something else, Madam Minister.

Discrediting the news media, which are generally mainstream media, is a trend we see in a number of countries, from a certain type of politician. You don't have to go very far to see it. For years, Mr. Trump in the United States has been talking about fake news when he brings up traditional media. That's created a kind of divide between the so-called left-wing and right-wing media, a divide that has actually grown so much that it has probably created a disconnect with respect to the news media in the United States. In my opinion, that's what some proponents of populism and disinformation are trying to do politically. They're trying to discredit journalists who are very thorough and ferret out false information or false narratives.

Madam Minister, what do you think of Pierre Poilievre's approach and the fact that Canadians don't seem to buy into it at all?

You have about a minute left to have fun answering my question.

• (1155)

Hon. Pascale St-Onge: Thank you very much for the question.

Like you, I think that's an extremely dangerous approach. As we know, in a democratic society, the people in power, whether political power, large corporations or those who influence the world the most, must be accountable to the people. That's what distinguishes a democratic society from an authoritarian country where no one can criticize anything.

When I see Conservative members attacking journalists, I see that as attacking our democracy and those who demand answers from them. However, we know that the Conservatives don't like to give answers.

In short, I think this is an extremely dangerous approach, and I feel it says a lot about the Conservatives' view of how a democratic society works.

I also think it's dangerous from a national security standpoint. As we know, there's a lot of disinformation circulating on the Internet. Foreign interference even happens online. If Canada is to counter those who seek to destabilize our democracy, we need news and information managed by and for Canadians. When people attack CBC/Radio-Canada, the strongest broadcaster in Canada that employs a third of Canadian journalists, they are by the same token attacking our national security.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. We will go now to Niki Ashton.

Niki, you have two and a half minutes, and I will be lenient.

Go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

I would like to use my time to move a motion for which you've all received notice. It's with regard to Canada's ongoing protection of Nazis who were allowed to enter Canada during and in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust. This is a shameful part of our history, and I urge all my colleagues to support this motion.

We just marked Remembrance Day. We all, I'm sure, attended ceremonies honouring the Canadian soldiers who served our country. We vowed never to forget the sacrifices of the many Canadians who served and died throughout history. This year also marked the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the historic Battle of Normandy, in which Canadians played a pivotal role in liberating Europe and the world from fascism. The Battle of Normandy came at a heavy cost. Some 19,000 Canadians were killed or wounded by the Nazis.

In France, they remember. It was very emotional for me and my family when, on a private visit this summer, we heard the playing of *O Canada* and heard the appreciation of a town liberated by Canadian soldiers. Eighty years later, they remember. They remember what the fight against Nazism and fascism was all about.

This is personal for many of us. Today, I can't stop thinking of many members of my family who fought the Nazis. They knew what was at stake. It was the very future of humanity itself.

I think of my family and my community. I think of my family in Greece, who suffered under the Nazi occupation and fascist brutality. I think of the Jewish communities across Greece and in the village next to my *pappos*, my grandfathers, who were wiped out by the Holocaust. It was an absolute result of Nazi ideology. I think of others who have family members who were victims of the Nazis, or the family who never got that opportunity to come to Canada because they were turned away by a country that was far too comfortable saying no to Jews, the victims of the Holocaust, but yes to too many perpetrators.

Canadians deserve to know how, according to the Deschênes commission, Nazis were welcomed into this country. Many Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian organizations have been clear that the names need to be released, yet Library and Archives Canada, which is under the Minister of Canadian Heritage, said no.

This is shameful, so I want to move my motion. I move that "Given that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage regrets the continued protection given by the Minister of Canadian Heritage to the estimated 900 Nazis that were allowed to enter Canada after the Second World War", etc., be supported in this meeting today.

• (1200)

The Chair: I want to inform the committee that Ms. Ashton gave notice of this motion in writing, in English and French, on Monday, September 23, so it can be tabled on the floor today. I have to ask if anyone wants to discuss or debate this motion.

Seeing no hands up, I think we're going to have to call the question on the motion, since there's no debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, there are hands up.

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me. I'm just going to call on the hands that are up.

Go ahead, Mr. Sousa.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I want clarity. We're new to the committee, and I want to have time to reflect on what's being proposed to determine whether we should adjourn the debate or not.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, I can certainly elaborate. The motion I submitted on Monday, September 23, indicates:

That, given that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage regrets the continued protection given by the Minister of Canadian Heritage to the estimated 900 Nazis that were allowed to enter Canada after the Second World War by refusing to release their names and refusing to listen to organizations representing victims of the Nazis, the committee invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage to instruct Library and Archives Canada to release the names of the 900 Nazis before International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Monday, January 27, 2025, and that this motion be reported to the House.

The Chair: Monsieur Champoux is next.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, once again, Ms. Ashton comes to us with surprises at the end of the meeting. There would be a lot to discuss on this motion, and I would be more than willing to do that at the appropriate time.

I have very serious concerns about this motion.

On the one hand, an investigation and a report were done. Ms. Ashton's motion refers to some 900 Nazis, whereas some places are saying 800. That being said, were these individuals Nazis? That's not necessarily the case. The investigation revealed that, on the contrary, in the vast majority of cases, there was no reason to suspect them at all, and they were exonerated immediately.

On the other hand, among the issues I'm raising now, let's talk about the people who were investigated after the Deschênes commission. I think there were very few, just a few dozen, and they were exonerated. They didn't see fit to go any further.

Today, however, the motion calls for the disclosure of the names of those 800 or 900 people who are most likely dead today, in the vast majority of cases. Their descendants are surely very well integrated and have nothing to do with anything their parents or grandparents might have done wrong. I think this is extremely sensitive. Ms. Ashton has come to us with this motion at the end of the meeting, when it would probably require a slightly more informed and less rushed debate.

So I'm extremely uncomfortable with this motion that's coming to us—and I'm not sure why—when we're discussing CBC/Radio-Canada.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. Who is saying "point of order"?

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, are you rising on a point of order?

Ms. Niki Ashton: I know this committee has made an issue of trying to assume where members are coming from.

I used my time to put forward a motion I submitted almost two months ago, and it's the week of Remembrance Day. If people want to debate the truthfulness of the Deschênes commission, I find that deeply problematic, and they're impugning my motives during the week of Remembrance Day, on a motion I submitted on something as serious as protecting Nazis.

I hope we can move to a vote as soon as possible.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair—

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan, your hand is up.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes. Thank you very much.

I too am perplexed as to why, in a special meeting called to address the CBC and the minister, this has come up at this point. Many of us are not regular members of this committee.

I am not comfortable proceeding further on this, so I move now to adjourn.

The Chair: There's a motion to adjourn.

We have only five more minutes left on the clock, so shall I call a vote to adjourn?

• (1205)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Chair—

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I find it shameful that we're adjourning such an important debate, one about releasing the names and—

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, I'm sorry. I'm calling for a vote. Thank you.

Clerk, please go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer): The vote is this: Shall the debate be adjourned?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Who is calling for a point of order? I can't see.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: It's Brenda.

The Chair: We're in the middle of a vote, Mrs. Shanahan, but go ahead.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Is the point of order to adjourn the meeting or is it to adjourn debate?

The Chair: We are voting on the motion to adjourn. We can't debate it, but we can vote on it.

Go ahead, please, Clerk....

I'm sorry. Madam Shanahan, are you asking to adjourn the debate on the motion? I'm not clear on what you're adjourning.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, it's to adjourn debate.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Clerk.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: We started 10 minutes late. We're now 10 minutes after 12 p.m. I think the minister was very clear that she had an hour to give us because of certain circumstances with regard to maternity leave.

I think we should decide to adjourn the meeting now.

I want to thank the minister—

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): I have a point of order.

Maybe we can keep our rounds, or at least the last two, so Conservatives and Liberals have their own—

The Chair: We only have resources until noon, and we're now 10 minutes after noon.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I'll take two and a half minutes, or something along those lines. It's a recess week, and—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have five minutes for you and five minutes for Ms. Lalonde if we go on. Basically, that will get us to 20 minutes after 12. We need interpretation and other resources to continue.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I have a point of order.

It's a constituency week. There are no other committees going on. There are resources. We're all here, and—

The Chair: That has nothing to do with it, Mr. Duncan. We need extra—

Mr. Eric Duncan: I'm just asking for two and a half minutes each, at least.

The Chair: You are not asking for two and a half minutes. You're asking for resources.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I'm asking for five more minutes of resources.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're five minutes over our time and the minister is 10 minutes over her time.

Mr. Eric Duncan: The Liberal MPs were late for the meeting and we had to start late.

The Chair: I will adjourn the meeting.

I'm sorry. Is somebody's hand up?

Go ahead, Mr. Sousa.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Yes, I want to move to adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: Is anyone opposed to adjourning the meeting?

Obviously you are, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Yes. I have some questions.

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

The meeting is now adjourned.

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