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Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1110)

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon, everyone.

[*English*]

This is meeting number 143 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Before we begin, I will give you some housekeeping notes.

For those of us in the room, there is a little round decal on the desk in front of you. That's where you put your device. If you don't, it interferes with the transmission of sound. There's a little square instruction thing that you need to read as well, to know what to do.

No one is allowed to take photographs of the committee, as it's on the screen here. Later on, you can get them online.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, and that is creating a bit of a problem for us, as two of our witnesses who are meant to testify this morning are still having trouble getting online. I will tell you who those two are.

We're going to start, and then, hopefully, the sound people will have helped them to get online.

[*Translation*]

They are the witnesses representing the Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture and the Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de Radio-Canada.

[*English*]

They are having trouble getting online.

We will start, and then I will suspend when it's time for us to get them on. They can come on, and then we'll have to get them to present their five minutes so that we can carry on. If we wait and wait, we'll never start the meeting on time. Let's move on.

I want to remind everyone that when you speak, you must speak through the chair. Questions are addressed through the chair, and answers are addressed through the chair.

Again, all of the connection tests, with the exception of those two, have been done.

We will begin with the first witnesses, who are from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. We have Kris Sims and Ryan Thorpe.

Both of you can share the time, but you have five minutes to present. I'll give you a 30-second shout-out, literally, so that you can wrap up. If you don't get to finish what you have to say, you can get your points in during the question and answer period.

Who is going to speak for you? Ms. Sims, please begin. You have five minutes. Thank you.

Mrs. Kris Sims (Director, Alberta, Canadian Taxpayers Federation): Thank you for the invitation to speak with you all today.

My name is Kris Sims. I'm the Alberta Director for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I'm here with my colleague Ryan Thorpe, the investigative journalist for the CTF.

We are here to speak for thousands of hard-working taxpayers who want to defund the CBC. This needs to happen for three important reasons: the cost of the CBC, the fact that nearly nobody is watching the CBC, and the fact that journalists should not be paid by the government.

First is the cost. The CBC is getting \$1.4 billion from taxpayers this year. That money could instead pay the salaries of around 7,000 paramedics and 7,000 police officers. That money could instead pay for groceries for about 85,000 Canadian families, for a year. Instead, taxpayers are paying \$1.4 billion so the CBC can hand out huge bonuses, get microscopic ratings and overpay its out-of-touch executives.

CBC CEO Catherine Tait refused to tell this committee if she will take a severance when she leaves the state broadcaster. Tait considers that to be a "personal matter". It's not personal if it's taxpayers' money. Documents obtained by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation show that Tait is paid between \$460,000 and \$551,000 this year, with a bonus of up to 28%. That is a bonus of \$154,000. That bonus is more than the average Canadian family earns in a year.

Around this time last year, the CBC asked for more money. After that, just before Christmas, the CBC announced layoffs in its newsrooms. I've worked in many newsrooms, and getting let go is not a bowl of cherries, but what about the bonuses at that same time? Documents obtained by the CTF show that the CBC handed out bonuses costing \$18 million. As the CBC fan group Friends of Canadian Media put it, "This decision is deeply out of touch and unbecoming of our national public broadcaster."

Thank you to the members from the Conservatives, the Bloc and the NDP who voted to hold the CBC to account for these bonuses.

Let's take a look at viewership. According to its own latest quarterly report, CBC news network's audience share is 1.7%, meaning that more than 98% of Canadians are choosing to not watch CBC's news channel. We have some breaking news here in committee. Documents obtained by the CTF show that the CBC's supper hour news audience is so small that it's difficult to measure. In Toronto, the CBC's six o'clock news has an audience of 0.7% of that city's population. CBC's entertainment barely rates better than its news. The *Murdoch Mysteries*, which is not produced by the CBC, pulls in its biggest audience, with about 1.9% of the population.

Last, journalists should not be paid by the government. A free press means journalists free from government. A journalist who is paid by the government is in a direct conflict of interest. You cannot hold the powerful government to account when you're counting on the powerful government for your paycheque. The CBC is government-funded media. This government funding has warped the media landscape for decades, putting private media companies at a disadvantage, and that affliction is catching. Other media companies are also on government payroll now. At the same time, trust in journalism has plummeted. About 55% of Canadians now think journalists are "purposely trying to mislead people by saying things they know are false or gross exaggerations".

Canadians need a press that is free from government, so the people can hold their government to account.

The CBC is a huge waste of money. Nearly nobody is watching it, and journalists should not be paid by the government. It is time to defund the CBC.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much. You're right on time.

I now go to Les amis des médias canadiens, Marla Boltman and Sarah Andrews, and we can begin.

Which one of you will be speaking, or will you both be speaking?

Ms. Marla Boltman (Executive Director, Friends of Canadian Media): Hi, it's Marla Boltman here. I will be speaking first, and Sarah will follow.

The Chair: All right. You both still have five minutes between you. Thank you.

Ms. Boltman, please go ahead.

Ms. Marla Boltman: Madam Chair and committee members, thank you for inviting us to appear this morning.

Again, my name is Marla Boltman. I am the executive director of Friends of Canadian Media, a non-profit, non-partisan citizens movement that stands up for Canadian voices in Canadian media.

Joining me, again, is Sarah Andrews, our director of government and media relations, who will conclude our opening remarks in French.

For almost 40 years, our organization has proudly defended the CBC and the essential role it plays in Canadian public life. Our supporters fall into the 75% of Canadians who told pollsters either that they like the job the CBC is already doing or that they want to keep the CBC, but with improvements.

Let me offer you some straight talk. Like many of you, our organization was here for the big cuts to CBC under the Mulroney government. In fact, it's how we got our start. We were here for the Chrétien cuts; we were here for the Harper cuts, and we are still here waiting for the Trudeau government to provide the money it promised during the last election.

In real, inflation-adjusted dollars, these cuts and unfulfilled commitments have amounted to a 36% reduction in the CBC's parliamentary appropriation. In the meantime, expectations and demands have gone up. Indigenous programming has taken on a bigger role, and the need to improve French-language services has resulted in 44% of the parliamentary appropriation now going to Radio-Canada. All of these important improvements have meant less for English services.

Media technology has also changed. A much leaner CBC has had to follow its audiences onto the Internet while still serving them on television and radio. The money to do that had to come from somewhere. It was cannibalized from CBC English television.

Since 2013, we've seen a 40% reduction in real budget dollars for English TV. New spending is down from \$212 million to \$114 million in the last 10 years. Like you, we have stood witness to this decline and this shrinkflation, in which Canadians keep getting fed a smaller and smaller English television offering, and we've watched while the prime-time audience for our cash-starved English TV dropped from 6.8% to 5.2%, also in 10 years. Those are the numbers everyone cites, but in the meantime, audience ratings for CBC Radio One, cbcnews.ca and all Radio-Canada services remain top-notch.

The way to move all Canadians into the category of fully satisfied with CBC is going to require two things, adequate long-term funding and vision. We need these things now, because a strong national public broadcaster is especially vital at a time when our entire Canadian media sector and our national sovereignty are under great threat.

That's the message our supporters, your constituents, want us to bring to you. They don't want to talk about defunding the CBC, eliminating local news or silencing talented Canadian storytellers. What they do want to talk about is how the CBC can serve its audiences and their voices and values. They're looking to us and they're looking to you to help find solutions that lift everyone.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sarah Andrews (Director, Government and Media Relations, Friends of Canadian Media): Last week, Catherine Tait appeared before this committee for the fifth time this year.

It's time we moved on. Instead we should be working together to create an even better public broadcaster for its shareholders, who are the Canadian public at large.

We suggest that we begin as follows.

First, there should be no partisanship when it comes to CBC/Radio-Canada. The public broadcaster should serve all Canadians, regardless of political allegiance.

Second, governance may seem like a dry political issue, but it is a fundamental one. Board appointments should be much more independent. It should be up to the board of directors, not the Prime Minister, to hire and fire the chairperson.

Furthermore, Parliament should negotiate a long-term charter, much like the BBC charter, with the CBC/Radio-Canada board. That charter would include commitments respecting performance, public responsibility and funding.

Third, CBC/Radio-Canada should focus on producing local and regional news. It would do so by sending more staffers into the field, which would require more money. The hiring of 25 journalists across the country with money provided under the Online News Act would be a good start, and we must have more.

Fourth, we advise against the strategy of attempting to salvage what we can by cancelling entertainment programming for both anglophone and francophone audiences. CBC/Radio-Canada is the best possible platform for broadcasting flagship programs that tell our stories. People don't want to lose that programming. On the contrary, they want more content.

The time has come to protect our public broadcaster for the sake of our democracy, for our cultural sovereignty and for generations to come.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was great.

Now we're going to go to the third witness, who is Brigitte Wellens, from Voice of English-speaking Québec. She is the executive director of this organization.

Ms. Wellens, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Brigitte Wellens (Executive Director, Voice of English-speaking Québec): Madam Chair and committee members, thank you so much for this invitation to allow me to talk about this very important subject.

As was previously mentioned, my name is Brigitte Wellens. I'm the executive director of a community organization named Voice of English-speaking Québec, or VEQ, which was established in 1982. We're a not-for-profit community organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the interests of a dynamic English-speaking community in the greater Quebec City region.

An important point to note concerning our population is that every five years, 20% to 25% of our region's population is renewed by newcomers. Local media is not only a critical part of their integration process; it's at the heart of our community's vitality. Without it, communities experience a progressive erosion of their collective capacity to celebrate local stories and achievements, or to address issues and challenges that affect community members in their daily lives across the province of Quebec.

Our community represents only 2.3% of the greater Quebec City region, or just over 17,000 individuals in the local population. It's spread out over a very wide area, and there are no large concentrations of our population in one specific area of the region, so getting information to people in a timely manner in a way that's accessible to all is absolutely critical.

Funding should allow CBC to adequately resource local stations and allow them to be responsive to emerging news, stories, local events and activities in order to promote what's happening on the ground. We're a grassroots organization, and I believe that CBC should be a partner with us in promoting and improving community vitality in the regions across the province. It should also have the adequate resources to allow it, as a public broadcasting corporation, to be an active participant, alongside local stakeholders and community members, to have a positive impact on our community's vitality across the province.

In terms of representation and local voices, as the executive director of the organization for the past nine years and a board member for seven years prior to that, I've seen the constant decline of local resources. A lot of our content isn't recorded in Quebec City, and I've seen the decline in participation by local CBC staff in our events and our activities that bring together community members across our region.

It's critically important not only that we improve access to the content that's produced, but also that we improve the financial resources that the CBC has access to. We hear about things like defunding the CBC. On the contrary, I think that we should improve or increase the funding it has access to. When we compare it to the rest of broadcasters and news producers across the world, we're lacking in funding in terms of receiving 40% to 50% less than what other broadcasters and producers are receiving. Per capita, we should be looking at how much the CBC is actually getting in terms of listenership and viewership.

I can't say this enough. Our newcomers go to the source that is the most accessible for them. In Quebec City, that's CBC Radio One, but it gets peppered with little clips from other regions, because it is the only source for local news and content in the entire province of Quebec. I'm talking about six or seven hours per week. I would like to see an improvement and not a decline in these services and have them be more responsive on the ground in the local stories and news that are in the hearts of everyone in our community.

Thank you so much.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Wellens.

I'm going to suspend to see if we can get Madame Charette on. This is the one person whose sound was a bit iffy. We'll suspend.

• (1125)

(Pause)

• (1130)

The Chair: We're still having a problem getting Madame Charette on, so I think we will move on.

We're going to go to the questions and answers. This first segment is a six-minute segment. The six minutes include the question and the answer.

I will begin with Mr. Kurek for the Conservatives for six minutes, please.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the conversation that we're having today.

Mrs. Sims and Mr. Thorpe, we heard from the incoming CEO of CBC this past Wednesday that she had not heard any conversations from Canadians about defunding the CBC. I'm wondering if that resonates or lines up with what you and your organization have heard about this subject over the last number of years.

Mrs. Kris Sims: With respect, no, that doesn't line up with what we're seeing with our organization. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has been pushing for the CBC to be defunded. We hear from our supporters every single day, and there are thousands of them who want the CBC to be defunded, so, no, that does not line up with what our supporters want.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I found it interesting when I heard that response on Wednesday. We had Ms. Catherine Tait, the current CEO, whose term comes to an end in the next month or so. Through an access to information request, it was revealed that she noted that there was momentum that was growing in the “defund

the CBC” movement across Canada. I'm wondering if you have seen, over the last number of years.... You mentioned that you hear often from folks involved with your organization. Has there been momentum growing to “defund the CBC”?

Mrs. Kris Sims: Do you mean the “defund the CBC” movement? Yes, for sure. I've been a journalist for most of my adult life, largely in mainstream media, in and out of newsrooms, largely here in Ottawa. I can tell you that there wasn't really a serious movement to defund the CBC 15 years ago, maybe not even 10 years ago. Now you literally see it on T-shirts, bumper stickers, etc.

People are pushing for the state broadcaster to be defunded for two reasons. First, it's a huge waste of money, period; \$1.4 billion is an astonishing amount of money. Second, journalists shouldn't be paid by the government. It doesn't matter if the journalists are right-wing, left-wing or space aliens. They shouldn't be paid by the government, because it's a direct conflict of interest, so there is definitely a movement that's growing.

Mr. Damien Kurek: It sounds like something else that Justin Trudeau has broken.

I am curious, when it comes to the.... Quite often, we hear from folks who would support the CBC and, in fact, even those who would acknowledge some of the challenges that exist, whether it be the bonuses that were paid out, the expense, their not liking the programming or their acknowledging the bias that exists. However, they say, “Well, we need it, because that's how Canadians get their news.” I'm wondering if you could comment on that feedback that quite often gets parroted, especially here in the nation's capital.

Mrs. Kris Sims: That's a great question. It reminds me of the statement that we really appreciated, coming from the Friends of Canadian Media, when they said that those bonuses—18 million dollars' worth of bonuses—were unbecoming of a public broadcaster. We agree. That is unbecoming. I think it's the bonuses that are really attracting a lot of the attention here.

However, if so many people are watching the CBC and getting all of their news from the CBC, why is 1.7% of the population of Toronto watching it? It's even lower in Calgary and Edmonton, out west. If the CBC costs us \$1.4 billion per year and nobody is watching, is it still a waste of money? Yes, it is.

• (1135)

Mr. Damien Kurek: To those who would say, “Well, it's required for the preservation of Canadian culture,” how would you respond?

Mrs. Kris Sims: I find that odd, because there are a lot of private media companies, and there are a lot of other forms of entertainment and news that Canadians are choosing to watch, listen to and share. The idea that a government-funded broadcaster is going to be the keeper of Canadian culture is kind of insulting to people's intelligence and their own choice. If I don't watch the CBC, does that mean I'm not Canadian? That's absurd. So, no, Canadians are choosing to not watch the CBC; ergo, we don't need it, and we should defund it.

Mr. Damien Kurek: It was recently revealed that the government spent over \$970,000 to produce a podcast that ended up having only 229 subscribers. That's a lot of dollars per subscriber. It was specifically Stats Canada that paid close to \$1 million. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts or feedback about nearly \$1 million spent to produce a podcast. Many people do this from their phones, walking down the street, or whatever the case is, for virtually no cost, yet the government spent a million bucks and only garnered a subscriber base of 229. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts or feelings about that.

Mrs. Kris Sims: Off the top, quickly, I actually thought I misheard that when I first heard about it. I thought it was the government funding other people's podcasts, or whatever they were, but no, this was a government department's podcast. It is astonishing that it's spending a nickel on that.

I'm going to turn this over to my colleague Ryan Thorpe. He's the investigative journalist for the CTF.

Ryan, you were doing some digging on that. It was astonishing to see.

The Chair: Excuse me. Speak through the chair. Thank you.

You have only 15 seconds.

Mr. Ryan Thorpe (Investigative Journalist, Canadian Taxpayers Federation): I'll just add quickly that we dug up these records. The costs are ridiculous. They're producing podcasts no Canadian would ask or be willing to pay for. It's reflected in the subscriber count, and it is clearly a massive waste of our money.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go to the next questioner from the Liberals, who is Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I'll start off with Mrs. Sims and Mr. Thorpe. Thank you for being here.

I want to acknowledge that I think many Canadians agree with you that the bonuses were unacceptable. I acknowledge that. We had a conversation in this room, and it was very clear, especially considering the economic situation our country is in and the challenges that Canadians are facing, that it's something that did not sit well with Canadians. I agree with that.

I want to talk about the CBC as a concept, though. Back in 1936, when the Conservatives established the CBC, it was there to bring

the country together and to connect it. If you remove the dollar amount and the bonuses, do you agree with the concept of CBC?

Mrs. Kris Sims: It's still a conflict of interest, and I say this not from a taxpayer's perspective. We wouldn't want to spend money on a media company, but we don't want to spend money on companies anyway. We want no corporate welfare. We don't care what the companies are producing.

As a long-time journalist, it is just a fundamental conflict of interest for a journalist to be paid by the government. It doesn't matter if it's a Conservative government or an NDP government, or a left-leaning or right-leaning journalist. It is just fundamentally a conflict of interest for the media to be funded by the government.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I take that point.

The CBC is more than just a television broadcaster. It's more than just a deliverer of news. It does a lot more than that. For example, there's children's programming, election coverage in our country, the Olympics and radio. In the morning, when I wake up, I always open up the CBC Listen app. I listen to the morning news, but I also listen to the world news. That's how I receive my news. I don't think I've turned on the CBC channel for a long time. It's usually directly through YouTube, the website or the Gem app.

On the statistics you gave, I think Ms. Tait acknowledged that the viewership on television was dropping, but when you start to look at the online presence.... For example, on election night, there were nine million impression rates on the website. We're seeing a huge jump in online listening through radio, YouTube and the Gem app.

I think it would be fair to say that there may not be growth in television—across all broadcasters, we've seen a decline—but would you acknowledge that when it comes to its online presence, the numbers are actually increasing dramatically?

• (1140)

Mrs. Kris Sims: There are a few things there.

One, again, is that we're opposed to government-funded media, period.

Two, when it comes to ratings, I found it really interesting that Ms. Tait and others at the CBC don't want to give us their subscriber numbers—not names or anything like that, because that would be crazy, but their Gem subscriber numbers. It's one of those things where the conversation goes:

“Okay. Nearly nobody's watching you on TV.”

“Oh, trust us. We're picking it up with Gem.”

“Okay. How many people do you have on Gem?”

“I'm sorry. I can't tell you that.”

Mr. Michael Coteau: Right.

Mrs. Kris Sims: It's really odd.

That's the main element. We don't want the government funding media, and we don't have the ratings for Gem or online.

Mr. Michael Coteau: The other ratings are out there, though. They're very clear. I just went on to ChatGPT and put in, "What are the ratings for listenership and online viewing?" The numbers that come up are very new. I said nine million people tuned in online on election day. That says a lot. There's a lot of information out there.

Do you agree, for example, with the wage subsidy and the media support for...? For example, Postmedia has tens of millions of dollars.

You disagree with any media funding.

Mrs. Kris Sims: Yes.

Mr. Michael Coteau: It doesn't matter if it's community-based, a small community newspaper.

Mrs. Kris Sims: Journalists shouldn't be paid by the government, period.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Would you even disagree that a small community broadcaster that is not-for-profit, that's servicing a community by maybe providing information to a remote community on an emergency—things like that, local news...? You wouldn't support government supporting any of that at all?

Mrs. Kris Sims: The government should not pay media companies, period. Then, if you start getting into things like "What about indigenous programming?", the CBC spends a fraction of a percentage point on indigenous programming.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Right.

Mrs. Kris Sims: They pay more in executive bonuses.

Mr. Michael Coteau: How do we deliver media, or, I would say, news? There's a difference sometimes between what a journalist may put out and just general broadcasting for information—the weather, for example.

Canada's such a large country. How would you propose getting that information out there to all Canadians who maybe don't have access to the Internet because of where they are, but would have access to radio? How would you propose that people get that information?

Mrs. Kris Sims: Is that on an emergency basis?

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's just on a regular basis—community information. Do you think government should be supporting getting information out to small, rural communities that normally wouldn't have enough capacity through a business approach to support a local media agency?

Mrs. Kris Sims: Again, we're talking about the behemoth that is the CBC, \$1.4 billion—

Mr. Michael Coteau: No, I'm talking about just of the concept—

Mrs. Kris Sims: Just to be clear, you're whittling it down to this tiny little keyhole of getting emergency information to people in the north—

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Michael Coteau: You just said you disagree with all support for the media.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mrs. Kris Sims: I'm sorry, Chair.

The Chair: The time is up, Mr. Coteau.

I'm going to move now to the Bloc Québécois.

We go now to Martin Champoux for six minutes, please.

Martin.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to say that I'm extremely disappointed not to be able to have Ms. Charette involved in this exchange. It was extremely important that we be able to ask her questions. Her expertise and point of view would have made a major contribution to this discussion. I think Ms. Charette should try to reconnect to the meeting from another computer, in the hope, of course, that the problem is with her computer, not with the earpiece she's been provided. I hope we can hear what she has to say by the end of this meeting.

In the meantime, I'd like to speak with the representatives of the Friends of Canadian Media. We haven't heard a great deal from them, except during their opening remarks.

First, good afternoon to you both. I'd like to hear your opinions regarding the comments that have been made since this meeting began.

Ms. Sarah Andrews: We have lots of opinions. It will surprise no one that we definitely disagree with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. We certainly agree that the bonuses are unacceptable, and the committee has said the same thing. I think most Canadians are also opposed to the idea of handing out bonuses. That being said, it's time to move on to other things and to work together to improve CBC/Radio-Canada.

I have some statistics for you. I would remind you that 78% of Canadians want to keep CBC/Radio-Canada. They want an improved version of their broadcaster. I would add that 67% of self-identifying Conservative voters want to keep CBC/Radio-Canada. I can't speak for Ms. Charette, but francophone communities in this country want to keep Radio-Canada for its news programs, entertainment programs and all other information programming.

We are also told that the government funds CBC/Radio-Canada and pays its journalists. However, under its mandate, which is set forth in the Broadcasting Act, the corporation's editorial independence is guaranteed. CBC/Radio-Canada doesn't receive directions from the government or Parliament, apart from what its mandate provides. Its licensing conditions are set by the Canadian Radio-television and Television Commission, the CRTC, and salaries are paid by CBC/Radio-Canada. The separation between the public broadcaster and our elected representatives needs to be acknowledged.

• (1145)

Mr. Martin Champoux: I think it's important to let you clarify that point in response to this kind of populist disinformation purveyed by the proponents of the idea of cutting funding to, or defunding CBC/Radio-Canada. I didn't want to do it myself, Ms. Andrews. That would've been less appropriate. Thank you for that.

Having said that, I'd like to discuss the impact that reduced funding or defunding would have, since that's the purpose of this study. I talk a lot about culture, but we obviously discuss journalism too in the remote regions, and it's currently in a precarious state. CBC/Radio-Canada's role in covering regional news is extremely important for both its own point of view and that of other regional media.

I'd like to hear your views on the potential consequences of defunding the public broadcaster or cutting its budget.

Ms. Sarah Andrews: We find it very hard to understand why the idea of reducing or cancelling funding for CBC/Radio-Canada is a priority for some people, when, as I said, many surveys show that's not what Canadians want.

According to our own survey, which we conducted last December, a majority of Canadians even get their news from CBC/Radio-Canada. The CBC is the news source that English-speaking Canadians trust most. For the francophone population, particularly in Quebec, *La Presse* is the primary source, but Radio-Canada is a very close second. I think Radio-Canada is probably one of the only news sources that francophone communities outside Quebec have on the ground.

I've previously done interviews with Radio-Canada in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, and I'm sure the member has conducted many as well. We can't be sure that services will continue if funding is reduced or cancelled. When Ms. Tait appeared here, we heard her say how close the two institutions are, but they operate separately at the editorial level. Radio-Canada has its own ways of doing things, but, from the standpoint of resources in the field, we know they're very close and often work together.

The other question that isn't often asked is whether the anglophone majority alone would agree to pay for the francophone population. I'm sure anglophones would have something to say if everyone were asked to pay for a service offered solely to francophones.

Mr. Martin Champoux: The crazy idea of continuing to pay for French-language services was recently proposed by a Conservative member.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Martin.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Andrews, please allow me to ask Ms. Wellens a question. She spoke on behalf of Quebec anglophones just as you spoke for francophones outside Quebec.

Ms. Wellens, what other reliable news sources would anglophones in Quebec outside Montreal have if the CBC disappeared?

I have a few seconds left, but I'd like to hear your views on that.

Ms. Brigitte Wellens: A local newspaper called *The Quebec Chronicle Telegraph* is available in some places, but they can't rely on that print media outlet alone because the paper runs to only six to eight depending on the week. I believe it has at least 2,000 subscribers.

• (1150)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I go now to the New Democrats.

Ms. Ashton, you have six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you very much. My question is for Friends of Canadian Media.

Over the last 15 years, over 500 newsrooms have shuttered across the country. That means thousands of jobs in every community across Canada gone. Those stories are not being told, especially ones that speak truth to power. These media deserts are unacceptable. In communities like mine, we haven't been able to depend on the CBC, whose studio has largely remained shuttered, with intermittent coverage over the years.

What responsibility does the CBC have to invest in local and regional journalism, so that journalists are telling our stories based in our regions, not in Winnipeg, not in Toronto, but in regions across northern and rural Canada?

Ms. Marla Boltman: We have a number of tools in our tool box that we can look to use to support news media across Canada. We have the Online News Act, which will inject \$100 million per year into the Canadian news media ecosystem. We've already seen that CBC is taking that money and putting it out into the smaller communities. It announced that a few weeks ago. It's putting 25 journalists' boots on the ground in the western provinces.

Our goal is for the CBC to be on the ground in local communities, because we know how important local news is. We've heard it from other people on this call, and we're going to say it again here. We feel that on the ground in the communities is how we build trust, and this is how we learn about each other.

If we don't have news invested in local communities, people tend to defer to national news, and national news tends to be more polarized. As a result of that, we're seeing people turning away from the news, because they don't want to hear about the polarized news; they want to hear what's going on in their communities. If you combine that with the disinformation and the misinformation that we're seeing online, we're seeing a growing mistrust in public institutions.

We think that the CBC has a responsibility to be in local communities to stop the tidal wave of misinformation and ensure that Canadian communities have a place to meet. If we're not talking to each other, then we're not meeting, and then that impacts our ability to have a healthy democracy.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for sharing that critical perspective.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to ask Ms. Andrews a question.

The leader of the Conservative Party often says he wants to cut or cancel the CBC's funding, but he never says he'd like to cut Radio-Canada's budget. He tries to create the illusion that the CBC can be virtually eliminated without destroying Radio-Canada. Even the Conservatives understand how important Radio-Canada is for francophone communities in and outside Quebec.

Ms. Andrews, how can we explain to the Conservative Party that the CBC's anglophone services are important too?

Ms. Sarah Andrews: I'll repeat what I said earlier. You mustn't forget that the CBC and Radio-Canada share a single mandate, which is to inform, enlighten and entertain Canadians. That includes francophone populations outside Quebec and anglophone populations in Quebec.

We heard Ms. Wellens say that the CBC is one of the only news sources for anglophones who live in Quebec. As I said earlier, and as Ms. Tait also said when she appeared before the committee last week, although the CBC and Radio-Canada do their jobs separately, they share many resources in carrying out their mandate and producing their programming. The idea that you can avoid using Radio-Canada's resources if the CBC is defunded is utterly unthinkable.

In our opening remarks a little earlier, we mentioned that Radio-Canada currently receives 44% of CBC/Radio-Canada funding. That's an extremely large percentage. Rather than reduce or cancel funding, we think Parliament should invest more in CBC/Radio-Canada and in local and regional news to further support the mandate of serving the Canadian public all across the country. I know this is a very important issue for you, madam, and for the people in your riding as well.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We've heard a lot of discussion about what the mandate of the CBC/Radio-Canada should be. We in the NDP have been clear that a strong CBC/Radio-Canada benefits all Canadians. A strong and thriving CBC/Radio-Canada ensures that francophones and indigenous communities can hear the media in their own language. A strong and thriving CBC/Radio-Canada does not prioritize high-

level executive bonuses over workers. A strong and thriving CBC/Radio-Canada does not rely on journalists in Toronto or Winnipeg to tell the stories of people here in northern Manitoba and elsewhere in northern and rural Canada. What do we need to do to ensure a strong and thriving CBC?

This is again for the Friends of Canadian Media.

• (1155)

Ms. Marla Boltman: We need to start with what we mentioned in our opening remarks. We need to take the partisanship out of this. CBC is meant to serve all Canadians, regardless of who they vote for or what part of the country they live in.

The issue of governance, while it may seem like a bit of dry policy matter, is fundamental to the public broadcaster's success. Appointments to the CBC board should be far more independent, in the same manner, let's say, that we appoint judges. The board, not the Prime Minister, should hire and fire the president. As is done with the BBC, perhaps every seven to 10 years, our Parliament should undertake a charter review process that includes performance commitments, public accountability and secure funding.

More than anything, I think we would argue that what the CBC needs is long-term, sustainable funding. We are talking about an organization that we are asking to have a vision, set objectives and execute on those objectives when they don't know what their budget is from year to year.

Friends of Canadian Media has 10 employees. We have approximately a \$2.6-million budget. As the executive director, if I can't do that without knowing what my budget's going to be for a bit more than one year, then I don't know how the CBC can do it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

We begin with the Conservatives and Mr. Gourde for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mrs. Sims, what do you think triggered the decline in the CBC's ratings? Since when have they been falling? Is it 5, 10 or 15 years? Has it been gradual?

Is there a particular factor that has caused Canadian anglophones in the other provinces to turn away from the CBC's programming and perhaps to a more American market?

I don't know the anglophone market; that's why I'm asking you the question.

[English]

Mrs. Kris Sims: I'm sorry that I don't speak French well enough to answer you in French.

That's a very good question. Generally speaking, in my experience as a journalist, it's been declining steadily and rapidly. However, I do not have the hard data going back, say, 20 years on CBC viewership. I would have to go back and get that for you. We have only current data on viewership.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: The CBC's current programming ratings are a disaster—we can't deny it, and it's sad—compared to those of Radio-Canada, which is a francophone market leader. However, given all the money that's invested, the CBC could be an anglophone market leader and an example for promoting Canadian culture and expertise.

Its programs could even be picked up in the United States, but the opposite happens. Virtually no Canadian program is picked up elsewhere than in Canada. Furthermore, the ones that are produced by the CBC unfortunately aren't watched in Canada.

Why is that?

[English]

Mrs. Kris Sims: Why are people not watching the CBC?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Yes.

Mrs. Kris Sims: That's a great question.

From hard data, we know that, generally speaking, trust in journalism is at an all-time low. I think 55% of Canadians now believe journalists are saying things they know to be false, or gross exaggerations. I'm a journalist, and that was shocking to me, because you try to make sure you don't even get somebody's name wrong, or accidentally get a date wrong. However, now we have the majority of Canadians distrusting journalists to the extent they feel they're being deliberately misled.

I'm not sure why people are tuning out.

I will also point this out to you: You made a reference to imported programming from other countries being aired on the CBC. Very interestingly, again, from what we can tell, *Murdoch Mysteries* is their top-rated fiction show for entertainment. That's not produced by the CBC. I tried to find the top 15 shows—not news but just shows—and they ranked 16th. It was *The Great British Bake Off*, which is obviously produced in the U.K. It wasn't even produced by the CBC. That was another import.

• (1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

Ms. Wellens, earlier you said you represent the people of the Quebec City area. Did you mean the greater Quebec City region, including the Chaudière—Appalaches region or just the city itself?

Ms. Brigitte Wellens: It's more the national capital region, which therefore includes part of the Rive-Sud.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I see.

That represents approximately 1 million inhabitants.

Is that correct?

Ms. Brigitte Wellens: That's correct.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You mentioned that 17,000 out of a population of 1 million inhabitants, 1.7% of the population, might be affected by cuts to or cancellation of the CBC's funding. However, do those 17,000 persons regularly watch CBC programming or do they listen to or watch anything else? It isn't clear that those 17,000 people only watch or listen to CBC programming.

Ms. Brigitte Wellens: That's obviously not the case.

I unfortunately have no data for you, but I can tell you that, especially from a broadcasting perspective, the CBC is an essential news source for those people.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: What's interesting is that the organization you represent is the equivalent of our organizations on the francophone side in the other provinces outside Quebec. Your situation is exactly the same as that of our francophone minority communities. You're an anglophone minority community, and you're definitely one of the only ones in North America.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: This large region including Quebec City, Chaudière—Appalaches, the region of Est-du-Québec and Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean is truly unique in North America and home to large a francophone majority. We're very proud to be represented here in Ottawa. Francophones form a majority in that region, but the minority is really large.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go to the Liberals for five minutes.

We'll go to Ms. Anna Gainey for five minutes.

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

Thank you very much to all of the witnesses for being here this morning.

I would like to ask my questions of Ms. Wellens.

I was looking at a report recently from, I think, QUESCREEN, which is an organization, as you may know, out of Concordia University. It was a study that showed that, since 2008, 104 Quebec media outlets, including newspapers, radio and TV, have folded, merged or become online only, and about 22% of them were English or bilingual news outlets.

Depending on how you look at the statistics, Quebec's English-speaking population could be anywhere from 10% to 15% of the population. At 22% of those closures, there was a disproportionate impact, I would say, on the English-speaking minority, not only in Quebec City and the Rive-Sud, as we were just discussing, but actually in the English populations that live in small communities across the province of Quebec.

It's very important to underscore, again, as you have, the importance in particular of the radio—CBC Radio One—in terms of information and as a reliable, trusted source of information for these communities, not just in Quebec City but actually across the province of Quebec.

Could you elaborate a little on the experience beyond Quebec City exclusively in this regard?

Ms. Brigitte Wellens: Yes, absolutely, Ms. Gainey. Thank you for that question.

In regions like the Lower North Shore, or even the North Shore, Internet access is spotty at best, or non-existent. We're talking about places where, in the summertime, you cannot get from one place to another by road. There is no road that connects these people together. We're talking about communities that are completely disconnected from everything, including reliable access to Internet.

CBC is the only source. I'm surprised and shocked by that data. I'm saddened. I saw it disappear in our community. We no longer get the Gazette or any other English print media that used to come into the region. As I mentioned earlier, the Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph is the only print media that we have access to in Quebec City. In regions across the province, I think there's The Spec on the Gaspésie coast and there's a local newspaper in the Estrie region, but otherwise, in terms of English media, we're talking about CBC Radio One. Years ago, we had Global, which had a spot in Quebec City, but that disappeared a long time ago.

It's critical that we have sources that are close to the ground. When I say “boots on the ground”, I'm talking about local communities. There's an English-language minority in every administrative region across this fine province, and these people need that local news to be able to carry out their civic duty, to be informed on important challenges and issues that are taking place close to their home and to be able to have an opinion and exercise their democratic rights.

CBC is part of the fabric that makes up our communities. Yes, we're small in numbers and we may not have the critical mass to have our own local private media, but that's why CBC is so important. I need to remind everyone that the survival of our community depends on that fact. Section 42 of the Official Languages Act says that CBC has a mandate to protect that information, and they have a responsibility to French and English communities across Canada.

• (1205)

Ms. Anna Gainey: I agree. I think that's an important point. Thank you for raising it, along with the Official Languages Act, across the country.

As Madam Tait, and, actually, Madame Bouchard, underlined last week, there is a notion among some that we can defund the CBC and protect Radio-Canada or protect the francophone offering. I think they both very clearly stated that these two organizations are very closely linked. They share offices; they share resources, and you simply cannot defund or harm the CBC without also undermining Radio-Canada, which is another important piece. Therefore, we would actually be doing further damage to a very fragile system that exists through Radio-Canada and CBC in Quebec and the English community there as well. It's not lost on me how important CBC is to the minority language group in Quebec.

Some say that if we were to get rid of the CBC or Radio-Canada, we would see other news sources thrive and flourish. Since 2008, 104 Quebec media outlets have folded or merged. Have you seen new news sources thriving or flourishing? Have we seen other things try to take that space and fulfill that role in our democracy and in our communities in Quebec?

Ms. Brigitte Wellens: None whatsoever, because the cost of doing so is impossible. You'd be hard pressed to find someone who would be successful in carrying out what the CBC has managed to do for decades for Canadians across the country. I don't think it would be possible for someone else to just come out of the woodwork and create a local news media like that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That round is up, Anna.

I now go to Mr. Champoux for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair. Two and a half minutes is a short period of time.

Mrs. Sims, earlier you said that you were opposed to funding for the CBC. You called it corporate welfare. At least that's what I heard. However, when I go to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's website, I don't see any denunciation on your part of the tax breaks the government grants to Alberta's oil companies.

Since you're opposed to corporate welfare, I imagine you're absolutely scandalized by the billions of dollars that the federal government grants to the oil companies, which make billions of dollars in profits.

I'd like to hear your views on that.

[*English*]

Mrs. Kris Sims: We're opposed to all corporate welfare, period. It doesn't matter what company it is; we're opposed to it. In fact, if you go to our website, taxpayer.com, you will see several articles in which we are taking that to task, no matter what company it is.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I see that you really condemn the carbon tax, but not so much the major funding that the federal government grants to the oil companies, pipelines and so on. We can eventually come back to this, but that's not the subject of the study today.

Earlier you said that journalists were misleading Canadians. You often collaborate with media outlets such as True North and Rebel News. Do you think they are independent and rigorous media outlets?

From the standpoint of journalistic independence and news quality, how do you think they compare with what you call the mainstream media, such as the CBC and others?

What's your opinion on this kind of journalism and news organization?

• (1210)

[English]

Mrs. Kris Sims: I'm having a bit of trouble hearing you, but I'll try my best to answer. Once again, we are here to point out the cost of the CBC, that nearly nobody is watching it and that journalists shouldn't be paid by the media.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'll repeat my question, Mrs. Sims. I think you definitely heard it.

I asked you for your opinion of the media outlets you regularly collaborate with, such as True North and Rebel News, to name only two. It's not hard to see. It's online.

I just want to know whether you consider those media organizations rigorous and reliable from the standpoint of journalistic independence and information quality, as journalists from traditional media organizations such as the CBC, Global News and CTV, for example, can be.

[English]

The Chair: Give a short answer, please.

Mrs. Kris Sims: Through the Chair, I'm sorry. I think that is a personal opinion. I have worked with outstanding journalists from all outlets, actually. It doesn't matter if they're with True North, Rebel or Western Standard—or, in fact, the CBC, CTV or Global.

It's been both independent and alternative media—which is largely personally, directly or self-funded, or, in some cases, also speaking with the CBC in earnest about a lot of issues—and outlets like CTV and Global. There are good journalists in all of those newsrooms, but they shouldn't be paid by the government.

The Chair: Thank you very much

I'll move on now to Ms. Ashton. You have two and a half minutes, Niki.

Ms. Niki Ashton: My first question is for the Friends of Canadian Media. The Conservative leader, we know, is ideologically driven to destroy CBC/Radio-Canada. He's even willing to go on far-right podcasts that host hate groups like the Proud Boys to discuss it.

Conservative minds hanging out with the same people who promoted a group that stormed the U.S. Capitol and that we, as a country, have designated a terrorist group isn't a problem, but spending less than a dime a day to ensure that Canadians across the country can have access to quality journalism is.

What sort of planning should be in place to ensure the viability of CBC/Radio-Canada so it can survive Conservative cuts better than it has survived Liberal cuts?

Ms. Marla Boltman: As I mentioned before, we think the key is long-term, sustainable funding. It's impossible to run an organization as large as the CBC on a 12-month schedule. It's a constantly moving target.

I think the idea that the CBC's entire budget is simply a line item in the federal government's budget is incredibly.... Quite frankly, it seems ridiculous. If we can do anything to change that, we should, for all of the reasons I stated before. When you're working on a 12-month schedule, how do you execute on a vision and how do you meet objectives?

Also, as we said in our opening remarks, and I'll repeat myself, governance is fundamental. Appointments to the board should be far more independent. We think that having independence with the board and with the appointment of the CEO will help with the issue the public has with transparency and accountability, and that will make us stronger.

Also, this is very important. If you look at the BBC, it has a charter process whereby its mandate is reviewed every seven to 10 years. That includes performance commitments, public accountability and secure funding. Just as you take your car in for service every six months or 3,000 kilometres or whatever it is, we have to have regular check-ins on our national public broadcaster. That will ensure its viability in the long term.

As we've stated before, the CBC needs to get back into the business of local and regional news in a big way, with more boots on the ground in smaller communities. That will have a big impact on whether the CBC survives and thrives.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

I have a quick question, Ms. Wellens.

You talked about how critical it is for your community and across the regions of Quebec. You mentioned the Gaspésie. There are a lot of parallels with folks who live here in northern Manitoba, who rely particularly on CBC Radio to get their news.

I'm wondering if you can share how critical the work of our public broadcaster is. To what extent does it need to be supported, so that all Canadians, whether it's linguistic-minority communities like yours or those living in northern and rural Canada, get news they can rely on?

The Chair: Give a short answer, please.

Ms. Brigitte Wellens: As the only local source of reliable English information for not only long-standing community members but also newcomers to our region—I repeat, every five years, 25% of our population is renewed by newcomers—it's absolutely critical that CBC remain a vital part of our community's vitality in ensuring it fills the role that has been given to it in being able to share news stories, local issues, challenges and celebrations.

My community organization, as with all the other community organizations that do the same work as I do in other regions across the province, relies on CBC to share the work we're doing across the community, because we don't have the capacity to do so all by ourselves.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you. We've gone one minute over this time.

Now I'm going to go to the next Conservative.

You have five minutes, please, Mr. Jivani.

Mr. Jamil Jivani (Durham, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have some questions for Mrs. Sims and Mr. Thorpe.

Do you think the CBC respects the Canadian taxpayer?

Mrs. Kris Sims: With respect, I think that's a matter of opinion. A lot of people say they may not like the programming on the CBC and perhaps that is why they're choosing to no longer watch it. From Canadian taxpayers' perspective, it's due to those three main points: the cost of the CBC, the fact that nearly nobody is watching it anymore, and the fact that journalists should not be paid by the government. That's what is really important here.

As far as their opinions on their programming go, whether it's news, fiction or entertainment, we would leave that up to Canadians.

Mr. Ryan Thorpe: If I could quickly add to that, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has an ongoing legal challenge against the CBC. I filed an access to information request trying to see how much of those bonuses, the \$18 million in bonuses that they handed out, went to the senior executive team. They're stonewalling the release of that information, claiming that it's personal information. Well, when it's taxpayers' money, taxpayers have every right to know how much the CBC is allocating to its senior executive bonuses.

We did launch that legal challenge. I certainly don't think it shows much respect for Canadian taxpayers, the fact that we pay the bills but they say that we don't get to know how much they're spending on senior executive bonuses.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: What I hear from Canadians in reaction to the current CEO, Ms. Catherine Tait's appearance before this committee, and also last week's appearance by the incoming CEO,

Madame Bouchard, is a concern that no real answers were given in terms of any sort of accountability.

At this committee, we can point to ad revenue dropping, viewership dropping and trust in the CBC dropping, and there's no sense of, "Okay, we have to do something differently."

Instead, we see them lining up and saying that they just need hundreds of millions more dollars. I do think that has created an impression—in my view, accurately—among a lot of Canadians that there's just not a lot of respect for the taxpayer and that there needs to be some value delivered in exchange for all of that money being given to the organization.

What's your view on that?

Mrs. Kris Sims: I find it comes down to accountability, which is something the taxpayers federation is always pushing for.

The CEO, again, I will point out, makes about \$500,000 a year. The bonus she's entitled to is up to more than what the average Canadian family earns in an entire year, in all of their paycheques, so the idea that they were not being accountable is deeply concerning to taxpayers, and we don't believe that this is fixable. We don't think that they should throw more money at the CBC. The very idea is astonishing, because right now they're getting \$1.4 billion, and again, to put that into perspective, that's the grocery bills of 85,000 families for an entire year. It is an outrageous amount of money.

On the idea of throwing more money at them while they're being less and less accountable, we just don't think that is acceptable.

Mr. Ryan Thorpe: One quick point to add is that the CBC doesn't publish a sunshine list, but at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, we file access to information requests, and we do that homework for them. Since 2015, the number of CBC employees who are earning six figures and up has increased by 231%.

We're looking at the bonuses, which are \$132 million at the CBC since 2015. The six-figure salaries at the CBC have increased by 231%, and then we hear them come back time and time again, crying poor and asking for even more money, and I think, from the perspective of a lot of Canadian taxpayers, enough is enough.

Mrs. Kris Sims: I think it's about 1,000 people they've added to the sunshine list.

Mr. Ryan Thorpe: There are an extra 1,000 people on their sunshine list.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: We've heard also today from this organization, Friends of Canadian Media, another ask for more money, and that more money is going to solve all of the problems. They've also said, though, that they're unhappy with pretty much every prime minister in my lifetime. Noone has given them enough money.

It sounds to me like this is a hustle. It's an insatiable appetite. There's always going to be an ask for more. There's never going to be enough money. The more they fail, the more they need money. It's a circle that never stops. Do you think that's a fair interpretation?

Mrs. Kris Sims: To be nice off the top, we do really appreciate what the Friends of Canadian Media said when they said that this decision for bonuses is “deeply out of touch and unbecoming of our national public broadcaster”.

• (1220)

We agree with that, but, again, putting more money into government-funded media is just the opposite of what taxpayers want. We want media to be funded privately through willing donations, subscriptions or a GiveSendGo. However you give money to the media of your choice is how this should play out. The notion of just giving more taxpayers' money to government-funded media is just not going to work.

Mr. Ryan Thorpe: For journalism to work, it must stand on its own two feet. It's the only way it works.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now go to Mr. Noormohamed with the Liberals for five minutes.

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

Ms. Sims, I'd like to start with you. I share your concern about the state of news and broadcast media in this country, and I'm wondering if you might share with me your views on foreign ownership of Canadian media. Do you think that's a reasonable way out of this, to let foreign buyers buy Canadian news outlets and media outlets?

Mrs. Kris Sims: That's kind of getting a bit away from what we're here to point out about the funding of the CBC—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: No, but I'm just trying to ask you. I'm just asking a question.

The Chair: I consider that question to be in order. Thank you.

Mrs. Kris Sims: Madam Chair, I'm concerned that I'm giving my opinion about who should fund media outside of government.

We believe that Canadians should pay for the media that they want to watch, by and large, and that private companies should raise money through ads, subscriptions and donations. For example, we have BlackLock's Reporter, which has an annual subscription. They do outstanding journalism, and there are only two hard-working Canadian journalists.

Whether or not you get money from outside, I don't know. I guess it would be up to the private company.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I think there's a conversation to be had about this.

You have said, and I hear you loud and clear, that there should be no government subsidies, period, and there should certainly be no funding of subsidies to the media in Canada.

Are you concerned about the level of subsidy that Postmedia gets from the federal government, which they have now built into their business plan, and the fact that they are taking Canadian taxpayer dollars and also paying bonuses to executives that are probably, in some cases, 10, 15 or 20 times larger than what CBC pays its executives?

Mrs. Kris Sims: To be clear, there are two separate streams here that we're talking about. There's the CBC, which is \$1.4 billion, and then I think what you're talking about there is often referred to as the media bailout, if you can call it that, which is roughly \$500 million. Is that what you're talking about?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: No, there's a series of different.... If you read Postmedia's annual report, they disclose that government subsidy, of a variety of different kinds, is actually now part of their business plan.

Does that concern you?

Mrs. Kris Sims: Yes, it concerns us very much. To be clear, it works out sometimes, depending on the media outlet, to roughly \$30,000 per employee of a media company outside of the CBC. That is highly alarming. One, taxpayers shouldn't be paying for that. Two, journalists should not be paid by the government.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You mentioned that you've done some work with True North.

Mrs. Kris Sims: I've been a journalist for most of my adult life. I do hits and media interviews with all outlets.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Are you concerned that True North took a government subsidy? Have you expressed that same concern about True North?

Mrs. Kris Sims: No media company should take government subsidies, period.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Is that including True North?

Mrs. Kris Sims: That's any of them.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You said they need to defund the CBC, and I want to be very clear. When you talk about the CBC, you're talking about CBC/Radio-Canada, the entire thing? Is that correct?

Mrs. Kris Sims: Yes, \$1.4 billion should not be going to that company.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Then every French-language broadcast, everything in Quebec—I just want to be absolutely clear—every dollar of federal money that goes to the CBC and Radio-Canada should be taken away.

Mrs. Kris Sims: We'll point out that the CBC, to its credit, does raise some of its own money. I think it's around—I'd have to go back and check—\$400 million. It's around there and may be even \$500 million. That's nothing to sneeze at. That's an awful lot of money that it's generating on its own.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Right, but you would say all federal money, all federal subsidy for CBC and Radio-Canada, should disappear.

Mrs. Kris Sims: No taxpayers' money should go to that company.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Okay, so taxpayer money would be government subsidies. Is that correct?

Mrs. Kris Sims: Sure, it's whatever you want to call it. It comes from the taxpayer. It doesn't come from the government, but it's issued by the government.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Then if we dig into this a bit more deeply, where there are markets that are called “news deserts”, and there is no ability for news to get to those places, and we have coverage concerns in this country, how do you respond to the fact that there are populations in this country...? If the CBC were to disappear or to be defunded to the point where it focused entirely on those things that were profitable, which is largely going to be urban and those types of things, what would you do for those communities? How would you ensure that the communities in rural Canada, indigenous communities, or francophone communities in places like Vancouver got access to news coverage and to media coverage that would inform them?

• (1225)

Mrs. Kris Sims: With respect, through the chair, you mentioned indigenous programming, and I wanted to share this with you. According to the CBC's 2022-23 annual report, it spent \$6.4 million on its indigenous services. That is about 0.5% of its budget—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Ms. Sims, my question is, how would you get coverage to those communities?

My question isn't just about whether or not the CBC did this. My question is, if the CBC money were all to disappear, where would you go and how would you get news into these communities, particularly francophone communities in language-minority places like British Columbia, and indigenous communities that are doing this programming?

It's not a question of the dollars for me. Dollars are important, but my question to you is, how would you actually deliver that programming? That's what I'm concerned about.

Mrs. Kris Sims: That's perhaps something that Canadian Heritage could figure out, maybe even around this council table, this committee table—

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we have ended your five-minute round, Mr. Noormohamed. Thank you very much.

Finish your sentence and let's...

Mrs. Kris Sims: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

I just did want to point out in terms of the spending with indigenous programming that the CBC spent more than double on its bonuses alone than it did on its indigenous programming, so it has a lot of work to do there.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think we have to end this session and start with new witnesses for the second 90-minute session, so I want to thank the witnesses for appearing. Thank you very much for your patience.

We will now suspend the meeting before we return for the next 90 minutes.

Thank you.

• (1225) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1245)

The Chair: I now call the meeting back to order. We are resuming the meeting.

I need to give you some information. One of the people on the list for this session, Pierre Tousignant, is unable to be on. Madame Charette wanted to come on, but we're still waiting to find out where she is, so I'm going to begin the meeting. I think we should get on with it and not keep waiting for people to come on.

For those of you who are here at the meeting, you have five minutes to present, and I'll give you a 30-second shout-out so that you can wrap up. You can elaborate, if you missed anything, in your question and answer session.

Welcome, Ms. Kolt, director of culture and community initiatives, Flin Flon. Begin, Ms. Kolt, for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Crystal Kolt (Director, Culture and Community Initiatives, Flin Flon, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, vice-chairs and committee members.

I'd like to sincerely thank the committee for inviting me here today as a witness before this Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to discuss the consequences of defunding the CBC/Radio-Canada. I deeply appreciate the foresight of the committee to include a northern voice.

To give you a perspective on how I came to form my opinion on the matter, I would first like to share a bit about myself. My husband Mark and I moved from Winnipeg to Flin Flon, Manitoba, almost 30 years ago. Flin Flon is a semi-remote city of 5,000 people, located 800 kilometres north of Winnipeg, straddling the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border. We are graduates of the University of Manitoba school of music and we studied as a piano duo in New York City. Mark was an accompanist for the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Winnipeg's Contemporary Dancers.

We worried about potential budget cuts to those organizations, so Mark decided to change careers. He was accepted into the faculty of law, which eventually led us north, to the small city of Flin Flon. We thought we were leaving our love of the arts forever, but nothing could have been further from the truth.

The north was and is teeming with opportunity and ambition, especially culturally and artistically. Since our arrival in northern Manitoba in 1995, we have founded the Flin Flon Community Choir, which has performed at the Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall four times, most recently participating in the world premiere of Ola Gjeilo's newest work, *Twilight Mass*. We have produced Broadway musicals for northern audiences, like *Les Misérables* and *Mamma Mia!* We introduced northern choristers and audiences to most classical masterworks, performing with the Saskatoon and Winnipeg symphonies. I was on the provincial task force for Culture Days and on the board of the Manitoba Arts Council. Presently, I am on the boards of the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, the Manitoba Association of Playwrights and the Manitoba Choral Association. I am now the director of culture and community initiatives for Flin Flon. For 15 years, I was the cultural coordinator of the Flin Flon Arts Council.

I'm currently on the executive of the organization that founded the Uptown Emporium in 2020. This space is both a physical and an e-commerce marketplace for northern artists and artisans. We develop an export plan for northern Manitoban goods, and for 15 years we've been working towards the development of the North Central Canada Centre of Arts & Environment. Most recently, we received funding for the imagiNorthern network from the Canada Council for the Arts, which aims to support and develop prosperity and well-being for northern artists and their communities through the creative sector.

I wonder whether you have heard of any of my projects. The only way I can share this information nationally is through the CBC. Social media is too unidirectional. If you are not my friend on Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn, you may not hear or know anything about what I am doing.

We have not had a permanent journalist in northern Manitoba for several years. My relationship with the CBC is a two-way street. I need to have the opportunity to share my stories with the rest of the country. Northern and rural communities are relying on the CBC to provide consistently professional facts on local, provincial, national and international affairs. I believe that all of our governmental parties understand that the country is a mosaic of voices and that northern and rural voices need to be heard.

How can this be possible by providing fewer resources and support to the corporation? How can one journalist, if we are lucky enough to have a journalist, service all of northern Manitoba? Defunding the CBC, in my opinion, is a mistake. My fear is that the weakening of the CBC would be death by a thousand cuts. Now, more than ever, we need to support this corporation. Additionally, who would replace this national voice? The void would be filled, for sure, but, I fear, by the myriad Joe Rogans, Rachel Maddows and Sean Hannitys, instead of our own Canadian voices.

Losing CBC entirely would be devastating. We need a unified national perspective. My eldest son, a dad of three young kids, ex-

pressed how important and deeply comforting it was to have our Deputy Prime Minister announce that our government was coming up with strategies to deal with a possible Trump administration prior to the U.S. election. He prefaced this comment by saying that the comfort came from knowing that we were all hearing the news bulletin together, as a nation, at the same time and without inflammatory rhetoric. News that impacts and connects all of us in this enormous country, sourced from one reliable national news source.... How do you put a price tag on that?

There has been criticism about the cost of the CBC. Of course, I have little to no authority to comment on this. It's safe to say that many things cost money. There's much criticism about the financial management of our universities, but we need universities. There's criticism about our health care system, but we need a health care system.

• (1250)

Actuaries and politicians can deliberate on policy and procedures until theories are proven and problems are solved. We expect this. I just don't know how policy can be determined without fully understanding and supporting the field in question.

Rather than defunding this organization, I would ask that we head in the other direction. We need to establish locally based broadcasting outlets in a media desert like ours. In a region where physical distances are immense and access to other forms of communication is often limited, CBC/Radio-Canada is more than just a broadcaster. It is a cornerstone of community life, a guardian of cultural heritage and an essential service for fostering connection and understanding in Canada's north. The CBC plays a vital role in northern communities, serving as a lifeline for information, connection and cultural expression in some of the most remote and diverse areas of Canada.

Without boots on the ground and the support they require—

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Kolt. Could you wrap up, please?

Mrs. Crystal Kolt: We need a national broadcasting corporation. It needs to be professional, responsive, insightful, non-partisan and clear. It needs to represent the mosaic of Canada. Professional journalists need to be sprinkled throughout our country from north to south and east to west. You never know where a Peter Mansbridge and Tomson Highway are waiting for opportunity.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Kolt.

Now I will go to Ms. Carol Ann Pilon from the Alliance des producteurs francophones du Canada, please, for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Carol Ann Pilon (Executive Director, Alliance des producteurs francophones du Canada): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I am Carol Ann Pilon, executive director of the Alliance des producteurs francophones du Canada, or APFC.

APFC is a professional association that represents the francophone production companies of the official language minority communities, the OLMCs. In the past 25 years, we have worked hard to promote the exceptional audiovisual content produced by our members and to defend its cultural, economic, identity and linguistic value to the country as a whole.

Our members come from all across Canada, from Yukon to Nova Scotia, including New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia.

Through their activities, our members and their associates contribute to the economic vitality, cultural life and continued existence of the communities from which they come and ensure that a diverse range of francophone voices are heard across Canada. They produce captivating, original stories for television, films and digital media. Those stories are a reflection of the unique places from which they come, and they enrich the diverse range of Canadian audiovisual offerings. The francophone production of the OLMCs represents 7% of total independent French-language production in Canada. Approximately 40% of programs produced in the Canadian francophonie are broadcast by Radio-Canada.

The role of our national public broadcaster is fundamentally important for our sector and equally so in guaranteeing the development and vitality of the Canadian francophonie. This is even truer in the digital era, in which we now have increasing numbers of broadcast sources, but where regional stories are increasingly rare on screen. The francophone OLMCs, and young people in particular, need to see themselves reflected in these programs and films. For that to happen, they must have access to an ample and diversified range of Canadian programming that is representative of all francophone communities in Canada.

Radio-Canada has specific responsibilities in this area, as set forth in the Broadcasting Act and Official Languages Act. These two statutes, which were updated in 2023, also provide greater recognition of independent francophone production and the OLMCs.

Radio-Canada plays a leading role by enabling our producers to occupy their rightful place in the Canadian broadcasting system and to make the original content they produce more accessible.

Our national public broadcaster fosters the development of Canadian talent and creates opportunities for diversifying the way the regions and genders are represented in independent production. It is essential that Canadian citizens be offered varied programming in the current context in which the audiovisual landscape is increasingly being standardized.

Thanks to Radio-Canada, independent francophone production companies outside Quebec have produced major dramatic series. I'm thinking of the serie *Le monde de Gabrielle Roy* in Manitoba,

Mont-Rouge in New Brunswick and *Eaux turbulentes* in Ontario. By supporting these fictional productions on a broader scale, Radio-Canada has managed to do three things: it has enabled the professionals and creators in our communities to exploit their talents; helped put the regions outside the major centres on screen and ensured that local stories concerning the entire country are told; and put French Canadian content in prime programming position.

Radio-Canada is a unique and essential voice in the media landscape. In many instances, its regional stations are often the only ones providing local French-language programming. Francophones living in Moncton, Toronto, Winnipeg, Victoria and Whitehorse seek, from those stations, what the major private broadcasting groups can't offer them: specific French-language programming that directly targets them. Radio-Canada is also the only broadcaster that provides a platform for a critical mass of francophones and francophiles both in Quebec and across the country.

In conclusion, I would add that APFC agrees that the Crown corporation's mandate is robust. In a constantly changing ecosystem, its obligations are many and can create considerable pressure. The public funding that supports the national broadcaster is substantial but also commensurate with its obligations. Radio-Canada is a fundamentally important institution for democracy.

• (1255)

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Ms. Carol Ann Pilon: It is also fundamentally important for Canadian creators.

I repeat: no other entity in the audiovisual ecosystem reflects the regional, cultural, identity and linguistic diversity of this country the way Radio-Canada does. Which is why it's essential that it be guaranteed adequate and predictable support so that the national public broadcaster can continue playing its role in a confident and relevant manner.

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

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Pilon.

I'm going to go to the Quebec Community Groups Network and Sylvia Martin-Laforge for five minutes, please.

Ms. Martin-Laforge.

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge (Director General, Quebec Community Groups Network): Good evening, Madam Chair, Vice-Chairs Waugh and Champoux, and members of the committee.

My name is Sylvia Martin-Laforge. I'm the director general of the Quebec Community Groups Network.

The QCGN is here today representing the English-speaking community of Quebec, Canada's largest official language minority, with over 1.3 million members. Our mission is to advocate for the rights and the vitality of this unique community. Today, I will highlight the critical role of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in supporting our community, the challenges we face and the actions required to address them.

First, it's essential to understand that the English-speaking community of Quebec is not a simple extension of Canada's English majority. We are a distinct and diverse cultural and linguistic community with unique needs. Despite our numbers, our representation in CBC's non-news programming remains limited, leaving many English-speaking Quebecers feeling excluded from broader narratives.

Our community faces significant challenges, particularly when it comes to media access. There is a stark urban-rural divide. Urban areas, such as Montreal, traditionally benefited from diverse English-language media, but rural communities struggle with limited infrastructure, poor connectivity and a lack of locally relevant content. This disparity has created news deserts in certain areas, where residents are left without access to reliable information about their communities.

The rise of social media, while offering some opportunities, has introduced its own set of problems. Algorithms on these platforms prioritize content designed to engage, not to inform. This fosters echo chambers and reduces exposure to diverse perspectives, further isolating minority voices. Public broadcasters such as the CBC are uniquely positioned to counteract these trends by prioritizing inclusivity, diversity and nuanced reporting at the regional and local levels.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Public broadcasting plays an essential role in our democracy. The CBC network isn't just a broadcaster; it's an essential platform in promoting informed citizenship and inclusive discourse. Public broadcasters reinforce democracy by providing independent information, promoting pluralism and holding leaders accountable for their actions. To paraphrase political scientist Loïc Blondiaux, democracy isn't about voting; it's about the debate that precedes it. The CBC has always served as a forum in Canada, a public space for conducting informed debate and sharing values.

[*English*]

However, challenges arise when the CBC operates like a commercial broadcaster, focusing on ratings rather than its public mandate. Centralized programming decisions made in Toronto have often overlooked the needs and aspirations of English-speaking Quebecers. This disconnect undermines CBC's potential to be a bridge between communities.

At this critical juncture, we must take decisive action to strengthen CBC's role as a public broadcaster. This includes refocusing the CBC to ensure that it is prioritizing resources to serve minority communities effectively; prioritizing local and regional content to see to it that CBC is producing and amplifying stories that reflect the diversity of English-speaking Quebec; investing in rural and re-

mote community infrastructure to bridge the urban-rural divide by improving connectivity and access to localized talent and content; and fostering collaboration to build stronger partnerships between CBC and community organizations such as Y4Y—our youth group—the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network and, of course, QCGN.

In conclusion, CBC is more than just a broadcaster. It is a cornerstone of our cultural and democratic fabric. For the English-speaking community of Quebec, CBC is a lifeline, connecting isolated communities, amplifying minority voices and fostering informed citizenship.

Let us ensure that CBC continues to serve as an agora for all Canadians, a place where all voices are heard, stories are shared and debates shape our future.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Martin-Laforge.

I'm going to have to suspend, guys, because we have Madame Charette ready to come on. We're going to try one more time with her. If she cannot connect with us, we're going to move on with the question and answer period.

We'll suspend.

• (1300)

(Pause)

• (1300)

The Chair: We'll now begin with Madame Charette for five minutes. I'll give you a 30-second shout-out.

Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Charette (President, Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture): Good afternoon, everyone.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me to present the views of our organization on these issues.

My name is Annick Charette, and I am president of the Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture, or FNCC.

First of all, I have found it hard to understand the exact issue regarding the hundreds of job cuts at CBC/Radio-Canada. The staff numbers that we have for the previous year are as follows: a total of 141 employees have lost their jobs, and 205 vacant positions have been abolished, for a total of 346 positions out of CBC/Radio-Canada's total staff across the country.

In the current environment, these job cuts are having a greater impact on the workloads of the remaining teams than on the services provided to the public. However, we mustn't downplay the effects of the policy of always doing more with less. We're seeing rising stress levels, heavier workloads, extended work schedules and, in the case of news, difficulty covering increasingly large areas with minimum staff.

Radio-Canada workers are devoted professionals. They are committed to serving the public with a high level of commitment. Above all, they are proud to work for Canada's public media service because they believe Radio-Canada is a national treasure.

That being said, we should be discussing the very essence of that public service.

Radio-Canada belongs to Canadians as a result of a social contract established nearly 100 years ago. Radio-Canada's mission is to represent the essence and values of Canada to its population, to guarantee them access to high-quality information across the country and to reach the most remote Canadian homes to create a window on this exceptional country, which extends across 6 time zones and approximately 9,980,000 square kilometers. No other broadcaster can carry out this mandate; no social network has this mission to devote itself to the Canadian people and to reflect their reality.

Now more than ever, the public broadcaster has a role to play in holding together the society in which we live. It must be the mirror and mouthpiece of diversity, of what distinguishes us and what should unite us in the globalization of markets and the hyper-prevalence of the American standardization of all audiovisual product consumption models.

Are we, as a society, prepared to abandon the representation of our reality and cultural identity, those of both Quebec and Canada, to the moods of the private sector's economic interests or those of multinational corporations such as Netflix and Disney? That's the question we have to ask ourselves in considering the value of CBC/Radio-Canada.

Are we prepared to erase the specificity of Canadian and Quebec culture in the digital space?

Local news across the country is doing the best it can as it deals with a 70% decline in advertising revenue. Tens of newspapers are shutting down, and radio and television networks are reducing their coverage, thus resulting in declining traditional revenues.

In the circumstances, it's both unrealistic and irresponsible to make private-sector newsrooms responsible for covering all of Canada. News wastelands extend across the entire country, and CBC/Radio-Canada is the only player that can halt their advance. Well-informed citizens are the foundation of a solid and enlightened democracy.

That said, is everything perfect at our public broadcaster? The obvious answer is no. The same is true of any public broadcaster around the world. That mission and ambition can't be achieved without relying on guiding principles such as independence and transparency, or without the support of stable, multi-year funding

that guarantees the broadcaster's ability to project itself into the future.

Today's media world is characterized by an overabundance of available content, growing competitive pressures and globalized supply. The considerable importance of CBC/Radio-Canada in the audiovisual content production ecosystem must not be underestimated. To undermine our public service broadcaster is to endanger many media industry players, content producers, artists, craftspeople and workers who earn a living from it.

In its present form, practices and way of doing things, can Radio-Canada meet the present challenges and new paradigms that define its sphere of action? That's a good question. Is the implicit social contract with the public still valid? We perceive a growing distance between Radio-Canada and the public, even more so from its young audience, despite its attempts to draw closer.

• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Charette: We think that social contract should be renewed by updating the conditions of the broadcaster's existence so that it meets certain expectations and still has its special role to play. We at the FNCC are more than ever convinced that the Canadian people must have access to a strong and adequately funded public service broadcaster.

Canada allocates \$33 per inhabitant to the funding of the public broadcaster, whereas the global average is \$88. We're second last in this category among the G7 countries. We need to reflect on that because, otherwise, tomorrow we will no longer be Canadians staring at our screens; we will be an audience that's being offered to the people of California, whose interests—

[*English*]

The Chair: Please wrap up, Ms. Charette.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Charette: Thank you for listening.

[*English*]

The Chair: You can elaborate in the question and answer segment. Thank you.

We begin a six-minute round. For the Conservatives, we have Kevin Waugh.

Kevin, you have six minutes.

• (1310)

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

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for coming.

Last night I was flipping around the channels, and I ran across PBS Detroit. They were doing a fundraiser celebrating Willie Nelson's 90th birthday. Believe it or not, Canadians were going on with their wallets and their credit cards, supporting PBS TV out of Detroit. They were very supportive. They have several programs. In fact, I watch PBS Detroit here in Saskatchewan.

I don't have to tell you that ethnic media is also exploding in Canada right now. Their voices are not heard, so what do they do? They don't have their hands out to the federal government; instead, they have worked very hard with their communities to have their voices heard through ethnic media.

I point out, Ms. Kolt, that APTN television was started back in 1992. Why? It was because the public broadcaster did not at all fit the indigenous programming needs, so, in 1992, APTN started. We are paying for it today, a subscription out of our cable.

In Saskatchewan, we have Missinipi radio out of La Ronge. They are doing very well in La Ronge. They are broadcasting northern stories.

In Saskatchewan, I know of at least four indigenous groups that want to apply to the CRTC to also have community radio without subsidies from the federal government.

Ms. Kolt, what are your thoughts on that? Others don't wait for the federal government to hand over more money. I've talked about three or four instances in which ethnic and indigenous groups have gone ahead themselves, raised the money, and have a voice in their communities. What are your thoughts on that, coming from Flin Flon?

Mrs. Crystal Kolt: I am very familiar with those radio stations, as well as another one in Flin Flon, Thompson and The Pas, called Arctic Radio, which we take advantage of and we absolutely love.

What I am talking about is what I need with the CBC. I need to be able to get my stories further than my own communities or northern rural areas. There are things that are happening across the country that I think will be missed if they are exclusively with the smaller networks.

One of the reasons I was so involved with Culture Days is that I need to be able to hear what's happening more broadly than within my own regions of northern Manitoba and northern Saskatchewan. That has been something I need.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I understand that.

Ms. Tait, last week.... They can't keep a reporter in northern Manitoba, yet the CBC went to the federal government needing \$42 million extra because of being contractually obligated to pay. Half of the \$42 million went to performance pay.

Would you say that CBC has a problem with grossly mismanaging its budget, in that the offices in Winnipeg and the offices in Toronto are swelling with executives and not putting people where they should? I see last week that they made a big announcement about hiring 25 more regional and local reporters. For me, take down the executives and put reporters in rural areas like yours, where they are needed more than ever.

Could I have your thoughts on that, Ms. Kolt? We've seen an explosion of executives and [*Inaudible—Editor*] not going to where it should be, as many of the groups here have talked about today, in rural Canada.

Mrs. Crystal Kolt: As I said in my speech, I feel that everybody has to be accountable—a business is a business—so that is something I feel strongly about. However, I do feel that, come what may, we need to have the support to have not only the journalists sprinkled across our country, where needed, but also the supports.

We had a person by the name of Mark Szyszlo, who was a journalist in northern Manitoba—I don't know if it was for a decade—and it was this wonderful, amazingly supportive network—

• (1315)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's the problem with CBC. They do not fill needs. When he left, there was a vacancy, and they didn't fill it right away—

Mrs. Crystal Kolt: I would like—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Ms. Martin-Laforge, do massive bonuses strengthen access to media, as you were saying? Here we had the massive bonuses, with over \$18 million handed out. Did that help anything in media?

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: We're not here—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, we are here to talk about it.

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: We are, but I would say to you that the QCGN is not here to talk about massive bonuses and operations. We're here to talk about an investment in the vitality of both the English-speaking community and the French-speaking community, as Ms. Kolt was talking about.

Changes in operations and changes in the governance of CBC/Radio-Canada are certainly on the table, but they have to be on the table in terms of implementing what is needed in our communities and across the land.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I think I'm out of time. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll next go to the Liberals for six minutes.

Anju Dhillon, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Pilon, you clearly understand how important it is to broadcast Canadian stories and support Canadian artists. If certain members of this committee achieve their goal of defunding CBC/Radio-Canada, we will lose a major part of our ability to support local talent and to share those stories from a personal and professional standpoint.

Would you please explain why defunding CBC/Radio-Canada would be so harmful to our country's film industry?

Ms. Carol Ann Pilon: It's hard to consider the services that Radio-Canada offers to francophone minority communities and those that the CBC offers as two isolated entities, particularly in the country's regions. While the programming broadcast by the two services may be very distinct, they often share infrastructure and technical and other resources.

This pooling of resources is strategic. If you reduced the CBC's regional services, that would necessarily cut Radio-Canada's regional capabilities. You must bear in mind that regional services have already suffered previous cuts.

It seems to be that merely thinking about the CBC disappearing from the regions causes one to contemplate Radio-Canada doing the same.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you.

I'd like to discuss a lot of topics, but my speaking time is limited.

On the international side, can you tell us how important it is for a country such as ours to have a strong public sector in the arts and information field, particularly considering everything that's going on with foreign interference?

How is Canada perceived compared to other democratic nations?

Ms. Carol Ann Pilon: I wouldn't necessarily dare talk in any detail about how Radio-Canada is perceived compared to other public broadcasters because I don't really have that information.

However, I know that Radio-Canada recently received representatives of public broadcasters who have been part of an association for many years here in Ottawa to discuss that exact question. I believe that the truth is still a major concern for most Canadians. I've previously mentioned that in other appearances. The code of conduct that Radio-Canada has established is one of the strictest in the world, and I think it affords Canadians some assurance that the information it broadcasts is reliable.

• (1320)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you very much, Ms. Pilon.

[English]

Mrs. Kolt, my next question is for you. I'm going to try to lump them all in together.

We heard that there's a conflict of interest with CBC and the government. There are 18 countries with a public broadcaster like the CBC. Do you think they're all in a conflict of interest?

The other part of my question is more like a comment. We're being compared to the U.S., and it's the only G7 country without a public broadcaster. Would you talk to us a little bit about that?

My third question is this: How important do you think it is for us in Canada to have a national broadcaster to protect against foreign interference and misinformation?

Thank you, Mrs. Kolt.

Mrs. Crystal Kolt: In terms of the importance of our independent voices, I think it's imperative. The national broadcasting system is our voice. People are people; they will be enticed by other voices that are around, and right now, with the way the social media

world is going, it is being fed to us very easily and directly. We need to have an independent voice, such as the CBC, to be able to protect us from international interference. I cannot see how that can be possible with other independent private sectors within the media world.

I don't know if that answers one of your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I think our six minutes are up.

Now I'm going to go to the Bloc.

Martin Champoux, you have six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm very pleased to be able to welcome Ms. Charette, who had a lot of technical issues this morning and made a considerable effort to resolve them. Thank you for your perseverance, Ms. Charette.

I listened to the remarks you made during your presentation, and what I concluded from them that we should discuss CBC/Radio-Canada so long that we waste precious time. We need to protect ourselves from things that I don't think are important rather than focus our energies on the future of our public broadcaster. Nearly 80% of Canadians and an even larger percentage of Quebecers agree that has to be done.

I would prefer that we discuss the future rather than waste time defending ourselves against populist remarks that more resemble disinformation than facts and against an argument for cutting or cancelling the CBC's funding. You and I obviously don't agree on that idea.

I know that you took part in a reflection exercise on renewing the public broadcaster's mandate and that you think it's very important that the public broadcaster survive. You represent 6,000 news industry members, including many who gravitate around CBC/Radio-Canada.

What does the future look like for you? What should we do to protect the public broadcaster going forward, in this evolving context, which has vastly changed since its mandate was last revised?

Ms. Annick Charette: There are many parts to your question, but I'll try to give you as brief an answer as possible.

As I said, Radio-Canada is a national treasure and a strong public broadcaster that meets high, internationally recognized standards.

I have in my hand a short quotation from something I read on the UN website. Andrei Richter, a professor at Comenius University, in Bratislava, wrote as follows:

In the modern cacophony of contradicting messages, disinformation and conflicting interpretations of events, [the public service media] is the voice of quality and investigative journalism, of fact-checking, context and reason. In this regard, [the public service media] is capable of establishing a standard for commercial media in the dissemination of timely and reliable information to the public, especially in emergency situations.

I think that tidily sums up Radio-Canada's mandate. What you have to remember is that the government and the Canadian people have mandated that the public broadcaster provide this service across Canada. Radio-Canada has to account for itself to the people of Manitoba, northern Quebec and British Columbia, in particular, and that's what it's doing.

Should we question its budget and management? We should definitely have that conversation so Radio-Canada can modernize. We need to have that discussion, but we have to do it with an open mind. There can be no ideological distractions. We need to give the Canadian people excellent television and continue doing so into the future. It's true that cutting or cancelling the CBC's funding would have an impact on Radio-Canada in Quebec, even though that's not clearly and precisely stated.

• (1325)

Mr. Martin Champoux: I don't think anyone's fooled about that, Ms. Charette. We all understand that that would have a major impact on the cultural and information industries and the French-language services across Canada.

Having said that, I'd like to discuss the funding issue.

As you mentioned in your opening remarks, the public broadcaster's funding amounts to roughly \$33 per Canadian per year. You pay more than that for Netflix, Spotify and a lot of other subscriptions. And yet you'd think that \$33 a year scares a lot of people. You yourself said that the global average is around \$85 or \$88. Every citizen in Germany pays \$100 or \$150 a year. You don't hear the Germans complaining that they pay too much.

Furthermore, the situation isn't the same in Canada. Here the news has to be delivered in both official languages and several indigenous languages.

People often criticize the bonuses and the fact that CBC/Radio-Canada captures part of the advertising pie. Wouldn't the solution be to make sure the message gets through and to sharply increase CBC/Radio-Canada's annual budget on a cost-per-capita basis?

Ms. Annick Charette: I don't think its current funding should just be maintained; it should be increased. We discussed the small media outlets and the people who feel they're competing. You have to remember that, if Radio-Canada stopped advertising, it's advertising revenue would go to private broadcasters. They won't be double-dipping.

On the other hand, I think Radio-Canada's vision should also include the idea of supporting local news outlets by sharing certain parts of its turf with those outlets that also need support, since they can't survive on their current revenue levels.

There may be solutions, but we need to have that conversation. As I said, it has to be done with an open mind. We can't just put the lid on the Radio-Canada pot and say it's worthless now, then set it aside and have to reinvent the model. We have something solid

here, and we have to continue working on it. There has to be accountability, of course. We have a right to question budget allocations or—

Mr. Martin Champoux: —compensation models.

Ms. Annick Charette: That's it: we have to question the compensation models.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Ms. Charette, we've previously discussed the idea of CBC/Radio-Canada contributing, by sharing infrastructure and online resources, to the survival of very small media outlets and independent outlets that are finding it hard to get through this period. I find that very interesting.

Ms. Annick Charette: Thank you.

Mr. Martin Champoux: My time is up, but thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks very much.

I go to the New Democrats and Niki Ashton for six minutes, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Kolt, thank you so much for speaking to us today, for joining us here today, for sharing your visionary work that has given so much to our region, our province and our country. Thank you for sharing your work in the arts, which has lifted up so many northern and indigenous artists across our region.

You've shared a clear message about the importance of the CBC for northerners in rural regions. You've also, though, shared the need for our public broadcaster to invest in regions like ours.

I know you made reference to Peter Mansbridge. Our region used to have a vibrant CBC contingent. In fact, Peter Mansbridge, as we all know, at least here, was first discovered in Churchill and brought on to the CBC. Others, like Cynthia Greer of Norway House Cree Nation was one of the first people across the country to provide local programming entirely in Cree as part of CBC North Country.

Years ago, Eric Robinson worked as a producer and broadcaster for the CBC here in northern Manitoba. He went on, of course, to become a cabinet minister in government. Also, of course, there is Mark Szyszlo, who worked for decades in our station based here in Thompson but was servicing the entire north on the road, connected to communities, sharing our stories—not just, as you pointed out, with our own communities and with each other, but more importantly, with our province, our country and, in some cases, the world.

I'm wondering if you can share with us what it was like, given the work that you do, to have a CBC presence in our region, and what came out of that? Could you compare that to what it's been like since 2017, when Mark Szyszlo left, when we've had our station shut down and intermittent coverage based here in the north?

• (1330)

Mrs. Crystal Kolt: Yes, thank you so much.

When we moved up north, we really were trying to figure out how we would keep connected with the rest of the world. Having a direct line to the world.... I can't express how important it was, because it's so complicated to try to connect when you're so far apart from each other.

I was able to first be introduced to Mark Szyszlo because he was roaming around everywhere in the north. He was in every single community. I was able to call him about...whether it was our first performance in Carnegie Hall or anything we wanted to share, and share that with him. He would be the professional to determine whether or not it was worthy of taking south or further across the country. I trusted his opinion. I trusted his professionalism. I knew that he cared about what was happening in my region and throughout northern Manitoba. It was like a switch was turned off when he was no longer there.

Now, the CBC has tried very hard to try to maintain some sort of communication between the north and south, but it's, I think, virtually impossible to try to do that without boots on the ground up around where we are, because it's just so vast and there are so many things happening. Things are being missed unless we actually have that person there who can support us.

It has been night and day. I have been working very hard to get my message out. However, again, it is...I won't say impossible, because I believe everything is possible in Canada, but it's extremely hard. For me, in the north, I feel like in my world what I'm trying to do is still very much "pioneering". There are still new opportunities every day that are happening, but I need to be connected with my world and my country and my province, and that has been lacking. It's been very difficult the last five years.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for sharing that, Ms. Kolt.

Now, we've heard, and I know you've heard; a number of us have heard that we are slated to have a new reporter, hopefully starting early in the new year. However, many of us have also made clear, given how vast our region is, how diverse our communities are, the importance of supporting this reporter and not just throwing him or setting him or her up to fail. Could you speak to what kinds of supports are needed to make sure that we have a real presence that can stick it out for the long term, as is part of the CBC's mandate?

Mrs. Crystal Kolt: Personally, my opinion is that it goes back to the term "death by a thousand cuts". If you think of any one of us within our lives, if you were trying to do what you were doing in an area that is more than half of your province, by yourself, how can you possibly do everything that needs to be done—see everything, connect with everybody—alone? You need to have the supports.

We can do a lot. Volunteers do a lot, but we're not talking about volunteer positions. We are talking about professionals. We need professional journalists and support teams around to help support the voices of our country.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Ms. Kolt. I look forward to asking you more in the second round.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Niki.

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

I begin with the Conservatives and Mr. Gourde for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Ms. Charette, what do you think is the distinction between Radio-Canada and the CBC?

Radio-Canada seems to be sensitive to its audience and has really good ratings. Its business is doing well. The CBC may not operate on the same format. You can tell me whether or not that's true, but the CBC's business doesn't seem to work as well.

What in particular distinguishes the public broadcaster's anglophone programming from its francophone programming?

• (1335)

Ms. Annick Charette: I won't be surprising you by saying that, for francophones, it's a matter of survival. There may be much broader market offerings for anglophones, and other services may appeal more to the anglophone audience. What concerns me is that the anglophone audience now can't tell the difference between what comes from United States and what's made in Canada. I'm also concerned that anglophones consume media in a piecemeal way.

The obligation to be competitive is one thing, while the obligation to represent society is another. Representing Canadian society means giving it a voice through productions that have yet to be made and that will represent specific issues for Canadians.

I don't know if that kind of production will appeal to the public at large. However, if 25,000 people love opera and you offer them that content, you've effectively achieved your objective. I don't know whether you have to offer more opera-related content, but that's diversity. Broadcaster choices are important.

Quebec has a captive audience because there aren't a lot of French-language offerings. The supply on the anglophone side is extensive, but that has nothing to do with mission or performance. If you assess the public broadcaster based solely on its performance, you've lost sight of the goal of its mandate.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I'd like to ask you the same question, Ms. Pilon. Ms. Charette said that the anglophone side may not be as sensitive or be able to satisfy its clientele's tastes.

What do you think distinguishes Radio-Canada from the CBC? What are the differences between the two audiences, and how do you explain their success or lack thereof?

Ms. Carol Ann Pilon: As Ms. Charette previously mentioned, an incredible range of English-language media content is available everywhere for Canadians. That anglophone content is also available to francophones. We can see that the rate of bilingualism is increasing in Canada, particularly in francophone minority communities. That has always been true in our case. We live and work among them. There is therefore considerable competition between anglophone and the francophone production intended for francophone minority communities.

Since Radio-Canada operates in the regions, it can offer French-language content to francophones in minority communities. It offers news as well as entertainment that's produced, for example, by members of the Alliance des producteurs francophones du Canada. However, francophone communities outside Quebec nevertheless have access to far less francophone content than Quebecers do.

In addition, thanks to its presence, which is required under its mandate, Radio-Canada ensures that it produces content that mirrors francophone communities. This is becoming more important than previously, particularly among young people, because we know how much content they consume on platforms such as YouTube. Many of them are bilingual, and they can therefore consume increasing amounts of media content in English. That's why it's important to continue supporting French-language production and to offer—

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Ms. Pilon—

Ms. Carol Ann Pilon: —the budgets required for those productions so they can compete—

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Ms. Pilon. Here's my final question.

Ms. Martin-Laforge, I want to congratulate you. You've made a lot of progress, and you've been working in your organization for a long time. In any case, we've known each other for nearly 20 years.

You said that the CBC should also have more regional content. Would you please tell us more about the advice you gave to the CBC? I hope they consider it. If they had taken it into consideration, we wouldn't be here discussing this problem today.

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Thank you.

• (1340)

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Martin-Laforge, I'll give you time for a short answer, because we've run out of time for this round. Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Mr. Gourde, thank you for your question.

[English]

I have to say that in Quebec, CBC is managed from Toronto.

Unfortunately, we believe that paying more attention to the English-speaking community in Quebec, certainly in the rural areas, would be very productive for our community, for our young people, and for jobs in Quebec, so more investment in Quebec would be necessary.

I hope that somebody else will ask the same question, so that I can continue my observations.

Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

The Chair: Thank you.

I ask members to please try to keep within the time, because we've gone over time a lot on this round. When I give you 30 seconds, it doesn't mean you can ask a 30-second question. It means you can ask a 15-second question for a 15-second answer. I'm sorry.

All right. Now I'm going to go to the Liberals.

We have Ms. Lattanzio, Patricia, for five minutes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I will take advantage of giving Madame Martin-Laforge the opportunity to continue with her answer. However, I will also ask the following question to her.

According to Stats Canada, as of 2021, Madame Martin-Laforge, there are over one million citizens in the province of Quebec who identify as having English as their first language. Today, we understand that it is now at 1.3 million. Your organization, as we all know, is dedicated to ensuring that the community of English-first speakers in Quebec remains well served and supported, since, of course, they too deserve to know what's going on in their communities. Can you talk about the importance of providing these services and information to Canadians in both English and French, and how the Conservatives' promised slashing of the national broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada, would put these two minority language communities at risk?

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Thank you for the question.

We are very interested in keeping CBC and Radio-Canada working together, because, as other people have said here today, working together is the magic of this public broadcaster.

I don't know if the committee members know of this, but there's a study from StatsCan that is upcoming, the survey on the official language minority population. This postcensal survey was conducted by StatsCan in 2022 to gather detailed information about English-speaking populations in Quebec and French-speaking populations in other provinces and territories. The survey aims to understand various aspects of this community, including access to education and health, and the language practices of every day. This will be incredibly important for CBC/Radio-Canada in the provision of services to the communities.

Also, official language communities don't live just in official language communities. We live with Mrs. Kolt; we live across Canada, so we need to work together to offer official language minority communities access to services in the service of linguistic duality for the public broadcaster.

I would like to say that, Ms. Lattanzio, and that this is a very important survey that I understand will be coming out just before Christmas.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay.

I wanted to know your opinion. Do you think that anyone is better served by more foreign-owned media covering Canadian stories? For example, would CNN cover the Canadian wildfire season or linguistic issues, as we've seen in the last couple of years, as well as CTV or Global News?

Ms. Sylvia Martin-Laforge: Well, let me give you an example of a story that happened in Chelsea, Quebec, a couple of years ago around a young woman in the school system who was, because of the hijab, moved to an administrative job. That was very local. I'm not sure this would have been covered in the French media in the same way as in the English media, whether it be Radio-Canada, TVA or anything else, or whether it would even have reached the rest of Canada if CBC and our QCNA local papers had not been on the ball. We need the combination of media, electronic media and written media, to tell our stories to the rest of Canada. To CNN, no....

People are mostly interested in bad news stories, not good news stories. That's the other part of this. We count on CBC to tell the good news stories coming out of our communities to the rest of Canada—not in an echo chamber, just to ourselves, but to the rest of Canada.

• (1345)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Madame Martin-Laforge, for all that you and QCGN do.

[Translation]

My question is for Ms. Charette

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: You've heard the Conservative members say they're concerned about the layoffs of slightly more than 100 employees, including some whom you represent. You've also heard them say they want to defund CBC/Radio-Canada, which would result in the firing of thousands of people.

What do you think about those two contradictory ideas that come out of the same mouths?

Ms. Annick Charette: Is that question for me?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes, it is.

Ms. Annick Charette: There was a lag, and I didn't hear the question.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Madam Chair, may I ask my question without my speaking time being docked?

Ms. Annick Charette: I heard the question, but I didn't hear my name.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: All right.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, you can repeat the question, Patricia. Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I'll repeat it, Ms. Charette.

You've heard the Conservative members say they're concerned about the layoffs of slightly more than 100 employees, including some whom you represent. You've also heard them say they want to defund CBC/Radio-Canada, which would result in the firing of thousands of people.

What do you think of about those two contradictory ideas that come out of the same mouths?

Ms. Annick Charette: First of all, you have to have grounds for dismissal.

I know that happened in a state of panic. In addition, inaccurate information was circulating about the number of positions to be cut. No firing is ever pleasant. We obviously defend all the people we work with. We still wonder about the effect the loss of a job can have.

As I told you, it has an impact on the teams and the ability to want to invest in them. I work in the cultural sector, not just in that of Radio-Canada. If Radio-Canada were defunded, that would have an incredible impact on productions and the capacity of the production ecosystem in Quebec and Canada.

As I also mentioned earlier, Radio-Canada triggers funding processes and generates productions that meet various standards, and commercial standards, fortunately.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Don't you think that's contradictory?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Charette.

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Charette: You pointed it out—

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to Mr. Champoux for two and a half minutes, but before I do, we have to be able to get everyone across for QP. I'm hoping the Conservatives and Liberals will agree to remove the last two questions at the end of this round.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Can we just shorten them?

The Chair: You could shorten them to two and a half minutes each.

Martin, you have two and a half minutes.

I'm holding you to it, guys.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Given your generous treatment of my colleague earlier, I'd also appreciate some generosity on your part since two and a half minutes is very short.

That being said, Ms. Charette, you partially answered a question that I wanted to ask you about the impact of the CBC cuts on Radio-Canada and on the high-quality content production ecosystem.

Consequently, I'd like to ask you what you think of the report that the Quebec government has in hand concerning the public broadcaster's future.

Ms. Annick Charette: I don't have it with me. Would you please tell me about the recommendations in question?

Mr. Martin Champoux: I thought you'd been consulted on the preparation of that report.

Some of the recommendations may be considered in a future study on the renewal of CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate.

How do you think the Quebec government would perceive its involvement in developing the public broadcaster's new mandate?

Ms. Annick Charette: The Quebec government is quite concerned and has struck another committee on the future of the audiovisual sector for that purpose. It's quite concerned about potential denaturalization, a potential lack of room for francophone production and the addition to our ecosystem of players such as Netflix and Disney. Those companies will obviously have product preferences and will want to maintain products with universal content. I'm thinking, in particular, of anglophone productions whose social approach is more consistent with what's being done in the United States.

Quebec society has particular characteristics. We like a number of things. We want certain values to be reflected in audiovisual productions. I doubt that major producers like Netflix view matters in the same way, and I imagine the Quebec government also has doubts in that regard. So its position is based on certain values.

• (1350)

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'd like to ask a final question, since our time is limited.

According to the surveys, the Conservatives have a good chance of coming into power in 2025. However, they're threatening to defund CBC/Radio-Canada. That will probably also be the case of culture-related content. We're familiar with their legendary fondness for culture, especially when it comes to cutting budgets.

Do you think that the cultural sector, the media in general, and even businesspeople have been mobilized enough and that they're aware of the danger that a Conservative government may present for culture in Quebec?

Ms. Annick Charette: That's what I hope. They should mobilize and be aware of the threat to culture. We will work on that aspect because we take the threat very seriously. Our existence and specificity are at stake, as is our vision of Quebec and Canadian society.

Mr. Martin Champoux: The fact remains that, even if you talk to those people, I don't get the impression that resonates outside the circle of people who are directly concerned. Society in general should really be very concerned about that possibility, but we aren't hearing much about it.

Ms. Annick Charette: I hope we can make our voice heard more in the future.

Mr. Martin Champoux: We'll join forces and keep each other informed.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[English]

Ms. Ashton, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Ms. Kolt, you've spoken about how having a CBC presence helps us share the information we need in terms of world events, politics, arts and culture. It's also important in terms of public emergencies. Significant fires raged in northern Manitoba this past summer, a number of them around Flin Flon. The one by Cranberry Portage, as we know, also very close to Flin Flon, forced a last-minute evacuation. That fire was so intense that it also burned fibre optic lines going to Flin Flon, leaving Flin Flon, one of the largest communities in our region, without Internet for days.

We know that Arctic Radio did heroic work in informing local citizens of that reality, but the reality is that we didn't have a CBC presence here in our north to speak to this public emergency, to speak to the domino effect of what these wildfires meant to our communities in terms of losing Internet service and telecommunications. More importantly, it didn't give voice to this crisis out of our north.

How critical is it to have locally and regionally based media like the CBC to speak to this reality, this precarity, especially as we know that public emergencies like wildfires risk being a more serious part of our reality here in northern Manitoba?

Mrs. Crystal Kolt: I was deeply involved with that particular situation within the city of Flin Flon when that happened. What ended up happening for those three days when we had zero connectivity with the rest of the world was that the little Flin Flon Arts Council had purchased three portable Starlinks. One went to the fire station, so they could communicate among themselves. One went to northern affairs for the evacuees, and one went to the airport so that the planes could land. Other than that, we were completely cut off from the rest of the world.

Arctic Radio—you're right—did an amazing job of helping us communicate. Otherwise, we were literally running from house to house and from office to office to try to find out what was going on and going to happen.

We need to be able to communicate further with the rest of the country and the rest of the province when things like this happen. These things are going to be happening more often than not. It was essential. It was an amazing eye-opener that, in our day and age, this could happen and that we could be so lost without that kind of support. It is critical. We need to be able to communicate with each other and across the country.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

I will now go to Mr. Kurek for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for their contribution to the discussions that we've had today.

Madam Chair, in the last block I mentioned something that was revealed through an access to information request, that the Liberal Government spent over \$970,000 for StatsCan to produce a podcast that garnered a total of 229 subscribers. That was an unbelievable waste of tax dollars, with a return on investment that is dismal at best but truly a colossal waste of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

Madam Chair, I would like to move the following motion that I put on notice on Friday. I hope that it can be passed expeditiously as a clear statement from this committee that this sort of spending is not acceptable.

Given that, at a time when Canadians are facing the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation, recently obtained documents have revealed that the Liberal government has spent over \$970,000 for Statistics Canada to produce a podcast show with only 229 subscribers, the committee call the chief statistician and senior officials from Statistics Canada and report to the House that it condemns this outrageous abuse of taxpayers' dollars.

Madam Chair, I move that motion here today, and I hope that this common-sense motion can find support from this committee.

Thank you.

• (1355)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kurek.

I have a question. Can you clarify the motion? What do you mean by "call the chief statistician"? How do you want to call him—on the phone? How do we call him? What are we doing here?

Mr. Damien Kurek: I am confident that our very capable clerk would be able to arrange, at a future meeting, to have the chief statistician.

The Chair: Do you mean you want to call him to the committee?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Yes.

The Chair: I'll just put that in, then. It will be "the committee call the chief statistician to"... "Invite" is a better word.

Thank you very much.

I think we now have a motion on the floor, but before we deal with it, I would thank our witnesses very much for having attended, giving us good information and being so passionate about the study we're doing. I want to thank you very much while we move into discussing the rest of this.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Noormohamed, go ahead.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I want to thank my honourable colleague Mr. Kurek for bringing this motion. I have a tremendous amount of respect for him, but he did say that this was a "common-sense motion". I fail to understand where the common sense is in having a discussion about podcasts, when their own members are muzzled when they appear on podcasts and say things that their leader doesn't like.

Perhaps the member opposite might consider an amendment. I know they've been shopping this motion at a variety of different

committees. I think we're up to eight now. Perhaps we might amend this motion to invite the member for Peace River—Westlock to talk about his experiences with podcasts and about what happens when he says things that the leader doesn't like or when they are caught off guard.

Let's talk about statistics. At the end of the day, it was the Harper government that gutted StatsCan. It was the Harper government that abandoned the long-form census. It was the Harper government that deprived experts, businesses, stakeholders and researchers from high-quality data in the process, but we know they don't like science, so I guess that doesn't really make much of a difference.

Look, our government believes in evidence-based decision-making and understands the importance of stats and data and connecting with Canadians in a wide variety of ways. I'm not going to defend the podcast, because that's really, I think, a bit of a straw man on this one. I think the real issue is that if Conservatives are really interested in talking about podcasts, why don't we find out why the member for Peace River—Westlock has not been allowed to appear at a committee to talk about his own legislation after appearing on this podcast?

To save our Conservative friends the embarrassment, we're going to vote against this motion and move on, or we may find ourselves amending this in a way that my dear friend may not like.

The Chair: You do not have an amendment.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: No, we're going to vote against this.

The Chair: Thank you.

May I suggest the term "person"?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm sorry?

The Chair: You didn't get that.

I said, may I suggest the term "straw person" as opposed to "straw man"?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Straw person—yes, sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay, Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Jivani, go ahead.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Out of respect for time, I won't speak long. I do think we heard quite a lot of testimony from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation today about abuses of tax dollars. This is very much in line with what our committee has been hearing from the witnesses we have brought forward. This is an egregious example of abuse of taxpayer dollars that does deserve time from our committee. How decisions like this get made that have such little regard for the context of what the Canadian people are going through right now does deserve a serious look.

Thank you.

• (1400)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jivani.

I will now go to Mr. Champoux.

Martin, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, for the same reasons as I stated barely a few days ago, I'm opposed to this kind of motion that's being spontaneously tabled in the last minutes of meetings.

We don't have time to debate them properly or to hear arguments for and against. When we wish to debate motions seriously and rigorously, we will table them when we have time to debate them properly.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Martin.

I will now go to Taleeb.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm okay. I think, if we're ready for a vote, let's go to a vote.

The Chair: All right. If there is no more discussion, I'm going to call the vote.

(Motion negated: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, I will adjourn the committee.

The meeting is adjourned.

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