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Chair: Yvan Baker



Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number 14 of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 25, 2025, we're meeting today to continue our study on the quota of French-language music imposed on French-language radio media.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour. From Cogeco Media inc., we have Caroline Jamet, president, and from Les Productions Normand, we welcome Alexis Normand, artist entrepreneur, by videoconference.

Welcome to both of you. You will each have five minutes for your opening remarks. We will then proceed to a question and answer period with members of the committee.

Before we start, I see Mr. Godin's has his hand raised.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before hearing testimony, I think it's important to be realistic and understand that something particular happened in official languages last week. We lost Mr. Steven Guilbeault, our minister for Official Languages, who was also the minister for Canadian Identity and Culture at the Department of Canadian Heritage.

I know I'm not in line with the required 48-hour notice to study the motion. The plan for Thursday was to hear from the president of the Treasury Board and the minister for Official Languages regarding the situation with the Prime Minister, the use of French and the importance and impact it has on government bodies.

I would therefore like the Chair's consent to table a motion for convening a meeting on Thursday.

The Chair: I will consult the clerk.

Mr. Godin, do you wish to give notice of motion or do you wish to table it?

Joël Godin: I would like to give notice, but the instructions in the motion refer to Thursday, December 4. Yes, I want to table the notice, but I also want it treated as urgent, to fast-track it, so that we can debate it today, because it affects Thursday's agenda.

The Chair: I consulted the clerk. You have the right to give notice of motion, because I gave you the floor. You can do that at any time, but you may do it now because I gave you the floor.

If you want to move the motion, you require the committee's unanimous consent. I'm not the one who decides.

I must inform the committee members about a few procedural points. The first hour is reserved for our witnesses. The second hour will be in camera to discuss a report on another subject.

If you get unanimous consent and table the motion, the committee will be seized with it.

It is therefore up to you, the committee members, to decide. The other possibility is to move it during the meeting's second hour, when the witnesses are done testifying. It is up to the committee to decide, and it is up to you, Mr. Godin, to make your request.

• (1110)

Joël Godin: Indeed, Mr. Chair, I request unanimous consent for us to debate the following motion. I will read out the notice of motion I'm tabling before you today, Tuesday, December 2, 2025, and we will see for the rest.

That, given the resignation of the Honourable Steven Guilbeault as Minister of Official Languages, the Committee instead invite the Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Official Languages, to appear before the Committee for no less than two hours on Thursday, December 4, 2025, regarding the subject matters for which Minister Guilbeault had been invited, and that the clerk of the Committee send this invitation forthwith.

I think it is important to show we want to address official languages, and the fact that there's been a change of minister will not mean the French language is any less vulnerable. It is truly vulnerable. I think it's important to act now.

I therefore request the committee's unanimous consent to approve my motion.

The Chair: You're asking for us to do this immediately. Is that right, Mr. Godin?

Joël Godin: Yes.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent for Mr. Godin to move his motion now?

Ms. Chenette, the floor is yours.

Madeleine Chenette (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): I don't know the rules. I'll say that right now. I don't want to make a faux pas. However, I do not think that, given the deadlines we have, the new minister is ready to meet with us. We must be realistic.

I can understand why Mr. Godin wants to have the minister. I don't know if I am saying "yes" to the motion or "no" to the motion. I do not agree with forcing the minister to come meet with us. Furthermore, it's his prerogative, but it's not realistic to think he could come this Thursday.

The Chair: Several people want the floor; Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, then Ms. Mingarelli.

I want to clarify something, because I want to be sure we understand Mr. Godin's request. We planned to hear our witnesses and proceed with a round of questions, as per usual. What Mr. Godin is asking for is unanimous consent from the committee so that he can immediately move the motion he just read out.

If you give your consent, we will start debating the motion. That is what he is asking. We're not kicking off a debate on the minister's attendance. The question I'm asking committee members right now is this: Do we have unanimous consent for Mr. Godin to move his motion now?

Madeleine Chenette: So, in this context, my answer is no. It's not because I'm minimizing the importance of French and the Francophonie. It's very important and we need to discuss those things presently.

The Chair: We therefore do not have unanimous consent.

We can now move on to statements from our witnesses.

Thank you for being with us. You each have five minutes to give your opening remarks.

We will then move on to a round of questions and answers with committee members.

Ms. Jamet, I give you the floor for five minutes.

• (1115)

Caroline Jamet (President, Cogeco Media inc.): Thank you.

Honourable MPs, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, thank you for granting me the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am Caroline Jamet, and I'm the president of Cogeco Media. We head 21 radio stations in Quebec and Eastern Ontario, which reach nearly 4.5 million listeners per week.

French-language radio advertising is an essential pillar of our culture and local news, but regulatory unfairness in the face of foreign web giants is threatening its survival. To protect our local voices, the government must act now and level the playing field by supporting our industry.

We are passionate about radio. We believe in its unique force as well as in our fundamental role. For more than 40 years, we've been a key player in the free flow of ideas and information, contributing to Quebecois and Canadian culture for the local communities we serve. We are committed to keep playing this role.

French-language music on our airwaves is part of our mission, and so is promoting local artists. We also cover the rich cultural vitality in other areas like film, theatre and books.

We share the goal of promoting Canadian musical content. Our commitment goes well beyond broadcasting music on our airwaves. We conduct over 500 interviews a year with artists, and that's not counting cultural columns and promotional events. Those are all contributions that the Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, does not recognize or measure.

The commercial French-language radio industry is now under threat.

The arrival of foreign digital platforms disrupted Canadians' listening habits. The regulatory framework, created for our industry during the last century, never changed. Foreign platforms are eroding our revenue, and our audiences have no regulatory constraints.

Montreal's French-language music radio lost 40% of its listening hours over five years. On the revenue side, foreign digital platforms, mostly American, attract 10 billion of the \$14.3 billion of the country's advertising investment dollars. Only 30% of advertising revenue reach Canadian media, and barely 4% reach radio.

It is urgent to act, so that our radio stations can keep playing their role.

Furthermore, we are living in a time of growing disinformation, which is eroding our democracy. The journalistic content and local information we offer are more essential now than ever. In a recent SOM poll of Quebecers, 90% of respondents think that the media, including private radio, is important for democracy, and 85% were of the opinion that private radio broadcasts credible information.

Most of the time, we are the only bulwark against the spread of news deserts.

We cover real regional life and communicate citizens' opinions, which foreign digital platforms will never do. CNN and Fox News will never tell the inhabitants of Saint Jerome about local events, or cover the Lake St-Jean International Crossing.

American web giants and large foreign platforms are the source of the crisis we're living through now. Holders of unprecedented market power, these foreign companies are waging unfair competition for audiences and breaking our sector's business model.

We therefore ask the government and the CRTC to act. To do so, the federal government can and must intervene on five fronts.

First, section 19 of the Income Tax Act contains a loophole allowing Canadian advertisers to deduct their advertising expenses when they buy ads from platforms like Facebook. The loophole encourages advertisers to invest in foreign platforms instead of Canadian media. It's incompatible with the issues affecting our local media.

We call on this committee to recommend that the government extend the application of section 19 to foreign online businesses. It would level the playing field and encourage investment in Canadian media.

Second, we are asking for broadcaster incentives to promote buying media from Canadian media.

Third, we ask the federal government to set an example: end preferential purchasing of advertising from foreign digital media, and choose Canadian media instead. Every dollar sent abroad is a dollar taken away from Canadian media fighting for their survival. Furthermore, the public very broadly supports a policy favouring local media. It garnered support from 87% of francophone Quebecers, according to SOM.

Fourth, the government must support journalism. Currently excluded from programs benefitting other media, our ask is for radio to be included in the Canadian journalism labour tax credit.

Fifth, the CRTC must lighten the regulatory burden weighing on our industry, since other platforms have no requirements at all.

• (1120)

Thank you for your time.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Normand for five minutes.

Alexis Normand (Artist-Entrepreneur, Les Productions Normand): Good morning, I am Alexis Normand, a writer, composer and performer. I make jazz-inspired folk music, and I also direct documentaries. In life, I consider myself to be a Franco-Saskatchewan artist entrepreneur. For more than 20 years, my art has explored language, identities and the history of those who are part of the Canadian Francophonie.

I'll start with the obvious: reducing French-language song quotas is a major mistake for the survival of French. For me, a Canadian francophone artist, and for my colleagues, the issue goes beyond language. These cuts would weaken an already fragile cultural ecosystem, which allows our voices to exist on the air. It's a matter of visibility, but it's mostly a matter of identity. Our accents, our dialects and our stories are rarely sung on commercial radio. Quotas are sometimes the only thing guaranteeing that a French-Canadian song will reach the public in Quebec, for example, even if the song is solid, catchy and competitive. Reducing the quota would reduce our chances of being heard to nearly nothing. In my opinion, not only should the quotas be maintained, but a certain percentage should be reserved for the Canadian Francophonie's artists. We deserve to be on the air, to be heard and to see our accents and our experiences normalized. If the quota is cut, it would be to make room for what, more English-language music? Would a 40% quota still mean that it's a French-language radio station? For my album to be considered francophone by the music industry, here in

Canada, at least 70% of the songs have to be in French. Sponsors count the words, in fact. Nothing less than 70% is considered francophone.

I want to express a concern. I remain unconvinced that the shrinking audience for French-language commercial radio has any connection with music in French, especially since English-language commercial radio stations are experiencing the same decline. I'm frustrated to see that reducing the quota is under consideration, since listeners are migrating towards streaming platforms, as there are no ads. I understand that Cogeco's ask is linked to significant financial pressures. I feel a great deal of compassion because my colleagues and I are going through an unprecedented revenue crisis.

The industry is constantly evolving. I have, in fact, never produced two albums the same way. I don't claim to be a commercial artist and I never really wanted to be one. Even if commercial radio was never at the heart of my marketing strategy, I recognize the essential role it plays in the musical ecosystem and I don't want to see it disappear. Weakening language protection mechanisms helps no one. These cuts protect their profit margins.

Instead, we should work together to find solutions that support businesses and protect French. I have four to propose, in fact.

The first solution, we already talked about; it involves regulating digital platforms. They should be subject to French-language and Canadian music discoverability requirements. Using an algorithm-based playlist that, with the help of machines, makes suggestions based on what songs a person previously listened to and the artists they follow on Spotify, for example, would help algorithms find and suggest French-language music. To make Spotify do it, Canadian musical metadata must be normalized and require the inclusion of both language and country of origin. It's common, here at home in Canada, but it's not the standard.

The second solution involves acting in an intersectional way. Last week, on Facebook, the Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario de Prescott et Russell sounded the alarm. Some new car models are now being sold without an FM radio. Before the trend becomes more widespread, the disappearance of FM radio should be dealt with.

The third solution would be to create financial incentives, such as tax credits, encouraging businesses to buy advertising from French-language private and community radio.

Finally, in fourth place, I suggest imposing a minimum quota for French-language music, for example 5%, on English-language commercial radio stations.

The French language would be protected through brave, future-facing choices.

I'm ready to work with you to build a sustainable ecosystem, an ecosystem in which our voices, all our voices, can be heard.

• (1125)

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

We will now go to questions from members.

Mr. Godin has the floor for six minutes.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Ms. Jamet and Ms. Normand for being with us today.

Your testimony was very interesting. We can see that the points of view of the artist and the broadcast company are not all that different.

I'll start with you, Ms. Jamet. At the outset, you talked about the inequity between the regulations that apply to your company and those that are imposed on the web giants. Based on what you said, it's a matter of unfair competition.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

Caroline Jamet: Thank you for your question.

Yes, it's unfair competition because there is currently a double standard in our industry.

On the one hand, Canadian broadcasters are constrained by extremely demanding rules. On the other hand, we have platforms that are not regulated, that are eating into our revenues and taking away our audiences, and that have tremendous resources at their disposal.

Transformational changes need to be made in our industries. We also need to adjust business models to adapt to the market. In the meantime, we are seeing our revenues melt away and foreign platforms' revenues increase astronomically.

I think that, in our society, it is important for private media to be strong. Today, we're in an environment where the public broadcaster is funded and where there's really a steamroller ahead of us, private radio stations. Action needs to be taken. When these rules were imposed on us, those platforms did not exist.

So the system needs to be rebalanced, and it's a matter of urgency. Action really needs to be taken now because, if private media lose their space, who will play that role? Foreign platforms clearly will not.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Jamet.

This is an observation. The broadcasting, audio, television and even newspaper ecosystem is in an anglophone ocean. As you said, regulations were created in the past, but we have to evolve.

What do you think of the idea of bringing together, very effectively and very quickly, industry stakeholders, including artists like Ms. Normand, to find a solution?

I come from private radio and I see that it is on the verge of extinction. It's time to take action, as you said earlier.

Is bringing industry players together and working together a potential solution? You have to understand that the purpose of the motion I moved here at the Standing Committee on Official Languages is not to punish or argue with anyone or to further regulate private

radio stations. Rather, its goal is to figure out with you how to ensure your basic sustainability by enabling our artists to be broadcast through you.

Can the option of a summit be added to your recommendations as a potential solution?

Caroline Jamet: We're always open to discussion. However, you're putting your finger on other industries. You're talking about television. I can also tell you about newspapers. The radio industry is the big forgotten industry when it comes to support. Today, newspapers receive support for journalistic resources. The television model was built so that there would be tax credits to support Canadian production.

Radio funds 100% of its content and receives no support. Radio doesn't get the same treatment as other media. We produce Canadian content, and radio is a partner of choice in the areas of society, charity, culture, information and public debate. That is a fundamental role.

The study I cited earlier—I would be happy to submit it—also shows the extent to which Canadians agree on the importance of that role. I think a special interest must be taken in radio and the support we receive must be considered, as radio is the ultimate local medium.

Joël Godin: As I often say, Ms. Jamet, radio is the medium closest to the usage period, and it's a very interesting selling point for selling advertising on your platforms.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on the federal government's investment. Do you receive any grants from the federal government?

• (1130)

Caroline Jamet: We actually received funding from Google for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, project. It's a small amount. Going back to what I was saying earlier, we don't have access to the Canadian journalism labour tax credit. We don't have access to the credit for television.

To answer your question, the federal government's advertising investment is meagre compared to the investment—

Joël Godin: So you get little to no subsidy.

Caroline Jamet: That's correct.

Joël Godin: In addition, the government is not leading by example; it is investing in unregulated international platforms and neglecting local media, which is radio.

Do you consider private radio to be the sacrificial lamb in the ecosystem?

Caroline Jamet: I think so—

The Chair: There are only 10 seconds left. I'll ask for a quick answer, please.

Caroline Jamet: —and now is the time to act to preserve it because it plays a fundamental role.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Jamet.

The Chair: Mr. Deschênes-Thériault now has the floor for six minutes.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Ms. Jamet, thank you for your testimony.

I think we've heard about the particular challenges of commercial and community radio stations. A wide range of ideas have been proposed for us to consider. I would like us to go beyond the issue of quota cuts today. We've seen the negative impacts that could create, but there are other kinds of solutions that we can look at.

You proposed an incentive for advertising purchases in Canadian media. Can you tell us more about that proposal?

Caroline Jamet: I'm happy to do that. We think incentives need to be created because, as I was saying earlier, the current rules allow a Canadian company to deduct its advertising expenses on Facebook, on Meta. It's not right that companies are still being encouraged to buy advertising outside the country. What we are proposing is a tax credit for companies that invest in local media.

I think that would be a good way to encourage buying local. The federal government has actually announced a buy Canadian policy. Advertising definitely needs to be a part of that.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: In particular, you mentioned the federal government's purchase of advertising, which brings me to my second question.

We know that the federal government has a separate budget for advertising purchases. Various witnesses have told us that a percentage of those funds could be reserved for purchasing advertising in local media.

What is your opinion on that suggestion?

Caroline Jamet: It's certainly a good idea for the government to set an example in its advertising spending by purchasing advertising, first and foremost, in local media. If we want to have a well-balanced system, with healthy private media, we need that investment. There's a lot of communication from the government. First and foremost, it must use local media to share information with Canadians.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: In your comments, you alluded to the regulatory burden faced by private radio stations, beyond the issue of quota. We've heard about the consequences of a change in quotas. I would like to know what other regulatory burdens there would be. Does that involve a number of other regulations? Can you elaborate on that?

Caroline Jamet: I can give you an example. A few days ago, my team emailed me to say that they had managed to complete the work to submit the 115 forms to the CRTC that a large team had been working on for weeks. Those 115 forms took a lot of work. We need our resources to make content.

Right now, the regulatory burden is immense given all the paperwork, all the forms we have to fill out. Of course, some of the contributions we're making are intangible. We do a lot to promote Canadian culture. That is not taken into consideration or measured by the CRTC. We're also asking that all of those things be recognized.

Basically, we're asking that our entire contribution be taken into consideration when it comes to radio stations.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you very much.

I'll now turn to Ms. Normand.

Thank you for your testimony. You clearly illustrated why francophone music quotas are important for our artists. In a francophone minority context, you are at the heart of an identity, you breathe life into French in the public space and you create an attachment to the francophonie.

You raised the subject of online platforms and metadata and offered various potential solutions. What could you add to those potential solutions and to ways we could improve the discoverability of our francophone artists on online platforms?

• (1135)

Alexis Normand: Digital platforms need to be regulated. Like my colleague said, it is urgent.

It is too bad this was not done eight or ten years ago. There is a second type of playlist on digital platforms. Editorial playlists are curated by human beings. It could be a Spotify employee. The solution could be to work with digital platforms to train people in the region to create playlists tailored to the reality of Canadians, especially from the Canadian francophonie.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: You have been in the music business for many years.

We have discussed how music quotas are a tool to ensure airtime for francophone music.

When it comes to more traditional media, such as the radio, do you see other ways, other tools or other mechanisms that can be implemented, once again, to increase the discoverability of our francophone artists?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds remaining.

Alexis Normand: Simply maintaining the current quota would not be enough. Another possibility would be to set aside a certain percentage of this quota for music from the Canadian francophonie. It is lovely to hear artists such as Lisa LeBlanc and Daniel Lavoie singing about our experiences on air, but there are so many more artists to discover, and our voices are hardly breaking through.

It could be a solution to getting our voices heard more.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you.

We have 15 seconds remaining. Would you like to share a final comment or idea?

Alexis Normand: A French-language music quota could be imposed on English radio stations. I think this might also help us.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you.

I am going to run with this.

Do you think that imposing a French-language music quota on English radio stations could help you?

Caroline Jamet: I think they are two very distinct markets. The French-language and English-language markets are very different from one another.

We will have to see whether—

Mario Beaulieu: A number of witnesses were in agreement.

There really are two solitudes.

On the one hand, many anglophones do not know a single actor....

On the other hand, there are 21 radio stations in Quebec and Ontario. What is the approximate split between Quebec and Ontario?

Caroline Jamet: We have one station.

Mario Beaulieu: There is one station.

You are talking about the gradual collapse of the media, and you seem to be attributing it to the French-language music quota.

Is it not somewhat reflective of the decline of French and French-language music consumption in Canada, particularly in Quebec?

Your observation is a warning that there is truly a significant decline in French in Quebec.

Caroline Jamet: We also see young people today turning to platforms to listen to music. Among young people aged 15 to 29, 72% listen to music on foreign platforms, which broadcast very little French-language music. Only 16% of this same group listen to the radio.

I think we need to look at the forest and not just the tree. We must ensure the long-term future of our industry. It will contribute to the vitality of the French language because we are a key player in this ecosystem.

Mario Beaulieu: At the same time, I think if we lower the French-language music quota, it will be the beginning of the end. It's a vicious circle, because the less we hear French-language music, the less inclined we are to appreciate and listen to it.

There are other ways. You have listed some of them. All foreign platforms are exempt from tax measures, even though not so long ago they were supposed to be subject to tax measures. However, the government decided not to do so in order to please President Trump. That did not work out well.

Have you been pushing for this to be implemented? It seems to me that we don't hear much from you. Maybe I have not been looking in the right places.

Caroline Jamet: For several years now, we have been critical about this tax situation and the advantage that companies who invest in advertising outside the country get.

This is the message being sent for the several years now. Mr. Louis Audet was the one who started talking about this several years ago. All media joined us.

I think this is key and it falls under the government's jurisdiction. Action can be taken in that regard.

• (1140)

Mario Beaulieu: It's really unfair, and it doesn't even make sense. Someone thought they would start a business in the United States so they wouldn't have to pay taxes here anymore. It's quite appalling.

I think pressure really needs to be applied. We are being told the government could have recovered \$1.2 billion a year. Could this money have been put to good use to support private radio stations?

Caroline Jamet: Absolutely. Initially, this rule was put in place to support local mainstream media. If someone invested in mainstream American media, they were not entitled to this benefit. However, a loophole was created with the advent of digital platforms, and it has never been corrected.

So this aspect could certainly help us.

Mario Beaulieu: I think this is even essential for culture, for French-language radio stations. With regard to the tax credit for advertising in local media, there are a whole range of measures that can be used. Another recommendation proposes including the journalism labour tax credit for those working at radio stations. It is also recommended that the Income Tax Act be amended to exclude foreign platforms.

Can you think of any other ways to do this? If all these rules were enforced, would you still maintain your request to lower the French-language music quotas?

Caroline Jamet: The downward trend, representing a 40% loss in listening hours over five years, is huge. We believe this trend must be reversed. This requires action.

We are prepared to sit down in a few years' time to see if there is a substantial impact. We are not dogmatic, but something really needs to change. We are truly stunned by the current lack of action. We have been talking about this for several years, anticipating the acceleration that is happening right now. What's more, it is very worrying to see how much young people today are turning to these platforms for their music consumption.

We therefore need media outlets here that are in tune with what is happening as well. That is what we are trying to do.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds remaining, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mario Beaulieu: Can you suggest any other measures we have not already mentioned?

Caroline Jamet: You mentioned the journalism labour tax credit. It is truly critical for radio to be included in these programs. It is essential to have local media. We must put an end to these media deserts. Last year, 40 radio stations shut down. We continue to see media losing ground. It is not just radio stations, but also television channels, newspapers and regional weeklies.

Out of several of our stations, we are the only media outlets still around. I think this is very worrying for our society. The environment must change.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

We will now move to the second round of questions.

Since we have about 15 minutes left with our witnesses, I am going to do what I always do—

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Joël Godin: Can we ask for unanimous consent for the full hour?

I understand that I took some time when I tabled my motion, but I think it was important. Since we will be meeting in camera to discuss committee business, would it be possible to have a full hour?

The Chair: If it is the will of the committee, it will be my pleasure.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: We will nonetheless finish at 1:00 p.m. today.

The Chair: Yes. We will finish at 1:00 p.m.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I am fine with that.

The Chair: We will take 10 to 15 minutes of the second hour to finish the session with our witnesses. We will need five minutes to move in camera.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: I agree.

The Chair: Agreed.

Accordingly, I will grant the same amount of time.

Mr. Godin for five minutes.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Jamet, I'm going to ask you the burning question. If Cogeco Media retains a 65% quota, how much should the federal government give you to remain at that percentage under the same archaic CRTC conditions that currently exist?

• (1145)

Caroline Jamet: I know that, a few years ago, we considered adding a financial component.

What we are trying to achieve is a large audience. If our audience continues to decline, I do not think we will be able to fulfill our role adequately. We want to play a robust role with a long history. That's what matters.

There is an element, then, of scope and presence, and we have to adapt our content too.

Joël Godin: I understand you did not want to put a number on it, but I am going to lead you somewhere else.

Caroline Jamet: Go ahead.

Joël Godin: In the latest budget, CBC/Radio-Canada received \$150 million. Apparently, Radio-Canada radio is not considered a competitor for private radio because it does not carry advertising. Do you know which morning radio show in Quebec City is the most listened to? It's Radio-Canada's. There is no competition

in terms of advertising revenue, but there is competition in terms of audience share. This is therefore unfair competition.

Even though there are no commercials when you listen to the radio, there are commercials on OHdio, Radio-Canada's Internet platform. This is hypocritical of this Crown corporation. What's more, an additional \$150 million has just been invested.

Is this not unfair competition?

Caroline Jamet: It is clear that public broadcasters have resources we do not have. When it comes to advertising, we are transforming our businesses to find advertising revenue in the digital world. However, there is competition because it is not easy to generate advertising revenue.

Currently, we are competing with the public broadcaster, which is already funded. You are quite right.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Jamet.

Earlier, you mentioned 115 forms that must be submitted to the CRTC for compliance purposes. This clearly shows that the CRTC has not kept pace with technological developments. This could be done online, and it would receive the data on a daily basis.

The CRTC therefore has work to do. I understand you are caught between a rock and a hard place, since it is the CRTC that grants you your licence.

Do you believe that the CRTC should use the report we will be submitting here following the witnesses' appearances in order to move forward more quickly and ensure that the fossil known as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission gets dusted off?

Caroline Jamet: You are quite right.

This is an organization that has failed to adapt. We need to change the mindset at the CRTC, which regulates our industry. There has been a lack of action in recent years, which has led to the situation we find ourselves in today. It is therefore urgent that major changes be made to the way we look at what we do; as I mentioned earlier, we must include all contributions from radio.

Currently, we are only looking at one element, and that is unfair. We also have an organization that could regulate foreign platforms, but it isn't. This inequity is causing enormous harm to our industry.

Something needs to change. Indeed, the CRTC must have the courage to implement these changes.

Joël Godin: We need to take the bull by the horns because it's not easy. I understand there is no magic solution, but we need to work with the stakeholders.

I would like to return to the 40% and 65%. Earlier, our artist, Ms. Normand, mentioned the importance of discoverability and showcasing new talent.

We are here to protect both official languages, and the most vulnerable language is French. So let's keep that 65% in mind. Now, if I take into account your interviews, your promotions, your work in the field to earn a larger share, and if we promote a new artist, it's worth a lot within that 65%.

Could this be one among many possible solutions?

The Chair: Your time is up.

Ms. Jamet, I would ask you for a very brief answer.

Caroline Jamet: We want to avoid having to count reports and seconds in a bureaucratic environment where we have to count all these things, because these are things we do.

We would therefore like to see recognition of all the elements you mention, which constitute part of our contribution to culture.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

We will now go to Ms. Chenette for five minutes.

Madeleine Chenette: Thank you, Chair.

First, thank you, Ms. Normand. Your presentation was very clear, as were your recommendations. So I will not be asking you any questions. It is not because I am not interested, but rather because it was crystal clear.

I will take advantage of your presence here, Ms. Jamet, since you have considerable and long-standing experience in the media sector.

Of course, we agree with your assessment of the situation, except for the fact that French getting more airtime on your media is a problem.

I think it's one of the important aspects, while you are presenting all the other elements on which the industry is being fundamentally challenged.

In this context, the CRTC also has a role to play, but with the evolution of the industry unclear, what is the CRTC's role? Which came first, the chicken or the egg? I don't know, but that's where the fundamental problem lies, ultimately.

Therefore, before addressing a broader issue, I would like to clarify one of your five points. Once again, your points were extremely clear; it's just the second one that problematic.

When you talk about media incentives, what do you mean? What would make a difference?

Caroline Jamet: We could actually encourage companies that want to advertise on local media through tax credits and other means to ultimately protect our local media instead of sending our money outside the country. When we do that, we're weakening Canadian media.

Madeleine Chenette: I think the whole notion of advertising is still a recommendation to consider in the short term, but it's just a band-aid. The entire advertising sector has been completely transformed. Algorithms are now able to target us and tell us what we need. That's why the platforms are so strong compared to radio stations. Radio is still in mass communications mode, whereas the platforms are in targeted communications mode. That's why I don't think these solutions are sustainable enough to save the radio industry.

Private and public radio both play a role as democratic institutions in the vitality of our community.

Yesterday, the Regroupement des festivals régionaux artistiques indépendants launched the Observatoire pour la culture indépendante et les festivals artistiques.

We're moving from communication to community infrastructure and democratic infrastructure.

How can we imagine an integrated media model if the CRTC is stuck in a straitjacket? What do you recommend to help us move forward on this?

Caroline Jamet: First and foremost, I think our proposals need to be taken into account and implemented. That would be a good start.

You mentioned the platforms and mass media. I think you make a very good point.

It's important to realize that each radio station has one type of programming. On foreign platforms, it's listener-driven programming. Our challenge is to reach our audience with one type of programming. We can't personalize programming for every single listener. That's what competition is all about. When people leave us, they go to those competitors who don't really play French-language music; they don't really play a role in supporting local culture.

That's why we have to look at the radio model and adapt what we do. We shouldn't keep a system that dates back to the 1980s, because the world has changed; habits have changed. We've told you about trends, and we can see that the trend is downward.

Therefore, we need to change the rules of the game.

Madeleine Chenette: I hear you loud and clear, but personalization is happening everywhere, not only in the media sector. The wave is here to stay. The current model is way too obsolete to deal with that reality.

The goal is to reach young people age 15 to 29 and over who have become accustomed to seeking out a foreign culture. Our Canadian pride is historic, because we didn't have this problem in the past. How can we take advantage of it and breathe life back into the industry, bring back the community aspect and refocus personalization on my community rather than keep a global perspective?

My question is about your audience and the analysis you do. What are you learning about these listening habits and what interests people about Canadian and francophone culture compared to what interests them about discovering the world?

• (1155)

The Chair: We're out of time, but I'll ask for a very brief answer, if possible.

Caroline Jamet: What I'm saying is that our industry is mass media and it needs sustainability.

We play a key role. In the Montreal market, almost 8.5 out of 10 people listen to the radio every week. We still have significant strength. We want to maintain it.

I think the important message is that radio is still a strong medium today. We must have the means to continue to earn revenue in line with our needs, to create our content. We need a more flexible environment. These factors will help us find our place again, because we're local media and we're still very present in people's lives.

Even though people have other choices, they still listen to the radio. Young people are important. We agree on that. That's why we need that flexibility. Being more agile will definitely help our industry adapt. We're trying things out right now, but there are so many stringent rules that we're almost programming with Excel sheets.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu now has the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

I'm going to talk about CBC/Radio-Canada.

The latest budget included \$150 million in funding for CBC/Radio-Canada. Does CBC/Radio-Canada have a lot of advertising revenue? Is there a way to balance that so that private radio stations benefit more?

Caroline Jamet: From a digital advertising standpoint, it's certainly a competitor.

As we try to impose digital revenue on ourselves in this world, it would help our private radio sector enormously if the public broadcaster didn't sell advertising.

Mario Beaulieu: Could we not, for example, increase the quota for French-language music at CBC/Radio-Canada? It already plays a lot, but it seems as though there's a trend towards English-language music. We're also seeing interviews that aren't directly translated on TV.

Caroline Jamet: The public broadcaster has a mandate to promote Canadian culture. It's also a broadcaster that has the means to do a lot of things.

However, in my opinion, the question of the public broadcaster's role and how it can fulfill its role even better to showcase Canadian culture remains entirely relevant.

Mario Beaulieu: Great.

Can you think of any other measures that you haven't been able to talk about yet?

Caroline Jamet: I told you about our measures. As I said, sustainability is extremely important. I think it's important to look at our industry with the specificity of radio in mind.

I would also add that there's a lack of support for our industry. We don't have access to any programs for our content, which we fully fund. Our hosts are often also artists, we do interviews, we're present. If you knew everything we do societally and charity-wise to help communities! That's important.

Mario Beaulieu: What program could provide you with significant support?

Caroline Jamet: Actually—

The Chair: The time's up. You have 10 or 15 seconds to respond.

Caroline Jamet: Any support for radio will bring us sustainability, which in turn will help us play our role, the role we've been playing for years and want to continue to play.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you very much.

Caroline Jamet: Thank you very much, sir.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

I now give the floor to Mr. Dalton for five minutes.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

Ms. Jamet, you told us last month that revenue had declined by 15% over the past 10 years. Is that right? My assistant found that information in her research. There's been a decline in revenue in recent years.

Is it true that there's been a decline?

Caroline Jamet: Absolutely, our industry is seeing a decline in revenue. Most Canadian radio stations are no longer profitable. We're seeing a massive decline in the radio industry.

Marc Dalton: We don't count inflation, so it's not just a decline, but when we see the cost of living and wages, it's getting harder and harder.

You currently have 21 radio stations. Is there a risk that some of those stations will shut down?

Caroline Jamet: We're not there yet; we're looking for solutions today, which is why I'm here before you.

To answer your first question, we wrote off \$88 million in assets at Cogeco Media a few years ago. I just wanted to show you how difficult the financial situation is.

Marc Dalton: So it's really urgent for you.

With regard to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, based on your comments, do you think the rules are from another century or another media universe?

Caroline Jamet: Absolutely. Those rules worked in a different time, in the last century, but now the environment has completely changed. It's no longer realistic to operate under rules from another era.

It makes no sense, and it's hurting our industry.

Marc Dalton: How long have you been trying to convince the CRTC?

Caroline Jamet: For years, we've been explaining to the CRTC that we need some flexibility.

I can't give you the exact number of years, but I can tell you that we've made several attempts in recent years. We told the CRTC what was going to happen. Today, we can see that it's happening. We're in a downward spiral that began a few years ago. However, if we do nothing, it's going to spin faster.

Marc Dalton: Everyone here on the committee wants to see the use of French increase across the country; that's very important. I'd like French to be spoken everywhere, if possible, but I don't want to impose anything on radio stations. It's really about the vitality of your stations and the opportunity to serve your listeners.

Caroline Jamet: Yes. We know for sure that if we continue to do things the way we're doing them right now, we'll get the same outcome. That's why urgent action is needed.

Marc Dalton: How do you explain the CRTC's attitude towards this?

Caroline Jamet: It's very hard to explain, we don't understand it. We don't understand that there haven't been any adjustments, that our recommendations haven't been acted upon over the past few years. It's truly incomprehensible that an organization whose role is to support the Canadian industry doesn't see the impact of its policies, that it hasn't been able to adapt them, that it's let foreign platforms force their way into our markets, eating away at our audiences and revenues, and that it hasn't changed its policies. Since it can do nothing about the platforms, it turns to us, the radio stations, which it can regulate. It gives us more regulations.

I want to mention one thing. At the last hearings, when we received information from the CRTC, its goal was to add more regulatory constraints, which makes no sense.

Things have to be turned around. It's urgent, because we can't go on like this.

Marc Dalton: Okay, thank you.

I had a few questions for you, Ms. Normand. Congratulations on your success as a francophone artist.

I'm a member of Parliament from western Canada. That's where you live. There are no commercial radio stations. We're talking about the survival of commercial radio stations in the east here today.

I may be able to ask you some questions another day.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Mingarelli now has the floor for five minutes.

Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My questions will be for you first, Ms. Normand.

Your directorial debut documentary, *Assez French*, explores your francophone identity in the Prairies. What feedback or reactions from the public have you received since the film came out?

Alexis Normand: The film really hit home with francophones, especially those living in minority communities. The film explains—I put a family on screen that looks like... I put my family on screen. I grew up in an exogamous home. My mother is anglophone and my father is francophone, but he's really assimilated due to Saskatchewan's language laws. This film shows how language and culture are passed from generation to generation. I toured with the documentary, but also with my music. It was my biggest tour ever. I did over 120 shows across Canada, in Quebec and even in France. People are finally seeing themselves on the screen.

People didn't feel they were francophone enough because they have an anglophone parent. Nowadays, there are even more languages and cultures in a home.

I'd say that this film is the project I put together that managed to get people talking to show that there's more than one model for what the francophonie can look like, especially in the Canadian francophonie. In Quebec, it was an eye-opener for people. They know that there are francophones in minority communities, particularly out West. People know very little about us, but they got to see how much we embrace French to keep it alive where I come from. Our voices need to be heard on private stations in Quebec to help us spread that message.

That's also why I'm against lowering quotas.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much.

I really appreciate your comments, because I, too, grew up in a family where my father was francophone and my mother was anglophone, but they were both from Montreal. I had a similar experience growing up.

Have you felt a change since the beginning of your career in how your work as a francophone artist is being received?

Alexis Normand: I would say yes, because, as I did with this project, I have focused mainly on the Canadian francophonie. I passed through Quebec a few times to screen the film, which won a Prix Rendez-vous Québec Cinéma, or Prix RVQC, the year it was released.

I would say that people are seeing each other more and more. My francophonie is fluid in my daily life. I don't live in boxes or frames. It's really fluid. So I think that, for many people, it was important to see that it exists and that it's not taboo, this way of experiencing one's francophonie.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much.

How do you see the future of the francophonie in the Prairies? What role can artists play in its vitality?

Alexis Normand: As an artist, the reason I create is precisely because I see our role. It's because I know that when I put on a show, when I release a film, I create an event that people can attend and we can experience our culture and language together.

So that really gives meaning to my life and career. It fits there. The more I share my work, the better I see that anglophones are curious about French, and I see their openness to the francophonie in general. The French immersion schools here are overflowing with students. Their parents want more music in French.

I think the role of artists in all of this is paramount.

• (1210)

Giovanna Mingarelli: Ms. Jamet, thank you for being with us today, but I don't think I'll have enough time to ask you a question.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our two witnesses once again.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you, Ms. Jamet and Ms. Normand, for being here and for your testimony.

We're going to suspend to go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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