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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, September 22, 2025, the committee is meeting for its study of CBC/Radio-Canada's priorities.

We have with us today, from CBC/Radio-Canada, Madame Marie-Philippe Bouchard, president and chief executive officer.

Thank you for being with us today. We are getting started about 10 minutes late because we had a vote in the House of Commons. I'm not sure if your schedule permits it, but we'd love to have you stay for an extra 10 minutes afterwards. Thank you very much.

With that, we're ready to get started.

You have five minutes, Madame Bouchard, to give us some opening remarks.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard (President and Chief Executive Officer, CBC/Radio-Canada): Madam Chair and members, I welcome the opportunity to meet with you again, this time as president and CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada. It has been a busy 11 months.

[Translation]

When I last met with you, I said CBC/Radio-Canada needed to be a listening organization, that I wanted to take the time to listen to employees, to stakeholders and to Canadians, the users and the non-users of our services. That's what I have been doing, across the country. What I've heard is reflected in the new strategic plan. We'll be sharing that with Canadians at our annual public meeting on October 28, but I think it would be helpful to share the details with you today.

We all know the challenges facing Canadians today: economic and trade pressures; the hollowing out of local news by global digital platforms that now capture 92% of digital ad revenue in Canada, the revenue that once sustained a diverse news ecosystem of community newspapers, radio, even television, all across the country; and the continued rise of polarization and the difficulty in knowing what information is accurate.

What I've heard is that a public broadcaster, serving all Canadians with relevant and reliable news and supporting Canadian culture, is more important than ever. But people expect more from us.

In this environment, CBC/Radio-Canada should be a national public service, helping to bring Canadians together and supporting democracy and the media ecosystem.

To support this public service role, our strategic plan has three pillars: proximity, digital agility and bringing people together.

The first pillar, proximity, means increasing our connections by being present in more communities and offering content that is trusted and also engages those who currently may not use or value what we offer. We also need to be a better collaborator with private and community media to help support a healthy media ecosystem.

Our second pillar, digital agility, means ensuring that our content is easily available on whatever digital platforms Canadians are using, and using technologies like artificial intelligence for the public good.

The last pillar is bringing people together. That means finding ways to build understanding by creating opportunities for shared Canadian experiences.

[English]

We are building on a very strong foundation. Our extensive network of journalists spans 90 locations from west to east and across the north, and in seven foreign bureaus, providing news and information trusted by Canadians.

Our commitment is to homegrown stories. We are the largest single investor supporting the creation of original content by Canadian independent producers. We have the most popular radio shows and podcasts in the country, and digital services used by 21 million Canadians each month.

This year, we've been able to add journalists to over 20 communities in every region of the country, providing a local service to communities that have never had a local CBC or Radio-Canada service and sharing their perspectives with the country.

Through our collab program, we are partnering with local public libraries in more than 250 communities. There, we're offering programs tailored to what the community wants from us. Sometimes it's workshops on video production or how to make a podcast. Sometimes it's sessions on spotting fake news or recording television and radio programs with a community audience. That's also proximity.

Finally, we'll keep listening to Canadians. We'll listen, and we'll adapt, so that we can increase the public value created for their benefit.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: That was even less than five minutes. Thank you very much.

We'll now start with questions from Mrs. Thomas with the Conservatives.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Ms. Bouchard, I'm sure you're familiar with Travis Dhanraj, of course. He worked for the CBC as the host of the show *Canada Tonight*. He aimed to give multiple voices and perspectives an opportunity to share on his show. Unfortunately, due to the culture that was created within CBC's workplace, he was forced to resign. In his resignation letter, he described CBC's workplace as facilitating a culture of "retaliation, exclusion, and psychological harm."

How do you respond to these allegations?

• (1545)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: As you know, Mr. Dhanraj has filed a complaint with the Human Rights Tribunal. Unfortunately, I am limited in the comments I can make, because we are going to hear the evidence at that tribunal.

Rachael Thomas: I'll just set the record straight right here. At this committee, you do have the ability to be open and honest. Everything you say here is, of course, kept in confidence. It's not usable in court.

I would be curious as to how you would respond to that.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: This is not my interpretation of my responsibility. We are in a court litigation or quasi-judicial tribunal litigation. With respect to that process, I will reserve my comments.

Rachael Thomas: Is it true that there's a culture of toxicity at the CBC?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: That's not what I've experienced. You may know that I worked with the CBC prior to coming back as the CEO. I worked there for almost 30 years. I was away for 10 years, and since I've been back, I've been travelling and meeting with a lot of our employees and a lot of stakeholders. I have not witnessed what you describe as a culture of toxicity.

Rachael Thomas: Those were the words of a former employee, actually; those are Travis Dhanraj's words, not my own. He would speak from his experience there.

I'm curious. Have you looked into his case at all since becoming CEO? You have had 11 months to do so.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Again, I cannot comment on his specific case.

Rachael Thomas: I'm not asking you to comment on the specific case; I'm simply asking you if you have looked into it. Have you looked into his complaints and his concerns?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: There are people in the organization who are charged with doing that, and I trust that they have.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. As CEO, you have not, but you have simply allowed others to do that work for you.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: As is natural in a large organization, I don't actually double up on everybody's responsibilities.

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Bouchard, as is natural in any organization, the buck stops with the CEO—the person at the top. They are the person responsible for cultural formation, and the culture at the CBC, according to Mr. Dhanraj, is one of toxicity. It's one where there is "retaliation, exclusion, and psychological harm" being done to employees. You're telling me that doesn't concern you enough to dig into that on your own. You're telling me that you simply stepped aside and allowed others to deal with that.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I would tell you that we conduct surveys on a regular basis of the work culture and the employees' perception. One individual's claims do not make a whole organization's culture. What I have as evidence, first of all, is my own experience in the organization in the last 10 months but also the responses to surveys that we conduct regularly with our employees that describe their sense of pride and their sense of fairness in the organization, and those surveys show that the sentiment is widely positive.

Rachael Thomas: Are those surveys anonymous?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Yes, they are.

Rachael Thomas: Excellent.

In a leaked phone call, Mr. Dhanraj asked the CBC management why they, the CBC, can't get interviews with Conservatives. The CBC management replied vaguely, saying, "Well, you know why."

I'm curious. In your estimation, why are Conservatives not welcome at the CBC?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I would say Conservatives are quite welcome at the CBC. In fact, they are interviewed regularly.

Rachael Thomas: Give me examples of the last five Conservatives who were interviewed on a show within the last two weeks, anywhere within the CBC.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I can't answer that. I can get back to you and give you more detail. I don't watch and listen to everything we broadcast on a continuous basis. If you would like, I will provide those numbers.

Rachael Thomas: Which show offered by the CBC do you think is most fair—offers the most diverse views—in terms of news coverage?

• (1550)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, all of our shows, especially in the news area, are governed by the same journalistic standards and practices. I would say—

Rachael Thomas: Are you saying all of them are equally diverse?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I would say they are all striving to achieve the proper balance in terms of subject matter, interviewees and diversity of points of view.

Rachael Thomas: So there would be no bias at the CBC.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, I would say that's not our policy. That's not our practice. I'm not oblivious to the fact that some people claim there is bias, but that's not how we work.

Rachael Thomas: What's your perception? You're the head of the organization.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: My perception is that we are working very hard to try to bring accurate, fact-based news and information to Canadians every day.

Rachael Thomas: There's no bias at the CBC, according to you.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: There's no bias, according to me.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. Interesting.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor for six minutes.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): Good afternoon, Ms. Bouchard.

In two minutes, can you tell us how you see CBC/Radio-Canada's role in the Canadian digital landscape in an online world full of disinformation?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: As a public service media outlet, we play a particularly important role in the digital age. For many years, we have helped transform the relationship between Canadians and their public broadcaster. We have gone from a traditional, linear and analog mode of transmission to a digital one. We were pioneers in this area and we continue to be. This is very important, because Canadians are increasingly exposed to information from foreign sources, which dominates social media in particular.

Canadian news has become even more scarce in the lives of Canadians since Meta decided to block publishers of Canadian news content on its sites. Therefore, we need to work harder to ensure that Canadians can discover and access Canadian content in French, English and eight indigenous languages. That's our mission.

We also work very closely with international partners and other stakeholders to develop practices that help restore a semblance of civilized dialogue. We know that social media algorithms lead to polarization by rewarding extremes. There's little room for open dialogue and common understanding.

We're working on coming up with tools that will be available to anyone who wants to use them, including news publishers, so that people can have civilized discussions about current affairs. The purpose of public service media is to work toward the common good and create value for the public.

• (1555)

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Since you mention redoubling efforts, how can CBC/Radio-Canada better meet the needs of citizens on the South Shore, particularly in my riding of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, in terms of local news and French-language content?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Francophone content has been our business for a very long time. As you know, we have close ties with francophone communities, both in major centres and in regions outside Montreal, as well as throughout Canada, in all communities where there is a francophone presence.

We do this not only through our traditional stations, but also through digital tools that allow us to create hyperlocal content, such as hyperlocal newsletters or news summaries in the form of vertical videos that are easy to discover and view. This allows communities to see themselves continuously rather than at set times or limited appointments on national broadcasts. This promotes continuity in relationships.

In addition, the presence of journalists in the field allows communities to express themselves and be seen not only at home, but across Canada.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: I'm going to talk about diversity now.

I've heard about diversity and I've seen it on screen. Could you explain CBC/Radio-Canada's current objectives in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion?

I am referring as much to representation on screen as to internal content and organization, particularly with regard to the recruitment, retention and promotion of talent from under-represented groups.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Before I took up my position, the organization had already put in place a plan to promote equity, diversity and inclusion. The results of this plan are available for your review. However, in the new strategic plan, we reaffirm the importance of reflecting Canada as it is today, taking into account the diversity of the communities that make it up. It is also important that this be reflected not only in our team and our staff, but also on screen.

We are therefore working closely with organizations such as the Indigenous Screen Office, or ISO, and the Black Screen Office, or BSO. We are collaborating with entities that help us develop production capabilities from these communities. We promote and develop projects.

When it comes to hiring and promotion, we have internal programs that aim to identify the leaders of tomorrow. The goal is to facilitate things, to overcome any organizational barriers that may remain in order to develop talent, who will then be able to take on positions of responsibility or develop their skills in various areas.

We therefore pay particular attention to achieving these objectives.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bouchard.

Mr. Champoux, you now have the floor for six minutes.

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

Good morning, Ms. Bouchard. Thank you for being here today.

This is a great opportunity to learn a little about the status of your work. I know you have been very busy since you took office 11 months ago. I am thinking in particular of all the planning work that lies ahead for the coming years.

You recently published your five-year plan, your strategic plan.

Before addressing specific points in your strategic planning, I would like to hear your thoughts on how these discussions went. I am referring in particular to information. Let me explain.

We live in a world, an era, where news is confronted with misinformation and disinformation. Facts become falsehoods, truths are twisted. I imagine this represents an incredible challenge for journalists.

However, as a public broadcaster, you must ensure that you provide information that is neutral, and as objective and factual as possible.

How do CBC/Radio-Canada's news professionals present this challenge to you?

How could you address the public broadcaster's obligation to report the news, notwithstanding the fact that a large part of the population is looking for news that is often prefabricated, somewhat distorted, and generally reflects their mood and the state of the day?

I would like to hear your comments on what this challenge meant in the discussions you had with your teams.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: First of all, I'm not convinced Canadians are looking for misinformation. I think it's more that it finds them, and they get caught up.

That said, regarding the way people consume information, I would say they are more on the receiving end, because news is now streamed, like the news feeds on X, Facebook and many others. There's a ton of them out there.

Thankfully, sources like CBC/Radio-Canada are more thorough. Some private and community media are also available on digital platforms, and people are still turning to them.

Yes, we have to compete for our audience's attention, but our surveys show that people don't question the reliability of our services. Canadians still trust the information we provide.

The trick is making the information available to them when they need it on the platform they use. We have no problem reaching people on our platforms, whether it's the CBC News website or the Radio-Canada Info app. However, some people don't visit our sites, because they're glued to other media, like YouTube.

Part of our strategy regarding those who don't visit Canadian news platforms will be to meet them where they are and bring that content to them, to make sure they can find it, so it becomes a daily news source.

● (1600)

Martin Champoux: We agree that on platforms like X, there are more comments than news.

It seems to be the new thing. People tend to get their information from comments more than traditional news sources, like CBC/Radio-Canada. Maybe that's the challenge for your news rooms, fighting a style, in this case commentary, that they can't use, since commenting is not part of journalism.

Do your offerings focus more on that aspect? You offer a lot of programs, for example, that invite commentators of every stripe, sovereignists, federalists, Conservatives and Liberals.

Do you feel obligated to provide these types of programs to reach an audience that wouldn't turn to you otherwise?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Inviting commentators is part of a balanced way to share information.

There are facts, and there is on-the-ground reporting. We feel on-the-ground reporting is important, which is why we want to be more present on the regional and global stages. There are few media organizations in Canada with the capacity to provide international coverage. It's a very important element to keep Canadians informed of what's going on in the world.

It is also important to offer different news formats depending on how people get their information, including formats adapted to young audiences, like our *Mon actualité jeunesse*, or MAJ, section. It presents current affairs in a way that is tailored to teenagers. We also offer the journalism laboratory Rad, which is intended for young adults.

We have to keep developing formats that reflect how the demographic groups we want to target get their information.

Martin Champoux: Among the groups you're targeting or trying to reach are those who don't use your platforms and those who often criticize or disparage CBC/Radio-Canada.

How are you reaching those who criticize your organization?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I observed a real paradox in my first few weeks in this position when I visited the local news team in Calgary. I saw what a strong and effective newsroom it was, which explains why CBC Radio One ranked first in the Calgary market. The fact that the journalism we provide is so popular in Calgary must mean something.

Calgary is not the only city where our radio offerings rank first. The reason is that the services are local. Local service fosters trust.

Across all our service offerings, we realize that we need to keep nurturing this local connection through our digital platforms, as we've done so successfully with radio.

Martin Champoux: We can come back to local and regional news later, since that should be an interesting subject over the next few weeks.

Thank you.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: For the second round, we'll go to Mr. Diotte for five minutes.

You have the floor.

Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Thank you.

Thanks for being here, Madam President.

I wanted to tell you a little bit about myself. I have a great interest in the media myself. I was a journalist for three decades before getting into politics. I was also president of the Edmonton chapter of the Canadian Association of Journalists and a national director of that association. That association is all about trying to make journalism better. That's a driving passion of mine to this day. I think we need better journalists, we need more of them and we need them to be balanced.

Now, we've heard allegations from Travis Dhanraj, who is not some rookie, some kid. We've heard allegations from your former employee that CBC was not balanced and is not fair and objective.

How do you address that severe criticism? What do you say to that?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I say that we strive to be balanced. Are we always, every minute of every day, managing that? It's impossible to do that every minute, but overall we are striving to be balanced.

Mr. Dhanraj is talking about his own experience. Again, I said I wasn't able to comment on that.

We are aware that it is something that we need to work at all the time.

• (1605)

Kerry Diotte: Why do you think you need to work at it all the time? Do you sense that there's not the balance that you would like?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It's very difficult to measure output. It's easier to measure the perception. We do measure perception. Overall, the perception of balance is still very much measured around Canadians, but there are areas where we see that the numbers are a little lower. The numbers we get from the surveys we conduct about the perception of balance I think are a function of the fact that maybe we're not present enough in those locations.

Kerry Diotte: Are you—

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'm tying it in to the local service as a way to create that sense of inclusion, of reflection, that then draws into balance.

Kerry Diotte: This is particular to Alberta. I believe you've had surveys that indicate that Albertans do not.... They're not your biggest fans.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It's Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Well, again, it's a paradox, because radio is very successful, but Alberta and Saskatchewan are areas where we need to invest.

Kerry Diotte: Why do you think people in Saskatchewan and Alberta don't trust the CBC or feel that it's not balanced?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I wouldn't say people in general don't trust the CBC, because that's not what the evidence or the surveys reveal. The level of trust is not as high as we would like, but it is still the majority of people who trust CBC.

Kerry Diotte: Could you extrapolate a little bit on the level of trust? What don't they trust? What is that survey telling you?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The survey doesn't tell me exactly why their sentiment is what it is. They answer the question—

Kerry Diotte: It's not a very good survey, then.

Aren't you trying to gauge trust and balance? As a long-time journalist, that's the premier thing that you want to achieve.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: You get a sense of that when you are in the field with the people. When you are boots-on-the-ground, reporting what's going on in the community, what the preoccupations are, I think that's how you enhance the sense of inclusion and the sense of trust.

Kerry Diotte: Thanks. That's a little vague.

As far as balance goes, I'm wondering if you would agree to table the last five Conservative voices that were on CBC News over the last two weeks. You were asked that previously, and we'd like to have it provided to the committee no later than October 30.

Is that fair?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'm assuming that's possible.

Kerry Diotte: Okay, so you'll do that.

There's an organization called AllSides media. It looks at media bias. Here's an example of how they rated some media outlets. They rated The Atlantic, The Guardian and The Huffington Post as left-wing media. They gave centrist ratings to Reuters, The Christian Science Monitor, Forbes magazine and The Wall Street Journal. They listed right-of-centre media as Fox News, National Review and The Epoch Times.

Do those sound about where they should be? Would you agree with that list?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, I've seen those kinds of surveys, and it sounds.... That's about what I've seen from those surveys.

Kerry Diotte: Okay, so—

The Chair: That's your time.

We'll go over to Ms. Royer now for five minutes.

Zoe Royer (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Marie-Philippe. I'm very pleased that you are here.

I'll start with a follow-up, in the spirit of fairness. While you are preparing that report, it would also be good to know how many Conservatives were asked for interviews but declined, particularly in the lead-up to the election.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I think we can certainly add that information in.

Zoe Royer: Thank you.

There's an important distinction between a public broadcaster and state media. Just because a broadcaster is publicly funded, that does not make it state-controlled media, as you know. To be clear, the CBC is a public broadcaster, not state media. It operates at arm's length from our government.

Marie-Philippe, can you walk us through the key measures that ensure the CBC's independence and explain why it is inaccurate to compare it to state-controlled media?

• (1610)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: There are many things, but it's built into the Broadcasting Act. The statement is very clear that all the framework around the CBC, from its governance to the span of regulation that the CRTC exercises, is there to safeguard the independence of the corporation vis-à-vis government in terms of its editorial and creative freedom. We do have responsibilities in terms of accountability for the management of the appropriation that we get, but we are independent from all government interference in terms of editorial direction and creative freedom.

Those are the main aspects, but it's also verified by various organizations. We get verification of our independence through the Journalism Trust Initiative, which certifies organizations worldwide as to their independence.

Zoe Royer: Thank you. I really appreciate your response.

CBC/Radio-Canada's 2025-30 strategy defines it as a national public service media organization that belongs to the public and creates public value by fostering democratic life and cultural cohesion. How do you measure that public value today, especially in an era when trust in institutions and media is declining?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: We measure public value, first of all, by many dimensions.

The first one is use. How many Canadians use us and for what amount of time during their week or their month? That can be measured across platforms: time spent and reach. That's a value to Canadians.

We also measure how they perceive our service in terms of fairness and balance, but also reflection of their community, information about their concerns and reflection of the diversity of the country.

We measure our impact economically. We are an important trigger for expenditures in the creative sector. We have a wide span in that way, and that creates value for Canadians.

We also want to measure the value for our employees. This is a large organization, and we look at various KPIs that value the experience of being an employee of CBC.

Zoe Royer: Can you very quickly describe an example where CBC's independence has been tested and upheld?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Oh my god, that's my day-to-day life.

First of all, there's the independence of the newsrooms. Our structure is such that we do protect the call- and decision-making capacity of our heads of news. They are at a distance from other considerations or from senior management.

We also have independent ombudsmen who can look at complaints from the public about the application or use of our journalistic standards and practices. They are completely independent from the newsrooms, and they can give advice and render decisions on whether or not the JSPs, the journalist practices, were respected in a particular case. That's another sign of independence and of value to Canadians, because we are creating a framework where they do have a recourse and they can be heard.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Bouchard, your strategic plan covers a period of five years, from 2025 to 2030. Technology has moved so fast over the last few years it makes your head spin.

Does your planning take into account the possibility that traditional television might totally disappear from our media landscape by 2030?

• (1615)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Traditional television, so using linear antennae, is still popular, especially in the francophone market. In fact, this market is still quite vibrant, even among groups consisting of younger viewers.

Linear television viewing has decreased further among younger audiences, but the format is still more popular than it is in the anglophone market. As long as people use this traditional media, I don't think we should stop providing the service. Some generations will continue to value traditional, linear forms of media.

Martin Champoux: You realize that CBC/Radio-Canada might be the last of the Mohicans, so to speak, when it comes to linear broadcasting and the availability of programs on traditional television?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It's all about market dynamics. The format is still popular with francophones, because we are among a number of players providing the service.

We're also very worried about our colleagues' future. They're having a hard time. It is public knowledge that advertising revenues have gone down. The resulting context makes it hard to maintain such a strong viewership. That said, this linear viewing format is important, because it helped francophones stay in touch with their culture and French content.

In contrast, when your audience is scattered across the digital space, you lose part of your global audience. Our industry must therefore protect this critical mass, regardless of the technological format we choose.

Martin Champoux: That's reassuring.

You also talked earlier of possible co-operation between CBC/Radio-Canada and regional broadcasters to ensure high-quality media and journalistic coverage in the regions.

Have you explored the idea further? Have you talked to potential partners?

Are private regional broadcasters interested or open to the idea?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I've met with many of my colleagues in the francophone private and community media sectors, as well as representatives from the anglophone media sector, specifically here and in northern Canada.

I always start by asking them how things are going, and to tell me what's working and what they need.

Then, we focus on what we could do in our operations to support what's going well and look at what can be done in the future to foster this support. It might be reducing constraining costs. I'll give you an example. During an election, polling costs could be shared among different media outlets to reduce costs for everyone. It could also be sharing images from an event for free.

We try to determine what we can do to help them reduce their costs, so they can invest in a specific type of coverage that sets them apart.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Waugh, you have five minutes.

Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome again, Madame Bouchard.

I looked at your five-year plan for CBC. Right at the top, you talk about accountability and transparency. Those two should be on the top for any organization, yet to date, you've refused to provide any accountability to Canadians by sharing the numbers of CBC Gem. That's an issue.

We talked about it here with your predecessor, Ms. Tait. She said that it was going well and that there were two million on-and-off viewers, yet the subscribers vary. There's the Olympics, so they come on and watch the winter Olympics, and then they leave.

Why aren't you disclosing those numbers for CBC Gem? Your competitor may be Crave from Bell Media, and they're trumpeting four million. Why would you not disclose the CBC Gem numbers to the public, if you're all about accountability and transparency?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The way people subscribe to platforms such as Gem or Crave is evolving quickly. It used to be that everybody was behind a paywall, and CBC was offering a hybrid model with both TOU.TV and Gem. First of all, Gem was completely free, and then we added on a tier of subscriber features, which were essentially about being able to watch without advertising and having access to CBC News Network. These are considerations that are at play in the negotiations that we have with distributors, with bundling. These are issues that are discussed under confidentiality when we are negotiating.

The fact of the matter is that the CRTC, which is the body that governs all of the telecommunication and the platforms, considers this type of information specifically and treats it as confidential.

We have a situation where we have the Information Commissioner, who came to a conclusion, and we have the CRTC, which considers that to be confidential. We really have a conflict of interpretation.

• (1620)

Kevin Waugh: Why are you hiding it? Are you embarrassed about the numbers of CBC Gem?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: No.

Kevin Waugh: Why don't you come out and just say, "Here are the numbers we have"?

You started CBC Gem in 2019. Now you have a five-year mandate that you released last week. Give us some numbers.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, I can give you a number of 5.3 million. That's the number of people who have created an account. That's not necessarily—

Kevin Waugh: Are they paying?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: No, not necessarily. The number of people who are paying is a number we keep confidential for competitive reasons.

Kevin Waugh: Yes, I understand.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It is validated by the CRTC.

We're asking the court to simply reconcile these two interpretations that are contradictory. That's what we're doing.

Kevin Waugh: How much money have you put into Gem in the last five years? Do you know that number?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't have that number.

Kevin Waugh: Could you bring that number forward?

We had Ms. Tait here glowingly talking about Gem and about how it's doing. We'd like to know how much money you've put into Gem. You have a five-year commitment here that you released last week. You want more children, more newcomers and more youth. You want to get non-users involved, and you want dissatisfied users to come on board.

How are you going to do that when you're not really accountable and transparent with your numbers?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Mr. Waugh, our accounts are public. There's lots of transparency around how CBC receives and manages public funds, and our commercial revenue as well—more transparency than most.

Specifically, on Gem, I would just like to point out that there's the platform in terms of technology, and then there's the content. The content is multi-use. It finds its way on various platforms, to use that term. It can be on linear TV. It can be on Gem. It can be on third party platforms. It's difficult to circumscribe what you're asking because—

Kevin Waugh: Could you do your best for the committee? Bring some numbers in the next couple of weeks while we're asking certain—

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The number I can speak to eventually, because I don't have that right now, is how much we've invested in technology. In terms of content, that would be impossible to determine, because of the multi-use content.

Kevin Waugh: Then just give us the number that you've invested into Gem. That would really help, I think. It would help because it's one of your growing platforms, as you mentioned. Radio and TV are dying.

Could you bring those numbers forward?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I wouldn't say that radio is dying. In fact, we are still very successful with radio.

Let me see what I can bring forward.

Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Al Soud, you have five minutes.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's great to see you, and it's great to be back in committee.

Madame Bouchard, I would like to thank you as well for taking the time to be with us. I would also like to congratulate you. I know that it was only in January that you started your mandate, but it was announced in October a year ago. Congratulations on that.

Last week, like many of my colleagues, I had the privilege of spending much more time than usual in my riding. This also meant that I could attend things that I might otherwise have missed. On Thursday, for instance, I attended a parliamentary workshop with some brilliant students. Of course, I'm biased. I'm a UTM graduate. We talked about a lot of different things—parliamentary procedure, being young in the world of politics, artificial intelligence and energy innovation. The conversation that stuck with me most was on polarization.

Canadians, especially young Canadians, are tired of watching politics take precedence over priorities. In a study by the Public Policy Forum in August 2023, more than 70% of respondents said that Canada was moderately to severely polarized. More than 45% expected it to get worse over the next five years. Some 25% are very or extremely worried that Canada itself is threatened by these political divisions.

I have three questions for you. That's a lot of questions, so if you'd like to take much of the time, that's perfectly okay. If not, I have other questions, I promise.

First, could you briefly speak to this rising trend of political polarization and how it might impact the work done at CBC/Radio-Canada?

Second, what role do you believe media might have played in propagating this trend, but also, what role do you believe media could play in terms of fixing or at least helping fix this trend that we've seen?

● (1625)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It certainly has transformed the landscape and the expectations of audiences as well. It's evident in many, many ways in the reliability of the information they see. We see also, with the AI tools that are now being deployed—sometimes for the better but a lot of times for the worse—a manipulating of pictures and making believable something that is completely fictitious.

That's a serious concern. That's a concern that we navigate through, even in our reporting, on a daily basis. Our reporters are faced with people who are less likely to consider speaking to reporters, simply because they don't know whether or not they can rely on what they see. That's a global problem for all the media. It's not specific to CBC/Radio-Canada, but we are very much in the field, in these situations, so it does impact us.

What can we do? We have already started, and I think we need to expand on it, to invest in media literacy through tools that are available to everyone. By having specific beats for journalists who explain how certain facts were distorted by certain sources, people develop their own ability to distinguish between fact and fiction and manipulation and disinformation. I think we could, as a media collectively, and with schools and universities, do a lot more in that area. We do in fact have a program where we go into universities and have these discussions as Radio-Canada and CBC with students about how they can arm themselves against the risks of disinformation and manipulation and how to better identify reliable sources and question what they see. I think we need to invest collectively, but CBC/Radio-Canada has potentially a leadership role. We've developed tools. We can share them.

I was speaking earlier about the conversation on comments from users. You see horrible stuff sometimes, to the point where some stories are just closed to comments. It's just not possible to entertain that kind of conversation. It's not a conversation. It's a shouting match. It's insulting. We need to re-establish a space where people can have a reasoned conversation and learn from each other. We are working with partners on developing such a tool. It won't replace the big platforms, but if we can give a taste of having civilized conversations somewhere, maybe it will give people a sense that it can be something else. It can return to something a little bit more helpful—useful to open your mind so you can make up your own mind. I think that's the most tragic thing: If we end up as people not being able to decide for ourselves, because we don't know what's true and what's not, or what we can rely on and what we can't, then that becomes really a threat to democracy.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you. That was perfect.

The Chair: That was very well said. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor for five minutes.

Bernard Généreux (Côte-du-Sud—Rivière-du-Loup—Kataskomiq—Témiscouata, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Bouchard, thank you for joining us today.

I like numbers. CBC/Radio-Canada's total budget for 2024-25 was around \$1.4 billion.

Have you received or will you be receiving the \$150 million the government promised?

Is that amount included in your annual budget for this year?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: No. The \$1.4 billion is a budgetary allocation. It's not our total budget. It doesn't include our own-source revenues.

• (1630)

Bernard Généreux: In past years, your organization gave bonuses to senior executives.

Out of the 7,000 employees at CBC/Radio-Canada, how many are considered senior executives?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: If I remember correctly, we have about 1,200 managers, including 200 senior executives. The 1,200 managers and professionals are what we call non-affiliated

employees, meaning they are not unionized and they have certain responsibilities. Senior executives represent the smallest group.

Bernard Généreux: Were the senior executives the only ones to benefit from the bonuses handed out by your predecessors, or did all 1,200 managers receive them?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: All 1,200 managers received the bonuses.

Bernard Généreux: You decided to put an end to the practice. However, your payroll still went up by \$40 million this year.

Why is that?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It's actually \$37 million, not quite \$40 million, and it includes the pay increases for all unionized employees, so 80% of our workforce.

The amount you're referring to, which is closer to \$37 million, reflects an increase in the total payroll, including the negotiated increases in the collective agreements for our unionized employees.

Bernard Généreux: Are the collective agreements set for three years?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It varies, but I think they're all in effect and will probably expire in 2026 or 2027.

Bernard Généreux: If I understand correctly, the government has yet to give you the amount it promised, but should do so in 2026 or 2027, before the pay increases come into effect.

Is that right?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't know. It all depends on what parliamentarians decide when they vote on the budget. I don't have any information on that.

Bernard Généreux: If that's not the case, then the pay increases would use up a large portion of that money, which means there might not be any new services offered.

Is that correct?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't think we can come to that conclusion, no. The pay increases given this year were already planned.

We're starting a new budget cycle, and we're waiting to see what Parliament's decision will be regarding the budget.

Bernard Généreux: Could you send us a document, which would obviously remain confidential and available only to committee members, showing the salary increases for these 1,200 executives? This would give us the chance to compare these increases with the previous system, which included bonuses.

I'm an entrepreneur. I know that bonuses aren't guaranteed every year. Some years, business can be tough.

Are bonuses paid based on specific criteria? I believe that, at the time, they were based on certain performance criteria.

Given the end of bonuses—or salary increases, depending on your perspective—tied to performance criteria, how do you justify paying higher salaries, if applicable, without necessarily seeing any growth in your client base or improvement in services, for example?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Your question covers a lot of ground. I'll try to keep my answer short and get to the bottom of it.

A report prepared by the Mercer firm has been posted on our corporate website. The board of directors commissioned this report to determine the compliance of our total compensation system for our 1,200 non-union employees, who aren't all senior executives.

This report outlines how the compensation structure is built, including the variable component, which we refer to as bonuses. It also discusses how the structure compares to its reference market.

Our strategy is to remain in the market median. This means that 50% of companies and organizations pay more than we do, and 50% pay less. We're really in the middle.

When we considered ending variable compensation or bonus programs, Mercer recommended that we maintain our position in the market in order to keep attracting and retaining the required talent.

It's not a matter of paying more than others, but of staying above the median. We adjusted salaries to maintain our position, but we won't be making recurring adjustments. There won't be—

• (1635)

Bernard Généreux: There has been a salary increase for—

The Chair: Sorry, but you have gone well over your time.

[English]

Mr. Myles, I'll turn the floor over to you for five minutes.

David Myles (Fredericton—Oromocto, Lib.): Thanks very much.

Thanks very much for being here, Ms. Bouchard.

One thing I've come to realize about CBC/Radio-Canada over the last number of years is that it's not only the people who don't like it who criticize it; it's also the people who do like it who criticize it, and I think there's room for that. It's one of these things where it's a Canadian institution that can be better, and it's okay for Canadians to ask it to become better and to challenge it.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I agree.

David Myles: I've seen it change over the years. I will say, I don't listen to all of the CBC programs, although I've been listening to *Power & Politics* while I work out in the morning. Just to let my colleagues know, Larry Brock, Scott Aitchison, Andrew Scheer, Melissa Lantsman and Michelle Rempel Garner have all been on it since I started listening over the last couple of months, so the representation has been there on that one show that I'm listening to, and they did a great job. Your colleagues did a great job on that show, and that's just one show.

I am curious about this polarization conversation. I think what's happening now is that the conversation about diversity is becoming about diversity of opinion, diversity of thought. How does that become part of the diversity conversation for the broadcaster? This is what I think a lot of members are bringing up.

When we think about polarization in Canada, it seems to me that one of the great sources of polarization is actually urban versus rural. I'm wondering if some of the polling has given you a similar sense, and also, if maybe some of the centralization that took place over the last 15 years.... I notice there's a bit of a reversal to this thought, and I wonder if this is an effort to address that rural-urban divide, which I think is probably one of the stronger divides, more so than right-left, in Canada. I just wonder if that was some of the thinking.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: First of all, I completely agree with all of what you said. I've worked with CBC/Radio-Canada for a long time, and I've been constantly asked.... People say, "We would like this." People ask a lot of their public broadcaster, and that's a good thing. I've always found that to be positive, because they feel attached to it. They feel that it's essential to them, and they want it to be as good as it can be. It's a great motivator for us—for the employees and for me as their leader—to have that sense of connection and of expectation. It pushes us to go further, so that's a good thing. I think our plan, as you will find, is honest about it. We can do better, and we want to.

In terms of rural and urban, I completely agree with you. When I started in the mid-eighties—I'm old—we had so many people and so many shows in so many locations, and then through various waves of budget cuts, we got more and more centred into large urban areas. We lost something there. We maintained some of it on radio, but television, because it was more expensive to make, got more and more centred into big locations.

We find that, especially.... When I was visiting out west, I had a lot of conversations with business people, with ordinary citizens, with other media, emerging and established, about that—about how we need to hear more about what matters to people in the farming industry, in the fisheries, in various locations that are really important for our economic development, for our culture, but we seem to be too far from them to hear from them on a regular basis.

We've done some wonderful things, like going out to locations for a day or two and sitting with people and just listening. That's not continuous service, so that's not enough, but at least it opens the mind to the things you don't see when you don't run into these people on a day-to-day basis, when they don't know you. I strongly believe that the local extension, re-establishing ourselves in a number of locations where we've never been or where we have not been in a long time, is of great value.

We also need to do that with awareness of the state of local media in those locations, making sure that we partner where we can and support where we can, so that there is diversity of voices and we don't find ourselves to be the sole supplier of information. That would be a loss for Canadians.

It's a balance, but I believe you're right that the urban-rural divide is contributing to a sense of disconnect.

• (1640)

David Myles: Yes, for sure, hearing those stories on the air, especially on the national broadcaster, I think is an important part. It is a major part of our country.

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up, Mr. Myles.

Thank you. It was a great conversation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Bouchard, in your strategic plan, you described measures taken with good intentions. I look forward to seeing how they'll be implemented.

However, one paragraph caught my attention. You said that you're committed to providing more content related to culture, music and amateur sports, along with Canada-wide coverage with a special focus on official language minority communities and francophones. You believe that this will give organizations access to sponsorships and national and international visibility.

Will you be bringing back the television show *Les héros du samedi*?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't know.

Martin Champoux: If you bring back the show, can you please make sure that you keep the original music?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Oh my goodness! You're feeling nostalgic, Mr. Champoux.

Martin Champoux: Let's get back to serious matters. I see that you made many good commitments.

A question was asked earlier about the \$150 million increase in funding proposed by the Liberals during the election campaign.

Do you already have plans to integrate this additional amount, for example, by responding to a fairly widespread request to gradually eliminate the need for advertising, for instance, but also by promoting free access to all levels of CBC/Radio-Canada's digital platforms?

Could this money be used to take a step in that direction?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The idea is to create public value. It's also necessary to strike a balance in terms of the availability of funds, the pace of payments and the stability of funding.

This data is vital. In the past, the funding was sometimes renewed. We were happy about this. However, the money was often reinvested for only a year or two. The funding would then return to

a previous level, which prevented us from making sustainable investments.

In the case of regional deployment, for example, we hire people and commit to their careers. In this case, we can't rely on temporary investments.

The structural changes that you referred to have an impact because they cut resources. Unless a balance is created with predictable and stable additional resources, it's difficult to move in that direction. Once you leave any kind of commercial activity, it's quite difficult to return to it.

You need predictability. I don't have that right now.

Martin Champoux: The major consultation carried out by Ms. St-Onge, which you also took part in, focused heavily on CBC/Radio-Canada's funding model.

If the budget were to increase, would you consider revising this model and moving away from the advertising market?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I think—

The Chair: You have four seconds left.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'll refer you to the answer that I gave last time.

If we want to maintain a critical mass of activities and avoid losing out to Google, advertising on CBC/Radio-Canada, particularly in the francophone market, offers some value. These considerations must be taken into account.

However, we weren't talking about advertising in all types of programs, but about advertising during news broadcasts. Ad-free news has its benefits, but it mustn't cost us vital resources that we can use to invest in services.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have a question before we go any further.

I represent a riding in Hamilton, Ontario, which, as I'm sure you know, is the biggest city in the country that doesn't have an independent CBC radio station. Several years ago, I think, we got an interim Internet-based team, but as far as I can tell, that team has actually shrunk in the interim years. It hasn't grown, and there is still no CBC radio station.

Last year, Global News shut down 900 CHML radio, which Hamiltonians were used to going to for many years for news and information. Those reporters are sorely missed in our community.

Now there is a resurgence of energy among Hamiltonians to bring a CBC radio outlet to Hamilton. There is a station available to take over, 900 CHML, so there is something available that Hamiltonians are used to tuning in to for news and information. It's something that I think Hamilton would really like, to have the advantage of extra reporting from CBC. We're not Toronto, and it's not sufficient to Hamiltonians to say, "Well, you get 99.1". It's a different market; it's a different community.

I'd like a response to that, please.

• (1645)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, I'm going to take it under advisement. I am aware that we established, some time ago, what we call a digital station. It's not the same as having a full-fledged antenna and radio and signage and so on. I'll look into it.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all I ask.

Mrs. Thomas, you have five minutes.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Bouchard, on September 15, during a Radio-Canada broadcast, CBC journalist Élisabeth Serret made unfortunate comments. She said that it's "the Jews [who] finance a lot of American politics", and then in another quote she said that the big cities are "run by Jews" and that Hollywood is "run by Jews".

Now, I recognize that Ms. Serret has been put on indefinite leave from the CBC—that's my understanding—but I'm curious if, as CEO, you unequivocally condemn these comments.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I actually apologized to all of our employees for that incident, and the news management apologized to all viewers for that incident. It is unacceptable.

Rachael Thomas: Okay.

Do you unequivocally condemn these comments as extremely racist?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: They're unacceptable, hurtful and contrary to our journalistic standards and practices.

Rachael Thomas: I appreciate that, but this isn't the first time this has actually happened. We've seen anti-Semitic rhetoric used by the CBC and unfair reporting.

For example, during the events of October 7, when those were reported by the CBC, throughout that time, statistics were often taken from Hamas itself, which of course is a terrorist entity, and used by the CBC as if they were from a government ministry itself.

In addition to that, there was news reported from the CBC with regard to a supposed hospital bombing by Israel. Of course, that was pushed out by the CBC as alarming breaking news, only to find out moments later that it was actually a misguided missile from Hamas and that it wasn't a hospital; it was a parking lot next to the hospital. By that point, you can imagine the hatred and the outrage that had already been targeted toward a vulnerable population that exists here in Canada, our Jewish community.

It has been time after time. Unfortunately, I don't have the allotment of time to outline all of the incidents, but this has happened a lot.

What are you doing to tackle this anti-Semitic rhetoric that exists within the CBC and its news reporting?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: If there is any incidence of inaccurate reporting, there is a process. It's called the ombudsman's office. We answer an awful lot of questions and complaints—first of all, the news management itself, and then, if the complainant is not satisfied with the answer they get, they have full access to the om-

budsman. This is how we get better. If there are mistakes being made, then there is full transparency on that.

Rachael Thomas: With all due respect, it's not getting better, though. I mean, here we are. This most recent event just took place on September 15, when extremely racist, extremely anti-Semitic comments were made on the airwaves.

I guess my question for you on behalf of the Canadian public, and in particular on behalf of the Jewish community, would be this: Will you, as the CEO of the CBC, undertake a thorough investigation to confront this type of systematic racism that exists within your organization?

• (1650)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: What we do, and what we've endeavoured to do, is to train and support our journalists and our teams to identify situations where statements could be made by third parties, witnesses or whatever and to treat those with care. We try to source our material in the best way we can and to live up to our standards. We are constantly reminding them what our standards are.

Rachael Thomas: My question is very straightforward. It's just a yes or no. Will you do an investigation? Will you make sure that, from top to bottom within your organization, there is not in fact a line of systemic racism?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: My answer is, we have very robust journalistic processes and protocols. They are examined on a continuous basis for all sorts of potential situations.

Rachael Thomas: What I'm hearing from you, with all due respect, Ms. Bouchard, is an unwillingness to do a re-examination. You're stating to this committee that it's okay, that everything is fine and that you've already done everything that can possibly be done: "There's nothing to see here. Turn away, folks, and look elsewhere."

I'm asking you whether you would dare—

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't think that's what I'm stating.

Rachael Thomas: —to take a second look inside your organization. Would you dare to take a second look? Would you dare to do an investigation?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that journalism is a continuous process of questioning, revisiting and challenging, and this is how we live. This is what we do, so we don't have stop everything to do a full investigation.

Rachael Thomas: So, no further investigation—

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: We are constantly challenging ourselves.

Rachael Thomas: —and no further insight.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Myles, you have five minutes.

David Myles: Thank you very much.

I have a question about the mandate. I always find the mandate interesting. I think the mandate is something along the lines of promoting Canadian stories, exporting Canadian stories to the world, strengthening local artists, Canadians telling stories about themselves to other Canadians, uniting the country. What I'm interested in is the relationship between the mandate and ratings, because it's a tricky balance.

I think about cultural programming. I think about *CBC Music Top 20*. If we're talking about cultural programming—and I'm sure it's the same on Radio-Canada—there's always a tendency to want to play American hits because it gets people through the door. I'm sure that, in television, American sitcoms get people in, and then ratings go up. At the same time, that doesn't actually speak to why it's publicly funded and has the mandate that it does. Then, all of a sudden, it's competing with commercial entities in major markets—let's say, in the soft rock market, they're playing similar music at similar times.

How can CBC lean into the mandate, and what is the relationship with ratings? It is a tricky balance.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: An old boss of mine used to say, “There's no public broadcasting without a public”, so we need to be reaching people. That's why I was saying that reach is a really important factor: How many Canadians actually tune in to our programming, wherever and on whatever platform? Even if they tune in to YouTube or TikTok, but it's CBC-produced or CBC-acquired content, that counts for us. That's a way to touch people.

We're not in a race to be number one. Sometimes we end up being number one, and that's a by-product of putting out good content that people want to listen to or watch. Again, the radio success is all about the local, our ability to be close to where people live and what's important to them.

In terms of music, I ran *Ici Musique* on the French side for a number of years, with great joy. It's doing incredibly well, with a very unorthodox approach to music radio. It's not formatted. It's multi-genre and it's growing. That says something about our ability to mediate between artists and the public, and to intelligently bring discovery into their lives. That's a craft and something our people are really great at.

I think it's a mix of making sure we have moments when we can all feel together.... Last Saturday, again on Radio-Canada, was the 400th episode of *En direct de l'univers*. It was all about the public who were fans of that show. It's been going on for 17 years. It's a great showcase for local talent. We do that on CBC, and we do that on Radio-Canada. It's not about the commercial value or the mass audience; it's about feeling together and the cultural experience we generate.

• (1655)

David Myles: Do you think that, over the years you've been there, it's leaned sometimes more towards...? There must be a balance. At some point, you know you can play Beyoncé every hour and it's going to bump up ratings. At what level do you say no to Santana and say yes to...?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, first of all, we've made our music formula to be, essentially, Canadian. We have the highest

volume of Canadian plays in the market, so that's.... Also, we have a diversity of genres, which is unheard of.

However, we also have authors. We are a great force behind selling books by Canadian authors. Our programs and our contests, like *Canada Reads* and the equivalent in French, sell books for our artists and creators. We have a real influence in how people experience culture and discover emerging artists, and that's really important, but we also have these moments when people come together around comedy or a great show that is iconic to their experience as Canadians.

David Myles: Do you see the cultural programming moving into the regions as well?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: We have some already. The digital formats help us a lot, because they're less constraining than the traditional full production of television. Audio is easy. It is already fully cultural and decentralized. Television is a little trickier; it's easier to consider having multiple types of experiences and formats in digital.

David Myles: That's right, but local music shows, for instance, in each of these regions—

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

We have time to do two more rounds, as long as we get through them quickly.

I'm going to turn to Mrs. Thomas.

You have six minutes.

Rachael Thomas: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Ms. Bouchard, I guess my question is with regard to temporary foreign workers. It's come to light that the CBC has hired 20 positions since 2015 just within Ontario alone. These positions were deemed “high-wage”. Why are Canadian workers not good enough for the CBC?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: As far as I know, currently there are no such temporary foreign workers employed at CBC. I don't know the history of 2015 that you're citing, but right now there are none.

Rachael Thomas: Did you see the report that came out? You're unaware that there's any report of temporary foreign workers being employed by the CBC.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: What I'm saying is that my information is that currently there are none.

Rachael Thomas: That's not what I'm asking about, is it?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, I don't know about 2015. I wasn't there.

Rachael Thomas: Sure. You're very good at skirting questions and trying to slough them off as if it's up to the last CEO and you're not responsible for answering for the organization anything past the last 11 months. Ms. Bouchard, you are in this seat. You occupy this title, this role, and therefore the responsibility that comes with it. There is an expectation that you would have some familiarity with the history of the CBC and the decisions that have been made.

Since 2015, 20 temporary foreign workers were employed by the CBC, and that's just from the province of Ontario alone. Are Canadian workers not good enough for the CBC?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: We employ 7,000 Canadians at this stage—that's how many Canadians work for CBC. I think they're exemplary employees. I don't see why you would say that Canadian workers are not good enough for CBC. That's not the evidence.

Rachael Thomas: Let's not put words in my mouth, Ms. Bouchard. I did not make that statement, but CBC's actions are making that statement. They are pointing to the belief that Canadian workers are somehow not good enough.

Some of these positions that were filled are computer programmers, computer network technicians, business management consultants, marketing researchers, announcers and broadcast technicians. We have many individuals in this country who would be more than happy and more than qualified to fill those roles.

My question is why Canadians weren't given priority over temporary foreign workers.

• (1700)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Again, I don't know what you're referring to, in the sense that I wasn't there. The evidence I have is that there are no foreign workers working for CBC at this point, and there are 7,000 employees who are Canadian.

Rachael Thomas: Would you commit to providing this committee, then, with the total number of temporary foreign workers hired within the CBC and CBC/Radio-Canada in the past 10 years and the positions for which they were hired, and providing that for the report by the end of October?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't know if that information exists or not. If it does, I'm happy to provide it, but I'm not familiar with it.

Rachael Thomas: Would employment records for the last 10 years not exist anywhere at the CBC?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'm just saying that I don't know if they exist. If they do exist, I will gladly provide them to you. If they don't, they don't.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. I would appreciate that. Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass the floor to my colleague, Mr. Waugh.

Kevin Waugh: I wanted a clarification, if you don't mind, Ms. Bouchard.

You said the CRTC may consider the subscription numbers confidential. Does it forbid you from releasing the numbers, or is that your decision, and your decision only, for releasing them?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: You're absolutely correct. It's not a ban on releasing information; it's just a matter of the conditions under which we are expected to negotiate with distributors. We have discussions with all sorts of distributors for our content, for our platforms and for our apps. That creates a context where information may not be available to the people you're negotiating with.

Kevin Waugh: Your lawyers today went to court trying to prevent the subscription numbers for CBC Gem.... You were very active today, your organization, sending your lawyers ahead saying no, we're not going to talk about subscription of CBC Gem. Why?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'll restate my answer to your previous question. We are in the market negotiating with providers on a commercial basis for distribution. There is information that is sometimes sensitive in those negotiations. We have a regulatory body that recognizes that sensitivity and allows people, businesses that are in this market, to consider that information confidential.

We have an interpretation by the Information Commissioner that says that we have not met the standard for that confidentiality. We want reconciliation between those two interpretations, and that's why we asked the Federal Court to consider the situation.

Kevin Waugh: Okay, you're right. The Information Commissioner, a while ago, asked for CBC to disclose the numbers.

I don't know what you're hiding. I really don't, because you're a public broadcaster. You're getting the funds from the public, and you're not in competition with Bell Media, Crave or any of those. I know the metrics of radio, TV and digital, and I don't see the issue with CBC Gem saying, "We own 1,500 subscribers." It's been going on for six years. I think that's the least—

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I gave you a number—

Kevin Waugh: Where is your accountability and your transparency that you talk about in the five-year plan?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I gave you a number earlier, which was 5.3 million accounts created.

Kevin Waugh: Those are different from subscriptions.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I agree that they're different from paid subscriptions.

The Chair: That's your time, Mr. Waugh. Thank you very much.

Mr. Al Soud, you have six minutes.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madame Bouchard, you've been very frank with your answers, and I want you to know that it's appreciated.

You mentioned AI tools earlier during an excellent response. As you may know, this committee is currently undertaking a study on the impact of technology advancements in artificial intelligence on Canada's creative industries. I'd like to offer you the opportunity to speak to CBC/Radio-Canada's perspective on this—the way it's impacting journalists and the way in which you operate.

I'm also interested in knowing what role you believe CBC/Radio-Canada might be able to play in setting national standards for ethical and transparent AI use.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: That's a very active and interesting question, and I think it's on the mind of everybody who is in the creative sector.

There are concerns about intellectual property being stolen through AI processes, the scraping that's going on, which is affecting all the media organizations that are deprived of their intellectual property, of the hard-working reporting they're paying for and producing, which is being used to train models.

There are concerns about artists being dubbed or having their voice fabricated and having them speak stuff that they've never said, sometimes to defraud people, which is even worse for their image. There's a lot of scary stuff going on.

There's also a lot of potential in AI, and that's the paradox. We can all sit back and say that's horrible but it's happening, or we can leverage it to some extent and use it for good. I think we have a lot of really smart scientists and artists in our country who are well equipped to help us tackle this potential, and at the same time trying to protect.... There's definitely a role for government in setting some ground rules so that we can protect the intellectual property and the value of people's investment in their creation. At the same time, there's also a lot of work to be done on media literacy to safeguard the ability of citizens to understand where they're getting their information and whether it is reliable or a fake, a deepfake.

Then there's how the media and the community itself can work together to develop practices and ways of working that are in fact respectful of IP, respectful of facts and of the citizens, but improve productivity and allow us to create more content at a reasonable cost because we have mastery of those tools.

We definitely have to share and work together. I don't think it's a case where everyone can develop their own in silos. We're too small, compared to the big guys who are right now just descending on the whole world, and there would be great value in working together. We have conversations with partners, with potential partners, about their challenges and the possibility that we can join forces, and I expect these conversations to continue and accelerate.

• (1705)

Fares Al Soud: That's fantastic. Thank you once again for a very comprehensive response.

[*Translation*]

I'll discuss another topic.

I like Toronto, especially when the Blue Jays are playing well. However, the city can sometimes feel a bit stifling. We're seeing this in Mississauga in the media these days.

Similarly, national broadcasters play a key role in informing the public, but they can also overshadow or draw attention away from smaller local media outlets. This can lead to media deserts.

Could you tell us a bit more about this situation?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: In our regional deployment plan, we focused on markets adjacent to larger markets. The chair referred to Hamilton, and I'm quite aware of that market.

In Quebec, in the city of Lévis and throughout the Chaudière-Appalaches region, and in the greater Toronto area's Peel region, the markets are peripheral. These cities have their own economic and cultural life. These types of cities often aren't served by the old method of having a station in the downtown core.

Setting up offices and creating content available across all our platforms from these offices make it possible to provide local information and also to create the potential for national representation for these communities.

This provides a two-fold benefit for communities. For our organization, it's an opportunity to connect with very urban communities, very rural communities and the surrounding areas.

The surrounding areas are often places where people feel less connected to the mainstream media and where trust, while not necessarily eroding, may be less cultivated. The goal is really to cultivate that trust with relevant content.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you.

[*English*]

Canada is often cited as having one of the most transparent and trustworthy media landscapes, demonstrated through CBC/Radio-Canada's recertification by Reporters Without Borders' journalism trust initiative in September 2024.

Can you speak to why you think Canada is perceived as transparent and trustworthy globally?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: First of all, I think we have a very robust governance structure for media. We have independent public media, and we have private and community media. The broadcasting sector has always been a hybrid market, and we've had, historically, a very strong written press. That's been challenged to a large degree. I'm hoping it can transform and morph into something else. There remain large publications that are more digital than paper now, but they're still very significant. The diversity of the sources is one of the factors.

The existence of legal protections for journalists and for media that ensure their independence, protect their sources and support their ability to access government information, and the fact that government officials respond—because there are cultures and countries where you can ask all you want and you're not going to get an answer—and our governments feel they are responsible and answer questions from journalists, all of that induces a culture that makes the media more reliable, more trustworthy and more independent.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for six minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Bouchard, if you look around the table, you'll see that a few of us have grey hair—although some of us hide it well. We lived in a time when we had to be a bit curious in order to seek out information and stay informed. We had to read the newspaper and plan our evening schedule around when we would sit down to watch news reports, the television news or other sources of information.

In those days, fewer people were well informed and more people were less informed. Today, some people are well informed. Perhaps we're still curious about finding information in the right places, especially by checking sources. Many tools give us the chance to do this. At the same time, some people are also exposed to current events, but with news coming from all kinds of sources. We touched on this earlier. You spoke about digital literacy, and that's what I'm getting at.

I have the impression that it's an even greater challenge today. You don't just need to inform people who may be less exposed to current events or news. You also need to draw people back from unreliable sources that provide inaccurate information. These sources are spreading misinformation. You spoke about artificial intelligence. It's a great tool, but also a scourge at the moment.

When you embark on a mission to foster the curiosity of future generations, how do you overcome this challenge without losing hope or becoming discouraged?

I wouldn't call it a lost cause, which would be quite defeatist. However, I sometimes sense that this is a massive struggle.

What are your thoughts?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It's a major challenge indeed.

The first step is to get out there. That means showing up where people are getting their information. Some people, especially entire generations of young people, spend all their time on YouTube. If you don't give them rigorous content that shows up on YouTube, you're missing the boat.

You also need to take part in educational activities and engage with young people. At Radio-Canada, we organize school visits throughout the year to give young people the chance to become somewhat familiar with how news is produced and how the media machine works. There's something a bit mysterious about this process. Anyone can make a video, but you must know what a rigorous

approach entails. You must know about the need to check your facts and use two sources, because one source isn't enough.

This effort to shed light on the process helps give young people the tools needed to exercise sound judgment regarding information. I think that the media and educational institutions have a collective responsibility to work more closely together.

Martin Champoux: That's precisely what I want to talk about.

I can see that you're trying. Earlier, you mentioned a couple of news sections on Radio-Canada's site, Rad and MAJ. You have an online presence; you're delivering news and information to young audiences in a format that speaks to them in the spaces where they gather.

Still, social media platforms are massive engines. For every piece of trustworthy information on TikTok, there must be 150 pieces that aren't. You can't systematically target and expose each one. That's not your job.

Nevertheless, as a society, we need to figure out a way to identify unverified or untrustworthy content. We also need to do that as citizens, and we need to teach young people how to do it.

How do we do that, though?

You said you work with schools, but at what age do you start educating children? They have screens and go on social media younger and younger. I think Canada is behind. It should have taken the bull by the horns by now, but it hasn't. Meanwhile, young people are at risk of falling into this trap for years.

How do we tackle the problem quickly?

• (1715)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The decrease in content moderation on the platforms—

Martin Champoux: There's none.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Yes, it has deteriorated so much that it's non-existent. That doesn't help things.

Certainly, that's what we are seeing. There's no oversight. Every other type of media has oversight. In some cases, it's self-regulation. The Quebec Press Council helps to provide that oversight. Broadcasters are overseen by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC. CBC/Radio-Canada has an ombud, but the online platforms have nothing. There's no framework holding them to account for anything.

That means the public needs to be better equipped. Scandinavian countries, for instance, have opted to address the issue by focusing on the school curriculum. That work carries through to media organizations, especially public media, which encourage and support the initiatives.

Civil society stakeholders need to work together, because the on-line platforms can't be counted on for oversight.

Martin Champoux: You're absolutely right.

I believe we're meeting with Meta representatives on Wednesday. They'll keep telling us how they are working to verify content, how removing false ads from their platforms is hard. It was in the news again this week, ads encouraging people to—

The Chair: My apologies, Mr. Champoux, but I have to interrupt. There's an issue with the interpretation.

[*English*]

I'll suspend for a minute while we try to deal with the problem.

• (1715) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1730)

The Chair: All right, we're back.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you can have a minute. I think that will be enough.

Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I'm disappointed to hear you say that a minute will be enough, but I'll take every second you give me. Thank you.

Ms. Bouchard, we are fighting this great battle for digital literacy. We also want to instill curiosity in those who consume content or have an interest in what's going on. However, we are up against digital giants that couldn't care less. They do what they want. Instead of using tools like AI in constructive and helpful ways, they use them for a completely different purpose. They use them to increase the spread of fake news and content that is often extremely questionable.

In conclusion, what does co-operation with foreign industry players look like to you? Eventually, there will have to be some.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I would say that thinking about society and identifying all the elements that make society stronger is in the DNA of public service.

It's about putting our collective heads together and working with all the change-makers that can be of use. Private and community media come to mind, as do public players—media, libraries and the education system, from elementary schools to universities.

Sometimes it will mean working with researchers to better understand certain phenomena and leveraging touch points with audiences to understand what's going on.

It really requires thinking about all the tools we have, as a society. We are orchestrators. We can be much more effective with a lot of people.

Martin Champoux: We can never become complacent.

Thank you very much, Ms. Bouchard.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor for five minutes.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Bouchard, I asked earlier about LMIA's being acquired and temporary foreign workers being hired by the CBC. You said that wasn't done under your watch. The last LMIA that was secured was in quarter three of 2024, so that would have been just a few months before you took over in January 2025.

What happened there, then? If there was an LMIA that went in, was that person never hired?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'm sorry; what is this acronym that you're using? I'm not familiar with it.

Rachael Thomas: An LMIA is an approval from the province to hire a temporary foreign worker for a position at the CBC after they have shown proof that they've looked for a Canadian worker to fill that position but haven't been able to find one.

• (1735)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Okay.

Rachael Thomas: The CBC applied for an LMIA approval, and they got it in quarter three of 2024, just before your tenure started. That seems to be on the books during your time as the CEO, but you said earlier that it didn't actually happen on your watch. Was this person hired and then fired only a few months later?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I have no information with respect to what you're citing, so I'd have to look it up.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. Under your watch, starting in 2025, not a single temporary foreign worker currently works at or has worked at the CBC since you took over. Is that correct?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: That's the information I have, but I can double-check.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you. You'll report that back to the committee. Is that correct?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Sure.

Rachael Thomas: Perfect.

Will you also commit to this committee, given the rising unemployment numbers, that during your tenure as CEO you will not hire any future temporary foreign workers to fill positions?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Honestly, we are in an environment where we are hiring the best talent we can. We are obviously hiring Canadians in a vast proportion. There might be incidents where, for very specific types of work, there's a requirement. If there is a process and it's approved by the authority, I don't exactly see what the issue is that you have with this process, but maybe I'm not familiar enough.

Rachael Thomas: I guess my issue is the fact that unemployment rates in Canada are rising, and the CBC is looking elsewhere to find its talent, rather than right here at home.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't think it's accurate to say that we're looking elsewhere—

Rachael Thomas: With all due respect—

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: If I could finish my answer, we're looking extensively—

Rachael Thomas: The last LMIA was filed for hiring a business management consultant. I think there are quite a few of them in Canada.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Again, I'm not familiar with the example that you're citing; I'd have to look it up. What I'm saying is that we are in constant interaction with universities and colleges and with job fairs. Our talent acquisition people work very hard to find talent and train them, and we are very much involved in a Canadian workforce environment.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I'll hand it over to my colleague Mr. Diotte.

Kerry Diotte: Madam President, I want to talk about media bias and balance again. The AllSides organization rates media bias. They rate The Atlantic, The Guardian and Huffington Post as left of centre. They rate Reuters, The Christian Science Monitor and Forbes as centrist. They rate Fox News, National Review and The Epoch Times as right of centre. I think most people would agree that this is fairly accurate. Is that correct?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, I mean, that's their rating.

Kerry Diotte: Right. Okay.

In 2022, the same organization rated CBC as left of centre. What will you do to try to bring CBC to the centre of the mix?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Again, we were talking earlier about the divide between urban and rural. I think sometimes urban issues tend to be considered as potentially more centre or left, and rural issues are sometimes considered to be more centre or more right. I think having a wider span—

Kerry Diotte: This organization didn't look at urban and rural, per se. They looked at straight-up bias.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I understand. I was getting at—

Kerry Diotte: They found that CBC has bias.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: No, you were asking me what we'll do about it, and I was saying that redeploying in more locations, and being in contact with more people in a diversity of contexts, will improve our ability to accurately reflect the mood of the country and the various points of view. That's the plan.

Kerry Diotte: I've seen a lot of speeches by Pierre Poilievre in Alberta. The biggest applause line, by far, is when he says, "Defund the CBC". Why do you think Albertans are so upset at the CBC that it needs to be defunded?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't know exactly what the people attending those meetings have in their hearts. I've met with some Albertans—not everyone, obviously—and we've had frank conversations about what they feel is lacking in our coverage. I've also met people who feel that CBC is absolutely essential.

I think there's a diversity of feelings toward CBC. Can we do better? Always. We can always do better.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Royer, you have the floor for five minutes.

Zoe Royer: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to preface my question by highlighting some of the things about CBC that I really appreciate. One of them is a radio program called *North by Northwest*. It's a uniquely B.C. program, and it also sells books. They interview local authors. They feature diverse content, indigenous content and extraordinary interviews. I know that many folks cite that program for purchasing their next book. That's one.

The next one is CBC Gem. A program that I love, whose name is similar to the last title, is *North of North*. It features a cast set in the fictitious Ice Cove, an Inuit village. I really, really love the push-and-pull between the characters. It's a comedy. It's excellent writing. It has an excellent cast. I think I binge-watched some of that. I have a free CBC Gem account, so I guess I would fall into one of the 5.3 million in that category.

I also know that there's a lot of content that you don't even need a free account to watch, such as *Hockey Night in Canada* and *Power & Politics*. CBC does lots of stuff.

I also want to highlight Radio-Canada in the metro Vancouver area. My husband is a municipal expert. He's a francophone. I know that he is interviewed on regional issues, such as transportation, emergency preparedness and housing, that the French-speaking community might not otherwise hear in B.C. I have a huge appreciation. CBC does a lot.

Many countries give their public broadcasters predictable multi-year funding, such as the BBC's licence fee or the per household models in democratic France and Germany. Given the volatility of annual funding, can you describe how the CBC might benefit from a statutory per capita model to strengthen its editorial independence and strategic planning?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: That has been the one thing that has been lacking in our structure as a public broadcaster for decades and decades. It is the predictability—the ability to invest in people, to invest in the welfare of Canadians whom we develop as journalists, as producers, as researchers and as creators of all kinds. It's the ability to partner in a reliable way. When we enter into relationships with community media, we promise something that we sometimes can't fulfill with a long-term view because we don't know if the funding is going to be there or not. Our stability and our ability to be the actor that is transformative for all of the media sector, all of the cultural sector.... I was just talking to independent producers. A show takes three years to develop. It costs an awful lot of money. We need partners in order to be able to leverage the creativity that is in Canada. If we were able to plan multi-year, we could shore up so many independent production firms that are really struggling.

If we're talking about content for children, this is an area where, historically, independent production was extraordinary in Canada, but it has been depleted terribly, to the point where the few that remain are struggling. If we could invest in a durable way and partner with our other educational broadcaster partners, we could develop long-term views about how we finally accompany our children with content that is relevant to them, accessible to them and durable.

It would make a huge difference, and this commitment would be transformative.

Zoe Royer: That's amazing.

I think we have only 30 seconds left.

Is there anything you would like to share in closing that maybe wasn't captured in a question?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Despite the trials and tribulations and the difficulties, I think I'd like to share hope. There's a lot of promise in the public broadcaster.

• (1745)

The Chair: Ms. Bouchard, we want to thank you again very much for your participation today and for your fulsome answers.

I've learned a lot. There are a lot of journalists around this table, so I think you got a lot of really probing questions. We appreciate your time and thank you for responding to our request for you to come.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Thank you very much.

The Chair: With that, I declare this meeting adjourned.

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