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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.)): Good afternoon, colleagues. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 24 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, December 10, 2025, and the motion adopted on Wednesday, December 10, 2025, the committee shall resume consideration of Bill C-15, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on November 4, 2025.

I would like to welcome our Minister of Canadian Identity, Marc Miller, who is joined by Francis Bilodeau, his deputy minister; Joëlle Montminy, senior assistant deputy minister; Blair McMurren, assistant deputy minister; and Véronique Côté, chief financial officer.

With that, Minister, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed. Thank you.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members. It's nice to see all of you.

I want to begin by acknowledging the land we're on, the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Thank you for inviting me here today.

As you all know, in this time marked by uncertainty, a changing economy and unprecedented challenges, as a society, we know that, more than ever, we need to protect our identity and stand together to confront these challenges. In his mandate letter, the Prime Minister set out our government's priorities for meeting this moment: defending our sovereignty, strengthening our country on the world stage and creating a Canada that our children and grandchildren deserve.

[Translation]

Budget 2025 confirms the government's commitment “to protecting what makes Canada unique and brings Canadians together—through continued investments in our official languages, our public institutions, and our natural and cultural heritage.”

I am privileged to speak to you today about the 2025 budget, which provides \$772 million in support for the arts, culture, media and journalism, as well as other measures to preserve our national identity.

[English]

There are historic investments outlined in budget 2025. However, we are proposing only one corrective measure directly through the BIA, which is the reason for my appearance today.

In 2023, Bill C-11, the Online Streaming Act, and Bill C-13, on the modernization of the Official Languages Act, were considered around the same time, and both sought to amend the same section of the Broadcasting Act. While in the Senate, Bill C-11 had a privacy provision added, which was later unintentionally overwritten when Bill C-13 was passed. The measure we're proposing in the BIA simply corrects this error and restores Parliament's original intent.

I don't assume that will take up 50 minutes of discussion, but I wanted to highlight it.

[Translation]

Returning to the 2025 budget, we are providing funding to help make a greater impact in the areas of sport, cultural industries, arts, heritage and, of course, community celebrations. Investments in Canadian creators and culture significantly strengthen the economy by creating jobs and stimulating innovation, while supporting Canada's long-term growth, productivity and competitiveness globally.

Budget 2025 provides more than half a billion dollars for the growth of Canada's audiovisual sector, which is noteworthy. This includes more funding for the Canada Media Fund to better support Canadian creators and producers, and additional support for key national institutions such as Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board of Canada.

[English]

In addition, we're investing an additional \$6 million in the Canada Council for the Arts, \$150 million for CBC/Radio-Canada and over \$46 million to support the performing arts.

The special measures for journalism component of the Canada periodical fund will also be extended to support community news outlets and magazine publishers.

Funding for the sport support program will build on previous investments to advance diversity and gender equality in the Canadian sport system.

Other items include funding for arts and heritage activities and increased support to help with the hosting of the men's FIFA World Cup in 2026, as well as efforts to support the awareness of indigenous cultures.

[*Translation*]

We have also announced an investment of more than \$1.4 billion in minority-language education and second-language learning. We've signed agreements and are still working closely with each of the provincial and territorial governments. Our two official languages aren't just a cultural treasure for each and every one of us. They also open doors to international trade and facilitate collaboration between our provinces and territories.

[*English*]

Budget 2025 builds on our national pride by investing in the traditions that bring communities together. It provides \$21 million for local festivals and events, as well as \$20 million to support Canada Day celebrations across the country.

[*Translation*]

We're also doubling the annual funding for Acadian National Day celebrations. Finally, following the success of the Canada Strong pass last summer and during the holiday season, we're proud to have renewed this initiative.

[*English*]

The Canada Strong pass will return in the summer of 2026 to help families save as they discover and rediscover the incredible cultural and natural treasures that make our country so great.

Our culture is vibrant, unique and diverse. It's the tie that binds us. It puts our shared values and national identity on display and serves as our calling card to the world. It reflects our strength, our confidence and our inclusiveness. It's what makes us and Canada truly exceptional.

Thank you for your attention.

I look forward to answering your questions.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister Miller.

We will begin with Ms. Thomas for six minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister.

Bill C-11, of course, as mentioned in your opening remarks, was sold as not regulating user content. However, the CRTC has recently confirmed that it can, in fact, require algorithms to manipulate what Canadians see online, which ultimately would boil down to censorship, if that were the case. It's exactly what Conservatives have warned about. It's exactly what Canadians have been very much concerned about.

I'm just curious, what do you make of this, now that the CRTC is willing to admit that it can, in fact, compel algorithms?

Hon. Marc Miller: This is, first and foremost, Ms. Thomas, an issue when it comes to the ongoing work that the CRTC is doing in

making sure that we are properly regulating platforms. Specifically, what the CRTC is currently seized with is making sure that people are providing Canadian content.

This isn't about free speech. It isn't about telling people what to do. It's about making sure that we have a thriving and modern broadcasting system in a country geographically situated like Canada, and making sure that we survive in a country that gets a lot from American culture.

Rachael Thomas: Algorithms can, in fact, result in speech censorship. What do you make of that? If algorithms are compelled, it means that people will be able to see certain content and not other content. That means certain content can be put into some abyss somewhere where folks cannot access it or they can post it, but then it'll automatically be hidden because of an algorithm.

That's censorship. It's keeping some people from being able to say what they would like to say online. It's keeping others from being able to see what they would like to see or listen to online.

Hon. Marc Miller: I think you and I—and indeed this committee—have seen what algorithms can do and, if they are manipulated, what effect that manipulation can have on the availability of content. I don't think there is any suggestion that the CRTC is going to suppress algorithms or suppress speech by making sure people are behaving responsibly.

Are you suggesting otherwise?

Rachael Thomas: By the CRTC's own admission, it is saying that it has the ability to compel certain algorithms to be—

Hon. Marc Miller: Well, the CRTC is a regulatory agency. It has to live up to the standards of its own constituent charters.

Rachael Thomas: In order to achieve the outcomes of Bill C-11, it would be incumbent upon the CRTC to compel certain algorithms to be enacted.

Hon. Marc Miller: I think you're reading a lot more into it than what the CRTC is actually doing. It's a responsible regulator.

Rachael Thomas: Are you able to assure Canadians here today that this will not, in fact, be the case, that algorithms will not be compelled and that outcomes will not be instituted?

Hon. Marc Miller: Are you suggesting that any platform can use any algorithm to push its own narrative and content into the Canadian public—

Rachael Thomas: Minister, I'm—

Hon. Marc Miller: —and that should be unregulated?

Rachael Thomas: —just asking for assurance for Canadians. Can you, in fact, assure them that algorithms will not be mandated in such a way that it would control certain things from appearing online and others would be mandated to appear online?

Hon. Marc Miller: What I can assure Canadians is that the CRTC can, and is expected to, do its job, which is to make sure we have a properly regulated broadcast environment.

Rachael Thomas: They are saying they have the ability to compel algorithms.

Minister, what you are effectively saying, then, is that you stand behind that.

Hon. Marc Miller: I think we agree to disagree on that.

Rachael Thomas: With all due respect, that is exactly what you just admitted to.

Minister, Bill C-11 came into effect in June 2024. It's been almost two years.

What tangible accomplishment has been achieved through Bill C-11 for Canadians? It was touted as something that would further our identity and culture. I'm just curious; what tangible things has it done to do that?

Hon. Marc Miller: By its passage, it has signalled to the industry and to Canadians that we are expecting people to behave in a way, in a free and open society, as they should and to build up and make sure that we are building a society that allows, in this environment, the media to thrive justly, as you highlighted, by supporting freedom of expression, but in an environment that is fair and accessible to all.

• (1550)

Rachael Thomas: Would you say that this outcome has been achieved?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't think we're entirely there, no.

Rachael Thomas: What part of that outcome has been achieved?

Hon. Marc Miller: We passed a law that was very important, to make sure that people are doing their jobs and in some cases paying their fair share.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. In fact, Bill C-11 is caught up in the courts.

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes. People are allowed to sue in Canada.

Rachael Thomas: Absolutely. It actually hasn't gone forward in any way, but there's been a whole lot of money spent by the CRTC on Bill C-11 and building a regulatory framework. Is that really the best use of Canadian dollars when nothing has been accomplished for nearly two years?

Hon. Marc Miller: Well, I certainly wouldn't reduce funds to the justice system simply because people are suing, which is their right.

Rachael Thomas: I'm not asking for money to be reduced to the justice system, Minister. Don't put words in my mouth, please.

Hon. Marc Miller: I didn't hear a question from you.

Rachael Thomas: Right now, Canadians are struggling more than ever with affordability. The changes that were brought in with Bill C-11 and with Bill C-18, the Online News Act, have increased the cost of subscriptions—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Thomas.

That concludes the time for this round. We're going to continue now.

Rachael Thomas: It will likely further increase the costs down the road. What do you make of that?

The Chair: Ms. Thomas, that concludes your time. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Leitão, you have six minutes.

Carlos Leitão (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister, and good afternoon as well to your staff.

Let's get back to the budget, particularly the investments planned in this budget and the investments that directly support Quebec's cultural sector.

I have two questions on this subject. Could you briefly outline the highlights of the investments in Quebec's cultural sector?

Hon. Marc Miller: First, broadly speaking, as I pointed out in my introduction, there's been an investment of over \$700 million in arts and culture. This includes \$26 million for the National Film Board, \$150 million for Telefilm Canada, \$150 million for CBC/Radio-Canada, \$48 million for the Canada Music Fund and \$127 million for the Canada Media Fund, which is immensely important for the cultural landscape of Quebec and Canada. In addition, in Montreal, I announced a \$6-million investment for the purchase of Canadian and Quebec content by TV5MONDEplus. This is immensely important in a sector that is a source of pride for Quebec and for Canada as a whole.

Carlos Leitão: Very good. Thank you very much, Minister.

On the subject of CBC/Radio-Canada, it seems to be of great interest to our friends on the other side. Could you just give us your thoughts, your opinion on this: Why is it important for the federal government, for the Canadian government, to support CBC/Radio-Canada?

Hon. Marc Miller: The media is the fourth pillar of our democracy, so a well-funded public broadcaster is an important building block of that pillar. Those who conduct research in this area aren't surprised to see that CBC/Radio-Canada, compared to its peers, ranks below the OECD and G7 average. That funding is precisely what is needed to create an environment where people can get reliable news. A state-supported, and therefore independent, broadcaster, rather than a state broadcaster, is immensely important in terms of credibility. Given the situation we are facing, it's clear that the general mood is one of skepticism. Not funding this broadcaster or suggesting that we cut its funding would, I believe, undermine public confidence in this immensely important broadcaster, not only in terms of the reliability of news, but also in terms of democracy.

Carlos Leitão: Thank you, Minister.

Indeed, I can attest that I've always found CBC/Radio-Canada to do an excellent job, especially CBC News. It's a very high-quality and independent organization. So, yes, it's very useful and very necessary to ensure the long-term viability of this organization.

I'd also like to mention another point that I think is very important. In Quebec, we have several festivals, events and cultural institutions that play an essential role in the cultural, economic and social vitality of Quebec. Often, it doesn't take huge amounts of money to support this sector.

How does support for these initiatives constitute an asset for Quebec culture? Could you tell us a little about that?

• (1555)

Hon. Marc Miller: That's an extremely relevant question.

As I mentioned in my introduction, it comes as no surprise to anyone that we are in North America. Quebec is the only French-speaking nation in North America, which means that preserving this culture requires sustained investment from the federal government, specifically to preserve and promote our national identity. Whether it's an investment in the arts, culture, or public broadcasting, I think people are well aware that there are several levels of government that invest, but that the federal government must be there to ensure that these people shine, not only throughout Quebec, but also throughout Canada.

Carlos Leitão: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I think that—

The Chair: You have 45 minutes left, no, 45 seconds.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Carlos Leitão: Understood, thank you.

For my part, as I said earlier, what I find particularly interesting is that, in many cases—such as these festivals and events, which we always think of as major events in Montreal or Quebec City, for example—a cultural event supported by the federal government can often have a disproportionate effect on small towns in the regions, in a positive sense, of course. It is often the only activity they have—

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, in these regions—

Carlos Leitão: So it's thanks to the support—

Hon. Marc Miller: I know that our time is up, but more often than not, it's the federal government that's giving support.

Carlos Leitão: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, Mr. Leitão.

Mr. Garon, you have six minutes.

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Don't tell Mr. Leitão he has 45 minutes left: he might start filibustering, and we might regret it.

Minister, you seem like a trustworthy person. I'm going to take you at your word. You said that the media is the fourth pillar of our democracy. Are private media, private television and local media part of that, or is the fourth pillar made up solely of CBC/Radio-Canada?

Hon. Marc Miller: No, and I think you knew the answer to that question before you asked it. The answer is obviously no. The question that should be asked, and which you may ask me, is: what is the government's role in supporting this pillar?

Jean-Denis Garon: Okay.

The budget allocates \$150 million to CBC/Radio-Canada for the current fiscal year. You made that promise during the election campaign. You know very well that the Bloc Québécois didn't oppose this specific measure, but we also have private media outlets, particularly television stations, that are facing a very serious crisis.

What does this budget have in store for them, the rest of the fourth pillar?

Hon. Marc Miller: This brings us back to the question I asked myself, namely, "What is the government's role in subsidizing these organizations?" We support them through several tax credits—

Jean-Denis Garon: But what are the new parts of the budget? What are the new measures?

Hon. Marc Miller: You've seen them, they're the ones I laid out.

I know people are going to criticize me for not giving enough money to x, y or z—

Jean-Denis Garon: No one's criticized you, we're just asking questions.

Hon. Marc Miller: It is my understanding, however, that the support for the media went to CBC/Radio-Canada.

Jean-Denis Garon: Did CBC/Radio-Canada ask for \$150 million or did the government offer it up during the campaign? Was there an official submission?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't know.

Jean-Denis Garon: You don't know.

If the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture doesn't know, then who should we ask?

Hon. Marc Miller: I wasn't at the Department of Canadian Identity and Culture during the election, as you well know, so I certainly wasn't talking to CBC/Radio-Canada.

Jean-Denis Garon: That's great.

However, the short answer is that there isn't much for these other media outlets. You know, the goal is not to try to corner you, but to reiterate that we believe the entire media ecosystem is important, that these other media outlets are part of the fourth pillar, and that tax credits could also be extended to newsrooms, as is the case for print and electronic media, etc. The goal isn't to corner you, but really to do good for the community by making these proposals. That's why we're making them, obviously reiterating that we think there's very little in the budget for the rest of the fourth pillar. I think our proposals are worthwhile and worthy of consideration.

I'd like to talk to you about the performing arts.

The budget allocates a great deal of money to culture. Your predecessor said so, it's true, and we applauded it, but the Canada Council for the Arts had requested a \$140-million increase in funding. This request was supported by the entire cultural industry, yet the budget allocates \$6 million. CBC/Radio-Canada didn't ask for \$150 million, but it got it. The Canada Council for the Arts asked for \$140 million.

What are your criteria for allocating funds, particularly when you allocate them during an election campaign?

• (1600)

Hon. Marc Miller: My first point would be that this is not a binary issue as you describe it. My second point would be that during every fiscal year, there is a decision-making and priority-setting process, and I'd say that this is even more so the case when commitments are made during an election campaign. So—

Jean-Denis Garon: There's still fairly broad consensus on the need to adequately fund the Canada Council for the Arts. So there's a process that starts with a request for \$140 million in funding and leads to virtually nothing.

What is this process that leads to nothing?

Hon. Marc Miller: The Council for the Arts will be getting millions of dollars. That's nothing to sneeze at.

Jean-Denis Garon: I'm talking about additional funding. There are billions of dollars going to CBC/Radio-Canada as well, and you didn't mention that before giving them \$150 million. How can you go from a funding request for an additional \$140 million to \$6 million when it was requested?

But then you hand out \$150 million to CBC/Radio-Canada in the middle of an election campaign because you felt like it.

What is the process that leads to that? As a parliamentarian, I'm curious.

Hon. Marc Miller: I can assure you we didn't just feel like it, and it's no surprise that CBC/Radio-Canada would need money.

Jean-Denis Garon: You're unable to confirm that they had asked for it. We looked into this closely, and at no time did CBC/Radio-Canada make such a request during the campaign.

Hon. Marc Miller: It's an arm's-length corporation.

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you for reminding me that it operates at arm's length.

I would like to briefly mention Ticketmaster and Live Nation. This falls under your department's jurisdiction, and I believe it to be an important issue. In 2010, these two companies merged, and the U.S. Congress is currently pursuing antitrust proceedings against this conglomerate. Since 2019, it has been operating as a kind of cartel that controls 49% or 50% of the market share.

I would like to know what you think about this issue. Have you, in collaboration with the Department of Industry, contacted the Competition Bureau? Is any action being taken here in Canada in this regard?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't want to speak for the Minister of Industry, but as of now, I have not been in contact with the Competition Bureau.

Jean-Denis Garon: Does that worry you?

Hon. Marc Miller: It does. Any kind of monopolistic behaviour in Canada is cause for concern.

When we talk about Evenko, which puts on a lot of festivals, and Live Nation, we certainly have cause to question their behaviour.

Jean-Denis Garon: It's the role of—

Hon. Marc Miller: There's the Montreal International Jazz Festival, which is a very important event. I don't think anyone will campaign against that.

Jean-Denis Garon: No, but it's also the Competition Bureau's role to ask these questions, and it's under your jurisdiction.

Hon. Marc Miller: Then there's the Osheaga festival. I think these things are important. I understand the premise of your question, and I'm not debating you on that.

Jean-Denis Garon: Once again, I'm not saying that you haven't done anything and that you should have taken action before today. It's just an issue that concerns me. As an economist and culture lover, it concerns me. I was curious to know if anything was happening over at the Department of Industry. Since you are relatively new to your position, at least this time around, I thought it would be interesting to ask you that question.

If you could keep us informed of any developments on that front, I think the committee would appreciate that.

Hon. Marc Miller: As someone who's interested in artists, it worries me, too.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garon.

Apologies, Minister, but we've run out of time for your response.

[English]

We're going to continue with Mr. Lawton for five minutes.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Thank you.

Minister, you are the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture. Do you believe that religion is an integral part of Canadian culture and identity?

Hon. Marc Miller: Absolutely.

Andrew Lawton: You obviously know where this is going. On October 30, when you were the chair of the justice committee, you spoke about how there is “clear hatred” in some verses of the Bible and the Torah, and you said prosecutors should be able to have the discretion to lay charges if someone invokes a particular scripture that you find objectionable.

How are you standing up for the various diverse communities, and faith communities in particular, that you extolled in your opening statement when you believe that sincerely held religious beliefs should attract prosecution?

Hon. Marc Miller: I believe anyone should be able to freely read the Bible, Torah, Quran or any religious scripture. It's a guarantee in the charter that I will defend as well as you will—

• (1605)

Andrew Lawton: Unless it's a verse that you don't like.

Hon. Marc Miller: What I said—and you were there—

Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.): I have a point of order.

Hon. Marc Miller: No. I'm glad to answer that, Kent.

Kent MacDonald: This line of questioning has nothing to do with the budget or the BIA.

Andrew Lawton: It stems from comments made in his opening statement, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Excuse me. I didn't recognize you, Mr. Lawton.

Mr. MacDonald, it's not a point of order. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lawton, you can continue to have the floor, but I would ask that you be recognized before you take it. Thank you.

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't think religious scripture should be used as a defence for a hate crime. If someone publicly says they want to kill all the gays, and they are relying on a passage in Leviticus, they should be prosecuted, hard stop—and I'm a Christian. I firmly believe that person should be prosecuted.

Andrew Lawton: That would not be a good-faith usage of scripture.

Hon. Marc Miller: That's your debate, but sometimes prosecutors may be prevented from laying charges because there's some hesitation. I think it needs to be clear in the law, and I think you would agree with it, and any reasonable person would as well.

Andrew Lawton: You said, back in December, “I think if you talk to people of faith and even religious leaders, they would see that this is really something that makes sense”, with regard to removing those religious speech protections from the Criminal Code.

I have spoken to people of faith and religious leaders, and Bill C-9 and the removal of the religious defence have been denounced by the primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, the United Church of Canada, the National Council of Canadian Muslims, the Rabbinical Council of Toronto, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

Why do you believe you know more than these faith groups about religious freedom and protections for religion in Canada?

Hon. Marc Miller: As a Protestant, I rely on my relationship with Jesus and my reading of the Bible. I believe ministers can be guides, so I think I stand on an equal footing. I think you would agree with me on that.

If you really want to protect religious institutions, you will talk to Pierre Poilievre, Parliament's only temporary foreign worker, and have him pass Bill C-9 to protect religious institutions.

Andrew Lawton: The government has signalled that the online harms act, which has been twice tabled and twice not passed, will be returning. This is a bill that would, among other things—as in its previous incarnations—reinstitute section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, which allows for the human rights code to go after what the government deems online hate speech.

Will that be part of the forthcoming online harms act?

Hon. Marc Miller: Look, if you want my opinion on it—

Andrew Lawton: I'm not asking for your opinion. I'm asking for your insight as the minister.

Hon. Marc Miller: I'm not going to speak about deliberations that are in front of cabinet.

If you want my opinion, there are issues in and around freedom of expression in any act that would be presented in Parliament to keep Canadians, and particularly children, safe from online harms. I don't think it's necessary to have a private recourse regime under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Andrew Lawton: We already have a bill before the House of Commons by Michelle Rempel Garner. I believe it's Bill C-216. I might be wrong about the number. It creates a duty of care for tech companies to deal with very legitimate online harms against children and sexual victims.

Why not support that?

Hon. Marc Miller: I'm not unsupportive of it, frankly. I spoke to your colleague Ms. Thomas recently about that. I have yet, in fairness, to speak to Ms. Rempel about it.

I think the motive and purpose behind it are laudable. I think in the articulation of it, it should be properly introduced by the government, and supported by one. I'm willing to work with her on the details.

Andrew Lawton: Will the forthcoming online harms act be a bill that you put forward, or will it be a justice bill?

Hon. Marc Miller: It's TBD.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lawton.

We will now continue with Mr. MacDonald for five minutes.

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister and other witnesses.

Minister Miller, Prince Edward Island's cultural identity is deeply rooted in its Acadian heritage, and it's reflected in many of the family names around my living area, like Arsenault, Gallant, Paquette and Chaisson. It represents generations of language, arts and culture throughout Prince Edward Island and, indeed, Atlantic Canada.

This heritage is celebrated every year through National Acadian Day. In this budget, we committed funds to continue funding that celebration. Can you elaborate on what investments the federal government has made in budget 2025 so that Acadian and franco-phone families and communities across Prince Edward Island and Atlantic Canada can continue to see these tangible benefits?

Hon. Marc Miller: That's a very important question, Kent.

Perhaps I didn't have much time to say this while answering Mr. Leitão's question, but there are events across Canada that really merit and deserve support from the Canadian government. Sometimes we're there with the provinces, and sometimes we are not. In this budget round, we have \$4 million going to the *Fête nationale de l'Acadie*. It's so important. I have Acadian blood in my own veins, so I'm proud to support that as well. It's so important for the Acadian nation to make sure we are supporting it with the appropriate funds to celebrate the day.

If anyone hasn't seen the Tintamarre, I encourage them to go and do it. It's not every Acadian town that does that, but it's neat to go and see. It's a painful part of our history, but it's a shared history and one we have to continue to support. Those millions of dollars will go to some really cool events in the middle of the summer.

• (1610)

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, Minister.

Also in P.E.I., we have the Confederation Centre of the Arts, which was opened in 1964. It's a historic performing arts facility that gives many visitors an opportunity to see island culture. I think over 200,000 people a year visit there; 150,000 attended performances, exhibits and educational programs just last year.

Minister, we're seeing a transformation taking place at the Confederation Centre of the Arts. There's the construction of a new rehearsal hall. With cultural buildings like these inspiring Canadians, what's in budget 2025 to continue the operation of such facilities and promote culture and events in Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Marc Miller: Any time we're promoting the birthplace of Confederation, we're doing a good thing. You were modest enough not to mention the amounts, but I'm not that modest. I think that putting over \$5 million into renovations will draw not only Canadians—with more and more Canadians travelling within Canada, we'll certainly see more Canadians—but international travel as well, for Charlottetown to shine and to show on the Canadian and the world stage our beautiful shared history.

It's something that I don't think anyone should vote against, because it is so critical to highlighting who we are as a country and our history in the birthplace of Confederation.

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, Minister.

Further along in the budget, we talk about the \$150 million for CBC/Radio-Canada, on top of the \$42 million that was already topped up. In our region, smaller communities depend a lot on that public funding for CBC because it may be the only shop in town that's delivering news—real news, in my opinion—and playing local music, local talent.

Can you speak further on the importance of providing that funding for those smaller communities that depend on it?

Hon. Marc Miller: I have these discussions, even in the context of modernizing CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate. What we often hear from regions is that, yes, the heat map of where CBC/Radio-Canada penetrates is not perfect, but in some communities that is perhaps the only resource to get news. Let's not get into other unreliable news that is penetrating. It is important.

To the colleagues who were talking about the fourth pillar of our democracy, it is so critical. It's more than just news. It's about making sure that people are able to hear themselves in the accents and languages that they hear when they talk to their families or go to the store. It's also about getting fair news to remote areas.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. MacDonald. We're going to have to end it there.

[Translation]

Mr. Garon, you have two and a half minutes.

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, Bill C-15 includes the repeal of paragraph 19(1)(g.1) of the Canada Post Corporation Act. You've probably been informed that municipal libraries in rural Quebec are concerned. If Bill C-15 is passed as is, Canada Post will no longer have to have its rate schedules approved by cabinet. The current act includes an exception for libraries, which means they get preferential rates when shipping books between regions.

So the Réseau BIBLIO du Québec is concerned. I could also talk about associations for the visually impaired, for example, who tell us they're afraid they won't be able to get Braille books anymore. I understand that there's a desire to give Canada Post more freedom with regard to its rate schedule, but this exception existed in the act.

I asked the Minister of Finance about this. He was not aware of it. He told us that the exception would possibly be maintained. I checked, and it is not being maintained. Does that concern you? Would you be open to working together on amendments so that municipal libraries in the regions can continue to enjoy the preferential rate?

• (1615)

Hon. Marc Miller: You've caught me a little off guard, but I'm not unsympathetic to the issue you're describing.

As you know, we're a minority government and so have to work with the opposition parties, but I'd be happy to work with you on this.

Jean-Denis Garon: We'll follow up on that.

Regarding the government's role in television, my colleague Mr. MacDonald all but came out and said that the only real news comes from Radio-Canada.

In first-year economics, students are taught what a public good is. A public good is something that is produced and that everyone can access. It can almost be stolen, and it is expensive to produce, so if the market is left to its own devices, no public goods would be produced. In a world where social media can disseminate what television stations do for free, television, including private television, is a public good. For any serious economist, such as Mr. Leitão and myself, the government certainly has a role to play in supporting them. However, you seem to think that this isn't the case.

What is the government's role in supporting private television?

Hon. Marc Miller: We could spend all day or more talking about that.

Jean-Denis Garon: Let's hope not.

Hon. Marc Miller: First, the government plays a role since public broadcasters are regulated by the CRTC. We know that in the current climate, these organizations need support, but—

The Chair: Your time has expired, but you can pick up where you left off in the following round, Mr. Garon.

Mr. Lefebvre, you have five minutes.

Eric Lefebvre (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): I'll be splitting my time with my colleagues.

[*English*]

Andrew Lawton: Thank you.

Minister, what do you believe, fundamentally, the role of CBC is?

Hon. Marc Miller: I think it is, as I mentioned earlier—and even if you were to consider one of the great philosophers of the conservative movement in Burke—a fourth pillar of democracy that keeps me and you accountable to the public by making sure that there is reliable information that people can have and consume as they get their information about whatever they want but, most importantly, can judge and elect people like me and you to this place.

Andrew Lawton: Does a television show about a tomato that speaks to children about colonialism fit that?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't know. What do you think?

Andrew Lawton: I would say that it's not something that government needs to subsidize.

There has also been, just to use a recent example, a CBC news story called, "I felt people would judge me for getting Botox. Then I realized I was judging myself". I haven't read that. It may or may not be interesting. Is this so vital to the Canadian identity and cultural fabric that we must pay for it?

Hon. Marc Miller: You expect your public broadcaster to have shows that are relevant to the public. It doesn't necessarily have to be relevant to you or me. As an important aspect of that, I shouldn't be telling them what to do. I can have my view on it but, again, I shouldn't be telling them what to do.

Andrew Lawton: If CBC were not there, is the belief that there would be no one else to broadcast the Olympics? That's something

that broadcasters around the world spend huge amounts of money for the rights to do. Why is a state broadcaster needed to galvanize what could be a money-maker for private media companies?

Hon. Marc Miller: You could probably debate it, but I think it makes sense. There could be, but also the CBC does a pretty good job of it, and why wouldn't it?

Andrew Lawton: Do you believe that CBC's role should be to fill gaps that otherwise no one else would fill, or is it to do something even if it means competing with private players in the market?

Hon. Marc Miller: Definitely, it's a lot of the former and perhaps some of the latter. We talked with my colleague Kent MacDonald about getting into remote regions. I think that CBC has a duty to get that information into remote regions where it isn't economically viable to do so.

Absolutely, maintaining the vitality of our official languages is key, especially in francophone communities outside Quebec, given the state of the language in those communities. There is—

Andrew Lawton: I don't know if the tomato spoke about colonialism in both official languages or not.

Hon. Marc Miller: Maybe, maybe not, but I'm sure it did a great job of it.

Andrew Lawton: I yield to Ms. Thomas.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Minister, along those lines, your government has committed another \$150 million to the CBC. There was already \$1.4 billion that was committed. This is at a time when Canadians are struggling with affordability. They are the taxpayer. They are the ones who are ultimately paying for that increase that is going to the CBC.

Meanwhile, CBC viewership is down, and trust is down. Canadians just aren't there with you, Minister, and yet they're expected to foot the bill. I'm curious, on their behalf, about what accountability measures are being used to determine that this is in fact a wise use of dollars.

• (1620)

Hon. Marc Miller: When you look at the numbers—and the numbers are revealing, Ms. Thomas—CBC is not as well funded per capita as the broadcaster of any comparator country. Under us are only the U.S. and one other country, and we're pretty close to another.

There's general consensus that a robust publicly funded national broadcaster is important to democracies like ours. Do they get everything right? Certainly the answer is no, but it is important for them to be there to do exactly what they are supposed to do, which is to inform the public, for example, on issues of affordability.

Your party has been quite open about defunding the CBC, but I think that would undermine the trust of Canadians, who are relying on information from reliable providers to make those decisions as to who to vote for. They have been remarkably good at getting that information out, in my view.

Rachael Thomas: If I may, the question was around accountability, but rather than offering any metrics that you as a government are using to determine the success of the CBC and whether or not more money should be spent there, the only thing you've mentioned is comparing to other countries and what they're spending. You're more interested in keeping up with others—keeping up with the Joneses, if you will—than you are in holding the broadcaster accountable for actually producing what Canadians rely on.

Viewership is down. Trust is down. Canadians are not buying into this, but you're insisting that we need to spend more money because other countries are doing it. Why is that your metric? Why are you not holding the CBC to greater account?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Thomas. That concludes the time for this round.

We'll continue with Mr. Sawatzky for five minutes, please.

Jake Sawatzky (New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, Lib.): Thank you, Minister. It was so great to see you in British Columbia.

Thank you to everyone for coming today.

Minister, the Fraser Mills sawmill was built on the banks of the Fraser River, and it recruited 100 French Canadians as workers for the area. The workers themselves founded the French-speaking village of Maillardville, which is part of my riding. That became one of the largest French-speaking communities west of the Rockies in the 20th century. Today, Maillardville is an important historic site for the Franco-Columbian community. There are also some local organizations, such as the Société francophone de Maillardville, that are doing important work to preserve the French language there.

Of course, being the minister responsible for official languages, the protection and support of the French language is one of your responsibilities. Could you explain what's included in budget 2025 to ensure that we're supporting Canadian French language and content, both at home and abroad?

Hon. Marc Miller: As I mentioned to your colleague, Mr. Leitão, there are the supports that we've talked about at some length now for CBC/Radio-Canada, for Telefilm and for the Office national du film. Those are really important budgetary measures in the context of a budget that had a rationalization aspect to it as we looked at making some difficult choices as to what we were prioritizing. I think prioritizing institutions that continue to make us proud of our Canadian national identity, including the promotion of our official languages across Canada, is key. It includes penetrating into small communities like the one you mentioned.

I know you have made significant efforts to learn French yourself. I think that is laudable. There need to be more opportunities in that respect. We have been signing bilateral agreements with provinces—over \$1 billion in education agreements for second-language learning. More often than not, that is French. There is also

the action plan that saw significant investments into the French language across Canada, including in Quebec.

Jake Sawatzky: On a separate note, I saw an article where you mentioned the show *Heated Rivalry* as a Canadian content triumph. It just happens to be the case that Hudson Williams also worked in my riding of New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, at The Old Spaghetti Factory, which is just behind my old constituency office.

I know that federal funding has helped this show. Would you like to explain or provide some examples of how federal funding has enabled Canadian stories to reach new audiences at home and abroad?

● (1625)

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't think that's an exception. Hopefully, it would be a rule, seeing what *Heated Rivalry* is doing. It would not exist if the federal government had not invested about \$4 million into the program. That's a quarter of the funding, and then you fold in some of the tax credits.

That show was pitched to American producers. They passed for a variety of reasons, even though they liked it. People were not willing to trust their instincts and embrace the risk. With the funds that were provided by the Canadian government, that show now is breaking all sorts of records and defying stereotypes in society, even in countries where views of the gay community and LGBT rights are not what they are here in Canada.

It's a great show and all that, but it's also spurring a lot of discussions, especially for young kids in locker rooms and in toxic environments who are questioning who they are. If they feel inspired by that, that's cool, too.

Jake Sawatzky: Absolutely.

It was a funny moment to see the Prime Minister say, "Do the leg thing." That was quite a moment.

Giving Canadian children the opportunity to explore this beautiful country is definitely an important role for the government. What actions is the government taking to safeguard Canadian identity while promoting our culture through initiatives like the Canada Strong pass?

Hon. Marc Miller: That's a really cool pass. Perhaps people would ask why we are supporting museums in that way and whether we shouldn't be doing something else, but museums are a great place for kids to discover, in a healthy way, a whole ton of things, whether it's dinosaurs in Toronto or airplanes right here. There are cool things to discover. If the numbers are right, 500,000 kids saw or visited museums and benefited from the Canada Strong pass, which we are going to extend in 2026.

Over the Christmas period, we saw an uptick. We don't have the numbers on that, but clearly we're seeing more kids going there. It's not limited to kids; it's for all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We're going to have to conclude this round here.

I have to say that a Canadian show must have broken the cultural sound barrier when *Heated Rivalry* gets brought up in Parliament at the finance committee.

On that, Ms. Cobena, we're going to turn to you for five minutes.

Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thank you for joining us, Minister.

This is the first time I actually get to ask some questions.

My first question for you is this: Why do you need the power to exempt any person or corporation from almost any federal law, except for the Criminal Code, to do your job?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't necessarily. It's probably a useful tool to have. Those clauses that do find their way into legislation are often interpreted with a standard of reasonableness. To be quite clear, we don't necessarily need them, but they're a very useful tool to have.

Sandra Cobena: Okay, you don't need them. Would you be open to removing it from this bill, then?

Hon. Marc Miller: Do you mean from Bill C-15? No.

Sandra Cobena: Why not?

Hon. Marc Miller: Well, it's not my job to remove it. It's a useful tool to have in the context, particularly if we're trying to get things done in a rapid fashion.

Sandra Cobena: Well, the concern is that you are able to make decisions on your own, based on your prerogative, behind closed doors with no accountability to Parliament or to Canadians. In your remarks, you talked about protecting what makes Canada unique. In a democracy, this clause is undemocratic, so why would you like to keep it?

Hon. Marc Miller: I'm sorry; I didn't hear your question.

Sandra Cobena: Why would you like to keep the clause if it is undemocratic? You can exempt any company, entity or individual from almost any federal law except for the Criminal Code, on your own, with no public disclosure, behind closed doors.

Hon. Marc Miller: Like I said, it's not an indispensable tool. It's a helpful tool to have. These clauses are often interpreted by courts on a standard of reasonableness in the context. In the context that we are seeing, with things moving very rapidly, it is important for us to be able to have some nimbleness.

Sandra Cobena: However, if there is no accountability to the public and you don't have to disclose what part of the Conflict of Interest Act was violated or anything like that, then I don't think that's in the best interest of the country.

Hon. Marc Miller: First, this is a bill on which members will be asked to vote. It is also one where, in my belief, this tool should be used sparingly, but again, it is useful to have in the context.

• (1630)

Sandra Cobena: Why should one individual minister be allowed to bypass 150 years of Canadian law and exempt a person or a company of their choosing?

Hon. Marc Miller: Look, that may be your view, but I don't think that is what's happening here.

Sandra Cobena: Well, that's how it's written.

Hon. Marc Miller: It doesn't say people are being exempted from 150 years of law.

Sandra Cobena: It says from any federal law except the Criminal Code.

Hon. Marc Miller: There's no mention of years.

Sandra Cobena: It's any federal law that has been passed over the last 150 years.

Hon. Marc Miller: Right. I'm not going to parse this out with you.

Sandra Cobena: Just to be clear, you don't need it to do your job, but you want to keep it, nonetheless.

Hon. Marc Miller: I think it's helpful to have.

Sandra Cobena: Do you see the potential for abuse, though, in that companies or people will have to lobby you personally and not care about the law itself?

Hon. Marc Miller: No one's asked me to overturn any laws.

Sandra Cobena: You would have the ability to.

Hon. Marc Miller: In some context, perhaps, but again, this is something that would have to be used very judiciously.

Sandra Cobena: How could you possibly think that this would not undermine the trust in our democracy, then?

Hon. Marc Miller: I think Canadians expect us to act reasonably. I think Canadians expect us to be judicious in our decision-making.

Passing a law like Bill C-15, which all members will have the opportunity to vote on, is something that is inherently accountable in and of itself.

Sandra Cobena: Well, it has this particular clause that is very problematic. It is all over the news. I have a letter from 43 organizations asking you to strike it because of the potential for abuse, but you still want to keep it.

Hon. Marc Miller: I have answered that question about three times now.

Sandra Cobena: I just don't find it reasonable for you to have the powers of a king, essentially.

Hon. Marc Miller: I certainly don't have the powers of a king.

Sandra Cobena: If you are allowed to exempt any entity from any federal law, it is like having the powers of a king.

Hon. Marc Miller: Is that a statement or a question?

Sandra Cobena: It's a fact.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cobena.

That concludes the time for this round.

We will continue with Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister and officials, for being here.

Mr. Miller, we heard some comments about the public broadcaster. If you check them to their logical conclusion, it could be argued that colleagues are arguing, ultimately, for a system whereby the government is deciding what is and is not broadcast by the public broadcaster.

Can you reiterate the importance of an independent public broadcaster for a democracy like Canada's?

Hon. Marc Miller: It's critical.

The CBC-empowering legislative document goes back 90 years. It has been integral to building up and bolstering the democracy that we have today. CBC/Radio-Canada has been criticized from its inception. There are books by Pierre Berton on this.

It's not an institution that should lack scrutiny, but it certainly needs independence. When I say "independence", it doesn't mean that it's unaccountable. Ultimately, the CBC is accountable to the legislation that creates it, but also to the public; otherwise, the public loses trust.

We've seen the loss of trust in the last few years for a variety of reasons. In the prevalent media environment with online platforms, there's a lot of misinformation and disinformation spreading around. As a beacon of light in that, sometimes, vomitorium, you need an independent broadcaster that has the resources, often supported by the state but without the influence of the state—independence from the CEO, the board and the editorial boards—and in the context of our bilingual country, content in English and French.

It should never be understated that a key pillar in keeping me and you accountable, but also members of the opposition, is making sure that information is honest and truthful, with a process that ensures that independence, whereby journalists can ask me the same difficult questions they ask the opposition.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

I also want to ask you a question about multiculturalism in Canada and its future. You're the minister responsible for introducing a really important set of reforms that have begun to restore sustainability in the immigration system. Still, though, we see a narrative on immigration in Canada and other democracies, of course.

What future do you see for multiculturalism in this country? How will you be moving forward in continuing to underline the importance of that kind of vision for a multicultural, multi-faith democracy, as Canada is, considering the prevalence of current narratives around it?

• (1635)

Hon. Marc Miller: Hopefully, I won't be alone in it. As the minister in charge of the multiculturalism law, it is to make sure that the principles that underpin it are being maintained in the context of

the bilingual country that we are, a country that's built on immigration, other than indigenous peoples.

It's no secret to anyone that there is a large anti-immigrant sentiment. When we see that eating away at the public narrative in a toxic way, it eats away at another fundamental pillar of our democracy, namely pluralism, which multiculturalism underpins.

People do need to integrate into Canada, in a democracy, and subscribe to and practise our values, one of them being our respect for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Key to this is making sure that we continue the investments in highlighting who we are as a country—first and foremost, Canadians, but at times united by our differences, which sometimes requires funds that we come here and humbly ask for, but it also requires engagement from all Canadians, not just elected officials, to realize that we are better because we have the ability to have discussions about our differences and realize that, at the end of the day, we're all Canadians and we're proud of it.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

I have 40 seconds left. The people back home in London wouldn't be happy if I didn't ask a question about the film sector and its future. There's a lot of excitement around the city. We've had a few films and TV shows shot in London.

What would you advise medium-sized communities like London to do to better position themselves for that kind of vision for the future? It's been an emerging area in our economy in some ways.

The Chair: Give a very brief response, please.

Hon. Marc Miller: Well, get out and go to London. It's a lovely place. I've been there myself.

You see a lot of films being filmed around the country, and we need to keep that up. That reality is under threat in some very asymmetrical discussions with our partner to the south of us, but we need to stay on top of that.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Garon, you have two and a half minutes.

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, you seem keenly interested in the government's role in broadcasting. As for me, I'm interested in your opinion.

Is it the role of the government to broadcast advertisements on public television? I'm talking about ads for deodorant or potato chips, for example, or political ads broadcast during the news when there's an election campaign going on.

Is that the government's role, in your view? You seem like an expert on this.

Hon. Marc Miller: The government's role is to fund the public broadcaster. If that public broadcaster then seeks to increase its revenue by running ads, that is beside the point.

Jean-Denis Garon: That is really interesting. So you believe that CBC/Radio-Canada still running ads after getting an extra \$150 million on top of the billions it already gets is beside the point.

I'm asking because your predecessor, Ms. St-Onge, and even your other predecessor Mr. Guilbeault didn't think it was beside the point at all. When Ms. St-Onge was working on the file, she said that CBC/Radio-Canada's policy required a basic framework.

Do you believe it's beside the point and isn't deserving of consideration?

Hon. Marc Miller: No. It's beside the point in that the government has no place influencing CBC/Radio-Canada directly by telling it what it can and can't do.

Jean-Denis Garon: And yet it gets its funding from the state, so you do have a say. When you give an organization \$150 million, you can ask it to run fewer ads. No one likes ads, anyway.

Hon. Marc Miller: I'm simply exploring the counterargument that CBC/Radio-Canada shouldn't necessarily get all of its funding from the federal government. I think everyone can agree on that. However, I'm more concerned about it running ads during the news than if it did so during the rest of its programming.

Jean-Denis Garon: If it's not that big of a deal, instead of giving it \$150 million of taxpayers' money, why didn't your government tell it to run more deodorant ads?

Why didn't you ask it to stop annoying people with advertising in exchange for that \$150 million? I think Canadians would have been grateful to you.

• (1640)

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't think people find advertising annoying, necessarily; some ads are annoying. This might be worth considering.

Jean-Denis Garon: I think we would win a referendum over that issue.

Hon. Marc Miller: When it comes to winning referendums, the Bloc Québécois is zero for two.

The Chair: We need to stop there. Thank you very much, Mr. Garon.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank the minister and the officials accompanying him. We're going to take a short break and suspend the meeting before starting the next hour.

• (1640)

(Pause)

• (1645)

[English]

The Chair: We are going to get started. We will resume the meeting.

I would like to welcome our witnesses.

We have Vicky Eatrides, the chairperson and CEO of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. She is joined by Scott Hutton, vice-president, consumer, analytics and strategy; Scott Shortliffe, vice-president, broadcasting; and Rachelle Frenette, general counsel and executive director, legal services.

With that, Ms. Eatrides, you have five minutes for opening remarks. Thank you.

Vicky Eatrides (Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission): Good afternoon, and thank you so much for having us.

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I'm joined today by colleagues who have already been introduced. We have Scott and Scott, to make things easier, and our senior legal counsel, Rachelle Frenette. We are very pleased to be here as the committee studies Bill C-15.

Before we get into committee members' questions, perhaps we could start with a brief overview of the CRTC and the work we are doing for Canadians.

[Translation]

As you know, the CRTC is an independent quasi-judicial tribunal that regulates the Canadian communications sector in the public interest. We hold public consultations on telecommunications and broadcasting matters and make decisions based on the public record.

The commission consists of nine members and we're supported by a team of expert staff that help us with decision-making.

[English]

I know that we are here to talk about Bill C-15, which makes an amendment to the Broadcasting Act, but let me begin by briefly touching on our other major line of work, which is telecommunications.

In meetings with Canadians across the country, we hear about how critical high-quality Internet and cellphone services are for employment, health care, education, connecting with loved ones and so much more. We also hear about what happens when there is a lack of meaningful connectivity, and those stories are troubling.

In 2019, the CRTC launched a broadband fund as part of a government-wide effort to help connect rural, remote and indigenous communities across Canada. Since then, we have allocated funding to projects delivering Internet and cellphone services to over 54,000 homes in over 320 communities. These projects connect critical institutions like schools, health care facilities and community centres that people rely on every single day.

The CRTC's work to improve connectivity goes hand in hand with our efforts to strengthen competition and to make telecom services more affordable. One way we are helping to provide Canadians with more choice is by allowing competitors to sell plans using the networks of the large telecommunications companies. For Internet services, more than a dozen companies are using the access granted by our framework to provide competitive plans to Canadians. For cellphone services, competitors have expanded into 88 communities across seven provinces. What does that mean? It means that there is more choice for Canadians when they are looking for Internet and cellphone plans.

We are also seeing some positive movement on prices. For example, according to StatsCan, prices for cellphone services decreased by over 37% over the past four years. At the same time, we know that networks are expensive to build and to maintain, so we put measures in place to make sure that companies keep investing.

Making sure that Canadians have access to high-quality networks and to choice is one part of the equation. The other part is making sure that we can easily find those choices and switch to plans that meet our needs.

Last year, we launched a consumer protections action plan to help protect and empower Canadians. To bring that plan to life, we initiated public proceedings dealing with everything from preventing bill shock and limiting fees to making it easier to compare offers and switch plans. We will issue those decisions in the weeks and months to come, so stay tuned.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

So that is some of our work in telecommunications.

Now, let me share what we're doing in broadcasting.

As you know, through the modernized Online Streaming Act, Parliament mandated us to modernize Canada's broadcasting framework and ensure that online streaming services make meaningful contributions to Canadian and indigenous content.

Overhauling a decades-old regulatory framework is no small task. The changes that are required are substantial and complex.

One of our first key decisions required online streaming services to direct funding to areas of immediate need, such as local news on radio and television, French-language content, and indigenous content.

We're continuing to take action in areas that matter to Canadians. For example, we've issued decisions to support local news on radio and television, and we will be issuing more major decisions in the coming months.

[*English*]

To wrap up, we're doing work on multiple fronts. We're not finished yet, but we're helping to make real, meaningful progress.

More Canadians now have access to high-speed Internet. There are more choices when it comes to cellphone services. Stronger consumer protections are coming. As well, the broadcasting system is evolving to better reflect the Canada of today and tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

Thanks again.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Eatrides.

We will begin with six minutes from Ms. Thomas, please.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Eatrides, I'm curious with regard to Bill C-11. It's been on your plate for just about two years now. I'm curious as to how much has been spent on preparing for the implementation of Bill C-11.

Vicky Eatrides: Let me share very briefly what we've been doing on Bill C-11—

Rachael Thomas: It's okay. I'm not asking for an outline of things that have been done. I'm just asking for the monetary amount that has been spent.

Vicky Eatrides: Okay. I'm not sure that we have those numbers at our fingertips.

We would be able to get that figure to you.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. That figure can be sent over to the committee, then.

Vicky Eatrides: Absolutely.

Rachael Thomas: Perfect. Thank you very much.

With regard to Bill C-11 and Bill C-18, I'm curious as to what type of analysis has been done since their passing in terms of their impact on subscription prices, reduced service options, and content being blocked or downgraded. What type of analysis has the CRTC done in terms of the impacts of Bill C-11 and Bill C-18 on these things?

Vicky Eatrides: Bill C-11 gave us a mandate to modernize the act, and we've been taking a number of steps to do that. We have put in place the contributions bringing in the online streamers, which was what we were asked to do by Parliament. We have also put in place a new definition for Canadian content, and we're taking measures to support—

• (1655)

Rachael Thomas: I'm just going to take you back to my question.

In your opening statement, you used the word “choice” multiple times and referred to being on the side of the consumer multiple times. If that truly is the desire of the CRTC, then I would imagine that some analysis has been done with regard to Bill C-18 and Bill C-11 and making things more affordable. Has that taken place?

Vicky Eatrides: Again, in terms of the mandate under the Online Streaming Act and putting that in place, what we've been asked to do is bring in the online streamers as broadcasters, which is what we've been working on, and that's why we have our initial base contributions decision. The work continues in terms of putting these measures in place.

Rachael Thomas: Do you expect that consumer prices would go up or down based on Bill C-11?

Vicky Eatrides: Again, I would come back to our mandate, and our mandate is to ensure that online streamers are brought into the system and to ensure the other objectives of the act, which are to support Canadian and indigenous content. That's what we've been focused on.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. There is absolutely no care of the consumer whatsoever in the considerations and deliberations that take place at the CRTC.

Vicky Eatrides: Again, what we've been doing is holding public proceedings, which includes hearing from various consumer groups. I can tell you that in the context of the Canadian content hearing, we heard from 500 intervenors. We heard live from almost 80. We've heard a wide range of perspectives on this, and what we're putting in place is what Parliament has asked us to do.

Rachael Thomas: What's the number one benefit that you're hearing from consumers?

Vicky Eatrides: It's to ensure that we are supporting areas that are important, like local news, French content and indigenous content. That's what we're hearing in terms of what Canadians are asking for.

Rachael Thomas: What would be the number one drawback? What are they concerned about with the implementation of Bill C-11? You said you heard from 500 consumer groups. What's their top concern?

Vicky Eatrides: Again, it comes back to the issues we've been talking about. People are very focused on wanting to make sure we have support for things like news. We've heard a lot about the importance. People are concerned—as I think we all hear from Canadians—about the loss of news and that kind of content.

Rachael Thomas: In my office, I hear from quite a few people as well. I wouldn't know the exact number, but it would be well over 100. It would be in the thousands, actually, if I do that math correctly.

The top concerns I hear about are the protection of freedom, choice, speech and access to information. A second thing I hear a lot about is just consumer pricing. They're concerned that, with increased regulation, consumer pricing will go up. I'm surprised that neither of these were mentioned by you, and I'm curious as to why we're hearing conflicting things.

Vicky Eatrides: I would say that freedom of expression and the free flow of information are fundamental principles in the telecommunications work we do, and on the broadcasting side as well.

In terms of pricing on the broadcasting side, that's for private companies. We don't regulate the price of broadcasting.

Rachael Thomas: No. However, your regulation does cause prices to go up.

Vicky Eatrides: We are focused on putting in place the measures Parliament has asked us to, and—

Rachael Thomas: A moment ago, you also said that you're focused on making things more affordable for Canadians and being on the side of the consumer.

Vicky Eatrides: That's correct. There are a lot of examples of the work we've been doing to ensure more affordability, which is having more choice—

Rachael Thomas: I'm just curious about how Bill C-11 falls into that example of creating greater affordability.

Vicky Eatrides: When I was talking about creating better affordability, that was in the context of our telecommunications work in terms of Internet and cellphone pricing.

Rachael Thomas: Okay. It's probably more reasonable to expect that Bill C-11 would actually cause the prices to go up.

Vicky Eatrides: I can't speak to what private companies do. We don't regulate the price on the broadcasting side.

Rachael Thomas: There will be a greater regulatory burden they will have to carry. Is that correct?

Vicky Eatrides: They have to comply with regulations.

Rachael Thomas: Okay.

Will they be expected to change their algorithms?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Thomas. That concludes the time for this round.

We will continue with Mr. Sawatzky for six minutes.

Jake Sawatzky: Hello. Thank you for coming here today.

I want to bring our topic over to scam calls and unsolicited calls. I'm sure we all get them. I certainly get quite a few—not only calls but also texts.

At a previous meeting, we had RCMP Chief Superintendent Michael Saghbini here, and I asked him this question as well. He said that the RCMP has worked with telcos to try to minimize this. For context, these calls not only are a problem but also pose consumer protection risks for seniors and those in vulnerable populations who might be targeted through phishing and fraud schemes.

Could you speak about what enforcement actions the CRTC is currently undertaking to investigate and prevent such calls or texts, including spoofs and abandoned robocalls? Maybe note how effective those measures have been in reducing scam calls for Canadians.

• (1700)

Vicky Eatrvides: Perhaps I can start off. I might turn things over to my colleague Scott to provide more detail.

Certainly, we hear a lot about scam calls. They are absolutely a nuisance at best and, sometimes, fraudulent at worst. There is a government-wide effort to tackle these issues. We work with the Privacy Commissioner and the Competition Bureau to promote compliance with CASL, Canada's anti-spam law. We do that. We work within a civil regime. We have a small but mighty team that works on that. The main thing we do on that front is promote compliance and, again, work with law enforcement; it has a criminal aspect as well.

I don't know whether you want to add some details, Scott.

Scott Hutton (Vice-President, Consumer, Analytics and Strategy, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission): We've also found that what very much helps in the work.... As Vicky mentioned, and as our chair mentioned, we're very much in a civil regime, and we end up collaborating with the civil partners mentioned and with those who look at cybercrime with respect to fraud on that front. In light of our role, certainly, we're able to participate, gain knowledge and share our knowledge with those parties.

It's very much about working collaboratively to provide prevention and advise Canadians on what the most recent scams are—things we're hearing through the spam reporting centre and from actual complaints filed with us and those we are investigating. We can't quite share the investigations with you, in light of the very nature of them being investigations, but we are continuing on that front.

What is very helpful is to arm Canadians with the information needed to make sure they can protect themselves.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you very much.

I'll switch the topic to local media.

Of course, there has been a profound transformation over the past decade. Traditional revenue models that once funded Canadian programming, like cable and television subscriptions, are declining. Then, of course, streaming platforms have grown.

The CRTC's new digital broadcasting regulatory framework requires online streaming services to financially contribute to the creation, production and promotion of Canadian content. Can the CRTC provide an estimate of the projected annual financial contributions that online streaming platforms will now be required to

make under the new regulatory framework, and how much reinvestment this is expected to generate for Canada's cultural production ecosystem?

Vicky Eatrvides: As part of the Online Streaming Act given to us by Parliament, we were directed to bring online streamers into the regime. We fairly quickly held a proceeding and a public hearing on base contributions to start to get that money flowing fairly quickly. We certainly heard about a need, as I mentioned earlier, in terms of local news, the importance of news and some of the challenges that are being faced, so we issued a decision on base contributions that is expected to bring in an estimated \$200 million per year. That is the base contributions, and the work continues in terms of the actual expenditures for each of the companies. We're continuing to work on that.

Jake Sawatzky: Thank you.

Madam Chair, how long do I have left?

The Chair: You have one and a half minutes.

Jake Sawatzky: I was reading about next-generation 911, which would represent a critical modernization of Canada's emergency communications infrastructure. Unlike legacy 911 systems, NG911 enables Canadians to access emergency services through voice, text, real-time video and data transmission, which improves response capabilities, especially for persons with disabilities in crisis situations.

Implementing NG911 requires substantial investment into telecom network upgrades, cybersecurity protections, data management systems and public safety answering point modernization. Given the scale of these infrastructure and operational costs, it would be great if you could explain how the CRTC is overseeing the national rollout of next-generation 911. What's the total estimated cost of the implementation, and what safeguards are in place to ensure that the public safety upgrades don't disproportionately increase costs for consumers?

• (1705)

Vicky Eatrvides: Perhaps I can start. I don't know if I'll have time to go over it in any detail—perhaps not.

Obviously, I think we all know how important and critical 911 is to Canadian safety. This is an issue that we've been looking at for some time and consulting on very broadly. We have been hearing from—

The Chair: I apologize. I'm going to have to end it there.

Thank you, Mr. Sawatzky.

[Translation]

Mr. Garon, you have six minutes.

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Eatrises, I'd like to return to the bill before us. We're still talking about Bill C-15, even though that isn't always apparent from our discussions.

If I understand correctly—and I may not—section 24 of this bill is intended to correct an error that crept in during the last Parliament, when the modernized Official Languages Act was passed. I know this is technical, but I'd like you to explain the error that was made, particularly with regard to privacy, and how it can be corrected. Perhaps you could give us some concrete examples.

Was the privacy of Canadian citizens compromised here? I'd like you to explain that to us, because that's essentially the work we have to do together today.

Vicky Eatrises: First, privacy is a key consideration in our work. Every time we make a decision, we take Canadians' privacy into account. I know there may have been a mistake, but I can assure you that we always give privacy careful consideration.

I can ask our legal counsel, Ms. Frenette, to explain what happened.

Rachelle Frenette (General Counsel and Executive Director, Legal Services, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission): With pleasure.

I will explain the context surrounding the provision that is the subject of the committee's study today. As we understand it, this is a legal provision of an interpretive nature. In carrying out its work, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission is required to examine privacy issues related to the subjects it addresses. In the course of certain legislative amendments made by Parliament, this provision was inadvertently removed from the interpretive legal text.

However, I can assure you that, in the course of its work, the commission has always taken these privacy issues into consideration, for example when initiating public processes. We're also subject to the Privacy Act, like any other federal institution, so we comply with all the obligations under that act, especially since there are other legal provisions included in the Broadcasting Act that address Canadians' privacy.

So we undertook our regulatory work with full knowledge of the facts and with privacy issues in mind.

Jean-Denis Garon: I think that's clear. I understand that an amendment will be proposed to essentially put a band-aid on a minor but very real risk. Thank you very much for explaining that.

I'd like to come back to the minister's testimony earlier. We were talking about the role of the government in television broadcasting. He replied that it was the government's role to fund CBC/Radio-Canada because only CBC/Radio-Canada is regulated by the CRTC. I'm not an expert on broadcasting, and I was under the impression that the CRTC regulated traditional television and all stations.

Could it be that the minister was mistaken?

Scott Shortliffe (Vice-President, Broadcasting, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission): Thank you for the question. I'm not here to talk about a minister's testimony, so I can't comment on his remarks.

That said, we're responsible for the entire system, including traditional television and radio, and now the online services mentioned in the broadcasting bill. It's clear that this is a system, and we're responsible for regulating the entire system.

• (1710)

Jean-Denis Garon: That's great. Thank you very much.

I have a bunch more questions lined up and I have about a minute and 45 seconds left, so I'll keep them short.

Again, I've got a broader question. Often, when we and people in the industry follow the CRTC's work, it seems like you take a long time to make decisions. I think that's a recurring criticism.

Is anything being done at the CRTC to speed up the process, particularly the regulatory decision-making process?

Vicky Eatrises: Yes, absolutely.

Unfortunately, this isn't the first time we've heard this. I would say that, as a quasi-judicial tribunal, we naturally have processes, public hearings, and we hear from all interested parties. Naturally, this takes time. We work hard just to move things along more quickly.

I can talk about this a little, but I know we don't have much time.

Jean-Denis Garon: That's all right, I'll give you the 30 or 40 seconds we have left.

Does it come down to financial resources? We've looked at the budget. Do you have enough resources? What are the main reasons why decisions take so long and why people in the industry often have to wait so long?

Vicky Eatrises: What it comes down to is the nature of our work, because we have formal processes. Public hearings take time. As I mentioned, we had 500 stakeholders for a single process, a single case dealing with the definition of Canadian content. It takes time. We had a three-week public hearing. Plus, there are many different perspectives.

Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Garon.

[English]

We will continue with Mr. Lawton for five minutes, please.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you very much, witnesses and officials, for being here.

I'd like to go back to the Online Streaming Act and, specifically, the new definition of Canadian content that the CRTC has set out.

What is the mechanism by which streaming companies that fall under the act—whether it's YouTube, Netflix or a podcast platform—are expected to conform to their obligations?

Vicky Eatrides: We are working through these various proceedings, and there are some more to come. We have other public proceedings that are ongoing. Through those decisions, we will be moving to conditions of service, and those will apply to specific companies.

Andrew Lawton: In effect, they would have to make sure that their algorithms conform to serve up the required amount of content that you've said is fitting that new definition. Is that correct?

Vicky Eatrides: The act actually prohibits us from regulating algorithms, so we don't do that.

Andrew Lawton: How are they supposed to ensure that they are offering up the right balance of CRTC-approved content without an algorithm change?

Vicky Eatrides: Perhaps I'll turn this over to our head of broadcasting to provide more detail.

Scott Shortliffe: We have certain decisions that are still before us. We ask questions about discoverability. Discoverability is more than algorithms. We had several of the streamers intervene in those proceedings and bring to our attention the amounts they already spend on promoting Canadian content: for example, what they do in terms of billboards and promotions and what they do in terms of bringing Canadian artists forward.

By their own testimony, they've said there are many ways they can make content discoverable. We are now examining whether we will build rules around that. Those decisions are still forthcoming, but the concept of discoverability is not the same as algorithms. As the chair said, the act clearly says we will not make orders regulating the use of specific computer algorithms or source code.

Andrew Lawton: You mentioned advertising. Are you saying that YouTube could satisfy its obligations by running a billboard campaign promoting *Heated Rivalry*, but not changing anything about the YouTube home page or the user suggestions?

Scott Shortliffe: I'm saying that we ask questions about the best ways to promote Canadian content and make it discoverable, because it was an objective in the act. We have a record in front of us.

Andrew Lawton: You've had several years of this already. I feel that you're saying you don't prescribe an algorithm, knowing full well that in order to conform to the regulations, these streaming companies will have to modify their algorithms.

Can you give me an example of how they would meet your definition or your expectation without having to amend their algorithms?

Scott Shortliffe: I'll just take this in two parts, if I could. First of all, our definition of Canadian content that is applied throughout the system is not necessarily about promoting specific shows.

In terms of how they could meet that, that is a subject of a public consultation and a forthcoming decision. Since we're a quasi-judicial tribunal, I can't give you examples at this time.

• (1715)

Andrew Lawton: Okay. Then, we're just supposed to trust that it will all work out. Is that the expectation on Canadians?

Scott Shortliffe: I think the CRTC always expects that Canadians will hold us to account when our decisions come out, and we will be pleased to answer questions when our decisions come out.

Andrew Lawton: Consumers desire a variety of things. There are Canadians and people who live in Canada representing diverse backgrounds who may prefer to watch content from their home country or in a different language. In the past, the CRTC has actively fought certain aspects of consumer preference. A notable example of this is the simsubbing debate from some years ago, where Canadians wanted to be able to access American Super Bowl ads, and the CRTC erred against consumer choice.

What safeguards are in place to ensure that this isn't going to happen with the online streaming regulations?

Scott Shortliffe: What I can say is that we will act within the ambit of the law that Parliament has given us. Simsub is a very complicated discussion, but I will say that the CRTC actually brought in a rule saying that Canadians could watch the Super Bowl on whatever platform they wished. However, we were taken to court, and the Supreme Court of Canada found that we had exceeded our powers in that respect.

Andrew Lawton: What recourse is available if a platform is not complying with the framework that's set out? I won't name any, but let's say there's a company that doesn't believe this has all that much authority, but they meet what you believe is the threshold for it. What can the CRTC do to force compliance or disconnect service in Canada?

Scott Shortliffe: I'm sorry. I'm just trying to parse your question and make sure that I answer it correctly. Forgive me if I'm taking a long—

Andrew Lawton: If someone doesn't comply, what do you have available?

Scott Shortliffe: If someone doesn't comply, we have an escalating series of measures we can take that start with a warning letter and that can go to a mandatory hearing. At the most extreme level, Parliament has now given us the possibility of administrative monetary penalties, which is a tool we have not used to date, so we have a variety of tools.

I think the first thing—

Andrew Lawton: Could you shut off access to a website in Canada?

Scott Shortliffe: We have no power to shut off access to the Internet, no.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lawton. That concludes your time.

We'll continue with Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, all of you, for being here.

Ms. Eatrides, I have a question on artificial intelligence. In fact, I know you gave a recent interview, in early January, on how the CRTC was approaching or was beginning to approach that question. I ask the question as a parliamentarian. I think all of us, around the table and beyond, are concerned about the rise of AI. We see tremendous potential with it, of course, not only for democracy perhaps, but also for all sorts of benefits beyond democracy—in health care, in particular, I think.

Let's think about generative AI, for example, and what that might mean, ultimately, for deepfakes and for the use of those in election campaigns, between election campaigns and these kinds of things. I know that the European Union is advanced, certainly, when it comes to looking at questions like that. Is the CRTC prepared to delve in further and address the matter?

Vicky Eatrides: I can tell you what we hear and have been hearing about in our proceedings with respect to AI. Obviously, there's a lot of concern. There is a broad range of views, which is not surprising, in the broadcasting sector. We hear about a fear that television and movies will no longer be created by humans. There's obviously fear about job loss, which you hear across the board. We've also heard some positive remarks about accessibility and about how closed captioning and other accessibility tools have been made better because of AI. We've heard a wide range of things.

We have been asking questions about AI in our most recent decision on the definition of Canadian content. We did include in our decision a reference that creators should be human and not artificial intelligence, so we have started to address those kinds of issues on the broadcasting side.

Peter Fragiskatos: That's encouraging, but obviously these risks remain. Again, I look to Europe, for example, which has moved ahead and requires that the individual or organization from which the AI content originates—the video, in the example I'm giving—be made clear. When it comes to deepfakes, for example, this is where I think the real risk is. If there are risks, all of us worry about that, and constituents do, too.

Do you believe that, for the content creators of AI, we should know who's putting out such videos? Should that be required, as Europe has moved in that direction?

• (1720)

Scott Shortliffe: We also have questions about AI usage in other consultations of ours, which are still open. I can say that we're in close touch with our colleagues in Europe. We trade information with them. We're aware that we're under different legal statutes.

We're building a record around broadcasting in Canada. We're also not responsible for the open Internet, and we realize that deepfakes are often shared on social media platforms, which we don't regulate.

On broadcasting platforms, we have asked questions around the usage of AI. We have raised the question about labelling. It is a matter that is still before us, but we're certainly paying close attention to what's happening in Europe, while balancing that with our primordial mission to ensure there's freedom of expression. We're always balancing those issues.

Peter Fragiskatos: All of us know it's a new and emerging area, so of course I would encourage you to continue to make efforts on that. It's very good that you're engaged with the Europeans on it.

I have about a minute left.

Could you touch again on the advances that have been made when it comes to affordability? I'm thinking specifically here about cellphones. This has been an ongoing issue for a number of years. Ms. Eatrides, can you go over the numbers again on the achievements we've seen so far?

Vicky Eatrides: Like committee members, we often hear, when we are speaking with Canadians across Canada, about the challenges in terms of affordability. You asked about cellphone services. We've put measures in place on the cellphone side where we have allowed competitors to offer more choice to compete using the networks of large telecommunications companies. We've seen a lot of choice come out of that.

The StatsCan data we've seen, which I referred to earlier, shows that from 2021 to 2025, cellphone prices have gone down more than 37%, which is quite significant considering that we've seen a lot of other prices being relatively stable in the market or going up. We have seen some positive signs on that front.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[Translation]

Mr. Champoux, you have two and a half minutes.

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

Thank you for welcoming me to your committee. This is a first for me, but it's not the first time I've met with CRTC representatives, whom I'm happy to see again, as always.

I wanted to take the opportunity given to me by my colleague Mr. Garon to ask the CRTC members a question about the independent local news fund.

Last year, in June if I'm not mistaken, the CRTC issued a decision allowing Corus to join the group of broadcasters eligible for this program, which is essential for regional news coverage. The CRTC justified Corus's inclusion among the program's beneficiaries on the grounds that new funds, new money, would be coming in to enhance the program and offset the inequity created by the arrival of a major player like Corus. However, the money still hasn't arrived. Obviously, this money was supposed to come from funds recovered from the digital giants. Where do we stand on that? What can we say to broadcasters who are struggling to keep their newsrooms open?

Vicky Eatrises: I'll start by briefly explaining the context. We've heard from many Canadians that newsrooms are really important, and we agree. We've taken many steps to support newsrooms. With regard to our decision on base contributions, we decided that since newsrooms are really important, we need money. We've made decisions about radio and television, which is what you're talking about.

I'll ask Mr. Shortliffe to give you a more specific answer on that.

Martin Champoux: I have very little time.

Mr. Shortliffe, I know you're capable of giving us very detailed answers, but I really want to know if the money is on its way. Will these broadcasters be forced to close stations due to the funding shortfall? That's really the question on everyone's mind.

Scott Shortliffe: As a result of a decision by the Federal Court of Appeal, the funds are ready to go out. I've been checking the court's website three times a day. At the same time, we are in contact with the Canadian Association of Broadcasters to find out more about the pressure on broadcasting. There are more decisions to come.

• (1725)

The Chair: We need to stop there, Mr. Shortliffe.

Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[*English*]

We will continue with Mr. Kelly for five minutes, please.

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you, Commissioner and officials.

In September, you appeared at the industry committee to answer questions, including questions from my colleague Raquel Dancho, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul. She asked you a series of questions about what the CRTC is doing to crack down on fraud and scam phone calls. You then talked about resources and limitations, but you said that you have a role to play.

I wonder if you can update Canadians on what your office is doing to cut down on the ongoing problem of fraud conducted over the telephone.

Vicky Eatrises: Thank you for the question.

As we talked about earlier, this is obviously at best an annoyance and, at worst, fraudulent and criminal.

We have a civil regime that we, together with the bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, promote compliance with, and there's a lot of education on that front. Anything that falls more within the sort of pure fraud type of activity would fall more with law enforcement.

Pat Kelly: As the regulator, you have a role regulating the companies that carry the phone lines over which this fraud is done. The amount is not trivial. The estimates are up to \$12 billion. All MPs are contacted in their communities by victims of fraud. They tend to be among the more vulnerable in our society, and the estimate is as high as \$12 billion.

I think Canadians are looking for urgency on this, not just explanations of all the different jurisdictions, so can you demonstrate to Canadians the urgency and tell us what further steps your commission has taken on this since that meeting in September?

Vicky Eatrises: We are always promoting compliance and education about scam calls. I would say, and you did mention this, that it is a very small part of our role. The only amount that we get in terms of parliamentary appropriations from government is less than 5%, or—

Pat Kelly: Are you under-resourced to fulfill this aspect of your mandate?

Vicky Eatrises: We work with others to fulfill this part of our mandate. We work with partners on this front. Again, what our focus has been is really to help promote compliance, again working with our partners on this front to do that.

Pat Kelly: Are legislative changes needed to give you the tools you need to properly regulate the businesses through which these frauds are conducted?

Vicky Eatrises: Again, we're part of the civil regime. We help promote compliance with CASL, Canada's anti-spam law. If you're talking about pure fraud, which falls more on the criminal side, that would be all law enforcement, so even additional resources would not put us in the realm of—

Pat Kelly: The companies you regulate are on the front line of this, and this is where referral to law enforcement would come into play. Is that correct? You would refer it to law enforcement.

Vicky Eatrises: We do.

Pat Kelly: But the vast majority of cases are not even reported. Most victims don't even report, and prosecutions are, I think, rare. Do you know the success rate of prosecutions for the referrals that you make?

Vicky Eatrides: Again, I think this would be a better question for law enforcement, because our regime is civil. We do not—

Pat Kelly: I'm asking about the referrals that you make. You said that you're in partnership with law enforcement. How many referrals have you made for prosecution in any year you might be able to track?

Vicky Eatrides: It's complaint-based. We should be able to get the information about how many complaints we would pass along to law enforcement, but if there's—

Pat Kelly: Okay, please table that.

Vicky Eatrides: Okay.

Pat Kelly: If there is a success, are you able to give sufficient evidence for law enforcement and then prosecutions to make the case?

• (1730)

Scott Hutton: The regime, through the spam reporting centre and arrangements we have, shares complaints received. We are not involved in the prosecution, so we would not have data in that regard.

Pat Kelly: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelly.

We'll continue with Mr. MacDonald now, for five minutes.

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, witnesses.

We've been talking about fraud, so I'm going to branch out a little from that.

On the CRTC's role in controlling sextortion of our youth in Canada.... Do you have a role to play, and can you speak to that?

Vicky Eatrides: My short answer would be no. I don't know if our legal counsel has anything to add.

Rachelle Frenette: Madam Chair, we are a statutory creature. We are bound by the statute and we implement the statutes that Parliament in its wisdom has chosen to provide us the mandate with.

Certainly, while that is an extraordinarily pressing issue for all Canadians, it is not within the realm of the CRTC to regulate in that space.

Kent MacDonald: You would have to take direction from statutes to put regulations in place that would make online platforms accountable. What happens is that we can't punish the bad actors who are from outside of our country under regular law. We would need to have regulations that would make the platform providers accountable.

Rachelle Frenette: When we're talking about issues like sextortion, those are criminal matters, which would probably be more appropriately dealt with by law enforcement agencies.

As the communications regulator, we have to be bound by the statute with which we have been entrusted by Parliament, and that is regulating the communications space, ensuring a sustainable

Canadian broadcasting system and ensuring a robust telecommunications system across Canada.

Kent MacDonald: Is it reasonable to think that you could, if you were given the direction, regulate online platform providers so they would have to deal with the issue of sextortion online?

Scott Shortliffe: We'd be very cautious about speculating about anything we haven't received. I'll also note that with what Parliament has given us to date, we have a very limited role in online services. We deal with online broadcasters when they act as broadcasters, but, for example, the act is very clear that we don't deal with social media and we don't deal with the open Internet, so we have a very restricted role under our legislation currently.

Kent MacDonald: Okay.

I'll pivot to something a little more upbeat.

In budget 2025, Canada has included funding for the Canada music fund, the Canada periodical fund and the building communities through arts and heritage program. I think that's sending out a signal to strengthen Canadian storytelling and the creative industries. I'm from Atlantic Canada. We depend tremendously on regional broadcasters and small digital platforms to promote culture in our communities.

Can you speak to how the CRTC will be encouraging the creation and distribution of culture through its programs?

Vicky Eatrides: We've been given the mandate by Parliament to put in place and implement the Online Streaming Act, which is all about ensuring that there is support for Canadian stories, Canadian content and indigenous content. All of the work we are doing right now and have been doing is to ensure that those Canadian stories and that Canadian content are available.

Kent MacDonald: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

We will now continue with five minutes from Mr. Lawton, please.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you very much.

I want to go back to the Online Streaming Act and what's captured by this.

When we are looking at a streaming platform's offerings that would be subject to this, podcasts would be included in that. Is that correct?

Vicky Eatrides: The policy direction that was given to us by government specifically said that podcasts are not included, and as part of our decision on base contributions, we said that we would not regulate podcasts.

Andrew Lawton: How do you define podcasts? Again, this would be less germane when you're talking about Netflix, but when you're looking at YouTube, there are a lot of shows that still have production values, production companies. They are our visual entities. How are they excluded? How is that line drawn in a way that a scripted fictional show is captured, but a commentary show or a chat show that isn't news programming wouldn't be?

• (1735)

Scott Shortliffe: Those are excellent questions. We haven't gotten to the part of our regulatory cadre where we've had to define exactly what a podcast is. As we move into that social media space, I think the questions you posed are exactly the questions we want to pose and we want to hear from informed witnesses on.

Thank you. Those are great questions.

Andrew Lawton: I was bound to have one or two, but I appreciate that.

Again, you're not actually able to definitively say that certain programs that people would largely see as podcasts won't be captured by this, because the lines have not yet been drawn. Is that what you're saying?

Scott Shortliffe: What we can say is that we've been clear that we won't regulate podcasts. Therefore, if someone brought us a case and said this is an edge case, our starting position would be that if it's identified as a podcast, we would not want to regulate it. We would look at the evidence put in front of us.

We've been very clear that we have no intention of regulating podcasts, based both on the policy direction and on our decisions.

Andrew Lawton: As I read the determinations of what Canadian content is, it's supposed to be, for the most part, value-neutral. You're looking predominantly at ownership and production, not whether it sufficiently tells the story of Canada. Do I understand that correctly?

Scott Shortliffe: Yes, it's based on a points system. It modified a points system that had been around for several decades. We did add some bonus points for identifiable Canadian content. We went through what that means, such as whether it's based on a Canadian book. It is meant to be neutrally applied. We don't want to get into a case where I or any of my colleagues are saying, "This is Canadian enough." We want to be able to add up points based on the Canadians who are making the content.

Andrew Lawton: That brings us back to the objective. Is the point of this to ensure that we are creating Canadian jobs and supporting productions that create Canadian jobs, or is it about telling the story of Canada? In the messaging from the political side of this, from the government, it was always about ensuring that Canadian stories are being told. However, you've designed the regulations in a way that is strictly about ownership. You could have a Canadian-owned production that's set in New York City, with American characters, that's trying to get picked up by a U.S. network. It's not actually promoting Canadian identity in any meaningful way.

Scott Shortliffe: What I'd say is that our existing rules have always been based on that. We've actually tried to come up with a system now that will encourage more partnerships. We now have

these bonus points that would recognize certain Canadian attributes. I think that we don't see it as an either-or. We believe that if you have great Canadian talent, that will bring more economic opportunity into Canada, and it will allow you to reflect Canadian values and Canadian stories.

Andrew Lawton: Keeping in mind what you said about the work in progress on defining what a podcast is, how can we ensure that we're keeping the broadest possible interpretation of that so we aren't including what most people would say are shows that should not be subject to this regime in the same way that a multi-million dollar scripted production would be?

Scott Shortliffe: What I'd say is that we're still building our regulatory cadre. As I mentioned, we haven't looked specifically at that question, but anything we do will be based on the public record and on public submissions. In answer to an earlier question, that's why sometimes it feels like it takes us a long time. It's because we need those records before we make decisions, so that they will be considered and Canadians will know that we are basing it on evidence put in front of us.

Andrew Lawton: This legislation now goes back many, many years. Obviously, you don't want to rush into the wrong decision here, but why has there not been an accounting for what are pretty core questions that were dealt with when the legislation and regulations were being drafted? Why has that not happened yet?

Scott Shortliffe: We're trying to take the legislation step by step. We took a look at Canadian content in audiovisual. We were changing decades' worth of practice. We brought in a base contributions decision that's bringing \$200 million into the system. We created a commercial radio news fund. We've bulked up the independent local news fund. We have many more decisions that are coming.

The Chair: Apologies, Mr. Shortliffe, but I'm going to have to end it there.

Thank you, Mr. Lawton.

I will now turn to Mr. Leitão for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Carlos Leitão: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good evening, Ms. Eatrides. Welcome and thank you for being here.

I'd like to address two different issues: the first is communications, and the second is broadcasting and telecommunications.

I recently changed my Internet service provider, and everything went smoothly. I think I benefited from the new rules you put in place that allow one company to use another company's network. It worked in my case. I'm very happy, and everything is fine.

However, many people in our ridings are telling us that they don't understand why you're forcing a company that has invested in building a fibre-optic network to let its competitors use that network.

Could you explain to us and to the people in my region, in Laval, why that's not quite how it works, that in fact the decision increases competition, which in turn increases the range of services available to the public?

• (1740)

Vicky Eatrides: I will start and then ask Mr. Hutton to continue.

This is really important. Our job is to promote competition, but at the same time, we really want to promote investment. We understand that networks are very expensive, so we've put a lot of measures in place in conjunction with our decisions to ensure that investment continues.

I'll ask Mr. Hutton to provide you with more details.

Scott Hutton: There are two regimes you're referring to: the cellular network regime and the residential Internet network regime, so to speak. They're a little different, but the concept is still the same. Setting up regimes is always a key element for us. Yes, we are asking these companies to share their networks, but only for a certain period of time. The goal is to give new players time to find new customers and financing so that they too can ultimately invest in their own networks.

Naturally, in the meantime we're taking steps to ensure that prices are fair and equitable. I'm talking here about the fees that these new players have to pay to the incumbent companies. Companies need to be able, through a pricing framework—which the CRTC is working very hard on—to have the means to continue investing. These arrangements allow them not only to invest, but also to succeed. Some go through negotiation, others through CRTC pricing. However, it's still very important for us to have this team to be able to answer the big questions. We need more competition and more players, but we also need towers and fibre-optic networks across the country to ensure that Canadians are connected to the outside world.

Carlos Leitão: Indeed.

We're all familiar with the very large companies, but there are also medium-sized companies that have invested in their own networks and now find themselves at a slight disadvantage due to the new regulatory framework. What are your thoughts on that?

Scott Hutton: There are two different markets. On the cellular network side, we've put a regime in place to encourage the deployment of these mid-sized companies in this market. We call them medium-sized companies, but they're still giants. We want various regional companies to be able to move beyond their traditional territory and compete with each other. That's really where we see the impact of competition from these new players on market prices. In fact, you've benefited from it yourself.

Carlos Leitão: I don't have much time left, Mr. Shortliffe, and I wouldn't want you to be interrupted a second time. You talked about discoverability, which is very important, after all. Could you briefly tell us how you intend to ensure that—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but there won't be any time left for a response. It's unfortunate.

Thank you, Mr. Leitão.

Mr. Champoux, the floor is yours.

Martin Champoux: Why stop when everything is going so well?

The Chair: You'll be closing out the meeting, Mr. Champoux.

You have two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

For about six years now, the government's been trying to legislate digital platforms with Bill C-10, which became Bill C-11, then Bill C-18 about online news. The CRTC ended up having to set up regulatory frameworks based on these new provisions. These laws and regulations have been challenged relentlessly and repeatedly by digital platforms and web giants.

How would you rate Canada in general, or the CRTC specifically, in terms of regulating web giants, six years after we started trying to regulate them? You can give a rating out of ten. You can also give a rating out of five or three, if you want it to sound better.

• (1745)

Scott Hutton: You know, my role is to look at what's happening outside the CRTC and around the world. Naturally, these players are allergic to regulation, and I think you've made a good point about that. Some of our decisions, which you mentioned earlier, are still—

Martin Champoux: I know you well enough, Mr. Hutton. I know you won't give us a number. Maybe I wouldn't have said—

Scott Hutton: I won't give you a number, but it's important to note that what may appear to be progress elsewhere may not actually be progress. We've had some visits recently. Yes, in France, there are all kinds of wonderful regulations in place, but if Netflix sets up shop in another country, they don't apply.

We work with companies. They fight us for a while, but we're also seeing some successes, with certain Canadian programs being developed and certain investments coming in. So we're hopeful that we can go ahead—

Martin Champoux: Your optimism is encouraging.

I don't want to interrupt you, but I have much less speaking time than my other colleagues.

I've noticed something else, too. We've made a lot of concessions. We agreed not to tackle algorithms. We understood that they could represent a trade secret for companies. Furthermore, we don't want to legislate, we don't want to regulate different forms of broadcasting such as blogs, and so on. At some point, this environment, this mode of communication, the consumption of information and culture, among other things, changes from year to year.

At some point, won't the traditional media that the CRTC is empowered to regulate simply fade away in favour of these new forms of broadcasting that you won't have had to regulate because they will always have been excluded from your scope of activity? Don't you think we're constantly on the wrong track—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Champoux, but your time is up.

Martin Champoux: But it would've been such a great answer.

The Chair: I don't doubt it.

Martin Champoux: I know Mr. Hutton, so I know. Maybe we could get a written response.

The Chair: This isn't the only meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance today.

[*English*]

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the witnesses very much for their presentations and assistance here today.

Colleagues, I'm going to adjourn this meeting and see all of you back here in 10 minutes to begin the next meeting of the finance committee for today.

The meeting is adjourned.

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