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Chair: Lisa Hepfner



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• (1145)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 26 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would ask all in-person participants to please read the guidelines written on the updated cards on your table. These measures are in place to help prevent feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters. There is a QR code on the card that links to a short awareness video if you need more information.

Pursuant to the routine motion adopted by this committee, I can confirm that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of this meeting.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. All comments should be through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, September 22, 2025, the committee is meeting to study the state of the journalism and media sectors. It's quite a broad study.

With us today, we have Travis Dhanraj, former journalist. From the Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec, we have Angelica Carrero, executive director. Welcome. From Freshet News, we have Janis Cleugh and Mario Bartel. From Friends of Canadian Media, we have Raj Shoan and Randy Kitt. From HonestReporting Canada, we have Mike Fegelman, Amanda Eskenasi and Dr. Haran Shani-Narkiss. Please forgive me if I've butchered your names. We also have Paul Deegan from News Media Canada. It's good to see you again, sir.

Everyone, or your organizations, will have five minutes for an opening statement, and then we'll open up the floor to members for questions.

We'll start with Mr. Dhanraj.

You have the floor for five minutes, sir.

Travis Dhanraj (Former Journalist, As an Individual): Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

As a kid growing up in Alberta, I wasn't like most of my friends. Every night, I watched *The National* with Knowlton Nash. He represented a public broadcaster that belonged to Canadians—not to

power and not to a party, but to the public. That is the CBC I believed in.

Many Canadians know the story about one of my tweets. In April 2024, I publicly stated that *Canada Tonight* had requested an interview with then CBC president Catherine Tait, and the request was declined. Those were facts. Shortly after, I was removed from the air.

On May 7, 2024, Tait told this very committee she was “not aware of any repercussions”, yet 24 hours earlier, ATIP records showed that her vice-president, Barb Williams, briefed her directly about my situation. That matters because trust matters.

The tweet was not the beginning. It was the breaking point. For months prior, tensions had been building, not over performance, but over control. While I was publicly held up as a bold, diverse host, my ability to lead the very program carrying my face and name was quietly being stripped away.

CBC's stated commitment to diversity contrasted with the realities of tokenism. Still, I pushed forward, creating a nightly panel to showcase real diversity, including of thought. I questioned unequal pay and why, for example, one contributor who was indigenous always needed to be paid, while others weren't. When a prominent Black journalist requested compensation after appearing and doing the exact same job, I was told to reconsider booking him moving forward.

I attempted to end this discriminatory practice. Instead, the panel was cancelled. When it came to politics, interviews were blocked under guardrails, governed by an internal document never made public titled “Parameters for Political Guests”. Political access was centralized and booking decisions were controlled elsewhere. It did not happen once. It became a pattern. It became the standard.

Power & Politics, hosted by David Cochrane, was given gate-keeping authority over which politicians could appear on *Canada Tonight*. When I questioned that control and who was in control, I was viewed as disruptive.

At the same time, I raised concerns about a toxic environment. After I sat down with Speaker Greg Fergus for a conversation on Black History Month, chief political correspondent Rosemary Barton circulated internal communications questioning my program, copying senior leadership, insinuating that she or Mr. Cochrane should have done the interview. It was an intimidation tactic, which management ignored. I, and others, raised concerns about bullying behaviour by senior figures, including Mr. Cochrane, but while he remained on air, I faced discipline and marginalization.

The transcripts of these meetings show that the issue was not about my journalism, but about reputational risk to the corporation. I received a written warning carrying the threat of termination. I was placed under confidentiality restrictions that prevented me from correcting public and internal narratives. The CBC silenced and intimidated me simply for trying to do my job and fulfill my public service role to Canadians.

This is not about left or right. It's not about one tweet or one career. It's about systemic control, tokenism, selective enforcement and a toxic culture where intimidation went unchecked.

When I refused to waive my rights under the Canadian Human Rights Act in a proposed confidentiality agreement—a gag order, essentially—my role was not renewed. My union, tasked with protecting my rights as an employee, told me explicitly, “It's very much a normal thing that we use.”

After 25 years in journalism, my career ended. The dream I had as a kid of working at the CBC was shattered, along with my trust in it.

Inside the newsroom, the message was unmistakable and did not need to be spoken. I raised concerns. I challenged centralized control and bias. I fought for real diversity and equal standards. I tried to do my job as a journalist. Within months, I was pulled off the air, disciplined, restricted from speaking, stripped of my prime time program and eventually out altogether.

If you were still working there, would you feel safe raising similar concerns? This is how silence becomes culture. It's how whistleblowers are intimidated.

Public institutions do not weaken from scrutiny; they weaken when they avoid it. The CBC that I believed in was strong enough to withstand accountability. If it is to endure as a public broadcaster worthy of Canadians' trust and over \$1.4 billion of their money, it must be strong enough to withstand it again. Accountability is not destruction; it is survival.

• (1150)

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we go to Angelica Carrero, with the Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec.

[*Translation*]

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Angelica Carrero (Executive Director, Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec): Madam Chair, mem-

bers of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to share a few comments as part of your study on the journalism and media sectors in Canada and Quebec. I would also like to commend the committee for its work, which resulted in fair and timely recommendations in its third report.

As part of the executive team at the Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec, or ARCQ, I have the privilege of seeing the work done by these stations. We have 37 radio stations across the province, from Montreal to Matagami to the Îles de la Madeleine, for example. Most of them are French-language stations, but some are bilingual or English-language, such as the station in Blanc-Sablon. They cover a vast territory, sometimes with only modest annual budgets. The work they do is creative, relentless and sometimes nothing short of miraculous. These are also media outlets that have been around for many years and have stood the test of time, despite the challenges.

The vast majority of stations employ at least one journalist, sometimes two or even four, for a total of about 50 journalists working to provide reliable news coverage of community issues that is grounded in everyday reality. Community radio stations have long enjoyed the public's trust. This was confirmed by a study conducted by the ARCQ in 2024.

Furthermore, it is not enough to simply claim to be doing local or community journalism; you have to actually do it. The physical presence of journalists at community stations must be distinguished from cases where news is generated by non-human means, or where broadcasts merely relay information from a larger nearby urban centre.

In addition to the physical presence of journalists and all their volunteers—and there are many volunteers—it is the mission and purpose of community radio stations that make them excellent ambassadors for local news. Their mission is to serve the community in which they are rooted. In fact, it is the community that creates and manages the radio station; therefore, the station has the community's interests at heart. It's important to remember that these are non-profit media outlets and that they play an essential role in protecting press freedom and defending the public's right to quality information. Indeed, their content is diverse, non-partisan, comprehensive and reliable.

I would venture to say that we are, therefore, providing the kind of community-based journalism that the committee sets out in its second recommendation, and it is certainly true that it needs a great deal of support. Indeed, as I mentioned at the beginning, community radio stations operate on meagre revenues that are dwindling year after year. When it is suggested that they're heavily subsidized, it's truly lamentable, since the only provincial subsidy they receive barely covers the standard salary of a single employee. These are subsidies that are difficult to bring up to date, even after many years.

At the federal level, there is indeed the LJI, or the Local Journalism Initiative, which we greatly appreciate, along with some project-based funding available to those who meet the eligibility criteria, but that's not enough. Fortunately, we're stepping up our efforts to move forward with the CRI, or the Community Radio Initiative, which could be managed by the Community Radio Fund of Canada, or CRFC, in an effort to increase the funding available to all community radio stations across the country.

We're asking the government for annual operating funding of approximately \$30 million, so that each station receives about \$85,000, an amount that is still quite modest compared to the funding provided to or required by other broadcasters. This assistance would nevertheless help ensure the financial viability of community stations. Otherwise, radio stations must rely on their advertising revenue to try to make up for this shortfall. However, as several experts have already pointed out, this advertising revenue has clearly shifted to foreign platforms, which gobble up almost all of it. This is nothing new. It is Canadian government money being used to grow the financial assets of large American multinationals. All of this runs counter to this same government's much-promoted policy of buying local.

• (1155)

I'd also like to highlight the joint work we're doing with our two sister associations, NCRA, the National Campus and Community Radio Association, and ARCC, the Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, to request a clear directive on local advertising placement so that a specific portion of the amounts is systematically directed to community advertising. Together, our three associations represent independent, not-for-profit community radio stations across Canada. We believe that this directive would encourage governments to place more of the money that is already set aside with local media outlets. It's a redistribution of existing money; it's not a new request. Above all, we believe that local advertising would have a much greater and lasting impact on citizens.

As the Government of Canada continues to invest in public communications to raise awareness of its programs and services, it is increasingly important to ensure that messages are delivered through channels that actually reach the audiences they are intended to reach, rather than by digital giants that have no roots or support in Canada. Advertising that doesn't take into account geographic, linguistic or digital barriers risks leaving some communities confused and uninformed. In short, the idea is that community radio stations help the government fulfill its mission to inform all Canadians and to have a greater impact on them.

Thank you very much.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Next we have Janis Cleugh and Mario Bartel from Freshet News.

Collectively, you have five minutes. I'm not sure how you want to share that. Go ahead.

Mario Bartel (Co-Founder, Freshet News): Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this committee.

My name is Mario Bartel.

Janis Cleugh (Co-Founder, Freshet News): My name is Janis Cleugh. Along with Theresa McManus and Cornelia Naylor, we are the co-founders of Freshet News, the first non-profit news co-operative in western Canada that's union-supported.

We are veteran community news reporters, editors and paginators with more than 100 years of combined experience, covering New Westminster, Burnaby and the Tri-Cities in British Columbia—approximately 600,000 people outside of the city of Vancouver.

Last April, Glacier Media, now called Lodestar Media, closed our three online publications—the New Westminster Record, Burnaby Now and Tri-City News—in the middle of a federal election. It meant that we couldn't cover the all-candidates meetings, that our candidates couldn't get their messaging out and that our readers were lost about who to vote for. This is dangerous for democracy.

Mario Bartel: When I originally landed at Tri-City News in 1991, virtually every community in the Lower Mainland was served by at least two local papers. Consolidation and closures winnowed that down to one in most communities by 2015.

In August 2023, the same month our Meta social media shut down, Glacier Media stopped printing our newspapers altogether. The company said that online was the only way forward. It wasn't.

Less than two years later, five rapidly growing cities and two villages immediately east of Vancouver were left with little or no local news source. That meant decisions made at city halls and school boards got no independent coverage. There were no stories about young athletes and emerging artists, and no coverage of local events, festivals and parades.

Janis Cleugh: What may have been no longer economically viable to Glacier Media was untenable to the journalists who had dedicated their careers to sharing those stories. After all, we live in those communities, too.

The four of us got together with a co-op developer. With the support of our union, Unifor Local 2000, we put together a plan to keep our communities informed.

We spent the summer and early fall of 2025 learning about co-op structures and governance, fundraising and doing community outreach. People told us they didn't know what was happening in their hometowns anymore.

Mario Bartel: On October 15, we launched Freshet News online, a single title covering all of our communities. It's named for the annual spring runoff from the northern snows that wash down the Fraser River past our cities. It symbolizes renewal, a fresh start.

Two months later, we revived a print edition. We're monthly for now, but we plan to increase to twice a month in April, with our ultimate goal to return to weekly publication.

We're four journalists who never had to give much thought to the business side of our craft, the ads that ran between our stories and the distribution network that got those stories to readers.

Janis Cleugh: The learning curve has been steep, but our journalism skill set has made us adept to changing gears when needed.

The communities are responding. Our website traffic grows every week, as do subscriptions to our weekly email newsletter. Advertisers are eager to get into our newspaper, and readers are scooping up the newspapers—20,000 of them—from our distribution points at city halls, community and cultural recreation hubs, grocery stores, coffee shops, barbershops and senior residences. We even get calls to replenish.

Mario Bartel: We truly feel that our model of non-profit, locally rooted journalism that's accountable to the communities we serve is a way forward as corporate media gives up, but what we're doing is not new. In fact, across the United States, as corporate media abandons communities due to lack of profits, reporter-led news organizations and collectives are filling the gap.

Still, supports are lacking for journalism start-ups in Canada. We've come this far mostly on a volunteer basis as we continue looking for jobs. Our severance and EI benefits have dried up. Our fundraising at community events and through an online crowdfunding platform is composed of mostly small individual donations of \$10, \$25 and \$100 at a time. We don't have charitable status, so we can't issue tax receipts that might shake loose transformative big-money support.

Foundation funding frequently looks for a proven history, something that's difficult for a start-up to provide. Grant opportunities are often like fitting a square peg into a round hole. The few that are journalism-specific, like the local journalism initiative, are already oversubscribed and don't provide funding for such critical supports as hiring ad reps who can bring in ad revenue, or cover costs like software subscriptions, insurance, printing and distribution.

● (1205)

Janis Cleugh: Make no mistake: Many of the media industry's wounds are self-inflicted, with too much growth too quickly back when times were flush, too much consolidation, too many resources expended chasing bad ideas and too many owners who are investors rather than people who believe in the mission of news.

Those owners would have us believe that the news business is dead, but from our experience over the past few months, since we started Freshet News, it's been quite the opposite. People want to be connected to each other and their communities free from algorithms. Businesses want to share their stories with local customers. Journalists want to be able to write and keep sharing their stories.

Putting community back into community news is the way forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That was a very effective use of sharing your time. As a former community reporter, I really appreciate your efforts. Thank you for all you're doing.

Next, from Friends of Canadian Media, we have Raj Shoan and Randy Kitt.

I expect an equally engaging back-and-forth between the two of you.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You have the floor for five minutes.

Raj Shoan (Executive Director, Friends of Canadian Media): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

Friends of Canadian Media is a non-partisan, public interest organization dedicated to ensuring that Canadians have access to strong, independent Canadian journalism and storytelling. We advocate for citizens, not for corporations, because a healthy media system is essential to a healthy democracy.

Let me begin plainly: The state of journalism in Canada is poor, and in most communities it is deteriorating further. Over the past decade and a half, hundreds of local news outlets have closed across the country. Millions of Canadians now live in communities with little or no local news coverage. Newsrooms have shrunk. Journalists have been laid off. Entire beats have disappeared.

This is not simply an industry transition; it's a democratic deficit. Local journalism scrutinizes municipal councils. It covers courts. It informs citizens about public health, education and emergencies. When journalism disappears, civic participation declines, polarization increases and misinformation fills the vacuum.

Governments have taken important steps, including with the journalism labour tax credit, the local journalism initiative, the Online News Act, the Online Streaming Act and support for CBC. These measures matter. They demonstrate recognition that journalism is not just another sector; it's democratic infrastructure. However, the structural disruption facing Canadian journalism remains profound. The economic model that sustained local news has been destabilized by global digital platforms that capture advertising revenue while investing minimally in Canadian news production.

That brings me to five areas where federal leadership is essential.

First, the Online News Act and the Online Streaming Act are critical to creating a sustainable funding framework for local news. These laws must not be weakened, traded away or hollowed out through exemptions or side deals. Regulatory certainty and enforcement are essential.

Second, eligibility for the journalism labour tax credit should be expanded to include broadcasters. Broadcast newsrooms, particularly in local television and radio, face financial pressures similar to those in print. They too are pillars of local accountability.

Third, Parliament should close the loophole in section 19 of the Income Tax Act that allows a full deductibility of advertising on foreign digital platforms. Canadian advertising dollars should not receive preferential tax treatment when they're directed to foreign platforms rather than Canadian outlets.

Fourth, the federal government should commit to directing at least 25% of its advertising budget to trusted domestic news organizations, both publishers and broadcasters big and small. This would strengthen local journalism while ensuring that Canadians receive critical public information through reliable channels.

Fifth, Canadian news creators must be protected from having their content used by artificial intelligence companies without permission or compensation. Copyright protections, licensing frameworks and transparency requirements must ensure that journalism is not harvested without value flowing back to those who produce it.

Finally, a vibrant CBC is part of a strong ecosystem alongside successful private and independent media. As the national public broadcaster, it plays a foundational role in connecting regions, serving official language minority communities and maintaining news capacity where commercial models are under strain.

I will now turn to my colleague Randy Kitt.

Randy Kitt (Director of Media, Unifor, Friends of Canadian Media): Thank you, Raj.

Unifor represents approximately 9,000 media workers across Canada. In the last several years alone, hundreds of journalists and media employees have lost their jobs. When newsrooms shrink, the consequences are immediate. There are fewer reporters at city hall, fewer investigative projects, fewer rural correspondents and more reliance on centralized news content, yet the demand for reliable information has never been greater, as Freshet News can tell you.

We are living through a period of geopolitical instability, rising misinformation and increasing public cynicism. Journalism is one of the few professions capable of grounding public debate in verified fact. Failing to stabilize Canadian journalism means surrendering not just jobs but our sovereignty—losing the local accountability, shared facts and democratic resilience that safeguard our nation's independence.

Journalism is essential to a functioning democracy. The Canadian government should treat it like a national park. It's something that must be nurtured, protected and properly funded for future generations.

• (1210)

Raj Shoan: A strong journalism sector is not a luxury. It's infrastructure for democracy, and it's imperative that we sustain it.

We thank the committee for undertaking the study and stand ready to assist.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to HonestReporting Canada. I have Mike Fegelman in the room.

Do you have colleagues online? Are you all joining in the five-minute opening?

Mike Fegelman (Executive Director, HonestReporting Canada): They will be joining in the Q and A component.

The Chair: Very good. You have the floor now for five minutes.

Mike Fegelman: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning. My name is Mike Fegelman, and I'm the executive director of HonestReporting Canada. We're a non-profit organization that ensures fair and accurate Canadian media coverage of Israel. We started more than 20 years ago, but the overt media bias we have experienced and seen over the last two and a half years has made that era look quaint by comparison.

Just hours after thousands of Palestinian terrorists invaded Israel on October 7, carrying out an orgy of murder, rape, torture and kidnappings, our taxpayer-funded broadcaster leaped into action.

In a letter to editorial staff, George Achi, CBC's former director of journalistic standards and practices, warned journalists not to use the word "terrorist" when referring to Hamas and not to admit that 2005 was the end of Israel's permanent presence in Gaza, which it was. Even when Canadian officials refer to Hamas as terrorists, Achi wrote that reporters "should add context to ensure the audience understands this is opinion, not fact." Hamas is, of course, a listed terrorist organization.

It soon became clear that for the CBC and for wide swaths of the Canadian media landscape, their role was not to report the facts to Canadians, but to use their immense influence in society to promote a narrow ideological agenda.

Present day news outlets parrot talking points from pro-Palestinian activists and overwhelmingly feature guests with a predictable anti-Israel world view, presenting them as credible while choosing not to include opposing voices. When anti-Israel groups sneeze, it achieves wall-to-wall news coverage. When Amnesty International accuses Israel of committing a genocide, going so far as to make up a new definition in order to do so, or when a discredited group of non-experts makes such claims, they get widespread coverage.

When scholars documented Hamas's fabricated death toll or penned a comprehensive report demonstrating that no genocide took place, they were ignored by our media. The unfounded claims of genocide and starvation were promoted ad nauseam by our media. As it became clear that those allegations were false, reporters didn't apologize; they simply moved on. Now, like a cat chasing a laser dot on the wall, the worst offenders in anti-Israel media bias in Canada—whether the CBC, The Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star or others—take their cues not from what's newsworthy, but from what complaints are being made by pro-Palestinian activists.

When reporters document the worrying rise of Islamic radicalism in Canada, the presence of Iranian regime officials in our nation or the impact of Qatari dark money in Canadian universities, they are treated as *personae non gratae*. When a Canadian mosque recently honoured Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and glorified him as a martyr, our journalists ignored this brazen support for terrorism.

Our journalists have a solemn duty to hold the powerful to account, not to act as their water carriers, but that's what they've done, promoting hard line anti-Israel disinformation and acting as unpaid publicists for an immense web of extremist actors in Canada.

This media coverage directly contributes to a spike in anti-Jewish hate crimes. When Israel is painted as a genocidal and pariah state and opponents are widely silenced, a target is drawn on the backs of Canadian Jews. The incessant demonization of Israel—and, by extension, of Jews—has led to an unprecedented attack on the Jewish community, with terrorist rallies now a regular occurrence on Canadian streets and with Jewish schools and synagogues, as we saw this past week, shot at, all while far too many elected leaders and law enforcement ignore this cancer in our midst.

Over the past two years, our media has promoted ideology over facts. In the case of the CBC, it did so at the taxpayer's expense. I'm happy to recount numerous examples of Canadian media bias that we have confronted. When our media act as stenographers for a regressive and hateful world view, it's not reporting the news; it is creating it. When our leaders stay silent, they let it happen.

Our elected leaders must take the lead to remedy the situation. In my written testimony and submission to this committee, I've offered three concrete courses of action that you can take to directly counter these critical issues, and I would be happy to elucidate them today for anyone interested.

I have brought with me here today two colleagues, Dr. Haran Shani-Narkiss, CEO of Innohives, and Amanda Eskenasi, director of education at HR Canada Charitable Organization. They conducted a comprehensive review of the CBC's coverage of the Israel-Hamas war and have provided real scientific evidence of asymmet-

ric coverage. It isn't an opinion that the CBC is one-sided; we now have scientific, irrefutable proof.

Canadian taxpayers fund public broadcasters to provide accurate, impartial and reliable information. When media outlets choose ideology over facts, they fail in this fundamental duty, leaving Canadians misinformed on issues of national security, terrorism and international conflict. This is not merely a concern for one community. It affects every Canadian's right to understand the world as it truly is.

• (1215)

Restoring trust in our media is not a partisan issue, but a national imperative. Parliament must act now to ensure that our media serve Canadians with facts, fairness and integrity, because an informed public depends on it and our democracy requires it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, we have Paul Deegan with News Media Canada.

Welcome, sir. You have five minutes, starting now.

[Translation]

Paul Deegan (President and Chief Executive Officer, News Media Canada): Good morning.

News Media Canada represents about 550 news titles across Canada, from independent weekly community newspapers to large urban and national dailies.

[English]

Since I last appeared before this committee, the advertising market in Canada has continued to remain very challenging. Simply put, too many ad dollars are being scooped up by Google. Last year, a U.S. Federal Court judge ruled that Google, which operates in all three areas of the market—the buying, the selling and the ad exchange itself—illegally monopolized the ad tech market through anti-competitive conduct.

News publishers fully embrace and support the responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence. At the same time, despite deploying bot blockers, we are seeing the theft of our intellectual property on an industrial scale. Companies like Google, Microsoft, OpenAI—which is familiar to all of you because of their employees' failure to alert authorities prior to the Tumbler Ridge incident—Perplexity and even Canada's Cohere are ingesting, repackaging and distributing copyright-protected content directly from published news articles.

These companies aren't just providing snippets that one would find through a traditional search. They're providing very detailed summaries and passing them off as their own creation. They're depriving news publishers of audience, subscriptions and advertising, and are thus capturing the value journalism depends on for its survival.

Moreover, Google, which is dominant in search, has embedded AI-generated summaries directly into its search interface without providing publishers with an effective opt-out mechanism. If publishers want to block Google's AI crawler, they find themselves de-indexed or unable to attract traffic to their sites.

News is an essential input to the knowledge economy. It helps people, businesses and investors make better, more informed real-time decisions. It's also a necessary input for the output of AI companies, but the value transfer cannot be asymmetrical. The user needs to pay the creator. The content theft by AI companies must stop, and government can help.

First, Public Services and Procurement Canada and Treasury Board can work together to ensure that those on the government's list of artificial intelligence suppliers—there are a hundred and some odd companies on that list—sign a supplier agreement that states they will use our material ethically, with a commitment to the principles of transparency, consent and attribution with respect to all copyright-protected source content.

Second, the industry minister can ask the Competition Bureau to look into the state of competition with respect to search and AI. Googlebot should be split into two crawlers, one for AI and one for search. That would help level the playing field between publishers and Google and between other AI companies and Google. Those companies have no incentive to sign commercial agreements with publishers when Google's AI services are getting the content for free.

Third, the Copyright Act should not be amended to include a text and data mining exception or be weakened in any way. Rights holders must be protected, with no exceptions.

On the positive side, the Online News Act, while imperfect, is working for Canadian news publishers. Prior to the act, and in an effort to thwart it, Google and Meta did content licensing deals with a number of news publishers. Most of our members, however, were left out in the cold without a cent. Today, whether you're a large publisher or a smaller independent, you're getting about \$16,400 per year, per full-time journalist. For example, the World-Spectator from Moosomin, Saskatchewan, received almost \$80,000 last year. Prior to the Online News Act, most of our members never saw a dime in content licensing from these big American tech firms.

Between the Online News Act and the Canadian journalism labour tax credit, which rewards those who maintain and grow journalism jobs, there's finally a level of predictability for business planning, which is translating into a level of stability in many newsrooms, where we are seeing investment after years of cost-cutting. Both of these measures should be maintained.

Let me turn briefly to government advertising. Despite the government's stated buy Canadian policy, changing its agency of record and spending tens of millions of dollars each year, news publishers

are not seeing any meaningful federal government ad dollars, yet when a bank, a retailer or a car company runs a national or regional campaign, news publishers do okay. That's because their chief marketing officers know that we are a great way to reach and engage Canadians.

Why are we only seeing micro pennies on the dollar when it comes to federal campaigns? It's simple: The government's agency of record is doing what is easiest and most profitable for them, and that's programmatic advertising through American big tech firms.

• (1220)

We hope the committee will recommend an advertising set-aside, which you heard about earlier. An ad set-aside done right.... On the publishing side, for example, we reach 86% of Canadians who engage with newspaper content each week.

It's time for the government to think more like a marketer who cares about reach and efficacy. We can help you reach engaged audiences better than anyone. For advertisers, whether they are governments or the private sector, credible journalism strengthens trust while delivering better business results in a brand-safe environment. There's absolutely no reason the federal government shouldn't use Canadian news brands to inform Canadians.

[*Translation*]

We live in an era of disinformation and misinformation, which are amplified by algorithms. Facts matter. High-quality information produced by real people who do the work of gathering and verifying facts, as well as legal review, is paramount.

Thank you. I look forward to our discussion.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

We'll now turn to questions from members, starting with Ms. Thomas for six minutes.

You have the floor.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to each of you for being here today.

Mr. Dhanraj, I'm curious about a document you talked about in your opening remarks, "Parameters for Political Guests". Would you be willing to table that with the committee?

Travis Dhanraj: I would.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

I want to get to the bottom of this. Can you talk about any pressure you experienced at the CBC to shape stories in a particular fashion?

Travis Dhanraj: Sure, I can. I am here speaking out, and this is my story.

Over the past several days, and even when this story initially came out, other CBC employees, current and former, have come forward to me who are afraid to speak out publicly. They sent me some statements, and if I can, I'd like to read into the record some of what I have been getting from current and former employees.

This is from a current employee at the CBC: "I've been with CBC for 10 years, and I have witnessed and experienced multiple incidents of the misuse of taxpayer dollars, racism, favouritism, nepotism, sexual harassment and verbal abuse." Then she goes on to outline specific examples.

The next individual is someone you would all know if I said their name. They left the CBC after a 10-year career. The end of their statement says, "Without exaggeration, I experienced toxicity every single day, and it was almost always from the same people. It was not subtle. It was not hidden. It was part of the daily reality of working there." She goes on to say that she was set to interview Catherine Tait on air. "I introduced myself to her in the makeup room as the host. In front of others, she responded, 'I didn't know I'd be interviewed by somebody who looks like she is 14.' That moment stayed with me. It was dismissive, inappropriate and reflected a broader culture in which respect was not always equally extended to everyone."

On Mr. Cochrane, this is from one of his former producers: "His toxic behaviour extended beyond editorial matters and was more often than not deeply hypocritical. While he publicly presented himself as a supporter of diversity, he actively undermined the contributions of colleagues who were minorities."

This is from somebody who left the industry and had to go to another country: "After about a year of working there as an anchor"—this is in Vancouver—"I was suddenly removed from the anchor desk. I was told the decision was related to the colour of my skin, that as a white person, I did not fit the diversity targets they were trying to meet. No concerns about my performance had ever been raised. My concern was the system and the reasoning behind the decision. My frustration was never directed at the individual who stepped into the role." She also said that she was forced to check a box if somebody of a diverse background appeared on the air, and she said that was concerning to her. "I believe it's important to include a broad range of voices and perspectives, but reducing interview subjects to a checkbox felt like an overly simplistic way of approaching something that deserves much more care and thought."

I could go on. There are a number of these stories, and it is shocking. These people have been traumatized. They are scared to come out. They are scared of the professional repercussions. Management, like Andree Lau, Brodie Fenlon, Cathy Perry and Chris Carter, are concerned about protecting the reputation of the organization as opposed to dealing with these issues when it comes to employees.

• (1225)

Rachael Thomas: Mr. Dhanraj, can you outline what years you were there?

Travis Dhanraj: I finished at Global in 2020 or 2021, I think. It's in the bio I provided.

Rachael Thomas: Perfect.

Travis Dhanraj: I then came to Ottawa as a parliamentary reporter. I flew around with the prime minister. I covered Parliament Hill. Then I went back to Toronto. I was on *Marketplace*. I covered the Queen's funeral.

Then I got my own show, and I thought I'd have some say in how that show went. This is a picture of the folks we had on the intersection panel. We have here one with Rahim Mohamed and Rachel Gilmore. I don't know if you can get two other people who are as far apart on the ideological spectrum as that. There's also Sheila Copps, Brian Lilley and Fae Johnstone.

We were having the Canadian conversation, and this panel was cancelled. You also have issues of pay equity when it comes to all of these folks.

Rachael Thomas: Obviously your point was to create a panel that was full of diversity. It was not just in skin colour, ethnicity or religious background. You wanted diversity of thought.

Travis Dhanraj: That's correct.

Rachael Thomas: Were you given the journalistic freedom to move forward and do that, for the sake of the Canadian public?

Travis Dhanraj: No. The issue became the panellists. *Power & Politics* gave us a list of 43 or 45 people, saying not to go near these people. Some of these folks were reporters, like Robert Benzie. If there's a story breaking at Queen's Park and we're on at seven o'clock, we should be able to call somebody who covers Queen's Park and talk to them. There were continued hurdles and roadblocks set up to have a certain group of folks in Ottawa in control of who was allowed on programs. Mine was a particular concern.

There were repeated episodes of Conservatives being blocked. I have the Gchats right here. I said, in terms of getting folks on, that we needed to have balance. It was not about just having a show with Conservatives or just with Liberals. If *Power & Politics* is going to have Liberal talking points on all the time, we should have balance as a network.

I told Brodie Fenlon and Andree Lau repeatedly that we are in contravention of section 11 the Broadcasting Act if we are not providing equitable time for all perspectives. I didn't want to flood the show with Conservatives, but I did want to have balance.

I can talk to my legal team, because some of this is before the Human Rights Commission in terms of how it happened, but there were repeated attempts, over and over again.... At one point, I heard that maybe I could have NDP folks on, but Conservatives were a no. It should blow the Canadian public's mind that this was the stuff that was going on.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Al Soud, you have the floor now for six minutes.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you all for those opening remarks.

My first question is for Ms. Cleugh and Mr. Bartel.

First, it's a pleasure to meet you both. Ms. Royer speaks very fondly of you.

I'd like to focus on a highlight of your opening remarks. You noted a lack of support. I'm quoting this because I thought it was interesting and well said. You said, "Grant opportunities are often like fitting a square peg into a round hole."

From your experience in building a new outlet, what are the biggest barriers facing independent journalism start-ups in Canada? What do you believe would best help address those barriers?

Mario Bartel: We're journalists and we've run head-on into some of the challenges to creating a viable business and some of the costs of that. The local journalism initiative has stepped up with some funding for us. That helps cover some wages for our crew, but it doesn't deal with the need to hire someone who can sell ads. We don't know how to do that. We shouldn't be doing that; we're journalists. We want to maintain a separation between the ad side and the journalism side.

Luckily, we have found some people who are willing to help us off the side of their desks to get us going. To go forward and to ramp up, we have to become professional at every level of this. Some of that infrastructure support is critical to this.

We ran headlong into just how expensive some of these things are, like software licences to allow us to produce a newspaper, web hosting fees and insurance. All of these things that we were completely oblivious to in our role in the newsroom have come home to roost. Luckily, our crowdfunding gave us a good foundation to start tackling some of these things.

As we move forward, becoming a viable business will mean backfilling a lot of those things with support.

Fares Al Soud: Over the past few years we've certainly seen a significant number of community newspapers close or reduce their reporting capacity. You highlighted this in your opening remarks.

From your perspective, as a long-time local journalist reporter, could you speak to what happens to community accountability and civic engagement when local news coverage disappears? I believe you highlighted that it was dangerous to local democracy, but I'm keen to see you expand on that, if possible.

Janis Cleugh: We became a news desert. We have news deserts and news-poor jurisdictions. Glacier Media closing in the middle of

the federal election was quite bad. We've had people pretending to be reporters sit at the media desk at council meetings. They're reporting when we're not. That's dangerous.

Fares Al Soud: That's perfect. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Carrero, the Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec, or ARCQ, represents 37 different local radio stations. As you are no doubt aware, many community stations rely on volunteers and limited funding.

In your opinion, what are the biggest operational challenges facing community radio today? I'm thinking, for example, of declining advertising revenue or digital disruption caused by foreign platforms.

Angelica Carrero: You clearly identified the challenges.

First, volunteers actually run all the operations, which isn't ideal. These volunteers invest their time and energy in keeping these radio stations alive. However, any business based solely on this type of model is difficult to sustain over the years. Yet it does happen. The stations manage to make it through. Operational funding is obviously the key. It's really necessary, and it's lacking.

You then talked about advertising revenue. As I and a number of my colleagues have said, we lack advertising revenue. The revenue has gone to foreign platforms. It would be good to have a clear directive from the government. As I said, radio stations could then contribute to the government's message.

You also talked about the digital transition. Indeed, this other factor poses a major challenge. I would say that the stations are community hubs that provide broadcasts on the FM band but also on the web. You can listen to them. There are podcasts, news programs and so on. They really do provide a full range of media. However, we need to help them make this digital shift. The shift is sometimes more difficult, depending on the station, of course.

• (1235)

[*English*]

Fares Al Soud: Mr. Shoan, Canada's broadcasting and media regulatory framework was designed at a time when traditional television and radio dominated the landscape. Given the rapid rise of global streaming platforms and digital media companies, do you believe Canada's existing regulatory tools are still adequate for protecting Canadian journalism and cultural sovereignty in the digital age?

Raj Shoan: I believe the tools are there. Perhaps the CRTC has been a bit slow in taking action. The CRTC has done some good things, and certainly the Government of Canada has done some good things.

The Online Streaming Act and the Online News Act have been enormously helpful. The tax credit and the local journalism initiative have been helpful.

The CRTC made a very important decision last year to ask streamers to contribute a base contribution of 1.5% of their annual revenues to support local news. That's being challenged in court right now, but we feel confident it will go the CRTC's way.

Those are all important steps, but more needs to be done, especially given the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' conclusion that a significant portion of the Canadian population—I believe it's 2.5%—has no access to local news or has access to only one local news outlet. That's a problem that needs to be corrected.

The tools are there, and the regulator needs to be encouraged to use them.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Champoux now has the floor for six minutes.

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

I want to thank the witnesses. We have a wonderful group of witnesses here today. I think that this speaks to the importance of the topic covered in this study.

However, before speaking to these witnesses, I would like to move a motion. I've discussed it with some committee members. I'll read it. I would like us to debate it at the end of this meeting. That way, we won't interrupt the period for asking witnesses questions. The motion concerns Radio-Canada's decision to make Réseau de l'information, or RDI, programming available on Amazon's Prime Video platform. We find that this decision warrants an explanation and certainly a challenge.

The motion is as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, Marie-Philippe Bouchard, to appear before the committee for a minimum of two (2) hours to explain the decision to make ICI-RDI's programming available on the Prime Video platform, owned by the American multinational Amazon, even before it is made available to Quebecers and francophones in Canada on Tou.tv or on a Canadian-owned platform.

The motion is available in English and French for the committee members. As requested earlier, I would like us to set aside time at the end of today's meeting to discuss the motion and to explain the spirit of the Bloc Québécois' proposal.

The Chair: I think that everyone agrees. The motion is placed on notice. Thank you.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, I would like to thank all the witnesses for joining us today. This extremely important study addresses a topic that remains of great concern. The variety of media sectors represented here speaks to this.

I'll start with you, Ms. Carrero. We hear a great deal about community media. We know that times are tough and that the support isn't commensurate with the needs. I'll put the same question to Mr. Deegen, who represents the print media. However, I'll start

with you, because you raised the issue of the journalism initiative, or LJI.

Have your members noticed a drop in the support provided by this program? Does this support still live up to their expectations? I know that it's vital to ensure journalistic coverage in the regions of Quebec and in other places, of course.

How do things stand with you and your members when it comes to the LJI?

Angelica Carrero: Yes, the LJI is a measure we appreciate. It's funding that's available to stations. We haven't noticed any particular decline. Stations apply and hope to receive funding. However, we certainly hope that it will be renewed in time for the 2026 budget.

I would also add that, sometimes, it's a rather odd situation. Although a station may qualify for LJI support, it still needs to find and hire staff. So it's not just a matter of having the subsidy; you also have to be able to use it. That's a whole other story, but I wanted to point that out. Otherwise, we appreciate the LJI. Again, as I was saying, we're really hoping to see a renewal for the 2026 budget.

• (1240)

Martin Champoux: I also wanted to ask you this question, Mr. Deegan, because I know that your members are often supporters of this program, which is very important, not only for coverage, as I was saying, but also for print media. My colleague Andréanne Larouche, the member for Shefford, received a comment from Val-Ouest, a community newspaper in her region, that funding was 30% lower this year. That has a huge impact on small regional print media, as well as on community media.

Have you seen this concern among other members of News Media Canada?

Paul Deegan: Yes. Newspapers benefiting from the program received about \$37,000 per journalist this year, and we have about 200 journalists in the program. It's very important to weeklies and other independent and community media in Canada.

Martin Champoux: Have your members told you that the program was less generous toward them this year?

Paul Deegan: Yes.

Martin Champoux: So we're still waiting on an expansion of this program that's essential to cover media deserts, which we discussed briefly. News deserts are everywhere, and this program is part of the efforts to address them. Thank you very much.

I'll come back to you, Ms. Carrero, because we talked about AI earlier. It will certainly come up often in this study. In community media, I imagine you don't use artificial intelligence for news broadcasting and production. However, some media outlets are turning to this technology for very real financial reasons, and these are often media outlets that have access to funding programs to which you don't have access.

How do you view this kind of distortion in the fairness of the rules? I guess it isn't a reason to crack open the champagne.

Angelica Carrero: No, you're absolutely right.

You can clearly see that community radio stations work with certain principles and certain missions that they try to carry out as best they can. If any organizations can take advantage of AI, it's community radio stations, since they don't have the staff, because they don't have the funds needed. Yes, it's a bit nonsensical that other media can receive certain subsidies to which community radio doesn't have access.

So it's a big question. Community radio stations must uphold their mission. Those tools do exist, and we can't ignore them. Yes, we would like some help in that regard.

Martin Champoux: I'd like to ask all the witnesses a question about federal ad placements in general and the somewhat of a transfer of ad placements from traditional media to digital media. I've been in my position since 2019, and today we're asking for the same thing as we were then: that the government commit to investing less in foreign digital platforms and investing more in traditional media.

I'll turn to Friends of Canadian Media, who have been working on this for years.

Do you feel that this is a lost cause, that the government—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Champoux, but there isn't enough time left for a response.

Martin Champoux: They can respond a little later.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: They may be able to respond next time, perhaps.

[English]

Mr. Diotte, you now have the floor for five minutes.

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

Mr. Dhanraj, I found your testimony quite fascinating. I myself was a journalist for 30 years. I was also the national director of the Canadian Association of Journalists.

Journalism has indeed changed. You noted that you used to sit down and listen to Knowlton Nash as a trusted voice. As a kid, I remember watching Lloyd Robertson. Peter Kent, Stanley Burke.... Ironically, Peter Kent stepped down in 1978 after criticizing political interference from the Liberal prime minister.

The CBC does talk about being diverse, inclusive, fair and balanced, yet one of the CBC's premier segments is something called *At Issue*, which features Toronto Star journalists Chantal Hébert and Althia Raj and Globe and Mail journalist Andrew Coyne. In what universe is this diverse, fair or balanced as a news panel?

• (1245)

Travis Dhanraj: *The National* makes their own decisions, I suppose, in terms of who they put on that panel. It's Ms. Barton's panel, so I guess you'll have to talk to her about the editorial decisions.

What I was attempting to do on this program was have a diversity of opinion. When they cancelled the panel, I sent a note to panelists asking for feedback, and I was disciplined for that.

I want to talk about the NDA I got, because it's important. I was raising concerns about editorial...and was slapped with an NDA, which is a practice that the CBC is using frequently and was raised by Dave Seglins. You guys all have the paper. "Dhanraj has considered whether he has a human rights complaint with respect to the issues in dispute and, by his signature below, confirms that he does not. Further, he confirms that he seeks no right or remedy under the Canadian Human Rights Act, as amended with respect to the issues in dispute, and any such claim is barred by this agreement."

That should be shocking to every member on this committee, and I hope that other members on the committee take an interest in the issues I'm outlining here, because it is very important. We should not have a public institution silencing their own employees and having them waive their rights under the Canadian Human Rights Act. That should be shocking.

Kerry Diotte: Getting back to the bigger issue of fairness and balance in news, you mentioned at one point that CBC management actually prevented you from interviewing Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre on your show. Can you describe what happened there?

Travis Dhanraj: I basically wasn't allowed to pick up the phone and talk to Conservatives.

I have some Gchats here. I want to read you part of them. I'm talking to my senior producer and asking—this is an editorial discussion—if we can get a Conservative perspective. That's essentially what I'm saying. "It is a no to the Conservatives", I'm told. "We can't chase anyone from the entire party. The chase is with P&P." If *Power & Politics* is not able to secure a Conservative or somebody who presents an alternate perspective, then we are not allowed to.

I'm told at one point, "We're sure that there's a myriad of other types of interesting guests that you can chase outside of the Conservatives." "Can I be included on conversations with *Power & Politics*?" I'm told, "That's not how we work."

I said to management, "By playing petty office politics, we feed into Conservative narratives that we have a bias against them. *Canada Tonight* is a melting pot of news of the day, and politics and decisions from it largely impact Canadians, so we need flexibility to respond to emerging stories."

Yes, I wasn't even allowed to pick up the phone and call to request Pierre Poilievre. Look at what happened when I had Melissa Lantsman on my show. I was threatened with being pulled off the air, and the CBC then said in a news statement that they didn't threaten to do that. There were recordings of them trying to do this.

Kerry Diotte: Why do you think they were doing that?

Travis Dhanraj: There's an effort to essentially protect those in Ottawa, in terms of their perspectives on these things and in terms of who they want on the show.

We did an interview with Karen Johnson, my co-host on the new podcast I'm doing. It is out right now. She's another former CBC employee who is talking about the toxic culture. She alleges that she was called a "brown Barbie" and a "bimbo". She says there's a high school culture, and these are things that...this is fine. If you have hosts doing that—it's not fine—management is responsible for dealing with it. If management is not going to do anything and if the president of the CBC is going to come here and expect a tongue-lashing and then go back to the CBC and continue to get funding without accountability, these practices will continue.

Shame is clearly not enough to get the CBC to a place where it will hold itself accountable, so it's incumbent upon this committee to do that.

• (1250)

The Chair: Ms. Royer, you have the floor now for five minutes. Go ahead.

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

I'd like to begin by welcoming witnesses from my community: Janis Cleugh and Mario Bartel of Freshet News. Thank you both for your decades of service.

When Glacier Media's Tri-City News closed last year, it was a devastating loss for our riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam. I'm extremely grateful that veteran reporters like you stepped forward—

The Chair: I'm sorry. Ms. Royer, your audio is a little low for the interpreters. I'm hearing that they are having trouble hearing you. Can you try moving your boom closer to your mouth and see if that's any better?

Zoe Royer: Is that better?

The Chair: Yes, I think it's better. Keep that boom close to your mouth. It just sounded as if you were a bit far away.

Zoe Royer: I'll keep it close. Are we going to start the clock from the beginning?

The Chair: You can have your time back.

Zoe Royer: Okay, great. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to begin by welcoming witnesses from my community: Janis Cleugh and Mario Bartel of Freshet—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Royer. The audio is not good.

Zoe Royer: You're still not getting it. Let me check the connection.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend for a minute while we try to work this out.

• (1250)

(Pause)

• (1250)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Unfortunately, we do not have good sound from Ms. Royer.

[*Translation*]

Therefore, Mr. Ntumba has the floor for five minutes.

• (1255)

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'll start with you, Ms. Carrero.

First, thank you for your presentation.

I would just like to hear your thoughts on a specific point. I believe my colleague Mr. Al Soud touched on this a little earlier.

Many community media representatives are asking for advertising. To what extent will this help community radio stations continue to exist or survive?

Angelica Carrero: As I said earlier, we receive a grant, but it barely covers the wages of one station employee. Obviously, community radio stations have to be creative and find other ways to fund themselves, and advertising revenue is one of those ways to make up for this shortfall.

There are other ways of doing it as well. We know that community radio stations broadcast bingo games, for example. That also helps them from a funding perspective. In short, these are ways to fill a gap that isn't filled by grants. Of course, it's very important and has always been central to the model of these media outlets. They've all operated this way for a long time. It's nothing new. Obviously, there's been a loss of revenue in recent years. That's why we're really advocating to bring back that revenue.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you, Ms. Carrero.

Mr. Bartel and Ms. Cleugh, I don't have words to describe what you experienced last year. However, I can say that you're a model of resilience in the face of adversity. Despite what you went through, you came back and we can clearly see your love for the media. You love the media. You love your job.

When you talk about much larger donations, do you have a number in mind?

[*English*]

Mario Bartel: We launched a founders club that allowed people to donate a minimum of \$1,000, and we recognized them in house ads in our newspaper. The campaign didn't really get going as strongly as we had wanted because we kept running into roadblocks with trying to issue tax receipts. We're not a charity. A few efforts we tried would have run afoul of the CRA, and we didn't want to do that. We didn't want to do anything illegal that would come back and bite us.

We don't know. We got some support from our union and some other groups that stepped up selflessly and said, "We believe in this too. This is important for our community." We don't know what kind of potential is out there if we don't have some of these tools available to us, such as being able to issue tax receipts.

We spent a lot of time trying to investigate things. My colleague here, Janis, has spent a lot of time writing grant applications. As we said, it's often fitting a square peg into a round hole. We're trying to get grants as cultural institutions or things like that, which we kind of fit into, but it all depends on how you look at it. It's a lot of effort to find money wherever we can to try to give us a foundation that we can build upon.

[*Translation*]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: I'm going to move on to Mr. Deegan.

At the end of your remarks, I heard you talk about Canadian brands. You said that you wanted the Government of Canada to be able to consider Canadian media.

Do you think that the Government of Canada is currently not considering certain media outlets? If so, what would be your proposal for moving forward?

Paul Deegan: I think the government spent about \$75 million on advertising last year, but less than \$2 million went to all Canadian newspapers.

Let's take the example of La Presse, in Montreal.

When La Presse ran a campaign, as a major Canadian bank in Quebec would do, it received funding through advertising spaces. However, the government gives almost nothing. I think that's a problem.

We're very helpful in getting the attention of Canadians, but the coordinating agency is taking advantage of that. It's programmatic advertising, like it is with Google.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, for two and a half minutes, I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Champoux.

Martin Champoux: I want to come back to the representatives of Friends of Canadian Media, to whom I asked a question about recurring and repeated demand.

Mr. Kitt and Mr. Shoan, it's not just your organization, it's all Canadian-owned media. The government is literally divesting from traditional media to invest in online platforms, which are obviously all foreign-owned.

Do you think it's worth it to keep trying to do everything we can? Do you think that, at some point, the government will understand that the survival of our media depends on governments' advertising investment, at whatever level? Obviously, we're talking more about the federal government, which invests an enormous amount of money in digital platforms, compared to what it invests in traditional media.

What is your position on that? Do you think we need to keep raising our voices on this issue?

[*English*]

Raj Shoan: There are two steps the federal government could take.

First of all, as we said in our opening remarks, if it allocated even 25% of its annual advertising revenue budgets to publishers and broadcasters, that would have a substantial effect. Even a relatively small diversion of Internet advertising revenue to Canadian news media would be hugely beneficial to these entities.

Over and above that, as you mentioned earlier, the advertising deductibility issue is something France has been raising for countless years. We issued a report in 2017 and 2018 called "Close the Loophole!". I encourage everyone in the room and on the committee to google the report and listen to it.

This has been a long-standing issue. We think it's a simple, clean, easy measure that has a very successful precedent, and traditional advertising would actually raise money for government rather than cost money. We haven't really seen any serious arguments against it. Quite frankly, the precedent has been in place since the 1960s, and we think it would continue to be effective.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Ms. Carrero, what does that represent in terms of advertising investment for community broadcasters?

In your opinion, for how many of your members is it a matter of survival?

Angelica Carrero: It is for all members.

I repeat: It's not the grants that sustain them, but rather advertising revenue. There have even been election campaigns, as we saw last year at the federal level, where nothing was invested in local media. However, the message would have been much better conveyed. In short, it's really a matter of survival for all local radio stations.

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much.

I imagine the same is true for print media, since weeklies are directly affected by this as well.

Paul Deegan: Yes, that's right. However, in Ontario, Premier Ford's Conservative government gives 25% of its advertising budget to the media.

Martin Champoux: Thank you.

[*English*]

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

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Mr. Dhanraj, in your previous remarks, you mentioned there was a blacklist of 45 people who were not permitted to appear on the CBC, and that list came down from management. Would you be willing to table that list with the committee today?

Travis Dhanraj: Yes.

Rachael Thomas: Mr. Dhanraj, do you have knowledge of the Prime Minister's Office ever talking to the CBC with regard to how a news angle should be covered or taken or the content that should be reported on?

Travis Dhanraj: I know concerns were raised by people who were on *Power & Politics*. I have documentation related to those concerns being raised. I know that the folks who raised these concerns are fearful of exactly the same thing that all these other folks are fearful of: professional reprisal.

I also know that this was raised repeatedly. Whether or not there was influence from the former prime minister's office in terms of the editorial decisions being made on *Power & Politics*, even the allegation of that, on its face, needs to be investigated.

From my understanding—and CBC can put out a statement correcting me if I'm wrong on this—I don't think there was ever an investigation. That is a serious concern if there are repeated allegations made about perhaps too much influence here.

I was a reporter in Ottawa, and I've been at Queen's Park. I was the Queen's Park bureau chief for Global. Reporters have sources, and we all know that, but there's a line where that leads into editorial decision-making, and you have to make sure that is clear. If there's even an allegation that line may have been crossed, you have to look deeper.

● (1305)

Rachael Thomas: To that end, we know public trust in the media in general is on the decline. We know this is true with the CBC. There's no exception there.

Travis Dhanraj: Yes.

Rachael Thomas: In your mind, then, is that lack of trust justified?

Travis Dhanraj: Right now, the CBC continues to put out statements and come to these committees saying, "We might have a bit of a problem, but overall we're not biased." That's gaslighting Canadians. Canadians can see that this is an issue.

Folks have accused me of coming here as a cheerleader for the Conservatives. I am not a cheerleader for the Conservatives. I'm sorry. I'm not a cheerleader for the Liberals, either. I was trying to do my job as a journalist, and part of that was being balanced. When I was pulled into disciplinary meetings, I was told that I was editorializing because I put out that Catherine Tait wouldn't come on the program and that this was unfortunate. "This is unfortunate" was editorializing and perceived bias.

There's a lot of perceived bias going on that I don't see any discipline around. I think CBC needs a wake-up call in terms of accountability. Really, that's incumbent upon this committee. I have made recommendations. There are 11 recommendations on how to move some of this forward.

When it comes to Mr. Cochrane, during the convoy, for example, we were talking about Tamara Lich, an individual involved in the convoy. We were doing a story around that. Offhand remarks can be made at times, and I said that I thought she had a couple of last names. "People who live in trailers usually do." That's an off-colour remark.

If this is a pattern, if the staff on your own show are raising it and if people are leaving the program, you have to look a bit deeper into it, as opposed to pulling me off the air for saying that it's unfortunate the president didn't come on the show.

Rachael Thomas: The Canadian public is paying for this to the tune of about \$1.4 billion.

Travis Dhanraj: Yes.

Rachael Thomas: Of course, the government increased that by an additional \$150 million. At the end of the day, the public is the shareholder and the ones who are supposed to be benefiting from this news coverage.

In your estimation, what changes are needed to restore trust?

Travis Dhanraj: There needs to be an overhaul when it comes to management. You have my specific recommendations.

I will also say this. I am not here as somebody who does not believe in public broadcasting. I was on *Jonovision*. I started as an audience coordinator at the CBC when I was 19 years old. I worked on *Royal Canadian Air Farce*. I worked on *The Red Green Show*. I then left. I came back. I worked at CBC Edmonton. I worked at CBC Toronto. I left and came back again. I took a pay cut to come back to the CBC. I used to walk around the CBC Broadcasting Centre when I was 19 years old and sneak into the newsroom. I thought, "I want to be in this place at some point. This is the heart of the news organization."

It has gotten so far away from what it was. The CBC should not be a polarizing force. It needs to bring Canadians together. It has the infrastructure to do that. Until there's a recognition of the problem among management, nothing will happen. They fail to recognize this. I would be willing to sit down tomorrow with the new president to talk about some of this stuff. Good people are leaving. They're being forced out, and their concerns are being dismissed because it's about protecting reputation.

Well, here's some news: I don't have to want to destroy the CBC, because management and executives are doing a great job of that on their own.

● (1310)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to try one more time with Ms. Royer and see if we have sound now that she has a new headset.

You have the floor for five minutes. My fingers are crossed.

Zoe Royer: I'd like to begin by welcoming witnesses from my community: Janis Cleugh and Mario Bartel of Freshet News. I want to thank them both for their decades of service.

Of course, when Glacier Media's Tri-City News closed last year, it was a devastating loss for our riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam. Why is this? It's because democracy only works when citizens can see the truth clearly, and that requires strong, independent journalism so that voters can make informed choices and hold leaders accountable.

Janis, you said, "This is dangerous". This brings me to the matter of journalistic integrity and the journalist code of ethics. I would really like to drill down on this, if I could, with you and Mario.

With the advent of podcasts and online news, there's a great deal of misinformation. How are Freshet journalists trained, and is that the norm?

Janis Cleugh: I was trained in Britain under a program called the NCTJ, the National Council for the Training of Journalists. There's a standardized curriculum in colleges and universities in Britain. You do a one-year program. You take legal courses, municipal government courses and shorthand. You then go out in the field for 18 months. Everyone writes a national exam in the end.

We don't have this in Canada. We need this in Canada. It's similar to a Red Seal trade. It would help municipalities that are struggling with reporters who call themselves reporters and are not professionally trained. It would help municipalities figure out who should be at the media table.

Zoe Royer: Okay, I got it.

Can we drill down a bit further and speak to the core principles? What really are the core principles of the code of ethics for journalists? What are the pillars?

Mario Bartel: Well, you try to be balanced. You try to give both sides of an issue. When you cover city council, you try to give a fair representation of the concerns that were raised and how they were raised so that when readers read how a decision came to be, they have some knowledge as to what some of the downfalls might be and what some of the advantages might be. You report. You don't interpret. You report.

Zoe Royer: What I'm understanding, Mario, from what you just said, is that accuracy and verification are absolutely key, as are multiple sources. Journalists themselves need to be free from conflicts of interest. There can't be any exchange of gifts or favours. There is a high level of accountability and transparency.

Can you speak to some of these principles in how you report and avoid bias? How do you bring that into Freshet News?

Mario Bartel: I think we do as we've always done: We stand apart. We don't try to cultivate friendships or favour with anybody. We go in there with a fresh mind as to what is being discussed and what the issues are. You give a fair ear to all sides and report accordingly.

Zoe Royer: I know there was a gap between the closure of Glacier Media's Tri-City News and the opening of Freshet. Of course, the closure happened just ahead of the election. What do you feel the impact was on the electorate in making decisions in the lead-up to the election? What actually happened?

Janis Cleugh: As we said in the opening, we couldn't cover candidates, and the readers were lost. They didn't know who to vote for. They didn't know where to go.

Again, it was very dangerous to democracy. Having corporate media pull out in the middle of the federal election was devastating to our readers, the advertisers and the candidates.

Mario Bartel: In a normal news cycle, too, we would be there covering all-candidates meetings for readers as kind of the proxy for people who don't go but who still may be interested. They may not be interested in sitting around for two hours at a meeting, or they just weren't able to go. We're the proxy. That's how we see

ourselves. It's the same thing for city council or anything we cover. We're kind of the proxy for the public.

When you are able to give the flavour of a candidate and what they said and give the issues raised by people at all-candidates meetings, that's bringing information to the larger public as well. Hopefully, that then informs everybody a bit better when it comes to marking their ballot on which way they're going to go.

• (1315)

Janis Cleugh: We also cover a very large—

Zoe Royer: I noticed that there was a prevalence of other freelancers and journalists who we'd never heard of before taking up the space in the news desert. People were then tuning into that, because they were hungry. I think the electorate is particularly hungry for—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Royer. That's all the time we have for the question. I really appreciate that you made the point that journalists have to be in the room at school board meetings, at city halls and in courtrooms. When people say that AI can take over the job of journalism, I think they don't understand what journalism is. AI can't be in those rooms.

Ms. Thomas, you now have the floor for five minutes.

Rachael Thomas: Awesome. I'm going to ask one quick question and pass it off to my colleague.

My question is for Mr. Fegelman, or your colleagues.

You made a statement with regard to linking the safety and security of the Jewish community here in Canada to biased coverage from news media. I would like you to take a moment to expand on that in terms of the consequences there.

Mike Fegelman: I'll speak to a portion of that, and then I'm going to hand it off to my colleagues on Zoom.

The first thing is that what's reported today becomes domestic and foreign policy tomorrow. I echo Mr. Dhanraj's comments about a very, let's call it, jaundiced marketplace of ideas.

What we have seen in the past couple of years, most certainly as it relates to the CBC, is the elevation of radical voices—giving them a platform and giving them undue legitimacy, which we feel really serves to elevate fringe and marginal voices that are traditionally on the fringe and are trying to work their way into the mainstream. It then serves fundamentally to fan the flames of hatred against Israel and the Jewish community.

HR Canada Charitable Organization and Innohives did a long-term, two-year study on the Hamas-Israel war that found there was an asymmetry in the CBC's coverage. Most specifically, they found it elevated radical voices like Independent Jewish Voices Canada, which is a radical, anti-Zionist hate group. Giving them this platform bestows a kind of credibility, which they don't deserve.

I'll allow Dr. Haran Shani-Narkiss and Amanda Eskenasi to speak in more detail about their work.

Haran Shani-Narkiss (Chief Executive Officer, Innohives, HonestReporting Canada): First of all, thank you, Mike.

I'm here as a scientist, and if there are any questions about the research we've conducted, I'm happy to answer them.

Taking into account the asymmetry that's already inherent in the Israeli-Gaza war, we found some very troubling evidence showing, for example, how the CBC is using headlines in order to promote one side of the story such that even when you compare it to the actual reporting by the CBC—

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, there's a sound issue again. The interpreters are having trouble doing their job.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we don't have good sound for your intervention.

Haran Shani-Narkiss: Is that better right now? If not, maybe Amanda can take that.

The Chair: I'm sorry, no.

Haran Shani-Narkiss: Okay.

Amanda Eskenasi (Director of Education, HR Canada Charitable Organization, HonestReporting Canada): Maybe I can try to speak to this and offer one final thought.

My colleague Haran is a scientist, and he deals with data, numbers and objective truth. I'm also a scientist, but a different kind: I'm a social scientist. I look at behaviour and trends—human behaviour and how people react to what they see in the news and what they are presented with.

When an organization like the CBC, which is a Canadian institution, is supposed to be well respected, has a history in our country of being the place where you are supposed to get real, honest news about what's going on in the world, and is beating a very one-sided drum, a very one-sided narrative—that's what's being offered to Canadians—of course Canadians are going to be angry. They're going to be upset because what they're being told is the reality is upsetting and angering. When you only present one side of what's going on, you end up with an ideology; you don't end up with reality and with the facts.

When you are feeding Canadians... The CBC is not telling Canadians how to think about an issue. They're showing Canadians what to think about the issue, and that should not be the role of our public broadcaster.

As you know, to return to your question, Ms. Thomas, if you have consistently one-sided narratives like this, of course you are

going to have people who feel they need to do something about it. When we have one-sided narratives that demonize an entire group of people—because that's what's happening—of course you are going to have people who are angry about that and feel they need to do something about it. That, unfortunately, is what we're seeing on the streets in Canada right now, and what we saw this weekend in Toronto.

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Myles, you now have the floor for five minutes.

David Myles (Fredericton—Oromocto, Lib.): That's great. Thank you very much.

Thank you to everybody for being here today and getting this study started off in a very lively way.

I think we're all very interested in making sure that there's a diversity of voices in journalism. That's what makes great journalism.

One thing I'm curious about is the right balance. How can we create an ecosystem where private broadcasters and journalists thrive, as well as public broadcasters? What does the balance look like, especially in rural communities?

One thing I find, which I think speaks to what's been mentioned, is that often rural voices are not.... Particularly as more and more newspapers in small towns close and more and more radio stations in small towns close, how do we make sure that things aren't centralized in the cities of Canada and that the voices of rural Canadians are also part of all the conversations we're having?

Maybe I'll start with Paul to speak about that, if you have some thoughts.

Paul Deegan: Thank you so much.

One of the important programs for rural voices is the local journalism initiative. Many of our members would be couples in their mid-seventies. They own the local community newspaper. Their kids have moved to the city or are doing something else. The LJI is a way of getting a reporter into that community and invested in that community, covering cops, courts, city hall and that kind of stuff. I think the LJI is absolutely critical for rural coverage.

One thing I will say about the CBC, and this is an issue in particular in rural communities, is that the CBC has been poaching journalists from community newspapers. This is a problem. There's a terrific column written by Tim Shoults of the St. Albert Gazette, and I think you should all read it. It's in his own paper, and it's also in the National Post. Take a look at that. We're losing journalists to the CBC. They're getting more money and better benefits. We don't begrudge the CBC.

I'll give you just one example. Jeff Elgie, who's an entrepreneur who owns Village Media, trained a journalist. The journalist was hired by the CBC and went to Toronto. Jeff felt okay about that. The journalist was in Toronto for a while, and then they moved that same journalist back to the Soo to compete with him. He trained that journalist. That's a real issue. It's an issue in Franco-Manitoban communities, for example.

An issue that we're very concerned about is the poaching of talent. It's a free labour market, but to go after and pick off people from community newspapers in communities like Banff is just not fair.

David Myles: Part of what I'm looking to get at, too, is about some of those places of conflict between the two sectors and how we can seek to support both in the ideal world to make sure those voices are not dismissed, particularly in rural communities. Are there others?

Paul Deegan: One challenge we have is with Canada Post in terms of distribution. For a lot of our members, these are a printed product—a community newspaper.

Canada Post has made a decision that if you have a Canadian Tire flyer in your newspaper, it falls under something called the consumers' choice program. If a community says, for example, that they don't want junk mail, essentially you're not able to deliver that newspaper to the community with a Canadian Tire flyer. The Canadian Tire flyer might be, for that particular publisher, \$75,000 a year in revenue. That's two reporters.

There's a lot the federal government can do to ensure that rural community news outlets thrive. The CBC is one avenue. Canada Post is another.

• (1325)

David Myles: Are you encouraged at all by the idea of CBC moving into rural communities and broadening the base of some of their stations?

Paul Deegan: Our view is that CBC should be complementary, not competitive. If they move into communities that are already well served, that's an issue. They should move to areas that aren't served.

When you look at the list the CBC put forward in the "Editor's Blog"—they've done it twice in the last year or so—many of these communities are already well served by community newspapers and community radio stations. I think that's something we have to look at. They shouldn't be predatory in the marketplace, if you will.

David Myles: Very good.

I have one quick question on ads. Do I have a bit of time?

The Chair: Yes, you have a bit.

David Myles: Speaking about the ad thing, I'm curious to know what you meant when you said that private enterprises bought into local advertising even more than the government. What motivated that?

Paul Deegan: We're a great way of reaching Canadians. About 86% of Canadians read newspaper content each week.

When you advertise in a community newspaper, it's in a brand-safe environment. In terms of some of the digital ads, you have no idea where they are going to wind up—perhaps on some porn site or something or other. We're a great way of reaching Canadians. We're cost-effective.

If we're getting ads from banks, airlines, telcos, etc., how come we're not getting ads from our own government? All of the federally regulated industries and grocery stores advertise with newspapers, yet we don't really see a dime from the federal government. That's a problem.

David Myles: In the private sector—

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

David Myles: Thank you.

The Chair: I gave you a bit of leeway there, but there's a limit.

[*Translation*]

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

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Fegelman, you startled me a little earlier when you talked about the radical voices colouring media coverage—that's a loose translation.

As I understand it, HonestReporting is an organization that ensures accurate reporting, particularly around the conflict in Israel against Hamas and, now, around the conflict in Iran.

Personally, I think it's entirely appropriate for organizations or groups to ensure the quality of news coverage. In a conflict situation, it's even more delicate, but I think that's okay. It's important.

However, your methods, Mr. Fegelman, are despicable. It's unacceptable. You have a website on which you directly attack journalists who provide coverage or do work that you don't like. I don't understand how you can define yourself as someone who ensures the quality of coverage when you use methods similar to harassment.

Laura-Julie Perrault, from La Presse, and Magdaline Boutros are targeted on your website. Instead of denouncing the coverage, which you consider to be inadequate, you directly attack the work of journalists and encourage your supporters to write to them directly by even providing them with the framework so that they can write directly to their media outlets. Thousands of emails were sent to those journalists, and perhaps others.

Do you think this method of harassing journalists is a constructive way to ensure fair coverage of these extremely important and highly sensitive issues? Do you think this method of harassing journalists is the right thing to do? Do you defend it?

[English]

Mike Fegelman: If I may answer your question with a question, when your constituents contact you with concerns and complaints, would you characterize that as harassment?

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: Not at all. The people I represent expect me to do a job. They elected me and they have the right to contact me directly. You could contact the media that hires those people. You could connect with the Radio-Canada ombud. That's how things work in the media, not by communicating with journalists. Then it becomes personal. It becomes an attack on their work and, often, on people's integrity. You're attacking someone who isn't there to receive hundreds and thousands of stupid emails, and in tones that are often....

In short, we, as elected officials, expect that. That's part of our job; journalists don't have to endure that. Go after elected officials, media executives, the CBC/Radio-Canada, La Presse and Le Devoir, but please let journalists do their work and get feedback from their bosses.

Don't you think that would be the right way to go?

• (1330)

[English]

Mike Fegelman: We regard ourselves as an added layer of editorial oversight. In a world where we're hearing of massive cutbacks in the Canadian journalism landscape and there's less verification, we've found that most journalists actually value the work we do. That may surprise you. We are pointing out the unfairness and the lack of balance.

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: In that case, since I have very little time left, could you—

[English]

Mike Fegelman: When there's a back-and-forth, I can't hear.

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: Sorry. Yes, we have to allow for interpretation.

I have very little time left. Can you provide me with names of journalists who support your work? I'm talking about journalists from credible media, not commentators. I would like to know which journalists support the kind of feedback you provide directly to journalists on the quality of their work.

We could talk about this for a long time. I think the chair is going to cut me off soon, but if you want to respond to what I've just said, I'd be happy to read your comments. You could write to the committee and send me all the documentation you find. You and I could even continue this conversation at a later date because I think this is a very important issue. The credibility of your comments is at stake, and they could be very relevant to this debate.

The Chair: The witness could provide us with a press release with that information.

Mr. Fegelman, perhaps you could give us the names that Mr. Champoux asked you for.

So we will have that information later on because the time is up.

[English]

We've had a request for two-minute turns for each party before we finish this conversation and get to Mr. Champoux.

Is everybody okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Ms. Thomas, you have two minutes.

Kerry Diotte: I'll be taking the two minutes.

Mr. Fegelman, it was very interesting when you indicated that a CBC executive said the network shouldn't refer to Hamas as a terrorist group even though the Government of Canada has recognized them as a terrorist group since 2002. Why should the public be alarmed at this?

Mike Fegelman: In the Canada Gazette, they're publicly listed as a terrorist group. Their day job is to strap a suicide vest on themselves with the intent of maiming and murdering innocents.

When our media sanitize language, it effectively legitimizes the actions, or at least it distorts them. People aren't then fully aware of what these people do and what their intentions are: to wipe Israel and Jews off the map.

It is really misrepresenting the facts on the ground. Language matters. Diction matters.

Kerry Diotte: Your organization did a deep dive into the coverage throughout the CBC since October 7. Can you reiterate some of that coverage. You allege that it was highly biased.

Mike Fegelman: I'd like to recount a couple of examples of CBC bias that we've come across.

The first was on February 16. CBC/Radio Canada's correspondent Elisa Serret, who was later suspended, uttered an anti-Semitic trope on air when claiming that “the Israelis, in fact the Jews, finance a lot of American politics” and control a “big machine”. It's a clear-cut anti-Semitic trope.

CBC continues to use reporters who have expressed radical anti-Israel views. They have a journalist named Sara Jabakhanji who, in 2021, signed an open letter boldly proclaiming that there should be more pro-Palestinian coverage. That's just at the CBC.

I would refer you to my colleague Amanda Eskenasi, who can talk in specifics about some of the results of the study her organization did on the CBC's bias.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have just two minutes for everybody. It's really quick. We call it the “lightning round”, like a game show.

Mr. Myles, you have two minutes.

David Myles: I'll go right back to Paul, because we were interrupted a little.

I'm sorry to keep going back to you, but I am curious about this advertising piece. I hear what you're saying about the opportunity to support these journalists and the work of these papers and broadcasters. At the same time, there has been a decline in private advertising in newspapers, certainly. Am I correct that this is a fact as well?

• (1335)

Paul Deegan: Absolutely. The ballpark numbers show that advertising in Canadian newspapers a dozen years ago would have been about \$3.5 billion. Today, it's probably \$900 million or so.

David Myles: Okay, so the private sector has also abandoned that route.

Paul Deegan: I wouldn't say abandoned. I'd say they've changed their spend, but we're still doing okay at a lot of community newspapers. If you pick up a community newspaper, you're going to see the ad from the Chevy dealer. You're going to see the ad from the RE/MAX agent. We still do okay, but disproportionately, we don't do well with government, and in particular with the federal government.

David Myles: That's interesting. Is it because they believe this is where the eyeballs are and that they should go where the eyeballs are?

Paul Deegan: The government has an agency of record—I think this dates back to the sponsorship scandal years ago—that makes the decision. It used to be Cossette Media and it's now WPP Media.

I think those firms have done what is easiest and most profitable for them, which is programmatic advertising—those ads that pop up everywhere. However, you develop much more of an impression if you take out a full-page ad in *Le Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe*, for example. You're going to make much more of an impact that way than with a little programmatic advertising that pops up.

David Myles: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Chair: I know there are a lot of individual MPs advertising in our local media, but that's a different budget and I won't get into it.

[*Translation*]

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

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I didn't know I was going to get those two extra minutes.

Mr. Fegelman, I would feel dishonest if I didn't give you an opportunity to respond to what I said earlier. I thought we would continue this conversation through an email exchange or otherwise.

I'll give you a minute to react to what I said earlier, if you want to pick up where we left off.

[*English*]

Mike Fegelman: My apologies. I didn't hear your question when you first asked it. If you don't mind, re-ask the question. Forgive me. The audio is terrible for me.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: The question I'm asking gives you an opportunity to respond to what I said earlier. We ran out of time for you to respond.

[*English*]

Mike Fegelman: I'm so sorry. I cannot hear his question.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Can you hear the English interpretation?

[*English*]

The Chair: I could translate for you, but I think we want to make sure that our system is working properly.

Is it that you can't hear or that there's no translation?

Mike Fegelman: I can hear the translation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: If I keep speaking in French, can you hear me? Oh, I was on mute. Now, is it working better?

The Chair: If I speak in French, does it work? Is the interpretation not working?

[*English*]

Mike Fegelman: If you could, speak a little louder in the translation booth.

Mike Fegelman: I can hear. If you don't mind, just repeat the question. I apologize.

The Chair: Yes, we'll give you time.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Champoux.

Martin Champoux: It wasn't really a question, Mr. Fegelman. I would like you to respond to what I said earlier. We were interrupted and we ran out of time, so I would ask you respond to my comments for a minute, instead of continuing this conversation later on. I'm simply giving you the opportunity to respond to what I said earlier.

[*English*]

Mike Fegelman: I'll give you an example of some of the dialogue we've had in recent days. We filed the complaint with *The Globe and Mail* to their standards editor because they published a column that said Israel takes Palestinians hostage, which it does not do and is a violation of international law. We filed the complaint. They received it. They appreciated it and took corrective measures to issue a correction. That's the kind of what we consider to be constructive dialogue that is important.

I would also say, to your comment about alleged harassment, that if any of our subscribers.... We have about 80,000 subscribers from coast to coast. If anyone engaged with a member of the media in a way that we felt was unprofessional, strident, knee-jerk and reactionary, we would be the very first to try to sensitize them to our concerns. If they weren't listening and were uncooperative, we would take them off our list.

We don't think that is helpful. We think it's actually quite counterproductive. I would also say—

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Sorry, but I have to interrupt because I'll be out of time.

If journalists contacted you to say that they didn't agree with your way of doing things and that they would prefer that comments, criticisms or discussions of this nature be directed to publishers, desk managers or newsroom bosses rather than directly to journalists, would you listen? Would you be open to that dialogue?

• (1340)

[*English*]

Mike Fegelman: We're certainly open to any kind of dialogue with any different leverage point in the Canadian media landscape.

Our challenge, though, is that what we oftentimes encounter is window dressing of accountability and evasive efforts in the implementation of journalistic standards, meaning that we could bring a grievance to a journalist's editor and they may not reply and are totally evasive. We think that's quite problematic.

There is a necessity for an oversight mechanism. Broadly speaking, our goal should be a very Canadian response with civic engagement, because I think that's fundamentally constructive.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: That's where we disagree. I think that, at some point, we have to accept that there are processes in place and that it's not up to journalists, workers or people who haven't asked to have that relationship to be subject to that harassment. I think you have to draw a line somewhere, and the way you do it with your appeal to contact journalists directly by email pushes you over that line. That's my opinion.

I think we're going to have to leave it at that so we can discuss the motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Exactly.

Mr. Champoux, if you want to start....

Martin Champoux: No, it's fine.

The Chair: So I think we can continue. It will take five minutes.

[*English*]

Witnesses, you are free to go if you'd like. We're going to discuss the motion that Mr. Champoux raised earlier today. You don't have to leave. You can stay to the end, but we have finished with our questioning of you. I hope it was not too onerous. We truly appreciate all your participation.

Keep in mind that you are welcome to send in any further information or documentation. I know that Mr. Dhanraj has been asked to supply certain documents to this committee. We can take all of that. If there's something you forgot to say, for example, don't hesitate to reach out to the committee. We can include all of that in our consideration of our report.

Thank you again.

Monsieur Champoux.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I read the motion into the record earlier. Let me provide some background quickly.

In Quebec, last week, we learned that Radio-Canada had chosen to make ICI RDI available on Prime Video, which is owned by Amazon, an American giant that, as we know, is having trouble complying with our laws and the legislative measures we are putting in place to regulate the digital giants. That really came as a shock, because ICI RDI will now be available in a bundle on Prime Video, when the channel isn't even available on TOU.TV, the Radio-Canada platform that should include all the platforms and channels offered by the public broadcaster.

So this is a problem for Quebecers. We've seen it in the media, and not just in Quebecor media. I know that some will say that Quebecor's commentators have really focused on that, and that's true. However, La Presse and other media outlets also talked about it. It is really very surprising.

That said, I fully understand the desire to reach as many people as possible and the desire to be available. We are fully in favour of the discoverability of content, whether journalistic or cultural. In our opinion though, regardless of the strategic rationale for this decision, it's very hard to justify streaming that channel on Prime Video, an American platform, before offering it as a priority on a Canadian platform.

The purpose of this motion is therefore to invite Ms. Bouchard to explain this decision and answer questions from parliamentarians so we can understand the decision and understand why Quebecers and francophones across Canada cannot access ICI RDI on one of the Canadian-owned platforms, particularly on TOU.TV, the platform that Canadians already pay for.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Généreux.

Bernard Généreux (Côte-du-Sud—Rivière-du-Loup—Kataskomiq—Témiscouata, CPC): We agree with the motion.

However, I would like to give Mr. Champoux the opportunity to tell me whether, as I think, it would be appropriate to hear from people who have criticized Radio-Canada's decision, and by that I mean journalists, former employees or former program directors of ICI RDI. They all have a lot to say in Quebec right now.

This decision has left everyone literally speechless because it makes no sense, especially since Amazon doesn't distribute news through its platforms. All the news distributed in Quebec and Canada, particularly news in French, has been reduced. In addition, this company is challenging a Government of Canada decision and is refusing to pay its 5% contribution from its Canadian revenues, something that certain witnesses will speak to at committee in the coming weeks. It makes absolutely no sense.

I think we should give other people the opportunity to speak, and not just Radio-Canada. I don't know if Mr. Champoux is open to that.

• (1345)

The Chair: Mr. Myles, you have the floor.

David Myles: Personally, I think it would be worthwhile to hear from the CEO alone so she can talk about these decisions. We could still ask her to talk about Radio-Canada's strategic plan. Talking about these decisions is important, and it would give us an opportunity to ask questions about the strategic plan.

I would add that through an amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, you have the floor.

Martin Champoux: Mr. Myles proposed an amendment, but Mr. Généreux also proposed one. I don't know how you would like us to proceed in order of priority.

The Chair: Indeed.

Mr. Généreux, you proposed an amendment, didn't you?

Bernard Généreux: I proposed adding a meeting. So we would have two two-hour meetings to give us the opportunity to invite other witnesses to appear, who could be invited by all parties.

The Chair: Is everyone in agreement?

David Myles: We agree that there should be a second meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Myles, were you proposing another amendment?

David Myles: I move an amendment to the motion so that, during the first meeting with the CEO of Radio-Canada, she also talks to us about the strategic plan.

The Chair: The clerks are saying that she can come and talk about anything, and I agree with them. I don't know if it's necessary to make an amendment.

Mr. Champoux, go ahead.

Martin Champoux: That's what I was going to say.

First, if it is the will of the committee, I am entirely in favour of adding a meeting to hear from other witnesses about the decision to make ICI RDI available on Prime Video.

Then I was just going to say to Mr. Myles that, when Ms. Bouchard is here, we can ask her about strategic planning. I don't think that is straying far at all. That decision might be part of

strategic planning, so it's the same topic. I don't think we need to add an amendment.

David Myles: The important thing is that it be included.

Martin Champoux: When a witness appears, we can ask the questions we like, as long as they're on the same topic.

Madam Chair, do we need to go to a vote?

The Chair: I think there's a consensus.

Shall we talk about a date for the invitation?

Martin Champoux: I didn't specify a date in the motion. It was voluntary, because the study we're doing right now is important, and we've been waiting for it for a long time. I do think it should be the priority after the current study though.

The first thing we would do after this study would therefore be to proceed with this short two-meeting study.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Bernard Généreux: I completely agree, although we could split our current study in two to make sure we have those two meetings. We can wait, that's not a problem, but we should make sure that all committee members don't deliberately ask questions about our current study when the president of Radio-Canada is here to discuss another topic. I can't tell others what to do, of course, but I think we have to be careful not to mix up the two studies. Perhaps the CEO of Radio-Canada will want to talk to us about it when she is here.

Personally, I would have suggested a date to meet with the president of Radio-Canada and the other witnesses as soon as possible so we can move on from this issue.

There is a significant risk of mixing up the two topics when the president of Radio-Canada is here.

• (1350)

The Chair: I don't think we can restrict what questions members ask witnesses. They can ask whatever they want.

As Mr. Champoux said, the two subjects are related. I understand your point of view, but we can't limit members in what they want to say.

[English]

Mr. Myles.

[Translation]

David Myles: She shouldn't have to come back a second time two weeks later, even though it may be normal for the CEO of Radio-Canada to appear here often. That's all I have to say. We also have other studies. I completely agree with inviting her, but if we ask these questions now, what are we going to do if she comes back two weeks later for another study? I'm flexible, but it would be a bit odd for her to come here three weeks in a row and for us to have already asked our questions regarding the platforms.

[English]

The Chair: I think that's up to us, and if it gets repetitive, it gets repetitive.

The clerk has heard from the CBC that they are available on April 14 to come on the study we're in the middle of now, so it's kind of in the middle. We could finish the study and invite them right back again, but that's okay.

Monsieur Généreux.

[Translation]

Bernard Généreux: I know that the vice-president, who is responsible for programming, gave an interview on Radio-Canada. I'm not sure if it was last Friday or yesterday. In any case, I wouldn't be surprised if Radio-Canada sent us someone other than the CEO to come and justify that, but that's not what we want. That's the tricky part.

We want the president to come to debate this issue, because it raises a fundamental issue for Radio-Canada. The organization receives \$1.4 billion. The minister has also announced potential cuts. Canadian users and listeners will nonetheless have to pay \$4.99 to access ICI RDI. If they don't have cable, they will have to go through an American company. This raises a fundamental question: Why are ICI TOU.TV and Gem services not free in Canada?

Honestly, between you and me, I think that if we ask Canadians, they will say that, after paying so much money, they shouldn't have to pay more to see so-called special programs or programs like *La petite vie* six months before they appear on television. I find that completely absurd. The question will inevitably cover that as well.

I think therefore that the two hours with the president of Radio-Canada are necessary, and that we should hear from other witnesses who will come to ask questions about those decisions.

Now, as part of the study we're doing, we're talking about fairness in the media. There is indeed a question of fairness overall, but I think we should make sure to hold one or two meetings, as we have just decided, on this issue alone.

I appreciate what Mr. Myles said about inviting her several times. I would be very surprised if she agreed to come and meet with us twice within three weeks because, generally speaking, the committee room is not a place where Radio-Canada people, particularly CEOs, like to show up. So I'm not sure she's going to accept two invitations.

Therefore, I propose including a date in the motion to have a meeting with Radio-Canada on this particular issue.

The Chair: I think we'll send an invitation once we finish this study.

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor.

• (1355)

Martin Champoux: I have two things to say quickly, because time is running out and we have to go to question period soon.

First of all, when we invite Radio-Canada, the CEO always shows up. That's her job. It's part of her mandate. She is the link between the public broadcaster and the government.

Next, we decided earlier that there will be two meetings after the current study. There won't be a problem with the frequency of visits. Ms. Bouchard will appear when she is invited, and we will be flexible given her busy schedule. I have no doubt that she will be delighted to appear before the committee if we invite her. She really likes us.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Thomas.

Rachael Thomas: I know she really likes me.

I have a quick comment. We will have no control over what the folks at this committee determine to ask the CEO when she comes. Obviously, the issue that has been brought forward by Mr. Champoux is a timely one. It's one that matters. Should folks wish to ask questions with regard to that, it absolutely 100% relates to the study at hand, which has to do with fairness in the media. There's a big question around this. Is the CBC being fair when they're requiring payment on top of tax dollars that have already been extended to them for this type of programming?

All that is to say that everybody here is a duly elected member of Parliament and has complete freedom to ask the questions they feel need to be asked.

The Chair: I agree. To be clear, we will be inviting CBC on this study, and then when this study is done, we will invite them again on the study that Martin has proposed. It will be two different studies. When they come for this study, it will be as part of a wider panel, so it's not like they will be here on their own anyway.

Mr. Champoux.

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: If I'm not mistaken, the original motion says that, as part of this study, the minister must come alone for two hours, and the CEO of Radio-Canada must come alone for two hours.

Is that correct?

The Clerk of the Committee (Jean-François Pagé): An amendment was adopted so that the minister would be alone and the CEO of Radio-Canada would be part of a group. [English]

The Chair: Are we all good? All right.

Martin Champoux: Okay.

The meeting is adjourned.

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