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Chair: Lisa Hepfner



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• (0815)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 33 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Before we begin, I would ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table in front of you. These are measures in place to help prevent feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters. You'll notice that there's a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

Pursuant to the routine motion adopted by the committee, I can confirm that the witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of this meeting. I think we have some witnesses online today, although I don't see them yet.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. All comments should be addressed 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.

[Translation]

Before we begin, let me wish you a happy birthday, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Champoux, the floor is yours.

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): I just want to say that we are all hoping to look as fit as Mr. Généreux when we get to his age.

Congratulations, Mr. Généreux. We want to know your secret.

[English]

The Chair: We have with us today Marie-Philippe Bouchard, from CBC/Radio-Canada. We also have Local Independent Television Stations with us online. We have Calvin Millar, president of Channel Zero. As full disclosure, Channel Zero is the company that owns CHCH, where I worked for 20 years. I know Cal well. We also have with us Rod Schween, president of Pattison Media, and Angus Frame, president, Torstar Corporation, here in the room. Also, from The Hub, Rudyard Griffiths joins us online.

Welcome, everyone. You will each have five minutes as a group, if you're here with a group, to give us opening statements.

[Translation]

Ms. Bouchard, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard (President and Chief Executive Officer, CBC/Radio-Canada): Madam Chair, members of the committee, at my last appearance, we discussed the challenges facing Canadian media organizations.

As previous witnesses have highlighted, foreign giants are monopolizing digital ad revenues—to the tune of 96.5%.

This has enormous repercussions for Canadian media at a time when traditional ad revenues continue to decline.

In this rapidly shifting landscape, CBC/Radio-Canada is especially mindful of its responsibility as Canada's public broadcaster.

[English]

Today, I'd like to draw your attention to how CBC/Radio-Canada is contributing to the Canadian media sector. From content sharing and journalist training to advertising and joint advocacy on common causes, we are prioritizing collaboration with other Canadian media.

In terms of content, for example, CBC and the Toronto Star have partnered on a new investigative crime podcast about Ryan Wedding, the Canadian Olympian turned FBI most wanted fugitive.

CBC/Radio-Canada also shares content with other media. In Tumbler Ridge, for example, we organized the camera pool at the memorial service, providing live video to other media covering the story and keeping the number of cameras to a minimum out of respect for the community.

Similarly, several CBC daily newsletters link to articles from private local media, such as in Fort St. John, Medicine Hat and Sault Ste. Marie.

• (0820)

[Translation]

In certain places, notably Iqaluit and Rimouski, we offer our hourly radio newscasts to community radio stations.

In terms of publicity, CAB/Radio-Canada gives media partners free ad inventory to promote their news content to a wider audience.

CBC/Radio-Canada also contributes to training initiatives. For example, Radio-Canada invited other media outlets to participate in Journalisme 6x5, an event organized with the news group Les Coops de l'information, where Radio-Canada professionals shared their expertise on investigative journalism, social media and artificial intelligence.

Our contribution to the Canadian media ecosystem also includes helping other media outlets in official language minority communities. We recently reached an agreement with Envol 91 FM, Winnipeg's French-language community radio station, to allow them to continue broadcasting their signal from our antenna.

CBC/Radio-Canada has also spearheaded the defence and promotion of causes we have in common with other Canadian media. We have collaborated with Corus/Global News, Torstar, La Presse and Bell Media, among others, to combat online harassment of journalists.

[English]

As Canada's public broadcaster, we have a mandate to inform, enlighten and entertain. To do this, we need to keep up with how and where Canadians consume content, while also supporting the media sector.

Our strategy focuses on three priorities: proximity, digital agility and bringing people together.

In January, to improve our proximity and services to Canadians, CBC News opened 11 new bureaus to better serve and reflect the concerns of people in communities such as Châteauguay, Dawson City, Richmond, Peel Region and Swift Current.

CBC has also strengthened its local coverage in Hamilton, Fort Smith and Lloydminster.

[Translation]

Radio-Canada has done the same, adding more resources in 22 communities, including Calgary, Charlottetown, Gaspé, Kelowna, Saskatoon, Shawinigan, the Montérégie region and Moncton.

[English]

We continue to bring Canadians together. What better example is there than our coverage of the Winter Olympic Games?

In a Leger survey, 80% of Canadians said that it is important for Canada to have a public broadcaster to cover major sporting events like the Olympics, and 71% said that our Olympic coverage allowed them to follow athletes from their regions. In total, the games attracted over 89 million streams on our digital platforms.

[Translation]

This shows that the public broadcaster is listening and adapting to reflect the changing consumption habits of Canadians.

We are adapting to these changes by collaborating with other Canadian media outlets, as with our Olympic coverage, which was done in partnership with TSN, Sportsnet and RDS, and by ensuring that our content is discoverable and accessible on the platforms Canadians use.

On this subject, the committee has invited me to speak at a later date about our agreement with Amazon to carry ICI RDI and CBC News Network on Prime Video. But I am happy to answer any questions you may have about this today.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that the diversity and vitality of the Canadian media ecosystem are central to our strategy and mandate. We are fully committed to playing our part in supporting a healthy and diverse media landscape in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Next, we'll go to Calvin Millar and Rod Schween with Local Independent Television Stations.

Together, sirs, you have five minutes. Go ahead.

Calvin Millar (President, Channel Zero, Local Independent Television Stations): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning. My name is Cal Millar. I'm here in my capacity as chair of the Local Independent Television Stations group, or LITS. I'm also president of Channel Zero, owner and operator of CHCH.

With me today is Rod Schween, president of Pattison Media, with television stations in Kamloops and Prince George, as well as 51 radio stations spanning the four western provinces.

You heard from LITS members RNC Media and Télé Inter-Rives on April 14. A fact sheet on LITS has been provided with this statement.

All independent broadcasters operate through a combination of entrepreneurship, commitment to a community and optimism.

As many of you will remember, in 2009, the late Izzy Asper's Canwest Global was found to be bankrupt. Shaw Media bought most of Canwest's local stations, but a handful, including our CHCH and CHEK-TV in Victoria, were orphans. They were redundant in a national network that favoured reach over local service, and they were slated to close.

We acquired an unprofitable CHCH at the time. Our management team grew up watching CHCH. We knew—or at least we gambled—that CHCH could have a future and took it back to its past, where it was rooted in its community, anchored by local news and run locally and prudently.

Almost two decades later, I think it's fair to say that we have had a measure of success. We produce and air 30 hours of local news and information weekly, which is probably more than any other local broadcaster across the country.

Up until recently, we ran this as a private business that made some money and mattered in our community. We believe we matter more than ever, but this year, we will lose millions of dollars.

• (0825)

Rod Schween (President, Pattison Media, Local Independent Television Stations): Here at Pattison Media, we first got into the business of local television in 1987, when we acquired our Kamloops station. Both Kamloops and Prince George are much smaller markets than Hamilton, each with approximately 100,000 people. I trust you can appreciate that providing local news to markets of this size, with advertising as the only commercial revenue, has never been easy. However, what we at LITS all have in common is that our past challenges pale in comparison with the challenges we face today.

When Pattison bought Kamloops, the Internet effectively didn't exist. When Cal's company took over CHCH-TV—we're only talking about 2009—total revenues for TV stations in Canada were \$2.1 billion. Today they are \$1.5 billion. This might not sound like a big drop, but realize that after inflation, it represents a 50% drop. For LITS, this 50% drop has resulted in the closure of five local stations to date.

How did this happen? Did we forget how to run TV stations? Did we lose our relevance or our collective competitive edge? No, I don't think so. What happened is that Internet advertising grew from \$1.8 billion in 2009 to a whopping \$20 billion today. Let that sink in. Over the course of a couple of decades, Google, YouTube and Facebook, platforms that have almost zero content costs and infinite advertising inventory, grabbed almost 75% of Canada's advertising market. We didn't lose this advertising because we have nothing to offer Canadians; we lost it because U.S. tech giants figured out how to monetize Canadians' attention in a way that costs them virtually nothing. The implications are huge. They go well beyond the impact on LITS and our ability to provide local news.

The relevance to this set of hearings, however, is blindingly simple. If Canada wants to maintain a Canadian-owned and controlled broadcasting ecosystem, something this committee insisted remain a policy objective in its review of the Online Streaming Act, and if we want a truly sovereign nation—a democracy in which Canadians make decisions based on facts and considered analysis, not fake news and foreign influence—we have a lot to do and not a lot of time to do it.

Calvin Millar: You've already heard from a number of witnesses who have helped diagnose the problems and proposed solutions. Absolutely vital is that the government does not give away either the Online Streaming Act or the Online News Act in trade negotiations. On the latter, in February, LITS filed an application with the CRTC to bring Meta under the Online News Act.

We have a number of specific recommendations for government. We also have commentary on each of these recommendations in our written opening statement, which we do not have time to read, unfortunately.

First and foremost, we ask you to support the CAB's request for emergency bridge funding of the ILNF. Going forward, we have three recommendations to build a viable and sustainable news ecosystem for all broadcasters. One, extend the journalism tax credit to broadcasters. Two, have the federal government commit to directing at least 25% of its advertising budget to trusted domestic

professional news organizations. Three, eliminate advertising tax deductibility on foreign platforms.

In their earlier appearances, RNC Media and Télé Inter-Rives spoke about the urgency of the situation, saying that if support isn't imminent, cuts in news hours and journalists and ultimately station closures are all but inevitable. Thunder Bay's TV stations are at a similar risk, as are those of Miracle Channel and Pattison. We ourselves, CHEK and NTV have a bit more runway, but as things stand, news cuts are likely this summer or possibly fall. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians in smaller communities will lose a significant amount, potentially their only source, of local news. We are here to ask you to help ensure that this doesn't happen.

Thank you. We'd be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thanks to both of you, and thank you for reminding us of this story.

Mr. Millar, I lived through the whole process. I will never forget the day we were all brought into a room and told, "If we don't find a buyer for you, in a month you're going black." Thank you for the reminder.

We will now start questions with Mrs. Thomas....

Oh, I'm sorry. Next is Torstar Corporation. I'm a bit discombobulated because my timer went off. I apologize for that.

Mr. Angus Frame, you now have the floor for five minutes. I'll try to make sure that my timer doesn't make noise this time.

• (0830)

Angus Frame (President, Torstar Corporation): Thank you for having me.

My name is Angus Frame. I'm the president of the Torstar Corporation. I spent the first 12 years of my career as a journalist before moving into digital leadership and product building. I've spent my career at the intersection of journalism and technology, building the platforms that deliver the news to Canadians.

I'm here today to represent Torstar's more than 350 journalists, all of whom are based in Ontario. From the Toronto Star and The Hamilton Spectator to our suite of hyperlocal community brands, including The Smiths Falls Record News, the New Hamburg Independent and many more, our reporters are often the only ones in the courtroom or at city hall. Without them, many Ontario communities would simply have no local reporting at all. The stories we tell—such as Brendan Kennedy's story of prisoner abuse at Maplehurst correctional institute or those on a Peabody-nominated podcast, *Left To Their Own Devices*, about online harms—are not possible without the talent of dedicated journalists and the resources to support them.

Over 11 million Canadians come to our network of sites, apps and feeds every month. We are deepening our relationship with them and diversifying our business through new digital products, partnerships and events.

We are investing in the next generation. This year, we are hiring 40 new or student journalists. The stability provided by federal programs has given us the predictability needed to make these hires, expand our footprint and invest in local news and high-quality journalism.

However, our resilience is challenged by an increasingly abusive environment. Canadian journalism faces multiple market failures caused by big tech monopolies.

U.S. courts found that Google maintains a monopoly over the ad tech stack. It acts as the buyer, the seller and the exchange, taking a massive cut of every advertising dollar. The court also found that Google had engaged in several unlawful schemes, including manipulating its ad exchange auction and rigging bids so that its own customers would win. This has deprived publishers of billions in ad revenue worldwide. Foreign giants control the entire tech stack. They have inserted themselves as an unavoidable gatekeeper, controlling who can compete in digital markets and who can be seen and heard.

Google has controlled traffic for years and has wielded the power to make or break publishers with changes to its core algorithm, which remains veiled in secrecy. Google's more recent AI Overviews summarize content and present it to users in a way that discourages a click-through. Publishers don't get traffic, attribution or revenue from this practice, which effectively steals our content under the guise of innovation.

We are fighting the theft of our content, but we cannot do it alone. We need the regulatory environment to recognize that journalism is not just another content type but fundamental infrastructure for a functioning democracy. When big tech undermines the business model of local news, it replaces it with AI slop and a fractured ecosystem in which misinformation and disinformation thrive. This makes it increasingly difficult for Canadians to operate from a place of shared knowledge.

We see the Ontario government taking a positive step with its ad set-aside program, prioritizing local media. Ottawa must follow suit. The federal government is weakening our information sovereignty by turning away from Canadian media and platforms

while funnelling millions of tax dollars into the coffers of foreign tech monopolists.

I will leave you with a challenging scenario. Imagine that tomorrow, the government faces an emergency and needs to communicate urgently with Canadians. The only way to do so will be through channels owned and controlled by Silicon Valley billionaires and the Trump administration. This is no mere hypothetical. These actors can exercise control over Canadian institutions, our press and our civic life.

I ask each of you to remain vigilant about big tech's power over Canadian policy-making. Many so-called Canadian associations are dominated by U.S. big tech.

As Canadians' elected representatives, I urge you to guard against the false narratives about Canada's best interests. You can do this by asking, does a proposal counter big tech's power over Canada, or does it ignore or even accept that power? If it's the latter, you are not hearing the solution. You are being urged to surrender.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (0835)

The Chair: That was very well said, sir. Thank you very much.

Finally, we go back online to Mr. Rudyard Griffiths with The Hub.

You have five minutes, sir.

Rudyard Griffiths (Publisher, The Hub): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the committee for the invitation to appear today.

The study you have under way examines journalism and media in Canada, including—I want to focus on the words of your motion—“issues of fairness and competition”. This is where I want to focus my remarks.

First, I'll say a brief word about The Hub by way of background. I'm its publisher and co-founder, with my colleague Sean Speer. This month, we marked our fifth anniversary as a digital news and commentary start-up. We're pleased that in the last 12 months, there were over 28 million engagements with our platform, predominantly by Canadians from coast to coast. At 300,000 monthly downloads, our podcast feed is one of the country's largest, dedicated to the issues this committee cares about: Canadian politics, economics and public policy.

We think that growth tells all of us something important. There's clearly a real public appetite for new voices and new perspectives in the national media mix. We're proud that we built our national audience through private grants, subscriptions, advertising, sponsorship and events. Unlike virtually all of our peers, large and small, we have not utilized government subsidies to fund our news journalism and public commentary. To this extent, we believe The Hub's continuing success is a powerful proof point that high-quality journalism and serious policy analysis can thrive independent of government subsidies.

However, this may not remain true for much longer, not only for the few remaining non-subsidized outlets but ultimately for the Hub. This brings me back to the topic of fairness and competition, which is at the heart of your study.

By refusing to use subsidies to fund our journalism, we compete on an uneven playing field. To state the obvious, the labour tax credit is not tied to any meaningful performance metric. It is allocated on a journalist head count alone. This conveniently rewards incumbents that have had decades to build subscriber bases to sustain their newsrooms. This is great for them; I congratulate them. Start-ups, meanwhile, have to build their audiences from scratch. They have to go from zero to one, 100 and, in our case, over 30,000 subscribers. They have no subscriber base to fund the newsroom in a way that would qualify them, were there meaningful support in the first place when they start out, as we started out five years ago.

Adding insult to injury, large incumbents engage in predatory subscription pricing. You've all seen it. It's one dollar for six months or one dollar for a year. They do this knowing that taxpayer supports will make them financially whole at the end of the day. Inexplicably, this payroll tax subsidy scheme is also anonymous. Recipients are not disclosed. This means that outlets like The Hub, which believe that journalism not funded by government largesse is a key selling point to potential readers, cannot differentiate themselves on the very issue of press independence because of the anonymity of the subsidies and how they're given out.

Think about that for a moment. At The Hub, we've come to accept the reality that, despite undermining public trust in the media—I can speak to that; I have hard data on it—freezing incumbents in their dominant positions and stifling innovation among new digital start-ups, these once temporary government supports are now permanent, and they are likely to continue to expand. Between the Canadian labour journalism tax credit and the local journalism initiative alone, Canadian taxpayers are spending close to \$100 million a year on news subsidies.

Let me offer four quick, practical reforms to make better use of this money.

First, end anonymity. If the media industry believes, as it says all the time, that transparency is the basis of public trust in all institutions, including the government, it should apply this standard to itself. Canadians deserve to know which outlets are receiving public money vis-à-vis the labour tax credit and how much.

• (0840)

Second, stop subsidizing the head count. If you're going to subsidize the press, reward outlets for growing their audiences, not their

overhead. Tie a meaningful portion of the credit to reaching engagement and subscriber growth. Reward outlets that Canadians are choosing to read, like The Hub.

Third, require a code of conduct. Outlets taking subsidies should declare them openly and regularly in their mastheads, on their websites and in their annual reporting. They should be discouraged from using their own platforms to lobby for more government money. This is now pervasive across much of mainstream media. It's a conflict of interest, and it further erodes public trust.

Finally, I'll conclude with this: Mandate that payroll subsidies go to funding journalism, not cash payouts to owners and bondholders. The Canadian Journalism Collective already requires this of Online News Act funds. The same rules should apply to the labour tax credit and be tightened to require mandatory financial disclosure by recipient outlets of exactly how they are spending the public's funds on their news and journalism operations.

I'll stop there. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Now we will move to questions from members, starting with Ms. Thomas for six minutes.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you so much.

Ms. Bouchard, in one of the comments you made in your opening remarks, you said foreign giants are monopolizing ad revenue. Further to this, another witness added that about 75% of Canadian ad dollars are going to foreign giants. Certainly, we see this as an issue, and it is concerning.

My concern goes further, though. It doesn't seem to be just advertisers that are choosing these foreign giants. Our Prime Minister is as well. On Sunday, he came out with what seemed to mimic a state of the union address, similar to something Trump would give in the United States. Instead of choosing the CBC—which I would think of as his natural choice, given that it's Canada's broadcaster—he chose to put it out on YouTube, which belongs to an American tech giant.

I'm curious to know what you make of this and why you think this choice was made by the Prime Minister and his office.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'm not privy to why the Prime Minister chose this particular vehicle. Of course, there are processes for the government to address the nation through the CBC for official announcements of various kinds. Otherwise, we have standing invitations for most politicians to come to our various programs.

I don't know. I can't speculate on the question.

Rachael Thomas: Okay.

It's well known that trust in the CBC's media provisions is down with the general public and viewership is down. Do you think any of this had to do with the reason?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I want to qualify your statement. The trust in the public broadcaster, in general, holds relatively steady at around 75%. I don't have the precise numbers, but that's a significant number. Usage, in general, across platforms, is relatively steady as well.

We see movement from conventional services, such as linear television, and movement towards digital platforms, podcasts, FAST channels or websites, so I wouldn't characterize it as a downward trend in general.

Rachael Thomas: Does it concern you that the Prime Minister chose to go with an American platform, YouTube, instead of coming to Canada's public broadcaster, the CBC?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't have a particular position, as the public broadcaster, as to where the Prime Minister chooses to address his concerns. He comes to our stations. He has come to various programs. There are plenty of journalists from the CBC who are able to ask questions and provide some exposure for his statements, but I can't explain this particular statement.

• (0845)

Rachael Thomas: Right. I think most of us are having a hard time explaining it.

Interestingly enough, you're talking about ad revenue being monopolized by these foreign giants. The current government also spends the vast majority of its advertising budget with these same foreign giants, instead of coming to Canadian companies.

I'm curious. Are you in support of this decision by the government?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I am fully in support of my colleague broadcaster's position that there should be an effort made by all public undertakings to support Canadian media through advertising. I think that's a wise way to spend it.

Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry. I'll pose my question again.

This current Liberal government puts the vast majority of its advertising dollars into big American tech giants. Overwhelmingly, it does not choose Canadian companies. What is your position on this? Do you agree with the decision by the government?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: As I said, I am in agreement with the position of the CAB and other Canadian media, encouraging government to invest in Canadian media. That is my position.

Rachael Thomas: Okay.

One thing the CBC loves to talk about is supposed news deserts. You listed a number of cities that the CBC has put a presence into over the last couple of years. You listed places like Lloydminster, Calgary and Moncton. We've heard from numerous witnesses at this committee that there is local coverage in these places and that they feel quite targeted by the CBC, quite under attack by your organization, because the CBC comes in with \$1.6 billion of taxpayer money plus ad revenue and is able to then displace local organizations that are doing good work. These are local people who live in the community. They are a part of the community, and they're reporting on the community. The CBC comes in with transplants and puts people there for maybe six months or up to a year. Then these people usually transfer out to other jobs or opportunities. They're not a part of the community. They're not living there long term. They don't understand it.

The CBC has this unequal playing field that is created because it's coming in with government dollars and ad dollars, and then it's able to displace smaller players that have been there for years, sometimes decades or even up to a century. How do you feel about that?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Well, I would qualify a lot of the statements you have made. First of all—

Rachael Thomas: Just to be clear, these are not my statements. These are statements made by these local news initiatives that are doing good work on behalf of their communities.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Mrs. Thomas, I was trying to reflect on all of your commentary, including the cities you mentioned. I think we've had a station, both in French and in English, in Calgary for years and years and years. This is not a news desert.

We are reinforcing our coverage in smaller locations where we have not had a presence before. Sometimes there is local media there; sometimes there is not. Not everything is equal or the same. Where we do have local media—which we are hoping to collaborate with—we enter those markets with conversations with local media to see how we can help each other and how we can support each other through training opportunities or facility sharing. We are there not to extinguish existing media but to enrich—

Rachael Thomas: Ms. Bouchard, with all due respect, they don't see that. That's not how these local news companies perceive the CBC. That's not how the CBC is entering into these local communities.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: With respect, Mrs. Thomas, I go out in those markets and meet with local media—

The Chair: Thank you.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: —and I have frank conversations with them face to face. So do our newspeople.

The Chair: I will turn the floor now to Mr. Al Soud for six minutes.

Sir, go ahead.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being with us today.

Ms. Bouchard, I want to begin by setting the tone for my questions. You will be popular this morning. I have a deep respect for the work of the CBC. I believe in its mission. I believe in the integrity and good faith of the people who work within it, and I believe its role is more important now than ever.

As Canada's national broadcaster, you carry a unique responsibility, one that comes with heightened expectations around transparency, credibility and public trust. You are asked to do more than most, often with fewer resources than your international counterparts.

The nature of my questions today is to reflect concerns and perspectives that have been raised throughout this committee's proceedings. Some of these do not reflect my personal views, but I think it's important that they be addressed directly and on the record.

I'll admit that you've beaten me to my first question on the idea that the CBC could play a greater role in sharing its infrastructure—that is, equipment, facilities and other resources—with smaller outlets when appropriate, so instead I will ask this: We've heard concerns that the CBC operates at times as though it is competing directly with private sector news organizations. How do you view the CBC's role within the broader media ecosystem, and do you, in fact, see yourselves as competitors to other outlets or as complementary to them?

• (0850)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I have addressed this in previous appearances before the committee.

My personal philosophy is that, as a public broadcaster, we are responsible for making sure our actions serve the citizens and, at the same time, encourage a vibrant media ecosystem. This means entering into all sorts of discussions, and I listed a number of them in my opening remarks, in which we can help support independent media, both community and privately owned, and we do this through various initiatives.

These are very dire times, and I am very concerned. The stories we heard this morning about the fragility are just some of the examples that we live through every day.

This is part of our team's responsibility. It doesn't mean there is one story or there should be one side always sharing storylines or angles. It's important that there be different points of view and different voices in a market. This is why it's important that there's diversity of ownership and news format. It's what we're trying to help preserve.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, Ms. Bouchard.

Another concern raised is the idea that the CBC, given its scale and resources, sometimes draws from journalists. I believe this was just asked; I don't know that you were given the time to respond.

How would you respond to this characterization, and what responsibility do you believe the CBC has in supporting a healthy distribution of journalists across our country?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: First, I want to say that our first interest, when we try to start a new bureau, is to ensure we will have somebody who knows the local community and who will stay. We all have this interest. Whether it's local independent media, community media, the CBC or bigger media, we all want to have local people reporting on their community.

Sometimes this means we have to develop new training paths, and this can serve other media as well. We've had discussions about sharing the training capacity that we have or that we can trigger with colleges and universities to the benefit of independent and community media in the market.

Yes, we are looking to have people locally who will stay and commit to the community.

We don't approach journalists from other media. If there's a posting, we can't stop people from applying. That's a reality. We can't exclude people, but we don't approach them. There are plenty of cases in which they come to us, and eventually, they've gathered their experience and they're looking for something else. Journalists are known for wanting to gain experience through various postings. Sometimes they go to some other media in the same town or in another community. This is a situation we deal with all the time.

We are recruiting, and we are concerned about having enough professional journalists to feed all the media that are out there and want to hire them. This means trying to work with other media and colleges and universities to train more journalists. Unfortunately, a lot of them are exiting the profession because of the precarity of the circumstances.

Fares Al Soud: The CBC is often subject to criticism based on trust. It was alluded to not long ago. You highlighted a figure of roughly 75%, or in that range.

I'd like you to walk us through the mechanisms currently in place to ensure editorial independence, transparency and accountability at the CBC, as well as what you believe defines credible, high-quality journalism today.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: First of all, we have long-standing, very extensive journalistic standards and practices. They are our own. They are a model for others. Each media has their own, and rightly so, but we are influencing each other. We have a code of conduct that teams are held to. There's a healthy debate in all of our newsrooms about what subject to cover, what angles to cover and what guests to chase. There is an editorial process in which stories are vetted and sources are checked.

We have teams that are specialized in verifying information, because there's so much misinformation and there are AI-generated images. We have teams specializing in debunking this type of material that is toxic to some extent or could be very misleading. We have very rigorous processes that are a process of debate within our own newsrooms.

There's also accountability. If we receive a complaint or a concern, the news management is responsible for replying and for answering, and this gives rise to an examination of the process that was followed. If the person who wrote in a complaint or a comment is not satisfied with the answer, they have access to a completely independent ombudsman. They are responsible for French and English services to answer and completely review the journalistic work that was done. They then come out with a ruling.

Our ombudsman's rulings are very useful, because internally—

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you. I don't mean to cut you off. We have run over your time, but well done.

[*Translation*]

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

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Welcome to all the witnesses; my thanks to them for being part of this important study.

Ms. Bouchard, I am going to start by asking you the \$150-million question.

The government has provided an extra \$150 million to you—not to you personally, of course. It was an election promise.

Are you able to tell us how that money was spent or invested? Is any of it left? Do you have other projects to fund with it?

Can you give us a little update about it?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The \$150 million you are referring to appeared in November's budget and was approved by a vote in Parliament at the end of March. At that point, the money came into our books. It has been distributed according to our strategic plan as the result of a vote by the board of directors. The money is spent to correspond to the priorities in our strategic plan.

Martin Champoux: So you didn't take the money for specific projects you would not have done normally. I will let you continue.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: As I said in my introduction, adding positions for journalists was a major priority for us in bringing us closer to Canadians. We, both Radio-Canada and CBC, have announced a number of community journalist positions.

We have also made investments to improve our digital platforms with a view to enhancing discoverability and to prioritize entertainment content locally, regionally and nationally. We have also invested heavily in independent productions because that is where most broadcasters have had to make cuts.

So that is money that has been committed but not really spent right away, because the productions are not yet available.

Martin Champoux: My concern is that those \$150 million will not be available again next year, at least so it seems at the moment. So the journalist positions that you have created and the productions you have invested in are at risk.

Are you going to be able to keep the positions you have created?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: When we invested that money, according to the priorities in our strategy, as I told you, we knew that it was temporary. But we said to ourselves that we still have to move forward because that's a priority. Canada needs those resources. We need to better serve all our communities. If the funding is not renewed, we will have choices to make. But we are going to protect those priorities.

Martin Champoux: I feel that the priorities we are dealing with in this study are really about journalistic coverage in the regions, any regions. You answered questions on that previously. While some colleagues and I will have different opinions, I feel that we need as many different voices as possible. A diversity of information in the regions has been sorely lacking for years, important though it is.

I think you know that I see the public broadcaster as having an important role to play in that, in collaboration, not in competition, with other media. We may have to be careful about the way in which the collaboration is done, but I feel that it is important to maintain the investments you have made in regional journalism.

That leads me to ask you about greater Montreal. I know that, in more remote regions, positions for journalists have been opened and journalists have been hired. But recently, we are hearing a lot of concerns in greater Montreal. I know you are making an effort there, but concerns have been expressed recently. One is that media coverage in the Laurentians is not good enough, despite the issues that the media, especially the public broadcaster, should be addressing.

How do you see those concerns?

● (0900)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: You are quite right. The demographics of greater Montreal are changing. A lot of people have moved to the suburbs. Our Montreal newsroom used to cover the suburbs, but it was not enough. So, for French-language services, we created two positions in Terrebonne, in the Lanaudière region, two positions in Laval and Mirabel to cover the Lower Laurentians, and two positions in Brossard, to cover the south shore and Montérégie.

I can also announce two positions in Mont-Tremblant, in the Upper Laurentians, and two positions in Vaudreuil on the West Island. We did not announce those positions in the first wave, although we did internally. So I can tell you about them this morning.

Martin Champoux: Just now, when you were replying to my colleague opposite, Madam Chair interrupted you and said that your time had expired. That leads me to a question that Quebeckers often ask: why can't we see the playoffs? The Montreal Canadiens hockey team have unfortunately been playing a lot of overtime games recently.

Why did our French-language public broadcaster not get the rights to broadcast the playoffs? Why can't we follow the Montreal Canadiens?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The National Hockey League is a business. The league controls its broadcast rights in order to get the greatest amount of money out of its markets. They do not seem to consider free access for Canadian citizens on Canadian soil to be a priority.

So the rights were negotiated with other partners. They have to make money from them, of course, because they paid a lot for them. I have no problem with them doing that. However, they put the games behind paywalls or they provide them by subscription, because they have to make their money back.

We just have no access to that market. Radio-Canada lost those rights a very long time ago.

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much, Ms. Bouchard.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: But we have made a lot of investments in women's hockey.

Martin Champoux: That's excellent. I encourage you to continue doing so.

[English]

The Chair: That would be [Inaudible—Editor] overtime.

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

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

I'll go to Rod Schween.

Thank you for hosting me when I was in Kamloops a little over a month ago. I appreciated the tour of your facility.

Rod Schween: Thank you for coming.

Kevin Waugh: I enjoyed it.

I have lots of memories with Bill O'Donovan and so on, because we used to work together in Saskatchewan.

You closed the Medicine Hat station, as you know, on June 3.

Ms. Bouchard said in her statement that she collaborates with other media.

When CHAT, which had been in Medicine Hat for 70 years, exited the market, did CBC reach out to you as an independent television station that was leaving?

She claims they collaborate with media. Had you had any talks with CBC when you left Medicine Hat?

Rod Schween: I'll say that we do a lot of work with CBC on the transmission side. We're very good partners with each other. We rent transmission space from them. They rent transmission space from us. We've had a wonderful relationship with them in that regard.

Unfortunately, when we exited Medicine Hat...and I saw some of the coverage from the committee earlier. It was suggested that we couldn't compete with CBC. I'll be very clear that our decision to exit Medicine Hat came before CBC added its bureau in Medicine Hat.

To answer your question directly, no, unfortunately, they have not. We have not had any conversation. I respect the fact that they will come to the market and they will put out a job posting. We have to do the same thing in our markets. We would respond as well, but boy, I would love to have a conversation whereby we could collaborate on bringing journalists to markets like Medicine Hat, because we have great difficulty in that.

Unfortunately, when they came to Medicine Hat, they took one of the remaining journalists we had decided to keep in Medicine Hat, so we could still try to service the market with our local radio station. Instead of helping us in the market, they left us without a journalist. We had to go out and train somebody else. Of course they're going to hire the person we spent time and money investing in, the person who knows the market, knows the people and has the contacts, and we're left to start all over again.

● (0905)

Kevin Waugh: Mr. Schween, we have not heard this only in Medicine Hat. We've heard it all over.

Ms. Bouchard, you just heard from an independent news operator who said you are poaching people, and you are.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I didn't hear him say we were "poaching". No.

Kevin Waugh: No, don't rephrase it. Mr. Schween said you walked into Medicine Hat and took one of his employees, a person they'd spent months, if not years, training.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: One of his employees applied for the job. The job was filled after the station had closed. The same employee stayed with us for a little while. Then they moved on to another job in another province.

Kevin Waugh: How does that—

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I'm saying that we offered him an opportunity to stay in Medicine Hat.

Kevin Waugh: Yes.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: He took the opportunity. His own career, his own wishes, led him elsewhere. This is business. This is what happens in human resources these days. People move. They move because they want other experience. We are all faced with the same challenges.

I'm sorry that there was not a conversation at a timely moment for your station that was closing. I think that should have been a good reflex.

I'm trying to build this reflex as I travel across the country and meet with local leadership, because we don't know what we don't know. If we ask questions.... I have had many, many conversations with local operators, and I always start with this: What's going on? What is working for you? What is not working for you? How can we help?

Kevin Waugh: Yes. Okay. Medicine Hat is a gap. You just heard that the local independent TV pulled out of Medicine Hat, and you didn't reach out to Pattison Media, which I think CBC should have.

Mr. Schween, you heard her comments. How does it help expand media when they walk into a community and poach or whatever—I'm going to say "poach", although maybe Ms. Bouchard doesn't agree with that word—in a so-called media desert when you have closed the TV station down?

Rod Schween: I don't think it does, unfortunately. I wouldn't even call Medicine Hat a news desert after we exited the market. We made the decision to close the television station because, quite frankly, we had lost money in that market six out of the previous nine years. We were slated to lose last year, even before closing costs. This would have been seven out of 10 years we were losing money in that market. We made a decision to keep our radio operations going there. We haven't abandoned the Medicine Hat market. We continue to serve the market and many others.

Unfortunately, this is not the only case in which CBC has taken one of our employees. I agree that it's not poaching—the same thing happens with us—but respectfully, they can't say that they're working to have conversations in these markets and help in those situations, because I have many other examples of that, unfortunately. You've heard many other examples of that. I would welcome that conversation; unfortunately, I think they're targeting markets that aren't news deserts, in a lot of cases, and I would encourage them to do so.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Zoe Royer (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I'm going to pose my first question to Mr. Frame.

Mr. Frame, you mentioned that you represent 350 journalists. You mentioned, in the scenario of an emergency, that predominantly American news would be reported to the Canadian people.

I would like you to imagine yourself in the seat of a parliamentarian for a moment. We know we need to pivot, in terms of supporting a vibrant, local, credible news network across the country, coast to coast to coast.

What are some of the policies you would want to implement? What would be the priority with which you would roll these out? Maybe you could also speak to some of the international legislation that is happening right now, given the state of journalism.

• (0910)

Angus Frame: Thank you for the question, and thank you for having me.

It's a good question in terms of policies that could be put in place to support the news ecosystem in Canada. I think you asked, more or less, the priority order of what I would do. I would start with the easiest, and it's been alluded to already. I would follow the model set by the government in Queen's Park, as well as by the local government in New York City and in the state of Maryland, and set an example for the country by allocating federal ad spend to Canadian-owned and operated media, showing confidence in and support for those channels and signalling to the private sector that this is a commitment to the country.

From a policy perspective, I would then look more closely at some of the monopoly challenges we're dealing with, specifically around Google. You asked about other jurisdictions and what they're doing. There's been a lot of effort and investigation into the problem of AI Overviews. What happens is—and you've probably all experienced it—you do a search on Google, and instead of providing you with a collection of links to news sites where original journalism has been done, Google reads all those news sites on your behalf, takes the content and summarizes it for you. This creates a block between us, our audience and our business model opportunity. They do this without our permission or endorsement, and they do it in a way we can't compete with, because their monopoly on search means that we're not able to block their bots from crawling our content without putting our own businesses at risk.

In places like the U.K. and in the European Union overall, people are looking at this situation very seriously and investigating the opt-in and opt-out potential, in terms of AI Overviews. There is also a very lively discussion in the tech community around the need for bots to disclose their purpose so that when a bot comes to your site, it has to identify, honestly, what it's doing. It can't come and index your content for search but also use it for AI training. There's a lot of work to be done around the policies that support the protection of content as the AI moment continues to grow around us.

I referenced the court decisions in the United States around Google's monopoly over ad technology. The Canadian government could follow that path, investigate the behaviours of Google and their control of the buy side, the sell side and the overall marketplace for ad tech, as well as the proven illegal behaviours to corrupt that market to the unfair advantage of Google.

I would start, simply, with the advertising set-aside policy of the federal government. I would then move into the challenge of AI stealing content and the need for permission and bot disclosures to be required. I would encourage an investigation into the ad tech practices of Google in order to address the monopoly situation we're trying to live with.

Zoe Royer: That's amazing.

Very quickly, what is the hallmark of credible journalism versus non-credible journalism in Canada?

Angus Frame: As the CBC noted, we have publicly posted journalistic standards. We publish corrections when we make an error. We are accountable to our subscribers, our readers and our communities. We also employ an ombud who will adjudicate when there's a complaint about our coverage and independently determine whether we've been on side.

If you were to contrast that with other institutions that have no such accountability and do not correct or claim a responsibility to the truth or to accuracy, you would see a stark line between the two.

We published a story a couple of days ago about AI-generated "slogaganda" being spewed toward Albertans in support of separation.

That kind of irresponsible AI-generated propaganda is the antithesis of what we do in terms of transparent, high-quality journalism.

• (0915)

[Translation]

Zoe Royer: Thank you very much.

[English]

Angus Frame: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, I now give you the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: I am going to continue this discussion by turning to you, Ms. Bouchard.

Does Radio-Canada have rules on the use of artificial intelligence in its newsrooms?

I am talking about it being used as a research tool. Of course, I would not expect you to be broadcasting news generated by AI. However, what framework have you, as the public broadcaster, imposed on your newsroom employees?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Approved artificial intelligence tools are available, in the newsrooms and for all of our employees, with our governance framing it. Certain tasks can take a long time and can be an administrative burden, so the tools are generally used to make those tasks easier and quicker. With the news, for example, they can be used to sort through large quantities of information.

When we use artificial intelligence in the production process, which can happen, we declare it. So there is some transparency there.

But we do not create content, except to demonstrate what artificial intelligence does. That's when we explain artificial intelligence and show people how it is used to create pictures and so forth. We use it when we are trying to explain it. But we do so in a very transparent way.

Martin Champoux: But, human nature being what it is, "an open door may tempt a saint", as they say. I imagine that there are a lot of expressions to describe a tired journalist at the end of a shift deciding to use an AI tool to write a piece.

Do the newsrooms have ways to check and monitor things like that and prevent them from happening in advance?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: First, our journalists must adhere to our standards and practices. Second, they work as a community and are always seeing each other.

Martin Champoux: Yes, but sometimes, when no one is looking, it might be a temptation.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Yes, but our newsrooms are very busy. Our journalists are on site. They do not work from home in their basements. So there's a lot of coming and going, a lot of action.

There is also an editorial process in which a producer or assignment editor will review the reporting, the pictures or the copy. So the production chain has major stages at which things are verified.

I feel that anyone pretending to use their intelligence with generated information in their professional work would be sanctioned. I have no reason to suspect our journalists of doing that. I feel that they hold themselves to standards, particularly the members of the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec in our teams.

There's also a discussion between our unions and management on the healthy use of artificial intelligence. The reality is that we cannot dismiss it, because artificial intelligence has become part of our environment and the young people who will be coming into the workforce will have grown up with it.

So we must define the use of artificial intelligence, be extremely transparent for the public, and make sure that it does not affect the trustworthiness and the truth of our product.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, you now have the floor for five minutes.

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

Ms. Bouchard, the Liberal government promised you \$150 million before the recent elections and they kept that promise.

But last November, in the 2026–2027 budget, the government announced cuts of \$190 million for CBC/Radio-Canada.

Is that a fair statement?

• (0920)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I don't interpret it like that.

Bernard Généreux: How do you interpret it?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: We received \$150 million in the 2025–2026 budget. That was a three-year budget and funding for 2026–2027 is yet to come. But the year has started and it is possible that decisions are being made.

I did not interpret it as a cut. I saw the previous amount as reinvestments that allow us to meet some ongoing commitments, because we control the way in which the funding is managed.

Bernard Généreux: Anyway, you should expect to get \$40 million less for 2026–2027, because that is what was announced. It's not Mr. Poilievre who you should be afraid of, it's Mr. Carney.

Canadian media are also receiving about \$7 million from Google. Since this study began, we have been hearing evidence from a host of media outlets on the brink of bankruptcy or of closing. Basically, they are about to disappear.

How is it that an organization like CBC/Radio-Canada, which receives \$1.5 billion in public funding, can receive another \$7 million from this collective fund, when the funds could have been distributed elsewhere?

Why did you accept the money? You could have chosen to decline, even though the collective decided to give it to you.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: That's a very good question.

We just have to recall that the money comes from the legislation in Bill C-18. The bill establishes the principle by which digital platforms must compensate the media, the copyright holders, for their use of journalists' production.

Bernard Généreux: Yes, I understand that.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: We produce journalistic content that is protected by copyright. So the principle by which Google has to compensate us for the use of that content is an important one, even though we are a public broadcaster.

Australia has a program that operates differently, but is the same in spirit. ABC also receives revenue from the platforms for the use of its journalistic production.

It starts with the principle. Then there can be discussions about the way in which those funds can best support the industry in the future.

Bernard Généreux: Some witnesses, particularly those from Télé Inter-Rives in Rivière-du-Loup, who own station CHAU in Gaspésie, and some people from the west—who we have just heard from—came to tell us about being in the same space as Radio-Canada. We are not opposed to that, but the reality is that those organizations hire journalists straight out of school. For all kinds of reasons, Radio-Canada does not hire journalists without experience, or at least hopes that they will have some experience when they arrive at their door. So smaller organizations are obliged to train those journalists for several years. Then Radio-Canada enters the market with new journalism positions in Rimouski, or Matane, or Gaspésie, paying salaries that are higher than the companies can afford.

So here's a question: Could there be training agreements with Radio-Canada?

Would it not be the Government of Canada's role to provide the tools?

CBC/Radio-Canada receives a huge amount of money from Canadians. Could the government not have you establish training agreements, especially in the regions?

Today, companies like yours and like all the other players, are losing advertising revenue.

I wanted to introduce that thought because I absolutely do not want to forget what I have to say.

Don't tell me that I've finished, Madam Chair. I am just getting started.

The Chair: The time is running out quickly.

Bernard Généreux: Ms. Bouchard, I will let you answer my questions, if you can.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I agree completely that we should be developing training programs together. We are trying to do just that. We are discussing it. Each time I tour the regions, I start conversations about it. I often ask training institutions, like CEGEPs and the like, to try and develop talent locally, rather than exporting it all the time.

Bernard Généreux: Madam Chair, I feel that my five minutes are always shorter than other people's five minutes.

The Chair: It's not five minutes.

Mr. Ntumba, the floor is yours for about five minutes.

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

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you, Ms. Bouchard.

CBC/Radio-Canada's 2025–2030 corporate strategy includes a number of ambitious objectives, such as opening CBC/Radio-Canada to youth, newcomers and divergent opinions. It also establishes priorities, namely proximity, digital agility and bringing people together.

Which indicators are you going to rely on as you evaluate your progress on the objectives set out in the 2025–2030 corporate strategy?

• (0925)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Thank you for that question.

The values framework will be based on measurements of consumption, on the public's engagement in our product in French and English, and on their perceptions of some aspects of that product, such as its trustworthiness, its ability to reflect their reality and their regions, the trust we inspire with the services we offer, and the ability to reflect the diversity of their communities. We will measure the data on these perceptions through surveys.

We are also going to measure our economic impact and footprint, meaning our value to the Canadian economy as a result of all our activities.

Finally, as for every balanced scorecard, we will measure internal indicators, such as employee commitment, retention, the diversity of the workforce and its distribution across the country.

All these measures are part of our framework of values. The public will be able to see them as they come out in our quarterly reports. We have already published some data in the third-quarter report of 2025–2026. We will consolidate the data in our annual report to be published later this summer or in the early fall.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Let's go back to the issue of finances that my colleague was talking about.

Is it possible to reduce CBC's funding without harming Radio-Canada's operations?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The two are closely linked. Of course, the budgets are different and the services in French are separate from the services in English. However, they do share a lot of infrastructure, both technological and physical. This includes workplaces and many of our information processing systems. All our regional stations work in both English and French. The teams working in each language collaborate to a huge extent.

Often, the francophones in minority situations are in very much smaller teams and they greatly depend on their CBC colleagues' ability to gather information and pictures.

So the activities are integrated to a considerable extent. It would be difficult to maintain the quality and quantity of French-language services if there were major cuts at CBC.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: We are still talking about the regions today. In your view, when CBC/Radio-Canada arrived in more remote regions, was that part of the reason that private media, like Medicine Hat News, had to close, or did something else happen?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I am troubled when a station closes its doors. They are stations we have worked with. I remember a time when some of them were even Radio-Canada affiliates. So my relationship with those regional stations goes back a long time. They contributed to the market and they were always there. Yes, it's a disaster.

However, it comes as a result of economic conditions, not of Radio-Canada's activities. That is what the people who operate those stations say.

When we were in a position to find solutions ahead of time, we did. We did it with Envol 91 FM. It was not a private station; it was a French-language community radio station in Manitoba. It was going through some extreme conditions and was in danger of having

to shut down. We found a viable and sustainable solution that takes its economic situation into account but does not further disrupt the market.

You should know that we are also in a market with other infrastructure providers. So, when we share infrastructures and provide everything at no cost, others will say that we are engaged in unfair competition. We have to find a balance. In the case of community radio or local services with little economic impact, we try to find win-win solutions for everyone.

It's not like we started that work last week, but we are still at the early stages. In my discussions with my colleagues in senior management, and with the teams in regional stations, I have to open their eyes to solutions that may be off the beaten path.

• (0930)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Diotte, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

Ms. Bouchard, in your opening remarks, you mentioned Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. That's where I'm from. Many years ago, I started my career in broadcasting there at the CBC TV outlet. Unfortunately, that outlet is now gone; it has closed.

CBC gets almost \$1.6 billion, so why have you abandoned smaller markets like Sault Ste. Marie and those in Alberta and throughout the country?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I was part of the CBC back then. I was in the legal department. I wasn't in the field or in local newsrooms, but I remember how tragic it was that we closed down so many operations in smaller markets to concentrate on one station per province.

This was done back then for reasons of financial constraints; there were cuts to our appropriation. I don't fault the administration of the day, but it is a constraint that has harmed our ability to serve adequately.

Now, instead of building stations, which would make no sense, we are creating bureaus. We are creating capacity for local reporting and multiplatform broadcasts so that we can get stories locally and then use digital, FAST channels or newsletters to publish those stories and reach the local market.

Kerry Diotte: Switching topics a bit, there is a recently published book by a former CBC producer, David Cayley, titled *The CBC: How Canada's Public Broadcaster Lost Its Voice (And How to Get It Back)*.

It examines recent coverage by CBC News, and Mr. Cayley points out two major recent events in which the CBC identified the “correct” political line and embraced it without hesitation or exception. He said that CBC badly failed in its coverage of COVID and the truckers' convoy; he alleges that CBC treated truckers as enemies of the state.

We've also heard in this committee discussions about how the CBC has covered the war in Gaza, and that it has a distinct anti-Israel bias.

What do you say to Canadians who say the CBC is biased in its coverage?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: My colleague described the processes we go through and the standards we uphold. Journalism is a daily process. It evolves every day. I don't think we can characterize our reporting in any other way. It's a process, and we are accountable to citizens for that process.

I don't believe our reporters are pursuing a particular agenda. They are seeking the truth. They are double sourcing their information. They are doing a lot of fieldwork, which is a luxury, I have to say, because we are publicly funded. It is important that we have foreign correspondents and envoys who are interviewing people living through some of these conflicts and some of these situations.

Field reporting is really important, because that's how the public can see for itself what is going on.

Kerry Diotte: What do you say to criticisms of the three things I mentioned, including the convoy and COVID?

• (0935)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: We are a public institution, and we are subject to opinion and criticism. I will uphold the right of anybody to have opinions about our coverage, but I will stand by the quality of our journalism any day.

Kerry Diotte: We also heard from Peter Menzies, a former CRTC vice-chair, who said that he thinks objectivity is an enormous challenge for public broadcasters, and he feels that most of your reporters are centre-left.

What do you say to that?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: Our reporters are held to standards. They are not pursuing an agenda, and they are not pushing their opinions. They are basing their stories and their broadcasts on facts that they check. People can have opinions about it—that's fine—but it doesn't change the nature of the work we do.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

Thanks, everybody, for being here today.

My question is for Mr. Schween and Mr. Millar.

Many of us were elected in 2025, so we didn't live through the Bill C-18 years in terms of its establishment. We've come to this committee, and we've heard about some of the challenges, particularly with Meta's decision to remove Canadian news content and

the impact it's had on a number of institutions, organizations and businesses.

You spoke to its importance, so particularly for those of us who were elected in 2025, what was the original intent of that bill, and why is it still so important to you? You mentioned that you're concerned about its future. Maybe we could go back and talk about its intent and where it's working.

Obviously, the Meta challenge is another thing, and we can talk about that as well.

I'd love some insight.

Thank you.

Calvin Millar: Thank you for the question.

Bill C-18 was argued before this committee to a great extent. My colleague Ms. Bouchard touched on the fact that the compensation from Google—they are the only ones paying into it right now, as you alluded to—is compensation. This isn't government funding. It isn't even funding out of a philanthropic issue. This is money to recognize that, for the better part of 20 years, the online services have used our content—often without attribution and certainly without compensation. The establishment has been crucial.

It isn't enough. It doesn't replace or fairly compensate us fully, but it is a heck of a good start.

David Myles: Mr. Schween, do you have anything to add to that?

Rod Schween: As Cal points out, we don't operate in a walled garden anymore, and we have a level of competition that's unprecedented. We still live in a regulatory world, in a lot of cases, that was designed and put together at a time when we did operate in a walled garden.

As a colleague of mine in our company likes to say, we have way more people chopping at our tree, and you've heard about the impact of the loss of advertising.

Bill C-18 isn't perfect, but it is the mechanism we have in place at the moment. What I'm really worried about is that the measures in place will get set aside through ongoing trade negotiations, as well as the delays caused by them and the impact the delays will potentially have on LITS members and other media companies across Canada. This is going to be catastrophic.

David Myles: Mr. Frame, I think you spoke to this as also being a matter of principle. I think you speak about this as a matter of principle in terms of copyright. Maybe we can speak to that a bit as well.

Angus Frame: You're specifically talking about—

David Myles: It's with regard to Bill C-18 and why it was established in the first place. I think that's part of what's getting lost a bit in this conversation, especially for those of us who weren't here through those years of establishing it.

Angus Frame: The way I think of Bill C-18 is that it's payment in lieu of licensing agreements for copyright-protected material. Google uses material to their business benefit without formal permission, and Bill C-18 is a negotiated settlement in order to compensate for that behaviour.

I would argue that it's working. I think Cal and Rod noted as well that money is flowing to publishers. It's being used to put journalists on the street, telling the stories for Canadians. It's a strong and courageous piece of legislation that is supporting the industry and making a difference to us.

• (0940)

David Myles: What is the appropriate response when Meta decides to take all the news content from Canadian sources?

Angus Frame: I have a different view of the Meta situation. I think they used Canada for theatre. Meta has been backing away from news globally. My publishing colleagues in many different geographies around the world have all experienced significant drops in traffic referrals from Meta, and specifically Facebook, which peaked in 2018.

Facebook—Meta—was moving away from news, and Canada just presented a moment at which it could be dramatic about it, make some noise and create a false impression about the value of their platform and the importance of it. It was part of a global strategy they were rolling out, and we were just a convenient pawn in a narrative they were creating.

David Myles: Has it negatively affected your business?

Angus Frame: The impact on traffic from Facebook was most notable in our community sites.

We developed a number of fairly robust community groups, discussions and traffic channels that were built on reliance on Facebook, and we have had to work very hard to replace that lost traffic—we've done so successfully—and to create direct relationships with our readers, our audience.

We are doing that successfully, but this absolutely had a dramatic and negative impact on traffic, most clearly on the smaller community sites at Torstar.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

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

Martin Champoux: My colleague David Myles has hit just the right note and I love Mr. Frame's reading of Meta's attitude.

I worked on Bill C-18 with several other members of this committee and I can tell you that the legislation that ensued came about as a result of that study. We are dealing with fairness in the media industry and that was the spirit of Bill C-18. If the legislation seems inadequate to some, it is because of the behaviour of the digital companies. They are good-for-nothings; they conspire to challenge the legislation we establish in order to keep on with their activities unfettered and to suck the life out of our cultural and media industries. That's what we ought to be censuring. I really like Mr. Frame's reading of the situation.

Since we are talking about digital companies, let me turn to you, Ms. Bouchard. I am sure that you can see this question coming.

I have to tell you that I really liked Radio-Canada's reaction when people complained that ICI RDI was on a subscription platform owned by Amazon—not to mention any names, but it was Prime Video. The reaction was swift. The call to arms was not quiet. You therefore decided to pause Amazon Prime subscriptions for ICI RDI until—and correct me if I am wrong—the public broadcaster's content is available on platforms paid for by the funding Radio-Canada receives.

My question may be a little annoying, but who first had the brilliant idea to propose that at a time when the digital companies are being called to account?

That's my only question: Who said it would be a great idea to be on Amazon Prime?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I know that you are an avid reader of our strategy. You have certainly noticed that we said we would go wherever Canadians and Quebecers are. We will seek them out wherever they consume content. That's our objective: to serve them wherever they consume content.

Now it turns out that Amazon has a service called Prime Video. It is well established in Canada and already offers a number of Canadian channels, including all Bell's channels, French and English, and even a Quebecor channel, TVA Sports. Our data shows that the channel is used by 50% of those under 35, francophones and anglophones alike. So, if we want to reach people who no longer have cable by providing a trustworthy and semi-official streaming source of information, the idea is, as I said, for us to go where the people are.

We certainly recognized that putting ICI RDI on Prime Video, as the only way to subscribe if you don't have cable, was going to push people towards Amazon. We felt justified in taking a step backwards in order to first create conditions that would encourage people to access ICI RDI on TOU.TV, just as CBC News is accessible on CBC Gem. Then they would always have a way to move to our platforms to get our services. It's like putting on your own mask before helping others.

But I am not naive. When we offer the option to subscribe to Prime Video, there will be people who will choose to do so, because it is their platform. The Quebec government has passed legislation to allow francophone content on foreign platforms. With an agreement such as the one we have, we are helping with the discoverability of francophone content on platforms that Quebeckers use.

● (0945)

The Chair: I am now giving the floor to another member.

[*English*]

Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor for five minutes.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you very much.

My question is for Mr. Griffiths.

In your opening statement, you talked about the importance of establishing trust. You made a comment with regard to money being given by the government in order to prop up existing journalists and entities. You talked about the fact that with the way it is done with the “payroll tax subsidy”, as you called it, it's rather difficult for new players to enter the market. Instead, it boxes them out and protects the existing players.

I'm curious about your view on what this type of conduct by the government does to overall public trust in the media. Further, I'm interested in knowing your views on what this does to journalistic integrity and overall transparency. They are tied together, of course—trust with integrity and transparency.

Rudyard Griffiths: Thank you, MP Thomas, for the question.

To bring some hard facts into the conversation, the Reuters Institute at the University of Oxford—which is well respected—has documented the decline of Canadian trust in the news. The trust that Canadians have in the media fell from 55% in 2016 to 39% in 2024.

Polling that we've conducted indicates that 76% of Canadians agree that government funding could undermine journalistic objectivity. About 67% of Canadians surveyed do not trust the government to decide which media organizations qualify for subsidy support.

We have to understand that this whole conversation, for the last hour or so. It seems to be entirely focused on the large incumbent organizations, and I get that. They have powerful lobbyists, and clearly, they've been very effective in designing a subsidy scheme that is optimized for their needs. To a large degree, it entrenches their incumbency, for the reasons I talked about.

I appreciate your raising the issue of trust, because nowhere in this conversation has anyone addressed the extent to which trust in the media is plunging, including trust in the CBC.

Will we connect? Will we have the courage, fortitude and perspicacity to understand that there may be a connection between large-scale government funding of the media, with an increasing public distrust in news and journalism and the consequences of all of that for our democracy? Instead, it seems as though we're having a conversation that's exceedingly convenient for many of the people testifying today on behalf of the organizations they represent. It's basically about how we can maximize subsidies that we receive from

government to maintain and sustain our business models, which are legacy models that were built over decades. I do not deny that they produce excellent journalism and provide a public service.

Other than my voice today, who's speaking for what we'll hope will be the next generation of media organizations that will come up in this country, that will develop new ways of telling Canadian stories and writing effective journalism? Who's speaking for them? Where are the types of reforms to the subsidy model that could allow 1,000 flowers to bloom?

I'll end on this point. We're celebrating our fifth anniversary at The Hub, after five years of building this organization from nothing to something. When I look around, I'm distressed to see that no one has followed us. There are very few new media start-ups of any size, since these subsidies came into effect in 2019.

We have to acknowledge that the subsidy regime is doing something. It is squashing innovation. It is impeding new models, methods and types of organizations to renew our journalistic capacity in Canada.

I appreciate the question about trust, because it's something we need to discuss. We need to connect it to subsidies. We need to connect it to how the subsidy regime has largely frozen Canadian media, from the CBC to my old friends at The Toronto Star and others.

We're not seeing a renewal in the industry. We're not seeing dynamism in the industry. I would challenge anyone to argue otherwise.

● (0950)

Rachael Thomas: You said there were consequences for democracy. Quickly, what are those consequences?

Rudyard Griffiths: Arguably, the whole purpose of the subsidies was to support a vibrant media. In turn, it could provide Canadians with accurate information, so they could make informed choices as citizens in the democratic dialogue that we are all part of.

I quote those numbers to you. Trust in news fell from 55% in 2016 to 39% in 2024. Much of that period was covered by the current subsidy regime. The subsidy regime doesn't seem to be having any positive effect on trust.

In fact, as our polling showed, 76% of Canadians, three out of four, agree that government funding undermines journalistic objectivity. That may be true or not. In many cases, it's probably not true. It's the perception of what large-scale government funding is doing to the media. This is a Faustian bargain that the media has entered into.

The Chair: Thank you.

Rudyard Griffiths: In order to save itself, it is ingesting these subsidies, but it is bleeding trust at the same time.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

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

David Myles: This is super interesting. I find one thing very interesting, which is that, you know, perception is one thing, but reality.... It might not be reality. Part of the job of good journalism is to define the difference between perception and reality and to lean into the things that are real.

We've heard a lot of talk in this committee about giving weight to organizations that don't have very much journalistic integrity, that lean very much into pushing the perception of interference where there is no interference. There's also a responsibility from a journalistic perspective to make sure that there is a line between perception and reality. Ideally, good journalism leans into reality. I think that's what we're all talking about.

I also find it interesting, when we talk about the difference between 2016 and 2025, that it corresponds to a huge breadth of news organizations and fake news online. It happens to correspond to some of this subsidization. We've talked about the subsidization and why it's important. So many organizations come in every day. It's because the market is failing, and large companies are taking advantage of the content. I find it interesting that the idea.... There was also skepticism when large businesses were paying for advertising in newspapers. I was in university in the early 2000s, and there was a lot of skepticism around the corporate influence of large media organizations. Journalism is a practice.

It's interesting, because the corresponding distrust also comes with the growth of fake news online. Part of our job is to make sure that we are drawing a line between what is true and what is not true. The line has been vague at points in terms of what is considered real journalism.

I think we all agree that we want a strong ecosystem with multiple players, including innovative online companies as well. We want that, particularly if their interest is in having true journalism, being accountable to readers and having journalistic standards and practices. When we're talking about the public broadcaster, I'm curious to know.... When we're talking about rural areas and about building out a bigger ecosystem, one question that comes to mind for me—and, I think, for many people here—is advertising. When you're competing with private companies for advertising—I'm looking at other public broadcasters around the world, some of which rely on advertising and some of which don't—how does that play into, particularly, the relationship between private media and public media? How do you perceive this in the international context?

● (0955)

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: There are many models of public broadcasters. Hybrid models of funding are prevalent. Sometimes there are restrictions on advertising in certain time slots or on certain types of revenue. Some are allowed to generate revenue abroad, not necessarily commercial revenue in their territory. There are many models.

The one that CBC/Radio-Canada was founded on has always been a hybrid model, in which advertising on television and, later, digital platforms was part of the whole financial basis for the delivery of services. Of course, we don't generate shareholder interests or anything like that. All the revenue we generate through advertising is reinvested to support what we do in the service of Canadians.

The advertising market has been declining for everybody on linear platforms. We don't have advertising on radio, and we haven't had it for a long time. Radio is a local market for advertising, so I'm glad we don't have an issue with local advertising at that level.

In most of the small markets we are re-entering, we are re-entering with bureaus, not with stations, so we don't have inventory to sell that is specifically for linear television in terms of the work we do there. It's unlikely that we would have any kind of impact on that market from an advertising point of view. In larger markets, yes—Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver—we have a mix of national advertisers and more local advertising.

What we do, though—I want to point this out—is work with other publishers and other media to try to regain a little more sovereignty in our own advertising market. The advertising market in Canada is composed of about \$25 billion. The bulk of that is owned by American giants. Only a small portion is exploited by Canadian publishers and operators in broadcast, print and digital. We form a very small part of that \$25 billion. Our advertising revenue is \$250 million a year—just 1%.

Can we work together to grow the part that Canadian media owns and benefit from it together, instead of fighting among ourselves? That's the proposal we have on the table. That's why we are participating in a collective that is trying to—particularly with digital advertising, which has been completely taken over by those foreign platforms—work together to create value for all of us in Canada, and to regain some access for the Canadian businesses wanting to reach Canadian audiences. Remaining in the advertising market sometimes allows us to take the lead in those conversations and to offer to pilot stuff with our funds to benefit the whole community.

That's what we're doing.

David Myles: Thank you.

The Chair: Your time is up.

The Conservatives are still deciding who's going next.

Let me throw this out there: We've heard a lot from the CBC about competition in different markets. I worked at the Edmonton Journal in 1998. I think there were four radio stations. There were three or four newspapers. There were several TV stations. We all competed against each other, and we had more and better news for it. Sometimes competition is good in communities.

Are you ready?

● (1000)

Rachael Thomas: It'll be Mr. Diotte.

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

I'll leave my comment there as is.

Kerry Diotte: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Mr. Griffiths, last week, this committee heard from Peter Menzies, the former CRTC vice-chair and former publisher of the Calgary Herald. He shared his belief that objectivity in newsrooms, right now, is “an enormous challenge”.

Do you agree? How can we expect journalists to be objective, for instance, when their newsroom relies on funding from the Liberal government?

Rudyard Griffiths: Peter is a contributor and a columnist at The Hub. We really appreciate his analysis.

I'm possibly less concerned about objectivity than I am about a diversity of media, especially media by type and size. As I've discussed, there's an inherent tension that seems to exist now between incumbent legacy media and start-up independent media, let's call it, on the extent to which the subsidy regime has entirely worked to the benefit of the former and not the latter. I think objectivity will solve itself—largely, I hope, in the eye of the beholder—and we will have more media outlets like The Hub that follow rigorous journalistic standards.

The Hub is a QCJO, registered with Revenue Canada. We employ professional journalists. In fact, one professional journalist was reached out to in the last week to 10 days by the CBC to see if they were interested in leaving The Hub to go work for the CBC, so I'm a little confused about our friend at the CBC's comments that they don't actively seek out talent amongst competitor organizations like The Hub.

I hope that answers your question. I really hope that the committee in its work on this study will focus on the key words of “fairness and competition” in your motion. That's where this discussion needs to go. In that discussion, yes, we can talk about big tech. We can talk about legacy media's concerns about competition vis-à-vis big tech. However, let's not forget independent media, start-up media and our concerns about competition vis-à-vis legacy media in Canada. I think we can walk and chew gum at the same time.

Kerry Diotte: You mentioned that three of four Canadians surveyed feel that government funding hurts trust. What's the solution to that?

Rudyard Griffiths: Sunlight is the ultimate antiseptic. It's jaw-dropping that we're putting tens of millions of dollars a year of public taxpayer funds into media organizations and we are requiring no disclosure on their part that they are recipients of the labour tax credit. If media argues again and again that government should be transparent and that transparency leads to accountability—it is the *sine qua non* of their own journalism—then why do large legacy media outlets not disclose that they are beneficiaries of the labour tax credit and communicate to their readers, listeners and viewers the millions of dollars they receive?

The National Post, to their credit, does this, because they have to file as part of their publicly traded status as a corporation, but many other media, including The Globe and Mail.... I don't know if Angus can talk about the Toronto Star and whether it's been open about whether it has, in fact, availed itself of the labour tax credit. I assume it has. I don't see that anywhere in the Toronto Star. I don't see it on its masthead. I don't see it on Toronto Star's website.

I mean, come on; let's bring some transparency to this conversation. This would be one important first step toward restoring public trust.

Kerry Diotte: You also mentioned that we need to do subsidies differently. Could you expand on your ideal model for that?

Rudyard Griffiths: I'm increasingly reconciled to the fact that these subsidies are not going away. Let's remember, everybody, that we said in 2019, when we created this program, that it was going to be for five years and then it was going away. A lot of very respected voices in media signed on to that. They said it was vital that this had a sunset clause. Well, we're now on the other side of that sunset clause and we're talking about millions of dollars more going into various types of subsidy programs. We've created new types of subsidy programs over the last five years.

There are two ideas that I want to reiterate. Stop subsidizing head count. Why not switch the subsidy metrics from measuring the advantages that are inherent to incumbent legacy organizations and start allocating subsidies on the basis of audience reach, engagement and subscriber growth? This is far more equitable. It would allow smaller organizations in the start-up phase to benefit from subsidies. Right now they can't. It's a cart-and-horse problem that this subsidy regime, especially the labour tax credit, has created. I think it was created purposely that way by lobbyists for legacy incumbent media.

Finally, let's ensure that the payroll subsidies go to journalism. Right now a lot of these large legacy organizations are private media. Those subsidies are going directly to owners and bondholders. They are not going to journalism.

● (1005)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Champoux.

Martin Champoux: I just want to mention that some witnesses are having connection problems. There were some before. I had the same situation yesterday at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. It's not a disaster, but the problems seem to be more frequent these days.

I don't know whether the problems are on our end or on the witnesses' end. But something should really be done about it because, as you know, it can become very difficult, dangerous even, for the interpreters.

The Chair: That's true. It's not the first time it has happened.
[English]

Mr. Griffiths, you have flicked in and out a couple of times. I don't think we missed any of the content of your speech, but we're making a note of a bit of a connection issue.

Thank you.
[Translation]

Mr. Ntumba, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Frame, Parliament has adopted various measures to support the media industry, especially with regard to the competition from international digital platforms. However, any government action must guarantee a fair balance between financial support and media independence.

In your view, what role can the federal government play in supporting a vibrant media industry while still fully safeguarding the editorial independence of public media?

[English]

Angus Frame: Thank you for the question.

This will be consistent with my opening remarks and some of my comments earlier. The government needs to support a functioning marketplace for media. Absent a functioning marketplace, which we don't have due to the monopolistic practices of the foreign tech players, it needs to find ways to support independent voices across the country.

The current programs that are in place—the journalism tax credit, the funding through Bill C-18 and the LJI—are functioning measures absent a fully functioning marketplace.

I think Mr. Griffiths and I share almost the same vision but see different obstacles being the major problems in getting there. A diverse plurality of new and traditional voices across the news ecosystem in this country is needed and healthy for democracy. It's healthy for the future of journalism, and it's something we would all like, but it's not something that can be accomplished when the market has been perverted the way it has been. Until that reality is corrected, we will need to work together—government and private media—to make sure our industry continues.

[Translation]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you very much.

Ms. Bouchard, CBC/Radio-Canada has a unique place in Canada's media ecosystem, in terms of information, culture, official

languages and regional representation. Its role is often presented as a pillar of universal access to trustworthy information.

What role does the public broadcaster play today in maintaining a strong, accessible media system in Canada?

How do you see that role having to evolve to respond to the technological changes and to the expectations of the public?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: As I was saying just now, we have to continue to develop accessible services that react to the changes in the way people consume information and entertainment. That specifically implies following them on the platforms they choose—they are legal and accessible, after all. Then we offer diversity and a safe environment that allows them always to come onto our platforms in order to consume information and to be entertained.

We have to do that with a good understanding of the industry, which is faced with many challenges. Everything we can do contributes to that effort. We have actually offered packages with Bell's platforms, for example, so that we can provide subscriptions to ICI TOU.TV and Crave. We have also worked with our colleagues from Les Coops de l'information in designing training programs that their journalists and ours have access to. We have also developed ways of improving the performance of Canadian media in securing advertising revenue.

Specifically with regard to smart TVs and the digital environment, we have a lot of work to do to establish a kind of sovereignty and ensure that Canadian companies have access to those media. We want them to replace Google and Facebook and we want them to be the vehicles of choice for Canadian companies wishing to reach the Canadian public.

There are a lot of things we can do and we are in a new era.

Honestly, I have been working in this area for 35 or 40 years. I am old school, but we have to be constantly learning. We have to be always asking questions. That is what we are doing with our journalism colleagues. We have to ask ourselves what we can do to move forward together and to preserve our industry.

• (1010)

The Chair: Now we are going to move things along more quickly.

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

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Bouchard, we have very little time to talk about an important subject that I find extremely tricky: journalists being harassed at work.

A few weeks ago, we received a group that I do not wish to name so that they do not get publicity they do not deserve. They use despicable practices by targeting journalists whose reporting does not suit them or who do not use the angle they would prefer.

Are you sensitive to this problem?

Does this harassment—let's call it what it is—have any effect on the journalists?

It seems to be mainly directed at female journalists, which is even more troubling. There might be a fear that women may lose interest in the profession.

How are you dealing with the issue?

In your view, how should we, as elected lawmakers, go about defining and protecting the work of journalists on the ground?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: There are laws that address criminal harassment and other forms of unacceptable behaviour.

As a Canadian employer, a Canadian company, we work to document such situations, with the safety of our employees at the top of our mind. We also formed a coalition with other media and other publishers who also find themselves to be witnesses and victims of this kind of activity. Our aim is to make the public sensitive to these practices and to reject them. I feel that we all have to stand together and bring a little civility back into everything.

However, it is true that we have much more stringent security measures around our work as journalists today.

Martin Champoux: Is it not a little concerning that you have to have security measures so that people can do their jobs without being harassed?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: It is terribly concerning.

Martin Champoux: We do not just need security measures, we also need psychological support to be available, because harassment is not always criminal. When someone gets 1,500 emails because of reporting that someone else does not like, it's a concern.

It's not illegal either because we have this notion of freedom of expression. People have the right to express their disagreement. But it seems to me that a line is being crossed and that is a concern.

What do you think?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I think we have a responsibility to call it out, to account for it and to have specific ways of protecting journalists who have to suffer the consequences of these activities, these reprisals. It is true that the digital world allows for all kinds of intrusions into people's lives and that can be extremely invasive.

However, we still have to make sure that our on-air people are accessible. We must feel that we are able to take the pulse of the public.

So we must find the right balance. I feel that the best solution is to share good information with other media going through the same situation in order to come up with better solutions together. We have to say loud and clear that it is not acceptable and we want no more of it.

• (1015)

Martin Champoux: Thank you very much, Ms. Bouchard.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[*English*]

We'll have a quick three minutes for the Conservatives and three minutes for the Liberals before we wrap up.

[*Translation*]

The floor is yours, Mr. Généreux.

Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Bouchard, why is ICI RDI still not available on ICI TOU.TV when the CBC News Network is available at no cost on CBC Gem?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: The CBC News Network is not available at no cost on CBC Gem. It is accessed by a paid subscription. It comes from a model that our 24-hour specialty news channels developed 30 years ago using royalties paid by the cable companies. To be fair to the cable companies, which are still paying to distribute our 24-hour news channels, we provide them by subscription on the digital platforms.

ICI RDI is not available on ICI TOU.TV because certain agreements with the cable companies prevent us from doing so at the moment. In other words, in commercial negotiations, the cable companies in question have indicated a desire to restrict Radio-Canada's ability to use its RDI signal on its own platforms. Those commercial discussions are ongoing and we hope to lift those conditions.

Bernard Généreux: That means that, at the moment, in terms of public funding, francophones are less well served than anglophones, everywhere in Canada.

It seems to me that the reason you went to Amazon Prime is the same reason why the Prime Minister went on YouTube to make his speech.

It is clear that we are experiencing the americanization of information in Canada. From what I am hearing at the moment, that is exactly what is happening, at the very least. What does that mean? To me, it feels that we are literally heading straight into a wall.

I am thinking about all the independent media, not Radio-Canada, because it receives funding. Soon it will take \$2 billion, \$3 billion or \$4 billion to fund Radio-Canada because all the others will have disappeared.

You are demonstrating that the Prime Minister was right. Indirectly, you have also approved his appearance on YouTube to speak to Canadians, instead of using your service that Canadians pay for.

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: With all respect, Mr. Généreux, I disagree with your statement completely.

Radio-Canada's information is readily available to all Canadians, and in French, on our digital platform, both streaming and on-demand.

Bernard Généreux: Ms. Bouchard—

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: However, our online information service, RDI, is only available by subscription for cable subscribers and, indirectly, for some subscribers to other services, like RiverTV.

Bernard Généreux: Ms. Bouchard, you decided to go to Amazon, an American platform, instead of using TOU.TV to broadcast RDI to francophones across the country.

The message that sends is that you are telling everyone to go to American platforms instead of Canadian platforms to publicize what we have to publicize. The Prime Minister himself did it. He's the prime example.

Why is the Government of Canada so keen on buying all that advertising on American platforms and not on Canadian ones?

Marie-Philippe Bouchard: I am not the one you should be asking, Mr. Généreux.

[*English*]

The Chair: We don't have time for an answer anyway.

Mr. Al Soud, you have the floor for three minutes.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Millar and Mr. Schween, we're increasingly seeing mid-sized private broadcasters operating in a squeezed environment, caught among global digital platforms, shifting advertising markets and rising content costs. Companies like Channel Zero and Pattison Media are often forced to make difficult decisions about scale and programming in a rapidly changing media landscape.

To what extent has the environment affected your willingness or your ability to invest in higher-risk, public interest journalism, including investigative or local accountability reporting?

Calvin Millar: If I could, I'd direct it to talking about probably the biggest economic driver—and I'm not going to call it a silver bullet—that could really make an impact for all of us around this table by increasing the amount of Canadian advertising directed to Canadian media. That's a very simple message in a report that came out in 2016, and it has been updated repeatedly.

In the Income Tax Act, to solve this problem when it first occurred close to 40 years ago, there was a restriction on the de-

ductibility of Canadian advertising by Canadian companies when they advertised on foreign media. Thirty years ago, in 1996, we decided to exempt the Internet, as it was simply known, from that requirement because there was almost no advertising on it. Today, three dollars out of every four dollars, three-quarters of the entire advertising market—home radio, newsprint, television, online—goes to the online intermediaries Google and Meta.

If this simple tax exclusion were removed from digital media in section 19 of the Income Tax Act, it would repatriate slowly and at the choice of Canadian businesses, but it would repatriate billions of dollars into the ecosystem. That needs to be taken care of. This would provide the funding to look at all the things we've talked about: increased local journalism, investigative journalism and new media outlets, such as that of Mr. Griffiths.

● (1020)

Rod Schween: I'll tag this to Cal's comment. One of our suggestions was to have the federal government commit to directing at least 25% of its advertising budget to trusted domestic news organizations.

While waiting to attend the hearing this morning, I was thinking. We operate 51 radio stations in Canada, and we're expected to play 35% Canadian content on our radio stations. It doesn't make sense. If that's expected of us, and if we've asked for only 25%, should we ask the government to spend at least 35% of its funds on Canadian media?

If it's fair for the goose, it should be fair for the gander.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you both.

The Chair: That's fair enough.

Thank you very much, to all of our witnesses, for your excellent testimony today. It's very much appreciated.

I believe you've already sent in your opening statements, but if there's any further information, if something occurs to you later or if you feel that you didn't have time to fully explain something, please send it to our committee via our clerk. We can take that into consideration for our final report on this study.

Thank you again. The meeting is adjourned.

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