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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



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• (1610)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I now call the meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 112 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

[*English*]

It's a hybrid meeting that we're having. As you can well see, we have a lot of people sitting out there in neverland. Most of them have been tested, and they're connected.

I'm going to say the usual housekeeping things.

While the Board of Internal Economy does not mandate that we wear masks, it's advisable if you're not well that you consider your colleagues and wear a mask.

To the witnesses, we have a very powerful audio system. If you have any devices near your mics, I will ask you to move them, because they can create feedback that would cause a problem for the interpreters. Similarly, for the rest of us who have them, let's move our devices away from our mics.

Also, you cannot take pictures of the proceedings. The meeting will be online. You can get it later on if you wish, but you shouldn't be taking pictures right now. That's not allowed.

One final thing: Each group is going to get five minutes to present. If you're a member of a group, you can decide who is doing that five minutes. If you are an individual, you have five minutes. I will give you a 30-second shout-out, which means you should wrap up what you're saying because you will get an opportunity later on when you are being asked questions by the members to be able to elaborate and expand on what you didn't get to say in your presentation.

Any questions and comments should be made through the chair.

That's about it, so we will begin.

This is a study on the media. It has been brought forward by our esteemed colleague Monsieur Champoux, and we are at the last meeting today, so we're not going to be able to hear from the people who were not able to attend, but we hope they are going to send us written presentations so that we can read them as we do our report.

We will begin with John Gormley, lawyer, retired radio talk show host and former Member of Parliament, by video conference. He is appearing as an individual.

Mr. Gormley, the floor is yours for five minutes, please.

Mr. John Gormley (Lawyer, Retired radio talk show host and Former Member of Parliament, As an Individual): Madam Chair, committee members, thank you so much for the opportunity to present a few thoughts. I think my remarks time to five minutes and 15 seconds, so I'll try to get them succinctly delivered.

Gosh, time has flown. I chaired the predecessor to this committee in 1988, the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture. Albeit very late, it is good to be back.

It's a challenging time for some in the media. Many observers saw this coming from concerns in the 1980s and beyond over media ownership structure, erosion of local newsrooms, technological convergence, and the impacts of the Internet and social media.

Should Canada's news sector hold a conference or forum on the future of the media? Well, why not? The more voices and perspectives, the better.

Asking if the government support this forum implies that taxpaying Canadians should pay, yet again, for more hand-wringing about the media. I am not for this. I don't necessarily accept the supposition that Canadian media are in trouble because they're underfunded by the government.

The government has nothing to do with this. The media are in trouble because they did two things: First, they bet on a modernized definition of journalism that backfired and lost audiences, and second, they whistled past the graveyard as the Internet and social media developed the technology to migrate content and revenue away from the media, which was entirely predictable, given the behaviour of large Canadian media organizations.

I have recently wondered where the media would be today if the federal government had done nothing—no local journalism initiative, no journalism labour tax credit, no enhancements to the periodical fund, and not even embarking on the Online News Act. Does any of this—or all the money in the world, for that matter—nudge the media toward innovation, adaptation and change?

For generations, three clear boundaries existed in journalism: There was reportage, an accurate, unbiased, neutral, factual chronicling of what happened; there was editorial commentary, featuring opinion and perspective and the expression of diverse and divergent opinions and voices; and for those media that could afford it, there was investigative and in-depth work, which often revealed wrongdoing, forced accountability and advocated change.

The legacy media and their wire services intentionally blurred these distinctions and decided that agenda-based journalism would replace balance, factuality, impartiality, a freedom from ideology and bias, and a divestment of personal opinions and agendas. With this came a laser-like focus on social justice, climate change, drug use harm reduction, intersectionality, race, colonialism and gender politics. The media became so preoccupied with allyship that they stood up for and defended certain causes rather than scrutinizing and reporting on them.

Not surprisingly, this change in journalism challenged the public's traditionally high level of trust in the media. In part, people no longer believed that the media were in it for them as neutral observers dedicated to truth, and a rational response for news consumers was to vote with their feet and seek alternatives. At the same time, the Internet had developed with astonishing pace and scope, and by the second decade of the 2000s, social media flourished, consumer choice was vast. The legacy media struggled for audience, advertising revenues migrated and the die was cast.

Then why does the government today bear responsibility for the media's miscalculation? If this were a crisis, like rebuilding a destroyed hospital or vital infrastructure, by all means the government should step in. However, the roles and functions of journalism and the modern media are still evolving. They're being redefined. There's a risk that government gets in the way by subsidizing inefficiency and not incentivizing the necessary change. Even the legacy and the new media lobbying for government money, and accepting it, does little to enhance confidence in their independence or reliability.

Does government funding pay for better journalism? Does it restore credibility and trust? Does it create new models for telling our stories and delivering important information? Does it drive toward financial sustainability, or simply postpone the inevitable?

Government funding does not incentivize news organizations to make better decisions. It does not compel the media to make subscriptions viable or to develop micro-subscriptions so that consumers can pay as they go, nor does it advance philanthropically supported journalism, donor/member funding models, or non-profits.

President Ronald Reagan famously summarized an old political joke from the 1970s by sarcastically observing, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government, and I'm here to help.'"

• (1615)

I respectfully suggest that policy-makers carefully examine what, how and who they are trying to help in this case.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You went exactly 15 seconds over. In this committee, we allow some leeway now and then. Thank you, Mr. Gormley.

Now we'll go to Tara Henley, who is a journalist, author and podcaster.

Go ahead, Ms. Henley, for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Tara Henley (Journalist, Author, Podcaster, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to the committee. Thank you for inviting me to participate in your study on a national forum on the media.

My name is Tara Henley. I am a journalist and author in Toronto, and I am the host of the Lean Out podcast, a subscriber-supported weekly current affairs interview show that hosts guests from around the world, including many journalists. I have been a journalist for 22 years, with experience in newspapers, magazines, digital, radio and television, as well as in publishing a current affairs book.

For the past year, one of my central lines of inquiry at Lean Out has been on the collapse of the media. I've interviewed researchers, authors, historians and professors; I've read reports and covered journalism panels and forums; I've read a large volume of emails and comments from the public; and I have spoken with journalists in both legacy and independent media, as well as opinion writers across the political spectrum and media entrepreneurs. I am currently writing the 2024 Massey essay on the state of the media, to be published in the *Literary Review of Canada* this spring. The focus of that essay is on declining trust in the media.

As this committee has already heard, the problems facing Canadian media are complex and multi-faceted, and our newsrooms are under enormous pressure. We know that the collapse of the Canadian media is largely economic. The Internet has disrupted our industry and the advertising business model has imploded. We also have heard from witnesses at this committee that the industry faces challenges with ownership and consolidation. We have seen mass outlet closures, dwindling audiences and mass layoffs. By some estimates, there are now just 10,000 to 12,000 journalists in this country.

Government intervention in the industry has also presented challenges for some players, including independent and digital outlets, and has resulted in Meta pulling out of news in Canada. We heard powerful testimony on that recently from media CEO Brandon Gonez.

The media are in a profoundly weakened state, and there are consequences to this. Good journalism involves revealing inconvenient facts, airing unpopular perspectives and challenging dominant narratives. The volatility of our industry risks breeding conformity and caution, both in leadership and in our press corps, and this can erode the quality of coverage. In the current climate, the training for the next generation is also jeopardized, as there are fewer mentors and outlets—particularly, fewer local news outlets—for journalists to train at.

An important point is that the economic precarity of journalism means that young people without family financial support are less likely to go into the business and do internships or poorly paid jobs in the expensive cities where our media are now concentrated. This reduces the diversity of perspective in our newsrooms at a time when we most need to increase it.

As the industry is collapsing, the public relations industry is exploding. Cecil Rosner, formerly of *The Fifth Estate* at CBC, notes in his recent book that journalists are now outnumbered by PR professionals by a ratio of 13:1. We in the media are facing not just catastrophic economic and structural pressures; we're also grappling with a serious decline in public trust and a citizenry that is increasingly tuning out from the news and is increasingly hostile towards journalists.

These are all major problems for maintaining a robust and healthy press, so I very much support the idea of a national forum on the media, especially one that would have meaningful participation from the public. If we want to save the Canadian media, we're going to have to listen to the public and we're going to have to forge a journalism centred on the public interest as the public understands it, as witnesses Sue Gardner, Jen Gerson and Colette Brin have already persuasively argued before this committee.

I do not believe the government should have a role in facilitating a news forum, and I especially don't think it should fund it. In my view, any funding from the government that flows to the media at this point would hinder our attempts to rebuild trust. There is evidence to suggest that subsidies have created an environment in which segments of the public believe the media have been bought off by the government. We heard this view at committee as well in words from Unifor's Lana Payne, who said that her members face complaints that they are a "tax-funded mouthpiece for the PMO". We know from a 2023 Angus Reid poll that most Canadians—59%—oppose government funding of private newsrooms, believing it compromises journalists' independence.

I do want to be clear: I do not believe subsidies result in direct editorial interference, but that doesn't mean they don't impact trust. As an industry, we have a duty to insulate ourselves from the power that we are meant to hold to account. The media derive their credibility from their independence from power, particularly government power, and maintaining public confidence in that independence is of paramount importance, as important as maintaining the independence itself. We must contend with the public perception of government funding and understand that it likely erodes trust at the exact moment, unfortunately, that the Canadian press most needs to rebuild trust.

• (1620)

Without trust, we have no audience. Without an audience, we have no revenue. Without revenue, we have no path forward for the Canadian media, and without the media, we do not have an informed electorate or a functioning democracy.

The Canadian media do need to be saved. That is very true. My message is simply that the government cannot save us: We have to save ourselves.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now go to Ms. Boltman. Is Ms. Boltman ready?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Desjardins): She's not.

The Chair: Can I go to Ms. Andrews? I will go with Ms. Andrews, director, government and media relations. The two of them are from the same organization. Those are our last two witnesses.

We will suspend to do a sound check with those two witnesses, if you don't mind.

• (1620)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I'd like to ask Brent Jolly, president of the Canadian Association of Journalists, to begin as a witness. Brent, you have five minutes.

Mr. Brent Jolly (President, Canadian Association of Journalists): Thank you.

Thank you to everybody on the committee for providing me with the opportunity to explain to you my view on the current crises—and I use the plural here—facing the Canadian media industry right now.

[*Translation*]

I am speaking to you today as president of the Canadian Association of Journalists. For those committee members who have never heard of us, the association is the national voice of Canadian journalists in all types of media. It represents more than 1,000 members across the country.

[*English*]

For nearly a half of a century, the CAJ's mission has been at the forefront of providing members with high-quality professional development training opportunities and to engage in public interest advocacy work that supports all Canadians' right to know. This includes subjects such as access to information, transparency, public disclosure and ensuring that Canadian journalists are free to exercise their constitutionally protected role to report on matters in the public interest.

Given that I have limited time to offer opening remarks, and in light of some of the outstanding quality of the testimony that has already been offered by witnesses to this committee, I am going to refrain from rehashing everything that's already been read into the public record.

My reason, though, for attending and wanting to speak with you today is to present a rather clear and unequivocal message: Many journalists in Canada are hurting.

We are hurting financially, as salaries do not keep up with inflation. We are hurting financially when staff positions are replaced by internships, or not replaced at all. We are hurting emotionally, oscillating between the challenges of navigating an increasingly hostile world while trying to ignore the deep feelings of anxiety about when the next so-called “cutdown day” will come. It's a reality. It's a proverbial Sword of Damocles that hangs over our collective heads.

We are also hurting developmentally, as professional development budgets have been slashed. Just think about it: Talented musicians need to practice. Olympic-level athletes spend hours in the gym and developing robust dietary regimens. Journalists too need training to ensure their skills are kept sharp in order to navigate an increasingly opaque and hostile world. The training, unfortunately, has become a luxury and not a necessity.

[Translation]

I challenge you to imagine a profession that is so essential to the smooth functioning of democracy, and yet whose conditions are so difficult for those on the front line of the battle between truth, lies and disinformation.

[English]

Seldom does a week go by when I don't speak to journalists who have played the game the right way, only to be left with their hands palms to the sky, trying to figure out what to do next and why they're continuing to devote their life to the craft of journalism. However, right now I can also say at this very minute that there are hundreds of early-career journalists who are working in communities across the country as part of the local journalism initiative. Rather than thinking about their next assignment, I suspect many of their minds are on whether they will have jobs come April, as funding has not been renewed as of yet. It's code red, and I hope you hear the alarm sounding.

[Translation]

While I'm grateful to the committee for wanting to organize a national forum on the media, I fear that, as Mr. Champoux pointed out a few meetings ago, this decision comes 10 years too late. Alas, time is running out.

• (1635)

[English]

The future of journalism is predicated on making tough choices, perhaps unpopular ones. However, I will appropriate an old baseball metaphor: It's better to go down swinging than to be caught looking at strike three with the bat resting on your shoulder.

I look forward to a healthy conversation with members of this committee this afternoon and I'm happy to provide some insights on potential actions that could be taken.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jolly.

We will now go to Ms. Andrews for five minutes, please.

Go ahead, Ms. Andrews.

Ms. Sarah Andrews (Director, Government and Media Relations, Friends of Canadian Media): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, committee members.

Friends of Canadian Media is a non-partisan citizens' movement that stands up for Canadian voices in Canadian media. From public broadcasting to news, culture and online civil discourse, we represent hundreds of thousands of everyday citizens from across the country who want to protect and defend Canada's rich cultural sovereignty and the healthy democracy it sustains.

I would like to start by acknowledging Parliament's most recent actions. Bills C-11 and C-18 triggered considerable debate, but together these policies represent a necessary and vital impulse to do something, to act rather than to acquiesce, and to react to the eroding impact that foreign tech companies are having on our news, our culture and even our democratic health.

When it comes to the news crisis, many shrug their shoulders and suggest there is nothing to be done, that this crisis represents the irresistible march of time and technology, that we are powerless to act, and that the public doesn't even care, but that is wrong. Every day, our supporters tell us how much they do care and how deeply concerned they are about the future of the news sector. They feel what's being lost, and they want better.

They're not alone. Recent polling we commissioned shows that for all the downsizing and derision, Canadians still turn to so-called traditional media to get their news. Seventy-three percent of adults said they deemed news from television, radio and newspapers to be trustworthy and reliable. By contrast, social media was trusted by only 30% of Canadians. Sadly, nearly 80% of Canadians felt that it's getting more and more difficult to know what is true and what is not.

This last statistic should come as no surprise. With the relentless pace of news layoffs, editorially rigorous and trusted journalism is increasingly being replaced by misinformation and disinformation. Some of it is just sloppy. Some of it is ideological. Some of it is predatory trolling for profit. Some of it is outright malicious and even dangerous.

Here we are, knee-deep in a Canadian news crisis, but perhaps it's time to focus less on the result and more on the cause, because if we follow the money, it is clear that advertising revenues have fuelled this crisis in the news.

[Translation]

Over the past decade, GAFAMs—digital giants like Meta and Google—have made their way into our daily lives. These platforms are increasingly coveted and have used their global reach and unfettered market advantage to cannibalize advertising revenues. Not only have we enabled them to do this, we've encouraged it.

Currently, in Canada, advertising purchased on foreign digital platforms is considered a tax-deductible expense. In 2018, when our organization published our study “Close the Loophole! The Deductibility of Foreign Internet Advertising”, we estimated that \$5 billion in advertising was being extracted from our economy. We need to close the gap and encourage Canadian advertisers to choose homegrown platforms.

However, we can't stop there. Programmatic advertising has spawned a veritable misinformation and disinformation economy in which toxic content is fuelled by a near-constant flow of advertising dollars. This disinformation economy is worth several billion dollars, most of which ends up in Google's pockets. The company systematically ignores its own standards and practices designed to ensure that digital ads are not placed on sites offering extreme content and ideas.

We can act by imposing transparency and accountability requirements that would help redirect advertising dollars to trusted sources of information, away from those whose business models allow them to profit from amplifying violence, hatred and disinformation.

We must also provide CBC/Radio-Canada with a sustainable funding model. It is the only broadcaster required by law to produce news in all regions. Unfortunately, however, it is crumbling under the weight of chronic underfunding, compounded by a freeze in the last federal budget. As private broadcasters continue to withdraw from news production, particularly local news, our national public broadcaster must have the resources to fill the void and fulfil its mandate. What's more, if CBC/Radio-Canada were better funded, this could reduce its dependence on advertising.

• (1640)

[English]

Before we wrap up and address any questions you may have, we want to answer this committee's central question about whether there is a need for a wider study of the Canadian news ecosystem. Our answer is a definite yes.

However, while that study is taking place, we do encourage Parliament to turn its focus to the advertising economy and its tremendous impact on our news, our culture and our democracy. Canadians are looking to you to take up this task, and we urge you to move swiftly and to take a big swing, because half measures have brought us here, to a news crisis that may quickly become a democratic one, and that would be unacceptable.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.

The Chair: Now I want to go the question-and-answer component of this meeting.

There are some rules here, basically. You're going to get questions from a representative of each political party, and I'm going to give them a 30-second warning when the time is almost finished.

The first round is a six-minute round. Those six minutes include the questions and answers, so I would like everyone to exercise their journalistic skills and their parliamentary skills and be as crisp as possible in terms of questions and answers. Thank you.

We begin now with the Conservatives. The first person up for six minutes is Rachael Thomas.

Rachael, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you to each of you for joining us. It's nice to have you here today.

My first question is for Mrs. Henley.

I was reading an article that you drafted not too long ago, and in this article, you state the following:

I don't think any government program can ultimately save the news media unless the public was willing to allow news to become a permanent ward of the state.

I believe you expanded on this a little bit in your opening comments—the fact that government involvement breaks trust with the public and ultimately isn't a long-term solution for the viability of news media in Canada.

However, I'm interested in this statement that you've outlined here. You say that any government program cannot save news media unless, of course, the public is willing to allow news to become a permanent ward of the state.

Can you expand on that a little bit?

Mrs. Tara Henley: The quote that you have referenced I don't actually recognize from my own work, but the sentiment I certainly agree with. Basically, I think that the intervention of the government in our industry has caused harm more than it has advanced the interests of the Canadian press. I think that at this point, we need to look at what the media can do to save itself, and I have some ideas on that.

First of all, I think the necessary precondition is for the government to end interventions in the industry, and I would encourage Parliament to think along those lines. At this point, we need full competition, and in order to have full competition, we need that to change.

I also think that we need to have a reform of the CBC. I do believe that we need a strong public broadcaster, particularly in this moment, but in order for the CBC to fulfill its role in society, I think it's important to have a mandate review. I would like to see some of the changes suggested by my colleague Jen Gerson. I would like to see the CBC refocused on local news, on investigative journalism and on filling the gaps in the market that are difficult and expensive to produce.

I would like to see the CBC reorient away from competing with digital innovators and move towards supporting them. There are a lot of ways it could do that. I think it could play a vital role in training the next generation of journalists, as it already does to some extent. I also think that the CBC could use its facilities to allow training journalists to make podcasts. I think the CBC could play a really important role in the digital innovation that's already under way and that needs to continue. It needs to stop being a commercial entity that is competing against these start-ups.

I also think that there needs to be a vast experimentation in business model. We're already seeing that to some extent. We're seeing start-ups like Substack, which is the platform that I'm on, being very successful at monetizing journalism. We're seeing Paul Wells, for example, and Jen Gerson at The Line use that model to much success.

We're also seeing innovation in terms of a charity model. The Hub is one that stands out. I think you're going to see a lot of hybrid models going forward.

The other thing that I think needs to happen is that we need to look to other markets for inspiration, and on that front, I would refer the committee to a book called *What Works in Community News*. It is just recently out, and it's full of success stories from across the U.S.

Finally, I have four specific suggestions for media. I think we need to decentralize. I think we need to utilize remote work so that journalists can work in their own homes in small communities and not have to move to Toronto. I think we need to stop hiring for university degrees, which I don't think are necessary, and this would also expand the pool of talent and perspectives. I think we need to increase ideological diversity within our press corps, and I think we need to vastly increase public participation. I think we really need to hear more and listen more to the public about what it wants us to do and how it wants us to serve the public interest.

• (1645)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mrs. Henley. That is quite the list. I appreciate your attention to detail in offering those solutions to us here today.

I want to turn my attention to Mr. Gormley.

Thank you for joining us here today.

Interestingly enough, you mentioned that you're a former member of Parliament. You served here in the late 1980s, but you didn't mention your background in news. I'm not sure if you would wish to just summarize that quickly. I acknowledge that you are here as an individual today, but you certainly have a breadth of knowledge that comes from the newsroom.

My question for you comes from your opening remarks. You said, "There's a risk that government gets in the way by subsidizing inefficiency and not incentivizing the necessary change." I'm hoping you can expand on that. You have about a minute.

The Chair: You have slightly under a minute, Mr. Gormley.

Mr. John Gormley: Thanks, Mrs. Thomas.

Yes, I was born and raised a radio journalist as a kid in high school, then in university, then as an assistant news director and news reader, writer and beat reporter. Then I was a talk show host, then a member of Parliament, then a lawyer and then was back for 25 years as a radio talk show host in Saskatchewan. I have been blessed, since I was 17, to have experienced everything from how newsrooms operate to how the strong opinion perspective media work in what I have done as a talk show host.

Regarding innovation, adaptation and change, at the risk of sounding as sensationalistic as I accuse many journalists of sound-

ing, I really wonder if there has to be a fundamental reconstruction. I must confess to being—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Gormley. I am so sorry, but you've run out of time. Can you elaborate on that in another question? I'm sure you will get another one to elaborate on your thoughts. Hold those thoughts. Thank you.

I'm going to go to the next person. We have Taleeb Noormohamed for the Liberals. You have six minutes, please.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you very much to all of you for being here.

In something that will seem uncharacteristic for me on this committee, I would like to pick up where Ms. Thomas left off, if I could, and start with you, Mrs. Henley.

I'm really interested in your thinking around the idea that there should be no government support for journalism and news. I find it interesting that you would say that, because a lot of organizations, including True North media, Postmedia and the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, which are no fans of government, have very actively taken advantage of public funds.

I'm curious. When you talk about the diversity of viewpoints and the different perspectives, how does that reconcile with the fact that very vociferous critics of the government have certainly not become wards of the state? It's quite the opposite, and in fact they use that government funding to say things and do things that would be diametrically opposed to what a ward of government might want.

I'm wondering if you could share your thoughts on that.

Mrs. Tara Henley: I think you're absolutely right that there are outlets that have taken advantage of the subsidies and have still maintained strong criticism of the government. I think that is a fair point.

I would like to say, though, with regard to government funding, that the final judge of whether the government funding is appropriate is the public, and we are seeing strong signs from the public that it is impacting public trust. I've heard this in interviews. I've heard this from professors. I've heard this from experts in the industry. I've heard from fellow journalists that frequently the feedback they're getting on social media is exactly what we heard from Uni-for, which is that the media are a mouthpiece for the PMO.

I also hear that as well from the public over and over again. I think that the defining factor here is public feedback. I think we really do need to pay attention to it.

• (1650)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That's interesting. There are those who would say that True North is a mouthpiece for the opposition, right? I think this storyline cuts both ways.

I'd like to go to Mr. Jolly for a moment and then follow up with Ms. Andrews with the following question.

You've heard one of your colleagues say that government should get out of the business of supporting news and journalists. You represent journalists. You represent, in some sense, organizations that are trying hard to deliver journalism in a complicated environment, where I think that we can all acknowledge that the media have not moved as quickly as they can to be adaptive and to look at new ways of communicating with Canadians.

How would you respond to this? How do you respond to the idea that government should get completely out of the business of supporting journalism, particularly when you think about rural communities, indigenous communities, the north, and so on and so forth?

Mr. Brent Jolly: To be brief, I think any idea of abandoning that is pretty facile and doesn't understand the economics of how journalism works or how Canada has traditionally operated. I look at the United States. California is introducing bills to support local journalism, and Illinois, New York state and Utah, and I believe there's another one as well, but I could be mistaken.

In the U.K., there's the BBC. There are the nordic models in Scandinavia. They've all relied on some sort of government subsidy to exist. I think you can make an argument—a philosophical one—that, sure, the government could get out and let the survival of the fittest ultimately prevail. My recommendation is that there won't be much left to support our democracy. We're going to devolve into a nation of TikTokers and YouTubers who are out there not communicating stories in the public interest but just looking to profit off of whatever rumour is going around the Internet. I think that's pretty clear, based on my understanding of things.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Jolly.

Ms. Andrews, could you answer the same question?

Ms. Sarah Andrews: Definitely.

I think, first of all, there aren't just subsidies. When we talk about government and parliamentary intervention, we're also talking about actions that have already been taken, like Bill C-18, for example, which does not provide a subsidy from the government; it is in fact the government intervening and correcting an imbalance in the market. I think it's very important to look at where we can intervene with the tools in our tool box, and not provide a direct subsidy but sort of correct those market imbalances.

As I mentioned in my remarks, closing the loophole in the Income Tax Act is one of those opportunities, and we're very happy to hear that the heritage minister is taking a further look into that.

Of course, I come back to the CBC, the public broadcaster. The parliamentary appropriation is such an important part of the CBC's budget. In fact, we at Friends of Canadian Media would advocate that the CBC be fully funded by the parliamentary appropriation at some point in time.

I was glad to hear from Mrs. Henley. I completely agree that we need to have the mandate review for the CBC. We're very much looking forward to the work of the advisory committee in the next little while, to see how we can get the CBC to be the best it can be and make the most out of that parliamentary appropriation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'm going to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

From the outset, I'd like to repeat a clarification I've made, I think, at every meeting we've held on this study into the possibility of holding a national forum on the news media. This committee is in no way recommending that the government pay for, organize, finance or coordinate this national forum. I would like to reassure the stakeholders who have expressed concerns in this regard. The purpose of this study is precisely to see how the community can organize itself to hold such a national forum. We also wish to see how the government can support this national forum, but certainly not by directing it, meddling in it or predicting its conclusions by directing the discussions. I wanted to be very clear about that.

Ms. Andrews, thank you for the data you can provide. How many members are there in Friends of Canadian Media? How many members do you have right now?

• (1655)

Ms. Sarah Andrews: We don't have members as such. However, we reach over 300,000 Canadians by mail, email, phone or through petitions and the like.

Mr. Martin Champoux: You usually get a rather good response from them, because they are people who like the media in general, the news media. I know you've been working hard for years in this area, and it's interesting that you have brought some numbers.

You told us earlier about the Gandalf Group study and the question of public trust in the media. We can see that trust hasn't completely disappeared. There's still a lot of hope, there's still a way to turn the tide in the relationship between the public and the news media. What do you think the media industry should do? How should it behave to regain the public's trust? As a follow-up question, if governments were to have a role to play, what should that role be, and what should it be limited to?

Ms. Sarah Andrews: These are very good questions.

Is the problem coming from the media, or rather from the presence of disinformation and misinformation on social networks, which people are seeing more and more of, especially on their Facebook or Instagram feeds? As I mentioned in my presentation, we want to tackle the programmatic advertising market, which finances disinformation and misinformation. This is one of the ways parliamentarians can tackle the problem.

We also need to encourage media models that retain the trust of Canadians. I'm thinking, for example, of *La Presse*. As you may have seen in the Gandalf Group survey published in January, *La Presse* is the French-language news medium in which Quebecers place the most trust. Radio-Canada ranks a close second. Among anglophones, CBC is the most trusted medium. So investment in the public broadcaster is very important. CBC/Radio-Canada needs to have a presence across the country, especially in smaller communities, where we've tended to withdraw. You need to make sure that CBC/Radio-Canada is adequately funded.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Jolly, I'd like to hear your opinion on something I know is of concern to professional journalists, many of whom you represent.

Comments are coming from people who are often former journalists who have chosen a new business model by turning to digital and are doing a kind of new-style journalism, as they describe it, which often approaches commentary or news with an angle, so to speak. This business model inevitably means that the advertising side is perhaps a little too close to the newsroom, if you know what I mean. These people make comments about or criticize the state of traditional media and news, and one of their frequent comments is that it is traditional media's fault for not adapting, keeping up with technological evolution.

What is your reaction, and that of the entire journalistic community, to these comments?

Mr. Brent Jolly: I'd like to answer in English, because it's quite a technical question.

Mr. Martin Champoux: That's no problem at all, Mr. Jolly.

[English]

Mr. Brent Jolly: I think what we need to understand about content in the grand scheme of things is that opinion is cheap. It doesn't cost a lot to produce. I can rip off an opinion column in an hour and a half about an idea I have.

I think what is really more important is something that the witness from the FPJQ mentioned. He cited some information around the costs of production of a simple story or a slightly more complex story or an investigation. I had a chance to look over that information over the weekend and was quite surprised by it and thought it was a really good piece of research to actually identify for Canadians that good news and quality journalism cost money.

As for opinion, I'm interested to hear what people think, but I don't surmise that it is the be-all and end-all, because there's a lot of context that often gets omitted in opinions and people aren't properly informed by just thinking about what an opinion columnist says.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: When we hear, for example...

[English]

The Chair: I am sorry; you have five seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Now I'm going to the New Democrats and Niki Ashton. You have six minutes, Niki.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you. Thank you to our witnesses.

My first question is to Ms. Andrews.

We've heard a lot about the role of government in the media. We know that government in recent years has allowed and approved the buyouts and mergers we've seen in major media conglomerates: Rogers-Shaw, the expansion of Bell Mobility, etc., etc. As I've referenced before, we can describe the media landscape in Canada as three media conglomerates in a trench coat. The reality is that this kind of oligopoly has been allowed to exist with government support and approval.

What we've also seen is that these major media conglomerates only turn around to cut hundreds of jobs, if not thousands. The recent Bell Media cuts are an indication. They are leaving regions without news outlets and contributing to media deserts and leaving Canadians on the hook.

Do you think that the current media oligopoly is a problem in Canada, with the fact that so few major media conglomerates are running the show?

Ms. Sarah Andrews: I will give you the short answer first, which is yes. Then I'll expand a little bit on that.

When you are part of an oligopoly, you expect oligopoly margins on all of your business lines. The margins on news content can't remotely compete with what companies like Rogers and Bell are seeing on their wireless and Internet revenues, particularly when it comes to local news. One of the reasons they're earning these high margins on wireless and Internet is that they are an oligopoly and there is very little competition. This creates a totally unrealistic expectation that news, particularly local news, can or should earn similar margins, so it's like a bad feedback loop.

Notwithstanding this, private media companies have acquired and merged their way to a position of dominance in broadcast news, a critical public resource. Then, when they still don't get the same astronomical margins they get on wireless and on the Internet, the result is cuts and closures.

What is equally concerning is that giant corporations like Bell and Quebecor are now trying to completely get out of their current regulatory obligations to provide news. In fact, just after Bill C-11 passed, they started to make the case to reduce their obligations through the implementation of the Online Streaming Act.

The fact that these companies have been allowed to become an effective oligopoly and earn these high margins actually creates a corresponding obligation on them to protect and preserve news and journalism, given the critical role these things play in preserving our democracy.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay. Thank you for sharing that.

I want to go to a specific question on the CBC. I appreciate the note that you and Mrs. Henley made around reviewing the mandate of the CBC. I represent a part of the country that's been abandoned by the CBC. Despite commitments to greater coverage for indigenous communities and regional representation, it's been years since we've had a stable presence from the CBC, which is something that is part of their mandate, particularly here in Manitoba.

I want to get at the question of cuts to the CBC more broadly. It seems like we regularly open the news to find that another major media company is shutting their doors and shutting down local coverage. Recently the CBC announced that due to the Liberal 3% cut across the board, it would be forced to cut its workforce by 10%, reducing CBC/Radio-Canada employment levels to lower than even the Stephen Harper years. It's deeply concerning.

Can you discuss what these job losses will mean for the media industry moving forward?

Ms. Sarah Andrews: I think you touched on a point that hit a nerve with a lot of Canadians. Everyone was very frustrated by the job cuts we heard back this fall. We were particularly angry because we felt that these were avoidable. This is part of—and I mentioned this in our opening remarks—the fact that the CBC has been chronically underfunded. That chronic underfunding has been compounded by the 3.3% budget freeze.

If you look at where Canada ranks among similar OECD countries, you see that we rank 17th out of 20 when it comes to funding for the national public broadcaster. That breaks down to about \$33 per person per year. That's not a lot of money. Along with the Bell job cuts, when it comes to journalism, we're really at risk of seeing the kind of news deserts in broadcast journalism that we're already seeing in print. That really will impact smaller communities, because private broadcasters are increasingly abandoning them. In many cases, the CBC is the only broadcaster when it comes to local or regional news. I think, for example, of Prince Edward Island, and the CBC is all they have.

We really need to start talking about long-term, sustainable and predictable funding for the CBC so that it can live up to its public service mandate to Canadians. That conversation has to happen in tandem with the mandate review to ensure that the CBC does live up to the local news requirement.

As you may be aware, Friends of Canadian Media filed for a review of the CBC's broadcast licence conditions, because the CBC had requested to lower its requirements when it comes to local news. We've challenged it on those grounds. We're waiting for the hearing from the CRTC. We're hoping that it's going to happen in the next little while. We really want to push the CBC to provide Canadians in all the communities with the local news that it's supposed to.

• (1705)

The Chair: Niki, you've gone over time. I've let you go a little bit.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

The Chair: There were a few seconds, but there you go.

We're now going to the second round, which is a five-minute round.

We'll begin with Jacques Gourde from the Conservatives. You have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Gormley, would you like to finish your answer to my colleague Rachel Thomas's question?

[*English*]

Mr. John Gormley: Thank you, Mr. Gourde. I was in the midst of saying that I am an unrequited fan of Tara Henley and that I have followed her work in the last two or three years. What you hear from Tara, in many respects, moves us to where I think we're heading.

At the risk of sounding alarmist and apocalyptic, I'll say that we may well be in a position here that buggy whip makers and farriers were in when Henry Ford rolled the first Model Ts off the assembly line. There could well be, for example, a large corporate broadcast ownership. There has to be a compression between senior management and content. I see a world where there is hyperlocal website-based networking. Many weeklies are doing that now in smaller western communities that have a multimedia product. I see a Substack-type model of network providers. The old idea of the radio broadcasting station may work if it's hyperlocal. CTV knows nothing about running radio stations, and recently even less about TV. I mean, how do you cut your noon news package and cut other things and leave only your supper local news?

We may well be into the kind of corporate and content reorganization that has to be bold and has to be dramatic, and unless we're prepared to get government out, I just don't think news is going to adapt and innovate as it has to.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Gormley.

Ms. Andrews, you talked about the paradoxes between CBC and Radio-Canada. I'm more familiar with Radio-Canada because it's in French and we listen to it. But CBC seems to be struggling with its ratings. Is this a programming issue, or more a question of competition from other media?

Ms. Sarah Andrews: That's a good question.

It's safe to say that in the French-language market, there are really only two or three broadcasters: Quebecor Media and Groupe TVA, Bell Media's Noovo, and Radio-Canada. The latter has succeeded in establishing itself as a very present voice in the lives of francophones, particularly those outside Quebec, for whom it is really the only broadcaster that is present.

Regarding CBC, many of our supporters have told us about the programs they have historically held dear. Lately, however, CBC has had to compete for advertising revenue, in large part due to the public broadcaster's underfunding. Because of this, we're seeing programs that are a little more commercial in nature, that are less in keeping with the traditional nature of CBC and perhaps less popular with the public.

That's why revising CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate is so important. We need to refocus CBC/Radio-Canada on its public mandate of reporting the news to the public. CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate can be described in three words: inform, enlighten and entertain.

• (1710)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Ms. Andrews.

Mr. Jolly, you talked a lot about how journalists suffer from poverty and lack training. But training is a luxury. You also said that the exercise we want to carry out, organizing a national forum, comes 10 years too late. Can you explain to me why it would be 10 years too late?

[English]

Mr. Brent Jolly: It's getting to the point where something needs to happen. We need some action. Otherwise, I see a generation of journalists coming out of journalism school unsure about the future. I was talking to a colleague who is the same age as I am. We couldn't believe what we were hearing from some young journalists currently in journalism school or running community newspapers about the challenges of getting a job. I think that creates an ultimate brain drain, and it creates a democratic deficit.

Mrs. Henley was talking about the number of people citing Cecil Rosner's book and the number of PR people who are going in that PR direction with their careers instead of journalism. I think that creates a huge problem for our democracy in the long term.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jolly.

Now I will go to the Liberals for five minutes. Mr. Coteau, you have the floor.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you so much to all the witnesses here today. I appreciate all of your perspectives and views.

At the last meeting we had, there was a discussion around different types of models that could emerge out of this new age of journalism and news in general. We heard about not-for-profit models. We heard about changes with more localized approaches.

Maybe I'll start with Mr. Jolly.

Have you heard, through the many journalists you represent, about new models people are talking about and exploring? If so, can you share those with us?

Mr. Brent Jolly: Absolutely.

I think there are people who aren't just exploring them; there are people who are actually doing them, and there are several examples.

There was a great piece in the *Globe and Mail* a couple of days ago about journalists going about it in their own different ways. They talked about CHEK News on Vancouver Island, which is a co-op owned by the people who work there. There's *The Narwhal* and others that have RJO status, so they are registered charities in accordance with changes to the Income Tax Act and things like that, which the government has implemented over the last little while. They can issue tax receipts, and I think that is huge.

I am also the chair of something called the Investigative Journalism Foundation, which is a new outlet. We are a not-for-profit newsroom, and we are growing. We are hiring more and more people all the time, because we are doing public service work and focusing on data. We're looking into how we can use SSHRC grants and different opportunities that have historically not been taken up to build out datasets and things like that.

I think what I would say broadly is that for this forum, everybody is in a bit of a different position. If we are talking about what the future looks like, I think we have to account for that, because I don't think there is going to be a one-size-fits-all solution to these problems.

Look at, for example, what *La Presse* is doing. You heard about that a couple of weeks ago in the last round of testimony. They are making \$13 million. I believe that was their bottom line, in the black. This can happen. I think what we need to figure out is what the common denominators are and how we incentivize different kinds of—

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'm going to jump back in, because I have limited time, but I appreciate that response.

It was my colleague who moved the motion to do this study, and I think there's value in looking into the future of journalism—the future of news and the future of a very important piece of our democracy.

Mr. Gormley, I don't want to misrepresent you, so correct me if I'm wrong. The impression I got from you is that government should stay away from news in general. However, we have heard from many witnesses that there is a role for government. It could be through providing incentives or through advertising dollars. When it comes to local news especially, we know the models out there today are taking away from the local response and the ability of local news to get out there, because there's no investment through advertising. We're hearing about these different models: co-operatives, not-for-profits and tax changes. These include government being part of the process. I believe government can be used as a tool for the greater good. We collectively, as a society, come together, form governments and look for ways to better the world around us. There are many examples of that.

I would assume that your perspective is a bit different from Mr. Jolly's. Would you reflect on the fact that government can play a role? We've heard some examples. Would you respond with your perspective on that? I find it interesting that there are some contradicting perspectives from some of our witnesses.

Thank you.

• (1715)

Mr. John Gormley: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

I won't speak for Mr. Jolly, but I'm not saying there's no room for government anywhere. You identified tax policy, which can be a much finer, more surgical approach, particularly for modelling what we want delivery to look like. Is it philanthropic? Is it non-profit? Is it a pay-as-you-go micro-subscription? Is it a subscription like we have now for Substack?

My experience—and this is interesting—is that when we tend to look locally, we think of cities of often 50,000, 60,000, 80,000 or 100,000. In small, rural, local communities, there are, through radio stations and local weeklies, very much integrated online products deriving advertising revenue. They are doing a multimedia approach—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gormley. Perhaps we can continue that thought in another question.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you so much.

The Chair: I have to move now to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux.

You have two and a half minutes, please, Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would really like these meetings to last two hours longer so that we can hear more of the witnesses' opinions and responses, which are often very relevant and interesting.

Ms. Andrews, I have just two and a half minutes and I'm going to address you, because you are perhaps the most neutral of all the witnesses who are here today.

There are many voices saying that the public must be consulted. Earlier, Ms. Henley said that the public should be asked what they think about the future of the media. On this subject, however, I'm reminded of a famous statement by Henry Ford, who said that if he had done what the public expected of him, he would have invented a faster horse.

I think we should indeed listen to what the public has to say. However, in your opinion, where should the public's opinion rank in this study that aims to refocus the news media?

Ms. Sarah Andrews: That's a very good question. Perhaps a happy medium would be to solicit people's opinions up to a point, consult them a little.

For example, I'm going to tell you about a campaign we're going to launch ourselves about CBC/Radio-Canada. We're going to survey our members to ask them how they see the future of this corporation, and then we'll present the information gathered to the committee that's being struck, to give it the perspective of Canadians. It won't necessarily be direct participation, but it will give Canadians a chance to make their voices heard through newsletters or written comments that would then be incorporated into a report. It would be an interesting way to hear about the challenges they see regard-

ing the media. Then we'd take the information with a grain of salt and incorporate it into a study.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you. I do think it's very interesting, even essential, for the public to be part of the thinking around this.

Do you feel that in this review we need to question absolutely everything about the journalism model we currently know? Do you think we even need to question the fundamental criteria that define true journalism, or whether, on the contrary, these criteria should be at the core of our thinking?

I could have put my question to any witness, but I'll continue with you, Ms. Andrews, because I have very little time.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll give you 30 seconds, Ms. Andrews.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sarah Andrews: I'm going to offer a very personal opinion.

What worries me about asking a wide range of Canadians their opinion of journalism is that people don't necessarily have a good idea of what the profession is. So I would take public opinion on journalism with a grain of salt. On the other hand, I think it's very important for the journalistic community to participate in the review of journalism criteria.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

Madam Chair, as this is our last meeting today, I would ask for a few more seconds to allow the witnesses who did not have time to answer my question to do so if they feel like it—if need be, in writing later—as I am very curious to hear their opinion on this matter.

• (1720)

[*English*]

The Chair: If I don't hear any objections, I think we could allow you that privilege, Mr. Champoux, since it's your motion. You did give up one two-hour slot already. Perhaps we can hear a very quick answer from everybody else. I'll go to Mr. Jolly for a quick answer.

Mr. Brent Jolly: I think what the government can do—or parliamentarians, I should say, not government—is focus on news literacy education. That's different from media literacy. That's not about how to use your iPhone and what platforms to go to. It's about the mechanics and the study of what journalism is, what a lead is, why you have both sides or why you don't have both sides. It's about the mechanics of it. I think that is foundational and is something that we need more of in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Andrews, you spoke earlier.

Go ahead, Ms. Henley.

Mrs. Tara Henley: Yes, I think Ms. Andrews has made many really thoughtful and important points already at the committee today.

On the point of taking what the public has to say with a grain of salt, I would strongly disagree with that. I think it's actually an anti-democratic impulse to say that. I think the foundation of democracy rests on the idea that we trust the public to take in information, to make up its own mind about that information and then to decide what action needs to be taken, if any. I do have faith in the Canadian public.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Henley.

Go ahead, Mr. Gormley.

Mr. John Gormley: To amplify only on that point, I had made a note: The public supports, patronizes and is loyal to media that are relevant to them, that are aligned with their view, not of issues, but of the way we order our society, and that gives them value. Once the media get back to that, we don't need meetings on the crisis in the media, but we have to create an environment where that happens and the public matters.

The Chair: That's great.

Now I'm going to move to Niki Ashton. Niki, go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

My question is to Mr. Jolly.

I represent a part of Manitoba that has 41 first nations, three large urban centres and numerous rural communities. In terms of the media landscape, it's an absolute desert. We have four newspapers, and most of them are hanging on by a thread.

As I mentioned earlier, the CBC has abandoned us. We have a very active radio station in our three urban centres that goes above and beyond—I'm talking about the CHTM and the CFAR network—but the reality is grim here. Our newspapers rely, big time, on the work of reporters supported by the local journalism initiative. It is the way our communities hear news that comes from other communities, from our province, from Winnipeg and, dare I say, from Ottawa, the faraway place. The reality is that our newspapers rely on sharing the work of these reporters.

We know that more than 400 local journalism reporters are serving more than some 1,400 local communities. How important is it for this kind of support to continue?

Mr. Brent Jolly: I worry about what news deserts would look like without the LJI. There are so many small news organizations right now that are hoping, praying and waiting for some acknowledgement and understanding about what's going to happen with this program.

There are hundreds of journalists who have moved to places like Churchill, Manitoba, or to The Pas because they had a job there. If they don't know if they have a job in April, then what are they going to do? Are they going to work at Home Hardware? I don't think that is really befitting of treating people with professionalism.

I think it's about time we decided if this program is going to continue. I hope it does. I hope we hear something from officials pretty

shortly about where it's going to go. If we don't have it, then the information deserts are going to be cataclysmic.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

You have four seconds left, Niki. Do you have any last great words?

Ms. Niki Ashton: No. Thank you.

• (1725)

The Chair: I'm going to move ahead to Kevin Waugh of the Conservatives for five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, to Mr. Gormley, congratulations on your semi-retirement. I would say that your 25 years as a radio broadcaster in our communities of Saskatoon and Regina in Saskatchewan are duly noted. You certainly built up a loyal listenership in talk radio.

This committee hasn't talked much about radio. They're more concerned about the CBC and that direction. I want to get your take on local radio. Many have reached out to me in this country. We have not, in the heritage committee, even discussed the radio airwaves and where they're going. Would you comment on that?

Mr. John Gormley: That's a great question, and thank you very much for your kind words.

It's dependent on the ownership structure. When Bell cut loose 4,800 employees three weeks ago, a senior vice-president mentioned that the radio model was broken. I said to a friend that I dearly wish that I could sit down with some people who, as recently as two months ago, were my employers and have done very well by intensely local radio, and ask what they think of Bell's model. I think that at the local level, radio presently has done very well.

Is it radio that will one day have you end up in Toronto? Yes, if you work hard, but there will be thousands of young journalists who may not proceed past Red Deer. With respect, I would not get into the idea that one is entitled to a job if one goes to J-school. Radio is a very competitive regime.

With radio models that, again, are intensely local and reflective of the community, are prepared to also be on the web, have multi-media and have local ad revenue, radio is doing much better, particularly outside the larger cities.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You mentioned no local journalism initiative—the LJI—no journalism labour tax credit and maybe eliminating the Canada periodical fund. What would the media look like, in your estimation, if we got rid of those three?

Mr. John Gormley: I don't know, but I do know what it looks like today and I see loyalty, trust and engagement with audiences being lower than they've ever been. That started, I would argue, with the media doing things differently, but it's certainly lost at least 10 points in the latest Angus Reid survey with the perception that the media are in on something that the government is doing.

Again, way before I was a radio talk show host who was paid to have opinions and perspectives, I was that journalist who took great pride in nobody knowing what I thought of anything. There was such a strong sense of neutrality and asking tough questions. I couldn't fathom what it would be like to go to work every day knowing that listeners thought my company—it doesn't matter if it's left or right, in answer to the colleague earlier—was taking money from the government. I'm sorry.

Mr. Waugh, I don't know what it would look like, but I wish we had the opportunity to see it, because I think we would have found innovation and adaptability much more quickly.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You know the media do not adapt. You were in it and I've been in it.

It's interesting, because CTV, as you mentioned, is regulated by Toronto, if you don't mind, and that's why you have decisions made to get rid of 45 radio stations, eliminate noon television broadcasts, eliminate late-night, weekend and holiday broadcasts, and it's too bad.

I'm going to turn it over to my colleague Mrs. Thomas now, as she has something she would like to bring up.

Thank you.

The Chair: You have 35 seconds, Rachel.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair. That won't be a problem.

I wish to move a motion.

At this point in time, having indicated that I wish to move a motion, I'll just say thank you so much to the witnesses for being here with us today.

I realize that this is a bit disruptive, but unfortunately, with the way the committee is structured, the only opportunity we have to move a motion is when we're in public, which is when we have witnesses.

The motion that I wish to move is:

Given that,

According to the 2021-22 and 2022-23 Public Accounts, The Department of Canadian Heritage has issued transfer payments to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in the sum total of \$600,000 and \$569,353 respectively, and that,

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council awarded a February 2022 Connection Grant in the sum of \$24,999 in which the main applicant and speakers at the conference for which funding was granted have publicly expressed antisemitic views, including calling for a "global intifada" and support for designated terrorist organizations in Canada, and that,

The Department of Canadian Heritage has confirmed the implementation of an anti-racism declaration as a condition of funding in their grant applications, and that,

The Government of Canada has committed to the Canada Anti-Racism Strategy; Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee:

Invite the Ministers of Canadian Heritage and Innovation, Science & Economic Development for a minimum of two hours each, to discuss the repeated and systemic awarding of grant funding to individuals or organizations expressing antisemitic views;

Recommend the Government of Canada immediately conduct a whole of government review of grant applications to include an anti-racism declaration as a condition of funding, and

Report its findings to the House.

Madam Chair, the reason this motion is so important to move today is that a group within the University of Alberta was granted this money.

We know that anti-racism in Canada is on the rise—

• (1730)

The Chair: Excuse me, Mrs. Thomas. You're speaking to this motion now.

What I will do is tell the witnesses that they're free to leave. I want to thank them for their time and their very interesting commentary on the study that Mr. Champoux has brought forward. You're free to go any time you like.

We will continue the meeting with Mrs. Thomas taking the floor with her discussion on her motion.

Thank you.

Go ahead, Rachael.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm just not—

The Chair: I wanted to let them know that they could leave now—that's all. I noticed Mr. Jolly is still here.

Mr. Brent Jolly: Yes. I'm okay. I'm interested in the motion. I'll just stay.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You know that you don't get to weigh in on it. Do you know that?

Mr. Brent Jolly: I'm a total dork. That's okay.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Good stuff.

Go ahead, Ms. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Welcome, Mr. Jolly, and thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the committee accommodating this.

We know that anti-racism in Canada is up and we know that it is particularly alarming—I hope we do—when there is government money going toward the support of that. I think that's very disturbing. I've been contacted by citizens from across the country, as have my other Conservative colleagues. Finally, we've decided that we're going to act on the information that we've been given and advocate on behalf of Canadians, and in particular on behalf of the Jewish population, the Jewish community here in Canada.

There is no place in our country for anti-Semitism, and for \$25,000 to be transferred from the Government of Canada to a group that is known for furthering anti-Semitism is absolutely alarming. It's appalling. It's disgusting. There needs to be an investigation. There needs to be an understanding of what took place here. It should be noted that this is not the first time this has happened. We've been here before, haven't we?

Laith Marouf, a raging anti-Semite, who is incredibly vile in the comments that he made online, was granted \$133,000 through the heritage department. Of all things, he was granted that money to run anti-racism training. The hypocrisy could not be more rich. To this day, the government has not recouped those dollars, even though it claims it has tried. We have an individual out there who continues to be a raging anti-Semite and has received \$133,000 from the Canadian public to help further his cause.

To make matters worse, there is this organization, or this group of anti-Semites, that conducted a three-day conference at the University of Alberta, and their speakers have anti-Semitic content all over their social media pages. I have it right here. These are just a few that I printed out—one page, two pages, three pages, four pages, five pages, six pages, seven pages, and there are multiple posts on every single page.

These folks got \$25,000 to host a conference at the University of Alberta. I don't understand how any member around this table could be okay knowing that government money went to support something like this. It is incumbent upon all of us to get to the bottom of it, and the way to get to the bottom of it is by asking ministers to come to this table and answer for the decision that was made.

If we want to understand this further, the University of Alberta hosted this conference in February, on three different Fridays. They called it the "Mediations of Racial Capitalism Conference". Then they brought in speakers, as mentioned and as shown, who have this history of making anti-Semitic comments. One of them even called for a global intifada.

This would never be okay, but then I look at it in light of October 7 and what happened, and it just makes my skin crawl all the more. There were members who took the stage at this conference, who took a key place, who are advocating support for organizations that we've declared as terrorist organizations—one that Canada hasn't, but the U.S. has. Surely we at this table are not okay with this type of conduct being perpetuated in our country. Surely we will choose to take a stand against that.

I'll speak to this a little further. Some of the content that is held within these pages, that was found on these social media pages, is the following. One of these speakers is promoting and sharing resources from a Canadian-listed terrorist organization, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Others are publicly celebrating or supporting Hamas' attack on Israeli civilians on October 7. That's disgusting.

● (1735)

You have others sharing support for the Houthi movement in Yemen. That's crazy. Then you have another who signed a petition supporting an anti-Semitic professor at a university who is being fired for his vile views and for spreading them, and this person was coming to his defence.

Here we have it. This conference is sponsored by the Government of Canada, with the logo full on. This money came down from Canadian Heritage, went to the council and then went to the University of Alberta to this group of individuals through the University of Alberta.

I think for the government's funds to be used to provide a platform for such conduct, for such vile remarks, is just wrong. It's absolutely wrong. Again, my plea to the committee would be for us to take the time to understand this more.

Interestingly enough, we had the minister here with regard to Laith Marouf. In fact, we've had the conversation a couple of times, and promises have been made and promises have been broken. The latest was that the minister sat here and made a commitment that no dollars would be given out without thorough investigation of those they were being given to. There was a vow made that the same type of funding mistake with Laith Marouf would not be made again, that there would be this lens applied to the application process in order to make sure that another anti-Semite or someone who perpetuated hate against any group of people would not be granted money from the government, yet here we are, approximately six months later, and we're having that conversation. We're staring into the face of the problem again.

I guess I pose a question to the government, and it is this: What will it take to make sure that we're not here again? What will it take to make sure that we are not perpetuating any sort of hate, especially anti-Semitism? I mean, Jews are the most persecuted group in Canada. For crying out loud, I would hope this government would want to do something to remedy this.

Conservatives are offering an opportunity to do that. We're offering an opportunity to have the ministers here, an opportunity to ask questions and an opportunity to get to the bottom of this. The motion asks that both of these ministers come, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. The motion says that they would come for a minimum of two hours each and that they would discuss the repeated and systemic awarding of grant funding to individuals or organizations expressing anti-Semitic views.

As mentioned, this has happened before, but we certainly should make sure that it doesn't happen again. It's the folks at this table who have the opportunity to hear from those ministers, to make change or to recommend change. It's ultimately up to the ministers to make the change. They're the ones who have to implement the programs. They're the ones who ultimately have to do better in terms of their review of applications for grant funding and looking into these folks and the types of vile beliefs they might perpetuate.

It would be my hope that the government in the future would not find itself in this situation, but I think the way that we, as the opposition party, make sure that it doesn't happen is that we generate accountability, and the way we generate accountability is by moving a motion of this nature and asking for the ministers to come and answer tough questions and for that to be on public record for Canadians to be able to hear and understand what took place here.

As mentioned, I have heard from Canadians from coast to coast on this issue. It is deeply concerning to them, especially to those who belong to the Jewish community in Canada.

• (1740)

It's my hope that my colleagues would join with us in supporting this motion and in generating change, not only for the current time but for the future of our country and the grant monies that are given out in the coming weeks, months and years.

I say that, but we'll have a Conservative government pretty quickly here, and there will definitely be some significant change then. Hopefully, for the next few months that the Liberals are in power, we can generate a bit of change and prevent making this mistake once again.

With that, I'll ask for the members across the way to support this motion and to vote in favour of accountability, in favour of transparency, in favour of equality among all people, and against racism, discrimination and anti-Semitism in our country.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Thomas.

Go ahead, Mr. Champoux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Firstly, Ms...

[*English*]

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry, Ms. Lantsman.

I'm sorry, Martin. You are after Ms. Lantsman.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): I won't be long, Mr. Champoux.

It's never a pleasure to speak to a motion like this, but it is important to support a motion like this one from my colleague. Thank God for her and her willingness to hold this government to account, because it's promise made, promise broken every single time.

This is the latest piece of information, after months and months of seeing people taking to the streets, vandalized synagogues, shots at schools and temples, particularly in the Jewish communities, in every large city across the country and even in some smaller communities.

It's important that we get to the root of this, because leadership comes from the top. Never have I seen a government break the long-standing consensus in this country about its position between principle and popularity and choosing to side with barbarism and terror, frankly, and choosing to fund those who espouse those kinds of views.

I want to read this into the record, because I think Canadians need to hear it. It's \$25,000. This is, of course, after this committee sat here questioning the former failed minister responsible for diversity in this country under the minister of heritage. Both now have moved on.

I would expect that the committee would like to give an opportunity to this minister to clean up the mess of the last minister and actually hold this department to account to make sure that funding doesn't go to things that are called "Mediations of Racial Capitalism" conferences. It's a three-part series aimed at the—I'm going to quote—"racial character of capitalism in its complex intersections

with structures of settler colonialism, anti-Blackness, heteropatriarchy, and empire". This is according to a website that was promoting the event on February 9.

If that doesn't sound insane to the folks at home, it's deeply concerning that the government would fund a conference with the speakers who were there. One of the speakers is a professor of digital media studies in the United Kingdom named Francesca Sobande, who on her own social media was retweeting things from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. This is a designated terrorist group.

We've sat at this committee talking about how this country speaks about terrorist groups that have in some cases been designated since 2002. These resources were crafted by an organization called Samidoun, and by the way, they have the same leadership. One is a designated terrorist organization, and the other should be designated a terrorist organization, but I guess that could be a conversation for the public safety committee. These two organizations share these leaders. It is the government's money that is going to fund this conference, where people who speak at this conference are sharing that kind of material.

That's just one of them. I can go through many, but I want to talk about the importance of this at this very time.

Before coming to this meeting, I sat in a room with a number of people particularly from the Jewish community across the country—in Vancouver, in Ottawa, in Montreal, in large cities—listening to stories about how they have been targeted in the streets because of what they believe, where they pray, where they go to school and how they look. Then we see their own government, the Government of Canada, perpetuating this through the funding of people like Laith Marouf, who, again, was here to teach anti-racism, not espouse it.

Just for the record, he was given \$133,000. We're still waiting to get \$122,000 of our Canadian tax dollars back from him. I suspect the members of this committee would want to see every single dollar of that returned. We even had two failed ministers say that. They brought themselves to say that they're going to retrieve the funds after pretending not to know about the situation for a number of weeks.

• (1745)

This is why I think this motion is important. This is why I think that the committee ought to get to the bottom of this and give the new minister an opportunity to correct the mistakes of her failed predecessors, who have done nothing to ensure that this stuff doesn't happen at Canadian Heritage. It's not just Canadian Heritage, by the way: This is happening across departments.

I'm going to say one more thing. There is money that comes from all kinds of departments for all kinds of programs during the course of any year. I'll bring up one case, because it is a case that was funded by the Government of Canada. It is an organization called Inspire. They've been on the receiving end of grants from FedDev Ontario during the pandemic and after the pandemic, and organizations like that have taken away a platform from speakers. This one took away a platform from a speaker who served in the Israeli military 30 years ago, who is a Canadian, who is a champion of feminism and women's rights and is a celebrated athlete.

You have one organization de-platforming views that they don't agree with, and you have the Government of Canada platforming these vile anti-Semitic voices with Canadian tax dollars. I would expect that the committee would want to get to the bottom of this.

I am very grateful that the vice-chair of this committee continues to bring these issues forward. I hope that we don't have to come back to this committee every time a grant is given to fund the prevalent anti-Semitism that this government is frankly behind.

● (1750)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Champoux is next.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm certainly not questioning the importance of the subject raised by the Conservatives. I'm just seriously disappointed in my colleague Ms. Thomas's timing, in the context of a study that was originally scheduled to last four meetings and that I myself offered to shorten to three. It's a subject I feel very strongly about, and one that's important for the future of the media. There were 30 minutes left to hear from these quality witnesses. We could have continued to discuss things with them, and this motion could have been debated at a later date. This really isn't very nice.

That said, Madam Chair, on the substance of the motion, I agree. Given what we experienced with the Laith Marouf case, we must make sure that the recommendations we made following our study were followed. Everyone was aghast. We were all outraged at the way things unfolded, and we demanded changes through our recommendations. It would be entirely legitimate for us to hold the government to account and check whether the recommendations issued following the meetings on the Laith Marouf affair were followed.

Now, I want to talk about the fact that we're using an event like this, which isn't on the same scale. I'm not saying it's right; on the contrary, it's completely reprehensible. There's nothing good about giving money to an organization that uses anti-Semitic rhetoric and wants to start an intifada. It makes no sense to give public money to such organizations. However, we can discuss the path this money has taken.

As for the motion itself, I'm not convinced that the work has been done properly. I'd be willing to hear the Conservatives' arguments on that, but according to my research, the \$600,000 and \$569,353 we're talking about did not come from Canadian Heritage at all. So we're debating a motion that would have benefited

from a little more research. However, I'm prepared to be corrected if someone can show me that this money did come from Canadian Heritage.

Now, I'm not sure what to do with the motion at this time. I don't know how urgent people feel this proposed study is. In my opinion, it would be more relevant for us to hear from representatives of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. They're the ones who should be reporting to us in the first place. Perhaps at a later date we will judge that the ministers responsible should indeed be convened. Will it be the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Minister of Industry or the Minister of Diversity? In short, I think we're giving a high priority to something that deserves more nuance.

I'll stop here for now. I'm curious to hear what my colleagues have to say about this, but it would be worth checking the facts and rewording the motion. For example, we need to check whether the amounts in question, which total just over \$1.1 million, actually came from Canadian Heritage or the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. I'd be very interested to...

[English]

The Chair: You raise an important point, Mr. Champoux. This money did not come from Canadian Heritage. I don't think that SSHRC is funded by Canadian Heritage; I think it's funded by ISED. Therefore, the question here is this: Who funded the motion, and is this motion appropriate at this committee?

I am going to try to find that out, because nobody's sure who funded the motion. I don't know if anybody has any information to offer on who funded this and on whether it is Canadian Heritage or ISED that funds the research councils.

As we know, ISED funds research councils, so that is an important question that you raise, and I think we need to get that answer. I don't know that the clerk can tell me, and I'm putting her in a difficult position, because the motion in itself, even though it was tabled a while ago, doesn't really ensure that it was Canadian Heritage that was responsible for this money. I think that if it is not Canadian Heritage, then this motion is going to be inadmissible in this particular committee.

Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

● (1755)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I believe I still had the floor.

[English]

The Chair: Do you still have the floor?

All right, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'd like to address another point that I find interesting. Again, I have no problem with the spirit of the motion. We do have to make sure that public funds go to organizations that meet the required criteria. However, I believe that if we open this discussion, we should open it up more broadly. There are other groups that are targeted as well. I think other groups targeted by hate speech should perhaps be included. Of course, we can discuss that when we see if the motion can be debated at this committee.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think that that's a question that we're going to have to ask.

Ms. Lattanzio, did you want to speak—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Yes.

The Chair: —to answer this question?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I want to speak on—

The Chair: I have a list, and you can go on the list, or if you have an answer to Mr. Champoux's question, I would entertain it.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes, it's—

The Chair: Otherwise, I would have to go to Mr. Lawrence.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes, it would be with regard to Mr. Champoux's comments.

The Chair: It's a point of information. All right. Go ahead.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: For my part, I too understand the spirit of this motion, Madam Chair, but I would agree with my colleague. Up until such time as we have the certainty as to who—

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): I have a point of order, and then I want to give you the opportunity to respond.

I think that was fair, Madam Chair, but it's clear that this was a point of debate at this point. I don't mean any disrespect, but I was next on the list, and you could go to the list.

The Chair: No, I don't think it's a point of debate. Mr. Champoux asked a question. I did not have the answer. The clerk did not have the answer. Ms. Lattanzio says that she has the answer, so I'm giving her the opportunity to answer.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have a point of order.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I don't have the answer. What I'm saying is that I—

The Chair: You're saying that you don't have the answer.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I do have a point of order.

The Chair: Excuse me. Yes, go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Madam Chair, when the chair is asked a question, it is for the chair to answer. Ms. Lattanzio just said that she doesn't have the answer. Therefore, she is ceding that it is in fact debate.

The Chair: She told me initially that she was answering Mr. Champoux's question. I listened to that. She now says that she

doesn't have an answer, so I'm going to rule her out of order. I'm the chair, and I think I can follow the rules quite nicely, thank you.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have to go after Mr. Lawrence in the lineup. Thank you.

Philip, you have the floor. Thank you.

I think I don't need you to remind me about the rules, Mrs. Thomas. You tend to do that a lot, because—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: I know what the rules are, and you second-guess everything that people do. You literally second-guess everything. Ms. Lattanzio originally said that she had an answer. Now she says that she doesn't, so I have done the appropriate thing and have given Mr. Lawrence the floor.

Philip, go ahead.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I have a point of order.

Madam Chair, with all respect, I've had my hand up for a while.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry, Niki. You are in the lineup. You are coming after Mr. Lawrence. It's you, then Mrs. Thomas and then Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay.

The Chair: I know you're there. I've seen you.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm sorry. I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

A very good question was posed by Monsieur Champoux about whether or not this would be admissible with respect to the question that he has just asked.

I'm sure there are a lot of folks on all sides who would like to weigh in on this important conversation. Perhaps we might consider suspending and getting the answer to the question so that we can inform the conversation in the right way. If it's not for this committee, ultimately you will be the arbiter of that. Perhaps we could make that determination once we have the answer to this very important question that Mr. Champoux has raised.

The Chair: That is one solution, Mr. Noormohamed, that we can pursue. However, as I said, I asked the clerk if she had the answer, and she didn't, and I certainly don't.

Instead of perhaps debating a motion that may or may not be inadmissible, I have a request to suspend until we get the answer. Is there any objection to suspending?

• (1800)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes. A motion cannot be moved on a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I beg your pardon, Ms. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Noormohamed cannot move a motion to suspend when he himself is on a point of order.

The Chair: I don't understand your question at all. Why is he on a point of order?

I didn't hear him say "point of order".

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, the floor belonged to my colleague Mr. Lawrence, so how else did Mr. Noormohamed get the floor?

The Chair: He did not say "point of order", but he was making a suggestion.

We can go ahead and be absolute about these things or we can try to find a response. Nobody's disagreeing with the motion, Mrs. Thomas. Everybody's just wondering who funded this—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair—

The Chair: —and whether this is the appropriate place.

Go ahead, Philip.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I don't want to talk over you, but I think we can come to a reasonable—

The Chair: Thank you, Philip.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: —resolution to this.

I'm going to make a couple of quick comments, and then I think it would be advisable to move to suspend, if the committee thinks that is fair.

I would like to put this briefly on the record: We are in a precarious time, a time I have never seen in my 45 years on this earth and in Canada. We have forces of anti-Semitism—and I might say as well Islamophobia—that are really ripping at the very fabric of our country right now. We have a government that is putting out legislation that professes to fight this hatred but that in reality, regardless of whether we're talking about Canadian Heritage or otherwise, is funding this hatred.

I think it behooves all of us—not just as members of the Liberals or Conservatives or Bloc or NDP, but as Canadians—to get to the bottom of this. This is not a resolution about condemning but about exploring, so I think it's very reasonable to study this in order to understand this situation, and I think we should do it promptly, because we don't have much time. As a committee and as a country, we need to show that we are fervently against anti-Semitism in all of its forms.

With that, I would move to suspend so that we can move forward, hopefully in a quick way, to begin this study and to get to the bottom of this.

The Chair: Is there any objection to this motion? It's a reasonable one. It's trying to get to the business and to make sure it's done properly.

I suspend this meeting.

[The meeting was suspended at 6:02 p.m., Tuesday, February 27]

[The meeting was resumed at 4:11 p.m., Tuesday, March 19]

• (52010)

The Chair: I want to apologize. My asthma seems to be acting up today, and then I ran, which I shouldn't have done, so I'm having trouble breathing.

[Translation]

We are resuming meeting number 112 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, suspended on February 27.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[English]

I'm going to go through the usual stuff about the fact that the public health authorities do not mandate masks, but please wear one because they are excellent tools for preventing you from getting respiratory diseases and from giving it to others.

I remind you that you are not allowed to take screenshots or shots of any kind of the meeting. You can get the proceedings on the House of Commons website.

I remind you about the audio and the sensitivity of audio. If you have any devices, keep them as far away as possible from the mics when you are speaking. Also, keep yourself as far away as possible from your next door neighbour's mic.

We're resuming where we left off, because the meeting had been suspended. We have on the floor a motion from Mrs. Thomas. We are going to resume debate on the motion.

Before we do, at the last meeting, if you recall, we decided not to go forward until we had some information about the motion itself—who gave what to whom, etc., and whether this motion was in order.

I asked the analysts to check the information, and they did. From what they told me, I'm going to have to rule this motion inadmissible, mainly because in this motion we are asking the Minister of Canadian Heritage to come and speak about giving money to a conference that was a racist conference. While the Department of Canadian Heritage did give money to SSHRC, it gave money specifically, and only in the last two years in the year mentioned, for sports activities and in relation to research on sport. They cannot answer questions on this particular fund because they were not responsible for it. Another department did it.

One may want to consider if one can deal with that department in an admissible motion.

I'm going to have to rule this motion inadmissible because while the issue of racism falls under the mandate of this committee, the actual grant falls under the mandate of the committee on industry and technology.

The main intent of the motion focuses on this study, and it's one of the core responsibilities under the Department of Canadian Heritage's framework. At the same time, this grant was not given for this conference by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

I did not research it myself, just in case you were wondering about the credibility of it. I had asked my analysts to do this, and they reported back to me on this issue.

Thank you.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

I would highlight that I actually have a copy of what is posted on the government's website. It shows that in fact nearly \$25,000 was given to this conference. It's not true that it just goes toward sport organizations. That's just not true, based on the document that I have in front of me.

I challenge the chair's ruling.

The Chair: I am telling you that I did not research and come up with this. The analysts, who are very impartial and have always done good work for us, told us that no money was diverted for anything other than sport and that the grant for SSHRC specifically for this particular conference actually came from another department.

By the way, I should tell you that SSHRC, which is an arm's-length research body, does not have anything to do with departments. The money is given, and they make a decision about what they're going to research.

I just want to put that on the table with regard to research bodies, which are not parts of departments but are stand-alone research bodies that get grants for doing work, and they decide who they are going to give the grants to when they look at it. That's basically the explanation.

Martin, you have your hand up.

● (52015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, my colleague indicated that she was challenging your ruling, if I'm not mistaken. At this point, there's no room for debate, and we have to go straight to the vote. After the vote, I would speak on another matter.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Clerk, please call the vote.

The Clerk: The vote is on the question of whether the chair's decision should be sustained.

To clarify, if you vote yea, you sustain the chair's ruling and the motion is deemed inadmissible. If you vote nay, you overrule the chair's decision, and we continue with the debate on the motion.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I see Mr. Noormohamed's hand up, but Mr. Champoux had the floor.

Go ahead, Martin, and then Taleeb.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: If I understand correctly, Madam Chair, there is no further debate, your ruling has been upheld, and we can move on to something else. I would therefore like to move the following motion, which I submitted within the prescribed time frame in the last few days:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee invite the CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, Catherine Tait, to appear for a period of two hours to answer questions concerning:

1. The increase in funding to the public broadcaster of nearly one hundred million dollars per year;

2. The exemption granted by the government to CBC/Radio-Canada to reduce its operating costs by 3.3%;

3. The payment of performance bonuses totalling nearly fifteen million dollars to CBC/Radio-Canada executives.

And that she explain the impact of these announcements on the announced elimination of eight hundred (800) positions, as well as on the continuation of high-quality journalism in the regions of Quebec and Canada.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Martin.

We now have a motion on the floor.

Mr. Noormohamed, I'm going to have to entertain discussion on this motion. If you're speaking to the motion, your hand will be recognized. I will ask anyone speaking to the motion or against the motion to please raise their hand.

Mrs. Thomas's hand is up, and then we have Mr. Lawrence.

Is this to the motion? That's what we're discussing.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

Chair, I would offer the following friendly amendment to the motion so that the motion would read, "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee invite the CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, Catherine Tait, and the Minister of Heritage to appear for a period of two hours each within seven days of the adoption of this motion."

The Chair: I might add that I don't think there is such a thing as a friendly amendment to a motion, unless you had discussed it with the person before the meeting and they had agreed to entertain it.

You are putting forward an amendment to the motion. Can you read just the piece that's the amendment, Mrs. Thomas?

● (52020)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm just trying to be kind. I'm offering an amendment.

The Chair: I know you are, but we have to vote on it. Please present the amendment.

You are adding the Minister of Canadian Heritage, and you're adding a timeline. Is that it?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: That is correct.

I am adding "the Minister of Heritage". She would also come. It would be Catherine Tait who would come for two hours, and the Minister of Heritage would also come for two hours.

Also, each of these witnesses would appear "within seven days of the adoption of this motion".

I'm happy to provide copies of these changes to the committee members, should they wish to have them.

The Chair: All right. We have an amendment on the floor.

Is anyone speaking with regard to the amendment?

We have Philip and then Martin.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I believe I still have the floor.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you had finished.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I just want to confirm that the clerk does have the wording of the amendment.

We're good with it? Perfect. Thank you.

The amendment adds that the Minister of Heritage would come. The reason that I feel this is important is that there's evidence to suggest that the Minister of Heritage actually knew that these bonuses had been given out. The problem is not the fact that the bonuses had been given out in October; the problem is that the CEO of the CBC, Catherine Tait, came to this committee and seemingly misled us to believe that this wasn't the case, that bonuses were actually being withheld until a further decision could be made in March.

The Minister of Heritage ultimately is responsible for holding the CBC accountable. It seems appropriate that she would come to this committee and help us understand what happened here, so that's the reason for that amendment.

The second part of the amendment that I have added here is that they would come within seven days of the adoption of this motion. The reason this is important is that sometimes these types of motions can get punted down the line and not end up actually becoming a case for study here at this committee for quite some time. I do believe, as my honourable colleague Mr. Champoux has outlined, that this is of the essence. Important things need to be discussed. Accountability needs to be had. Questions need to be posed and answers need to be given. That's the reason for the timeline there.

If I may, my colleague Mr. Champoux didn't really speak to the essence of this motion. Perhaps he intends to do that in just a moment, but I'll speak to it from my side of things.

The overall motion calls for the CEO, Catherine Tait, to come to committee, and now I've added the Minister of Heritage, to answer with regard to bonuses that have come to light. Members of this committee will recall that just before Christmas, the president and CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, Ms. Catherine Tait, announced that she would be cutting 800 positions. She said she was doing this because of what she called "chronic underfunding".

It's important to remember that the CBC is given \$1.3 billion annually and that the heritage minister actually increased that by another \$100 million this spring. When asked whether or not millions in bonuses for top executives would be out of the picture based on this hardship, she said it was "too early to say". In other words, she was reserving the right to give bonuses to top executives, but she was scrapping 800 jobs.

At the end of January, we asked Ms. Tait to come to this committee, where we had the opportunity to ask her questions with regard to the absurdity of this decision. During that time, she led us to believe that bonuses for 2023 had not yet been given and would be withheld until March. However, based on ATIP, access to informa-

tion, we now find out that actually she had given \$15 million in bonuses even before she had made the decision to scrap these 800 jobs. That means she put those bonuses ahead of those jobs. She put bonuses for executives ahead of 800 individuals who needed those positions.

Given that it seems she misled this committee, we have every right to bring her back and to ask her important questions. The reason this is so important is that at the end of the day, the CBC is a public broadcaster, paid for with public money, and it is our job at this committee to hold her accountable.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much.

I have just a quick brief comment, with your indulgence.

• (52025)

The Chair: You will speak to the amendment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Yes. I'll go off topic for, I promise, just 20 seconds.

I'm really kind of surprised and shocked that the previous motion was ruled inadmissible. Racism, the study of racism and fighting racism seem squarely within the heritage committee. Regardless of the funding—

The Chair: Philip—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I apologize. I'll be just 10 more seconds.

The Chair: Philip, this is out of order. We're not dealing with that. We're dealing with an amendment at the moment. We want you to speak to the amendment and focus on that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Okay. I will get to it.

I think you actually end up in a place where you can't study it in either committee, because innovation and industry isn't really normally the place where you study racism and anti-racism efforts.

That said, I'll move forward to the amendment.

Ministerial accountability is really a cornerstone of our democracy. It is absolutely critical. We've seen through the testimony from Ms. Tait that she appears unwilling or unable to make changes. With respect to the bonuses and letting 800 people go, I think we really need the minister in this committee to change the action.

I think the people of Canada, particularly in the province of Quebec, would want to see the minister of the federal government of Canada held accountable and responsible. I am very skeptical that Ms. Tait of her own accord will make decisions that positively affect the employment of the workers, particularly in Quebec at Radio-Canada. I am quite confident that the people of Quebec would want to have their representatives and the representatives of this Parliament ask the minister of the federal government of Canada those questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Philip.

Martin, you have your hand up. Then we'll have Taleeb.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank my colleague Mr. Lawrence for his concern about what Quebeckers want to see here in committee. I can say that Quebeckers increasingly want the federal government to stop meddling in their cultural and communication affairs. The way things are being managed and the cuts at CBC/Radio-Canada, which will also affect CBC/Radio-Canada's French services, are, for us, an injustice that doesn't go over very well.

That said, this is a matter for the management of CBC/Radio-Canada. As we know—and as we've been told many times—the management of CBC/Radio-Canada is not within the government's reach, nor should it be. If the government has anything important to do with the management of CBC/Radio-Canada, it's to retool the mandate or renew the mandate of the president of CBC/Radio-Canada. In fact, the minister has announced that work is under way to hire a new president.

The minister will appear here by May 31 if the motion moved by my colleague Mrs. Thomas is adopted. I think it is perfectly reasonable for the minister to come and talk about spending. I think it will be an excellent opportunity to ask her about that.

However, for the time being, I would like Ms. Tait to be seated at the end of the table. I want to ask her about what she told us in December. She came to justify the cuts of 800 positions and the budget cuts due to the chronic underfunding of CBC/Radio-Canada. She explained that one of the reasons was that the government was going to impose budget cuts of 3.3% on all government agencies, including CBC/Radio-Canada. She also explained to us that funding was a problem because it wasn't enough and that CBC/Radio-Canada had to use more original funding strategies than others, particularly through advertising and sponsored content. However, a few weeks later, we learned that the government is increasing CBC/Radio-Canada's operating budget by \$100 million and that the corporation will be exempt from this 3.3% restriction, which remains mandatory for the other agencies and represents tens of millions of dollars.

So, at this time, I don't see what's going to justify CBC/Radio-Canada maintaining the elimination of 800 positions, which will have a significant and probably irreversible impact on journalistic coverage in the regions, in Quebec and Canada, and an irreversible and extremely serious impact on the dissemination of culture—particularly francophone culture—in Quebec and Canada.

I think the decisions made by Catherine Tait about the end of her mandate are an insult to Quebeckers and Canadians. I would remind you that her mandate has been extended until January 2025. She needs to come and sit down here and explain to us the reasons that will justify maintaining her cutting millions of dollars and the positions of hundreds of workers who are essential to journalism and culture—particularly francophone culture—in Quebec and Canada.

I think the part of Mrs. Thomas's proposed amendment that deals with the time frame is interesting. As I said, we'll be able to question the minister when she comes to talk to us about the estimates. I have no problem with that, but I don't think it would be appropriate to hear from her at this time. However, setting a maximum time limit for the implementation of this motion, once it's adopted, is entirely reasonable.

Where I have a problem is with the seven-day limit. According to the current schedule, a seven-day deadline takes us to Tuesday of next week. That leaves just one meeting because the House isn't sitting next week. Either we meet with Ms. Tait on Thursday of this week, which seems a bit short notice to me and raises the risk that the president of CBC/Radio-Canada won't be available for one reason or another, or the committee meets during the weeks when the House isn't sitting, and I'm wondering if we're in that much of a hurry.

I'm open to hearing my colleagues' arguments. I'm not at all closed to this issue. I wonder if it couldn't be done at the first meeting back after the two-week break. Personally, I'm quite open to this compromise. As I said, I have nothing against the second part of Mrs. Thomas's amendment, which proposes setting a deadline for the meeting.

I'll stop there, because I want to hear what my colleagues have to say about this.

• (52030)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Noormohamed on the amendment.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I think there are a couple of things here.

I think there are certainly challenges to the amendment. Right now we are speaking to the amendment, if I'm not mistaken.

I want to be very clear that we are focusing on the amendment right now, and then we're going to focus on the main motion thereafter.

I think the idea that we are starting to think about whether we want political interference into the world of the CBC and having the minister—any minister—come to speak to what is happening at CBC is hugely problematic.

We have seen time and again the politicization of the CBC, the idea that we hear from our Conservative friends day and night that they want to defund the CBC, that the CBC is somehow the government mouthpiece, while at the same time as they say to people in Quebec that they want to keep funding Radio-Canada.

I think the idea of bringing ministers into a conversation about the actions of CBC is hugely problematic unless we want to get into the business of having the political sphere tell the CBC what to do. That is neither the mandate of the CBC nor the way in which any reasonable Canadian and reasonable person would want the CBC to operate.

If we are to look at the merits of the amendment that Mrs. Thomas wants to make, I think the real question we have to ask is whether we are comfortable living in a world where politicians get to decide what's on the CBC, where the politicians get to decide what the CBC does, how the CBC works, so on and so forth.

I find that troubling. I am somebody who believes fiercely in an independent public broadcaster and a public broadcaster that is able to tell the stories of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, whatever those stories are, whether they are for or against what the government is doing, whether they support the government or not—and more often than not, they don't, because they're good-quality journalists and their job is to ask difficult questions regardless of who is in power. When we start bringing ministers to the table to start asking them questions about what the CBC is doing, I think we are going down a very slippery slope.

I think the amendment itself is fundamentally flawed in that regard. I think it is an opportunity that is being created to politicize the CBC. It's an opportunity again for Conservatives to talk about all the reasons the minister should defund the CBC, while in French they say they want to support Radio-Canada.

I think we need to be vigilant against that. I think it's important for all of us to remind ourselves that the political stripes of who is in power have changed in this country since Confederation. The hallmark and the standard of this country is a public broadcaster that has reported without fear or favour on what the government has done or what the government has not done.

Calling a minister to come and having the minister asked to justify actions of the CEO runs completely counter to the independence of the CBC. There is an independent board of the CBC that provides oversight. There is an executive team that is responsible for the function of CBC.

If we look at precedents of public broadcasters and the history of public broadcasting in this country, it is abundantly clear that we, regardless of who has been in the Prime Minister's office, have studiously avoided politicizing the CBC by holding ministers to account for what the CBC does. When we start to do that it does create, as I said before, a slippery slope.

I certainly don't think this is something that is going to be heard by the Conservatives, because they have whatever agenda they have, but I would encourage my colleagues in the Bloc and the NDP to really ask themselves if we want to go down a road of having the minister appear as an opportunity for the Conservatives to grandstand and simply browbeat the minister by asking why we are funding a public broadcaster.

Knowing the minister, I'm certain she would enjoy defending the CBC, as most Canadians would, but I think the fact that we would want to make this a circus about political interference into the actions of the CBC is hugely problematic.

I would encourage all of us to raise our voices against this amendment and to make sure, if there is an opportunity, to keep driving home the point that we will not stand for the politicization of the CBC, that we will not stand for this type of action. When it comes to creating a conversation in which ministers themselves are the ones opining on the function of the CBC, I think that is a real problem.

• (52035)

I'm seeing a note, Madam Chair, from the interpreters, so I'm just going to pause for a second. Are they having some challenges hearing me? The clerk might want to check in. I just got a note saying that they're able to translate, but that the quality is not good. Is that true? Is there something you want me to do to adjust that?

The Clerk: It's the microphone that doesn't seem to be selected.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Does that help them? Is that better for them now that I've done that? They just redid the setting of the microphone on the computer.

The Clerk: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Okay. I don't know how much of that they caught. I don't know if they need me to repeat anything or if everything worked out okay. I'm happy to repeat what I was saying, but I think everyone heard what I had to say. If they did, then I will end my comments, but if you need me to repeat anything, if it was not heard properly, I'm happy to repeat it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

We'll go to Ms. Ashton next on the amendment and then Mr. Waugh.

Ms. Niki Ashton: In the spirit of expediency, I think what's most important here is to hear directly from the CEO of the CBC, Ms. Tait. I think we can ask questions of the minister when she comes on the estimates, but I would like to see a meeting focused on the CEO.

We won't be supporting the first part of the amendment, and, like Mr. Champoux, we are open to the second part in terms of timing.

• (52040)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Go ahead, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait made statements in December while knowing that the performance bonuses had already been handed out in October. It's frustrating, because if you listen to the meeting from December, you hear that Ms. Tait claims that there were no performance bonuses at all. The bonuses were handed out in 2023. They normally do that in the early part of 2024.

Right away, we have found, Madam Chair, that Ms. Tait lied to the committee when she came here in December, and she is head of a major \$1.4-billion corporation. She came to committee and misinformed everybody around the table, and that is a real concern.

I like the motion by Ms. Thomas for a couple of reasons. We need to reconvene next Tuesday, March 26, seven days from now, to hear from Catherine Tait. She has misled Canadians. She came here saying that she needed to drop 10% of the CBC staff, over 800 people, and then the Treasury Board, along with the heritage minister, agreed to a \$96.1-million gift to the CBC, which brought them from \$1.3 billion to \$1.4 billion in the budget.

What's interesting is that Ms. Tait has not talked about any more cuts, despite getting \$96 million. She hasn't even really talked about whether we are going to reinstate those who were on the chopping block.

It's an interesting dilemma that we have in the heritage committee here, because I definitely think we need to hear, Madam Chair, from the head of the CBC, Catherine Tait, and also because the Liberals at one time talked about a 3.3% decrease to the funding of CBC, and then all of a sudden turned around and gifted the CBC \$96.1 million.

That's why I like the updated amendment from Ms. Thomas. Where did this money come from? When CBC went crying that they were going to cut 800 staff and that their bonuses were not coming, we find out that the first 10 months were paid out, so we still don't know about November and December Christmas performance bonuses, which I think we're going to find out about very shortly, either at the end of March or certainly April. It's astounding to me that CBC can cut 800 employees and still give out nearly \$15 million in performance bonuses.

I'm here for next Tuesday, March 26. I like the amendment and I will support it wholeheartedly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Kevin.

Is there anyone else who wants to speak to this amendment?

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Sure. I have a couple of things here.

With regard to the timeline of "within seven days", there's nothing precluding this committee from doing work during a break week. If we deem it important, we are welcome to do that. Of course, I understand that individuals are returning to their ridings. It's no problem. They can of course log in and be a part of that meeting virtually, so that has been accommodated.

Second, with regard to the Minister of Heritage, I recognize the arguments that have been brought forward by Mr. Noormohamed. I will just highlight a couple of things—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I have a point of order, Madam Chair. The camera seems to be on you and not on Mrs. Thomas for some reason.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I don't control cameras, Kevin, but it's duly noted.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I know, but you're sitting there relaxing, listening to Mrs. Thomas, and I think the viewers out there would like

to hear what Mrs. Thomas has said and what she has to say, and also see the video.

We have a number of cameras here. Perhaps we could employ those who got released from CBC to run these cameras if they're not properly run.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay. Now go ahead, Mrs. Thomas. You have the floor and the camera.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay. Awesome. Thank you.

Well, thank you to my colleague Kevin for bringing attention to that.

Once again, those words did come from me. I would just highlight for this committee that we have every ability to work during a break week. I realize that many of us are returning to our constituencies and will be working there, but there's no problem. We can always log on and do this meeting by Zoom. Those seven days shouldn't be a problem.

The second thing I would say to the committee is with regard to having the Minister of Heritage appear. Look, there are a couple of things that need to be noted here. Mr. Noormohamed mentioned that the minister is not responsible for answering for the CBC; in fact, actually, the minister is responsible for giving a contract to Ms. Tait and for having renewed that contract to Ms. Tait. Further, the minister is responsible for now doing the search and finding the next CEO or president of the CBC, and so the minister is actually directly involved.

I'm not sure if Mr. Noormohamed is implying that she is politically interfering in the CBC by making these hiring decisions or if Mr. Noormohamed is simply looking to mislead the members of this committee by saying that the mandate is different from what it actually is. Nevertheless, it is true that the minister has a lot to do with the CBC and the decisions that are made at the head of the organization.

The third thing I would raise is that it is the minister, in fact, who also made the decision with regard to the additional money that is going to the CBC. It is the minister who has determined that almost another \$100 million will be given to the public broadcaster for this upcoming year, and we can expect to see that solidified in the budget. That is my understanding.

For these reasons, it does seem that, based on the motion Mr. Champoux has brought forward, which has to do with both of these things that I just stated, it would be appropriate for us to hear from the minister in addition to Ms. Tait.

You'll note that I am not taking away from the time that Ms. Tait is to be given. She will have two hours, and the Minister of Heritage will also have two hours. It's simply an addition. There's nothing being deleted or taken away from the motion.

● (52045)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Thomas.

Ms. Lattanzio is next.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Madam Chair.

At this point, I think it would be worth reading the motion out loud to have a better understanding of the spirit of this motion.

It says,

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee invite the CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, Catherine Tait,

—and now the amendment says—

and the Minister of Canadian Heritage to appear for a period of two hours each within seven days of the adoption of this motion

—that's also part of the amendment—

to answer the following questions concerning:

1. The increase in funding to the public broadcaster of nearly one hundred million dollars per year;
2. The exemption granted by the government to CBC/Radio-Canada to reduce its operating costs by 3.3%;
3. The payment of performance bonuses totalling nearly fifteen million dollars to CBC/Radio-Canada executives;

And that she explain

—“she” referring to Ms. Tait—

the impact of these announcements on the announced elimination of eight hundred (800) positions, as well as on the continuation of high-quality journalism in the regions of Quebec and Canada.

Clearly—

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, we are dealing with the amendment only. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes, I understand. That's why I've highlighted the amendment part.

Clearly, Madam Chair, the original motion dealt with the economic or managerial decisions that the CBC takes, and I don't see the role of the Minister of Heritage in the managerial or financial decisions being taken.

Clearly, the spirit of the original motion is with regard to the expenses and the spending of sums of money, which really have nothing to do with the mandate or the role of the Minister of Heritage. Therefore, I won't be voting in favour of including the Minister of Heritage.

With regard to the delay that my colleague has included in the motion, I agree with Monsieur Champoux. We can certainly come back from the constituency week and deal with this motion, unless there seems to be an urgency that it absolutely needs to be dealt with in the next two weeks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Based on what we've just heard in the last few minutes, I have the impression that my Conservative colleagues won't agree to withdraw the invitation to the Minister of Canadian Heritage from their amendment. The part of the motion that I agree with is the part

that seeks to specify a deadline for the appearance. If there is an opening, I would be tempted to suggest that we split the difference by inviting the CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada to appear at the first meeting scheduled after we return from our constituency weeks.

I have nothing against the committee sitting during those weeks, Madam Chair. It's not a problem for me at all, but I think it should be reserved for situations of a certain urgency. However, I don't believe that there is any danger at stake in the coming weeks. This is something that could very well be discussed when we come back in three weeks, it will still be topical, and it will be the same answers or non-answers that we're going to get from Ms. Tait. I think we can set a deadline so that it can be done quickly, but I don't see a national emergency requiring us to convene this parliamentary committee for weeks when we're in our ridings, especially since I would bet my last shirt that Ms. Tait will find a reason to tell us that she's not available for a while.

So we could start by setting the date of April 11, which is the first meeting scheduled after we return from the constituency weeks. If everyone agrees, we could move a subamendment or reject the amendment on the table and move another one to add that to the motion. Then we'd be on the right track.

• (52050)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Niki, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Niki Ashton: I was just going to say that I support Mr. Champoux's proposal that we set aside the first scheduled meeting after we return from the constituency weeks.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I see no other hands up. I'm going to entertain a vote on the amendment of Mrs. Thomas.

(Amendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: Did I hear you say you wanted to propose a subamendment, Martin?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I don't think I can move a subamendment or an amendment to my own motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: You cannot move a subamendment to your own motion, no.

All right. Now let's deal with the main motion as it stands, which was put forward by Mr. Champoux, minus the amendments by Mrs. Thomas.

Is there any debate on the main motion as unamended?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'd like to propose an amendment.

[*Translation*]

I thank my colleague for the very good idea.

[English]

I'm going to do this on the fly, and perhaps we can get the assistance of the clerk to iron out the wording. I would like to put that we have the meeting with Ms. Tait for no less than two hours on April 11, the first day of our return.

Mr. Martin Champoux: It's April 9.

Philip Lawrence: Oh, it's April 9.

[Translation]

I'm sorry.

[English]

The Chair: You would add “no less than two hours on April 9”. All right, that's a new amendment.

Martin, did you put your hand up?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Absolutely.

[English]

The Chair: We're speaking to this amendment proposed by Mr. Lawrence.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I think the amendment reflects what we just discussed. I think everyone agrees that we should hold this meeting quickly. If we hold it on April 9, that will give us time. That's perfectly reasonable. I don't think we even need to debate it any further, because I have the impression that everyone is in agreement.

We could go straight to a vote, Madam Chair. I absolutely support this amendment.

• (52055)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Noormohamed's hand was up with regard to this amendment by Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I just want to clarify that it is an invitation from Mr. Champoux. I just want to make sure that we have clarity around whether this is an invitation or a summons to the CBC CEO. It's an invitation, correct?

The Chair: The word is “invite”.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: It's an invitation. Okay, thank you. That's all I want to know.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Go ahead, Anna.

Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): I just have a question.

If she's not available that date—let's say she has a vacation already planned or something—is it not better to leave it open to “as soon as possible” or...? I don't know. If she can't do that date, then where are we? Do we resume this whole conversation with a new date? Can we not just say “as soon as she is able”?

The Chair: You have posed a question.

Mr. Noormohamed, do you want to answer it? Are you speaking to the—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: My question was going to be similar to Ms. Gainey's.

We also have the folks from Bell, who have disappeared into the wind. It just seems like if the date doesn't work, then people just won't be showing up.

I think we have to deal with these things with some type of urgency. For example, in the situation with Bell, we still haven't been able to pin these guys down. I'm wondering, from a scheduling perspective, how this would all work.

The Chair: The situation with Bell is that we gave them a date. They were not able to make that date. I mentioned that situation at one of the last meetings we had, and everyone agreed that we can't make people come if they cannot. The clerk has been negotiating a time for them to appear.

Did you want to speak to that, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Bell has responded that the next availability of the CEO to appear is Tuesday, May 28.

The Chair: The committee may want to deal with that because it was a summons for Bell, wasn't it?

Okay, it wasn't a summons; it was an invitation.

The committee will want to deal with it, but right now we are actually dealing with Mr. Lawrence's amendment.

Go ahead, Philip.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I think it's more than reasonable, given that we're giving the CEO three weeks of notice for her to be here, but I would also be amenable to changing it to any time before that, to April 9 or before, if you want to give the clerk additional time. The Conservatives are more than happy to meet during the break week if that better suits the CEO's schedule.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any further discussion?

Martin, do you want to discuss Philip's amendment?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I have no problem with Mr. Lawrence's proposal. I probably would have trusted the good faith of Ms. Tait, who clearly told us here that we didn't need to summon her to appear and that we could simply invite her. In any case, that's her duty since, in her own words, she has an obligation to accept the committee's invitations.

We can invite her to appear on April 9, or at her earliest availability, should she be out of the country, as she was last fall when she travelled to Australia. So I would suggest April 9 or the first deadline, or as soon as possible after that.

[English]

The Chair: You are adding a subamendment: “or the earliest....”

We'll go to Philip and then to Kevin and Niki.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Do I have the floor, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I wouldn't want to just leave it open to “as early as convenient” because convenience can be defined in different ways. I think “any time up to April 9, including April 9” would be good, but I'm okay with just saying “April 9”. It's simple. Let's just go ahead and get her here.

If there is an issue.... Maybe the clerk could inform us as to what would happen if Ms. Tait says she is unavailable then.

The Chair: Go ahead, Geneviève.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Sorry, I didn't mean to get you—

The Chair: If she says she's unavailable, we cannot take her and bring her in on a stretcher or something...whatever.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Go ahead, Geneviève.

The Clerk: If she is unavailable, I would inform the committee, and they can decide whether they would like to be open to a different date or to go the route of the summons.

The Chair: Let us know if she says that she's unavailable, and then we can make that decision.

All right. Now I will go to Mr. Waugh and then Ms. Ashton.

• (52100)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: In fact, Madam Chair, we might even get a bonus here when she comes on April 9. The head of the CBC might tell the committee that in November and December, added to the \$14.9 million in bonuses that she has already paid out in 2023, she might tell us on April 9, “Oh, well, you know what? In November and December, I was Santa Claus, and we gave out more bonuses.” April 9 might be the nice date.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Niki.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I just want to be clear on the timing and that the language we're using won't refer to the break weeks. I agree with the sentiment that this perhaps isn't as urgent as other matters that have to be dealt with during the break weeks. As somebody who represents one of the largest ridings in the country, I'll say that break weeks are critical to hitting the road. A lot of the communities I represent don't have quality Internet, so it's not always easy to drop everything and connect to committee during times when we've already booked travel.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

I'm going to reiterate that there is only one simple amendment, and that is “for no less than two hours on April 9”. That's the amendment, clear and simple. It doesn't mention break weeks. Everyone is discussing and throwing in break weeks, but the amendment is pretty simple.

Mr. Noormohamed, are you speaking to the amendment?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

In the context of this amendment, we've heard Mr. Waugh, whom I have tremendous respect for, make light of collective agreements and payments made under collective agreements. We've also heard him mock CBC employees who have lost their jobs and the competence of House of Commons—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: On a point of order—

The Chair: Mr. Noormohamed, that is not speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: It is, Madam Chair, if you let me finish my point—

The Chair: It's your intervention, but you are in fact not speaking to the amendment.

If you wish to speak to the amendment, go ahead. You have the floor.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: My point is that if we are talking about this date because somehow there is going to be some magical bonus issued....

I mean, I think the context is important. If we are asking someone to appear, setting these dates has clearly not worked. What I would like us to do, if the intention of the committee is to call somebody, is to make sure that we get the person to show up, and not just say “here are the dates we're going to give you”, and then it doesn't work, and then we move on to the next thing.

I have said this before and I'll say it again: setting a date has clearly not delivered us the folks from Bell, and that was a summons. If we're going to do this, we have to give people enough time to show up. The clerk is doing her work to make sure that people can show up, but this is an important consideration—

The Chair: Actually, Bell it was not a summons; it was an invitation.

Madam Clerk, I'm going to call the question on this amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The motion now under consideration is an amended motion that adds, after the reference to Ms. Tait, “for no less than two hours on April 9”.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Thomas, the floor is yours.

• (52105)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I wish to move a motion for consideration by the committee today.

The motion reads as follows:

Given that the Liberal government's carbon tax has had a detrimental impact on the cultural, civic, and economic life of Canadians, making life increasingly unaffordable and severely limiting their ability to support and enjoy the arts and culture sector, the committee report to the House its recommendation that the government should immediately cancel the carbon tax.

Madam Chair, I am happy to pause and give a moment for the motion to be distributed, although it has been on notice since January 26, and then I would like to resume—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Chair, I have a point of order. I would like you to rule on the admissibility of this motion at this specific committee, please, because I am fairly certain we don't deal with carbon pricing in this committee.

The Chair: I will ask that we suspend for a few moments while I look at the admissibility or inadmissibility of this motion.

Mr. Lawrence, please go ahead.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I believe it's permissible.

It says specifically, “has...a detrimental impact on cultural, civic and economic life of [Canada]”, and I believe that culture is direct-ly within the four squares of heritage.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your input.

I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes.

● (52105) _____ (Pause) _____

● (52115)

The Chair: We're resuming the meeting.

We suspended so that we could discuss with the clerk and the analysts.

I am going to rule this motion admissible because it clearly speaks to the mandate of heritage. I have the mandate with me here. The mandate is to deal with the economic and cultural life of Canadians and to make it possible for them to experience arts and culture in the country. The motion speaks clearly in saying that people can't experience it. I'm going to rule it admissible and I'm going to entertain debate on the motion.

Mrs. Thomas, did you want to say something about it?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

As a reference for the committee, I would highlight exactly what you've referred to here, Chair. Under the Canadian heritage mandate, which is posted on the government's website, it says, “The Department of Canadian Heritage...and its Portfolio organizations play a vital role in the cultural, civic and economic life of Canadians.”

That line, which then appears in our motion, is used by the government itself to describe the mandate of the heritage committee. It is appropriate that we would discuss, then, the effect the carbon tax is having on those things in Canadian life.

I'm not sure about other members at this table, but I have had the chance to meet with the head of Theatre Calgary. I have met with various theatre organizations and other entertainment organizations

in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. I have heard first-hand from them about the difficulty they are having in regard to ticket sales.

They would point to the feedback they're getting from their patrons as to why they are not frequenting as much. The number one reason would be that life is unaffordable. It's that at the end of the day, folks are left with less disposable income. Because of that, they are making the decision to cut things like live theatre from their weekly, monthly or even maybe the activities that they would engage in once or twice a year.

As a result, these organizations or companies are having a really difficult time making ends meet. Those that I have had the opportunity to meet with, of course, are looking for greater support. They're looking to the government for that.

In fact, the government wouldn't be asked for that if Canadians could simply afford to go and participate in the activities they wish to. If they had the money in their pockets to be able to afford to go to dance, to music festivals or to live theatre, then these companies or organizations would not be left having to beg for a handout.

They do not wish to be in that position. They wish, instead, to be upheld, maintained and supported by individuals—by Canadians. Mainly, that's the way they want to be supported, because it would mean they have an audience, which is ultimately their goal. It would mean there would be people in the theatre who were watching these shows, who were excited about these shows and who were supporting these shows. It would mean that arts and culture were alive and well and being supported in this country. That is the mandate of this committee.

The mandate of this committee is to make sure the cultural, civic and economic life of Canadians is upheld and supported. One of the big ways the government can do this is by scrapping the carbon tax and making sure Canadians are not having to pay this punitive amount of money, which is attached to everything from home heating to gas to groceries.

This government is now scheduled to increase that carbon tax by 23% in just a few weeks, on April 1. When the government increases the carbon tax yet again, you can imagine the impact this will have on Canadians. It's robbing them yet again of disposable income and the ability to afford the arts.

I believe it is incumbent upon this committee, then, to take those things into account, to stand up for all arts and culture in this country, and to therefore recommend to the House that the carbon tax should be immediately cancelled so that Canadians are left with more money to be able to pay for the things they wish to spend money on, such as the arts.

I'll leave it there for now.

● (52120)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Noormohamed, did you take your hand down?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Chair, I did put my hand up, because—

The Chair: No. You're not ready to speak, but I'm wondering, because your hand was down.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I did put my hand down on this particular motion, because I assume we'll vote on it.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree with this motion for a number of reasons. I wake up very early in the morning and I read all newspapers in this country. I can tell you that what is happening before our eyes is a disaster.

In London, the Home County Music and Art Festival has been cancelled. Taste of Saskatchewan is cancelled. Hot Docs and Toronto Fringe Festival have major cutbacks. Just for Laughs is eliminated in Montreal and Toronto. Taste of the Danforth is cancelled this year. Toronto arts and food festivals are all cancelled this year. I can go on and on.

I'm very disturbed at what's going on in the culture. This is worse, believe it or not, than we saw during COVID. Many of these organizations were looking forward to relief after COVID, but this is worse now. They're hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt.

Nobody has the capability now of going to these events. Attendance has been well down in 2023 right across the board, from the Atlantic provinces, Madam Chair, to your province in B.C. They're not drawing the interest they once did, and I believe it is because of the carbon tax. People in this country don't have the disposable income to really give the arts and culture in this country the financial boost that they need.

In the last three months alone, in 2024, many of these organizations have had to make major announcements in January, February, and March. They're usually booking people at this time to perform in June, July, and August, and they've decided to just close up shop.

I've mentioned a few here, but there are many more, coast to coast, that just can't afford it anymore. They're very disappointed, because, as you know, people in the arts community don't make a lot of money. They go from city to city just to eke out a living and make a name for themselves. Because of the carbon tax, the year 2024 will be disastrous in the arts community in our country. They just don't have the disposable income that they once had.

Thank you.

• (52125)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

I will now go to Mr. Lawrence, and then Ms. Ashton and Mr. Champoux.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My colleagues commented quite eloquently and profoundly with respect to the arts. My background's more on the finance side. I'd like to take a moment, if I could, and talk specifically about the economic impact of the carbon tax.

Across the different provinces, whether in Ontario, where net of rebate you lose about \$600, or in Alberta, where you lose about \$1,000, just imagine if you put that net amount towards some type of live theatre. That \$600 would get you, I believe, a season

pass for every production at the Capitol Theatre in my riding of Port Hope. I'm sure they would greatly appreciate it if all 100,000 residents of Northumberland-Peterborough South were given that \$600 back and spent it at the amazing live theatre at the Capitol Theatre in Port Hope.

When we look at it, of course we see the financial impact that the PBO put out, saying that if you're in Alberta it's \$1,000 and if you're in Ontario—my province—it's \$600 across the province, the impact is there for all where the backstop applies.

The other part of it is that it has a significant impact on inflation as well. This has been somewhat under-reported, or even misreported, I might say. The Governor of the Bank of Canada, in response to questioning at the finance committee, said that 0.6% of inflation is directly as a result of the carbon tax, and the upcoming increase is responsible for 0.015%, which equates to about 26% or 27% of total inflation. This means we could eliminate nearly 30% of inflation tomorrow if we just scrap the tax, which would be a tremendous benefit.

We're all hearing it, whether you're Liberal, NDP or Bloc Québécois. I'll tell you that in the next two weeks, I guarantee the thing that all of us will hear most about is the affordability crisis. As my great staffer, Emma, said as we were discussing this, if in fact you are struggling just to have enough to eat—and there are two million Canadians using food banks right now—it's very difficult to afford arts and entertainment.

That was a short digression. I'll wrap up soon.

You need food to live—it's the “how” of living—but you need arts and entertainment to give you the “why”. When people are deprived of that because of the affordability crisis, even for those who are able to make it through, a lot of the “why” is taken away when you don't get to see the beauty of art, live theatre and amazing performances that take place from coast to coast to coast.

Everything we can do to get this economy back on track—not just so that people are no longer reliant on the food bank but are able to afford the wonderful performances and afford the “why” we go through every day—would be absolutely amazing. I will be fully supporting this motion and I encourage all my colleagues to do the same. I'm hoping we can get unanimous support for it.

Thank you.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Chair, we now have 30 minutes left in the meeting. We have folks who were there to do the sensitivity training. If we're not going to be able to do that training, maybe we can at least let them leave so that we can continue whatever is happening here. It seems unfair to them.

The Chair: Yes, it would seem to me that we're going to be continuing this debate, so I think we can ask them to come another time. However, we do need to listen to them. This is so important. Thank you.

All right. Go ahead, Niki.

Ms. Niki Ashton: First off, this is the second committee that I'm on where we're dealing with this motion. While I appreciate that affordability is a crisis in our country and it's clear that people are struggling here at home and across the country, I think we're also seeing some serious theatrics from the Conservatives in trying to jam these motions into every single committee.

Also, as somebody who's been a member of Parliament for a while and was here during the dark days of Stephen Harper when it came to the arts community, it's pretty rich to hear Conservatives go to the wall for the arts. When they were in power, we saw some of the deepest cuts to arts and culture.

Also, on comments that the arts are suffering more than during COVID, I know Conservatives like to downplay the pandemic—

• (52130)

The Chair: Niki, excuse me.

Are you not getting translation?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, at times, Ms. Ashton's microphone seems to be moving or obstructed. The sound quality is certainly not adequate for interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Your microphone's cutting in and out, Niki. Please try to speak into the microphone and speak a bit more slowly.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, and maybe I can speak more slowly. All the equipment I'm using is House equipment.

All of that is to say that we in the NDP have been clear that affordability is a crisis. We would love for the Conservatives to join us in calling for fair taxation, especially of the rich and powerful in our country, who are getting off the hook without paying their fair share of taxes. It's money that could be reinvested in our social safety net and reinvested in ways that could support Canadians who are struggling right now.

This motion does not do that. Certainly, we won't be supporting it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Martin.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I find it interesting to hear my Conservative colleagues defend the cultural industry and creators. It's refreshing. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage deals with communication, culture and many such issues. Culture is about entertainment, and I must say that my Conservative colleagues are entertaining and creative in their way of always bringing up the carbon tax.

That said, Mrs. Thomas spoke earlier in her speech about people in the cultural community with whom she discussed the situation that prevails from one end of Canada to the other and that is also extremely worrisome in Quebec. The financial situation is difficult, and the next few months don't seem to be encouraging for the cultural sector either.

We hope that the programs will be maintained, but they will probably not be improved, which is a concern for many. We have seen closures. We have seen festival organizers in financial difficulty. The Just for Laughs festival, among others, won't be held this summer. It's extremely worrisome to see cultural giants in Quebec and Canada stop their activities like that.

That said, I think the situation in Quebec, and particularly in Montreal, where my colleague Mrs. Thomas says she has had conversations, is the same as in the other major cities in Canada.

However, the carbon tax doesn't apply in Quebec, so I would be curious to know what the difference is between the financial situation of the cultural industries in the other major cities in Canada and that of Montreal, so that we can see what the real impact of the carbon tax is on the cultural industry. Since it does not apply to Quebec, we can't say that it has an impact on culture in Quebec. If we can take that as a benchmark, it will allow us to see whether there is really an impact of the carbon tax in the rest of Canada, since—I would remind you—the carbon tax doesn't apply in Quebec.

That's all I have to say.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Martin.

Now I'll go to Mrs. Thomas again.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

I can appreciate a number of the comments being made around this table, particularly those by my colleagues Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Waugh. I believe both of them made really good points with regard to the carbon tax and the impact it's having on Canadians.

Mr. Waugh listed almost a dozen festivals and celebrations that are being cancelled or have been cancelled because money just isn't available. If we were to tap into that further, we would see that the reason money isn't available is that there are no individuals showing up at these things. There's a lack of demand. It's not a lack of want; it's a lack of demand.

To clarify, then, I'll say that Canadians want these things. They want to engage in cultural activities. With regard to Mr. Champoux's point, Canadians want to celebrate their culture, their tradition and their way of life, whatever that might be. There's a whole host of things within that. However, when they don't have the income to be able to participate in those activities, it results in a lack of demand. Again, the want is significant, but the demand is not. As a result, we're seeing these things being cancelled.

With regard to Mr. Lawrence's point, the carbon tax has a significant impact on the disposable income of a home and on people's ability to be able to afford activities within the realm of arts and culture. Instead of being able to engage in these activities, which tend to be a lot of fun and, as Mr. Lawrence said, provide the “why” to life, too many people are stressed out and concerned about affordability issues. We have literally millions of people in this country lining up at food banks every single month. We're told that we can expect another million to be added to that lineup in this coming year of 2024, in the months ahead of us. The reason is that Canadians are struggling to be able to pay their rents, to put fuel in their vehicles, to put food on their tables and to pay for other activities, such as putting their children in sports or the arts.

This is a problem. This is a really big problem. It is appropriate for this committee, then, to take that under consideration and to care about Canadians in this way. That is the reason for the motion that we've moved here today.

● (52135)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gourde is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will add my voice to that of my colleague Mrs. Thomas to explain the collateral damage of the carbon tax in the arts community.

I also want to respond to Mr. Champoux. He understands very well that Quebec chose to set up a carbon exchange about 10 years ago already because it felt pressure from the federal government. Knowing that the Liberal government was going to set up a carbon exchange, Quebec chose another path, but it might have chosen another path if it hadn't felt so much pressure knowing that there would be a carbon exchange in Canada in the future. This—

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

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Champoux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I want to clarify my colleague Mr. Gourde's comments, just to set the record straight. The carbon exchange to which Quebec belongs was adopted when Mr. Harper's government was in power in Ottawa. So there was no real pressure from the Liberals at that time. As a matter of fact—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Martin Champoux: No, it's a point of clarification.

There you have it, Mr. Gourde, the facts have been set straight.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence, I'm sorry; Mr. Champoux is making a point.

Shall we continue? Are there any further speakers?

Mr. Gourde, are you finished?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: May I continue, Madam Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Chair, I told my colleague Mr. Champoux that we heard about the possibility of a carbon tax about 10 years ago.

The carbon tax in the other provinces and the Quebec carbon exchange are currently about the same. However, with the increase that will come into effect on April 1 and subsequent increases until 2030, the carbon tax in the other provinces will exceed the amount of the carbon exchange.

The Liberal government has made it clear that as soon as the tax exceeds the amount of the exchange—if it isn't adjusted—the increase will apply in Quebec at the same rate as in the other provinces. That means that Quebeckers will pay as much as the other provinces, either through a carbon tax, a carbon exchange or a mix of the two.

The collateral damage will affect all economic sectors and, inevitably, the economic sector related to arts and culture, including ticket sales. Quebec is a very large province. When you go to see a show in the regions, you have to get in your car and calculate gas costs, in addition to tickets and other expenses. People who tour also have gas costs. There is a multiplier effect in all areas of our society. Inevitably, that hurts culture.

This motion is really important. It would lower the cost of living across all economic sectors. It would also allow people to keep more money in their pockets. When they have more money, they can make choices. Cultural choice is inevitable, because Quebeckers love to go and see shows when they have the means to do so. They invest heavily in shows and culture when they can.

As you will understand, Madam Chair, the impact of the carbon tax, even though it doesn't currently apply in Quebec, will apply as a result of the increase on April 1 and subsequent increases, because the amount of the carbon exchange will reach \$170 a tonne.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (52140)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll go to Mr. Waugh again. Go ahead, Kevin.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to point out that right now the Winnipeg Jets are near the top of the NHL. Their owners have actually talked about an issue in Winnipeg, because they're not selling out every day that they play, and yet the hockey club, today, would have a pretty good chance of going a long way in the NHL playoffs. This is what we see happening in this country when we look at teams like Winnipeg or teams like Ottawa, although Ottawa has had a tougher year.

I think the cost of living has hit Canadians coast to coast. When I look at the Winnipeg Jets situation, I see that they already lost a hockey club years ago in Arizona. The owner came forward here about two months ago, not saying that they're going to move, but saying he's concerned with the attendance of 12,000 instead of the 15,000 to 16,000 that they should be getting. Then everyone in the Winnipeg area got their backs up, if you don't mind my saying it, Madam Chair, because they love the Jets, but they just can't afford the tickets.

Of course, the numbers will probably go up in the playoffs, and it will be interesting, because everybody from the commissioner of the NHL, Gary Bettman.... In fact, Bettman arrived in Winnipeg because he too is concerned about the situation.

The arts, culture and sports in this country are hurting. The Winnipeg Jets, who are fighting for first overall in the NHL, are having attendance problems only because citizens from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, with the carbon tax, are struggling to support a hockey club that certainly should be supported this year.

My last comment is about Wolseley, Saskatchewan. They're one of four communities in Canada looking to improve their rink. Every year TSN, along with Kraft Hockey, donates a sizable amount of money, up to \$100,000, to improve a rink. However, the story out of Wolseley this week wasn't that they're going to kick off the competition on March 29; the story out of Wolseley, with about 850 people, about an hour or so out of Regina, is that they're out of food for the food bank. Over 30 people have gone to the food bank in the last week, and they've been told, "Sorry, we have no more food."

This is in the province of Saskatchewan, Madam Chair, which actually feeds not only this country but the world. Let's look at what's happened there. In my community of Saskatoon, 23,000 people a month go to the Saskatoon Food Bank & Learning Centre. Then we get to Wolseley, which I wanted to talk about, because we're all excited, as Saskatchewan has never won the \$100,000 from Kraft Hockeyville. They have a chance to win it here, but everyone now has shifted. They're not going to worry about the rink, which is the community that everybody knows in rural Canada—the rink—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: When I made comments earlier, you noted that they were not relevant to the motion. I'm just curious as to how this has to do with arts and culture funding and the carbon tax in Canada. I'm not sure talking about hockey and the NHL and privately funded hockey teams like the Ottawa Senators—with other reasons for people not going to their games—are part of the conversation about arts and culture in Canada, which we have heard our colleague so emphatically seek to defend.

I'm certain that when there are chances to fund the arts, they will be actively supporting them, but for now, Madam Chair, I'm not sure how this relates. Could you help us with that, please?

The Chair: I have allowed Mr. Waugh to do this because sports, of course, are part of heritage. I take your point about the private sector making a lot of money in the NHL, etc., but I think Mr. Waugh was trying to press a point about whatever his point is that he is making with regard to this.

• (52145)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Just to wrap it up, Madam Chair, the point was this: I feel for Wolseley, because Canadians, in the next two weeks, will be asked to vote for a community that gets a \$100,000 gift from Kraft to do the hockey rink renovations. Some don't have ice. Some want an ice plant. Wolseley needs, like others in this country, an upgrade.

When I talk about Wolseley, it is all about the food bank and the empty shelves and the cost of living. That's why I kind of tied it in with the Winnipeg Jets as a sports team, but in Wolseley, Saskatchewan, with a population of 850, they are struggling not only for the rink but for the food bank, which is under siege right now with no food on their shelves and is under the greatest need.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I see no other intervenors....

Go ahead, Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm sorry. Mr. Waugh's comments on hockey are too irresistible for me not to comment on. I'll be very quick, though, so we can move to a vote and move on.

I cheer for a team. I cheer for multiple teams. Of course, I cheer for the Toronto Maple Leafs, but I also cheer for the Buffalo Sabres. The Buffalo Sabres operate out of the community of Buffalo, which has a population of 276,000. Winnipeg has a population of 795,000. The Buffalo Sabres have been terrible. They haven't made the playoffs since Stephen Harper was prime minister, to give you an idea of how bad they've been. In 2022-23 they drew, on average, 15,000. Compare that with the Jets at 12,000, and the Jets have been a much better team. I think it's reflective of the economic differences.

In the U.S., the per capita growth has been—

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'll be two more seconds.

The Chair: —I'm going to say that this is out of order now. We're just getting into the weeds on hockey teams.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Just give me one second to wrap it up.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: The per capita income in the United States has grown by over 50% in the last 10 years. In Canada it has grown by 4%. One of the economic differences between Canada and the U.S. is the carbon tax. If we want to fund sports, if we want to fund arts and if we want to fund the performing arts—which I think, as I said, are critical to Canadian culture, and their very existence is the fabric of our country—we need to axe the tax.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will go to Ms. Ashton and then Mr. Champoux. I think we're becoming very circular in this debate right now.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I certainly support moving quickly to a vote, but I also just want to be clear here.

First of all, as the only Manitoban in this committee who has followed this story about the Jets, I think it's really important that we be clear that the Jets, nowhere in their announcement, talked about the carbon tax. To bring that into this committee is just bizarre. If we want to talk about hockey, let's talk about hockey, but let's be truthful. When the Winnipeg Jets talked about a drop in sales, they didn't talk about the carbon tax specifically. Also, the Jets are partially owned by one of the richest men in Canada, so we're not being factual in our discussion here.

I'm certainly keen to move on to the vote so that we can get this over with.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Champoux is next .

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I would like to speak very briefly, since we've touched on the issue of hockey. I know of a town where it wouldn't be at all difficult to fill the arena at every game. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to point out that we want the Nordiques to return to Quebec City.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll say Vancouver and the Canucks.

All right. Seeing no other discussion, I'm going to ask the clerk to call the vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: The motion is defeated. Thank you.

We have asked the people who were going to talk to us about trauma-informed practices to leave.

Ms. Thomas—

I'm sorry, Mr. Noormohamed. Your hand was up first. Go ahead.

• (52150)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As you rightly point out, today was supposed to be a day when we would hear from folks who were going to help us understand how to deal with victims and to have trauma-informed conversations. Instead, we've entertained frivolous motions on the carbon tax.

Given that we've wasted all of their time and that they're now gone, I'd like to move that we adjourn this meeting.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to call the vote on adjournment. Is anybody opposed to adjourning?

Ms. Thomas, go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm opposed. We still have 10 more minutes, and we....

The Chair: It's not debatable, Ms. Thomas. The motion is to adjourn the meeting. Thank you.

There's just one person—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Take a vote. I'll ask for a roll call vote.

The Chair: Geneviève, can you do a roll call vote on adjourning the meeting, please?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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