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# Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry





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Thursday, February 15, 2024

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 111 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

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

[*English*]

Today, we are working in a hybrid format. As usual, there are many people virtually and many people in the room. While public health authorities have not mandated those in the room to wear a mask, I am suggesting that you do, even though I don't have one on.

I would like to take this opportunity to discuss some housekeeping.

You're not allowed to take pictures of this meeting. The meeting will be online and you'll be able to view it later on.

Every time you speak, please go through the chair.

This room is equipped with a powerful audio system. It is important that we don't get feedback, because it really affects the hearing of the interpreters. If you have any secondary devices, please don't put them close to your microphone because it could cause feedback.

Today we are studying the issue of a national forum on the media, and we have the following individuals.

We have Shree Paradkar, a columnist with Toronto Star Newspapers.

We have Sylvain Chamberland, chief executive officer of Arsenal Media.

[*Translation*]

We have Éric-Pierre Champagne, president of the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec.

[*English*]

We have Brandon Gonez, chief executive officer of Gonez Media Inc.

[*Translation*]

We have Pierre Tousignant, president of the Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de Radio-Canada.

[*English*]

Finally, from Unifor, we have Lana Payne, national president, and Marc Hollin, national representative.

Each witness will have five minutes to speak for their group.

I will give you a 30-second shout to let you know that you should wrap up. You may not finish everything you want to say, but there will be a question-and-answer segment where you can elaborate on some of the things you didn't get to speak about.

We now begin with Ms. Paradkar. You may proceed for five minutes.

**Ms. Shree Paradkar (Columnist, Toronto Star Newspapers Limited, As an Individual):** Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to share my views with regard to your study on the national forum on the media.

It won't be news to anybody present that the news media is teetering on the precipice of what is likely an extinction-level event. A decades-long decline appears to be accelerating, with ever more layoffs and shrinking revenues.

In the next five minutes, I plan to briefly outline the challenges that my industry faces and focus on one that I believe demands urgent and honest examination.

There are fundamental questions before us now. Do we want to save the industry? Do we believe in an independent media that is not a propaganda tool for any political party or for any vested agendas that do not serve the public interest? Do you as MPs believe journalism is an important function of democracy? Do you believe Canadian society would function more justly if we had eyes on city council, on the police, on the health and education systems, on indigenous affairs, on federal affairs and on you?

If the answers are yes, then comes this question: What are the challenges facing the industry? In broad terms, I would put them into two buckets. One is financial troubles. The other is trust.

The financial troubles facing the industry are well known. Indeed, internal town halls in newsrooms have long been filled with doom and gloom for more than a decade. These troubles stem from a steady drop in ad revenue, subscription models that have never been the lifeblood of news organizations but are being relied upon now to rescue companies, consumers who have been burnt out by information overload on social media and may not find news relevant enough to support it, and social media sites that are no longer promoting news articles.

Solutions to financial challenges may look like but are not limited to non-profit models for news companies, soliciting donations rather than subscriptions, the government facilitating licensing agreements with AI companies to use the content that the news industry creates, and perhaps facilitating private funding for independent investigative journalism.

However, the point I wish to focus on is the second one: trust in the media.

A study in 2022 produced by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford found that trust in Canadian news media had dropped 13% since 2016. The study's authors wanted to measure public perceptions of polarization on the media landscape, so they asked respondents if they thought the news media was independent from undue political and business influences "most of the time". Instead, they found that half of the respondents said they considered mainstream news organizations to be politically close to each other. That response suggested that one of the many causes of distrust is the perceived lack of diversity in both media ownership and the perspectives offered.

Another U.K. study found a relationship between a lack of trust in journalism and low levels of news literacy among the population. Its recommendations to build confidence and trust among audiences involved improving journalism standards and ensuring that the regulation of news standards be operated independently of the news industry.

These studies and reports confirm what journalists like me see on the ground, which is that the fundamental gatekeeping function of a news organization—the daily decisions that answer the question "What is news?"—is perceived to be biased, that people on various sides of the political spectrum do not see the media representing their viewpoints or interests, that historically excluded communities continue to be misrepresented in the news and that journalists disproportionately come from homogenous backgrounds.

The latest survey by the Canadian Association of Journalists found that Canadian newsrooms are still overwhelmingly white, with 75.5 % of their staff coming from that racial background. It gets worse at the supervisory level, which is 84% white. In addition, Black journalists are the most likely to work in part-time or intern roles compared to full-time or supervisory roles. Far too many newsrooms have no indigenous journalists, and while women make up more than half the workforce, they are more than 60% likely to be in part-time roles.

• (1540)

As much as the diversity of journalists is about racial and ethnic backgrounds, it is also about economic backgrounds. A U.K. study

found that 80% of its journalists had a parent in one of the three highest occupational groups, compared to 42% of all U.K. workers. In Canada, too, industry norms such as unpaid internships, poor full-time job opportunities and poorly paid full-time jobs create substantial barriers for aspiring journalists from lower-income backgrounds.

However, there is little purpose in bringing people from different backgrounds if the perspectives they bring are not valued. This was apparent in the coverage of issues such as #MeToo, the racial reckoning of 2020, gender identity issues today and the COVID pandemic. One current example is the coverage of Israel's assault on Gaza, which itself stemmed from Hamas' attacks in Israel on October 7. North American analysis shows media outlets are found to be overwhelmingly skewing their coverage in favour of Israel.

The continuing reality is that women and other minoritized journalists who challenge the status quo are disproportionately at the receiving end of harassment, threats and abuse, a phenomenon that has been adequately documented, even by the United Nations. Where they were trolled initially by strangers, the attacks that led to dog-piling then began to come from journalists and other professionals and are, regrettably, being normalized by politicians. These intimidation and silencing tactics create a chill in the free expression of a diversity of perspectives. This, in turn, feeds a distrust of media within communities. To counter these effects, government should boost laws and regulations that robustly support journalists who are under attack.

When the audience does not feel connected to fact-based news, it leaves little incentive for individuals to financially support it. In other words, without trust or without the idea that ordinary citizens benefit from the news media, there is little hope of financially resuscitating the industry through them.

In conclusion, anyone embarking on solutions to rescue the news industry will have to wrestle with how to support fact-based news in an information ecosystem that rewards polarity, how to invest in diverse perspectives in news, making—

• (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Paradkar.

Can you wrap up, please?

**Ms. Shree Paradkar:** Yes.

**The Chair:** *Mea culpa*. The chair let you go on for an extra two minutes.

I'm sorry, everybody.

**Ms. Shree Paradkar:** Do I have 10 seconds to wrap up?

**The Chair:** No, you have no time left. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Shree Paradkar:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Now I'll go to Arsenal Media and Sylvain Chamberland, who is the president and CEO.

Go ahead, Sylvain.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chamberland (Chief Executive Officer, ARSENAL MEDIA):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, honourable members.

I would like to begin by thanking you for allowing me to share my observations and comments on a sensitive topic that, in my opinion, directly affects the maintenance of a healthy democracy: the future of news media, specifically, independent commercial radio stations located outside major urban centres. This invitation means a lot to me, so thank you.

My name is Sylvain Chamberland and I have been working in media for over 35 years. I worked at Éditions Transcontinental and as the general manager of news and information at TVA. I was also the president and CEO of Radiomédia, a network owned at the time by Astral Media. After that, I was the news director at Radio-Canada, so I handled francophone services, and vice-president of business development at Quebecor. Twelve years ago, I founded ARSENAL MEDIA, and I've been the president and CEO of ARSENAL MEDIA since its inception. Lastly, I'm also the president of the Association des radios régionales francophones, an association of regional radio stations in Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario.

I'd like to say a few words about ARSENAL MEDIA, a fully independent media company that has built a unique business model. The company is not publicly traded, does not belong to a conglomerate and receives very little in the way of government subsidies.

With ARSENAL MEDIA, I wagered on regional news and media when nobody else was really interested in it. Over the past 12 years, ARSENAL MEDIA has become Quebec's largest independent group of commercial radio stations outside the Montreal and Quebec City markets. ARSENAL MEDIA has 75 employees located everywhere from Abitibi, Sept-Îles, Lac-Mégantic and Témiscouata to central Quebec, the Lower St. Lawrence, the Gaspé, the Saguenay and beyond. We are present across Quebec.

ARSENAL MEDIA also includes 10 regional digital news platforms, several other websites on various topics of interest, two e-commerce stores and a digital creation studio.

Of course, ARSENAL MEDIA is also the voice of 18 radio stations and seven transmitting stations. Last week, we acquired seven former Bell Media stations, the entirety of Bell's assets sold in Quebec. If the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission approves this transaction, we'll have 25 stations and seven transmitting stations all across Quebec, in addition to 15 regional news platforms. This will make ARSENAL MEDIA Quebec's largest broadcaster.

Needless to say, some of the communities we serve are media deserts, where we are one of the few news and information sources. Our arrival on the Quebec communications scene disrupted the status quo in the province's media landscape. We are now more determined than ever to be the local and regional news leader. We want to ensure that all Quebecers can get relevant information that matters to them. I would add that it should be that way for all Canadi-

ans. They should be getting their news from all the radio stations that already exist in Canada.

I would also add that ARSENAL MEDIA is very involved in the communities we serve, donating tens of thousands of dollars to schools and community organizations every year.

It's time for the federal government and all elected officials to support local radio stations outside major urban centres, which do essential work providing news and information to the local population. I believe that support for journalism should not be limited to a single type of media, nor should it benefit those operating in just a few large regions of the country. That's the problem, in my opinion. Now, more than ever, support for news and information needs to help all the people working to keep all Canadians informed.

• (1550)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chamberland:** Right now, regional commercial radio is losing big. We're getting the short end of the stick compared to print media, television, community radio and, of course, CBC/Radio-Canada. Commercial radio stations that produce news are being treated as a less worthy news source.

I will close by saying that making sure at least a minimum amount of information reaches all parts of the country is the best way to protect the health of our democracy. For that reason alone, honourable members, you should pay close and immediate attention to this unfair situation that threatens the future and stability of Canadian society.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Chamberland.

We'll go to Éric-Pierre Champagne, president of Arsenal Media.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Madam Chair, Mr. Champagne is the president of the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne (President, Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec):** The president of ARSENAL MEDIA is next to me.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I mixed you up.

We'll go to *Éric-Pierre Champagne* for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. *Éric-Pierre Champagne*:** Thank you for inviting me to take part in the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage's study.

My name is *Éric-Pierre Champagne*, and I am the president of the *Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec*, or FPJQ, the largest association of journalists in Canada. With some 1,600 members, the FPJQ brings together freelancers, employees and managers in all areas of media communication: reporters, researchers, filmmakers, communicators, columnists and news photographers. Since 1969, the FPJQ has stood up for a free press and the public's right to know, giving journalists a voice wherever necessary. I have been a journalist for some 30 years. I have spent more than 22 of those years at *La Presse*, where I specialize in environmental issues.

Thank you for taking an interest in the future of media and journalism. I am here to share the perspective of Quebec's journalists. It is their job to inform the public in an increasingly difficult environment. I want to underscore the importance of keeping in mind the real issues we are facing. The media crisis is much too important of a societal issue to be summarized in a few clichés. The truth is that journalism is more important than ever in an increasingly polarized society. Also true is that fewer and fewer of us are doing this increasingly challenging work. In a decade, from 2010 to 2020, our workforce shrunk by 23% in Canada. I'll ask the same question *Amélie Daoust-Boisvert*, a professor of journalism at Concordia University, asked: If Canada's justice system had lost a quarter of its workforce in 10 years, would we remain indifferent?

As we lose journalists year after year, the world is becoming more—not less—complex. The skill set and knowledge required to do the job continue to grow. Meanwhile, the number of people doing the work is shrinking, as is the time in which to do it. Is a journalist's job that hard? The answer is yes. The bar is high. Like elected officials, we do our job in the public eye. In just a few years, the climate has gotten worse. What used to be rare has become normal, as we face harassment and hate unlike anything we've ever seen. The pressure on journalists is tremendous. Despite all the challenges, we keep practising a profession we consider vital in a democratic society. The men and women doing this work deserve respect.

As we now know, the media business model is broken. Some 80% of digital advertising dollars in Canada go to web giants Meta and Google. Those revenues and profits leave the country never to return. That leaves 20% of the advertising pie for Canada's media organizations to share. Think about it. Name one industry that could survive such a drastic drop in revenue.

Producing news content isn't free. Tuesday, *Colette Brin*, a professor at Université Laval, told the committee that producing quality news is expensive. For lack of better data, here are some 2018 figures courtesy of Unifor: covering a straightforward news item costs \$331, covering a complex news item costs \$935, and producing an investigative report costs \$10,710.

As our media outlets continue to inform the public in the face of the storm, we struggle to hold our own against the foreign giants. In a letter that appeared today in *La Presse*, the chair of the board of Cogeco, *Louis Audet*, illustrated that clearly. In 2024, advertisers can still deduct advertising dollars spent on foreign digital platforms like Meta for tax purposes. That is absurd as our media outlets die a slow death.

While those in the media look for solutions—and, I assure you, they are looking—it's important to keep in mind why we need media and journalists working to inform the public.

In its latest report, the World Economic Forum identified disinformation as one of the biggest global risks in the next few years. What a troubling—if not terrifying—prospect as artificial intelligence systems take hold.

Here is a chilling statistic. According to a study by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, fake news spreads six times faster than real news. Think about that.

• (1555)

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

**Mr. *Éric-Pierre Champagne*:** The diminishing number of journalists to inform the public creates an even more fertile breeding ground for disinformation. The best way to fight disinformation is the truth.

The last point I want to make is about trust. Much has been said about the breakdown in the public trust in the media. The survey results aren't very encouraging. According to some, the media are no longer relevant—end of story. However, I want to share some of the results of a *Léger* survey on the public's trust in various professions. Firefighters are at the top of the list, trusted by 95% of people, MPs and ministers are trusted by 31% of people, and journalists are trusted by 48%. No one, however, is calling for our political system to be dismantled because so few people trust elected officials.

That is why news and information are important. Journalists, like media, are not perfect, but the work they do is essential.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to *Brandon Gonez*, chief executive officer of Gonez Media.

*Mr. Gonez*, you have five minutes. I'll give you a 30-second shout.

**Mr. Brandon Gonez (Chief Executive Officer, Gonez Media Inc.):** Thank you.

As a little background about me, I'm a former broadcaster. I used to work for Bell Media and Corus Entertainment. I started my career in the second-smallest market in this country, in northwestern British Columbia, in the town of Smithers. Before leaving mainstream media, I worked for Bell Media in the largest market in this country, in Toronto.

I have a unique experience working for our largest broadcasters in this country, but I also have a unique experience because I left, in the midst of the pandemic, to start my own digital media company, called Gonez Media. Since then, we've acquired legacy publications and turned them digital. We have a team of nearly 20 folks. More than half are journalists, with many of them coming from legacy organizations, having been laid off and severely impacted by the media crisis.

I want to talk about the impact of legislation on this country, particularly Bill C-18. As a digital-first media company, we never asked for this legislation. We found a new model that worked for us, that was sustainable and that was providing new opportunities, especially for journalists of colour in this country, who for far too long have been told that they don't belong in newsrooms across this country or who have experienced discrimination and racism. We changed that model, and we're now one of Canada's fastest-growing online media companies.

When Bill C-18 came about, we were severely impacted. We lost our pages on Meta-owned platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, which were literally the platforms we built our business model on. Our revenue impact was a more than 40% loss. We were at risk of literally doing the exact same thing that legacy media companies had done to our staff.

One of the issues I have in particular is that the heritage minister at the time was quoted as saying that media companies affected by this block would be made whole. We have not been made whole. In fact, we have had to be agile, to innovate and to find new ways to sustain our business and our model.

One thing I would like everybody here to really focus on is that a lot of digital-first media companies are really agile. They don't have the resources to hire lobbyists to be here in Ottawa to advocate for them like legacy media companies do. When we and this government are approaching tech giants for funds, coming from the legacy sector, I do understand the importance of supporting that. I think there is an ecosystem that can sustain all different facets of media. However, if you're trying to draw money from tech giants and the bulk of that money is going to legacy companies that didn't adapt and build a business model that can be sustained in this current environment, and then you're leaving digital-first companies on the sidelines, that doesn't make sense.

What I've always wanted is for Canada to be a leader in the world, to foster a whole new ecosystem where we can have digital-first companies providing news, entertainment and culture content right to Canadians, right to their fingertips, using the devices they use. Everybody in this room has a cellphone. We found a way to create, in a different medium, the exact same content my peers have

been doing for years and found a way to do it sustainably and profitably, creating a growth industry.

Th legislation put forth and the rules around it have literally harassed and chained us, and it's really disappointing because a lot of digital-first companies are led by people who look like me—people of colour—and women. I can tell you we are one of the larger organizations, but when I talk to my peers, whose companies are a lot smaller, I hear they are at the brink of closing their doors, meaning we are going to be left with an ecosystem of companies that are living only because of government funding.

Before this legislation came into place, we did not accept one dollar from the government. We did not apply for any of that. We were sustainable and profitable.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** We had an audience that was glad we were creating content and doing so in such a way that they could receive it and access it.

One thing we learned during the pandemic, which is why I left legacy media, was that there was a gap between getting information and getting it to Canadians. We found a way to fill that gap, and we wanted to be a model, a successful model. It's so unfortunate that this legislation has led to one of the world's biggest tech giants, where most Canadians literally access entertainment and information.... Now they can't do that. What are they left with?

**The Chair:** Please wrap up, Mr. Gonez.

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** What are they left with? They're left with blogs run by people who do not care, who do not have ethics, who do not have any form of care for how news is presented and who can put anything online.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gonez.

I will now go to the next witness, Monsieur Tousignant, from the Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de Radio-Canada.

You have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Tousignant (President, Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de Radio-Canada (FNCC-CSN)):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for inviting me.

The Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de Radio-Canada, or STTRC, has approximately 3,000 members in Quebec and Moncton. The members we represent work in more than 200 jobs, ranging from administration and the technical sector to production. We are the second-largest communications union in the country. The STTRC belongs to the Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture, or FNCC, one of the nine federations that make up the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, or CSN.

Even though our primary responsibility is to negotiate and uphold employment contracts, the STTRC has always fought for adequate, stable multi-year funding for CBC/Radio-Canada. We support its mission to inform, enlighten and entertain, and we embrace its values.

Beyond their employment relationship, the vast majority of our members share a special bond with the organization. They are committed to ensuring that Canadians have access to accurate verified information, in English, in French and in several first nations and Inuit languages.

The STTRC, in co-operation with the FNCC and CSN, has participated in at least two campaigns in support of the public broadcaster. The most recent was in 2016, with the *Tous amis de Radio-Canada* campaign. It met with tremendous popular success in Quebec and Moncton, with as many as 12,000 people answering the call of organizers and marching in the streets of Montreal. A series of performances were put on throughout the province and in Moncton, demonstrating people's commitment to CBC/Radio-Canada.

The work of CBC/Radio-Canada is vital in the North American landscape. For francophones, who are—and will always be—a minority facing extinction, Radio-Canada is the tool of choice to showcase who they are and how they live. It is thanks mainly to Radio-Canada that francophones right across the country are able to see themselves, hear their voices, tell their stories, debate the issues they care about and nurture their connection to a strong community, fragmented though it may be. For anglophones, CBC is an essential tool to support and promote what it means to be Canadian.

While not alone, CBC/Radio-Canada is a beacon for understanding regional, national and international realities from a Canadian perspective. CBC/Radio-Canada is worth protecting, and the government must ensure its growth and development.

The current media crisis is, at the outset, a financial crisis. CBC/Radio-Canada's business model is helping it to weather some of the storm, but not all.

We are calling for a media summit, which would give the government an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the public broadcaster. It is essential that the government not only ensure CBC/Radio-Canada's independence in producing content, but also provide the public broadcaster with financial support. The two go hand in hand. There is no such thing as a relevant and independent public broadcaster without adequate, stable and consistent funding.

The public broadcaster is not immune to the turmoil in the media sector. CBC/Radio-Canada announced that it was cutting 800 jobs, which will undermine its ability to fulfill its mandate, especially in

francophone communities. In order to bring reliable, verified information to Canadians, the public broadcaster must maintain a network of stations across every province and territory with adequate staffing and resources. Credibility is the CBC/Radio-Canada's trademark, but the flood of fake news weakens and diminishes that credibility.

The work of CBC/Radio-Canada is not something to be measured strictly in financial terms. It is about more than ratings. It is a collective effort to help us know and understand one another better, while helping us better understand the world we live in. It is fundamental to the vitality of our democracy.

The last thing I will say is this: now, more than ever, CBC/Radio-Canada is you and me. It is us.

• (1605)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Monsieur Tousignant.

I'll now go to Unifor.

I understand, Ms. Payne, that you are speaking for the group. You have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Lana Payne (National President, Unifor):** Thank you.

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. It really is a pleasure to join all of you today. I would like to thank my fellow witnesses for their excellent opening remarks.

Our union represents more than 10,000 media workers across the country in broadcast television, radio, newspapers, digital news and film production. I can tell you that they are dedicated and passionate about their work, and they are tough and principled. They care about the important role they play in our democracy in telling stories, in holding the powerful to account and in making sure that we as Canadians have the information we need every day to make the decisions we have to make in our lives. They understand their responsibility.

Our members face a number of very tough realities at the moment. You've heard it here. It's a media sector in crisis, with widespread job loss, the destruction of local news in so many places across Canada, harassment and violence on the job and a concerted effort by some in the political class to erode trust in journalism itself. The sector's integrity is called into question, as they are accused of all kinds of things, including the latest, which is being a tax-funded mouthpiece for the PMO.

I'd like to provide some context on the state of local news in Canada at the moment. In just the last 14 months, the media sector has undergone a brutal list of cuts and closures: Postmedia cut 11% of its editorial staff; BCE cut 1,300 jobs and closed radio stations last year; Nordstar Capital eliminated two-thirds of Metroland's workforce, converting more than 70 weekly papers to digital only; Corus/Global, just this month, cut more jobs; and BCE just last week announced the layoff of 4,800 employees in both telco and media, including 800 Unifor members. On the media side, the cuts included all but one noon-hour newscast in Toronto and weekend newscasts in most major markets across the country, as if the news stops on Friday at 5 p.m.

BCE also killed *W5*, the longest-running investigative news program in Canada. Apparently, we are told, it will be replaced with reruns of the American comedy *The Big Bang Theory*.

I don't have time to list all the cuts, because we'd be here all week. It's almost impossible to measure the impact that this is having on local communities, where so-called news deserts are leaving Canadians, especially those living in small towns and rural areas, without access to meaningful, relevant local news.

Canadian telecommunications and media companies have a responsibility that is bigger than to shareholders. They have a responsibility to Canadians, to Canada and to journalism. Fact-based journalism matters, and the truth, as you've heard, has never been more important. Fake news has infested the fabric of our society, sowing distrust in the media, in government and in institutions. In the middle of that chaos, we need the media to tell our stories, to uncover truth and to hold the powerful to account.

We understand that no single piece of legislation, fund or subsidy will be enough to solve this crisis, but there are things we can do. We can renew and expand the local journalism initiative, a program that supports the creation of original civic journalism in under-represented communities across Canada. It's slated to expire in April. There's also the Canadian journalism labour tax credit, which was recently extended and expanded in the fall economic statement, an important move that Unifor called for and supported. Governments, both federal and provincial, can earmark bigger portions of their advertising budgets for local news: local TV, radio and newspapers, and, as you've just heard, Canadian digital media.

Now I'll say a few words on the other crisis: increased harassment and violence. Employers, workers and their unions, including Unifor, journalism schools, governments—

• (1610)

**The Chair:** You have nine seconds. Can you wrap up? You can expand later.

**Ms. Lana Payne:** —and even members of the public all have a role to play, as do political leaders.

In closing, I stress that the layoffs, downsizing and closures that I've highlighted today cannot continue if we actually want to have local news in this country. Also, journalists deserve to work harassment-free, no matter where that work is—online, a protest in downtown Ottawa or even in the foyer of the House of Commons.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. You can expand on some of that when we get into the question-and-answer section.

We'll now go to the question-and-answer section. It begins with a first round of questions from all the parties here. It's a six-minute round. I want to stress that the six minutes include questions and answers, so please be as terse as you can in your answers—maybe not terse, but as short as you can in your answers. I don't want you being terse.

We'll begin with the Conservatives and Rachael Thomas.

Mrs. Thomas, you have six minutes, please.

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

My question is for Mr. Gonez.

Mr. Gonez, you started out serving in legacy media. You then left and started something on your own. It's been very successful. You're digitally-based. I believe you've hired 10 employees, if I read that correctly. Obviously diversity is something very important to you. Clearly you have an audience, so you've gained the trust of the Canadian public—kudos to you.

Your company seems to be going in the opposite direction of the legacy media. This government made the determination to go ahead with Bill C-18 even though it knew that the bill, supposedly for the benefit of legacy media, was to the detriment of digital media providers like you.

You just made a statement that, because of the legislation, Bill C-18, your revenue has gone down by 40%. That's a pretty big cut. Obviously what that represents is not just a financial cut to your company. It also means that Canadians aren't able to access the news they want to access, which is, of course, to their detriment.

My question for you is this. Clearly Bill C-18 didn't work and isn't working, so what is the answer to make sure that Canadians have access to quality news and independent journalism in a sustained fashion going forward?

• (1615)

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** I understand the intent of Bill C-18. We're all hearing, obviously, about the crisis that's unfolding, and of course, we don't want to lose any more journalism in this country. Any way to sustain that is a good thing. I always believe that an expanded industry is a better industry because the more stories that are being told, the better for all of us.

It's unfortunate, though, that with the implementation of this bill, one of the largest tech giants, which owns two of the biggest social platforms that each and every one of us in this room uses.... We are no longer on those platforms, so what is on those platforms? If the mission was to stop or try to slow down the amount of disinformation out there, it's only gotten worse because trustworthy folks are no longer on there.

When I look at this, I say thank goodness Google didn't walk away from the table, or else all of us would have been effed. I don't mean to use that lightly, but it is the truth. Thank goodness Google did stay at the table, and I truly hope that Meta comes to its senses and comes back to the table.

If there are new funds coming into the ecosystem, I truly hope that everybody in this room will advocate for the people who took a risk to create innovation in this country so they will have a specific stream allotted to them where they can access some of those funds to continue to do the amazing work they're doing. I also hope that everybody in this room will advocate for racialized owners of media in this country so they also have access to a specific stream to continue to do the fine work and the hard work they're doing to tell the stories that they've been left out of.

I want everybody to understand that even before this crisis was unfolding, we had problems in the legacy sector. We had problems with diversity. We had problems with the diversity of storytelling. That's not to diminish the hard work of everyday journalists across this country, but we have to acknowledge the gaps that need to be filled. People like me took a risk and said that we were going to leave this legacy sector and try to fill those gaps, and we were doing a darned good job. It really is unfortunate, because I believe that if this block didn't happen, we probably would be about 50% bigger than we were before it happened.

We can't go back in time. The bill is here and I'm a realist. However, what we can do is try to, again, make people who have been affected whole. We can also try to foster an ecosystem where we can see other players, like GMI, emerge across this country in places like B.C. and Saskatchewan, in provinces that suffer from news deserts. Also, hopefully, we can have less impact...to what's happening in the legacy sector. I just don't want digital-first voices to be left out of the conversation, because we have been the most severely impacted by all of what's been transpiring.

**The Chair:** You have a minute and 27 seconds left, Mrs. Thomas.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** I'll take that time.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Shields.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Thank you.

We've heard a lot about trust. I'm sensing from what you're saying that you had trust in what you were building. Legacy media has lost trust.

We heard that only 13% of Canadians trust legacy media. What did you do differently to build that trust?

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** The loss of trust in legacy media is very complex and layered. There have, of course, been political attacks against the media industry; this is not fair and should never have

happened. There's also an onus on legacy media to fill the gaps that I identified, with storytelling and making sure that we're reflective of the populace across this country.

We've tried to be a voice for people and to deliver information the way people speak on the streets. Not everybody speaks in the uniform way you see on CTV National News. Some people have an accent in this country and it's okay if they hear content with an accent. The mayor of Toronto has an accent, so why can't the news presenter who's delivering information also have an accent?

There were issues at play, and I think a lot of Canadians across this country never felt represented or reflected. What my company and the journalists—

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Please wrap up.

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** —I've hired under me have done—we have about 10 journalists, but we have about 10 other people who are not journalists who sustain the company—is tried to be a proper reflection of the people we serve.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gonez. I admire your passion. You can expand later, on another question for you.

Now we'll go to the Liberals for six minutes with Mr. Coteau.

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

Mr. Gonez, I remember when you were on TV and the work you did. You were an outlier, a young Black man holding the microphone, an anchor talking about the issues on the street, talking to people. It was very impressive; it was different and refreshing.

I remember when you left to start your own company, because there was a bit of buzz around that. I asked myself, "How could a guy on top of his field leave and go into the wilderness?"

I just want to say that I appreciate—

**The Chair:** Please be careful, Mr. Coteau. He went to B.C.; we're not the wilderness.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I'm talking about going into digital and starting brand new, Chair. Leaving an established media company and starting a new company is a big risk.

I noticed what you and a lot of people did, and I just want to say thank you for your work and for your advocacy here today. Many people are obviously paying attention to the work you're doing. You're rewriting the entire business, so thank you for being here today.

I want to turn my attention to Ms. Paradkar.

I found your opening very intriguing because you talked a lot about trust. MP Shields talked about trust as well.

I think you brought up some statistics on politicians and reporters, so I started to think about politicians. There's been a massive movement to subsidize politics over the last couple of decades. If a person makes a political donation in this country, that person gets a subsidy. If they donate \$400 federally, I think they get 75% back. Then I believe there's a movement in many different places... In Toronto, for example, there's an allocation from city coffers back as a direct rebate to the donor. Even political parties get federal subsidies.

They did this because back in the old days, really rich people controlled politics. When you were talking, I started to think about the fact that in media there are big interests involved. We've gone from back in the old days when the news barons had control, to these super-companies—Apple is three times the size of the Canadian GDP—that control narrative. They have a lot of influence.

I think we need to revisit the entire way we do things.

You talked about looking at the not-for-profit model and you brought up AI. Not only are these companies using AI to create content based on old content and sources that reporters like some in the room have written before, but they can take the content and put it on different platforms and profit off it as well.

Do you have any other models you can share with us? I'm assuming if there was a forum on media, this would be a place where new models of doing business would come forward. Beside the not-for-profit sector, have you heard of any other models that have come forward to revisit the way we do news in this country?

• (1625)

**Ms. Shree Paradkar:** Thank you for that.

The only other model I know of is the donations model that The Guardian has. I believe those donations are also publicly subsidized by governments. If there is separate funding or tie-ups, as I mentioned, with AI companies, then that's a viable option.

People don't value what comes for free, but they will value and take in something they pay for. Unfortunately, we are in an ecosystem where information is free, but information is often conflated with news, which it is not. The newsgathering process, which is amplified, distorted, shorn of context and then distributed for free, is often itself an expensive process, as Brandon Gonez has just testified to as well.

Donations from individuals, donations from local companies to maybe fund local investigations, and donations from big companies could come with the idea or absolute condition that they have no editorial say, because it can get dicey when you have big companies

coming in. There is a way to do it with people having no say in the independence.

Those are some of my suggestions.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** If this forum was to come forward with different types of models.... There are tax incentives and things like this that could obviously play a role in putting in incentives.

I want to speak to Ms. Payne.

How much time do I have left, Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 14 seconds, Mr. Coteau.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Well, maybe I'll take this opportunity to say thank you to all of our guests here today.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Michael.

I'll go to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all of our witnesses today. These meetings and discussions are very important to me and to all the committee members, not to mention to the people who work in media, especially news. It is very tempting to bring up a slew of issues that we really want to discuss, given the seriousness and scale of the crisis. It has been impacting everyone in the news sector in Quebec and Canada for years. My sense is that we are turning our attention to the situation 10 years too late.

Mr. Gonez, I want to start by telling you how much I appreciated your opening remarks. Your comments were sensible and reasonable, and you bring a healthy perspective to the discussion. I want to give you a bit of reassurance: I think your company and those like yours are an essential part of the discussion around the future of the media. That discussion cannot happen without the involvement of pioneers in the digital media space. I want you to know that.

Now I'm going to turn to you, Mr. Chamberland. We worked for the same company in the 1990s. You were at Radiomédia and I was at Astral Media. We never crossed paths, but your reporters did the news segments for my radio shows, so we do have that connection.

All that to say that we have a few decades of experience under our belts. We've seen the landscape change. You opted to focus on local radio with Arsenal Media. To some business people, that may sound like a crazy gamble, the state of radio being what it is. You, however, decided to put your faith in local radio and its future as a viable sector.

You recently purchased seven of Bell Media's stations. The committee will actually be meeting with Bell Media representatives in the coming weeks. We probably won't show them quite as much appreciation as we are inclined to show you, given that you just saved a number of local stations. I gather that the news was also reassuring for the people who work at those seven stations.

Would you say the stations are in good shape? Do you plan to grow them locally? What does the future of those newly purchased stations look like?

• (1630)

**Mr. Sylvain Chamberland:** Thank you for your question, Mr. Champoux.

Obviously, we bought the stations to grow them, not to keep them as they are.

That said, the stations are in good shape. We've bought stations that were in worse shape. Initially, we bought a lot of stations that were on the verge of going bankrupt or technically bankrupt, and we were able to turn them around. In this case, though, the stations are in good shape.

I want to echo something Mr. Gonez said, which I found interesting. Obviously, we are humble and take great pride in our stations, but I do want to make two or three other points.

It's true that radio is boring. It's a bit square. For me, though, radio is still the literal lifeblood of news and information in Canada. That's the first point.

Second, I was careful to point out that we have digital platforms in each of our regions, and that is fundamental. Generally speaking, they replaced the local paper. Our platforms get a good bit of traffic. We have more than 100,000 subscribers, and \$60 million to \$70 million views each year.

I want to add something important. Meta has been talked about a lot, and I'm not trying to say that I am for or against the bill. I do want to say, though, that Meta has no effect on us. Why? Because, for the past 10 years, we've been focused on building a relationship with our listeners and readers. We boldly took the initiative of going after them one by one.

When I see everyone panicking all of a sudden, I think to myself that they should have known. This isn't the first time Facebook or another platform has changed its algorithm. BuzzFeed disappeared overnight, as did media company Dibly in Canada. Every media company has to own up to its responsibility. I somewhat agree with Mr. Gonez on that. Media companies need to take responsibility and work to build their relationship with their audience. I watched the absolute shock of most traditional media companies, as they came to the sudden realization that they had to go to the source. Of course they have to go to the source, but that's always been the case. That is the responsibility of media companies.

If they send a listener, viewer or reader to a competing platform, it's natural that they would lose that person to the other platform permanently. That is media and business 101. I do think that, overall, the players were incompetent and failed to grasp that basic concept. What happened? They sold their souls to the devil and sent people to competing platforms, rather than betting on themselves and focusing on their own platforms.

At Arsenal Media, our ecosystem is in good shape. Yes, we are going to save jobs. Yes, we are going to grow our stations. We've built an ecosystem that has not just digital news platforms, but also online stores.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chamberland:** Our structure ensures extremely robust media.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** The industry, or whoever holds the national forum that we want to organize on the basis of this study, would say that traditional media have a future in an ecosystem that will probably need to shift to the digital world in the short term.

**Mr. Sylvain Chamberland:** Undoubtedly. The shift to a digital platform should have already taken place. *La Presse* took the plunge a long time ago. That newspaper has been on a digital platform for 20 years. That said, in addition to the digital platform—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Chamberland....

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chamberland:** It's over, isn't it?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You can expand in the next question. Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sylvain Chamberland:** Oh, okay.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I saw that but didn't say anything.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Nice try, Mr. Champoux.

For the New Democrats, we have Niki Ashton.

Niki, you have up to six minutes.

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

My first question is directed to Ms. Paradkar.

We've heard a lot from the right about how journalists are unwilling to criticize the government. I believe they're wrong. If we want to look at the hesitancy to be critical of power, we need to be looking at corporate consolidation, the oligopolies that exist within the media landscape in our country and the shrinking of the number of voices that are willing to be critical of power.

You've spoken out against Israel's brutal bombing of Gaza. You faced an organized campaign of harassment that has impacted your work. If we're going to talk about journalism being under attack in the country and how we can support good, accurate journalism, we cannot ignore this reality.

We need journalists who are going to speak up about what is happening in Palestine and Canada's role there. We're talking about an intense bombing campaign that has left roughly 30,000 Palestinians dead, mostly women and children. We also know that, on average, five journalists or media workers are killed a week, the highest rate of journalist deaths since the Committee to Protect Journalists began recording this over 30 years ago.

What can we do to create a climate where these voices are heard, where journalists don't rely on the passive voice to describe the death of Palestinians, where journalists don't have to fear losing their job for accurately reporting the horrors of war and genocide?

• (1635)

**Ms. Shree Paradkar:** It's a very sober time for a lot of people who have histories of trauma, and it is a complex subject that I recognize has caused a lot of pain for multiple communities in Canada and around the world.

In terms of being able to criticize any side or speaking up for Palestinian rights in the face of what the ICJ has called a plausible genocide, if I had solutions for how to make that happen, I think it has to come from a full societal push towards justice, which involves not just media companies but also politicians and unions. It's about keeping an eye on what justice is and how to separate pressure groups from media, not allowing any interference in the process of gathering information fairly and accurately on any side of any conflict. That has become a challenge.

Right now on this particular issue, there is often a Palestinian exception to many free news gathering practices, and I have been stunned by the silence in my industry. I have been stunned by the silence in the medical industry, among academics. I don't have the answers to why that is so. It is a much more complicated response than I think I can give you here, but it is very concerning.

One of the pleas I make is for Canada to invest in a free press. That is the only way forward. Canada has the potential to be a world leader in being completely free, pluralistic and independent in its press. We have the potential. I think it's going to require a lot of introspection at individual and collective levels for us to make it happen.

I'm sorry I don't have any specifics to give you here, because it's too complex to condense.

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

In the time I have left, I want to direct my other question to Ms. Payne from Unifor.

Unifor represents 12,600 media workers across the country, and we know that thousands of the workers you face are facing immense difficulty right now. We in the NDP stand with them.

You spoke of Bell Media's latest devastating announcement. Meanwhile, Bell's CEO made \$13.59 million in total compensation in 2022. For the CEO of Rogers, it was \$31.52 million.

At what point is corporate greed costing thousands of Canadians their jobs and millions of Canadians access to good-quality journalism?

**Ms. Lana Payne:** Thank you, Niki. That's a great question.

We have a huge problem here. These companies have special privileges in our country. They are awarded special privileges. They get access to broadcast and have almost a monopoly in some areas, as in the telecommunications sector.

At the same time, I would say that this is a social contract that they should be feeling right now. Part of that means we don't go through this; we don't have thousands and thousands of Canadian workers being laid off and a media landscape in wreckage. They have a responsibility to expand that and connect Canadians through these services.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds, Ms. Payne.

**Ms. Lana Payne:** It is really important to consider that, outside of what they're paying their CEOs, they are sending millions and millions of dollars a year in increased dividends to shareholders—all of this money. These are choices these corporations are making. There could be different choices, choices to employ Canadians in good jobs and deliver excellent journalism. It's up to all of us, including government, to make sure those companies live up to these responsibilities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Payne.

I'll now go to our second round of questions. It's a five-minute round.

For the Conservatives, we'll start with Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for coming.

Like all Canadians, I'm concerned about the future of all our media. However, I find it inspiring to hear from people such as Mr. Gonez, who chose to launch his start-up, which has now become a company. Mr. Chamberland's account also gives me a glimmer of hope. Business models are being redefined.

Let's start with you, Mr. Chamberland. You didn't have a chance to finish what you were saying earlier. It really interested me. There was a possible solution involving a business model that seems promising for the future. It would help maintain and perhaps even reinstate journalism jobs.

I'll let you continue.

**Mr. Sylvain Chamberland:** Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

I have two points to make.

First, we have the ecosystem itself. I think that things will become harder and harder for non-diverse media companies. However, I think that things will be easier for media that have a range of properties and capabilities. I think that Mr. Pattison showed this a long time ago in western Canada, for example. The Newcap era in the east also comes to mind. These media owners were part of a conglomerate that supported development. It isn't necessary to be part of a conglomerate, but I think that things will be harder for non-diverse companies.

I have more things to add. We're getting a bit lost here, so I'll focus on news and support for this area.

I keep saying that the news in the regions doesn't receive the necessary support. The regions have far fewer media outlets and far more media deserts. One thing to really consider is that the major urban centres receive far too much funding. When the government acts as a client, for example for advertising purposes, it always invests far too much money in the major regions, at the expense of the outer regions.

Money should be shifted, on a per capita basis, to the various regions across the country. It wouldn't cost anything. However, this isn't happening. Right now, there's too much investment in the big cities only. I have nothing against big cities. That said, they can't receive 95% of the budget.

I'll give you a concrete example. Last year, we received \$16,000 in advertising from the federal government for all 18 of our radio stations. What's \$16,000, you might ask? It's better to have it than to owe it, I agree. However, \$16,000 for 18 stations isn't much, given that the budget was probably somewhere between \$130 million and \$170 million.

The government's lifestyle advertising should be aimed at all Canadians, not just a specific segment of the population. However, reaching all Canadians means venturing into the more remote regions. The web isn't the only way to do so. In some regions, people don't even have Internet access. They have only radio access. The radio signal can be picked up anywhere.

All Canadians must be included. That's the most important thing. Everyone talks about fairness, representativeness and so on. If you want to be fair and representative, you must speak to all Canadians, everywhere, on an equal basis.

• (1645)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Mr. Chamberland.

I still have a little time left.

Mr. Gonez, we heard that you needed journalists. What qualities should journalists bring to your type of company in the future?

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC)):** You have 35 seconds.

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** The quality of journalism is in the understanding that trained journalists are going to be good journalists. How journalists progress in their careers is based on the quality of leadership they have and whether they have good leadership and good news producers who are constantly pushing them to check their blind spots and constantly pushing them to make sure they are incorporating voices that are left out of the conversation. Whether you agree with the voices or not, they're still part of the conversation and represent part of the population. That is still important.

Some people might look at me and say they don't want to hear from a certain type of person based on how they look. No. I want to hear what you have to say, but you better respect what I have to say too. That's how media should be. We have to properly and accurately reflect as many voices as possible. At the end of the day, you're never going to get everybody's voice at the table. Nothing is perfect in this world, but you have to try, and you have to keep trying.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh):** Thank you, Mr. Gonez.

We're moving on now to the Liberals for five minutes with Mr. Noormohamed.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here. I know there are a lot of you here and there's a lot of ground to cover.

One of the things I've been reflecting on is the report that was written by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, by Peter Menzies and Konrad von Finckenstein, who provided a series of recommendations in respect of how we can think about reframing the media climate in this country and how we can think about supporting journalism. One of the recommendations they made—and I would love your thoughts on this—was to allow “[a]ll expenditures by Eligible News Businesses that involve investment in digital transformation” to be claimed as a capital cost. That's a very specific recommendation, but I think of the context of the transformation of media, the context of how we enable the media to survive and thrive in an entirely new era, when we have seen print publications and others not able to make the jump into digital in a meaningful and thoughtful way.

I'm happy for anyone to jump in on this. What are your thoughts on that? What challenges do you see in making sure the quality of the work produced is able to be maintained in a context where you are enabling an entire move to digital and you're doing it in a way that allows a writeoff of capital costs quickly? Do you think there are risks to that?

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** I just want to make sure...because I'm hearing a bit of a theme here that if you're doing digital, quality might suffer. That's not the case. You have to go through the same ethics and the same steps to produce a proper report, whether it's on TV, on radio, in the paper—in anything. I just want to make sure that's what's being—

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Just to be clear, that's not what I'm saying. The question is more like this: How do you ensure that what is news is actually news? It's in that context. We have quality journalism. We have people who are doing their best, and then we have folks who go out into the field and decide that they're journalists. How do you draw that distinction in a way that allows for credible news to continue to make its way to the fore without being subsumed by stuff that might not necessarily be credible and that might be considered veritable misinformation?

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** That's based on the outlet making sure that it's presenting the right information. It doesn't matter which medium you're on. You're going to have talking heads and you're going to have reporters. You're going to have opinion pieces and op-eds, and you're going to have factual reports. That's always going to be the case.

I want to address one thing really quickly. When we are talking about placing funds for digital transformation, newspapers, for a long time, had to decide whether to go digital, and a lot of companies decided to maintain what they were doing. That was their choice. What it did allow, though, was room for opportunity for new innovators to come in, for entrepreneurs to step into that field and fill those gaps. I think that's amazing.

In terms of any funds that are being discussed and explored, if there is going to be a portion that goes to digital transformation, I want to see newspapers sustained and I want to see legacy outlets that have been here for 40, 50 or 60 years remain today because there is trusted value in them. However, we should also make sure there's room and there's money attached for people who took a risk so they can continue to grow, because people who take a risk shouldn't be hindered.

• (1650)

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I want to come back to that very point.

I know Mr. Champagne wants to jump in, and I think Mr. Tousignant wants to jump in, but I want to come back to the second point, Mr. Gonez, after they've had a chance to respond.

[Translation]

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** I'll temporarily stop speaking to you as president of the FPJQ and start speaking as a journalist who has been working at *La Presse* for 22 years. I think that most people here don't read French, so they don't know the situation at *La Presse*. For a number of years now, *La Presse* hasn't published a paper edition. We're entirely digital. The company that I work for posted \$13 million in profits last year. *La Presse* is now a not-for-profit organization. It doesn't belong to a private owner, a consortium or anyone else.

I applaud the enthusiasm of my colleague here. However, it isn't true that traditional media are failing to embrace change and make

an effort. I'm a living example. We just hired new journalists, and we were recently told that 10 new journalists would be hired in the coming year.

It's possible, even for traditional media, to make this shift and to continue providing information to the public. We're the most widely read French-language daily in North America.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** In my opinion, it's...

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Noormohamed, you have two seconds left.

[Translation]

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I wanted to give Mr. Tousignant a chance to speak about this issue, but maybe he can do so later.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. Champoux for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll keep this short because two and a half minutes go by quickly.

Mr. Champagne, I'll ask you three questions about the national forum that the current study aims to organize.

First, which news media groups or sectors would have the necessary credibility, from the perspective of all the industry stakeholders, to organize this national forum? The discussion will involve everyone, and will probably cover topics that are difficult for some industry stakeholders to address. Who could organize this event?

Second, what key topics should be discussed? Obviously, government funding could be on the agenda. However, I think that the greater focus will be on the news media's business model. What topics should be prioritized?

Third, if you have the time, can you tell me what role the governments should play in this study? In your opinion, what role should both the provincial and federal governments play in this discussion?

I'll let you respond.

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** You're talking about a Canada-wide national forum, right?

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** It may be a bit hard for me to answer this question, since it concerns the whole country.

Many stakeholders are involved in this issue. We saw this at Tuesday's meeting. Most of the participants were professors, so people who take an interest in journalists and who teach and conduct research.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** The academic sector would have the necessary credibility and respect.

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** I'm thinking of the academic sector, for example. Obviously, there can't be any national forum without journalists. This means journalists such as my colleague here and me, along with journalists from other places. We also need to hear from media bosses and people in various social groups.

I've been hearing all sorts of comments, especially about public trust in the media. We need to take note of these comments, but also put things in context. A Statistics Canada study released this week shows a strong correlation between public trust in the media and public trust in institutions. I don't think that we talk about this enough. It's one thing that must be addressed.

Another issue is revenue. We need to talk about that too, of course. Earlier, I wanted to show how much it costs to produce news. Quality news is even more expensive to produce. It takes more time and requires checks to make sure that the work is done properly.

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

[Translation]

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** This issue must be addressed.

What do we need? The voices of different communities must be heard. Traditional media have sometimes failed in their duty to better represent certain new voices, both in Quebec and in Canada. We need to look at all these issues from a broader perspective, and not from a strictly political perspective. In reality, this crisis affects society as a whole.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** In other words, we politicians should get out of the way and turn this over to you.

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** I'm not telling you to get out of the way.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** No, I'm just joking.

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** However, I don't want this issue used for political purposes. It's a societal crisis.

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I completely agree with you.

Thank you, Mr. Champagne.

I believe that my time's up.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Martin.

I'll go to Niki Ashton for two and a half minutes.

• (1655)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

I'd like to ask my question of Ms. Paradkar.

In your presentation, you talked about the loss of critical voices in the media and about the harassment received by journalists who ask tough questions and seek to hold power to account, journalists like you.

We referenced in the previous question the attacks on journalists who have been willing to speak about what is happening in Gaza and Palestine at this time. Do you think journalists are less willing

to talk about important issues that exist, whether they be Palestine or others, because they think harassment and potential job loss simply aren't worth it?

**Ms. Shree Paradkar:** I'm going to base my answer not so much on my own experience, because I'm not a young journalist and a lot of the criticisms I get just bounce off me. They don't bother me too much, but I must tell you that every time I go to a journalism school to lecture students, the first question I'm asked is about abuse and repercussions.

I'm asked how I face them. I believe that's not only for journalists, but also for women politicians and doctors. It's disproportionately women and women of colour who face this if they are people with strong opinions, and it's across the political spectrum. This is something young people are watching very carefully. They are very concerned about this, because they come with a high sense of justice versus injustice and want to speak, but then are feeling already that they might be silenced and are trying to figure out how to deal with that silence. That has led to what a UNESCO report called the "chilling".

It's important to understand that abuse, harassment and threats are not only in the form of bad language that comes your way and not only in the form of criticisms—even racist, gendered or misogynistic criticisms. They're also in the form of the dog-piling that happens when other journalists or professionals dog-whistle to their followers to attack you. The criticism itself could appear to be fair or even reasonable, and then what ensues is the dog-piling of attacks of their followers. That is also seen by UNESCO as a form of abuse.

These are all—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Paradkar. We'll come back to that later on in another round.

I'll now go to Kevin Waugh.

Kevin, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Gonez, you started out here today by saying that you had massive losses because of Bill C-18 being passed. Not one member of the government has talked about this here today. You lost because of Bill C-18.

Can you comment on what you lost with Bill C-18's passing last June as far as money goes, as far as staff goes and as far as the vision for your company goes?

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** Yes. Leading up to before August, we were hiring a journalist every single month. That's how fast we were growing. Look at one of our pages. Just on Instagram alone, the average number of Canadians we were reaching every 30 days was 35 million.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** What? It was 35 million? That's the population of this country.

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** Yes.

One thing we found that was so fascinating about the digital landscape was that we didn't look at what we were doing as a Canadian thing. We thought that with our stories, we connected with support globally. I thought that was really fascinating.

What we have in this country is such a unique situation. You can have somebody who looks like me and whose parents were immigrants...and now I've been able to start something super successful and to start to hire people who didn't have a safe place in some of these other newsrooms across the country.

I also understand a hundred per cent of the intent behind Bill C-18. I know what crisis has taken place. As I said, I've worked in the second-smallest market in this country: Smithers, a town of 5,000. I've also worked in the largest city, and I know what's happening. There is a deep need for a strong public broadcaster and for sustaining a diverse range of media voices, but it shouldn't come as a hindrance to people who took a risk in this country to create a new ecosystem, to create new opportunities and to give voices to people who were left out of the conversation.

That was always my fear about Bill C-18, potentially. How it was executed wasn't the right way. The intent, yes, I understand, but how it was executed severely affected people who were creating a whole new format that potentially could have been replicated across the world.

• (1700)

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** The problem with Bill C-18 is that legacy media has the say. They want to shut you down. They want to shut down new digital platforms. They want all the money, and when Bill C-18 happened, you were affected. You didn't say much, but all the legacy.... The Toronto Star had a side deal with Google prior to Bill C-18. Now they're maybe not going to get as much money as they had hoped, because with Google, \$100 million.... Maybe it's \$75 million.

There still could be side deals, but I think for people in this country, trust has been the issue. They're looking for news outside the legacy media. You've proven it. You were in legacy and you went from Smithers to the biggest market. You took the gamble. There are others in this country taking the gamble like you did and who I believe are being held back.

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** It is unfortunate.

As I said, I believe a healthy media ecosystem is an ecosystem that has all different players—strong and healthy players that can sustain themselves. I believe that one hundred per cent. I do not believe it should come at the hindrance of people who took a risk to create a whole new ecosystem that is thriving.

For any money coming that has been committed, I believe there should be a dedicated stream for people and businesses that are created under the premise of living on the tech giants' platforms. We went there first and we created something sustainable, so there should be a stream dedicated to us. I'm not saying all the money should come to us—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Why not? That's the new future.

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** I'm not greedy. Maybe if more people who are leading the companies had the same mindset, we wouldn't be where we are today, but—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Let me ask you this, because I only have a few seconds. Is the government intervention right now holding you back?

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** It has had an impact.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** How much of an impact?

**Mr. Brandon Gonez:** It has had an impact. I'm hoping that as things are fleshed out, we can be made whole, as the minister at the time said.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gonez, and thank you, Kevin.

I'm going to Ms. Lattanzio.

By the way, welcome to the committee, Ms. Lattanzio. You're now a permanent member of our committee.

You have five minutes.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm glad to be among my colleagues. It's a very interesting study.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank the witnesses for delivering their speeches today.

My questions will be for Mr. Tousignant and Mr. Champagne.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tousignant, some members of Parliament from other political parties want to cut funding to Canadian news organizations such as CBC/Radio-Canada. In your opinion and experience, how would this type of measure affect the Canadian news industry?

**Mr. Pierre Tousignant:** First, Radio-Canada gradually turned into a broadcaster. Corporate choices were made at the expense of in-house production to support the development of a television industry in the country. As a result, Radio-Canada's entertainment industry, known as variety shows, is mainly produced by the private sector.

With regard to the main impact of reduced funding for the Société Radio-Canada, I must first point out that the CBC and Radio-Canada are closely connected. Your committee has heard testimony on this topic. I won't defend the positions of Radio-Canada management. Ms. Tait and her colleagues are quite capable of doing so, and better than I could.

That said, there are four unions at Radio-Canada. I'm in regular contact with my colleagues in the other unions. We try to work across unions, because we have issues in common.

The Société Radio-Canada is a package. Its mission is different from the missions of private companies. It isn't just a matter of funding. CBC/Radio-Canada is a societal project that transcends ratings and accounting data.

Changing the funding for Radio-Canada is a matter for public debate. This debate doesn't belong to the unions or Radio-Canada management. The funding for Radio-Canada belongs to the public and to you, the elected officials. The corporation belongs to all Canadians. It must be seen in this perspective, as a tool for bringing people together from one end of the country to the other. This includes francophones, anglophones and first nations people. The project must be defended and protected. However, this shouldn't be done at the expense of other current models, which have different missions and challenges. CBC/Radio-Canada is a project and must be treated as such.

• (1705)

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Indeed. It's a societal project.

In your opinion, how does Radio-Canada contribute to regional reporting?

What would be the biggest impact on listeners and viewers if Radio-Canada were to disappear?

**Mr. Pierre Tousignant:** If you talk to any francophone association in New Brunswick or western Canada, they'll say that cutting funding to Radio-Canada would jeopardize the survival of francophone communities both inside and outside Quebec. Of course, there are other media outlets in the country, as demonstrated by today's presentations. However, Radio-Canada is probably the main outlet where Canada's francophones tell their stories, talk to each other, hear from each other, debate and showcase Canada's francophone culture on radio, screen and digital platforms.

As we see it, the reduction or elimination of Radio-Canada's funding in this environment could lead to the disappearance of French-speaking communities, or at the very least, could adversely affect these communities.

Conversely, the same applies to the CBC in Quebec. As has been pointed out, private English-language media are less active outside the major centres. CBC is still active in Sherbrooke, Quebec City and Montreal. It's probably the main English-language media outlet covering Quebec as a whole. The CBC is also important to Quebec's English-speaking community.

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds.

[Translation]

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Thank you, Mr. Tousignant.

Mr. Champagne, I'll turn to you. If we run out of time, you can respond in writing.

In your opinion, what is the impact of the announced changes to the Canadian journalism labour tax credit? How will they affect the news industry, both at the regional and local levels?

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** I believe that the time is up.

[English]

**The Chair:** I don't think we have time for an oral answer. I think you'll have to send that in writing, please, Monsieur Tousignant. If you can send it in writing to the committee, we will share your answer. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** That question, Madam Chair, if you'll allow me, was addressed to Monsieur Champagne.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Champagne, can we have that in writing, please?

**Mr. Éric-Pierre Champagne:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to come—

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** I'm sorry, but according to the schedule we have, we're going until 5:15 before we head into committee business.

**The Chair:** We have votes as well, so we'll have to cut everything we do short by about five minutes. Not everyone's going to get a piece of the action in a third round, Mrs. Thomas, so I've decided to end it here.

I thank the witnesses for coming and for all the valid and vital information you gave us.

I'm going to suspend so we can get into business. Thank you.

• (1705)

(Pause)

• (1710)

**The Chair:** I have an indication that some members would like us to go in camera for the business meeting. It's going to take us about five to 10 minutes to do that, so we'd better get on with this, because we're going to have bells soon.

Yes, Mrs. Thomas.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Thank you.

I wish to move a motion. We are in committee business, so I'll go ahead and do that.

**The Chair:** What I am trying to do is get back into committee business.

Mr. Champoux indicated he wants to say something.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Madam Chair, Ms. Thomas has the floor right now. I think that she wanted to move a motion.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

Go ahead, Rachael.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Thank you, Chair.

I—

**The Chair:** We are still in public. Do you all know that?

**An hon. member:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay, that's good. It's just so you know.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** I believe that's regular practice.

Thank you very much. I appreciate getting the floor.

I wish to move a motion, I don't think it will take too long. I have a second motion after this, which I think will be quick too. Hopefully I'll have the consent of the committee for this one first.

I move:

Given that:

A rise in antisemitism and antisemitic violence at Canadian university and post-secondary campuses is being witnessed and documented across the country;

Six Canadian universities are currently subject to class-action lawsuits alleging “decades-long documented history of antisemitic rhetoric at multiple Canadian universities”; and

The 2024 AGPI Universities Antisemitism Report Card highlights the “serious problems our universities have with antisemitism, anti-Zionism and anti-Jewish hate”;

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee:

Immediately undertake a comprehensive study, of no less than 10 hours, and invite Presidents of Canadian Universities to discuss what actions they are taking to counter this escalation of antisemitism and antisemitic violence on their campuses, and report its findings to the House.

Madam Chair, this is the motion I'm moving today. I brought copies of it should you wish for me to distribute them to the committee.

**The Chair:** That's great. I was going to ask if we could distribute them.

Are they in English and French?

• (1715)

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Yes, I have copies of the motion in both French and English.

**The Chair:** Thanks. Then let's pass them around.

While waiting for them to be passed around, I want to give you a piece of information that I think I need your response to. We heard back from Bell. They responded to the invitation for February 29.

They said the CEO is not available during that week and offered instead to appear on either March 19 or 21.

I'll need the committee to tell me how you want to go with that. I'd like to get your feedback while we're waiting for the distribution of the motion.

Is it okay for them to come on March 19?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** There's no objection, so I'll inform the clerk to go ahead and tell them they can come on March 19.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I believe they're in front of the CRTC right now. That may be one of the reasons, but yes, March 19 is fine. I think we need the CEO of Bell here.

**The Chair:** We shall go ahead with that. The clerk has informed me that we'll now have the meeting with Bell on March 19.

We have bells, so I need permission from the committee to go for another 15 minutes.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** No.

**The Chair:** Do I have permission to go for 15 minutes? Okay, good.

What we have on the table is Mrs. Thomas'—

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** No, we don't.

**The Chair:** Do we not have permission to go for another 15 minutes?

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** No.

**The Chair:** Well, I need unanimous consent to go for another 15 minutes when there are bells. Unfortunately I don't have it, so we're going to adjourn until after the holidays.

Have a nice week off, guys.





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