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## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, June 5, 2007**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger**

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Tuesday, June 5, 2007

•(0905)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)):** Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 68 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), this is a full investigation of the role of a public broadcaster in the 21st century.

This morning we have with us, from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Tony Burman, editor-in-chief of CBC news, current affairs, and Newsworld, CBC radio and television; and Alain Saulnier. He is the general manager, news and current affairs, French services.

Welcome, gentlemen.

Mr. Burman, you're first on the docket, so we'll let you go first, sir.

**Mr. Tony Burman (Editor in Chief, CBC News, Current Affairs and Newsworld, CBC Radio and Television, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for this invitation. It is a privilege for Alain and for me to appear before your committee.

For the past seven years, as editor-in-chief of CBC's English services division, my role has been to oversee the news and current affairs programming on CBC television, radio, Newsworld, and CBC news online.

[Translation]

For more than 50 years, CBC/Radio-Canada news services have been keeping Canadians informed about their community, their country and their world at large. During that time, the CBC has moved from being a radio-only broadcaster to a multi-platform service to Canadians and to others around the world.

[English]

In the past four years at the CBC we have integrated CBC news and current affairs operations across CBC radio, television, and our increasingly important online service. This has not only been more efficient, it has enriched all of our local and network programming by ensuring that information, ideas, and resources can be more easily shared.

In my opening remarks I'd like to focus briefly on three aspects.

The first point is the CBC as Canada's window on the world. CBC/Radio-Canada has more international bureaus than any other news organization in Canada.

[Translation]

In many of these bureaux, our correspondents report for both the CBC and Radio-Canada. We truly are Canada's Window on the World.

[English]

Let's recall the past year. I think of Afghanistan. The CBC stood out for its efforts to give Canadians the most comprehensive coverage. *The National*, with Peter Mansbridge, is the only national newscast that has ever broadcast live out of Afghanistan.

Think of Lebanon. In the eleven months since last summer's war, only the CBC has stayed in Lebanon. Only the CBC maintains a full-time bureau in Beirut, with correspondent Nahlah Ayed.

And think of Africa. Our commitment to covering the horrible incidents in Darfur has taken us back to that region in Sudan repeatedly, in spite of the dangers inherent in such reporting. At one point last autumn we were the only network in the world in Darfur.

A second important area is the CBC as a provider of original and unique programming. There may be a multitude of choices in today's ever-changing media world, but many of them in Canada are owned by very few companies. More than ever, we would argue, there is a need in this modern democracy for a strong, public broadcaster.

You'll recall the Ontario lottery story, first told by *the fifth estate* last autumn. This investigation represented the finest traditions of public service Canadian journalism. Stories such as this—and there have been many of them recently on local and network programs on CBC radio and television—are the product of excellent, diligent, original work.

We sometimes hear it said that there's no need for CBC news because the private broadcasters do exactly what we do, and they do it well. We can agree that private broadcasters do some things very well and we can perhaps debate it some other time whether they do them better than CBC. But there is no debate about the role of CBC news when it comes to bringing Canada together at important times in our history. No other broadcaster comes close in providing live coverage of major events that tell the story of our country.

For the past 12 years in a row, CBC television news has been honoured with the Gemini award for the best live news special of the year. Last summer CBC news provided the world with coverage of the AIDS summit in Toronto and the World Urban Forum in Vancouver.

[Translation]

Just a few months ago, we were the only broadcaster that produced TV coverage of the ceremony at Vimy Ridge for the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic battle there. It was only through CBC Television that Canadians saw our new War Museum opened.

[English]

Surely when it comes time to measure the value of a news service, one of the litmus tests is how the service rises to the occasion when the country needs it, often when no other broadcaster will.

● (0910)

My third and final point is about the CBC as a journalistic organization uniquely accountable to Canadians. Our duty to provide accurate, fair, and high-quality information to Canadians is at the heart of CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate as a public broadcaster.

At the CBC we have several safeguards to ensure not only that this is achieved but that Canadians can hold CBC news accountable.

CBC/Radio-Canada has an extensive code of journalistic standards and practices, a policy book, which I think you have on your desk, that is widely respected internationally by other broadcasters and news organizations. As editor-in-chief, I write a regular media column for cbc.ca dealing with policy issues and inviting contributions, including criticisms, from our audience.

And of course there is the CBC ombudsman. Canadians have access to an independent ombudsman at both the CBC and Radio-Canada to resolve major complaints about programming. In addition, CBC/Radio-Canada reaches out to experts and its audience to continually monitor the quality of its news and current affairs programming over the course of a season.

It's important to stress that no other broadcaster or news organization in this country has accountability safeguards as stringent as at CBC/Radio-Canada.

Everyone in Canada has an opinion about CBC, particularly about its news programming, and we wouldn't want it any other way. As we are often reminded, we are not perfect, and we acknowledge that, humbly. That is why we are so focused on improving.

But let's keep things in perspective. Every public opinion poll on the subject indicates that CBC/Radio-Canada is Canada's most respected news organization. In audience numbers, CBC radio news is number one in local and network programming in many Canadian markets. CBC Newsworld is Canada's top-rated news channel, by nearly a two-to-one margin. CBC news online is Canada's most popular Internet news site. And many of our TV news and current affairs programs, including *The National* and *the fifth estate*, are at least equal and often ahead of their commercial competitors in audience numbers. So there are accomplishments that should never be overlooked.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to our discussion.

[Translation]

I would now like to introduce you to my colleague from Radio-Canada, Alain Saulnier.

● (0915)

**Mr. Alain Saulnier (General Manager, News and Current Affairs, French Services, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation):**

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am very pleased to be with you today to talk about news and information at Radio-Canada. Exactly one year ago today, Sylvain Lafrance, CBC/Radio-Canada's Executive Vice-President of French Services, announced the integration of all Radio-Canada news and information services under a single structure, and entrusted me with the mandate of managing this revamped news department.

The key objective of this restructuring was to allow us to respond even more coherently to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was about strengthening our public broadcasters' French services so that they remain a touchstone for citizens looking for references, and seeking to better understand the world they live in. Radio-Canada already possesses many assets enabling it to fully assume its role as a public broadcaster.

First of all, I remind you that Radio-Canada is the only French-language media organization in the country to provide such a broad spectrum of news coverage. How many francophone news operations can boast of having reporters in Toronto, Vancouver, Moncton and Calgary? You know the answer without even asking the question. All media considered, we have the largest contingent of French-speaking reporters in the country.

We are also the only French-speaking media outlet that presents international news reports and analysis. With our 11 foreign correspondents and several hundred regular contributors posted on 5 continents, our international news gathering presence exceeds that of all other francophone media in the country. Were it not for Radio-Canada, French-speaking Canadians would increasingly have to rely on the English media and on international news agencies to get a sense of what is happening around the world. No other media outlet, print, radio, television or web, offers as much content in French about the world, and the world in our backyard, as Radio-Canada does. Unlike others, we are not limited by our national territory. With a presence from coast-to-coast and spanning the globe, Radio-Canada is uniquely positioned to explain to Canadians what is happening in their regions, in their country and worldwide.

For this Fall, we have implemented a regional strategy across all of our services with the goal of strengthening our regional roots and ensuring better reflection of regions on our national networks. In news, for example, this has meant a greater presence in Toronto, as well as the addition of regional Saturday and Sunday editions of the *Téléjournal* newscast in Atlantic Canada. About a year, we began transforming RDI into a bona fide continuous news service. Given an increasingly competitive media environment and in the spirit of the unique mandate entrusted to RDI, our goal was to simultaneously strengthen our regional presence and develop a more seamless approach, while ensuring greater editorial consistency. Decentralization of our workday 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. programming now allows us to provide better news coverage all across the country, live and regardless of where or when stories are breaking.

Of course, no matter how hard we try, we can't always please everyone. We continually strive to strike the ideal balance of news and information content across all of our networks. Yet we must ask ourselves: What would happen if we were not present and accessible to the largest possible number of TV viewers, right across the country? Would a private all-news network be the solution? What kind of content would the French speakers be given to watch? News from Toronto, Moncton, Vancouver and Calgary? International stories from Canadian reporters posted abroad? Not a chance! What we offer is unique.

In dealing with complaints, we make our responses public, when appropriate we acknowledge our mistakes and take the necessary corrective action. Incidentally, anyone can now view these complaints and our responses, as well as the ombudsman's annual reports, via the CBC/Radio-Canada website.

By consolidating our TV, radio and web services under a single-management structure, we have sought to clearly position the Radio-Canada mandate as an instrument of democracy and culture. This combined strength is what allowed us to maintain a news gathering presence in Afghanistan for 12 consecutive weeks, with seasoned reporters like Céline Galipeau, Alexandra Czacka and Frédéric Nicoloff filing stories. By the way, I am pleased to announce that we will again be reporting from the front in Afghanistan as of this fall.

On the radio, we are the only media organization to offer such first-rate news content at all hours of the day. And we know that this content is being appreciated by listeners: our radio newscasts, to cite one example, reached record audiences according to the latest BBM survey results, from winter 2007. Moreover, what television network besides Radio-Canada can boast 10 current affairs programs on its schedule, including 6 that air in prime time? You won't find any: current affairs programming is simply non-existent on the private networks. Nowhere else but on Radio-Canada will you find programs like *La Facture*, a magazine that covers the everyday problems faced by citizens. *La Facture* is seen by an average of more than 705,000 viewers each week. Then there is *L'épicerie*, a magazine program focused on food, which each week reaches an average audience of 658,000. *Découverte*, one of the only French television magazine programs in this country devoted to science, draws an average viewership of 600,000 on Sunday nights, and in recent weeks has even posted audience numbers near the one million mark.

• (0920)

[English]

This fall, having leveraged the combined expertise of our TV, radio, and web team, we will become the only Canadian French language TV network to air a weekly prime time newsmagazine on international affairs. This brand new program will be produced in front of a live studio audience with renowned guests and one-of-a-kind reporting that will enable us to better comprehend the world—the whole world and your world.

[Translation]

We provide Canadians with quality programming as witnessed by the many national and international awards bestowed upon our programs over the past year. *Découverte*, for example, won no less than four awards, including the Géméaux for best public affairs

program, and the CAID Prize at the International Science Film Festival in Athens. The program *Dimanche magazine*, which air on the Première Chaîne radio network, won a prestigious Peabody Award in 2006 for a report about climate change. And the series 109, produced in Toronto and aired on RDI, won a Gold Ribbon Award at the most recent convention of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

As we look to the future, Radio-Canada is called upon to create a public broadcasting space that is stronger than ever before. This is vitally important. In a multi-channel universe and given the phenomenal number of different news sources, we must create an "island of trust", where citizens can be secure in the knowledge that the news and information they get from their public broadcaster is reliable and credible. To be able to enrich citizens' democratic and cultural life, and properly pursue its mission as a public broadcaster, Radio-Canada must maintain its ability to promote social cohesion and be a reflection of true diversity.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you for those presentations.

The first questioner, I think, is Ms. Marleau.

Okay, go ahead, Mr. Scott.

**Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.):** I guess she's deferring.

Welcome to the witnesses.

First of all, I have to apologize. Last Thursday I made some reference that the national CBC didn't give enough attention to the legislature in Fredericton. That afternoon a deer walked into the legislature in Fredericton. I don't know how you did it, but your attention to detail is appreciated.

I have a couple of things. First, we've had an awful lot of discussion about advertising or not in the context of the broadcaster generally. What effect does the advertising that exists on English language television—I'm specifically speaking to that here—have on the decisions taken in the context of news?

I was watching yesterday, fretting over the well-being of Paris Hilton. On the question of distinctiveness, you can rest assured that we can get that other places.

So what effect does the need to have good numbers have on those kinds of decisions?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Well, first of all, I assume your reference to Paris Hilton was metaphorical. The CBC, and I know this is shared by Radio-Canada, is aggressively hostile to the coverage of those stories. I won't bore you with the many examples over the past several months, or even recent years, of where we have been totally offside in contrast to American commercial cable, and to a certain extent Canadian cable. Toward those stories, our indifference and what I sense from you are the same.

The public broadcaster must do what it can do to expand its audience, to connect with as many Canadians as possible, but within reason and not at the expense of quality. We have never been indifferent to the size of our audience. I think the balancing act for us has always been how to provide a range of programming and to ensure that we don't sacrifice quality in the search of numbers and the search of ratings.

As far as I'm concerned, the connection of advertising with news and current affairs doesn't exist. I've been with the CBC in senior positions for about 20 years, and I can't remember one decision I made or my colleagues made that focused on trying to get audiences so that advertisers were happier with us. There is a firewall in our organization.

So I don't think that's an issue for us—advertising. What is an issue is that if we as an organization didn't have a large number of Canadians watching us or listening to us or reading us, people like you would be quite unhappy with the place of CBC and Radio-Canada in Canada. It's a balancing act.

• (0925)

**Hon. Andy Scott:** It wasn't metaphorical. I was watching yesterday, and we had a lot of Paris on Newsworld yesterday.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** With respect, I think the fact that she is going to jail is of interest to a lot of our audience. I think our coverage of that was limited to that.

**Hon. Andy Scott:** Again, it's a question of distinctiveness. If we wanted this, we could find it someplace else.

The other part has to do with cbc.ca and the text nature of it. I had a forum with kids in my riding about this exercise. One of the things they brought to my attention—I hadn't thought of it, because I grew up on newspapers—was the idea of seeing it in text and sort of seeing it like an online newspaper, as against what you think of in terms of audio and visual. They were the ones who quickly asked why a medium that is basically, historically, radio and television is aspiring to become a newspaper. I'm sort of taking it directly from their perception to you. They're looking for something much more visual, much more like they would expect. I'm just curious about your response to that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** If I may, I would like to clarify one thing.

It is important to consider the CBC's website, whether it is CBC.ca or Radio-Canada.ca, like a set of content proposals. If you visit the site this morning, you will be able to see and hear audio and video reports, you will be able to listen to last night's *Le Téléjournal* again, and you will also be able to choose from various programs on-demand, which will allow you to re-listen to public affairs programming that was broadcast over the last few days.

This is clearly not a newspaper. It is quite simply a format that allows people to understand what audio and video content is being offered on these sites. It is from that perspective that we really must try and appreciate what we call the multimedia universe in its entirety. We will no longer be able to listen to radio and watch television as we have done over the last few years. You will be able to see programming on your iPod, on the web or also on your telephones, to such a degree that the CBC absolutely must go in that

direction so that the wealth of its contents—and I'm also thinking about the content that the Radio-Canada side has to offer—can be accessible to the greatest number of people. Those under the age of 35, in future, will get more and more of their information from the Internet.

How can we make sure that the CBC's contents, in which we invest a great deal of money and for which we have all the necessary expertise, is accessible to the greatest number of people? That is more or less what we are gambling on.

[English]

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Can I just add to that?

As of this past Monday, there was a significant revamp of the CBC news online site. I think you would see, and I think the kids you referred to would see, a far greater emphasis on both video and audio. That is the beginning of what I think will be a very significant kind of transformation of cbc.ca over the next several weeks. I think as resources permit, as Alain indicated, we'll be quite conscious of ensuring that the richness of video and audio is also a central part of our online service.

**Hon. Andy Scott:** Thank you. That will be appreciated.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

We'll go to Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

**Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning.

I would like to continue on the subject that Mr. Scott raised. We are in the midst of a technological revolution, with emerging technologies. Are you making sufficient efforts to reach out and educate the population, young people as well as old, in order to encourage them to go see the contents that you have on these new platforms? How are you doing so?

That is my first question.

• (0930)

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** There are several ways to draw young people to Radio-Canada. For example, our station broadcasts radio programs *275-Allô* and *Ados-Radio* every evening from 7:00 to 7:30 p.m. on the Première Chaîne radio network. From this platform, we invite young people to follow up on other platforms such as the web, where these shows are mentioned.

During television shows, we invite people to visit the Internet to obtain more information about the program's contents. Radio-Canada is the current leader in terms of providing rich and diversified content on all of its platforms. We were the first to provide contents on iPod. Do you know which one of the two most downloaded programs on iPod are currently? It is the show called *Les Années lumière*, which is broadcast on Radio-Canada's radio station.

This means that people are taking the time to download a two-hour radio show and listen to it when they feel like it. It's an invitation to young people to seek contents that they do not necessarily have time to listen to when they are first being presented on the Première Chaîne.

We have to use all of the outlets that exist. From now on, young people will no longer have to sit through a show at the hour we choose; they will watch or listen to it at the time that suits them best. It is up to us to fulfil this need. This is especially true for young people under the age of 30.

**Mr. Maka Kotto:** How are you raising the awareness of so-called dinosaurs—let's call them that—those who are reluctant to embrace new technology, in order to draw them to contents being presented on these new platforms?

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** Radio-Canada's website, Radio-Canada.ca features commentary made by Mr. Bruno Guglielminetti that allows us to understand how new technologies are being developed. This fall, a component targeted to young people on this same website will deal with these topics. There are specific themes that we intend to develop over the fall. There will also be a theme about the environment.

We have to be very proactive in this area. We need to invest in these platforms to offer contents to people of all ages and to encourage them to listen and watch us more and more.

**Mr. Maka Kotto:** In Quebec, someone from the circus community said *Only the sky is the limit*. Can you tell us what are the main stumbling blocks to your reaching an ideal situation in terms of information?

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** Are you talking about television or radio?

**Mr. Maka Kotto:** Given the limited time I have to ask my question, I'm referring mostly to television and radio.

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** Perhaps Tony could also answer that question. I, for one, believe that CBC/Radio-Canada must develop strategies specific to each form of media. For the radio, we all know that prime time is in the morning and late afternoon when we reach the largest audience. Shows that are broadcast during these hours are generally regional programs that serve local communities, but are also enriched with national or international content.

The strategy of radio stations consists of being increasingly open to the world. The best service to Francophones here in Canada is to provide them with access to the world. They must have increased access to international content, in order to be strong and to develop as a society. We believe that these prime time hours must be further developed.

The challenge with television is different. Television is developed within a mixed financial system, that is subsidized through a combination of government financial support and advertising dollars. It is not always easy to work within such a system. In terms of information, we try to offer the best. Sylvain Lafrance and myself have taken the stance of pushing for greater cultural content and quality international news.

Our challenge is to strengthen democracy and culture, and we intend to do so.

● (0935)

**Mr. Maka Kotto:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming this morning.

Throughout our hearings we've discussed a number of times pressures from advertising on news, issues of bias in news, and what stories are chosen. I've been thinking a lot about the pressure on a public broadcaster. The BBC was shaken to the foundation over the Andrew Gilligan story and whether or not the dossier was sexed up. But clearly the BBC was faced with a direct frontal attack by the Prime Minister's Office. It would do anything it had to do to get that story killed. And in the end, a journalist lost his position and the head of the BBC was tossed. History seems to have vindicated the BBC's original story.

I'm looking at issues with the CBC. The CBC isn't nearly as independent and financially secure as the BBC. I was thinking of the Terry Milewski story on the whole APEC summit. Susan Delacourt wrote that it was Milewski who was solely responsible for pushing APEC to the top of the news agenda through his dogged release of the leaked documents and his continuing attention to the APEC issue. Yet the PMO launched a right-in-your-face assault on CBC, and Milewski got the bounce as well.

How do you choose to take on government when biting the hand that feeds you could be problematic?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** If I could correct you, Terry Milewski did not get the bounce. He's still an incredibly—

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** He got the bounce from that story.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Yes, but he's still an incredibly valuable reporter for CBC news.

You characterized the challenge accurately. I don't think there's any organization, really, that was as conscious of the BBC scandal as CBC/Radio-Canada was. We really learned from that, both in terms of how the BBC approached the issue and how the government responded, imagining how that same situation could play itself in Canada.

I think there has been, over the years, a dogged determination on the part of the CBC to maintain its independence of government. The tensions between the CBC and the government over a variety of issues, including news and current affairs, are quite well known. It's something that comes with the territory.

I think you're right about the financial instability of the CBC. That's worrisome to everybody, including many of us as Canadians, not only as CBC employees. We try to provide, and I indicated some of them in my opening remarks, through our policy book and through our different kinds of safeguards, enough mechanisms so that at least the Canadian public can be confident they're getting the straight goods from the CBC—flawed on occasion, but the straight goods. Our hope is that we'll be able to maintain and endure any kinds of pressures we get, not only from government but from any side.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Do you think if there was a five- or a ten-year mandate with guaranteed funding, the CBC news service would feel more confident? Right now, you are waiting every year to the last minute on that \$60 million allocation, which may or may not come, depending on the goodwill of government toward your organization.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I think the answer is yes. I think it's ludicrous using any standard of life that this organization goes from year to year without a real sense of its funding. That has a ripple effect through the organization. Quite frankly, it does affect the news and current affairs part of the CBC, which is so important.

When Alain was asked about the challenges of Radio-Canada, one of the challenges that I think confronts both the CBC and Radio-Canada is the protection of resources. Otherwise, we can't maintain coverage of Afghanistan or Sudan or whatever.

I think some sort of financial stability would have a direct, positive impact on the information dimension of CBC's mandate.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I want to ask a question about advertising and the implications that would have on news coverage.

Yesterday on *The Current* there was a very interesting discussion of CanWest Global going to court to overturn the direct-to-advertiser ban on prescription drugs. They were taking the position that their inability to make money on advertising was a direct violation of their freedom of expression. Yet, on the CBC discussion, they were talking about the massive impact that direct advertising has on drug costs and the health system, comparing the U.S. to Canada and the different positions.

If CanWest was successful in that, that would certainly have implications for news coverage for a whole series of issues relating to health coverage. How would that downward pressure impact CBC? Would you feel that you would need to start to compete for drug advertising? How do you start to make those decisions on advertising that is very much implicated in news coverage?

• (0940)

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I don't have enough detailed legal knowledge of the CanWest initiative, but in general terms I think there's been a long-standing determination within CBC/Radio-Canada to create a firewall between its news and current affairs operations and advertising influences.

I think that has been, quite frankly, over the years sometimes difficult to maintain. I think we've maintained it, but I think the financial instability of the CBC sometimes runs counter to that. My confidence would be that we would maintain that distance and that

the CBC would never go in a direction where its advertising policies had an impact on editorial choices.

Alain.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** CBC's advertising code is unique and it is part of a number of instruments which aim to protect and guarantee CBC's independence from the type of pressure you are mentioning.

You also referred to growing concentration seen almost everywhere. One of the best bulwarks against concentration is the CBC because it is in a position to offer cultural and territorial diversity and to welcome all opinions. In another environment, concentration would cause increasing focus on one single viewpoint.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll move now to Mr. Brown.

**Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I'd like to thank our witnesses for coming today.

I'm probably going to stick more to the English side, Mr. Burman; that's one I'm much more familiar with. You've given your presentation, and I think it's an excellent advertisement for why we should watch the CBC and your news programming, but we're here to do a study on the role of the public broadcaster.

I'm going to quote from what you said:

We sometimes hear it said that there's no need for CBC News because the private broadcasters do exactly what we do, and they do it well. We can agree that private broadcasters do some things very well. And we can perhaps debate at some other time whether they do them better than CBC. But there is no debate about the role of CBC News....

Can you tell us why it's uniquely from the public side and why the taxpayers of Canada should support that? What are you giving Canadians that's unique in terms of news programming because it is a public broadcaster? I'd like to hear about that.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I think the answer is in different ways. Again, in reference to our earlier discussion, I think providing a news and current affairs service that's not unduly influenced by commercial and advertising concerns is very important in a democracy. I think there are many instances, both in Canada and the United States, where the commercial advertising influences within the media have had a material impact on the kinds of editorial choices that viewers and listeners are exposed to, and I think that's negative.

Again, as I tried to indicate in my opening remarks, there's a range of programming that the CBC and Radio-Canada provide that, quite frankly, our commercial competitors don't—the breadth of our international coverage, for example. And we do that not because it necessarily will have a direct impact on our “ratings” that night. We do that because we know a lot of Canadians rely on their public broadcaster to understand their connection to the world.

Again, as I indicated in my opening remarks, I think a lot of special events deal with the story of this country historically in terms of anniversaries, in terms of what could be described as mandate programming. We know through the audience response that these are very meaningful things.

So I think there's been on all our networks and our platforms the range of CBC radio programming across the country, the incredible importance of local programming across the country, that's, as I indicated, number one in many markets and number two in many other markets. It's a reflection of the distinctive place of CBC radio in communities from coast to coast to coast.

I think the success and the popularity of our online service is another example of why a lot of people are drawn to CBC, are drawn to Radio-Canada, a lot of younger people, for the kind of online experience and services we provide that, in their view, are far more relevant to their lives than some of the commercial competitors.

So if you collect it all together, a country can make a decision as to whether or not it wants to follow the American model, which is essentially to let the news media survive or not within a commercial environment, or it can do what has happened in Canada, what is happening in Britain, what is happening in every modern democracy in Europe, and that is to try to create a vibrant, unique public broadcaster to exist in a complementary way with its commercial competitors.

• (0945)

**Mr. Gord Brown:** We can get into a debate on how important ratings are in the whole process, but you talked about CBC radio being number one in markets. You have a unique model with CBC radio. I know there's heavy listenership, especially...I'm much more familiar with what's going on in eastern Ontario.

On the other hand, specifically talking about Ottawa, your television news I think is a distant third in terms of ratings. Why do you think it's so successful on the radio side and not so successful on the television side?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I think it's so successful on the radio side just because it really speaks to a lot of issues and concerns that are important across the country.

I would challenge, with respect, your characterization of television. Television is not simply the supper hour program at six o'clock; television is *The National*, television is *the fifth estate*, television is CBC Newsworld. Television is a whole multitude of programs. I think, again, as I indicated in my opening remarks, that if one looks at audience levels, we're dealing with many television offerings that are more than competitive with our commercial rivals, and in many cases, in audience numbers, exceed them.

In terms of the CBC television experience with regional programming at the supper hour, that has been a challenge for the CBC for many years. I think as this committee realizes, there's an initiative called MyCBC, which is focused around Vancouver, where there's a real effort to build some sort of renewed connection with our audiences at six o'clock through CBC television, and that's something we're working on.

My gentle response would be for us not to focus on one time slot as the sole determinant as to whether CBC television matters to Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Marleau.

**Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.):** I'm going to start by saying that I believe today as much as any time since the beginning of public broadcasting there's a tremendous need for you. I believe that despite the challenges you've faced, you've done a great job, both on the English side and on the French side.

I represent a riding in northeastern Ontario, as you may well know, the riding of Sudbury. I'm a francophone, so I listen to many programs, both in French and in English. I hope the financial challenges you face will not prevent you from continuing some of the great things you've done.

On the other hand....

[*Translation*]

I often watch RDI at the same time as CBC Newsworld. I like to watch French television. It is important for me to be able to hear the news, especially in the morning, because you know that as politicians we need to know what is going on. Yet, I don't see myself reflected in the news, I don't see Ontario nor Alberta there. Honestly, the program is mainly focused on Quebec. It is wonderful, but I would like more to be done for francophone communities.

I firmly believe that democracy is ill-served when people cannot be better connected throughout this country. That is essential to me. I know that you are trying, but I would ask you to try a bit harder, if possible. The same applies to radio.

• (0950)

[*English*]

These are criticisms, but they're more demands that you try to do more. I listen to CBC radio; I listen to Radio-Canada. When I drive home from Ottawa there are vast areas of this country that I drive through and the only service that's available on my car radio—and I don't have Sirius—is CBC or Radio-Canada. It's very important for those of us who drive through vast areas. But what happens is any kind of local programming ends at six—and it's not all local programming; it's mostly regional programming.

I'll give you an example. Last year as I was driving home CBC radio reported that they thought there was a fire at a seniors' home in Sudbury. They weren't sure. They couldn't get any facts to back it up. You have to understand that the CBC radio offices in Sudbury are about four blocks away from where this fire was. As we got closer to six o'clock—and this was on the English as well as the French side, nobody could get any information—and I was trying to find out what was happening, at six o'clock they signed off and said, sorry, we weren't able to get any information on this and our programming ends now, so they went to international.

So I ask you, can you somehow bump up some of that regional service? We have no other source of news up there. The other broadcasters don't give us anything. CBC and Radio-Canada are the only things we have. To me, it's wonderful that you do such a great job internationally, but you have to do a better job within the country as well.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I appreciate your point; I accept your point. Actually, the answer to your question is yes, we will be doing that.

I think one of the reflections of today's media environment is the fact that our audiences are everywhere at all times; no longer are they restricted to one time slot or one medium or one platform. I think the 24/7 nature of news—including, dare I say, local and regional news—is something that really absorbs us. One of the determinations of our new regional strategy, which will start in Vancouver and then move across the country, is what we're calling MyCBC. It is a 24/7 increase in regional and local service to our audiences on radio, on television, and online that would include more coverage through the evening, as you put it, on CBC radio and television, for that matter, and certainly more coverage through the weekend. I think we've recognized the problem, and I think you phrased it very well. I assure you that we're doing what we can within the resources that we have to address it.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Diane Marleau:** I would now like to hear what you are going to be doing in French. I'm very interested in that.

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** With respect to Réseau de l'information on television or on Première chaîne radio or television, we are very concerned about these matters. I can assure you that we take good note of all the criticism we receive. At the same time, we were the only ones able to cover the Francophone and Acadian Community Summit over the last weekend. These matters do concern us. It is part of our mandate and it is our duty to do this.

**Hon. Diane Marleau:** Yes, in fact, I should thank you for that, because it is impressive to see this coverage. But this type of event does not occur often.

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** If you'll allow me, I would like to add something with respect to the news. Where else than on Radio-Canada would you have heard about the greening of Sudbury?

**Hon. Diane Marleau:** Right.

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** In the same vein, when are you going to hear about forests and lakes in Quebec? Sometimes we get the impression that this territory is only made up of cities, when that is false.

So, we have to report on what is happening almost everywhere on the North Shore of Quebec, on the Lower St. Lawrence, etc. We have to cover the fisheries and the lobster crisis in Shippagan. Of course, we are concerned about these things.

I can also add that it is in this spirit that next fall you will see an Atlantic newscast produced on Saturdays and Sundays. We are starting to do this and we'll be doing more to try and offer as much news as possible not only during the week and until 6:00 p.m., as you pointed out.

• (0955)

**Hon. Diane Marleau:** We must make sure that Radio-Canada and CBC do not become like the others, in other words big city-focused

radio or television networks where you will only hear about Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. That is a concern to us because we are often inexistent in the eyes of the other media. You are our voice and our hope.

I am convinced you will remain. We can work together to ensure that this public service is maintained, because it is vitally important today.

I thank you for your work. I will continue to follow this issue to note your progress.

[*English*]

I'm going to follow your progress and hope you remember that you're not just there for big cities; you're there for small towns, for small cities, for all of the regions. Actually, you're more important in all of those media than you are in the big cities.

**The Chair:** We'll move on now to Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, gentlemen.

My questions are for Mr. Burman, because my colleague asked questions of Mr. Saulnier regarding the French corporation.

Mr. Burman, we travelled through various Canadian cities and there is an emergence of citizens media or community media wanting to serve local communities.

How significant are these new media to you? Given the fact that you are a journalist, do you forge alliances with these people? What kind of concerns, if any, do you have?

[*English*]

**Mr. Tony Burman:** The answer is yes. Again, this is part of our strategy to connect with Canadians in a far deeper way, wherever they happen to be. I think you're right. So many Canadians now across our country—not only in small towns and cities, but certainly there—have created a network of community media that is significant. I think the goal of our expansion of our regional and local connection is to make partners with as many people as we can, because I think in many communities the CBC and Radio-Canada are honest brokers. It's a safe zone; we're people who have interests similar to those of a lot of these groups. I think our goal is to do that.

I think what one notices on both CBC and Radio-Canada is a far greater inclusion of diverse viewpoints through so-called user-generated content; we encourage people to submit their own stories to us in ways that would relate to a wider audience. I think we're quite conscious that we've got to take advantage of the new media in the ways you indicate.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Mr. Burman, representatives of francophone communities outside Quebec that we have met with, complained about a shortage of journalists in their communities, and a lack of adequate and unbiased news coverage. It would seem there are few journalists willing to go to the regions.

I would like to know whether you have made any effort to ensure adequate news coverage? Are there incentives? Do you provide courses and information to journalists with respect to dealing with information on aboriginal or francophone communities outside Quebec? Do they get specific treatment?

[English]

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I think what we're becoming more and more aware of is the need for us to further decentralize our news and current affairs operation in a way that empowers people to contribute to our various programs and our services and our networks in a way that isn't dependent on larger centres like Toronto or Montreal. So I think in that sense we're trying to expand the breadth and the range of our coverage, and we clearly have to do that through journalists on the ground. There are incentives. We're incredibly aware that we've got to encourage people to cover this country in all of its locations. I think a limitation for us—and this gets back to the awful question of resources—is our resource level. As chief journalists, both Alain and I would easily make arguments for a greater number of journalists in a greater number of communities in this country, but we have our limitation that clearly we have to deal with.

So we do what we can with the resources that are in front of us.

• (1000)

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Finally, Mr. Burman, I have one last question.

I received an e-mail—and I will name the individual because he's well-known—from Réjean Beaulieu of the *Canard Réincarné*. This gentleman lodged a complaint with the ombudsman because when we went to Vancouver he was one of three francophones outside Quebec who came to discuss English CBC's services, and his testimony was the only one that was not reported upon by CBC. The CBC did not report on his testimony, which was slightly different from that of the other two people. In fact that was something that I had pointed out.

Are you aware of this complaint? He sent it to Mr. Pierre Guérin who is responsible for these matters, and he doesn't seem to have received a response.

It wouldn't be the first time—

[English]

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Is this...? Yes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** When the committee travelled, we met with at least four people who told us that they rarely receive responses when they complain to the CBC.

Earlier on, I was reading this wonderful small guide entitled "Journalistic Standards and Practises" and I was trying to see what

recourse people have or, at the very least, how they can have their voices heard. They have to resort to dealing with the ombudsman, despite the fact that they could be heard in their own community.

[English]

**Mr. Tony Burman:** It's hard to deal with specifics when I don't know the details of those specifics, but this whole thing perplexes me. We're quite aggressive within CBC and Radio-Canada in providing responses to people who either send inquiries or complaints. In a sense, that's the first line of response, from our program element. I can't remember—I think we have a 14-day requirement within.... I think there's a lot of accountability on that, so clearly in the fullness of time, there are things that slip through the cracks, but often when we are presented with these complaints, we discover that there's an answer to it. So I guess all I can say is let's get the details afterwards and we'll certainly look into it, because we are incredibly conscious of the need for us to respond to Canadians who send inquiries to us, and I think our track record in recent years has been very good on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Fast.

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of you for attending today.

When we got here this morning we were given a copy of the handbook of journalistic standards and practices for CBC and Radio-Canada. I've had a quick chance to review some of the points in there. What jumped out at me was, first of all, on page 99, under personnel standards, where it states, "The CBC must not only be impartial, it must also project an image of impartiality." So the whole issue of how the public perceives CBC...it's going beyond actual objectivity. It goes right to the root of what do Canadians think of CBC Radio-Canada.

As you know, there are many Canadians who are very supportive of CBC, but there are also many Canadians for whom CBC either has become irrelevant or it no longer reflects their particular values. Quite frankly, I've never bought into the myth that reporters can be completely unbiased. We're all human. We bring a package of values to the table and a package of perspectives that inevitably colour anything we do. I think the best we can hope for is to achieve a standard of objectivity that CBC, for example, would have credibility with the people it's supposed to be serving, which is the Canadian public.

I'd like to ask a couple of questions about hiring and firing policies. You have a pretty comprehensive set of journalistic standards that your staff has to comply with. I hearken back to an unfortunate incident where one of your employees was alleged to have doctored a photograph and enhanced it to make an environmental site look worse than it really was. Do you recall that particular incident?

• (1005)

**Mr. Tony Burman:** No.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** It just happened recently. I understand there was the use of filters to project an image that was worse than it really was. Do you recall that incident?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I usually have an incredibly careful memory of these things, but I do not.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** We actually had testimony before us several meetings ago about that very issue.

Let me then take it a further step. Could you describe for the committee the process you go through in hiring reporters to ensure that they're not bringing to the table a bias? When reporters are discovered to have somehow allowed their biases to filter into their reporting, what steps are taken to discipline them and perhaps terminate their employment when it's warranted?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** The selection process for the hiring of any staff, including reporters, is quite rigorous. When a position is open we post it, it's publicly known, people compete for it, there are various processes of elimination, and then there's a short list. There's usually a panel of four or five of our senior people who are then empowered to choose the best person.

Generally our hiring would not be at the entry level. We hire people who have experience as reporters. I think in that case we have a track record with these individuals. We're very conscious of whether or not an individual reveals or has revealed in his or her past some sort of bias. I think it's unusual if that is the case. That usually kind of eliminates the person from journalism pretty early on.

I think journalism is a team game. We have editors, we have assignment editors, and we have producers. Part of the safeguards that are inherent in a journalistic policy book like we have here is that we feel there are enough levels that if somebody either malevolently or innocently starts revealing a kind of passion or bias in certain ways, it's caught before it goes on air. I think that's why we're able to control these potential circumstances.

In terms of your second question, we have no patience for people who violate our journalistic policy book. We hold them accountable. There are various ways that we do that. Again, I don't think we have that problem as nearly as often as perhaps your question suggested, in the sense that I think we're blessed with a wide choice of people who want to become CBC journalists. In that sense, the ones who are chosen are really of quite high calibre.

I accept your earlier point that we all have personal views and personal passions in these things. I think what one learns as an experienced journalist is to park those things at the door. I think generally, and certainly with my CBC and Radio-Canada colleagues, is that we do that effectively.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** In your presentation you referred to how you try to ensure that your reporting is balanced. One of the things you referred to was the role of the CBC ombudsman. I believe the CBC, especially English television, is still having trouble reaching out to Canadians. I think there is much more that can be done to make CBC relevant. Have you considered other ways of reaching out to Canadians, making sure that the coverage you have is as objective as possible?

• (1010)

**Mr. Tony Burman:** We do that. I made reference to it in my opening remarks. We do this on a continuing basis throughout the year. We certainly do it when we are focused on special events such as elections or a major foreign international crisis like the Iraq

situation, for example. We create citizen panels. We create committees of academics or outsiders who are invited to critique our coverage.

There are about two or three different levels of coverage in an election. During an election campaign, which as you know goes for six or seven weeks, my senior team meets every Friday with a group from across the country who have nothing to do with the CBC and who reflect a whole variety of political perspectives. They give us very candid comments on how our coverage is on radio, television, or online.

I think there is a continual effort on our part, as you put it, to reach out to Canadians and to get some sense as to whether what they're getting on air or their Internet sites is acceptable and relevant to them.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Scarpaleggia.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not familiar with the incident that Mr. Fast brought up about the doctoring of an image. The most flagrant episode I'm aware of in terms of misleading the public on a news story—and you've probably seen this clip yourself on a U.S. private station—is where the reporter was reporting from a hurricane zone. She was sitting in a boat to show how high the water levels were, and as she was reporting very gravely from her canoe, a cameraman walked by her. Essentially, the water wasn't deep at all.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Oh, God.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** I guess you won't be hiring that reporter at the CBC.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** No, and I'll take note of the person's name. Thank you.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** You talked about these panels, especially during election time, to ensure that you're putting out objective news. To your knowledge, do private broadcasters do that?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Not to my knowledge, and certainly not to the extent that we do. Again, the premise of our initiative is that we can't have Canadians rely simply on the judgment of CBC journalists as to whether or not we're doing well. In that sense, we're quite happy to outsource it, so to speak, and to get outside views to how we're doing. It's really very valuable to us.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** If you'll allow me, I would like to point out that the very fact that we can communicate with people on the Internet and during call-in shows, on blogs etc., means that we can maintain a constant communication with the public. In this regard, we can know what people think of our shows. Listener services, complaints departments, e-mail exchanges, web blogs and phone-in shows give people an opportunity to have their voices heard. The fact that we offer these services is probably unique.

[English]

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** In terms of bias in reporting, I don't believe there's a systematic bias.

This might not be bias at all, but maybe across the country there's a bit of quirkiness in the sense that reporters might go to the same experts for opinions because it's easier; they have their number in their BlackBerry and they've established a rapport with them.

Once I remember—and again, this was a private broadcaster—watching a news clip about day care on the six o'clock news and I saw a friend of mine. The clip showed them taking their kids to day care. I asked how they got on the news and it turned out so-and-so's brother worked for the station.

How do you guard against reporters or producers getting too comfortable and always going to the same people, and sometimes giving profiles to the same people?

• (1015)

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I think that's a great challenge for all media organizations, and I think our desire to kind of expand the Rolodex, so to speak, to ensure that there's a true diversity of views, is something we're obsessed with. We actually monitor, in a very minute, statistical way—for example, through election campaigns—that reflection of diversity, not only diversity in terms of ethnic background but diversity in points of view. We kind of stopwatch it, so to speak. I'm not talking only about the Conservatives versus the NDP. I mean, that's a given. We're talking about a far greater diversity.

I think there's a far greater consciousness in this country, and certainly—I think we can speak on behalf of the public broadcaster—we have to provide a range and a breadth of coverage that reflects in our air, radio, television, or online services the diversity of this country. We're really focused on it.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** My other point has to do with firewalls. I understand that you have a firewall. I also understand that there are firewalls for private broadcasters as well. The argument from those who say that private broadcasters are too sensitive to commercial interests is not so much centred on the head of Procter & Gamble calling the news chief and saying he didn't like your story; it becomes more of a subconscious notion that we're not going to get a call on this, but we know that the head of the corporation won't be happy if we do too many stories that are anti-business or whatever, because we get our money from them. So even though there's a firewall, there's a subconscious kind of notion that we have to be careful.

Wouldn't that exist at the CBC as well, but in a different way, especially in a context in which funding isn't stable? There would be a firewall, but reporters and news directors would be aware that if we take too many runs at the government, since our funding is renewed every two or three years or whatever, we'd better be careful. Wouldn't it be the same system working, obviously not in reaction, necessarily, to advertisers but to government sensibilities?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** I think we are very conscious of trying to avoid that. I think the potential is there, and it's obvious that it's there. But I think there is such a range of voices in any kind of CBC news or current affairs operation that I think in a sense we're

protected from that, as long as we're conscious of not doing anything that inadvertently, through osmosis, plays to those kinds of things. I think our track record is pretty good on that.

I think the fact that there are tensions with governments is a given. I've had 30 years' experience at CBC, and I can go back to many governments when it's been the same. So for the CBC to start kind of tailoring its approach to the government in some sort of odd way that has some sort of impact on financing would be, first, ludicrous—

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia:** I understand that. I have one more small point, sir.

We're sort of saying that the private journalists, the journalists for the private broadcasters, are not immune from that kind of pressure from private advertisers. Do you know what I'm saying? I'm just trying to draw the parallel.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Mr. Chair, can I just, for 30 seconds, respond to the gentleman's reference to this photo?

I was just checking my notes. I think if you're referring to a photo that was on cbc.ca that was tied to the Kyoto Accord, what happened—your description did not connect with my recollection of it—was that a photo was retouched. It wasn't retouched for use on air. It was retouched because people do that in the graphic world to see what kind of impact.... It was misfiled. First, it should not have happened, and, second, it shouldn't have been filed. It was inadvertently pulled out and used.

There was a very subtle difference. In fact, it looked very similar. We did check it. It was immediately pulled when we were aware of it. It was an inadvertent error. We're very conscious of whether there is any suggestion that that's done. It was one of these things that was done in a way that did virtually no damage and that, to our knowledge, had no kind of negative motive to it. It was a process error that we have ensured will not happen again. It was filed in a way that someone had access to it, and it appeared on our website very briefly.

• (1020)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Thank you very much.

I appreciate your efforts to clarify this, and I think it speaks to the point. I guess the point for Canadians who are watching and listening to us today is the fact that it was a doctored photo, and the photo not only was a misrepresentation of actually what happened, but it was a misrepresentation because it was such an outdated picture that in the duration of time from when the photo was taken to the time it was published on the website, the smoke stacks were torn down. So it was a complete misrepresentation.

I think it speaks to the sensitivity that you have to engage in at CBC, yet it wasn't intended, you assure us, to mislead Canadians. But in fact it did mislead people because it was there to support an opinion that was being brought forward with the article it was published with.

I think that's the concern that many Canadians have, that you're a broadcaster, but you have a public trust to maintain, because, of course, Canadians expect to trust their national broadcaster. Obviously, there was major sensitivity around this, and unfortunately for CBC, this isn't the first and maybe won't be the last. But I think it's important that there be a strong statement after these types of things are done, as to the fact that it won't happen again.

So I'm wondering if you can clarify as to what type of statement was made and what assurances you can provide us with to ensure that this kind of biased type of reporting doesn't continue in perpetuity.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** In terms of this case, I tried to describe it in the sense that there was an investigation as to what happened, there was an apology issued, and we were able to determine that there was no untoward motive.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Any time a photo is there to substantiate a claim, I think there is a correlation that therefore it is in fact a bias that's.... I can understand that it wasn't intentional.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Well, it wasn't intended to go on air. I think that's the big issue.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** But the CBC website would have the same provisions as any on-air content, is that right?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Definitely, and I think there was a determination that this kind of thing will not happen again. In preparation for this meeting, I did review. There were, I'd say, six or seven instances in the past two or three years of where, mainly through inadvertence, through the kinds of pressures that a 24/7 news operation provides—and I'm not using this as an excuse—things happen. I am aware that there isn't a pattern. We're not dealing with things that—

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Let's talk about things that maybe aren't so inadvertent.

I'm wondering if you could explain to me the process through which stories are covered in Canada. Obviously, in any given day you have hundreds of stories that you could run on *The National* or CBC radio, and obviously there's a decision-making process as to what will be brought forward as a news story.

I find it interesting, actually—I'll just use it as an example, and you can go into your explanation as to how news stories are chosen for the day—that recently there was a sanctity-of-life rally on the Hill. In fact, I had the opportunity to walk by it, and I understand the numbers were about 7,000 people, so there were thousands and thousands of people here on the Hill. I understand there was even a press conference—one of my colleagues across the table was there—and I understand that CBC not only did not cover the rally, but they didn't cover the news conference of the different parliamentarians who were bringing this issue forward.

I'm wondering how the decision is made not to carry a feature involving 7,000 people on Parliament Hill, as opposed to, you know, we see sometimes 20 protesters somewhere and all of a sudden that's the news story that leads out. I'm wondering how you make the decision to ignore 7,000 people on Parliament Hill one day, and then the next day, if there are 20 protesters, the determination is made to make that the lead-out story.

**Mr. Tony Burman:** Your second reference is hypothetical. I think the decision by the CBC in choosing stories is the same as any other news organization, where we evaluate the news value of a particular story against the news value of other stories that are available. I don't have the particular details of that one story, in terms of how we handled it or didn't.

• (1025)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I'm just curious, hypothetically, as to how you would ignore 7,000 people rallying on Parliament Hill. I'm just wondering what kind of contemplation might be gone through in terms of determining—

**Mr. Tony Burman:** With respect, I don't think I accept your characterization. There is no one who woke up that morning and said, "Let's wilfully ignore a rally of 7,000 people". I could quite happily go back.... You know, I'll go back after this meeting and retrace that, but there is no day when there aren't a multitude of groups—interest groups, groups of people—that feel their particular event deserves coverage on our airwaves more than something else. That's part of the territory.

In fairness, I think probably a more accurate way of assessing it is whether a lot of these issues, including the one you're referring to, have received incredible attention on the CBC in a multitude of ways. I don't know what the staffing or the resource issue was that day with that story. We're limited in Ottawa; we can't cover the number of stories we want to in Ottawa. These are the kinds of choices that are made, and we stand by them, but I'll go into that in detail if you want.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** No, I just was curious. I thought it might be a pertinent example. I was just trying to discover how determinations are made, but I see you're not sure as to how that is, so I appreciate that.

**The Chair:** We now turn to Mr. Angus.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** This is a very interesting discussion for me. As an independent broadcaster and journalist, I've always had a very odd relationship with the CBC. I ran afoul of this little blue book many times, and I'm glad to actually see it in print, because I always wondered why some of the stuff I was delivering was.... I was getting my wrists slapped.

In fact, just for the record and because I think it is instructive, I was not doing news for CBC because I was known as someone fairly opinionated, but I did a lot of cultural coverage in the north, and I had done a 10-part series on pioneers of the north. It's about as innocuous as you could get, but I was involved in a very controversial battle in the north, and one day I was quoted on air. That morning I got a call from a very good friend of mine, a respected CBC journalist, who said, "You know you're done here." I said, "Yeah, I could see that." They pulled my 10-part series that morning and said, "This will not air on any CBC station because you are seen as politically active, even though you're not one of our journalists."

I'm asking my question because I've dealt with this code of standards. It seems to me that there is a real set of standards right across regional stations across the country; there is the insistence that CBC has a voice and that it maintains that standard. How do you ensure, not just at central command in Toronto and Montreal, but in Yellowknife and in Sudbury and in St. John's, that the standard is applied and that your producers have a good sense of what a CBC voice is and what isn't?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** We do it by the leadership that exists in those locations. I think one of the enduring strengths of the CBC and Radio-Canada is the quality of the news and program leaders, not only in the large centres like Toronto or Montreal, but across the country.

I think there's a greater desire on the part of both CBC and Radio-Canada to strengthen their regional presence and to expand into communities where there perhaps isn't a CBC presence right now. What ensures that the standards in those locations are up to what we would all like to think are the national standards is really the quality of not only the staff but the leaders.

This is a very significant document within our organization. I think a lot of people really take it incredibly seriously, and ideally that would limit the number of problems we run into.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I know and have worked with many people in private media over the years, and when you're in a northern region, an isolated region, getting your local story into national coverage is definitely fairly difficult, unless a hurricane hits the local trailer park and you just happen to be the camera person there. Otherwise there seems to be a disconnect.

How do you feel about the relationship between taking regional and local stories and putting them into a national context?

• (1030)

**Mr. Tony Burman:** That's a complaint I've heard at CBC for many years. It's something that we take seriously. I think if you really did a forensic investigation of *The National* in the past two, three, or four years, one would conclude, and I know the figures bear this out, that isn't nearly the case anymore. There is an openness on the part of all of our national and network programs for far more regional voices and regional coverage. I think a lot of that has enriched our programming. My guess would be that the number of complaints in that regard are probably fewer than they used to be.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I want to jump from regional to international because of the situation we're now facing with growing instability in various parts of the world, key news centres of the world. We've got the situation of Alan Johnston still kidnapped in Gaza. More and more journalists are now becoming targets for attack in regions and in wars where, in previous years, journalists were always able to continue carrying on. We have hardly any journalists able to work out of Iraq anymore. You mentioned that we're there in Darfur, but now Gaza is becoming a no-go zone. Many of these places are.

What is the decision process that is made around putting a journalist in the field in a situation that is unstable in today's climate?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** This has probably become the most important kind of issue confronting us as we cover the world. It relates to our coverage, as you point out, of Gaza. It relates to our coverage of northern Lebanon, all sorts of areas. I think we're blessed with a lot

of experienced people. I've worked in four war zones, and my colleagues have a similar kind of track record.

I think the question of the security and safety of our journalists is job one for most of us. I think what we do is balance the need for us as a news organization to cover the story for Canadians versus the fact that we've got to ensure that we do this in a safe way. I think a lot of it involves resources. As you would know, in Iraq, for example, the cost of security for our journalists now exceeds the cost of our journalists, and this is something that an organization like the CBC or Radio-Canada can't easily cope with.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Saulnier:** These are decisions which we make together. In the case of Iraq, Tony and I discussed the matter and decided to no longer send in any journalists there because we could not guarantee their safety. Last fall, out of three reporters sent to Afghanistan, two were women: Alexandra Szacka and Céline Galipeau. The third was Frédéric Nicoloff. We maintained a constant link with them, specifically to make sure that they were not taking risks that were uncalled for. I can assure you that as information manager, it is sometimes difficult for me to tell journalists to go out in the field, because I'm conscious of the responsibility involved.

[English]

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I have a final quick point here and then we can end it. When Alan Johnston stayed in Gaza, it was because he felt that if he left, nobody would cover this story and it would disappear. And we see now places like Chechnya where there are no-go zones for journalists, so anything can be allowed to happen there.

What happens to the news when there aren't people on the ground to be able to provide independent verification, or independent rebuttal, of the claims that are being made about these places?

**Mr. Tony Burman:** That is a real challenge. There are two ways of dealing with it. One would be that we do draw on locally based journalists and people, whether it's in Gaza or—a few years ago—in Chechnya, from those places where we are prevented from going. Also, I think what we do is cover the story around the region. For example, we still have covered a lot of Gaza in spite of the fact that we can't for the moment enter Gaza, because one can do that through Israel or through Jordan. It's a challenge for all media, not only the CBC, but we have such a range, as Alain indicated, of experienced field journalists that I think we're still able to cover the story as best we can in spite of the fact that we can't necessarily get into the area as often as we should.

• (1035)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

I thank both you gentlemen this morning for your answers to our questions. We're going to take just a short recess and then come back for some committee business.

•(1035) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•(1040)

**The Chair:** To get to some of our committee business, last week I was unsuccessful at the Liaison Committee. They turned down our request to travel to the U.K. to study the BBC, even though I put up a brave fight for all of us.

Second is a notice of motion from Maka Kotto. He proposes that:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage recommend that the federal government initiate as a matter of urgency the transfer of Quebec's share of the subsidies of \$60 million over two-years available for festivals, so that these funds can be allocated to existing provincial programs, and that adoption of this motion be reported to the House as soon as possible.

Would you like to speak to the motion, Mr. Kotto?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maka Kotto:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This motion reflects the will of Quebec's National Assembly, all parties included: the Liberal Party of Quebec, the Action démocratique and the Parti Québécois. Given the current emergency, the organizers of Quebec festivals had hoped, since they had met with Mr. Flaherty before he had even drawn up his budget and had been promised by the minister that new festival funding would be forthcoming to replace the money that had been cut by Mr. Martin, to see this new funding made available to organizations so that they could go ahead with their projects in an appropriate manner this summer.

However, it has become apparent that the Minister of Canadian Heritage has held back the money and does not intend to distribute it at this time, which is already creating problems on the ground. Festivals have been cancelled, others are accumulating deficits. Quebec has established criteria for redistributing the amount of money to which it is entitled. This is a request that was also reiterated by Mr. Bachand, Quebec's Minister of Tourism. He emphasized that this would be an emergency measure. The Minister of Canadian Heritage will have all the time she needs to set the criteria for the program next year, so that it is in line with her vision.

We are therefore faced with this reality. You know what impact the festivals have on Quebec's economy. You also know that, internationally, these festivals have put Quebec on the map, as we say, and they bring in tourists. Indeed, they are Quebec's drawing card to attract tourists from the United States, South America and Europe.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you.

I appreciate my colleague bringing this forward, because certainly in Quebec and the rest of the country there's a lot of concern about this festivals program.

But I am concerned about this motion. I have spoken with festival coalitions from across the country, and they still believe it's possible to get an agreement in place. If we support this, festivals in every

other part of the country will be basically sold down the river. I think that would be improper for us, because there's a question of the inequity of this motion.

There might be smaller festivals in, say, Prince Edward Island that aren't as..... I don't know whether they have criteria or not, but if we simply turn this into a transfer to one region and leave out every other festival in the country, we would be remiss in what we need to do, which is get the coalitions meeting with the minister, get this criteria in place, and get this money out.

•(1045)

**The Chair:** Mr. Abbott.

**Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** I would like to have the opportunity to also debate this, but before I do, I just need a bit of clarification from our clerk.

I'm curious because of my lack of knowledge of Standing Order 108(2). I wonder if we could have information pursuant to what in this order specifically relates to the motion by Mr. Kotto. In other words, if Mr. Kotto's motion is that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage recommends that the federal government do this, I have no difficulty with that. I'm just wondering what the specific reference to Standing Order 108(2) is. I don't understand that.

This is not a criticism; this is for a point of information.

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jacques Lahaie):** Section 108 (2) is general in nature and covers all activities undertaken by the Department of Canadian Heritage. According to this section, the committee is authorized to examine any question pertaining to this department. This is a general power, not a specific one.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jim Abbott:** Okay.

I won't belabour it. I still don't see the necessity of the reference pursuant to that. In any event, that's neither here nor there.

Mr. Kotto has heard me in the House and has heard the minister talking about the fact that the \$60 million over two years is in addition to the funds that have already been flowing. She and I have enunciated the number of dollars that are flowing. There has been an emphasis within our dialogue to point out that the idea of the \$60 million over two years is particularly to fund smaller events. And this must be Friday and frosty, because I happen to agree with Mr. Angus today, but the point still is that in addition to his eloquently stated position, this was never, ever, intended to be a transfer from the federal government to provincial governments, from one jurisdiction to another jurisdiction.

The intent of this, as described in the budget documents...and all the narrative that has occurred, either from the minister or from me, clearly has stipulated that this is to flow from the federal treasury directly to the people who will actually be using the funds. This motion is completely foreign in every respect to the intention of the minister and the government.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

We'll go to Mr. Scott first, and then to Mr. Kotto.

**Hon. Andy Scott:** It gets better, Jim, in the context of these. I'm agreeing with both Charlie and Jim, although I will say this.

While I don't think this is the appropriate remedy, I share his concern about the problem. I think the minister responsible for the summer jobs program has demonstrated the ability to respond to the mistake and try to remedy it quickly. So I wouldn't let the government off the hook completely for not being able to respond quickly and to remedy this in the same way they are attempting, at least, to remedy the problem with summer students.

As far as this particular remedy goes, I can't support it. I think there is a role for the national government as a national government to support these kinds of events and so on. I have no assurances that if it's given to the province—and this isn't about Quebec, this is about any province—they wouldn't just simply replace their own spending on the same events or finance a tax reduction, for example.

•(1050)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Kotto.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maka Kotto:** I would point out, once again, paraphrasing Quebec's Minister of Tourism, Mr. Bachand, that this would be an emergency measure and not a permanent one. Given the stakes involved for Quebec, we would be showing a lack of understanding of the cultural and artistic reality and the associated economic benefits by disregarding this urgency and the fact that Quebec's National Assembly voted unanimously in favour of such a measure.

I think that everyone, on all sides, has given his or her opinion. Consequently, I do not believe that we should dwell any further on the issue. I am therefore asking for a recorded vote on the issue.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, a recorded vote.

(Motion negated [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** I declare the motion defeated.

Mr. Fast is not bringing his motion forward at this particular time. It stays on the record as a notice of motion, but there needs to be more clarification.

We have two more things I'd like to get through first.

Order in council appointments is number one.

Her Excellency the Governor General in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the National Film Board, pursuant to section 16 of the National Film

Board Act, hereby appoints Tom Perlmutter of Montreal to be government film commissioner.

Is it the wish that we interview this gentleman?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Can I get a consensus that we would call him here?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** What's his name? I didn't hear you.

**The Chair:** Tom Perlmutter, of Montreal, Quebec.

The one other thing we have is a bit of luck, or what have you. CEO, deputy minister equivalent, Martin Matthews, from the New Zealand Ministry of Culture and Heritage, will be meeting with officials in Ottawa on June 11 to 13. He is in charge of public broadcasting in New Zealand, and we have an opportunity on the 12th to request him to appear before us, though he would request that meeting be in camera.

After my getting shot down at the Liaison Committee...and we can't travel to the U.K. When this gentleman is here, it would be a tremendous resource, I think. I'm told that New Zealand public broadcasting and Canadian broadcasting emulate each other.

So I'm going to make that suggestion. Is that good for everyone here?

**Some hon. members:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay, then, on the 12th we will have some great questions.

Just wait one second. Before we adjourn, there is one thing before our meeting next Thursday.

•(1055)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marion Ménard (Committee Researcher):** It is very important that we get your feedback during next Thursday's meeting, on the way we are to draft this report next summer. I would invite you to send me your proposals, recommendations or directions. We could use the same themes covered last Thursday during the round-table, namely the mandate, governance, accountability, new technologies and financing. In a nutshell, I would like to hear your thoughts on Thursday; the floor will be yours.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you. One other thing. Thanks for all the great work in that round table last week. I thought it was great.

The meeting is adjourned.





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