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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1110)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 140 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

[*English*]

Before we begin, most of you in the room know the rules, where to keep your device, etc., so that you are not going to be causing any kind of static feedback for the interpreters. Remember to read that little card. You have that little decal on which to put your equipment.

This meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I think you know the rules. Speak through the chair. Whenever you are asking a question, it must go through the chair. Do not speak unless the chair recognizes you. Don't take any pictures of the Zoom, etc. Most of you know the drill by now.

I would say that Ms. Tait knows the drill by now.

We shall begin.

I'm going to try to give you the 30-second thumbs-up or shout-out, or whatever you want to call it, to let you know that you have only 30 seconds left when we're doing it.

I welcome Catherine Tait, of the CBC, here today.

You know you have five minutes, Ms. Tait. Welcome.

Ms. Catherine Tait (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation): Thank you, Madam Chair and members.

This is my fifth appearance before this committee in 12 months. Each time, I have urged you to consider the fragile state of Canada's media industry and the importance of a strong public broadcaster, so we can ensure that Canadians continue to have access to reliable and credible news and information produced by Canadian journalists, so that they can continue to discover and celebrate Canadian creative talent, as well as the excellence of our amateur athletes, and so that Canadians can hear and connect with each other no matter where they live.

There are those who insist we don't need a public broadcaster anymore, that there are thousands of other choices, but are those choices operated by Canadians for Canadians? Are they dedicated to independent journalism with clear standards? Are they investing

in Canadian programs? Are they committed to showcasing our musicians and our writers in English, French and eight indigenous languages?

[*Translation*]

Ninety years ago, a Conservative government made a choice: to invest public money to create a Canadian public broadcaster—to protect culture for Canadians. The threat then was from American radio stations spilling over the border.

Today, the threat is much greater. A flood of foreign services coming in, and 94% of all digital revenues flowing out of Canada to foreign companies. What is at risk is the survival of a Canadian-owned media and the information Canadians need.

[*English*]

Other countries continue to invest in their public media, and they invest much more than we do, an average of \$78 per capita, more than double that in Canada.

CBC/Radio-Canada now costs Canadians \$32 per year, less than \$3 a month. In fact, now is precisely the time we should be investing more in public broadcasting, not less.

We have shared with you documents outlining some of the ways CBC/Radio-Canada serves Canadians.

Here's what's at stake: News and information the majority of Canadians trust; the largest investor in the creation of original Canadian programs; the most popular radio shows and podcasts; a digital platform used by 21 million Canadians each month for access to news with no paywall.

[*Translation*]

That is CBC/Radio-Canada. It is paid for by all Canadians in order to serve all Canadians, regardless of where they live or what language they speak. At a time when other Canadian media are cutting back; when Canadian writers, creators, musicians and athletes have fewer opportunities to get noticed and build a career, how does cutting public broadcasting actually make things better for anyone?

[English]

Ken Whyte is a conservative writer and the founding editor of the National Post. He recently said this about defunding CBC:

It might make some conservatives feel better emotionally...but it's not going to do anything for the culture of the country, for our understanding of Canada, for the ability of the various parts of the country to communicate with and understand one another, or even argue with one another. It's just going to make things worse.

I urge this committee to talk with Canadians. Talk with people in Trois-Rivières, St. Boniface, Prince Rupert, Charlottetown and Rankin Inlet who rely on CBC/Radio-Canada for their news. Talk with the Canadian authors who see their books become bestsellers after they've been profiled on *Canada Reads* and *Le combat national des livres*. Talk with Canadians who depend on us during a pandemic, wildfires or floods to find out what they need to know to protect their families.

I've had the privilege of speaking with Canadians across the country over the past six years. I know the majority love their public broadcaster. Some do not, and I've met with them too. We listen to their suggestions on how we can be better, putting journalists in communities where other media have left, launching local podcasts and finding new ways they can share their views about what's important to them. We will continue to transform our services to meet their needs, because we exist to serve all Canadians.

• (1115)

If I've learned one thing during my tenure, it is that CBC/Radio-Canada is a lifeline that links this vast country. Losing it will not make Canada better.

Thank you.

The Chair: Now we're going to go to the question and answer session. We will begin with a six-minute round, starting with Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, thank you for coming back to committee.

I find it interesting that, in your opening statement, you did not mention the reason you were called back to this committee, and that is the \$18 million in bonuses that CBC paid out.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

There are two things. One is that the sound online is cutting in and out. We're not getting half of what's being said when Mr. Kurek is speaking. I don't know what we can do to fix that, but it's.... I'm going to stick to that one. It was very hard to actually hear what he was saying. I don't know if it's his mic or if it's the room. It was happening a bit with Madam Tait, but with Mr. Kurek it was pretty hard to decipher.

The Chair: Should we suspend a bit until we figure this out?

I'm sorry, Damien.

I'm sorry, Ms. Tait.

Yes, let's go ahead and find out what's going on.

• (1115)

(Pause)

• (1120)

The Chair: We're resuming.

Begin from the top, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, thank you for joining the heritage committee again.

I find it interesting that, in your opening statement, you didn't mention the \$18 million in bonuses that were paid out. Certainly, when I speak to and hear from thousands of Canadians—

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

Mr. Damien Kurek: If the game is that the Liberals simply don't want to talk about the bonuses, at least they could be honest about it.

The Chair: Mr. Kurek, there's a point of order.

What is it, Mr. Noormohamed?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: There are two things I would now say. One is that Mr. Kurek knows me well enough to know this is not about playing games. We did have and we still seem to have some crackling on the audio; I'm pointing that out.

However, I also want to make sure we are clear about what the mandate of Madam Tait's appearance was today. I understand it was from the House order in respect of the cuts to the CBC, not about bonuses. I just want to be clear about what it is the discussion today is supposed to be about.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

It's back to you, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: It certainly wasn't a point of order. Again, it seems as though the Liberals are terrified, like Ms. Tait, to talk about the \$18 million in bonuses that were awarded to individuals at the CBC.

Now, Ms. Tait, in your opening statement you asked for more money, yet the last time more money was awarded to the CBC, it went to bonuses. As a show of leadership from the top—this was asked to you before, but you didn't answer clearly, so I'm going to give you another opportunity here today—will you categorically reject any bonus that is offered to you, as your tenure as the CEO of CBC comes to a close?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Madam Chair, there were a number of questions in that question, if I may—

The Chair: I heard that, and I really want to correct the idea.... If the committee wishes, I can reread the motion. It is about cuts to the CBC and the impact of defunding the CBC. That's one of the things that were clear. It was not about bonuses, because, if you recall, Ms. Tait was here not too long ago talking about bonuses. I will read it. It says, "including how the Liberal threat to cut funding led to hundreds of CBC-Radio-Canada job cuts and the effects on smaller communities, as promised by the Leader of the Official Opposition", and, "the consequences of defunding the CBC". That's clearly what the motion says.

• (1125)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Look, I think it is clear that Ms. Tait, in her opening statement, asked for more money. Conservatives do not believe that, if the leader at the top of the organization is unwilling to make a commitment, to say that they won't accept a bonus of what could be to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money, at a time when people are being laid off.... The last time the CBC asked for more money, they paid out more bonuses.

Ms. Tait, to you today, out of respect for the organization that you've led over the last number of years, will you reject, if offered, a taxpayer-funded bonus?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Madam Chair, I've appeared at this committee now five times, and I believe that I have more than adequately responded to questions about performance pay. I do want to correct the record. The funding that CBC/Radio-Canada received, the \$42 million, went to save 454 jobs of the 800 jobs forecasted as needing to be cut. Just to be clear, that money went to save jobs.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Just imagine, you say that it went to save jobs, yet still \$18 million in bonuses were paid out: \$18 million of taxpayers' money went out in bonuses. Ms. Tait, your tenure at the CBC is coming to a close at the beginning of January. Will you commit to not taking a taxpayer-funded severance at the conclusion of your tenure?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Let me say, just to clarify, the \$18 million was an obligation that the corporation had to the 1,180 unaffiliated employees. We have a payroll of close to \$900 million. If the member believes that we make decisions about performance pay in a frivolous fashion, I have to correct him. These dollars on payroll are put in place at the beginning of every year, so to suggest that funding that was provided at the end of the year was used in that way is, simply, incorrect.

Mr. Damien Kurek: It was \$71,000, on average, per executive. That's more than the average Canadian makes. Madam Tait, you make more than the Prime Minister makes, yet you refuse to reject a taxpayer-funded severance. Again, I ask the question to you today, Madam Tait: Will you reject a severance paid for by taxpayers at the conclusion of your term as CEO of CBC?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I've told this committee repeatedly, I have not received performance pay since 2021-22 and, given the terms of my compensation, like all other GIC appointees—every president and the CEO of every Crown—that includes salary and performance pay. I leave that decision to the government.

Mr. Damien Kurek: You could reject that today, yet you won't.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have one minute, but I've been witnessing.... I think I've heard this question asked at least 10 times at this committee in the past. Ms. Tait has answered it. Would you like to move on, Mr. Kurek?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, and I will move on by simply saying this. Madam Tait, you said in your opening statement that you speak to Canadians on a regular basis. Internal emails that you sent, which were accessed via access to information, suggested that there's momentum growing on the "defund the CBC" movement. Given your appearance here today, as has been the case over the last number of appearances that you've made, it's certainly not surprising as to why that is the case. There's decreased trust in the public broadcaster. Revenues are down. Ad revenue is down, and, most importantly, there are fewer viewers watching your programming. Do you have any regrets, Madam Tait, over your tenure as CEO of the CBC?

The Chair: Ms. Tait, you have 30 seconds.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Madam Chair, may I address the untrue accusations of the member?

Every media company in the country is cutting jobs. Our industry is in crisis. In our case, we forecast 800 cuts. In the end, we worked hard to make sure that the lion's share of those were vacancies, so 205 vacancies were cut.

I believe that we're talking about the wrong things here. Digital revenue has tripled since I began at CBC/Radio-Canada. Viewership is in fact up on digital platforms, because, with all due respect to the member, television viewing in general is down.

I would just say, let us focus on the facts. I provided all the members with this excellent document prepared by my staff on the facts around CBC/Radio-Canada. I really urge you to spend the time to learn about Canadians' viewership behaviour. They are online. Canadians are watching CBC on YouTube and on connected TVs.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

I'll now move to Anju Dhillon for the Liberals for six minutes, please.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I thought Ms. Gainey was picking up this round, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I have a list in front of me, Mr. Noormohamed, and it says Ms. Dhillon.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): You can put me in, Chair. I'll jump in.

The Chair: All right. Go ahead, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Ms. Tait. As mentioned, it's been five times, I believe, that you've joined this committee. We appreciate your being here.

The Conservatives have constantly looked for any angle possible to justify the cuts they would propose to CBC if they had an opportunity. They've been very clear. Their heritage critic—

An hon. member: I don't think anybody can hear Mr. Coteau.

The Chair: Mr. Coteau, people are saying they can't hear you. We're just going to figure that out.

What is wrong with everything today?

Will you try again, Michael?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can you hear me now?

The Chair: I can hear you well. I don't know if anybody else can.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Who said they couldn't hear me?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Everyone.

The Chair: It was everyone except me.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Maybe Mr. Kurek could take back the comment he made about our playing games, because there is an actual audio problem.

Mr. Michael Coteau: We know that Conservatives have—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're going to have to suspend until we fix this.

Michael, no one can hear you but me.

• (1130) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1135)

The Chair: We had Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Coteau, I'll let you restart, as I did with Mr. Kurek earlier on.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Again, thank you to Ms. Tait for joining us today.

As mentioned in her testimony, she's been here five times. It's quite obvious that every single time she appears, the Conservatives want to carry forward an agenda they have put forward to Canadians to get rid of the CBC.

We know that the CBC plays an important role in French Canada, in rural Canada and right across this country. In addition to that, it's a big part of, I believe, our heritage in this country, and it supports that heritage.

There are a lot of misconceptions. I would say that they're lies that Conservatives put forward when it comes to CBC. They want to create the illusion that the CBC itself is an organization that is

losing viewership every single day. In fact, I've asked you this question, I think, twice now. The fact is that viewership is up when you look at the way people are consuming media today.

I guess the question is, where are we today? Has the CBC increased its viewership because of the transition into more of an on-line presence?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, and I'll take the example of *The National*, because that's often cited as where we have declining television viewership. In fact, maybe 10 years ago, there were 1.2 million people tuning in on television, and today there are about 1.3 million people consuming *The National*, but only half of them consume it on television. There's still a solid number of people who watch linear TV, and the remainder—in fact, an increasing number—are watching on YouTube, on CBC Gem or on connected TVs.

Just to be very clear, so people understand what a connected TV is, it is not a linear television box. It is a connection to the Internet. That's why you can get Netflix, YouTube and Crave, as well as CBC Gem, the CBC News Network and all the other wonderful Canadian channels on connected TV. People need to understand that Canadians have moved online. That does not mean they have moved off CBC.

• (1140)

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much.

I hope the Conservatives are paying attention to that answer, because for some reason.... I don't know what it is, or where the block is—not the Bloc here but the block of absorbing the information that's being presented. For some reason, this question is constantly being asked about ratings. We know that the ratings are up, and we know that CBC is doing quite well when it comes to connecting with Canadians.

It's interesting. The Conservatives are okay with the fact that a lot of our media now in Canada has been purchased by American companies. Here we have, like many G20 countries, a public broadcaster that is owned by the people of this country and supports Canadian content.

I said at the first meeting you ever came to that I grew up watching CBC. A lot of the characters from my childhood were from CBC and TVOntario, which I'm a very big supporter of as well. It's our heritage in this country. TV shows from the 1970s and 1980s wouldn't have had a chance on American networks if they hadn't been supported by the Canadian taxpayer.

I cannot understand why Conservatives are so anti-CBC, one of the last true Canadian national networks that works directly with Canadians, that's funded by taxpayers and is publicly owned. I just can't understand why they would be so against it, yet, when it comes to the trend line that's taking place in this country, when it comes to media as a whole, for some reason, they seem okay that American corporations can own Canadian companies and media now. It's very challenging.

You know, one of the misconceptions they put out there is that they can keep Radio-Canada and get rid of English CBC.

I guess the question to you is this: Are these stand-alone organizations, or are they interconnected at many different levels? Can you separate the two sections of the broadcasting and just hope they survive or hope one survives?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Thank you for the question.

As I've said here before, CBC/Radio-Canada receives a single parliamentary allocation. Those funds are then deployed, with 56% going to CBC English services and 44% going to CBC French services in Radio-Canada. That's where the division stops, because the services are connected and interdependent in terms of shared station locales, shared equipment and shared technology.

I'll use the example, because I failed to mention it earlier, of the Olympics. The Olympics were produced absolutely collaboratively between the CBC and Radio-Canada. In fact, the CBC assumes about 80% of the costs, because it drives about 80% of the revenue associated with the Olympics, so without the CBC, Radio-Canada would not be able to show Canadians the Olympics.

There are many programs that we work on together. I'll just take an example of, let's say, one of our regional stations in Edmonton, where a CBC journalist may be going out and a Radio-Canada cameraman may be working with that CBC journalist. The two of them may, in fact, file stories together in their respective languages.

Let us be clear that these are not two separate companies. They are one. They obviously have a very profound editorial independence, but they have a shared infrastructure.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Tait. Your time is up.

Thanks, Michael.

Now we'll go to Mr. Champoux for the Bloc for six minutes.

• (1145)

[Translation]

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

Thank you for being with us once again, Ms. Tate. I'm starting to believe that you're beginning to like it and that you'll miss us once you're gone.

Like more than 80% of Canadians, I want to preserve our public broadcaster. In the current climate, it's essential that we have a business that presents the news in a serious manner, even though some dispute the current state of affairs. We have to save the news at all costs, and CBC/Radio-Canada is one of the tools we must use to do it.

However, some users—and we've been able to call them users since the advent of online platforms—the viewers and listeners, are legitimately frustrated. Last weekend, for example, I wanted to watch the Vanier Cup final, and I congratulate the Rouge et Or on their brilliant victory. When you open the app, you're asked to log in to your account, and advertisements are run during the broadcast of the match. These things eventually become frustrating because people wonder why they have to create an account—even though

it's free—to access the content they're already paying for with their direct and indirect taxes. You know how it goes.

If we want to keep a public broadcaster in healthy condition—and that's true of 80% of Canadians—and if we want it to prosper in the changing environment in which the news and media world now finds itself, the solution could be to make those quite frequent frustrations disappear. I know my Conservative colleagues dispute this, but as you yourself said, investing more money in our public broadcaster would help moderate the need to resort to advertising and subscriptions. That would go a long way toward eliminating some of the frustrations that are used as an argument by those who want to cut funding for CBC/Radio-Canada.

First of all, have you estimated the additional cost per Canadian to remove advertising from news programs? We can all agree that, if we suddenly deleted all advertising and substantially increased public funding, that could be a big help but wouldn't be accepted as easily as that, at least from a perception standpoint.

What do you think of that? Do you have any idea of the money we could expect to pay, as Quebeckers and Canadians, to eliminate the frustrations that most often arise with our public broadcaster?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I want to make a few remarks about those frustrations, particularly those related to the need to log in.

We now live in a digital world. What would be the point of a digital service if you accessed it without having to log in? The strength of our digital services is that, by gathering Canadians' data, they enable us to learn about their needs every day—

Mr. Martin Champoux: In that case, Ms. Tait, I'm going to clarify my example.

Many online services of the CBC and the Société Radio-Canada, the SRC, aren't included in the subscription, and people have to pay to access them. I'm going to add that frustration to the inconvenience of having to log in, which can be justified because it's a way to gather data.

Ms. Catherine Tait: So you're talking about subscriptions and advertising.

Some \$400 million in CBC/Radio-Canada's budget comes from commercial revenues. That means that we would then have to replace that \$400 million.

In addition, in the case of advertising in television services, for example, we would then have to fill several minutes with programming.

I believe that my predecessor said nearly seven years ago that it would take somewhere between \$400 million and \$500 million to avoid having to make that kind of payment.

Mr. Martin Champoux: I understand why we're talking about \$400 million to \$500 million because we would be offsetting the advertising revenues that we would have a raised. We would add content production capacity in order to fill those minutes. That's a very important point.

However, we aren't necessarily talking about doing that overnight and replacing that \$400 million or \$500 million.

That brings me back to the fact that our public broadcaster is one of the least costly per person among countries that have a public broadcaster. It costs us approximately \$33 per Canadian per year.

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's it.

The average cost among all countries is \$78. That's a difference of approximately \$45.

• (1150)

Mr. Martin Champoux: If we increased that contribution to \$45 per person, people wouldn't feel those frustrations. Fewer people might ultimately agree with that statement because there would be somewhat less frustration with the public broadcaster's offerings.

Earlier you said that it's impossible to withdraw funding from the CBC without having a major impact on the SRC's French-language services. I'd like to get a few more details on that. I'm thinking, for example, of the production styles that would generate more regular revenue. You mentioned the Olympics earlier, but that event takes place once every two years, including both summer and winter games.

In real terms, in everyday life, what would be the impact on variety program production and so on if we were to cut funding to the CBC as a vehicle for Quebec and francophone culture?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I said earlier, English and French services are closely connected and interdependent. Of course, there would be no direct impact in the case of an entirely francophone program such as *En direct de l'univers*.

However, there would be a problem if funding for Radio-Canada were weakened by cuts to the CBC's funding. As I said, the CBC and SRC are interdependent, which means that budget cuts would be made to all production, our own and that of independent producers.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now go to the New Democrats and Niki Ashton.

You have six minutes, Niki.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome Ms. Tait back to our committee for what I imagine is the final time we'll have these discussions in this capacity.

Your regular appearances, Ms. Tait, at our committee reflect how much Canadians care about CBC/Radio-Canada. You can't represent a rural, northern or indigenous community, or live in a part of

Canada that is francophone, and not understand CBC/Radio-Canada's importance.

For many of us, the CBC has a history of being the only one to cover our stories, but the CBC's reliance on major cities to sell smaller community stories is a problem. Its board's obsession with rewarding high-level executives' exorbitant bonuses while at the same time cutting jobs is a problem.

The CBC is our public broadcaster. It doesn't exist to mimic private broadcasters, who prioritize bonuses and profits over the jobs of their employees and over local broadcasting. Canadians deserve better from the CBC.

We in the NDP do not support the full-frontal attacks that we've seen from the Conservatives against the CBC. The CBC is critical to Canada, to a vital democracy and to all of our communities, but we need to see the CBC do better. It's time to ban bonuses at the CBC. It's time to invest in local and regional broadcasting, including in regions like mine, which hasn't had a permanent CBC presence and has had its station shut down for years.

I would end off by saying, Ms. Tait, that I hope your successor will take this feedback as guidance going forward. We have too much at stake when it comes to the possibility of losing the CBC.

In terms of local media, we've heard here in northern Manitoba that the CBC has finally found somebody to perhaps begin in the new year, filling a position that's been left vacant for quite some time in our region. This is very positive news, except that we know that the last time that was promised, the contract lasted only two months. I'm wondering about this person who is slated to take on this CBC position in the new year. Is their contract for longer than two months? How long can we expect them to stay? Obviously, for us in the north, and I would say in Manitoba generally, we hope this is a long-term commitment from the CBC.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I would just say to the member that, as you well know, we've been trying very hard to fill that position in Thompson, Manitoba. It is near and dear to our hearts, and I very much expect and hope that this next person taking the job will be there for a longer period. The person who was there before did not have a short-term contract. The person made the choice to leave.

The commitment is there, then. Again, as we said a couple of weeks ago, CBC will be committing to hiring 25 new journalists in locations across the country, focused on the west and the north, because we recognize the importance of our connection with local communities. As I've said many times, the force of CBC and Radio-Canada is our proximity to Canadians across the country. Therefore, you absolutely have our commitment to do so and to continue to do so, if I may speak for my successor.

• (1155)

Ms. Niki Ashton: We certainly welcome this new person, and we hope your successor and the CBC will ensure that regions like ours have the support necessary for their CBC employees to thrive and stick around for the long term, as ought to be part of CBC's mandate.

Moving on, you've been clear that due to the Liberal threat of a 3% cut across the board, you had to lay off workers. The Liberals can go on and on all they want about the threat Conservatives are to the CBC, and they're not wrong, but it is a basic fact that this Liberal government's actions meant that hundreds of Canadians don't know where their next paycheque is coming from. Meanwhile, high-level executives got bonuses almost double what the lowest-paid workers at the CBC got.

If you could change anything about your time at the CBC, would you have given up those bonuses to save the jobs of CBC employees?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I just have to correct the record, Madam Chair. We were very clear in our December 2023 statement that we were forecasting a \$125-million deficit, and that was due to a number of factors, including pressures as a result of coming out of the pandemic, with the inflation and rising costs of production, and increasing declines in advertising revenue linked to television.

Yes, we also faced a 3% cut from the federal government. That was a forecast, and I should be very clear that it was a forecast over three years. The first year, it was about \$11 million. That was not the deciding factor that tipped the situation for us. It was a piece of it, yes, indeed. There was also \$21 million in integrity funding linked to the pandemic that we also lost that year.

Just to be very clear, when we look at our budget, we look at a holistic situation and not single items.

Ms. Niki Ashton: However, my question is whether you would have given up those bonuses to save the jobs of CBC employees?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I've said before, performance pay is part of the annual salary calculation that represents about \$900 million of payroll. It is separate from the ongoing budgeting that we were doing. The \$42 million was used very directly to save 454 jobs.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Ms. Tait, I think the question here is—

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, your time is up.

Ms. Niki Ashton: It was unfortunate—

The Chair: Thank you. You'll have another round.

It's a five-minute round for the Conservatives and Liberals.

Mr. Jivani, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Jamil Jivani (Durham, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, we've heard you speak about wanting more money from taxpayers. We've heard you talk about job cuts. I'd like to ask some questions about how your business, the CBC, is currently operating. With the billion dollars of taxpayer subsidies you have, the CBC has to compete with the private sector, including in hiring talent. Is that correct?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, we don't compete with the private sector. We live in an ecosystem with the private sector. We are complementary to the private sector.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Okay. That sounds like a fancy way of saying "compete".

Does that include having to hire broadcast executives and on-air talent in the marketplace or the "ecosystem", as you referred to it?

Ms. Catherine Tait: For sure, there are situations in which on-air talent might go to CBC, as they often do to CTV or to TVA.

It is an ecosystem. People move. We want to have those kinds of opportunities for all our journalists.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: To attract talent, would you have to pay market compensation to people you want to bring into the organization?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I've said before, we aim for what we call P50, which is about 50% of market. At no time are we trying to beat the market; we average the market.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Okay.

You make about half a million dollars, plus you haven't ruled out bonuses, so maybe more than that. Would market rates mean that executive vice-presidents may be on salary for over \$1 million a year?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'm sorry, but I'm not following your logic here.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: If you are competing in the ecosystem, as you described it, are you having, potentially, to pay executive vice-presidents \$1 million a year?

• (1200)

Ms. Catherine Tait: I think MP Champoux raised this question with me at my last appearance, when we talked about the compensation at Bell, TVA and other media companies. We are not paying anywhere near.... As I said, we stay to about 50% of market rates.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Gotcha.

Could you confirm how many CBC employees may be earning in the range of your salary or higher?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I don't believe anybody at CBC/Radio-Canada has a base salary higher than mine.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: What if you factored in bonuses? Would there be salaries that would be comparable to yours?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, there would be, at the executive vice-president level.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Okay. Would there be any indicators in your business performance that would cause you to consider that you might be overpaying some of your employees based on the performance of the organization? Are there any indicators that would cause concern in your mind to overpayment for what the CBC is producing and what the outcomes are of the organization?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely not. As I've said before, we do an annual review with the board of directors with outside experts to check on that very question. We're constantly mapping salaries right through the unaffiliated groups to look at whether they are, as I said, at a 50 percentile.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Just to confirm, as you're doing this mapping, there would be nothing you could foresee that could make you pause and say that this would be a reason we should not be paying bonuses or high salaries. Would there be no cause for concern that maybe people are being overcompensated with taxpayer dollars at the CBC?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I absolutely do not believe that people are overcompensated. If anything, we are not competitive in the market.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: To the Canadian people who pay all of these salaries and fund the organization, you'd like to say to them now that there's nothing that could come on your radar, there's no data point that could come across your desk, that would make you pause and consider that maybe we're paying too much, maybe the organization's not performing well enough, maybe we have to restructure how we're doing things or maybe we need a bit of self-reflection on why the "defund CBC" movement is growing so exponentially?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I said before, the reason the board of directors made the decision to do a compensation review was in fact to make sure all the information we've been working with is, in fact, 100% accurate, and perhaps we should be looking at other ways to approach compensation. There's an openness to change and to review, absolutely.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: However, declining viewership wouldn't be one; declining revenue wouldn't be one, and broad public distrust of your organization wouldn't be one. It seems to me that maybe it would be fair to ask the average Canadian taxpayer what you need to see to consider that the CBC is heading in the wrong direction. Therefore, asking for more money, as you have done today, seems not only out of touch, but rather audacious.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Let me be clear: Digital revenues have tripled. CBC Gem, which was launched at the beginning of my tenure, now reaches millions of Canadians. Let's be clear that the facts you are—

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Is ad revenue down?

The Chair: Excuse me. Time is up.

I'd like Ms. Tait to answer the question.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: I'm sorry.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Digital ad revenue and subscription revenue are both up. TV ad revenue, as per all media companies, is down or flat, depending on the market. It's actually higher right now in Quebec than it is in the rest of the country. The country is suffering inflation, so sponsors and advertisers have withdrawn. Quite frankly, to say that viewership and ad revenue are down, and those are the determining features of these last six years, is simply inaccurate.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

I now go to the Liberals.

Mr. Noormohamed, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Madam Chair

Thank you, Madam Tait, for being with us again.

I just want to start by saying that I think a couple of things are clear.

First, if the CBC, which is government-funded, is being held to a particular standard, then that same standard should be applied to private sector organizations like Bell Media, CTV and Postmedia, which have been taking millions of dollars in subsidies from the people of Canada.

I don't hear the same revulsion from the Conservatives when it comes to the private sector, which continues to hemorrhage money and whose executives are paid in the millions of dollars yet are still gladly laying employees off and taking taxpayer dollars at the same time.

I think it's a bit disingenuous for people to say they're going to attack the public broadcaster. It's the only broadcaster that unites Canadians and brings in the voice of rural, indigenous and francophone communities from coast to coast to coast and whose employees, yes, are paid materially less than what they might make in the private sector.

I expect, Madam Tait, that in the private sector you would make a heck of a lot more money than you make at CBC. I know many journalists at the CBC and others who work in the executive and other parts of CBC, who make a lot less than they might make in the private sector. They do this because of love for the country and because of the mission of the CBC.

It is clear to me that the "defund the CBC" movement is largely because of the rage farming and ideological stuff coming from the Conservatives. For some reason, they want to keep driving division between Canadians rather than having a unified public broadcaster that actually provides high-quality content to Canadians.

The question I would put to you, Madam Tait, is this:

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Why do you think the Conservatives detest the idea of having an independent broadcaster that works for Canadians, Quebeckers, people across the country?

[*English*]

Ms. Catherine Tait: As you know, I don't comment on political matters.

All I can say is that defunding the CBC would mean denying 80% of the population local news. It would be denying thousands of independent producers, creators, musicians and authors their livelihoods.

We can criticize how, in the last year, CBC/Radio-Canada had to lay off 141 people. It was very tough. Let us not forget that defunding the CBC represents, at a minimum, laying off 3,500 people at this corporation, plus the thousands of musicians, artists, performers, producers and sound technicians, etc., who depend on CBC/Radio-Canada.

Defunding the CBC would be denying French language minority communities from their lifeline to *le fait français*. Defunding the CBC would be denying the right of communities and indigenous communities across the north to hear their news in their language and connect with the south. It would deny the south the ability to learn about the north.

To me, it is absolutely without reason. When you ask me what the reason is, I say to myself that there is no common-sense reason for eliminating CBC. In fact, I ask myself the question, "Why?" This organization, this Crown corporation, was created by Parliament. Why would parliamentarians want to undo this Crown corporation that has existed for 90 years? If they have a problem with how we execute on our mandate, let's fix the problem.

We talk to Canadians every day. It's why we launched a show like *Cost of Living* out of Calgary. It was because we knew we needed more local shows in the regions. It's why we've launched local podcasts across the country and local FAST channels across the country. It's why we're hiring more journalists in the west.

We do not see defunding the CBC as a solution. We see that as making Canada worse, not better.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Madam Tait.

Building on that, we heard another falsehood come from the Conservatives about the fact that the CBC has lost the trust of Canadians. In fact, that's actually not true.

All the data point to the fact that the majority of Canadians continue to believe that the CBC is a trusted voice, including half of Conservative voters. I'm not sure which half they're talking to, but it seems to me that if the data show that at least half of Conservatives and many others believe that the CBC is a good thing, then it seems like their data points and their research perhaps aren't as solid as they think it might be.

I'd like to lean in a bit on this fanciful notion the Conservatives have that they could support French language programming in Quebec only. We know that they don't care about French language rights outside of Quebec. It's probably too woke to think about indigenous communities and to think about the idea of telling the stories of Canada.

Let's talk about brass tacks in Quebec. They perpetuate this myth that you could run a successful Radio-Canada without CBC's infrastructure.

How ridiculous is that, exactly?

Can you quantify for us what would actually happen if you said that you're going to cut all the funding to CBC and focus entirely on Radio-Canada? Your Olympic example was one.

What would that actually do to the quality of Radio-Canada and its ability to deliver what it's trying to do?

• (1210)

Ms. Catherine Tait: I would say the Olympics is just one example. There are many examples.

As I said, technology is the backbone of the organization. We are now a digital company. The Internet protocol technology on which all of our services live is shared and paid for by both services. If you cut one out, it is, by definition, going to weaken the other.

I will point out another example. When I joined CBC/Radio-Canada, Gem was in its infancy. We launched Gem, and Tou.TV was sitting on its own platform. We had two separate platforms. We harmonized those two platforms, because it made sense, with public dollars, to focus on one platform. CBC Gem and Tou.TV live on the same platform.

If you take away the financing of CBC Gem that contributes to that one platform, you will have half a platform. Let's just think. With each of those things where there's technology involved, we are, as I said to MP Champoux, weakening Radio-Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

I now go to MP Champoux for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, how many Canadians still depend on conventional television for the information they seek and to access culture? Do you have any figures on that?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's a very important question.

In 2018, six years ago, roughly 29% of Canadians watched only linear television, while approximately 22% used digital services. In 2023, 11% of Canadians only watched linear television; now 32% use digital services.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Can we say that people who still rely on linear television don't do so necessarily by choice but rather, in many cases, because it's impossible for them to access digital content? I'm thinking of those who live in remote regions, for example.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, absolutely. That's why we say we will never abandon those people.

I'd like to point out that more people in the francophone market still rely on linear television than in the anglophone market.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Yes, we love our good old TV in Quebec.

Do private broadcasters such as TVA and Bell have the same obligations as the public broadcaster regarding news coverage, particularly in the remote regions?

Ms. Catherine Tait: They have obligations toward the regions, of course, but they aren't as profound as ours. We have an obligation in the Great North of the country and in minority communities, among other regions.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Approximately how many tens of millions of dollars would it cost if, for example, a Conservative government made good on its foolish and crazy commitment to cut the CBC's funding and, at the same time, that of the SRC, while maintaining all the latter's services to preserve the broadcaster of French language and culture across Canada? I just want to show how ridiculous that proposal is.

Ms. Catherine Tait: It would be in the tens of millions of dollars. I mentioned the Great North, for example, where Radio-Canada has very few journalists.

Mr. Martin Champoux: It wouldn't be a major saving.

Ms. Catherine Tait: No.

Mr. Martin Champoux: You can't say we could save \$1 billion out of the \$1.4 billion of public funding.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I would add that we also have certain contract-related financial obligations. For example, we have the broadcasting rights for the Olympic Games until 2032.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Do you agree that this is a ridiculous and very populist commitment?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Martin Champoux: I gave you the answer. In good French, we call that "*une passe sur la palette*".

Thank you, Ms. Tait.

Madam Chair, I can continue if you wish.

[English]

The Chair: I've given you some leeway, Mr. Champoux, but you're fine.

We'll go to Ms. Ashton for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

Ms. Tait, we have a problem. You yourself identified the momentum behind the "defund the CBC" movement. We've all acknowledged that this is core to the Conservatives' ideological attack, but it certainly rubbed Canadians the wrong way to see that the CBC was doling out \$18 million in bonuses at the same time as so many Canadians were suffering. We know that a number of CBC employees have been laid off. Local broadcasting is not being invested in the way it was.

Going back to your message to your successor, if you could change anything about your time at the CBC, would you have given up those bonuses to save the jobs of CBC employees?

• (1215)

Ms. Catherine Tait: As we have said many times—I say "we", because the chairman of the board of directors has also underlined it—we have obligations to the unaffiliated and union employees at CBC/Radio-Canada. Those obligations are legal. You keep using the word "bonus". Performance pay is part of a person's salary. It's part of our contracted obligation to them to honour that, so I would

not change that decision. I think it was extremely wise of the board of directors to consider revisiting and looking at all the compensation to make sure, and to assure Canadians, that we are doing the right thing. Beyond that, I cannot say that we would change our position, because it was a legal obligation.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Ms. Tait, I think your answer is part of the problem here. The CBC belongs to Canadians. Without question, there are certain legal obligations, but one would also note that we are in exceptional times. The CBC's mere survival is at risk. Canadians want to see a public broadcaster that is accountable to them, not doling out executive bonuses while cutting jobs and failing to invest in local and regional broadcasting. I hope your successor will do a better job when it comes to ensuring that the CBC is not out of touch on that front.

We have asked, and the NDP has asked, for a banning of executive bonuses, making sure that CBC employees are kept on the job to ensure that local and regional broadcasting is able to be done the way Canadians deserve that it be done. The last thing we need is a CBC that is out of touch with Canadians.

[Translation]

I also want to question you about the importance of Radio-Canada.

When the Leader of the Opposition speaks to the media in English, he often mentions his objective to defund the CBC, but he never mentions the SRC. He always refers solely to the CBC.

But his plan is clear: He wants to defund both. His Quebec members never speak in the same way as his other members. That's precisely how "the two solitudes" are expressed for the members of the Conservative Party. They say one thing in French and another in English.

Would you please describe how the efforts that the Conservative Party leader has made to attack the CBC and the SRC have affected your work?

Ms. Catherine Tait: The present situation is obviously very hard for CBC and SRC employees. They do their work in an atmosphere of uncertainty. Then there are all the financial pressures coming from outside. Our media industry is in crisis.

It goes without saying that people wonder what another government's approach would really be, but, for the moment, I always tell them to stay focused on the job and make the news credible and reliable for Canadians.

You must never forget that the CBC and SRC have been around for 90 years and that they have offered Canadians their services over all those decades.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

We'll now go to Monsieur Berthold.

Luc, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, Ms. Tait.

Do you acknowledge that there was no Internet 90 years ago and that the situation then was very different from what it is today? Constantly looking back over 90 years somewhat diverts us from the current issue.

Don't you also acknowledge that the parliamentarians who created the CBC absolutely have the right to decide its future?

Ms. Catherine Tait: What's the question?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Are the parliamentarians who established the CBC 90 years ago completely entitled to decide its future?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I referred to influence—

Mr. Luc Berthold: It is a simple question: yes or no, do you think—

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, it is not a simple question at all. The answer has to be considerably qualified.

• (1220)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Not all that much, Ms. Tait. You said proudly that parliamentarians had founded it. So parliamentarians still have oversight of what becomes of the money spent, the money they manage on behalf of Canadians.

I have a question for you about the 1,100 employees among whom the \$18 million in bonuses was divided up. Do those employees, those executives, get salary increases every year, Ms. Tait?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Madam Chair, I would like to point out that these were not only executives. We are talking about—

Mr. Luc Berthold: I am talking about the 1,100 employees to whom I referred.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Berthold, will you allow Ms. Tait to answer your question, please? Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Catherine Tait: We are talking about non-union employees. Okay.

What was the question?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Do these people get salary increases from year to year?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It depends.

I think that the increase for the last five years was about 1.5%. That is half of what the unionized employees got under our last collective agreement.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So these people get wage increases as all or a majority of Canadians do. It all depends on what is bargained or on relations with the employer. Each of the groups or individuals still negotiates with their employer.

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, you didn't understand.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Yes, I understood. Each of—

Ms. Catherine Tait: The non-union employees are not entitled to negotiate their salary increases.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So the CBC decides unilaterally what salary increases these people get.

Ms. Catherine Tait: It depends on what we receive from Treasury Board.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So they get a salary increase and on top of that they get bonuses that have totalled \$18 million. We saw the figures earlier. Those figures seem exorbitant. On top of the bonuses—

Ms. Catherine Tait: On average, it is \$15,000 per employee.

Mr. Luc Berthold: That is still a very attractive percentage of their pay, Ms. Tait. On top of the salary increases, they get bonuses.

Do you think it is reasonable that these people get bonuses that size on top of their salary increases, in times when the economic situation is so difficult both for the CBC and for Canadians?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I said earlier, Mr. Berthold, we are still below the average.

People earning \$90,000 are earning less than people who work in a government department or for a corporation, for example.

You are giving the impression that these are huge salaries when they are no such thing. We still have trouble retaining people, attracting people to work for the CBC/Radio-Canada.

Mr. Luc Berthold: How many of these employees earn more than \$200,000 a year?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I don't know. I don't have that figure in my head. I can send it to you after the meeting.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Right.

It would be good to have the number of employees in the \$100,000 to \$200,000, \$200,000 to \$300,000, \$300,000 to \$400,000 and \$400,000 to \$500,000 brackets, so the committee can compare that to what you have claimed.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Ms. Tait, I have one more question for you.

Since the beginning, it has seemed that the CBC is the only one that can do a lot of things in Canada. My answer has to be that actually, at least in the Conservative Party of Canada, we do want to preserve Radio-Canada. I have read the document you showed us earlier, which is evidence of the failure of the CBC.

I say that because if we look at the declining audience numbers, the total number of hours of television that people are no longer watching and the number of hours when people are using the social networks that the CBC has set up, we see that this is a failure, unfortunately.

As well, what we need in Quebec is a strong public television network because we are in a francophone society surrounded by anglophones. I was looking at daily viewing times, and they have declined much more on the anglophone side than on the francophone side. Radio-Canada's good ratings raise the CBC/Radio-Canada average and drive the CBC up. I also do not share your opinion that by cutting the CBC we would not be able to maintain the quality of Radio-Canada.

I think there are experts and people at Radio-Canada who are very good and are capable of protecting francophone culture. I applaud them because I actually do not think there is a television network in North America that is as successful as Radio-Canada in the public sector. That is very much to the credit of Radio-Canada. Unfortunately, what we see on the CBC side is the complete opposite.

Does making it so that Radio-Canada is unable to do its full part and investing so much public money on the CBC side not amount to dragging Radio-Canada down?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I have asked the question several times: Are we going to ask the Canadian public to support a federal national institution for 20% of the population? Personally, I find that a bit extreme, to be very frank.

We have 80% of the population who listen to the radio, for a total of 95,000 hours of local radio every year. People watch 45,000 hours of television, of audiovisual production. So to say that the CBC is a failure, you have to have ignored that.

When it comes to English-language television, you really seem to be living in the past. We know very well that in the anglophone market, the CBC is not the only one that has lost its television audience. People are migrating to YouTube, Connected TV services, and so on. That is very clear to see.

When I arrived, very few people were watching CBC Gem, and today, two million people do every week. That really is a major shift. There is a sea change happening, Mr. Berthold.

• (1225)

Mr. Luc Berthold: There are only two million out of 40 million Canadians.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, guys.

I'm letting you guys go well over time. It's really getting to be ridiculous. Come on, let's go.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Don't put it on me. She was answering—

The Chair: I know. No, I'm not saying it. I'm just saying "you guys". It's a generic term, Mr. Berthold.

I'm going to go to Ms. Gainey.

[Translation]

Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to Ms. Tait for being with us again this morning. I imagine this will be her last appearance at our committee.

Regarding the conversation around CBC/Radio-Canada, I recall that in May, the Conservative Canadian Heritage critic was not able to answer a very simple question: whether Radio-Canada should stay.

I think her silence, or her inability to say "yes" to that question, really showed how little Radio-Canada is promoted or regarded as a very important organization in the Conservatives' opinion. That made me very uneasy.

I consider both organizations to be very important. I am thinking mainly of Radio-Canada, which is very important for francophone communities all over Canada and Quebec, obviously. It is an organization that we absolutely need.

On that point, is it true that the CBC and Radio-Canada share space in buildings all across Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: They share space in all the buildings and premises.

Ms. Anna Gainey: So the employees of both broadcasters work together, in the same offices.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Exactly.

Ms. Anna Gainey: If you get rid of an office, and here, I am thinking of the Toronto office, where the Conservative member has big plans to convert it to apartments, or who knows what, that would affect not just the CBC, it would affect Radio-Canada too, is that right?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes.

For example, Radio-Canada employees do in fact work in the Toronto building. So they would find themselves on the street.

Ms. Anna Gainey: I just wanted to put this question to you: in fact, can cuts be made to the CBC without hurting Radio-Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No.

Ms. Anna Gainey: Right.

I think it is important to establish very clearly that the two public broadcasters cannot be separated. They work together. They do a lot to promote bilingualism all across Canada. I think it is extremely important to point out that the two public broadcasters work together, and it is not possible to have an agenda that involves taking the CBC's funding away without that having very negative consequences for Radio-Canada.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Exactly.

I can give you another example.

I am thinking of our Curio service, which is for teachers and schools all across Canada.

That service offers programs in French and English. This gives teachers all across Canada access to information in English and French for their students. It is actually a very important service.

Ms. Anna Gainey: I agree with you completely on that point.

Personally, as a mom, I believe it is very important to have programs in both languages. My children mainly speak English at home, but they watch a lot of television and listen to a lot of radio, programs about hockey teams in French, and so on. We often watch these programs in French, as a family, so we have more opportunities to learn French.

I imagine a lot of other families also appreciate this.

• (1230)

[English]

I'm going to return to the top here.

I just wanted to be reminded or get an answer to this: Is it true that every G7 country has a public broadcaster?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, it is.

Ms. Anna Gainey: Thank you.

I recall in one of your earlier visits you had some interesting data on the price per head, for example, or the per-citizen cost to run or deliver public broadcasting. Do you have those available with you? It seemed to me that we were in a position here in Canada to be delivering really extraordinary value for what it actually costs each citizen.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, I think when we talk about \$32 or \$33 dollars per head compared to an average of \$78.... Let's not forget you have German public broadcasting at \$150 a head. Let's just remember also that Canada is a unique land mass, the second largest on the planet, and we're delivering across six time zones in English, French and eight indigenous languages. Not only are we delivering television, radio, digital streaming services and podcast services in all of those languages, but we're doing so over a vast territory, which means the value and the cost-benefit analysis is extraordinary.

What we deliver to Canadians is unique on the planet, and it is precious, because, if I can say it again, as I said in my opening remarks, we are the only national media service that connects all the dots: east, west, north, south, English, French and indigenous. It's an extraordinary privilege. It's an extraordinary treasure for this country.

Ms. Anna Gainey: I agree with you, and it's very disconcerting when we have people in elected office saying that trust is down, viewers are down and ad revenue is down, when you've shown us time and time again in this committee and through publicly available information that, in fact, trust is high. The viewers, listeners and readers are up. The digital ad revenue tripled, I believe you said. While other revenue is somewhat flat, it is dropping, as you've said, across media sectors and across the landscape. The performance is there, and it is also valued by Canadians.

I would also like to take this chance, while you're here with us again at committee, to thank you for your work and your service at CBC/Radio-Canada and to wish you all the best in the next chapter. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gainey.

I now go to a third round, and we begin with the Conservatives and Mr. Waugh.

Kevin, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Ms. Tait, for appearing, as you said, for the fifth time in 12 months.

Two months ago, the CBC, your organization, said that ad revenues were down, and you've stated today that this is the case. Last year at this time your organization made the biggest staff reduction ever. Since then, and you've admitted this, \$1.4 billion of public funding goes to the CBC. Now we know that ad revenue is down and that it makes up 30% of the commercial activities for the corporation, are you planning any staff reductions in the month ahead?

Ms. Catherine Tait: There are a couple of things I'd like to correct, Madam Chair, if I may.

Concerning the biggest job reduction ever, in the previous 10 years before I arrived at CBC there were over 1,000 jobs cut at CBC/Radio-Canada. The net loss of jobs in the six and a half years I have served is 90, because, by the way, we also create new jobs. We're talking here about 141 occupied positions that were lost. Let's deal with facts here.

In terms of TV ad revenue, I have said repeatedly—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes, we know that.

Ms. Catherine Tait: So what is your question?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: My question is, are you going to reduce staff like you did last year, in December? The private sector has already started staff reductions, as you know. Last year, you followed them in the month of December. Are you going to do that again?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I will say, and I can say this very openly to this committee, that thanks to the \$42 million that we received, we will deliver the budget for 2024-25, which ends in March, without further staff reductions.

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You said at the beginning that you need more funding. You said that in your opening five-minute statement. Have you asked the minister or any of the Liberal cabinet ministers for more funding going ahead for 2024-25?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Since I began this job in 2018, I have been asking all stakeholders. I have met with ministers. I have met with MPs from both sides, all sides, of the table to talk about the structural financial challenges that CBC/Radio-Canada faces. I just described how, with \$32 per head, we're delivering enormous value. I have been speaking about the need for more funding—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: How much more?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I started with—and I think I said so to MP Champoux—the \$400-million to \$500-million range to have sustainable, manageable funds to provide a vibrant, robust service.

If I may, on this talk about TV revenues being down, do you think that CBC/Radio-Canada or Radio-Canada alone can compete with the billions of dollars of streamers like Netflix and Amazon? It's impossible.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, let me ask you this. Your key performance indicators, which you have not met.... I think that's why the public is a little upset with the bonuses: You have met only three of the 14. You admitted here last time that you moved the goalposts so that you could get the KPIs. I think that's why taxpayers in this country are upset with you and the CBC board right now. You moved the KPIs so you could get \$18.3 million in bonuses and over \$3 million in executive bonuses.

That is the issue with the CBC right now, Ms. Tait, that you appear to have not read the public on. They are upset with you on this.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'm very sorry; you're misrepresenting the facts.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm not.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, you are.

I'm very sorry, but Madam Chair, we do not move the goalposts. Our KPIs—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You admitted it last time.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —are based on market data.

The Chair: Can you allow the witness to answer the question you asked, Kevin?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It's like football. You've moved the goalposts so that you could get your KPIs, the \$18 million in bonuses. We all know that. You've admitted that in previous testimony at Canadian heritage here. That's why Canadians are upset.

The Chair: Ms. Tait, please answer the question.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I have been asked the same questions over and over again. I have answered the questions. If the purpose of this appearance is simply to throw a barrage of insults in my direction to discredit the organization, it is totally unproductive.

The Chair: You have one second, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, I'm done. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I then move to Mr. Coteau for the Liberals. You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and again, thank you to our witness today.

It's pretty clear what the Conservative agenda is. It's to destroy the public broadcaster and replace it with American-owned, for-profit media. It's very clear what they stand for and what their agenda is. It's been clear in the last five meetings, and it's clear today.

Again, I want to thank our witness for bringing, I would say, some facts forward that are completely counter to every single thing the Conservatives are saying.

I just want to ask you a series of questions. I would just ask for very short answers, just so that we can be on the record here today

when it comes to CBC/Radio-Canada and the perception the Conservatives are trying to present.

Really quickly, is viewership up or down?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Depending on the platform, it's up.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Okay. Are Canadians supportive of CBC/Radio-Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As we've seen in multiple third party surveys, and I'm talking about non-CBC surveys, CBC/Radio-Canada remains the most trusted source of credible news in this country. The Pollara survey also indicated that CBC/Radio-Canada is the most admired media brand in the country. There are many surveys that indicate that CBC and Radio Canada remain very much loved among Canadians.

• (1240)

Mr. Michael Coteau: Internationally, how is CBC perceived by other G20 countries?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We are considered one of the most innovative on the planet. The Internet protocol-based centre, the new Maison de Radio-Canada in Montreal, for example, has been visited by broadcasters from around the world. The work we're doing in Toronto on something called the “universal production platform” is recognized as groundbreaking work. We are considered innovative and solutions-oriented with respect to the challenges that all public broadcasters face today.

Mr. Michael Coteau: In regard to digital ad revenue, where are you today?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We count ad revenue and subscription revenue together. The number was at \$38 million in 2018, and today it's at about \$105 million.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's remarkable. Are you the only national bilingual broadcaster in this country?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Okay. If CBC were cut, what would happen in rural Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: People would be denied local service—news, television and radio.

Mr. Michael Coteau: What is CBC's position in regard to diversity and inclusion?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We consider that CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate is to serve all Canadians. That is why, for the last four years, we've made a very concerted effort, with enormous success, to be more representative, not only in our workforce but also in our programming.

I point to the wonderful Radio-Canada series, *Lakay nou*, now renewed for a third season. I also point to shows like *Allegiance* in Surrey, B.C., based in the Sikh community. As well, I point to *North of North*, a new show and the first-ever comedy series produced in Iqaluit. It's a comedy show produced by Inuit creators.

Mr. Michael Coteau: My last question is one that I always end with, if you recall. How is CBC doing when it comes to supporting young children in this country?

Ms. Catherine Tait: CBC Kids and Radio-Canada's MAJ, *mon actualité du jour*, are two critical services that are committed to media literacy. We have hundreds and hundreds of thousands of visits online to our programming through various services for kids.

I mentioned just a minute ago Curio, our educational service that goes to schools across the country. We are critical to educating and informing the next generation of viewers.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much.

Again, this will probably be the last time you will join us at this committee. On behalf of myself and I'm sure many other members, thank you for your contribution to Canadian culture and heritage.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I appreciate that. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Coteau.

I now go to Martin Champoux for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, you have often given Conservative members answers you had already given me. Personally, I suggest that they listen when I ask questions; that way, they could make better use of their speaking time, for example by asking questions that have not already been answered.

Ms. Tait, were you consulted by the minister and her advisory panel on renewing the CBC's mandate?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I had an opportunity in August to give a ninety-minute presentation to the panel members. We also answered some questions in writing, of course.

Mr. Martin Champoux: What recommendations did you make to that advisory panel? What recommendations for improving or modifying CBC/Radio-Canada's mandate would you like to see put in place during the next mandate?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We do not believe the mandate should be changed. We were very clear on that. We have the same mandate as all public broadcasters in the world: to inform, enlighten, and entertain our audiences. The issue is rather to see what we could improve. In our case, it is how we serve Canadians who live outside urban areas. That was our recommendation, but we need funding so we can have journalists in place all across Canada.

● (1245)

Mr. Martin Champoux: That is an excellent way of looking at it; regional coverage is indeed extremely fragile. I think the public broadcaster has an important role to play in the survival of regional information. We experience this on a daily basis.

Let's assume that the public broadcaster has the leeway it needs and has more resources to invest or reinvest in certain specific areas. What areas would you like to see given more financial support, to allow for it to develop in ways that are more worth considering, and maybe more profitable for the corporation?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We are living in an increasingly digital world. In order for our services to be able to stay relevant for Canadians, we need artificial intelligence, for example. There is a huge amount of work to do when it comes to technology.

In terms of content, we need to work with independent regional producers, not just in Montreal but also in Manitoba and all across Canada.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Could providing facilities or infrastructure for regional private broadcasters that are unable to get established or grow, for lack of resources, be included in the mandate of CBC/Radio-Canada, the public broadcaster?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, absolutely. We are currently developing relationships with Quebec's community radio stations, for example, for sharing both parties' content. That way, they could have access to our videos, among other things.

Mr. Martin Champoux: We could then extend that line of thought, and say that if funding for CBC/Radio-Canada were cut, it could have consequences for the French services, but also for the small broadcasters that might benefit from alliances with Radio-Canada.

Ms. Catherine Tait: It would have consequences for the entire media ecosystem; we must not forget the independent producers.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you. I think that is all the time I have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Ashton, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On the one hand in this committee, we see the Liberals, who espouse their support for the CBC, yet they were the ones to threaten cuts to the CBC that led to job losses. It's also the same Liberals who approved 18 million dollars' worth of bonuses at a time when Canadians are struggling and so many journalists at the CBC have lost their jobs.

On the other hand, we have the Conservatives, who have attacked the CBC and made a campaign around defunding the CBC a key part of their platform, an attack that is truly an attack on our communities and the vitality of our ability to tell our stories, and of course, in terms of our Canadian identity. The reality is that Canadians deserve a CBC that is accountable to them and a CBC that is in touch with them on all fronts, and that means banning executive bonuses.

At a time when jobs are being cut at the CBC, it's important that we see leadership from our public broadcaster that doesn't prioritize executive bonuses at the expense of jobs and local broadcasting. We also need to see a public broadcaster that invests in local journalism. I've often talked about my region, which has not had a permanent CBC presence despite having a CBC station for years, so commitments to local and regional broadcasting ring hollow when the CBC has been incapable year after year to get the job done and make sure that our region, which services 85,000 people, has a CBC presence.

We certainly hope that the new person we're expecting to come on board in the new year has the support necessary from CBC Manitoba, from our public broadcaster, to make sure that our region is heard. We also want to make sure that other local and regional broadcasters have the support necessary to do their work. The CBC isn't about getting the news out of Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver. It's about all of us.

Therefore, as we see a new CEO coming in, as we expect to hear a new mandate from the CBC, our hope from the NDP is that we see a strong CBC/Radio-Canada that ensures that we're not seeing executive bonuses, that we are banning executive bonuses, and that we are in fact hiring journalists, local broadcasters, and opening up stations that have been shuttered, ensuring that gaps, including in media deserts, are being filled—

• (1250)

The Chair: Please wind up, Ms. Ashton. Thank you.

Ms. Niki Ashton: —and that we're also seeing that the CBC stands up for all of us.

I'm concerned that your tenure, Ms. Tait, has not seen that kind of commitment. Canadians deserve a strong CBC, a strong Radio-Canada, and we will continue to fight for that. Thank you.

The Chair: I don't think there was a question there, Ms. Tait, but did you want to respond? You may, quickly, but we're running out of time for this round.

Go ahead.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I just want to speak of the tenure, and I want to make a couple of points.

During my tenure, I am so proud of the work that we have done. We have launched CBC Gem, a video streaming service that is devoted to Canadian content, news and local news. We have launched Ohdio at Radio-Canada, the top Canadian-operated audio streaming service in the French language in this country. We have tripled digital revenues. We have, for the first time, knocked the Olympics and the Paralympics out of the park.

You're telling me I have said enough. Okay.

The Chair: Guys, we have 10 minutes, which means two five-minute slots.

I'm going to really cut everybody off if they go beyond their time.

We have Mr. Scheer for two and a half minutes, and then I understand you're sharing it with Mr. Kurek for two and a half.

I'm going to cut you off, guys. All right?

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): I'll get right to it.

Ms. Tait, would you categorize your term at the CBC as a success?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: You believe that you've left it in a better place than where you found it?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Okay, so I'll just go through a few things, and I just have to say, you must have quite the echo chamber there if you believe that, because, when we're talking about how out of touch the CBC can be with Canadians, you need only to look at the bonuses that you paid out during an affordability crisis to executives and senior management while laying off the frontline staff, something that even Peter Mansbridge called the CBC out for.

When we look at all the metrics, all the key performance indicators, ad revenue overall is down, and trust is down. Despite polls that the CBC might have commissioned for itself, independent third party organizations that analyze this indicate that trust in the CBC fell 17% in just four years. Viewership is down to less than 3% in prime-time markets. That means during prime time, when Canadians are going into their living rooms to watch what is on TV, 97% of Canadians say no to the CBC, tune it out and move on to other things.

Based on all of that, Ms. Tait, I just want to thank you, on behalf of the Conservative Party, for your efforts in helping us promote the campaign to defund the CBC. I think outside the Conservative caucus, you have been the most successful person in creating the demand to defund the CBC. The \$1.4 billion of taxpayers' money doesn't go for an online streaming service. It goes to a whole host of products, from which Canadians are choosing other sources of information and entertainment.

Again, I don't really have a question there. I just wanted to say thank you for your efforts to help us defund the CBC.

The Chair: Ms. Tait, did you have a comment?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I must say that it really does shock me, the extent to which certain members of this committee—and the sub-ins, or whatever you call them—seem to make me the target and throw insults at my tenure at CBC/Radio-Canada in order to discredit the organization.

The organization has stood for 90 years. We know that 79% of Canadians say they believe that CBC/Radio-Canada should continue. To have this somehow be proof that we should be defunding the CBC is ridiculous.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

I understand that Mr. Kurek is not sharing the time with you, Mr. Scheer. Go ahead.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I just want to point out that those were not insults. It may be insulting to hear that ad revenue is down, but that is just a fact. It may be insulting to hear that 97% of Canadians choose to watch things on TV other than the CBC, but that is just a fact. It is just a fact that trust in the CBC has fallen by 17% in just four years.

When I had a chance to ask you about trust in the CBC, one of your responses back was that the number of corrections that CBC News issued was up. That was proof or some kind of evidence that the CBC could be trusted. I look at it the other way. When you have a falsehood broadcast on the national news, and then a correction follows up a few days later, or in an online post, that doesn't instill confidence and trust in the CBC. It points out that the CBC allows things to get to air before doing proper vetting, validation and fact-checking.

It may be insulting to hear the dollar amounts about executive bonuses, but I'll tell you who was really insulted. It was the front-line workers who were laid off when the CBC was claiming it didn't have enough money to keep that entire workforce and who then read in the paper—or read in a news source other than the CBC, because they probably weren't watching it either—that senior management and executives all got bonuses.

Those are just facts. Everything I have listed off comes from third party, independent sources who have indicated all that.

Again, I just want to say thanks for your help in our efforts to defund the CBC.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

I now go to the Liberals for the last piece.

Mr. Noormohamed, you have five minutes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I want to begin by thanking Mr. Scheer for that deeply unserious monologue and for popping into the committee without having heard any of what had happened before. I guess this is a pattern we're seeing from Conservatives, of trying to bring U.S.-style misinformation. I guess that's just second nature for some of those folks, and that's fine.

I think it's also important that if we're going to start casting aspersions.... I suspect there are members of the Conservative Party who probably want to know where their money went during the tenure of Mr. Scheer's leadership, but we're not here to discuss that.

What I would like to talk about first, Madam Tait, is facts, because they seem to be in short supply from our friends opposite today. We heard this monologue of things that haven't gone well, because they have chosen to manipulate data in a particular way. I'd like to go back and ask specifically and sharply about platforms. Can you talk about CBC's size and scope across all platforms? They seem to think that television broadcast is the only thing that media companies are measured by. Can you talk about all platforms?

Ms. Catherine Tait: During my tenure, CBC.ca and Radio-Canada.ca have become the number one digital news destinations in the country. Our .ca news sites are used by 21 million Canadians.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: For the folks who may not understand what “number one” means, does that mean above all of the other private broadcasters?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That means above all other Canadian services. Google and Facebook are still higher than the Canadian services, but we are number one in terms of news sites.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Just to clarify, the public broadcaster is doing better than the private enterprises that are in the same Canadian private business in the sector. Is that correct?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Not on all platforms, but I'm talking specifically about news.

With respect to Tou.TV, the streaming service of Radio-Canada, it is number one in the French market. CBC Gem ranks number two behind Crave.

Listen, when we talk about performance, today, television is one piece of a very complex multiplatform operation, and you can slice it and dice it every which way.

I would like to, if I may, Madam Chair, just read a little letter that I received this morning. I remembered that MP Waugh had some letters from Saskatoon. This one literally came in over my desk this morning.

The writer said she had listened and watched CBC for over 75 years. She has only two channels on her radio, CBC Radio One and CBC Radio 2, and she relies on CBC TV News for truthful and unbiased reporting. She listed some of the things she thinks that CBC does right: news, local, national, investigative, the arts, music, live concerts, French, ethnic, comedy shows, movies, coverage of historic events, children's programming and literature reviews. She said she may have missed some of the programs, but the calibre of the hosts, journalists, presenters and technicians was so excellent. She wanted me to pass on to all of the staff at CBC her grateful thanks for providing her the world in her armchair, free, unbiased, informative and pleasurable. She sent her regards as a faithful listener and said, “Let's hope the CBC continues for years to come.”

I won't give her last name, but her first name is Judith.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

I was just reflecting on what we used to watch when we were growing up. Because we didn't have cable, we watched the CBC, and there were a lot of lessons that Mr. Dressup taught us. One of them was about being truthful and about understanding all of the things around us, so that we could decide how we were going to show up.

I find it disappointing that a lot of the conversations we have had with you have been around a base set of “facts” that actually are not grounded in reality at all. I mean, this whole notion of performance pay versus bonuses is something we have litigated a million times at this committee. The whole question of how the CBC is performing relative to other platforms when it comes to news in this country has been tossed around like a political football.

I want to end my questions with you today around the whole concept we have heard from the Conservatives. Mr. Scheer laid bare today that there is an active campaign to defund the CBC. I think it's important for us to defend the CBC.

I want you, in very brief terms, to say to Canadians and Quebecers what defunding the CBC, as Mr. Scheer wants to do, will actually mean for small communities, for large communities, for the news ecosystem in this country and for Canadians at large.

Could you summarize that in one minute or less?

• (1300)

The Chair: Actually, she does not have one minute. She has 30 seconds.

I know you can do it, Ms. Tait.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Okay, here we go.

The dangers of defunding CBC include denying 80% of the population local news, 95,000 hours of local news radio programming and 45,000 hours of Canadian TV content. It means denying tens of thousands of independent producers, creators, musicians, performers and technicians their livelihood. It means denying the north access to each other and to the south. It means denying French minority communities their connection to their language. It means cutting at least 3,500 jobs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Did you finish, Ms. Tait?

You have another couple of seconds to go.

Go ahead.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Oh, I thought you said seconds.

That's fine.

Here is one last thing: It means that Canadians would not have access to international news presented to them by Canadian journalists.

[*Translation*]

Our foreign correspondents are a very important asset.

[*English*]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Tait, thank you so much.

I don't know whether I'm going to have a chance to ask you questions again but, in the words of Mr. Dressup, “Keep your crayons sharp and your sticky tape untangled, and always put the tops back on your markers.”

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before we end the meeting, because we're coming along to end it now, I want to ask you a question, Ms. Tait. I've been listening to all of these hearings. We've been hearing bandied about the idea that you make more money than the Prime Minister. We had Bell Canada here, and I know the Conservatives themselves and everyone at this table was appalled by the layoffs at Bell Canada when the CEO was making \$13 million a year. I remember people asking whether he would give up some of that to keep his staff. However, I just want to ask you, given that kind of salary for a CEO of a private broadcaster, what would happen if there were no more CBC and we had to depend only on private broadcasting to give us the news, given that—I know in my neck of the woods, in British Columbia—a lot of people cannot get news other than from CBC? What would happen?

Ms. Catherine Tait: What would happen is that many communities across the country....

I can't hear. These people are talking so loudly.

The Chair: Yes, I know. Can you please allow the witness to speak? Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Tait: What would happen is we would have more news deserts. Already in Canada, in many communities private news organizations have shuttered, and that would just accelerate. With the absence of CBC/Radio-Canada, you and your community would have no Canadian news. What that means is you would depend on Facebook, Google and other foreign services to get your news. I would say that it will be absolutely.... It will make Canada no better. In fact, it will make it worse. I guess that's what I would say to that.

The Chair: I want to thank you, Ms. Tait, for coming—

Mr. Damien Kurek: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: —over and over. I suppose you've been here so often that we should make you a member of the committee, perhaps.

I call this meeting adjourned.

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