



Canadian Media Guild

La Guilde canadienne des médias

CWA/SCA CANADA

November 21, 2016

Mr Edward Greenspon
President and CEO
Public Policy Forum of Canada
1400-130 Albert Street
Ottawa, Ont.
K1P 5G4

Dear Mr. Greenspon:

Thank you for the opportunity to answer the questions posed by the Public Policy Forum (PPF) as part of the review of the crisis facing journalism in Canada.

The Canadian Media Guild (CMG) represents thousands of media workers including journalists working across the country at CBC/Radio-Canada, Canadian Press, Thomson Reuters, APTN, MBS Radio, Shaw Media, Agence France Presse, Vice Canada, Shaw/ Corus Media, TVO and TFO, ZoomerMedia, as well as media freelancers. Much of what the Canadian public sees and hears on television, radio or on news sites online comes to them thanks to the hard work of dedicated CMG members.

A few of our members working on the ground as journalists have been able to share their experience and their perspectives at some of the Roundtables held by PPF in different Canadian cities as part of this review.

CMG is pleased to contribute further to this consultation by sharing our views in response to the main questions posed by PPF during the consultations.

Q: Does the decline of traditional media pose a risk to the civic function of journalism, therefore the health of democracy?

- A. CMG has been outspoken about the disinvestment from journalism and the consequences of that development.

In reviewing published announcements of media industry job cuts, CMG found that between 2008 and 2016, at least 16,500 jobs (see attached documentation) were cut in the media business in Canada.

There is no question that these cuts have an impact on the work done at these media organizations, including journalism. In addition there is no evidence that this important



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work of informing the public and holding powerful interests to account is now being done elsewhere.

Here are a few examples of how CMG members have described the situation:

*“What happens, and we’ve started seeing a lot of it, is **a lot of important local stories don’t get covered.***

If someone locally is being taken advantage of, or is not being treated right by their government, there may be no one who will tell that story because you just don’t get as much coverage... Is your politician representing your interests or his own? That’s as important to know in our communities as it is on Parliament Hill.”

(CMG member, 2014)

*“It’s very clear to us that there has to be money put back into the regions (or centers as they are now called). **To say they’ve been cut to the bone would be kind.**”*

(CMG member, 2016)

*“**Original documentary programming, independent and in-house, is at its lowest point in over 20 years on the CBC.** The issue should be increasing **in-depth journalism**, not cutting it even further.”*

(CMG, 2014)

*“MBS has **not had local newsgathering resources in Saint John for approximately four years.** All of the regular “local” news and information programming aired on MBS stations is produced in a small newsroom in Halifax. There are **no local reporters to cover local or provincial government, or the issues and events taking place in Saint John.** “*

(CMG, 2012)

*“TFO, an Ontario provincial public service education broadcaster, has introduced **information content that incorporates promoting the sponsoring entity within the story, unbeknownst to the viewer.**”*

(CMG, 2015)

At the same time, a Pew Research study published in 2015 indicated that in the U.S. some local entities outside of journalism, particularly within government, are using their websites in part to serve as “news” providers to citizens.

If non-independent sources are investing resources in communications while organizations that provide independent news are struggling to do proper newsgathering, the result is an environment in which citizens who require accurate, reliable information lose out.



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CMG's answer is, therefore, that the decline of independent media services, and the lack of reliable alternatives, does pose a risk to the accountability that journalism must provide in a healthy democracy

Our view is that the fundamentals of journalism – such as maintaining newsgathering capacity across the country, feet-on the ground in local communities, robust journalistic standards, a range of views and the ability for newsroom staff to get paid to do their work – remain critical.

In general, CMG believes stable, professional jobs in the news business allow journalists to do their work without fear of reprisals. Therefore, the trend toward precarious work in the media presents a threat to independent journalism. The interest in unionizing at newer media companies such as VICE (organized by CMG earlier this year) reflects these concerns at newer media organizations. Like their colleagues, journalists in newer media organizations are interested in improving their ability to do quality work, including editorial independence, and fairness.

CMG hopes the review will examine the issue of media concentration in Canada. According to some estimates, **Canada has one of the most highly concentrated media landscape in the world**. We believe this has adverse impacts on journalism, especially diversity of voices.

B. A word on CBC/Radio-Canada:

Continuous cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada have threatened Canada's national public broadcaster's function as the largest newsroom in the country and a watchdog accountable to citizens no matter where they live in our vast country.

The debilitating cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada moved Canadians in communities across the country to speak up in the 2015 federal election demanding that funding to CBC/Radio-Canada be restored.

At the time, CBC/Radio-Canada's funding had been reduced to \$29 a year per Canadian, compared to an average of \$87 a year per capita in other developed countries. With promised new funds, this amount will rise to \$33 per Canadian. CMG has argued that funding should increase to at least \$43.50 per Canadian – half the average in other Western democracies – to slowly start moving the national public broadcaster in the right direction.

Overall, more than 90% of Canadians say they support courageous reporting from CBC/Radio-Canada but they are worried that the broadcaster's challenges including funding cuts may push it away from this type of programming.

Here is a definition of public broadcasting:



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“Public broadcasting is defined as a meeting place where all citizens are welcome and considered equals. It is an information and education tool, accessible to all and meant for all, whatever their social or economic status. Its mandate is not restricted to information and cultural development — public broadcasting must also appeal to the imagination, and entertain. But it does so with a concern for quality that distinguishes it from commercial broadcasting.

Because it is not subject to the dictates of profitability, public broadcasting must be daring, innovative, and take risks. And when it succeeds in developing outstanding genres or ideas, it can impose its high standards and set the tone for other broadcasters. For some, such as British author Anthony Smith, writing about the British Broadcasting Corporation — seen by many as the cradle of public broadcasting — it is so important that it has “probably been the greatest of the instruments of social democracy of the century.”

(UNESCO partner WRTVC)

CMG’s view is that CBC/Radio-Canada funding and mandate must be restored, then expanded so it can play its unique role as Canada’s national public broadcaster.

Recommendations:

- ***With increasing fragmentation, now more than ever, Canada needs a strengthened national CBC/Radio-Canada, that’s appropriately funded, with an expanded mandate to continue serving citizens on the various platforms they use – start at \$43.50 per Canadian (half what other advanced democracies invest in their public broadcasters***
- ***Guarantee CBC/Radio-Canada’s independence by implementing a non-partisan selection process for its President and Board, and by repealing measures that allow government interference in day-to-day operations at CBC/Radio-Canada introduced in Division 17 of Omnibus budget bill 2013. In addition, CMG proposes that CBC/Radio-Canada’s Board include CBC employees.***
- ***Ensure adequate funding for Provincial education public broadcasters (TFO, TVO, Télé-Québec, Knowledge). They are equally vital elements of Canada’s media landscape that must remain vibrant and continue to provide a diversity of voices***
- ***Leverage and mark The Canadian Press’s 100-year anniversary in 2017 by incorporating this outstanding achievement in Canada’s 150 events to celebrate excellence in journalism in Canada***
- ***We hope this review will include a serious analysis of the consequences of the casualization of reporters’ work on journalism***



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- *Examine and address the impact of increased media concentration on Canadian journalism*
- *Support demands for legislation that protects freedom of the press, including protection of sources*

Q: If so, are new digital media and new digital forms of communications filling that gap, or likely to fill that gap in the near-term

Here's CRTC Chair Jean-Pierre Blais' comment, speaking in February of this year at the end of his public consultations and hearing on local news:

"YouTube, Facebook and Twitter have been in business barely ten years. Can we as a society afford to entrust something as fundamental to our democracy as news reporting to services like these that are still in their infancies? Newspapers have honed their journalistic practices over centuries; television and radio stations over decades."

Blais continued:

"I look forward to the moment when we can say with certainty that [VICE] and their peers have fully arrived as genuine, trustworthy and accountable news media outlets. I hope that many more news innovators hasten to arrive. Their help is needed. By and large, though, the strength of digital technologies today lies in giving citizens the opportunity to connect with and be present in their communication system. It does not lie in news analysis. The investigation functions these channels present today are simply not developed enough to be considered robust and effective. My fear is that incumbent media, for whom these technologies are extremely disruptive, will be tempted to over-rely on these services in order to improve their bottom lines. And that they will lose sight of the importance of the public service they provide as a result."

Anecdotally, we know the newest media/communications do not fill the gap left by the accelerating cuts to journalism. For example, BuzzFeed Canada closed its Parliament Hill Bureau citing this disconcerting rationale:

"With the 2015 Canadian federal election behind us, we are wrapping up our Canadian political coverage"



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Scott Lamb, BuzzFeed's Vice-President of international editorial, in a memo to staff provided to The Globe and Mail by BuzzFeed

Furthermore the rise of Facebook and Google as media giants that the public is now relying on for news is a development that must be examined. CMG believes it's urgent to study their role and impact on journalism in Canada and to develop and set appropriate standards.

Recommendations:

- ***Establish and promote solid journalistic standards for newer media platforms***
- ***Thoroughly examine the growing role and impact of foreign giants such as Facebook and Google in the news business in Canada, establish their responsibilities and set robust standards.***

3Q: If not, is there room / need for public policy and what would that look like in as un-intrusive way as possible?

Because the fundamental role of journalism in our democracy remains vital, CMG recommends that the supports currently in place for journalism should be maintained (e.g., funding for public broadcasting) and develop new sources of revenue to support journalism (e.g. invest proceeds from spectrum sales back into public broadcasting, establish CMG-proposed Public Service Media Fund; introduce tax incentives to encourage advertising in Canadian media)

Recommendations:

- ***CMG's proposed Public Service Media Fund (PSMF) would be set up as follows: The Fund would serve to support local news and would be accessible – based on clearly defined criteria – to public and education broadcasters, broadcasters representing unique voices such as APTN, and any independent local news broadcasters on any platform. The Fund could be administered by the Canadian Media Fund or another arm's-length mechanism***

The PSMF would be funded from a small percentage of BDU revenue (1.5) % And because it would fund local content on diverse platforms, large Internet Service Providers (ISPs) would also contribute a levy in the form of a small percentage of their profits

- ***The federal government should set aside half the proceeds from any sale of valuable spectrum (\$5.3 billion in 2015) back into major cultural institutions including CBC/Radio-Canada, given the fact that these are public airwaves. Scheduled sale of more spectrum (AWS3 in 2015 and 2500 MHZ in 2016) will bring in new revenue to government coffers – similar sales in the U.S. yielded \$10 billion***



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Additional notes:

***Maintain investment in local television news:**

According to the CRTC, TV news is as relevant to and valued by Canadians as at any point in its history (81 % of Canadians prefer TV news),

And Pew Research indicates US News watchers overwhelmingly prefer television (80%), while readers prefer the Web

http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/pj_2016-07-07_modern-news-consumer_1-02/

***Expand on Ryerson news poverty research project**

Examine the preliminary results of this project and encourage more studies.

<http://localnewsresearchproject.ca/in-the-news/>

***More information**

CBC needs more funding and true independence - CMG

<http://www.cmg.ca/en/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ENG-FINAL-DOCUMENT-JULY-2014-Funding-an-Independent-CBC-CMG-Proposals.pdf>

State of the News Media 2016 – Pew Research

<http://www.journalism.org/2016/06/15/state-of-the-news-media-2016/>

Sincerely,

Carmel Smyth

President, Canadian Media Guild
