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Chair

Ms. Julie Dabrusin

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• (1635)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.)): We will start up again.

I'm pleased to welcome the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism. With him today, from the Department of Canadian Heritage, are Hélène Laurendeau, Deputy Minister, and Andrew Francis, the Chief Financial Officer.

Today the committee will study the subject matter of supplementary estimates (B), 2018-19, votes 1b and 5b under Department of Canadian Heritage, referred to the committee on January 28, 2019, and pursuant to Standing Order 81(5), deemed reported back three days before the final allotted day of the supply period ending March 26, 2019. Therefore, today's meeting will take place under Standing Order 108(2).

[Translation]

You have the floor, Minister.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Members of the committee, good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting me to speak before the committee.

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg.

As you mentioned, I am joined by Ms. Laurendeau and Mr. Francis.

[English]

Before we get into the supplementary estimates, I will thank the committee for all your hard work in the last couple of months on Bill C-91, regarding indigenous languages; on the review of the Copyright Act; on Bill C-369, to establish a national day for truth and reconciliation, just name a few. Those are very important issues to Canadians, and your work is making a difference in their lives.

[Translation]

Thank you for all your hard work.

[English]

Today I'm honoured to speak to you about the investments we're making in Canadian arts and culture. This year's budget reflects a promise we made to Canadians four years ago, a promise to support

the middle class and the people working hard to join it. Canadian Heritage will continue to reinvest in our creators and cultural industries.

Why do we do it? We do it because culture matters. It matters to all Canadians. We all love going to the movies, singing along to a favourite band, or enjoying a great book. Judging from your reactions to a certain Canadian rock icon who recently paid this committee a visit, I think members of the committee can agree that some of our best memories are from concerts we've been to.

[Translation]

I often say that culture is fun, but it is also good for the economy. In fact, culture contributes more than \$53 billion to the Canadian economy. The cultural sectors also employ over 650,000 Canadians and create many more jobs in the tourism industry. This means indirect job opportunities in restaurants, transportation and construction, among others. It has a major impact across the board.

[English]

Lastly, we've reinvested in culture because diversity and inclusion are important to Canadians. These values are part of our identity, part of who we are. Sadly, we know that Canada is not immune to racism, discrimination and the politics of division. That is why we're investing to celebrate our diversity and promote inclusion.

[Translation]

The investments in budget 2019 will allow us to keep the promise we made to Canadians.

We're supporting our music industry by investing \$20 million over two years, or \$10 million a year, in the Canada Music Fund. We're supporting our creators, festivals and shows by investing \$16 million over two years in the Canada Arts Presentation Fund.

We're also supporting local celebrations, especially those of diverse groups such as pride festivals and powwows, by investing \$34 million over two years in the Building Communities through Arts and Heritage Program and in the Celebration and Commemoration Program.

It should be noted that the amount also includes \$10 million over two years to mark the new National Truth and Reconciliation Day and to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day.

[English]

Through the multiculturalism program, we support projects to eliminate discrimination, racism and prejudice in communities across Canada. In budget 2019, we proposed to provide \$45 million over three years, starting this year, for a new anti-racism strategy. We want to find ways to combat racism in all its forms, while focusing on community projects. At the governmental level, these efforts will be coordinated by an anti-racism secretariat.

In terms of reconciliation, our government is taking a decisive step in the right direction by tabling our bill on indigenous languages. Thank you all for doing the pre-study and completing your report on the bill. What you did is so important, because as you know, the situation is urgent. Three-quarters of indigenous languages spoken in Canada are endangered. That is why we will provide adequate, stable and sustainable funding to reclaim, revitalize, maintain and strengthen indigenous languages.

• (1640)

In our 2019 budget, we're proposing major investments. You saw it: more than \$333 million over five years, starting right now, starting this year, and more than \$115 million every year after that.

[Translation]

The bill proposes responsive and flexible mechanisms that will allow us to direct funds to Indigenous communities, namely regional and national Indigenous organizations, and self-governing Indigenous governments.

They are the ones working on the ground, and they know local needs much better than I do, much better than we do. They are, therefore, best placed to define the solutions that will work best for them. They will have the freedom they need to allocate the funds appropriately.

Madam Chair, we look forward to continuing to work with you, members of the committee, and the Senate to pass the bill before the House adjourns for the summer.

[English]

In addition to the investments laid out in the budget, we're pleased that the supplementary estimates (B) include the additional funding we requested. It amounts to an increase of \$9.34 million.

Allow me to review quickly the main items included in that amount. First, the amount of \$5 million will go to the Vancouver Foundation to improve access to Canada's justice system. It's also our government's way of recognizing the enormous contributions of Beverley McLachlin, former chief justice of Canada. These funds are used to support projects that help break down barriers to civil and family justice.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Canadians have the best possible access to the justice system. It's key to having a healthy, democratic and inclusive society.

[Translation]

In honour of the former Governor General of Canada, the Right Honourable David Johnston, Supplementary Estimates (B) also include a grant of more than \$2 million to support a foundation,

which mobilizes Canadians around promising projects that contribute to a stronger Canada.

Thirdly, Supplementary Estimates (B) includes more than \$1 million for the Canadian Soccer Association to support the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup of Soccer. Those who know me know that I'm very pleased about that.

Finally, I'd also like to mention an investment of more than \$500,000 for an initiative of vital importance to all Canadian citizens: ensuring a healthy digital democracy.

[English]

The health of our democracy depends on the reliability and diversity of our news and information sources. Every citizen is entitled to develop informed opinions, hold governments and individuals to account, and participate in public discourse. There is a rise in false, misleading and harmful information online and in social media. In this matter, our government takes its role very seriously.

We support projects that equip Canadians with the ability to evaluate online information with a critical eye. In our 2019 budget, we want to strengthen this digital democracy project, so we're proposing an investment of more than \$19 million over four years. These funds will create a program that will help us better understand the impacts of misinformation and identify ways to fight it. This investment will also allow Canadians to lead an international initiative to strengthen citizens' resilience to misinformation and promote diversity of online content.

It is in the same perspective that we want to support journalists across Canada. I've said it before and I'll say it again: Professional journalism is one of the pillars of our democracy.

• (1645)

[Translation]

When we see how quickly our newspapers are disappearing, we cannot stand idly by. Our government is playing a major role in that as well. It will continue to play a major role and we will do something about it.

You know that, you saw it in the fall 2018 economic statement: we announced our intention to bring in targeted tax measures in support of Canadian journalism, including through tax credits and tax incentives. I want to assure you that the fundamental principles of an independent and free press will be absolutely upheld in the granting of these credits and incentives.

[English]

Madam Chair, arts and culture remain priorities for our government, and we'll continue to support our artists and creators, just as we will continue to create jobs and protect our inclusive diversity.

[Translation]

Madam Chair, honourable colleagues, thank you for your attention.

I also want to thank my parliamentary secretary, Andy Filmore, for his absolutely extraordinary work. We are lucky to have him.

I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Okay.

We will now move on to questions and answers.

Mr. Breton, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, minister for being here with us today.

Welcome Ms. Laurendeau and Mr. Francis. It is always a pleasure to have you here with us.

We are very proud to see that the government is investing in arts and culture.

Minister, I will get straight to my first question, which — I hope — might affect organizations back home.

You talked about investing in festivals. As everyone knows, there are major festivals held in Quebec, in big cities like Montreal and Quebec City, in which the government participates. However, if I understand correctly, the proposed new investments in the budget for festivals are more for the regions, as well as smaller festivals that are often the cornerstones of celebrations. You talked about the economy and this investment will add to the regional economy.

I would like you to elaborate on these investments you are proposing for festivals that you briefly mentioned in your presentation.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for the question, Mr. Breton.

Thank you for inviting me. I so enjoyed visiting your riding and playing guitar with the students at the school in Granby. It was a nice time.

Mr. Pierre Breton: It was memorable.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It was spur of the moment and memorable.

You are right to point out that we've made a considerable investment in festivals. In fact, there are two investments in particular that you need to remember. For major festivals we are investing \$16 million in the Canada Arts Presentation Fund. For smaller festivals, like the ones that might be held in your riding and elsewhere of course, we are investing \$14 million through the Local Festivals component of the Building Communities Through Arts and Heritage program.

We are also investing another \$10 million in celebrations and commemorations such as Canada Day or other types of celebrations. We are essentially talking about an additional \$40 million over two years for these celebrations.

It is certainly a lot of money. This is the first time in about a decade that these budgets have been increased. Our festivals bring us together to celebrate these important things. These festivals add life and vitality to our regions, our villages, and our towns.

I know that a number of festivals are held in your home riding, Mr. Breton. I knew your region well. I hope people will come see us to talk about a possible collaboration.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you.

This is excellent news for our regions where these festivals are held. Industry was very keen on seeing this investment. It is excellent news.

You talked about journalism. In my riding alone, there are five media outlets. It is incredible. There is a daily newspaper and four community newspapers and one radio station. As you said, journalists are going through a period of immense change.

You talked about investments. How specifically can our local media access more capital to help them get through this major shift?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You are right to bring that up.

As you said, our newspapers are in crisis. They have lost half their employees since 2010. We are going to address the heart of the problem by creating concrete measures to support Canadian newspapers, big and small, all while preserving journalistic independence.

There are two different investments. First there is \$50 million for the regions. We want to ensure that everyone has access to news that is objective, impartial, and balanced. We think that people have the right to know what is going on at their city hall or what their provincial MLA or federal MP are doing, no matter where they are from.

There is a \$50-million investment, but also another large investment of \$600 million consisting mainly in tax credits. This will be managed in a neutral way. In other words, there will be a committee and industry itself will determine membership. It is not the Minister of Canadian Heritage who will determine, based on certain criteria, eligibility for the tax credits that will be paid to the newspapers in question.

• (1650)

Mr. Pierre Breton: If I understand correctly, the tax credits will go mostly to news reporters.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It has to be about the news.

Mr. Pierre Breton: It has to be news.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It can't be an opinion piece.

Mr. Pierre Breton: It can't be operational.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It can't be for opinion pieces, when someone writes their point of view, for example.

Mr. Pierre Breton: It has to be news.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We're talking about news that is objective, professional. Here in Canada we are very lucky to have such professional journalism. It is the envy of the world. That is the type of journalism we are trying to protect.

Mr. Pierre Breton: I have a minute and a half left.

Music means a lot to me. You mentioned it and said that we will provide more support to the industry with a \$20-million investment over two years. There may be other aspects in your presentation that have to do with music, including with regard to the Canada Music Fund.

Minister, could you please provide more details on the new investments that have to do with music?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely. Music is something we all care about.

Two things needed to happen. First we had to increase funding. The Canada Music Fund had not been increased. Not only that, but it had been reduced over the years. We had to reinvest in it significantly. We are investing \$20 million over two years, \$10 million a year.

ADISQ is applauding our investment. It is exactly what they asked for. We needed to not only invest this \$20 million, but also modernize the Canada Music Fund. We will do that at the same time.

Mr. Pierre Breton: Thank you.

The Chair: That is all the time you have.

Mr. Pierre Breton: It is over.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: We are now going to Mr. Shields for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, Minister, I will thank your staff. I want to thank Ms. Laurendeau for her input into our committee and the study we recently did. She stayed with us for many hours and provided valuable input, so I really appreciate your staff being there. She was excellent.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you.

Mr. Martin Shields: I'm going to deal with the business income tax measures referred to a minute ago. One of the comments from the Quebec Community Newspapers Association was this:

Some of our member newspapers do not have the resources to employ more than one journalist and often, the editor also writes news articles.

It's not going to work.

In my riding, I don't have any dailies; I have weeklies. I have the Taber Times, the Vauxhall Advance, the Rocky View Weekly, the Chestermere Anchor, the Bassano Times, the Strathmore Times and the Brooks Bulletin.

If you look at all those papers—and that's not all of them—the owner is usually the editor. The owner has a camera and there's one reporter. However, these are the lifeblood of my communities. They cover the local mayor, the councils, what the hockey team did, and enhancing development in that community.

They are the lifeblood, but under your criterion of “two or more journalists in the production of its content who deal at arm's length

with the organization”... The editor is usually the owner. He's not only the owner; he's the photographer and the writer. All of them that you can list might have one reporter, or maybe two, but usually they're not just a reporter; they're also a photographer.

Therefore, every one of the weeklies in my riding won't get anything out of this, because the criterion eliminates them. These papers, all of the weeklies, are the lifeblood of all the communities in my riding.

I had the Calgary Herald years ago, but I don't take it anymore because it doesn't cover the communities in my riding. That's what most people do. The weeklies are the lifeblood, and the owner is the editor, the photographer and the reporter.

One of the owner-editors I met with said, “You're trying to save print media. The federal government used to advertise in print media, but now they don't. It's all social media. Give us back our print media advertising from the federal government. You've pulled that all from the weekly newspapers.” He said, “If we had that as a source of income, that would make a difference.”

On the one hand, you want to support the production of newspapers, the big newspaper chains, which maybe are dying, but you said you need to support them. However, on the other hand, you've pulled that support from the weekly newspapers that are the lifeblood of the communities.

You say they have to have two separate reporters. If you look through every one of my weeklies here, the Brooks Bulletin included, they won't qualify because of that piece. These are owned by the editors. The editors are the owners of these weekly papers. They can't be separated; they're part of it.

That's an ask when I meet with the weekly newspapers in my riding. They say, “Give us back the print ads that the feds were doing. You're going to support the large newspapers in print form, but you've pulled the support and advertising from the weeklies.” That's a challenge.

• (1655)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I sense many questions in that question.

Mr. Martin Shields: Well, it's a huge challenge for the weeklies.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, Mr. Shields, but with due respect, the shift from traditional media to social media started under the previous government.

Mr. Martin Shields: I got that, but you're going to support \$600 million into the print media.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It did start under the previous government. It's something that you see across the world. Now, what do we do with that? Do we cross our arms and do nothing, or do we intervene? We said, “We have to intervene.”

For weeklies, it's a different program. It's the periodical fund, which already exists. We're putting \$75 million per year into that program. It already exists and it is there for weeklies. That's where they go.

Mr. Martin Shields: However, with that simple criterion, you've eliminated the weeklies out of that \$600 million.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Actually, we don't eliminate anybody. We're trying to—

Mr. Martin Shields: It's what it says right here.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: —fix a problem that exists.

Mr. Martin Shields: If they don't meet that criterion, they're eliminated—

The Chair: Could we have just one person speaking?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Shields, I'm trying to understand. With all due respect, your party seems to be opposing this measure.

Mr. Martin Shields: I am, for my weeklies in my riding.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: On the other hand, you seem to say they should get the funds.

Mr. Martin Shields: You're saying you're supporting the major dailies, but you don't support the weeklies.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No, as I mentioned to you, we're supporting the weeklies through the periodical fund. There is \$75 million there.

Mr. Martin Shields: However, you are not supporting them with the new \$600 million.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It is there for them. It depends. Some of them could qualify under the rules.

Mr. Martin Shields: No, none of them will. Under that criterion, not one of them will qualify.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: However, the periodical fund is there, with \$75 million, and it has actually always been there. They're allowed to—

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, but you have a new program with \$600 million. With that simple one-line criterion, you've eliminated all the weeklies.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: No.

Mr. Martin Shields: In my riding, you did.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The program was not for the weeklies. It was there for the other papers. For the weeklies, we have the Canada periodical fund.

Mr. Martin Shields: Would you consider changing that criterion?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The panel can consider that. I'm not there to tell them what to do.

Mr. Martin Shields: No, but you have that criterion already set. All I'm asking is that you change it.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The criteria that are there that launch the conversations.... It opens up the conversation. They can end up with some few things that are different. However, there's one thing: I'm not going to name the panel and I'm not going to tell them what to do.

Mr. Martin Shields: Oh, I got that. It's just that one line in the criteria, and then that all the print ads have been pulled. It really makes it difficult under this criterion you've put in here, and then with the print ads from the federal government gone. These weeklies are the lifeblood of my communities, all of them. We don't have a daily.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I invite you to tell them to go to the periodical fund, which they probably already know.

Mr. Martin Shields: All right.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now move on to Mr. Nantel for seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Laurendeau and Mr. Francis and Mr. Rodriguez for being here.

As you know — and I think everyone on this committee agrees — this is a topic that is absolutely vital to our cultural distinction and overall cultural diversity, for a place like Canada, but Quebec in particular, which has such prolific television production, to continue to thrive and be given a promising future internationally as well.

Let me begin by saying that since I have only seven minutes and I have already lost 30 seconds introducing myself, I will ask you the shortest questions possible and I hope you will give me the shortest answers possible.

In your circle, do you ever have the chance to spend time with children who are 10 or 12 at most and have you noticed that they are not really exposed to Quebec culture any more?

• (1700)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm just going to ask that you sideswipe the supplementaries.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, there are a lot of children in my life.

Are they no longer exposed to Quebec culture? No, they still are.

Would I like them to have more exposure to it? Yes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Well, the truth is that recent statistics show that 42% of children under four have their own devices, iPads or tablets, and can watch whatever programming they want. Adults are happy that television and radio broadcasters are no longer imposing their content on them. We have to acknowledge that a five-year old watching the same episode of *Paw Patrol* in English is a problem.

The cultural sector has asked you several times — as recently as mid-winter at the Montreal conference on the future of broadcasting, distribution, creation and francophone production in the digital era, or CEMAD — to establish interim emergency measures, things the government can do.

I blew my top when I reported these facts. I was told it was the same old thing. It is not at all the same old thing. The information was very pertinent. Industry's best of the best and other stakeholders were there. They asked you to intervene. I was told that I was asking for the same old thing. I was told I was repeating myself.

When will you intervene and do what needs to be done? When will you bring in interim emergency measures? The Yale commission preliminary report doesn't come out until June.

The Chair: Mr. Nantel, what exactly are you alluding to?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am talking specifically about page 2-62 where it indicates a \$9-million adjustment for vote 5b because the government isn't doing anything and as result has to use public funding, or the Canada Media Fund budget. It is all related. The government is spending Canadians' money while the Canada Media Fund dries up because fewer and fewer people are subscribing to cable.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Yes, but, Mr. Nantel, you know that the government is committed to making up for declining revenue. We are doing that with the government's own money.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That's right.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: The Canada Media Fund is very important to us as a government just as it is to you. We share the same opinion on this.

As far as the fund is concerned, June is two months away. We have put a tremendous amount of importance on the work of this committee and we are waiting to see the report. What is more, we asked the committee a very specific question. We asked what we can do to ensure that online companies — Canadian or not — support the creation, production, and distribution of Canadian content. That is essential to us. It is fundamental. I have always said that those who want to take part in the system have to contribute to the system. Now we just need to determine how.

That is what we will do together.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That's the issue. If we have to wait until June for these recommendations, we will be in election mode. Do you promise to apply the interim recommendations of the expert panel?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We'll see. What I will promise is to ensure that all those who take part in the system contribute to it. No one gets a free pass on that.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Regardless, we all agree that when the Liberals were elected, Ms. Joly, your predecessor, said that the situation made no sense, that the ecosystem wasn't working any more, and that we had to fix it. Four years later, nothing has changed and the safety of cultural content has not improved whatsoever for Quebec even though it has invested to ensure that its society is represented on the screens of every platform. Today we are dealing with a series of unregulated platforms. It is very worrisome.

Look at how courageous France was in fighting the European Union to get — and its not nothing — these corporations to pay their taxes. We would like these major U.S. companies to pay their corporate taxes, collect tax on transactions, including GST, and to guarantee 30% local content. Those are some stand-up people. Why wait so long? Why have we lost four years? I want to believe that you are waiting for the interim recommendations, but at least tell me that you're going to enforce them. You told industry stakeholders to trust you, or the Conservatives would come back and cause problems.

I ask the chair to allow me to read the motion I moved the last time. We haven't voted on it. It says:

That the Committee take interest in our cultural industries and in the challenges of the digitization of the economy, and undertake a study on interim measures which could be adopted in the short term to support the Canadian cultural and media system; and that the Committee make recommendations and report its findings to the House before June 1, 2019.

I ask that we vote on this proposal that I talked to you about and which you all received. Thank you.

● (1705)

The Chair: Mr. Boissonnault, you have the floor.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): I think now is not the time for that and we can just say no to that proposal. I have a point of order to reiterate an important fact. We invested \$100 million in the Canada Media Fund. It is not accurate to say that we haven't done anything.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I'm not sure it's acceptable for you to respond to me. We are supposed to be voting, but you refuse to do that. I want to point out that the \$100 million in public money is supposed to come from Internet service providers. It is not supposed to come from taxpayers. There was a system in place that was working, but no one had the courage to stand up for it, and that is going to jeopardize Quebec culture on screens in the future.

The Chair: Was there a question for the minister in all that?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: No, I was asking that we vote on the motion that I duly tabled within the past few weeks.

[English]

The Chair: We're going to go to a vote, which requires us to distribute the terms of the motion. We will ask for it to be distributed right now.

As we're distributing the wording, the floor is now open for anyone who wants to debate this point. I do not know if I see anyone; I've already heard Monsieur Nantel speak to it.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Do you want me to reread it?

The Chair: Do you have it in front of you? I don't.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Yes, I have it.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It is moved: “That the committee take interest in—

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Now that he has started reading it, he has to finish.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It is moved:

That the Committee take interest in our cultural industries and in the challenges of the digitization of the economy, and undertake a study on interim measures which could be adopted in the short term to support the Canadian cultural and media system; and that the Committee make recommendations and report its findings to the House before June 1, 2019.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Boissonnault, you have the floor.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: It is our practice to deal with these matters when we discuss the work of the committee. I find it completely out of order and we will be voting against this proposal.

The Chair: Mr. Nantel, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I have been very cooperative over the past few weeks. I would remind everyone that this motion has the support of every member of the coalition for culture and media. They all understand very well that a member of Parliament is keen to defend Quebec culture. Honestly, I've been the only one doing so for the past seven years. Every member of this coalition has asked us to study this motion because we have to inform the department of the best practices that are used in other countries.

The cultural industry as a whole is dealing with the challenges of digital technology, but not as much as Quebec is. Quebec's productions have a record audience. They are in serious trouble if the system in place is disrupted by the arrival of new Internet players.

Thank you.

•(1710)

[English]

The Chair: Just as a technical point, the wording of the motion that was distributed may not be the correct wording, so I'm just getting that looked into.

Mr. Blaney.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Chair, we are ready to vote and ask for a recorded division.

[English]

The Chair: All right. I just want to see if there's any more debate.

Seeing none, we will continue.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Now we can continue.

Mr. Hogg.

Mr. Gordie Hogg (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Thank you.

A reference was made just a moment ago to the newspapers and the tax credits. You made reference to the panel. What's the status of that? When will the panel be appointed to review the support for the weekly newspapers?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: They're working on it. I've asked that it be as soon as possible, but again, I'm not involved in this and I don't want to be involved in this.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Fair enough.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Those will be suggestions by professionals in the field.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: We had a number of witnesses give testimony with respect to the national day for truth and reconciliation and the National Indigenous Peoples Day. There were particular concerns expressed about the funding that might be available to operationalize that.

Could you give me an update in terms of the follow-through? I think there was some commitment to follow through on that. Could you let us know the status of that, please?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely, and thank you for the question, Mr. Hogg.

The budget that was presented a couple of weeks ago provides \$10 million over two years for this. This is extremely important. We're not saying that we're going to do it. Normally we would do it, but we're saying that we will provide the money for people who want to celebrate the accomplishments, the history and everything related to indigenous people across the country on June 21—the money will be there—and also on September 30, which is more a day of reflection on residential schools, reflecting about the past and making sure that the past doesn't repeat itself.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you.

I will declare that I have some interest in the discussion with respect to anti-racism, diversity and multiculturalism. I did my doctorate in that area, so unfortunately I have a bit of bias or some thoughts with respect to that. My comments around that would be that I think we probably talk about multiculturalism and diversity as part of the Canadian way, and I think we're saying that wrong, because multiculturalism talks about differences rather than sameness.

My bias would be that I think we should be talking about how, wherever people go in the world, most people basically care about the same things. They care about family, community and getting ahead, whether that's economically, socially or spiritually. I think it's great that in Canada we can celebrate that sameness from a number of different traditions, beliefs and religions.

Can you tell me a bit about the strategies that you look at, going ahead, in terms of how we deal with multiculturalism and diversity, particularly with anti-racism and some of the radicalization that occurs with that? Do we have some strategies around that?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: We do, and thank you very much for that question. It's something that is a priority, not only for me but for all of us, for the government and the people in the department. If you will allow me, I will concentrate for just a couple of minutes on fighting racism.

As you know, there was an anti-racism strategy in the past that was cut by the previous government. We thought that it was necessary to have one again. Why? It's because we feel that there is more racism, discrimination, than before. Social media carries a lot of things that shouldn't be there. We need to stop that. We need to fight racism. Fighting racism is not something that you do just like that. It's short-term, mid-term and long-term, but you have to start somewhere, and this is what we're doing.

To build a strategy, we've had 22 sessions across the country in the last few months. I participated in the majority of them. My parliamentary secretaries were there, and there were many MPs and ministers. There were 600 participants from 400 different groups. We were in your province a couple of times.

This allowed us to build this national anti-racism strategy, for which we got \$45 million in the budget, which is pretty much \$15 million a year for three years. Now, I will be able.... I'm not in a position now to share all the details of the strategy, but I can tell you that fighting racism in all its forms, fighting systemic racism, needs different types of actions, and this is what the strategy will include.

It will also include—I can mention it because it was in the budget—a secretariat that will be in Heritage and will coordinate everything that is done across government. More than “coordinate”, the word I always use and want to use is “leadership”. We want to be very proactive on this. We want to show leadership and make sure that all departments are complying and things are changing, because we have to do it for our country and for our children and our grandchildren.

I'm very proud of all the work that brought us here, and I'm really looking forward to presenting the national anti-racism strategy.

● (1715)

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Thank you for that. One of the issues I have is that if someone of a particular religion or tradition commits a radicalized or terrorist event, the religion is often attached to them. I think we have to move away from that, because radicalization can happen in any culture, with any background and any history. I think we have to move away from that and find ways to.... That's why I think we should be talking about the sameness, because that can happen in any culture.

I'm going to turn my time over to Mr. Boissonnault.

The Chair: You have an hour and...I'm sorry. You have one minute and 15 seconds.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Wow. An hour and 15 minutes would be great.

[*Translation*]

Minister, I have two quick questions.

[*English*]

First, I love diversity in all its forms. How important is it to you, and what's the commitment of the ministry in making sure that we have equitable funding for arts organizations across the country?

Second, how important is it for us to have access for the LGBTQ2 community to celebrate Pride and other events through existing

funding? Can you see this increasing in the months and years to come?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It's extremely important and extremely important—for both.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Bravo.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Was that short enough?

The Chair: You still have 50 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: How does giving the LGBTQ community access to funding from Canadian Heritage reflect our fundamental values?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It is fundamental because it is part of our social fabric and who we are. We recognized that these differences are our strength. We have to provide funding while respecting differences and out of a sense of inclusion and a willingness to and the beauty of working together. As I said, this budget has a lot more money for large and small festivals. These are opportunities for celebrating a host of things, including differences and inclusion.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move on to Mr. Blaney for five minutes.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, minister.

Of course we are open to allocating more money for festivals. You talked about the budget. The fact remains that there is a deficit in the tens of billions of dollars, which will be a burden for future generations.

You have a bigger problem than that, minister. Your Prime Minister is caught up in ethics violations involving an unprecedented political interference scandal. I also want to come back to the Norman scandal. The Davie shipyard—

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Point of order. That's out of scope, Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Madam Chair, this has nothing to do with the matter at hand.

● (1720)

The Chair: I agree.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, I hope you didn't deduct this intervention from my speaking time.

The Chair: That's good.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, I would like Mr. Boissonnault to let me get to my point.

The government is currently in trouble. There are no two ways about it. Last week, the Prime Minister sent an intimidating letter to the leader of the official opposition—

Mr. Pierre Breton: I rise on a point of order. He is off topic again.

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, I would like you to stick to today's topic of discussion.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, if I weren't constantly interrupted I could get to the point I'm trying to make.

The Chair: We stop the clock every time.

Hon. Steven Blaney: What is the government trying to hide? While the government is embroiled in scandals, in intimidating threats against our leader, a minister—

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Chair, you made a ruling.

Mr. Blaney, it is quite clear. You have been off topic three times now.

The Chair: We have stopped the clock again. I ask that you to stick to talking about—

[*English*]

Canadian heritage and multiculturalism, supplementary estimates (B) and the budget.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: I am getting there.

The Chair: Get there faster.

Hon. Steven Blaney: If you allow me, I will speak. It is my right and it is my speaking time.

My question is: what is the government trying to hide? It talks about the importance of transparency. In the budget, it allocates \$600 million for the media, during an election year. I'm sorry, Mr. Boissonnault, but the discussion we are having is entirely relevant.

My colleague, Mr. Shields said that the media in our regions would not see a dime of this money. The francophone media—

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: I believe he is off topic again.

Hon. Steven Blaney: The president of the Association de la presse francophone, Mr. Sonier, said that the payroll tax will not even benefit the businesses in my riding.

Mr. Boissonnault, there are regional media in my riding and I want them to benefit from the measures the government is putting in place. The government says it wants to help the media, but it is missing the mark. However, this is happening in an election year, at a time when the government is embroiled in scandals.

Minister, is this an awkward attempt at getting out of a negative news cycle?

May I ask that question, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You did ask it.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you very much.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Blaney, I think that the media plays a fundamental role. The media played an important role when they talked about the measures taken by your government at the time. I am talking about the cuts to Radio-Canada, getting rid of the PromArt and Routes commerciales programs, cuts to the arts and music sector. The media shed light on the fact that—

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Rodriguez, journalists—

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I cannot answer that.

The Chair: Mr. Blaney, I have to allow Mr. Rodriguez to respond.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Please be brief, minister, because I have another question for you.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Of course. I am always brief, Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Of course, minister.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I always look forward to your questions.

When the media shed light on all your cuts—

Hon. Steven Blaney: Minister, I would like to take advantage of the fact that you are before me today to ask you how much your government has invested in Facebook. Taxpayers have the right to know how much the Canadian government invested in Facebook over the past year.

The Chair: I very rarely do this, but, Mr. Blaney—

Hon. Steven Blaney: May I get the answer, Madam Chair? We are talking about the budget. I want to know how much the Canadian government invested in Facebook over the past year. That is money that is not going to our regional media. Could I get that answer, please?

The Chair: The main problem is that you are talking at the same time as the minister. That interferes with interpretation and prevents us from hearing the answer. There can be only one person speaking at a time. I did not hear the response and it is a bit complicated for me. I heard the other question, but we have to wait for the answer. Then we may continue.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: You're right, Madam Chair. The questions are incomprehensible.

Mr. Blaney, I reject your premise. You say that we do not support regional media. However, the regional media in your riding and in other ridings will benefit from the various programs we are offering, including the \$50-million investment and another \$600 million in tax credits, not to mention the Canada Periodical Fund. I am sure that the media in your region benefits and I hope they will continue to benefit from these programs even more in the future. These programs are there for them.

Hon. Steven Blaney: How much has the government invested in Facebook over the past year?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: I invite you to ask Facebook or Public Services and Procurement Canada that question.

Hon. Steven Blaney: If you don't have the answer on hand, minister, you could get it to us later today or in a few days from now.

The Chair: Can you explain the purpose of your question, Mr. Blaney?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: This question should be directed to Public Services and Procurement Canada. My department doesn't buy advertising.

The Chair: That is therefore your answer, minister.

Hon. Steven Blaney: We are talking about helping the media. Advertising spending is being directed to new suppliers. Instead of using a loophole and contributing to the problem of declining ad revenues that our weekly newspapers and our traditional media are experiencing, why not attack the source of the problem?

Secondly, what would you say to the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting when they say that the government is currently complicit in this decline since it gives tax benefits to companies that buy advertising from Internet service providers and the Facebooks of the world?

• (1725)

The Chair: The problem is that—

Hon. Steven Blaney: Excuse me, Madam Chair, but the question isn't for you. It is for the minister and I would like him to answer.

The Chair: I know that, but you have exceeded the five minutes you were given.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Time always flies with Mr. Blaney.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, I would like to receive written answers, if possible.

The Chair: The minister has already answered most of your questions.

Hon. Steven Blaney: No, he didn't. I still don't know how much money the government invested in Facebook. I don't know what he'll tell the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting about the subsidies disguised as tax credits that the government is giving the Facebooks and Googles of this world.

The Chair: The minister answered the first question by indicating that it had to do with another department.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Blaney, if I were impolite I might say that you spent 10 years doing nothing, but I will refrain from saying that.

The Chair: We will now move on to Mr. Long for five minutes. [English]

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. That's hard to follow.

Minister, thank you for coming this afternoon. Thank you for your presentation, and thanks for your commitment to Canada and what you do for all of us.

As you know, my riding of Saint John-Rothesay is home to Canada's first and oldest incorporated city. Because of that, it has a wealth of nationally significant historical assets. When I ran, I ran on developing, re-energizing and remarketing those historical assets. One thing I learned when I travelled the world with my aquaculture job was that European countries embrace their history. They market their history. They celebrate their history and they put money into those assets. Obviously, in my riding, there's a keen interest to work with Heritage Canada and to get investments in preserving our historical heritage assets.

Can you speak, Minister, more broadly on how our federal government is investing in heritage assets through the Canada cultural spaces fund, and how those investments are already benefiting, and have the potential to benefit, communities across the country, including my riding?

Thank you.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely.

As you know, we've invested an additional \$300 million in the Canada cultural spaces fund over 10 years. That's an extra \$30 million a year. Why? It's extremely important to do so. This allows us to invest in small projects. I remember one in a region in Quebec that was for \$150,000 to change all the lighting and sound systems in a venue in Lavaltrie, if I remember well.

We are also able to invest in larger projects, worth a couple of million dollars. For example, in your riding, we invested \$925,000 in the Imperial Theatre in Saint John for renovations and upgrades to their stage and audio systems. The Saint John Theatre Company received \$63,000. In your province, Fredericton received \$500,000 for the Beaverbrook Art Gallery. Those are very important strategic investments we're making.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you for that. Thanks for what you do for all of us, Minister.

I'll turn it over to MP Dhillon.

[Translation]

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you for being here, minister.

I would like to talk about multiculturalism. As a visible minority woman from Quebec, I have the following question: how will the funding to fight racism and promote multiculturalism help other people like me find their own place here and in other spheres of influence?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Thank you for your question, Ms. Dhillon.

As I was saying to Mr. Hogg, I believe, we are seeing a resurgence of discrimination, hateful comments, and various forms of racism.

We have decided to do something about it. We consulted more than 600 people and 400 groups across the country. We met with experts, but also victims of racism and discrimination. We then implemented a program that I will have the opportunity to introduce soon, once I have submitted it to cabinet.

We are launching a number of very concrete projects. For example, in the area of justice, how do we reverse the trend of overrepresentation of certain categories of people such as blacks and indigenous peoples in the prison population? How do we make it easier for people whose name or skin colour are different to find employment? How do we promote social inclusion? All of that will be explained in detail in the anti-racism plan we are presenting shortly and for which we have already allocated significant funding of \$45 million.

• (1730)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Do I still have a bit of time, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute left, Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay.

The plan you are unveiling soon, will it also address the intersectionality I was just talking about? I am a visible minority woman. Let's not forget people from the LGBTQ community either. Will all of that be addressed?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Absolutely. Intersectionality was raised quite frequently during our consultations. Parliamentary secretaries,

federal MPs and people from across the country took part in those consultations.

Many people who experience this intersectionality came to testify. I remember one woman, who is black and gay. She deals with the cumulative effect of all these barriers that stifle her hopes, limit her personal growth, and reduce her choice of jobs. Without getting into the details, know that all these issues will be addressed in our plan.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you, minister.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. It was wonderful to have you here.

[*Translation*]

Thank you two as well, Ms. Laurendeau and Mr. Francis.

[*English*]

It was good to have you all here with us again.

The meeting is adjourned.

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