



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 103

Tuesday, December 5, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Tuesday, December 5, 2023

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

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

Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting No. 103 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

[*English*]

While public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer require mask-wearing indoors or on the precinct, masks and respirators are still excellent tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases. Their use is strongly encouraged, because these diseases are on the rise now.

I want to take this opportunity to remind all participants about some simple housekeeping.

You're not allowed to take screenshots of the proceedings, because it will be out there on the web later on.

This room is equipped with a powerful audio system. When you are speaking, it's really important that you not have other devices around to cause feedback. When you finish speaking, just press and turn off the mic. When you turn it on, be really careful that you're not echoing in the room, because it really affects the ears of the interpreters.

Finally, I want to remind everyone that questions go through the chair. This goes for the committee members as well.

Also, I will give you a 30-second heads-up when your time is up, so you will need to start thinking about how you will end your sentence.

I will also remind you that the way we speak to each other is really important. At committee and in parliamentary proceedings, it's important for us to be respectful of each other. We can differ, absolutely. That's what most of these meetings are about—differing and being argumentative with each other, etc. However, let's try to do this with a certain amount of decorum.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming today.

As you know, we're doing a study on the tech giants. This has been a real problem for us after the passage of Bill C-18.

As individuals, we have Peter Menzies and Pierre Trudel, who is a professor in the public law research centre at the Université de Montréal law school. We have the American Economic Liberties Project, Dr. Erik Peinert, research manager. We have the Center for Journalism and Liberty, Open Markets Institute, Dr. Courtney Rad-sch, director.

The Hub is in your notes, but they're not coming today. They are going to come another day.

Lastly, we have, from Unifor, Marc Hollin, national representative, and Julie Kotsis, media representative, national executive board.

I will begin.

You will all have five minutes to present. I will give you that 30-second shout-out so you can wrap it up. If you don't get to finish your presentation, remember that you can get your little bits in during the Q and A period.

Now, the five minutes is per organization, not per person, so if you're sharing your time in your organization, remember that you have only five minutes.

I'll begin with Peter Menzies and Pierre Trudel.

Peter Menzies is an individual and then Pierre Trudel is another individual.

Peter Menzies, please begin, for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Menzies (As an Individual): Thank you.

I hope I can provide some constructive remarks that you can take forward to help Canada's news organizations flourish once again.

First, though, I wish to clarify a couple of points.

I represent only myself. The blend of my experiences of three decades in journalism and a decade with the CRTC has given me a relatively unique perspective. I have been outspoken in raising the alarm concerning the problematic unintended consequences of legislation, much of which has unfortunately come to pass.

I've always done so only on behalf of myself. I am not a member of any political party, federal or provincial, nor do I contribute to any. I am not a member of any organization, a paid lobbyist or a shill for big tech, as has been inferred. I am just a citizen with a passion for sensible public policy and independent, competitive journalism.

I have no intention of retelling the story of Bill C-18. You all know that well enough.

The role of journalists in society is often described as being to hold the powerful to account, but in Canada, we now unfortunately have a news ecosystem in which most of our journalists could soon have at least half of their pay dependent on the government, Google and any other offshore money the CRTC might come up with as a result of hearings this week. Given that the two most powerful entities in our society are governments and large data-vacuuming tech companies, this is not where we want to be, for as much as the news organizations and journalists involved may swear on their mothers' graves that these realities do not and will not influence their coverage, what they say or how they view the situation, frankly, doesn't matter.

What matters is what the people who read, watch and listen to their news think. While, for sure, some people won't care, a great many will believe that news organizations are fatally compromised. As a result, the public's faith in journalists will continue to wither, and trust in journalism will eventually die. Many will increasingly come to see news organizations as businesses that saved their skin by selling their souls.

We need to find a better way forward. To that end, I recommend to you "And now, the news", a policy paper authored by myself and Konrad von Finckenstein, published this spring by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. It calls for the development of a national news industry policy framework that would ensure that the news consumer is served by a healthy, modern, competitive and refreshed news ecosystem that delivers fair, balanced and accurate news that is trusted.

There's a lot to unpack in that paper, but there is one recommendation in it that you can act on, beginning right away. Get the CBC out of the advertising business.

There will be no flourishing for news organizations until the CBC's dualistic distortion of the marketplace is replaced with a level playing field. We will never have one of those, provided the CBC continues to compete for advertising revenue while being paid \$1.3 billion a year by Parliament to be a public broadcaster.

That money is intended to allow the CBC to achieve its public mandate, and no doubt much of it does. However, it also allows the CBC to out-resource companies like The Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, Postmedia, Le Devoir and dozens of smaller start-ups, while soaking up as much as \$400 million in advertising revenue. That's significantly more than all the government and Google supports combined.

This is not to say there is not a role for a public broadcaster, but that's not what we have. What we have is a publicly funded commercial broadcaster and online platform.

Meanwhile, TVA and CTV lay people off and Quebecor and Bell are begging the CRTC to get Netflix and Disney+ to subsidize their newsrooms. It's ridiculous.

A flourishing future for a free and independent press in this country is just not possible so long as the CBC exists not as a pure play public broadcaster but as a publicly funded commercial broadcaster and online platform operator. No industry could thrive in such circumstances.

CBC/SRC needs to be stripped of its ability to earn domestic advertising revenues and needs to streamline its operations to focus on its mandate and make its news freely available to others. Immediately eliminating it as a recipient of the Google fund would be a good start.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now go to Mr. Trudel, professor at the public law research centre at the Université de Montréal.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Trudel (Professor, Public Law Research Center, Université de Montréal, Law School, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm a professor of media law and information technology law. I was a member of the Yale committee, a group of experts on updating Canada's communications statutes. Almost three years ago now, we tabled a report entitled "Canada's Communications Future: Time to Act". However, it's as an individual, a university professor and an observer of trends that I have prepared this short address.

The subject mentioned in the notice of meeting, and which appears to be what you are working on, is the current and ongoing use of intimidation and subversion tactics by the tech giants to evade regulation in Canada and elsewhere around the world. I'm going to make three comments about this practice or propensity by the tech giants as they attempt to evade regulation in countries just about everywhere around the world.

My first comment is about how urgent it is for all countries—and Canada in particular because it's a medium-sized country and not a major player on the planet in these areas—to strengthen their co-operation with other democratic states. The world will be operating as a network from now on, and countries urgently need to do more to coordinate their efforts and improve their ability to anticipate dominant trends, particularly in technological developments, and their impact on policy objectives. For Canada in particular, this means anticipating much more proactively than it has in the past, the effects of these technological mutations on the Internet as we know it, because they present significant challenges to achieving Canada's political and cultural objectives.

My second comment is on the need to update its legislation to put an end to the free ride the tech giants have had so far, owing to our failure to impose ground rules currently applicable to all Canadian firms. I believe that giving these multinationals carte blanche over the past two decades was a horrible mistake. It's urgent to make up for lost time, and it will be difficult.

My third and final comment is to remind everyone that the practices of multinational firms, and their various technical configurations, establish regulations by default. Consequently, the real question is to know whether these default regulations put in place by the tech giants are compatible with Canadian values as reflected in our laws. The purpose of these laws is to promote the growth of Canadian culture and Canada's information universe.

For example, is it compatible with our values to allow the algorithms designed to maximize the value of the massive data used by the web companies to generate advertising revenue, and to maximize the risk of harassment against members of the community or vulnerable people? I would say no, it's not compatible with our values. That's why it's imperative to stop giving the multinationals the freedom to impose their rules and values. It has in many instances led to highly deplorable consequences, including the dismantling of our media industries.

● (1115)

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. It's all within time. You guys are being very good about that. Thank you.

I now go to the American Economic Liberties Project, Dr. Erik Peinert, research manager.

You have five minutes, please.

Dr. Erik Peinert (Research Manager, American Economic Liberties Project): Hello, my name [Technical difficulty—Editor]

The Chair: Can you stop for a minute, please, so we can see what's going on? We cannot hear you. There's a problem. We're going to try to fix this.

Can we suspend for a second while that's dealt with?

Thank you.

● (1115)

(Pause)

● (1115)

The Chair: Mr. Peinert, please begin. You have five minutes. Thank you.

Dr. Erik Peinert: Thank you.

Hello, my name is Erik Peinert. I am the research manager at the American Economic Liberties Project, a Washington, D.C.-based policy and advocacy organization focused on reducing concentrated economic power and broadening opportunity for small businesses, workers and communities. I earned a Ph.D. from Brown University [Technical difficulty—Editor]

The Chair: Once again, we're having some trouble.

Excuse me, Mr. Peinert, we're having some trouble hearing you. Can I let you and somebody on the floor, the audio people, work it out?

I'm going to move to the next witness, just in the interests of time.

I will go to the Center for Journalism and Liberty, Open Markets Institute, Dr. Courtney Radsch, director.

You may begin, please, for five minutes.

● (1120)

[Translation]

Dr. Courtney Radsch (Director, Center for Journalism and Liberty, Open Markets Institute): Thank you for inviting me to testify.

My name is Courtney Radsch, and I'm the director of the Center for Journalism and Liberty at the Open Markets Institute, and a researcher and affiliated fellow at several institutions including UCLA and the Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI).

I've spent the past 20 years of my career as a journalist and researcher, and I have never received funding from a tech giant for my research. The Open Markets Institute does not accept any funding from tech giants, making us a rare independent voice on technology policy and journalism.

[English]

In fact, what happened to Open Markets is emblematic of the way tech giants wield their money and power to intimidate and to bully. The Google-funded think tank New America Foundation fired Barry Lynn, our executive director, and exiled staff in 2017 after OMI issued a statement praising one of the first penalties that the European Commission imposed on Google for anti-competitive conduct. This is not a unique example of how big tech manipulates institutions to dissuade critical research while it also funds them to produce “research” that supports its positions and advocates for positions to further big tech interests.

Just yesterday, renowned disinformation scholar Dr. Joan Donovan filed a whistle-blower complaint against Harvard for retaliating against her after the university received a record half billion dollars from The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. As the complaint notes, Dr. Donovan’s work was “particularly timely as it is used to inform policymakers as they legislate”.

Indeed, much of what we know about how these opaque oligopolies operate is because journalists and researchers have ferreted it out or a whistle-blower leaked it.

I will cover just five ways, briefly, that big tech deployed its vast resources and charitable arms to evade regulation, to influence research and journalistic coverage, and to intimidate critics and undermine legal regulatory oversight. While the playbook borrows from big tobacco, big oil and big pharma, the manipulation is intensified through the use of their own platforms to manipulate public opinion and to censor their critics.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, with all due respect for our witness, would it be possible to ask her to slow down so that our interpreters can do their work properly?

[English]

The Chair: Dr. Radsch, could you please slow down so the interpreters can translate into French for some of the members of our committee?

Thank you.

[Translation]

Dr. Courtney Radsch: Yes.

Sorry about that.

[English]

First, tech giants use their platforms to propagandize against regulation they oppose, distorting public perception and debate. We saw this in Australia, Canada, Brazil and the U.S. with news media bargaining legislation. Google used its search page to advocate against proposed laws, and reportedly told evangelical preachers in Brazil that they would no longer be able to quote the Bible online.

The Brazilian judiciary accused Google of undue influence in the legislative process.

Second, tech giants censor news and withdraw access to data and APIs, as well as threatening to leave entire markets to avoid meaningful regulation and deter oversight. Meta even impeded sharing links from Australian government sites during parliamentary deliberations about the bargaining code there as part of its negotiation tactics, according to a whistle-blower.

Google and Meta have threatened to ditch news entirely, despite the fact that disinformation degrades their platforms while news provides greater value and a better user experience, and they have pressured news outlets to kill stories, including coverage of a recent study that estimated they owe U.S. publishers more than \$12 billion a year. This pattern of censorship and distortion can also be seen in motions to suppress information, destruction of evidence and obstacles to public scrutiny, as with the historic antitrust trial against Google happening now in D.C., where it opposed audio livestreaming.

Third, they undermine democratic institutions, seek to handicap regulatory agencies and evade laws they don't like. We saw this in Meta's decision to censor news in Canada rather than comply with Bill C-18, and in its lawsuit against the FTC over attempts to force the company to comply with restrictions on data gathering.

Fourth, big tech companies spend more money in Washington, Brussels and other world capitals than virtually any other sector, through direct lobbying and by funding industry groups and fellowships that help shape how policy-makers think about issues they regulate, putting big tech-funded experts into the heart of policy-making.

Fifth and finally, big tech provides funding to most civil society, research and advocacy groups working in tech policy, digital rights, AI governance and the media bargaining code space, as well as journalism.

I do not want to disparage the work of these organizations, but the perception of interference, along with the potential to divert attention for more important and consequential issues, is a way to subvert demand for regulation. Research shows that big tech funding to media correlates with countries where governments are considering fair compensation legislation, and now AI companies are following the same playbook.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, big tech companies generate chaos and disruption, which then they leverage to blame governments for crafting unworkable regulation that only becomes workable once modifications that benefit them the most are made.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Radsch.

Are we ready to go to Dr. Peinert? No? Yes? I will move on until I am told that we're ready to do that.

We now have Unifor, with Mr. Marc Hollin, national representative, and Julie Kotsis, media representative, national executive board.

I don't know who's going to speak, or if you're going to share your time, or what.

All right, Ms. Kotsis. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Julie Kotsis (Media Representative, National Executive Board, Unifor): Thank you very much.

Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. It's my honour to join you today to make a representation on behalf of Unifor.

My name is Julie Kotsis, and I am chair of the Unifor media council. Unifor is one of Canada's largest unions in the media sector, representing more than 10,000 media workers, including members in broadcast television, newspapers, digital news publishing, film and TV production, and graphics and printing.

While you consider all of the important evidence you've been gathering through the standing committee, I'd like to share another critical perspective, the experience of journalists and media workers and how the future of local news and the people who make that news has been thrown into crisis by the disruptive influence of tech giants.

In my time at the Windsor Star, I have witnessed a profound and troubling transformation of the newspaper business in Canada. Canada's newsrooms are shrinking. Other newspapers have gone through the same painful downsizing. Just as an example, in 2009, Unifor's membership at the Toronto Star totalled 610. It was down to 178 in 2022. The same is true for broadcast news.

This year alone, more than 100 Unifor members in the broadcast segment lost their jobs. We know that not everyone is concerned that journalists and media workers are losing their livelihoods. What should concern everyone, however, is the impact that the loss of local news has on the fabric of our democracy. Local news is how Canadians learn about the world and what's going on around

us. It's one of the ways that we hold governments and corporations accountable. Local news is how we gather vital information about natural disasters like this year's forest fires or floods.

While this is, perhaps, an obvious point, what puts journalists and media workers at the heart of this discussion is that they are the ones who create local news. They have the training, experience and professional standards to provide high-quality, fact-based journalism.

We've heard some experts and witnesses framing this discussion as the fight for the free flow of information online and the very notion of a free and open Internet. Even if this discussion was about the very notion of a free and open Internet, tech giants like Google and Meta are the very last organizations we should be looking to for guidance.

This committee has already heard countless examples of how the tech giants control what we access online using opaque and ever-changing algorithms that they hide from users and regulators and protect at all costs. They collect our data and sell it for profit. They control every aspect of online advertising, frequently allowing for the proliferation of toxic and hate-filled harassment and abuse on their platforms. I will tell you that a great deal of that harassment and abuse is aimed at journalists and media workers, including members of Unifor.

I would like to take a moment to talk about the harassment of journalists and media workers. This is an issue that our union takes very seriously. In February of this year, we released a comprehensive discussion paper called "Breaking the News: Media Workers Under Attack". As part of that discussion paper, we undertook a membership survey about harassment and abuse.

It won't surprise you to know that, according to Unifor media workers, messages on Facebook and Twitter were a key vehicle for harassment and abuse by members of the public. Unifor media workers know that the argument about a free and open Internet is a red herring. To reiterate, this is really about the ability of governments to enact meaningful rules and the willingness of the tech giants to abide by those rules. To put it plainly, our members are used to standing up to powerful global corporations and, as good trade unionists, we know that we must stand up to bullies together.

In fact, I'd like to return to some basic union principles as I wrap up my comments. For us, solidarity is about finding common ground and standing together, even if not all of our interests are totally the same. We know, all too well, that one worker standing alone against an employer is almost powerless, but when we come together, we have collective power. We respectfully encourage elected officials and the federal government to work together in solidarity and with jurisdictions around the world to establish rules that will rein in the unchecked power of the tech giants.

Thank you.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Kotsis.

We're going to try Dr. Peinert again. He's from the American Economic Liberties Project.

Let's go for five minutes, please.

Dr. Erik Peinert: Thank you. Hopefully it works this time.

Hello. My name is Erik Peinert. I'm the research manager at the American Economic Liberties Project, a Washington, D.C.-based policy [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Desjardins): I'm sorry, Mr. Peinert, but we're having issues with the sound again.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Peinert. There's absolute static on your end. You've talked to someone here from the committee, and you've tried to fix it, so I don't know what we're going to suggest.

To the audio people, if we lost the picture, but listened to him on audio—we know what he looks like now—would that make a difference? I have found in certain international meetings that it does. Can we try that?

Okay—let's try losing the picture and going with your disembodied voice.

Thank you.

Dr. Erik Peinert: Okay—we will try that.

I will continue where I left off.

I earned a Ph.D. from Brown University, where my research focused on competition, monopoly and antitrust and has been published in leading academic journals.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about big tech's pattern of coercion in response to regulation and specifically Meta's recent action to block Canadian access to news articles across its platforms in retaliation for the passage of Bill C-18, the Online News Act. This follows a nearly identical action in 2021 by Meta, then Facebook, to extract concessions from Australia with respect to its news media bargaining code.

This discussion comes at a time when the news industry across the globe is in peril. It's an industry I've watched closely since I was a child. I was raised by a journalist. My mother began her career as a reporter for a local paper in rural New England, moving to various editorial roles in minor cities, to the newsroom at The Boston Globe, and then to executive positions at The Boston Globe and

GateHouse Media, now Gannett. She now owns several successful, independent local papers in Massachusetts suburbs.

My personal and professional experiences lead me to make two principal points today, the first being about the platforms' business models in this market.

Media companies pay to produce and distribute content that a large mass of readers find valuable. They then sell ads to businesses that want their offerings in front of those readers. On one side, Meta and Google have become a central way for readers to access news media, which gives them power over journalism outlets, with an implicit threat to cut off readership.

On the other side, Meta and Google also have an effective duopoly over digital advertising, and both face or have faced antitrust lawsuits for illegal monopolization in this space.

These companies are not providing viewership so much as using their dual control over Internet traffic and advertising to monetize content that journalists produce at considerable expense. Recent research by economists at the University of Zurich indicates that 40% of Google's total revenue from search advertising would go to publishers and other journalism outlets if it faced more competition. With media companies paying to produce the product [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Clerk: I'm sorry, Mr. Peinert, but we're having issues with the sound again.

The Chair: We heard some of the things you were trying to say.

Can we just try one more time?

The Clerk: The only issue would be that change of sound, which might hurt the interpreters.

• (1135)

The Chair: Okay. Perhaps what we will do, committee, is to try to reschedule Dr. Peinert, because I think he is giving us valuable information. Perhaps we can get him a different earpiece or a different audio system, so that he will actually be able to talk to us.

Dr. Peinert, would you be willing to come back?

Dr. Erik Peinert: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Chair: Okay, I know that was static, but it sounded like you said, "Sure." Thank you.

The clerk will contact you with regard to your return to this committee. Thank you.

Mr. Coteau, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): I was going to say that he could just dial in, instead of using the Internet. He could just call in by phone.

The Chair: The clerk is telling me that the committee room does not have phone lines.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Oh, okay. I thought Zoom automatically had the 1-800 numbers, but if there's a distinct line....

The Chair: Apparently they do, but the interpreters say they won't be able to interpret. Thank you, though.

We will have the clerk and Dr. Peinert speak. I want to thank him for his time and for the valuable information he was giving us at the very beginning.

I think we've finished hearing from witnesses, so we're going to go to the question and answer section. I just want to let you know that the first section will be six minutes, and the six minutes include the question and the answer. Again, I will call out 30 seconds for the questioner and witness when you get close to the closing.

We'll begin with Mrs. Thomas for the Conservative Party for six minutes.

Go ahead, please.

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

Mr. Menzies, in your opening remarks, you made the following comment:

...in Canada, we now...have a news ecosystem in which most of our journalists could soon have at least half of their pay dependent on the government, Google and any other offshore money the CRTC might come up with.... Given that the two most powerful entities in our society are governments and large data-vacuuming tech companies, this is not where we want to be.

It seems that you are raising concern with regard to big tech and big government colluding to provide \$100 million to the news industry, and with regard to the fact that there is, in fact, a power imbalance when big tech is included in the equation.

Can you expand on your comments a bit?

Mr. Peter Menzies: Sure. Unfortunately, one of the things that didn't get addressed in the way Bill C-18 ended up was the power imbalance issue. I had quite a bit of sympathy for that. Phillip Crawley used to raise that issue quite elegantly before this committee and before the Senate transportation committee. We're left without that.

Google would have to speak with regard to its intention regarding the fund, but putting the media in a position of being dependent on both taxpayers' money and taxpayers' benefits, and on big tech money—the two most powerful entities in our world that we need media to hold to account—which is the path we're going down right now, is just not where we want to be. We want to move forward. That's what I am trying to encourage here: that people think forward as to how we can get past these hurdles with Bill C-18, this roadblock that we've ended up with, this dead-end road that we've ended up with, and move forward to a place where the Unifor jobs can happen, where we can be flourishing and where journalists can be serving who they want to serve, i.e., readers and citizens.

That's basically where we are with that. Also, in terms of that, you don't have to like big tech to realize that. If you look at the National Post's editorial the other day, you will see that it went on about how terrible Google is and about some of the things like the antitrust suits in the States. Then it said that they looked forward to being great partners with Google. That's where we are.

• (1140)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Menzies.

My follow-up to that, then, would be that Google went into a back room, entered into a deal with the government, and said that it would give \$100 million to a collective of its choosing.

I find that very interesting. You have a big tech company that is going to ultimately determine which collective, if there are multiple, it is going to enter into this bargaining agreement with. It's going to hand the collective \$100 million, and then that's supposed to go towards the perpetuation of news in the nation.

The minister has announced that the CBC has one-third of all the journalists in the country, and according to the regulations, we know that the money is supposed to be allocated according to the number of journalists in each office. The CBC, then, having one-third of the journalists in the country, would stand to gain \$33 million. It already gains \$1.4 billion in taxpayer money, and then it has access to another \$400 million through advertising revenue and now the most recent Liberal announcement of \$129 million in tax benefits.

I'm curious about the comment you made in your opening remarks with regard to the CBC and the fact that we actually can't level the playing field until it is omitted in terms of its ability to generate ad revenue. You also stated that it should be excluded from Bill C-18 or the \$100 million that Google is granting. Can you comment on that further?

Mr. Peter Menzies: There is a bunch there, but I'll start with the fund.

In the paper I mentioned that Konrad and I authored, we did suggest that there could be a Canadian journalism fund. We also suggested that the CBC should be excluded from that, because it would be double dipping, and also that only companies whose primary business is the creation of news would be eligible. That would allow the funds to focus directly on those companies that are most exposed on news and not necessarily on companies that do 80% to 90% entertainment programming and then do news on the side. The funds would go directly to that group.

In terms of the CBC, it strikes me as odd that nobody seems to think that when you put your thumb on the scales of an industrial framework to the extent that the CBC public funding does in terms of the commercial competition, that wouldn't distort the marketplace. I can't imagine the auto industry being able to function properly if the government said that there was a level playing field for everybody, but that it was going to give a subsidy to Chrysler, and that Chrysler could compete with the others for car sales in the same way as the others. I can't imagine that in the restaurant industry or the food industry or anything like that.

I'm not opposed to there being a public broadcaster, but we have a two-headed monster. We need to bring that to an end. Nothing good can happen for the news industry until we fix that.

The Chair: The time is up. Thank you very much.

I'm going to go to the Liberals and Ms. Hepfner.

Lisa, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Radsch, I want to go to you.

I'm not sure whether you saw the details of the government's deal with Google that was announced last week. If so, would you give us your reaction?

Dr. Courtney Radsch: Yes, I have seen the details. Thank you so much. I have been following these news media bargaining codes around the world.

I think it's beneficial to see what's happening in Canada. I don't think that the amount determined with Google is sufficient or at all on par with what is actually owed. Part of the problem is that there is a myopic focus on the value of referral traffic. I think tech companies have been very successful in arguing that we should have this very narrow conception of how we establish value.

Unfortunately, we didn't hear from Erik. He was talking about a study done in Switzerland that looked at the value that news provides to Google Search simply through its existence, regardless of whether somebody is looking for a headline or clicks through to a headline.

They looked through and said, "Okay, what percentage of people are doing informational searches and what happens to behaviour if you remove news information?" They had two different populations, one who had news and one who didn't have news. They looked at how their behaviour changed. They then basically got to a figure that showed that this percentage of Google's ad search revenue could be attributed to the mere presence of news on the platform.

That is a very valuable way to conceptualize how the value of news should be established. The Canadian legislation, I think, focuses too much on the idea of referral traffic in order to establish value. Similarly, it does not account for generative AI and the role that news plays in large language models and AI systems. I think that looking at a wider array of tech companies that could be covered and required to contribute to the fund would be important.

I share Peter's concern about having a handful of powerful actors funding the news industry, and the dangers of platform capture. However, I think that if you widen the scope of tech companies that come under requirements to pay for the news they are using to build the most valuable products in the world, we would be less concerned about this. You could create—and I think Canada has done this—a lot of transparency around which news organizations benefit, how you define a news organization, and making sure that there is some level of transparency for those deals. It's understanding that they are commercial deals but allowing the regulator to have insight into that.

Also, one of the ongoing problems of establishing value is that there is no real insight into the data that the platforms possess on their own to help determine that value. Even if you wanted to help the news organizations bargain more effectively, it's going to be dif-

ficult if they don't have access to data and information that will help them establish that value.

I think I'll leave it there.

• (1145)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I think you also have done some research in terms of the value of news to big tech platforms.

Would you tell me whether there's any threat to journalistic integrity and independence if tech giants are helping to fund journalism organizations? Indeed, if there are government funds to help with journalism organizations, does that have an effect on journalistic independence?

Dr. Courtney Radsch: Yes, certainly funding has an impact on journalists' independence. That's why one of the most important principles is to have a pluralistic array of funding, so that news organizations are not dependent on any one company, one government or one revenue stream. Ideally, you would see an array of mainly advertising-supported funding.

Also, I think there is a role for tax benefits or taxation of the tech platforms, to ensure that they are compensating for use of this data by creating subsidies or incentive programs.

If you have a lot of different sources of funding, then the power of any one source to—

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: We couldn't hear the French interpretation and the interpreter told us that she couldn't provide the interpretation.

Would it be possible for the witness to repeat her answer so that our parliamentary rights can be respected and so that we could understand what she said.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Martin Champoux: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: I think the important thing here is to ask Dr. Radsch to slow down. The interpreters are suggesting that.

Yes, Martin.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I think there's a technical problem this morning.

We've noticed that there seems to be a bad connection every now and then, and I think that's what's causing the problem.

Communication is inconsistent, which causes interpretation problems. I don't think the problem is coming from the witness's end of things.

I agree with my colleague Mr. Godin that we should ask Ms. Radsch to repeat her answer. You could stop the clock for our colleague.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will pause the clock, because I'm being asked to.

Does everyone want her to repeat the answer?

Go ahead, Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I noticed, Chair, that there was a bit of a glitch in her response. The audio seemed to cut out momentarily, similar how to how it did earlier today. I was still able to understand what she was saying, but there was a moment when there was a technical glitch.

The Chair: Let's give Dr. Radsch an extra minute on her time for answering, so that she can fill in the gaps that other people found in the translation, etc.

Go ahead.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Dr. Courtney Radsch: I could try to answer in French.

It's very important to have several sources of funding for the media [*Technical difficulty*], from the government, the platforms, advertising, and to have a number of funding options.

[*English*]

then the influence of one actor or one entity over news does not become so important and dependence is not so important. That is why it's important to look at government subsidies, taxation, and benefits, etc., as well as appropriate compensation by tech platforms and a robust digital advertising infrastructure.

However, let's remember that local advertising is also affected by big tech. We have Amazon putting local businesses out of business or constraining them to their logic. These are all intertwined. The role of big tech is seen throughout the entire advertising ecosystem, which affects directly the digital advertising that news organizations can obtain but also the simple ability of local businesses that used to advertise in news to remain sustainable.

I do worry about capture, but when you have this type of regulatory scenario where you have an independent regulator, you have distance between the fund that is created and the ultimate beneficiaries. That is beneficial. You need to have multiple types of entities that are represented on that board.

I would just go back to say that in addition to the Swiss study, American researchers recently took the study and looked at what would happen in the American market based on revenues and usage there. They found that it should amount to \$12 billion that the platform.... Well, for Google it would be about \$10 billion owed to news organizations. I think we need to reconceptualize how we're thinking about value.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now go to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux.

You have six minutes, please, Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I hope the connection is good enough to provide my anglophone colleagues with acceptable interpretation, and I would ask them to tell us right away if that is not the case. There do appear to be some technical problems this morning.

I'd like to thank the witnesses who are with us this morning. Their testimony and comments are very interesting.

I am pleased to see you again, Mr. Trudel. Once again, I'd like to thank you for shedding light on a matter you feel strongly about.

I'm now going to talk about something less pleasant.

Layoffs were announced at CBC/Radio-Canada on the news yesterday. I know that will affect a lot of people. It will certainly have an influence on the quality of the news and on the transmission of Quebec and francophone culture. Needless to say, if some 250 jobs at CBC/Radio-Canada are cut, in programming services alone, there will doubtless be consequences.

How would the current context be different today if we had taken action earlier and followed the recommendations of the Yale report in which you were involved?

If we had acted earlier to regulate the web giants in the information and culture sector, do you think we'd be where we are today?

Mr. Pierre Trudel: Unfortunately, Canada and other countries have lagged far behind in implementing measures to ensure that the ground rules are the same for national stakeholders, by which I mean national companies, and international ones, meaning the web companies.

We've lost decades by doing nothing about the tech giants, by taking a romantic view of the marvels of the Internet. And of course a state of affairs was allowed to establish itself, one from or which it is now extremely difficult to extricate ourselves.

If we are to succeed in making up for lost time and doing damage control on the current state of affairs, efforts will have to be redoubled. I believe it requires an urgent intensification of collaborative work with other countries because this erosion of the media structure, which has hit Canada hard, is also affecting all democratic countries.

The bottom line is that I think this challenge should have been addressed much earlier. The real challenge will be to redistribute the resources that have captured the attention of people who will henceforth be online, meaning just about everyone. Rather than doing that, we are still working within older models.

• (1155)

Mr. Martin Champoux: Your answer raises a lot of questions.

There has been a proliferation of cutbacks. For some time now, we've been hearing about a new one every two weeks or so. There have been cutbacks in news and in the production of local or regional content, particularly on the francophone side, which is what interests me the most. I get the impression that the cutbacks are also having a nefarious impact. It has been weakening news services everywhere in Quebec and French Canada. The main impact of that is that it may well mean even more of a shift towards digital companies.

Do you get the impression that this is drawing us into a rather pessimistic spiral?

Mr. Pierre Trudel: Yes, that's the impression I'm getting, and it's important to ask why it's like that. It's because advertising revenue is now being generated on platforms from which the public, and in particular young people, are getting more and more of their news content. Many of our fellow citizens are now spending much more time on these platforms, which don't feel any obligation to disseminate news that has been gathered using traditional journalistic methods. So much so that a company like Meta can say that it's going to censor Canadian media, ostensibly on grounds that it's a way of fighting against legislation it doesn't like.

Those companies ought to have been told that they wouldn't have the right to practise any censorship, except when national laws impose restrictions, and that they would have to use some of the resources they have earned from increased user attention to be partly reinvested in the production of Canadian news and content. That's the Canadian model that has been around for many decades, and it's a model that should have been continued and strengthened.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Trudel.

Martin, your time is up. I'm so sorry.

I now go to the New Democrats, with Peter Julian for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you to all the witnesses for attending. They have added some very interesting perspectives to our study.

[English]

I'd like to start with Ms. Kotsis.

I want to thank Unifor for its defence of journalists and workers in the media sector.

I note that the Unifor survey that came out last year found that “60.6% of [journalists] had been harassed in the field [and] 69% experienced anxiety as a result of their work.” It goes on to say, “The Unifor survey found much of the abuse contained racist and misogynist attacks, including threats of violence against the journalists and their families.”

You've noted in your brief to this committee about big tech “allowing for the proliferation of toxic and hate-filled harassment and abuse on their platforms”. I note that far-right politicians have been attacking professional, fact-based journalists. You noted in your presentation that we need to “stand up to bullies”.

How should the federal government be acting to stand up to bullies so that fact-based journalists can actually operate in our country without the threats and intimidation that they are getting online and from the far right?

• (1200)

Ms. Julie Kotsis: Thank you.

Through you, Madam Chair, I'm going to defer to my colleague, Marc Hollin, on this question.

Mr. Marc Hollin (National Representative, Unifor): Thank you.

There are a number of things we believe the federal government can do to limit the amount of toxic harassment and abuse that journalists and media workers experience. First of all, we tend to look at this issue with a two-pronged approach. One is to provide support for media workers and journalists who are the victims of harassment. They need immediate support in most cases. Any response should be built around that idea.

Then, of course, the second prong is to prevent the harassment from happening in the first place and to hold the perpetrators accountable.

One thing we would like to see, which we've recommended in a number of releases, is tougher take-down requirements. One example of a tool that's been used in other jurisdictions is requiring the platforms, when there's a complaint, to act quickly—sometimes within 24 hours or faster—to take down online content that is hate-filled or harassing and abusive.

There are a number of other tools that we would recommend. I know that a number of countries are in the process of developing some version of an online harms bill. That is an extraordinarily fraught bit of legislation, no matter where it's undertaken.

Really, we fall back on some basic principles around platform accountability. The platforms have to take more responsibility themselves, and they have to be made to take accountability by legislators. In many ways, the platforms want to have their cake and eat it, too. They want to appear to be passive entities, like a community bulletin board where users just post material and share TikTok videos and interesting content, when in fact, as the witnesses today and other witnesses have stated, we know that the tech giants control, moderate, mitigate and frankly profit from the transition of information and content in a myriad of ways.

We know that they're capable, when it suits them and they profit from it, of dealing with online content and with all sorts of content in different formats. For us, falling back on the principle of platform accountability is the number one way to make sure that the tech giants aren't able to sit back and say, “It's not us. We're just this friendly, passive entity. We're just a friendly, neighbourhood bulletin board.”

We know that's not true. It's factually untrue.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, we heard testimony from the Center for Countering Digital Hate. In their report, “Malgorithm”, they found evidence that Meta’s Instagram recommendation algorithm is “actively pushing radicalising, extremist misinformation to users”, including anti-Semitic and far-right, white supremacist tropes.

Thank you for that.

As you’re probably aware, Canada heavily subsidized Meta and Google to the extent of over \$1 billion a year in indirect subsidies. These are writeoffs that businesses can undertake by advertising on the Meta platform.

Does it make any sense at all for us to be massively subsidizing Meta, when they are refusing to heed democratic decisions in Canada and when they are promoting such hate in the pipeline of hate, as the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Centre have so clearly spelled out?

Mr. Marc Hollin: Through you, Madam Chair, again, certainly not. It is our belief that the government should not be providing even more financial incentives to these companies. Really, we fall back on the principle of them paying their fair share. These vastly wealthy global digital companies should be forced, if necessary, to pay their fair share in every aspect of their presence in any given jurisdiction.

It’s really a question of national sovereignty and the right of legislators and citizens to enact rules of self-governance and to expect any entity that exists within that area to abide by them. It’s really about those platforms paying their fair share and not being given a free ride, especially while they’re not only allowing hate but, frankly, profiting from it.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hollin, and thank you, Peter.

I’m going to go to the second round now. It’s a five-minute round.

I’ll begin with Kevin Waugh for the Conservative Party. Kevin, you have five minutes.

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

Here’s some disclosure up front: I spent 39 years as a Unifor member. I was a media guy in the private sector, meaning CTV as opposed to public. When I hear you guests come on and say it’s a level playing field and all this.... It has never been a level playing field. CBC has never had to undergo, as a public broadcaster, the threats that I see with the private, because when you lose a rating point in the news hour, you lose news directors and you lose production people, whereas the CBC is unaccounted for.

It doesn’t have one of its networks as number one in the country. It never has. Its ratings are brutal throughout this whole country, and it’s unaccounted for, yet it gets the \$1.3 million or \$1.4 million. Now it can get \$400 million in advertising and from the government, Google and so on.

It’s never been a level playing field.

Mr. Menzies, I’ll start with you, because you have three decades in journalism.

I’m right. It has never been and never will be a level playing field, so we should understand that in this country.

Mr. Peter Menzies: We don’t have that. You know, broadcasters complained about having the CBC use their taxes to compete against them for years, and we saw that when I was at the CRTC, but it was okay, because everybody was still making money then. Everybody was still making lots of money, so it didn’t happen so much.

In 2016, this committee heard from a number of newspaper publishers. I recall distinctly The Globe and Mail’s presentation, in which they encouraged the committee to have the CBC not expand its online business because that was...I think The Globe and Mail described the CBC as their greatest private sector competitor in that area.

I’m not personally opposed to the idea of there being a public broadcaster and there being a good public broadcaster. I saw for myself, when I was the Alberta and the Northwest Territories commissioner, the value that *CBC North* added to very remote regions and small, what I think are described these days as news deserts. I’m not opposed to that at all.

What I am opposed to is this unlevel playing field that is before the media industry. Notwithstanding all the issues with big tech and all those other things, as Ms. Radsch said, we need a diversity of sources of revenue for media not just to be independent, but to be seen to be independent. As long as the CBC is unbalancing the playing field, we’re not going to be able to get there.

Therefore, I’m asking this committee and its members to really take that message forward. Can we please get the playing field level? Then we can have a good discussion about the multiple things we need to do to make journalism flourish again in this country.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay. I have to move on.

It’s \$1.3 billion, not \$1.3 million, as I said. It’s with a “b” for CBC.

On digital news.... You pointed this out, because that has been the deciding factor in the last five years in this country. CBC is stealing reporters from newspapers and local markets to do the digital. That is what is killing the newspapers. That is what’s killing independent TV and radio stations. They simply cannot compete against the CBC digitally.

In Britain, the government has restricted the BBC on its digital platform. I think that’s what’s needed in this country to make it a so-called level playing field.

Do you agree with me?

Mr. Peter Menzies: I think that could be part of the discussion. It’s not a recommendation I’ve taken up myself.

Like I said, I think the first step is getting the CBC to become a public broadcaster again. There's a lot to say about how it might be funded, how it might sustain itself and how it might compete elsewhere. Personally, I think the idea of having a Creative Commons licence for CBC content would go a long way toward doing that, so all CBC content could be made available to all of its competitors inside the country for free. If it's publicly funded information, there's no reason it shouldn't be publicly shared.

That being said, your idea could have merit, as well. I think it's part of an urgent discussion. I don't want to say “longer discussion”, because I don't want to get into one of those thumb-sucking “Whither the CBC?” conversations. We need to move quickly. I think matters are urgent for the news industry, and some grown-up decisions have to be made.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Kevin. That's it. You ended your time.

Now, we go to the Liberals.

Ms. Anju Dhillon, you have five minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to start with Dr. Radsch.

My first question is about your testimony today.

You spoke about it somewhat, but could you please add anything you think would be pertinent, in terms of whether this new Google agreement will better help journalists and Canadians, and in what way?

Thank you so much.

Dr. Courtney Radsch: Thank you so much.

I think the agreement will help journalists and the media in Canada [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for negotiations. One of the things that—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Dr Radsch. We're having problems with the sound again.

I noticed that, when you move your hands, there is a little.... Perhaps you could try to be very still when speaking.

Thank you.

Dr. Courtney Radsch: Okay. I'm sorry. I'll try not to speak with my hands.

What I was saying was this: Part of what this act does is create a forum where all publishers have the opportunity to come to a negotiating table, because one of the biggest challenges I've heard from media and journalists around the world—I've interviewed and surveyed hundreds of them over the past two years as part of this research—is that they have no way to get in touch with the platforms. Even when they are fact-checking partners and even when they've attended training, they're unable to get in touch with the platforms. They can't even get verified on the platform, much less get a negotiating opportunity.

That is one of the most important things this legislation does. It also creates a precedent that says, “When you are creating a company that becomes valuable off the backs of other industries' work, they need to be compensated.” I think that's an important part of what this legislation does.

Furthermore, we've seen around the world that Meta and Google are trying to actively head off this type of legislation, despite the fact that there is growing momentum around the world to force big tech platforms—as well as, again, generative AI systems and platforms, many of which are dominated by the same big tech firms—to pay for the news they use.

This is a very important stake in the ground that I think will benefit Canadian media, as well as, potentially, media around the world. It is adding to this momentum. It's an attempt to at least.... I don't think you can even say this is rebalancing the playing field, because the playing field is so skewed. It is a little drop in the bucket.

The Chair: Excuse me, Dr. Radsch. We're told the interpreters cannot interpret at the moment. I don't know what the problem is.

Perhaps we can suspend and hold you at this particular point in your testimony, in order to see what the problem is.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, in all candour, I have enjoyed this witness's testimony, but we are getting into the latter half of the meeting. We have heard the testimony.

If interpretation for languages is not possible, I don't think we should ask any more questions of this witness, as it would be unfair to our francophone listeners, as well as to our participants.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lawrence, for that suggestion, but I think we should allow witnesses to answer questions. We cannot restrict that. We're trying to see if we can do something about the interpretation.

There seems to be a lot of trouble today. I am told by another committee that West Block is the worst place for audio. There's always a problem. I don't know what it is. Is it the way the rooms are configured? Is it the bricks in the building? I have no idea what's happening, but I've been on another committee that has a lot of trouble in West Block. I have no idea if that's the issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: I'd like to add something related to the point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. I'm sorry. I am told by the interpreters that it is her Wi-Fi connection that's giving us the problem. What we could do is try what we did before. At least we got two and a half minutes from Dr. Radsch.

Let's get her to turn off her radio and speak. Can we try that?

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, in connection with my colleague's point of order, I'd like to mention that I have the privilege of sitting on another committee that holds its meetings in another building.

Being here in the basement of the West Block is no reason for violating my parliamentary rights. I believe that interpretation is very important. I'd like a solution to be found; otherwise we will have to decide to do something about it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: I would like to inform the member that, in fact, chairs have written a letter to the administration complaining about this problem in West Block. I don't know what's being done about it, but we have all said that this is a major problem.

We're waiting to see what the administration of Parliament will do to fix it, because it's ridiculous that we are not, in a country like Canada, able to conduct a meeting with anybody outside of this country without having this problem. Everyone is frustrated by the problem. It has to be fixed, and whatever the administration can do over the Christmas holidays to fix it, let's get it to do that.

Let's try Dr. Radsch without her picture. We know what she looks like.

Would you like to answer the question, Dr. Radsch?

Dr. Courtney Radsch: Yes.

Can you hear me now, and can the interpreters hear me?

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Courtney Radsch: This legislation is important, because it creates a forum where all news media, including small news media and other news media, that are unable to even get an answer from a tech platform, or to get verified on a tech platform, will have the opportunity to negotiate.

That is one of the issues that is undervalued in this type of legislation. It is realizing just how valuable it is to create a forum for negotiation to take place, because collective bargaining in a regulatory framework increases the power of smaller news outlets.

Currently, there is no forum in which tech companies are compelled to negotiate with all outlets, other than in Australia. This is an often-overlooked benefit of this type of legislation. I think it will set a precedent for negotiation over the use of news content and data collected and used by AI systems. This is really essential as we move forward and not only try to correct for the mistakes of the social media era and news, but also look to the generative AI era.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Dhillon, you have one minute and 22 seconds left.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Dr. Radsch. I'm very sorry about the technical issues you were having to experience with us.

I would like to follow up. You spoke very briefly, before you were cut off, about advertisement. In one of your articles, you did research and you spoke about the advertisement revenue value of news content to social media tech companies.

Can you please talk a bit more about your research work and what you found as a conclusion?

Dr. Courtney Radsch: The research shows that Google and Meta dominate up to 90% of the digital advertising market. They control various aspects through a vertical monopoly that adds servers and exchanges. This means they can charge monopoly rents on digital advertising.

They also force news organizations to adapt and operate to that logic. We heard earlier about news organizations and their digital presence. One of the problems is that the platforms constrain news organizations to operate according to a logic of clicks and engagement, rather than public interest, because of their vertical monopolies over the digital advertising ecosystem.

Furthermore, what studies show about digital advertising is that news brings significant value to the digital advertising on a platform regardless, again, of whether anyone is searching for that news. For example, the fair compensation for the value that media content provides to Google Search, because of digital advertising wanting to be on that platform, would amount to about 40% of total revenue, or approximately \$176 million per year in Switzerland alone.

I'm fairly certain that Canada has a larger population than Switzerland, so you would expect that amount to be even greater in Canada.

Thank you.

• (1220)

The Chair: Now I'm going to the Bloc, with Martin Champoux, for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Menzies, you said earlier in your opening address that government funds should be set aside for companies that only do news, by which I mean the newsrooms. For example, broadcasting undertakings that produce other types of content ought to be excluded from government assistance, if I have understood correctly.

Generally speaking, it would mean that commercial radio and television stations would be excluded from receiving any assistance, even if their newsrooms were doing serious work.

Have I understood your comments correctly?

[English]

Mr. Peter Menzies: They wouldn't necessarily be included. I think the main purpose was that it would be businesses that were primarily in the business of news. For instance, in broadcasting, you have a lot of radio stations that do news only because the CRTC licence demands that they do news.

In major markets, that's not necessary. Then sometimes they have only one or two reporters who aren't necessarily adding a lot of value in the broadcasting companies. Some of them, not all—I don't want to accuse all of them—just see it as regulatory rent that they pay. If you had an all-news station, on the other hand, they would qualify conceptually, because this is a concept that we've put forward. News organizations would get the primary benefit from any funding.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I understand what you're saying, but commercial radio newsrooms, for instance, are just as valuable as other sources of information. Although I'm having trouble following your line of argument, I agree that the top priority should be serious news companies, without necessarily excluding commercial radio stations.

Returning to your comments about the CBC, you were saying that CBC/Radio-Canada should no longer be able to sell advertising in order to create a more equitable environment. I think you came to that conclusion without first reviewing the Crown corporation's mandate.

Wouldn't you agree that before reaching conclusions like disallowing CBC/Radio-Canada from selling advertising, the public broadcaster's mandate and funding should be reviewed?

[English]

Mr. Peter Menzies: You can put it in whichever order you want. Part of my argument is based on arguments made by Pierre Karl Péladeau at Quebecor and TVA. They recently laid off a number of journalists and put a good deal of the blame on the fact that—

The Chair: Can you shorten your answer, please? We're going over time, Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Peter Menzies: —it was difficult for them to compete against a subsidized SRC.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a point of order.

I fully agree with your strict control over speaking time. However, I'd like to draw your attention to the time it takes for interpretation when a witness is asked questions by someone speaking another language. This extra time is only to be expected, whether the interpretation is from French into English or English into French, because you have to wait until the interpretation reaches the listener, and then wait again for the interpretation of the answer. I think you should take that into consideration because it creates inequity in the sharing of speaking time.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that information, Martin.

We were 15 seconds over time when I called the question. Anyway, I will take that into consideration. Thank you.

We have Peter Julian for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Trudel, we heard you on the issue of the harassment of journalists. You also spoke about the importance of reducing online hate and eliminating the free ride that web giants were getting. I'm sure you wouldn't be surprised to learn that Meta and Google are currently receiving \$1 billion through indirect grants. We are subsidizing companies that want to advertise on Meta.

What measures should the government be taking? Should it stop subsidizing Meta and eliminate the carte blanche that gives them free rein to spread hate online?

What should the government be doing to fight online hate and put an end to the harassment of journalists and many other individuals, as you put it so well?

• (1225)

Mr. Pierre Trudel: To answer the first part of your question, governments should indeed be consistent. How is it possible to justify spending hundreds of millions of dollars on behalf of companies that choose not to comply with Canadian law? Companies like that should not be receiving funds, whether directly or indirectly, from the government. I think that's obvious.

As for the second part of your question, about what should be done to counter online hate, European regulations on digital services, under the Digital Services Act, offers some interesting avenues. Basically, at the international level, countries are introducing measures to force platforms like Meta or others to do a better job of analyzing and managing the risks to which users might be exposed. For instance, you mentioned journalists. It's mainly the women who are harassed, often in a concerted manner.

That's the kind of risk that companies like Meta and other platforms should be required to analyze and do a better job of managing, with a view to eliminating, or at least severely reducing, the various forms of harassment. Our best chance of eliminating the harassment you mentioned, not only of journalists, but also minorities, including women, is through systemic risk management. These minorities are subjected most heavily to systemic harassment.

Risk management of this kind is definitely something the platforms can do. Of course the courage to force them to behave is also essential. In Europe, the process has begun, and Canada should follow their lead.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

I will now go to Martin Shields from the Conservatives.

Martin, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. The variety of opinions is appreciated.

Mr. Menzies, you talked about the deal that was made. You've also written about it. If there were 15,000 possible journalists and that could break down to 6,000, I think the comment about pigeons fighting for crumbs would show up somewhere. I'm from a constituency of weekly newspapers, a dozen plus, and from speaking to them last night, it was clear they don't believe there will be anything at the table for them. What would your response be to our rural newspapers, or, as I call them, the "authentic" newspapers, because they're community-based?

Mr. Peter Menzies: It would be too bad if they were unfairly treated. I think the idea behind it is that everybody would be fairly treated. The idea of the fund that Konrad and I put forward is that it would be distributed, notwithstanding the exclusions I mentioned, on a per capita basis, per journalist. It wouldn't matter how many you had. You would get the same number per journalist that you had.

For the small weeklies, I'm afraid it's not a very happy economic outlook in terms of the transition to the Internet and that sort of stuff. I don't think there's a great deal of a future for print. I think the focus of funding, where it does occur, should be on helping news organizations adapt to the future to build strong digital platforms. This is where the fair compensation or fair dealing with big web companies can come into play on the power imbalance and that sort of thing. That's why a fund works for the little guys.

I don't want to get too long-winded about it, but that would be too bad for the little guys. They should be treated fairly. We need to encourage the innovators and entrepreneurs during a time of transition like this, and not just prop up failed old business models from large companies that are unable or unwilling to adapt.

Mr. Martin Shields: I appreciate that. Most of the weeklies in my riding are on digital platforms as well. They have transitioned, and they use both. Sometimes the weeklies are mostly digital and print very few. There's a lot of that transition, but I don't think the money is coming that way.

I think the money, as you have written, is probably 15% to 20% of what people would have been talking about a year ago. When that deflated number of \$100 million shows up, how are we going to deal with moving to the next level, as you want to talk about, and I believe rightly so? Where do we have to go next, other than the CBC getting out of advertising? What else do we need to do?

• (1230)

Mr. Peter Menzies: Well, there are a number of things that I think people should consider. I think expanding the tax deduction for subscribing to a newspaper or making a donation to a newspaper under a not-for-profit model should be examined. If any gov-

ernment considers news to be a public good, I think having a 15% write-off for your newspaper subscription is insufficient, to put it kindly.

I think I talked The Globe and Mail into campaigning for 70%. It would be the same as for political parties. If the political parties think that news is truly valuable, they might think it's as valuable as they are. Allow me, for my subscriptions—and I spend a lot on them—to get a 70% tax deduction.

If you do something like that, then you're subsidizing the behaviour you want, which is the consumption of credible news. You're subsidizing the reader to do it. There's a flow through of positive impact on the employer, because they can sell more subscriptions.

I'll give that as one example of something that public policymakers might consider, so that we are incenting the sorts of behaviour we want without creating a direct dependence on the government of the day for funding.

Mr. Martin Shields: Is there a belief that there is going to be news in the public sector? Will it happen?

Mr. Peter Menzies: I'm not quite sure I understand that.

Mr. Martin Shields: Do you believe there's a positive direction that we're going to go in to create what you're talking about as news?

Mr. Peter Menzies: Yes, as long as we don't get too bogged down in the present. I think if we throw some energy in and people from all points of the spectrum get together and bank some ideas together, then I have great faith that people will be able to get through this. There are a lot of smart and creative people around, from all different types of perspectives. We all need to get in the room and bash this out.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now go to Mr. Noormohamed, for five minutes, please.

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

Mr. Menzies, I have been following your words and your commentary today with great interest.

I want to get your sense and perspective on a few things. Do you think that government should be subsidizing journalism?

Mr. Peter Menzies: No.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: You don't.

What would you say, then, to the publishers in Mr. Shields' riding who would be dependent—ideally—on funds like this to help support them, if you don't believe in government supporting journalism?

Mr. Peter Menzies: Are you talking about the Google fund? That's a different thing.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm talking about any fund.

Mr. Peter Menzies: The Google fund is a different fund. The way I conceive of a web giant-supported fund is that it would be administered only by the industry itself. You would keep politicians, for their own good and the good of people, at distance—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Absolutely.

That is what's been proposed, Mr. Menzies. It's that the industry would actually administer the fund itself. The industry would propose the fund.

Mr. Peter Menzies: Actually, that's with the CRTC's oversight.

I'm not having a big problem with the Google fund as it is. It's ended up as a fund and not as a commercial negotiation between two companies. That's okay if that's where it ends up. It actually looks a lot like the fund that Konrad and I proposed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That's why I was surprised. In what you proposed with Konrad, in fact, I think a lot of it is mirrored in this. I think that is a good thing.

I want to go back to your point about—

Mr. Peter Menzies: I never said I was opposed to it.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Okay, I think there was an understanding in the room that you.... I just want to make sure you are supportive of that concept.

Mr. Peter Menzies: I am supportive of a fund funded by web companies. I'm not supportive of, as your initial question indicated, direct government funding to newspapers.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Okay, let's separate the two for clarity. To make sure we're not misrepresenting what you're saying, you are supportive of the fund that is being created as a result of the \$100 million a year from Google.

Mr. Peter Menzies: I'm supportive of that kind of fund, yes. We proposed it ourselves.

• (1235)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That's great.

You talked about the notion of fairness and about how the distribution needs to be fair through this fund. What would fairness look like for you?

Mr. Peter Menzies: Oh, yes. I mean, what we proposed was what I said, that you take out the people who are already subsidized, like the CBC. You can subsidize them however you want through direct subsidy, but take them out of that fund. You apply it so that only companies that are primarily engaged in the news business qualify for it. It's not people who might run a billion-dollar business and have one reporter, whom they are perfectly capable of supporting on their own if they wish.

Then it would be done on a non-judgmental basis, so nobody perceives you as biasing against a Conservative news outlet or a Liberal news outlet or a Progressive news outlet. You just do it on a per capita per journalist basis. If you have 100 journalists and it's \$10,000 a journalist, then you get whatever that adds up to. If you have one journalist, then you'd get \$10,000.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I think that's helpful. These are all important pieces of consideration that I'm sure will go into the process.

I asked you this question earlier about whether government should subsidize journalism.

Do you think the Government of Canada should cut all funding for all journalism—period, the end?

Mr. Peter Menzies: I think that our proposal in the paper was to see a phase-out period for that funding. Having built the dependence, it would be rash to suddenly whip the carpet out from beneath them.

I think it's unfortunate that the dependence has been created. The original journalism labour tax credit, for instance, was designed to be for five years, and that was on the recommendation, in part, of the industry itself.

I remember Bob Cox saying that eventually we're going to have to—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm sorry, Mr. Menzies. With the time we have left, I just want to get clarity on one point.

Under what you are proposing, at the end of this phasing-out period, the CBC and Radio-Canada would receive zero dollars from the federal government.

Mr. Peter Menzies: No, that's not what I said.

The Chair: I'm sorry. The time is up, Mr. Noormohamed.

I'm going now to the next round. I think we have time for one more round.

I'm going to start with the sharing of the five-minute round by the Conservatives, with Mr. Godin and Rachael Thomas.

Who shall begin?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for the Unifor representatives, who have not been able to say much because we haven't asked them a lot of questions.

Ms. Kotsis, in your opening address, you said that you were concerned about the loss of media jobs. That's certainly important, but, as I am sensitive to the status of francophones, can you tell me how many of Unifor's 315,000 members are francophone?

[*English*]

Ms. Julie Kotsis: Again, I would have to defer to Marc, because he is our researcher at Unifor.

Mr. Marc Hollin: I actually don't have the exact number of our total francophone membership. It's a significant portion, representing workers in—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Hollin. Francophones, then, represent a significant proportion of your members.

Ms. Kotsis, you said in your opening address that the tech giants were taking jobs away from Canadian media workers. It's your role as a union to protect Canadian workers and their jobs. It's important.

Since I am more attuned to the status of francophone Canadian workers, I'd like to ask you another question about them.

The government signed an agreement with Northvolt and Stelantis, but we can't get any information about it. Since you are perhaps closer to the current government, you might be able to tell us more.

Could you tell us whether these agreements include measures to protect francophones in plants located in Quebec?

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Hollin: Through you, Madam Chair, I actually don't know the answer to that. I can certainly commit to investigating and reporting back to the member on that question.

That's not something I was prepared to speak to today, to be honest, as part of our preparation.

• (1240)

The Chair: Could you send that information to us, please, on both questions? The number of francophone workers—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: I have a point of order, Chair.

I don't know if we need to hear, on this committee, about that issue. It's a totally separate issue, and I don't think it's relevant.

I would not ask him for that information.

The Chair: It was a question asked by a member. He could just send it in writing to the chair, and I will pass it on to the member.

It is relevant to what Unifor was speaking to. I'm sorry.

Go ahead, Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Can I have my speaking time back?

[*English*]

The Chair: Your time has been paused. We do that automatically.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Kotsis or Mr. Hollin, I don't know whether you've had access to this agreement, but wouldn't it be better for the government to disclose what's in the contracts, in the interests of Canadian workers and francophone Quebec workers, given that there is a decline in the use of French in Quebec and action needs to be taken now?

[*English*]

Mr. Marc Hollin: I think the protection and support of the French language and French culture has always been a priority for Unifor as a national entity and for our comrades in Unifor-Québec.

Again, it's not something that I have prepared to speak to today in terms of protections for francophone speakers through those specific contracts.

I can commit to putting you in touch with the folks within our own organization who can, I think, speak more intelligently on that subject. I would hate to misinform the committee or misspeak on any of those important questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you Mr. Hollin.

Madam Chair, what I'm doing is making a connection between the tech giants and the foreign companies that want to set up shop here and which, unfortunately, take jobs away from Quebec and Canadian workers.

That's why I think it's important to have access to the contracts. I asked the Unifor people whether it might be more logical to have access to the contracts to see whether the French language is being protected in Canada and Quebec.

I'd like to ask Mr. Hollin the same question.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think Mr. Hollin says he does not have that information on him. He can send it to the committee later on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I wasn't asking Mr. Hollin to send on a document, I just want his opinion.

Could Mr. Hollin perhaps agree or give us his opinion on the fact that Unifor, and all Canadians, should have access to these agreements with these external companies to protect francophone workers and Canadians? We need to take the required measures to stop the decline of French.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hollin, what is your opinion, please?

Mr. Marc Hollin: Through you, Madam Chair, again, I wouldn't want to misspeak on that subject. Of course, protecting and promoting the French language and French culture have always been a main focus, both as a national union and for our comrades in Quebec at Unifor Quebec.

To be honest, I'm not well informed on that specific subject. I am the media sector researcher for Unifor, and I'm prepared to speak specifically on issues related to the Online Streaming Act and other related topics.

I think that these are obviously valid and important questions. I don't want to sound like a broken record, and I apologize, but I would commit to the member to carry on that conversation at another time.

The Chair: Thank you. We're 14 seconds over time now, Monsieur Godin.

I shall go to Michael Coteau for the Liberals.

Go ahead, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I appreciate it, Madam Chair.

This is for Mr. Trudel.

One of the recommendations—I believe it was in reference to the time to act—talked about international co-operation to anticipate trends, but there was also a reference point, I believe, to maintaining culture.

How do you find the balance between working internationally through building trend lines and at the same time maintain an independent Canadian perspective? Do you have any thoughts on that? Maybe I misheard you, but that's what I thought the reference point was.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Trudel: That's exactly what I said. Borders in the world today are much more porous than they used to be. As a result, protecting Canadian values requires us to be much more attentive than we used to be about what is happening elsewhere. It's important to pay attention to methods being used and regulations being implemented by other democratic countries which, like us in Canada, want to ensure that their media can continue to be viable. They want to make sure that the resources their citizens contribute, directly or indirectly, to news is reinvested into news about life as it is lived in Canada.

There are no contradictions here. I believe that everything needs to be done as part of a whole, because from now on, what we have is a global system in which all of this is happening at once. We need to look at what steps other countries are taking to achieve the same objectives as us, namely protecting the dignity of our citizens.

It's important to be able to work with other countries, because we are dealing with multinationals that operate around the world. We can't pretend in our...

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can I jump in? I don't know how much time I have left, but I have a follow-up question. I'm sorry to interrupt you.

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] 12 seconds.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Okay.

Thank you very much. I appreciate the answer.

The Chair: Do you have another question, Mr. Coteau, or are you ceding your time?

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Chair, I don't think he heard that he has two minutes left.

You still have two minutes, Michael.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I heard 12 seconds.

The Chair: No. I said two minutes and 12 seconds. I'm sorry, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Okay. I'll keep my time. Thank you very much.

Just to follow up with Mr. Trudel, I'm a supporter of a public broadcaster. I think having a public broadcaster, in any country, that is there for the common good is a good thing. I think it was Prime Minister Bennett who established the CBC in its modern structure.

Probably the best thing the Conservatives ever did was create the CBC. It's a fantastic organization.

In this world of the Internet, by working with other countries to look for ways to collaborate and strengthen our support for good news, how does a public broadcaster fit into that collaboration? I'm assuming there are countries that just don't have a public broadcaster.

How does that fit into the mix?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Trudel: Basically, we need to find innovative ways to reinvent public service. Everywhere in the world, the same question needs to be asked: how, today, can we design a public news service that is relevant and that meets the population's needs

Services for the public have to be reinvented. Canadians get more and more of their news on the Internet via online platforms. This has to be taken into account. Public broadcasters, like others, need to learn how to work co-operatively. They are already doing so, but they have to learn to do more of their work in co-operation with others to take into account the fact that from now on, we are living in a world where national borders are becoming less and less important.

It strikes me that that public services are more essential than ever, because they are often the main vehicle through which minorities, including indigenous peoples, have access to services. From that standpoint, co-operation needs to be ramped up.

• (1250)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel. The time is up.

I'm going to Martin Champoux for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: With your permission, Madam Chair, I'd like to trade places with Mr. Julian.

I would then take his turn in the next round of questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to go to Dr. Radsch.

In your testimony, you were very clear about the impact of big tech. You referenced the issue at Harvard, where a donation was made very controversially. There was the shutdown of a disinformation program that was critical of big tech.

To what extent are we going to continue to see these things until the government takes action?

I want to ask you specifically about the \$1 billion that is handed out to Meta and Google every year in indirect subsidies from the federal government. Do you believe it's appropriate that the Canadian government heavily subsidizes Meta at a time when Meta is fostering such online hate?

Dr. Courtney Radsch: Through the chair, I would respond that I think we have seen quite a lot of retaliation against independent researchers and attempts to influence academic research.

It is very difficult to even gain access to the data needed to do much of the research, for example, on disinformation flows online. The platforms have a very dangerous hold on our ability to understand our information ecosystem, how information and communication circulate online, and, of course how harassment plays out as well. That is very concerning, and I think we're only going to see more of this, especially with generative AI, whereby access to the massive data models and the computational power needed to do this research mean that it's often only researchers who have some sort of link with a major tech company who are able to conduct the research or gain access to it.

The Digital Services Act provides independent researcher access, but that's only for researchers in Europe. I think that is a danger.

I am quite shocked to hear that the Canadian government is subsidizing the wealthiest companies in the world, especially a company like Meta, which is not only incredibly wealthy and not really in need of public subsidies, but also, especially, a company that has proven to be so detrimental to our public health, to the health of our democracies, to mental health and to adolescent health. It has accumulated so much power through its vertical and horizontal monopolies that it can bypass democratic oversight. It can simply choose not to comply with the law and to cut off journalism, which we all know is a fundamental pillar of democracy—

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Radsch. I think the time is well over.

I will go to the Bloc Québécois.

Monsieur Champoux, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to use my speaking time in this round to take the discussion back to the motion I moved in committee last week. This motion takes the current context into account, and, even more so, the news that we received yesterday about the major cutbacks at CBC/Radio-Canada.

I don't know whether the committee members would like me to read the motion again, but I think we've already read it and that it was well received last week. I believe we are aware of the the motion's content. It's to the effect that we should study the appropriateness of holding a summit on the media sector. I believe this is more relevant than ever.

With your permission, Madam Chair, given the limited time remaining for this meeting, and with everyone's approval, I'd like to move immediately to the discussion of this motion.

I'm hoping we might be able to vote on this important motion.

● (1255)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Martin.

I will quickly read the motion in two languages, because most people don't seem to have it with them right now. It's going to go into the record.

This is from Martin Champoux:

Whereas:

- (1) The news media is in crisis due to the dominance of foreign digital companies;
- (2) Hundreds of newsroom positions across Canada have been cut since the beginning of the year, and hundreds more are likely to be cut in the near future;
- (3) Canadian broadcasters, journalists' associations, news unions and many experts agree that urgent action must be taken to ensure adequate, diversified news coverage in all regions of Quebec and Canada;

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study to determine the appropriateness of holding a national forum on the media and that the committee determine its terms of reference.

That the committee hold a minimum of four meetings and report its recommendations to the House.

Shall I continue?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: No, that's perfectly clear, Madam Chair.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I support this, and I call the vote.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to call a vote?

Mr. Noormohamed, do you want to continue debate?

Let's be reminded of the time.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I want to move an amendment to the motion, which I shared with Mr. Champoux. I believe he would accept it as a friendly amendment.

The Chair: There is no such thing as a friendly amendment. Just read your amendment, please, Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: To keep this brief, point one remains the same. Point two remains the same. Point three would be modified. I'm sorry: Point three would remain the same, but the change would begin at "That":

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study to determine the appropriateness of the national news sector to hold a national forum on the media and that the committee invite sector experts and leaders to discuss and help determine the possible terms of reference. Provided the sector initiates a forum, that governments at the national and provincial levels be invited to contribute to this debate.

That the Committee hold a minimum of four meetings and report its recommendations to the House.

The Chair: Thank you.

Did everyone get that? We can discuss the amendment now. The clerk will distribute a copy to everyone, so you can see it.

Your name is up to discuss the amendment, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: It needs to be printed in both languages.

The Chair: I think it is in both languages.

It's going to be sent by the clerk to you right now, via your email.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I would ask that discussion be suspended until we have those documents in front of us, so we can read the amendment.

The Chair: Do you have the documents in print, Clerk, or do you...?

The clerk is sending them now.

We'll suspend.

• (1255) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1255)

The Chair: We can resume.

Mr. Lawrence, did you want to suggest an adjournment?

I need unanimous consent. We don't debate it, but I do need unanimous consent.

• (1300)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: We were scheduled to end at 1:00 p.m. Could we adjourn the meeting?

The Chair: Do I have unanimous consent for this?

I'm sorry, Philip, there is no unanimous consent.

We'll call a vote on the motion to adjourn.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: We'll continue with the meeting.

Go ahead, Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Chair, I move that we suspend the meeting.

The Chair: All right. Do I have unanimous consent to suspend the meeting? I just want to get a clear sense of where the committee wants to go.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: The meeting is going to be suspended, but I want to let everyone know what that means. When we come back to our next meeting, this will be where we pick up—on that amendment from Mr. Noormohamed.

Thank you. The meeting is suspended.

[The meeting was suspended at 1:05 p.m., Tuesday, December 5]

[The meeting resumed at 8:22 a.m., Thursday, December 7]

• (5620)

[Translation]

The Chair: Welcome once again to meeting No. 103 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

We are resuming Tuesday's meeting, which had been suspended.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[English]

We have a hybrid meeting today.

Because we were suspended, I can do the housekeeping.

Do not take pictures of the meeting.

Please wear a mask if you can, even though it's not required. It is a health issue that you should consider.

Don't forget to direct your questions and/or discussions to the chair. You cannot speak until I recognize you.

We're starting where we left off at the last meeting. We have an amendment that we were considering from Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed from the Liberals.

Would you like to speak and move your amendment? Everyone has it now.

Thank you.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Everyone has read it, unless folks would like me to read it.

What Mr. Champoux put forward, I think, was an excellent starting point. The minor modifications we've made to it are really to ensure that those who know the space best are convening the group and that those who know the space best are ultimately driving it, and not government, in that sense, although we also ensure that levels of government are invited to engage and to participate in the conversation.

My hope is that this is something we can all agree on, because we've all expressed a desire to be able to do that. With those minor modifications, if we can bring this forward, it will advance the work we all need to do as a group, and it can meet all our objectives and interests on the subject. That's really all I wanted to say on it.

• (5625)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

The member's adjustments to this motion are probably well-meaning, but I'll just point out what this does.

It says that “the committee undertake a study to determine the appropriateness of the national news sector to hold a national forum”. In other words, the committee will determine if it would be appropriate for stakeholders within the national news sector to hold a forum to discuss their challenges and overcome them.

Why would it be up to the committee to determine whether or not it's appropriate for stakeholders to host that forum? That's not for us to dictate. We don't get to determine whether or not that would be appropriate. If they want to do that, they can do that. It changes this motion entirely, because it is putting the power in our hands to determine the appropriateness of the national news sector—

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: On a point of order, Madam Chair, the original motion actually said “That...the Committee undertake a study to determine the appropriateness of” the national news sector....

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: No....

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Am I wrong? Maybe I'm wrong.

The Chair: It says, “undertake a study to determine the appropriateness of...a national forum on the media”.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm sorry, but it was always the committee that would undertake the study to determine the appropriateness, just so we're clear.

The Chair: I would like to say that, as this reads, it is the committee deciding whether it's appropriate for the national news sector to hold a forum. There's a grammatical change that may need to be made for this to make sense. That's all I'm suggesting. I'm not suggesting that it is necessarily out of order but that, actually, grammatically, it doesn't make sense because this committee does not have the ability, as Ms. Thomas said, to decide what anybody does in Canada in terms of sectors.

That's how it reads, so if you have a grammatical change, Mr. Noormohamed, can you consider it?

Mrs. Thomas, if you would like to continue, go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I would just bring that to the committee's attention. I don't know that it was the intent of the mover, but that is, in fact, how it reads now. I don't believe it's appropriate for this committee to determine whether or not it would be appropriate for stakeholders within the national news sector to hold a forum to talk about their own challenges and to resolve their own issues. I think that's their determination.

Now, should this committee wish to be involved at a governmental level and to engage in that conversation with stakeholders, that would be a more appropriate motion.

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I find Ms. Thomas's remarks very interesting.

I want to explain what the initial nature of the motion was. I don't think that the government should undertake this study or that it's up to parliamentarians to do so. However, I do think that some-

one somewhere should send a signal that this study is essential. That's basically the spirit of the initial motion. The idea is to say that a process of reflection should be established, a forum created and a national forum held on the state of the news sector.

I actually assumed that, once the committee had completed its assessment, we would entrust the industry people with the task of conducting their own national forum and that we would obviously provide a framework, not a framework for discussion or a direction, but the necessary wherewithal to conduct that study, independently; which goes without saying.

Whatever the case may be, I think it's up to the industry people to consider the matter, conduct that self-assessment and determine the attendant challenges. I think the industry people know they need to identify the means that should be used to address present and future challenges.

In that sense, I think that Mr. Noormohamed's amendment is helpful. It goes one step further, as it were, in the thinking I wanted us to do together. I ultimately think the way to go is to say that it's the industry people who should frame the issue, hold meetings and conduct the self-assessment. I have no objection to adding a little more clarification, but I think these are things that we can do when we assess whether it's appropriate to hold a national forum, which will constitute the mandate that the committee adopts for the brief study we'll be conducting pursuant to my motion.

That's why I think this amendment is entirely acceptable. If we want to proceed this way, we can do so quickly. We'll have time during the four meetings planned for this brief study to determine, as Ms. Thomas noted, how the industry people can organize and hold the national forum with the support they may possibly need from the government and parliamentarians. If they can do so independently, then so much the better.

• (5630)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Waugh, on the amendment, please go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: On the amendment, thank you, Madam Chair, along with Ms. Thomas, for pointing out the issue here. A lot of us have been around this table for many years. We've seen many news agencies come—newspapers and, not as much, radio, but certainly a lot of TV. A lot of them don't get along with one another, to be quite frank with you, especially in the TV industry.

I've been around here a long time. I'm not sure I can support this. For the last eight years, I've heard these news agencies coming here crying and saying this and that. It's interesting, because when I look at Bell Media and others, they own Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment, and they could open their wallet and have the best baseball player in the world signed this week. It will be interesting to see how they will spin that on their media platform. I've heard enough from the media organizations. If they want to do this, they can get together. I know that, especially in the television end of it, there is no love lost between CTV and the CBC. There is no love lost between French television and the CBC. There is no love lost between Global, Corus, CTV and CBC. If they want to get together, which they probably would do in Palm Springs or Florida, because that's where all the owners end up, they may do so of their own accord.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

I now go to Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I find it remarkable that those who talk about not wanting government to have overreach and how the government should not decide how the private sector governs its functions now say that it should be government and Parliament that decide what is appropriate for the media, and that the committee should then determine its terms of reference.

I think Mr. Champoux's comments are absolutely important. If you think about this in the context of what we are trying to accomplish here, if we have—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: On a point of order, I would just point out that we were simply speaking about the amendment that was made. It was actually the Liberals who moved the amendment that this committee would determine the appropriateness. We actually believe that government should stay out of it.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That's debate.

The Chair: Well, on the point that was made, I may be ruling this amendment inappropriate, because it doesn't make sense.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Chair, the—

The Chair: May I finish, please, Mr. Noormohamed?

It is beyond the authority of a standing committee of the House of Commons to tell a sector how it will behave, and that's how this reads grammatically. That's what Ms. Thomas is saying. It's not the intent of the motion, but that's the way it's phrased. It needs to be edited in some way. This is what people are saying. It's not about the intent but about how it reads.

Grammatically, it reads that this committee should decide whether it's appropriate for the national news sector to hold a forum. It is not up to us to decide that. We cannot decide that.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm trying to figure out how it is that even though in this committee we have the ability to study whatever we would like within the mandate of the Department of Canadian Heritage, and all those matters related, we could not in this group among us have a conversation and engage with the stakeholders to think about having a national forum on the media that is led by the sector. We should not be leading that conversation. The sector should be. We should be empowering them and working

with them. The sector should be leading that conversation. The committee should be inviting folks to have this conversation.

If there is a grammatical tweak, I am happy to look at what a grammatical tweak would look like. I think there is an important distinction here between the committee's determining the appropriateness of the news sector's doing something and having the sector tell us what they think. I think Mr. Champoux's comments are bang on.

I am open to working with others, if we agree on the spirit of what we're trying to do, on whether there's a grammatical or a linguistic shift that will get us to the same outcome. Perhaps I'm too close to it and can't see it, but I welcome comments from others who have constructive feedback on how we can improve that.

• (5635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excuse me.

As the chair, I'm suggesting that it's not simply a grammatical tweak. It's about what this motion actually says. I know that it's not what the member intends it to say.

Can you just fix it so that it says what you want it to say, please? That's all we're saying.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: We don't want to force the industry people to act. They're the ones calling for a national forum. A report on broadcasting was commissioned a few years ago and prepared under Ms. Yale's direction. It was entitled, "Canada's communications future: Time to act". That report was commissioned by someone. I don't think Ms. Yale woke up one morning thinking she had to form a commission and write a big, beautiful report on the future of telecommunications and broadcasting.

Reports are often commissioned, and the study in question is then entrusted to industry people. I think that's consistent with what's being proposed here. We're requesting a study, and we think it should be done by people from the news industry. However, the project will take whatever shape it takes. We can talk about all that.

So I think we could quite easily come up with something if we could make Mr. Noormohamed's amendment reflect that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. That, I think, is what we're trying to get at, Mr. Champoux, that Mr. Noormohamed's language reflects what he's trying to say. At the moment, it doesn't. I cannot say that it's appropriate for us to tell a sector what it can or cannot do, and that's what this amendment is saying.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian, and then Ms. Hepfner.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

First of all, I support the idea that the federal government is in favour of a national forum being held on the news industry across the country. That's extremely important. We know that the media are in crisis. We've seen that budget cuts have been announced at TVA and, more recently, at CBC/Radio-Canada, unfortunately. I know we'll have a chance to discuss this later. The president of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation will have to come back and discuss the situation. They're handing out bonuses on the one hand and cutting positions on the other. Our role as a committee is to advise the government as to whether it's appropriate to support that kind of initiative.

[*English*]

If that's our role, it's not having a study to determine the appropriateness of the national news sector's doing that. It's really—and this is the subamendment that I'm going to offer—on the appropriateness of the government's providing support to the national news sector to hold that national news forum.

If they choose to do that, it will take support from the federal government. We're talking about a sector that's in crisis. I certainly understand Mr. Waugh's comments about some of the corporations that own some of the media doing very well and choosing not to invest in the news sector, but the reality is that this is not going to happen unless the federal government says that this is important enough to support.

I would like to offer as a subamendment after the word “of”, “the government providing support to” the national news sector. That adds the words “the government providing support to” between “the appropriateness of” and “the national news sector” as a subamendment, which I think falls within our framework. It allows us to look at the appropriate ways that the government could provide support if the national news sector chooses to do that, as well as encouraging the national news sector to hold that national forum.

Particularly, when I think of my community, the Burnaby Beacon, Burnaby Now, New West Anchor and The Royal City Record are all struggling. The fact that we continue to subsidize Meta and Google with over \$1 billion a year and aren't providing supports to those local, fact-based journalists who do such a terrific job is something that needs to be considered as part of that.

That's certainly the framework that I think is appropriate for this committee.

Again, the subamendment would read, after “appropriateness of”, “the government providing support to the national news sector”.

• (5640)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to read out what we're going to be discussing now.

Mr. Champoux, let me read it into the record first.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study to determine the appropriateness of the government providing support to the national

news sector to hold a national forum on the media and that the committee invite sector experts and leaders....

That's how the subamendment reads, and I think that it makes sense. I'm going to ask you to speak to the subamendment now.

Speaking to the subamendment, we have Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

“Support”—what does that look like? That's a big word. Does it mean that the government will support financially or in direction? I do have some issues with this, as you heard before, but when I read “government provides support”, does that mean we have support here around the table to hold a national news sector to bring them in and talk to them, or is it financial support? I just want clarification.

The Chair: All right; clarification is key.

We had Mr. Waugh, and now we have Mr. Champoux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: It seems to me that the appropriateness of the support the government may provide will be part of the discussion we'll be having. I don't think we're saying that the government has to fund the study, although that kind of discussion will occur around the table at some point. From what I understand of Mr. Julian's amendment, we'll be discussing the appropriateness of the government's support for the national forum that the news media industry will be holding.

I think the compromise is completely acceptable. It really clarifies the amendment's intent, and I agree that we can adopt it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

To both Mr. Julian and Mr. Champoux, I think what Mr. Julian suggested makes perfect sense. It captures the spirit of what we're trying to accomplish. It accomplishes what Mr. Champoux wants to do and satisfies what I am trying to do. Clearly, the language was a bit clumsy.

I think it's a great compromise, and we would be glad to support it.

The Chair: Is there anyone else wishing to speak on the subamendment? If not, I'm going to call a vote on the subamendment.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: Now, I'm going to ask you to vote on the amendment as amended, which will be the new motion.

Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: The amendment to the original motion is still open for debate.

The Chair: Yes. We're now going to move the amendment. The subamendment is carried. We're going to vote on the main motion as amended.

Is there any debate on this?

Mr. Martin Shields: I would like to speak to this.

The Chair: Oh, the debate is on the amendment. I understood that Mr. Noormohamed had removed his amendment and was accepting the subamendment.

Okay. We're going to call a vote on it.

Do you want to vote on the amendment as amended?

• (5645)

Mr. Martin Shields: No, I want to speak.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

For clarification, we added those words in, but the rest of the amendment as presented is still there. Is that right?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: The rest of the wording is still there. Here's the challenge I have: "Provided the sector initiates a forum, that governments at the national and provincial levels".

I have a real problem with "provincial" being in there. That's not ours. I object to the word "provincial" being in there. It's not our business.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Mr. Champoux, and then it's Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Noormohamed, is your hand up?

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think that what my colleague Mr. Shields just said about the potential participation of other levels of government, the provincial level in particular, is very interesting. I had the same conversation with my colleague Mr. Waugh, and I answered that question. He also told me he was concerned about involving the provincial governments.

First of all, we aren't forcing them. We're inviting them to join the discussion. The Quebec government has asked to be consulted on this kind of discussion. It has also asked to take part in the present discussion. The Quebec government is also in the process of establishing a media assistance fund. This is certainly an invitation that the other levels of government would welcome with open arms.

I think it's entirely appropriate in the circumstances to include other levels of government that have expressed an interest in joining the discussion.

I also want to emphasize that even the involvement of local governments, such as municipal governments, that would like to have a say that these kinds of hearings would be entirely appropriate. The

issue of regional media coverage is currently a major concern. The municipalities have a front seat on that situation.

I absolutely don't think it's ridiculous to add the other levels of government and potentially to invite them to come and express their views at these kinds of hearings.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

Go ahead, Mr. Waugh and then Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As Mr. Champoux mentioned, we had a discussion prior to today's meeting. He filled me in on the province of Quebec. It's interesting when you start to bring in provincial governments.

Mr. Julian, the newspapers you just talked about are probably in crisis because the NDP provincial government is not putting any resources out.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Peter Julian: I do.

I would like Mr. Waugh, who I have enormous respect for, number one, to stick to the topic, but, number two, to be fact-based in terms of what he is speaking about. We're talking about fact-based journalism. He has to stay with the facts.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Waugh, are you finished?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: No. I was just going to say that it's interesting when we talk about governments at the national and provincial levels. They're the ones that have caused a lot of the crises in local newspapers. They pulled every ad they could in rural Canada. The crisis has hit, and some of the MPs around this table have really realized that, "Oh, the federal government is putting so much money into Meta and Google, and so on, and less into local newspapers." We've been saying that, Madam Chair, around this table, particularly Conservative MPs, dealing with Bill C-18. Local newspapers are the ones that are disappearing faster than any other. Finally, everyone else has realized it.

That's all I have to say.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Next, we have Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The addition of inviting the provincial governments to this reflects the aspirations that Monsieur Champoux talked about. For me, it also spoke to some of the concerns that Mr. Shields spoke about regarding the local media in his community, and the challenges that could be met only by provincial governments. They are, perhaps, closer to some of these issues than we might be.

Again, it's an invitation, and they are welcome not to participate if they choose not to. As an important gesture to involve, and to increase the scope of the conversation, lest anyone assume it is dominated by—the expression that our friends across the way like to use—“the Laurentian elites”.... This gives everybody a chance to be at the table and to be part of the conversation if they choose. If they choose not to, that's okay.

• (5650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

Go ahead, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: If the author of the motion had said “invite all levels of government”, it might have made sense, but it doesn't.

The Chair: Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I appreciate Mr. Shields' comments. There is an opportunity to provide amendments, but we are where we are.

The Chair: We are dealing with the motion as amended by Mr. Julian. Let's stick to that at the moment. There seems to be no sub-amendment coming up to change the language as it's written, so unless anyone else has any further discussion, I'm going to call the question on the amended amendment.

(Amendment as amended agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The amended amendment passes, so now we will go to the amended motion by Mr. Champoux.

Is there any discussion on that, please? If you wish, I will read the amended motion by Mr. Champoux, but you should all have it in front of you. I read it into the record the last time around, but I can read it again if you wish it to be on the record.

I'd like us to vote now on the amended motion by Mr. Champoux.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you. The motion as amended is passed.

I think we need to move on to the orders of the day, which I think would be meeting with witnesses, so I would ask that we suspend while we get into that second part of the meeting and get the witnesses moved on board.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is suspended.

• (0850)

(Pause)

• (0855)

The Chair: All of the witnesses have been checked. We have witnesses to speak to the study on the tech giants' current and ongoing use of intimidation and subversion tactics to evade regulation in Canada and across the world.

Today we have, from the American Economic Liberties Project, Dr. Erik Peinert, research manager; from Free Press, Nora Be-

navidez, senior counsel and director of digital justice and civil rights; and from The Hub, Sean Speer, editor-at-large.

We will begin with Dr. Peinert.

You have five minutes.

Dr. Erik Peinert: Hello. My name is Erik Peinert. I am the research manager at the American Economic Liberties Project, a Washington, D.C.-based policy and advocacy organization focused on reducing concentrated economic power to broaden opportunity for small businesses, workers and communities. I earned a Ph.D. from Brown University, where my research focused on competition, monopoly and antitrust and has been published in leading academic journals.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about big tech's pattern of coercion in response to regulation, specifically Meta's recent action to block Canadian access to news articles across its platforms in retaliation for the passage of Bill C-18, the Online News Act. This follows a nearly identical action in 2021 by Meta—then Facebook—to extract concessions from Australia with respect to its news media bargaining code.

This discussion comes at a time when the news industry across the globe is in peril. It's an industry that I've watched closely since I was a child. I was raised by a journalist. My mother began her career as a reporter for a local paper in rural New England in the late 1970s, moving to various editorial roles in minor cities, to the newsroom at The Boston Globe, and then to executive positions at The Boston Globe and GateHouse Media, now Gannett. She now owns several successful, independent local papers in Massachusetts suburbs.

My personal and professional experiences lead me to make two principal points today, the first being about the platforms' business model in this market. Media companies pay to produce and distribute content that a large mass of readers find valuable. Then they sell ads to businesses that want their offerings in front of those readers. On one side, Meta and Google have become the central way that readers access news media, giving them power over journalism outlets, with an implicit threat to cut off readership. On the other side, Meta and Google also have an effective duopoly over digital advertising, and both face or faced antitrust lawsuits for illegal monopolization in this space.

These companies are not providing viewership so much as using their dual control over Internet traffic and advertising to monetize content that journalists produce at considerable expense. Recent research by economists at the University of Zurich indicates that 40% of Google's total revenue from search advertising would go to publishers and other journalism outlets if it faced more competition. With media companies paying to produce the content and big tech getting the ad revenue, this destroys the model of journalism that a democracy needs.

Google's decision to broker a deal with the Canadian government last week, to pay about \$100 million Canadian per year to journalism outlets and publishers, simply confirms this. It acknowledges the value the platforms gain from journalism. The dispute was over the scale of payments and the terms of negotiation—whether to have one deal or require multiple bargaining groups—rather than whether compensation was owed at all.

This brings me to my second point: why these companies respond to regulatory proposals with bullying, threats and coercion. Rather than making rational business decisions in response to regulatory changes—as Meta claims it is doing with respect to Bill C-18—they see oversight and market governance as an existential threat to their predatory business models, and they react with hostility.

For example, these tech giants have been leveraging trade and investment frameworks to stop governments around the world from regulating them. Their latest strategy is pressuring governments to include digital trade clauses in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. In this way, big tech companies are better positioned to argue that policies like the Online News Act are violations of trade law because they unfairly discriminate against companies like Google and Meta by virtue of their American origin, ignoring that these companies are targeted due to their size and not their place of incorporation.

This is also even though, as American, multinational companies, their home country is considering many of the same or similar policies, with the journalism competition and preservation act being repeatedly introduced in the American Congress. They succeeded, to a degree, by getting the North American governments to include expansive digital trade clauses in the 2020 CUSMA. U.S. industry associations are already making use of this language to claim that the Online News Act violates Canada's commitments under the CUSMA.

More egregiously, Meta last week filed a lawsuit against the American Federal Trade Commission, one of its primary regulators, arguing that the commission itself is unconstitutional and, thus, effectively illegal as a regulator, rather than face an amended consent decree based on privacy violations that the company has repeatedly committed over the past decade, which the FTC has found involved children's data.

Adding little of clear social value but having learned to profit from it nonetheless, Meta repeatedly shows disdain for the rule of law in this space, preferring to destroy the legal system in the United States and elsewhere rather than come up with a business model that is both profitable and socially beneficial.

Having seen the continually worsening struggles of the news industry over the course of my life, I applaud the Canadian government for passing the Online News Act. We hope to see similar policies passed in the United States.

Thank you.

• (5700)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was really great. It was absolutely on time.

Now I would like to go to the Free Press, and Ms. Benavidez, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Nora Benavidez (Senior Counsel and Director of Digital Justice and Civil Rights, Free Press): Thank you so much for inviting me.

I'm Nora Benavidez, senior counsel at Free Press—not The Free Press, which is a different entity. I just want to clarify that.

We are a U.S.-based NGO, where I run public accountability campaigns and federal policy reform efforts to ensure that tech is protecting human and civil rights and upholding democracy.

Following years of work by civil society, academics and lawmakers documenting social media harms and urging more accountability, the largest tech companies have responded with disinterest. What's worse, they have increasingly used dangerous tactics to evade accountability. I'll talk a little about that today.

Since the global pandemic, other crises like the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, the attempted coup in Brazil in January of this year and the current conflict in the Middle East illustrate the critical role social media platforms play in shaping rapidly unfolding events.

Their failure to vet and remove content that violates their own stated terms of service harms and alienates users. Failure to moderate content inevitably also leads to the migration of lies and toxicity, from online platforms to mainstream media.

Just today, our organization, Free Press, released new research on the backsliding of big tech companies. In the last year alone, Meta, Twitter and YouTube have weakened their political ads policies, creating room for lies in ads ahead of next year's elections around the world. They have weakened their privacy policies to give AI tools access to user data, and they've collectively laid off nearly 40,000 employees.

Massive cuts have occurred across trust and safety teams, ethical engineering, responsible innovation and content moderation. Those are the teams tasked with maintaining a platform's general health and protecting users from harm.

This dangerous backslide has come under scrutiny. Evidence comes from whistle-blowers, from researchers who are looking at algorithmic discrimination; pressure also comes from organizations like ours, urging advertisers to leave Twitter because of Elon Musk's decisions, which make the platform more hateful and violent.

All of this points to the fact that tech companies cannot be trusted to govern themselves. Their response has been far from collaborative. There have been several new tactics that companies have adopted to shut down inquiry and accountability.

The first is cutting off researcher and API access to platform data. Researchers are now suffering various limitations. The NYU ad observatory was denied access by Facebook in 2021 to get its platform services, following months of inquiry analyzing its ad library tools. Twitter has made its API tool almost impossible for researchers to access, because of the high price tag. All of the major platforms require advance notice from researchers, who must be affiliated with universities to get access to their API. This sets up a de facto process whereby the platforms can approve or reject research access if they don't like how the ultimate product might be used.

The second major threat we are now seeing is litigation to silence researchers and critics. Elon Musk has adopted this tactic and has gone after several research entities and NGOs studying the extent to which hate persists and grows on Twitter. Musk has sued several organizations: the Center for Countering Digital Hate—I know their CEO spoke before you as well—the State of California, and Media Matters for America. He has also threatened other organizations.

These suits are dangerous to researchers, but they're also dangerous to the public, who will really be kept in the dark about tech companies' unethical practices.

Finally, the third major concern now is cross-sector attacks, abusing official power to go after researchers studying disinformation. This past summer, U.S. House judiciary chairman, Jim Jordan, led an effort that was demanding documents from leading academics, accusing them of suppressing speech, in particular Conservative speech. These attacks have absolutely led researchers to retreat from doing the necessary work they had been doing.

Big tech doesn't have to go after every tech accountability researcher and campaigner, because these actions are already having a chilling effect. We've witnessed, in plain sight, tech companies run nearly every play in the book to avoid regulation and accountability. Their platforms are undermining democracy, civil and human rights, privacy and public safety. That's why I'm really excited to be here today to talk with you.

• (5705)

We have called on our U.S. government to compel more transparency; to minimize the data that companies collect, use and retain; to outlaw discriminatory algorithms; and to tax online advertising and redistribute those funds to support local, independent, non-commercial journalism.

Thank you so much for your time. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Benavidez. You too were on time.

I will now go to the third witness, Sean Speer from The Hub.

You have five minutes, please, Mr. Speer.

Mr. Sean Speer (Editor-at-large, The Hub): Thank you, Ms. Chair.

Thank you, committee members, for inviting me to participate today. As the chair said, I present to you in my capacity as editor-at-large at The Hub, an online Canadian news organization that I co-founded nearly three years ago. We publish a combination of opinion commentary, standard news reporting and a series of podcasts.

We're philanthropically supported. Our audience size, content mix and level of engagement are growing significantly. We view ourselves as an increasingly valuable part of the country's news media ecosystem and a major contributor to its public policy discourse. As an organization, The Hub has generally opposed government intervention in support of the news media industry. I'd like to take my time here to set out how we've come to think about what's occurring within the industry and how policy-makers should respond.

Journalism is clearly going through a process of transformation. Traditional business models have been disrupted by new technologies and the rise of online platforms like Google and Meta, as the other witnesses have set out. This process of creative disruption has created a lot of destruction. It's led to business rationalization, layoffs and even outright closures, but there's also a creative dynamic, of which The Hub is a part. New and emerging players are experimenting with different business models, content forms and relationships with their audiences in order to figure out how to create a sustainable business that's ultimately supported by markets, broadly defined.

Most of these entities will fail. Some will succeed. Some will cover specific subject matters. Others will target geographical areas or particular points of view. Some will operate as for-profit businesses. Others will take the form of non-profits or even charitably funded organizations like ours.

The process I describe is complicated and uncertain, but it isn't a market failure that necessitates large-scale government intervention. It's a market correction that policy-makers should, generally speaking, let play out. It's of course the same dynamic market process that has transformed other parts of our economy over time and ultimately contributed to the country's progress and prosperity.

Now, one might argue that the news media is different, that it's not the same as other sectors, that it plays a more crucial role in our civic and democratic life, and that it therefore should be treated differently. There's something to that argument. We at The Hub believe passionately in the importance of reliable news and information in our democratic society, but we shouldn't let our good intentions interfere with the process of market-led change. Doing so would effectively signal that the legacy business model is the only one capable of meeting our democratic needs. It's ahistorical and fails to reckon with the exciting innovation occurring within the industry.

That said, there may be certain areas where public policy can play a role to better enable the transformation that's occurring within the market, rather than a shaping role that tries to presume in which direction the market should head. One example is to increase the charitable donations tax credit for registered journalism organizations to the same level as a tax credit available for donations to political parties. It would be a logical step to recognize that both institutions—the media and political parties—have key roles to play in the functioning of our democracy. Another example would be to make the subscription tax credit for qualified Canadian journalism organizations refundable and increase its generosity to higher levels.

The virtue of both these suggestions is that they would follow the choice of Canadian consumers. They would be subjected, in that sense, to a market test rather than the dictates of government itself.

I would sum up my comments this way. First, it's premature to conclude that we've reached a market failure that necessitates major government intervention. Doing so would take the onus off the industry to figure out how to create sustainable journalism, and it would impede innovation being led by independent outlets like The Hub. Second, to the extent that government opts to intervene, public policy should generally be neutral and subordinate to consumer signals. I put forward a couple of options, but there are no doubt others.

Let me conclude with this point, committee members. The Hub is currently running a series we're really excited about, called "The Future of News". We're bringing different voices and perspectives, including some you've heard at the committee, to our pages to talk about how to move forward, specifically how to create the conditions for a sustainable journalism sector.

I can tell you that after three years at The Hub, we're optimistic that entrepreneurs and markets are indeed capable of creating sustainable journalism and would encourage policy-makers to minimize their interference in that process. That approach would be in the best interests of journalism and, I would argue, of our democracy.

Thank you.

• (5710)

The Chair: You were on time as well, Mr. Speer. Thank you.

I will now open this segment to questions and answers. The first segment will be for six minutes. That includes both the questions and the answers—I'd like everyone to note that.

We begin with the Conservatives. The first questioner is Rachael Thomas.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you. My first question is for Mr. Speer.

You said that right now in the news sector we're seeing lots of new and innovative approaches being taken and that they're largely being driven by market values. You said that this is a good thing and that government intervention is thwarting or distorting that innovation that's taking place.

I'm curious if you can expand on that a bit in terms of the impact that government interventions such as Bill C-18 have on the innovative news sector and its future.

Mr. Sean Speer: One of the challenges, MP Thomas, that news start-ups face in terms of building an audience and building awareness in the marketplace is, of course, finding different channels to reach that audience.

Up until now, for The Hub—and I think others have testified similarly—Meta and Google have been a major part of that process. We don't see the platforms as a threat or playing a counterproductive role. They've enabled us to build and grow what are increasingly sustainable news organizations that can start to fill some of the gaps that have been created by the process of disruption, which is at the heart of much of the work the committee is doing.

One of the consequences, of course, of Bill C-18 has been that many of us have lost the ability to communicate, reach our current audience and grow it, because the law has caused Meta to leave the Canadian market. Fortunately, the agreement between Google and the government prevented a scenario whereby Google similarly left the market. Had that happened, I fear that a lot of the progress we're seeing in the new and independent media sector would have been fundamentally disrupted.

I would say that, as you think about the work the committee is doing, I would encourage you to start with the Hippocratic oath to do no harm. Permit entrepreneurs, innovators and, of course, long-standing media organizations to go through the iterative process of trial and error to figure out how we can continue to deliver the news and information that Canadians need, reflecting the changing technological environment.

• (5715)

The Chair: Excuse me, I'm going to stop this for a second.

May I ask that people address the questions and answers through the chair and not directly to each other? Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Right now, under Bill C-18.... I'm sorry; I should not say that.

Google has managed to get an exemption from Bill C-18 and has offered \$100 million to the news sector in exchange for that exemption. It is proposed by the PBO, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, that about a third of that funding is going to go to the CBC, which is already a publicly funded broadcaster to the tune of \$1.4 billion and has another \$400 million in ad revenue and subscriptions.

What does this do to the overall news media market and its future in this country, when big tech and big government collude to give one-third of this money to a public broadcaster?

Mr. Sean Speer: I would say two things in response, Ms. Chair.

First of all, we can talk about the risks to the public's trust of media organizations, which, on one hand, are responsible for holding to account governments and big tech for many of the reasons outlined by the two other witnesses. One can't help but think that, either in fact or in perception, their ability to carry out that accountability function will be undermined. I think that is something that policy-makers need to take seriously. Indeed, the industry does.

To the broader question, though, I would say that one of the biggest concerns of a model that doesn't follow consumer signals or market signals but instead has either the government or, in this case, an industry association or industry interlocutor between the individual media organizations and, in this particular case, Google, is that someone is ultimately going to adjudicate the distribution of those resources. I think the fear of start-up organizations like The Hub is that those resources will be disproportionately directed to legacy media companies and not the parts of the sector that are growing and innovating.

One of the challenges, of course, is that it is not an inadvertent consequence of the policy framework that has been established; it is inherent in it.

That's why I said in my statement that, if indeed the government or the committee is of the view that action needs to be taken to support the sector, I think the preference ought to be that public funding follows, at least when possible, consumer preference or market signals to minimize the extent to which either government or, in this case, some sort of industry representative ultimately decides the allocation of resources.

The Chair: Next up, we have the Liberals and Ms. Hefner for six minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you, Chair.

I will start with Mr. Peinert. It's nice to see you again today. I'm glad we can hear you, finally.

You mentioned in your opening statement that tech giants have been able to monetize content that journalists produce at a huge expense, or something to that effect.

Would you expand on that, please?

Dr. Erik Peinert: I would expand on that on two levels. One point to emphasize is that journalism, especially local and provincial—or, in the United States context, state-level—requires a fair amount of direct labour to go out and talk to politicians, public officials and members of the community, and there's no way to technologically replace that fact. It is expensive, and you need to hire

journalists to do that work. It is always going to be media companies and journalism outlets doing that.

In terms of the other side of the equation, of big tech being able to monopolize this, I want to emphasize that we are not dealing with a situation of abstract market forces or price signals, but rather a group of companies that have developed and, through a series of mergers in particular, created a particular market structure whereby they are able to take an overwhelming majority of the income and profits.

Google owns the ad management tools for both the advertisers buying ads—the online advertising market—and the media companies selling ads. Likewise, in those same markets, Meta and Google have been caught bid-rigging for their ads for those exact advertising tools.

We are not dealing with a technological change that just fell out of the sky. It is a market structure whereby they can determine who gets paid what to maximize their own profits. Google and Meta are neither paying directly toward the media companies nor even employing journalists. Instead, they are using the existence of journalism of which, online at this point, they have created the expectation that it is largely free to be channelled as traffic through their own platforms and not compensated for.

• (5720)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: What I saw over more than 20 years of being a journalist was a massive shrinkage of newsrooms. When I started in 1999, we had hundreds of journalists in a newsroom. Today, the newsrooms are virtual, and there's maybe a handful of reporters producing the content.

What is the effect on our democracy and our society of having such a dearth of voices in journalism today?

Dr. Erik Peinert: I can speak broadly to that. It's very bad for democracy overall. I think democracy requires a free press, not just at a national level, to comment on what a prime minister or a president is doing, or what the national legislature is doing, but at local levels and regional levels. Journalism in a democracy requires that you have oversight and people knowing what public officials are doing.

As we've seen over the last 20 or so years, as the number of journalists has dried up, there's simply not a reporter to send to a public meeting to know what's going on. The public is uninformed. There is significant research indicating that as newsrooms close, corruption in public offices increases, because there's simply no oversight to stop it.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you.

Ms. Benavidez, I will turn to you now. In some of the articles through your platform, you talk about how social media companies have abdicated all responsibility to their users. You've said that certain demographics in particular are targeted by advertisements and discouraged from participating in voting and in censuses.

Would you tell us more about this work that you've done and what it means to our democracy?

Ms. Nora Benavidez: It's difficult to quantify how users are targeted with different content, because as I mentioned in my opening remarks, there's just so much opacity plaguing these companies, and attempts by researchers or others to glean insights are met with the various tactics I mentioned.

That being said, there are some hallmarks that we've seen over the years. In particular, during election periods, we know that certain user demographics have been targeted with content that makes them afraid to engage and go to the polls. In the United States, users whose identities are Black, Latino or native American have been targeted with laser-like precision by major tech companies: Meta, which at the time was Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The content that some of these users see really plays into their existing vulnerabilities, fears within communities and distrust of government.

The kernel here is it always feels credible. People see something online and they trust it. They then become fearful, and the content they might be given will play into what their perceived vulnerabilities already are. In the 2020 election in the United States, users were given content that specifically mentioned that certain law enforcement or others might be at polling locations. That also preyed on fears of violence or intimidation.

• (5725)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you.

Mr. Speer, quickly, you said in your remarks that the tech giants had given you a platform in order to do your work. You also said that you're supported by philanthropy.

Is that sustainable?

Mr. Sean Speer: I think the answer is yes.

We're building large-scale philanthropy from foundations that support us, and we're also increasingly building a network of individual donors and subscribers who want to pay for our content. We think that's not only a sustainable business but also a useful means of ensuring that our content is responsive to and reflects what audiences want. That's a relationship that we don't want public policy to break.

The Chair: Thank you. Now I will go to the Bloc Québécois.

You have six minutes, please, Martin Champoux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us today.

Their opening statements and the answers they give to the questions my colleagues asked are very helpful. They remind me of the discussions we're having now about support that should be granted to the media industry.

We're discussing business models. I think we all agree that the traditional media business model has to be revamped. Furthermore, if a national forum is being proposed, its purpose is to revamp the model and enable media companies, especially in the news industry, to prepare more effectively for present and future challenges.

I absolutely agree on that point. I believe everyone agrees that we have to give industry people tools and enable them to acquire tools to adapt to the digital shift. In most cases, that shift is still incomplete or has been accomplished with limited resources and is therefore not very effective.

News companies must be able to transition to a business model that more effectively responds to the technological reality of today and tomorrow. We talk a lot about assistance for newsrooms, support for the media and business models, but I think we're forgetting to consider the matter from the standpoint of users and consumers.

Mr. Speer, I thought your remarks on tax credits for newsroom contributors were very interesting. I agree with all the innovative ideas that enable newsrooms to flourish and be effective and that they should do their work unburdened, as it were.

However, we often forget that news users and consumers aren't the same at 20, 40 and 70 years of age. People consume news differently depending on age. People 55 and over, for example, still get their news from radio and television. Radio listeners are even younger. People 35 or 40 years of age and older get a lot of news from the radio.

It's clear from demographic data that older people get a lot of their news from newspapers, the print media. Many of those people aren't even equipped with technologies that allow them to get their news from platforms, for example, or simply from the Internet. You can't necessarily force those people to get equipped or to learn how the technologies work.

I think we should also start thinking in those terms, thinking of those people who still need news to be provided in traditional formats. There are countless print media outlets in the regions of Quebec and Canada. My colleague Mr. Shields often talks about the 20 or so small weekly newspapers that are in trouble in his riding, precisely because support for them may be ill-suited or poorly designed. That all needs to be revamped.

Mr. Speer, I think I understand the direction we should take. However, don't you think the transition needs to be gentler? We should support the newsrooms and media outlets that meet the needs of people who still get that kind of news from newspapers, the print media. Government support will eventually be directed toward business models that more effectively meet the needs of tomorrow and those of the younger generation.

I don't know if my question is clear, but I'd like to hear your comments on this.

• (5730)

[English]

Mr. Sean Speer: Respectfully, I think we precisely don't know where we're going. That is why government should be cautious about intervening in the market in favour of one particular content format or business model or approach to journalism. This process is uncertain.

I couldn't begin to tell you what future sustainable journalistic business models will look like. I think everyone from The Globe and Mail to The Hub, and virtually everyone in between, is trying to figure that out, through a combination of subscribers, sometimes venture capital and, in our case, philanthropy.

I ultimately have more confidence, I think, in markets. If there's a critical mass of Canadians who want their news produced and provided to them in a traditional physical newspaper, then I have confidence that entrepreneurs of some sort are going to seize that market opportunity.

I guess it's a long way of saying that precisely because this process is creative and uncertain, I would caution policy-makers not to intervene and preclude it from playing itself out.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

I understand what you're saying. The problem is that entrepreneurs know that the business model doesn't work anymore because of the digital domination in this industry. That's why I think we should provide this service to the public by supporting those businesses, even if their business model is no longer profitable. Entrepreneurs won't invest in something that's gradually bound to transform and even disappear.

We'll stop there for the moment because my time is up, but I think the discussion is very interesting.

Thank you, Mr. Speer.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian for the New Democratic Party is next.

You have six minutes, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank our witnesses. You're providing very important testimony to us this morning.

I want to note very clearly that the government already interferes massively in the marketplace, giving over \$1 billion in indirect subsidies each and every year to Meta and Google. Meta and Google, with fat profits and all of the despicable practices they have shown, have been heavily subsidized from the Harper government to today with over \$1 billion a year. That obviously has influenced the market and has led in part to the crisis we are experiencing now.

I'd like to start my questions with Madam Benavidez.

Thank you very much for your testimony.

It's chilling, what you're saying. The first part of what you said, which I believe is important to follow up on, was on the rise in hate. As you pointed out, the Center for Countering Digital Hate has pointed to Meta and X contributing to what the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center have called "the pipeline of hate".

We've seen a rise in anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and racism, with racist attacks seen right across North America. They were all provoked by Meta's secret algorithms, which attempt to foster and provoke, through what the Center for Countering Digital Hate calls "malgorithms", that rise in far-right extremism. We certainly saw last year that every single ideologically motivated mass killing in North America was caused by the far right.

Madam Benavidez, I want to ask you what governments should be doing to counter this pipeline of hate that is contributing to real-world killings as a result of being fostered online by these malgorithms and deliberate policies that help stoke engagement in all of its toxic forms?

Ms. Nora Benavidez: Thank you so much.

It's excellent to note that platforms alone do not bear the responsibility for content moderation. I believe it's important to elevate how government interventions can blunt many of the harms detailed in my own comments, as well as in those just provided.

There are a few calls that Free Press is making, many of them centring on the use and extraction of our data. I'll give you five core values and principles we are fighting for.

One is regulators codifying reforms to minimize the data companies can collect and retain, in order to protect against the discriminatory targeting of users—as I mentioned before—with tailored content and advertising.

Two is banning algorithmic discrimination by platforms and other Internet services that use AI tools to target users.

Three is requiring regular platform transparency and disclosure reports on a number of things. This includes content virality reports, the results of AI decision-making tools, and the visibility and takedowns of political ads. These reports should be accessible across all languages. We know there are gross asymmetries when it comes to moderation by platforms in languages other than English.

Four is developing a private civil right of action for violations that flow from platforms' use of our personal data.

Fifth and finally, it's leveraging other actions and authorities your government has at its disposal. In the United States, we believe leveraging agency and White House authority are critical. There is a need for better coordination, not less. When we cordon off communication between tech companies and other sectors, we get the environment we are now in. Therefore, our final recommendation is to elevate the ways we collaborate and coordinate, in order to share information, not block off access.

Thank you.

• (5735)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

As a follow-up question, we heard about the Meta donation to Harvard. Allegations are that this led to a crackdown on disinformation research at Harvard University. You point to the fact that Meta's new policies allow for clearly false political ads in the United States. The fear, of course.... We saw the myth around the election being stolen, which led to a physical attack on Capitol Hill. The same individuals involved in that now want unfettered access to people's homes right across the United States, with political ads that are clearly false. We have seen the role of the Russian disinformation machine, the Internet Research Bureau, both in the election of Trump back in 2016 and in the Brexit referendum—very clear interference that led to profound political decisions, with political consequences.

Are you concerned about all of these impacts on our democratic life and on our ability to make decisions in a free country?

The Chair: You have a very short time in which to answer, Ms. Benavidez.

Thank you.

Ms. Nora Benavidez: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There are dangerous real-world consequences when companies retreat from their previous commitments. This relationship...as content moves from online discourse to the off-line world. There is ample evidence now that we, as human beings, are informed and motivated by what we see online. We see companies doing less to protect users, and we know bad actors will exploit those openings and network vulnerabilities. We've seen it over the last two months in terms of the Middle East conflict.

I believe that, ultimately, platform integrity leaves democracy in the balance. We have over 40 elections coming up next year and—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Benavidez. I'm sorry. You can expand on that later on.

I'm now going to our five-minute round. Once again, I would like to warn everyone that the five minutes include both the questions and the answers.

We begin with the Conservatives and Kevin Waugh.

Kevin, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think we've lost a generation of news followers. In newsrooms, they don't think about what the consumer wants. Take time shifting: "We can't have the news on other than at 6:00 or 11:00." They saw

viewers coast to coast saying, "I want to watch the news when I have the time." That's why the platforms won out. That's why websites won out. I look at the news industry. They're still back in the fifties. They haven't grasped what the consumers and eyeballs want. When I look at the news media in the United States, and even in Canada....

Mr. Speer, you made a good point about donations. Even though they're in the United States, PBS television gets thousands of dollars from Canadian viewers. Why is that? It's because we watch it. When they have a telethon, I see hundreds of people in my community donating to PBS.

Perhaps that's the model we need for public television, not only in the United States but also here in Canada, with the CBC.

• (5740)

Mr. Sean Speer: I would just say two things in response, Madam Chair.

First of all, I'm slightly more optimistic that the industry is transforming itself in a way that connects it more closely to its audience. I think that extends from smaller organizations like The Hub to some of the major legacy players, which may have moved only slowly in this direction but are now moving in it. I think it's a healthy one. A connection between journalism and audience is fundamental to the future of the industry.

The second thing is, in terms of different financial models, I think there are extraordinary opportunities to build value for readers, listeners and so on and to start restoring the expectation that news is something people ought to pay for. Another witness observed earlier that one challenge the sector has faced is that, about 20 years ago or so, it put its content online, mostly for free. That socialized, as you say, a generation of readers and listeners to think news was valueless. I think the way to solve that, and we're seeing this play out in Canada and in the United States, from legacy players to smaller players, is to start restoring that relationship with the audience and to create the conditions for people to, once again, pay for news. I think that's a healthy development.

Ultimately, it seems to me that the role of public policy is to support that process, rather than to shape it in a direction such that, as I said earlier, we can't possibly know where it's going to end up and what types of models are ultimately going to be successful.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I think you made a very good point.

The firewalls that news organizations put up, like you said, 20 years ago, didn't work, and then they gave their product away for free, so they made journalism worthless.

When you look at that model now, I'm not going to pay for The Boston Globe, and I'm not going to pay for The New York Times, because I'll get it somewhere for free. That's the issue I think consumers themselves are facing. When they go to the paywalls, they'll say, "Well, do you know what? I'll find it somewhere else. Someone will post it, and I'll steal the information from there."

Mr. Sean Speer: If that is a predacious problem in the market, then I think there will possibly be a role for public policy and obviously a role for the players in addressing it. Again, I find myself more optimistic. I subscribe to multiple outlets, precisely because I want to read what they're producing. I think that's the increasing news consumption habit for a lot of people in the digital age.

To go back to a conversation we were having earlier, I think one way to incentivize or encourage that type of news consumption behaviour would be to increase the subscription tax credit, which is presently non-refundable. That is to say, if you're not paying taxes, you're not eligible to claim it, and it's limited to 15%. France has a subscription tax credit that is refundable, and it's 50%. It's mostly seamless for the subscriber. In fact, the media player is responsible for claiming the credit with the government.

There are ways for public policy, in effect, to continue to nudge in the direction of a stronger relationship between news outlets and audiences. I think that's a direction in which the sector is broadly headed and one way that public policy could support it.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I agree with you.

I think podcasts are going to take over from radio stations. You're right; when you come across a podcast that you like, you do subscribe. That's one of the new emerging players we're seeing in the marketplace, with podcasts, right now, attracting more listeners than radio stations do. It's consumer choice. That's the other one people have forgotten. The consumer will decide what they want to hear or listen to, and that will drive the market where it needs to go.

Mr. Sean Speer: I would say there are inherent trade-offs to everything we're talking about. I think the other witnesses raised serious challenges that policy-makers in Canada and elsewhere ought to focus on. There are trade-offs in all the choices before us.

One upside that I wouldn't want to go underexplored or underconsidered is the democratization of news that has occurred over the past 20 years. The barrier to entry for podcasts is essentially your iPhone. Everyone can be a podcaster. Then, of course, it's up to consumers to make judgments about what is reliable, what can be trusted and so on. That has given voice to so many people who, in the traditional era of a concentrated news media, were closed out of the public conversation, both in terms of—

• (5745)

The Chair: Mr. Speer, I'm sorry. You're about a minute over time, so I'm going to ask you to end there. You can probably answer further in the other round of questions.

Thank you.

Now, I'm going to the Liberals and Mr. Noormohamed for five minutes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I've been fascinated by a lot of what I've heard, because there's so much for us to really dig into here.

Ms. Benavidez, you talked a lot about.... Mr. Julian, when he was asking you—I don't know if he misspoke or if it was intentional—used the word "algorithm", but it sounded like "malgorithm", and I wonder if that's what we need to start calling it. "Malgorithm" is a great term.

Was it intentional?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, on a point of order, Madam Chair, that was from testimony from Mr. Ahmed, from the Center for Countering Digital Hate.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I see. It's fantastic. I should really start using that word.

When you look at the use of these algorithms as they pump some of this content out—particularly, as Mr. Julian pointed out, the hateful comments, the anti-Semitic comments and the Islamophobic comments, the stuff that really can cause material damage to people—who tends to benefit from the spread of that misinformation? When the algorithms on these platforms spread that information, who tends to be the beneficiary, politically?

Ms. Nora Benavidez: Thank you so much.

We know that, in the most recent year, with Elon Musk taking over Twitter, part of why he has reinstated so many previously banned accounts is to try to build up revenue, and many advertisers who have departed that platform have done so because they've seen that their brand content is featured next to horrific, hateful, white supremacist, neo-Nazi content. On the question of who benefits, I'm not sure. Elon Musk surely has not, and Twitter is now valued at less than half of what he bought it for over a year ago.

There are other benefits, though, and many of the companies are benefiting because of ad revenue for eyeballs in other contexts. When Meta realizes that its revenue comes primarily from eyeballs that see incendiary content, they are boosting that type of stuff and pushing for users to see the most controversial content, because they know it will get more attention, more engagement, more likes, more comments and more shares.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: In your experience—and I'm going to ask the same question to Mr. Peinert—is it primarily right-wing content or primarily left-wing content?

This question, just to be clear, is not meant to make a political statement, but to really determine whether the platforms are agnostic as to whom they decide to exploit. Do you see it on one particular side of the spectrum or the other?

Ms. Nora Benavidez: Given many of the opacity problems I've mentioned previously, it's difficult to say with certainty, certainly across every platform, what content is being boosted more than others. We have anecdotal evidence at best, and that's part of why we continue to call for greater disclosures and greater auditing of what processes are occurring within these companies, but one of the pieces we know is that far-right and extremist content has been engaged with over six times more than other content that is politically neutral.

The NYU ad observatory, which was kicked off Facebook for doing this research, found many of those various pieces of evidence and pointed to the way conservative and far-right content is getting amplified more. There's a current effort, at least in the United States, to recharacterize this attack, and part of what we have to be very careful about is the way that we point to evidence, to make sure that we are not making claims we cannot support. When lawmakers say that X or Y type of content is boosted, we have to make sure we have evidence to show, and that's why the precursor is necessary.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

Mr. Peinert, I'll pose the same question to you. I think this is an important conversation for us to have, and Ms. Benavidez has mentioned that it's about six times more that you'll see far-right extremist content being pushed.

Has that been your experience? How do you see the notion of the content that is being shared? Do you see it more the same way, primarily far-right content, very conservative content, or are you seeing it equally spread across the spectrum?

• (5750)

Dr. Erik Peinert: I would primarily reiterate what Ms. Benavidez has said. I can say only anecdotally that it seems that far-right content is more prevalent, but I do want to emphasize that, from the companies' perspective, it's clear that it's primarily driven by algorithms that are simply meant to keep users engaged to the maximum degree possible, and the companies don't appear to care what the political orientation of that content is as long as they can keep users engaged and, to some degree, addicted to the platform in order to maximize eyeballs on screens.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go to Mr. Champoux from the Bloc Québécois, for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, this committee has frequently looked into the influence the digital giants have on the media industry, particularly in the news sector. In some cases, it's more of a domination. Many components of the news industry are affected, such as advertising sales, of course, but also the way the news is broadcasted. The media definitely need to be more agile in this regard so they can compete more effectively with companies operating with new technologies.

It's probably these changes and this domination of the digital giants that are forcing large Quebec and Canadian media companies

to make major budget adjustments and cut jobs, as we saw this week with the announcement made by Catherine Tait at CBC/Radio-Canada.

Madam Chair, I would therefore like to introduce the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee summons Catherine Tait, CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada to testify on the subject of the job cuts announced at CBC/Radio-Canada for the year 2024, for a period of two hours.

That the Committee prioritize this motion over all other current and future studies and other Committee business, so that the Committee devote its first meeting at the return from the holiday recess...

Madam Chair, the clerk has distributed the motion in English and in French.

[English]

The Chair: May we suspend while we distribute the motion, please?

Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry. I just need clarification.

Were we given notice? Is he giving notice of the motion, or is he moving it?

The Chair: No. He's moving the motion now, because it's within the context of what we're studying. He doesn't have to give 48 hours' notice.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I understand.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll suspend.

• (0950)

(Pause)

• (0950)

The Chair: We can resume the meeting.

Peter, did you wish to say something?

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order. I have no objection to Mr. Champoux's moving this, though we do have important witnesses. I still have questions, so I'd like to seek unanimous consent to give him the opportunity to speak after we complete this round, so that he will then be able to move his motion.

• (5755)

The Chair: I'll ask Mr. Champoux, because if Mr. Champoux says no, we're not going to get unanimous consent.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: The last time I accepted that kind of compromise, we held a debate and didn't address the motion. I therefore reject it because I want us to address it. It's a very simple motion, and I believe the parties will promptly approve it.

I'd like us to address it, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: All right.

I will ask the witnesses to bear with us. Hopefully, we can get rid of this very quickly, and then get back to you. Just bear with us for a second.

We have a motion on the floor from Mr. Champoux.

Is there any discussion on the motion? Shall I call the question?

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Mr. Champoux's motion calls for Catherine Tait, the CEO of CBC and Radio-Canada, to testify on the job cuts.

We know that Ms. Tait, the head of CBC and Radio-Canada, has made the decision to cut 600 jobs, but we also know that when she was pressed during a media interview as to whether or not the executives would receive a bonus, she was not able to determine a definite no. In fact, she seemed very much to be leaving that window open, which would imply, then, that she is okay with cutting 600 media jobs while still giving big bonuses to the top executives of the company.

We know that Ms. Tait herself received a \$60,000 bonus this last summer. That \$60,000 is more than the average salary of a Canadian in this country. For Ms. Tait to determine that she's going to slash 600 jobs while still being okay with giving potentially millions of dollars, or tens of millions of dollars in bonuses, is absolutely ludicrous.

Not only does Ms. Tait need to come to this committee, but I would also offer an amendment to Mr. Champoux's motion. The amendment would read as follows toward the end. Following "period of two hours", it would state, "and the committee report to the House that it calls on the government to instruct the CBC to immediately ban all executive bonuses".

The Chair: May I suggest that it's not an admissible amendment, because the government cannot tell the CBC what to do? It's an independent body.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: That's what I was going to say.

[*English*]

I wish we could.

[*Translation*]

However, the government can't do that. I entirely agree with my colleague, but I think we should put those questions to Ms. Tait. They're burning questions for us.

[*English*]

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Julian, since I have decided that the amendment is inadmissible, are you speaking to the motion?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: First, I'd like to state very clearly that it's incredible to be handing out bonuses when you're also cutting local jobs across the country.

I of course think it's important that Ms. Tait come and testify and answer these questions. They're making cuts and, at the same time, issuing bonuses to senior officials at CBC/Radio-Canada. That's a contradiction, and everyone can see it.

[*English*]

Now, that being said, I know that with Mr. Poilievre, no one at CBC would be working. They want to destroy the entire institution. I think it's a bit rich for any Conservative to say, "Well, we're concerned about the cuts." They seem to be celebrating the cuts, and, tragically, Mr. Poilievre's tweet was inappropriate.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I have a point of order. I would ask that the honourable member be respectful at committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian, let's try to minimize the political comment here.

Does anyone else have their hand up?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, I still have the floor.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: The reality is that her coming forward to testify on the cuts to local positions right across the country at the same time as there are executive bonuses for CBC executives, I think, is absolutely appropriate. My preference would be to have her come as early as next week, but if the committee's consensus is to have that as the first meeting when we get back, I'm fine with that, and I'll support this motion.

● (5800)

The Chair: The second part of the motion says that "the committee prioritize this motion over all other current and future studies, so that the committee devote its first meeting" as we "return from the holiday recess". I may remind the committee that you have asked the Minister of Sport to appear. She's appearing on Tuesday.

Is there any further discussion on the motion? We have witnesses, so please recall that it would be nice to get this dealt with.

Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I will be very brief.

First of all, I'm very much in support of what Mr. Champoux is trying to do here. Given that the Minister of Sport is coming next week, I especially appreciate the fact that we're doing this in the first meeting back, so that we do not take away that time with the Minister of Sport that we've all been asking for.

I agree with Mr. Julian. As a former CEO, I cannot possibly imagine having fired employees before Christmas and then contemplating taking a bonus. I think there are a lot of questions the CBC needs to be asked by Canadians and by this committee. As everyone in this room well knows, the government does not control the CBC; therefore, we can't tell them what to do, but I think it's very important for us as parliamentarians to ask Ms. Tait those very questions when she does appear, including questions about the appropriateness of executives contemplating bonuses.

Again, it is not for government to direct her, but I think it's important for us to ask her these difficult questions, because it's important that they be asked on behalf of Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I laugh when people say they get bonuses. Listen, I've been in the business a long time. Bonuses are given every year to Bell executives, to Rogers executives and to every executive in the media in this country. They get bonuses at the end of the year. The difference here is that this is a public institution, not a private one.

If the CBC decides to give bonuses, we can stand up and all decry that they're getting their bonuses, but this has been going on for decades in this business. This is not new.

What really disturbed me, Madam Chair, if you don't mind my saying it, is that the last time Ms. Tait was here, she knew these cuts were coming. It takes months of preparation to cut back 600 to 700 employees. This doesn't just happen in a week. She knew when she was at this committee that these were coming and at this time. CBC has done this in the past in December, and she knew full well in committee that they were prepared for a mass exodus of news journalists. That's where this should go.

As for bonuses, yes, we're all upset, but this has happened in the business, Madam Chair, for decades.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now, if I see no hands up for further discussion....

Yes, we have Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I take the point—thank you to the members of the committee. I would offer, then, a different amendment, if I may.

Again, we know that Ms. Catherine Tait, the head of the CBC and Radio-Canada, has said that she is slashing 600 jobs from the organization, and we know that she's left the door open to give bonuses to the top executives of the company.

I'm hearing from the committee that we all feel this is inappropriate. Therefore, the amendment I would add would be at the end of the motion. It would read, “and that the committee report to the House that it would be inappropriate for the CBC to give bonuses to executive members”.

The Chair: It is an admissible amendment, that “it would be inappropriate....”

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes. It would be “inappropriate” or “imprudent”. Maybe we'll go with “inappropriate for the CBC to issue bonuses to executive members”.

The Chair: Okay. That's a statement, because we cannot decide that this can happen. As long as we're clear that we're not saying that it is inappropriate.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Absolutely. I'm sorry. Let me just adjust that a bit more: “and the committee report to the House that, given these job cuts, it would be inappropriate for the CBC to grant bonuses to executive members”.

• (5805)

The Chair: All right. This is an amendment on the floor. I'd like to hear any discussion on the amendment.

Shall we vote, or...?

We now have only 10 minutes left. May I ask the witnesses to leave? I'm very well aware that we have witnesses sitting here, who came to speak to us, and we're keeping them waiting.

Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I just want to point out that the meeting started at 8:22 this morning.

So we still have 15 minutes left.

I think we'd have the time to briefly consider the amendment and the motion, and there would also be a little time left for the witnesses.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, I know you think we can quickly... I have yet to see that happen at this committee, so let's decide.

Do we have the ability to go over time, past 22 minutes?

We have the room until 10:30, if the committee is interested, and if the witnesses can stay until 10:30.

Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry. I moved the amendment, and I wasn't done. I just wanted to make sure the floor was given back to me.

The Chair: Oh, you haven't finished. I'm sorry. Go ahead. Are you reading it out again?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I just want to be really clear here. What this motion does, then, is call for Ms. Tait, the head of the CBC and Radio-Canada, to come to this committee and answer our questions. It also asks that we report to the House that it would be “imprudent” or “inappropriate” for the CBC to grant bonuses to its top executive members. This is because the head of the CBC, Ms. Tait, made the decision to cut 600 jobs. If she were then to go forward with giving bonuses to executives, what type of message would that send?

The Chair: Have you finished your amendment? Do I have all the wording of it?

Because I have to read this into the record, so we can do it, what I have is that you are saying, “and that the committee report to the House that, given these job cuts, it would be inappropriate for the CBC to grant bonuses to executive—

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Madam Chair, I have a point of order on this.

I don't know if it's appropriate, before we even do a study, to ask to report back to the House. That's something we do after we do a study. Why, in the initial study, would we say we're going to report to the House? It doesn't make any sense whatsoever. That's something you do after you do the study. The whole point of this study is to bring Catherine Tait here and ask her those very questions. Then, absolutely, if it makes sense, we report back to the House what we heard.

Why would we report back to the House without hearing any evidence?

The Chair: That's an important point taken, Ms. Hepfner.

Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think that putting it in a motion ensures that it's going to be reported to the House. We're stating that up front.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: We haven't heard anything yet, though.

Mr. Martin Shields: That's right.

The Chair: Mr. Shields, I will, however, following up on what Ms. Hepfner said, just say to the committee that you will make the decision but I would ask, do we know for starters that there are going to be bonuses given? We cannot presume that this is going to happen.

We're making a recommendation within a motion to do a study, which is a little backward in terms of how we do work here, so I'm just putting that on the table for people to listen to as they vote on the amendment or not.

I still think it's appropriate in some ways to bring forward this amendment, so why don't we vote on it, if you're ready and unless you have any new points to offer? I've read out what Ms. Thomas said. May I—

Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: Is it in both languages?

The Chair: Is the motion...? Is it appropriate that we make a recommendation? Is the amendment appropriate?

The Clerk: There is precedence to report to the House based on a motion adopted—

The Chair: The clerk is saying it is appropriate to jump the gun on this one, so I'm presenting you with the amendment. Can we speak to the amendment, please, and only the amendment?

Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Back to your point, Chair, we don't know what the current plan is. It would be nice to find out, but instead of making a conclusion before we hear from the witness, perhaps it could say something like—and maybe MP Thomas will take this as

friendly advice—“to come and speak on the issue of CBC bonuses”, rather than just jumping to one conclusion.

● (5810)

The Chair: Ms. Thomas, do you have a response to that?

We are trying the amendment to be obviously.... I think everyone is in agreement with you, so can we get something that we can all agree with?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I would leave my amendment as is.

The Chair: You would leave your amendment as it is.

Therefore, unless there is any further discussion on the amendment, I wonder if we could call the vote. I'd like the clerk to please read out the vote.

Go ahead.

The Clerk: I can read out the motion as amended, that second paragraph, just so it's clear. With the amendment, the motion would read:

That the committee prioritize this motion over all other current and future studies and other committee business, so that the committee devote its first meeting at the return from the holiday recess to it and that the committee report to the House that given these job cuts, it would be inappropriate for the CBC/Radio-Canada to grant bonuses to executive members.

The Chair: Now, please call the vote. Thank you.

Yes, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'd like to move an amendment to the motion, then.

I had my hand up before the vote was called.

The Chair: I called the vote.

You had spoken, Mr. Coteau, and you had ended, so I am calling the vote.

Mr. Michael Coteau: The clerk spoke, though, and read the actual amendment, and I put my hand up, and then you said you were going to call the vote. My hand was up before you said, “Let's go to the vote.”

The Chair: I did allow you to speak, but go ahead, just allow.... Otherwise, we're going to be wordsmithing this whole thing. Let's get it moving.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I made a suggestion earlier that rather than jump to a conclusion, maybe we'd just direct the clerk to put in the motion, rather than the last piece that was added by MP Thomas, a focus that's more specifically on inviting Ms. Tait to come to speak on the issue of bonuses.

The Chair: You suggested that, and Ms. Thomas said to leave the motion exactly as it is.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can I make an amendment, then?

The Chair: If you're making a subamendment, please do so. Can you read it out, please?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'm really confused about the decision you're making.

You've invited committee members to vote. The clerk read the text, which included the proposed amendment.

I'm not opposed to Mr. Coteau's idea. I think is a good proposal, but Ms. Thomas has rejected it. You called for a vote and the clerk has read the amended motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is it the unanimous will of the committee to just go ahead and vote?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'm putting the question, Madam Chair. According to the Standing Orders, I believe that once the question has been put, there may be no further debate on the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. That's in the Standing Orders, yes.

The vote was called. Mr. Coteau had made this point before the vote was called. He is now making the point after the vote has been called.

The vote stands. We shall call the vote now. The clerk was reading out the motion only so that we could vote. I had called the vote.

Mr. Michael Coteau: On a point of order, Madam Chair, it was very clear that you allowed me to read my subamendment to the motion. You allowed me to do that, and I started to do it. I finished saying what I said. You asked if it was written down. We were at that point. You allowed me to propose a subamendment.

I don't understand why we're going backwards now to another point in this meeting process. If that's the case, I would like to know how we got to a point where I was allowed to propose the subamendment. You asked me to read it, and now we're back to, "It wasn't allowed." I don't understand that.

The Chair: The clerk is ruling, because she is keeping tabs on what is going on. She's ruling that, in fact, we had called for the vote before you made your subamendment. Therefore, I should allow for the vote to occur. Those are the rules, according to the clerk.

We should go to the vote.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I think the clerk is trying to say something.

• (5815)

The Chair: Go ahead, Geneviève.

The Clerk: I don't have anything to add.

The Chair: She's already spoken to me and said we should go to the vote.

Thank you.

I will call the vote now.

Are you going to challenge the chair, Mr. Coteau?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I won't challenge the chair.

The Chair: Let's go to the vote, please.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can I ask whether we can suspend for one minute?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You have to go to the vote.

The Chair: The vote is to be taken.

Let's call the vote, please.

Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can I ask that the amendment be read one more time? I think that's my right. Isn't it?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It's already been read.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I don't see it in writing anywhere.

The Chair: I will read it.

Look at the second paragraph in the motion:

That the committee prioritize this motion over all other current and future studies and other committee business, so that the committee devote its first meeting at the return from the holiday recess to it and that the committee report to the House that given these job cuts, it would be inappropriate for the CBC to grant bonuses to executive members.

That's what we're voting on. Please call the vote.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: We should go on to the amended motion.

I am not going to read it again, because you know what it is.

Mr. Champoux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, we've had a chance to discuss amendments to the motion. I honestly thought that Mr. Coteau's proposal to add this to the items we wanted to discuss with Ms. Tait was a good one. However, since a vote was requested, we had to follow the procedure. We did the right thing.

It could have been worded better, but the intention is there. That's why I voted for Ms. Thomas's motion. We can send a message to the House of Commons that, even though we haven't yet met with Ms. Tait, it's clear to all members of this committee, who represent all the parties recognized in the House of Commons, that it would be inappropriate for bonuses to be granted to the officials of CBC/Radio-Canada. The message may not be drafted in the way Mr. Coteau and I would have liked, but it is nevertheless appropriate.

Madam Chair, we have discussed the motion and amendments at length. Everyone understands it and knows what it's about. So I request a vote, please.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will vote now on the motion as amended, please.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The motion as amended is unanimously passed by the committee. Thank you.

Now I would like us to go back to—

Mr. Peter Julian: I thought you just adjourned, Madam Chair. You used the gavel. I took that as adjourning.

The Chair: I know. I'm sorry. I was just so anxious to get back to the witnesses. We have 10 more minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, I'm very sorry. As you know, I have a bunch of hats, and I have another committee to run to.

The Chair: I know. Can you not wait for another two minutes? You're up next for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: I realize that. That's why I asked Mr. Champoux to speak later. Unfortunately, he is....

The Chair: Do you not have two and a half minutes, Mr. Julian?

• (5820)

Mr. Peter Julian: I need to leave. I would ask to adjourn.

The Chair: Is there any opposition to adjourning?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes, Madam Chair. We have until 10:22 a.m. You stated that earlier. We would not be able to move for adjournment without unanimous consent before that time. I would ask that we use the last two minutes wisely.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will continue with the witnesses.

The next person up for questioning would have been—

Mr. Peter Julian: No, Madam Chair, I'm not giving away my time. I have to stay here as long as you're not adjourned.

The Chair: All right, Mr. Julian. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I have a question for Mr. Peinert and Mr. Speer, now that they're aware of the over \$1 billion the federal government provides in indirect subsidies. Basically, we subsidize advertisers to advertise on Meta and Google.

Does either of you, starting with Mr. Peinert, given your testimony on the importance of fact-based journalism, feel it's a good idea for Canada to continue to subsidize Meta and Google to such a massive extent?

Dr. Erik Peinert: No, I do not think that is necessary or a good idea, given the scale and profitability of this company—of either of these platforms, in fact.

Mr. Sean Speer: I'm afraid I don't know enough to answer. It may be that there's a case that it's the best means of reaching Cana-

dians with information that the Government of Canada wants to communicate, in which case the trade-off there might make it worth continuing to use those platforms to reach Canadians in the same way that The Hub and others want to reach Canadians.

Mr. Peter Julian: I would like to move on to Madam Benavidez.

I appreciated your comments about algorithm transparency. This is something that has come up in the U.S. Congress and in Canada. I have a private member's bill, Bill C-292, which would force algorithm transparency for platforms. Senator Ed Markey in the U.S. Congress is presenting similar legislation. In fact, his legislation inspired our legislation here.

The platforms are opposed, because the possibility of liability, once those algorithms are exposed, is something that they're concerned about. They're concerned they might be liable for the kinds of algorithms, the “malgorithms”, they're promoting that have led to so many incidents of violence.

What is your feeling on algorithm transparency in legislation? Do you feel it's important that legislators move forward with this type of legislation?

Ms. Nora Benavidez: It's incredibly important that you move forward with this legislation. Free Press Action endorses Senator Markey's legislation. We just met with him yesterday regarding the algorithmic justice and online platform transparency act. Companies often will acquiesce under threat of regulation. We need a first step of understanding what they are doing with their business models, their moderation practices and more.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter. You had four seconds left. That's good.

I will now go to Mr. Shields for the Conservatives—

Mr. Michael Coteau: Madam Chair, I think we're way past our time.

The Chair: We have two minutes.

Mr. Michael Coteau: It's 25 minutes after.

The Chair: Oh. It's 25 after. I can't see the clock very well from here. I'm sorry.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I would move a motion to adjourn.

The Chair: Is there any objection to the motion to adjourn? No?

Then this committee is adjourned, and I want to thank the witnesses for coming and listening to us debate a motion on the floor.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>