



Mr. Gary Schellenberger
Chair
Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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Mr. Schellenberger:

The Government thanks the Committee for its work on this review and wishes to express its appreciation to all of those who appeared before the Committee to share their views on the role of a public broadcaster in the 21st century. Individual Canadians, as well as representatives of Canada's cultural sector, contributed to a thoughtful discussion.

The Canadian broadcasting system has changed dramatically since the 1930s when CBC/Radio-Canada was created. At that time, CBC/Radio-Canada operated in an environment with only a handful of other Canadian radio services. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, and in particular since the mid-1990s, new technologies have resulted in Canadians, both as citizens and consumers, having an unprecedented power of choice from Canadian and foreign sources on television, radio and on the Internet. Today, the media landscape is filled with more media outlets and more fragmented audiences. This landscape presents great opportunities for Canadian businesses and creators, but also challenges assumptions about how best to meet the needs of Canadians.

In this context, the Government understands why the Committee would seek to conduct an investigation of the role for a public broadcaster in the 21st century. The challenge the Committee clearly had was providing a broad perspective and clear definition of what future role a national public broadcaster should play in the new environment.

Of the recommendations offered by the Standing Committee's report, many are addressed directly to CBC/Radio-Canada and are operational in focus. Given that CBC/Radio-Canada operates at arm's length, the Government will not respond directly to these recommendations, and rather is confident that CBC/Radio-Canada will give the Committee's recommendations due consideration. For the same reason, we will also not respond to the recommendations directed to the CRTC by the Committee. However, we note that the CRTC is currently conducting public consultations on the role of new media

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broadcasting, an issue touched on by the Standing Committee Report, and encourage Canadians to make their views known on these issues to the CRTC.

The Government also notes that the Committee has essentially endorsed the existing mandate for the CBC with the addition of digital media and emerging technologies as necessary to fulfilling this mandate. It is the policy of this government that CBC/Radio-Canada is and will remain Canada's national public broadcaster in English and French while recognizing CBC/Radio-Canada's freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence, as stipulated in the *Broadcasting Act*.

The Committee's key recommendation calls for a "Memorandum of Understanding" between CBC/Radio-Canada and the Government. This proposed agreement would be negotiated by CBC/Radio-Canada and the Government to set out the mutual responsibilities of each party, and would address the issue of stable, multi-year funding.

Although the Government strongly supports the principle of accountability to Canadians, which underlies this recommendation, such an agreement is not advisable under the current legislative framework. Funding to CBC/Radio-Canada is provided by appropriations voted by Parliament. The Government cannot bind Parliament as to the level or duration of CBC/Radio-Canada's funding, as this is a matter within the sovereign discretion of Parliament.

There are some important conclusions drawn by the Committee's report, including meeting the needs of official-language minority communities as set out in recommendations 1.8 and 1.9, as well as such shared views on the need to contribute to shared national consciousness and identity.

We also agree with the Committee that CBC/Radio-Canada should provide enhanced reporting of its operations. By setting clearer goals and using more effective performance measurements, CBC/Radio-Canada will be better able to demonstrate to Canadians that it is acting as a responsible and accountable public institution. CBC/Radio-Canada is expected to make the best use of its existing resources, which currently exceed \$1 billion annually.

Again, the Government thanks the Committee for its investigation on the role of a public broadcaster in the 21st century. The Committee's work has provided valuable insights on how Canadians view CBC/Radio-Canada. The Government's objective is to ensure that Canadians continue to find deep value in their broadcasting system. Our goal is to put Canadians first and ensure that their broadcasting system meets their needs in a changing media landscape.



Josée Verner, P.C., M.P.