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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



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• (1605)

[English]

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

[Translation]

Good afternoon, everyone.

[English]

Everyone looks so very far away with the new rules.

Welcome to meeting number—

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): My apologies, but I have a brief point of order.

We started a little bit late, but I'm hoping that we'll have the full two hours with Ms. Tait, if she's kind enough to stay for the full two hours.

The Chair: Yes, we will have the full two hours.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Welcome to meeting number 118 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I want to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted by the committee on December 7, 2023, and March 19, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of job cuts announced at CBC/Radio-Canada.

Before we begin, I want to remind all members and other meeting participants in the room of the following preventative procedures.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times.

As indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker's office to all members on Monday, April 29, the following measures have been taken to prevent audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced by a new model that reduces the possibility of feedback. The new earpieces are black, whereas

the former earpieces were grey. Please only use a black approved earpiece.

By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the beginning of the meeting.

When you're not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the middle of the sticker for this purpose that you will find on the table; there's a little round sticker with a funny looking thing that I think is representative of an earpiece.

Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. There's a little card here called "Guidelines for Meeting Participants".

The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and reduce the chance of feedback from an ambient earpiece.

These measures are in place so we can conduct our business without interruption and protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters, because we have had some serious incidents involving interpreters with regard to this issue.

I want to make a few comments for the benefit of members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Please go through the chair when you're asking or answering questions. For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function in the chat room.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

We welcome once again Ms. Catherine Tait, who is president and chief executive officer of CBC/Radio-Canada, and Marco Dubé, chief transformation officer and executive vice-president, people and culture.

Ms. Tait will have up to five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Ms. Tait, I think you know how this works. Somebody's going to ask you a question, and depending on what round we are in, we're going to tell you how much time everyone has for questions and answers. Thank you.

I invite you, Ms. Tait, to begin your remarks.

Ms. Catherine Tait (President and Chief Executive Officer, CBC/Radio-Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm pleased to be here to provide an update on CBC/Radio-Canada to the committee.

We shared with you a letter back in March to clarify the facts about our financial situation. Since then, our financial outlook has improved. Last December's estimated shortfall of \$125 million for fiscal year 2024-25 has been reduced to about \$20 million. This reduction is due to steps we have taken, including significant cuts to our operational costs, the elimination of 205 vacant positions and 141 occupied positions, and the additional \$42-million investment in the recent federal budget. This will allow us to maintain our services and to manage this year without further job cuts to balance our budget.

However, to be clear, we are not out of the woods. You have heard it from other witnesses: All Canadian media organizations face serious challenges from a digital world ruled by global players who simply do not share the same commitment to our country's interests.

• (1610)

[Translation]

I believe this is what this committee should consider today. How will we—here in Canada—support our own media ecosystem when the dominant players are leveraging global revenues with little regard for the needs of our local communities?

We saw it last summer when Meta blocked Canadian news in the middle of a national fire emergency, when communities facing evacuation desperately needed up-to-date information.

[English]

Canadians are spending more and more time on digital platforms. Canadian media, broadcasters and newspapers are subject to laws and regulations as well as established standards of accuracy, impartiality and balance. Foreign digital platforms operate in Canada without any of these obligations.

There's another problem. The more time that Canadians spend on foreign platforms, the less they are finding out about their own country, the challenges we share and the things we have in common. That mutual understanding is the glue that keeps societies together.

We believe that the role for the public broadcaster is to connect Canadians to ensure that they know what's going on in their communities and across the country. I'd like to quickly give you just a few examples of what CBC/Radio-Canada does to strengthen these national conversations.

Our presence in communities means that we share local stories with the entire country. We've been shifting resources to expand that presence to places like Kingston, Nanaimo, Grand Prairie and Lethbridge. It's a start, but there are still 35 communities with populations of over 50,000 that don't have a local CBC/Radio-Canada presence.

[Translation]

We present big nation-building events like the Olympics and Paralympics, the ADISQ gala and the Junos. These events bring Cana-

dians together in the millions and they showcase the incredible talent we have in this country.

[English]

We're committed to reaching young Canadians and newcomers where they are. That's why we launched Collab, our partnership with hundreds of libraries across the country. We host media literacy programs, teach podcasting and video production and introduce new audiences to Canadian music, books and other great programming. We're the only media in Canada offering children kids' news in both English and French on digital, on TikTok, on YouTube and in the classroom. It helps them decipher their world and learn how to develop digital smarts and critical thinking about the news.

[Translation]

We showcase uniquely Canadian stories. *Lakay Nou* on Radio-Canada is winning praise for its portrayal of Montreal's Haitian-Canadian community. *Bones of Crows* is the first indigenous drama in the history of television produced in English, French and Cree.

[English]

Still Standing takes Canadians to small towns they may never have heard of and shows us how much we all have in common. No one else does this.

Just this morning, we announced our latest project, Public Spaces Incubator, a first ever collaboration between four public broadcasters—

The Chair: Can you please wrap up, Ms. Tait. Your time is up.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —to develop solutions to make online conversations safer for all of us.

Our focus is simple: Keep Canadians informed, build trust in public institutions, strengthen democracy and protect and promote Canadian culture.

Thank you.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we begin the questions round, and we start with the Conservatives for a six-minute round. The six minutes include the questions and the answers.

We are starting with Mrs. Thomas for the Conservatives for six minutes, please.

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

Ms. Tait, on December 4, you announced that 800 jobs would be cut from the CBC. You said that 600 individuals would be fired, and 200 vacancies would not be filled, totalling 800.

At that time, you were asked whether or not executives would be given bonuses for 2023. You said that you weren't ruling it out. When you came to this committee, you confirmed once again that you were not ruling it out. In fact, you confirmed that a decision would be made by the end of March.

Now it's May, so I'm curious. Are you going to be awarded a bonus for 2023?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I said at the time, Madam Chair, that we have a process that is very rigorous. After internal deliberations with the board of directors at our June board meeting, once we've had a chance to present the audited financial statements, there will be a discussion and we will inform employees at that time of the decision that is taken.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait, an access to information request was put forward by the Taxpayers Federation asking for those 2023 bonus amounts. The CBC responded by saying that they would provide those, but not until May 10. Today is May 7.

I'm curious if three days prior you would be able to give those numbers here. I'm sure you have them. You just have not agreed to release the documents yet. However, I did write you a letter—I gave you a heads-up—so I'm curious if you'd share them here.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I thank the honourable member from Lethbridge for the opportunity to clarify a lot of misinformation that has been circulating regarding performance pay in 2022-23.

To be clear, CBC/Radio-Canada has—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry, Ms. Tait. I think there might have been a misunderstanding. I'm not asking about 2022. I'm asking about 2023.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Is that fiscal year 2023-24?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm asking about fiscal year 2023. That decision with regard to bonuses was made in "March". Those are your words. You told this committee that those decisions would be made—

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

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Just for clarification, is Ms. Thomas asking about fiscal year 2022-23 or 2023-24? This is just for the avoidance of doubt.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's not a point of order.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: That's not a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I think he's clarifying the question, so it's a point of clarification.

I think Ms. Tait wishes to know what year you're referring to. Years go from one year to another, April to April.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I trust that my time was stopped.

The Chair: Yes, the time was stopped.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I'm referring to fiscal year 2023, which ended in March of 2024.

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's actually fiscal year 2023-24. For that year, we have not issued any performance pay, because we have not yet reviewed the final results of the year that ended on March 31, 2024.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait, you are head of the management team. You confirmed, at our last committee meeting, that it is you and your management team who make that decision with regard to bonuses that are given out. You confirmed that the decision is made "by" no later than the end of March of 2024. You then made the comment that the board would have to sign off on that recommendation "in June".

I understand that the sign-off is coming up, but you do know what the recommendation is. As of the end of March of 2024, what is the recommendation for your 2023 bonus?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I've said previously, these conversations are subject to internal deliberations by the management team to the board of directors. We have not had that conversation with the board. That is scheduled for June 12 and 13. We will have that conversation, at which point the final results will have been audited and reviewed by the Auditor General. We don't simply precipitously pre-announce results when we haven't had the privilege of the auditor and our internal audit process.

Again, those final results are being assembled right now. They will be made available at the beginning—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait, have you been assigned a bonus for 2023? I realize that the board hasn't signed off on it, but have you been assigned a bonus for 2023?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No. I have not.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You have not been assigned a bonus for 2023.

Ms. Catherine Tait: No. I have not.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: So for 2023, there is no bonus coming your way.

● (1620)

Ms. Catherine Tait: I do not know that I have a bonus, because the process, as we have described, for Governor in Council positions is separate from performance pay. My process is that I will be evaluated by the board of directors. A letter of recommendation will go to the government. The government will reflect upon whether or not I or other appointees—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait—

Ms. Catherine Tait: —would receive any performance pay.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait, has the board package for that June meeting gone out?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: No. Okay, because you are member of that board.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I am.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: So you not only have a say with regard to bonuses for the top executives, yourself included; you have a say, not only in March, when you're a member of the management team, the most senior member of the management team, but then you get a second say at the board level. With all due respect, you do have a fair bit of power in terms of bonuses.

I'll ask again: Will you be up for a bonus in the consideration at the board meeting in June?

Ms. Catherine Tait: As I've said previously, this is part of an internal deliberation. It's an HR function. We have to be respectful of the governance—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: But, Ms. Tait, you do know the answer.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —that rules the CBC/Radio-Canada.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: But you do know the answer.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I absolutely do not know the answer.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You have zero clue.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Until I've had those deliberations with the board of directors, I cannot pre-emptively say what the results of the conversation, a future conversation, will be.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Sure—but you know what the recommendation is.

The Chair: You have 39 seconds.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You know what the recommendation is going forward to the board.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I think I've repeated myself enough to say that these are matters that concern the organization that operates at arm's length, like all Crown corporations, and I have to be respectful—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You did confirm that you are the senior member of the management team which makes the decisions, and then those decisions get recommended to the—

The Chair: You have 16 seconds.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —board. You are a member of the board. Therefore, you have access to information to the points and access to the decision-making.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: On a point of order, Madam Chair, this question has been asked, I think, six times now.

The Chair: I was about to mention that I think the question has been clearly asked and the answers have been clearly given.

I think Mrs. Thomas has literally about two seconds left to finish.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Chair, I guess in response to the point of order, since you're ruling in favour of it, I just want to be sure then that no repeat questions are permitted at this table.

Is that the ruling of the Chair?

The Chair: I don't think that was what the member suggested. I think he suggested that the question had been repeated over and over—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay, so what is an appropriate number of times to repeat the question?

The Chair: —and it was getting to be repetitious, because the question was the same and the answers were exactly the same.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

On a point of order, Chair, I'm just looking for a ruling. What would be the number of times that would be appropriate to repeat a question?

The Chair: There is no set number of times—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay, thank you, Chair.

The Chair: —but as a chair—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: —I may decide on how the meeting moves forward.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Allow me to finish speaking, Mrs. Thomas.

Thank you.

I'll now go to the next person with the Liberals, and it's Patricia Lattanzio.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Monsieur Dubé and Ms. Tait, welcome to our committee.

Ms. Tait, I'm going to read off part of the motion that was adopted by this committee to be able to undergo this study:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee invite the CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, Catherine Tait, to appear for no less than two hours on April 9th to answer questions concerning:

1. The increase in funding to the public broadcaster of nearly one hundred million dollars per year;

Can you tell us, Ms. Tait, what the nearly \$100 million noted in this motion represents?

Ms. Catherine Tait: This is the sum of money that was awarded in the main estimates, and it is from Treasury Board, a sum of money that corresponds to salary increases related to inflation. It's salary inflation funding, which all government departments and Crowns receive. It's not incremental new funding. This happens every two to three years.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Would the sum of \$100 million be consistent with past years?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: With regard to bonuses, I just want to have a clearer understanding.

In your opinion, is there a difference between the terms “bonus” and “performance pay”? Are they just the same or different? Is it that one just sounds fancier than the other?

Can you explain?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Thank you for the question.

It has been a point of great frustration that this committee, or some members of this committee, refer to performance pay as a bonus. A bonus, in my mind, is something that is given out on a discretionary basis. Performance pay is a part of the total compensation of an individual that is contracted or agreed upon at the beginning of their employment.

If I could give a very mathematical example, if you are earning \$80,000 and your performance pay is 10% of your \$80,000, that means you're paid \$72,000 until the end of year, when we review targets, key performance indicators and your performance, at which point you're paid out that amount of money.

In the current environment, pretty well all federal agencies, departments, Crown corporations and certainly the private sector use this performance pay as a way to incentivize and retain talent. If we were to eliminate performance pay at CBC/Radio-Canada, we would no longer be competitive in attracting talent to the organization, so it would create quite an obstacle for us.

• (1625)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I would like to hear what the legal risks would be if you were to, let's say, opt to arbitrarily cut the performance pays.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Just to imagine, we have 1,180-odd employees who receive this performance pay. If we were to decide to eliminate it unilaterally after a year where we achieved our performance indicators and our targets, we would be basically in a situation of constructive dismissal, given that those people would have performed the work of the previous 12 months. It does pose a legal risk, but more importantly, it poses a motivation risk, if people do not have this incentive. We know that it is a big driver in the company.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Is the performance pay noted in today's motion.... That's something that you've previously discussed before this committee. Is it something that was changed with regard to your last appearance? Has that undergone—

Ms. Catherine Tait: No.

In fact, performance pay has been part of the compensation regime at CBC/Radio-Canada for close to 20 years, like many of our colleagues, other Crown corporations and government departments. There's nothing new under the sun here.

If I may just correct the record, because there has been information circulated that we paid out performance pay knowing that we were going to announce—or after we announced—cuts.... It's simply untrue. Performance pay for the fiscal year of 2022 to 2023 was paid out in July 2023. We have not as yet paid out or even decided on performance pay for the year ending 2023 to 2024, just to clarify the record.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you for the clarification.

Is the performance pay in question—presumably based on key performance indicators—established at the start of the year relevant to non-unionized staff at CBC/Radio-Canada? If so, what are some of the examples of the roles this issue has in terms of consequences and impacts?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes. When we meet with the board in June we will also discuss the KPIs for the next fiscal year, the current 2024 to 2025 year. The board approves those KPIs.

Those KPIs are based on an analysis of what's going on in the industry and also stretch targets for the non-union employees or unaffiliated employees in the corporation. Those, as you know, can be numbers such as employment equity. It can be reach, digital reach. What we know is that these drivers do impact employees' performance and managers' performance.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: On a different topic, when the board of directors looks into options for the viability of the corporation, as we saw and as was reported in *La Presse* last week, is this a normal threat-and-opportunity assessment by the board of directors, in your opinion?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, absolutely. I mean, every media company in the country—

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, please.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —is looking at ways to combat the digital giants.

The board of directors, I believe, was acting very responsibly in asking management to prepare what we call a “transformation plan”, but which is really a reflection on options for the corporation to better prepare for a digital future and enormous competition.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now go to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux.

Martin, you have six minutes.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

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

Hello, Ms. Tait and Mr. Dubé.

Ms. Tait, the last time you testified before this committee, you talked about CBC/Radio-Canada's financial situation. You said that if the situation improved, you could revisit the decision that had been announced, to eliminate 600 positions divided equally between the French and English services. You will recall the outcry that the announcement prompted. I want to tell you straightaway that the outcry has not entirely died down.

Today, you described for us how things stand now. You talked about the money the government came up with, in particular the exemption you received from reducing your operating costs by 3.3%, and the \$7 million that CBC/Radio-Canada will be able to receive under the agreement with Google Canada. The situation has therefore been restored, from what you just said in your opening remarks.

Are you still saying that cutting jobs remains up in the air or are you going to remove this sword of Damocles that is dangling over the heads of CBC/Radio-Canada employees?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Given that the situation has improved, we can say that for the moment, we can stop cutting jobs. We are also going to try to restore investment in independent production.

Mr. Martin Champoux: In an open letter released this week, Mr. Tousignant, the president of the Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de Radio-Canada, and Ms. Brunet, the president of the Association des réalisateurs, said they were trying to get answers from you concerning 346 positions that were cut between December 2023 and April 2024.

Are they included in the announcements you have made? How were these cuts made? Were they made applying the same ratio as you initially proposed?

These people have had no answer from you. What can you tell them today?

Ms. Catherine Tait: If I may, I am going to ask Marco Dubé to give you some details about that.

Mr. Marco Dubé (Chief Transformation Officer and Executive Vice-President, People and Culture, CBC/Radio-Canada): What I can tell them is that a large majority of the positions that were eliminated were already vacant, so we limited the number of layoffs we did. There were proportionately twice as many layoffs among managers as among unionized employees. At the end of the fiscal year, of the 346 positions, there were a few more at the CBC than at Radio-Canada, and so the initial fear did not materialize. As well, the financial situation has improved, so we have been able to restore the situation. We are very happy about this, and we hope that things will keep going on a positive path.

Mr. Martin Champoux: I will not ask you for any more details about the specific positions that have been eliminated, Mr. Dubé. However, on behalf of the committee, I would like to get those details in writing. If you could send them to us, we would appreciate it.

Ms. Tait, this week it was all hands on deck. We learned that senior management at CBC/Radio-Canada was thinking about a merger formula in order to take on the digital giants and the new market that is taking shape for broadcasters in Quebec and Canada, which you spoke about just now.

Obviously, when there is talk of merging the CBC and Radio-Canada, we cannot expect Quebecers to be reassured and think that all is well, French will be protected, and their identity and culture will be given due consideration. We are worried; we do not think this makes sense.

At your last appearance here, if I recall correctly, you explained that the CBC and Radio-Canada share infrastructure, buildings, technology, equipment, and administrative and financial resources. In fact, you said that CBC/Radio-Canada was one company, except when it comes to programming and news. Do you understand why we might be worried now? You talk about a merger, but what are you going to merge if all there is left to merge is programming and news?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That is not the case at all. We are dealing with a digital shift. We are certainly talking about equipment and all the tools we have for production and distribution. The most important thing is that we be able to compete with the digital giants for this kind of investment.

I am talking about the platforms. I was in Winnipeg for the launch of our new national indigenous strategy and I met with people from Radio-Canada who work alongside people from the CBC. They asked me whether they would someday have the same platform for their rundowns since, for the web, the CBC and Radio-Canada have different systems and websites. This is the kind of deliberation we are engaged in.

Mr. Martin Champoux: You understand that when it comes to how the two entities have been managed in recent years, nothing has gone well for Quebec's unique cultural identity. Nothing has seemed respectful of the cultural difference. It worries us when you talk about merging the two entities even further.

When we think about the possibility, which is not completely crazy, of saying that you are actually trying to protect the CBC from the advent of a potential Conservative government that is threatening to slash its funding or defund it, we think that given that it is one company, what is allocated to Radio-Canada and the French services right now, in particular programming and news, is necessarily going to be used to fund the CBC's operations in order to try to save it, by robbing Peter to pay Paul.

• (1635)

Ms. Catherine Tait: That is not the case at all, I assure you.

The editorial independence of CBC and Radio-Canada continues to be a fundamental principle of our services. In fact, we have invested in a new home for Radio-Canada and we have also invested hugely in IP technology to improve everything being done at Radio-Canada. Personally, I promise you that the strength and importance of Radio-Canada for the French fact and French language will continue to be central to all our deliberations.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

Thank you, Martin.

I now go to the New Democrats, Niki Ashton, for six minutes, please.

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

With executive bonuses, layoffs of workers, cuts to local broadcasting, the use and abuse of non-disclosure agreements to silence and intimidate employees, Canadians may be wondering if we're talking about a major media conglomerate, perhaps Bell Media, but no, we're talking about the publicly funded CBC.

To many Canadians, the CBC, an institution we have built, is increasingly acting like a private corporation, putting profits ahead of everything else. We are aware in recent months about the back and forth on whether or not CBC executives like you, Ms. Tait, will be taking a bonus. Potentially \$15 million being spent on executive bonuses while jobs disappear is wildly irresponsible. Rewarding oneself for failure while families and communities pay the price of job losses and the loss of local programming is unacceptable.

Will you commit to cancelling executive bonuses to save as many jobs as possible?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I believe I've answered this question already, Madam Chair. The consideration on performance pay will be deliberated at our next board meeting.

Also, if I may say, cutting salaries does not—

Ms. Niki Ashton: You've already answered the question. I'll move on to my next one.

Madam Tait, you've talked about allowing communities to tell their stories. Sadly, that's not the case here in northern Manitoba. Our trail-blazing CBC station, North Country, is empty because the CBC has utterly failed to fill the position in a long-term capacity over a number of years. This means that 85,000 people living in first nations and northern communities across our region do not have CBC local programming, contributing to our existence as a media desert. We've been left with the occasional reporter sent from Winnipeg as part of your pop-up initiatives.

Ms. Tate, we are not a tourist destination; we are Canadians who deserve local programming in the CBC and the reopening of our local CBC station. The CBC has an obligation, including through the CRTC, to our station and local programming.

When will the CBC live up to its mandate, including CRTC obligations, and what are you going to do to reinstate local programming and staff-up our CBC station here in northern Manitoba?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'm really delighted to be able to break the news that after many, many months of posting the job in Thompson, Manitoba, we have in fact identified a journalist who will be reporting from Thompson, I believe, in the coming weeks. I checked in with our head of that presence.

Also, just to be clear, during a period of looking at job reductions, we kept the regional position open in Manitoba, because we believe, like you, how important it is. That's why we've opened bureaus in Nanaimo and other places.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'll stop you right there.

It is music to my ears that you have finally hired somebody after this many years. I appreciate the good news being shared. It also goes to show that public pressure works. I'm very much looking forward to this person's starting up and obviously getting the full support of the CBC, particularly CBC Manitoba. That's support we haven't seen the way we've needed to, or certainly the way our reporters have needed to, in the past.

I want to quickly move to another question. When the committee decided to bring you back, multiple former employees reached out to my office to discuss their mistreatment while working at the CBC. Not one of the many people who reached out to me was will-

ing to speak on the record, due to the use and abuse of non-disclosure agreements and non-disparagement agreements, especially when it comes to harassment. These are agreements that we've been told CBC requires employees to sign before they will even investigate.

As a result, I'll have to be somewhat vague in order to protect the identities of the people who reached out. Each person who reached out was recognized as excelling in his or her field. Not one of them had a good thing to say about how his or her time at the CBC ended. They all said that things got worse since you took over. Many of them mentioned directly apprising you of the situation but that nothing changed.

Can you describe CBC's policies on non-disclosure and non-disparagement agreements? Also, are you aware of instances where the CBC has investigated a claim of harassment where the CBC did not rely on a non-disclosure or non-disparagement agreement before starting the investigation?

• (1640)

Ms. Catherine Tait: I will have to ask Marco Dubé to get into the details, because I do not get involved, obviously, in direct personnel matters. However, I am deeply disturbed by what you are saying, and I will absolutely take it to heart. This is news to me. I take it very seriously.

However, maybe Marco can answer the questions—

Ms. Niki Ashton: Just to reiterate, what we are looking for is whether the CBC is aware of an investigation of a claim of harassment where CBC did not rely on the use of a non-disclosure or non-disparagement agreement before starting the investigation.

I will say, Ms. Tait, that we are aware of instances where former employees did raise this directly with you years ago, and nothing was done.

Mr. Marco Dubé: Thank you for your question.

The Chair: You have 38 seconds.

Mr. Marco Dubé: I'll simplify and summarize. We take very seriously all allegations of harassment and violence in the workplace. We assess those claims. We investigate those claims with external investigators.

There are rules around those investigations that are regulated. There's a law, actually, that we have to follow in the labour code.

We do all of that respectfully, and we try, along the way, to protect the victims of those events. Certainly, we try to protect, along the way, the confidentiality of people—

Ms. Niki Ashton: Are you aware of any cases in which an NDA was not used in investigating harassment? That's the question I asked.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but the time is now up.

We move on to the second round, which is a five-minute round, and we begin, for the Conservatives, with Rachel Thomas for five minutes. Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Tait, at our previous committee meeting on January 30, you confirmed that you are at the decision-making table with regard to bonuses. In fact, I'll quote you directly. You said, "They make that decision based on the data that we present to them". In other words, the board makes a decision with regard to bonuses. They sign off on them based on the information that "we"—your management team, which you are the executive leader of—make to them. Ultimately, then, you have a voice at the management table and at the board table. You have two places where you get to speak to whether or not the top eight executives of the CBC get bonuses, and how much. You are one of those top eight. Ms. Tait, what is the recommendation that went forward with regard to the bonuses for the top eight executives for the 2023 fiscal year?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I really am sorry to seem difficult here, but the 2022-23 year has already passed.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I didn't ask about that.

Ms. Catherine Tait: This year—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I was very clear. I'm asking for the 2023 fiscal year.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —so for the 2023-24 year...?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Sure, you can include those three extra months in 2024.

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's our fiscal year. It ends at the end of March 2024, so for 2023-24, no recommendation has been prepared as yet. We are still reviewing our final results. We are a large corporation—\$1.8 billion. A lot of data has to be reviewed, financials have to be audited and KPIs have to be assessed and evaluated. All of that package goes to the board in mid-June, at which point we will discuss it.

By the way, I am not part of that eight. I am separate. As a Governor in Council appointee, I do not participate in the performance pay that the other executives participate in.

• (1645)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay. I can appreciate that.

Either you lied on January 30 or you're lying now, and the reason being.... I'll quote the words that you used at that time. You said, "at the end of the fiscal year, which will be the end of March, [2024] the board of directors will decide". In other words, at the end of March 2024, which has now passed—it's May 7—there would have been a decision made. Now you just told me that no decision has yet been made.

Ms. Catherine Tait: First of all, I really take objection to being called a liar, which has happened several times. It is....

Madam Chair, this is not the first time that I am being called a liar by certain members of this committee. It actually is the first time in a 40-year career that anybody has ever addressed me in this way, so I want to make a personal objection.

Having said that, I made it clear that, at the board meeting following the end of the fiscal year, we would be reviewing the results for the fiscal year. That meeting is always held in June. It gives us the time to review all of the results, to get them audited and to prepare the package, in English and in French, for the board of directors. This is a very large corporation; we do not do this overnight.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait, there are two discrepancies here.

One, I'm looking at your website, and it says, "Senior Executive Team". Your picture is shown there, so you are one of the members of the senior executive team—so that's a point of clarification there.

Two, I read your direct quote when you said that bonus decisions would be made in March 2024. Now you're saying to this committee, no, those decisions haven't been made.

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's correct. They have not been made. They will be made at the—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Then why did you tell us on June 30 that they would be made in March, then?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Because it's the end of the fiscal—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You're either misleading us now or you misled us then.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I am not misleading you. I said that at the end of the fiscal year—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I just read it to you.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —and when the board meets after the end of the fiscal year. We're talking semantics here.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait, have you made recommendations, with your management team, as to whether or not the eight top executives will get bonuses for the 2023-24 fiscal year?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We have not.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: No recommendations have been made?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, we have not.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: When will those recommendations be made?

Ms. Catherine Tait: At the June board meeting—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: By the board...? The management team will have nothing to do with the recommendation?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We will present the results of the financial year and of the KPIs, and we will have an opportunity to discuss them. The HRGC, which is the human resources and governance committee, will review them—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —and they will make their recommendation to the board.

The Chair: You have 13 seconds.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Your management team has had that discussion, yes?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, not as of yet.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Wow. Okay.

Your information, then, provided on January 30 was not correct. You told us that the decision would be made by your management team by the end of March 2024. Now you're telling us, on May 7, that you have not yet had that conversation—

The Chair: I'm afraid the time is up.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —which points to great incompetence.

The Chair: I'm afraid the time is up.

I would like to remind members of this committee that we are a parliamentary committee, and we need to behave with a certain amount of respect towards each other and the witnesses. It is my job, as chair, to ensure that this happens. I would just mention that again so that everyone can be warned about choosing the language they use when they speak to witnesses, ask witnesses questions or speak to each other. Thank you.

Now we go to the next person up, Michael Coteau for the Liberals.

Mr. Coteau, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I do appreciate your being here.

I want to pick up from where I started last time when you were here, just to say that I did disagree with the current system that was in place to provide bonuses just because of the place the country is in. I did make reference to the fact that I didn't think it was aligned with where Canadians were. Having said that, though, I'm glad that the budget is providing more resources—if the budget is passed in Parliament—to mitigate some of the job losses that are there.

I said this before: I'm a big supporter of the CBC. I support the work that you do as an organization. I think it's an important thing for Canadians. It projects our values as Canadians. As a country... It doesn't allow big corporate dollars to influence public news, which I think is a good thing. I also think that having a public broadcaster is good for democracy. So, I do appreciate the work that you do.

I think it's obvious from what we're seeing from the Conservatives.... Again, despite my objections to the bonus piece, I want to talk about the CBC as a whole. It's obvious that the Conservatives want to defund the CBC. There's more to these questions than just the bonuses. It's about defunding the CBC. The leader of the Conservatives and the members on the opposite side have said time after time that they would defund the organization. It's very clear. Their previous leader said the same thing. Canadians have to realize what's at play here when it comes to the constant attacks towards CBC, bonuses aside.

I wanted to say that because I think it's important for people to know that, despite the rhetoric that's coming from the table, there are many Canadians who support the CBC, so thank you for the work you do.

Now I think you have an opportunity in front of you to revisit, perhaps, bonus structures in the future. Do you think that there may be an opportunity in this June meeting, once the actual bonuses have been issued, to actually start a conversation about what that structure will look like the following fiscal year—so in 2024-25?

• (1650)

Ms. Catherine Tait: We work with Mercer, a compensation experts company. Every year, we review the tools and the industry standards and norms to make sure that we are aligned with other members of either the media industry or other Crown corporations so that we're not out of step. We try to peg our compensation at about the 50th percentile. So, we're not paying more; we're actually at the 50th percentile.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I apologize for interrupting you. I have a minute and a half left.

Are you saying that the structure you have in place today is aligned with the other big broadcasters in Canada and maybe the United States, or just Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We only look at Canada.

Mr. Michael Coteau: You only look at Canada, and you're about halfway, at the 50th percentile.

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's correct.

If I may answer the rest of your question.... With respect to looking at other models, we have asked Mercer to look at other models because, obviously, we've been paying attention to the concerns not just of this committee but also of external critics or commentators. We're not tone-deaf; we're paying attention.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I hope that when that conversation comes up again at the June meeting, you can look at a revisit because you may be in a similar situation in the upcoming fiscal...where you're going to have to make some adjustments. Please provide that flexibility if possible.

I have 50 seconds left.

Do you have any updates on anything that's happening to support young people through the CBC?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely. This is my favourite subject.

We have absolutely blown it out of the court on a show called *Street Cents*, which is now running on TikTok. If you'll remember, 25 years ago, it was a TV show produced out of Halifax, Nova Scotia. Today it has been rethought and reimaged, and millions of kids are using it. It's fantastic.

What I'm really delighted to talk about is what we're doing for the Olympics and the Paralympics this year in Paris.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Is it full broadcasting for the Paralympics?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely, full broadcasting.

We just did a launch event, a 100-day countdown. The slogan is "Brave is Unbeatable". We have Michael J. Fox doing the voice-over on the English takes—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tait. If you could, wrap it up, please.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —and Céline Dion doing the voice-over on the French. This is thrilling for our kids.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

The Chair: Now I go to the Bloc Québécois, Martin Champoux.

Martin, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, I am going to try to navigate somewhere between the aggressive posture taken by the Conservatives and the deferential one adopted by my Liberal friends, and ask questions in order to get answers.

I am wondering whether it is appropriate to be proposing this deliberation about a merger, which we were talking about earlier at the end of my last round of questions.

The message is not getting through between you and the francophones at Radio-Canada and the public in general. What gets reported about your decisions is not always something to brag about. There was the podcast translated in Paris; you apologized, but it was a huge gaffe. There was how the "N-word" was handled with the episode involving columnist Simon Jodoin. There was also Wendy Mesley, fired simply for trying to explain the different sensibility of Quebeckers, who used the "N-word" several times at a work meeting. There are also the circumstances surrounding the resignation of Michel Bissonnette and the cuts you announced as being equally divided between the CBC and Radio-Canada, when CBC and Radio-Canada have nothing like the same performance or the same number of employees.

In short, you have done a lot of things that did not really result in you having a high popularity rating in Quebec. There is an expression in English that you must know: "read the room"—interpret the signals. Do you think the time was right for engaging in that exercise when you knew that the minister is in the process of doing the same thing herself? She is in the process of reviewing the governance, structure and mandate of CBC/Radio-Canada herself. But along you come with just about the same project and the same process, at the same time as the minister, whose job it also is to review the mandate of CBC/Radio-Canada.

I have to wonder about your motives. You are getting to the end of your term. Why not leave this project to your successor, who will be announced in the months ahead, rather than tying their hands with decisions that have already been made? That is how a columnist recently put it.

I would like to hear your comments on this, unfortunately in just a little time, because time is running out.

• (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 33 seconds, Ms. Tait.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Catherine Tait: To be quite clear, this work was initiated at the request of the board of directors, precisely in order to define options and ideas for the next CEO.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Why not let the minister do her job? Did you question the board's decision?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I hope that all our findings are going to contribute to the expert panel's work. We are going to convey all the ideas considered. This is certainly not something that has to be decided today. The board of directors asked that we engage in this kind of deliberation before I leave. That was the idea.

Mr. Martin Champoux: I am prepared to continue, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Nice try, Martin. I now go to Ms. Ashton.

Niki, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

One of the anonymous messages that I received refers to the use of NDAs by the CBC as "an ironclad policy that is enforced by CBC's legal department".

One of the people who reached out was a journalist who was dealing with a trauma-related injury as a result of the type of stories they were being asked to cover. After taking a pause from their job to heal, they returned to work with a request for accommodation, something that CBC was unwilling to accommodate. CBC eventually fired them, beginning a long fight for compensation. CBC refused to take responsibility for the injury. Not only that, despite this person's saying to the CBC that they couldn't do their job, CBC management reached out to their insurance provider to get the person's benefits cancelled, saying that they could do their job. This person felt this was retribution. It's hard to imagine otherwise.

Under your leadership, Ms. Tait, is it CBC's policy to punish employees who became disabled on the job and spoke out?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely not.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yet this person went through this situation and your corporation not only fired them—

Ms. Catherine Tait: If I can have a moment to respond to—

Ms. Niki Ashton: —but cancelled their compensation.

No, that's okay. I think the fact that this case exists is very problematic for the reputation of the CBC.

I would say that another case—

Ms. Catherine Tait: We'd appreciate the opportunity to respond.

Ms. Niki Ashton: —was an example of the CBC targeting an employee who required specific accommodations for their disability, yet CBC refused despite the fact this would be a contributing factor to their disability. This employee made clear they felt that this was punitive and retaliatory. CBC was unwilling to make accommodations in that case. NDAs were used.

I also want to bring up the fact that the BBC, as a matter of policy, stopped using NDAs in 2014 following the clear abuse of these to cover up for Jimmy Savile's pedophilia.

Has the CBC discussed eliminating the usage of NDAs to stop silencing employment complaints, including on cases of harassment?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'd ask Marco to answer that question.

Mr. Marco Dubé: Yes.

Thank you for your question.

Madam Chair, I think the MP is misinformed. We don't comment specific on HR files, but I don't think the MP is conveying information that's completely accurate. Since it is anonymous information, it's very hard for us to be able to respond in a specific way, but I will say that we take all allegations very seriously—

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Dubé, we are talking about the rampant usage of NDAs and you have said nothing that refers to that reality.

The Chair: I think we've gone over time, Ms. Ashton. I'm sorry.

• (1700)

Ms. Niki Ashton: I am not misinformed. I would appreciate an answer on that.

The Chair: I'm going to move on to the Conservatives for the next round, to Mr. Gourde, Jacques Gourde, for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, thank you for being with us here at the committee.

When you took up your position, about five or six years ago, you were seen as being a breath of fresh air for CBC/Radio-Canada. Now we get the feeling that the CBC is on its last breath. You have done a lot of work, you and your board of directors, to try to balance the budget, but there is still a deficit. The flagship is sinking, however, as the CBC's ratings prove.

Do you see Radio-Canada as a lifeline to rescue the CBC?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I think I already gave my opinions about the CBC's performance at our last meeting. We did point out that, yes, there has been a drop in the television ratings in the English-language market, but not just at the CBC. That decline is happening in all English-language markets. However, we are seeing a significant rise in ratings on the digital platforms. CBC is reaching almost—

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I am going to interrupt you, Ms. Tait, because I do not want to make you repeat everything you have already said.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage spoke to the media and announced that she wanted to change the mandate of CBC/Radio-Canada. Oddly, almost at the same time, one week apart, the media reported that you may be considering a merger of Radio-Canada and the CBC.

Was political pressure brought to bear on you to go in that direction, you or your board of directors?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Not at all. I am going to say it again: There will be no merger of CBC and Radio-Canada. We are looking at how to compete with the digital giants, so we can find solutions for the digital future.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Ms. Tait. So the deliberation comes straight from you.

Radio-Canada has managed to incorporate the identity and culture of Quebecers and francophones outside Quebec, and the ratings prove that it is a success. Unfortunately, the CBC does not seem to have managed to do the same thing, and the ratings prove that as well. Why has the CBC been unable to incorporate English-speaking Canadian culture in order to succeed?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Mr. Dubé, can you answer that question?

Mr. Marco Dubé: Madam Chair, I will be happy to answer the member's question.

Mr. Gourde, I think that allegation is false. There is no doubt that Radio-Canada is distinctive; I entirely agree with you. That also applies to the distinctive nature of the CBC among anglophones in the rest of the country. The CBC is number one in most markets with its morning radio show. Every week, the CBC reaches a great many Canadians, who are getting younger and younger, on its digital platforms. The CBC is a leader among English-language podcast producers. I think the CBC's relevance is apparent. Judging the CBC on the performance of conventional linear television in the most competitive market in the world—

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I am sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Dubé, but I do not have a lot of time left.

Ms. Tait, what is it that characterizes Quebec's francophone culture? What is it that characterizes anglophone culture outside Quebec, elsewhere in Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: If I may say so, we are talking about several cultures. Certainly the French fact and the francophonie are very important, especially for our Radio-Canada audience. Nonetheless, there is still a strong attachment to the CBC in English Canada, but it is much more diverse. There is a huge difference between the anglophone and francophone audiences, but they are both very important for Canada.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: The CBC's anglophone audience does not identify with the CBC. Has the CBC become too Americanized?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Not at all. We broadcast almost 100% Canadian content during prime time. We are well aware that English-speaking Canadians still feel tremendous loyalty to our content. If I talk about—

[English]

The Chair: You have 19 seconds.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, what characterizes anglophone culture and who could change things at the CBC?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We talk about our communities. We talk about indigenous experience in the north. We talk about experience in western Canada. We talk about all these things. English-speaking Canadians have their own culture too. You can talk to Ms. Thomas, who is sitting beside you, about that.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now go to the Liberals and Ms. Jenica Atwin for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Tait and Mr. Dubé, for being with us this afternoon.

I'm a new face on this committee, just kind of joining in here, and I'm really happy to have the opportunity to ask some questions today.

As you mentioned, CBC is a very large corporation. There's lots going on and lots to do. I'm just curious: Do you have conversations with other public broadcasters globally or provincially about the changes and challenges that public broadcasters are facing?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely. I'm the chair of a thing called the global task force for Public Media Alliance, and that group is six of the largest public broadcasters. We meet regularly, and we talk about challenges.

I'm delighted to say that we'll be hosting the annual meeting of public broadcasters here in Ottawa in October to talk about the issues that we all face— issues of disinformation, issues of financial challenges, issues of identity—and the role of public broadcasting in the future.

I can reassure the committee members that our industry is in crisis, not just CBC/Radio-Canada but the entire industry. You've heard it from other witnesses.

Rather than be over-indexing on performance pay, I would urge this committee to think about the solutions for the future of domestic media in this country—not just public, but public, private, news and entertainment, because we are in crisis. I've been in this business 40 years, and never before have I seen such great pressure on our domestic industry, and it is very worrisome. We see people dis-

appearing, companies disappearing and production houses shutting. It is extremely worrisome. It's terrible to lose one individual employee, let alone 140.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Would you have any suggestions for some of those solutions that might be put forward that could be helpful for our committee?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I could go on for hours, and I will let the minister invite her expert panel to have some reflection on that. I think sustainable, long-term funding is one of the solutions, and I look forward to being able to converse with that panel when they are announced.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: How might other organizations be adapting to the changes in, say, the advertising market, given that hundreds of millions of dollars that used to be relied on may no longer be available? What kind of shifts are taking place?

Ms. Catherine Tait: The advertising industry is also under extreme pressure. We've seen a decline in traditional television and advertising. At CBC/Radio-Canada, we've also been able to increase our digital advertising but nowhere near at the same rate. You've heard the digital pennies versus linear dollars analogy.

All of us are looking at how we produce the same amount of content and how we deliver the same amount of information in more efficient ways. To Mr. Champoux's question, how do we transform the way we produce the content so that it's more efficiently done rather than at the higher costs of the past?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: How are the various institutions moving to address the risk of structural shortfalls going forward, and how does CBC/Radio-Canada compare?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I think we're all struggling with the structural issues.

When we look at Google, Facebook, Netflix or Amazon, which have penetrated our market with no or few regulatory obligations, we are really at a loss, to be honest. We're doing our very best every day to maximize our impact and to maintain services for our audiences, but there are really no quick fixes here unless we are willing to stand up and say it's time for the digital giants to give back.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: With regard to some of the job losses we've seen, how many jobs become vacant in an average fiscal year?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's a good question. We probably have about 500 positions, either through resignation or through retirement, that become available in any given year.

• (1710)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Simply put, there's a regular churn of CBC employees who may come and go.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Absolutely.

If I may say—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —in the past, CBC/Radio-Canada had an employee body of about 10,000. Today, we're at 7,500. Of our budget, 90% is dedicated to our workforce. If something hits us, like economic hardship or financial hardship, the only lever we have is through workforce adjustment—just to be clear.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Atwin.

I'll now go to our third round, beginning with Tom Kmiec for the Conservatives.

You have five minutes, Mr. Kmiec.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let's talk first about francophones outside Quebec. When I go door to door in my riding and I tell people that the CBC's funding is going to be cut, they are only very rarely not happy to hear it. However, when I tell francophones in my riding that there will be no budget cuts at Radio-Canada, but there are discussions about a potential merger, that concerns them. La Presse told us that a source who is well informed about the issue who requested anonymity has confirmed that this transformation plan for competing with the digital giants exists.

Ms. Tait, you were almost categorical when you said the two services would not be merged, and yet other comments made by Mr. Dubé on the radio and in the press indicate that this big question is going to be considered by the board of directors. So where does the truth lie? Will this issue be considered, yes or no?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: So the board of directors is not going to consider it—

Ms. Catherine Tait: Merging the two services is not part of our deliberations at all. We are talking about harmonizing services, technologies and platforms and solutions of that nature, but we are not talking about content.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: You see why there is a problem.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Merging content is not on the table at all.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It is not just content. When you say “harmonize”, that can be synonymous with “merge”. So what are we talking about?

This is what Mr. Dubé said:

The next CEO will be the one deciding these major questions, but behind [our deliberations] there is really the wise use of public funds, and Canadians expect us to use money efficiently. They expect to have quality programming in French and English, but they also expect us to be an organization that does not duplicate resources just for the fun of duplicating resources.

Where is there “duplication” of resources at the moment? Is it in programming?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I am going to ask Mr. Dubé to answer.

Mr. Marco Dubé: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to clarify my thinking on that point, Mr. Kmiec.

We are currently looking into how we are organized for continuing the digital transition in the very long term. The editorial independence of both Radio-Canada and the CBC is extremely precious and we are going to protect it, because that is what preserves the distinctiveness of each of the media in its own market. That is the key to our success.

However, CBC/Radio-Canada has been one company for almost 90 years, and over those years we have always shared resources, because that is a wise and efficient way of spending the public funds we are given to produce programming. What we need to do now is imagine how that works in a digital universe.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Dubé, a series of articles published in La Presse talked about the fact that Radio-Canada and the CBC have a lot of services in common, as you said: financial administration, human resources, equipment, technology, buildings and infrastructure. So what is left that would not be affected by this grand merger plan?

You are using a synonym, the idea of harmonization. As a francophone outside Quebec, however, I understand that the board of directors is going to be considering a merger of Radio-Canada and the CBC.

Mr. Marco Dubé: There are still several places in the organization where we could work more closely. That does not relate to programming; it relates to the technologies, and here I am talking about the technologies that will be used to build the future, not the technologies of the past.

Official language minority communities are a perfect example of how the CBC and Radio-Canada can collaborate. The reason we are able to offer services in French in communities outside Quebec is that we are able to make the most of the resources of stations where francophones and anglophones work alongside one another to produce distinct, independent and different programming that responds appropriately to the needs of each of the markets.

• (1715)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I am going to ask you the question again: What is the board of directors going to be considering this fall, exactly? You have talked about new software and new technologies, but you told the press that infrastructure was already being shared. What I want to know is what is going to be considered by the board of directors.

Mr. Marco Dubé: It is too early to tell you what the board of directors is going to be considering this fall. The plan is not yet finished—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I am not asking you what it is going to be considering—

Mr. Marco Dubé: —and deliberations are still ongoing.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I am asking you for the substance of what it is going to be considering, the content.

Mr. Marco Dubé: We are going to be looking at how we organize our resources so we can continue the digital transition, in a universe where conventional linear media are in decline and audiences are going over to the digital giants' platforms. We want to continue to be a relevant public broadcaster.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'm going to go to the Liberals and Marc Serré.

Marc, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I think there's a correction here. I think it's Taleeb.

The Chair: Then I should be informed about it, please.

It's Mr. Noormohamed.

Monsieur Serré, I'm sorry.

Taleeb, you are up next for five minutes.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, one of the things I'd like to focus a little bit on.... When I was in the room and then while I was out, I was still following some of the conversation that was going on. I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the way in which the CBC, looking forward, thinks about the importance of regional programming, regional representation, and the conversations that CBC is going to be a part of in terms of ensuring that Canadians have access to Canadian content from across this country, particularly from small communities, rural communities and indigenous communities. How are you thinking about them in the construct of the current environment?

Ms. Catherine Tait: To that question, Madam Chair, I asked one of my colleagues, in preparation for this appearance today, how many hours of content we produce every year. The answer was 2.6 million hours of radio and television content, 7,000 hours per day, 600 articles on cbc.ca and radio-canada.ca, and 80% of those articles are from the regions.

You call it the regions. Anything outside of Toronto and Montreal is the core of our service. When we talk about our competitive advantage vis-à-vis digital giants, it's our proximity to Canadians. That's why we double down on libraries, and we're present and focused on newcomers. We can't assume that somebody who has just moved to Canada will have that long-term relationship with either Radio-Canada or CBC. That's why we produce a show like *Lakay Nou* to reach Haitian francophones in Montreal and across Canada.

I can say that just as we're working on a transformation plan, we're also preparing our next strategic plan. Again, this is not to tie the hands of my successor but to prepare him or her with as much information as possible so that they are as well prepared as they possibly can be and hit the road running. The reality is that they will have to launch a new strategic plan in the first six months of their tenure, and so we've done that work.

The number one priority is proximity, our presence in community. That is the power of CBC/Radio-Canada.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm digging into this a bit. You know it's the playoffs. Over the course of the the season, a lot of people have enjoyed *Hockey Night in Canada* in different languages. That was an important step on the part of CBC.

What's the impact?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It's not just *Hockey Night in Canada*. It's sports in general. One of the ways we reach Canadians is through amateur sports. We are the only broadcaster showing the hundreds and hundreds of amateur athletes—female athletes and para athletes—and giving them a platform.

When we talk about Hockey Night in Canada or the playoffs, it's fantastic. We have over a million viewers tuning in to CBC. To say CBC television is no longer relevant...it is the only place where Canadians can watch the hockey games they love for free. Remember that. Otherwise, it's behind a paywall.

● (1720)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Let's talk about the consequences of cuts. I think there was a lot of feigned outrage about the possibility of steps that you might take. I think there was some concern about what that might look like.

I think the bigger question is.... We've heard from members opposite their desire to basically put a "for sale" sign on the CBC, gut it and turn the offices into God knows what. Sell the CBC. Get rid of it. Gut it. We've heard all kinds of different expressions, yet, they say something else to people in Quebec. They say, "Oh no, we're going to save Radio-Canada, but we're going to gut the CBC."

Realistically, can you talk a bit about the intertwining of those operations, particularly in places like my hometown of Vancouver, where Radio-Canada and the CBC work from the same offices and many of the reporters and camerapeople do double duty? Walk us through that.

How ridiculous is this assertion that you could completely gut and destroy the CBC, but somehow save Radio-Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I don't feel comfortable commenting on any political position regarding the future of CBC/Radio-Canada. It's not appropriate for me to comment on that.

However, what I can say is we know that 80% of Canadians believe that CBC/Radio-Canada has a role to play in the future of this country. We know that 75% of Canadians consider CBC/Radio-Canada to be the most trusted source of credible news in this country. The Leger brand reputation study, released last month, indicated that CBC/Radio-Canada is the top brand among media companies in this country.

Therefore, in my mind, dismantling the CBC, which serves 30 million Canadians—

The Chair: Please wrap up your answer, Ms. Tait. Thank you.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —would be not listening to those 80% of Canadians who believe it's extremely important, and of growing importance, for this country.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll go to the Bloc and Martin for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, we hear about the problems experienced by the CBC, which may be a bit envious of Radio-Canada's successes, and with good reason, because Radio-Canada is a broadcaster that Quebecers and francophone Canadians everywhere in the country value highly.

We hear about the CBC's setbacks and the current difficulties in the market. I am among those who believe very firmly that it is important to have a public broadcaster. I believe the CBC is essential to Canadian democracy and Radio-Canada is essential to Quebec and francophone culture and to preserving that culture. I think it is essential to keep them both.

However, I also think it is possible that the battle is being fought on the wrong front. I sometimes get the feeling that other ways of saving our public broadcaster, on both the English and French sides, are not being considered. How much does the public broadcaster cost Canadians a year? Do people know? There are people saying we have to stop funding CBC/Radio-Canada because the corporation costs a fortune and is a money pit.

Ms. Catherine Tait: The annual cost is \$33 per capita.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Are we competitive?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We are in 16th place worldwide among public broadcasters.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Give me some examples. How does CBC/Radio-Canada compare with the BBC?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Per capita, the BBC costs five times more than CBC/Radio-Canada, while ZDF and ARD, in Germany, cost eight times more.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Do you think we should explore that avenue? Would it enable the CBC to be independent and profitable, and Radio-Canada to be vibrant and independent? Would this also be the opportunity to breathe a little life into the private sector, which would no longer have the public broadcaster in the way when the advertising pie is being divided up?

Do you think that avenue should be explored by the current government? We know the next government is not likely to do it.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Are you talking about splitting them?

Mr. Martin Champoux: I am not talking about making them into two entities. I want both entities to be viable without worrying about either one. Right now, the CBC is facing big challenges, for both the present and the future.

Ms. Catherine Tait: The CBC is also enjoying tremendous success when it comes to television. It is doing terrifically. Radio-Canada's success in the television market is still exceptional.

• (1725)

Mr. Martin Champoux: There are good products and good content, I agree, Ms. Tait. However, there are major financial challenges, as there are for other broadcasters too. The advertising pie is currently divided among a number of players and the digital giants are sucking its lifeblood. We want to protect the CBC and Radio-Canada from the siren call of advertising, so that we have ap-

propriate funding that is comparable to what we see in equivalent countries.

Do you think that would be a solution, to breathe some life into it and take a bit of weight off the shoulders of the broadcasting system as a whole?

Ms. Catherine Tait: If you are talking about eliminating advertising, I think we have to look at all the other public broadcasters that are trying to find other revenue sources. Having only public funds is a weakness.

[English]

The Chair: I think we're going over time. Please wrap up.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Even at five or six or seven times as much public financing, they still need advertising revenue.

[English]

The Chair: Martin, we're over time. Thank you.

The Chair: I'll now go to Ms. Ashton.

Nikki, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

I want to begin by taking issue with Mr. Dubé's comment about my being misinformed. I think it's indicative of the arrogance of the CBC and, clearly, as these are very vulnerable stories shared with us by your employees, I also think it's insulting.

You have an NDA problem. We know that the BBC banned the use of NDAs in 2014.

My question for you, Ms. Tait, as the leader of this organization, is why isn't CBC doing the same?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I will look into what you're describing as the "NDA problem." I'm not aware of this being a problem.

What I will say to you is that we are leaders in efforts regarding the well-being of our employees and providing support to them. During a very difficult time during the pandemic, as you well know, there was a great social justice outcry. We launched an anti-harassment and anti-racism platform for people to be able to anonymously declare any concerns they might have. We have done a lot of work in this area, and I'm very proud of that work.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I want to pick up on that exact point, but first, I also want to be clear that we're talking about the use of NDAs prior to investigations and forcing employees to sign NDAs before their cases are investigated. That's what we're hearing is happening at the CBC, which is unacceptable.

I want to bring up a case in which a journalist who had written a number of articles about discrimination as part of their work experienced that same discrimination and harassment themselves. They complained to CBC, and CBC said it wouldn't investigate the case until they signed a non-disclosure agreement. They refused, and their claim was investigated without their participation. The investigation was eventually closed without a resolution.

This person went and found additional income during that time so that they could afford to pay their bills while their harassment case was being dealt with. As a result, CBC fired them. It was, once again, a culture of retribution and a reliance on non-disclosure and non-disparagement agreements silencing people whose only issue was that they didn't want to take CBC's abuse lying down. It's embarrassing and it shouldn't be happening.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Bill C-65 mandated that harassment investigations must take place in a timely manner. Delaying an investigation until such time as an NDA is signed is a flagrant contravention of that law.

Do you find this practice acceptable?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We are in full compliance with that law, and, if I may say so, all indications from our annual Gallup polls show that the healthy environment for the majority of our employees is very much intact.

We have seen higher engagement scores over the last six years. I am enormously proud of the support that we've provided through our work on online harassment of our journalists, on all sorts of benefits and, most recently, on our collective agreements with the Canadian Media Guild extending benefits to, for example, indigenous employees. We've done an enormous amount of work in this way.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Tait. We're going to have to wrap up. We have gone well over time, and I have allowed it because Martin got some extra time, so there we go.

I am now going to go to the Conservatives and Kevin Waugh.

Kevin, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Ms. Tait, along with Mr. Dubé, for coming.

Ms. Tait, when you sat in the chair, you said, "Whoa, we've had a pretty good year. We're only going to lose \$100 million." Is that right? You said that. You have had a decent year. You were projecting a \$125-million deficit for 2024-25. You think you have reduced it by \$20 million.

Ms. Catherine Tait: *[Inaudible—Editor]*

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Go ahead, then.

• (1730)

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, we've reduced it by \$100 million. Our deficit is now \$20 million, which is a far more manageable number.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: All right, so the news media reports are false. You're only at \$20 million.

When you went to the Liberals—whoever went to the Liberals—asking for \$42 million extra in the budget, what was that for? Was it for saving jobs, or was it for executive bonuses?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It was for saving jobs and to be able to reinvest in the independent production communities—in franco-phone and anglophone communities.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Was that the condition of the money that you received?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No. There is no condition when they grant an award as such.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, you got \$96 million in the main estimates and another \$42 million in the budget, so you got an extra \$138 million of taxpayers' money.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I've already clarified that the \$100 million is related to salary and—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yeah, I'm going over the numbers, though.

Ms. Catherine Tait: —inflation, so it's not incremental dollars. What we received was \$42 million in incremental funding.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You said regarding your management team that you're separate in regard to the bonuses. Your two executive vice-presidents and five vice-presidents are separate from you on the bonus structure.

Who decides your bonus?

Ms. Catherine Tait: The government. The board of directors makes an evaluation of my performance and submits it to the minister. The minister then reviews it and submits it to the government.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Has that been done? When will it be done?

Ms. Catherine Tait: For this year, no. It will be done in June.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: When would that be made public? Would it be made public for you?

You say most bonuses in your corporation are in July. Could they give that money to you in June?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, I do not receive.... Again, I'm part of a government process that can take many months.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You, as the CEO, may not get a bonus until the fall.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I may not get it until a year later.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Have you received previous previous bonuses on time, being July?

Ms. Catherine Tait: No.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: When have you received your previous bonuses?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Probably nine months to a year later.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: But you're going to be retired.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I beg your pardon.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You're going to be retired, I think, in January.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I know. I'll have to wait.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Who makes the recommendation for the other seven? Is it you to the board, or is it the board?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I make a recommendation based on performance and the KPIs. We would assess the key performance indicators, and then there's a 30% personal objectives element. I make the evaluation of that performance piece for each of the seven executives.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that.

Your KPIs aren't doing well. I don't know what you're using for key performance indicators. I would say that 80% are not met in your corporation—I'm going to challenge you on that—yet you continue to give bonuses, or performance bonuses, whatever you want to call them.

The network isn't doing very well. I mean, I laughed at Mr. Noormohamed talking about the NHL on CTV. You've given it to Rogers for nothing because you couldn't fill the time when you lost the NHL contract, and Rogers picked it up. You've actually given Rogers carte blanche: Go ahead. Three hours are yours. Six hours are yours on Saturday. We won't have anything to do with it, but we get eyeballs on free TV. Isn't that right?

Ms. Catherine Tait: They paid many billions of dollars for the NHL rights.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: They did, but not to you.

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, and therefore, that was why we did not feel we should compete with a private broadcaster in that instance. If there's a private broadcaster that wants to purchase the rights, we step back.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: You did.

Ms. Catherine Tait: To be very clear, you're talking about television—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm talking about what?

Ms. Catherine Tait: You're talking about about television. Our KPIs are on a digital future. Our audiences have moved to digital.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: How do you do TV then? How do you assess TV?

I don't know how many CBC stations are doing very well in the ratings in this country. Maybe you can provide that after this meeting.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'm happy to do so.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay.

If you don't use KPI on television, what what do you use?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We look at our results. For example, one of our KPIs—

The Chair: You have one second left.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Please provide me and the committee with the ratings of CBC locally, coast to coast on the six o'clock newscast, if you don't mind.

The Chair: Thank you, Kevin.

I now go to the Liberals. I have Anna Gainey on the list, so unless the Liberals have changed their lineup, let me know.

• (1735)

Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Marc can go, sure.

The Chair: Marc Serré, for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Tait, you may know that my father, Gaétan Serré, was a member of parliament from 1968 to 1972. In 1971, he tabled a 21,000-signature petition from the region of Sudbury, in northern Ontario, for Radio-Canada to be available in that region. I am very proud of the work that people like my father did to get access to Radio-Canada programming. Obviously, I often listen to *Le matin du Nord*, for northern Ontario.

I have a real problem with the Conservatives' attacks when they talk about CBC/Radio-Canada. As well, I would like Mr. Champoux, on behalf of the Bloc, to say a bit about the importance of the francophonie outside Quebec.

We hear the Conservatives saying that they want to defund the CBC and my colleague Mr. Noormohamed talked about that a little earlier. In that scenario, I would like to know what to do so that minority communities like Sudbury, in northern Ontario, can still have access to Radio-Canada programming. Would you need more money for Radio-Canada, since it shares buildings and equipment with the CBC? I would like to hear your comments about that. How can we preserve the calibre of Radio-Canada in official language minority communities if the CBC is completely defunded by the Conservatives?

Ms. Catherine Tait: It will be very difficult, almost impossible.

Mr. Marc Serré: I do not know whether the Bloc agrees, but if the Conservatives completely defund the CBC—

Mr. Martin Champoux: A point of order, Madam Chair.

My colleague Mr. Serré is insinuating things that look a bit more like the kind of political spin we would normally see play out in the House of Commons. In committee, could we maintain a slightly loftier tone? The Bloc has never talked about wanting to shut down or defund the CBC. That has never been an issue. I have just now made a fairly clear point on that subject. On the contrary, I hope that the CBC will be strengthened and made more viable, while Radio-Canada is also protected. I just wanted to make that clear.

Mr. Serré, let's keep the spin for elsewhere.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Champoux, you are also no stranger to spin. However, on behalf of francophones in minority communities, I am very happy to hear your clarification that the Bloc Québécois will be supporting Radio-Canada everywhere in the country. Thank you.

Ms. Tait, I have a lot of trouble with the position taken by the Conservatives, who want to defund the CBC. You said that in that scenario, it would be very difficult for Radio-Canada to survive. What do you mean by “very difficult”? If the CBC is defunded, would all Radio-Canada stations in the country be shut down, apart from the ones in Montreal and Quebec?

Ms. Catherine Tait: In fact, we do not know what the entire proposal is. I cannot guess the impact—

Mr. Marc Serré: The Conservatives are clear: They want to completely defund the CBC. That amounts to billions of dollars.

Ms. Catherine Tait: They are talking about a billion dollars. However, as you say, that billion dollars does not relate only to CBC/Radio-Canada outside Quebec. It affects Quebec too. A billion dollars is more than half our budget. If that amount is cut, it would be a disaster for francophone media outside Quebec, for sure, but it would also be a disaster for the CBC.

Mr. Marc Serré: I hope my Conservative and New Democrat colleagues understand the situation. The leader of the Conservative Party is currently travelling all over the country talking about defunding the CBC, and that is an irresponsible position. As a francophone, I do not understand why the other parties in the House of Commons are not taking a clear position on the importance of not touching the CBC and Radio-Canada, because, otherwise, it will be hard for us to guarantee that they are present in official language minority communities.

Ms. Tait, mention was made of *Le matin du Nord*, but I would also like to talk about the importance of indigenous programming in northern Ontario. Can you tell us about that as well?

• (1740)

Ms. Catherine Tait: The role of the public broadcaster is to serve all Canadians. That means that we work for indigenous communities and for official language minority communities. Even if it is not profitable, it is our mandate. We are well aware that our service is vital for people who live in French outside Quebec.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Marc.

I now go to a fourth round. We have 20 minutes left, and a fourth round would take us to 25 minutes, so I ask the committee whether they mind if I change the timing to four, four, two, two, four and four minutes, and we can have a round. Is that good?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Philip Lawrence for the CPC, you have four minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Help me understand. I'm sorry. Can you explain that one more time, Chair?

The Chair: It takes 25 minutes to do one more full round. We have only 20 minutes left, so if I change the timing from five, five, 2.5, 2.5, five and five minutes to four, four, two, two, four and four minutes, we should get a round in, and everyone seems to be okay with that.

Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, we started the meeting five minutes late. We still have 25 minutes, however, so we can do almost a complete round.

[English]

The Chair: I'll ask the clerk.

Okay, I'm told by the clerk we have until 6:05, so that gives us a full round.

We will go, as per usual, to Philip Lawrence for the Conservatives. Philip, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Tait, for being here today.

One of the CBC shows that I will admit, as a Conservative, I like to watch is the *Canada Tonight* show. Of course, this features Travis Dhanraj. I'm wondering, do you watch that show?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I do.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I'm a bit curious as to why Mr. Dhanraj had this exchange with you, Ms. Tait. He tweeted on April 19, 2024:

At a time when the public broadcaster is under increasing scrutiny and when transparency is needed, #CanadaTonight requested an intv w/...Catherine Tait. We wanted to discuss new budget funding, what it means for jobs & the corporation's strategic priorities ahead. Our request was declined. This is unfortunate.

Why did you decline Mr. Dhanraj's request?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I was on annual leave; I wasn't available.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Okay.

Then Mr. Dhanraj, curiously, tweeted on April 19.... I'm sorry.” After this tweet he tweeted, on May 2, 2024, he was back on *Canada Tonight*, meaning he disappeared from the air for a week or 10 days. Was this because of any type of repercussions because he was calling you out publicly, Ms. Tait?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'm not aware of any repercussions, no.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Just on the heels of my colleague Ms. Ashton's comments, I find it a little strange that one of your stars, Mr. Dhanraj, calls you out publicly and then he disappears from the air for a week or 10 days. I just point you to your own conflict of interest policy, which says, "Our standards do not change when the CBC (or a CBC partner) becomes the story. Public interest guides our choices." Do you still stand by that statement?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Of course, and just to be clear, I don't get involved in the programming and scheduling decisions in the newsroom. I have to assume there's a reason that occurred for Travis Dhanraj, but I'm not, again, involved in any of those discussions.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Well, I'm not booking agent for Mr. Dhanraj, but I assume that he would probably like to have you on the show again. If Mr. Dhanraj reaches out to you, will you commit to going onto his show?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I will look at all invitations. As you can imagine, we have many shows, and that's just at CBC/Radio-Canada. I try to make myself available to as many as I can, given whatever is on the schedule at the time.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: To finish up, you didn't give me a complete—I guess—rejection of my premise that perhaps there was something off with the fact that Mr. Dhanraj was taken off the air shortly after calling you out publicly. Can you confirm, unequivocally to the committee, that there were no reprisals or negative outcomes to Mr. Dhanraj for his calling you out publicly for not appearing on his show?

• (1745)

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'm not aware of any.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Okay. Thank you very much.

I want to just tidy up a couple of things with respect to executive bonuses. You said, of course, your bonus will be set by the government, and you'll be receiving that for the fiscal year 2023-24. You'll be receiving that in, maybe, nine months. What was your bonus, though, for the 2022-23 fiscal year, and when did you receive it?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I think the range of my bonuses or performance pay is public, and I have not received it as yet, so I don't know what I will or will not receive.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: For the fiscal year of 2022-23, I understand your testimony is that you haven't received it, and you don't even know the quantum of it yet?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That's correct.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: What about for 2021-22?

Ms. Catherine Tait: Yes, I did receive that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Would you mind sharing how much that was?

Ms. Catherine Tait: This is personnel information. I don't believe I'm under any obligation to disclose the exact amount. The range is published on the website. It's a maximum of 28% of my salary.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: We're Parliament, which means that we can ask for any information we want. Kindly provide us with the bonus you received for 2021-22.

Ms. Catherine Tait: I'd like to get legal counsel to make sure that it's in compliance with the Privacy Act before I do so, but, if it is, I will provide it to this committee.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Could you provide us—because you said it's publicly available information—with the range, if you know it, for 2023-24? If you don't, we'll keep going back to the years that you do know.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Okay.

The Chair: You have six seconds.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Ms. Tait, for appearing.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now go to Ms. Gainey for the Liberals.

Anna, you have five minutes.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Thank you.

Ms. Anna Gainey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We've heard a little bit about ratings today. I thought we could take this chunk of time to get a more fulsome picture of the question of ratings.

I'm wondering if you could elaborate a little bit for us on how many Canadians use the CBC's online news services, the music and audio streaming services like CBC Listen, and video streaming services like Gem, I gather, and podcast radio. Try to give us a more fulsome picture of the consumption or the participation of Canadians in the content that you're producing.

Ms. Catherine Tait: Just to be clear, to the previous member's question, when I joined CBC/Radio-Canada, the number of Canadians who were consuming linear TV was about 30%, and the number consuming just online was at about 18%. Those numbers have now reversed.

When we talk about the performance of CBC, we measure digital performance. Today, cbc.ca reaches about 17 million Canadians every month. That is the single-largest number.... Sometimes CTV is at the same level. Certainly, during the pandemic, that number shot up to 22 million, and again, add Radio-Canada into that, and there are close to 25 million Canadians touching in on our digital platforms, just the .ca.

In terms of podcasting in English Canada, CBC is the leader in digital podcasting, with close to 10 million downloads every month from CBC Listen, Spotify and Apple.

Radio-Canada launched its podcasting service about a year ago and has now become, fantastically, number one in French language as well.

With respect to Gem, when I joined, it didn't exist. We launched Gem in 2019, and today about two million English Canadians tune in to Gem.

Most importantly for the consumption of news, another million are consuming news on YouTube, so when we talk about the audience for *The National*, to address to the honourable member's on question about 6 o'clock TV news, it isn't the market we are looking at anymore. We're looking at the digital audience, and for *The National*, about 1.2 million Canadians tune in on a variety of platforms, including connected TVs, to consume that very important show.

● (1750)

Ms. Anna Gainey: Looking at those trends and the inversion of how people consume news and media, where is your focus on the future? Where do you see the most growth and how is the CBC investing in that growth?

Ms. Catherine Tait: If you follow the CRTC's licensing process, one of the big breakthroughs was the CRTC's recognition that, for our investments in programs of national interest—that's drama, comedy and variety—they would now count digital expenditures as well as linear.

The future is digital. We are moving to an entirely digital world. When will that happen? For sure, in Quebec, at 23% market share for linear television, I think we have a good long time, and we will protect it, because it's really powerful and very important. In English Canada, the shift to digital is already well on its way, and that's why we're launching fast channels and doing all of the work we are to reach Canadians where they are, on the devices they're using.

Ms. Anna Gainey: How do we address, then, the “news deserts”, as we've called them? As we've seen the TV market shrink, and then the contraction as those jobs shrink across this industry, too, you've referred to the “crisis”. How do we help bring Canadians along on that transition where it's not happening as quickly and they feel like there's a shortage of local news available to them?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I think it's exactly what CBC should be doing and Radio-Canada as well: launching, for example, local podcasts, which we just did, with seven local podcasts in specific towns across the country so that there's local news produced by the local...the people who live in the community.

That will be the power—podcasts, FAST channels, Gem— all of those tools to make sure we're reaching those Canadians.

As I said, 80% of our news is coming from outside of Toronto and Montreal.

Ms. Anna Gainey: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I don't have any more questions.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I was just speaking with the clerk for a second.

Thank you. I'm sorry, Ms. Gainey.

I'm now going to go to Mr. Champoux for 2.5 minutes.

Go ahead, please, Martin.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would first like to reassure my colleague Mr. Serré. The Bloc Québécois is quite vehement on this point. When we defend Radio-Canada, its French services, and francophone and Quebec culture, and we dig our heels in when we hear about the possibility of the CBC's influence over Radio-Canada expanding, obviously we are protecting Quebecers. However, by default and the ripple effect, all francophones in Canada also benefit from the existence of a healthy, high-quality public broadcaster.

I wanted to clarify that, because it is a very important detail in the approach taken by the Bloc Québécois that does not seem to be very much appreciated by the Liberal government right now. Our vehemence is equalled only by our desire to protect our public broadcaster, which is the main vehicle of our culture in Quebec and Canada.

Ms. Tait, as you reiterated earlier, we cannot slash the CBC's budget without it having consequences for the French services. You have said that in the past, and it is clear to us. So if a Conservative government starts slashing the CBC's budget, it will necessarily have an effect on the French services.

If budget cuts were imposed on the CBC in proportion to its share of the public broadcaster's budget, would money automatically be drawn from Radio-Canada's share of the budget, so the CBC could survive, or would you allow the CBC to die out by eliminating a lot of services in order to preserve the viability of the French services?

Ms. Catherine Tait: That is the kind of question we are considering at the moment, because we are very far from the possibility of this kind of defunding of the CBC. We want to work on transforming our services and on a strategy to ensure the survival of both components of the broadcaster in the long term.

Mr. Martin Champoux: You are telling me that you do not foresee this threat materializing under a potential Conservative government. That is interesting. Do you have a plan or a vision of what might be? Are you not doing any calculations?

● (1755)

Ms. Catherine Tait: No, not for the moment.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Do you not think it would be useful to do so, rather than merging the CBC and Radio-Canada?

Ms. Catherine Tait: We are concerned about competition from the digital giants and about all the other pressures we are feeling.

Mr. Martin Champoux: However, you are not concerned about the real possibility that a Conservative government will slash the CBC's budget, which is what the Conservatives are constantly saying they want to do.

Ms. Catherine Tait: For the moment, we are waiting for the results of the next election.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Ms. Tait.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Martin.

I now go to Nikki Ashton. You have two and a half minutes, please, Nikki.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Madam Tait, I want to begin by saying that during the testimony, we heard from one of the whistle-blowers that they in fact did speak to you personally about the abuse of NDAs, including in their case. I understand that it is an issue that has been raised with you.

I want to share an excerpt from an anonymous employee who wrote the following: “It is anathema to what CBC rightly expects from its journalists—transparency, accountability and fairness. The CBC actually uses public funds to pay private lawyers to insulate its legal department from the burden of grinding down its own employees through this abusive process. Someone needs to ask Ms. Tait, on the record, about the extent of CBC’s practice to demand NDAs and other gagging devices, such as non-disparagement clauses, when settling with employees who have well-founded and proven claims of abuse.”

I will also add to that whistle-blower’s statement another whistle-blower’s statement, that they were told that they had to sign an NDA in order for their case to be investigated.

These are chilling stories for any media organization, but I would say that it is wildly unacceptable for our state broadcaster to be running the show like this. It is wildly unacceptable for the CBC, which is publicly funded and built by Canadians, to be treating its employees like this.

What we’ve heard today is how under your leadership and under the current CBC reality, our national broadcaster, perhaps paralyzed by fear of right-wing attacks, is making poor choice after poor choice. The doling out of exorbitant executive bonuses is unacceptable at a time when we’ve seen cuts and layoffs and and of course Canadians going through such a difficult time.

The crushing of all internal complaints through the abuse of non-disclosure and non-disparagement agreements and the mass firings of workers in your organization are unacceptable. CBC is increasingly resembling the Bells of this world, and Canadians will not stand for it.

The Chair: You have 24 seconds.

Ms. Niki Ashton: For a federally funded journalism organization to abuse journalists and spend public funds on high-powered lawyers to fine them and then gag them through NDAs is unacceptable. Canadians deserve better. CBC employees deserve better. Canadian communities deserve better. We all deserve better.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

I will now go to the Conservatives for five minutes.

Ms. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Ms. Tait, you confirmed that under Trudeau, you’ve been granted another \$140 million. Just over \$96 million was part of the main estimates and then another \$42 million was part of budget 2024. That’s a total of \$140 million.

Is this additional funding that is coming your way contingent on no more bonuses for executives?

Ms. Catherine Tait: First of all, the funding from Treasury Board in the main estimates is not incremental funding. That is the salary inflation funding that all government departments and Crowns get. What we have received is \$42 million, and it is not contingent on performance pay. As we are operating as an arm’s-length organization, we have a certain amount of discretion. Obviously, in this case, those funds will be applied to ensure no further job cuts and to ensure reinvestment in the independent production sector.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I’m sorry. Just to confirm, then, it is contingent on no further job cuts...?

Ms. Catherine Tait: I have assumed that it is. There is no direction when the government assigns dollars in the way that it does. There was nothing written in the decision.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay. Are you committing today, then, that during the year of 2024-25, there will be no more job cuts at the CBC?

Ms. Catherine Tait: There will be no significant job cuts related to balancing our budget. We are an organization that constantly, as you heard earlier, has people coming and going. We are constantly adjusting programming. I will never make a decision on behalf of the newsroom on a program that they may or may not decide to cut.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: On December 4, you announced that 800 jobs were going to be cut from the CBC. So far, close to 400 of those jobs have been cut. Meanwhile, the government has granted \$140 million in new dollars, taxpayer dollars, to the CBC. You continue to contend for your own executive bonus and the executive bonus of—

• (1800)

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

The Chair: Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Look, I respect Ms. Thomas’ right to tweet whatever she wants, but now she’s making accusations here, and now the committee will witness, and basically that they’re saying that—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, this is not a point of order.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Can I get to my point, please?

Thank you.

The Chair: I need to listen to the point before I can rule on it, Philip.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: They're basically saying that their testimony is not factually accurate. She knows that she's the one misrepresenting what the witness said when she appeared on January 20. I have copies of the transcripts of what was said at that meeting where she verbally attacked the witness with the clear intention of trying to get a clip that she thought she might be able to use for whatever purpose. The records show that the witness and her team clarified this issue.

I don't know what the member was doing—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is still not a point of order.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: —but I would like to point to the fact of that testimony, and unless my colleague can point to an alternative set of facts, I'd like to ask her—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is not a point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: —to withdraw the accusations that Ms. Tait is not representing the truth.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is not a point of order. That's not a point of order.

The Chair: I'm afraid it isn't, Mr. Noormohamed.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. My request is that she withdraw the accusation that the witness is lying.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: You don't have the floor.

The Chair: Well, you have a request.

The member has a request for withdrawing the accusation.

Mrs. Thomas.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's not a point of order. The floor is Ms. Tait's. His point of order is invalid.

Mrs. Thomas.... This is clear; ask the clerk.

The Chair: I know that in this meeting these members and witnesses, quite often, are accused of things that are not necessarily so. In many instances, people have had to suggest that it is not appropriate to assume what people's intentions are. I'm just suggesting that we should try to be a little more respectful and not badger witnesses or each other with accusations and assumptions.

Thank you.

Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Tait, clearly you have the members across the way doing your bidding for you today.

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

An hon. member: Yeah, that's horrible.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That is—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is not a point of order.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: This is not keeping decorum in committee.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: This is not a point of order. You're out of order, sir.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mr. Lawrence made a point last meeting—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: You are out of order.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mr. Lawrence, at the last meeting, made a big show about when—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Tell me the section. This is not in order.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: May I make—

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Noormohamed has the floor.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: At the last meeting, Madam Chair, Mr. Lawrence made a great show of being offended when a member was accused of their point of view being misrepresented. I think it is deeply offensive, at a minimum, that the member opposite would assert that I am here to do the bidding of any witness. I raised a point of order with respect to the testimony that was presented—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, this is not a point of order.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: —and I want people to know what the truth is. The testimony that I have here from that day would clear that record up. What I don't appreciate—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, this is not a point of order. These are not the rules.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: —is that I am being told by the member opposite that somehow I am doing the bidding of a witness, and I would like that comment withdrawn.

The Chair: Order.

Please, I would like Mr. Noormohamed to speak.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I would very much like that comment to be withdrawn because I am not here to do the bidding of any witness. I am here to do the bidding of my constituents.

The Chair: As chair, I'm supposed to actually ensure that there's decorum and ensure a respectful way that we treat each other and our witnesses.

We have a member asking that one member withdraw a comment that is an assumption and perhaps misleading. I'm going to ask the member if she wishes to withdraw that.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order.

Madam Chair, Mr. Noormohamed has not given a valid point of order. We are governed in this committee and this country by rules.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's not a point order.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: His point of order was invalid. Therefore, Mrs. Thomas has the floor. His comments are invalid.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence, I'm here to ensure that we stay on the business that we're doing here now, which is asking questions of the CBC and asking for their accountability on certain issues.

If we're going to talk about decorum, decorum means that we do not suggest that something else is going on in somebody's mind. We're not mind readers in this place. I think it's unfair that we do this a lot to each other and to witnesses.

A member has said that this is outside of the decorum of this committee. I know that Mr. Champoux also asked Mr. Serré that he should not suggest what Mr. Champoux and the Bloc are thinking, and Mr. Serré withdrew that and said thank you for the answer. So, let's behave in a like manner.

I think this is a reasonable request from one member, and I would like Mrs. Thomas to answer the question.

Will you withdraw that misleading piece of information that was included in the question?

• (1805)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: For the—

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence, this is not debatable anymore. You do not have a point of order. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry. I said "It would appear", and that statement stands, "It would appear".

The Chair: So, would you please repeat your statement, Mrs. Thomas?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I don't believe there's anything that requires me to.

The Chair: Well, I don't know. "It would appear" stands alone. "It would appear"... What would appear?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, normally these things are reviewed in the blues if you wish to make an issue of this.

The Chair: We have done that in the past, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Absolutely.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: That's why I would invite you to review the blues, make sure that you are asking something that is appropriate, and then to come back to this committee and make the request of me.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Chair, then I would request that we suspend to do that or adjourn given that it's 6:05, and then we can come back, because I would like a resolution to this matter.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: That would be raised on a point of order and you cannot move a motion on a point of order.

The Chair: I agree with you.

You cannot move a motion on a point of order, Mr. Noormohamed, but I think this is requesting that the meeting be adjourned because it's now five minutes after six.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have the floor, Madam Chair. I'm in the middle of a question round, and I've been interrupted numerous times by the members across the way.

The Chair: We have suggested at the beginning, when we went to this last round, that we had until five minutes after six. I'm looking at the clock and it is now five minutes after six.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: If this committee would like to continue with this discussion, I would like to hear from the committee with regard to adjournment. There's no debate on this. There's a question.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I do have the floor, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor but the meeting is over, Mrs. Thomas.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: It's not over.

The Chair: It's five minutes after six.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It doesn't just end when I'm in the middle of a question round.

The Chair: We had points of order that did that. We have to leave this room at a certain time I'm told by the clerk, and so we have to vacate the room.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I don't know that's entirely true. Perhaps you could check with the clerk to see if we could extend another five minutes.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you seem to have this penchant for arguing with everyone who makes any suggestions.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order, Chair.

That is inappropriate.

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence, please allow me to speak.

When we were going to this last round, Mr. Champoux suggested that we should find out how much more time we have left so that we could do 25 minutes. The clerk informed me then that we had until five minutes after six. It was clear. She said it and I repeated it.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

You have an obligation to listen to my point of order. This is not optional.

The Chair: Go ahead with your point of order.

An hon. member: The meeting is adjourned.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: No, it is not adjourned. I have a point of order and we're continuing on here.

The Chair: It's not adjourned because we didn't call the question.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: He raised a series of non-points of order, which you, against the rules, recognized. That was against the rules. That got rid of her time.

It would be an affront to democracy if you do not allow her to continue. This was clearly an obstruction of the process. Please continue to allow Mrs. Thomas to speak, otherwise, I will be bringing a question of privilege.

The Chair: Great, it's now 10 minutes after six.

Clerk, do we have time to finish this meeting?

The clerk informs me it is up to the committee to decide whether they want to continue.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, you accused me, and I'll use your words, of interrupting "everyone".

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: That's a superlative, interrupting "everyone," which is unparliamentary.

Madam Chair, I would bring that to your attention and I would ask you to make a ruling as to whether or not that should be withdrawn.

Does Mrs. Thomas interrupt everyone? If she does, then your statement stands, but if it can be proven that she does not interrupt everyone—a superlative—then you must withdraw it.

I would ask for your ruling as the official chair of this committee.

The Chair: I think, Mrs. Thomas, to decide whether you interrupt everyone, I'm going to have to go back into the past blues and read every one of them to find out if this is true.

But it is on the record, and if you like, I would withdraw the term "everyone" and say you often interrupt people in this committee, whether it's other members or witnesses or anyone who has something to say.

If you disagree with them, you interrupt. Often you do that. This is a pattern that you have, and I don't like it because it's not in keeping with having a respectful meeting. I'm going to state that clearly. We need to be respectful. We need to have decorum here. We are a parliamentary committee. We're not a little group of people chatting around here and throwing stones at each other, so let's try to be respectful.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: On a point of order, you just said we don't throw stones at one another, but I seem to be the object at which you throw stones quite often.

• (1810)

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, I think this is getting to be just a little bit too much. I correct anyone. I have corrected people who have interrupted everyone. I've corrected them each time to keep decorum in this committee. I think it's time we go with decorum in this committee.

I'm going to ask a question right now of this committee.

Do you wish this meeting to continue or do you wish this meeting to adjourn?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I want a recorded division.

The Chair: Thank you.

Clerk, can we record the division, please?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

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