

1. Protecting Canada's cultural sovereignty

Foreign companies are already permitted to own up to 47% of Canadian broadcasters and some of our broadcasters want to sell out completely to American interests. *Do you believe it is important to maintain Canadian majority ownership of our media and communications sectors?*

Canadian ownership and control can be a bit of a misnomer – in theory it is important for Canadians to control our cultural industries but what really matters is Canadian content. The products of the cultural industries speak to our values and traditions as a country. I fully support Canadian content requirements, no matter whether entities are Canadian or foreign-owned. Without Canadian content requirements, there is no guarantee that even a Canadian-owned entity would air Canadian programming. I do agree however that domestically-controlled entities are more likely to invest in developing new Canadian talent. This was one of the reasons why I supported the appeal to Cabinet on satellite radio to ask the CRTC to reconsider their decision.

It can be difficult to separate the cultural/content end of the continuum from the broadcasting/communications end – a change in one area can have ripple effects through other segments of the broader industry. I believe that Canada presently has an appropriate balance in the area of broadcaster ownership/control. However, with new technologies, we cannot develop Canadian cultural policy in a vacuum nor ignore these emerging trends. Though not a Conservative government priority, cultural policy must always remain on the "front burner" in the House of Commons.

2. More Canadian drama programs on television

Since the CRTC relaxed Canadian programming regulations in 1999, private broadcasters have fed Canadian audiences a steady diet of cheap American programs while the quality and quantity of Canadian drama have declined. *Do you think it is important to increase the quantity and quality of Canadian drama television programs on TV? How would you ensure Canada's broadcasters air more and better Canadian drama programs?*

I believe that the CRTC should be aggressive in enforcing the cultural regulations that are in place. Where these regulations and laws may be inadequate in a digital world, then the federal government should develop new policies and laws as may be required to provide the necessary guidance to the CRTC.

In terms of new Canadian drama, there is no question that we face a significant challenge in this area. Drama is relatively expensive to produce – producing and marketing these shows typically costs many fold more than, say, news or sports programming. Furthermore, the United States is a global powerhouse in producing drama programs and the US has a home market of 270 million people over which to spread these programming and production costs. Incremental revenues from foreign countries, such as Canada, are generally viewed as simply adding on to the profitability of this area of US business and expertise. These US programs are generally quite popular with Canadians, as with viewers of other countries. For these reasons, it is important for Canadians to determine whether forcing new Canadian drama into this picture should be our top cultural priority, or whether other areas such as documentaries, children's programming, satellite radio and news production may merit greater priority.

Certainly it would be my preference to have more quality Canadian drama programs that reflect our unique cultural identity and also contribute to a growing job-creating broadcasting industry here at home. Therefore, I would like to meet with interested stakeholders to discuss this issue in greater detail.

3. Re-building CBC's grassroots capacity

CBC's connection to Canadians and the communities in which they live has weakened in recent years. Grassroots programs and CBC's presence across the country have been slashed in the face of severe budget cuts. Today's centrally produced programs make CBC look more like the Toronto Broadcasting Corporation than the national public broadcaster it should be. *Do you believe the federal government should ensure that CBC has the resources and commitment to serve Canadians in their communities wherever they live? If so, how would you accomplish this goal?*

From my perspective, as an Atlantic Canadian with rural roots, this is a very important question. The CBC is arguably Canada's most important cultural institution. It is one of the few institutions that offer the potential for Canadians in all regions to speak with one another. I agree that the CBC has become a more Toronto-centric organization during recent years. One could also argue that CBC programming, in an effort to "compete" for ratings and advertising dollars with privately controlled newspapers and broadcasters, has become more focused on the frivolous and less on the substantive in this age of reality television.

In terms of the need for added resources, the CBC already receives a significant annual capital infusion – In the order of one billion dollars annually. I would have to examine this issue in greater detail to determine whether this amount is invested effectively by the CBC. If there is a proven need for greater CBC funding to fulfill a broad national mandate, then I would ensure that increased funding would be provided.

As a general observation, I would be more inclined to invest federal funds in the CBC than in present Conservative government priorities such as building larger prisons, providing firearms to our border agents, or many of the other trinkets and gimmicks included in the recent budget.

4. End patronage appointments to CBC's Board

Positions on CBC's Board, including its President, are currently Prime Ministerial patronage appointments. The Commons Heritage Committee unanimously recommended reforming this practice so that CBC's Board is appointed at arms-length from patronage to include the best and brightest Canadians, and that this Board, not the Prime Minister, should have the power to hire CBC's President. Friends believes that implementation of this reform would likely have prevented the recent lockout of CBC employees. Should the practice of political patronage appointments to CBC's Board be ended and should the Board be given responsibility to hire and fire CBC's President?

I agree with the process developed under the Martin government wherein the federal government appoints the Chair of crown corporations, such as the CBC, and the Chair and fellow board members select the President. The appropriate political accountability for crown corporations rests in the link between the Chair and the responsible Minister.