

CBC President Robert Rabinovitch - A Performance Report

Robert Rabinovitch's five-year term as President and CEO of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation expires on Monday, November 15, 2004. On that day, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage will hear from the CBC President as they consider a proposal from the Prime Minister to extend Mr. Rabinovitch's term by three years.

Friends of Canadian Broadcasting has reviewed Mr. Rabinovitch's performance and offers this assessment of his tenure as President of Canada's national public broadcaster. Overall, Friends' assessment is that Mr. Rabinovitch has earned a passing grade of C-.

Topic	Comment	Grade												
<p>FUNDING</p>	<p>Mr. Rabinovitch receives a passing grade in this category. During his watch, the grant CBC received from Parliament increased slightly from \$987 million to \$1.03 billion. Mr. Rabinovitch's success in persuading the federal government to top up CBC funding with one-time payments of \$60 million on three occasions was largely offset by other cuts to the CBC grant, including \$10 million announced on November 4th.</p> <div> <table border="1"> <caption>Parliamentary Appropriations to CBC during the Rabinovitch Presidency (Total Grant in 2004\$)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Amount (\$ millions)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2000-01</td> <td>987.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2001-02</td> <td>986.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2002-03</td> <td>1071.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2003-04</td> <td>1003.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2004-05</td> <td>1034.3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>	Year	Amount (\$ millions)	2000-01	987.3	2001-02	986.9	2002-03	1071.3	2003-04	1003.9	2004-05	1034.3	<p>B</p>
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<p>REGIONAL PROGRAMMING ON ENGLISH TELEVISION</p>	<p>Despite the relative stability of government funding during his term, Mr. Rabinovitch gutted CBC English Television’s supper-hour news in cities throughout Canada and lost almost two hundred thousand viewers as a result (Nielsen). Soon after taking office, Mr. Rabinovitch decided to dismantle the centrepiece of CBC Television’s regional programming, in spite of CRTC direction to strengthen CBC in the regions. Only a storm of protest on Parliament Hill and across the country over plans to cancel the supper-hour television news programs in 16 Canadian cities forced Mr. Rabinovitch to back down. In October 2000, CBC created a hybrid early evening newscast – <i>Canada Now</i> – that included less than half the regional news content of the shows it replaced and canceled all late night regional newscasts. Recent audience data for <i>Canada Now</i> confirm a substantial loss of audience share as a result of the Rabinovitch plan. An audience of 494,000 in the Spring of 2000 has collapsed four years later to 324,000 for the local component of <i>Canada Now</i> and 306,000 for the national component (Nielsen). In St. John’s, for example, CBC’s supper-hour audience share plummeted from 59% to 21% during his incumbency. See Appendix A for details on audience share in sixteen cities.</p>	<p>F</p>
<p>CANADIAN PROGRAMMING</p>	<p>Tony Manera launched CBC on a mission to eliminate foreign programs on CBC English Television during his Presidency. Robert Rabinovitch has continued this effort. This mission has been successful, with the most recently available data¹ showing that during prime time, 90% of CBC English TV’s audience is tuned to Canadian programs. It should be noted that during the Rabinovitch Presidency, viewing to foreign programs on CBC’s English TV during prime time more than doubled from 4% in 2000 to 10% in 2002.</p>	<p>C</p>

¹ Broadcasting Policy Monitoring Report 2003, CRTC.

<p>LISTENING SKILLS</p>	<p>The record shows that Mr. Rabinovitch does not take advice well, especially when it comes from Parliament or the CRTC.</p> <p>In CRTC hearings across the country during the Spring of 1999 leading up to the CBC's licence renewals in January 2000 that attracted more than 4500 submissions, Canadians told the Commission they place a high value on CBC programming about their communities. As a result, the CRTC directed CBC to maintain and strengthen regional programs and provide regional newscasts on weekends.</p> <p>In response, Mr. Rabinovitch called a news conference to attack the CRTC and denounced its decision as an unwarranted intrusion on his turf. As noted above, Mr. Rabinovitch then set out to dismantle CBC's flagship regional news programs.</p> <p>The House of Commons Heritage Committee also traveled the country in 2002 and heard strong messages that Canadians value CBC programs based in their communities and regions. This led the Heritage Committee in its June 2003 report <i>Our Cultural Sovereignty</i> to recommend that the CBC deliver a strategic plan with cost estimates to Parliament by June 2004 explaining how CBC would fulfill its mandate to deliver local and regional programming, meet its Canadian programming objectives and deliver new media programming initiatives. (Recommendation 6.3, page 218.)</p> <p>Since the Heritage Committee tabled its report on June 11, 2003, there has been no sign of a response to this important recommendation from the CBC President.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">D</p>
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<p>RADIO</p>	<p>CBC’s English Radio networks are widely regarded as crown jewels in Canadian broadcasting. In the early part of Mr. Rabinovitch’s incumbency, Friends heard numerous voices express concern that CBC radio was “dumbing down”, abandoning its adult audience in favour of a youth demographic. In 2000, Mr. Rabinovitch killed a proposal for an over-the-air “Radio Three” to cater to the tastes of young Canadians, in favour of an Internet based approach. Under his leadership, repeat programs continue to air every third hour. Criticism of CBC Radio One and Two abated somewhat in 2003 after Mr. Rabinovitch appointed a new Vice President of CBC English Radio.</p>	<p>C</p>
<p>ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING</p>	<p>After his January 2000 news conference to denounce the CRTC’s licensing decisions, Mr. Rabinovitch adopted a much lower public profile for most of his five year term, leaving his Board Chair to speak publicly on behalf of the national public broadcaster. This may reflect his long career as a behind the scenes civil servant and aide to private sector owners. Unlike many of his predecessors, he has done little to advance the cause of public broadcasting through public speaking and media appearances.</p>	<p>D</p>
<p>SENIOR APPOINTMENTS</p>	<p>Mr. Rabinovitch served almost two years with his predecessor’s Vice Presidents still in place. The widely-praised appointment of Jane Chalmers as English Radio Vice President is outweighed by his ousting of Michelle Fortin, the acclaimed Vice President of French Television, and the recent appointment of Richard Stursberg as Vice President of English Television. In common with Mr. Rabinovitch himself, Mr. Stursberg has no previous experience in broadcast television and has in the past strongly expressed views that CBC should abandon regional programming.</p>	<p>D</p>
<p>PHYSICAL ASSETS</p>	<p>Mr. Rabinovitch has spearheaded a thorough evaluation and redeployment of CBC's physical assets to extract resources that can be plowed into programming.</p>	<p>B</p>

Appendix "A"

Supper-Hour Audience Share for CBC Television 2000 – 2004 & Canada-wide Audience

	<i>Early Evening News</i>	<i>Canada Now</i>	
	Spring 2000 6-7 pm	Regional	National
St. John's CBNT	59.4%	21.4%	21.4%
Charlottetown CBCT	68.8	57.0	50.1
Sydney CBIT	18.3	3.4	3.5
Halifax CBHT	15.9	6.9	7.9
New Brunswick CBAT	11.9	4.5	3.9
Montreal CBMT	4.8	4.0	5.7
Ottawa CBOT	8.6	5.3	4.6
Toronto CBLT	3.5	2.6	2.2
London CBLN	1.0	0.6	1.3
Windsor CBET	25.3 ¹	12.2	11.4
Winnipeg CBWT	15.4	7.3	7.6
Regina CBKT	5.9	2.8	2.3
Saskatoon CBKST	2.9	2.9	3.5
Calgary CBRT	2.8	1.9	2.1
Edmonton CBXT	2.0	1.5	1.6
Vancouver CBUT	4.0	3.8	3.6
Canada-wide audience (Nielsen)	494,000	324,000	306,000

Source: BBM and Nielsen (Toronto & Vancouver)

¹ Prior to the re-orientation of CBC's supper-hour news in October 2000, CBC broadcast Windsor's regional news between 5:30 and 6:00 pm weekdays. The Spring 2000 BBM share for CBC's 6:00 to 7:00 pm early evening news program in Windsor, which emanated from Toronto, was 10.4%.