

Liberal leadership candidates speak out on Canadian culture and broadcasting

The Liberal Party of Canada will elect a new leader in December. FRIENDS of Canadian Broadcasting asked each of the eleven candidates seeking the job for their views on four key Canadian broadcasting and cultural issues.

Eight of the eleven candidates responded and we are pleased to provide their responses to you. Further information about the candidates or the views they express here may be obtained by contacting them at the co-ordinates listed on the reverse side.

All were asked to keep their responses to 150 words per question. Where candidates significantly exceeded this limit, we have edited their responses. The unedited text is available at www.friends.ca/liberalleadershipcandidates.



Carolyn Bennett Campaign
330 Bay Street, Suite 812
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2S8

info@carolynbennett.ca
www.carolynbennett.ca



Maurizio Bevilacqua Campaign
381 Kent Street, Suite 206
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 2A8

Toll Free: 1-888-628-7404
Phone: (613) 230-9350

info@maurizio.ca
www.maurizio.ca



Scott Brison Campaign
1 Nicholas Street, Suite 512
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B7

Phone: (613) 693-0919

info@scottbrison.ca
www.scottbrison.ca



Martha Hall Findlay Campaign
29 Gervais Drive
Toronto, Ontario M3C 1Y9

Phone: (416) 444-6532
Fax: (416) 444-3793

info@marthahallfindlay.ca
www.marthahallfindlay.ca



Michael Ignatieff Campaign
14A Isabella Street
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 1N1

Phone: (647) 724-8515 ext. 220
Fax: (647) 435-6744

comments@michaelignatieff.ca
www.michaelignatieff.ca



Gerard Kennedy Campaign
65 St. Clair Avenue E., 2nd Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M4T 2Y3

Toll Free 1-800-622-9399
Phone: (416) 849-3432
Fax: 1-866-236-1491

info@gerardkennedy.ca
www.gerardkennedy.ca



Bob Rae Campaign Office
468 Queen Street East, Suite 105
Toronto, Ontario M5A 1T7

Toll Free: 1-888-364-8085
Phone: (416) 364-8085
Fax: (416) 364-7441

info@bobrae.ca
www.bobrae.ca



Joe Volpe Campaign
520 Bronson Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7Y9

Phone: (613) 232-1002

contact@joevolpe.ca
www.joevolpe.ca

QUESTION ONE: 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?

Carolyn Bennett

Yes, I do agree that this is vital.

Maurizio Bevilacqua

I believe that Canada's cultural identity must be protected. Canadian programming is essential to preserving Canadian culture and will not be sold to foreign interests. The biggest potential problem of selling Canadian programs to foreign interests is that the Canadian content may not be protected. Rules currently exist to protect Canadian ownership as well as rules that protect a certain level of Canadian content. These rules must be enforced and I have no intentions to modify foreign ownership limits. Canada's cultural sovereignty is best protected with rules that are strictly followed that ensure a certain portion of media in Canada is Canadian content.

Scott Brison

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.... 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....

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.... cultural policy must always remain on the "front burner" in the House of Commons.

Martha Hall Findlay

Majority Canadian ownership of Canadian broadcasters has been a significant and positive factor in the development and strengthening of a strong, domestic Canadian industry. And it is helpful, at least in the current environment, to maintain these control limits.

What is equally important, however, is the leadership role that the federal government is willing to take in financially encouraging the development of a made in Canada production capacity and for Canadians to read, listen or watch their Canadian stories.

We are more likely to encourage a strong domestic industry, not through command and control, but through the innovative use of the tax system and other public policy tools to encourage Canadians to produce, Canadians to distribute and Canadians to consume Canadian productions.

Michael Ignatieff

Yes.

Gerard Kennedy

As a general statement on my views on broadcast policy in Canada, I think that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage (the "Committee") report "Our Cultural Sovereignty" (the "Report") was an outstanding bipartisan document and that a government I lead will be guided by many of the recommendations in the Report.

As one witness told the Committee in 2003, ownership in broadcasting:

"... has an importance well beyond most commodities. It's not a commodity, it's a cultural influence, and that's why we are here to talk about it and not about cups and saucers and pens and pencils. Ownership has a great deal of influence, I believe, over what is produced and why."

... I agree with the Committee's recommendation to maintain the current restrictions on foreign ownership.

Bob Rae

Canada must continue to maintain majority Canadian ownership of our own media and communications sector. Few countries face comparable challenges in maintaining national ownership and culturally relevant content, due to the tremendous power of the giant media conglomerates of the United States. I have always been a firm supporter of legislation to protect the Canadian media industry, and will continue to ensure legislative protection for Canadian-owned media. In the debate on the Free Trade Agreement, I stressed this aspect of our national interest. It is the only way to promote Canadian programming in the face of pressures from our neighbour.

Joe Volpe

Yes foreign ownership limits for broadcasting and telecommunications should be maintained at current levels.

QUESTION TWO: 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?

Carolyn Bennett

I believe we should review the CRTC regulations in light of the need to maintain Canadian drama production and broadcasting. I believe the position of CBC is particularly important for Canadian drama. Being married to Canadian filmmaker Peter O'Brian has meant that I have cringed every time I have seen 'An American President' or 'Apollo 13' on CBC television. CBC must have the budget to produce excellence in original Canadian drama, as well as in news and public affairs, and coverage of national events. The CBC should also have a role in cross-promoting Canadian film, music and culture.

Maurizio Bevilacqua

Canadian broadcasters produce a lot of high quality programming be it in sports, comedy, news or drama. In the francophone market, Canadian-made dramatic productions have developed popular followings and are some of the top rated programs. In the English markets, Canadian drama television does not do as well. The issue is complex due to our physical closeness to the world's largest English television market, the United States. Americans can sell programs at prices that are far lower than what it would cost to produce the show in Canada. We should strive to create *made-in-Canada* television, but the greater focus should be *made-for-Canada* television. The government must work with the CRTC, which is ultimately responsible for high quality production.

I will focus on working toward high quality production, rather than trying to overproduce Canadian dramas. I support the Canadian Television Fund and feel it should be strengthened and preserved.

Scott Brison

...In terms of new Canadian drama, there is no question that we face a significant challenge... 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.... 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.

Martha Hall Findlay

Borders are breaking down in broadcasting. We can no longer assume that Canadians and the Canadian broadcasting industry can shelter behind a government-regulated communications industry.

We do need a made-in-Canada approach to production support from the federal government. One that provides quality content to Canadian broadcasters and one that can help bridge from a regulatory-driven agenda to a consumer-driven outcome. We need to have a strategy that financially rebuilds the CBC's production capacity that has been ravaged by over a decade of budget cuts. Not because the CBC should be "protected", but because it can be the engine of strategic growth in Canada and a global approach to broadcasting.

We need to believe that Canada's cultural industries are critical for our economic success domestically and internationally and fund them accordingly.

Michael Ignatieff

Yes.

This isn't just a drama issue. Canadian broadcasters need to air more and better drama, documentary and news programs. Certainly there is a need to increase overall funding in the development of Canadian content. But the issue is much bigger than that. We need to have broadcasters wanting Canadian programming. That means improving the process that brings them from the concept stage through to final production. It means improving the calibre of the programming. As a consequence, I would undertake to initiate a Bi-Partisan Task Force of political leaders, industry stakeholders and Canadian citizens to fully examine the Canadian Broadcasting Industry and provide recommendations on how to improve this vital industry.

Gerard Kennedy

...English Canadian [drama] programming that will attract a large audience has become very costly. This is because viewers, particularly in English Canada, have grown accustomed to American programs with high-production values. Further complicating matters is the fact that American programming is cheaper to buy and generates a higher rate of return for Canada's broadcasters than the purchase or production of made-in-Canada programming.

As the Report pointed out, this challenge is not new.... While there have been some successes, challenges remain. The current funding system for Canadian programming has become an exceptionally complicated and bewildering experience. I support the Report's finding that the federal government must develop a comprehensive and integrated Canadian programming policy and strategy....

I would also undertake a thorough review of the manner in which the federal government finances programming in this country both in terms of tax credits and through direct funding.

Bob Rae

Arlene and I are avid fans of the CBC, both TV and radio, and watching and listening to CBC programs has been an integral part of life with our three daughters. We have been shaped and stirred by the wonderful dramas and documentaries that bring to life the achievements and personalities of significant people who are part of our history. It is the specifically Canadian outlook of our own drama programs which makes them so important for promoting and sharing the Canadian experience. Canadian broadcasters, particularly the CBC, need to air even more high-quality drama programming. One solution would be to promote many more pilot dramas, in order to test what Canadians would like to see. This could also provide opportunities for more young talent to break in. I would also hope to promote strong and responsible management of the CBC to maintain and improve the quality and quantity of CBC-produced drama programs.

Joe Volpe

Yes, Canadians should be able to enjoy excellent Canadian drama programming. The federal government should consider establishing clear targets for Canadian drama in programming. All decisions about Canadian content should be made by a centralized body.

QUESTION THREE: 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?

Carolyn Bennett

Again, resources are vital. CBC must be the nation's broadcaster, and it requires augmented resources so it can fulfil this mandate. It must bridge the distances and cultural diversity of our country in both official languages. CBC and Radio Canada must be able to subtitle and dub where necessary. It is imperative that English Canada be exposed to our vibrant Quebec culture and that Quebecers be able to understand the reality of the one million francophones outside Quebec as well as the challenges of English Canada.

Maurizio Bevilacqua

The CBC is a very important cultural institution that offers programming to all the regions of Canada. The federal government dedicated \$120 million from 2001 to 2003 to the CBC to help offer more safe, commercial free programming every year. The CBC should also continue to utilize the resources available, including the internet. The internet gives the CBC an opportunity to transmit into communities across the country. Part of CBC's mandate is to enlighten and inform Canadians and I support any effort to do this.

It is important to reach out to different regions in Canada. In many industrialized countries public broadcasting is still the main instrument in public policy formation in broadcasting. The CBC may not be able to play the same role in every region and this role might be changing from what it was in the past, but making sure that some role still exists between regions and the CBC is vital. The focus of funding for the CBC should be on the regions that receive very little broadcasting because this is where the broadcasting can be most valuable.

Scott Brison

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, offering Canadians in all regions the potential to speak with one another.... The CBC has become... more Toronto-centric... 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, CBC already receives a significant 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. 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....

Martha Hall Findlay

We have to acknowledge that there is intense competition for federal tax dollars. There needs to be more federal government support for the creation of Canadian written, produced and delivered production.

Ottawa needs to ensure that there is balance between public and private sector broadcasters and one approach is to encourage the private sector to pick up the community aspect of the broadcasting environment and the public sector to tackle a broader Canadian vision. But that broader Canadian vision needs to be adequately funded and that must be addressed.

Michael Ignatieff

I believe the CBC is underfunded. I also believe the first mandate of the CBC is to provide content that reaches out to all Canadians, in all regions, in a consistent manner. The matter of whether a broadened Federal government commitment to the network is employed to deliver at a local level is a matter which needs to be closely examined on a community by community basis. In some instances, private broadcasters provide capable local broadcast commitment.

Gerard Kennedy

As somebody who grew up in a small, rural community (The Pas, in Northern Manitoba), I know how important local broadcasting can be.... The Committee was concerned that community, local and regional broadcasting services have become endangered, and that many parts of Canada are being underserved. I share that concern.... The status quo is not working.

The paradox is, at the precise time that we are failing our local communities and regions, new technologies like digital channels and the proliferation of high speed internet access are making it both cheaper and technologically easier to get more local voices on the air.... CBC should produce high quality civic and cultural programs while promoting local voices and perspectives... to represent and speak to Canadians from all parts of the country including big cities, small towns and villages.... I will provide sufficient federal funding to allow the CBC to implement its strategic plan to ensure that the CBC re-grow their local offerings.

Bob Rae

Canada is a country of regions, each with very distinct issues, cultures, and needs. We also have a national perspective and shared values that deserve celebration and affirmation. This must be reflected in the programming offered by our public broadcaster. As my friend Noreen Golfman has pointed out, this isn't a nicety – it's the law. The Broadcasting Act clearly states that the CBC must reflect all parts of Canada and recognize the special needs of regions. I would make it a priority to strengthen regional programming to the CBC, and would make the resources available for the CBC to do so. The cuts to the CBC regional offices went too far, in my view. I would strengthen the CBC's regional offices.... I also believe that regional offices would enhance innovation within the broadcaster, by creating programming and opportunities for young and established talent throughout the country rather than always in Toronto.

Joe Volpe

Funding given to the Corporation should take into account its local and regional programming responsibilities as included in the Broadcasting Act. The Federal government should give the CBC multi-year stable funding to allow the Corporation to implement its local and regional plan which it presented to the standing committee on Canadian Heritage last year.

QUESTION FOUR: 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?

Carolyn Bennett

I believe the Board should be able to hire, do performance appraisals of, and fire the President. I also believe the President should be someone with a background in broadcasting.

Maurizio Bevilacqua

I agree with the recommendations from the House of Commons Heritage Committee that reforms should be made to the CBC's Board of Directors. The CBC's Board should have control over appointments and should not be in the hands of the government to make the decisions. The reason for this is to stress accountability and to make sure that the best people are being put into the appropriate positions. The CBC ultimately will be more efficient if the best people are assigned to the board, fulfilling the goals of Board members and the government. If the Board is free of patronage appointments, then we can look at the issue of the Board having the responsibility to hire and fire CBC's President. If the Board is free of patronage appointments, then they should have the responsibility to hire and fire the CBC's President.

Scott Brison

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.

Martha Hall Findlay

[No response]

Michael Ignatieff

The CBC board should be comprised of people who represent the best and the brightest in the Canadian media community. All appointments, at the CBC as elsewhere, should be merit-based and should strive to reflect Canada's diversity. The board should have responsibility for the CBC's President.

Gerard Kennedy

I believe in a CBC with a strong, independent Board of Directors and a President who is accountable to that Board. As such, I agree with the Report's recommendations that "in the interests of fuller accountability and arm's-length from government, nominations to the CBC Board should be made by a number of sources, and the CBC President should be hired by and be responsible to the Board."
I am concerned with the fact that women, aboriginals and minorities have been under-represented on the CBC Board, as have appointees from western and northern Canada. In selecting future Board members, we should ensure that the Board is broadly representative of the country.

Bob Rae

It is important that there remains some direct oversight in the management of the CBC from the elected Government of Canada – due both to its cultural mandate and its taxpayer subsidy.... I would be very careful that an arms-length procedure would not remove the management of CBC from its responsibility to the Parliament of Canada. Similarly, I would not empower the Board of CBC in the hiring and firing of management to such a degree that the Corporation becomes divorced from its relationship to the Government of Canada. I believe in appointments based on experience and merit, conducted transparently and fairly....
Improving the appointment procedure can best be achieved through the introduction of a fair and transparent process, ending in an appointment on behalf of the elected government of Canada. This is the best way to encourage appointments based upon merit rather than patronage....

Joe Volpe

All GIC appointments should be based on a merit based system. The most qualified person for the position should be put forth. The criteria and guidelines for the hiring of the President and board members of the CBC should be developed in cooperation with Department of Canadian Heritage and the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.