

On January 25th, 2025, one of our members, Judi Milne, received this written response from Conservative MP Rick Perkins, MP for South Shore-St. Margarets, Nova Scotia. Judi had written to ask for his party's position on the CBC. The Conservatives have been clear in their intentions to defund the CBC. Judi shared Perkins' letter with the PNA and our National President Dan Oldfield has given a point-by-point rebuttal. Feel free to share this.

Perkins: The CBC receives almost a billion and a half dollars each year in funding from this Liberal government and produces content and news in direct competition to private broadcasters, both in the traditional media space and online. In fact, the CBC operates the largest online news organization in Canada in direct competition with private news organizations including the Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail and dozens of other print newspapers. The online news space is where most Canadians go now and where private news organizations must charge for their work to survive. Yet the CBC gives it away, because of excessive taxpayer support not available to private companies, harming the ability for private news to exist.

Oldfield: This first paragraph tells you pretty much what this is all about. The rationale to defund the CBC is politically, as opposed to financially, motivated. Mr. Perkins claims the CBC is receiving funding from the "Liberal government," implying that the CBC is doing the Liberal's business. But the appropriation provided to the CBC does not come from a political party. Rather, it comes from Parliament, as it has since 1936 when it was created by a Conservative government. It is the same type of payment provided to all government departments and other agents of the Crown to provide a mandated service to Canadians. It is not a subsidy.

The CBC is not in competition with private news organizations. Those have existed side-by-side with the CBC since its creation. Furthermore, CBC is not just a news organization. The services CBC provides, which includes arts and cultural programming, is available to all Canadians.

It is not a product that is “given away” but paid for by all Canadian taxpayers to be used by all Canadians.

Mr. Perkins refers to the amount provided by Parliament as “excessive” and (later on) “massive.” Yet, to carry out an extensive government mandate, the CBC represents 0.12% of public spending. CBC/Radio-Canada offers programming in English, French, and eight indigenous languages on its domestic radio service. It is the sole provider of services in several communities. Its funding amounts to roughly \$32 a year per capita which ranks it 18th out of 20 western nations. No other public broadcaster must deal with the geographical and linguistic complexities the CBC faces.

Perkins: In addition, they are harming local Canadian communities where the CBC is unfairly putting local media out of business by competing against them while being continually subsidized and not having to maintain a profit to keep their lights on.

Oldfield: Mr. Perkins does not provide any evidence that the CBC is putting local media out of business. He entirely ignores the increasing concentration of private ownership and the massive technological changes the industry has seen. Private media has existed side by side with the CBC since its inception. Privately owned newspapers, radio and television operations have been bought up by large organizations which have shut down portions of their operations to maximize profits. CBC does not exist to make money; it exists to provide a public service. Private media exists to make money. By describing the CBC as competition, Mr. Perkins appears to object to anything that stands in the way of private enterprises making money.

Perkins: Its mandate, as laid out in the Broadcasting Act, is to provide services that “informs, enlightens, and entertains”. It is my view that the private sector, online sources, and local outlets with funding tailored for their needs, can do this just as successfully, if not better, without the immense

weight of government gatekeepers and bureaucracy that the CBC must have as a crown corporation.

Oldfield: Mr. Perkins' view, simply put, is that private media can do what the CBC is doing just as successfully if not better. One has to ask: if that were the case, why aren't they doing it now? He also seems to be suggesting that funding will be provided to private media businesses to do what the CBC is doing but without any of that nasty government oversight, which he refers to as "government gatekeepers and bureaucracy."

Perkins: The funding and role the government plays to support Canadian artists and musicians can and should continue, but it just no longer makes sense to use the CBC as the vehicle to do so. There are various other pathways which don't contribute to the downfall of local media and continue to be a money pit that is stuck in the same position it was in 20 years ago.

Oldfield: CBC is by far the biggest financial supporter of the Canadian cultural industry. To suggest removing the CBC from the picture and that so-called and unnamed "other pathways" will fill the void is naïve. If that's the case, then why isn't it already happening? Certainly, we've seen private media aggressively grab up content they believe will make them more profitable – professional sports, for example.

Perkins: The merits for keeping the CBC as it exists today, with a massive government subsidy, when faced with this reality are not clear for Canadian taxpayers or for the need to reduce our out-of-control deficit by stopping spending. Our position is to defund the CBC by removing the taxpayer subsidy.

Oldfield: Again, the use of the word subsidy. That may be what Mr. Perkins is proposing for private media businesses but it's not what the CBC gets. What he also fails to note is that for every dollar provided to

the CBC, there's a two-to-one return (source Deloitte). Most businesses would consider that a good return on their investment.

Perkins: Conservatives are committed to bringing home a strong, Canadian media landscape no matter where Canadians are. By redirecting the billions spent each year on news and programming that is no more Canadian than what our local and private broadcasters are making, our arts and culture can have more attention and more direction to be successful.

Oldfield: As Mr. Perkin's argument gets weaker, the amount he suggests is spent on the CBC gets bigger: it's now "billions spent each year." As to programming on the CBC being no different than the privates, it becomes clearer that Mr. Perkins is either not watching or listening to CBC. Privates (both CTV and Global) air entirely re-broadcasts of US programming in prime time. CBC airs only Canadian. CBC Radio/Radio Canada's programming is completely different than that of private radio; most notably, there is no advertising on CBC/SRC radio.

Perkins: Defunding the CBC will never involve an end to our support for rural outlets such as those on the South Shore nor to the operations of Radio-Canada, which still plays an important role in our French communities in Canada.

Oldfield: It's hard to imagine how someone believes they could cut a billion dollars out of the CBC/SRC budget and maintain French services and/or services to smaller communities. There's a clear failure to understand how CBC's funding works and how the interdependence of French and English services functions. Currently French services use approximately 40% of the annual budget. This doesn't fully include the cost of shared infrastructure (buildings, technical facilities, personal, human resources, etc.

Were this an actual attempt to reduce deficits, the CBC would not be a target. The CBC returns to the economy and the communities it serves more than it receives. A couple of things become clear in this response. The campaign to defund the CBC is a political quest. The Conservative government's primary concern is making private businesses more profitable at the expense of a public service. Going after the CBC, which has been charged with keeping watch on government actions and decisions (both Conservative and Liberal), is nothing more than a poorly disguised attempt to avoid government oversight and criticism, both of which are essential for preserving our democracy.