

## Who Is Paying for the News?

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Freedom of the press has long been recognized as important to maintaining a healthy democracy. But there is always the question of money. To follow the story, follow the money. Now it is the news business itself that is the news story so let's follow the money...

In the 2018 Federal Budget<sup>1</sup>, some funds were allocated to “support local journalism in underserved communities.” The exact amount is \$50 million<sup>2</sup> over 5 years. So there is the money, and it is presumably great news for journalists in “underserved communities”.

But which communities are underserved, and who will decide exactly which journalists will get the money? The budget gave insight on that too: “one or more independent non-governmental organizations”. Excellent, what could possibly go wrong? When it comes to accountability, one is often enough, right?

When it comes to “non-governmental organizations” (NGOs), there are quite a few around, and it is remotely possible that a few would have the kind of “core mandate” that our current government would find acceptable. Perhaps asking candidate-organizations to check-off an attestation about their core beliefs. The government could even make it the same one that organizations have to agree with to qualify for the Canada Summer Jobs Program (as I warned in a recent Communique<sup>3</sup>).

Of course, the next step is to ensure that the journalists, who would eventually be paid to serve underserved communities, also agree to this attestation. That would quickly and easily sort the field to be sure that no one would be writing any embarrassing stories about things like abortion and euthanasia.

Is this so implausible? I see too many signs pointing in that direction to be ignored. What seemed impossible a few months ago has already happened. We've already been required to affirm the social values of the Liberal government in order to qualify for public funds.

With the important role of the media in protecting our democracy through investigative journalism, direct government subsidies to news agencies—including the CBC—should never happen. The playing field must be level or there will always be suspicion that the news we get is little more than propaganda for those who pay the bills.

While the common complaint is that the world has changed so much that newspapers are no longer profitable, these facts still remain: People want the latest news. Businesses want to advertise where people are looking. The government has too many vested interests to choose who or what should get our tax dollars, how much etc. Money motivates people to write, and government money motivates writing that agrees with the government's position—or else!

There have been changes in how people prefer to get their news, but that is the source of innovation. If an email is preferred to a paper on the doormat, then news sources that send emails will have an edge.

Advertisers are incredibly creative; they have adapted to the different formats needed for online and email news.

Governments are always seeking re-election. They are dependent on the whims of voters whose opinions are informed and changed by news stories—so government subsidies to news sources place them in a conflict-of-interest situation.

But back to the \$50 million; it is not that much in a budget of \$311.3 billion<sup>4</sup>. But the budget is also out of balance by nearly \$18 billion! Many, many, 50-million-dollar expenses have to be eliminated to balance this budget! The problem is that Canadians voted for a government that promised unbalanced budgets, and the government has delivered on that promise (to our chagrin).

One possible means to subsidize the media that will be explored (according to the Federal Budget) would be to encourage news sources to become registered as not-for-profits<sup>5</sup>, or even as charities so that people could donate to ones that they appreciate and also get tax receipts. The good thing about this approach is that it would put the choice to support (or not) into the hands of citizens. But what criteria would be used to determine which news agencies could qualify to become charities, and who would approve this change? Would some news sources like, say, the (left-leaning) Globe and Mail and Toronto Star qualify in 2019, an election year, but the (right-leaning) National Post have to wait until 2020? Take a good guess. The devil is in the details.

The independence of journalism is a key part of a healthy democracy; ours has long been compromised by the government-funded CBC. Making more news agencies government-funded will not solve the problem. Taking subsidies away and lowering taxes would be a great start.

CHP Canada believes in a level playing field, with freedom of speech and freedom of association for all. We encourage you to use the freedom that you have to join the CHP. Become a member who helps us to reach out further to our fellow Canadians! Other parties also ask for your support based on what they can do for you but the CHP is seeking the good of those who are weakest, those who have no voice—the pre-born. No other party is taking a unified and uncompromising stand for them. The CHP is seeking equality for all under the law. The pre-born can't vote, join a political party or contribute financially. They need you to act for them, to speak for them, to vote for them and to take out a membership on their behalf.

Your support for CHP shows that you agree that honesty, democratic integrity, and respect for all human life is essential. Join today!<sup>6</sup>

## **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> [www.budget.gc.ca/2018/docs/plan/toc-tdm-en.html](http://www.budget.gc.ca/2018/docs/plan/toc-tdm-en.html)

<sup>2</sup> [nationalpost.com/opinion/andrew-coyne-the-good-news-is-we-dont-get-the-50m-the-bad-news-is-someone-else-does](http://nationalpost.com/opinion/andrew-coyne-the-good-news-is-we-dont-get-the-50m-the-bad-news-is-someone-else-does)

<sup>3</sup> [www.chp.ca/commentary/canadian-values-or-liberal-values/](http://www.chp.ca/commentary/canadian-values-or-liberal-values/)

<sup>4</sup> [www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/2018-federal-budget-highlights/article38116231/](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/2018-federal-budget-highlights/article38116231/)

<sup>5</sup> <https://ipolitics.ca/2018/02/27/federal-budget-opens-door-non-profit-media-models/>

<sup>6</sup> [www.chp.ca/get-involved/](http://www.chp.ca/get-involved/)