

Ministry of Citizenship,
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June 15, 2015

Mr. Gordon Brown
Chair, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Brown:

I am writing to you in your capacity as the Chair of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage with regards to the hearings scheduled next week to examine OMNI-TV's recent programming changes.

OMNI Television's news broadcasts have played an integral role in the lives of the more than 3 million Ontarians who immigrated here from around the world. Many Ontarians have relied on OMNI's local news programming to connect them to their community, and to better understand the issues facing our cities, our province and our country. I know this is true for all of the immigrant communities that have been ably served by OMNI, and its predecessor CFMT.

The recent replacement of OMNI's in-house production of Punjabi, Mandarin, and Cantonese-language newscasts with other programming – and the elimination of all Italian-language news and current affairs programming entirely – is of great concern to these communities and to me as Ontario Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. These latest cuts to local news programming follow the cancellation, in 2012 and 2013, of a total of 21 locally produced shows that affected another 12 language groups, including Portuguese and South Asian daily newscasts. These cuts disproportionately affect seniors in many communities, as OMNI is often their only source of local television news.

Ethnic and multicultural media plays an integral role in the integration of newcomers to Ontario. In fact, the presence of these journalists is part of what helps to make Ontario one of the world's most attractive destinations for immigrants.

Upholding cultural diversity is one of the key goals of Canada's Broadcasting Act. Canadian media pioneer Ted Rogers knew and understood that Canada's increasing multicultural population would need access to information in their own language in order to integrate, grow and contribute to Canada. He was a champion for multicultural programming, and his vision for local multicultural news programming is being effectively dismantled.

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While I'm pleased that Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is holding a special meeting next Wednesday to discuss the recent programming changes at OMNI, I respectfully ask that the Committee invite representatives from the CRTC to explain how they can allow these cuts that effectively isolate our multicultural communities.

The federal government, which has responsibility for the CRTC, should look closely at amending regulations to ensure that vital multicultural programming is restored and preserved.

With Ontarians speaking over 213 languages and originating from over 200 countries, our diversity, especially in our media sector, is key to ensuring that we retain the economic advantage that comes hand-in-hand with our vibrant diversity.

I respectfully request that a copy of this letter be shared with all committee members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Chan', written in a cursive style.

Michael Chan

Minister

c: The Honourable Stéphane Dion, Vice-Chair, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage
Pierre Nantel, Vice-Chair, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage