

PRESENTATION

6468 MR. HAWKINS: Thank you.

6469 I would like to thank the Commission for allowing me to appear here today and share some of my ideas and experiences that relate to local news programming.

6470 By way of background, I have worked in the television industry for 30 years, for the past 23 years as a camera operator and videographer for CKVU in Vancouver.

6471 I have also been elected to the position of Local Union President for the past 10 years.

6472 Back in 2006 there was a dramatic reduction in overall local news programming at CKVU when all traditional news programming was terminated, leaving only Breakfast Television, a 3 1/2 hour morning show. No 6 o'clock news, no late-night news and nothing on the weekends.

6473 Now, almost 10 years later, there are far fewer people involved in producing this ever-shrinking show. The savings from years of layoffs have not been reinvested in the programming, and local news content continues to shrink.

6474 The story over at CHNM or OMNI has been similar. When owned by a group of local business people hours of local programming employed over 80 people and produced a full range of local ethnic programming.

6475 Along came Rogers in 2008, promising to build on this model but instead cut programming and jobs to where today OMNI employs less than a dozen people who produce bare-bones, live-to-tape, community information programs in Mandarin, Cantonese and Punjabi.

6476 And even though the CRTC imposed conditions requiring Rogers to maintain OMNI's Victoria Bureau, it laid off its only two employees in Victoria as soon as the tangible benefits were spent last August.

6477 Now, all provincial news for CITY and OMNI is covered from Vancouver.

6478 The CRTC has heard many complaints from the Union and the public over the years and each time the Commission has expressed concerns about Rogers' lack of commitment to local news programming, even going as far as directing Rogers, at licence renewal, to review its strategy

for local news on City TV stations in western Canada.

6479 Yet every CRTC renewal results in the same vague conditions that allow Rogers to keep cutting local news and local programming or, worse, the CRTC decides against imposing any conditions at all, trusting the broadcaster to keep their promises.

6480 When Rogers applied for its most recent renewal, resulting in Decision 2014-399, it assured the Commission that it did not intend to remove ethnic news in prime time.

6481 The CRTC then said that imposing a condition of licence to require ethnic newscasts would be an "undue" financial burden, costing Rogers up to \$2 million. You did not explain why \$2 million for local news requirements was "undue", when Rogers had just set records for its billion dollar NHL deal.

6482 What happened after this decision? Rogers laid off dozens more employees and reduced those important ethnic news programs into pre-recorded community programming shows, just a few months before the recent federal election.

6483 Today Rogers only employs one field reporter for their Breakfast TV show in Vancouver. He spends most of the day doing live hits into the updates, occasionally grabbing streeters on the issue of the day. This is hardly in-depth journalism. That leaves a couple of camera operators to cover the news of the day in Canada's second largest English market.

6484 The story is the same for Rogers in Edmonton, Calgary and Winnipeg, whose stations have been transformed into news bureaus.

6485 Meanwhile, the CRTC says that the only thing that matters in its decisions are conditions of licence, and Rogers is playing by those rules.

6486 And that is precisely the problem. The CRTC has no rules and no conditions that stop these huge, vertically integrated companies from eliminating original local programming. Rogers can do what it pleases, because it is only bound by conditions of licence, and its conditions of licence seem almost meaningless.

6487 Rogers' failure to invest in itself would be entirely its own business, except that broadcasting is regulated and for important reasons. This is why

Parliament set out specific goals in the Broadcasting Act.

6488 Parliament expected broadcasters to strengthen the system, not perpetually weaken it.

6489 Some have asked if local programming on OMNI and City in western Canada is the “canary in the coal mine” for local news. If it is, the canary is lying on the bottom of the cage and its future prospects don’t look very good. It’s being starved of the resources it needs to survive.

6490 If the CRTC is serious about local news, it must impose conditions that mandate specific levels of original, local news for each station, originating and produced by employees of that station.

6491 Every spring my members get nervous and this year is no different. On Monday Rogers announced 200 more employees are getting fired. Looking around the workplace, who is going to lose their job this time? Last May, the answer was over 40 employees fired from OMNI and City in Vancouver.

6492 This takes me to the questions of the Commission that you’re asking through this

important process. Where is the industry going in the future? How is it going to get there intact? How do we get on the new bridge before the old bridge collapses?

6493 We are the creative content professionals who have dedicated our working lives to reflect Canadian stories back to Canadians, to produce the local news programs we all value so much in our lives. We celebrate communities' successes we question failures. We help Canadians make informed decisions. We are the essential ingredient for a healthy democracy.

6494 Additional funding or re-allocation of current funding must be monitored by an independent third party and consider such factors as how many local news stories are covered? How many creative content professionals are involved in the process? Is the content presented to the public in an original way, over multiple platforms, not just TV stories dumped onto the internet?

6495 And since you have now said in Decision 2016-8 that the only thing that matters in your licensing decisions are conditions of licence, you must impose conditions that require quality local, daily, original, in-house news programming at the next round of renewals. There must be a real

mechanism to deal with these companies in a timely way when they bend the rules.

6496 On the subject of Canada's Ethnic Broadcasting Policy, the Commission has heard from thousands of Canadians that Rogers isn't doing enough with its five OMNI stations. This 1999 policy needs to be updated to reflect the realities of today and give whomever wants to take the challenge of broadcasting to millions of multicultural Canadians clear guidelines.

6497 Surely these communities are worthy of their own policy review to engage them in a meaningful way.

6498 Any over-the-air license must require local original in-house ethnic news to be produced as a condition of license. Canada's growing multicultural communities represent the equivalent of a small market within large metropolitan areas. So it makes sense to me that any funding available to assist small markets could be made available to these multicultural programs.

6499 In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Commissioners, and Commission staff, it's critical to Canadians that they have access to over-the-air local original news. The good news at least is that these huge

vertically integrated companies, like Rogers, Bell, Shaw and Quebecore have many advantages in the new digital world. They are discoverable, trusted gate keepers to Canadians.

6500 They own the cable and cellphone delivery systems and the high speed data highways into Canadians homes. They control not only many conventional radio stations but most of the conventional television stations in Canada, along with most profitable specialty services. If they cannot do well perhaps the answer is to let others try.

6501 We know what the challenge in this hearing -- we know that the challenge in this hearing is huge. Establishing conditions of license and a funding framework to ensure that the Canadian broadcasting system can finally begin to grow and thrive moving forward. This is what will serve Canadians interest.

6502 My coworker's and I would be proud to be part of the creative content future for Canada's broadcasting system. We want to work with our employers and with the CRTC to ensure there is the best possible quality creative Canadian content on the new bridge.

6503 Thank you for your time.

6504 THE CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much Mr. Hawkins.

6505 Commissioner Molnar will start with the questions.

6506 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: Thank you.

6507 Good afternoon Mr. Hawkins. You mentioned that you're the local union president; that is with Unifor is it?

6508 MR. HAWKINS: That's right Unifor Local 830M.

6509 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: And did you have the opportunity to hear our conversation with Unifor this afternoon?

6510 MR. HAWKINS: Yes, I did, while I was driving in.

6511 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: Oh, while you were driving.

6512 MR. HAWKINS: Technology.

6513 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: Yeah. We had a good conversation with them and maybe while you were driving weren't able to put all your attention -- hopefully not all your attention -- to the conversation, but hopefully it was hands free -- however that was going for you.

6514 But I assume that you are supportive of the positions that they put forward to us this afternoon?

6515 MR. HAWKINS: That's right. Yeah, I've talked to Howard and Randy. I'm familiar with their position and I support it.

6516 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: Right. And you have the opportunity to give the particular flavor of your region so that's good too.

6517 There is a couple things that you had in your written submission that I just wanted to touch on with you if that's okay.

6518 MR. HAWKINS: Sure.

6519 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: You are -- particularly as it regards the definition of what is local and whether or not a physical local presence is needed.

6520 And you make in your statement -- or in your submission to us you speak of the need for reporters, camera operators, editors, writers, assignment to editors and hosts are all important elements, and you say decisions made at a centralized hub are often out of touch with the realities of the local community.

6521 You may have heard some of the large over-the-air broadcasters speak of using technology to try and reduce the cost of local programming and things such as anchors and editors are something that technology allows some economies of scale and scope.

6522 And I wondered if you might be able to comment on why it's important that all the different functions, including editors and hosts and so on, are present within the local community.

6523 MR. HAWKINS: Well, I can say that if you let technology drive the policy and not the Broadcast Act and other factors that technically they can do news in front of a green screen, but when there's a fire in Kelowna and there's emergency measures technology also now allows you to put those anchors in that city, in that environment to give

people a perspective of the news that previously talk technology couldn't.

6524 So it seems like the technology that some of these companies -- their perception of it is perhaps looking in the rear view mirror as how can we do what we have always done using technology instead of looking forward and thinking of what can we do in the future and use technology in a more creative way. And then certainly to do that you have to have the storytellers in the street and those storytellers are the hosts, they are the editors, the camera operators -- all of our camera operators are also editors.

6525 So, you know, when we look to the future let's not look too much in that rear-view mirror. It might guide us a little bit but I think that when you're thinking of technology it should enable us to do things in a more creative way looking towards the future.

6526 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: Can we use your expertise to tell us what might be the opportunities for the future?

6527 If it isn't ---

6528 MR. HAWKINS: Well ---

6529 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: --- centralizing -- using technology to centralize, do you see opportunities that would enhance or, you know, change the way local news is collected and informed -- used to inform the citizenship?

6530 MR. HAWKINS: Well, using more people instead of less people, investing in the future.

6531 You look at Ted Rogers when he put in news radio and he didn't use technology he used feet on the street, and that was an investment. It didn't make money initially and over time it did.

6532 We need one of these broadcasters to be brave and invest in the future. They talk to us about using digital technology that we want to put some of our material online but then they layoff the people that are the creative content professionals to do that.

6533 You know, I believe both at CTV and City TV they laid off people in their internet department, writers and people contributing to that just as an efficiency.

6534 It seems that's the area that we should be investing in, certainly supporting.

6535 Like I was saying, we don't want to have the old bridge collapse, it's what's supporting us, but if we can invest in the new bridge using the resources from the old bridge hopefully to do that then, you know, that might be a good way to invest in the future.

6536 But I think somebody's got to be brave and really invest in a vision and put your best people in front of it. Don't just add it as another task and also, you know, after you publish this story could you also just dump this on the web. You know, let's look maybe a little more to the future and engage our -- you know, engage the viewers.

6537 We used to have this thing called Speakers Corner and that was, you know, people coming to the corner to give us their opinion. It took time to edit through all the material. But, you know, something like that could be part of the future. It certainly isn't news, it would be other local programming, but with everybody with an iPhone and opinions you could certainly -- probably put an interesting locally relevant program together doing that at very low cost.

6538 COMMISSIONER MOLNAR: Well, thank you for that, because that's a great segue for my next

and actually final question, and that was the question of local programming and local information versus local news. And what kind of priority or importance do you believe should be placed on each of those?

6539 MR. HAWKINS: Well, local news is the core. You know, that's going to feed the dialogue. If you don't have people to cover the shooting in Surrey and you're going to have a panel discussion on your South Asian broadcast about violence in Surrey, you know, you're sort of going at it backwards.

6540 And certainly a talk show or a community show like Colette was referring to that they've converted there, the news to community programming and that somehow they can cover local news better by reducing the feed on the street and making everybody go into the studio.

6541 That's not news; that's something different. News is not where it comes to you all the time; you have to go to it. You have to chase the people down sometimes and also filter the people who want to have their opinion expressed by coming in studio. It's a combination.

6542 COMMISSIONER MOLNER: So just to clarify, and I did say it was my last question, but I do want to clarify. You know, breakfast television for example, one might question, I mean, that's not news, but it is local in large part to -- I should say in large part, it's not news, but it is local programming and engages with some audience.

6543 Do you continue to believe that that should be a priority within our broadcasting system to provide diverse local programming?

6544 MR. HAWKINS: Well, I think that there should be more of a news element to breakfast television and more funding for news with reporters doing the stories and not just sending videographers and cameramen to grab visuals and the occasional clip, but to do some analysis.

6545 And that's, you know, part of the larger three-and-a-half hour window, which is, you know, I think quite a good program for what it is.

6546 And I think you're right, it's not news, it is a -- more of a current affairs program. When you break it down, there are, you know, news elements that are as strong as we can make them with the resources that we have. You know, we work very hard every day and since last May a lot harder.

6547 COMMISSIONNER MOLNAR: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins, those are my questions. I certainly have a sense of your frustrations that you've expressed here today.

6548 MR. HAWKINS: Thank you.

6549 THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. I believe that those are our questions for you and thank you again for participating in this proceeding. And you will be able to continue in the reply phase of the proceedings, so thank you.

6550 MR. HAWKINS: Thank you very much.