

PRESENTATION

6061 MR. HAWKINS: Thank you. I'd like to thank the Commission for allowing me the opportunity to speak at this important group licensing hearing.

6062 My name is Steve Hawkins and I have worked for the past 32 years as a local news camera operator, since 1992 at CKVU in Vancouver. It's been a great ride, however, a little bumpy over this past decade.

6063 I was elected to the position of local union president back in 2006. I've had the opportunity to advocate for local news at various CRTC hearings and consultations over the years.

6064 In my intervention that I'm speaking to today, I gave evidence of how Rogers' failure to invest in local programming both at CITY and at OMNI have left Vancouverites underserved.

6065 However, it's with cautious optimism that I appear in front of you today.

6066 I'm encouraged by recent statements made by Chairman Blais recognizing the importance of local programming to Canadians, and that our largest broadcasters, like Rogers, must live up to their responsibilities under the Broadcast Act to provide Canadians with high-quality, well-funded local news, the type of local news programming that makes our democracy so much stronger.

6067 It's hard to know specifically how to react to Rogers' applications because their Vancouver operations are so intertwined between both CITY and OMNI. Six hours of daily, local news at CITY, new programming in adherence to the Commission's new Broadcast Policy, along with the possibility of a return of local ethnic newscasts on a new OMNI regional channel -- this could see real growth to local news coverage, something we haven't seen in Vancouver for years.

6068 I support Unifor National and 723M's conditional support of Rogers' 9(1)(h) application and I concur with their statements and submissions from yesterday.

6069 In fact, most of my members enthusiastically endorse this plan. And why not, if it gets daily ethnic news back on the air? Canada's multicultural

communities would be the big winners. For only a few pennies a month it seems like a bargain. What could possibly go wrong?

6070 Well, unfortunately I don't have to look too far back to recall CRTC expectations and directions that failed to deliver. As the Commission works to define its new broadcasting policy, I wonder how you will define well-funded, high-quality local news.

6071 Clearly the Commission has not been applying this measure in a consistent way to the Vancouver television market.

6072 CTV Vancouver employs over 80 people in producing their local news; Global BC employs over 150 people producing hours of local news; and Rogers Toronto operations employs over 200 people producing their local news. Is the Commission aware of how little resources Rogers has at its western stations? "First rate local coverage"? The evidence is to the contrary. Budget news with a bare bones staff is what Rogers has been doing in western Canada for the past decade.

6073 Following the 2014 licence renewals, we witnessed Rogers' dramatic format change at OMNI, replacing Category 1 daily news with a Category 2(b) current affairs show, a decision that left dozens of ethnic Canadian journalists out of work just months before the last federal election. And we have a provincial election coming up this May 2017, and it makes you wonder what sort of coverage we'll be able to -- how much attention we'll be able to pay to that.

6074 What got less attention at the time was the dramatic reductions to all of the Vancouver operations, both at CITY and OMNI. In fact, the overall staff was reduced by half.

6075 Today in Vancouver, it falls on Rogers' few remaining employees to scramble every day. BT's morning team are some of the most creative and hardest-working people in television. Given what little resources we have, "making air" every day is an amazing accomplishment.

6076 It's with this lens that I ask you to view the importance of Rogers' current proposal. Without clear conditions of licence on their CITY application and approval along with clear conditions of licence with the Regional channel, Rogers' Vancouver operations could become a glorified news bureau for Toronto, and OMNI Vancouver could follow their Alberta operations with no daily in-house programming in just a couple of years.

6077 An additional \$3 million to fund six hours of local news programming in their CITY stations outside of Toronto? This doesn't sound like it will go very far. Will it result in well-funded, high-quality news? How many more journalists will actually be added in Vancouver? What are these six hours going to look like? We've got very few details to comment on in this process.

6078 If the Commission decides not to grant Rogers 9(1)(h), or require conditions of licence that would see daily, ethnic newscasts back on air in Vancouver, I feel a short-term licence would allow for a full review of your 1999 Ethnic Broadcasting Policy, followed by an open licensing process for all of Rogers' OMNI licences. Your decision earlier this year, 2016-8, demonstrated just how important it is to have strong, specific, conditions of licence.

6079 To be clear what we need from the Commission to ensure there is local news in the future are specific conditions of licence, not expectations, directions or some other trusting form of "would be nice", but conditions the public can hold Rogers to that will ensure they produce high quality, well funded, daily, original, in-house, local news programming, local journalists, editors, writers, videographers, and assignment editors feet on Vancouver's streets.

6080 Thank you for your time today, and I'm prepared to answer any of your questions.

6081 THE CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Hawkins. Ms. Vennard, Commissioner for Alberta and the Northwest Territories, will start us off.

6082 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: Good afternoon, Mr. Hawkins. Thanks for coming to our hearing virtually.

6083 I want -- I have a couple of questions for you, and what I'm going to do is just ask you to put together a couple of things that you said in your original intervention.

6084 The first one -- and I'm just going to quote you a couple of them -- they're short -- in number 30 of your intervention, you said,

6085 "Rogers' operations in Vancouver does not have a single person that works exclusively as a news reporter."

6086 And in number 16, you said,

6087 "If the CRTC is serious about supporting local news, it must impose conditions that mandate specific levels of original local news for each station originated and produced by employees of that station." (As read)

6088 And I'd like to know, what would you suggest would be appropriate?

6089 MR. HAWKINS: Well, instead of just simply an hours' game -- and we saw that with 14 hours -- it was 14 hours in April 2015; it was 14 hours in May 2015 -- yet we did it with, you know, half the staff. Some sort of a payroll calculation to hold them accountable so that they can't change the payroll numbers and keep the hours up, because the quality clearly goes down ---

6090 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: What -- can you ---

6091 MR. HAWKINS: --- you know, as witnessed by having one part-time reporter, you know?

6092 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: What do you think it would take to get high-quality local news? What would that take, because you asked us in your oral submission. You say, " I wonder how you will define well-funded, high-quality local news?"

6093 And so I'm turning to you, and I'm saying, "Considering what you said, and considering your intervention, how will you define -- how would you define it?"

6094 MR. HAWKINS: Well, you know, we don't have access to the specific numbers yet. When you look at the numbers of employees -- and that's why I went there -- you know, every day when we're out there and a competing television station is putting together a very good product with 18 journalists and we have 1 journalist, you know, that speaks volumes.

6095 So you know, setting specific hard numbers is hard, but something comparative to a city the size of Vancouver, that's why some sort of a payroll calculation that would be a percentage, perhaps, of -- you know, these are the numbers for accountants, not for me. But ---

6096 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: How many reporters, if ---

6097 MR. HAWKINS: Yeah, something like that. I mean, that's the comparison.

6098 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: How many -- how many reporters, for example, if we look at the different people that are involved in that? How many reporters would you say would be required, because when, you know, when we're talking about, you know, high-quality local news, like, I'd like to get some clarity on ---

6099 MR. HAWKINS: Yeah, and I think ---

6100 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: --- what that seems to be ---

6101 MR. HAWKINS: --- you have to be reasonable here, right?

6102 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: --- from your point of view?

6103 MR. HAWKINS: Yeah, and I'm going to be reasonable here. I'm not going to say, "Well, Rogers, you should do exactly what CTV and Global have done," and we have the -- for 10 years have not invested in it, so I don't know that it's reasonable to say that, you know, September 1st, 2017, that we should have, you know, 20 reporters. But certainly, starting out with, you know, a dozen visual content professionals that would be a combination of journalists, videographers, video content producers, that sort of commitment.

6104 You know, today when we talk about a journalist, it's a very wide range when you're looking at that definition. But it's feet on the street, and people in the local community making editorial decisions.

6105 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: So in your estimation, that would be, say, 12, 15, 10?

6106 MR. HAWKINS: Well, as a start, but I mean, if you again, compare it to what -- and if you want to have a product that, you know, over the course of the five years, and you know, these hearings are looking at the five years and how will the industry be after five years. You know, you would hope that over the course of these regulated five years, at the end of the five years, that Rogers and the other players -- but I mean, Rogers is the one that I'm most concerned with -- will be able to build a product in this regulated environment that will thrive in a non-regulated environment.

6107 And as they build this new product that they're talking about, which we have very few details on, you know, hopefully that will be the vision. And there has been some indication that we're not going to make what I think would be the mistake of chasing the other guys, doing what they do well,

but to, you know, within the context of local storytelling and strong journalism, to build a new product that's really better positioned for the future than perhaps a legacy product.

6108 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: As I understand from your intervention, you know, when we're talking about news, you've got the news itself, the actual news, whatever that is, be it City Hall or something happening in the city or whatever is news; and then with the local reflection, then that's something that happens as well.

6109 So you can see where, you know, we're trying to -- we're looking at how -- what should this look like, as -- and particularly for OMNI?

6110 MR. HAWKINS: Yeah. Oh, yeah, I mean, you've got local -- it's soft news and hard news, if you will, and some days ---

6111 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: Yeah, and I'm not looking ---

6112 MR. HAWKINS: --- you know, the slate is full of hard news.

6113 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: I'm not looking for answers -- I'm not looking for answers from you. That's, you know, that's up to us, but I'm looking for your thoughts on these.

6114 MR. HAWKINS: Sorry, could you repeat the question?

6115 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: Yeah, I said I'm not looking for answers from you. I'm looking for your thoughts on some of these issues.

6116 MR. HAWKINS: Yeah, but specifically, what? On local ---

6117 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: The news and the local reflection ---

6118 MR. HAWKINS: --- reflection?

6119 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: The news and the local reflection on news within OMNI.

6120 MR. HAWKINS: Well, within OMNI, you know, they're doing it all from the studio right now, and it's the national newscasts, you know, that wouldn't be local Vancouver news, it would be regional news. But I certainly would see more journalists on the street telling those stories.

6121 And you know, *I was in Fusaki* (with Visaki and) during the Chinese New Year, reflecting those and you know, perhaps doing programming outside of the one-hour local news programming, but doing specific community programs celebrating those important events.

6122 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: Okay. I have just one more question for you. You say that Rogers should be given an administrative extension. Would you like to explain that or comment on that?

6123 MR. HAWKINS: Well, that's a comment on their application that would be the application without the mandatory carriage, without the 9(1)(h). And the -- their proposal, and even in some of their comments, they've really indicated that it would be a very short window that they would even be able to commit to their current affairs show. And in their -- in Susan Wheeler's submission that she made in August and gave, you know, a great list of what the 9(1)(h) would present, it also gave an indication as what they feel the current licence doesn't require them to do.

6124 And it's -- you know, it's just not enough, and they -- their current licence, in their submission, they wouldn't even have to do the current affairs show.

6125 So in that case, I would think that the Commission should review the ethnic broadcasting policy and out of that, have an open process to see who could do the best job of fulfilling the commitments of these licences with an open process, you know? Rogers would be included in that as well as others.

6126 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: Okay. I just have one final question for you. I'm wondering, would it be accurate to say that your organization does not support the 9(1)(h) application?

6127 MR. HAWKINS: No, I'd say that we do support the 9(1)(h) application and our suggestions are how to make it stronger. We think that's a way to support the multicultural community that deserves, you know, free over-the-air local TV and local news. It's a great way to provide that service to them.

6128 COMMISSIONERS VENNARD: With the changes that you suggest?

6129 MR. HAWKINS: That would be the conditional support, yes.

6130 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: Okay.

6131 MR. HAWKINS: Certainly their proposal, you know, the details that they gave in August, if they could provide, you know, as a condition of licence, the details in the paragraph 34, I mean, that would be something I think our members would enthusiastically support.

6132 COMMISSIONER VENNARD: Okay, thank you. I have no more questions.

6133 THE CHAIRPERSON: Thank you very much for your presentation and your participation in this phase. And you've got the honour of closing out Phase II of this public hearing so thank you very much, Mr. Hawkins.