

Commissioner Shoan says CRTC abdicating leadership role

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Toronto – Unifor condemns today's CRTC decision following its review of Rogers' elimination of all daily newscasts at OMNI TV.

"The Commission is looking the other way while ethnic and third language television news dies in this country," said Howard Law, Media Director for Unifor. "Almost half a million new Canadians depended on those newscasts."

The CRTC ruled that that OMNI's move does not violate its conditions of licence, though Commissioner Raj Shoan wrote separately from the majority of the Commission that "by denying the applications but taking no meaningful action to address the legitimate concerns of the applicants and interveners, the Commission is abdicating its leadership role with respect to the creation of effective ethnic broadcasting policy in this country."

The Commission's passive response comes eight months after OMNI slashed its Punjabi, Mandarin, Cantonese and Italian news services in May 2015, just prior to the federal election campaign. Law points out that Rogers executives made no mention of the upcoming cuts in 2014 when it asked the CRTC to renew OMNI's licence, in part because it provided the daily newscasts to ethnic communities.

"The Commission ignored, wouldn't even repeat, Unifor's arguments that Rogers mislead the CRTC about the possibility of eliminating newscasts, just months before it chopped the programming. It took a separate opinion from Commissioner Shoan to state the obvious. "

This decision comes on the same day the CRTC launched a working paper on the policy framework for local and community television programming which makes no mention of ethnic broadcasting. As part of that process, a survey conducted for the CRTC reveals that 81 per cent of respondents believe that local news is important and that the public record shows that Canadians sense that there is a weakening of the ecosystem for local news gathering, production and dissemination across all Canadian media.

"Daily newscasts rest at the core of the mandate of conventional local television" said Randy Kitt, Media Council Chair for Unifor. "As such we are disappointed at the CRTC's decision to ignore the importance of the OMNI newscasts and to let Rogers off the hook".

Unifor is Canada's largest union in the private sector, representing more than 310,000 workers, including 14,500 media sector workers.

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