

Presentation to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

of

Aboriginal Peoples Television Network Incorporated

May 4, 2009

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Merci de me recevoir aujourd'hui. Mon nom est Jean LaRose, et je suis directeur général d'APTN.

Cette année marque le 10^e anniversaire d'APTN.

Il y a 10 ans, il était difficile d'imaginer qu'un réseau national autochtone puisse offrir une couverture en direct des Jeux olympiques à la grandeur du Canada, et ce à raison de 10 heures par jour en haute définition, aussi bien en anglais qu'en français, et jusque dans huit langues autochtones. Avec les Jeux de Vancouver en 2010, c'est maintenant une réalité.

Notre préparation en vue des Jeux olympiques est un défi que nous prenons plaisir à relever. Nous formons des annonceurs sportifs dans les langues autochtones – nous trouvons de nouvelles façons de commenter les épreuves sportives dans nos langues.

We are training technicians, building sets and performing “behind the camera” work. We are working in partnership with other host broadcasters to bring Canadians complete coverage of the Games. In these Games, we will reflect all of Canada in way that has never been done before.

You are hearing a great deal in your Committee meetings about how parts of the broadcasting system are broken.

But, I can tell you that APTN is a success story.

APTN is a national network – we strive to reflect all Aboriginal communities: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. And, we act as a bridge between Aboriginal Peoples and the broader Canadian population.

We deliver three separate regional feeds – directed to the West, East and North of the country – as well as a high definition feed. I have distributed to the committee an information package about APTN and our programming.

En l'espace de 10 ans, nous avons beaucoup accompli.

APTN prouve que, grâce à la *Loi sur la radiodiffusion* et au CRTC, le système canadien de radiodiffusion est fort et contribue au mieux-être des Canadiens.

Permettez-moi maintenant d'aborder des thèmes sur lesquels le Comité se penche.

FUNDING FOR LOCAL PROGRAMMING

APTN doesn't provide local programming, at least not in the sense discussed at these hearings. But in many cases, our programming has regional and local roots and reflects a particular region or Aboriginal group from that region.

Our Northern service is the most “differentiated” of our regional feeds. We currently schedule 40.5 hours each week of distinctive Northern programming on this feed. Usually this programming is in Inuktitut or other Aboriginal languages spoken in Northern communities. This is a different way of looking at what is local programming. Programming that reflects Nunavut and Nunavik is local, from our point of view, even though the

communities it serves are spread out over a region that represents a large percentage of Canada's land mass.

APTN licenses this programming from our general revenues. These revenues come from the subscription fees earned from broadcasting distribution undertakings in Southern Canada and from advertising.

The Northern broadcasting societies receive additional funding for this programming from the Government of Canada through the Northern Aboriginal Broadcasting Program. Funding for the Societies through that Program has not changed for many years. As a result, the Societies have not been able to stay current with technology and increased production costs.

Avec les sociétés, nous travaillons au renforcement de leurs aptitudes techniques et de leurs capacités de production, et il en résultera de nouvelles émissions destinées aux jeunes de la région, ainsi qu'aux autres jeunes Autochtones du Canada. Pour produire ces émissions, nous faisons appel à d'autres moyens de générer des revenus.

En plus de la programmation locale du Nord, APTN diffuse régulièrement des émissions qui concernent d'autres collectivités autochtones des quatre coins du Canada. La totalité de notre programmation provient maintenant de producteurs autochtones ou de maisons de production qui sont la propriété d'Autochtones ou qui relèvent de leur contrôle.

FEE-FOR-CARRIAGE

In the past, APTN has expressed concern about the disruptive impact that the fee-for-carriage proposal could have on the broadcasting system. Our concern has been based on two main factors.

First, a fee-for-carriage could increase, materially, the cost of the basic level of service. The basic level of service already costs many subscribers more than \$300 each year. Affordability is an issue. And you should be under no illusion: the BDUs will aggressively market this fee as a tax on consumers.

Second, we are concerned about the impact on the Canadian broadcasting system as a whole if access to the system is made more expensive for Canadians – especially at this time when the entire system is facing competition from the unregulated new media sector. Increasing the cost of access could “turn Canadians off” of Canadian broadcasting, just when their enthusiastic participation is most needed.

Si les décideurs optent pour les frais de distribution, il faudrait porter une attention directe à l’abordabilité du service de base – et à la façon de faire des nouveaux frais une solution « gagnante » pour les consommateurs. Dans le passé, APTN a proposé un forfait de base « entièrement canadien » qui soit plus petit et imposé par le CRTC, de sorte que la programmation canadienne reste abordable et accessible à tous les Canadiens. Cette approche, ajoutée à une sélection de canaux numériques davantage orientée sur le consommateur – plutôt que le forfait « à

volonté » qui est maintenant si populaire et coûteux –, pourrait offrir une piste de solution.

TRANSITION TO DIGITAL PROGRAMMING

Pour ce qui est de l'élimination graduelle de la technologie analogique, APTN a de l'avance sur l'industrie. Il y a quatre ans, nous avons conclu qu'il serait financièrement illogique de poursuivre l'entretien et la mise à niveau de notre réseau de postes émetteurs terrestres dans le Nord.

At the same time, we know that APTN has a history of over-the-air service in the North, and an important role to play in the preservation of Aboriginal languages. The delivery of APTN to all Northern residents will be continued.

With the assistance of the Department of Canadian Heritage, we developed an innovative approach. We entered into agreements with a satellite DTH service, Bell ExpressVu, and with local cable operators (in cabled communities) to make sure that all residents now served by analog transmitters will still be able to access APTN's Northern service – without any charge – through their satellite or cable distributor.

We are rolling out this program in smaller communities across the North. Through this program APTN-North is made available to Northern residents as a free service. No resident is required to obtain any additional level of service from a distributor to continue to receive APTN.

I don't know whether a comparable program would work in Southern regions for Southern broadcasters, but the program is working for us.

ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The Government of Canada has played a direct role in supporting Aboriginal broadcasting for a long time.

Le Programme de Radiodiffusion Autochtone dans le Nord soutient les sociétés de radiodiffusion du Nord. Comme je l'ai dit plus tôt, les fonds qui proviennent de cette initiative stagnent depuis environ 15 ans.

Le Programme a financé les dépenses en infrastructure permettant la transmission d'APTN Nord dans tout le Nord, et il a permis à APTN d'amorcer sa transition depuis son réseau analogique par la voie des ondes. D'ici à mars 2010, l'élimination progressive de ce programme concorde avec celle de notre infrastructure analogique.

Il n'y a toujours aucun programme similaire dans le Sud pour les Autochtones.

APTN ne reçoit directement aucuns fonds du gouvernement pour soutenir ses opérations ou son mandat national.

Nous obtenons des droits de licence et des capitaux par l'entremise du Fonds des médias du Canada, lequel soutient la production indépendante en général, mais ne se concentre pas sur la programmation « locale » en tant que telle.

At this point, it is difficult to say whether the recently announced changes to the Canadian Media Fund will hurt or further Aboriginal programming, and regionally-focused programming in particular. A great deal will depend on the details.

For now, let me just say that one of the stated goals of the fund is to “reward” programs that, to quote from the Department of Canadian Heritage’s Backgrounder “have achieved and demonstrated the most potential to achieve success, in terms of audience and return on investment”.

I just want to point out that the audience in Iqaluit is not the same as the audience in the Greater Toronto Area – and the potential return from these audiences is, obviously, not comparable. It is a real question for us whether smaller audiences, in Iqaluit, Thomson or even Regina and Winnipeg, for example, will be given the same kind of weight as an audience in Toronto when funding decisions are made.

And, we are also concerned about the focus on “hit” programs, which may not lead to the kind of innovation and risk taking in programming that is required. And what may be a “hit” for Aboriginal audiences may not be with any other demographic in Canada. Will that make it less of a “hit”?

With respect to the CRTC’s new Local Program Improvement Fund, APTN will not be eligible for that fund. LPIF funds are not likely to find their way to support local Aboriginal programming.

I am not criticizing the LPIF, I am just pointing out that it was not intended to support local Aboriginal programming and it won’t.

I thank the Committee for its time and I would welcome any questions that you may have.