



**The CBC Pensioners  
National Association**

*Preserving our Future, Sharing our Past*

**L'Association nationale  
des retraités de la SRC**

*Assurer notre avenir, partager notre passé*

## **HELP SHAPE OUR FUTURE!**

### **PNA DISCUSSION PAPER # 6 – THE CBC, PUBLIC BROADCASTING & DEMOCRACY**



This is the last in a series of discussion papers designed to help you choose the political party most likely to meet the interests of older adults in Canada. Although we wrote about the CBC in our first paper, we're revisiting it now in the context of preserving a healthy democracy. This paper reminds us of the importance of a strong public broadcaster and a legitimate professional media. We hope you'll pose our suggested questions to your local candidates. And when it comes time to make your voice heard, remember who's most likely not only to preserve the CBC but to respect professional journalism.

**THE ISSUE: The importance of public broadcasting, and the CBC/Radio-Canada in particular, to a healthy democracy.**

#### **WHY IT MATTERS:**

There is limitless information available at our fingertips. Choosing your news is now easier than ordering a pizza online. The social media explosion showcasing platforms such as Tik Tok and Instagram, now the news source of many, has surged amid a much smaller mainstream media and journalism pool in Canada. Heritage Canada estimates there are 450 fewer news outlets in Canada since 2008. This includes radio/tv stations, newspapers and magazines. Think about how many local newspapers and radio stations have disappeared from your own region.

With fewer journalists to ask questions, and media outlets to host political debates and delve into accountability issues - how well served is our democracy?



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Even with a diminished media presence, Canada has been able to rely on CBC/Radio-Canada for news.

The CBC's mandate is set out in the Broadcasting Act. The national public broadcaster is obligated to inform, entertain and enlighten us, and to represent Canadians to each other. It also has a responsibility to cover elections, engage the audience, bring us debates, and nurture informed discussion. It's not only a legislated responsibility, but as a public broadcaster, a duty.

Whenever there is a provincial or territorial election, Canadians can know what's happening in real time through radio, television, and various online streaming services from CBC/Radio-Canada. We know that its professional journalism is maintained through rigorous standards and practices, and not ad-hoc information from anonymous influencers or fake news found on social media. National election coverage is done through CBC/Radio-Canada's network of reporters and stations across our country. *No other network has the capability or reach to provide such extensive coverage of these vital events, and in multiple languages.*

Public broadcasting is a pillar of democracy in most of the free world. Regardless of newspaper shrinkage, or station closures, CBC/Radio-Canada brings us the news needed to make informed decisions. But even in a democracy like Canada, it's getting harder for reporters to speak to decision-makers and to push for transparency and accountability. Increased misinformation, and disinformation is adding to the feeling of mistrust of all media organizations, journalists, and CBC/Radio-Canada.

At a 2024 gathering of public broadcasters from around the globe, each member organization, including CBC-Radio Canada, signed a declaration committed to battle what they view as the mounting impediments to democracy. Signatories to the Ottawa Declaration have pledged to serve their citizens by fulfilling the following commitments:

1. Ensure wide access to news for all citizens — providing accurate and impartial news and current affairs programming, in line with evolving technology and audiences' changing consumption habits.



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2. Combat disinformation — supporting media literacy for people of all ages, in addition to fact-checking and verifying the origin of news and current affairs content.
3. Restore civil democratic debate — encouraging an informed, respectful and nuanced exchange of views on their platforms, reflecting the diversity of their audiences, and providing a broad range and depth of analysis.
4. Call for accountability from social media platforms — looking to those social media platforms that distribute news to promote the free flow of reliable news and information from public service media on fair terms, and put in place safeguards and measures to address disinformation and impostor content.
5. Use AI for public good — establishing and complying with principles of responsible AI use, and unlocking the potential of AI through a framework that promotes transparency and fair use of our content.

## **WHERE THE PARTIES STAND:**

### **The Liberal Party**

Liberal Leader Mark Carney expressed strong support for CBC/Radio-Canada during a campaign stop in Montreal. His support was framed as a necessary step to protect Canada, its culture and its institutions from attacks from south of the border and by foreign interference.

Carney committed to a stable funding model that would see an initial increase of \$150 million, with a longer-term goal of bringing funding in line with other public broadcasters around the world.

"When we compare ourselves to the U.K., France or Germany, we see that our public broadcaster is underfunded," Carney said. "That has to change." Carney also said funding of CBC/Radio-Canada would be enshrined in law, meaning any changes would need to be approved by Parliament, not just the government's cabinet.

Several of Carney's proposals echo those contained in a white paper released in February by outgoing Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge. They are consistent with



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the previous Liberal platform which supported the protection and promotion of the French language and Francophone cultures in Quebec and across the country, as well as increasing the production of national, regional and local news.

### **The Conservative Party**

Party leader Pierre Poilievre is on record as saying “I can’t wait to defund the CBC and sell off the headquarters for housing.” The CPC leader is adamant that private broadcasters and media outlets provide news and programming for Canadians, making CBC unnecessary and costly.

Defunding CBC, while maintaining Radio-Canada, would end CBC programming on English radio, television, streaming services, and web. Yanking the English media services would also destabilize Radio-Canada in locations outside of Quebec. The immediate impact would be the loss of thousands of jobs, and the disappearance of reliable news coverage and public engagement during a time of surging disinformation and challenges to democracy.

The Conservatives say they are deeply concerned with the welfare of private sector broadcasters and service-providers, which they believe play a vital role through local and regional programming “that reflects the language and multicultural realities of our country.” The CPC maintains these businesses must be in a position to compete in “an ever-increasing fragmented and global market.”

### **The New Democratic Party**

NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, also campaigning in Montreal, expressed the party’s support for CBC/Radio-Canada, saying that it’s important to “invest significantly” in a reliable public broadcaster. Singh cited the threats from misinformation and disinformation that endanger democracy, as well as Trump’s assaults on Canadian sovereignty. He also noted, “CBC, as a public broadcaster, has been a fundamental part of celebrating Canadian culture, celebrating Quebec culture.” The party has stated that the arts “are at the heart of who we are as Canadians.”

The NDP states explicitly it will increase funding for the CBC and Radio-Canada “to help reverse the damage of decades of funding cuts.” The party believes that public broadcasting has “a remarkable legacy of connecting all points of our country – and it needs to have an even stronger future now more than ever to



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help make sure that Canadians have access to accurate, relevant information no matter where they live.”

### **The Green Party**

The Green Party has long championed legislation to modernize and strengthen the CBC's mandate while insulating it from political interference, according to Jesse Edwards, a party assistant. Edwards wrote in an email to the PNA when asked to clarify the Greens' position that the Green Party “strongly supports a vibrant, fully funded public broadcaster which plays a vital role in our democracy... We believe that supporting CBC/Radio-Canada is not just about media policy—it's about safeguarding democracy, encouraging civic engagement, and promoting social cohesion across our vast and diverse country.”

In response to the St-Onge report, GPC co-leader Elizabeth May said, “It’s gratifying to see one of the old-line parties aligned closely with the Green Party position as outlined in our last three federal election platforms.” Co-Leader Jonathan Pedneault noted that CBC/Radio-Canada is well supported by viewers in Quebec: “In light of the current threats emanating from the US, perhaps viewers and listeners everywhere in Canada will welcome a stronger public broadcaster that reflects our unique culture. This is only possible if our federal government provides it with the strong financial support it needs.”

### **The Bloc Québécois**

The Bloc Québécois says in its party platform that it would support the modernization of CBC/Radio-Canada if it means greater independence between French and English services. It’s unclear what that independence would look like.

The Bloc would demand free access to all online content from the public broadcaster, including Tou.TV, and specialized networks, and would like to see more local programming.

It would also advocate for changes to the regulations governing traditional media who don’t respect the existing rules around Canadian content. And it would seek a meeting “of all stakeholders to examine the future of broadcasting, particularly as it applies to Québec, in a changing environment leading to concentration and cultural homogeneity.”



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## **WHAT THE PNA SAYS:**

The PNA is a strong supporter of a robust CBC/Radio-Canada to help ensure a healthy democracy. The Association wants a political commitment to stable long-term funding of CBC/Radio-Canada to fulfill its mandate of fostering democratic discussion and debate by providing thoughtful and insightful news and information to help Canadians make informed decisions about the society they live in. Reflecting Canadians to Canadians is another vital part of its mandate. The PNA believes Canadians want and deserve professional and credible journalism.

## **SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CANDIDATES:**

1. What do you read or listen to from CBC/Radio-Canada?
2. How important is it to have a strong public broadcaster in order to support a healthy democracy?
3. Will you support CBC/Radio-Canada in its commitments in the Ottawa declaration?  
How?
4. CBC/Radio-Canada has a mandate to reflect Canadians to Canadians. Yet funding continues to decline and the ability to meet the mandate is increasingly difficult. Will your party commit to long-term stable funding?
5. What role should the government play in combatting disinformation and fake news?
6. Will you and your party support maintaining our local (or regional) CBC/Radio-Canada station or will you support closing it and laying off its staff?



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*For more on the CPC position on public broadcasting, please read the entire policy document*

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*Pierre Poilievre@PierrePoilievre, "I can't wait to defund the CBC and sell off the headquarters for housing."*

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