



WGC Calls on Heritage Committee to Support Choice for Canadian Audiences

Ottawa – May 6, 2009. The Writers Guild of Canada appeared today before the parliamentary Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, which is looking into "The Evolution of the Television Industry in Canada." The WGC reinforced to the Committee the fact that Canadians want to be able to choose Canadian content on their television screens, and that providing that choice is at the very heart of the broadcasting system in Canada.

A 2008 Harris/Decima poll revealed that more than three-quarters of Canadians (78%) feel it is important to have a choice of television programs that reflect Canadian society, values, and perspectives. The Canadian people invest to help broadcasters provide this choice. In order to support a Canadian broadcasting system, broadcasters receive a number of lucrative allowances such as mandatory carriage, simultaneous substitution, and advertising deductibility. As well, broadcasters' program production costs are subsidized by tax credits and the CTF licence fee top up program.

Yet in the last several months, Canadian broadcasters have done little else but try to position themselves to provide less Canadian programming to Canadians. On top of relief for local programming, the broadcasters are now petitioning for changes to requirements around high-quality Canadian programming like documentaries and drama - some broadcasters want to eliminate the requirements altogether, and others want to dilute them by allowing cheaper programs such as awards and reality shows to qualify. If change is required, it should not come at the cost of the very identity piece of the system – quality Canadian programming.

Rebecca Schechter, President, WGC, says "Now, after many years of enjoying stable profits and being supported through public policy, these newly integrated businesses are petitioning for relief from the very thing that should give them purpose: providing Canadian programming to Canadian audiences. If these companies do nothing but act as middlemen, rebroadcasting foreign shows, why have the Canadian people invested in them over the last decades? What have we been building?"

"Canadian broadcasting history tells the tale: broadcasters won't make high-quality programming if they are not required to by regulation," says Maureen Parker, Executive Director, WGC. "Members of parliament are in the unique position to ensure that there is Canadian in the Canadian broadcasting system. We're asking legislators to stand up for Canadian voices by standing up for the CRTC as it works to enforce the *Broadcasting Act*. Empower the CRTC with a system of meaningful fines and non-financial penalties which will help them enforce regulations. As a union, we know very well that rules are no good unless they are enforceable. And right now, the CRTC doesn't have the power, and the broadcasters know it."

The WGC thanked the Committee for this timely review of broadcasting in Canada. "This seems like a watershed moment in Canadian broadcasting, and there is a lot at stake for the industry and for Canadian audiences," added Ms. Parker. "We urge the standing committee to tell Canadian broadcasters that they have no business asking Canadians to give up Canadian programming."

For more information, please contact David Kinahan, Director of Communications, Writers Guild of Canada, at 416-979-7907 or 1-800-567-9974, or by email at d.kinahan@wgc.ca

The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) represents 2,000 professional English-language screenwriters across Canada. These are the talented people who create the distinctly Canadian entertainment we enjoy on our televisions, movie screens, radios and computers.