



SUBMITTED VIA INTERNET

Ms Diane Rhéaume
Secretary General
Canadian Radio-television and
Telecommunications Commission
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N2

September 27, 2006

Re: Review of Certain Aspects of the Regulatory Framework for Over-the-Air
Television, Notice of Public Hearing CRTC 2006-5

The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) would like to submit supplementary comments for consideration in the matter of the notice of public hearing CRTC 2006-5 in addition to the Coalition of Canadian Audio-visual Union's (CCAU) brief. We also respectfully request the right to appear as the Writers Guild of Canada at the public hearing on this matter.

1. The WGC represents more than 1,800 professional screenwriters across Canada who create the distinctly Canadian entertainment we enjoy on our television, movie screens, radio and computers – such as dramatic TV series and movies, feature films, documentaries, animation programs, comedy and variety series, children's and educational programming, radio drama, corporate videos and digital media productions.
2. The WGC is pleased to participate in this public hearing in order to ensure that the Canadian regulatory framework provides for ongoing production, acquisition and broadcast of high-quality Canadian programming. We feel that significant improvements need to be made in order to attract more viewers to the Canadian over-the-air broadcasting system.
3. In addition, our assessment of the over-the-air broadcasters' expenditures on eligible Canadian programming over the past five years indicates a significant downward trend in spending. Their expenditures on Canadian programming dropped from 27% to 25% of advertising revenue, while spending on American programming went from 27% to 35%. To make matters worse, this happened while advertising revenues rose more than 15% over the same period.¹ That means that during the past five years as over-the-air broadcasters were making more money – they were spending less on Canadian programming and more on foreign.

¹ CRTC statistics cited in the Review of Certain Aspects of the Regulatory Framework for Over-The-Air Television, Comments Filed by the Coalition of Canadian Audio-visual Unions in response to Broadcasting Notice of Public Hearing CRTC 2006-5

4. This reduction in Canadian television programming comes at a time when we need to communicate with our fellow citizens more than ever. As the most accessible and affordable means of communication, over-the-air television gives us the ability to identify with other Canadians. Whether you are new to this country, or your family has lived here for generations – television shows us what it means to be Canadian by reflecting our history, values and sense of humour.
5. Although technology is offering new ways of entertaining and informing Canadians, over-the-air broadcasting remains the foundation for communicating ideas in our country. Traditional forms of programming – such as one-hour television dramas – are enhanced by new digital forms of production and distribution, including webisodes and mobisodes, which provide complementary content. Since digital programs are delivered on a one-to-one basis, they will never replace the one-to-many experience delivered by broadcast television. We know this because overall per capita viewing numbers have increased from 23.7 hours per week in 2001-02 to 25.1 hours per week in 2004-05.²
6. The reality is, Canadians are looking for high-quality programs – drama in particular. And what we don't produce here, Canadians will look for elsewhere. In 1999 the over-the-air television policy was revised to allow for reality-based programs. While these programs remain popular, the audience demand for good drama has been consistent. Audience ratings demonstrate that a show like CTV's *Corner Gas* is very popular with Canadians and can pull in more than a million viewers.³ Unfortunately, there are not many examples of high-quality programs being produced to meet Canadian demand. *Corner Gas* is a success because all the stars were aligned – the showrunner and the rest of the screenwriters were experienced professionals; it had sufficient development time; the production budget was adequate; the performers were experienced and recognizable Canadian stars; the show was cleverly promoted; and it was scheduled during prime-time. This shows it takes a serious commitment to produce high-quality programs, including script development expenditures, production funding, promotion of our on-air talent, and scheduling and promotion of the show. Unfortunately not enough is being done right now.
7. The Canadian industry is primarily a television industry. In 2004/05, the total volume of Canadian television production was \$1,685 billion (\$1.1 of that was English-language production) compared to a total volume of feature film production of \$253 million (\$174 million of English-language production)⁴. Combined, the television and feature film production industry employs over 119,500 Canadians in full-time jobs.⁵

² CRTC Broadcasting Policy Monitoring Report, 2006

³ From www.cornergas.com - Monday, September 18, 2006 – The first episode of *Corner Gas* season 4 played to an audience of 1.3 million viewers.

⁴ Profile 2006: An Economic Report on the Canadian Film and Television Industry, p. 37

⁵ Ibid. p. 13

8. Television is very much the screenwriter's domain. The show's bible and scripts are the centre of all activity for the other professionals involved in the television show, such as the producers, directors, performers, editors, and technicians. In fact, the head screenwriter – called the showrunner – is the key creative position on a television series. Showrunners are involved in decisions concerning every aspect of development and production – from hiring the directors and performers and approving locations, costumes and set decoration, to ensuring the show comes in on budget and on time. In the U.S. showrunners are household names – J.J. Abrams – *Alias* and *Lost*; Aaron Sorkin – *West Wing* and *Studio 60*; David Chase – *The Sopranos*; John Wells – *E.R.*. Ours are not as familiar but we too have showrunners like Chris Haddock – *Da Vinci's Inquest* and *Intelligence*; Brent Butt and Mark Farrell – *Corner Gas*; and Susin Nielsen – *Robson Arms* and *Alice, I Think*.
9. High-quality productions also require experience and a broad talent base. We need to put more money into script and concept development, so screenwriters can write a range of scripts and then test those scripts to see which appeal to audiences. This is standard practice in Hollywood, where, as a rule of thumb, about 10 scripts are developed for each show that is produced.⁶ In Canada there are usually only four scripts produced for every one show. We also need to invest more money at the front end of development: if a script needs another draft then there has to be money available or, if a script is not working, we need the ability to “burn” that script and start all over again. And once a series is greenlit for production, the story department should be fully staffed and working on the scripts as soon as possible. All of this requires money – and more money than we are currently investing. That's why we have made a recommendation in our CCAU submission that private conventional TV broadcasters spend 7% of their gross ad revenue on Canadian drama, and that a reasonable proportion of their Canadian drama budget be allocated to script and concept development.
10. Although money is the major factor in creating high-quality Canadian drama, there are other factors at play here. We need more original programming, not less. Repeats drive audiences away from Canadian drama. A quick look at the broadcast schedule of the conventional broadcasters shows television programs like *Blue Murder*, which originally aired from 2001 to 2004, is still on Global TV's prime time schedule.⁷ Global is also running repeats of the very low budget serial *Train 48* in order to meet its Canadian content requirements. This is a particular affront given that these shows were supposed to be daily serialized stories about current events. There is nothing current about airing a show that was produced three years ago.

⁶ Cited in the Review of Certain Aspects of the Regulatory Framework for Over-The-Air Television, Comments Filed by the Coalition of Canadian Audio-visual Unions in response to Broadcasting Notice of Public Hearing CRTC 2006-5, page 9

⁷ WGC research. *Blue Murder* is aired Saturday nights at 9 p.m. on Global.

11. New shows also need to be regularly scheduled during prime time in order to retain an audience. For example, CTV decided to order its own teenage version of *The O.C.* called *Whistler*. It then aired the show during the summer months when very few Canadians are watching television, let alone a show about frolicking in the snow at Whistler. It was then bumped around several times in the schedule with the final two episodes airing on a Friday night in August. Another example at CTV is *Instant Star*, where seven of 13 episodes were run at 8:30 p.m. on Tuesdays before being bumped for *Canadian Idol*⁸ on August 29, 2006. As of the date of this submission, *Instant Star* has not continued to air on CTV.
12. We often look to the number of high-quality dramas coming out of the United States and wonder why we can't do the same. We have to remember we are on a totally different playing field. The United States has a population of almost 300 million people. We have an English-language population of only 18 million, and our television market is split into two languages, French and English. We cannot compete on the same terms as the Americans. That is why we need the CRTC to regulate the broadcast industry to ensure we can produce high-quality television and tell stories that reflect our values, history and humour. We shouldn't be forced to accept a foreign culture as our own.
13. The WGC thanks the CRTC for this opportunity to provide our comments in respect to the improvements that need to be made to the Canadian regulatory framework in order to provide for the ongoing production, acquisition and broadcast of high-quality Canadian programming, and would be pleased to reply to any further questions.

Sincerely,



Maureen Parker
Executive Director
Writers Guild of Canada

⁸ WGC research.