



Writers Guild Says BCE-Astral Deal Must Provide More Benefit for Canadian Audiences

For Immediate Release – Toronto – September 12, 2012– The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) was in Montreal today working to ensure that the BCE/Astral deal includes a revised benefits proposal that allocates more resources to on-screen benefits. Directing the money to the development and production of quality Canadian programming, says the WGC, is of clearest benefit to the broad Canadian public.

Maureen Parker, WGC Executive Director, said that “we look to the CRTC to ensure that more Bell doesn’t mean less diversity in the system. Canadians must be able to choose from a wide variety of quality Canadian shows over a wide variety of services. That should include shows like *Flashpoint* and *Saving Hope* – it should also include edgy adult drama, like *Call Me Fitz* and *Durham County*, and quality youth programming like *Connor Undercover* and *Overruled*.”

To mitigate the risk that the proposed acquisition represents to the diversity of voices in the broadcasting system, the WGC asked the CRTC to make it a condition of licence that Bell and Astral maintain separate expenditure requirements on Programs of National Interest (PNI). Such a condition will work against the bottom-line impulse to create only mass-market programming that can be aired across all the group’s services.

Jill Golick, WGC President, noted that “audiences want a wide variety of programming choices. Canadian screenwriters would love to be making shows that represent the diversity of Canadian tastes. But with the number of companies controlling broadcasting dwindling, it is increasingly important for the CRTC to compel broadcasters to provide a rich selection of Canadian programming for Canadian viewers.”

The WGC is requesting that the CRTC require BCE to re-file its benefits proposal with a more appropriate allocation of 85%-90% to be spent on onscreen programming. We are confident the CRTC will bring its careful scrutiny to BCE’s proposal, disallowing the more self-serving inclusions such as the telecommunications infrastructure cost of upgrading Northwestel broadband service.

Parker added that “directing incremental on-screen benefits to PNI and children’s series & MOWS will strengthen the television talent pool in Canada, and result in additional hours of quality TV for a range of Canadian audiences.”

And in order to ensure a level of predictability, stability and growth over the term of the proposed benefits, the WGC asked that the CRTC require BCE to spread the spending equally over the next five years.