



WGC Asks Government to Reject CRTC Decisions

Toronto – June 27, 2017 — The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) has filed an appeal to Cabinet about the recent, potentially disastrous CRTC broadcasting decisions 2017-149 and 150. The decisions have created deep concern in the Canadian screenwriting community for good reason: they slash private broadcaster funding to Canadian programs by 40% and could lead to over \$200 million in reduced broadcaster spending on Canadian shows over a five-year licence term.

“We appeal to Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly to reject these deeply flawed and harmful decisions which deal a massive blow to Canadian culture by drastically cutting Canadian-created production,” says WGC President Jill Golick. “Screen-entertainment is the most popular cultural medium of our time. Canadian screenwriters are committed to creating shows that connect our histories, share our values, enrich our social fabric and strengthen our country. But if these decisions stand, we will be forced to leave our country in search of employment elsewhere.”

This inevitable talent drain is because Canadian screenwriters occupy a unique position in the industry. They do not work on foreign or “service” productions — primarily U.S. shows shot in Canada, not created by Canadians — as do some industry professionals. Canadian screenwriters’ primary role is to create shows that are commissioned for Canada’s private broadcasters and CBC.

Consequently, the CRTC decisions endanger both Canadian storytelling and its storytellers. It’s a particularly short-sighted choice during Canada 150, a time when Canadians should be able to look to a future where Canada’s cultural output will expand, not shrink. Instead, the CRTC has facilitated the latter, by reducing Bell Media and Corus Entertainments’ minimum spending requirements on “programs of national interest,” (PNI) — drama, documentary, children’s programming etc. — to 5%. Status quo PNI spending levels are 8% and 9% of broadcasting revenues for Bell and Corus respectively, but in standardizing PNI at 5% former CRTC chair Jean-Pierre Blais chose to disregard the method used to calculate PNI contributions.

“Blais ignored precedent and turned away from the existing methodology of calculating PNI,” says WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker. “Instead he standardized PNI spending using the lowest common denominator. Where in Canada’s Broadcasting Act does it even imply that standardized contributions are a policy objective? Nowhere. What the Act does say is that the broadcasting system should contribute significantly to the creation of Canadian programming, and maximize Canadian creative resources. These CRTC decisions don’t fulfill either crucial cultural objective.”

Heritage Minister Joly’s public, laudable intent has been to bring the best of Canada to the world. The WGC is in complete agreement, and asks the Liberal government to ensure a place in the Canadian broadcasting system for our own culture: The world needs more, not less, Canada.

Contact: Li Robbins, Director of Communications, Writers Guild of Canada
416-979-7907, extension 5234, l.robbins@wgc.ca

The Writers Guild of Canada represents 2,200 professional English-language screenwriters across Canada, the creators of distinctly Canadian entertainment enjoyed on all screens.