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Thursday 11 September 2008

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Jeudi 11 septembre 2008

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Agency review:
Ontario Educational
Communications Authority
(TVOntario)

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Examen des organismes
gouvernementaux :
Office de la télécommunication
éducative de l'Ontario (TVOntario)

Chair: Julia Munro
Clerk: Douglas Arnott

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 11 September 2008

Jeudi 11 septembre 2008

The committee met at 0930 in room 151.

AGENCY REVIEW ONTARIO EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY (TVONTARIO)

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Good morning. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. This morning we are going to have a review of the Ontario Educational Communications Authority, TVOntario.

Mr. O'Brian, I presume? Welcome to the committee. Perhaps you could, for the purpose of Hansard, introduce those you have with you at the table.

Mr. Peter O'Brian: It's a pleasure to be with you this morning. I'm Peter O'Brian, as you've said. I'm the chair of the board of TVO. I'm here with my colleague the CEO of TVO, Lisa de Wilde, next to me, and Lee Robock is the COO, chief operating officer. As I say, it's a pleasure; we're looking forward to discussing TVO with you this morning.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I just would like to echo Peter's enthusiasm about being with you this morning. We thought that the most compelling and high-impact way to share with you what's happening at TVO these days was to do it by video. So, as Steve Paikin says every night, Michael, roll tape.

Video presentation.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. We're going to do two rotations. Each party will have an opportunity to ask questions, and we'll be looking at 30 minutes for each. We'll begin with the official opposition. Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Welcome to the committee. It's good to have you here. It was interesting to watch the video. I sense that it's perhaps, and you can correct me if I'm wrong, a response to the criticism last year and I guess this year with respect to your decision to close down the Queen's Park bureau and the concern that was expressed at the time about the lack of coverage. That's certainly why I'm here today. As Ms. de Wilde knows, I've communicated on a couple of occasions about my interest in this area. It's a long-standing interest; it goes back, I think, over 20 years. One of your predecessors, Mr. Herrndorf, appeared before this committee. I was sitting in the chair and raised the issue of

coverage, or lack of coverage, of Queen's Park and the Legislative Assembly itself, and contrasted that with what's happening in other jurisdictions. The one I referred to at the time was New York state and Inside Albany, which was a half-hour program on a weekly basis devoted solely to the happenings in the state Legislature. Mr. Herrndorf shared that concern and interest and as a result of that was part of the Studio 2 development and the Fourth Reading component of Studio 2. It didn't satisfy my view with respect to the coverage, although it was helpful. I don't think there was any doubt about that, and people enjoyed Studio 2 and the Fourth Reading component, those who care about Ontario politics and the happenings in this place.

0940

Now, of course, that's gone, and I'm glad to see that you're planning to expand your involvement in Ontario issues. But I have to say that my concern is still there in terms of the mandate of TVO and education. I'm being quite frank, and I'm sure all of us, if we want to be open and honest about this, have people coming into our constituency offices on an almost daily basis who have no idea who's responsible for what, what level of government, whether it's municipal, provincial or federal.

A few years ago I had some people here representing a very large union in the province on a lobby day. Two women in their forties met with me to discuss their issues, and then I asked them if they'd like to sit in the House. They sat and observed the House in question period, and they came out after and were just elated; they just enjoyed it so much. They said, "We didn't know that this happened here. We thought it only happened in Ottawa." These were middle-aged women representing a major union. I was driving down the Thousand Islands Parkway on the weekend, on Sunday afternoon, coming back from my cottage and I saw a couple of "Re-elect Bob Runciman" signs out on the lawns. There is a real lack of understanding.

We saw some polling this week, and I don't think I'm feeling too much of the lack of appreciation and understanding of Ontario issues; it's the fact that people really don't know what goes on in this place. I think there are models; I don't think Inside Albany is operating anymore. There is a show called New York Now, through PBS again, which covers the happenings in the state assembly. I know that most states, through PBS, do provide that kind of intensive coverage that focuses on their state assemblies.

You contrast that with the focus on the federal—CPAC coverage is intensive. All of the commercial networks, whether it's Mike Duffy or Don Newman on politics on CBC or CTV's Question Period every week, focus on federal issues and federal politics and commentators who focus on those issues. There is a real lack of appreciation of what's transpiring in this place. I think that's a real problem. I think it's a role that TVO should be filling and has failed to fill, since its inception, really, to my way of thinking.

We're seeing even less and less coverage of this place now. We were provided with a column from Murray Campbell in the *Globe and Mail*, dated 2008. This was following the concerns about the closure of the Queen's Park bureau. In talking about how the coverage of the Park has diminished—he used 1988 as a marking line—he said there were “30 news organizations, full-time members working from offices in the ... building and ... 18 part-timers who were not given office space. Ten years later, there were just 18 outlets,” and as of 2008, only 17 outlets. We know that some of that is with consolidation with the large news services, but we also know, those of us who have been around this place, that there just isn't the coverage of what transpires here.

In terms of the availability of the signal through the Legislative Assembly, if you take a look, Star Choice recently announced it's cancelling its coverage of Queen's Park. ExpressVu has never covered it. Rogers moved the signal up into the stratosphere, and we were talking about that earlier, so many people can't get in touch with it. Your channel used to repeat Queen's Park question period after 11 o'clock at night; it's my understanding you don't do that anymore either.

Those are my main concerns, and we can go over some of them in detail as we go through the day.

I also was told that you have a parliamentary bureau in Ottawa, and maybe you can just indicate quickly if that's accurate or not before I pursue—okay.

So we're getting mixed signals with respect to the Queen's Park bureau. We heard initially that the bureau was closed, and then we got some press coverage afterwards, “Well, no, the person who was assigned there had left.” It must be close to a year now that there has been no one here, and even when Sue Kelley was here, it was on kind of a spotty basis. But you've maintained a parliamentary bureau in Ottawa. You are an educational network for the province of Ontario. Closing down an office in Queen's Park and maintaining an office in Ottawa with the Parliament of Canada, when they have all of the extensive, significant coverage available through CPAC, through all of the commercial networks and through the news networks is truly puzzling to me. I will get into a number of other areas afterwards, but I think this is a failure on the part of TVO. I'm not sure whether they feel that there's not going to be enough interest or viewership with a show like that. I'm not sure why it has never gotten off the ground when it seems that similar or comparable programs are available in so many other jurisdictions. I know you're trying to stress broad-

ening your coverage of Ontario, and that's commendable, but I'm specifically interested in what I see as the continued erosion of coverage at this place. It was modest at best 20 years ago, and it's even worse today.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: It's really good to get an opportunity to have this conversation with you. I'm pleased that you've put it squarely on the table this morning. It's a really big question. I hope I will manage to address all the various pieces that you've put forward. Please forgive me, this is my first time before a committee like this, so if I miss any of the factual questions that you raised, please do come back at me with them.

To start, it really must be underscored that TVO's commitment to covering what makes Ontario Ontario has never been stronger. That is the starting point for everything, because we are a provincial agency, and we're funded in large part by the government of Ontario. A couple of points, I think, of clarification might help.

TVO isn't, and has never been, a news organization, so while we have great impact in the province—it's gratifying to understand that TVO does reach 10 million people over the course of the year—at the end of the day, we are a small organization with limited means. Being a news organization is frankly something we've just had to cede to the really big public and private media organizations. That being said, over the last decade plus, TVO has built a real expertise in current affairs. The difference in the coverage that current affairs means is, I think, best expressed in what we now have in our flagship program, *The Agenda* with Steve Paikin, where every night we can take the issues that are the big issues of the day, of the week, and go deep on them. I would say to you that what TVO brings to the table that is unique is that ability to go deep in current affairs.

0950

I'd also share with you that I know the really smart team led by Steve Paikin and Dan Dunskey that builds that show every day really does watch the issues that are emerging and is convinced that there is no big issue that it has missed on *The Agenda*. That's something that they, as the journalistic team, feel very strongly about and it is something that motivates them, that defines the issues they are looking at and identifying as the big issues to be covered on the show.

To address specifically the question of the Queen's Park bureau, I think I would start by saying we're but a few subway stops away from Queen's Park and it doesn't take more than 10 or 15 minutes for some of our journalists to get down to Queen's Park when that is necessary. There has also been a tremendous change in terms of technology, so people can be monitoring and understanding what's going on without being physically present in an office. So I guess what I would suggest to you is, the fact that we don't have a physical office here has nothing to do with our passion for really thoroughly bringing to our viewers the big issues that are going on in the province.

To address the issue of the Ottawa bureau, we have one producer who has a work station in some shared

space in Ottawa, and that happens to just be something that—it's a fact of life, that's where he lives. He's part of a team and he just happens to be physically located in Ottawa. It's a bit harder to get to Ottawa than it is to hop on the subway and get downtown.

Another point to make in this is the commitment to raising the political literacy of the province. We completely agree with you, Mr. Runciman, that that is something we can make a real contribution to, and I think it's a wonderful illustration of where the new platforms, the Web-based delivery platforms, are ideally suited to creating and making accessible that kind of information about precisely what happens in question period: How do committees work; what's the role of committees; how does the budget get made? There's a lot that can be contributed in terms of demystifying the machinery of government and increasing the political literacy of everybody in the province. It's most exciting to think that it's something that can be done on an on-demand basis. It also could be really powerful as a tool even in the more formal learning situations of schools. But it can also be something that—you know, my dad is interested in it and he can go online and he can figure it out.

The kind of mindset that we're bringing to the challenge that you have laid out for us is really to say, "Okay, using the media tool kit that we have today in 2008, how can we best do something that will be high impact?"

Interjection.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay, yes.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I guess I don't accept your position with respect to your being just up the street. I suppose the Toronto Star, the Globe and the Sun could take the same position, or anybody who's left in here at this place. Maybe we should close those offices and have MPPs who are over in the Whitney Block move into the main building if that stands up to scrutiny.

I guess you didn't in the Ottawa bureau issue—can you not appreciate the optics of that? You're an Ontario network, funded significantly by Ontario taxpayers, and you're keeping a bureau open in Ottawa while you're closing one here that covers the goings-on of the government and the taxpayers who fund you in a significant way.

You didn't respond to my comment about the question period rebroadcast, and I'd certainly like to hear that. I've never suggested that you should be a news organization, and I'm talking about the coverage. If you take a look at some of the examples of programs covering state legislatures, I think you'll see that this is an educational network, in my view, where they're dealing with MPPs of all stripes, committee chairs, committee clerks, committee researchers. They're trying to give a better and broader understanding of how these places function, the roles and responsibilities of members. Most people have no idea. They think we're working only when this place is in session. They don't appreciate the roles that members play in this place and beyond.

I'll get into this later, in the second round—and you didn't deal with this well—why you have never moved in

this direction, or some of your predecessors. I'm not laying this all on your doorstep, although you have cancelled the one component that I thought was somewhat helpful, Fourth Reading. Is it that you simply don't think the viewership would be there, the interest would be there, or is it cost-prohibitive from your perspective?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: To answer the question about question period, it is indeed broadcast on the signal at 1 o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It is.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Yes, absolutely.

What I should stress is, this is not at all a question of viewership. I think we, as an organization, do have to make choices. That being said, I really do want to try to convince you that in the context of The Agenda with Steve Paikin, we are able to devote more time and go into more depth when the issues are hot and when they are important and pertinent to people. So I would say to you that in the context of The Agenda with Steve Paikin, we are working really hard at taking those provincial issues, whether it's about the agrarian issues, whether it's about the impact of the closure of plants, how the economy is adapting, what's happening up north—those are all issues that become the subject of particular shows on The Agenda. It's just that the flexibility of our format allows us, when those are the big issues, to actually go into greater depth, and it's without, one could say, the rigidity of a specific half hour once a week. So that's the choice that has been made.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: One final question in this round—no?

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Can we wait?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Sure.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. We'll move on to Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's very good to see you here this morning. I wanted to follow up on something that came from the previous questions, and that is around your Web-based initiatives. My concern arises from having actually spent some time in the north recently and the concerns that exist around lack of access to Internet services, particularly in some remote northern communities, where even children, which again is a big part of your mandate, do not have access to Internet at all. First of all, is this something you've thought about? Can TVO play a role, particularly in terms of the educational piece that you have for young children and others, in finding a way to augment access to Internet in remote northern communities—but also the extent to which this increased focus on that part of your work in Ontario is not accessible to children who do not have Internet access in their homes or in some cases their schools. Could you speak to those issues?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: That's an excellent question and it's a really important one for all of us who see the tremendous potential that the Internet presents for education. I think that TVO's role is probably limited to creating the content. We probably don't have a role to play in actually extending Internet access. I think what

makes me feel optimistic about the scenario you describe is that Internet access is increasing at a rapid pace. We had some really good discussions just a couple of weeks ago with the people behind SLAAMB, the Sioux Look-out aboriginal reserve that's looking at how we can get into delivering GED testing. The same issue was raised, which is that it would be so much more adaptable if we could deliver the testing using the Internet. We looked at it, and the sense we had in our discussions with them was that it's not possible today, but within two years it is going to be possible. So the whole piece around digital media is that it's not a flash cut, where you flick a switch; it's much more of a gradual rollout. If you permit me a bit of a parenthesis in terms of the pace of change around digital media, it's hard to stop and say, "Four years ago, we didn't even have YouTube." Yet, today, 13 hours of video is posted to YouTube every minute. So just in the space of four years you had that kind of a change. You can take the example of the Olympics. Four years ago, 200 hours of video were streamed at the Olympics; this year, 2,200 hours were streamed.

1000

I just give you those as examples of how it's not happening fast enough, I agree with you, but it is happening, and I think that the importance of having great, made-in-Ontario educational resources for young children is really where TVO can make a unique contribution. What we create on television for kids stands alone. The good news is, we are on basic carriage and we are on ExpressVu and Star Choice as well as—if there are any small cable systems way up north. So the television signal stands alone and it provides unique, amazing content for children that starts with an educational outcome in mind, that has a teacher involved in the development and the creation of the content, and then, as access to the Web becomes available, the process or the experience can be richer. I would say to you, I absolutely share your desire to get the Web-based tools into the hands of more kids.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: That's great. It's interesting, because in the way that you describe the value of the television-based programming, I hearken back to the questions from Mr. Runciman. I think that his frustration—and again, I don't want to speak for him at all, but I actually have a lot of sympathy for many of the arguments or concerns that he raised, because in many ways, the opportunities to provide information about what's happening at the provincial level also exist with the television piece. I would agree with Mr. Runciman in that TVO is not necessarily maximizing those opportunities. I would say that there are—I'm trying to get my mum on the Internet, but she's just not going there. It's good that your dad is, but my mum isn't. She goes on to play her games, and that's good. It helps with her mental acuity and those kinds of things, but she has difficulty in terms of the Internet at this point.

Nonetheless, my point is that there are people who are either not going to or are not able to or cannot afford to access these—I mean, I watched the video and it was quite interesting. Many of the educational pieces around

the provincial Legislature seem to be in your Web-based programming, not in your television-based programming. So again, I do believe that there is a possibility of an expanded role around these opportunities for Ontarians who do not access information through the Internet and would hope that you would consider that as a place that TVO can possibly be going in the future.

I guess my question would be, in terms of your strategic planning for the future—we've talked about where it has come from and we've talked about what's happening now, and you heard some of the concerns, not for the first time, I'm sure. Is there any opportunity in your future strategic planning to re-look at whether or not the television-based programming could become more Ontario-based programming?

I say that because not only is there an issue around what we don't see at this point, but I come from a community that used to have its own television channel. It doesn't anymore and it's now owned by a larger corporate media source. Our own local and regional news has been significantly reduced. We don't have CBC coverage in our community, so we lack this regional focus. It seems to me that TVO has or could have a role to play in some of that more regional type of information being provided to connect regions in the province with each other and provide that broader understanding of who we are in Ontario, from one edge of the province to the other.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I think you raise really important questions, and they are certainly ones that, in the context of our planning, which is something that we do on an annual basis, we're constantly looking at to see how we can increase the impact of TVO. Since Peter and I joined three years ago, impact has really been the touchstone of how we measure what we can do. We're always saying, "How can we do more? How can we get out there more?" That's why we are so excited as an organization to be taking *The Agenda* on the road this year. It's been a really long time since we've been able to have the means to get out into the province, so we view this as a beginning, but a very exciting one.

It is an example of where we use the television programs, really, as we said in the video, as the sparkplug for additional resources. But it's never at the expense—it's all about amplifying the impact. If you look at what we do in *The Space*, which is the kids' content for the after-school crowd starting at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, we very much use technology to make those links out in the community. We partner with different organizations like *Let's Talk Science*, which happens to be located in London, but that's just an example.

We also are starting to leverage new technology. There's Skype technology—which, if you have any university kids in your family, they know how to use for long distance. We figured out how to leverage it so that we can send one of our really talented hosts, Jackie, out of *The Space*. She takes a cellphone, a laptop and a camera and is able to actually move around the province, meet up with people, and it comes back into the

television signal. It's a small example, but I think it's one that we get quite excited about because it's a relatively low-cost way of expanding our reach.

I agree with you that, undoubtedly, technology is going to allow us to do more and to get out more into the province, and that's something that really does motivate us as an organization.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Do I have time for one more?

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Yes, you do.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I wanted to ask a little bit about the role that TVO plays in supporting made-in-Ontario programs, so specific programs that are made in Ontario. There has been some concern recently that that role has been declining somewhat. I'm wondering if there is capacity with TVO to begin to have more involvement again in made-in-Ontario programming. I say that in terms of the programming itself, but also the pieces that go into the programming in terms of the technical side, the knowledge side and the staffing piece. Is it possible to continue to do the kinds of things that you're talking about and expand that role without additional resources that would help with that made-in-Ontario programming?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: That's a question that I think needs just a little bit of context, which is that we've had the great fortune of being able to rebuild in digital our in-house production capacity. Our ability to create made-in-Ontario content is really something that is a huge strength of the organization and that allows us to deliver on our mandate of providing something to the province that no other broadcasters are providing.

Every year, we're creating approximately 500 hours of made-in-Ontario, made-at-TVO content. A couple of hundred hours of that is children's content, and that's something where we've had a real commitment, to increasing the amount of that children's content, because it is linked to the Ontario school curriculum, so it is really meaningful. It's part of our strategy that we want to surround the school experience and help kids go to school eager and keen to learn, all tied in to the student success priority of the government. Definitely we've been expanding the number of hours of the kids' content because we think that is something we do that nobody else does and that it really does make TVOKids a different kind of destination, where we ask kids to work a bit harder, but we also believe that they are delivering and that they are learning and that it is contributing to them having a lifelong love of learning.

1010

In the case of our adult-focused content, we have The Agenda with Steve Paikin; we have Big Ideas, which is another example of a really great mechanism where we do reach out into the province. I did go back and flipped through the different lectures we created for Big Ideas, and probably a third of them were from universities outside of the GTA. Big Ideas is a great example of content that garners a relatively modest audience on the television signal and yet has a huge following as a podcast download. In fact, on iTunes it's the number one download in terms of educational content, not in Canada,

but in Canada and the United States. So it's a really strong offering. I just wanted to make that pitch for Big Ideas.

In terms of Your Voice, we reach out into the province, bringing guests in; they may come into the studio, or we often use satellite to do those video feeds. We often do that on The Agenda as well.

I think with the capital rebuild that we were able to do we have streamlined and ended up with what we call modest, Jetta-like production facilities, but they're state-of-the-art and they're incredibly impressive. I would like to invite you all to come up to our open house on November 12 so you can get a really hands-on feel for what makes us unique. Thanks to that capital rebuild, we are positioned to produce a lot of content.

Listen, we have lots and lots of talented people who, if given the opportunity to dream and to do more, could of course do three times more; we could do 100 times more. But right now I think we have a really focused content strategy where we are obsessed with doing things that the market doesn't do. Could we do more? Of course. But we have good funding right now, we're on a solid base and we're very charged up about the upcoming season. As I said, it's letting us get out of the studio for the first time, and now it's really about what more we can do and how we can do it better and how can we have greater impact.

Sorry for going on like that.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: No, that's okay. Just a final question. You talked about children; we've talked about adult programming. The ones who are always the most difficult to communicate with, I would think, would be the young adults and teens. What do you have right now, and anything in store, in terms of that age group?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I have a dream on that one. I think that one, the way you characterize it, is the hardest demo to attract to television in particular. Teens in particular, young adults, are really increasingly tied into Web-based Internet experiences. We are a long way along in our digital conversion but we're not quite there yet. We have some more heavy lifting around our content management, but by the end of this year we'll be a long way along to being able to have easy access to our content.

What we're looking at is how we can mine the archive that TVO has built over the years and repurpose it and put it together in a way that becomes a compelling source of unique Ontario-based information and history. We know that we have created unique content that no one else has over the last almost 40 years. So it is a dream in the sense that I say we have to find a way to talk to young Ontarians and provide them with those kinds of Web-based tools, because otherwise they're going to go to Google. While there's nothing wrong with Google, it is I think really important in this century to be able to offer kids and young people in Ontario content and perspectives that are rooted in our reality. So it is on my dream list.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But no specific plan, nothing specific in terms of implementation?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Not yet.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much, and we'll move to Mrs. Sandals.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Good morning, and thank you for coming. It has been very interesting to hear about all the exciting things that you're doing at TVO.

You mentioned in response to the last round of questioning the fact that you're moving towards digital, and we understand both that your licence—that the CRTC will require you to go there, and that there has been a significant investment by the provincial government in allowing you to convert to digital. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about what that really means to you overall, the move from analog to digital, and what effect that has in terms of how you will have to reorganize your own resources and what impact that has on how you do business daily, but also what sort of opportunities that creates for you in the future, in terms of things that you will be able to do in the future that you're not necessarily able to do now.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Thank you. That's a huge question, and I will try and focus my remarks.

I did want to just point out that in the package we've prepared for you, we pulled together a few slides that we thought might help to illustrate some of these issues. If I were just to turn you to page 6, it's a slide—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: That's right, exactly—this. On page 6, we tried to graphically show how all of the different pieces are linked. So that is today, in digital. We are already so much more than simply a TV station that creates television programming. We create amazing, innovative, Web-based products—that's the tv.org.

I should just mention tvparents.com, which is a unique, Web-based suite of resources that gives parents access to experts on educational issues. Again, it's not something that anybody else does, but it ties into our strategy of partnering with parents so that they, in turn, can be more effective partners in their kids' education. So that's one take on it.

Let me just direct you to this lovely diagram, which is a simplified way of—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: What page are you on?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Page 13; I apologize. It describes really what the digital value chain looks like. It starts with the creation of content, it goes into the management of the content and then ends with the distribution.

We have, over the last couple of years, been really focused on upgrading and rebuilding the creation capacity within TVO. What that means, in its most tangible form, is that our cameramen have new, state-of-the-art digital cameras as opposed to the old analog ones that they were holding together with duct tape a couple of years ago. It means that we can create content with more certainty that everything's going to go right. Because in a sense, going digital wasn't really an option; the whole industry was going digital. It was a global phenomenon, so we didn't really have a choice. We had to get there or become irrelevant. So the great news is that we've been

able to make that move, thanks to the investment on the part of the province.

We're now moving through that value chain, so we have the new studios up and running and we have the new field cameras, so when we go out into the field and do The Agenda on the road, we have this amazing air-pack, which is a studio in a suitcase that will allow us to do that very simply and easily.

The content management piece is way more complex but also way more powerful. That's where we will be able to make content once and use it many times. It's content that could be on television, it could be on our website, it could be on Yahoo's website, it could be on Joost; it could be on many different platforms, but the beauty of digital is that it's made once and then it can be repurposed easily.

In both the content creation piece and the content management piece, digital means a huge effort around retraining. It's very exciting, but it's also a bit scary. And so over the last couple of years, the organization has been really involved in an intensive retraining exercise for—most of our 365 people on the team have had digital touch them in some way. If you're a cameraman or if you're an editor, it's been more dramatic, more of a really immediate impact on your job, but everybody realizes that what the organization can do is changing. So I think it's giving birth to a great sense of innovation and what more we can do, and it's really gratifying and exciting to see people come up with new ideas.

1020

There's one idea around—when we go with The Agenda on the road, we're going to obviously have a studio audience and do that kind of a town hall type of format. But the day before, some of the really smart brains at TVO have come up with something called Agenda camps. This is like—an “unconference” is what it's called.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: An unconference?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: An unconference. And it brings together people from the community who are interested in issues of public policy. Specifically, the issues that we're going to be talking about are what's happening in the different regional economies of Ontario. It will bring together members of the community, and, in a very new-media way, resources will be created. So there will be essentially a wiki of that experience, where people are bringing forward ideas, debating them, talking about them, and it'll be captured on video. That's an idea that wouldn't have been possible a couple of years ago. Now, our producers are able to come up with new ideas that are out of the box. And that's all thanks to digital.

That's just one example, and then as you move along the value chain, distribution is the last piece of it. We'll be focusing on upgrading our master control, which will give us a better signal and it'll also give us some additional capacity around things like descriptive video, which is an important piece.

And then the last piece is the over-the-air transmitters, and that's a big issue that we have to take into account and figure out what is the best plan.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: We were talking earlier about the degree to which you're able to get out into the regions and reflect what's going on with content about regions. So if I'm understanding you correctly, then, the move to digital broadcasting will actually enhance your capacity to get out and do regional content, because you don't have to be in a studio any more to produce good quality. You'll now be able to travel much more easily and produce good quality with the mobile digital.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Yes, our airpack is a powerful tool. Going out into the field is a costly exercise, and we're a pretty buttoned-down organization when it comes to how we manage our costs. But certainly, digital is more nimble and it allows us more flexibility. So I think going forward, the potential is very exciting, and now we have to just figure out where we leverage it to make that impact.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: We've really focused on the TVO side of the operation and we haven't really talked about the Independent Learning Centre side of the operation. I wonder if you could just bring us up to date on what sort of initiatives you've got with the ILC and, again, where you see the ILC going in the future. So, currently, what are you doing and what are your future plans?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: The ILC is a unique resource that allows people of whatever age to pursue high school credits, ultimately with a view, if they choose, to getting their high school diploma. In addition, we are also the only place in the province that's licensed to do the GED, which is the high school equivalency test. So in the case of the ILC, it really is something that fills a lot of gaps. And I think as we look forward, there's a digital possibility for it as well, in the sense that we can migrate more and more of the course work onto the Internet, which just makes it a more flexible way—and I think to respond to the idea of that's where a lot of the older teenagers and young adults are turning and expect to be able to get their products. So in terms of the future of the ILC, it is very much one of a digital strategy that is in evolution and in development.

In the case of the GED, that's one where right now we have one illustration of working with SLAAMB up north to be really responsive to an emerging demand. Suddenly, there are some really important economic developments in new mines, a couple of new hospitals, and people need to get their high school equivalency to be able to take the apprenticeship positions. That's one where we have to be really responsive and find a way to get the prep work done in those communities and, most importantly, the testing done. In many cases, those are fly-in communities where being able to get your high school equivalency is going to change your life, because you're going to have access to a job that you otherwise didn't.

To come back to the ILC and getting your high school diploma, every November we do graduation ceremonies, and it is truly heartwarming to see the range of people for whom getting your high school diploma outside of a traditional secondary school is, again, a life-altering,

great moment. Sometimes, they're people who were just out of high school, missed a few courses, and they need to fill it in and then be able to go on to university. But sometimes they're people who have been out of high school, never got their diploma—they can be moms who are 50—and haven't told anybody that they're even working on their diploma, and it's a big reveal and a big deal. It's lots of small, happy stories where the ILC does something that really does move people to a better place in their lives, and that's pretty exciting.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Actually, I agree with you. As somebody who's attended a lot of high school graduations and commencements in my life, my favourite is actually our local school of continuing education where adults have come back and struggled through those credits they need. Often we'll even have a few seniors for whom this has been their life goal, to get their high school graduation diploma.

One of the challenges that we face in northern communities is trying to provide a full range of credits for students who are in northern secondary schools in remote locations, and I know from work that I've done in the north in the past that one of the ways in which you can extend the capacity of a really small secondary school to deliver a wider range of curriculum is to have the students picking up some of the credits using the ILC format. I'm presuming that once you move to digital, there will be greater capacity to put some of that through satellite, because a lot of northern communities are more likely to have Internet access through satellite than they are through more conventional powers. How is that all going to work together? I know it's often crucial to northern education that you have some capacity to pull some of those credits from someplace other than local delivery.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Absolutely, and that is very much a strength of the ILC, that it does allow you to take more specialized courses, perhaps a third math course. It might not be calculus—you could take algebra as well. On the question of delivery, really, however the Internet is delivered—if it is on satellite, so be it—it needs to be an Internet-based delivery system so that it's cost-effective, because video delivery by satellite is just cost-prohibitive.

It's coming. It's not coming as fast as you'd like when you're all the way up north, but it is coming, and I think it is just a question of us being at the same point along our development so that we can leverage it when it is possible.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: We've had a lot of conversation, if we go back to the mainstream TVO, about coverage of issues and politics in Ontario. I used to watch Studio 2 and Fourth Reading. Now that you've moved to The Agenda format, my sense is that viewership for that has grown and been very steady and devoted.

1030

It's always hard to let go of one thing and move to another, but I wonder if you could give us a bit of a sense in terms of hours of coverage. The format has changed

but, in terms of the total time that you're devoting to issues in Ontario, has that really changed?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: It's an interesting question. I don't have the precise breakout, because that's not something that I just have at my fingertips. I can get that for you if it's interesting.

I think the way to really look at it is that what The Agenda sets out to do is to put the viewer in the centre of the big debates and the big issues. The reason that is the defining feature of the program is because we listen to what we're hearing from our viewers. The research we were doing told us that people wanted depth and they wanted more voices. I really understand why people are seeking depth because, when you look at the multitudes of news outlets that are out there, an awful lot of it is about sound bites and it's about who is doing what to whom, in a very abbreviated and un-nuanced way. What our team at The Agenda does is really provide way more about the "why."

I think there's a real interest on the part of a lot of viewers in understanding things. People know that the world is complex, they know that things are interconnected, and a lot of people really want to understand those interconnections. That's also one of the reasons why we cover things like what's going on in China and the economy there, not simply because China is a big economic power but because what happens in China does impact Ontario. In order for us to really understand as a province how to be more and more successful, we need to understand what's going on out there. The world has become so interconnected, and I think people understand how complex it is. I find it really gratifying that there's a larger audience for current affairs today than there was two years ago on TVO. The Agenda with Steve Paikin wins in its time slot for current affairs. I find that an incredibly optimistic piece of data about where people in the province are at. They really do want to sink their teeth into it.

In addition to that television experience, there's a really avid group of several thousand people who are in the online community communicating and adding to the debate and contributing to the debate. I find that really exciting.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: So the viewers are obviously eating up the new format. I must say, as a politician, that it's very gratifying to see some venue in which the discussion takes more than the 10-second sound bite and people actually dig a bit deeper. Thank you for that.

I think I must be almost out of time.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Actually, yes. We'll save questions, then, for the next round. We'll move back to Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: How much time do we have?

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): You have about 12 minutes.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Okay. Just off the top, there's a question I wanted to ask at the end of the last go-round. You heard my comments about the lack of

access to the parliamentary channel now, the legislative channel, and you indicated, which is positive, that you're re-broadcasting question period at 1 a.m. Would you ever give consideration to broadcasting it live, now that it's at 10:30 in the morning? I guess that's the change; it could still be 10:45 this fall, but starting next year, assuming the majority government will get its way, it's going to start at 10:30. I just wondered if you'd ever consider taking a look at doing that, given the reducing availability of the legislative channel.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: That's a tough question. Where the television signal is a relatively inflexible one is revealed in how we could answer that question. We've made a promise to kids in Ontario that from 6 a.m. in the morning until 7 p.m. at night, kids and parents can count on TVO to deliver a commercial-free, high-quality, trusted educational experience.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: That's understandable and I appreciate that.

Ms. Lisa De Wilde: So the rigidity of TV is that breaking up that uninterrupted offer is a really tough one.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'll rephrase the question then: Would you consider doing it in a time slot that's more likely to be available or viewed by Ontarians?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I'm thinking that this would be a perfect offering to stream live on the Internet.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Well, that's being done. I guess the answer is no.

You talked about winning in this time slot, which I thought was interesting. I can understand that you want to have success with a program like The Agenda, but I didn't think that winning the time slot was the goal of your organization.

In any event, you say you've been listening to viewers. Over the last couple of years I've seen press reports, I don't know whether they're accurate or not, about your membership dropping—this was in a Windsor Star editorial—from 100,000 at the end of 2004-05 to about 65,000. What are your membership numbers today?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Today we have about 75,000 members.

I think that the question of self-generated revenues, because that's really what donors are a part of, needs to be understood in its totality. Self-generated revenues for an organization like TVO will always be a big challenge, but that's not surprising, because TVO is there to fill a gap that the market isn't serving. I really do think that's one key leg of the stool on which TVO is built.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Some elements of it are, but not all of the programming, I would suggest, fits your description.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I can assure you that when we set out to schedule the network on TV and on the Web, we're motivated to do things that are unique and that aren't provided by other broadcasters. In the case—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I want to get my points on the record here and I only have a few minutes.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I wanted to just lay out for you the question of earned revenues. In the context—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I'm sorry; I don't want to hear that. I'd like to go on to something else here. Your membership obviously is down from 100,000 in 2004, even if it has gone up slightly.

This editorial in the *Star* mentions as well that you don't release your viewership numbers to the public, even though the taxpayers are kicking in most of the money. Is it still the case that you don't release your viewership numbers to the public, even though you were exulting over *The Agenda* winning its time slot?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: The fact that *The Agenda* wins its time slot is a really gratifying piece of information, precisely because—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Why don't you release all of your viewership numbers?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: If I could just—

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd just ask—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I don't mind having questions answered—not going off into other areas that don't deal with my questions.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay. We'll go back to Ms. de Wilde.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: In the case of *The Agenda*, the viewership numbers are relevant because it's a piece of content that is consistent with our educational broadcasting strategy. Of course, if we were running *American Idol*, we'd have way bigger viewership numbers. So, when I say when we're not a viewership-driven network, that is a cornerstone of our strategy. We are guided by some of the viewership numbers when it's falling within our strategy, but it has to start with, does it fit within our educational broadcasting strategy?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Why don't you release those viewership numbers publicly?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Some of them we do, just like any network.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Why not all of them on an annual basis?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: We've put some of the key numbers in our annual report, and we're happy to do that.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Sure, and you're going to put in the ones that look good, I guess. I would suggest that if you're going to do that, it should be consistent; you should release them all so people can have a better assessment of value for money. I know you spoke, in your financial strategy, of value for money, and we'll get into that a little later, if we have time.

I assume, I may be wrong on this, that *The Agenda* is the most costly production at TVO.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: That would be fair.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Can you tell us what the annual cost of producing that show is?

1040

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I don't have that breakdown. If you look at our in-house content, it's about two thirds of our programming budget. So it would all flow back from that.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Okay. I will ask if you can provide that information to the committee.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: We're happy to do that.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It would be helpful.

I got something in the mail a while ago, a DVD: Steve Paikin—year two of *The Agenda*. I don't know if that was put out into the video shops; I haven't seen one. I'm sure it's probably not doing as well as season one of *Dexter*. I just wonder what the cost of producing something like that is, as well as the distribution costs—if you could provide that to the committee as well.

I'm just wondering, since the hiving off of TFO, have salaries of senior management been impacted by the reduced responsibilities in terms of not having both arms of the organization? Has that had any impact at all?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: The hiving off of TFO from TVO: It has been a big change to the organization but, in a sense, at the end of the day the back-off as functions of finance, IT, HR, were essentially functions that have to be provided whether we have TFO or we don't have TFO.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: So nothing has happened.

Your road show that you're talking about for *The Agenda* this coming season: I've heard—I was called about this, whether it's accurate or not, so I'm asking for your view—that you've hired an outside firm to develop that rather than using people within the organization. If that's true, I just wonder—the complaint was, of course, that you have the talented people, and you've mentioned the talented people in the organization—why you would go outside and at what cost?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: TVO often uses freelancers to augment the teams when we need additional capacity, so *The Agenda* team is running *The Agenda* on the road. We may be, because it is an additional—I mean, it's a big effort on the part of the organization, so we may have added some freelancers, but it's only to augment the team that's there.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Okay, well, I'd appreciate getting the information on costs associated with that as well.

The financial strategy which was outlined in your document—and you have three priorities: reinventing the revenue model, reducing cost base, and value for money. I don't have time to get into this, but it would be interesting to know at some future point if you can provide us with what you've done to reduce your cost base.

The value-for-money issue—I'm curious. When you're assessing your financial strategy in becoming financially sustainable, how do you define internally that you're getting value for money?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Some of the benchmarks that we would use are to look at other provincial educational broadcasters. One of the clearest metrics that we use is to take the total public funding we receive from the province of Ontario and divide—let me back up. The \$3-per-person-in-Ontario metric that we have developed is one way we express the value that we represent to the province. When we compare that to the cost of our sister network in Quebec, they're about \$7 a person. We're sort of similar large markets, so that's one benchmark. In terms of value for money, it is about being really focused on

how we do things in a way that is modest and that has limited focus. So when we built our digital studios, we moved from five shooting spaces down to three. That was about doing things in a modest way. Those are the types of exercises. I'm happy to address the cost base. We had a couple of floors. We gave up two floors of the building precisely to reduce our costs.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Okay. That would be helpful, if you can give us that information as well.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): A minute.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: One of the things I wanted to get into, but obviously I'm not going to have time, is that I clearly believe that we're going to have to encourage the government to take a look at this memorandum of understanding. It was indicated that it's going to be before Management Board this fall. I haven't looked at it; I'd like to look at it, if that's possible. I think we have to clearly spell out—I know we can't get into directing decisions in terms of what's going to be on and what's not going to be on, but in broader issues, if the CRTC can say 60% Canadian content, I think we have to do something there in terms of requiring coverage of the Legislative Assembly and perhaps an Ontario content requirement as well.

I did get some e-mails—and again, this may not be fair to you or fair to the organization, but maybe a brief comment. The suggestion from a couple of people was that since all of these changes have transpired over the past couple of years, morale in the organization is at the lowest these folks have ever witnessed. Perhaps you'd like to speak to that issue, how you see morale within the organization.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Yes, I'm happy to do that. That's not at all my sense of the organization. I think there's a great sense of excitement and pride that we've been able to modernize the production capacity in-house. I think there's a sense that the organization has increased impact and has the ability, going forward, to further increase its impact. I think there's a tremendous amount of excitement around what new web-based activities we can do.

I don't have any specifics, so if you want to talk to me off-line, I'm happy to do that. But in terms of answering the general question, it's a pretty pumped-up place.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. We'll move on to Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm interested in your comments about the reduction from five shooting spaces to three. Can you talk to me about what that's done in terms of your staffing levels?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: It hasn't changed our staffing levels.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Staffing levels have not changed at all?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: No.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So you have the same amount of staff.

You spoke in your initial comments about the 500 hours of original TV programming. How does that com-

pare to the past and how do you see that changing, if at all, in the future? More than 500 hours of original TV programming is what you're saying now—

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: In-house, just to be precise; it's the 500 that are created in the shop. That has probably declined from when we had the daily show in the afternoon, the More 2 Life, just to put that card on the table. I think right now, we are operating at capacity—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: No, I'm asking how many hours. So if it's 500 now, how many would it have been three years ago, five years ago—

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Let me just check. As I said, when we had More 2 Life, it was around 700. It has now come down to slightly more than 500.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Does that have any impact on your ability to obtain revenues in the future? If you're reducing your development of in-house production of original programming, how does that then impact your ability for future revenue streams, if you're reducing that piece? The other thing that I noticed is that in some of your documents, you talk about making new content available through innovation and distribution, but you also talk about being “a smart aggregator of content”—which doesn't say a developer of content, but “an aggregator” of content—and “to distill and provide context to the complex issues that are shaping our world.” It seems to be a shift in focus from producing original programming in-house to becoming a collector and distributor of information, particularly as you focus a lot of your comments around your new digital capacity; again, that's to a broader audience than what your mandate would suggest as being public service.

I guess I'm trying to figure out, are you an Ontario public service, and if you are, is that your focus? Then, if that's your focus, shouldn't there be a commitment to in-house programming that speaks to that mandate as opposed to the World Wide Web and competing with other broadcasters for smart aggregate content? Some of it goes back to the previous comment. Are you in this to be competitive with other broadcasters or are you in this to be a public service for the people of Ontario, and then how do decisions like reducing original programming play into that as well as your opportunities for future revenue?

1050

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Let me take a try. To be absolutely unequivocal, we are a public service Ontario broadcaster, made in Ontario.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For Ontarians.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Made in Ontario, for Ontario. So when we talk about the Web, it's in the context of that sort of umbrella. First of all, it has got to be educational, and secondly, it has to be Ontario. That's what makes us unique. We're not competing with anybody else.

In terms of my—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Just for clarification, though, you did talk about competing with Google and all of these other—so it's quite clear.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Thank you for coming back and highlighting that. When I say, “competing with Google,” it’s that I think there’s a real need in the province of Ontario to have made-in-Ontario resources available online for kids, teenagers, young adults—and my father—in Ontario.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Maybe someday my mother too.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Okay, absolutely. As a matter of fact, I always think when it comes to the Web, you just have to give people a reason and that’s what will get them over that hump. It is about providing something that is uniquely Ontarian and that has an Ontarian perspective. So it’s that, in the world where Google is everywhere, how do we carve out a place that is uniquely about what makes us Ontario?

In terms of my smart aggregator concept, I think of that as the 21st century version of a broadcaster. A broadcaster traditionally was something that pulled together and produced a package of compelling content.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But the most important thing that I’m concerned about is the hours of actual in-house production.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: And on that, I could not be clearer: When we create in-house content, that’s what allows us to do what TVO is, so our commitment to in-house content is sacrosanct.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: But the trend is reducing.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Well, listen: I think that, in the context of 2008, one has to look at the totality of the media resources that we create, so TV programs are an incredibly important part of it, but all those other Web resources are also a part of the picture. For example, the websites, the blogs, the Agenda camps I talked to you about, the fact that using the video player on TVOKids—on tv.org—you can access content, the microsites that we create for documentaries; tvoparents.com is an amazingly important resource. That, the 40 hours of your voice that we create, isn’t included in that 500 hours because we have this CRTC definition of television content. But those hours are amazingly impactful.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Do those hours generate any revenue for TVO, the web-based—

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: If you’re talking about building new revenue streams from the web distribution, that’s a business that’s just beginning.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So, no, at this point that’s—

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: No, but I would hope that you would just let me expand for a moment. If you don’t play, you can’t win, so it’s really important that we’ve been able to start to put our parents’ content, for example, on the Yahoo site. We’re now out there being seen by people in a way that is really cost-effective because Yahoo has a lot of eyeballs and it is about impact and about getting our content into the eyes and the hands of people who want to use it.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Your in-house programming that has gone from 700 to 500—a little bit more than 500, you said—what kind of revenue stream has that been and

has the revenue stream declined in the same proportion as hours?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: That’s a really good question, and it allows me to provide a bit of context around the sale of content that’s created at TVO. I think that the more unique our content is, the more Ontario-specific it is, the less there is in fact an international market for it. So that is a business that is mature and declining. That’s something that’s a worldwide phenomenon: More and more markets are turning to their own domestic content. That’s just a fact of life, and that’s been going on for at least the last decade. So there really is sort of an inverse relationship. The more we hone to what makes Ontario Ontario in our kids’ content, and certainly in creating current affairs—there’s really never been an after-market for current affairs, because it’s time-specific and it’s location specific.

So when we look at the revenue potential going forward, it really is about getting it onto different platforms and then being able to earn the pennies that are associated with digital distribution and those pennies multiplying. But it is for every media player—I’ve been in this business for longer than sometimes I can count. I’ve been watching the way Canadian broadcasting has evolved for the last 25 years and in the last few, we’ve seen huge changes. To me, it is all about how you tap into the potential and how you start to play in the new media world. That’s why we’ve partnered with people like Yahoo or Joost, because we think there’s a potential to grow new revenue streams; we know that other revenue streams are becoming mature, and it’s always a question of juggling the two.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I guess what I don’t understand in your contextual description of the decisions that are being made around in-house production is, if we go from 700 to 500—I don’t think you answered the question—is there actually a reduction in revenue stream as a result of that decision? Rather, what you said is that the trend is out of the international market in terms of value for these kinds of programs that are produced in-house. It seems to me that if you’re saying that the overall market isn’t there any more, plus you’re reducing the amount of in-house programming, isn’t that a double effect in terms of reducing revenue?

The other piece to that is, again, this thing I just don’t understand in terms of—you keep insisting, “Yes, we’re for Ontario; that’s what our job is. We’re an Ontario public service,” and yet we’re talking about international markets. I guess I’m just trying to figure out where the piece about in-house production fits going forward. If we’re already on a downward trend, and you’re saying it’s not generating revenue, are you seeing even a further decline in the future? What is the implication, then, for your mandate about being an Ontario public service?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I’m trying to separate out the strands. The role of in-house content is core to our strategy; and going forward, it is the core of our strategy. So—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So you don’t anticipate significant reduction?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I don't see any reductions, and in fact I was trying to persuade you that the broader way to understand all of the content we create is to take a look at the TV, but also to understand that all the new web-based content is also content, and it's also unique, important Ontario content. So I come back to your voice, because I think it is unique content that empowers parents to feel that they can really understand the important issues around their kids' education, whether it's about how much homework should they be doing, does your child need a tutor, what happens when you see bullying in the schoolyard, are kids overprotected, are they not given enough opportunities, what do you do with a gifted child. Those are all really important issues that we, uniquely, tackle. So that content is on top of the 500 hours. I think to even talk about the reduction is not to fully appreciate the full suite of content that we create, which includes TV and the many new web results.

To address your question of the revenue impact, I really think that they're not connected. The ability to sell made-in-Ontario content has been declining for years and years and it's a challenge that everybody who creates content, all the independent producers in the country, struggle with. It's a really, really tough financial equation. Peter O'Brian, our chair, has tried valiantly in the case of feature films in Canada. It's a Herculean task to create content and actually make it make money, which is why we're privileged to be in the position of being a publicly financed organization. That allows us to make content that the marketplace wouldn't finance.

1100

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): That's the time available. Ms. Broten.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I want to see, in the questions that I want to pose, if I can't tie together to some extent the issue that you were just discussing, which was with respect to the measurables of viewers over the Internet and on TV.

I'm wondering whether or not the investments in terms of digital and the direction of the future will allow TVO at some point to move to an on-demand strategy, where you actually can see the connection between accessing on the Web when you want it and accessing on TV. I was commenting the other day to my spouse that our children will really never know a world where there's no on-demand. At almost three years old, they do demand a certain TV show at a certain time and really don't understand when you say, "Well, that's not on right now." I would hope that some of the TVO programming would allow us to move in that direction at some point in time because I think it's critical for the modern world and some of the exact stakeholders and viewers that you are trying to assist in this educational platform.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I couldn't agree with you more. I think that the whole trend is to on-demand. It's about customers as young as your three-year-old thinking that's how media is consumed. What we've been doing over the last couple of years is getting ourselves organized so that in fact that is the way we are consumed.

When you think about what's often called IPTV, Internet protocol-based TV, it will be about each individual being able to literally customize what their TVO offering is. It will be like "my TVO." If I'm a documentary junkie, I would be able to watch nothing but documentaries and literally create my playlist and tap into them. We have a very interesting idea around the kids' content. It's to be able to take all of the elements of Gisèle's Big Backyard and organize them by what elements serve literacy, what elements serve numeracy, so that you could in fact create a playlist that would allow you to really focus on something that your child might actually be struggling with at school. It would be a different kind of homework help. Those are very much the types of things that, when we've completed our transition to digital in terms of content management, we will be able to offer. I think it's incredibly exciting.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: Will the current measurables that now tell you, with respect to viewership and the questions that Ms. Horwath was asking—does a move to on-demand allow you to measure your success rate in a different way? Right now, if I view a program over the Internet, that's not counted in your numbers; is that right?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: It's not counted in our television numbers, but we already have viewership numbers in terms of our websites. We have over three million unique visitors who come to the totality of our three websites, and that is increasing. The kids' piece is really strong. We've added the video player, which is now on TVOKids and TVO.org. The video player allows you to go in and stream video. We are able to track those numbers, absolutely, so that is something that we're starting to do.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: With respect to the important step that was taken to sever off and give independence to TFO and one of the proponents of that French-language service in the province, the one thing that I still think could be uniquely Ontario is to see some minor French content within the mainstream TVO, to the extent that you might see on some of the US networks, where you'll have other languages being played within the content of kids' shows; they'll be learning another language. I wonder if that's something that your main TVO programming sees, that there's still a unique Ontario element in that there's a very significant number of anglophones who are interested in having their children learn at least some French language but who might not be able to have those kids follow the full TFO programming because of the level of intensity of the French language.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: That's an idea I'm happy to take back to the shop and talk through with our programmers and just see how we could make sense of that.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: The other thing I'm wondering: In terms of your parent website and the information that's available there, is it your ultimate goal to flow some of that content to TVO in terms of assistance to parents? The moms I talk to in my community—I think we've all transitioned, so if your kid bumps his or her head, you don't call anybody; you go on the Internet and

look up “Bumped head: What do you do?” But to some other extent there are times of the day when TV content is more accessible to a busy mom; she’s cooking in the kitchen, her kids playing. Is that something you see doing with some of that content?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Yes. In fact, with Your Voice we are playing with the start time. When we launched it, we put it at 1 o’clock in the afternoon, thinking that that might be the right time. Now, this fall, we’re putting it on the Web at 9 o’clock on Tuesday night, and also adding it to the broadcast signal so it’s on at 4 o’clock on Sunday afternoon. I would also point out that it is available on demand, so if you don’t catch it on the Web when it’s being streamed live, you can go back into the archive and pull it up. So when you do go online about the bumped head or the equivalent, it’s there to be pulled down.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I can’t overemphasize enough, like you, that it is so important that, as Ontarians search for content on the Internet, we start to see more Ontario-based content. I think we have a unique perspective here in the province, and we’re proud of various services and perspectives with respect to education specifically and health and other things. There is so much of the content you pull up on the Internet that is US-based. As I’m sure all of you are, I’m proud to live in Ontario, and I’d like to access that information.

I know my colleague has a couple of questions.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: How much time do I have, just so I can be brief?

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): You have five minutes.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Okay. That’s great. That will be more than enough. Thank you.

I’ve got a particular question on the Civics 101 initiative you have coming out for the 2008-09 season. I think a number of us around this table probably pay visits to schools and talk to the kids in grade 5. The first question I have is, is this aimed at the grade 5 level? That’s when they take civics in school. Is that where you’re starting from?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: No. In fact, it’s aimed at a broad audience. I would like to think that it would be relevant to grade 5, but it really is aimed at anybody who’s interested in the questions about what makes our government tick, how does the political process unfold? I really believe that it is about increasing political literacy, and that is something that isn’t specific to grade fivers.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ll tell you something very specific that would be of some use to me, and I don’t know if it would be appropriate that that be channelled through TVO: Certainly when I go into the classroom, what the schools will do is bring all the grade 5 classes together, so you have about 100 kids at once. The idea is that you get 30 or 45 minutes with them, and you want as much interaction with them as you can possibly get. You want them to talk to you as much as you want to preach to them or tell them what government is all about in a very non-partisan way. Is there a CD available or are there highlights of your program that would be easily

distilled down to something you could show to a class or to a group of grade fives in three or four minutes that would wrap government up in a nutshell?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I think the way this suite of resources will work is that it very much could be downloaded into little capsules that you could put together into that kind of teaching resource. It’s very much in its development. It’s conceived as something that will have lots of stand-alone pieces that will answer the questions. Frankly, it will be something that can evolve. We’ll be constantly adding to it.

1110

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The visits have convinced me of two things. The first thing is, I think you’re the best person you’re ever going to be in your life in grade 5; I think you’re open to new ideas and you’re still not really jaundiced—and that there is an interest out there that, if you engage kids in the right dialogue, they’re interested in government, that it’s not something that is somebody else’s job; it’s their job.

Just one quick question: A lot of the questions have been around the viewership and who is watching. I think if you look at communications, politics has gone from being entertainment—at one point, when the candidates came to town in the 1800s, it was a big deal. Everybody went out to the church basement and that was the show for the year. Now you’re competing with other forms of entertainment, and there seems to be a desire that we have politics on TV or that people are able to access their political system through that medium. Are we being honest with ourselves, though? With all of the competing interests, is there truly an interest in what happens at Queen’s Park? I know people who are interested in my community who would watch this program religiously, but I could probably count them on both hands.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It’s your family.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Yes, it’s my family; it’s my sisters. My sister’s probably watching right now.

Is there a market out there? Are we fooling ourselves? Is there truly a market that wants to watch question period every day, or would we be putting it on just because it’s a public service and it should be on? Is there a market demand for it? I guess that’s the question.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: What I can tell you is that when The Agenda does programs that are focusing on Ontario issues, people are tuning in.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Right. But if you just showed question period or if you just showed this meeting?

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: Well, I don’t think this meeting would be that interesting.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Well, no. This isn’t the exciting part of Queen’s Park, but it’s quite typical of what happens at Queen’s Park.

Ms. Lisa de Wilde: I think the beauty of the digital world of media is that it will allow us to cater to way more niche audiences. Someone way smarter than me has called it the long tail, and it really is that when the cost of distribution becomes not a barrier, then you can aggre-

gate your family, my dad and Ms. Horwath's mother—it doesn't really matter where they are; they can all tune in, they're interested in it, and that's enough. That's the ideal that IPTV will make possible. We're all moving gradually towards it, and I think that's when the media become very powerful, because it's not about whether it's a mass offering; it's about whether it is addressing a specific need.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Very good. Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. I think all members would agree that we've had a very fulsome discussion and appreciate your being here today. I would just remind you that there is an opportunity to be invited to appear back at some later date in the fall, given the remarks that will be given this afternoon. I just wanted to point that out to you.

There is nothing further on our agenda this morning, so we will recess until 1 p.m.

The committee recessed from 1112 to 1301.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Good afternoon, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. We are continuing with our discussion on agency review—at this particular time, the Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TVOntario).

This afternoon, we are going to hear from a number of stakeholders, each of whom are going to make presentations and will have the opportunity to make comments. Any time remaining will then be available to members of the committee.

JOANNE SIMMONS

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): I would like to ask Joanne Simmons to come forward and make a presentation. Good afternoon, and welcome to the committee. Do make yourself comfortable. We have allocated 30 minutes and, as I have just said, you may use any or all of that time, and the time you leave will then be for questions from the committee members. So, if you're ready, please begin.

Ms. Joanne Simmons: I'd like to begin by thanking you and for inviting me, because I'm very pleased to speak on behalf of TVO.

A little bit about myself: I am currently serving as a vice-principal at Donwood Park elementary school in Scarborough. It's a new role for me, so it's very exciting. However, I have been an educator for 20 years and served our students in a variety of different roles. I have been a classroom teacher at a variety of different grade levels, I have been a special education consultant for the board, and when at TVO I was working in the capacity of an instructional leader for mathematics across the Toronto District School Board. It was, I guess, through my name being listed, I don't know how, but TVO somehow invited me to come down to their offices a little over four years ago to meet with them to talk about children's programming in mathematics. I went to the meeting with the coordinator, Stewart Craven, from the Toronto District School Board, completely unaware of what was

about to happen—working with TVO. I had just completed working on the early math strategy, on the expert panel report with the Ministry of Education, and was in the process of developing classroom resources for teachers to help them follow up with the recommendations of that report. So when I sat down in TVO's offices and they said they wanted to develop children's programming specifically targeting the age group of kindergarten to grade 3, I'm not at all exaggerating that my heart began to flutter. As a mathematics educator, it has been always a challenge to find quality resources for young children, resources that are engaging to the children and also easy and comfortable for teachers to use in the classroom. So I started sort of jumping up around the table as I met with Marney Malabar, who is the producer of TVOKids; their seconded educator, Stacie Goldin; and Phil McCordic, whom I knew as an actor, from being a parent watching TVO with my son, but whom I found out later was also a writer.

Both my coordinator and myself—I'm sure I can speak on his behalf—were further impressed when they had this idea of doing children's programming for mathematics, but they weren't already committed to anything without hearing from us first what the latest research and recommendations were from educators in the province of Ontario around mathematics. As I have already said, we'd just finished the expert panel report on math for the Ministry of Education, so I shared the highlights of that with them, which included things like making math meaningful and engaging for children; ensuring that mathematics for young children is in context and can be related to their daily lives; ensuring that mathematics is taught through problem solving; and the really challenging piece, ensuring that we're also reaching out to parents to help them engage with their students in mathematics.

These were large ideas and recommendations, with the expert panel knowing as we made them that we weren't really ready resource-wise and teacher-training-wise to fully implement them at the time that the expert panel report occurred, so they said, "You know what? I think that we can help you and work together in meeting some of those recommendations." So I agreed to stay in with them, and over the next four years, 40 episodes of a show called *Tumbletown Tales* was produced at TVO. Each script was sent to me as it was written to validate and ensure that the math was accurate and that the episodes were developmentally appropriate for our children in our Ontario schools. I'm not sure what has happened here so far today, if any of you have had a chance to see *Tumbletown Tales*. I don't think you can even explain it—I'm looking at the TVO people—in that it's actually a little five-minute math show that is a dramatization of math in the life of a bunch of rodents in a town called Tumbletown. They're actually hamsters and guinea pigs and chinchillas that are voiced over, so it is immediately engaging to the kids and hilarious to adults.

After the programs were produced, TVO did invite me to write some teachers' guides. They also consulted with

me as they built a wonderful interactive website for children that connects directly to the programs. The children see the TV show, then they can go to the computer and they can practise some of the math ideas on the computer.

In my capacity as an instructional leader working with teachers, I began showing the episodes in my workshops with teachers. They were the highlights of my workshops. It was hard to control the laughter in the room, and teachers were saying, “Thank you, thank you, thank you,” particularly the teachers of kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2 students.

Math has changed dramatically since all of us were students in mathematics. We know that our children need a broader set of mathematics skills. They need the same skills we needed, but they actually need more. They need these skills in context, they need the numeracy, and for teachers to find a way to present that numeracy to six-year-olds from very diverse backgrounds is really a treat.

I walked into my new school as a vice-principal, with a staff that was already actively using Tumbletown Tales as part of their mathematics program. So when they found out that I had been involved, they actually decorated my doors with all sorts of rodents, which was odd but fun. They willingly participated in a research study just recently that Stacie Goldin, the seconded educator at TVO, wanted to conduct, so I hosted it at my school, inviting teachers and administrators from neighbouring schools. Because beyond just having kids use it, what TVO does time and time again, in my experience and in my conversations, working with colleagues working in other curriculum areas, is that they want to reach out to teachers to just really make sure and get their feedback that what’s going on—the television, on the computer and in the hands of students in the classroom—is in fact the highest-quality materials. So they came into my school, put on a fantastic in-service for my teachers, provided them with more resources and gave them an opportunity to give feedback and ways to improve the programs. For me, that is also very impressive.

1310

The last thing I’d like to highlight before allowing you to ask me questions—the common question is, “How do you teach a hamster math,” which I’m not prepared and have never been prepared to answer. Really for me, in my latest role as a vice-principal, I’ve grown an even greater appreciation for the outreach that TVO provides to parents and our community. In my particular community, I would say the vast majority of my parents are new Canadians working very long hours, very committed to their children and their children’s education, but who really have a limited amount of time in their days to really sit and do the kinds of things that they say and I believe they want to do with their children, which is to help improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

Also, a large number of my parents do not speak English fluently yet. They’re new Canadians. So it is tremendously comforting to me, as a vice-principal, to be able to say to the parents, “Do what I did”—because this

is exactly what I did—“set your TV to channel 2.” You know for sure what they’re going to see is going to be high-quality, education-wise. It’s going to be safe for kids to watch. You can set your Web browser and you can bookmark TVO kids for your kids and you don’t have to worry that they’re in an unsafe place on the Internet. You can sit and watch and engage in these things with your children and learn right along beside them. I can tell you that my parents have told me that they actually watch it even when their kids aren’t there because it’s so fun. That’s really the truth.

There are many layers of TVO that I truly appreciate, and I know that my colleagues—I’m speaking on behalf of many teachers and other administrators—really appreciate the conscientiousness and the thoughtfulness with which TVO is preparing materials for our classrooms and for our kids at home.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. We’ll begin with Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Good afternoon. I’m very pleased to meet you. It sounds like you’re very pleased and excited by the work that you’ve been able to do. Do you still work with TVO? Are you still an employee or on contract?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: I’m not even on contract; I’m kind of a volunteer. I’m still doing things at TVO and I’m delighted to do them. Basically, just recently, Marney Malabar had another brainstormed idea to do another math series. She did call me and I came again and I’ve been brainstorming and reading scripts with them. I do this, as I said, volunteer. Sometimes, it is during my hours as an educator for the Toronto District School Board. I’m not exactly sure of my board’s relationship with TVO, but a few years back, TVO was actually brought to the instruction department, so that’s all the instructional leaders in the Toronto District School Board, covering many, many different subject areas. Robin Shepherd, the executive superintendent of instruction at TDSB, had TVO come in to share with us the programs that are being offered by TVO so that we could go out to all of our schools and help them access the programs, because they were felt to be such high-quality pieces, and further encouraged us, as educators, to work with them. It’s an old adage, but it really does take a whole village to raise a child, so it’s in our best interest to have good TV programs for our kids, so I’ve just continued on in that capacity. We’ve been reading scripts. There’s a new show coming; I don’t even know what it’s called. But, yes, I will always come back because the work that they do is great.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Are you aware whether TVO has expanded these relationships with school boards outside of the Toronto District School Board?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Personally, what I am aware of is that they did around mathematics. They came and also did a presentation to the Ontario Mathematics Coordinators Association about three years ago. That would be math leadership province-wide. And because people knew through that presentation—they heard that I had a

little bit of a connection, I received numerous follow-up emails about how they could access some of the materials for their boards that were shown at that presentation. It's interesting to me—I'm also colleagues with the dean of education at the University of New Brunswick, and she also is very aware of TVO programming with her student teachers in New Brunswick. So clearly, beyond me, there's been some outreach.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: That's good. Could you identify some areas where you would think children would benefit from TVO expanding into other areas in terms of education? You talked about numeracy and literacy; are there other things that you think would be beneficial or that you suggest would be the next frontier that TVO should be looking at in terms of programming for children and developing new material?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: They're far more expert than me as far planning the next frontier, but I can tell you that educationally a very hot topic for us right now is media literacy. It's literacy but really media awareness. I know that our IT teacher—in our school, we have a specialized information technology teacher—is helping kids to evaluate websites that they're watching and be critical thinkers about the things that they find on a website. TVO has the Tumbletown Tales website that's very math-oriented, but they have this whole greater website with lots of things for kids to go in and read critically in a media environment. So I really think the connections that they can provide for schools, for teachers who are trying to teach this media awareness in a safe environment, because the Internet can be a scary place for us as educators, are probably where I would ask as an educator for more support from TVO. If you could help us pull all your media pieces together into a media awareness program for our kids, that would be fantastic.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Would you see something like that being focused only on the Internet or something that would be backed up, again, with programming on the television?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Again, with television too, because I know that in our school we talk a lot to our students about what they're seeing on television and the messages they're receiving and the images and what they mean on television, so absolutely. Again, it's a safe show.

As a parent, I can tell you that there was the body image series—I'm trying to remember it; my son's 17 now, so I can't remember the name of the show—that we talked a lot about in my house. Again, it was a nice, safe environment for me to talk about the body images issue, because even young boys are now struggling with that, we know. So it's a safe media conversation place for me, as a parent and a teacher.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: One of the issues that came up in the conversation early on—you had mentioned that you're not sure what we did. We didn't watch any of those shows; we did see a little promotional video, though. One of the things that came up was the issue of reduced effort at in-house production of new materials

being done. Obviously, the work that's being done that you're describing is the exception going forward. If the capacity is there for TVO to continue to add more of these in-house programs and development of in-house programming, do you see that as something that—so taking off the educator hat, as a taxpayer and as an Ontarian, do you think that's good value for money, for the public to actually have our public broadcaster, our public service, if you will, undertaking efforts to do that kind of work?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Again, I'm going to qualify this: I don't actually know how much it costs to produce a television show at all, so if you're asking about my taxpayer's money—I appreciate solidly TVO and the types of programming that I watched as my child grew up. I don't know what the percentage is at TVO of how much they're creating in-house and how much they're bringing in, because everything I see on there is good quality. I like the fact that there's Canadian content, as a Canadian. I like the fact that the math programs deal directly—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Do you get a sense that it's Ontario content?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Ontario content. I'm saying Canadian, but—

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Because we talked about as well that there's a concern about the extent to which TVO is reflecting enough of Ontario and Ontario culture and Ontario issues. We talked about that from the broader perspective, particularly around politics and Queen's Park and those kinds of things. One of the things that was pointed to was some new work that they're doing on the Internet in terms of a website that talks about the different orders of government and what they do and how you can find out who your MPP is and how a bill gets developed. Do you see that as being a tool that would be used in the classroom as well?

1320

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Absolutely. I spent the last two days gathering resources around that very topic from my teachers who are currently teaching civics, because the election is coming and the grade fives are very engaged in that, so, absolutely. That was actually one of the things I suggested.

I haven't been to TVO, because we're just starting a new school year, but there is going to be some Ontario information there. I know there is some Ontario social studies information there that I browsed through when they came to our instruction department. I guess your question is, how important is that to me, as a taxpayer? I'm very proud to be from Ontario and I'm very proud to be a Canadian, and I love the fact that when I go on there, it feels very Ontario, Canadian, to me. There are things on there that come from other countries, and some of those shows are very unique. I remember my child enjoying the accents of some of the people; I know there are some Australian shows. That's a good conversation to have. That has never been problematic to me, as a parent. The fact that the math program that was specifically

developed, if I use that as an example, to target a really critical issue in Ontario schools at the time that it was developed, which was the recommendations of the early math strategy—as a taxpayer, I’m thrilled that that was done because I know a lot of time and money was put into the development of the early math strategy expert panel report; the teacher PD was very costly. So to have that partnership—that’s what it felt like to me; I don’t know exactly who funds TVO—was amazing to me, as a taxpayer, a parent and an educator, that all of that aligned. So the more that that happens, I would be happy to pay for that, as a taxpayer, because it was really good for kids. I saw it in the eyes of the teachers and I saw it in the eyes of the children. The teachers feel validated when they see on television what they’re working hard on in the classroom. It says to them in a larger way that, yes, we’re on the right track, that we are meeting our expectations, as teachers, from our employer, which is the province of Ontario. So those are very strong messages, I believe, and worthwhile.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. We must move on. Mrs. Sandals.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I’m very excited. My background is math and being a school board trustee and all that stuff, so if you want to get me cracked up, it’s about early math and who teaches it and how and is it effective. Anyway, you’ve just landed right in my area of enthusiasm too.

A couple of questions about how it delivers, because you’re obviously so really excited: How do we make sure that teachers who don’t have a principal or a vice-principal like you who has been really, really involved—how do we get the message out to teachers and parents that this really high-quality material is available?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: That’s a very good question. Communication is, as you know, our number one challenge in education. At the TDSB we’re so large that it’s really a huge challenge. I would recommend working, again, with the media literacy heads in the school board. When I began showing the Tumbletown Tales in my workshops with teachers—I had teachers from across TDSB, which in itself is very diverse—some of them had never heard of it and some of them were well into it. And I asked that question: “How did you know about this?” Some of them knew about it because teachers are also parents, and they’d seen it, as parents, gone to the website and investigated it. So that’s how some of them knew about it. Some of them knew about it because, apparently, and I didn’t know this at the time, it was listed in our media catalogue. Our teachers order from a media centre, and the TVOKids programs are listed in that catalogue, and they had gone in there and ordered it. So I think it’s probably multi-level communication that has to happen: I think taking advantage of the central office staff in school boards, which I was at the time, and making them aware—I thought TVO did a great job coming in and talking to all of us—ensuring that people whose role in the board is to communicate are aware of it, have copies of it and so on and so forth, and again, administrators, because administrators write newsletters

to parents. So I share my newsletters now with the administrators in my family of schools, and they see the little link to TVOKids on my newsletter and they’ll ask me, “What’s that?” and so on. So again, reaching out to administrators—part of our role is that communication to parents—I think would be a great start.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Particularly if you can report in your school newsletter that the grades 1 and 2 teachers are using this resource and then, as a parent, that’s where you connect into the resource. But the other thing you’ve just mentioned in terms of the teacher wanting to access the actual materials: I assume these clips are periodically broadcast over TVO, but you can also order them. So if you order the clip, I’m guessing you get a CD or something that you can play in the classroom.

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Yes. There used to be, and TVO will be—if I say it wrong, I apologize, but I believe at the very beginning there was a portal online that teachers went into to get it. I had my copies that they gave me. But a teacher told me. I said, “How did you get it?” and she said that she at that time sent a blank VCR tape to our media services department and they made copies for her and sent it out; the teachers didn’t know we could do that. I mean, it’s all communication. That went around for a while and people were sending in VHS tapes. Recently they came out on CDs, so my understanding is that they borrow from our media department. It comes in the mail. You get to keep them for a week or two, and back they go through courier mail. So that’s how.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Okay. So that’s really, really important. Maybe you’re the wrong person to ask, but as TVO expands its Internet capacity, one would hope then that that’s something teachers might even be able to directly download. If you do it in the more formal way through your own resource staff at the board, are there teaching materials that come with the clip that tie it into the outcomes and all that stuff that you need as a curriculum trainer?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: I should have highlighted that part. Absolutely. There was a teachers’ guide written after the first episode, and it has pre-viewing instructions for teachers during activities, follow-up activities, post-viewing activities. I authored some of them. I notice they had someone else, because one time I said I was too busy. In writing those, my vision, again, was to connect to the early math strategies, make them very hands-on, and to make those connections to media literacy with the pre- and post-viewing. So, yes, the teachers get those as well. Those are also available online, and there are also teacher recommendations/suggestions and parent suggestions online. There are click boxes for parents and for teachers, and they can go in and download materials from there.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: So what starts out as producing a five-minute clip actually becomes a whole package for a unit and, if we can connect teachers to TVO, they can take that unit and connect it with curriculum they have to cover anyway.

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Yes, and if I can just add, yesterday at our staff meeting at Donwood Park, our teachers were informed that we were not renewing the copyright. We're both new—my administrator said that schools can buy copyrights for showing publicly produced movies, and our teachers said no; no, we're not, because we have a wonderful media department with some quality educational materials. The very first hands that shot up were my primary teachers, who said, "But Tumbletown Tales: Can we still show Tumbletown Tales?" I said, "Yes, anything from TVO you can show." So that becomes even more important, and I believe that principals are making decisions more like we did at our school. We don't want to purchase those copyrights because we don't have time to screen all of that stuff to make sure it really is appropriate. When we get our teachers to order from our media department, we know it has been screened by educators and has been approved for showing to whatever grade level. It's going to become even more important that there's access to quality stuff.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: And by the way, total trivia: The other copyright issue is federal, not provincial.

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Right.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): And that's the perfect note on which to move on, to Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Thank you for being here and thank you for your volunteer work at TVO. I'm certainly no expert in the area that you have worked in, but my grandkids appreciate the good work. My wife and I, through being supporters of TVO for many years, also have a small role in supporting what you're doing and what the network does.

I'm curious: What provincial riding do you live in?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: I actually—am I supposed to know my riding number? It's embarrassing. I live in Durham. I live in Pickering, Whites Road and Finch. I don't know the number.

1330

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Do you know the name of the MPP?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Oh boy, this is bad. No?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: No it isn't. I'm sorry; I don't mean to embarrass you.

Ms. Joanne Simmons: I know where I am in my school district, but—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I appreciate this, because you're being frank and honest. I'm making a point here—and I didn't know what your answer was going to be. You're an educator. The point that I've been making—I don't know if you witnessed the earlier deliberations. My concern is about how so many people in this province, huge numbers of people in this province, don't know the responsibilities of municipal, provincial and federal governments. They don't understand what goes on in this place, Queen's Park, and the roles and responsibilities of MPPs. I think you've dramatically delivered the message that I wasn't fibbing when I said that earlier.

I see this all the time. I've been a member of this place for almost 28 years, and people come into my office on a daily basis and we see this. I believe TVO, the education network for Ontario, as part of its education mandate, should be doing something to improve that situation. What in fact is happening, of course, is that we're seeing declining representation of media outlets in Queen's Park, declining coverage of the business of this place. TVO itself has closed its Queen's Park bureau. I believe that if we had a show, a dedicated program to deal with the business of this place—what members do, the responsibilities, the committee work, the clerks, the researchers, the onerous tasks that many of us have to do, the kinds of delegations and times that we have to commit to those—it would give Ontarians a much, much better understanding of this place and the roles and responsibilities of the provincial government. I think that that should be a clear requirement of the mandate of TVO and I think that it's not meeting that.

Thank you for inadvertently helping me to make my case.

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Okay, but let me kind of now clear my name a little bit and concur with you at the same time, because I'm thinking it might be Wayne Arthurs, and I'll tell you why—and I'll tell you why I think yours is a good idea. My son, who is 17 years old, loves politics. He could have answered your question all the way around. Why? Because Wayne Arthurs, who was the mayor of Pickering for a very long time, came to his classroom and read him a book. I'll just tell you that. I had to buy for my son that year for Christmas a little desk and a little pretend phone because he played Mayor Arthurs for a number of years in my house. I'm not kidding; that was the role play. We visited the Pickering Town Centre, the Parliament right across the street there, from many times to see if we could see Wayne Arthurs. I'm not kidding. I hope he doesn't ever get to read transcripts of this because he's 17 and that would be uncool, but that was a very big deal in my house. That was local politics.

He loves politics. He's taking politics next semester in grade 12. He loves everything about it. As you can see, he has a mother who knows a lot about politics when she's not happy—I can tell you who the MPP was there when I was not happy, but I won't—because I actually wrote letters and found out. But on a daily basis, you're right: not very aware. I've questioned myself all the time, "Why is it that my son knows so much about politics and is so interested?" And I've always traced it back to the fact that he was touched by him at a young age.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Do you ever watch provincial question period?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Yes, we do sometimes at my house.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Where do you watch it? Do you know where you watch it?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: What channel? There is a channel for this kind of—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Do you have cable TV?

Ms. Joanne Simmons: We have cable. We have Rogers—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Because it's very limited in availability. That's another issue that I dealt with—broadcasting question period—because very few opportunities are available for access to question period now.

Ms. Joanne Simmons: But kids are actually very interested in politics. Teachers, obviously, aren't always as equipped as we should be for teaching it.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Thanks very much.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. We really appreciate you coming and providing us with your very specialized insight into this particular agency that we're reviewing. Thank you very much for appearing here today.

Ms. Joanne Simmons: Thank you.

CANADIAN MEDIA GUILD

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Our next presentation is from the Canadian Media Guild. I'd invite those members to come forward and make themselves comfortable in being able to provide us with their comments. Good afternoon, and welcome to the committee. I would just reiterate what I mentioned earlier, that altogether we have 30 minutes. You then have the opportunity to make comments for as much of that time as you wish, and the remaining time will be divided amongst the three caucuses in order to have further discussion. For the purposes of Hansard, I'd ask that you introduce yourselves.

Mr. David Hawkins: Okay, I'll begin. First of all, I'd like to thank the committee for providing the opportunity for the Canadian Media Guild to present. My name is David Hawkins and I'm a producer at TVOntario and president of the guild's unit at the provincial broadcaster. I'm honoured to be one of more than 50 producers, hosts and programmers who work each day to provide original and thought-provoking programming and content to Ontarians through the publicly supported educational broadcaster.

The work we do has evolved quite a bit since the early days of TVOntario. For example, I now work almost exclusively on producing for the Web, providing Ontarians with new ways to access and share information, and identify and participate in conversations about issues that matter to them. You heard much this morning about The Agenda on the road and The Agenda camp. I'm one of the producers involved in this initiative to build a new level of citizen involvement in the discourse on public issues that affect them directly.

It's doubtful the Web will ever replace TV, but we are finding new ways of using the Web, together with TV programming, to enhance the opportunities of Ontarians of all ages to connect with each other, with the framers of issues and with those who can affect changes in our society. Over the last two years, TVO has charted a course for public educational broadcasting in the 21st century. Production employees are working toward the

kinds of new programming for TV and the Web that people can't find anywhere else on the dial. We have lots of ideas and enthusiasm, but what no one should forget is the power of television to take you to places you haven't been before and to introduce you to ideas and subjects that you never knew interested you. TV is the platform that inspires the other platforms. Every media organization uses their television productions to drive traffic to online.

Before I turn things over to Lise Lareau, our national union president, I want to assure you that TVO employees are a skilled, experienced and committed resource. Our work reaches Ontarians directly and connects them to their fellow citizens, idea generators and decision-makers. I urge you to make a long-term commitment to TVO and to help us continue reaching Ontarians where they live with original made-in-Ontario programming that they can't get anywhere else. Thank you.

Ms. Lise Lareau: Thanks, David. I am Lise Lareau and I'm the national president of the Canadian Media Guild. Just to put some perspective on that, that is the union that represents the folks at TVO, also at the CBC, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, S-VOX, Canadian Press, Reuters—a lot of media organizations.

I too appreciate your committee's attention to these issues. I was particularly interested in the questioning this morning. We noted the appetite for TV programming, and we'll shed some light on that perhaps in the questions and answers.

To pick up on something David just said, we actually believe TVO is more important now than ever. Why? Because—Mr. Runciman, you mentioned it, others here have mentioned it—the private sector is receding from local and regional newsgathering. In every community in the country, I can cite to you examples of where there have been either layoffs or some contraction within the local newspaper. As just one example, Sault Ste. Marie used to have a TV station affiliated with CTV. Now it's just a bureau, so the people of the Soo cannot get Soo-based news and information. That's one example; there are lots of them.

With my other hat on, I see seasoned journalists, editors and photographers either being laid off or bought out and so on as the industry has both consolidated—one company buying another—but also in some of that media confusion, I guess, that Lisa de Wilde talked about this morning. A lot of these companies don't know what to do with the digital revolution, so as a result there have been layoffs. No one person could tell you the reason altogether for all the layoffs, but there have been a lot of them. So what's happening is that it's hard to find good newsgathering in communities in this province outside of Toronto.

1340

I bet that you can tell me stories of some environmental issue in your riding that wasn't covered, or some hospital closure that wasn't covered until election day. Those are the examples I'm talking about. As a result of

that contraction of the industry overall, we think TVOntario has more importance and relevance now than ever before.

In fact, we know that this committee's job is not to be prescriptive about what TVO does specifically. That's not its job, and I'm not here to say that's its job. But we do believe that there's capacity inside. There's certainly the knowledge and talent to be more proactive in its programming, to have a role in developing issues as opposed to covering them when they've become issues.

With that backdrop, our members at TVO have been talking about these issues since some of the cuts at TVO that preceded *The Agenda*; they've been talking about ideas about programming. Not that you can prescribe this stuff, but it would be good for you to know some of the things we're talking about. We've had a couple of brainstorming meetings, and the same kinds of programming ideas come out of these meetings no matter how often we have them and in what context.

The recurring themes, for example, that they think they could be doing, that there's capacity to do, are programs aimed at youth. We talked about that earlier this morning—or you did. By “youth” I mean over 12, a very difficult-to-serve age group, where we believe that television and the Internet could be far more connected.

Environment: Nobody is covering the environment in this province the way it should be covered. You show me a single article or TV show covering an environmental issue. I can't think of one.

Arts and culture: Studio 2 used to do it. No one is doing it particularly well now in terms of what's going on in the communities in this province outside Toronto. This has an impact on much of the stuff that Mr. Runciman was talking about earlier today: lack of understanding, lack of connectivity from community to community.

And, yes, I think—not just me; our members—there is a role for more political discourse on TVOntario. How that programming actually emerges is, again, not for us to decide. But I too was smiling when you were talking about *Inside Albany*, that PBS show in New York state; I remember it well. Those were the days when Mario Cuomo was governor. It was a good show about a very localized topic. It gave people a sense of the role of government and not just issues.

What I'd like to leave you with before I throw it to Karen Wirsig, who is our policy specialist at the Canadian Media Guild, is the sense that our members at TVO love their work. It's a great place to work, but there's so much more it could be. There's just more “there” there. To that end, we really appreciate the conversation.

One other really exciting element that was raised earlier this morning was the transition from analog to digital. There was a question asked of Lisa de Wilde about that. One of the things she got to at the end but didn't really elaborate on is what it will mean for over the air—that's free TV—in communities across Ontario. We believe that the digital technology brings great promise, and we've done a lot of research about this which Karen will elaborate on. We think it could really help the under-

served communities of this province, possibly with a role from government. So I'll throw it to Karen, then.

Ms. Karen Wirsig: Karen Wirsig, staff at the Canadian Media Guild.

We got wind a couple of years ago of the fact that broadcasters were not necessarily planning to replace their transmitters after the switch-off of analog transmitters in 2011, and it worried us because of what we knew would be the impact in small communities around the country and around the province here. We began to look at what was going on in other countries around this transition, because most countries, in the developed world, in any case, are quite far ahead of Canada on this transition. We discovered that digital technology allows for some fun things, such as, a single transmitter using a single frequency can actually send out six channels.

So we think there's an opportunity to actually improve access to free television anywhere, but specifically in smaller communities around the province. It might even be an opportunity to bring more of the legislative channel, with TVO, with other public and private channels, to Ontario viewers for free. It would give them an offering of six fairly local, certainly Canadian, over-the-air channels that most communities don't get now and would be a reasonable alternative to cable and satellite. When we're talking about the value of educational television, here's where public and educational television would really be highlighted like nowhere now on cable or on satellite. So when we think about the digital revolution, we don't only think about computers and hand-held devices, but we also think there's a role for television. As David and Lise have pointed out, television programming doesn't look to be going away. There are exciting possibilities. We're really interested in working out how people can maintain access to free TV. It's especially important for low-income Ontarians, seniors and people in remote communities who otherwise don't get very good service that reflects their interests and their views on the kinds of television that they have access to, i.e. satellite, which tends to be a continental service, as opposed to a local service.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. We'll begin with Mrs. Sandals.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: That's sort of a lead-in to what I wanted to ask. There has been a lot of talk about the conversion to digital. David, you mentioned that you're actually working on *The Agenda* and the out tour, so it would be interesting to hear a little bit about what, from your perspective, you will need to be doing on *Agenda on the road*; but also, how CMG has been working with TVO to make sure that you and your colleagues get the training that allows you to work in that new digital world.

Mr. David Hawkins: Those are two very different questions.

First of all, *Agenda on the road*: There are two main groups of TVOntario that are working on that, the *Agenda* group proper and the online group that I'm part of. We are mostly, from the online perspective, responsible for the unconference that Lisa was mentioning this

morning and facilitating the content that will be derived from that. It's a very experimental approach. The idea is to access and involve citizens in new dialogues that they identify as the important things to talk about related to each of the areas' economies that we're focusing on. I'm not certain what you mean by what more we would need in order—these projects are well under way. We have staff—perhaps not enough staff, ultimately; there are many jobs to do. But the exciting thing about this project is that it involves every aspect of the organization, from the top managers right through to all of the technical people and so forth.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: What I was wondering, then, generically, is, since you've come out of a world of analog production and you're now moving into digital production, both on-air and over the Internet, is that involving the requirement for your members to have a lot of access to retraining?

1350

Mr. David Hawkins: Okay. The second question is around retraining, and certainly our members are very hungry for training. There are numerous tools that producers from the television side, like myself, have not actually used before. Many of them are developing as we speak, so there are numerous applications that are available. They offer a very cost-effective alternative to building them ourselves, although we have capacity to do some of that, and sometimes that is our choice as well. We've had a series of training orientation sessions because the decision was made to move in this direction, so we have to actually hit the ground running. Everyone is approaching this as an opportunity to learn. Everyone recognizes that there can be some stumbles and some mistakes along the way, but that's also the beauty I think of the digital online world. Everyone understands that, and we correct those mistakes as we go. There's a lot of forgiveness online, thankfully.

Frankly, there are numerous other issues to work through, and we've defined a process—this is all inside baseball folks, sorry—around who does what. We have defined professions within the industry, and so we need to sort out those sorts of things as well. Then that may lead to some snags, but anyway, we're having those conversations.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: It's often the inside baseball stuff, though, that makes it run smoothly, sorting that out. I'm glad to hear you're making progress. If we've got a few minutes, Laurel—

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just two minutes.

Ms. Laurel C. Broten: I wanted to pick up a little bit on the comment that was made with respect to what Lisa de Wilde was talking about this morning. If we think to a future ahead where there might be more drive for on-demand television, and you might generate what you'd like to see, it would seem to me the synergy between that drive of consumers, new technology that is now allowing you to make films and stuff on your videocam or your telephone—does that ultimately lead us to a world where we see increased drive for localized content, or do you think it drives us in the other direction?

Ms. Lise Lareau: There are a lot of myths about what has gone on since the digital revolution in the mid-1990s. One of the biggest myths is that there's more news available to people. There actually isn't more news; there's a lot of sources for the same news. We know this because our members repurpose much of it for everybody. Whether they're doing it at Canadian Press, a big resourcer—they generate and re-source it—same with the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. and, to a degree, what you've heard here at TVO as well, this is common. There are fewer people repurposing for many more. There's less individual and independent news gathering going on. It's not just in Canada, and it's not just a single employer here and there.

I would urge this committee not to get hung up in the technology. We're here to say it's actually not the technology that matters that much. The technology is going to change certain delivery options and accessibility options, but really we're here to say, "You know what? You still need content. You still need programming." We'd like people to examine what TVO can do with that, the largesse of it all. In our view there's more to it than what you see. There's just more of a role, more exciting possibilities for it.

To answer your question, whether it's on demand or streamed or seen over the air for free or cable or satellite, it really doesn't matter to our members that much as long they're producing stuff for consumption for citizens to see and hear. I would hope that you don't get hung up in the technology when you do your examinations as a committee.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. We need to move on.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Thanks for being here, and I appreciate that someone in the audience has also watched Inside Albany in the past. I used to be a regular viewer of the show.

Ms. Lise Lareau: Well, there were two of us, anyway.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: I've long been a fan of American politics, in any event.

I've never had the ambition to be a watchdog for TVO, but going through these hearings I'm inclined to take that on, because I am, I would suggest, frustrated with the responses that we received from Ms. de Wilde today, and there doesn't really seem to be an appetite to take on expanded education, if you will, of Ontarians through a dedicated Queen's Park program or perhaps through a repeat of question period in a more viewer-friendly time slot.

I asked some questions earlier today that were based on some e-mails that I received. These could be folks who have an axe to grind, but there was also a column in the Thunder Bay Chronicle Journal, which our researcher provided us with back in March of last year, talking about the dramatic changes that took place internally at TVO a couple of years ago, staff changes and so on. The claim was made to me about morale, which seems to bear out this column, with the couple of e-mails I received this morning.

When I asked Ms. de Wilde about that question, she said certainly it's not her perception that people are pumped up. Are there any morale issues up there? Is it as hunky-dory as she suggested?

Mr. David Hawkins: Hunky-dory. I suppose, Mr. Runciman, any workplace has ebbs and flows of morale, and it's no different at TVOntario. There's continued uncertainty around the strategic agenda, and as we move forward, I think there is also great excitement about the potential and possibility for accessing new tools, new production methods, new content that we can make. We're building towards that.

I think I would be remiss if I did not repeat some of what Lise said, that there is also a great appetite to get back into communities across Ontario and bring television stories back to the larger audience. I think we have done that well throughout the history of the organization and I think that we can do it again. I believe we have the talented people and the resources to do it. But I'm not on the management side and I don't make those spending decisions. I'm very respectful of management rights in the organization.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Another question I asked Ms. de Wilde—again this is one of these e-mails I got just this morning. You said you were involved in the production of *The Agenda* on the road. This was a concern being expressed, I assume from someone internally, about an outside firm being brought in to handle the organization of the road show, if you will, and the fact that the view was that there were many talented people internally who could take on those responsibilities, without the additional cost burden associated with going outside.

Mr. David Hawkins: Again, I'm not aware of particular costs associated with anything. There are some outside individuals, contractors, who have been brought in. This is an extensive project. It's over five separate months, five locations. It's a big deal to take a studio production and put it into a new community. We're grafting on this additional production, which is around the unconference, *The Agenda* camp. The individuals have to do with line production. It's an individual on *The Agenda* side who is helping connect the dots throughout the organization. No producer has been involved in that level of production in-house so far. On the online side, we've hired some consultants who are expert in putting on these community events. They've put us through a couple of really tremendous workshops in understanding how to identify user goals throughout this and how to build our landing page to allow them to then produce content, find the information and connect in the way that they want to. This is a very detailed strategy before each event, during the event, during the broadcast and afterwards, because one of the things that we're really trying to produce here is content that lives well beyond the one broadcast and then gets built upon, and it gets built upon by Ontario citizens throughout the province.

1400

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: What's the budget for this?

Mr. David Hawkins: Again, sir, that's not knowledge that I have.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: It sounds like it's quite a project, though, so the budget is probably fairly significant. So if you weren't involved in budgeting, you wouldn't know what it costs on an annual basis, the production costs, for example, for Studio 2.

Mr. David Hawkins: Again, sir, the beauty of my employment is that it has always been in public broadcasting and I haven't had to worry about those things.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Thanks very much.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you, and we'll move on to Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I wanted to follow up a little bit on the discussion around the capacity that exists, or at least the opportunity that exists, for new programming to be developed at TVO. My first question is, is the capacity there? Following on the discussion that was just had, many resources appear to be going into this particular project, which sounds like a great project, actually. But does that, then, reduce the capacity to undertake some of these other kinds of new programming initiatives, and then, following up on that, outside of this five-month projection of this new initiative that's going to be the focus for a while, does the capacity exist currently to get some of these great ideas that keep coming up actually onto the table and developed? Or are there are more resources required to be able to produce more in-house programming?

Mr. David Hawkins: Well, I'll start with that. When we talk about capacity from the perspective of our membership, we talk about the professionals in place and our sister or brother union at TVO: CEP. From the technical side, we have the people who have the capacity and ability to do this kind of new and additional programming that we're talking about, and we have the equipment as well. In terms of how the resources are divided, those are not decisions that we make. So I can't really answer that in a direct way.

Ms. Lise Lareau: I would add one other thing. There's no question that our members at TVO have sensed—I mean, you've heard it this morning. There has been an emphasis on the online. You could argue at the expense of TV. *The Agenda* on the road is a wonderful initiative that perhaps is moving away from that trend a bit and balancing it out a bit. But it's our view, and not just our view—a lot of people in the industry hold the view—that you can't emphasize one without the other, you cannot put all your eggs in the online basket if your television programming isn't leading people there. So is there capacity? My own view is, probably to a degree. And then there should probably be discussions; the budgetary discussion goes on, right? But what it takes is the imagination to do more, the signals that people want them to do more. We're here to say that there is the ability and probably some capacity with the current budget to do more now, but it's certainly a dialogue we would like to see happen.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It seems to me, from what I've heard, that the professional staff, the workers, the

members of your union and your sister union—I like the word “sister” better—have these brainstorming sessions, they have these dialogues, they have these discussions, and there is a level of frustration in terms of not being able to realize some of these dreams, if you will. Does that conversation happen with management, or is that a kind of internal conversation that doesn’t happen with management?

Mr. David Hawkins: So far, it may be happening at a micro level, so there has not yet been a format that has been defined for those larger conversations. We would be very interested in taking part in discussions around new content initiatives, but we need the invitation, essentially.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We’ll send them the Hansard.

It’s important and I think there’s real value in what the front-line people identify and what their talents, skills, artistic views and capacities are to feed into something that can make TVO a more fulfilling place for Ontarians to get information and news and regional connectedness and all those things. I think it’s a very good opportunity that we will miss if we don’t find a way to feed that conversation, and perhaps—again, it’s not up to us to set the vision; that’s up to the board to do. But if there are signals that are coming—I like that word “signals.” It kind of feeds in with all of the conversations today. But if there are signals that are coming from the workers and the unions and the staff and there are signals that come from here and from the public, then that’s perhaps something that could lead to a broader vision or a vision that sees this as an opportunity, as opposed to a conflict, with other initiatives that are already committed to by TVO.

I guess the only other question that I had goes back to the issue of youth. I asked the question earlier, to both the previous presenter and to the TVO representatives who were here earlier today. Do you have any ideas particularly around engaging that youth population, the over twelves, the youth/young adults? Are there things that you see as being opportunities that are not being taken advantage of at this point?

Mr. David Hawkins: I’ll just start. One of the things that was identified through our brainstorming at the union level with select producers throughout TVOntario is that programming that itself is youth-driven—the face of the show is youth, the issues are actually identified and explored by youth—would generate a youthful audience in that demographic. Also, I have teenagers and their capacity to whiz through applications online just amazes me. They know stuff I don’t know. So I think they could be very helpful in our putting together productions of this sort and connecting with the two platforms in ways that are unique to them.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: And interestingly enough, perhaps an opportunity to provide training or engagement in the field for youth who are looking for where they’re going to land in terms of future careers and some—

Ms. Lise Lareau: Yes. The previous presenter talked about media literacy. You could see an educational opportunity there. These were the sorts of things that were

done in our brainstorming, but again—I’ll say it a third time—we don’t presume to think that this committee is going to tell TVO what kinds of programs to put on. That isn’t the role of any kind of government committee.

There just are so many other ideas out there and so many places it could be going. I think it’s safe to say that the folks working inside don’t get a sense that they’re part of the conversation, but also that these conversations are happening anywhere, this sort of “let’s do more.” I think that may be, too, a media phenomenon of the past 10 years. A lot of media employers have shrunk, as I indicated earlier. So it’s easy to get into a mindset of doing less. It’s a common occurrence in many media organizations: shrinking, a little bit of fear about what’s going on, digital this, online that. So it’s not just TVOntario. We say this about other employers as well: “Please reach, rather than contract, if you please could.”

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): We’ve exhausted our time, but we appreciate very much the comments that you’ve made. Thank you very much for coming here today.

Ms. Lise Lareau: You’re welcome.

GEORGE THOMSON

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): I’d like now to invite Mr. George Thomson forward. Good afternoon, Mr. Thomson, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. As you might have already observed, you have 30 minutes in which to make comments as you wish, and the remaining time will be divided amongst the members of the committee. So if you are ready, please begin.

1410

Mr. George Thomson: Thank you for inviting me to the committee’s proceedings. As you’ve said, my name is George Thomson. I’m a senior director of the National Judicial Institute, but I’m actually here in my role as the former chair of Ontario’s citizens’ assembly, which ran from about June 2006 to May 2007. I’m keen to have a chance to speak about the unique TVO contribution to this exercise that I was part of because it was valuable in itself but also because I think it is a very good example of where, over the next several years, TVO will be increasingly going.

Many of you, I hope, know that the citizens’ assembly was created to model a very unique and extensive method of engaging citizens in discussion about important public policy issues, and in this case, looking at and potentially making recommendations on the topic of electoral reform. For me, the most important part of the exercise was the fact that it was the most extensive experiment, exercise, in citizen engagement ever tried in this province and certainly, almost ever tried in the world. It involved bringing together 103 randomly selected citizens who spent an intensive eight months learning, consulting and deliberating on an important public policy issue of direct relevance to the democratic process.

A lot has been written about what we did to try to make that process effective—and I brought an example

of that with me—what was done to try to show that ordinary citizens can become well able to contribute to a discussion of fundamental importance, and also why this was a really important exercise, quite independently of the fact that the electorate chose not to accept the model that the citizens' assembly proposed but to retain the present model of electoral reform. I think there's evidence of the importance of that, because you can see more and more examples of citizen engagement being tried; for example, the health citizens' council here in the Ministry of Health, and there are lots of examples elsewhere.

So that brings me to TVO and the contribution that they made to this exercise. We approached them with the idea that they could help us create a record of this historic and unique process. They, and with their help, we, began to see that this was an opportunity to do much more, to actually test out a new process that would use emerging technology that would make it possible for people anywhere in Ontario to be part of the process, to observe the whole citizens' assembly process, to share in the assembly members' learning and then have access to everything the assembly members had access to; and then, even more than that, to actually contribute to the debate and the dialogue, to actually go beyond the normal approach of audiences being passive recipients of information and actually to be able to interactively contribute back.

TVO was the media—and frankly, the only media, I think—who saw the process of citizen engagement as so important here, independently of the topic being addressed. They did a bunch of things, and I'll just summarize them.

First of all, they created a video record of the whole exercise. If the public was going to be asked to respond to the work of the assembly, they needed to have some confidence that the process was being well managed and really was a way of supporting strong deliberation and discussion. So it was good to have it available, and they used Web streaming to make every part of the assembly's work available to anybody who wanted to watch it on their computer, live or after the fact, or on their iPods. By using the new technology, the whole assembly, from front to back, was available.

The second thing they did was extensively use students—broadcast and journalism students in particular from Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology and students from other community colleges—to do a lot of this work, and that helped to manage the cost, to make it much less expensive. It didn't in any way affect the quality of it, and it made it a very valuable and useful educational experience for these students. TVO really, in my mind, and I watched them doing it every one of the weekends we were together, was a sort of mentor to these students and a very effective mentor.

Thirdly, they used student journalists to facilitate the creation of separate materials using new technology, including blogs and podcasts. Actually, these students created a very useful documentary on this process of citizen engagement. That documentary, which TVO has

shown, is a very valuable piece in itself, I think, that demonstrates why involving citizens in this kind of work is so important. The palpable excitement of the citizens to be part of this exercise is really visible in that documentary.

Fourth, of particular importance, they created an interactive element that not only allowed people to watch what was happening but actually to comment on the content, to comment on the proceedings, to express their views on the issues and to have that come back into the record of the proceedings. They broadened the dialogue and the discussion.

Finally, they used their regular programming The Agenda, Allan Gregg's programs and others to produce the most complete, in my view, balanced and informative discussion of the issue itself, including during the public education stage.

That's what they did. They did it using this new technology in a way that was a tremendous revelation to me, and they did it extremely well. The conclusion I've drawn from that, and I think it fits with some of the things I've heard in the short time I've been here today, is that if you see educating and involving citizens in the major public policy issues that you work on every day in your role as a fundamental part of making the democratic process real and making it work for the broader citizenry; and if you see it as a way of connecting them to the important work of government and contributing to the resolution of tough issues like voter apathy and low voter turnout; and if that is an incredibly important objective, and I think it is; and if there is a role for a public broadcaster, which I think there is, to contribute to that in a major way, and empowering people to be engaged citizens is in the vision of TVO; then I think they in this particular case were ahead of many others in the way they came at that and in the way they used innovative technology, and in particular interactive use of technology, to start help accomplishing that goal. It was a small experiment. The topic itself turned out to be a hard one in creating those connections, but I don't think that's the issue. I think the potential is enormous when you think of the other areas where citizens have to become connected and engaged. I think it fits perfectly with TVO's educational mandate, and over time I think will have a real impact on the way TVO goes forward and carries out its role. That's why I'm delighted to have a chance to talk about it.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much, and we'll begin with Mr. Runciman.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Thank you for being here. I have no questions.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Ms. Horwath.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thanks very much. Welcome; it's very nice to meet you, and congratulations on the work you did with the citizens' assembly. Did you get any feedback at the end of the day—it might be in the package that you brought along—in terms of how many people actually engaged through the TVO process with the citizens' assembly work?

Mr. George Thomson: I can't give you numbers. In fact, the citizens' assembly members can answer this even better than I can because they used those blogs and so on to try to connect with people. There were a number of contributors. The topic itself tended to draw more people who were already somewhat interested in the topic rather than the broader citizenry. For a host of reasons, the work of the assembly was not as visible as it needed to be, in my mind, elsewhere and so there was more reliance on TVO as almost the sole source of this information, which limited the number of people who saw it. I would also say that the technology itself is technology that is new, that is particularly technology that younger persons and persons familiar with things like web streaming and podcasts and iPods for that purpose use, and so there was more involvement of people who had that kind of capacity. The exact numbers of people I can't say, but I would still say it was enormously important as an example of what it can do particularly if we were moving to a topic which more broadly connected with people as it was being done by citizens.

1420

Ms. Andrea Horwath: So the thing that would have pumped up the relevancy of what was happening in TVO for the broader public would have been other ways of connecting people into that piece: broader advertising, promotion, a greater dissemination of the opportunity. Do you think that's fair?

Mr. George Thomson: Yes. I think there is a need to do a lot of work to help people see the potential of using technology in this way so they actually go in and look at this material. I think that's changing and growing over time, and it won't take a lot of advertising, and 10 years from now we will be surprised at how extensively people are using these models to get at the information. Also, the number of people who do it will be directly related to their interest in the topic that they're being educated and asked to contribute on.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mrs. Sandals.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: That's a really interesting experience.

I'm going to pass this over to my colleague Mr. Flynn, but I just wanted to note for the record that there have been a number of questions about budget for various parts of the TVO operation. I noticed in the briefing notes we got that it didn't go into the current year. Just for the record, the basic operating grant for TVO was actually increased by 25% this year, so that from \$30 million in 2007-08, it was increased to \$37.6 million in 2008-09. I just thought, because there had been a number of budget questions and the briefing notes didn't go into the current year, that would be useful for the record. I'll turn it over to Mr. Flynn.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'm intrigued by the experience that you had with TVO, simply because they followed the process quite well.

I want to be a bit critical but in a way that you can learn something from this, so we can all learn something from this. This really is a mathematician's or a statis-

tician's dream problem, where you had a randomly selected group that came up and voted overwhelmingly to support a certain proposition. You'd think the behaviour of the randomly selected group, had they been selected randomly, which I think they were, would then be mirrored by the general population—that's the whole idea of having a randomly selected group—but it wasn't even close; in fact, it was almost exactly the opposite. At the end of the day, the population from which the random group was selected voted overwhelmingly to reject the proposition, which makes you think that somewhere along the way something didn't get translated or a communications medium was not taken advantage of in some way. Your message today appeared to be that there's potential there. I wonder if you could expand on what that potential might be, and, if you had to do this all over again, is there anything you'd do differently or is there anything you think TVO should have done differently?

Mr. George Thomson: To some degree, you get me into a discussion of what I thought of the efforts to publicly educate the Ontario electorate before they voted on this. To be frank with you, I think there were a lot of problems translating the learning and understanding and the experience of the citizens' assembly to a learning and understanding amongst eight million or nine million potential voters in relation to this issue. I think the public education campaign frankly did not do as good a job as TVO did to give people access to what they really wanted to know about this issue, both pro and con, so that they would be an informed public and actually be interested in voting one way or the other.

Another answer is simply to say this ultimately was a decision by the Ontario electorate and they were entitled to say no if they didn't agree with what was being recommended.

As I look back on it, I'm not sure there are a number of things that we could have done differently. The mainstream media did not connect to this issue to much of a degree. It was being talked about in the middle of an election campaign, where a lot of other things of significance were being discussed—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Not really; just one.

Mr. George Thomson: Yes. So it did depend upon a really intense effort over a very short period of time to educate the public as a whole.

Why I think this has major significance is, if you look forward 15 years from now, the kinds of methods that were used here are going to be commonplace methods of connecting with people and giving them the information they need. So there is a much greater likelihood that those methods will have connected with people, so they would learn along with these citizens and therefore be better equipped to decide what they thought of it. Here, other than those who connected to the TVO experience, the rest of the Ontario public really had this come to their attention late in the game with not a lot of information to help them know what they were getting, and it wasn't a terribly helpful process.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I have this theory, as I get older and watch the other generations coming up behind,

that you see the methods of communication expand; still, what hasn't expanded is that there are only 24 hours in a day, and you tend to sleep between six and eight of those and you only have a capacity to absorb so much, and things start to drop off your plate. My theory in the turnout for elections is that politics have begun to slip off people's plate at the expense of other things. If you're looking after the kids, if you're just bombarded by messages, at some point things get put aside. I'm starting to think that perhaps politics are being put aside, and people are crossing their fingers, I think, and just hoping that their governments are doing a good job.

They say now that the younger generation has a much shorter attention span, that they want things in 20- and 30-second sound bites, because that's all the time they can afford, and then they move onto something else. Going back to the exercise with the citizens' assembly, were we trying to give too long a message or were we expecting the electorate to commit too much time to understand that message?

Mr. George Thomson: I think it's important to first look at those 103 citizens. For them, this was the experience of a lifetime. They learned a huge amount; many of them came away from this exercise different human beings, and they came away connected to government and connected to the issues of government in a way, I would say, 99% of them had not been before. So this process of giving them a sense of involvement, of feeling that this was an issue where their views were relevant, giving them a chance to contribute in that way, was the thing that connected them to the political process.

I think the challenge is—and you've stated it well, that the time available is limited—how do you take that experience and broaden it and give people a chance to use these new methods of technology to actually connect to you, to the democratic process, to the issues that you're dealing with every day and feel that they're part of the process? Until that happens, I think the risk of ever-greater apathy is very great. That's why this model, for me, was so important, both in what it accomplished with them and then what TVO did to raise the potential of connecting much more broadly. In the long run, I think that's the only way that people's interest in the democratic process is going to be maintained where it can and brought back where it needs to be.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Mrs. Van Bommel, the final question goes to you.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Just expand a little further on this whole thing of the citizens' assembly. As Kevin has said, people have a lot of things on their plate. The 103 people who were part of the citizens' assembly, I'm assuming, had a fairly steep learning curve when they first got into this, because they were looking at something that was quite different than what the electoral process is in this country, but it's similar to what goes on in a number of other countries. They were learning about something that for them probably was the first time they'd ever been introduced to that.

Mr. George Thomson: That's true.

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel: Do you see, in the future, a role for TVO to continue to expose all citizens to that kind of learning curve? Maybe some of the concern was a reluctance to support something that most citizens hadn't had as much exposure to as the members of that citizens' assembly.

Mr. George Thomson: Yes, I do. I come away absolutely convinced that randomly selected citizens, given the time and the investment and the incredible commitment that they had here, can learn about most difficult public policy issues in a way that enables them to make a valuable contribution. What I think is the real issue now is how you make that an ongoing learning experience for many other people, not just on this topic, but other topics, and it's not polling or quick focus groups. People don't learn about that; they tell you what they already know. This was a process where they learned and then decided what they knew. This method using new technology may be a way to enable to continue a learning process and then be real, informed contributors rather than off-the-top-of-the-head contributors. It's going to take a while and it's a hard slog to get there, but I'm very pleased that TVO took it on as an exercise here.

1430

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you very much. I appreciate you coming, Mr. Thomson. This concludes the—

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Madam Chair, can I ask one question please?

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Certainly.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman: Sorry, Judge Thomson—of Mrs. Sandals: You mentioned the \$37 million. I'm just looking for clarification, because the documents that we had provided said \$45 million, or \$44 million-plus, close to \$45 million. What does the \$44 million-plus—does that include something other than the transfers from government?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm looking at a slightly different summary, but part of the confusion in tracking this is because in earlier years, the operating funding for TVO and TFO were combined because TFO wasn't independent. So you're quite correct that the operating grant for TVO in 2005-06 and 2006-07 was \$45 million, but that represented both TVO and TFO. Then, the first year it was sort of separated out it was \$30 million for TVO, and then \$37 million this year for TVO. I need to go back. I'm reading a different piece of paper than you're reading, so let me just find the piece of paper that you're reading and make sure that I'm saying that in the same context, because it is very confusing because it is presented in different ways over the years, so it's difficult to track. I agree with you.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay, because I was just going to say that the researcher has some comments to make with regard to that, just to clarify.

Mr. Larry Johnston: The figure I have in the back-grounder as \$45.9 million was the Ministry of Education's expenditure estimates for 2008-09. However, the financial figures that TVO provided with a breakdown of

provincial funding only went to 2007-08. So I think what you've given us is the base grant for 2008-09.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: That's correct.

Mr. Larry Johnston: There will be other funding, probably for the digital—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: No, that wasn't the total funding; it was the base operating funding. Because there have been transition grants for separating out TVO and TFO, and there have also been capital transition grants for moving to digital, when you look at the totals, they're up and down like a yo-yo because of the transition. But when you follow the base operating grant, which may be the more relevant thing in terms of capacity to produce, my understanding—and this would be on page 7 of the document that we've all got—is that the provincial base grant in 2005-06 and 2006-07, for the two operations combined, was \$45 million. When you move to TVO only, in 2007-08, it was \$30 million, and when you move to TVO

alone, 2008-09, it's going to \$37.6 million. We're agreeing, Larry?

Mr. Larry Johnston: Yes.

Mrs. Liz Sandals: We're agreeing.

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): Good. I appreciate that.

I just want to remind everyone that from this morning's presentation, we will be awaiting some clarification on the questions that were raised and look forward to receiving that.

At this time, I would say that the meeting is adjourned until 9 a.m., Friday, September 12. That will be in this committee room, where we will conduct follow-up reviews on the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and subsequent to that, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.

The committee adjourned at 1432.

CONTENTS

Thursday 11 September 2008

Agency review: Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TVOntario)	A-205
Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TVOntario).....	A-205
Mr. Peter O'Brian	
Ms. Lisa de Wilde	
Ms. Joanne Simmons	A-218
Canadian Media Guild	A-223
Mr. David Hawkins	
Ms. Lise Lareau	
Ms. Karen Wirsig	
Mr. George Thomson	A-227

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