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## CBC a dysfunctional organization

In the last column, we identified why the CBC needs to be fixed. Forty percent of the corporation's budget is spent on CBC Television, chasing ratings and advertising dollars in a vicious cycle that produces mediocre programming no different than any other station on the dial, and all the while ratings fall to abysmally low levels. What should be done?

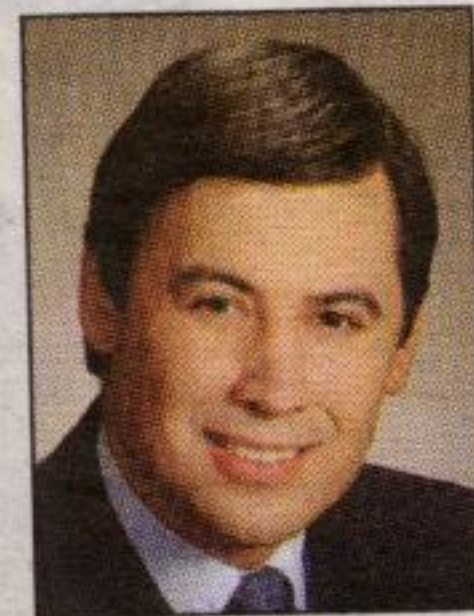
Governance of the CBC should be reformed. The president of the CBC should be appointed by the CBC board, and not by the prime minister. Currently, the president is accountable to no one other than the prime minister. Unlike any other organization, the CBC board cannot hire or fire its president, thus creating a dysfunctional organization.

CBC Television should completely or partially de-commercialize. The CBC bids on the rights for expensive sports programming like *Hockey Night in Canada*, but needs commercials to pay for these rights. The ad revenue required to pay for these rights and the ensuing commercialization undermines what the CBC is supposed to be about. So, one solution is for the CBC to remove commercials from all programming except for sports broadcasts.

Reducing the number of commercials from normal programming would allow the CBC to air a five-minute national newscast at the top of each hour, and a 60-minute national newscast at 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. Reducing or eliminating commercials would allow the network to focus on quality Canadian programming, and to abandon the current preoccupation with ratings (which are already abysmally low).

The responsibility as a public broadcaster is not to go after the largest audience and the most ad revenue; that's for the private for-profit broadcasters. The primary responsibility of a public broadcaster is to produce high-quality informative programming from a Canadian point of view. This would allow the CBC to displace TVO and PBS as the choice of

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REPORT**



**Mike Chong**

viewers looking for intelligent programming.

This may mean more money is required for the CBC. Since 1993, this government has cut \$200 million out of the CBC's budget in real terms. The BBC receives more than twice as much funding per capita as does the CBC. Among OECD countries, 20 spend more as a percentage of GDP on public broadcasting than do we. We get good value for our investment in public broadcasting, especially considering our sparse population spread out over a wide geographic expanse and our two official languages.

A newly-focused CBC would also have other benefits. It would project Canadian interests in a stronger and more cost effective way around the world. A newly focused CBC would tie the regions of the country together in a stronger way, thereby strengthening national unity.

That is why this government's handling of this lockout was so unfortunate. After eight weeks of disruption, little was accomplished that will help the CBC to refocus itself as a public broadcaster relevant to Canadians.

We can be reached at [chongm@parl.gc.ca](mailto:chongm@parl.gc.ca) or at 866-878 5556.

(This is the second in a three-part series on the CBC.)

—Mike Chong is the MP for Wellington-Halton Hills

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