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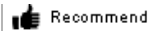
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DAILY NEWS Sep 10, 2014 8:34 AM - 0 comments

Local Broadcasting Focus of CRTC Television Hearing

2014-09-10

TEXT SIZE 

Concern about the future of local TV will be front and centre at the CRTC hearing on the future of TV with the release this morning of an opinion survey of residents in five swing ridings.

The Nanos survey, commissioned by the watchdog group Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, found voters in in these constituencies greatly value local news, want the CRTC to avoid undermining local TV and want their MP to fight to protect local broadcasting. Four of the ridings are served by local television stations at risk because of the possible elimination of simultaneous substitution and other sweeping changes up for consideration at the hearing.

"Local broadcasting in small and medium town Canada is at risk and proposals under consideration by the CRTC could force it and other local stations across the country off the air," says Friends' spokesperson Ian Morrison.

Nanos Research surveyed 100 respondents in each of five 'swing' ridings including Hamilton West-Ancaster-Dundas, London West, Ottawa West-Nepean, St. John's South-MountnPearl and Thunder Bay-Rainy River. Taken together the survey of 500 people found very strong support for local broadcasting:

81% consider local news valuable

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77% would care if local news were to stop

71% think the CRTC should avoid regulatory changes that would undermine their local TV station

89% think their MP should work to keep local broadcasting strong

79% think local news contributes to making their community stronger.

“Voters in in these constituencies are looking for leadership from their local MP and will blame the government if their local station fades to black,” says Friends spokesperson Ian Morrison.

At the request of the Harper government, the CRTC has proposed to change TV signal distribution to a pick-and-pay model where Canadians choose only those channels they want to buy. The government has promised Canadians that unbundling TV channel packages will reduce the cost of TV subscriptions. But companies that deliver TV services, such as Rogers and Bell, say prices will not go down significantly.

The Commission is also considering ending simultaneous substitution (simulcast), the system that for four decades has required distributors to replace U.S. border stations' signals with Canadian signals on American programs for which a Canadian broadcaster has purchased the Canadian rights. Simulcasting is estimated to raise Canadian broadcasters' revenues by 30% – and close to 100% in small markets.

Small independent TV stations are unanimous that ending simultaneous substitution could deliver a fatal blow to them.

If the CRTC kills simultaneous substitution, Friends is concerned that a likely outcome would be the closure of a number of small-market independent TV stations. In particular, independent stations in Canada's smallest markets, such as Kamloops, Medicine Hat, Lloydminster, Thunder Bay, Rivière du Loup, St. John's and Hamilton are especially vulnerable.

According to The Small Market Independent Television Stations (“SMITS”) Coalition, whose members operate 19 local stations, the CRTC's proposals “put in question the very viability of SMITS across Canada. This is not a threat. It is a reality.” SMITS also estimates that simulcasting boosts revenues on small-market stations by up to 100%, essential to their profitability, and therefore survival..

Even Bell Media's CTV2 network of stations in London, Ottawa, Barrie, Victoria and Pembroke is at risk. In its 2011 Group renewal, Bell cited the challenges facing its CTV2 network, and guaranteed their operation for a few years. A fundamental change in the regulatory environment – such as the loss of simulcasting – could provoke that decision.

Nine-in-ten voters in the five swing ridings studied would advise their MP to vote to increase or maintain CBC funding.

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In the aggregate of these five ridings, the study reveals the Liberal Party has a substantial lead over the second place Conservatives who are essentially tied with the New Democrats.

Nanos conducted a random telephone survey using live agents of 100 residents of five federal ridings, for a total of 500 respondents between August 23rd and August 26th, 2014. The sample included both land- and cell-lines. The margin of error is ± 4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error for a subsample of 100 respondents in a constituency is ± 10.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Friends of Canadian Broadcasting is an independent watchdog for Canadian programming and is not affiliated with any broadcaster or political party.

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Should OTT services like Netflix or YouTube be mandated to contribute financially to Canada's broadcast or digital media production funds?

Yes -- Just like broadcasters, financial contributions should be mandatory.

Yes -- They should face similar Canadian content requirements and regulations as well.

Yes -- OTT TV providers and online music providers both.

No -- There is no way government regulations or technical restrictions could make it possible.

No -- A wider and more competitive marketplace, not a restricted one, is the way to go.

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