



# Address to the Canadian Association of Broadcasters

Notes for an address by the Hon. Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.  
Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada  
Leader of the Official Opposition  
Ottawa, ON  
Monday, November 29, 2004

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As proud Canadians, we sometimes refer to some of the great achievements that have cemented our citizenship and contributed to our collective growth, such as the building of our transcontinental railway system.

Too often, however, we tend to overlook the contribution of the latter-day pioneers whose determination, skill and vision gave us national television and radio networks that are among the best in the world.

These networks of radio and television stations have not only brought us together, from the Atlantic to the Pacific and the Arctic and allowed us to understand and speak to one another.

They have also given support to generations of Canadian artists, producers and technicians.

You have created new wealth and given good jobs to thousands of Canadians in leading-edge creative and technical sectors.

That is why I am very grateful for this opportunity to thank and congratulate all the members of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, present and past, who have helped fashion this powerful instrument of national unity and cultural diversity.

In opening this convention, your president, Glenn O'Farrell, stressed the importance of renewed partnerships for Canadian private broadcasters.

I believe he specifically mentioned the importance of renewed partnerships between your association and policy makers and regulators; between producers and creators; between distributors, listeners and viewers in communities across the country.

Our party is presently engaged in a thorough, country-wide policy development process and I can assure you that we welcome suggestions and observations from professional groups such as yours as we seek to update our political program.

In that context, I would like today to describe, in general terms, how I view the present Canadian broadcasting environment.

Before I do so, however, I want to say how honoured I feel to be taking part in the CAB Broadcast Hall Of Fame Luncheon.

On behalf of my party I would like to congratulate the twelve outstanding individuals that will be inducted in the Hall of fame this year:

André Bureau, Shan Chandrasekar, Dick Irvin, Max Keeping, Jim Macdonald, Randy Moffat, Bernie Pascall, Oscar Peterson, Percy Saltzman, Claire Samson, Jimmy Tapp and Austin Willis.

Since I was not here last year, I hope you will allow me also to extend special congratulations to one of the 2003 inductees, Bev Oda, who has since become the Conservative Member of Parliament for Durham, and our critic for Canadian Heritage in the House of Commons.

I feel very fortunate to be able to count on the experience and dedication of such a remarkable woman.

Any consideration of the broadcasting environment in Canada, I believe, should be informed by the profound revolution that has taken place in communications technology, and the commercial and societal changes it has brought about over the course of our lifetime.

The creation and convergence of new technologies, the proliferation of channels and the breaking down of barriers have only just begun redefining our world.

And yet, communications have already had a profound and lasting effect on world affairs.

For example, would the fall of the Berlin wall, one of the seminal events of history, whose effects are still being felt today – for example in Ukraine – have happened without the world-wide mobilisation of opinion made possible by modern communications?

Millions of people – on both sides of the Wall – saw and heard President Reagan, standing at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, say: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

And today, that wall is no longer standing.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of other walls have fallen since.

Not walls of concrete or barbed wire, but the very walls of distance and time.

Thirty years ago, Marshall McLuhan was hailed as a great guru, a prophet, for predicting that we would some day live in a “global village”.

Today, we are all citizens of that village.

But at the same time as the proliferation of communications is creating a single global marketplace, we are witnessing a fragmentation of audiences within that space.

I wonder for example if my all-time favourite rock band, The Beatles, would have become the same global phenomenon if today’s varied fragmented marketplace of popular music had existed in the 1960s.

I also note in passing that political parties operate in an industry that is at the forefront of changes in communications technologies and market structures.

We use the full gamut of media to disseminate our message.

We advertise nationally and locally, in general and in target formats.

We use slow, traditional, information packed ways of reaching people, as well as newer instantaneous and image-based techniques.

In a democratic society, everybody must be our market, whether they are on the cutting edge, or would prefer the modalities of a century ago.

And like most human sectors activity, politics has evolved considerably to meet the demands of the new information age.

If you were listening to Sir John A. Macdonald for example, the founder of the original Conservative Party, you might be settling in for a two or three hour speech, which would be reproduced in the Conservative broadsheets - and summarized and commented in the Liberal ones – one or two days later.

Today, political leaders are expected to express the party philosophy in 8 second clips.

My first observation on the present broadcasting environment in Canada is that we are very fortunate, as consumers and as a society, to have access to a balanced mix of private, public and specialty services.

A Conservative government would respect and protect that balance, while laying in place a direction for its evolution. I want to speak briefly about that direction.

First, on the public side, the CBC/SRC is and will remain Canada's public broadcaster, operating radio and television services in both English and French.

These various services are unique, as are the marketplaces in which they operate.

Il faut souligner la relation spéciale qui existe entre les services françaises et son auditoire.

La télé et la radio de Radio-Canada sont un élément indispensable de l'infrastructure culturelle des communautés francophones d'un bout à l'autre du pays.

Dans plusieurs endroits, Radio-Canada est le principal et parfois unique diffuseur de langue française. Nous reconnaissons d'emblée ce rôle privilégié et nous le préserverons.

With more specific reference to English-language CBC, its radio services have remained non-commercial, giving its audiences a programming with which they are generally satisfied and which is seen as unique.

However, English-language television has tended to become more commercial, more in direct competition with private television and more driven to use American programming to attract advertising dollars – an approach which does not appear to be successful.

We believe that CBC English-language television should become, and will have to become, more distinctive if it is to remain viable and fulfil its role as a unique public broadcaster.

We should consider giving it a mandate that clearly articulates its role as a unique Canadian broadcaster, and seek to reduce or eliminate mass-audience American programming from its schedule.

In terms of foreign content, CBC could concentrate on non-North American, international programming, that tends to be under-represented in the system.

Along the same lines, we would seek to reduce CBC's dependence on advertising revenue and its competition with the private sector for these valuable dollars, especially for non-sports programming.

This refocused CBC will, obviously, have to be provided with stable and long-term public funding.

But we cannot jump to the conclusion that Canadian broadcasting is defined only by the CBC.

I agree entirely with Glenn O'Farrell who wrote recently that "private broadcasters embody the true meaning of community spirit, and they live it every day."

In times of emergency, like ice storms or floods, or in more joyous occasions like the Calgary Stampede or the Easter parade, communities are often energized or engaged by their local private radio and television broadcasters every bit as much as by the public side.

As a practicing conservative politician, I might add that such local broadcasters often provide an indispensable element of diversity in the link between elected representatives and the voters.

La radio et la télévision privées, en particulier, ont joué un rôle irremplaçable dans le développement et la diffusion de la culture française au Canada.

Le Parti conservateur du Canada est très sensible à la nécessité non seulement de préserver mais de promouvoir la langue française au Canada.

Comme gouvernement nous appuierons les efforts des radio diffuseurs privés pour mieux refléter le caractère bilingue et multiculturel de notre société.

On the private sector side of broadcasting, I believe the key ideas of the future will continue to be competition and specialization.

Increased competition and fragmentation of audiences are part and parcel of new sources of entertainment and information, more niche market services and the increased availability of new Canadian and foreign services.

Specialty channels are taking a larger and larger place in the broadcasting spectrum.

Since 1996, the number of English and French language specialty services licensed in Canada has tripled, growing from 38 to 118 in 2003.

In the Conservative Party, we start by recognizing that private sector broadcasters and service-providers are businesses first and foremost.

And as such, you must be able to compete and have the flexibility to adjust to an ever-changing marketplace, by responding primarily to the audience rather than primarily to the regulator.

And you will need both regulatory flexibility and predictability to remain viable and competitive in an ever-more fragmented and borderless marketplace.

This brings me to the subject of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, whose mandate, as you know, is to supervise and regulate the radio, television and telecommunication system.

The CRTC is essential to enforce broadcasters' property rights and stop signal theft, which costs your industry \$400 million in lost revenues a year.

But, though the CRTC has had a mostly positive influence on the development of broadcasting in Canada, I think it is fair to say that because of a lack of any renewed or forward-thinking government policy direction, it has also developed policies and practices that are out-dated, protectionist, and not meeting the audience's demands.

I can assure Canadians that we do not recommend eliminating the Commission. This should be very clear.

But we do believe a review of the Broadcasting Act is necessary, especially in light of the changing environment in which it must be implemented.

We believe, for example, that it is important to have a stable Canadian presence within our broadcasting system and the private sector is a vital element of that presence.

However, a Conservative government, while requiring a level of Canadian content programming of Canadian private sector service-providers, would also provide more flexibility to determine what program mix will drive their businesses.

There should be programming and service choices that reflect the education, information and entertainment demands of all Canadians and, as I have said, there will remain a true public broadcaster.

However, on the private side, the overall system should be driven principally to meet consumer demands.

A similar market orientation should be implemented on the technology side.

I found it particularly revealing, for example, that last week, when the CRTC published its 2003 report on the status of competition in the telecom industry, industry executives and analysts said that the information it contained was already dated given the pace of change within that industry.

This is a powerful reminder of the necessity for regulatory bodies to be focused on flexibility.

We would enable the broadcasting industry to utilize new technologies to achieve its public and private objectives.

It makes no sense to me that government policies would inhibit or reduce the utilization of new technologies in the provision of broadcasting services.

This will only encourage Canadians to by-pass the Canadian system by accessing foreign services available through less easily regulated new technologies such as satellites and the internet.

It is ultimately futile, especially in light of the emergence of new technologies, to try and keep out competition.

A better way to go in my opinion is to increase flexibility, lessen the regulatory burden and streamline government intervention and processes.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that the Conservative Party is presently completing an extensive process of updating our policies and I expect that many of the issues that raised today might be discussed at our first national convention next March in Montreal.

I thought it useful however to indicate in broad brushes how we see some of the challenges facing the Canadian broadcasting industry today.

I do not expect that we will agree on everything. I do hope however that we will be able to pursue this dialogue on a regular and constructive basis in the future.

I want to assure you also that we share the same objective that is expressed in this convention's theme: in our deliberations, policies and actions we too are "putting Canada first."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry a déjà écrit que « le plus beau métier du monde est d'unir les hommes ».

C'est ce que vous faites à tous les jours, et je vous en félicite.

C'est aussi ce que nous voulons faire.

I also hope that the day will come when we will be able to collaborate in ensuring that Canadians continue to enjoy one of the best broadcasting systems in the world.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup.