Toula Drimonis Headshot

[**Toula Drimonis**](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/toula-foscolos/) [Become a fan](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/users/becomeFan.php?of=hp_blogger_Toula%20Drimonis)

Former TC Media News Director. Freelance writer, editor, opinion columnist. CJAD800 radio contributor.

**Canada Can't Afford to Cut Funding From the CBC**

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***UPDATE:***[*CBC has officially announced*](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/cbc-to-cut-657-jobs-will-no-longer-compete-for-professional-sports-rights-1.2605504) *that they must cut $130 million from their budget this year. They will "eliminate 657 jobs over the next two years."*

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and Radio-Canada staff across the country are bracing for deep cuts today, as the public broadcaster aims to respond to an estimated $100-million revenue shortfall in the next year.

After a year with lower than expected advertising revenues and the loss of hockey broadcasting rights to Rogers Media for the next 12 NHL seasons, employees are expecting deep cuts to take place mostly in the sports, sales, and programming departments.

The recent Federal government cuts to CBC/Radio-Canada have amounted to $115 million that the public broadcasting corporation stands to lose in funding over three years. A significant amount of money that directly translates to approximately 600 employees being let go, as well as countless services and programs expected to be slashed.   
  
It's likely that some Canadians may be rejoicing at the news, but I am certainly not one of them. While I recognize the need for our public broadcasting system to re-assess its role and its services in these lean times, what it should come down to is a sense of prioritizing what matters most to us.

As an avid listener of CBC and Radio-Canada programs, I recognize and appreciate the extreme importance of what is offered to me on a daily basis. I don't want it compromised and I certainly don't want it jeopardized.

The CBC provides a coast-to-coast identity, and support for our artists and intellectuals. It provides a popular forum for well-reasoned arguments, for ideas to flourish, for the kind of intellect that stands in stark contrast to popular infotainment produced and consumed daily in mass quantities.

It's important to remember that the CBC and Radio-Canada can't be viewed (or judged) by the same standards as mainstream media. Their raison d'être is not simple distraction, it is to be universally accessible, contribute to a sense of national identity and community, and -- most importantly -- keep a safe distance from vested financial interests. What that means is you can't necessarily assess their worth based on numbers, but rather good programming.

While it's vital to tighten our collective belts, it's also important to put things in perspective. The grand total of the entire $115 million the CBC stands to lose is less than the cost of one F35 fighter jet! I realize that my hard-earned tax dollars don't always fund what I personally, as a voter, find most important (Afghanistan? The War of 1812 commemorations anyone?), but it's imperative that most of the expenses somewhat reflect my values.

All in all, each Canadian taxpayer's contribution to the CBC is exactly $34; much less than the $124 per person British taxpayers pay for the BBC or the $77 per person French taxpayers are dishing out for their state TV. It's a measly amount to pay for quality programming, particularly in these erratic times when people seem to be drowning in information, but starving for knowledge and perspective.

It is vital for a properly-functioning democracy that a neutral and independent (as much as possible) source of information exist. Slashing budgets and requesting that a public broadcaster increase its revenue through private sources inevitably increases the troubling possibility of outside pressure and interests controlling your source of news.

"A thousandth of our GDP (which is what taxpayer's contribution to the CBC amounts to) is not too a high price to spend for a smarter Canada," stated *National Post*columnist Jonathan Kay.

You think we can't afford to offer intellectually-nurturing programming in these tough economic times? I think we can't afford not to!

Vapid "infotainment" is at our gates masquerading as legit news. We need to ensure that there's always room for excellence, or at the very least, its willful attempt.

Over the years, as media ownership has become more and more concentrated in the hands of the few, there has been an increasing trend of distrust in the media's reliability to report the news accurately and in an unbiased fashion.

The type of media convergence currently being seen in Canada and around the world points to an inherent unfairness and imbalance in the way information is communicated to the people. We need unbiased sources of information where the bottom dollar isn't the main motivator.

Concerns about the disproportionate power exercised by the media in a democracy become more compelling as the industry itself becomes more concentrated. Around the world, media concentration in the hands of the few has been raising red flags for decades.

Media convergence and concentration of media ownership can compromise democracy and the dissemination of information. Commercially-driven companies focus on profit, not the public interest, and it's a trend that can ultimately prove to be very dangerous. A public broadcaster is a good balance to private, money-driven interests.

In an article written by Lawrence McCurry for Canadian Dimension magazine, pointing to mainstream media's failure to cover the G20 Summit fairly, he states: "In 1990, 17.3 per cent of daily newspapers were independently owned; whereas in 2005, one per cent were."

In 2003, the Senate Standing Committee on Transport and Communications launched a study of Canadian news media. In its final report, released in 2006, it expressed concern about the effects of the current levels of news media ownership in Canada. Specifically, the Committee discussed their concerns regarding the potential of media ownership concentration to limit news diversity and reduce news quality. Eight years later, media convergence is at all-time high and the Canadian broadcasting landscape is in dire need of neutrality, or at the very least, sources of information not beholden to solitary profit-driven media conglomerates.

Media concentration and cuts to public broadcasting have raised concerns about journalism's ability to help Canadians be effective citizens. Years ago, during a Montreal conference on journalism in the public interest, former Radio-Canada journalist and now academic, Dominique Payette raised an excellent question: why do we focus on the link between strong journalism and strong democratic life when we do work in emerging democracies, but ignore it in our own?

It's a good question. It's a question that, given today's media reality, is more relevant than ever.