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* **CanCon Is Still Relevant In The Digital Age**

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The digital revolution has brought many wonderful things.

Canadians can plug into international events from the comfort of their own home or office, or from just about anywhere thanks to mobile devices. And the world, we hope, can do the same to find out about the great north -- Canada.

The challenge, it seems, is in making sure there's Canadian content for the world to find and enjoy.

A review of Canadian content rules announced last week is welcome news, as long as it is done right.

Heritage Minister Mélanie Joly has said that "everything is on the table" in this review, which starts with an online questionnaire, and will continue with public discussions next fall.

There hasn't been anything close to this kind of scrutiny of the industry since the Mulroney government overhauled the Broadcast Act 25 years ago -- long before anyone had heard of digital streaming or online services such as Netflix.

Joly ought to be commended for tackling the laws around Canadian broadcasting, which originated in a simpler era before the digital age. As much as the current rules are out of date, it will be no easy task to update them. After all, just as no one could have imagined Netflix or YouTube 25 years ago, no one today can imagine what advancements might come next -- let alone how to write laws that might remain relevant.

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The goal of this evaluation must be to encourage the development of home-grown content that not only tells Canadian stories to capture the Canadian audience, but also intrigues the rest of the world to get to know us. It is no easy task, but surely it can be done.

In Denmark, the national broadcaster decided years ago to aggressively market well-made Danish TV shows that would not only improved the quality of television at home, but gave the country a massive cultural export. The result, thanks to TV shows such as The Killing and Borgen, is that Denmark now punches well above its weight in the culture wars.

Joly would no doubt like to see the same happen for Canada, but it won't be easy. Government support for Canadian content and Canadian media must be guided by a policy to keep the best parts of the existing system. That means public funding for Canadian content at the CBC and tax credits for film production in Canada, as well as ensuring private funding for the Canada Media Fund and local programming.

Finding ways to balance the digital era with supporting local programming is key if Canada is going to continue to foster local democracy in communities. Fixing this balance must become an urgent priority for the CRTC and any revisions to the Broadcasting Act.

Under the previous Harper government, the CRTC engineered changes to the regulatory system that drained money away from local news and programming, including multicultural television. Local news tells Canadians about their communities and the issues affecting their lives, and must be encouraged.

There are those who welcome Joly's announcement of the review as a chance to shed any Canadian content rules, along with restrictions on foreign ownership. Such impulses are not only wrong-headed, but dangerous.

Canadian content rules were set up in reaction to the flood of media coming over the border from the United States, where much larger and much better financed broadcasters and music companies pushed Canadian content and artists to the sidelines.

The digital explosion has not diminished the overwhelming influence of American culture in Canada, or the importance of Canadian artists being able to tell Canadian stories. If anything, it has made the need more urgent -- even as the solutions are less obvious.

We must also keep in mind that trade deals such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which Canada has signed but not yet ratified, would put severe restrictions on how much Canada could re-regulate an industry, including media, once any deregulation has been put in place.

For broadcasting, that would mean that once Canadian content rules have been relaxed, trade deals such as the TPP could prevent policy makers from putting that genie back in the bottle. This is why active involvement from all of us in this debate and discussion is vital for the future of media in Canada.

With technology advancing so quickly, 25 years will no doubt be too long to wait for the next update. And when that next update comes, we need to ensure our hands are not tied by trade deals such as the TPP.