

The Honourable Pat Duncan  
Senator – Yukon



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Sénatrice – Yukon

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CANADA

The Honourable Leo Housakos, Senator  
Chair, Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications  
The Senate of Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada, K1A 0A4

Dear Senator Housakos:

Thank you very much for your astute leadership in your capacity as Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications

As part of your study on the topic 'local services provided by CBC/Radio-Canada', I write to you in order that members of the committee will be provided with a brief. This brief includes my remarks in the Senate of Canada during the debate on the Inquiry on the future on CBC/Radio-Canada.

My intervention outlines the history of CBC Radio in the Yukon, explains the role of CBC radio locally in the Yukon to provide content by and for Yukoners, how the CBC serves as a community information hub and is an essential part of our emergency response plan when other communication systems are not functioning. This is part of the Canadian story, and that of the CBC/Radio-Canada, which is important to add to the committee's record.

I would like to thank the Clerk, Angus Wilson, for trying to accommodate my appearance, which, unfortunately, did not work with my current committee responsibilities. This is the reason I chose to submit the remarks attached below as part of the evidence received by the committee.

Yours sincerely,

The Honourable Pat Duncan, Senator (the Yukon)

c.c.     The Honourable Julie Miville-Dechéne, Deputy Chair  
          The Honourable Andrew Cardozo, member  
          The Honourable Bernadette Clement, member  
          The Honourable Rodger Cuzner, member  
          The Honourable Donna Dasko, member  
          The Honourable Clément Gignac, member  
          The Honourable Fabian Manning, member  
          The Honourable Jim Quinn, member  
          The Honourable Paula Simons, member

## FUTURE OF CBC/RADIO-CANADA INQUIRY—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the inquiry of the Honourable Senator Cardozo, calling the attention of the Senate to the future of the CBC/Radio-Canada.

**Hon. Pat Duncan:** Honourable senators, I am conscious of the hour and appreciate your time and attention this evening.

May I begin with an expression of gratitude to the First Nations who, for millennia, have been guardians of the land and all who walk upon it in the Yukon and who welcomed and shared the riches of the land with newcomers? Thank you to the Algonquin Anishinaabe, guardians of the land in Ottawa where we do our work.

I rise today to address Senator Cardozo's inquiry calling our attention to the future of the CBC/Radio-Canada.

Honourable senators, in order to know where we are going, it is important to know where we have been. In order to address the future of CBC, specifically CBC Radio, may I share with you some of where we have been, specifically in the Yukon?

We are rapidly approaching the CBC's eighty-eighth birthday on November 2. Looking back for a moment, a 1938 Whitehorse Star newspaper article described the CBC's first report to Parliament, where it reported a surplus of \$128,819, with total revenues of \$836,998 in its first five months of operations. Two months later, the Whitehorse Star quoted Macleans magazine questioning what Canadians actually get from the CBC — is it worth it? Interestingly, two weeks after the end of the 1937-38 fiscal year, CBC reported revenue of \$2.2 million and a surplus to Parliament.

Moving a few years forward to November 20, 1942, thanks to the military system, the Yukon was on the national CBC Radio airwaves with coverage of the official opening of the Alcan Military Highway — the Alaska Highway — a special ceremony from Soldier's Summit on Kluane Lake.

Honourable senators, the military system I just referenced, like the Alaska Highway, was a critical part of northern infrastructure in the Yukon, and the story of the birth of the CBC in the Yukon is another legacy of the American military presence.

In February 1944, CFWH commenced operations at 1900 hours. This station was the first Army Expeditionary Force radio station in the Northwest Service Command, operated for and by soldiers under the Special Services Branch of the U.S. War Department. CFWH operated on 1240 kilohertz with a transmitter power of 100 watts from the army's facilities at McCrae near Whitehorse. All the programming was American.

Within months of the first broadcast, a request show called "Platter Parade" had become popular with both military personnel and civilian residents in the Whitehorse area. CFWH's record library had grown to 800 records, making it possible to comply with 90% of all requests. Also, CFWH needed to move to

new studio facilities because the original location was too small for many of the audience-participation programs the station planned to produce. The weekly programming schedule was carried in the Whitehorse Star newspaper, something that continued for many years.

By October 1945, arrangements were made to commence Canadian news broadcasts over CFWH for 15 minutes per evening, three times a week. The broadcasts originated from the PR branch of the Sixth Service Command in Edmonton. The announcer was Warrant Officer Fred Ayer. Previously, he had read local news over CFWH when he was stationed in Whitehorse.

On December 15, 1945, Whitehorse shared in an all-Canadian broadcast on Christmas Day. This special Christmas programming originated in Toronto at 11:00 a.m. Whitehorse time. Local contributions included the Christ Church choir singing and citizens commenting on Christmas in Whitehorse under wartime conditions.

On June 1, 1946, control and operations were transferred from the U.S. Army to the Northwest Highway System, Canadian Army. All on-air personnel would have been volunteers, including community members as well as RCAF service members. Yukoners learned the 24-hour clock because events were announced in military time.

On October 16, 1946, back when there was some politeness in politics, CBC started free time political broadcasts on the Trans-Canada Network. The "Nation's Business" was broadcast on Wednesdays.

CBC programming became available to CFWH and other remote radio stations in the country in 1952. At first, this meant about 25 hours of programming a week, increasing to 60 hours by 1956. This was not live programming. It was shipped from Montreal and was about two weeks old by the time it hit Yukon airwaves.

In May 1956, discussions began within the community and nationally between the CBC, the Department of Northern Affairs and RCAF about the future of community radio stations in the North and the possibility of CBC taking over the service. On August 28, 1958, a letter from Conservative MP Erik Nielsen outlined CBC's plans for taking over radio services in northern Canada.

On November 9, 1958, the CFWH volunteer station went off the air. Volunteer Terry Delaney signed off. A special ceremony was held that Sunday evening to mark the handover. F.H. Collins, the Yukon Commissioner; Gordon Cameron, the Mayor of Whitehorse; and Erik Nielsen, MP for Yukon, were in attendance. The very next day, on November 10, the CBC-owned CFWH went on the air. Now CBC employee Terry Delaney signed on.

A network of low-power relay transmitters, or LPRTs, was installed in the 1960s in most of the highway-lined communities. Just as the Alaska Highway wound its way from Dawson Creek, B.C., in Canada to Fairbanks in Alaska, mostly through the Yukon, and just as the rivers and subsequent highways brought gold, silver, lead and zinc from Dawson, Mayo and Faro, the CBC connected Yukoners with one another as well as the Yukon with Canadians in this country and throughout the world.

In the summer of 1965, Bob Charlie of Dakwākāda, Haines Junction — later the chief of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations — joined the CBC staff. He was hosting the popular Saturday request show, taking over from Gertie Tom who had been broadcasting in the Southern Tutchone First Nation language. The show name changed to "Klahowya" meaning "Hello, how are you?" in a B.C. First Nations language.

Long before we were enlightened by the works of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that included former CBC North broadcaster Marie Wilson, listeners in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon grew up hearing the stories of Ookpik the Arctic owl, written and produced by Les McLaughlin whose broadcasting career started at CFWH.

Colleagues, a few moments ago, I mentioned Terry Delaney. Here's a little-known part of my story: One of my first places of employment toward the end of high school was CBC Radio in Whitehorse. On the morning show, I was the sports reporter filling in with the national sports that came over a telex. Terry Delaney taught me to rip and read. Some of my favourite CBC memories were the interview I did with Clarence Campbell on the day he retired from the NHL, and the odd phone call from an Inuvik listener late in the evening weekend music show who thought it was a request line.

Today, CBC Yukon community reporters from Old Crow to Watson Lake and from Beaver Creek to Faro continue to link the Yukon with their community reports on the morning show. We are regularly tuned in to what is going on in Alaska on "Midday Café" at noon with Leonard Linklater, who is Vuntut Gwitchin from Old Crow. And the arts, music and business reports all find a home with Dave White in the afternoon. All of this programming includes fair, unbiased reporting on the newscasts and the all-important weather and road reports.

That CBC Yukon reach throughout the territory is not unique to the Yukon alone. Canadians throughout the country will recall the distinctive voices of Peter Gzowski, Barbara Frum and "Cross Country Checkup" on Sunday afternoon, which brought a civilized discourse to national issues with callers from coast to coast to coast. CBC Radio continues to link us and represents a national identity.

As fascinating as the Yukon history of the CBC Radio is, as well as my belief in its relevance to every part of our country, what of its future, as the inquiry before us suggests? I would invite every member to cast their mind back or, more immediately, to search the internet on the Emergency Preparedness Canada website or the emergency preparedness website in your region. You will note that most, if not all, of the sites will recommend that your emergency kit include a battery-operated FM radio.

Honourable senators, allow me to tell another story from my region. As recently as May of this year, I found myself at the Association of Yukon Communities annual conference in Dawson City, which is 500 kilometres north of Whitehorse, when the fibre optic cable connecting the Yukon with the South was cut. All cellular and internet connection disappeared. This meant that the emergency 911 system in the Yukon went down, electronic payment systems went down and attendees at the conference put down their cellphones and talked to one another. The Yukon Amateur Radio Association volunteers immediately were on their ham radios to relay messages between first responders and those who may be in need of help.

Allow me to share an email from Pam Buckway, a Yukoner, who spent a great deal of her time in Beaver Creek — mile 1,202 on the Alaska Highway. She studied broadcasting at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and at the end of her schooling, she returned to the Yukon to be a CBC broadcaster and a most familiar voice to many Yukoners. She wrote to me:

When the power goes out or cell service goes down, I'm reaching for my ham radio with one hand and the transistor radio with the other to turn on CBC Radio. The CBC's mandate was to reflect Canadians to one another. It needs to keep doing that. I used to love listening to Peter Gzowski interview people.

Today, I love young Tom Power on “Q.” I learn a lot from him and his show’s research team about arts and entertainment that I would never seek out myself. I love “Reclaimed” and the Indigenous music from all over the world that they present each week. I catch “The Current” and “As It Happens” when I can. CBC News is still my trusted news source. And the CBC needs to remain a public institution.

During the event in Dawson, when all the communication lines were cut down, the CBC Radio staff were broadcasting in Shipyards Park, near the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. They became the key source — the only source — of information for 44,000 Yukoners, telling them where to go if they needed help, where there would be shelters open, where the various ambulances and RCMP cruisers had been posted and what to do should there be an emergency. CBC Radio, with its reputation as a reliable source of accurate information, was the only dependable mode to communicate to everyone with an FM radio.

I would like to note and add that I am grateful for the recognition of this service and of the CBC by Ted Laking, who is seeking the nomination to be the Conservative candidate for the Yukon in the next federal election. In his recent public statement about the CBC and its future, he said, “CBC Radio plays an extremely important role in connecting our communities . . .”

He continued, “I’ll continue to advocate for that essential role in promoting community issues and public safety.”

As much as those younger than I might spend more of their time listening to SiriusXM or the local commercial radio stations, CBC Radio clearly remains a vital part of our communities.

This point was reinforced with me recently when I attended the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations General Assembly. A young woman who was working at the Kluane Lake Research Station in the summer months asked me about the future of the CBC. She said, “It is so important to us when we are out on the land.” That is the only source to know where there are forest fires, what weather systems are expected, and what the state of the road conditions will be — information you need to be aware of. This is from a young, well-educated scientist who spends much of her time in Calgary performing vital research in our country. She said this to me: “Please do all you can to keep the CBC a national public broadcaster.”

My promise to the young scientist was this: I will try to do my best. I hope my remarks today will provide some food for thought for my colleagues.

Shàw níthän, mahsí’cho, gùnáłchîsh. Thank you.