



STANDING UP
FOR CANADIAN VOICES

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Deputy Prime Minister
and Minister of Finance

*The Honourable
Chrystia Freeland*
Department of
Finance Canada
90 Elgin Street
Ottawa, Ontario
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February 14, 2022

Dear Deputy Prime Minister,

On behalf of FRIENDS (formerly Friends of Canadian Broadcasting) and the 360,000 Canadians we represent who care deeply about Canadian storytelling, I am pleased to present you with our submission for Budget 2022.

FRIENDS – indeed Canadians across the country – were pleased to see your government’s promise during the election to increase the CBC’s funding by \$400 million over four years, to reduce its reliance on advertising.

For 85 years, CBC/Radio-Canada has been the voice that has tied our country together. From tragedy to triumph, our public broadcaster has been the glue that binds Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Most recently, CBC played an essential role in keeping Canadians safe and informed during the pandemic. Now, with the spread of misinformation, hate and illegal content streaming across our border, Canadians need the CBC more than ever.

While your government has recognized these threats and is actively working on bills to tackle them, attacking the problem is not enough. We need to build the alternative – a place where Canadians can turn to for quality local, national, and international news that reflects Canadian stories through our diversity of voices. The CBC can be all this and more, but only if properly funded.

For decades, the public broadcaster’s mandate and parliamentary appropriation was supported and expanded by successive federal governments from all political stripes. But starting in the 1980s, funding to the public broadcaster was slashed. Every Prime Minister from Brian Mulroney to Stephen Harper left the CBC with even less funding than their predecessor. While your government began investing in the CBC at the beginning of its first mandate, in constant dollars, funding for the CBC on a per capita basis has not been this low since 1961.

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Over the years, the CBC has been backed into a corner, striving to remain relevant and fulfill an increasingly complex and urgent mandate across an ever-growing number of platforms, but with fewer public dollars. It is no surprise that the CBC has started to look elsewhere for extra cash. The answer, for now, has come by way of advertising; a transformation of the public broadcaster into a destination for audience-hungry companies selling their products to Canadians. Today, the CBC's budget is comprised of at least \$500 million a year in advertising and subscription income.

The commercialization of public broadcasting erodes both the CBC's public service mandate and Canadians' trust in public service media. The result is a CBC that is forced to consider the needs of advertisers instead of singularly focusing on the needs of its shareholders – the Canadian public.

The CBC is one of the most poorly funded among its OECD peers, with only \$33 of per capita funding, compared to the \$87 average among the world's strongest democracies. Your promise of \$400 million over four years is a good first step, but Canada's public service broadcaster should not be driven by an existential funding crisis and an endless fight for survival. It should be able to count on predictable and stable funding that allows it to fulfill its core purpose – ad-free and at no extra cost to Canadians.

In the last Federal election, FRIENDS' supporters pledged their vote to parties that would defend the CBC and Canadian storytelling. In support of this, please accept these individual letters from Canadian citizens as a testament to the importance of the CBC.

Their message is simple: fulfill your election promises by increasing the CBC's budget with an aim to make our national public broadcaster ad-free.

Thank you for your time and consideration on these important issues. We look forward to working with your government and are available for further discussions at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Marla Boltman
Executive Director