



NATIONAL CITIZENS INQUIRY

Vancouver, BC

Day 2

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EVIDENCE

Witness 7: Jeff Sandes

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Marion Randall

Marion Randall, again, for the record, a local lawyer assisting your next witness, who is Jeff Sandes. Can I have you, Mr. Sandes, to please state your name and spell both your first and your last name, please?

Jeff Sandes

Jeff Sandes, J-E-F-F S-A-N-D-E-S.

Marion Randall

And do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, when you give your presentation here?

Jeff Sandes

Yes.

Marion Randall

So I'll just go through quickly who you are, a little bit, and you can add to it if I've made a mistake. You originally studied journalism about 35 years ago when you were still young. Then you subsequently worked in journalism as a reporter for United Press for three years and then freelanced in a community newspaper for about five years in Surrey. Then you did leave journalism for a bit for other work that you undertook. And presently, you do work in trucking, but you're also a freelance journalist for *The Epoch Times*, is that correct? Have I summarized that correctly?

Jeff Sandes

Yes, you have.

Marion Randall

Okay, so I think what you were going to address us here today with was, sort of, the changes in journalism. So if I could begin with, perhaps you could tell a little bit about when you were trained as a journalist 35 years ago and how that differs from colleagues in journalism that you've met now, what they're training was like.

Jeff Sandes

Okay, there's a lot to discuss, I suppose, that has changed. But back then, the industry seemed to attract people that, I guess, wanted to get into writing. They felt there was a noble call to it. There's people who are just kind of looking for a career that might, I don't know— They were still looking for something to do full time. And the program I was a part of, I thought, trained us all incredibly well. It was at Langara College, the province, BC. The graduates were all over British Columbia, community newspapers, dailies, all kinds of media.

Marion Randall

Would the word objective come anywhere into your training?

Jeff Sandes

Yeah, we were trained to take any issue, any story we were dispatched, and to consider as many different viewpoints that might come into this particular situation. So if you're covering city council or you're covering a press conference for somebody closing down a business in the city, even athletes, there's more than one position, typically, on whatever the story is that you're dispatched to.

And back then, we usually had a little more freedom to determine what actually might be the story that we would end up writing about. You'd go out into the field; you would gather your interviews, do your research, and you have mostly all day to kind of follow your story. And nowadays, we're mostly behind a computer, writing on something on the other side of the country, trying to find somebody to get as far as quotes go, maybe a little bit of data. But for the most part, we don't have the same effort into building a story like we once used to.

Marion Randall

Okay, so if I could, about 2010, I think, you began to notice a change in the way media was produced—and you're sort of getting into that area now—and it was in terms of the covering of the issues: one-sided or more-sided, and a reason why it wasn't multifaceted anymore.

Jeff Sandes

Oh, okay, sorry. Yeah, I'd say a dozen years or so ago, that's when I started to recognize the way stories were covered, they were produced, the way we were starting to take them in. We were losing some of the quality that I felt I was trained to do as a journalist. Of course, I wasn't in the industry anymore at that time, but I always scrutinized it.

What became a lot more evident was— It's almost as if there was going to be sides being chosen. There was less balance as far as bringing in other viewpoints. And that's sort of the approach that journalists seem to be moving toward. Once, I think, Donald Trump became a

politician, it became clear that every media outlet virtually decided to pick a side on whatever issue, and they just went off the rails.

Now, I will say though, even if I point my finger at a media outlet or a reporter and say that they're not doing their job professionally, they would still point their finger back at me,

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or at the outlets I work for, and say the same thing. So everybody, I think, still believes they're doing a professional job, but I would argue that we've kind of lost some of that structure.

Marion Randall

So is part of what you would say, is that people who are in journalism now are more motivated by ideology than they are about reporting on the incidents that are important to Canadians?

Jeff Sandes

I would argue that. In talking to some of the people I went to school with, and a couple of other long-time people in journalism before this testimony, the younger people that are coming into the industry seem to be coming in more with kind of political and social ambition as opposed to professional obligation. And we don't have a network to develop them, to mentor them. The system, one of these journalists told me, has been corrupted now. So you find maybe the market that you want to report in and you're kind of given a little more free reign to do that on one side of an issue.

Marion Randall

So can you also comment—you were observing the media and from your inside knowledge of the profession—about the influence of advertisers in terms of journalism?

Jeff Sandes

Right. One of the people I did study with, she was just telling me, before she left, her publisher told her to pull a story because it framed their biggest advertiser in a negative light. And that was the threat that was given to the newspaper. Another fellow I know, more locally, he was given the same directive to change a story based on their newspaper's biggest advertiser.

It is a reality when you have a low budget and if you're a community newspaper, in particular, you depend on whatever resources you can get as far as advertising goes. And so if your biggest customer is going to say, "We're pulling our ads," then it's partly going to influence, perhaps, the way it's covered. Of course, we have corporations and government initiatives to try and also, I guess, help journalism, but when you're getting money from the government, you seem to be also influenced.

One fellow I talked to in the Kootenays, Sean Arthur Joyce, who's been freelancing for years, decades, had his first stories not published because he feels the newspaper was getting money from the National Journalism Initiative [Local Journalism Initiative]. Forget what it was exactly called, but basically, it allowed underserved journalism communities to hire somebody for a year and allow them to sort of develop and work in the community and

learn the ropes. But now, if he had something critical or seemingly critical about the government, those stories weren't getting published.

Marion Randall

Now you mentioned advertising resources. Have there been other— From your inside knowledge of the profession and what you've noticed with your colleagues now and your previous colleagues, in terms of staff, for example, copy editors, if you can talk about that. And fact-checking.

Jeff Sandes

Yeah, so a lot of newsrooms are going to be operating on sort of a thinner staff. You have the reporter, which most of us end up seeing on TV or reading from their byline. But behind the scenes, you'll have others that are involved in laying out the product on the website or the newspaper, producing it for TV or radio. In a lot of cases, you're going to cut corners, or they have had to save money by having fewer copy editors and some of those production staff. Therefore, if you have a story that would have been considered maybe investigative journalism where you have a lot of research, a lot of data, a lot of interviews, it's a lot more cumbersome to vet and fact-check those stories. It takes a lot of time as opposed to, maybe, taking three other stories and getting those out on the internet or ready for primetime viewing. And so with that being one of the restrictions, it does have an impact on how fast a story could go or whether it's even approved because of how in-depth it may need to be.

And I'll say one other thing, too, that comes into play with this. While I'm being critical of journalism overall today compared to in the past,

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a challenge that a lot of reporters will have in today's real time is based on the media outlet you represent. There are people in government, in police, in business that won't talk to you. And even if you're trying to give balance, which is what your editor or your copy editor may be looking for, if you don't get a reply or response and you're ghosted, then the rest of your story may look like it's biased or imbalanced. And that's part of the reason why we'll have these accusations that we have. Yeah, like I say, biased outlets, biased reporters.

Marion Randall

Now, I wonder if you can just comment a bit on censorship, and especially in respect to the COVID era, you wanted to tell the Commission about that. About what happened in COVID and government regulation, censorship.

Jeff Sandes

That's a little more difficult one for me to comment on with accuracy. I mean, when Dr. Hoffe was here, he talked about a lot of deaths and injuries that have not been reported, and it reminded me— I think there was a child that likely died from eating tainted baby food and they immediately covered it in our media in North America. Largely, they shut the plants down; they ended up recalling all the product. And we have somebody, or a population, that may be damaged: We need to cover it. We need to let everybody know, and so, we did that with the baby food. Then we have another population that is being damaged and being injured, and yet we're not covering that.

The censorship—we know now, since Elon Musk bought Twitter—at least extended into social media. There is the Trusted News Initiative, started in 2019, of a lot of different media outlets and social media companies that look to try and, I'll say, censor information on fair elections and eventually on COVID and vaccines. And so when you have a conglomerate of different media outlets that are working to make sure a particular talking point is produced, then you're limiting the professionalism we're supposed to do. And you know, with the Ukraine war, search engines—I think all of them or most of them—decided to suppress information that might have something to do from a Russian perspective. And so, this is another example of how we're getting limits on what we can intake as news consumers.

Marion Randall

Now do you have any information about whether journalists are dictated, in any way, as to words they can use, like say, let's take "protest" versus "riot."

Jeff Sandes

Yeah. So we have— In Canada, it's called the CP Style; in America, it's called the AP Stylebook. And essentially, there's some conformity that all media outlets in the country are supposed to adhere to for certain things. And the example I would usually give would be when there was a military coup in Burma, they renamed the country Myanmar. Well, what do we call it? Is it Burma? Is it Myanmar? And the stylebooks would determine that for us.

So the way that those usually go, they move more in one direction than another. So an example back when I was studying journalism or first in it, if it was the abortion debate, and you are on one side or the other, you would be pro-choice or pro-life. Today, if we are to write on that, you would be pro-abortion rights or anti-abortion rights. And so the language is manipulated so that it's as if you have somebody that's in favour and somebody that's against. And then of course you throw the "rights" in there. We're skewing the way that it could be a balanced approach, in my opinion.

So during the unrest that happened following the George Floyd death, one of the things that changed was rather than, at least in America, being able to call the unrest a "riot," it was supposed to be called a "protest." There was a change at around the same time, I believe, where you couldn't refer to somebody as "a mistress," but rather as "a companion." Anyways, those are some of the examples of how we have guidelines on how we're supposed to follow, as a country,

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in all media outlets, and they come up with their own standards for that.

Marion Randall

Can you tell us a little bit about— I think that communities are increasingly served by news agencies or people that work for the news that don't even live in their community. It's more and more centralized, is that the case?

Jeff Sandes

Well, in rural BC at least, and it's probably throughout the country, you used to have a staff. You would have your editor and you would have your reporters. You would have your advertising workers. You would have people that would work on all of the public comments, so obituaries and weddings and other announcements. But now what's occurring is, in order to save money, you have a skeleton reporting staff and you'll have an editor that will be serving two or three different newspapers in communities that he may not even live in. And that's a reality in order to try and budget to still have a viable newspaper in a community that depends on it.

Marion Randall

And then, we saw with the Trucker Convoy, that there was only limited media coverage and did you have a comment about that?

Jeff Sandes

So this goes back into kind of picking sides that I was saying. As news consumers, I would argue, we've been part of that problem because if we believed mask mandates and vaccines save lives, there's these media outlets that will tell us that. And if we believed it was about control and oppression, these ones will tell us that. And whatever one we wanted to migrate to, we would go to. And they're going to keep feeding us, or I would say, the industry feels we have to keep supplying that red meat to our demographic.

And in the Trucker's Convoy, this was an example of people affected by the mandates that felt they had no other choice. They organized this. It left from British Columbia. We covered it with *The Epoch Times* from the beginning and through the entire journey. And even as it was gaining tens of thousands of people at the different stops and gaining more notoriety and notice, there were still outlets that were pretending it didn't exist. And that would be an example of a news story, especially in Canada, that should be covered or it used to be covered by everybody.

I remember one day listening to—I won't say the name—but I would always listen to a certain radio station for my Canadian news on satellite at 4 a.m. And a few hours earlier, there was a terror attack in Spain where Canadians died. And that should be the lead story in every outlet that we have, every newspaper, every radio broadcast, everywhere. Yet this particular host spent the opening segment talking about Donald Trump. This is the type of thing that, I'm arguing, is probably generating more attention, more clicks, more opportunity to keep your base that's coming to you for news happy. And this is a sliding scale of what constitutes news nowadays in how we approach that.

Marion Randall

So would you characterize news today as lacking balance compared to decades ago?

Jeff Sandes

Yeah, 100 per cent. What we were supposed to do is—take the Trucker's Convoy as an example—report what's happened. And there's people that are going to support it; people that don't. And then there may be other things that are going on, such as potentially traffic jams or environmental impacts or who knows; there's all kinds of things we could probably think about. And then the objective would be to bring all of that into a story and allow the consumer to decide what they think about it. They're informed, and whether they support

it, don't, or are indifferent, that would be what our job was supposed to be. But instead, what we end up having is creating an environment where we either put these people on a pedestal or taint them as a dredge to society and that's not for us to do. We're supposed to be reporting it.

Marion Randall

Okay, is there anything further that you have to tell us or can I open it up for the commissioners for questions?

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Jeff Sandes

Well, the one other thing that I just wanted to mention is I'll read something or I will notice something when I'm doing research that sometimes gets me interested. And I'm not sure exactly where it's going, but I have a suspicion that we may be moving into an era in Canada where our governments are looking to control our speech.

So we all know what "fake news" is—but what it's being rebranded as now by our governments is "misinformation," "disinformation," and "hate speech." And these are very broad definitions based on what they once used to mean. And so we've already seen our government starting to move into legislation that will restrict what people might say about the Holocaust or gender identity. And recently, I saw two clips where our Prime Minister was condemning people who believe in flat earth theory. And my sense is the potential for further legislation and the opportunity of Bill C-11 to allow more regulation on what we can say could be on the horizon. And if they determine that something that's misinformation or disinformation comes from your media outlet, your podcast, then maybe they're going to move into restricting that or censoring it.

So that's something I would argue all journalists should be paying attention to because we used to advocate that— The saying was, "I hate what you're saying, but I'll die for your right to say it." And that was something that was what we all embraced in journalism. But today: "I hate what you say, and I don't want you influencing anybody else with what your opinion is." And we're doing that in media too, largely. So that's something, I think, we should pay attention to.

Marion Randall

Thank you. Any questions from the commissioners?

Commissioner Massie

Thank you very much for your testimony. I was wondering, I think, because of the technology, journalism is going through a very probably serious, rapid evolution, if you want. And is the problem due to the fact that now, with the new technology, that there is a strong competition from what I would consider citizen journalism as compared to the big companies or organization that would have the resources to forecast their news previously? And now it can be done by just a small team of people that are well organized and disseminate or share a message that people want to listen to, that resonate with people. So that's a kind of challenge that makes it very difficult for professional journalism to find their niche. Because very often, the citizen journalism don't necessarily have all of

the means or the costs associated with big diffusion, but sometimes they manage to make a living out of it.

Is that a new model, the transition that we're going into?

Jeff Sandes

Well, the rise of the internet certainly has given entrepreneurs the opportunity to create their own media landscape, and a lot of them are one-person functions. I'm not sure that there's too many that are there to compete. Certainly, the traditional approach to journalism when we used to watch news at 6 p.m., it's about retaining your viewers.

One of the people I went to school with—he has created his own little mini-empire by himself—he used to do TV. And if he had a great story that was in everybody's interest, but if he couldn't get an image, like a mugshot or something like that, then it's irrelevant to TV. And the citizen journalist has, I think, a lot of ambition like you say, and they may be motivated by something pure and noble. But there's a lot that will also be looking to support themselves.

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And so, if they're going to get an audience that's going to be all anti-Trudeau or pro-Trudeau, then they might focus only on stuff that would kind of broadcast that.

The bigger thing that could impact this might be artificial intelligence, which could allow people to create content that you can't tell is phony or not. And if you want to lie or create something that is going to truly mislead, but you can't tell, that could be coming as well.

I just wish we had some of the opportunities to do it in the old way, where we would be dispatched to the story in the field, we'd have all day to produce it and put it together. But that doesn't really exist anymore. You don't get paid very much in this industry. If you file a couple of stories a day, then you can make a good living, but otherwise, you are going to have to cut corners here and there a little bit.

And I will emphasize again that our media outlets will all say we have journalism integrity. We have high standards. I'm not sure that's necessarily true, but they'll say it, and a lot of times, they'll believe it. I mean, there is one here in BC that on their website, they talk about their social activism as being part of what their mission is, and they have really high journalism integrity. I don't think you can merge the two with that. You should just have journalism integrity. Tell the truth; report the facts as best you can.

Commissioner Massie

The other issue also is—you need to make a living. And if these large institutions become more and more dependent on government subsidies, how is it possible that they can actually raise questions about what the government is doing? Isn't that some sort of conflict of interest built into the way it's operating?

Jeff Sandes

Right. So everybody will say that doesn't influence us. But, like I said, the fellow in the Kootenays who I was talking to, he'd been submitting copy for 20, 30 years, and until he submitted something that did not make the government approach to COVID look good. All

of a sudden, he wasn't getting his story published. And that was an outlet that was receiving money from the government to pay for somebody to report for them for a year, and his suspicion was the two were tied. The editor might dispute that, I never talked to them. But when you look at the advertisers trying to say "Hey, I don't want this story out there because it makes me look bad," and if you put it out there, that's the end of our advertising. If the government's not going to give you your money either, maybe you're going to be influenced as well.

Commissioner Massie

Thank you.

Marion Randall

Yes, please.

Commissioner DiGregorio

Good afternoon. Thank you so much for coming down and sharing with us today. You spoke a little bit about something I'd never heard of before today, the CP Guide, which I think you described as guidelines for media outlets in terms of which words to use. And I'm just wondering if you can help me understand a little bit more about this, like who is creating these guidelines and how our media outlets [inaudible: 00:28:34]?

Jeff Sandes

Right. So, CP stands for Canadian Press and it goes just beyond a choice of words. There's things with grammar. It covers a lot of different areas. I haven't read it for many years. I used to buy the book, every edition, back early in my career. But what they're doing is trying to make sure that you as a consumer, if you read this newspaper today and then you watch this news program tomorrow and then you catch a podcast or something on the internet the next day, all on the same issue, there's uniformity so you won't be confused. And that's why I mentioned Burma and Myanmar. If you'd never heard of Myanmar before and that's what they're reporting, you may be confused. And that's why they're trying to make sure that we have some method to make our consumers have less confusion when they're daily, or multiple times in a day, looking to access the story.

Commissioner DiGregorio

And who is producing? Is there a particular organization that produces these guidelines?

Jeff Sandes

Well, it would be people in the Canadian press. I've never met any of them; I was never introduced to anybody, but that was just the guideline that we were always given and they still are there today.

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So there might be a committee or a panel, but I can't speak to that.

Commissioner DiGregorio

Okay, and so it's something that, as part of journalism training, you would become made aware of and would adopt as part of your learning.

Jeff Sandes

Yes. Well, you're supposed to be.

Commissioner DiGregorio

Right. My second question relates to— I really would like your comments on, there's been some recent instances, particularly in Alberta, of politicians who are simply refusing to answer questions of journalists based on the particular media outlet that they report for. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on that.

Jeff Sandes

It's happened to me here as well, in BC. It's the reality now. Depending on who you work for determines whether or not you'll get a comment often. And they all have gatekeepers to sort of protect the layer before you get that comment or that data. This is why I mentioned, you may have the initiative to do a balanced story on something that you need political comment on, but because of who you work for, they're expecting you to give them a hit piece or make them look bad, so why should they even bother? And like I say, I've experienced that dozens of times: so virtually every story has reached out to such and such and did not receive a comment. We see that in every story, virtually, that you would read, probably.

Commissioner DiGregorio

Thank you.

Jeff Sandes

And by the way, I'll say I don't like that that happens. But if it's a product of how we've failed as media outlets, then in a way I can't really blame people for being cautious on who they talk to.

Commissioner DiGregorio

Thank you.

Marion Randall

I think there's another question there.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Have you seen an increase in editors censoring opinion letters from people who write contrary to the government narrative?

Jeff Sandes

I wouldn't say that I have. The one fellow I told you about who had his copy rejected, the one thing he mentioned is, that newspaper has a vibrant letters-to-the-editor page and all points of view are always published. So while his stories were not produced, they still showed some balance by allowing the public or the community to say things.

In my experience, they've got to balance a whole lot in making a decision, whether to approve me to do a story that I pitch. But a lot of what he has to decide is—how much copy is Jeff going to supply here? How much research and fact-checking and vetting are we going to have to do? Because he's got limited resources, and it's a tough one to make those decisions.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

And in terms of Ontario—I'll try to sit back a bit, I don't know what's going on, I'm getting the bounce back.

In Ontario, the MPs sent out a card, and I'm going to say probably around 2018, that talked about the fundamental freedoms in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. And they had section 2(b), they listed freedom of thought, belief, opinions and expression. And they dropped the part that said, "including freedom of the press and other media of communications." So I'm just wondering, if the MPs are not aware of that latter part of section 2(b), if that might be why they were so willing to push through the federal censorship law that will affect the industry going forward.

Jeff Sandes

Are you talking about Bill C-11?

Commissioner Kaikkonen

I am.

Jeff Sandes

I'm going to say no. One, I think we've seen in Canada, our Charter doesn't really hold up. I mean, in British Columbia, the churches that went to the BC Supreme Court, they agreed that their constitutional rights were violated, but they were going to let those fines stand. When the provinces went to the Supreme Court of Canada arguing against the carbon tax, again, agreed that this was a violation of the constitution, but climate change is so important that we have to let this stand. I don't think we have people that value that constitution here in our country. And if our media maybe put more effort into illustrating parts like what you brought up there

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and let everybody know that this was happening, then we might have greater pushback against our government. But right now, you can kind of do what you want in your position of authority, and there's not really any repercussions to it. And our job as media was really to hold government to account. I'm not sure we do that anymore, collectively anyways.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

And then my last question is about—you mentioned skeleton staff and resources of community and daily newspapers to be able to put out their message. Now we know they all get subsidized, and I believe the last figure I heard was 500 million, but it doesn't actually include the number of advertisements that were put in as well. And then when you add situations where you have the government, who has unlimited resources—and I'm going to give you an example—to send out news releases, is it easier for journalists to just accept the news release and print it verbatim?

And I'm going to give you the example, and I believe it is—I hope this is right—Ludwig versus the RCMP. The RCMP had, in that case, unlimited resources to continuously send out news releases against the Ludwig family. And regardless of what side we sit on, the newspapers were picking up those releases from the RCMP side and not necessarily getting the story from the Ludwig family. That was back early 2000s, maybe. I'm just wondering how that has changed, or has it changed? Or has it just become worse that the federal government can, with their unlimited resources, continue to spin stories in their favour? And how does that work in the newspaper industry?

Jeff Sandes

I don't recall the circumstance that you just described. But I can tell when a press release has maybe had a few words changed and has been published, and that does happen a lot. You know, there's less people, I think, that get into journalism with actual journalism training. If you're limited on how much time you have and you're given a press release, "Can you rewrite this so we can put it out?" it's easy to just—I'll change this word, that word, and that word, and away we go. That's completely lazy, but it does happen.

The resources, if the government has them— They're not breaking the law, I guess they might as well keep doing it. And if the media companies are going to put out, verbatim, what they're wanting you to say, then it's in their advantage to keep putting those out and sending them out.

Commissioner Kaikkonen

Thank you very much.

Commissioner Drysdale

You know, we often hear that the press is a fourth level of government to protect the public. In other words, how can the public make decisions about what their leaders are doing if they're not being informed? And we tolerate the press in order to be informed about what the government's doing. I think what I've heard you say in your testimony is that they aren't necessarily reporting for the sake of the people's education anymore: that they're reporting to get advertising; they're reporting to get funding from the government; they're reporting for everything else almost, seems to me, from your testimony, rather than informing the people. Can you comment on that?

Jeff Sandes

Yeah, I was also saying that the demographic that comes to your outlet, they have an expectation that you're going to keep telling them what they want to hear. That's our fault, today. And as social media has become a part of all of our lives, I imagine virtually all of us will surround ourselves on social media and our mainstream media with voices that are

going to reinforce what we already believe or what we want to believe. And so this is the tricky part.

I'm not in a newsroom, so I don't know the behind the scenes of how you make decisions. But in talking to people I went to school with and hearing that these are real-life decisions a publisher or an editor has to make in order to still get revenue, it never was something that we were willing to accept 30 years ago: "Well, fire me then! I'm publishing this! If we lose our advertiser, so what?" It matters today.

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I know with the outlet I'm with, there was an opinion piece on central bank digital currencies. It was published in America. But if you subscribe, you had access to it here. And the expert who was putting it together, he endorsed them. And the comments section were, "How can *The Epoch Times* have this guy write a story? I'm cancelling my subscription." This was pretty much the entire thing. I mean, I put some examples down here, too, but there was a headline after a Donald Trump speech and it said, in *The New York Times*, "Unity." Anyways, they ended up changing it in order to make sure that the newsroom and the people that wanted something bad about him said. So they would change that from the internal pressure.

We have an audience that will come to our outlets—and they're expecting to get more information on the Trucker's Convoy, on vaccines saving lives, or the harm they're doing, what Trudeau said here or there or everywhere. And when we don't give it to them, I think that is where— We used to always see the same stories as important, and then we'd cover them with a little different sort of angle, perhaps. But now, our audience makes those decisions for us largely, I think. And I'm trying to say that in the old days, we were there to merge the different viewpoints and that was what we, as a public, expected. But it's not like that much anymore.

Commissioner Drysdale

The public always had an expectation to hear or see what they wanted to see, and that's a human condition. But the media—and I'm not just talking about the press media or I'm not talking about *The Epoch Times* necessarily—has changed. And one of the things you kept saying, or you kept referring to, is "save money, save money, save money." They don't have the reporters anymore, save money.

And for perhaps an organization like *The Epoch Times*, it is different than an organization like CBC or CTV or Fox News. You know, these are the richest corporations that I can think of. They can afford to pay 800-million-dollar settlements. CBC reported incredible bonuses to their upper management, and yet I believe what your testimony is, is that they just keep paring down the resources available to the reporters, taking out editorial staff, taking out all kinds of staff, not going out to a scene to get the story anymore, and yet they're paying these enormous bonuses. How can these two things be?

Jeff Sandes

Yeah, I can't speak to some of the bigger corporations. I can say *The Epoch Times* has grown in readership and subscription rates during my time there. I'm not saying it's because I'm there. But there's people that have found the stories that they were interested in. The Trucker's Convoy is a great example because it got such little attention across the

traditional Canadian landscape in our media that we had stuff in there that people were looking to read, as an example.

The CBC is unique because they get a lot of government funding in order to exist, and a lot of that will go into the news portion of them. Other networks I can't speak to, although one news director I did talk to did talk about the collapse in the newsroom here in Vancouver once mandates became a reality.

Marion Randall

Mr. Sandes, I'm just thinking, to try to stay focused. I think you're responding to a comment. In the interest of time, perhaps, I'm not sure where you're going with all this.

Jeff Sandes

Okay, I've gone off the track there. Sorry, where should I get back on track? I am in the media.

Marion Randall

I think the commissioner made a comment and have you finished responding to it? I'm just saying, I'm not sure where we got with all this; I just know that the clock's ticking. I can see it. So did I interrupt? Did you get an answer to what you were sort of looking at?

Commissioner Drysdale

No, but that's fine.

Marion Randall

Yeah, I think we got off track because your question really, sir, was, are they influenced by the money?

[00:45:00]

And you're not really able to answer that, is that correct, Mr. Sandes?

Jeff Sandes

Oh, no. Okay, my apologies. Definitely, the money is a big issue. I can't speak though with CBC getting big bonuses. I know that the government does fund CBC; they've done it for years.

Marion Randall

So with respect, I think what you're saying, yes, money influences, but you can't speak to specific situations. Would that be accurate?

Jeff Sandes

Mostly, yeah.

Marion Randall

Okay, thank you. So are there any more questions?

Commissioner Drysdale

Just one last one.

Marion Randall

Thank you.

Commissioner Drysdale

I can't remember who it was this morning, it may have been Mr. Buckley who talked about corporatization. I've often referred to that as monopoly; some people refer to fascism.

What is the effect that so many of our media companies, not just newspapers, but media companies are conglomerates and they're owned by, you know— There's very little diversity of ownership in the media. And what effect do you think that's had on people?

Jeff Sandes

I would argue that it has had an effect. But in order to be viable, you buy everybody up that can't afford it and then you try to figure out how to make it work. I would probably say I can't really comment on that.

Marion Randall

Is this, perhaps, beyond what you can comment on?

Commissioner Drysdale

Yeah, that's a valid answer. Thank you.

Marion Randall

That's valid. Thank you.

So are there any further questions? Thank you. So thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Sandes.

[00:46:32]

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The evidence offered in this transcript is a true and faithful record of witness testimony given during the National Citizens Inquiry (NCI) hearings. The transcript was prepared by members of a team of volunteers using an "intelligent verbatim" transcription method.

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