

Newspaper Advertisements

Media subsidy a threat to independence: Pallister

LARRY KUSCH

PREMIER Brian Pallister says he is concerned Ottawa's decision to subsidize news media outlets will undermine their independence and their effectiveness in reporting on national issues.

Pallister said he is not arguing against short-term help for an industry facing transitional challenges, but noted there are possible pitfalls to any prolonged financial aid.

"I think there needs to be some reflection and some consideration given to the potential dangers of such practices if they are long-term," he told reporters after question period at the legislature on Friday.

"Transitional challenges are real and I respect that, and I understand that the media face those challenges, but so do many other sectors in our society."

Pallister said long-term media funding by Ottawa would raise concerns about the potential for perceptions of bias.

He said he was not speaking about bias towards the federal Liberals, who are offering the aid, but towards the federal government in general.

"How easy will it be for the media to criticize anyone else, any other group that is in receipt of federal funding in years ahead? That would be difficult. It would seem that there would be a crisis of principle at that point in time. I think there might be a natural reluctance to criticize the hand that is feeding one's organization," Pallister said.

Free Press publisher Bob Cox does not buy Pallister's argument.

"The federal program is going to have no effect whatsoever on journalistic independence or the ability of journalists to comment on any and all government actions, or on the actions of other recipients of government support," said Cox, chairman of News Media Canada, which has lobbied for newspaper subsidies.

"If you think otherwise, you don't know much about the history of federal support for journalism. It started prior to 1867 with a postal subsidy

to publications so they could be sent to readers in isolated outposts — like Manitoba settlers. That program still exists and funds magazines, community newspapers and farm, business, ethnic and Indigenous publications. Then there is the CBC, federally funded for the past 92 years, with a strong tradition of independent journalism.

"The new program simply recognizes that newspapers and other non-regulated news outlets need help to transition in the digital age, and it's important to preserve their newsrooms in the interim. It's important and welcome support, and it will not compromise what we do."

This week, the federal government announced it would start subsidizing Canadians' subscriptions and donations to news media as well as newsroom salaries. A panel of journalists would decide which agencies would qualify for support. Ottawa has earmarked \$595 million in subsidies over five years, ending in March 2024.

Pallister said the subject needs a public airing, and he's seen little debate on the issue so far.

"I think the sounds of silence can be most unhelpful at times," he said.

NDP Leader Wab Kinew said the Progressive Conservatives are trying to use Ottawa's proposed subsidies for legacy media outlets as a wedge issue in the run-up to the 2019 federal election. He said he doesn't believe news organizations who accept the funding would allow that to bias their coverage.

"It's pretty clear that this premier doesn't have much respect for a free press," Kinew said, referring to threats to sue the *Free Press* for its coverage and to legislation passed last session that would no longer require certain government advertising in newspapers. (The government says it will delay proclamation of the advertising provision.)

— with files from Jessica Botelho-Urbanski

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● MORE COVERAGE ON X00, X00

New protocol for Kinsmen bingo

BILL REDEKOP

KINSMEN Jackpot Bingo and CTV Winnipeg have reached an agreement on a new protocol following the missing bingo ball fiasco on last week's show.

The changes were triggered when an eagle-eyed viewer spotted a ball missing from the tray before it was dumped into the bingo machine on Nov. 17.

It isn't known whether the ball — B2 — was ever in the blower from which the numbered balls were drawn.

The largest Kinsmen Jackpot Bingo pot ever of \$372,229 is being withheld from the winner or winners until the Liquor, Gaming and Cannabis Authority (LGCA) completes its investigation.

The Kinsmen said the missing ball must have already been in the machine because all of the balls were retrieved afterward. The information was based on reports from CTV staff because Kinsmen has no access to the studio.

In the agreement reached with CTV on Friday, the bingo caller, usually Kathy Kennedy, will now run through a step-by-step dress rehearsal of the bingo cycle before the broadcast.

The host will load the balls onto the tray, drop the balls into the chute and empty it into the blower. The blower will be activated and the caller will pull all 75 balls one by one from the machine. This will all be recorded on video.

"It's something we've never done before," Kinsmen Jackpot volunteer chairman Raj Phangureh said. "That will ensure there weren't any balls left over in the machine from the week before."

It will also demonstrate that the blower is working properly and that there are no balls damaged in such a way that would compromise their movement in the blower. A complete set of backup balls are available at every game in case one is missing or damaged.

During the broadcast, there will now be a slightly higher, top-down camera angle to give viewers a clearer sightline to ensure all the balls are in the trays.

As well, the game will not start until the Kinsmen approve. A Kinsmen telephone operator located off-site will inspect the tray shown on television before giving the go-ahead by telephone for the game to begin.

"We just don't want a repeat (of last week). I think a lot of the time the

easiest task becomes the most overlooked task," Phangureh said.

There will also be a single wide-angle camera of the host and the bingo machine recording the broadcast. It won't necessarily be aired, but will be available in case of an anomaly.

In its investigation, the LGCA asked for any extra footage from before or after the broadcast. There was none.

"We're really just doing this to cover all the bases. In some ways, I feel we might be going overboard but it's better to be safe than sorry," Phangureh said.

The Kinsmen didn't necessarily feel pressured to restore the Jackpot Bingo's reputation, but the events of last week weighed on the minds of the organization's members, he said.

"We would hope we wouldn't need to save our reputation. I would hope that this is seen as, you know, the first time an honest mistake has been made, and we were quite sure after the game that all 75 balls were actually in play for that game," Phangureh said.

The policy will be in place for today's bingo. The jackpot starts at \$15,000.

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COMMUNITY INFORMATION SESSION

Wanipigow Sand Extraction Project
Canadian Premium Sand Inc.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2018
SEYMOURVILLE HALL, SEYMOURVILLE, MB
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Drop-In Format)

As part of the Provincial Environmental Assessment process for the Wanipigow Sand Extraction Project, Canadian Premium Sand Inc. (formerly Claim Post Resources Inc.) is hosting a Community Information Session. This will be an opportunity for local communities and the general public to learn about the Project and share their feedback.

Inquiries: Crista Gladstone, (204)477-5381, crista.gladstone@aecom.com



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