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Private members bills are garnering a lot of attention and debate within this Parliament. And there is no denying that the issues raised in Bill C-327 (An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act (reduction of violence in television broadcasts)) are topical, but topical does make the bill necessary.

Of note, for example, is the erroneous assumption that the Bill would add something to the system by putting now missing authority in the hands of the CRTC. It will not. The regulator already has this authority, in the form of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Violence Code, which came into effect on January 1, 1994.

Is M. Bigras aware of the fact that the Code is a Condition of Licence for *every* Canadian television broadcaster? Is he aware that his proposal of a 9:00 pm watershed for the airing of programming that includes violence intended for adult audiences is already in place? Has been since 1994. So have the most specific and protective codified standards applicable to programming intended for children – anywhere.

Because of the fact that the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council presents its Annual Report to the CRTC (and the public, of course), the Commission is always aware of violence and any other issue that concerns the Canadian public. Nor is such reporting just an annual event. There is, in reality, a close ongoing interaction between the CRTC and the CBSC. No sweeping of any issues under the rug. Close consultation. Continued regulatory oversight.

General references to violence in the media are not new. Nor is M.P. Bigras' bill, which was first introduced in the House in 2000. It was not necessary then. It is less necessary seven years on. Most important, there is simply *no* quantifiable evidence that violence on television has increased in importance as a policy issue.

When 13-year old Virginie Larivière deposited her petition with Prime Minister Mulroney in November 1992, television was the issue, but it is 2007, the world has changed. First, technology has resulted in the greatly increased role of video games, DVDs, the Internet and music lyrics as platforms for violent content. Indeed, I would argue that these may have supplanted, even overwhelmed, television as the primary source of media violence. Second, and much more important, Canada's private broadcasters have long since taken charge of the issue of violence on television.

In the Violence Code, the broadcasters provided solutions.

One (presaged above) was the Watershed hour. Canadian broadcasters do not air programs that include any violence intended for adult audiences before 9:00 pm or after 6:00 am. Even though the Broadcasting Act requires the provision of programming for a wide variety of tastes and interests, broadcasters view that early part of the day as a haven, free from adult-themed programming, for Canadian families.

In addition, there is no gratuitous or glamorized violence on television at any time of the day or night. Not for children. Not even for adults. Period.

There are special, detailed, focussed and restrictive rules dealing with children's programming. No country has a more thorough set of rules. For example, very little violence, whether physical, verbal or emotional can be included. Animated children's programming cannot have violence as its central theme or even suggest that violence is the preferred way to resolve disputes. It cannot encourage dangerous imitation. Nor can it even include themes that threaten a child's sense of security. Even frightening or otherwise excessive special effects not required by the storyline are prohibited. And so on.

Even as the real-life terrible tales recounted at the Pickton trial trouble us all, the Violence Code has, since 1994, even anticipated concerns with the content of news and public affairs programming. While assuring that, in this democracy, the presentation of the news ought not to be sanitized to hide the reality of the human condition, broadcasters must be cautious in the use of violent or disturbing footage, taking into account the age of likely viewers at earlier times of day.

Broadcasters actively help audiences make informed viewing choices. Ratings icons run every hour and advisories telling viewers in plain language what's coming are broadcast at the start of dramatic programs and following every commercial break.

And, finally, in the event that any one of the foregoing rules is breached, the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council is there to deal with it. The disappearance of the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* a decade ago is ample evidence of that. No huge financial penalties, as proposed in the Bigras Bill and debate, were needed. Just a self-regulatory system and broadcasters prepared to abide by its rulings. The morning after that decision, YTV pulled the series. The next week, TVA did the same. And Global took its own steps to respect the CBSC decision.

Moreover, the percentage of complaints about violence on television made by the public to the CRTC and the CBSC, which is a fair barometer of the audience's concerns, has dropped steadily, in fact by 37% between 2001 and 2006.

In addition to the activist role played by Canada's private broadcasters, there is an immense role to be played by parents, who are the content gatekeepers in their homes. Nor is violence the only issue for them. What is or is not appropriate for any given family must be determined by those who guide familial values. And television set manufacturers and cable/satellite digital boxes provide the V-chip and other technical blocking devices to cut out signals that parents consider inappropriate for their homes.

There are numerous other examples of the effectiveness of the self-regulatory process outside of the violence on television area, but the rules and principles are the same. No regulatory cannons are needed in Canada to *force* broadcasters to adhere to the Violence Code, not to mention the three other codes administered by the CBSC (on ethics, portrayal and journalistic ethics). They do it because they live in the communities in which they broadcast. They do it because they are proud of their standards. Best of all, the system works. It balances the undeniable interest of all Canadians in freedom of

expression with the interest of all Canadians in the application of standards to what they watch on television and listen to on the radio.

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