

The CTF – A force for the long term



Michael McCabe is President and CEO of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. He may be contacted by phone at (613) 233-4035, by fax at (613) 233-6961 or by e-mail at cab@cab-acr.ca

For close to five years, television viewers across Canada have been tuning in to programs like *Cold Squad*, *Le Retour*, and *Stories from the Seventh Fire*. They watch them because they are Canadian stories told by Canadians, and very simply because they are good.

When audiences sit down to these or any of the hundreds of award-winning shows created by Canadians, they find quality, unique entertainment in the comedy, the human drama, the arts, the cultures, and the histories these programs depict. What many of them don't know is that behind these shows is an unparalleled private/public investment initiative.

On February 22, Minister of Canadian Heritage Sheila Copps announced the government's decision to renew its \$100 million contribution to the Canadian Television Fund for one year. She told the broadcast, cable and production industries the government is firm in its determination to provide continued support, encouragement and promotion

for Canadian cultural products at home and abroad.

Since its launch in 1996 by Canadian Heritage in partnership with the Canadian cable industry and Telefilm Canada, the CTF has become a major cultural and economic success story. Over the years, it has leveraged more than \$2.6 billion in production, contributed to the creation of 1,535 Canadian film and television programs, and helped to bring 8,475 new hours of television programming to the air. It has also helped to generate over 20,000 knowledge-based jobs across Canada, many of these held by young people starting out in the broadcasting and production industries.

We know Canadians are watching U.S. programming. This is a reality that is not going to change. What we also know is that thanks to the CTF quality, home-grown shows are being broadcast and watched in homes across Canada and, more than ever, in other countries. They are attracting bigger audiences every year.

The CTF is a private/public partnership that works. To work even better it must become a permanent feature of the broadcast landscape. The government's decision to renew its contribution for one year sent a strong signal that this is important.

The CTF Renewal Coalition, an industry group comprised of the CAB, CCTA, CFIPA/APFTQ, CAFDE, CIBC, and CBC/SRC, has been working to ensure the continued success of the CTF well into the new century. Since late 1999, the Coalition has led a strong lobby campaign to renew the Fund. This has included the launch of the CTF promotional spot *Plugged In/C'est branché*, which was created by JPL, the production arm of TVA, and aired by broadcasters nationwide. We continue to urge the government to streamline the governance of the CTF through the creation of one fund, one administration, and one board. In recent weeks we have met with Finance Minister Paul Martin, who is prepared to endorse

long-term support of the Fund if we can continue to make our case.

Where do we go from here?

Television audiences are more demanding than ever and the CTF has allowed our industries to keep pace, but only up to a point. To continue to meet the needs of our viewers, and to secure a strong, competitive advantage in the global economy where the market for television programming is on the rise, we must find ways to increase the supply of high-quality Canadian programming. We can do this both with money and through policy changes and initiatives that will position our industries to maximize the opportunities the new global marketplace presents.

The CTF Board needs to recognize the impact of convergence on our industries by permitting Canadian companies to own, produce and distribute programming. For example, if broadcasters were allowed to acquire programming distribution rights for Telefilm-funded projects, a direct spin-off of this policy change would be the investment of millions in new money by broadcasters in the development of more and better Canadian programs.

New cash injections from the private sector would complement what the CTF has achieved to date and help to grow the critical mass of stories being made by, for and about Canadians. With more money we can develop and nurture the writers, actors and stories and really take advantage of emerging new technologies to make more Canadian shows that bring in the viewers. More money would enable us to boost the promotion and marketing of our products in Canada and abroad, something we simply don't and can't do enough of because resources are too often tapped out after a project is completed and out the door.

At the end of the day, what matters most is more and better Canadian programming if Canadians are to succeed and thrive in the rapidly growing and changing multi-platform, global environment.