

# Geminis: a chance to celebrate excellence and salute leadership of Canadian private TV



## Contribution by Glenn O'Farrell

*Glenn O'Farrell is president and CEO, of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.*

AS the members of our industry gather at the Toronto Metro Convention Centre for the 18th Annual Gemini Awards, there is much to celebrate. In 2003, Canadian viewers have an unprecedented amount of television viewing choices, in every conceivable format, with programming to suit all tastes.

During the awards ceremony, we will see once again that our domestic television industry consistently produces a large number of programs of the highest quality, thanks to creators, producers, performers and technical crews that are second to none, as well as the support and dedication of broadcasters and policy makers who are committed to a distinct Canadian television industry.

This year, private broadcasters' programs and stars have lit up the small screen. Programs like *The Eleventh Hour*, *Blue Murder*, *The Atwood Stories* and *Trailer Park Boys* are just a few of the shows that not only received a record number of Gemini nominations this year but also garnered large audiences.

Private broadcasters have earned recognition for producing first-rate news and current affairs shows, and this is reflected in the multiple Gemini nominations received by programs like *Global National with Kevin Newman*, as well as the nominations for such incisive programs as Citytv's *Media Television*, or the highly effective *A MuchMusic Special: Afghanistan*. The list goes on and on.

This should surprise no one, of course. After all, Canadians turn to private broadcasters as their first choice for television viewing. In recent years, private television has seen a considerable increase in its audience numbers. In fact, between 1991 and 2000, English-language private television (conventional and specialty and pay services) saw its overall market share go from 54% to 61%, while French-language private television (conventional and specialty and pay services) increased from 68% to 76% in the same period.

Best of all, Canada's private broadcasters are the first choice of Canadians for homegrown programming. The numbers are impressive. Between 1984 and 1999, English-language private television saw its audience share for Canadian programming go from 54% to 74%. In other words, almost three-quarters of English-Canadians watching Canadian shows do so on privately owned channels.

Given the importance of private broadcasters, both to the Government of Canada's cultural objectives and to our economy as a

whole, it is imperative that an environment be created that fosters our long-term commercial viability.

That is why private broadcasters are leading the campaign to shut down satellite signal theft, a silent killer of jobs that is also undermining Canada's cultural expression.

In all, more than 750,000 Canadian households may be illegally accessing satellite services, either by purchasing unauthorized equipment or by hacking into Canadian services. This translates into over \$400 million per year in lost revenue to Canadian actors, writers, directors, producers, technicians, distributors, broadcasters, advertisers and the many others employed in the production and airing of Canadian television programming.

Private broadcasters recognize that, in the global marketplace, Canadian content is our competitive advantage. But a market of over 30 million viewers does not provide sufficient resources to produce the level of programming Canadians have come to expect. That is why we are working with the Government of Canada and other stakeholders in pursuit of our objective to establish dependable funding for Canadian programming.

The Roundtable on the Future of Canadian Television Fund that has been organized by the Department of Canadian Heritage is a good first step, but more must be done. If we are to achieve the cultural goals set by the government, we need to address the apparent disconnect between cultural policy and regulatory obligations by ensuring long-term and secure funding that enables us to produce the kinds of shows that Canadians want to watch.

Canada's private broadcasters are the number one source of Canadian television content to Canadian audiences. We dominate in almost all programming categories, including news, public affairs and documentary, sports, drama-comedy, and variety-music. In virtually every class, Canada's private broadcasters are the overwhelming choice of Canadian viewers, choosing our programs over those offered by the public broadcaster by a wide margin.

Of course, this evolution did not happen by accident. It is the result of a series of well-thought-out decisions made over the years by Canadian broadcasters, producers, directors, writers, actors, the regulator and the many others who chose to build a vibrant, successful Canadian television industry. It is the result of government policies that pursued a specific vision, one that puts a premium on television shows that are made in Canada for Canadians.

These policies have been buttressed by recognition of the specific challenges associated with producing quality television in a small market like Canada, and a firm commitment to ensuring that television production in this country has access to the financing it needs.

The result is an industry that provides high-skill, high-paying jobs for thousands of Canadians, from directors, actors and writers to caterers, carpenters and sound technicians that inject hundreds of millions of dollars into our nation's economy.

Private broadcasters are very proud of what we have achieved in the years since the Geminis were first established, and we are very confident that the future will be even better.

On this happy occasion, as we come together to salute the artists and personalities who entertain or inform us, let us continue to build on our commitment to Canadian television. I encourage everyone involved in this dynamic and important industry to pull together and work toward a new deal for Canadian television, so that next year's Geminis, and the following ones, will be bigger and better than ever.

I congratulate all the CAB's members for the many nominations they have received this year. This recognition is a fitting tribute to your drive, your creativity, your love of this country and your passionate commitment to giving Canadians the very best that television has to offer. •

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