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CRTC BLOWS IT: *New TV Policy won't help Canadian drama*

Gatineau – The CRTC has blown its chance to put Canada back in prime time; instead it has given broadcasters a free pass. While ACTRA welcomes the return of Canadian spending requirements on conventional broadcasters, the new policy represents a 'status quo' on spending and a reduced commitment to overall Canadian programming. Most concerning is the lack of any requirements to air Canadian drama.

"We've been fighting for 10 years to get Canadian scripted programming back into prime time, we're completely gobsmacked that there's nothing in this policy to ensure that," said Ferne Downey, ACTRA National President. "It's the same old story – broadcasters get a free ride while Canadian culture gets put on a back burner. None of the front burner dazzle that requires drama to be aired on the conventional stations. What a disappointment."

"It's great that broadcasters are being told to spend money on Canadian drama, but they're not being told they have to air it. Instead they've been given free-reign to dump all of their drama on their specialty channels while feeding Canadians a steady diet of made-in-the U.S. programs in prime time," said Canadian TV star Nicholas Campbell.

The CRTC's new group-based licensing framework announced today will require corporate broadcasting groups to spend at least 30% of their gross revenues on Canadian programming. In addition, conventional TV services will need to spend a minimum of 5% of their revenues on programs of 'national interest' - scripted drama, comedy and awards shows. However, the policy doesn't require broadcasters to air any of those programs. Instead they can offer it up to their affiliated specialty channels.

"In order for our culture to survive we must be able to see our own stories on TV where all Canadians can see it – and that's on conventional television in prime time," said Stephen Waddell, ACTRA's National Executive Director. "I'm sure big cable is delighted with this decision since the only way Canadians will be guaranteed to see their own scripted programming is to shell out more even more money to cable companies to get access to specialty channels."

While the lack of any exhibition requirements for conventional broadcasters is concerning, ACTRA is pleased to see a number of the other requests it made of the CRTC included such as the elimination of 'priority programming'.

"We're looking at today's policy as a floor, not a ceiling. We'll be pressing for higher spending requirements and the imposition of exhibition requirements during the 2011 licence renewal hearings," said Downey.

ACTRA (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists) is the national organization of professional performers working in the English-language recorded media in Canada. ACTRA represents the interests of 21,000 members across Canada – the foundation of Canada's highly acclaimed professional performing community.

- 30 -

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