

April 10, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL

To: Members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Dear Committee members,

We write to you today regarding Unifor's concerns with the Bell Canada Enterprises Inc. (BCE) Board of Directors' decision to eliminate thousands of good Canadian jobs across the country while continuing to increase shareholder dividends and payouts to its executives.

Unifor members have expressed concerns with BCE paring down Canadian jobs over the past years. However, the company has disturbingly and dramatically increased these actions by cutting more than 6,000 jobs in an eight-month period. These figures include BCE's announcement in February 2024 that it would axe 4,800 telecommunication and media jobs amounting to the elimination of 9% of its workforce in one fell swoop.

BCE also chose to announce that it would further increase its dividend payout to shareholders at the same time.

Our union commends the Heritage Committee's action to summon Bell executives to appear on April 11 to address the job cuts.

Alarming, BCE cut 1,300 jobs last June, mainly at Bell Media. BCE further decimated news coverage in February with the elimination of CTV noon and weekend newscasts in most markets across the country and the termination of W5, an important long-form investigative program which ran for 58 seasons. In fact, it was the longest running weekly investigative news program in North America.

It is chilling that at the same time BCE executives were sealing the fate of W5 behind the closed doors of its boardroom, journalist Avery Haines and a W5 crew were risking their lives to witness and record the experiences of migrants making the perilous journey through a drug cartel-controlled jungle to bring that story home to Canadians.

Every member of the committee is encouraged to watch this excellent piece of Canadian investigative journalism as an example of the truth-seeking reporting that BCE is dismantling.

Watch W5's Narco Jungle: The Darien Gap [here](#).

As you may be aware, Unifor leadership along with telecommunications and media members held a rally in Ottawa on March 19. Hundreds of workers took to the streets to send a clear and straight-forward message in opposition to BCE's job cuts and record-high shareholder payouts: Shame on Bell.

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Renowned journalist, news anchor, and former W5 host Kevin Newman joined Unifor at a Parliament Hill media conference where he stated: "By slashing its newsrooms year after year Bell is leading an information retreat among all broadcasters, and creating TV and radio news deserts where there are few, if any, private sector journalists. Canadians are left asking, 'Where do we find the truth now?'"

Unifor urges members of this Committee to heed Mr. Newman's words. He warns that we are living in an era of disinformation and cognitive warfare aimed at undermining the truth. The constant cuts to news and information sources are now to the bone – at a time when verified, fact-based reporting is under constant strain from external forces, and their own company. Many Bell Media workers want Canadians to understand the threat these cuts pose to Canadians and to the health of our democratic society.

"To keep cutting the Bell division devoted to the pursuit of truth amounts to capitulation to those adversaries who are trying to undermine our trust in truth, in one another, and in our peaceful society" Newman said. "This is the time to fortify our information defences, not tear them down."

Read Kevin Newman's Toronto Star op-ed [here](#).

Adding insult to injury, the very day after Bell workers held their Shame on Bell rally, BCE invited hundreds of [telco workers to group virtual meetings](#) only to be told that their jobs had been eliminated. As BCE continues to hand out pink slips, it is clear that BCE had no clear plan for which positions or people to cut. This left thousands of workers in a state of anxiety and worry, waiting for almost two months to find out if the axe would fall on them. Some are still waiting.

The loss of a high level of experience with the departure of long-time workers, including those who were working on the next generation of technology, without a viable succession plan is of the greatest concern. Most of the 700 telecommunications jobs eliminated in the last round of cuts are customer service positions. These cuts can only lead to a decrease in service quality, leaving customers to struggle with A.I. bots.

It is our contention that the actions of BCE board members violate the social contract and corporate responsibility that this company owes to all Canadians. We ask that when the BCE executives are finally brought before your committee that this information be

strongly considered and that key questions be asked in order to hold this company and the people who run it accountable.

How long did it take the BCE board of directors to decide to throw 6,000 people out of work and gut local news programs, kill programs like W5 and erode telecommunications service jobs in Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and all across Canada?

How much time did the Bell BCE Board of Directors take to consider the plan to fire thousands of workers, compared to discussing corporate executive compensation such as the 20% pay raise the president and CEO received in 2022 and the 40% pay raise between 2020 and 2022?

Did BCE make the decision to slash jobs in one breath and hike dividends and CEO pay in the very next breath?

Unifor, BCE workers, and Canadians deserve to know the answers to these questions in order to hold Canada's largest telecommunications company and the individuals who run it accountable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lana Payne', written in a cursive style.

Lana Payne
National President

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