

Office of the Ombud
English Services

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2025-26

Ombud

Ombud

Office of the Ombud
English Services

CBC  Radio-Canada

June xx, 2026

Mr. Michael Goldbloom
Chairman, Board of Directors
CBC/Radio-Canada

Ms. Marie-Philippe Bouchard
President and CEO
CBC/Radio-Canada

Members of the Board of Directors
CBC/Radio-Canada

Dear Mr. Goldbloom, Ms. Bouchard and Members of the Board of Directors:

I am pleased to submit the Annual Report of the Office of the Ombud, English Services, for the period April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026.

Sincerely,

Maxime Bertrand
CBC Ombud, English Services

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
• Trends	8
• Reviews at a Glance	15
• Other Issues	20
• Some Housekeeping Is in Order	22
• A Year in the Life of the Ombud	24
Conclusion	26
APPENDIXES	
• I Table: Distribution of Complaints per Platform	27
• II Table: Reviews	28
• III Ombud's Mandate	29

INTRODUCTION

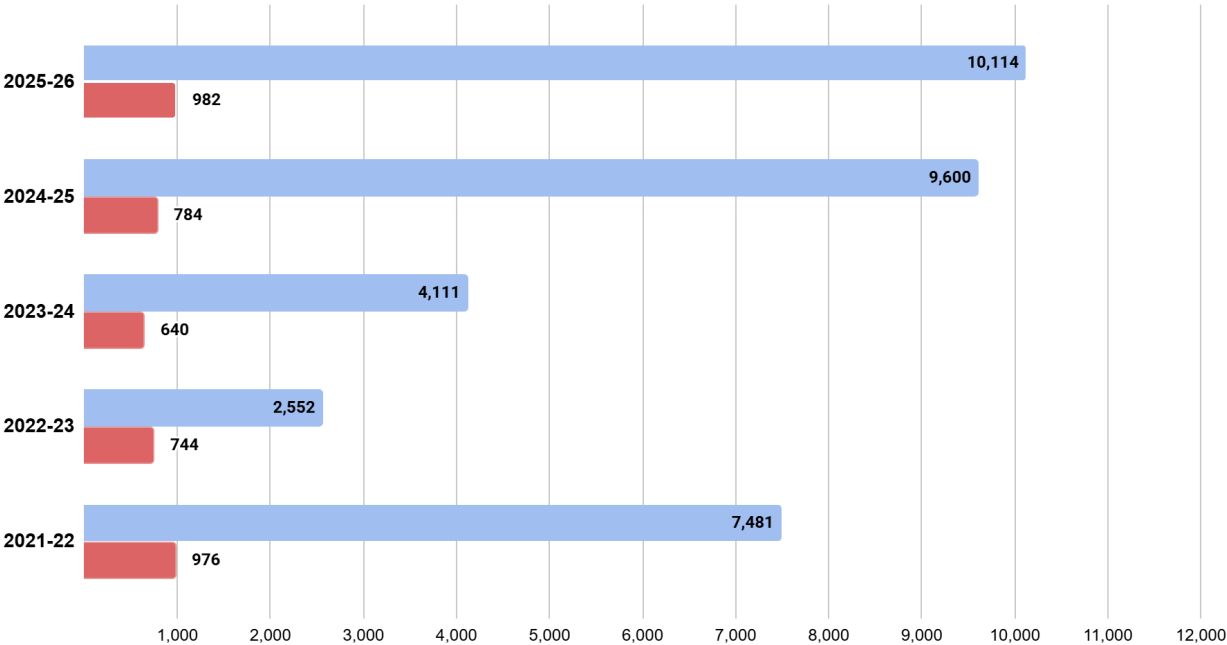
If ever I'd wondered whether the spike in complaints was a passing phenomenon, any doubts have long since vanished.

The trend hasn't just been confirmed: the sustained volume has become endemic to my work each day. While perhaps less pronounced than during the 2024-25 fiscal year, the uptick clearly signals a growing dissatisfaction that shows no sign of abating.

| THE YEAR 2025-26 IN FIGURES

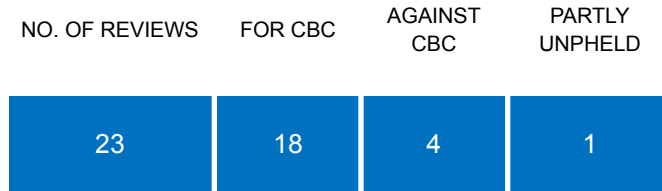
Between April 1, 2025, and March 31, 2026, my office received a total of **11,096** comments, complaints and expressions of concern — an increase of **6.9%** over the previous year. Of those, **982** fell outside the scope of the Ombud's mandate. Of the remaining **10,114**, **1,611** were forwarded to programmers for a direct response; the rest (**8,830**) were shared with News management.

NUMBER OF COMMUNICATIONS



It's worth noting that this office does not insist on a reply when a complaint is too broad or is part of an organized campaign. All complaints are shared with management, though I only request a response for some; management then has 20 business days to reply.

In 2025-26, **37** of the complaints to which management responded were escalated to this office for formal review; my office had completed **23** by the end of the year. Of those, **5** identified either a policy breach or room for improvement — a ratio broadly consistent with previous years. There was no discernable pattern as to the nature of the errors or the breaches.



Fifty-six requests for review remain outstanding from previous years; these will be completed in the coming months.

Of course, formal reviews are only one benefit of the Ombud process at CBC/Radio-Canada. Perhaps more significant is the proactive commitment to accountability it fosters among programmers.

In 2022-23, my predecessor began tracking how often complaints received by this office had led CBC to improve or correct a story, regardless of whether a formal review was conducted. There were **112** such cases in 2022-23. This figure dropped to **62** in 2023-24 and has stayed roughly the same in the following two years (**64** and **55**, respectively). When corrections or improvements are made, complainants generally do not follow up with a request for review.

The usefulness of the Ombud process, however, extends far beyond adjudication.

One important demonstration of accountability has been the noteworthy improvement in complaint response speed. Two years ago, CBC management took an average of **15** working days to provide an official response. By 2024-25, this had gone down to **9** days. The 2025-26 figure of **9.2** days remains essentially unchanged from the previous year. This stability, maintained despite a turbulent news cycle, is clear indication of CBC management’s commitment to accountability. That alone is both noteworthy and commendable.

NUMBER OF COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED

	TOTAL NO. OF COMPLAINTS	INFORMATION PROGRAMMING	GENERAL PROGRAMS/ OTHER	COMPLAINTS PROCESSED	AVERAGE RESPONSE TIME (DAYS)
2025-26	11,096	10,114	982	1,611	9.2
2024-25	10,384	9,600	784	1,735	9
2023-24	4,785	4,111	640	1,173	9
2022-23	3,296	2,552	744	982	15
2021-22	8,457	7,481	976	1,684	19

THE YEAR AT A GLANCE

The year 2025-26 was relentless, an unremitting onslaught of conflicts and tragedies: the war in Iran, the Bondi Beach shooting and the perpetual crisis in Gaza.

Key developments in 2025 included the election of American Pope Leo in May, the 12-day war in Iran in June, and ongoing Israeli airstrikes targeting Hezbollah positions in Lebanon. Attention later shifted to renewed tensions over Greenland, a ceasefire in Gaza, a trade war with the Trump administration that continued to shape international economic relations, and a series of parliamentary floor crossings in Canada.

Things only seemed to escalate as the new year dawned. The U.S. military strike in Venezuela brought the holiday torpor to a swift and brutal end. The world was still trying to process images of a shackled and blindfolded Nicolás Maduro, flown under military guard to the United States, when the news broke from Minnesota: 37-year-old mother-of-three Renee Nicole Good had been shot and killed by an ICE agent.

Meanwhile, President Trump was again rattling his sabres over Greenland, sending diplomats scrambling and world leaders into a state of alarm. At the same time, protests in Iran — already simmering since late December — erupted with a vengeance, their images breaking into Western awareness despite the ongoing communications blackout.

Taken together, these events contributed to a broader sense of instability in the media landscape.

It has been said ad infinitum that trust is the backbone of public media. Without trust, public broadcasters can't function. My sense, however, is that we may have moved beyond that formulation. The erosion of trust is no longer a nebulous threat, a vision of what may come to pass if the media fails to do X or Y: it is here, now. The public, it would appear, has lost faith. The question they're asking now is not how public media can be made more accountable, but why it even exists.

A provocative question, but one that can no longer be waved away: it must be addressed, or at the very least, acknowledged.

The BBC's recent struggle with a profound crisis over allegations of bias — and the obvious glee with which certain groups anticipated a similar fate for the CBC — underscores the fragility of “legacy” media's reputation today.

If that sounds like doomsaying, allow me to point out that these sentiments are a direct reflection of my daily correspondence with Canadian audiences.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that people who write to the Ombud generally want to air a grievance; they can only be expected to be vocal. Still, even among the rare writers who send emails to thank the CBC (yes, they do exist!), a measure of uncertainty has taken root. They still believe in the CBC's mission, but their trust is no longer blind. Increasingly, it is being replaced by a “wait and see” attitude and a growing concern over perceived shifts in coverage.

TRENDS

| TUMBLER RIDGE AND ACCURACY

The events in Tumbler Ridge, B.C., represent one of the most devastating mass shootings in Canadian history. The community remains in mourning after a former student of Tumbler Ridge Secondary School shot and killed eight people, including six children, before dying from self-inflicted gunshot wounds.

The CBC's coverage of the shooting and its aftermath triggered a wave of criticism. Complaints ranged from unintentional errors to the handling of the perpetrator's identity.

Admittedly, there were moments of "live-to-air" fumbling. For example, viewers and listeners were quick to flag the slip of the tongue by the host who had inadvertently said "Trump Tumbler Ridge" during the unfolding drama.

In the past, such a slip might have been dismissed as a typical byproduct of a high-pressure, breaking news environment where journalists must balance the duty to inform with the responsibility to protect an active investigation. Today, however, the public is far less forgiving.

More critically, Tumbler Ridge placed a harsh spotlight on the complexities of reporting about gender identity, showing once again that, for many Canadians, the topic is an editorial minefield.

The CBC's editorial decision was to adopt the RCMP's description of the suspect: an individual "**assigned male at birth [who] began transitioning to female around six years ago.**" In its reporting, management used the pronouns and gender descriptions provided by police in their official communications, which aligned with the suspect's own self-identification.

This approach triggered two starkly opposing sets of complaints. One group argued that the shooter's gender identity was entirely irrelevant to the tragedy and that highlighting it would unfairly stigmatize a vulnerable minority group. Others, however, contended that the CBC's description was inaccurate, arguing that biological sex is immutable and that the broadcaster was failing its duty by not identifying the suspect simply as "male."

Those viewpoints mirror a profound social rift. On the one side is the belief that, during a time of national grief, debating pronouns is almost unconscionable; and on the other, that the CBC was either withholding vital information or framing it inaccurately.

Navigating this is a delicate balance. Ultimately, however, a public broadcaster's *raison d'être* is to serve the public interest above all else. This is paramount and requires an unwavering commitment to accuracy, relevance and transparency. In this specific context, providing the detail that a suspect was assigned male at birth and began transitioning to female is both accurate and relevant to a comprehensive understanding of the suspect's background.

However, gender identity neither defines nor explains the violence perpetrated. In the context of this investigation, the individual who perpetrated the criminal acts is most accurately described as “the suspect,” “the shooter” or “the 18-year-old shooter.” The CBC was correct to prioritize these terms when reporting on the events.

The suspect's history with the mental health system is another relevant consideration. In this light, descriptors like “troubled individual” or “troubled youth” are appropriate. The goal is to avoid dubious associations that are at the root of stigmatization.

Accuracy and relevance go hand in hand, and in this regard, the CBC's stance was the right one. I am well aware that some may weaponize the call for accuracy to promote a specific social or political agenda. However, staying true to core principles is always the best defence. Accuracy is not an excuse for bias: it is a bulwark against misinformation and disinformation.

| IRAN: ACCURACY AND FACT-CHECKING

The January demonstrations and subsequent internet shutdown in Iran encapsulate the challenges media face when attempting to cover events in a country with limited — or, as in this case, non-existent — access. As I noted in my blog at the time:

When boots on the ground are an impossibility, the only way forward is to rely on press agencies for images and accounts, or at an extreme, social media. With that comes the dauntingly complex task of verifying every single frame and each individual testimony for accuracy.

Covering international crises through diaspora communities in Canada may appear more straightforward, but it presents its own challenges. In one instance, CBC's *Power & Politics* invited Mona Ghassemi, president of the Iranian Canadian Congress, to comment on the events in Iran. The interview prompted strong reactions from many Iranian Canadians, who argued that she did not represent their views and that certain assertions went insufficiently challenged. Management later acknowledged that the interview fell short of editorial standards, citing inadequate preparation that limited the ability to effectively follow up.

The program subsequently featured another perspective from within the Iranian diaspora, interviewing human rights activist Arsalan Kahnemuyipour.

A specific point of contention arose regarding this interview. As it turns out, Mr. Kahnemuyipour is a former President of the Iranian Canadian Congress (ICC). *Power & Politics* did not disclose the affiliation on air because the production team was unaware of it; Mr. Kahnemuyipour had not shared the information during the vetting process.

As I remarked:

When covering an international crisis, talking to members of the diaspora in question to obtain inside information about the whys and wherefores of events is clearly the right approach. The challenge lies in knowing who's who. Members of any diaspora are essentially a microcosm of their country of origin, meaning that any pre-existing factions and allegiances are likely to remain just as strong in their new country. And, as with any society, neutral viewpoints around contentious issues, though they exist, can be very hard to find.

Which brings me to my next point. Fact-checking is not an option: it is basic journalism and an absolute must. Laxism in that regard undermines credibility.

| VOICES OF CONTENTION

CBC/Radio-Canada is frequently told that unorthodox ideas or “provocative” voices are missing from its platforms.

Some critics feel the public broadcaster no longer represents their worldview, driving them to seek their news elsewhere — often from less-regulated sources. Others, however, believe that providing a platform to non-mainstream views, no matter how relevant, amounts to an endorsement. These complainants often maintain their own list of individuals and organizations they believe should be considered *persona non grata*.

Navigating this requires adhering to the dual mandates of the JSP. On the one hand is the CBC's commitment to honouring diverse Canadian voices and reflecting the full range of Canadian experiences:

All Canadians, of whatever origins, perspectives and beliefs, should feel that our news and current affairs coverage is relevant to them and lives up to our principles.

At the same time, the CBC must act responsibly in how these views are framed:

We are aware of the impact of our work and are honest with our audiences.

This does not mean avoiding controversy, but simply ensuring that divergent views are presented with the necessary context — and without endorsement — so that audiences can gauge their credibility for themselves. Ultimately, maintaining public trust hinges on walking this fine line.

Several months ago, CBC News General Manager and Editor-in-Chief Brodie Fenlon penned a [blog](#) outlining the editorial rationale behind these choices.

He wrote:

We don't shy away from contrarian views or perspectives that challenge orthodoxy. To quote someone is not to endorse them or what they're saying. Rather, it's to contribute to your understanding of a story and all the angles. The best journalism often involves facts and viewpoints that challenge our own worldview, or alternatively, help clarify it.

In many ways, *The National's* interview with Hasan Piker served as a test of these principles. Piker is one of America's most popular political commentators and is no stranger to controversy. On February 28, 2026, *The National* interviewed him regarding his popularity and his stance on a range of issues.

That did not sit well with segments of the audience who felt that providing a platform to an individual they characterized as an “**antisemitic far-left extremist**” was exceptionally inappropriate for Canada's national broadcaster.

Others did not object to the interview itself, but felt the segment focused too heavily on Piker's popularity while omitting the material context necessary for viewers to fairly evaluate his rhetoric.

I have two primary takeaways from these complaints:

1. **The discomfort of the “loud whisper.”** Interviews with figures like Piker cause profound discomfort, even among those who claim to value open debate. My view is that controversial voices are part of the fabric of modern society. Perspectives that were once mere whispers in obscure circles can now be heard with a clarity and at a decibel level that has risen alongside global polarization. It is vital to know that these voices exist. However resistant the audience may be, it is constructive for them to understand that these voices are part of the contemporary discourse.
2. **The challenge of “material context.”** *The National's* interview did attempt to cover the necessary ground, specifically addressing accusations of antisemitism. Yet for many complainants, that was not enough. This raises a fundamental question: What constitutes “material context”? How much is enough for the viewer

to feel they have been given an exhaustive portrait of a controversial interviewee? This question is further shaped by a practical constraint: news reporting operates within limited time. Not all details can be included, and editorial choices are therefore inevitable.

There is no universal answer. It remains a case-by-case scenario where these questions must be asked and answered every single time — knowing that, regardless of the efforts made, some will always find the results lacking. While necessary, interviewing such figures will forever remain a challenge. That should not deter the News department from doing its job, but it's a job that will continue to require exceptional rigour and tact.

| SECRETARY OF WHAT, EXACTLY?

Few could have predicted that the CBC's audience would find itself in a heated debate over the job title of a U.S. cabinet member. Historically, the role had been known as the Secretary of Defence. However, following his return to office, Donald Trump moved to rename the position the Secretary of War.

The President's penchant for rebranding is nothing new, the attempt to rechristen the Gulf of Mexico as the "Gulf of America" being a prime example. This time, the CBC's decision to adopt the new nomenclature for Pete Hegseth caught the audience's attention. As one complainant wrote:

I am disappointed that the CBC is using Trumpian language. It really bothers me. Language truly matters, as Orwell pointed out in his classic novel 1984. I would appreciate it if you explained the reason for this to me. Does the CBC now refer to the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of America? Why kowtow to Trump and his whims?

In its response, CBC management defended the choice by citing the JSP requirement for language that is accurate to the particular circumstances of a story. Their duty, they noted, was to "learn, understand and clearly explain the facts to our audience," using language that was "clear, precise and inclusive."

They then elaborated on the legal nuances that dictated this choice.

In the United States, congressional approval is required to change the name in statutory (or legal) references such as laws. The president does not have the power to do that. [A bill put forward in the U.S. House of Representatives on Sept. 2](#) proposes to redesignate the Department of Defence the Department of War. It has not passed. So official documentation in the United States, such as laws, continues to reference the Secretary and Department of Defence.

Until or unless that bill passes, CBC News will accurately use Secretary and Department of Defence when discussing legal (or statutory) documents where the president does not have authority to change the name.

However, an executive order signed by Donald Trump on Sept. 5 titled [Restoring the United States Department of War](#) changed the title from Department and Secretary of Defence to Department and Secretary of War in all other non-statutory capacities.

For example, Trump’s executive order specifies and directs his government to change the names in places such as the American government website, press releases, statements, international communications, social media, quotes from government officials, etc. That is completely within his right. And, for those purposes, the name has been officially changed.

That’s an important distinction because it means that in many official places where our audience is likely to encounter the term — what the government would describe as non-statutory references — the terms Secretary of War and Department of War are used. Our audiences will also continue hearing the president, and others in his government, use those words.

Because the American president has the jurisdiction to change the name in those non-statutory instances, and because our practice is generally to refer to people and organizations how they refer to themselves, CBC News is using the terms Department of War and Secretary of War in those non-legal or non-statutory use cases.

The decision to abide by the JSP tenet of accuracy in this specific case is commendable; it’s precisely what the CBC should do. The core issue here, however, is consistency. Internally, it appears that some staff did not fully grasp management’s guidance — a lapse noted by both this office and the audience.

Such a lack of uniformity likely explains the public pushback. When journalists and hosts seem unsure of which title to use (or provide both “just to be on the safe side”), it sends the wrong signal. Even the most principled editorial decision can be undermined by inconsistent application. It casts doubt on institutional buy-in, and in turn, fosters a perception that the CBC is “caving” to Trump’s wishes while other media organizations appear to be resisting them.

The public may not realize that the myriad sources journalists rely on — most of which still identify Mr. Hegseth as the Secretary of Defence — can cause a host to hesitate or momentarily forget in-house guidance. Nevertheless, the ire directed against the “Secretary of War” title is part of a broader phenomenon: a profound anti-Trump sentiment

and a burgeoning resentment toward the CBC for what some perceive as too much American news in its coverage.

As I wrote in my September 2025 blog:

I am well aware of the fatigue expressed by the great many complainants who believe the CBC gives far too much airtime to American news. Indeed, the question resonates deeply with me, too. Because it's not just about airtime minutes or column inches — it's about Canadian identity and sovereignty in an information age dominated by a global (and often American) media ecosystem.

We're walking a fine line: we can't ignore the U.S., but we don't want to be swallowed by its news cycle either. Does our proximity to our southern neighbour make a truly independent Canadian news agenda impossible? Should our public broadcaster deliberately "de-Americanize" its news priorities, or is that unrealistic in today's world? I turn the question over to you.

REVIEWS AT A GLANCE

My job involves upholding the five core principles of the Journalistic Standards and Practices. For this report, I thought it fitting to look at a few reviews from the past year through the lens of standards most seen to be breached. First among these is accuracy:

We seek out the truth in all matters of public interest. We invest our time and our skills to learn, understand and clearly explain the facts to our audience. The production techniques we use serve to present the content in a clear and accessible manner.

| ACCURACY

Accuracy and Completeness

Complainants frequently cite breaches to the JSP standard for accuracy when they feel reports lack sufficient details. While what constitutes “sufficiency” is up for debate — as seen in the Hasan Piker case — there are instances where a report clearly fails to meet the required threshold.

One such case involved a CBC News story on “gender-affirming health care” for transgender youth. While the report addressed key questions like “How does it work?” and “Are kids rushed into treatment?” a reader complained that it omitted essential facts.

The subsequent review, “[How Rare Is ‘Rare’? Accuracy Also Means Clarity](#),” concluded that the accuracy principle had been breached on two counts.

The first was rather straightforward: an interviewee had been misquoted, requiring correction.

The second involved clarity and depth. Beyond mere technical correctness, the JSP defines accuracy as a commitment to seeking the truth and clearly explaining facts. In this instance, the report failed to provide the depth necessary to fulfil that vision.

In my conclusion, I wrote:

[T]he article provides neither the context nor the clarity needed to understand the types of surgical procedures available or how often they are performed in Canada. Without such context, readers cannot reasonably judge what “rare” is meant to convey.

I further noted that while professional impressions — such as those from clinical consultations — are valuable, they remain unsubstantiated without scientific data to back them up. This lack of specificity leaves reporting vulnerable to critique and allows advocacy groups to fill the information gap with their own data. Ultimately, accuracy is not

just about providing information that is technically correct; it also demands enough detail to enable a grounded understanding of sensitive and polarizing subjects.

Accuracy and Headlines

A recurring complaint regarding headlines is that they do not provide enough information about the story or fail to properly reflect a report.

For the most part, I point out that the headline is not the article. Its function is to provide the gist of the story rather than a full report. However, when a headline makes a claim that is not substantiated by the article itself, a breach of the JSP occurs.

A particularly striking example involved a complaint from Senator Marilou McPhedran regarding the following headline: "[Senate's top spender defends long list of contracts for outside consultants.](#)" The senator argued that the report relied on imprecisions and lacked a detailed analysis of publicly available contextual documentation.

While most of the inaccuracies were quickly corrected, one critical issue remained regarding the "top spender" designation:

For senators without caucus leadership roles, in time periods set out in the article, I was a top spender. However, this distinction is not at any point made in the article and should not be claimed retroactively to justify the headline. In fact, the two top spenders are caucus leaders; their expenses are still subject to disclosure, as part of their operating budget.

In my review, "[Independent, though not autonomous](#)," I agreed:

The headline, taken alone, leaves readers thinking that you were the "top spender" in the Senate overall, when in fact you were the highest spender among senators without leadership roles.

Because that distinction wasn't made in the article, it can't be supplied retroactively to justify the headline. As a result, the headline failed to meet the JSP standard for accuracy.

Accuracy and Oversimplification

Oversimplification can lead to accuracy breaches, particularly when complex legal or political realities are reduced to single, definitive words. This is best illustrated by a complaint regarding the article titled, "[In the absence of an official Israeli postwar plan, settlers push their goal of a Jewish Gaza.](#)"

The complainant had focused on a photo caption in the article's original version stating that Israel's military occupation of Gaza "ended" in 2005. This terminology was challenged as a radical interpretation of international law, which stipulates that:

[A]n occupation does not depend on whether a foreign power has a direct ground troop presence in a territory, but on whether it asserts "effective control."

The purpose of a photo caption is to support the story. In this case, though, the caption failed to account for the broader legal reality.

On matters of significant controversy, the JSP requires that no single perspective be presented as undisputed fact. To satisfy the accuracy standard, the story should have reflected that there are two contrasting positions regarding Gaza's status.

Rather than using the definitive word "ended," the caption would have met JSP expectations by using more precise language, such as stating that Israel "physically withdrew" or that the occupation "transitioned into a blockade and external control."

In my review, "[When does an occupation end?](#)" I concluded:

Ultimately, the terminology surrounding Gaza remains a minefield of language, where a single word can inadvertently signal a definitive legal or political alignment. In such a sensitive context, the CBC's responsibility is not to simplify this complexity, but to navigate it with the precision and neutrality demanded by its own standards.

| BALANCE

Balance is a recurring subject of complaints, often based on a misunderstanding of the JSP. According to the standard, balance requires that divergent views on wide-ranging subject matter are reflected respectfully and over a reasonable period of time.

However, as seen in the review "[That's not what 'balance' means](#)," balance does not require "equal time" for every aspect of a subject — especially when the story has a specific investigative focus.

The complainant in this case had alleged that a report on the side effects of finasteride was "one-sided" because it hadn't sufficiently covered the drug's effectiveness at treating hair loss. In my review, I dismissed this, clarifying the following:

This report is not about male pattern baldness per se, nor is it about a drug to treat hair loss. Rather, it looks into claims of the rare but persistent and life-altering side effects that one such medication, finasteride, can have on some users. That is the specific path *Enquête* chose to follow, and in doing so, the team uncovered a devastating public health issue.

In essence, balance does not mean that a story about a drug's adverse effects must also promote its efficacy in order to be "balanced."

| IMPARTIALITY

The JSP defines impartiality as providing professional judgment based on facts while avoiding the promotion of any particular viewpoint on matters of public debate. Despite this, "bias" — the perception that a journalist favours one party over another — remains a frequent source of audience complaint.

A prime example involves a chief political correspondent's questioning of Prime Minister Mark Carney regarding potential conflicts of interest:

For someone who spent most of his life in the private sector, there's no possible conflict of interest in your assets? That's very difficult to believe.

Critics labelled the exchange as disrespectful and biased, with some suggesting that the reporter was tougher on the governing party than on the opposition.

In "[Does this really constitute bias](#)," I found no breach of the JSP, noting:

[A]s one of my esteemed predecessors once said: "Journalists are not stenographers; they are interpreters and challengers."

A tough or challenging question is not inherently a breach of impartiality. In this case, the question reflected concerns already being aired by some analysts, making it a legitimate pursuit of public interest rather than a personal or partisan attack.

More broadly, what this case highlights is a growing tension in public discourse: a decreasing tolerance for hard-hitting journalism. When audiences view "tough questioning" through a partisan lens, it complicates the broadcaster's mandate to hold power to account while maintaining a reputation for impartiality.

| UPDATES TO THE JSP? YES, PLEASE!

I chose to examine some reviews through the lens of the JSP to show how some complainants use their interpretation of the standard to advance their cause. In my view, the JSP's core principles are still sound: like good wine, they have aged well. But the language may need some clarification.

Many complainants believe that accuracy isn't just about exactness. For them, it also refers to context, specifically this line: *We invest our time and our skills to learn, understand and clearly explain the facts to our audience.* Is this one possible consideration for an updated JSP?

Then there's the delicate question of balance. Complainants often argue that balance requires a 50/50 split between the status quo and the critique — that it entails reporting in a tit-for-tat manner. When that doesn't occur, they feel the reporting is biased. The CBC's position is that reporting cannot portray both sides equivalently at all times, but that over time and across all CBC coverage, balance is achieved.

However, given the range of platforms and programs, how do we actually keep track? Is it time to revisit this notion of "balance over time"?

At any rate, it has been 10 years since the last standards update. With all that has happened since then, it's high time to catch up. Several new themes merit examination in relation to the JSP, artificial intelligence being perhaps the most obvious example.

OTHER ISSUES

| THE CBC UNDER SCRUTINY

Various individuals and organizations have written to my office to complain about perceived bias in the CBC's reporting.

One frequently cited example is coverage of the Israel-Hamas war. Two prominent advocacy groups focused on combatting racism, antisemitism and hatred have published reports raising concerns about systemic bias in this coverage. Both have relied, in part, on artificial intelligence to compile and analyze their data. The alleged biases span more than six months in one case, and over two years and eight months in the other. Complainants have demanded that my office conduct an independent investigation.

| NON-MANDATE COMPLAINTS

As noted, this office received 982 complaints this year that were unrelated to the Ombud's mandate. Of those, 42 had to do with Wayne Gretzky joining the hockey panel at the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026.

To say that viewers were not happy is an understatement. One complainant wrote:

Please explain why you have Wayne Gretzky on the Olympic [sic] hockey panel??? He has become the most despised hockey personality in Canada. He no longer represents anything Canadian for me. His relationship and support of a convicted rapist and pedophile... the leader of an openly hostile foreign country. You have made a terrible choice. Read the room!!



Another said:

I want to add my voice to the growing number of people writing to express displeasure at the decision to feature Gretzky on the hockey panel, as well as showing him periodically throughout the men's gold medal game. Very disturbing. The man is a traitor and is no longer considered The Great One by many Canadians.

In 2025-26, my office also received close to 60 complaints regarding such things as fake websites misusing the CBC logo and images of journalists, or deepfake videos of Prime Minister Carney advertising crypto currencies and fake government programs.

It may fall outside my office's jurisdiction, but I can't help resonating with the audience's expression of clear concern: namely, the serious risk to journalism posed by this kind of sophisticated falsification, which is only going to get better over time.

CBC News published the [CBC News AI Principles and Practices](#). In a blog post, General Manager and Editor-in-Chief Brodie Fenlon explained that the goal is "to position CBC News as the antidote to this growing problem."

A tall order, but an urgent initiative.

SOME HOUSEKEEPING IS IN ORDER

| REVIEW AND CLARIFICATION OF THE OMBUD'S COMPLAINT REVIEW PROCESS

My colleague Pierre Champoux, the Radio-Canada Ombudsman, and I have undertaken a review of the Complaint Review Process. The goal is to make the various steps of the process clear to all potential complainants and state our position regarding inappropriate language, similar complaints and orchestrated campaigns.

Below are the proposed revisions:

The Office of the CBC Ombud promotes transparent, respectful dialogue. As such, it may choose not to handle anonymous messages, as well as any messages that contain inappropriate language such as insults, threats, hate speech or profanities.

The Ombud also reserves the right not to process complaints that are part of a campaign, whether or not this is orchestrated on social media or elsewhere by an individual, interest group or organization. Nor will it handle substantially similar complaints; in such cases, the Ombud may decide to address only the initial complaint. However, all complaints received will be recorded for statistical purposes.

Certain aspects of our reviews also need to be addressed. The Ombud's office is committed to ensuring transparency in the review process. As a result, the following must be entirely clear: that reviews are never shared with complainants before they are published; and that, since reviews are public, requests for anonymity will not be accepted.

| TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES AND NEW SYSTEM

First, the bad news. In October 2025, my Radio-Canada counterpart discovered that certain complainants had failed to receive a response to their emails. The IT team subsequently found that the complaint forms on the CBC Ombud and Radio-Canada Ombudsman web pages were malfunctioning, and that enquiries submitted through those forms were somehow being blocked.

My web page was affected from August 6 through October 6, 2025. Given the impact this incident is likely to have on both our work and the CBC as a whole, it was recommended that the form be taken down.

Now, for the good news. My office will begin implementing Zendesk, a service platform that centralizes communications. The system is already up and running in the Radio-Canada Ombudsman's office, and the reports to date are positive. I welcome this change, as it will increase our efficiency in managing complaints.

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE OMBUD

| THE ELECTION PANEL CHAIRS MEET CBC NEWS LEADERSHIP

Last year, my office engaged a panel of 16 individuals from varied backgrounds to assess the CBC's coverage of the 2025 federal election campaign. They were tasked with listening, watching and reading CBC content produced over a 29-day period. The Board received their report last fall.

Early this year, Brodie Fenlon asked me to present the findings to his leadership team. I asked that he invite my panel chairs instead. I was eager for these three remarkable individuals who guided their respective groups with such skill to share what they had seen, heard or read. I was aware that including them in the meeting would mark a first.

Mr. Fenlon replied with an enthusiastic "yes." And so, on February 10, Alicia Pauld, Justin Howe and Nitin Mohan met with the CBC Journalism Senior Team during a Google Meet call. The conversation was cordial and honest. The chairs gave credit where they felt it was due, but they also voiced their criticisms. Managers listened with an open mind and asked questions.

During the subsequent debrief, the three panel chairs, delighted with the process, shared their hopes that this would mark the start of a new form of collaboration.

Let me explain. It is customary for every federal election to form panels to assess the CBC's coverage. These panels complete their tasks diligently. However, their impact is somewhat short-lived.

But what if their work were to extend beyond the campaigns? What if they could continue to fuel discussions on coverage? What if trust could be gained, one panel chair at a time?

| ONO ... IN CANADA

Every year, the Organization of News Ombuds and Standards Editors (ONO) gathers for a meeting of the minds. An international association representing ombuds, readers' editors and standards editors across all media platforms, worldwide. It aims to safeguard quality journalism and foster honest discourse about our industry's practices and purposes.

This year, for the first time, the meeting was held in Toronto. I had the distinct honour of moderating a panel of Indigenous journalists, who shared profound insights on the legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the ongoing evolution of media coverage.

CONCLUSION

I have exhausted the usual euphemisms to describe the work of an ombud. One thing is certain: this is not merely a job; it is a commitment — a vocation in the truest sense — grounded in the belief that journalism can continually improve through rigour, discipline and an unwavering pursuit of excellence.

Despite the prevailing negativity, I have seen that improvement take shape when the high standards set by the JSP are upheld.

Critique is an essential pillar of a healthy democracy. Yet when it becomes too strident, it can obscure a simple truth: good journalism not only exists, it remains strong.

And the CBC has a group of dedicated individuals who make it happen: General Manager and Editor-in-Chief Brodie Fenlon and his JSP Office: Basem Boshra, Senior Director of Journalistic Standards and Public Trust; Mari Ito, Senior Adviser in the Journalistic Standards and Practices Office; Paul Moore, Senior Adviser for Journalistic Standards and Language at CBC News; as well as Bob Campbell, Laura McIsaac..

I am grateful for the speed and courtesy with which they have consistently responded to my queries.

My thanks to the President and CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, Marie-Philippe Bouchard, for her continued trust and support.

My alter ego, Radio-Canada Ombudsman Pierre Champoux, has proven time and again that he has my back.

I also extend my thanks to Teresa Batista.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge David Studer, who came out of retirement to continue sharing his wisdom with us as a consultant.

Finally, a special and heartfelt thank you to Mylène Robichaud and Mariline Laverdure, both of whom worked miracles.

Onward and upward.

Maxime Bertrand
CBC Ombud, English Services

APPENDIX I

| DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLAINTS PER PLATFORM – 2025-26

TELEVISION	RADIO	CBC NEWS NETWORK	CBC.CA	SOCIAL MEDIA	OTHER
1,610	1,662	3,321	2,093	46	2,364

APPENDIX II

| REVIEWS – 2025-26

NO. OF REVIEWS	FOR CBC	AGAINST CBC	PARTLY UNPHELD	CARRIED FORWARD
23	18	4	1	56

OMBUD'S MANDATE

Recommendation for modification by Jennifer McGuire and Luce Julien – February 27, 2019:

| PRINCIPLES

CBC/Radio-Canada is fully committed to maintaining accuracy, fairness, balance, impartiality and integrity in its journalism, as expressed in its unique code of ethics and practice, the [Journalistic Standards and Practices](#). Our journalistic mission is to inform, to reveal, to contribute to the understanding of issues of public interest and to encourage citizens to participate in our free and democratic society. We base our credibility on fulfilling that mission through adherence to the values, principles and practices laid out in the Journalistic Standards and Practices.

The Ombudsman is completely independent of CBC program staff and management, reporting directly to the President of CBC and, through the President, to the Corporation's Board of Directors.

| MANDATE

The Ombudsman acts as an appeal authority for complainants who are dissatisfied with responses from CBC information or program management.

The Ombudsman generally intervenes only when a correspondent deems a response from a representative of the Corporation unsatisfactory and so informs the Office of the Ombudsman. However, the Ombudsman may also intervene when the Corporation fails to respond to a complaint within a reasonable time.

The Ombudsman determines whether the journalistic process or the broadcast involved in the complaint did, in fact, violate the Corporation's Journalistic Standards and Practices. The gathering of facts is a non-judicial process, and the Ombudsman does not examine the civil liability of the Corporation or its journalists. The Ombudsman informs the complainant and the staff and management concerned of the review's findings and posts such findings on the Ombudsman's website.

As necessary, the Ombudsman identifies major public concerns as gleaned from complaints received by the Office and advises CBC management and journalists accordingly. The Ombudsman and CBC management may agree that the Ombudsman undertake periodic studies on overall coverage of specific issues when it is felt there may be a problem and will advise CBC management and journalists of the results of such studies.

The Ombudsman establishes a central registry of complaints and comments regarding information content, and alerts journalists and managers on a regular basis to issues that are causing public concern.

The Ombudsman prepares and presents an annual report to the President and the Board of Directors of the Corporation summarizing how complaints were dealt with and reviewing the main issues handled by the Office of the Ombudsman in the previous year. The report includes mention of the actions, if any, taken by management as a result of the Ombudsman's findings, provided such disclosure does not contravene applicable laws, regulations or collective agreements. The annual report, or a summary thereof, is made public.

The Office of the Ombudsman reports annually on how each media component has met the CBC standard of service for the expeditious handling of complaints.

| COMPLIANCE

The Office of the Ombudsman is responsible for evaluating compliance with the Journalistic Standards and Practices in all content under its jurisdiction. It can be assisted in this role by independent advice panels.

Panel members are chosen by the Ombudsman. Their mandate is to assess content over a period of time, or the overall coverage of a particular issue by many programs, and report their findings to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will advise CBC management and journalists of these findings.

The evaluation measures performance in respecting the fundamental principles of CBC journalism.

All employees of CBC News, as well as the content they create, and employees of Local Services, Radio Talk information programming, or any service involved in the creation of news, current affairs and public affairs content must respect all of the principles of the Journalistic Standards and Practices, namely:

- **Accuracy, fairness, balance, impartiality and integrity**

With the exception of fiction and comedy, content produced by other employees which touches on politics, social issues, economics, cultural issues, scientific issues or sports — particularly if the issues are controversial — must respect the following principles:

- **Accuracy, fairness and balance**

User-generated content, when incorporated into information programming, must conform with the principles of the Journalistic Standards and Practices.

Moreover, in an election or referendum period, the Journalistic Standards and Practices applies to all content related to the campaign, parties or candidates that is broadcast and published by the CBC, regardless of the department concerned.

The JSP applies to all news, current affairs and public affairs content commissioned by CBC and produced by third parties.

The Office reports bi-annually.

| JURISDICTION

The jurisdiction of the Office of the Ombudsman covers all content produced for radio, television or the internet (including social media used by CBC) that falls within the scope of the Journalistic Standards and Practices.

Complaints beyond the Ombudsman's mandate should be addressed directly to the programs concerned, or [Audience Relations](#).

| APPOINTMENT

When filling the Ombudsman's position, the CBC openly seeks candidates from outside as well as inside the Corporation.

After appropriate consultation, the President and CEO establish a selection committee of four. Two members, including the committee chair, must be from the public. People currently employed by the Corporation or employed by the Corporation within the previous three years will be excluded from nomination as public members. The other committee members are chosen, one among CBC management, the other among its working journalists. Members representing the Corporation and journalists jointly select the committee chair among the two representatives of the public.

The selection committee examines applications and selects a candidate to be recommended for appointment by the President and CEO.

The Ombudsman appointment is for a term of five years. This term may be extended for no more than five additional years. The Ombudsman's contract cannot be terminated except for gross misconduct or in instances where the Ombudsman's actions have been found to be inconsistent with the Corporation's Code of Conduct.

The outgoing Ombudsman may not occupy any other position at the CBC for a period of two years following the end of his/her term but can, at the discretion of the incoming Ombudsman, be contracted to work for the Office of the Ombudsman.

Office of the Ombud

English Services

Contact Us

P.O. Box 500 Station A
Toronto, ON M5W 1E6
CANADA

416-205-2978

ombud@cbc.ca

cbc.radio-canada.ca/en/ombudsman

Ombud