



The Hill Times (Ottawa, ON)

© 2023 The Hill Times (Ottawa, ON). All rights reserved. The present document and its usage are protected under international copyright laws and conventions.



Certificate issued on May 14, 2024 to English Account NG C3 for personal and temporary display.

news-20230227-HHB-a0003375586

Source name

The Hill Times (Ottawa, ON)

Source type

Press • Newspapers

Periodicity

Bi-Weekly or Tri-weekly

Geographical coverage

National

Origin

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Monday, February 27, 2023

The Hill Times (Ottawa, ON)

• p. 9

• 868 words



Page 9

Copps' Corner

Time to pay the piper

Sheila Copps

Google leadership told a parliamentary committee that the government's attempt to monetize internet news content for local support would not work.

They said the same thing in Australia and, according to the government there, the move has provided almost \$200-million in payments to news providers since the bill passed in 2021.

OTTAWA— Google's Canadian muzzle may not work. The company says it is cutting off service to four per cent of the population on a temporary basis.

But rest assured, the four per cent will be those who feel it most.

Canadian Heritage is on the hit list.

That direct line of fire suggest this is an attempt to convince Heritage Minister Pablo Rodriguez to drop legislation which will require internet giants like Google to compensate Canadian news outlets for populating their sites with stories by Canadian journalists. Google says it is limiting access to news content to assess possible responses to the bill.

Google says the legislation doesn't work, and is obviously doing everything in its power to stop it.

That temporary blockage on Canadian Heritage information and other key providers coincides with second reading of Bill C-18 in the Senate.

It is the last stand for an internet behemoth that has no interest in paying for the news content consumed through its portals.

But similar legislation has been in place in Australia since 2021 and appears to be having the desired effect.

Our Bill C-18 is modelled on the Australian law, which has been effective in stemming the cash hemorrhage facing many Aussie news outlets.

In Canada, newspapers are dropping like flies. And it isn't just the printed word that is suffering.

Just last week, Quebec television network TVA announced layoffs of more than 200 people. A couple of weeks earlier, The Vancouver Sun wielded a similar axe to its editorial staff.

Google leadership told a parliamentary committee that the government's attempt to monetize internet news content for local support would not work.

But they said the same thing in Australia, threatening to pull Google out of the country altogether before the legislation was finalized.

In the end, Google complied with the requirement to sign commercial remuneration deals with the news outlets that populate their sites.

According to the Australian government, the move has provided almost \$200-million in payments to news providers since the bill passed in 2021.

As the Senate Committee on Transportation and Communications undertakes second reading of the our version of the bill, the usual suspects are lining up in opposition. University of Ottawa professor Michael Geist is calling Bill C-18 an attack on freedom of expression for all Canadians in one column, published Nov. 1, 2022, and headlined "Why Bill C-18's mandated payment for links is a threat to freedom of expression in Canada." Geist claims that seeking

payment for some news retransmission is the basis for this threat. His argument runs counter to the fact that for more than a century, Canadians have paid, in some form or another, for access to news.

Whether it's included in the cost of a television cable package, or financed by an annual newspaper subscription, access to content created by journalists has been financed the consumers of that content.

Geist and other "freedom of expression" proponents know that the internet is not exactly free, either.

Providers like Facebook and Google are currently charging for advertising to monetize their information offerings. Their advertising totals \$9.7-billion a year, representing more than 80 per cent of online ad revenues.

So, Geist's free speech claim doesn't really hold water. Every consumer of online news is subject to the influence of those paid advertisements. Hardly free at all.

The irony is that the news outlets whose stories are populating the internet are not paid a penny as a share of that whopping annual total of almost \$10-billion in advertising revenue.

Conservatives are opposing the legislation, partly because they say the CBC will receive remuneration as an outcome.

But they are not speaking too loudly because they agree that local news outlets in Canada are in real trouble and need some help to survive.

Bill C-18 is not going to solve all the

problems facing the Canadian news-gathering ecosystem.

Most internet-surfing young Canadians have never even bothered to subscribe to any made-in-Canada news service. Their news reach is global and much of what populates their feeds could loosely be called infotainment, not information.

The goings-on of Hollywood are much more interesting than the trajectory of a Canadian bill to save local newsgathering.

Government is also tackling the tricky issue of how to deal with fake news, and deliberate foreign interference in Canadian public policy decisions, including elections.

Last summer, Rodriguez and Justice Minister David Lametti set up an advisory roundtable on how to tackle internet disinformation and fraud.

Recent reports have alleged Chinese interference in the 2021 Canadian election.

Russian internet news influence in the last American election has been well-documented.

Internet information transmission is here to stay.

But it is time to pay the piper. Sheila Copps is a former Jean Chrétien-era cabinet minister and a former deputy prime minister.

The Hill Times