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Bell Media president Kevin Crull apologizes for 'intrusion' into CTV's CRTC coverage

Apology comes after CRTC issues statement calling pick-and-pay interference 'disturbing'

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Bell Media president Kevin Crull issued a statement at the end of the day Wednesday after a strongly worded release from the CRTC that called the allegation that the telecommunications company was manipulating news coverage 'disturbing.' (Adrian Wyld/Canadian Press)

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Bell Media president Kevin Crull has apologized for his involvement in CTV's coverage of the CRTC decision requiring cable companies to offer pick-and-pay television services, after a [Globe and Mail report](#) alleged he attempted to influence the network's news coverage of the decision.

The [Globe](#) alleged Wednesday that Crull attempted to ban the appearance of CRTC chair Jean-Pierre Blais in CTV's coverage last week of the broadcast regulator's [decision on pick-and-pay TV](#).

CTV is owned by Bell Media, one of Canada's largest cable providers. As a result of the CRTC ruling, Bell will have to amend its services and offer a basic \$25 cable package and let customers customize their channels rather than accept bundling.

Crull issued a statement Wednesday evening admitting he "reached out to the CTV News leadership team" but saying his intention was not to interfere editorially. His aim, Crull said, was to urge the CTV News team to focus not on the CRTC itself but on "a broad and necessary discussion of the impacts of the CRTC's decisions on consumers, our team members, and our business."

'It was wrong of me to be anything but absolutely clear that editorial control always rests with the news team.'

- Kevin Crull, president of Bell Media

Crull conceded, however, that his actions may have been interpreted as

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■ Bell head meddled in news coverage (Globe and Mail)

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editorial interference.

"It was wrong of me to be anything but absolutely clear that editorial control always rests with the news team," his statement said. "I have apologized to the team directly for this mistake.

"Indeed, their strong and straightforward reaction to my intrusion only heightens my appreciation of their independence, integrity and professionalism."

Coverage not compromised, says Crull

Crull said the incident did not compromise CTV's coverage of the CRTC decision, which, he said, "was fair, balanced and extensive and stands up in comparison to coverage of the issue by any Canadian news organization."

He closed the statement by saying he has "relearned a valuable lesson" from the incident.

Crull's statement came hours after the CRTC issued a statement criticizing the actions described in the Globe piece.

"That a regulated company does not like one of the CRTC's rulings is one thing," Blais said in the statement. "The allegation, however, that the largest communication company in Canada is manipulating news coverage is disturbing."

'Canadians can only wonder how many times corporate interests may have been placed ahead of the fair and balanced news reporting they expect from their broadcasting system.'

- Jean-Francois Blais, CRTC chairman

The statement did not directly name Bell, but its timing implied it was referring to the Globe story. (CBC has not independently verified the allegations laid out in the Globe story.)

"Canadians can only wonder how many times corporate interests may have been placed ahead of the fair and balanced news reporting they expect from their broadcasting system," the CRTC statement said.



CRTC chair Jean-Francois Blais did not name Bell in his release but made references to allegations of interference in news coverage by 'the largest communication company in Canada.' (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

The CRTC release also noted that broadcasters, including CTV, are members of Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, which governs codes of conduct in the industry. The CRTC says anyone with complaints on the file should take it up with the regulator.

"We expect Canada's broadcasters to live up to their responsibilities and adhere to a high standard in their news and information programs," the regulator said.

Media concentration fears realized

One media watcher says the incident raises concerns about concentrated media ownership.

"It's an example of some of the concerns that people have raised about conglomerate ownership," Carleton University professor Christopher Waddell said. "[It's] a classic example of ... when a company owns news media, it thinks it can influence what's being printed, broadcast or published."

"It's the sort of thing people were afraid was going to happen," he said.



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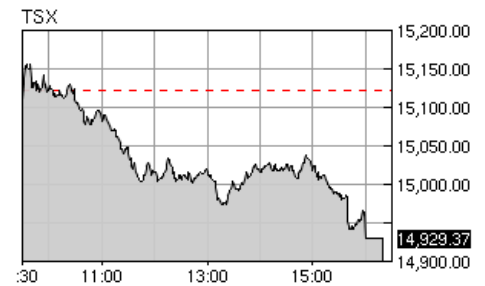
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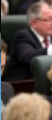
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