

October 21, 2019

Ombudsman  
CBC P.O. Box 500 Station A  
Toronto, Ontario M5W 1E6

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Carol's Interview with Vickery Bowles – *As It Happens* – October 17, 2019

CBC's journalistic standards of practice indicate that it values impartiality, and this precludes news and current affairs staff from expressing personal opinions on matters of controversy on all its platforms. CBC further comments that, "We achieve balance by featuring multiple perspectives and points of view to reflect a diversity of opinion," and, "CBC journalists do not express their own personal opinion because it affects the perception of impartiality and could affect an open and honest exploration of an issue."

Carol Off's interview on *As It Happens* on October 17, 2019, with Toronto Public Library's Chief Librarian, Vickery Bowles, did not meet this standard of practice. Off's questions considered one side between two opposing views on an issue, with no consideration of impartiality on that issue, nor regarding the protection of freedom of expression in Canada. The following questions are examples:

- You think someone has to be charged criminally before you would not allow them to speak in your facilities?
- The purpose of this – to look at what does it mean for society, the law and women – it wasn't an educational session, was it? This is someone who says that these rights should not exist, is that not the case?
- But if you have somebody within that discussion who denies that these rights should exist ... is that really a side? Or is that denying somebody their rights?
- There are limits to free speech. I'm sure you know that. And when free speech is hurtful or harmful to others, it is something that is shutting down the free speech of others. I'm sure you've heard that argument before.

Ms. Off continued with questions focused on the harm of free expression. At no point did she ask questions about the value of free expression or the reasons a library would take the position of supporting free expression, a right enshrined in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Public libraries are strong supporters of diversity and inclusion and recognize that social justice movements among marginalized groups have historically relied on freedom of expression to advocate for change.

The Canadian Urban Libraries Council/Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada finds it both extraordinary and concerning that a journalist on our nation's broadcaster, within a long tradition of journalism that relies on free expression, would adopt this approach. As Catherine Tait recently observed, "All public broadcasters depend on public trust. They can't exist without it." By taking a side in this debate, Carol Off has leveraged the CBC's reputation for trust and impartiality to promote one side, and, as result, has argued against the Canadian Charter's enshrined right to free expression within the limits of Canadian law.

Sincerely,



Pilar Martinez  
Chair, Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC)  
CEO, Edmonton Public Library