



NEWS RELEASE

Wednesday, October 8, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CIVIL LIBERTIES GROUP CALLS FOR GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATION AND ACTION AGAINST VANOC'S UNCONSCIONABLE EFFORTS TO STIFLE FREE SPEECH

VANOC's efforts to monopolize billboards and other advertising venues and crowd out the ability of anyone else to engage in free speech have been found out. VANOC's purchase includes all advertising space on public transit vehicles, including vehicle exteriors, transit stations and platforms, airport baggage carousels, mall posters, and outdoor billboards. Its purchases of outdoor advertising locations for the ten-week period surrounding the Olympic Games amounts to an unconscionable effort to suppress other viewpoints. Allowing government-sponsored organizations, like VANOC, to eliminate the right of others to put their message out before the public is just as offensive as would be allowing monopolies in the press and media to do so generally.

BCCLA President Rob Holmes: "We shouldn't shut down our fundamental freedoms just to have a two week sports event in 2010. The BCCLA has taken the lead in bringing to court TRANSLINK's policy barring political speech from the advertising on its facilities and having it held unconstitutional. The BCCLA has stood up against Bill 42, the BC government's gag law that limited third party advertising in elections while allowing major parties, the government and the large media concerns free rein. This time, instead of banning advertising they did not like, a government-sponsored agency seeks to buy up all of the space for any advertising so no one else can be heard. The courts have recognized the "right to be heard" as a fundamental value. VANOC's actions run counter to that. This pattern of government-sponsored efforts to stifle free speech must stop."

The BCCLA calls on the federal government and the Competition Bureau to investigate VANOC's actions. VANOC's website barks about its special legal privileges under the *Olympics and Paralympics Marks Act* and threatens others for potentially violating the *Competition Act's* ban on deceptive practices if they infringe on VANOC's trade names and marks. But VANOC appears to have ignored that same law's ban on anti-competitive activities, including "pre-emption of scarce facilities or resources required by a competitor for the operation of a business, with the object of withholding the facilities or resources from a market."

Allowing one organization to control public space in this fashion gets rid of a critical space for political speech and dissenting views. The BCCLA is particularly concerned that public space, including infrastructure funded by citizens, will be controlled by a single voice during a time when we may well expect that citizens will be looking to express different views, including those that are critical of the Games or governments.

The BCCLA letter to the Commissioner of Competition is at: www.bccla.org/othercontent/competition.pdf

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