

**2019-22 Nadolski vs Globe and Mail**

*April 10 2019 – for immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint about a factual error in an opinion article published by the Globe and Mail.

The February 15 2019 opinion column, "[The strange divide among Montreal companies](#)", named a number of large corporations with headquarters in Montreal and examined their differing histories, including references to allegations of corruption. The opinion writer argued that Bombardier and SNC Lavalin both have had close ties and problematic dealings with government.

The complainant, Michael Nadolski, cited a sentence stating that Bombardier received provincial and federal aid of "probably \$4.1 billion... over the past 50 years". He stated that an earlier source said that figure included mergers and was adjusted for inflation, but the opinion article did not include those qualifiers or context. He argued that as a result the opinion writer hid significant facts and misled readers. As well, he pointed to widely accepted journalistic standards that require a journalist who is summarizing or restating material to do so in a way that does not alter the original meaning.

A later edition of the article contained a link to the column about the original study. That link was not provided in the print version or in the article when it first appeared online. The NNC noted that the link was added, initially without an editor's note, after the complaint was filed with the NNC.

The Globe and Mail stated that the point in question is not a "significant error" that qualified for correction. It argued that a columnist's focus is on expressing opinion and argument, and that while an opinion column is based on facts, it is not intended to be a detailed recitation of the facts.

The publication rejected the NNC's suggestion for a clarification as a remedy. In correspondence with the complainant, the news organization said differing points of view and interpretation are best dealt with in a letter to the editor.

In stating there was no significant error in the sentence in question, the news organization pointed out the qualifiers "probably" and "over 50 years" in the reference. It also noted the writer attributed the subsidy figure to an expert author and subsidy tracker, and concluded that the reference to that study was correct.

It is worth noting that the news organization originally argued that its publications "do not inflation adjust numbers", and that the complainant provided a series of articles contradicting that statement.

The NewsMedia Council considered the journalistic standard of accuracy in the context of supporting facts in an opinion column. It also considered how corrections are made when errors or the need for clarification are identified.

The Council noted the complainant's view, but at the same time is mindful of the widely-accepted principle that a columnist's job is to take a point of view or advance an argument, and that a columnist is not conventionally expected to explain studies and source material in detail.

The Council found that the overall thrust of the article was to examine the differing operating styles of Montreal companies and especially the ties of two companies, SNC Lavalin and Bombardier, to government. It found that qualifying the sentence in question with “probably” signaled that the dollar amount is not exact, and that “over the past 50 years” would tell a reasonable reader of this publication that the figure was presented for current fiscal understanding.

The issue for both parties appeared to be whether the sentence in question constituted a significant factual error. The NNC’s view is that it did not.

While the NNC noted that a link to the referenced material was added after the complaint was raised, it considers that corrective action was taken.

For the reasons above, the Council found no breach of journalistic standards and dismissed the complaint.