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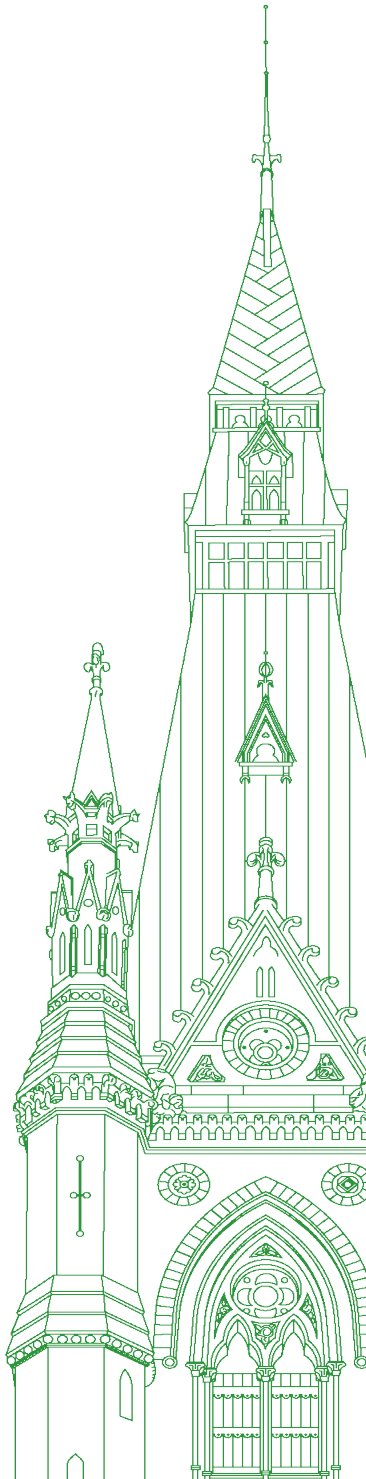
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Chair: Lisa Hepfner

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.)): Good morning.

Before we begin, I would like to wish a very happy birthday to our clerk Jean-François.

We don't have cake, but Bardish should bring chocolate, so there's a celebration here.

Welcome to meeting number 50 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Before we begin, I ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table in front of you. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents, and to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters. There's a QR code on the card. It links to a short awareness video.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to the order of reference of April 22, 2026, the committee is meeting to review Bill S-211, an act respecting a national framework on sports-betting advertising.

We have with us today the sponsors of the bill in the Senate and the House of Common: the Honourable Marty Deacon, a senator from Ontario, and the Honourable Bardish Chagger, MP for Waterloo.

Thank you both for being here. You each have five minutes for an opening statement. Then we'll turn it over to questions from members. Whoever would like to go first can go ahead.

Hon. Marty Deacon (Senator, Ontario, ISG): Hello. It's great to see you.

Thank you so much for inviting us to testify before you today. It's exciting to perhaps be in the home stretch of this legislation. I know many Canadians are keeping an eye on this bill, with the hope that something will be done to address the number of gambling ads their families are being exposed to.

I first tabled this legislation in 2023 as Bill S-269. The legislation made it to the House floor, but died on the Order Paper as a result of prorogation. At the Senate hearings on that bill, we heard from industry. At the time, single sports betting was still somewhat new, with the Ontario market being only a year or so old. We were told the firehose of ads that Canadians were exposed to was like a sidebar and the industry would eventually get a foothold. As it became established, these ads would naturally abate.

That was five years ago, yet these ads and promotions are unrelenting. As it was reported by the CBC last week, one study found that over the course of seven televised 2026 Stanley Cup playoff games, viewers were subjected to 3,000 gambling messages, and 95% of these induced no information about harm reduction or age restrictions. It's not surprising, then, that a steady drumbeat of studies is showing gambling harms taking off in Canada.

As reported last week, this includes research done by iGaming Ontario, the government agency responsible for online gambling in Ontario, which found that problem gambling rates are much higher than they anticipated. Research was then quickly suppressed. It's been reported that the Ontario government is against this legislation.

A report last year by Mental Health Research Canada found that seven in 10 Canadians gamble and that one in 10 of these bettors report problem gambling. Of those reporting problem gambling, young adults aged 16 to 34 were 12 times more at risk. Of this cohort, young men were three times more at risk.

The Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario also reports a spike in gambling-related suicides in the years after Ontario began allowing online betting. Other research recently released by the University of Toronto has found that in Ontario, ER visits by people suffering an injury or illness directly related to gambling disorders have doubled over a 14-year period, ending in 2025, with the most growth since 2022, shortly after these ads began permeating our lives. Another study makes a clearly significant positive correlation between advertising and the frequency of sports gambling.

Gambling harms are particularly insidious, because it's hard for friends and families to pick up on them. There's a natural friction with substance addiction. You have to experience the urge and physically move to go to the store or to a dealer. For a gambling addiction, it takes literal seconds between seeing an ad and placing a bet at one of the casinos in our pockets. We can do so on the bus, out at a bar or even here in this room right now.

As Canada opens up to wider prediction markets, like we are seeing in the U.S., we are making the conditions perfect for a nation of problem gamblers.

As many of you will recall, it was in Parliament in 2021 that we allowed single sports betting. We did so by passing Bill C-218, a bill I voted for, which removed a single line from the Criminal Code to allow provinces to open up their betting markets for private single bets. I compare that to Bill C-45, which allowed for legal marijuana sales. We passed that bill largely for the reasons we passed Bill C-218. Canadians were doing it anyway, so why not legalize it, regulate it and make some tax dollars along the way for this country?

I was on the Senate committee that studied Bill C-45, and I remember the total agreement that promotion should be heavily restricted by Health Canada, using the same standards across the country. You cannot even walk by a pot shop and see what's on offer, because we didn't want those under 19 to be exposed to any promotion whatsoever. We have accepted this restriction on free speech for cannabis promotion because of potential harms, particularly to our young Canadians, yet with gambling, we've gone the other way.

For many Canadian youth, they cannot turn on the TV, look at their phones, take a bus, watch or even play the sports they love at their local fields, arenas and gymnasiums without encountering some form of gambling promotion. Not only have we allowed single sports betting; as a society, we're outright encouraging the activity of gambling.

Perhaps it was the relative simplicity of Bill C-218 in removing one line in the Criminal Code that blinded the majority of us at the time to the harm promotions could cause. That was a mistake, and it's one I seek to rectify with this legislation and needed sober second thought.

This, of course, is a framework bill. I am not seeking to vilify gambling companies. They are not there to mitigate societal harms. They're there to make money. They are operating within the parameters they've been told they can, and we cannot rely on them to voluntarily scale back promotion when doing so would hurt their bottom line.

● (1105)

Like the promotion of other vice industries such as tobacco, alcohol and cannabis, it's our job as legislators to define these parameters and to do so at the national level, because a patchwork of provincial laws is only as effective as the weakest jurisdiction when it comes to broadcast and Internet-based promotions.

I thank you again for your time and look forward to our discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Senator.

Go ahead, MP Chagger. You have five minutes.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Thank you, colleagues, for having me here on Bill S-211. In my capacity as House sponsor of the bill, I look forward to the discussion alongside Senator Deacon, whose leadership has brought this conversation before Parliament.

Canadians are watching and following along. For many, this meeting is deeply personal, as they or their loved ones have been impacted by sports betting. For others, it's about restoring the spirit of sport that they love.

I have been listening to constituents from the riding of Waterloo, who are increasingly concerned about the volume of sports-betting advertisements they're seeing. Colleagues, I know that you have too. Constituents, including those from many of your ridings, have shared personal stories of gambling addiction, parent concerns about the normalization on youth and sports fans' frustration that the love of watching sports is being overshadowed by gambling promotion. The message from Canadians is clear: People are struggling, and we need to find a better balance.

In 2022, Ontario opened its online gambling market to private operators. Since then, sports-betting advertising has become a constant presence in national sports broadcasts, reaching Canadians far beyond Ontario's provincial borders. As of July of this year, Alberta has followed by opening its gambling markets.

The scale of advertising is significant. One study examining NHL and NBA broadcasts in Ontario found more than 3,500 gambling messages across just seven games, with betting references visible for nearly 22% of the total broadcast time. That is an average of two to three gambling messages per minute. Other provinces have reported seeing ads from Ontario companies whose services are not authorized to operate in their jurisdictions, demonstrating a policy gap in the current approach.

Ultimately, it was Parliament that legalized single-event sports betting through Bill C-218 in 2021. Therefore, the federal government warrants a role in this discussion.

Alcohol, smoking, gambling, cannabis and vaping products are all legal in Canada. The federal government played a role to ensure that Canadians are not bombarded to participate. To me, this is a responsibility that we have and is not an imposition on provincial jurisdiction.

That said, sports betting is a legal activity, and adults who choose to participate should be able to do so. However, legalization should not mean normalization, and legalization should definitely not mean promotion or encouragement. Young fans should be inspired by athletes and the competition and the value that sports promote. Gambling should not be an expected part of being a sports fan.

For many young people—primarily men—this line is increasingly being blurred as betting is becoming deeply socially associated as part of the game experience. In Ontario, gambling-related helpline contacts among males aged 15 to 24 rose by 317% following the expansion of online gambling. Young men are 12 times more likely to experience problem gambling in the highest rates when it comes to sports betting.

Taking all of this together, these findings paint a troubling picture of Canada's sports-betting landscape. A constant stream of advertising has blurred the line between watching sports and sports betting, with smart phones making betting opportunities virtually impossible to escape. Behind this normalization are real people and families experiencing the devastating impacts of these harms. Year over year, ER visits are up, suicides are up, insolvencies are up and calls to the Ontario gambling helpline are up. The federal government cannot let this trend continue.

Bill S-211 is an opportunity to bring clarity to this landscape. It is a non-prescriptive bill and, if passed, will act to initiate a conversation to better understand the risks, identify the gaps in our current approach and consider the data and trends so that we can put the well-being of Canadians at the forefront.

I would like to thank the stakeholders and experts who formally wrote to the committee. Provinces, clinicians, researchers and their advocates have contributed valuable evidence and perspectives to help inform the study. These contributions reflect the unfortunate nature of the issue and show that we need to do something. Hoping that this figures itself out is not the answer.

For Senator Deacon's team, this legislative process has spanned over 40 months already. Families and loved ones will face the consequences of sports betting's related harms for the remainder of their lives.

I again thank my colleagues for the attentiveness to studying this issue. With that, we welcome your questions.

● (1110)

The Chair: Well done, both of you, in terms of your timing. You're clearly experts at that.

[*Translation*]

We'll start with Mr. Hardy.

Mr. Hardy, you have the floor for six minutes.

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you very much.

Senator Deacon, thank you for being with us. My questions will be in French for the first round.

As we heard, this bill was introduced 40 months ago. Clearly, this is a bill that means a lot to you, and rightly so.

In your opening remarks, you said that seven out of 10 Canadians gamble and that 16- to 31-year-olds are 12 times more likely to become addicted to this kind of thing.

Why do you believe this issue absolutely warrants public attention?

Why has implementing this bill become so urgent?

[*English*]

Hon. Marty Deacon: That's such an important piece when we're looking at what sport is intended to be. We see the impact on—not exclusively, but particularly—a group in our population. Our 14- to 26-year-olds are the most vulnerable. If we look at how to ensure that we're building healthy communities, this is not working. Over my 40 months, the medical data has said that the impacts are increasing. There are different types of strategies that desperate young people are using.

One person is impacting eight others. Let's not ignore that. If you have a son or daughter who is really struggling, the impact is eightfold. Whether it's on mom and dad, the doctor, the coach, the classmate or the school, the impact is growing. I have a sense of responsibility to do something to get part of the horse back in the barn with legislation that we, as MPs and senators—I can't comment for this entire room—can support.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you very much.

We also know that this issue is under provincial jurisdiction, so there's a line we don't want to cross. How should this bill be framed to avoid crossing that line? Are we talking about broad guiding principles, or are we trying to gain a better understanding of the current situation? Will this actually—I won't use the word “interference”, which is a bit too strong, but there is a line that must not be crossed.

How can we ensure that this bill will not encroach on the jurisdiction of the provinces and of Quebec in particular?

● (1115)

[*English*]

Hon. Marty Deacon: It's a very fair question.

First, regulations were designed in a time of land-based gambling. Regulations were developed in a different, previous era. Look at how online gambling is changing the environment through apps, broadcasters, sport broadcasters, sponsorships, podcasts, etc., all around the country. This leads to a situation where each province and territory becomes quite limited in its ability to control advertising for its residents. It has become a patchwork. It's not restricted by borders.

It stopped being provincial when Ontario's online gambling began to seep across Canada. We've seen these ads seep in. We've listened to, for example, the British Columbia Lottery Corporation talking about how the ads from Ontario are moving to British Columbia on these illegal sites. They're cutting the revenues that B.C. is dutifully trying to get for itself. Manitoba is similar. Manitobans can easily place bets with companies registered with gaming Ontario, although they're not supposed to. The cat's out of the bag. The question of jurisdiction is already being neglected and cast aside by these betting operators.

Yes, we have provincial jurisdiction in so many parts of our federal and provincial partnerships. We have frameworks in a variety of different areas. What we need to do, as this framework is developed, is have co-operation among provinces, territories and the federal government and expertise at the table, including gaming folks. What makes the best sense, and what can we do together, moving forward?

You talked about Quebec, as an example. I would say that Quebec, like others, would have a very important seat at this table. I hope the federal regulation takes Quebec's lead on this. Quebec is doing good things. That's critical to recognize, honour and not fight against. It's a triangle. How do we take the revenue piece, the health piece and the commercialization or betting revenues piece and find the sweet spot in the middle of that triangle?

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you very much for those answers.

I don't think I'll be able to ask another question, since I have 30 seconds left, but I will move the following motion:

> That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), and in light of the European Commission's proposal of September 16, 2026, that Canada become the first "associate member" of the European Union, and of the alliance the government intends to launch at the Canada–European Union Summit in Montréal on October 29–30, 2026, the committee undertake a study of no fewer than six meetings on the implications of any such arrangement for Canada's cultural sovereignty, including:
>
> (a) the preservation of Canada's cultural exemption as maintained in the Canada–European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA);
>
> (b) whether any sector of Canadian cultural, broadcasting, audiovisual, publishing or official-languages policy could become subject to alignment with European Union law or to the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union;
>
> (c) the impact on the protection and promotion of the French language, particularly in Quebec, and on Canadian content requirements;
>
> (d) the consultations conducted by the government with the provinces, including Quebec, and with the cultural sector; and
>
> (e) the cultural and linguistic implications of any expanded youth mobility arrangement, including the Prime Minister's stated objective of allowing youth to "work, study, and live where they want on either side of the Atlantic," Canada's proposed participation in Erasmus+ and any expansion of International Experience Canada, with particular attention to the vitality of the French language in Quebec and in francophone minority communities, reciprocity for young Canadians and the role of the youth exchange programs of the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the capacity of communities to support the cultural and linguistic integration of newcomers;
>
> That the committee invite the minister responsible for the Department of Canadian Heritage to appear for no less than two hours, along with officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage, Global Affairs Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; that the committee invite representatives of the cultural, broadcasting and publishing sectors, of francophone organizations and of post-secondary institutions, including from Quebec; that the committee invite experts, parliamentarians and civil society representatives from European countries that have chosen to remain outside the European Union despite close geographic, security and trade ties, including Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, to testify on the effects of their arrangements with the European Union on their cultural, broadcasting and language policies and on their national sovereignty; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

I am moving this motion because a major summit between Canada and the European Union begins today in Montreal, and because this is our first meeting in a long time that's not in camera.

We need to consider the term "associate member" carefully. We know it was turned down, but, from an ideological standpoint, it remains at the heart of the discussions taking place in Montreal right now. What's interesting is that this term had been widely accepted and was put forward by President von der Leyen, who referred to it yesterday and again this morning on social media. Clearly, there's an intention to pursue closer ties, and that raises questions.

This hasn't been debated in the House, and we're not really aware of what's happening, so it's important to ensure that our laws and how we do things in Canada are not subordinated to ideological considerations without first going through the process that elected representatives carry out here in Parliament. It's very important that we have this discussion—

● (1120)

[*English*]

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): I have a point of order. If you start speaking under the six-minute segment and then you transition into a motion at the same time, are you still confined to those six minutes?

The Chair: According to the clerk, no.

Michael Coteau: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: As I was saying, this is a very important discussion to have because we get the sense that President von der Leyen is firmly committed to her idea of Canada becoming an associate member without first seeking the approval of the European Union and its member states. EU members seemed more interested in waiting and said they didn't really know what was going on.

The same thing is happening in Canada. The Prime Minister appears to be pursuing closer ties to the European Union without really consulting Parliament. We already have very strong alliances, particularly with our neighbours to the south, but the government has walked away from the negotiating table. Parliament was never told what was rejected and why Canada walked away, and now the government wants to do the same thing with the European Union, even though it could have a huge impact on everything from trade, defence and the economy to technology, security and education.

In my opinion, decisions should first be made at the top, by elected members of Parliament, and the Prime Minister should then deliver those messages. The opposite approach, having an ideology imposed on us, is not acceptable.

Discussing this issue is very important because it opens the door to things that need to be monitored, particularly when it comes to regulations.

When Canada adopts new laws and regulations, will it have to align itself with the European Union? That can have legislative implications.

Will Canada be able to participate in developing the rules, or will it have to accept Europe's existing rules?

Financially, will Canada have to contribute to European programs?

Again, I'm raising this issue not because I disrespect our colleagues at the end of the table, but because this is one of our first public meetings, the summit is opening today and nobody has heard anything about this. I think these are very legitimate questions that we are asking ourselves as parliamentarians. It's a job, a service to our constituents, who are also asking questions.

With that, Madam Chair, I think it's important that this discussion take place and that this motion be adopted.

[*English*]

I'm going to read it in English to make sure it's okay for everybody.

The Chair: We've had it translated.

Gabriel Hardy: I think I can speak to it in English just to make sure everybody understands. Let's go back to it in English.

> That, pursuant to the Standing Order 108(2), and in light of the European Commission—

[*Translation*]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: We have interpretation services that do that. If members had said they didn't understand the motion in French or the interpretation wasn't working, that would be fine, but why waste time repeating the motion in English? I realize the member has the right to do that, but we have interpretation services.

● (1125)

[*English*]

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Members have the right to speak in whatever language they choose, and it is a tremendously offensive insinuation to say that my colleague is unable to speak in English right now as he is choosing to.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): He can he can say whatever he'd like in either language or both languages. At no moment in time has my colleague implied that he could not speak the language of his preference. What he's rather saying is that there's no value in repeating the same points, given the fact that there's active interpretation and translation.

We have individuals here who care about a piece of legislation, and I suspect much of this committee would like to return to that.

The Chair: I'm going to give the floor back to Mr. Hardy to finish his statement.

Gabriel Hardy: All right. It reads:

> That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), and in the light of the European Commission's proposal of September 16, 2026, that Canada become the first "associate member" of the European Union, and of the alliance the government intends to launch at the Canada-European Union Summit in Montreal on October 29-30, 2026, the committee undertake a study of no fewer than six meetings on the implication of any such arrangement for Canada's cultural sovereignty, including:
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> (a) the preservation of Canada's cultural exemption as maintained in the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA;
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> (b) whether any sector of Canadian cultural, broadcasting, audiovisual, publishing or official languages policy could become subject to alignment with European Union law or the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union;
>
> (c) the impact on the protection and promotion of French language, particularly in Quebec and on Canadian content requirements;
>
> (d) the consultations conducted by the government with the provinces, including Quebec, and with the cultural sector; and
>
> (e) the cultural and linguistic implications of any expanded youth mobility arrangement, including the Prime Minister's stated objective of allowing youth to "work, study, and live where they want on either side of the Atlantic," Canada's proposed participation in Erasmus+ and any expansion of International Experience Canada, with particular attention to the vitality of the French language in Quebec and in francophone minority communities, reciprocity for young Canadians and the role of the youth exchange programs of the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the capacity of communities to support the cultural and linguistic integration of newcomers;
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> that the committee invite the minister responsible for the Department of Canadian Heritage to appear for no less than two hours, along with officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage, Global Affairs Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; that the committee invite representatives of the cultural, broadcasting and publishing sectors, of francophone organizations and of post-secondary institutions, including from Quebec; that the committee invite experts, parliamentarians and civil society representatives from European countries that have chosen to remain outside the European Union, despite close geographic security and trade ties, including Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, to testify on the effects of their arrangements with European Union on their cultural, broadcasting and language policies, and on their national sovereignty; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

I think it's super important at this moment that we have this motion, because this alliance project is opening in Montreal today and tomorrow.

The Chair: I have Mr. Al Soud.

Fares Al Soud: While I was more than happy to hear the repeated motion—French translation into English—the explanation has already been heard.

While I respect Mr. Hardy greatly, I think it's time that we proceed to the next speaker, respectfully.

● (1130)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Hardy.

Gabriel Hardy: I will just conclude on that.

Especially on student mobility, with what we see happening in Europe right now, I think every citizen in Canada and especially our youths are looking at that, and they don't want this to come into our country. We must have those discussions, because it's important at the moment that we study the impact of opening policies with this alliance and that we are able to give parliamentarians, who were elected by the people, the chance to analyze and open the discussion on this and then report to Parliament.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Since we received the notice of motion two days ago and it falls within the committee's mandate, I consider the motion to be in order.

[*English*]

I have Mr. Lawton, Mrs. Thomas, Mr. Al Soud, Mr. Champoux, Mr. Kuruc and then Mr. Ntumba.

We're starting with you, Mr. Lawton.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you sincerely to my colleague Mr. Hardy for bringing this up.

You just read the speaking list, and the number of MPs on this committee who wish to speak to this speaks to the importance of this motion.

I'm very grateful to Mr. Hardy for bringing this EU gambit by the Prime Minister into sunlight, because this is a process that has been done in a very underhanded and confusing way.

We have heard conflicting and contradictory stories. When media reporting first said that Canada was entertaining “associate membership” with the European Union, which is a category that does not exist, the Prime Minister denied it. Days later, Ursula von der Leyen extended the invitation to Canada, and Mark Carney went up on stage and gave her a big hug and expressed appreciation for it. We then heard other media reporting that it was actually Canada and the Prime Minister's Office that were pushing this in the first place.

Let me say from the outset that closer integration with the European Union through trade is entirely a positive. As a country, we need to trade with anyone we can around the world. That's why I was so proud to see the work of the former Conservative government negotiating what became CETA. It's noteworthy that even 10 or 11 years later, there are, I believe, nine European countries that have not yet ratified CETA. It should have been the priority of the Liberal government to ensure greater economic integration with Europe—not this EU associate membership idea, which, I reiterate, does not exist. This means that the wording is very important, if it's being accompanied by a suite of concessions or obligations that have not been revealed to Canadians.

It is incredibly appropriate, at a time when we are trying to assert our sovereignty and independence as a nation, to have this discussion in Parliament. I think the most suitable avenue, if it is going to be coming before a committee, is the heritage committee, which is tasked with looking at Canadian identity, culture and heritage.

We will never assert our sovereignty by being a star on someone else's flag, whether it is that of the United States or that of the European Union. To be Canada strong, which we often hear as a preferred slogan by the Liberals, we have to be Canada free and we have to be Canada independent.

I would love to hear from the Liberals exactly what it is about the EU.... They're laughing, so I guess Canadian independence is something they find amusing. I would love to hear what it is that the Liberals—

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): I have a point of order.

I just want to clarify. Mr. Lawton talked about an independent Canada, but I think he meant an independent Quebec.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Martin Champoux: I'm sure he just misspoke.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Andrew Lawton: Anything that breaks up our country is a laughing matter, Madam Chair. Thank you for returning the floor to me.

As we talk about what this associate membership in the EU looks like, I would love to hear the Prime Minister and the Liberal government say what it is they find so fascinating about the way that the EU governs its affairs. We've been clear that Canada should never compromise our autonomy on regulations, taxation and migration. These are all things where the European Union has been a colossal failure.

You look at taxes as one example. There are parts of Europe where the sales tax is 27%. We are already dealing with a cost of living and affordability crisis here. Do we really want to cozy up to a regime where the cost of bureaucracy has driven up taxes to, in some cases, more than a quarter of the goods that are being purchased?

You look at regulations. We would be here for weeks and weeks and months and months if I were to list off all of the European regulations that have ended up making it difficult for European citizens and European businesses. I can give you just a couple of absurd examples.

The European Union caps the wattage of vacuum cleaners, so you can't even choose what vacuum cleaner you want in Europe. The European Union has insane regulations on air conditioning, which were causing people to go to the hospital and in some cases die of heat because they couldn't get air conditioning in their homes this summer. This is the consequence of European Union politics.

On migration, everyone knows the chaos that has come from European migration. One of the reasons that the United Kingdom ended up leaving the European Union was because it was so untenable for them to deal with the open borders approach that resulted in, one year about 11 years ago, well over a million people entering Germany—one country alone, one example—a country of 80 million.

When we hear about labour mobility between Canada and Europe, that means that anyone who's in Europe would potentially be able to come and work in Canada when we have already been having the discussion about whether we need to get our immigration system back in check, which we desperately do after 11 years of Liberal immigration policy.

Then there are the cultural aspects of this. It is not lost on me that less than two weeks ago, we had riots in France, where 550,000 people took to the streets; I think there were about 110,000 in Paris. Buildings were looted. They saw property vandalism, vehicles on fire and riots in Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Limoges, Bordeaux, Lille and other cities and communities up and down France.

This is not a country that we should be trying to emulate. It can't even manage unrest in its own borders, and that's just one country in Europe. The riots—and I'm not defending that at all—were coming from unrest stemming from cost of living, immigration issues and issues that people had with the education system and the way government was operating.

At this time of all, what exactly is it that's on the table in this agreement between Canada and Europe? This is a question the government should be answering, but they're not, so I'm proud to be supporting my colleague Mr. Hardy's motion to bring some sunlight onto this here.

Thank you.

● (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lawton.

Mrs. Thomas, it's over to you.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

I think I'll just add to both of my colleagues' really good remarks in regard to this motion and pursuing a further relationship with the EU. As you know, since 2025 Prime Minister Carney has come to the table, promising Canadians that he would have his elbows up, that he would pursue greater independence for Canada. Right now we're in a bit of a trade dispute or spat with the United States of America and, of course, Carney wants to move us away from that relationship toward having closer ties to the EU, it would seem.

However, there is something to be considered here with regard to our national independence. This potential agreement with the EU would not only be about the relationship between governments, Canada and, then, EU countries or the EU Parliament itself; rather, there's something to be considered here in terms of the conversation among Canadians themselves. My concern is that, if we're not careful in pursuing this, the voices of Canadians could be ignored.

For example, as we pursue this, what happens to indigenous rights? What happens to those treaties? What happens to the way that we govern ourselves, as a country, in that regard? What happens to our respect for French and English as the two official languages in this country? What happens in terms of our respect with regard to Quebec's being an independent nation within a nation? What happens to those things?

Do we retain our autonomy as a country? Do we retain our independence, our ability to make these decisions, or does the EU begin to dictate to us the terms that exist right here within our own borders? These are big questions with regard to our national identity and our way forward.

Then, of course, yes, there are big questions with regard to our economy and trade, regulatory frameworks, the environment, technology and digital policy, and energy and natural resources. Alberta remains a superpower in this country as regards to those things. Will that continue to be the case? Will they continue to develop? Furthermore, there is our labour and social policy, our immigration policy.

We can look at defence and national security. A country depends on those things to protect its sovereignty and its people. In fact, a government's foremost responsibility is to make sure that its citizens are kept safe and secure. How will that work in terms of Canada's relationship with the EU? Do we cede some of that sovereignty? Do we cede some of those decisions with regard to defence, with regard to our border defence and with regard to the safety and security of citizens, or does the Government of Canada retain that power? These are big questions, and the answers to these questions will forever impact every single Canadian citizen, not only of this generation but of future generations.

While my colleagues across the way have turned their noses up at us a bit in regard to this motion, and have laughed at times, this is serious. These questions are real, and they are in the minds of Canadians, as Prime Minister Carney has been somewhat elusive about the relationship that he is pursuing with the EU. You'll recall that it came out in the news that this relationship was being pursued, and Carney denied it, only for us to find out a couple of days later, from the president of the EU, from Ursula herself, that, in fact, it was true that an associate membership was being extended to Canada. Unfortunately, this Prime Minister, I believe, has broken trust with the Canadian people because he has not been completely honest.

We have big questions. Canadians have big questions with regard to what is going on in the conversations that are taking place right now in Montreal. Those questions deserve serious consideration, and this place, as the heritage committee, is the place to have those conversations.

I'm thankful for the motion that my colleague Mr. Hardy has brought forward. I do believe that it's incumbent upon us to give it our time and attention.

● (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Al Soud, go ahead.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There's a lot that's been said tied to the Prime Minister's commitment to the French language, to Canadian culture. My simple response would be that he has thus far been absolutely unequivocal in his commitment to both. He has been unequivocal as it pertains to Canadian sovereignty, directly as it pertains to our conversations with the United States and the trade war currently taking place. There is no reason to believe that he would relent on that commitment as it would pertain to conversations tied to the EU.

Ms. Thomas has indicated that there are conversations that are vital, that should be taking place in relation to this conversation. I don't disagree: There is a time and place for conversations like this.

She made mention of the impact on Canadians. At the same time, we have a conversation taking place today tied to sports gambling, which also has an impact on young Canadians. Out of respect for our sponsors, who have dedicated countless hours to put forward this kind of work.... Perhaps the Conservatives care very little for young Canadians' safety within the online spaces as it pertains to gambling online. We certainly do.

Rachael Thomas: On a point of order, let's refrain from insinuating things.

Michael Coteau: That's not a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Al Soud—

Rachael Thomas: Chair, excuse me. There is a point of order there, because personal attacks are not fair game at a committee like this.

Fares Al Soud: That was not a personal attack.

The Chair: Mr. Al Soud, please continue.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you.

That being said—

Andrew Lawton: Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lawton.

Andrew Lawton: In terms of the procedure around this, and I believe it's under chapter 22 of the green book, we've seen this before, where this is going. Every time this comes up, the Liberals have a motion to adjourn. I would invite the members to vote on the motion and not try to get away from it, like they do every single time.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Al Soud, go ahead.

Fares Al Soud: Chair, quite frankly, it's frustrating that the Conservatives would try to take the rules we have in these institutions, the good faith with which we've operated at this committee, the constant note and tone of collaboration we've engaged with, and try to turn this into a political *démarche*.

With that note, Madam Chair, I move to adjourn debate.

The Chair: That is a dilatory motion. The clerk will call the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: I am going to turn the floor over to Mr. Coteau now.

Welcome back to the heritage committee. You have six minutes.

Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. I know the senator has put in countless hours, many months, to get it to this point. I want to thank our colleague from the House side for her work on helping to champion this issue.

How big is online gambling in Canada today?

● (1145)

Hon. Marty Deacon: My first response is it's real big. When we look at it, there is a more significant statistic. We're looking at betting on sport but not looking at other parts of the gambling sector. However, when we talk about participants, from 2010 to 2015, to 2020, to 2023, to 2026, the number is exponentially reaching up.

The data is provincial in nature, but we know that, when we look at the dollars, the billions and billions of dollars in revenues, those are telling us more of the story than the number of bodies. There is a lot of data on this, like this: Who's a repeat? Is it 10 people voting 10 times when there are 100, or are there 100 people voting once? There are all kinds of very rich data on it that says this is growing—and not just in provinces where it's regulated. That's a key piece too: It's up everywhere.

Alberta's recent. Alberta's in what we call a six-week or maybe even a three-week learning period. In those first three weeks, they were generating $186 million. That tells us, quickly, the volume and the mass. We have the breakdown of the demographic too.

Michael Coteau: We're seeing a change in the nature of gambling. I've read stories about how it's getting into predictive types of gambling: What percentage do you think is going to happen? You can gamble on anything today. There's an evolution that's taking place, and I think it's important for us to put in place some safeguards.

Last night we were debating Bill C-34, but different bills presented in the House—Bill C-16 and others—are trying to tackle the evolution of technology in modern society. I think this is an important piece of that puzzle, because the world is changing.

You mentioned that the Government of Ontario commissioned a report. Have we heard about some of the findings of that report?

Hon. Marty Deacon: This is the report that I believe you're talking about, that we're not privy to and that has been, I'm going to call it, hidden. Some of our media partners are trying to dig into some of these numbers, but some of the information does show really damning results.

Just to respond to the first part of what you said about how it's changing, there are, in this time of online, so many options: We have the broadcasting, what's called the micro betting, the in-play live and the pre-game. There is variety in the kinds of things that people are betting on.

In Ontario, as you just talked about, a report came out that showed great concerns, but was buried or suppressed. I think you're going to find some of that data and some of that information is being shared, last night, today and tomorrow. As we speak, the story is unfolding of the real information that was hidden.

Michael Coteau: The fact that one in four young people between the ages of 18 and 34—I believe that was the age group—is suffering from some type of harm through online gambling is a significant number. When they talk about gambling related harm, what type of harm are we talking about for people who fall into that category?

Hon. Marty Deacon: “Harm” is an interesting word. Some people might think of physical and mental harms. Emergency room doctors would tell you about issues around mental health and the dopamine that is pushed into the brain, wanting to win. We're dealing with some real mental health issues first, and those are leading to, particularly for young boys, reclusiveness—moving into the basement and not coming out in public. Then, the ultimate end of this is suicide and suicide attempts, which are up. That's the harm on the body.

There is also what these young people will do to get their money to get the bet and to pay the bill. Quite often, they are winning bets initially, so it's set up to be successful and, then, to want and want.... Advertising is increasing that want and that need.

I would also say that there is the harm of going bankrupt, the harm of not being able to pay a bill and the harm of not telling. I think that Rick Campanelli tells a good story about how hidden this was and how harmful it was over time.

● (1150)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: I'm sorry, but I would like to add this really quickly. There are loved ones, people around them, and so it's not just the individual who's participating in the sports betting. Don't forget about the ripple effects to the loved ones and the impact on those surrounding the individual.

Michael Coteau: When I sat in the Ontario legislature, we saw some data around suicide from gambling in general, and the harm that has caused. I think we need to be very careful, as algorithms and tech companies can use certain approaches to engage people and pull them further in. I think you made a very valid point about how a person can feel good about winning, and then, in trying to get to that point again, eventually losing almost everything or, in some cases, everything. It can destroy families.

I want to say thank you to the both of you for taking this issue to where we are today. I'm 100% supportive of what you're doing.

I also want to thank Bruce Kidd, Mr. Crombie and others who have been speaking on this issue here in Ontario. I know this is a national push.

Thank you for your work. I hope this legislation gets to a point at which we can ban it completely across this country.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Champoux, you have the floor for six minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator Deacon, your bill would establish a federal framework on advertising. If I understood your opening remarks and your answers to my colleagues' questions correctly, your concerns have to do with gambling addiction, particularly among young people, as well as related mental health issues and, to some extent, public health issues. In talking about your concerns, you mentioned health, advertising and gambling, all of which fall under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces.

Which aspects of this bill fall under federal jurisdiction, which aspects are consistent with the 1985 agreement, and why should we support your idea?

[*English*]

Hon. Marty Deacon: Thank you very much for the question. I think I understand it.

The intent of this bill is fourfold. The very first is around the advertising and trying to find ways to reduce advertising. We know that.

The fact is that it's a framework and, to the comment you just made, it is tasking the minister to bring stakeholders to the table to develop a framework of common understandings that we can work with our provinces and territories on to improve this problem. That's number one.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Go ahead, I'm listening.

[*English*]

Hon. Marty Deacon: The next piece is to look at some of the implications of this and at how we support the mental health piece.

The next piece is the consultation, working with and ensuring that we have the players, including the gaming folks, around the table to put this in place.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: First, are you familiar with the 1985 federal-provincial agreement on gaming?

● (1155)

[*English*]

Hon. Marty Deacon: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Are you familiar with section 8 of that agreement? It stipulates that the agreement may only be amended or terminated by the unanimous consent of Ottawa and the provinces. As things stand, there is no consent. We'd be voting on a bill that would have no effect because Quebec will not consent to interference in its areas of jurisdiction. Advertising, gambling and health all fall under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. I raise these concerns because, even though the bill targets advertising, the underlying objective is clearly to encroach on provincial areas of jurisdiction. Your bill has implications for health care. That's why I have serious reservations and why we don't support this proposal at all.

I know it's well intentioned and you're doing this because you care, and that's commendable. Earlier, my colleague, Mr. Coteau, talked about some things he observed when he was at the Ontario Legislative Assembly. However, good intentions alone don't make something relevant. I haven't found any grounds on which to support this proposal, and I can assure you that I've tried, Senator Deacon. Everything in it falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces.

Earlier, you said something I found very interesting. You said that the world has changed, that the reality of communications, particularly with the Internet, has changed and that the provinces' rules around advertising no longer apply because there are no borders. That's simply not the case. The scope of states' and nations' jurisdiction is readily defined by territory. Quebec can enact regulations and laws governing advertising that apply within its borders and do not apply to Ontario, which has its own rules.

One example of that is the ban on advertising to children, which has been in effect for decades. It's in effect in Quebec—and pretty much everywhere else—and if ads aimed at children appear on online platforms, they're quickly reported and removed. Existing laws and regulations are as effective as they can be in today's digital environment.

Even on that point, where I had hoped to find grounds for supporting Bill S-211, I came away empty-handed. I don't see any way in which this bill respects the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces in these areas.

I would even argue that reopening this issue is risky, given that the 1985 agreement was the result of a lengthy dispute. From 1973 to 1985, there was disagreement on this issue. The parties had to negotiate and, ultimately, they decided that responsibility for regulating gambling, lotteries and the like would belong to the provinces. Each province approaches these matters according to its societal values, priorities and circumstances, which aren't the same in Nova Scotia or British Columbia as they are in Quebec or Alberta, and that's entirely appropriate.

When I hear that the gambling industry itself, as well as representatives from several provinces, have raised concerns and aren't in favour of the idea, that's a warning sign. With all due respect, I applaud your idea and your dedication to this issue. I know your intentions are sincere and your objective is worthy, but, unfortunately, this bill encroaches on the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces, so I can't support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Lawton, you have the floor for five minutes.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the sponsors for being here.

I supported this bill. I recognize the harms of online gaming and the vast proliferation of advertising. I will continue to support the bill, and I hope that things do come of it.

That being said, as Mr. Hardy mentioned, we have, as a committee, been denied the opportunity for a couple of weeks now to be able to have a public airing of a lot of the issues that Canadians have expected us to deal with. I am going to be moving a motion and speaking to it.

The motion, which is on notice, is as follows:

> That, given that,
>
> (a) since 2015, police-reported hate crimes targeting religion have more than doubled, from 469 to 1,115 a year, and those targeting Jewish Canadians, about one per cent of the population, have more than quadrupled, from 178 to 788;
>
> (b) the government has confirmed, in answer to a written question, 423 police-reported arsons at places of worship since 2015, 90 of them in 2021 alone;
>
> (c) more than 100 churches have been burned or vandalized since 2021, and at least 33 of them were destroyed by fire, with arrests in only nine of those cases; six worshippers were murdered at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City in 2017; synagogues have been firebombed and shot at; and Hindu temples, Sikh gurdwaras and mosques have been repeatedly targeted;
>
> (d) on September 20, 2026, the eve of Yom Kippur, a gunman opened fire outside the Sons of Jacob Synagogue in Belleville and critically wounded Constable Jeff Smith of the Belleville Police Service, who was standing guard;
>
> (e) the Prime Minister himself has acknowledged that Canada's “civic compact is failing Jewish Canadians”;
>
> the committee, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), undertake a study of no fewer than eight meetings on vandalism, arson, shootings and other criminal attacks against places of worship in Canada;
>
> the committee invite the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture to appear on a panel of his own, without other witnesses, for no less than two hours, and invite the Minister of Public Safety, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Statistics Canada, police services and their hate crime units, and representatives of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and other faith communities, including congregations whose places of worship have been attacked, as well as any other witnesses the committee deems relevant; and
>
> the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

What I will say in support of this motion is that hate against faith communities is very real. This has been very close to home. In London, a little over five years ago, the Afzaal family was murdered for no other reason than their Muslim faith, a despicable act of hate and terror. We have seen, again, the rampant anti-Semitic attacks not just on Jewish institutions but also on Jewish neighbourhoods and Jewish individuals for no other reason than their identity. We have also seen over the last five years, according to the latest number, which Juno News has been tracking, 133 Christian churches across Canada vandalized, burned or desecrated.

There has been little to no public attention from many political leaders in the current Canadian government on that issue. The reason I use examples from all the Abrahamic faiths is to say that religious freedom for one is religious freedom for all. We need to acknowledge attacks on all faith communities, recognizing the importance of faith and faith communities to the cultural and social fabric of this country.

I know that for many members of this committee, there have been examples in their own ridings, in their own communities, of these attacks. I believe this should be an opportunity in which we will have support from all of them. I know, for Madame Auguste in Terrebonne, about four years ago at the Église Saint-Joachim, an intruder forced the doors open and broke—

● (1200)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lawton, you have presented your motion. Let me give you a ruling on it, because you can't debate the motion until I make that ruling.

I will tell you that I agree that this is a very serious issue in our society today; I don't want to downplay that at all.

As I read your motion, which was received in time, I note that a lot of it relates to the application of the Criminal Code and any recommendations the committee may make to the House; therefore, I believe this study would not fall within this committee's mandate. I believe it is better placed before the Standing Committee on Justice—and I know that Mr. Lawton is a member of that committee as well—or equally the Standing Committee on Public Safety.

As stated in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, fourth edition, in paragraph 20.114, “motions moved in committee must not go beyond the committee's mandate”.

For the awareness of everyone at the committee, I'll read this committee's mandate.

> The House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage has the power to review and report on the policies, programs and expenditure plans of the Department of Canadian Heritage and most of the agencies and Crown corporations within the Portfolio. These policies and programs relate to culture, the arts, heritage, official languages, civic education and literacy, diversity and inclusion, and Parks Canada, as well as youth, sport and Indigenous culture initiatives.

Therefore, the application of the Criminal Code is not part of this committee's mandate, and I declare this motion out of order.

Andrew Lawton: I have a point of order.

The Chair: This is not debatable.

Andrew Lawton: Madam Chair, you are setting up—

The Chair: You can challenge my ruling, Mr. Lawton, but you can't debate it at this moment.

Andrew Lawton: Madam Chair, I'm not debating. I'm asking for an indulgence for a moment.

The Chair: No, you can't have an indulgence for a moment.

Andrew Lawton: Okay. I'm—

The Chair: You can challenge the chair's ruling.

Andrew Lawton: I don't want to challenge your ruling right away. I believe it would be appropriate to hear submissions on this.

The Chair: No, you can't debate this. You do not have the floor.

Andrew Lawton: Madam Chair, you're saying that faith is not part of Canadian culture. That is the precedent you are setting.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Fares Al Soud: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: That is not what I said, and you do not have the floor.

Andrew Lawton: That is the precedent you are setting. It is an incredibly dangerous precedent.

I challenge the ruling.

Rachael Thomas: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] have a historic attribution given to them by the heritage department.

The Chair: We're calling the vote. Please stop debating.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: We're at noon, but I hope the sponsors of the bill can stay for an extra few minutes so we can get some more questions in. I'm sorry that you haven't had as much time to talk about your legislation as normal. If you have some extra time, we'll continue with your testimony.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Ms. Royer for five minutes.

● (1205)

Zoe Royer (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Senator Deacon and MP Chagger. I have deep respect for the work you've been doing on this.

Ads are everywhere. We have a public health crisis and a societal crisis. A member of my riding wrote, “Our family has been devastated by online sports betting.” The industry targets the vulnerable. In particular, a generation of young men are exposed to the dangers of gambling and gambling addiction. Lives are being ruined on smart phones.

I have three questions. If you don't have enough time, please follow up with answers later.

Number one, if restrictions on advertising or responsible gambling requirements become stricter in Canada, is there a risk that bettors will shift to international sites?

Number two, do you believe gambling operators should bear greater financial responsibility for the costs associated with problem gambling—including prevention, research and treatment—and, if so, what role should legislation play?

Number three, the volume of sports-betting advertisements during sporting events and on social media may normalize gambling for young Canadians. How does Bill S-211 address that concern, and what additional measures, if any, are needed to protect youth?

I'll go to both of you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

Hon. Marty Deacon: Thank you for the questions. I may come back and ask for some clarification.

I'm going to start off by saying that the intent of the bill has several tentacles. If we get a framework or some common understanding established, there are a couple of things that could happen. It could be whistle-to-whistle bans, meaning that from 10 minutes before competition starts to 10 minutes after competition stops, there is no advertising permitted. It could be time of day. It could be the use or non-use of celebrities. There are different things we could do to make these less appealing. I want to be clear on those as some of the possibilities, based on your last question about normalization and how we could get at this.

I think your first question was around international seepage. If we tighten things up—you're absolutely right—we cannot control the international imperative. We can't control what happens. It probably happens right now. What we're hopeful we can control is our own story. That could happen. There could be blocks. There could be no way to get on these sites. There could be ways that enhance.... We don't know that international piece. It's something we are aware of and monitor, but I can't respond as to what that would look like.

What I'm hoping is that we can do better work where we are.

Zoe Royer: Got it.

Senator Deacon, I'm going to interrupt, and you can follow up later with written details.

I'd also like to understand how it is that each of you decided to tackle this particular issue. Why did you ultimately decide to go the route of a Senate public bill as the mechanism? What are the limitations to what you can tackle through a Senate public bill or a private member's bill?

Thank you.

Hon. Marty Deacon: Post the single sport event betting bill, we saw a problem very quickly. We voted for that bill, so we wondered what we could do.

It took a lot of work—months—before we came to the floor of the Senate to say, "What can we do? What is the history of tobacco, cannabis and alcohol? What threshold can we set?" Working with the clerks, the law and previous rulings, we decided on a partial ban and we decided to set up a bill in the Senate. We wanted to get going and do the very best we could to minimize this problem.

The framework group could ask for a full ban. That's beyond my purview. However, that's where it started and why it started in the Senate.

Zoe Royer: Is the framework the ideal mechanism, or is it just a starting point?

Hon. Marty Deacon: You're right on both accounts. The framework is important because we want a minimum standard across this country. Once those folks and the stakeholders get together to develop a framework, they may find, through the expertise in that group, that it may look different, based on consultation.

● (1210)

Zoe Royer: Please follow up with some written information, because I know we have limited time. Our time together has been reduced quite a bit.

Lastly, if you had all the power of the federal and provincial governments behind you, what would you truly want to see done about sports betting and related ads?

Hon. Marty Deacon: That's a good question.

If I had all the power and if all the stars aligned, I would love a full ban on advertising, end of story.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: I would just add that I think there is actually a lot of power in the federal and provincial governments. There are certain jurisdictions that are maybe the outliers.

The concern is this: Will the model in Ontario, which is now being followed by Alberta, be the norm? Based on conversations I've had with stakeholders, there are other provinces considering it. If we think there's an abundance of online advertising at the current time, what will that look like when more provinces are entering that space? I can't foresee it being better; I think it would be worse. That's where there is a responsibility.

We are the government. We legalized sports betting less than a decade ago. We legalized cannabis, and I don't see any advertising enticing vulnerable communities to dabble in that space. What's happening with sports betting is the complete opposite. There are people who would call themselves responsible gamblers. There are people who recognize that addiction is a reality. When it's causing harm to individuals, families and communities, the federal government has a responsibility. This framework or this conversation is saying to bring the experts and the provinces to the table and to figure out the best way. A number of provinces are complaining about getting Ontario ads in their provinces. Perhaps tomorrow other provinces will be complaining about other provinces' ads coming in.

Clearly, something needs to be done.

Zoe Royer: Thank you.

The Chair: Our next questioner will be Mr. Champoux. However, I think we are ready to move on to our next witnesses.

I want to thank the sponsors very much for their time today and for bringing this legislation forward.

I will suspend for a couple of minutes while we get ready for our next panel of witnesses.

● (1210)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1220)

The Chair: I mentioned before we rose for the break that it will be Mr. Champoux's turn for two and a half minutes. Then we'll move on to Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Ntumba for five minutes each.

First, we will have opening statements from our new witnesses.

Online, we have with us Kevin Desjardins from the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

Here in the room with us is Renze Nauta from Cardus.

We'll start with you, Mr. Desjardins. You have five minutes for an opening statement. The floor is yours.

Kevin Desjardins (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Association of Broadcasters): Thank you and good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I am Kevin Desjardins. I'm the president and CEO of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, representing Canada's private radio and television broadcasters.

Let me begin by emphasizing that our members recognize the importance of responsible sports-betting advertising, particularly when it comes to protecting minors and vulnerable Canadians. Our concern is that the bill before you appears to assume that there is a significant regulatory gap that needs to be addressed without first establishing whether such a gap actually exists.

Sports-betting advertising in Canada is already subject to substantial regulation. In provinces such as Ontario and Alberta, licensed gaming operators must comply with detailed advertising requirements. These are supplemented by the Canadian Gaming Association's national code for responsible gaming advertising, which is independently administered by Ad Standards. These include restrictions on ads directed at minors, the use of athletes or celebrities, misleading representations, inducements and requirements relating to responsible gambling.

Broadcasters are also subject to established advertising standards and compliance mechanisms. Before Parliament creates another layer of regulation, we believe it should first ask what specific problem we are trying to solve that isn't already addressed by these mechanisms.

This brings me to our second concern, which is that additional restrictions on Canadian broadcasters could inadvertently push advertising to less regulated offshore and digital platforms. Canadian broadcasters are identifiable, accountable businesses operating under Canadian law. By contrast, enforcement is far harder with offshore gambling operators and global social media platforms. If restrictions fall mainly on Canadian broadcasters, ad dollars are likely to flow to those less accountable platforms, and ultimately that won't reduce exposure. It could actually make it worse. The goal should be a more accountable advertising ecosystem, not the opposite.

Our third concern is that licensed operators use advertising to identify themselves to Canadians and communicate safeguards like age checks and responsible gambling measures. Canadians already have access to offshore gambling services that may not be subject to Canadian consumer protections. Restricting visibility of licensed operators could make it harder for Canadians to distinguish legitimate services from illegal or unregulated ones.

Finally, the bill is written as though more restrictions on advertising are a given, rather than first assessing whether current regulations work. Our recommendation is that the federal government work with provincial regulators and industry stakeholders before establishing any additional requirements. The objective should be meaningful protection for Canadians and not simply additional restrictions on the Canadian media organizations that are easiest to regulate. Any new framework must also account for the reality that Canadian broadcasters compete with global platforms that don't face the same oversight.

In short, we support responsible advertising and meaningful consumer protection, but duplication and unintended harm should be avoided.

Thank you. I look forward to any questions.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll turn the floor over now to Mr. Nauta from Cardus.

You have five minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Renze Nauta (Program Director, Work and Economics, Cardus): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Renze Nauta. I'm a researcher at Cardus, a research institute that examines how society's institutions can support human dignity and the common good. I direct a research program at Cardus that looks at the role of economic institutions in supporting human flourishing. This led us to study the gambling industry and the impact of online gambling on Canadians' lives.

[*English*]

Our position on Bill S-211 is that it correctly identifies gambling advertisements as a serious public policy issue and that it is a good start in addressing it. At the same time, we believe this bill must be strengthened. Fundamentally, we believe that advertising for gambling should be treated in a similar way to how advertising for alcohol, tobacco and cannabis is treated, which is regulated by the federal government.

Let's start with some background. As members know, Parliament legalized single-event sports betting in 2021. The following year, Ontario became the first province to liberalize its online gambling market, opening it up to the private sector. Alberta followed suit earlier this year and Quebec is likely to follow.

The experience of Ontario is a useful indicator for where the rest of the country may be going, but the statistics on gambling in Ontario have become deeply disturbing. The latest data from iGaming Ontario show that Ontarians hold over 1.3 million player accounts across the various online gambling platforms. They wager nearly $10 billion every month. Of greatest concern, the average player account in Ontario loses over $300 per month. That's not how much they wager; it's how much they lose. Put another way, the average account in Ontario loses nearly $4,000 per year. I will flag that as a conservative estimate of how much individual people lose each month, since a person can hold multiple player accounts at once.

To put this in perspective, experts say it's not safe to lose more than 1% of your family income on gambling. Ontario is at 3.4 times that amount today.

Advertising is a significant part of the problem. Anyone who has watched sports lately is keenly aware of this. One study found that Ontarians were subject to 2.8 references to sports betting every minute during live sports broadcasts.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. When Parliament legalized single-event sports betting, it was argued that the goal was to bring the activity that was already being done on the black market into the legal market, allowing the government to regulate and tax it. That's fair enough. We can agree or disagree, but it's a fair public policy goal. The amount of advertising that we have seen since then defies that goal. The whole purpose of advertising is to increase demand. Companies wouldn't be pouring as much money into it if they didn't know it was working to do exactly that.

Parliament is strongly justified in acting in the face of this. I generally do not favour government interference in markets, but we must acknowledge that this is a market of a different type where the data show that the product is becoming dangerous, especially to young people.

This bill starts a conversation about what to do about it, but it can be strengthened to address the urgency of this issue in the following ways.

First, amend paragraph 3(2)(a) to ban sports-betting advertisements completely, or, at the very least, ban them during sports broadcasts when children are most likely to be watching, as the United Kingdom does. Ban advertising for in-game bets, a form of betting that is especially prone to addictive behaviour.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Second, add a provision to paragraph 3(2)(b) requiring gambling corporations to contribute financially to problem-gambling research, prevention and treatment. Their contributions should be at least equal to the amount they spend on advertising.

[*English*]

Third, add a new paragraph to subclause 3(2) to improve gambling prevention messaging. Standard tag lines, like “Know your limit, play within it”, do not convey the addictive nature of the product. This bill should require that the framework establish guidelines for gambling prevention messaging more along the lines of, “What are you prepared to lose today? Set a deposit limit.”

I believe these amendments would significantly strengthen the bill and are necessary to make this industry safe for Canadians to participate in.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will turn the floor over now to Mr. Champoux.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us for what little time remains in this meeting.

Mr. Desjardins, I'll start with you because you presented the perspective of broadcasters, who are already subject to a particularly heavy regulatory burden. My question is about advertising.

Approximately how much annual revenue does gambling advertising generate, province by province? Do you have any sense of those figures?

Kevin Desjardins: No, we don't really have an exact figure for these numbers. In fact, we're currently seeing a reduction in the number of ads. I'm not talking about the revenue they generate, but really the number of ads. There was a time when there were a lot of them. Perhaps that was because it was a new market and several companies wanted to establish themselves and were competing with one another. Now, we're seeing that the number of ads is starting to fall.

Martin Champoux: I'll return to the example of Quebec, because, once again, even though the arguments in favour of the bill are made in good faith and are based on good intentions, I'm not convinced, as the fact remains that we're talking about something that falls—and must fall—within the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces.

In Quebec, for example, Loto-Québec manages the gambling system, online betting and sports betting, and it reinvests a great deal of money in advertising campaigns that promote responsible gambling. Indeed, this is a very responsible way of using revenue from online gambling.

Rather than the federal government passing a bill that seeks to encroach upon the areas of jurisdiction of the National Assembly of Quebec and the provincial legislatures, rather than interfering in decisions that should be taken by them, would it not be preferable for the provinces to work together, to follow the example of those where things are going well, and to adopt the best practices that have proven successful elsewhere?

Kevin Desjardins: I would say that it is very much the provinces' responsibility to manage this. As you said, in 1985, there was an agreement between the provinces and the federal government on—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desjardins. We're out of time for this question.

I'm going to hand the floor over to Mrs. Thomas now for five minutes.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Mr. Nauta, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions.

Can you clarify the jurisdiction of this legislation, Bill S-211, with regard to advertising? There is some argument to be made that this should be left with the provinces and that the federal government should not intervene. Of course, this bill calls for exactly that—a federal framework would be developed.

Can you comment on why that may be in the jurisdiction of the federal government and in our best interests as Canadians?

Renze Nauta: The first thing I'd point to is precedent. Like we've said, the advertising of gambling should follow that of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis. Alcohol advertising is governed by CRTC regulations. Tobacco advertising is governed by the Tobacco and Vaping Products Act, which was passed by the federal Parliament. Cannabis advertising is under the Cannabis Act, which was also passed by the federal Parliament. It's precedent.

The other thing is there are international aspects to this as well. Certainly, there are going to have to be negotiations between Canada and the United States with respect to international games, because the NHL is a North American phenomenon.

● (1235)

Rachael Thomas: That's fair enough. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Further to that, in your opening remarks, you referred to the impact that sports advertising is having on minors and luring them into placing bets. Then, of course, that translates into an impact on their mental health.

Do you care to comment on that a little bit more?

Renze Nauta: Absolutely. I think it's something that was not well prepared for in Ontario, and it is having significant impacts.

There was a study earlier this year that showed data from a mental health helpline by ConnexOntario, for example. It compared the incoming calls about mental health from before and after legalization with respect to gambling. For men aged 25 to 44, the difference was that those phone calls almost doubled. For men and boys aged 15 to 24, it had more than doubled; it increased 161%.

There have also been many stories lately about how minors are accessing this, even though there are attempts to restrict their access to it. From an advertising perspective, this is one of the greatest problems. Even if there are attempts to restrict minors from accessing the gambling sites, they are absolutely being found by the advertising. My seven-year-old son, for example, knows what online gambling is, and I don't think it's appropriate that, just because he wants to watch the World Cup, he is subject to that. That is one of the greatest concerns that I have.

Rachael Thomas: That's fair enough.

I'm curious, again, about your allusion to the dangers of in-game betting. Do you care to offer a brief comment with regard to that?

Renze Nauta: In-game bets are a form of betting that happens, as the name suggests, within the game.

It used to be, before online gambling came along, that you would place a bet on a game, and then you would sit back, watch the match and find out at the end whether you had won.

Nowadays, because it's in your pocket and it's accessible at any time, there's this new phenomenon of being able to place bets as things are going. Instead of just betting on who's going to win the match, you can bet on who's going to score the next goal, how many goals will be scored or which team is going to score first or second in the third period.

It leads to a much quicker rate of gambling more akin to a slot machine than anything else. That's where some of the dopamine hits really start flowing. It makes it much more addictive.

We're calling for a complete ban on advertising for sports betting, but at the very least, we should be looking at a ban on advertising for those kinds of bets.

Rachael Thomas: I appreciate that, and I also appreciate the detail with which you outlined a number of amendments that can be made to this bill. I think that's really helpful and something that I hope that we as a committee will have further discussion on as we make those decisions on Tuesday, going through the bill clause by clause.

At this point, I'll hand the mic over to Mr. Lawton.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you. I have a motion, Madam Chair, and I would like to speak to it as well. I move:

> That the committee recognize that:
>
> 1. Faith and religion are integral to Canadian history, culture, traditions and national identity;
>
> 2. Houses of worship and faith-based organizations make significant contributions to communities through charitable work, social services and the preservation of cultural heritage;
>
> 3. Historic religious buildings and faith traditions are important parts of Canada's tangible and intangible heritage and merit preservation for future generations; and
>
> That this be reported to the House.

The Chair: I have a speaking list starting with Mrs. Thomas, then Mr. Hardy and—

Andrew Lawton: I said I was speaking to it too.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is a very important motion that fits squarely within the mandate of the heritage committee, and I will say that the reason I'm moving this now is because earlier in this meeting I attempted to move another motion that dealt specifically with some of the attacks facing faith communities. I had started to mention attacks on churches, mosques and synagogues in the ridings of the members around the table here, representing a range of faiths. When that was ruled out of order, it actually raised what I am concerned is a very dangerous precedent, which is that we do not recognize the integral role that faith and faith communities play in the cultural fabric of this country.

I would note that this committee has in the past entertained motions, debates and discussions on hate crimes, on matters to do with the Criminal Code. I have a list of motions that I found just in the last 30 minutes that have been accepted, debated and sometimes adopted, from members on both sides, dealing with the Criminal Code. Oftentimes, when assaults on identity and heritage take place, these are illegal, but we have to underpin that with an acknowledgement of the role that these organizations play.

I remember when one of your colleagues, Marc Miller at the justice committee—about a year ago to the day, actually—said that people should face criminal prosecution for quoting certain verses of the Torah and the Bible. A lot of faith communities were understandably mortified by that comment from someone who's now the minister responsible for Canadian heritage and identity because it showed a lack of recognition of the positive role that faith communities and people of faith play in this country.

A few weeks ago, the St. Thomas Islamic Centre, a Muslim mosque, hosted an interfaith gathering that I was very honoured to attend. We had representatives of Christian groups, Sikh groups and Hindu groups sitting in a mosque talking about the way that faith communities can work together to support the betterment of society. We also have, of course, opportunities all the time as members to go to various celebrations. We need to understand that, but we also need to understand the attacks that take place against faith communities.

I mentioned the Afzaal family's murder in London. I mentioned the attack at the Quebec Islamic centre. I also mentioned the 133 churches that have been burned and vandalized, including, as I was starting to say earlier, in Madame Auguste's riding.

I believe that in Hamilton we've seen Hindu temples subjected to break-ins and thefts. The Beth Jacob Synagogue was defaced with hate graffiti. The Hamilton Downtown Mosque...and arson as well at the First Unitarian Church. As well, at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, there was a break-in. Altars were burned. There was about $75,000 in damage.

All of us on this committee have examples of this in our ridings. I've noted that there seems to be an imbalance in when political leaders speak out about these. I think we need to stand up for hate against all faith communities. I would have argued to have a study on this. Now, that was not the prerogative for the chair, but we do need to, at a minimum, recognize the role that faith communities play.

This is incredibly timely now because we have seen the finance committee in the last Parliament recommend that faith organizations not be allowed to have charitable status.

Fortunately, with the prorogation and dissolution of Parliament, that recommendation died. I will note, however, that the finance committee's pre-budget consultation in this Parliament did have a provision that organizations that have a particular view on matters of life should be denied charitable status. If we start making the determination that charitable status should be dependent on the views of an organization in matters of conscience, we are de-legitimizing the role that faith and religion play in Canadian society.

This does not mean that everyone needs to adhere to a faith or a religion, not at all, but we need to recognize the tremendous work that faith-based organizations do, whether it's Indwell on housing, The Salvation Army or the individual mosques, synagogues and temples that are running food programs to deal with the food affordability crisis that has been allowed, sadly, to blossom on the Liberal government's watch.

All of this is why I think that, at a minimum, this committee needs to recognize the role that faith institutions play in our country, and that is a positive role.

● (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lawton.

I will note that, unlike the last motion you submitted, this one does not call for changes to the Criminal Code. Therefore, it does fall within the mandate of this committee and is in order.

I will turn the floor over to Mrs. Thomas, who is next on my list.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

The motion that my colleague has moved here today has to do with public concern that has grown in this country around the increase in censorship that is happening at the hands of the current government and the encroachment on freedom of expression within Canada. In particular, he is drawing special attention to religious freedom and the conversation around that.

Here's why it's so important. When speech is restricted, when Canadians are not able to hold a variety of viewpoints and express those viewpoints freely, it then actually restricts the flow of ideas, and it puts instead a dangerous amount of power in the hands of government. It puts a concentration of power in the hands of government.

I'll give you an example.

Bill C-11 was put in place by the Liberals. It requires that certain online content be given preference over other content. This government would argue that, even though certain preference is given, it's not taking the speech away altogether. For example, certain content will have to be bumped up in a person's search, and it will be given preference on the very first page of your search. However, other content will fall to page 53. Now, we all know that we don't read to page 53 when we do a quick Google search. As a result, this actually is censoring speech because it's giving preference to some over others.

It's akin to saying that, in a library, all books can exist. We believe in a myriad of viewpoints. They can be here. However, there are certain books that will be allowed on the first floor, and certain that will be allowed on the second, and certain allowed on the third. Then there will be this other category of books that will be tucked away in a storage room somewhere in a back corner. If you dare search for it, you'll find it. Then we claim that all books are treated with equal value, that all people who would use this library would be given equal access to these different ideas.

In fact, is that the protection of free speech? Is that protection of all ideas and viewpoints? I would argue no. I believe most Canadians would agree with that.

It's like saying to someone that they have free speech, the ability to share an idea with the general population. However, the only place from which they can speak is in some basement room with a locked door. Do they have the ability to speak? Absolutely, they have the ability to speak. This government would contend that free speech is protected.

There's another side to be considered, however. Within our charter, we not only have the right to express an idea; we have the right to be heard. By locking that person in a basement room with a locked door, yes, they had the ability to speak, but they did not have the ability to be heard. Bill C-11 does exactly that within the online space. It's a direct infringement on our rights and freedoms as Canadians.

Now, we are looking at other bills that potentially do the same. We'll have an opportunity to talk about those more at this committee. Our concern on this side of the table is this. When legislation is put in place that slowly but surely erodes the rights and freedoms of Canadians and their ability to hold a true belief and express that belief publicly, we enter into a very dangerous space.

The public square should be an area where we are able to join as a community, as a country, etc. and exchange ideas. Maybe we disagree, and that's great. Let's have the debate. To shut down that debate is altogether wrong. In fact, it can actually cause the problem to fester even more. The search for truth should be done in the public square. It should be done in that robust place rather than pushing people to the fringes where potentially harm and violence can fester and come forward.

Further to that, when infringement on free speech takes place, or when government overreaches, it causes people to censor their own voice. It causes them to go small. It causes them to go quiet. In many cases, it causes certain religious groups or certain faith groups to shrink back. Bill C-9 is a great example of this. It was put forward by this government in the name of wanting to protect faith groups, but in fact it actually causes many faith groups to shrink back, because the provisions within that bill allow for the potential prosecution of holding certain beliefs and of those beliefs reaching public airwaves.

● (1245)

This is a problem in our country. If we cannot agree to protect one another's right to believe certain things, to engage in certain faiths, of our choice as the Canadian people, if we do not respect that freedom, then we enter into a very dangerous place as a nation. It very quickly takes us towards countries like North Korea, Iran, Turkey and China. We do not want to go there.

The motion that my colleague Mr. Lawton has moved here today with regard to a study on this issue is very important. We must make sure that we are in fact protecting Canadians and their ability to believe what they want to believe, to speak what they want to speak, to exist within the rights and freedoms that are granted to them in the charter. Let's take the time. Let's look at that and make sure that our country is doing well.

● (1250)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Hardy, you have the floor.

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will read through the motion point by point, very briefly, to give my views on it, but it is very important that we adopt it today, for several reasons. Firstly, it states:

> 1. Faith and religion are integral to Canadian history, culture, traditions, and national identity;

I would even go so far as to say that they are an integral part of the national identity of both Canada and Quebec. Indeed, if there is one thing we know for certain, it is that the Christian faith and the values that have been upheld within that faith in Quebec since the very beginning—such as equality, respect, mutual support and love for others, and the common good—are, ultimately, part of the very foundation of our communities. This is what led people to work together and help one another to build monuments. Churches are at the heart of almost every town in Quebec. It all began around a church.

So, this reality—which is our past, for better or for worse, although I am not saying everything was perfect—led people from elsewhere to settle on another continent and build a nation. I truly believe we must not forget this, because without those values, there would be no schools or hospitals. A person's right to be recognized not by what they have in their bank account, but by their worth as a human being, stems from that. If we do not recognize this right and are unable to protect it, we are putting our history and our identity at serious risk. It is the committee's job here to ensure that we never forget this.

People often ask where secularism fits into all this. Once again, there have been many dogmas and many things done in the name of the bible or the Church. However, if we go back to the actual facts of the bible, there is a man called Jesus who said: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's”. That is a secular statement. It means that we must separate the state from religion.

Often, people are afraid and say that religion must be removed from everything and that we should no longer talk about it. On the contrary, it is our history. That is where we come from. When we do not know what is written in these books, we are sometimes afraid of them, even though there are very simple principles regarding the separation of church and state within the bible itself.

Secondly, it is written:

> 2. Houses of worship and faith-based organizations make significant contributions to communities through charitable work, social services, and the preservation of cultural heritage;

As I said, our schools, our hospitals and all the organizations that help the needy are often based on the values upon which our country was founded.

Thirdly, it states:

> 3. Historic religious buildings and faith traditions are important parts of Canada's tangible and intangible heritage and merit preservation for future generations;

As I said earlier, and as we are seeing happen in many countries, when people want to erase history, they start by erasing all the monuments of the past. In this way, young people will grow up without seeing these monuments and without wondering who was there before them. For example, in Iran, which was once a free country, what was the first thing they did? They destroyed the monuments. I'm talking about Iran, but all the great conquerors in human history have done the same. They arrive in a country, they don't agree with what they see, and they want to destroy the monuments. We remember Napoleon, who fired cannonballs at the Sphinx at Giza. The idea is to erase history to ensure that future generations will not see it.

I believe that our buildings which, at some point in their history, were linked to a faith—I mentioned the cross at L'Isle-aux-Coudres, in particular—just like our churches, must never be sacrificed in the name of the prevailing popular sentiment of the moment regarding how we would like history to have been written. The facts are important. We do not want to rewrite history; we want to live through it, learn from it, acknowledge it and protect it, and then move forward as a society.

So, I believe this is a motion that is entirely appropriate for the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. It is directly linked to the history of Quebec, which subsequently founded the rest of the country. So, I believe we should adopt this motion.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kuruc, you have the floor next. Then I have Mr. Al Soud, and that's the end of my list.

● (1255)

Ned Kuruc (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to touch on my colleague's point number three:

> Historic religious buildings and faith traditions are important parts of Canada's tangible and intangible heritage and merit preservation for future generations;

I want to touch on that because Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Hamilton in general, has not been exempt from acts of violence on its religious institutions. I want to list some of those.

First, we have the Hindu Samaj Temple. Then we also have the Hamilton Mountain Mosque, which is in my riding. We also have the mosque on Stone Church Road, the Ibrahim Jame Mosque on King Street East and the Hamilton Downtown Mosque. We have the Beth Jacob Synagogue. We have the Immanuel Christian Reformed Church and St. Paul's Presbyterian Church. We also have The First Unitarian Church, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, St. Mary's Catholic Church, Meadowlands Fellowship Church and Hamilton Christian Fellowship.

These are all religious institutions that have not escaped attacks or vandalism. One of them, the very first one, the Hindu Samaj Temple, was burned. These are unthinkable acts that we're speaking of in a country like Canada, where a major part of its population are immigrants, and we have a vast and widely accepted and loved religious framework. Canada accepts all religions. It loves all religions, and they are celebrated, and rightly so. I do believe that this is a very important part of this heritage committee.

I support this non-partisan study so that we can reinforce to Canadians that government supports all religious freedoms. That's something that I personally believe, along with many of my colleagues, was lost in Bill C-9.

For the community that I represent, Bill C-9 caused fear, confusion and trauma, and I believe it caused those three things to many Canadians. We need, and actually owe it to Canadians, to set the record straight, that freedom of religion is important and is a fundamental building block of Canadian society.

I support my colleague Andrew Lawton's motion on this, and I believe it's exactly where it belongs—in this heritage committee. I hope, then, that we get the support of our Liberal colleagues and our Bloc colleagues along the way because I truly believe this is a non-partisan motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Al Soud, please go ahead.

Andrew Lawton: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Just very briefly, after I concluded my intervention, you made a comment about the earlier motion that was ruled out of order. You said that it was because it proposed changes to the Criminal Code. I would just note for the record that it does not mention the Criminal Code, and that motion proposes no changes to the Criminal Code.

If that was the basis for your ruling it out of order, I think that might warrant reconsideration at a future meeting.

The Chair: You can't continue to debate something that we've already ruled on.

Andrew Lawton: It was on the wrong premise. I just wanted to make that clear for the record.

The Chair: Mr. Al Soud, go ahead.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to take a moment to thank my colleague, Mr. Lawton, for bringing this forward. It's an extremely important discussion. We wholeheartedly agree that faith-based organizations do some incredible work across the country.

Just in my beautiful riding of Mississauga Centre, we have the Muslim Welfare Centre, the City Centre Church, Masjid Al-Farooq, Christ for Life Ministries and Shalimar Islamic Centre. They're effectively integrated in every part of society, helping Canadians on a daily basis. Recognizing that work is absolutely invaluable.

There is very clearly a political game afoot here. We will not be tripped up by political games. The House has a lot of work to get to. We support this motion in principle and value. I would, therefore, only propose a slight amendment that we remove, “That this be reported to the House.”

● (1300)

The Chair: We will now debate the amendment proposed by Mr. Al Soud.

I have Mrs. Thomas and then Mr. Lawton.

Rachael Thomas: My honourable colleague Mr. Al Soud just opened up a statement saying that the motion itself is somehow playing games, and that Conservatives wanting to talk about free speech and the protection of speech with regard to religion and within the media—our desire to discuss that—is somehow political gamesmanship.

Fares Al Soud: I have a point of order.

Just for clarity, that is not what I said.

The Chair: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Coteau, go ahead on a point of order.

Michael Coteau: Considering we're at one o'clock and we do have a witness who's been here for probably an hour or two, and we've completely ignored the witness based on these motions that have come forward, do you think it would be wise to advise the witness that we're pretty much done?

The Chair: Yes.

Rachael Thomas: We started half an hour late. There's no reason why this committee couldn't continue for another half an hour.

Michael Coteau: It's a question I pose to the committee.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Rachael Thomas: My point was this. The member opposite has accused us of playing political games by standing up for freedom within the religious space in Canada and for making sure that those who engage in different faith beliefs are contended for, as well as historic and religious buildings. That's quite the accusation.

What's interesting to me, though, is that Mr. Al Soud has then moved an amendment to our motion that we would study it, but we would not report to the House, which means essentially removing any ounce of accountability for this government. Anything that is discussed at this committee or any recommendations that come out of this committee would just stop here. There would be—

Fares Al Soud: Forgive me, Chair, I have a point of order. I would just like clarity. Is this a study? The language is very—

The Chair: The motion before us is a report to the House. It is not a study.

Fares Al Soud: Thank you for the clarification.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, go ahead.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I appreciate the clarification. The chair just clarified that the motion is, in fact, a report to the House. Then Mr. Al Soud just asked to remove “reported to the House”, which basically means to nullify the motion that the Conservatives have brought forward. That's a political game. To remove the heart of the motion is a political game. I think it just goes to show how the Liberals handle these things. Rather than having the conversation and rather than advocating for—

Fares Al Soud: I have a point of order, Chair.

I believe we are having the conversation. We've made it abundantly clear that we wholeheartedly agree with the values and the principles of the motion, only that there's work—

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Fares Al Soud: I apologize.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, go ahead.

Michael Coteau: I have a quick point of order, Madam Chair.

Do you have resources to go past 15 minutes? What's the current situation now? I think we're past the two-hour point of the meeting. I just want some clarity.

Ned Kuruc: That's a political game.

Michael Coteau: No, there's no political game. It's a very simple question. What time are we finishing?

The Chair: Please don't interrupt when you don't have the floor, Mr. Kuruc.

Michael Coteau: How is that a political game, please?

The Chair: I will ask the clerk. We did start on time today.

Do we have resources to go later?

We have another 26 minutes. We can continue.

We'll go back to you, Mrs. Thomas. I believe you still have the floor.

Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

The motion that my colleague has moved has to do with faith and religion and these being an integral part of Canadian history, culture, traditions and national identity. It states that "Houses of worship and faith-based organizations make significant contributions to communities through charitable work, social services, and the preservation of cultural heritage". It goes on to say that "Historic religious buildings and faith traditions are important parts of Canada's tangible and intangible heritage and merit preservation for future generations". It's that statement that we simply would like to have reported to the House.

For Canadians, "report that to the House" means that we, as a committee, agree with this statement. Mr. Al Soud has asked, on behalf of the Liberals, that we do not report it to the House, which is akin to emptying the statement of any sort of power. It's a nothing statement then, because it's simply being read here at this committee, as it already has been, but is not moving forward anywhere else for greater consideration. To move it to the House means that it gets to be considered by all members of Parliament, including this government as a whole and, of course, the head of that government, Prime Minister Carney.

Mr. Al Soud asking to amend this motion by removing this part that we report it to the House is actually political gamesmanship of the most disgusting nature, because it's actually saying that he doesn't agree with this statement and that he does not want any accountability. It's saying that Canadians actually don't have these things afforded to them.

● (1305)

Fares Al Soud: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. I believe I made it abundantly clear that we wholeheartedly agree with the nature of the motion, but the first three points are the heart of that motion. Why is there the report to the House?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Al Soud. You have to wait until you have the floor before you can debate that.

This is on the amendment. I started a new list. I'll put each of you on the list.

Mrs. Thomas, you still have the floor, I believe.

Rachael Thomas: I would be curious then as to why my Liberal colleagues would hesitate to affirm a statement of this nature and allow it to be sent to the House for consideration by other members of Parliament, including the Prime Minister. I'm not sure if that's internal guidance that's been given to them as Liberal members, that the Prime Minister somehow doesn't want this to reach his desk. I think that's egregious, if that is in fact the case.

What we do know with great certainty is that the member has moved an amendment to the motion to remove this part that says it should be reported to the House, which is to gut this statement of any power, because it can simply be read here, and it stops here, which has already been accomplished. That's not the goal of the motion. The goal of the motion is that it be further considered by Parliament and that Canadians be truly advocated for in this way.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Earlier, Mrs. Thomas said that Mr. Al Soud was playing political games, but since the meeting began, I have noticed that my colleagues on the opposite side—with the exception of my friend from the Bloc Québécois, of course—have a well-honed strategy for playing political games themselves. In my view, they are failing to recognize the importance of examining the bill before us today, which affects Canadians from east to west, from coast to coast. This study aims to examine the impact of advertising on young people.

I fully understand the importance of moving motions to produce clips for publication on social media, but we are not here to make clips. We are here to examine an important bill that affects our children—

[*English*]

Rachael Thomas: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. I just wanted to highlight that Mr. Ntumba is accusing us of something that hasn't happened. He's actually reading motivation into what we're doing, which is rather inappropriate.

The Chair: Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Hardy.

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is fine for our colleague to share his opinion, but I just want to clarify one thing. Are we currently discussing the amendment?

We are talking about the meeting, but we are in the process of discussing the amendment. We must proceed in the correct order.

The Chair: That is correct. We are discussing Mr. Al Soud's amendment.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: All right.

We have a witness of great importance, which will allow us to finish our meeting on time and go about our business afterwards. I think we should carry on. Mr. Al Soud has raised an important point. That is our view. If my colleagues do not agree, Madam Chair, we should move on to the next stage to make a decision accordingly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ntumba.

Mr. Hardy, you have the floor.

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you very much.

I'd like to return to the amendment.

People say there are political manoeuvres. That is something we often hear here. However, there are matters that need to be discussed even if they are not on the agenda. Things happen every day. We cannot plan to discuss them three months in advance. Things happen on a daily basis, and we need to discuss them when the cameras are rolling and the public can see what is happening here. Today is one of the first opportunities we've had to do so in weeks. So, we are moving motions that we believe are important so that the public knows whether Parliament wishes to work on them or not. Every time we do this, we're told there are more important things to do, even though this is important.

I don't see why it would be problematic to produce clips—as we're often accused of doing—to inform people about a motion which we believe the public wants to hear about and which MPs should be working on. I do not see why this should have become a problem, given that events are unfolding in the news and we need to address them and respond to them.

Next, there is constant talk of political manoeuvring, but while it is said that everyone is, on the whole, in agreement on the motion being moved, there is a refusal to allow it to be reported to the House. You yourself, Madam Chair, say that this is a motion to report to the House on what has happened, yet the proposed amendment seeks to remove the part of the motion stating that it must be reported to the House. Thus, the work is completely nullified. They say it's extremely important, but they'd rather not tell the House what happened here, which is already a problem in itself.

Furthermore, the fact that they are constantly deciding what is important makes me uncomfortable. Why can't we raise issues that are important? Why do we decide that one thing is more important than another? Obviously, the Liberals have the majority, and that's fine. That's how Parliament works. However—

● (1310)

Fares Al Soud: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Al Soud, you have the floor.

Fares Al Soud: I just want to clarify one thing.

The opening words of the motion are “That the committee recognize that”. This is not a matter of referring to—

The Chair: That is a matter for debate; I'm sorry.

Mr. Hardy, you have the floor.

Gabriel Hardy: That's a very good point, and I'll give him that.

Essentially, my colleagues are saying that they agree with the motion as a whole, but that they do not want what is happening here in the House to be reported, even though it is the very job of an MP to represent the people and to speak about their issues so that Parliament is aware of what is going on. I believe the work we do in Parliament is important. So, by proposing to strip away the essence of the motion we are putting forward, they are seeking to undermine that. Furthermore, the first thing the chair said after reading out the motion was that it concerned the tabling of a report in the House. I believe that, quite intuitively, she understood where we were heading, but then her colleagues did not seem keen to go in that direction.

However, what I find truly troubling is the fact that it is up to others to decide the importance of motions. Whenever we propose something, it is never important enough, or it is not important right now. We are told that it might be important at some other time. The questions raised in committee by the opposition, which must be loyal to the people and the nation, are important. Our job is not to applaud the government. Our job is to take current events into account and to raise these issues in committee so that they can be debated.

We're constantly being told that we're engaging in political games and that there are more important things to do. We're told this in the House and we're told this here. Personally, I think that's a problem. If my colleagues want there to be no partisanship, they should stop deciding what is or isn't a priority based on their own opinions.

So, I believe that removing this element, as Mr. Al Soud proposes, is a problem. The Liberal MPs' initial reaction was to say they agreed with all of this. If they agree, we simply need to adopt it and everyone will be happy. What is more, when people watch the clips, they will think it is good that the members of this committee are able to agree because they think everything is fine. So, if there's no political manoeuvring, there's no problem. We just need to go ahead with it. However, people cannot help but engage in political manoeuvring by proposing to remove part of the motion. I think that's where the problem lies.

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, you have the floor.

Martin Champoux: This is quite entertaining. Personally, Mr. Hardy, I can't believe the Liberals are claiming that this debate is just for the sake of making sound bites. It really is attributing bad intentions to Conservative MPs to suggest they're just making sound bites. Frankly, I think that's in bad faith!

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Gabriel Hardy: That annoys me.

Martin Champoux: I understand your indignation.

Madam Chair, I had nothing in particular to add on this subject. I think the Bloc Québécois's position is quite clear. Quebec is a secular state. Canada claims to be a secular state. I do not think these are matters for this committee to discuss, but, having said that, that is why I am not getting further involved in this discussion and am leaving it to my colleagues to debate.

However, I think it would be courteous of us, given that the debate on this subject seems to be dragging on, to release the witnesses if they wish to leave.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desjardins and Mr. Nauta, for your presence here today. I'm sorry that we got a little off track, but we won't need you any longer for questions today. If you would like to leave, you are welcome to. If you would like to stay and be further entertained by this discussion, you are also welcome to do that.

Mr. Lawton.

● (1315)

Andrew Lawton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It would be out of order, but I would love to ask our witness questions about this motion. I'm sure that, given his work at Cardus, he would have a lot of very strong opinions. I invite him to submit those to the committee, if he does have any. I will say that Cardus does tremendous work acknowledging the role that faith and faith institutions play in Canadian society. Back when I worked in media, they were always tremendous at adding context to the issue we have at hand here.

I want to be mindful, as always, about what we're actually debating. This is the amendment specifically on whether to remove "That this be reported to the House." There was a very specific reason that line was in the original motion.

Often, what happens in committees can take place in a bit of an echo chamber. We do things all the time, and ultimately committees are products of the House of Commons. Committees are masters of their own domain in terms of how they run their affairs, but they are creatures of Parliament, which means that the work we do is to serve and support Parliament. We study, debate and amend legislation that comes from Parliament, then goes back to Parliament. We initiate studies that are meant not just to entertain ourselves, I speak for myself, but to support the work that the government does, which is supposed to be for Canadians. There might be some differentiation on whether that is the case.

I think it's lovely that we could all speak, and that Mr. Al Soud agreed with 97% of the motion. That's good, and I think it speaks to why this isn't a political game. Everything in here is something that people on all sides of the House should be able to recognize.

The benefit of it being reported to the House is twofold. Number one, we get to have a very serious debate at a time when it makes sense in the House of Commons, if Parliament so chooses, on matters that require a very open discussion, on the role that faith plays in Canadian society and the role that religious freedom plays, that philanthropy done by faith organization plays.

I bet it would be wonderful to have the opportunity, when there are so many attacks on faith institutions, for every member of the House of Commons who chooses to share, as Mr. Al Soud did, as Mr. Kuruc did and as I did, examples of faith communities in our own ridings that are doing tremendous work and give some of these communities that have been besieged by hate, animosity, attacks online and in some cases, sadly, attacks in person, the opportunity to recognize this important work.

I mentioned a few of the examples. About a block from my office, Indwell, which is a Christian charity that serves and supports everyone, is taking over an old school to turn it into transitional housing for people who need it. They are motivated by their faith beliefs to serve. Last week on Parliament Hill, we had representatives from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, an organization I know members from all sides have had relationships with. They have two growing projects in my riding. Again, it's a Christian organization that is serving people around the world, regardless of faith, ensuring they can eat. They do this because they are motivated by their faith.

There are so many opportunities to look around in our country and see people who have all sorts of negative things to say about people of faith. I've seen it on my own social media page. We post a picture with this religious group at this religious institution, and we have to turn off the comments because of the hostility and bigotry that exists towards people of pretty much all faith groups. Some deal with it more acutely than others, but everyone is dealing with it.

This is not an issue that is so small as to be confined to the heritage committee. This is, further to your point earlier, Madam Chair, an issue that, if you really brought it out, touches on the criminal justice system. It touches on women and gender issues. It touches on issues that actually affect other committees. Rather than having every committee introduce its own motion that deals with their own strain of it, it would be far more suitable for us to have this motion, lead the charge as the heritage committee, report it to the House, so that if and when an opportunity arises in the House where members want to discuss this, that option is there.

This is not something that hijacks the government's agenda. It's not something that trumps legislation before the House. As we've seen, the Liberal government has had no shortage of opportunities to flex its new-found majority to push its agenda forward. I suspect if they ever want to do that again, they can and will, so this is not taking away anything from Parliament. It's adding an option for all members.

I am mindful of the time here. I think we have a good-faith agreement on the essence of the motion. If our issue is just on this line, I'm hoping that's something that we can work towards.

Understanding that question period is approaching, I move to suspend the meeting.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

● (1320)

The Chair: We will continue. I have Mr. Kuruc next on the list.

Ned Kuruc: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to recognize that Mr. Al Soud did acknowledge that, principally, the motion is widely accepted. I was happy to hear that, but he lost me when he used the term “political game”. I found that very interesting because his recommendation to cut out the part where it says “report to the House” becomes a very big political game.

I understand that he's very experienced in committees. We had two points of order that weren't points of order, which he knows weren't, and now we're further down the path of more political games when it shouldn't be that. I hope with his acknowledgement that this is a good motion....

I think, if the faith-based groups in his riding and my riding were asked about this, they would want it to be reported to the House. That's the essence of what this is. We want this reported to the House. This is not a political game by any means. It is the meat and potatoes of the motion. Saying that you want it out is getting into political games.

His colleague talked about clips and that we're here to clip. I know in a Liberal-perfect world, Canadians wouldn't see this, but that's not the case. The case is that, yes, I will maybe report this to my constituents and Canadians.

I do not like and I do not appreciate the authoritarian approach and vibe that I'm feeling from these Liberals. I will clip. I will send these videos, and I will let the Canadian public know what is going on in this committee, because that's exactly what our duty is as parliamentarians. I will not have anyone on that side suppress me with an idea that we should not be sharing videos with Canadians or reporting to Canadians what happens in Parliament. This is Canada. It is the land of the free. We are not a dictatorship. We're not a communist regime, so we will continue doing what we do.

I do not appreciate the tone. We are now getting way off the topic.

Fares Al Soud: My tone was perfectly respectful.

Ned Kuruc: I think the actual part of the motion is wholesome. I think the Liberals understand that. I think everyone at this table can acknowledge that we all support the faith-based groups in all of our communities. We respect them heavily. We just ask that this report be brought to the House.

I hope that Mr. Al Soud can understand that. I hope we can all pass this motion, because that's what it's intended to do, report it to the House.

Thank you.

● (1325)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I had prepared three good questions, but, in the end, I shall not be asking them.

I will conclude by addressing my colleagues here today.

We have fully understood your approach, but we have also set out our own. We shall be happy to revisit this a little later, as it seems clear that we do not see eye to eye, due to your approach, which prevents us from aligning our positions today.

[*English*]

Andrew Lawton: I have a point of order. We're not getting translation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Ntumba, please carry on speaking so that we can check if it's working.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I had prepared three good questions for the witness, who is no longer here.

We understand our colleagues' request. It would be better if we discussed this next time, as time is almost up.

I move that the debate be adjourned.

[*English*]

The Chair: This is a motion to adjourn. That is a dilatory motion.

A voice: Is it to adjourn the debate or adjourn the meeting?

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: It is a motion to adjourn the meeting.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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