

*Private Members' Business*

This means that the advertising ban would apply to authorized lotteries operated by any of the provinces. Madam Speaker, I find it hard to understand why only provincial lotteries are covered by this amendment. Why not allow advertising when lotteries are operated at exhibitions or fairs? What is the difference? Is the basis on which a charitable or religious organization operates this kind of system so different that it should be not allowed to advertise but not the province? Madam Speaker, I do not agree. I think both should be allowed to attract the kind of people that are interested in this kind of activity.

• (1350)

In both cases, Parliament wanted to allow the provinces and these organizations to collect funds that in the end are used for the public good. Provincial lotteries enable the provinces to finance other programs for the benefit of local residents, while giving participants a chance to have some fun.

More than 15 years ago, some people called this a voluntary tax. In any case, authorized lotteries are a way for the provinces to collect funds without having to use other, less attractive means of collecting money. At least the customer gets something in return for his contribution!

Obviously, the purpose of advertising is to make people aware of the existence of these games. However, I think the ultimate objective is desirable, which is to let more people participate in order to collect more money for the government.

Madam Speaker, it is hard to understand why we must go after the provinces that are only trying to use one of the means at their disposal to lighten our fellow citizens' tax load. As far as I know, the provinces' use of lotteries has not yet led to such a storm of protest from the public that Parliament has to intervene by using its power under the Criminal Code.

On the contrary, from what I hear, people are telling us that they are pleased with the present arrangements and do not think that they constitute high-pressure sales. Madam Speaker, this means that the vast majority of our fellow citizens would be deprived of a way to find out about games or new games, which in turn would deprive governments of funds they need to finance and manage social programs in their province.

We must be, and of course we are, aware of the good intentions of those who favour such a bill: there is no doubt that they want to eliminate what they consider to be gambling binges. At least, that is what I hope is the purpose of this amendment.

Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, as you very well know, I really doubt that such an amendment could prevent someone who has a need or a compulsion to gamble and he or she will continue to do so in other ways that may be more underhanded and harmful.

It is well known that people who are compulsive gamblers will do what they must to satisfy their gambling addiction to lotteries and games. The absence of advertising on television and in other media will not stop those who are bitten by that bug from finding out about these games and spending money that others do not think should be spent on them.

Our fellow citizens who are filling a need will certainly not be cured by a ban on advertising for provincial government lotteries. Even a total ban on lotteries would do no good in such cases.

No, what must be done for these compulsive gamblers is to provide programs to help them break their habit similar to programs that exist to help alcoholics overcome their addiction.

To continue my analogy, Madam Speaker, what this bill proposes would be like authorizing the sale and advertising of liquor in retail stores while making it an offence to advertise elsewhere, the idea being that this would help alcoholics shake their habit. We know perfectly well this is wishful thinking.

In addition, when we consider that the provinces stand to lose revenue, just because some people hope to abolish what they see as disastrous, it is clear that any chance of success is practically non-existent, while the provinces would run a very real risk of incurring financial losses.

Madam Speaker, so far gambling, when properly managed as it is today, is economically useful to meet the provinces' real needs, while the provinces can then redistribute part of this money for the benefit of their residents.

Madame Speaker, Bill C-255 is a typical example of a piece of legislation that, presented in good faith, unfortunately misses the target and seems to create more problems than it solves.