

Sports betting motion, Federation Chamber 7 Nov 16

Deputy Speaker, in essence this motion calls on the Government to act on sports betting advertising and, in particular, for the implementation of a ban on gambling advertising during sports broadcasts in children's viewing times on commercial television, as well as on the SBS. It also recognises the increasingly large sums of money being lost on sports betting, and acknowledges that the current regulatory framework is inadequate.

Deputy Speaker this is a very important issue, and one that a great many people have contacted me about over the six years I've been a Member of Parliament and an advocate for gambling reform. It's also an easy issue to fix because the change to legislation required is simple and would no doubt attract significant community support. It's also a good start if the Government genuinely wants to start getting serious about gambling reform.

And get serious it must Deputy Speaker, not least because the latest set of Australian Gambling Statistics show that in the 2014-15 financial year some \$814m was lost by Australians on legal sports betting. Now this might seem like a drop in the ocean when you consider that nearly \$23bn was lost on gambling in general, half of which on poker machines. But this \$814m is in fact a serious issue in its own right when you also consider that it's the fastest growing area of gambling losses, and up by a staggering 30 per cent in just 12 months. Indeed if sports betting keeps growing at this rate, and there's no evidence to suggest that it won't, then gamblers will be losing over a billion dollars in this year alone.

Now Deputy Speaker I'm not suggesting we should ban sports betting or sports betting ads. But what we must do is put in place measures that limit the harm it causes. Heavens, surely it's common sense that if a product is harmful then the Government should step in and regulate it.

One key problem with sports betting is of course the saturation of advertising, and I'm sure anyone who has ever watched a sports broadcast on commercial TV knows what I'm talking about. You just can't escape it, and if the feedback to my office is anything to go by the community is well and truly over it because they just want to be able to watch the footy or the cricket in peace.

Now yes, there are some restrictions in place about when these ads can be broadcast, and the Free TV Commercial Television Code of Practice says that gambling advertising can't be shown during a G-rated program broadcast between 6am and 8:30am, or between 4pm and 7pm. But immediately below that clause is a great big loophole which says that this restriction doesn't apply during sports broadcasts. So in other words, there's nothing whatsoever stopping or limiting betting ads during sports broadcasts themselves, and the sports section of news broadcasts for that matter, when children are watching.

Deputy Speaker, as a father of two young daughters I well understand the community concern about the impact on children. Clearly the restrictions during G-rated periods are designed to protect children from inappropriate advertising, which is why the exemption for sports is so nonsensical because that's the time not only when children are watching, but when they're watching their sporting heroes in particular.

Crikey we know that children are especially susceptible to advertising and hero worship, and that gambling advertising has a real and measurable impact on the children who are subjected to it. For example a Deakin University study just this year showed that three quarters of children surveyed could recall at least one sports betting brand, and one quarter of children could identify four or more. The study also showed that children as young as eight could recall things like bonus bets and cash-back refunds after watching sports broadcasts. No wonder there's a real concern, backed up by evidence, that the proliferation of gambling advertising during sport is normalising gambling for children.

Deputy Speaker, the solution is simple. What the Government should do is amend the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* to explicitly ban gambling advertising during all children's viewing times, including sports broadcasts. This isn't my idea. This is what gambling reform advocates have been calling for for years. It's what the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform recommended in the 43rd Parliament. It simply shouldn't be left up to the commercial TV industry to self-regulate. Moreover not only do we know that self-regulation doesn't work, there's also a fundamental conflict of interest. Remember the gambling industry is the fourth biggest spender on TV advertising in Australia so you can see why the TV stations don't want to give up that revenue.

And while we're at it Deputy Speaker this motion, if passed by the House, would also call on the Minister for Communications to issue a directive under section 11 of the *Special Broadcasting Services Act 1991* to put in place a similar ban on gambling advertising on the SBS. This is necessary because there has obviously been a big increase in the amount of gambling advertising on the SBS, including during times when children are watching, and SBS isn't covered by the Commercial TV Code of Practice.

Deputy Speaker one of my first acts after the election in July was to stand with Senator Xenophon, and the Reverend Tim Costello from the Alliance for Gambling Reform, to put gambling reform back on the agenda in the 45th Parliament. Doing so was regrettably necessary because so far there's been so little interest in serious gambling reform from both the Labor and Liberal parties. Yes we did achieve some reform in the 43rd Parliament, despite Prime Minister Julia Gillard reneging on her deal with me for meaningful poker machine reform. But even the modest reform we did achieve was overturned by the Coalition Government after the 2013 election with, I might add, the support of the Labor Party in the Senate. Yes, we did see some enduring progress from the Gillard Government on gambling advertising with the banning of live odds while players are on the field, but it's still nowhere near what's required.

Deputy Speaker there's so much that needs to be done at both a state and federal level. Take poker machine reform, for example, where there's still a pressing need for the Federal Government to put in place effective harm minimisation measures. This is why I'll keep calling for \$1 maximum bets and mandatory pre-commitment, exactly as the Productivity Commission recommended in 2010.

At least in my home state of Tasmania we have the opportunity to finally get poker machines out of pubs and clubs because the current monopoly license period is coming to an end in 2023. Indeed four out of five Tasmanians either want fewer pokies in pubs and clubs or want them gone completely. No wonder when I recently raised concerns about a proposal for poker machines at a new venue in Glenorchy the response was overwhelming, with the community making over 180 submissions to the regulator.

Of course Speaker all of this comes down to money. The major parties simply refuse to give up the enormous donations they get from the gambling industry, the states and territories

don't want to give up the taxation revenue they get from the gambling addicts, and the commercial TV stations don't want to give up the revenue from the gambling advertisers.

Deputy Speaker, whenever we talk about gambling addiction it's easy to use facts and figures and to look at how much money is lost every year. But let's not forget that a huge amount of this money is lost by gambling addicts. And let's also not forget that every one of these gambling addicts, whether they're addicted to the poker machines or to online or sports betting, is a human being. They are a mother or father, a son or daughter, a brother or sister, a husband or wife, a friend or a work colleague.

Thankfully there are men and women of good heart in the Labor and Liberal parties who would like to see gambling reform. Indeed the Prime Minister himself is on the record, before he became Prime Minister of course, as being concerned about the harm caused by problem gambling. Moreover there's no doubt that the community overwhelmingly wants to see gambling reform, and in particular restrictions on gambling advertising.

Regrettably though, when Senator Xenophon put this same motion to a vote in the Senate recently it was voted down by both the Liberal and Labor parties. Despite this I still hold out hope that Members in this place, if only because we're directly accountable to our local communities and popularly elected, can bring themselves to see the harm caused by gambling in their communities and actually do something about. How refreshing would that be? Politicians putting the public interest ahead of political self-interest. We'll see.

In closing Deputy Speaker I thank the Member for Mayo for her support of the motion and for seconding it today.