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Chair

Mr. Mike Wallace

Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to get started five seconds early. I'm using BlackBerry time, so there it is, 3:30.

Thank you for joining us today at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, meeting number 67, pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, November 28, on Bill S-209, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (prize fights).

We're fortunate enough to have the sponsor with us, from the Senate, the Honourable Bob Runciman, senator.

Massimo Pacetti, the MP for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, has just arrived.

While they're getting comfortable, I will just let you know that late yesterday afternoon the clerk got a call—and he called me—from the British Columbia government, their department of sport or whatever it is, wanting to be a witness on this bill. My thought was that I would bring it to committee to say that instead of doing clause-by-clause today, the Monday we come back we'll put the first hour aside for any further witnesses because we only have one, other than the movers of the bill. We have only one witness today and I think it's appropriate that if there are others who would like to come and see us on this private member's bill that they do so. I'm putting that out for discussion for the group, and then we'll go right to the piece.

Monsieur Goguen.

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): We're not pressed on this bill. I don't see any reason not to have a witness who wants to come forth.

Also, there was some opposition from the Canadian Medical Association. I wonder if it wouldn't be worthwhile seeing an opposing point of view coming forth from a potential witness from that group. We do have time. It would be two witnesses, and clause-by-clause study after, if we see fit.

The Chair: Any other comments?

Madame Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): As I said previously, I have no problem with that. I think it's nice that we have a full view of things, and as I said to the chair, I really appreciate that because his comment was that in the wake of my comments when I presented my amendment at the last committee meeting, sometimes we're pretty rushed for time. I appreciate that we'll take our time on this bill, which is not the most contentious bill, so I do hope we have the

same attitude for bills that are a bit more crunchy, legally. I appreciate that because I think it makes us do a job a bit more thoroughly. We'll just remember for the next few bills that it's the proper attitude to have, when we have serious witnesses who want to appear in front of us, that we don't just short-circuit their appearance.

The Chair: Thank you. So it sounds like a reasonable approach.

Yes.

Mr. Robert Goguen: On Wednesday would we do the planning meeting?

The Chair: Yes. Here's what we could do. On Monday we could have witnesses on this. I've talked to Madame Boivin. It's one clause and we could actually still do clause-by-clause, or the clause, on Monday. On Wednesday we will have a planning meeting for the next little while. We are here for nine weeks, with a one-week break, so we'll see what we can plan within that time and we'll just do a subcommittee on the agenda. If that is satisfactory to everyone, that's how we will proceed the first week we're back. Is that okay?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: That sounds good.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Sorry for the delay, Senator, and Mr. Pacetti.

The floor is yours. I know we have you for only half an hour. Senator Runciman is chair of another meeting that starts shortly after four, so he has to leave at four, for sure.

The floor is yours, gentlemen.

Senator Bob Runciman (Ontario (Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes), CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On your comments earlier about asking the Canadian Medical Association, if they do confirm, you may want to consider asking an expert witness from the medical community on the other side of the issue as well. We had a fellow by the name of Dr. Sam Gutman, who is an experienced ringside doctor from Vancouver. He's been involved in monitoring these kinds of activities, including boxing, for many years. So to sort of counter the perspective you're going to hear from the Canadian Medical Association, it might be worthwhile asking him if he'd be prepared to attend.

The Chair: We'll follow up on that name, then. Thank you.

Senator Bob Runciman: Thank you to the committee for inviting me to speak about Bill S-209. This bill updates the definition of "prize fighting" in section 83 of the Criminal Code, a definition that hasn't been changed in nearly 80 years. When the current offence of prize fighting became part of the code, the only exception allowed was for a boxing match held under the jurisdiction of a provincial athletic board.

As we all know, a lot has changed since then, and that's why the bill is necessary. Other combative sports have increased in popularity in the intervening decades, particularly at the amateur level.

Mixed martial arts is the fastest growing professional sport in North America, yet technically all these sports, including some Olympic events, are illegal. Provinces are forced to skirt the law when they allow these competitions to go ahead. I describe it as creative interpretations of the Criminal Code.

Bill S-209 updates the definition of a "prize fight" to include an encounter with fists, hands, or feet, and expands the list of exemptions to the offence to include amateur combative sports that are on the program of the International Olympic Committee or the program of the International Paralympic Committee, other amateur sports as designated or approved by the province, and boxing contests and mixed martial arts contests held under the authority of a provincial athletic board, commission, or a similar body.

In all exemptions, provincial permission is required and the contests are supervised by provincial or municipal regulators. Most of the provisions of this bill are identical to those in former Bill C-31, from the second session of the 40th Parliament, provisions that were the result of extensive consultation dating back more than a decade among the federal government, the provinces, and national sports organizations. The only change from Bill C-31 is the addition of the words "or mixed martial arts contest" in paragraph 1(2)(d).

Regulators at both the provincial and municipal levels support this bill. Ken Hayashi, who is the long-time athletics commissioner of Ontario, and Pat Reid, the executive director of the Edmonton Combative Sports Commission, both testified at the Senate committee about the need to update the Criminal Code. These are people, I can tell you from my experience as consumer minister in Ontario, who take their job very seriously, who want to ensure all the rules are complied with, and that athletes' health and safety are protected.

Their job is more difficult when the law they enforce no longer reflects reality. I know that for members of Parliament the top-of-mind concern will be safety of the athletes. Regulators require physicians to be at ringside during combative sport competitions,

and competitors are subject to extensive pre- and post-fight medical tests and examinations, examinations that are conducted and supervised independently, unlike other sports.

The Edmonton Combative Sports Commission has compiled 10 years of evidence comparing injuries in mixed martial arts and boxing, that demonstrate that boxing is in fact more dangerous than mixed martial arts. They examined 556 boxing matches and found 9.5% of the fighters suffered concussions. They looked at 1,119 mixed martial arts bouts, and they found that the concussion rate was at 4.9%, just over half of that of boxing.

Regulators and competitors say the lower incidence of brain injuries in mixed martial arts is due to the nature of the combat and the various ways a fight can end, including the tap-out, which is a form of voluntary submission. Thirty per cent of UFC bouts end with a tap-out.

Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to sit here and tell you and other members of the committee that there are not significant risks of injuries in combative sports. There are. The question is, how do we best mitigate that risk?

In my view, proper regulation and supervision is crucial. Regulators want a more secure legal framework in which to operate. Bill S-209 is part of that process. By updating the Criminal Code to reflect modern reality, we are giving regulators one of the tools they need to keep athletes safe.

• (1535)

Again, I thank the committee for inviting me and look forward to any questions you might have.

The Chair: Thank you, Senator.

Mr. Pacetti, have you anything you'd like to add to that?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): I have a couple of notes.

I just want to thank the committee for having me. As colleagues I think it's a great honour to be in front of committee. I've done this a few times and it is a bit intimidating, but I understand that from your point of view you don't want to hear me for too long.

I'm just going to go through a couple of points. I already spoke in the House on this. I have a couple of points that I am going to make in French, so not to repeat what the senator just said.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

I would just like to highlight a few points.

The goal of this bill is to legalize certain combative sports that are currently illegal but tolerated. Bill S-209 will enhance our ability to monitor combative sports in order to protect participants by reducing their risk of injury.

Some will ask why we should even allow such sports. With proper oversight, combative sports, like mixed martial arts, become much less dangerous for participants than other very common sports like hockey or boxing. Underground fights increase the risk of injury and generate unreported earnings. Not only are mixed martial arts competitions such as the UFC's extremely popular in Canada, but they also represent considerable income for our economy.

The purpose of this bill is to update the Criminal Code. Amending the Criminal Code is an important step towards eliminating any ambiguity regarding the legality of combative sports in Canada. And the popularity of those sports is growing. The Criminal Code currently defines a prize fight as an encounter or fight with fists or hands between two persons. The Criminal Code provisions on prize fights haven't been amended since 1934. Back then, combative sports were primarily limited to boxing and wrestling. The Criminal Code needs to include other combative sports such as karate and tae kwon do.

This bill will help prevent illegal underground fighting. Updating the Criminal Code will legalize combative sports such as mixed martial arts and tae kwon do, while standardizing the regulations. Because the Criminal Code doesn't specifically allow certain combative sports, some Canadians organize underground fights, putting participants at significant risk. This bill will give provinces the extra tools they need to better regulate the practice of combative sports.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pacetti.

We'll go to questions now, and a reminder that we have these two fine gentlemen with us until four o'clock, and then Mr. Wright will join us from four o'clock until five o'clock.

Our first questioner is Monsieur Dubé from the New Democratic Party.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, senator and Mr. Pacetti, for being here today.

We're talking about bringing the provincial and municipal approaches in line with one another. Since this bill has been on the table, however, people have frequently been asking why. They think these sports are already permitted because a number of provinces and municipalities allow them to take place.

Could you speak to that in more detail? I think that's a key issue. There is really a desire to harmonize what a number of provinces and municipalities clearly want. I believe it may even be the majority of provinces.

[*English*]

Senator Bob Runciman: I think what has happened—and I can only really speak to Ontario—is that Quebec led the way with respect to having these kinds of events on a large scale. I know that there was pressure on the Ontario government for a number of years with respect to allowing them to occur. Just before the last provincial

election, the government of the day gave the Athletics Commissioner direction to authorize an event in Toronto. You'll hear later from a witness that it sold out 50,000 seats in no time at all, which is a recognition of the popularity of the sport. The Athletics Commissioner in Ontario is someone who I know very well. I was the consumer minister in Ontario responsible for the athletics commission during my time. It still falls under that ministry. Mr. Hayashi was there then and was a very rigid taskmaster.

I've been a big boxing fan all of my life, really. He and I used to have lengthy conversations about his tough hand with respect to making sure that everything was as safe as it could possibly be. He clearly was concerned about the direction he got from the government, because his reading of the law is that it wasn't allowed under the Criminal Code: no reference to feet. I think he felt they were on thin ice. Certainly, a lot of other jurisdictions across Canada who haven't entered into allowing these events to occur on a large scale in the event have been concerned about the law as it's currently written. Others simply feel that they're going to go ahead and do what I call creative interpretations.

I think that's what happened in Quebec, and I certainly think it's what has happened in Ontario, where they have classified these events as boxing matches. No one has complained. No one has filed a formal complaint with the authorities, but at the same time, every jurisdiction across Canada that wants to see their associations and organizations participate in these kinds of activities want the air cleared. They want the law to be very clear that they're on the right side of it.

● (1545)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I'll just allow myself to interrupt you there because I don't have much time left.

Thanks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pacetti, you mentioned underground fights. That's what I'd like to ask you about. It is quite clear that people practised these sports illegally at one point. Then, provinces and municipalities decided to step in and permit them.

You may or may not agree with me, but I think we're clarifying the legislation. We're adding clarity, if you will, by establishing a legal framework that protects the safety of athletes. Is that right?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: That's correct. Thank you for your question, Mr. Dubé.

As I said at the beginning of my presentation, the Ultimate Fighting Championship, or UFC, fights are currently illegal. They are tolerated, but illegal. I'm no lawyer, but even with the bill's passage, I don't think there will be a focus on requiring provincial and municipal governments to sanction these events.

With this bill, we aren't saying that all prize fights will be legal anywhere in the country. Unless I'm mistaken, I don't think they're legal in British Columbia. Permission has to be sought, and only some municipalities allow fighting of that nature.

Right now, the focus is on the fact that the practice is tolerated without the appropriate oversight. There is an attempt to circumvent the law when there shouldn't be. And with the bill, we're focusing more energy on curbing illegal underground fighting, because it is more dangerous for participants. That is why we should pass the bill. That is what I want to see happen.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Pacetti.

Thank you, Monsieur Dubé.

From the Conservative Party, we have Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator Runciman, I have an e-mail from a gentleman who's in my riding from the Ontario Grappling Alliance. Of course, I wasn't even aware there was an Ontario Grappling Alliance until I received the e-mail, but I'm going to ask you and Mr. Pacetti as well. He seems to believe or has received some advice that because of the changes in this legislation, grappling will now fall into a non-legal status.

My review of the legislation indicates that if it was legal before, it's still going to be legal; if it was illegal before, then it may or may not still be illegal, but it was illegal to begin with. I don't see how this legislation would affect grappling and the Ontario Grappling Alliance.

Senator Bob Runciman: No, I don't know either. That issue, not specifically with grappling, came up during the hearings. There is no known sport that does not use fists, hands, or feet. There was talk about naming specific sports. That could create problems, if new hybrid sports come on the scene in the coming years.

I think his fears can be allayed and that he will be safe under this change in the legislation.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Great.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: As a non-lawyer, my opinion is that we're just adding something; we're not deleting. The bill is just adding "feet" to the Criminal Code, so I don't see what the issue would be.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Great.

Mr. Runciman, as you know, the Canadian Medical Association is opposed to mixed martial arts. In one of her interviews, CMA president Dr. Reid said that her association doesn't endorse a sport that uses fighting techniques such as striking and kicking, but that they do encourage more traditional martial arts.

What is your answer to the Canadian Medical Association to convince them that they're wrong in opposing mixed martial arts?

• (1550)

Senator Bob Runciman: I'm not sure that we'll be able to convince them.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: You can try.

Senator Bob Runciman: We had testimony at the committee to deal with that argument. I referenced some of it, in terms of the studies that have been done in Edmonton with respect to concussions and the significant differences between boxing and mixed martial

arts. As well, we had the ringside doctor from Vancouver whom I referenced earlier indicating that he is seeing many more concussions from snowboarding than he is seeing from even boxing. We're hearing all the time about concussions in hockey, in football, in professional football and even amateur sports as well.

When you look at the record of mixed martial arts, and Mr. Wright will be able to speak to this in more detail, it is a pretty good record of safety. From the way they monitor their athletes before and after the fight, by independent medical personnel, I think they have gone the extra mile, if you will, to ensure that the athletes are as safe as they possibly could be in a sport in which there is always going to be some risk of injuries occurring. I think they are doing exceedingly well in protecting the folks who go into the ring.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Great.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: I can make a couple of comments.

I didn't speak to the Canadian Medical Association. I don't think we as parliamentarians have to be perceived as promoting combat sports. This is an update to the Criminal Code, in which something was lacking. It's out of respect for combat sports that we update the Criminal Code.

But all the statistics I've seen—somebody e-mailed me a Hopkins study—show that there are not more head concussions related to combat sports than there are to other sports such as hockey and boxing.

Is this piece of legislation going to make it safer or worse? I don't believe so; I think it's just going to make it more legit for companies like UFC and other recognized sporting companies, which are going to put more energy into making it safer, rather than put their energy into ensuring that their *i*'s are dotted and their *l*'s are crossed, because the event is going to be legal instead of illegal.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen, and thank you for your questions.

Our next questioner is Mr. Regan from the Liberal Party.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Senator, colleague, thank you both for being here today.

I come from Halifax, which is known as a boxing city. Boxing has been very popular in Halifax for many years.

One of the things that struck me as you were talking, Senator, was this question of the tap-out, and how it might differ from throwing in the towel. I recognize that throwing in the towel is what the boxers' managers would normally do, rather than the boxers themselves, and that may be the main distinction.

Do you know whether there is any evidence to suggest that there are fewer blows to the head in mixed martial arts than in boxing, and would that account for the statistics you refer to from Edmonton?

Senator Bob Runciman: That's certainly something you can pursue with the next witness. My recollection of the testimony is that there are fewer blows to the head. If you look at the length of the bouts, I'm not sure; some of them are three rounds, some six rounds

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: There are three rounds of five minutes.

Senator Bob Runciman: —and if you look at boxing, in which there are 10 rounds or 12 rounds now, and there used to be 15, and look at the blows to the head, in that boxing format the opportunities for more strikes to the head are significantly more frequent than in mixed martial arts. I can't recall the specifics, but that was roughly the testimony we heard at the committee.

Hon. Geoff Regan: In some ways I'm of two minds on this issue, on both. In some respects I don't like the idea of anybody hitting anybody. On the other hand, I've been a boxing fan and I admire the skills of great boxers such as Sugar Ray Leonard, Muhammad Ali, and we've had many great boxers from Nova Scotia.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes, there's Trevor Berbick, that's right, and many others. I had better mention the Canadians, such as George Chuvalo, as you say.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Geoff Regan: Let me ask my colleague, Massimo Pacetti, this question. Would you like to talk about why you think the current law is inadequate?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: As I said in my speech, it's just to bring it up to date. The focus is on trying to define it in a certain way so that it corresponds to the Criminal Code. I think it's inappropriate and that we should bring it up to date.

As a sports buff, I think it's unfortunate that these UFC combats cannot be legitimate. It's what the consumer wants. Why not give them what they want?

I think it's of ultimate importance that the participants be competing in a 100% secure environment. For me, that's what is important. We don't necessarily as parliamentarians say that we support or do not support it, but as a sports buff I have gotten to know some of the competitors, and I have actually been watching some of these UFC events. They train their athletes, and I don't know whether anybody in this room could ever attain their level of fitness.

They are trained for this. It's not something whereby you would just walk down the street and say, "Okay, let's get into a ring and fight for three rounds of three minutes and beat the crap out of each other."

These are trained athletes, and I have no problem supporting this bill. That's why I sponsored it.

• (1555)

Hon. Geoff Regan: What are the benefits you see from the bill in areas such as tourism?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Each province is going to have to decide whether they want to promote these types of events. We're talking about big events.

Not every single event out there is going to be a UFC event with Georges St. Pierre, drawing, if it be in Toronto, 50,000 people, or in Montreal, where we've just had twenty-odd thousand people. I think it's just a way for schools to promote another sport so that the kids can stay off the street, and within proper surroundings promote that sport.

I have a boxing club that started in one of the very low-privileged areas of Montreal. It has been a success. Now they are spinning it off, and they are doing mixed martial arts and all types of contact sports, because that's what kids want. They want to be physical. We're talking about kids in the age range of teens of 14 or 15 all the way to 21 or 22 years of age.

I think it's just one more area.... I hate to use the expression, but it's another tool in the tool box for sports to be viewed in a positive light and not a negative light.

Senator Bob Runciman: There was an economic analysis done—I didn't bring it with me—with respect to the economic impact and spinoffs for hotel rooms, restaurants, and so on in Toronto. It was quite significant for just that one event.

As Mr. Pacetti said, these are huge. We're looking at championship fights and those sorts of things. They can have a very significant and positive impact on the local economy.

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen. Thank you for coming, Senator Runciman and Mr. Pacetti.

That afforded a question to each party, and we're at 3:58, so I'll suspend for a couple of minutes while our next guest comes to the table. We'll have him for an hour.

Thank you very much. We'll suspend.

• (1555)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1600)

The Chair: Our next witness is from Zuffa Canada Productions, Mr. Tom Wright. He is the director of UFC operations for Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Welcome back to Canada, then, I guess. The floor is yours, sir. You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Tom Wright (Director of UFC Operations for Canada, Australia and New Zealand, Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), Zuffa Canada Productions, LLC): Mr. Chair, Madam Vice-Chair, and members of the committee, I want to first and foremost thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you this morning.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of the UFC, our athletes and mixed martial arts fans across Canada, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about our sport.

[*English*]

I'd also like to thank Senator Runciman for his stewardship in bringing Bill S-209 into the Senate, and the MP from Montreal, Massimo Pacetti, for introducing the bill in the House of Commons.

As both Senator Runciman and Mr. Pacetti mentioned, several people had the opportunity to speak to the committee in the Senate, which was addressing this issue, and there have been other opportunities for people to discuss the importance of bringing clarity to the Criminal Code and changing some of the ambiguity that currently exists within it.

I think it's important for people in this committee to understand that while my business card reads "Zuffa", and it reads that I manage the UFC here in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, I'm actually here today representing the sport of mixed martial arts. So I have a MMA hat on and I'm trying to represent our sport, which in many ways is a very young sport compared with the other sports that we typically spend a lot of time talking about, be it boxing, which goes back into the 1800s, or hockey, football, basketball, and baseball, the traditional team sports, which are well into their second century. The sport of mixed martial arts is actually not even a teenager, when one considers its roots.

While there are thousands of professional mixed martial artists competing in Canada and many more tens of thousands around the world, there are also many aspiring athletes who want to be able to compete and to demonstrate their skills and their athleticism as mixed martial artists.

Unfortunately, the situation we have at the moment is that there's a cloud of uncertainty and there is ambiguity in the way the sport is considered municipally and provincially in many jurisdictions across the country.

The initiative to have subsection 83(2) of the Criminal Code changed is intended to bring in a more consistent regulatory environment in order to bring continuity to our sport and to eliminate the ambiguity that certainly is present in the language that was written back in the 1930s.

It's important because, as Senator Runciman mentioned, the sport of mixed martial arts is the fastest growing sport in the world, and Canada has a very unique position in this sport. It's a position of leadership, not only from the sport's perspective, but also from the regulatory perspective.

When I speak about how Canada is regarded, it's interesting that we—I'm speaking now about the UFC, the company I work with—are the largest league in the world. If you think of the sport as hockey and the league as the NHL, or the sport as football and the league as the CFL, this sport is mixed martial arts, and the number one league in the world is the UFC.

This year alone we will be holding approximately 33 events around the world, and three of them will be held in Canada. Of those 33 events, 13 will be what we call pay per view—big, large, global events—and Canada will be hosting three of them. A week and a half ago we were in Montreal for UFC 158. We will be going to Winnipeg, Manitoba for the first time for UFC 161 in June, and we will be back in Toronto for UFC 165 in September.

That's three out of 13 global events, and these events are opportunities not only for our sport to be showcased but our athletes to be showcased around the world.

We compete with other cities not only here in Canada but around the world to host these events. In the past 12 or 14 months we've held events in Tokyo, Japan; Sydney, Australia; Macau; London; Rio de Janeiro; and of course we've held them across Canada in the cities I've mentioned, but also in Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and Chicago—major metropolitan areas.

It's an interesting tribute to our sport that Canada on a per capita basis is the largest consumer of mixed martial arts in the world, and we are home to some of the most famous athletes. Georges St-Pierre—we've all heard of his name—represents not only the province of Quebec but also the country of Canada so very well. He is an eight-time defending world welterweight champion. He was one of the individuals who ended up filling the Bell Centre last Saturday for UFC 158 in Montreal. Not only was Georges St-Pierre on that card, but there were a total of eight Canadians.

● (1605)

Our athletes come from coast to coast to coast. From Nova Scotia, T. J. Grant is one of our top 10 ranked lightweights, and he is from Cole Harbour. We could think of other athletes from Cole Harbour. I guess T. J. Grant would be number two from Cole Harbour, given that he's not quite Sidney Crosby yet. There are others from across the country.

It's important that not only have we been a leader with regard to our sport globally from a business point of view and from an acceptance point of view, but also from a regulatory point of view. At the heart of this initiative to bring clarity to the Criminal Code and eliminate the ambiguity is the goal of providing a consistent framework for regulation across the country and the necessary safety and health protection environment for all of our athletes to compete in.

I bring this up in particular because I recall a question being asked about how this impacts provinces versus municipalities. One thing that is really important to remember—and again I'll have my mixed martial arts hat on, not my UFC hat—is that the importance of having consistent regulation is to make sure that every single organization, be it a large professional organization that has offices around the world, like the UFC, or a local professional mixed martial organization that may only conduct its business in Alberta, British Columbia or Nova Scotia, be held to a specific rigour and a specific standard when it comes to the health and safety of the sport.

In the absence of regulation, in the absence of this continuity, you run into the potential issue that other organizations will not be held to that standard, and it is so very important. While the UFC may be the largest organization in the world, and while I personally would love to see us go to the territory of Yukon and take an event there, the chances are that we will not be able to take an event to the Yukon. That doesn't mean other professional mixed martial arts organizations should not be provided with that opportunity, and if they are, that organization or any other organization needs to be held to a specific and a strong, certain rigour in the regulatory standards that are in place, again to protect the health and safety of the athletes.

Senator Runciman spoke to the importance of pre- and post-fight medical testing. We also do pre- and post-fight drug testing. You want to make sure that there is a level playing field for these athletes. You want to make sure that weight classes are respected. You want to make sure that the officials are properly trained. You want to make sure that the sport is regulated, as other sports around the world and around our country are properly regulated.

In the absence of the clarity that we're seeking and that Bill S-209 provides, you run into the risk that some provinces won't sanction it and that some provinces may adopt a different perspective. It's the consistency that's so very important to allowing a sport such as ours to continue to grow and allow our country to continue to have the leadership position that it has.

I can tell you that now that I and our company and my team in Toronto are responsible for the UFC's operations in Australia and New Zealand, when I go into those countries, not only do I represent our sport, but they are anxious to understand what the regulatory environment is like in Canada.

Again, we provide a level of leadership when it comes to taking our sport forward and making sure it is provided with the foundation and the consistent regulatory environment to allow the sport to continue to grow safely, in a healthy manner, and in such a way as to make sure that the athletes' health and safety is protected at all times.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'm happy to take any and all questions.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wright, for that opening statement.

Our first questioner is Madame Boivin from the New Democratic Party.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Wright, for being with us today.

I gather that holding these events has always been a bit risky. Everyone was aware of the consequences, criminally speaking. I imagine, however, that there was some kind of informal arrangement whereby criminal action wasn't taken.

Every event you organized was a violation of section 83 of the Criminal Code, which would have made me quite nervous.

How have you managed to deal with all that?

[English]

Mr. Tom Wright: Thank you for your question, Madam Vice-Chair.

I think it's an interesting situation. Senator Runciman talked in terms of turning the other cheek. I think that jurisdictions had to basically, to use another euphemism, turn a blind eye to it. There never was a situation that I'm aware of in which the activity of a provincial athletic commission was challenged legally. I don't believe there was ever a situation in which it was challenged municipally. I think the situation is, as was recognized in some of the commentary by Mr. Pacetti and Mr. Runciman, that in the end these are two athletes—highly trained, highly skilled—who are entering

into a competition of their own free will and doing so with full knowledge of their situation.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: But at the same time, it shows that the disposition was absolutely useless. That's the point I'm getting at. That's my conclusion. I'm sure you agree with it.

Maybe it is because I got zero in biology when I was a kid, but one point I note is that we're adding to the definition in section 83 at the same time as we're introducing different organizations such as, just to name them correctly....

[Translation]

It says this:

a contest between amateur athletes in a combative sport with fists, hands or feet held in a province if the sport is on the programme of the International Olympic Committee or the International Paralympic Committee and, in the case where the province's lieutenant governor in council or any other person or body specified by him or her requires it, the contest is held with their permission....

That's a bit better.

But we're including only feet. When I watched a UFC fight, it seemed that elbows and knees came into play. I wonder whether the amendment under Bill S-209 would be sufficient to apply to the UFC.

Does the statement “fists, hands or feet” include elbows? Does “feet” include knees? I'm not sure whether you know what I mean, but I don't know whether the terminology is specific enough to achieve the intended result.

[English]

Mr. Tom Wright: Thank you again for that question.

We chatted about that when we were moving forward and thinking about exactly how to put the nomenclature in place. We came to the conclusion that you'd actually have to bring out a book of anatomy that included every single body part that could potentially be used in a competition, because sometimes it's your shoulder, sometimes it's your thigh, sometimes it could be your calf. At some point, you have to bring a level of understanding to what the fundamentals are in a mixed martial arts competition. It was felt to be representative of enough of the sport to add just the feet.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: So you're satisfied?

Mr. Tom Wright: Yes, I'm completely satisfied.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Excellent.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame.

Our next questioner is Mr. Albas from the Conservative Party.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Wright, for joining us here today. I'm a big fan of Senator Runciman. He was the sponsor of my bill for the importation of intoxicating liquors amendment that changed some of the archaic laws set during prohibition. I see that Senator Runciman again is trying to bring clarity to some old rules to allow more economic activity and more clarity.

Mr. Chair, we heard the Minister of Justice a few weeks ago point out that in cases such as the Citizen's Arrest and Self-defence Act, it's important that we clarify so that citizens know clearly what their rights are. In this case, I think a good argument can be made that there isn't sufficient clarity. When I was a municipal councillor, I said that if bylaws are not clear, then everyone is less able to act within their rights. So I think that adding the clarity that is before us is good.

Now, this particular prize fight... I find that to be a very interesting term. It seems to be a bit dated as well. I think it dates back to 1903.

Obviously it's our job as legislators to constantly keep reviewing some of these things, and there are effects upon amateur sport. In my area there are many judo competitions, taekwondo competitions, karate competitions. I guess, given the wording that is in the code without this change, that a lot of these very good activities could be held to criminal sanctions.

Is that not correct, Mr. Wright?

•(1615)

Mr. Tom Wright: It's possible. Again, I'm not a lawyer, but the ambiguity always brings up the potential that somebody might be able to find something in the language to jeopardize those sports that you're referring to, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Bill S-209 will extend the exemption for amateur prize fights in a number of ways.

First, it will allow any amateur combative sport event in a sport that is on the Olympic or Paralympics program. If a province chooses, it can require that the Olympic or Paralympic combative sport contest obtain a licence from that particular province.

Second, the bill will make an exception to the prize fight offence for any amateur sport contest that is placed on a list of designated amateur combative sports by the province, and the province can choose to require that a licence is necessary for a designated amateur combative sport contest.

Third, it will make an exception for any other amateur combative sport contest for which a province has chosen to grant a licence.

Mr. Wright, in your view, Bill S-209 will extend the exemption for amateur prize fights in a way that respects this provincial decision-making.

Mr. Tom Wright: Yes, absolutely, there's no question. Over the last two to three months, I'd say, I've specifically... A week ago, I was in the province of Saskatchewan, where they recognize that it's their position to determine whether or not they want to proceed to sanction the sport and regulate the sport on a provincial basis. They're going through the debate internally as to whether they perhaps want to do it on a municipal basis.

As you probably know, in British Columbia right now the sport is sanctioned, and only on a municipal basis, but Bill 50 was passed in Victoria last June, which allowed for the establishment of an athletic commissioner. That work is now going through the bureaucratic process. They will most likely be taking to their cabinet in the coming months the decision to move it to being regulated on a

provincial basis. My perception or understanding is that it will remain a completely provincial and/or municipal decision.

Mr. Dan Albas: In regard to my experience, the South Okanagan Events Centre is in my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla. It's in Penticton, British Columbia, and they have held such events. Again, in speaking to the members of the athletic commission, they've reported that it's all about setting up the systems to make sure it's properly regulated and that safety is always paramount, whether we're talking about the safety of the participants or the event itself and the logistics to go along with that. Certainly, there have been good reports of economic activity because of that.

I'd like to finish now, Mr. Chair. How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Dan Albas: I've been watching the UFC since it first debuted. I've been training in martial arts since I was nine. I have to say that since your company itself acquired the property and has carried on with the addition of weight classes and the addition of criteria of what is and isn't allowed—their original marketing was that anything goes—a lot of good things have happened.

I would encourage you to look at judo, as well as taekwondo, where there are international ranking systems for the Olympics and also their corresponding provincial and national bodies. I think that they train and educate one another and make sure their coaches are holding themselves to a very high standard. I would encourage your organization to support those kinds of efforts because, again, it is the fastest growing spectator sport in Canada.

I also imagine, Mr. Chair, that there are going to be elements where people are participating more and more, and I do know there's not always the same level of training and certification specific to the sport of mixed martial arts.

•(1620)

The Chair: Was that a question or just a comment?

Mr. Dan Albas: It's just a general comment, Mr. Chair.

I just want to remark again on how much I enjoy your chairship.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Tom Wright: Mr. Chair, is it possible for me to make one quick comment on what Mr. Albas said?

The Chair: You can have one quick response.

Mr. Tom Wright: Interestingly enough, over the last 12 to 18 months, I'd say, an organization has been founded in Sweden that is called the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, the IMMAF, and the UFC is absolutely supporting the IMMAF. I'm on a conference call with them every two weeks.

Their eventual goal is to gain acceptance through SportAccord. In order to gain acceptance through SportAccord, you need to have 40 global members. Right now, the IMMAF has 19, with applications from another 40 to 45 countries from around the world. All of those applications are being properly vetted, the notion being that you want to have that kind of international amateur body to provide the kind of guidance and oversight that are necessary for a sport to continue to grow, to continue to grow in a credible manner, and to eventually have an opportunity to make an application to become an Olympic sport.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wright, and thank you, Mr. Albas.

Our next questioner is Monsieur Dubé from the New Democratic Party.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

First of all, thanks for taking the time to be here, Mr. Wright.

We have a bill that my predecessor on the sports file, Glenn Thibeault, actually presented in terms of trying to find a way to get rid of this pandemic—I think at this point we can call it that—of concussions. That was one of the big issues for me when I started working on this particular issue with regard to MMA.

I remember even having a conversation with my colleague, Ryan Leef, and I started looking at studies and hearing from doctors and others who actually said that you have more chance of getting a head injury from horseback riding than by engaging in MMA, as absurd as that may sound.

That said, you come from a large company that has the capacity to properly regulate. I think we had a conversation once where you talked about the importance of this bill for smaller leagues as well, for folks who don't necessarily have the resources, about what having a clear legal framework does for the minor leagues, I guess you could call them, where there are aspiring athletes, for example, about making sure that's clear.

Would you care to comment on that?

Mr. Tom Wright: I would, thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Absolutely, having a consistent regulatory environment not only provides for that legal clarity, but ensures that the minimum regulatory standards of rigour are kept. I hate using the word "minimum", because whenever we look at something, we have the resources to go beyond that, but there's a certain threshold. An organization should not be allowed to conduct a professional mixed martial arts contest anywhere in this country unless those standards are met.

In the absence of a consistent regulatory environment across the country to allow for the provinces and the municipalities to share information, you run that risk that somebody might try to cut a corner here or cut a corner there. Maybe they will only have one ringside physician. Maybe they'll only test for certain performance enhancing drugs. They might try to skirt...and only because they may not have the resources to do that.

That's one of the reasons it's so critically important that we provide for this consistent regulatory environment to be structured. One of the impediments to that structuring is the ambiguity of subsection 83(2) of the Criminal Code.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: With regard to head injuries, part of the problem as well, going back to my earlier point about solving this issue, which seems a long way off at times, is that it seems one of the debates we constantly hear, to use an example similar to your league and other sports, let's say the NHL, always revolves around protocol.

It seems protocol is at a different place when you're talking about where you're coming from in the UFC. You'll even notice—I mean, I noticed this after I started working on this issue—that in Quebec, for example, the referees have the provincial government logo on their shirts, because that's the involvement the government has in the regulation.

Is that accurate?

● (1625)

Mr. Tom Wright: Mr. Dubé, that's absolutely accurate. It is one of the distinctions between our professional sport and other professional leagues. It is that arm's-length third party oversight that I think is critically important.

I'll give you a hypothetical example. We know how much of an icon Georges St-Pierre is for our sport, and I can tell you how important he is to our league. Let's say he's injured. I may want him to compete in a month. I may want him to go and compete in Winnipeg, because I know if he competes in Winnipeg, he'll do tremendously well and our business will do tremendously well. But it's not our decision. The decision is made by the regulatory commission that is overseeing the competition.

After every one of our competitions, the commissions will come out and they'll put an athlete under a suspension. It could be a 30-day, a 60-day, or a 90-day suspension, depending on what happened. That athlete is not even allowed to train with contact until such a time as he has been released by that commission.

The commissions share information, and not only among themselves in Canada; they're part of a global organization that shares that information. If an athlete's been injured in, say, Quebec, and tries to fight in Alberta, he's not allowed to, because the commissions share that information.

Now, if he happened to be a hockey player and he happened to be the best player on my team, and I'm going into the playoffs and I need him to play, I'm somewhat conflicted if I'm the coach; I really want Mr. Leef to compete.

That's the distinction.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: The player might want to as well, because athletes—

Mr. Tom Wright: The player might want to as well, but the player doesn't have a choice. It's regulated by a third party independent commission, which I think is interesting.

Like every other professional sport, we are very concerned about health and safety. We're concerned about head injuries. We're concerned about concussions. We are actually funding and supporting primary research in several university hospitals in the United States to make sure we're knowledgeable and informed about this, and we continue to do these things. But, again, providing for the consistent regulatory environment will allow for promotions, big and small, to be held to the same standards.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Dubé.

Mr. Regan, your turn, and my apologies. I missed you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Well, Mr. Chairman, as a visitor to the committee I'm not certain of the order. If you hadn't told me, I wouldn't have known, so don't apologize. I appreciate that very much.

Thank you, Mr. Wright, for appearing before us today.

You heard my questions earlier. Are you aware of any studies, other than the ones referred to by Senator Runciman, that can compare injuries, particularly concussion-type injuries, from mixed martial arts to boxing or other sports?

Mr. Tom Wright: There are some, and I would be more than happy to provide you with either links to their websites or copies of them. The interesting thing is that the Johns Hopkins University study, which I think Mr. Pacetti was referencing, demonstrated that there were no more significant traumatic head injuries in the sport of mixed martial arts than there were in boxing. There are other studies that have been done that actually show a significantly lower number of traumatic head injuries.

One of the fundamental differences, of course, with mixed martial arts, is that there are multiple ways to win and multiple ways to lose; whereas in boxing it's principally one or two. The other distinguishing difference between the two sports comes in the training for the sport. This is anecdotal evidence, data that have been shared with me by people who have been brought up in the boxing community, but the notion is typically that for every round that a boxer would fight in an actual competition, be it 10 or 12, those boxers tend to spar for about 100 rounds in their training. If you're training for mixed martial arts, you will do some striking, some boxing training, but you will also train in takedown defence, grappling, and submissions in wrestling and judo or karate, whatever it happens to be. What happens in that kind of environment is that if you're only training one way and then you're only competing one way, the logic is that there will be more traumatic head injuries. The actual facts tend to bear that out.

I think somebody else was mentioning earlier about some of the traumatic head injuries that happen in horseback riding. It's interesting. I read an article just the other day about two doctors from the province of Alberta who were writing in response to the Canadian Medical Association's policy statement calling for a ban on mixed martial arts. These are two doctors who were disappointed that the Canadian Medical Association seemed to be coming from more of an emotional decision; it wasn't based on fact. With the traumas they've seen and dealt with in the hospitals, there are far

more injuries from equestrian events, from hockey, from football, than they ever have seen in mixed martial arts.

I can provide you with a link to a website in the United States that tracks this. It's called the catastrophic sports injury something....

• (1630)

Hon. Geoff Regan: If there are any websites or links or information that you could provide, could you send those to the clerk?

Mr. Tom Wright: Oh, I'm sorry. I don't know the process. I'd be happy to.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's all right. That would be great.

I also want to ask you the question I asked about the tourism benefits when the previous two witnesses were here, and what your thoughts are on that.

I'd better add my other question to that one because I won't have a chance otherwise. I'm sure that fans in Nova Scotia, and I guess in a sense maybe it's opponents, too, would want to know what the chances are of MMA coming to Nova Scotia soon. As I mentioned, Halifax is a well-known city and Nova Scotia has a great boxing history.

Mr. Tom Wright: I'll answer your second question first.

I've already had conversations with individuals in Halifax at the Metro convention centre. I'd like nothing better than at some point to bring the UFC to Atlantic Canada. I have every expectation that it will happen. The economic benefits I believe would be tremendous.

When we held UFC 129 in Toronto, the first event that was held in Ontario after the Province of Ontario sanctioned the sport coming into 2011, the direct economic impact into the province was north of \$35 million. We had 55,000 people attend. We sold tickets to that event in all 10 provinces, all 3 territories, and all 50 states, and in every continent in the world, except Antarctica. The economic impact was tremendous. I know that to be a fact. I'd be happy to provide the clerk with that information. We also did economic impact studies for the two events we've held in Vancouver, again with tremendous success.

Not only do we believe that those events provide great economic impact, but I can tell you that the growth and the development of gyms, of MMA clubs, and of different combative sport clubs, has been significant and parallel to the growth of our sport. We have an athlete who used to compete, Jason MacDonald, out of Red Deer, Alberta. When he first started with the UFC, he had to go to San Jose to train because there were no facilities in Alberta for him to train at.

When I last chatted with him when we went to Calgary in July of last year, he was telling me that there are 77 mixed martial arts training facilities alone in the city of Calgary. That's another economic driver. These are small businesses. Everybody around here knows how small business as the economic driver of our country is very important.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wright.

Thank you, Mr. Regan.

I need permission from the committee in regard to any submissions to the clerk that are in one language, either English or French. For them to be circulated, they need to be bilingual, which won't be the case for some of those studies, obviously. I need permission to circulate them even if they're in only one of our official languages.

Think about it right now. Let me know by the end of the meeting, okay?

A voice: Yes.

The Chair: I don't want Mr. Wright to go to all that work so that the clerk gets to see it but none of the rest of us do.

Our next questioner is Mr. Wilks from the Conservative Party.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I could get permission from you and the other side to recognize Mr. Leef, I'll share my time with him.

The Chair: Yes. Any member who comes to the committee can ask questions. He wouldn't be entitled to vote if there were a vote. That's the only thing.

Mr. David Wilks: Well, we didn't want him to vote anyway.

An hon. member: Too many head shots—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Wilks: Anyway, thank you very much, Mr. Wright, for coming today. It was a pleasure to meet you a few months ago back in the Yukon.

One of the clarifications I have, of course, is on section 83 of the code. This will bring it up to a standard from the perspective of a national level. Everyone will be clear in understanding what section 83 is across the board from the perspective of the professional mixed martial arts contest.

The one thing that I did notice—and I know you're not a lawyer, so I don't expect an answer—is that under paragraph 83(1)(c), it also says “is present at a prize fight as an aid, second, surgeon, umpire, backer or reporter”. From the perspective of this bill, it will also protect them as well. Is that my understanding from this? Otherwise, it is the fighter that we're protecting, but not necessarily anyone else. I'm assuming that this amendment will also clarify that.

Could you answer that?

• (1635)

Mr. Tom Wright: Thank you, Mr. Wilks.

I think I can, although I'd be lying if I said that I read that section of the code, but I believe the circumstances are that, under the code, prizefighting is a summary conviction offence for participants, promoters, organizers, and everybody who's tied to it, not just the two athletes. It can be their corners, the referees, and the officials, and I guess conceivably it could be me. Yes, I think that's the other issue that needs to be brought forward, and I thank you for bringing it forward.

Mr. David Wilks: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Leef.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Wilks.

Thank you, Mr. Wright. It's good to see you again.

All competitive sports have some element of risk. As legislators and as people involved in the sport, we try to do our best for risk management. As a former competitor, both in long-distance running for team Canada and as a mixed martial artist, I'm probably fairly well-rounded with the fight or flight syndrome.

You talked a bit about the minimum standards and then said that UFC tries to go above and beyond those. I think it's beneficial to the Canadian public and people wondering about the sport to know generally what the minimum standards look like. In long-distance running as an example—I was just reading an interesting article on the Boston Marathon—people drop like flies. You can just pay your money and enter a marathon. It takes tremendous training and skill to run one, but there's nothing stopping people from just doing that.

Could you contrast what the general minimum standards are for mixed martial arts competitions compared to those of other sports? If I were interested in paying a fee and jumping inside a field, an octagon, a ring, or whatever to participate in a semi-professional amateur mixed martial arts competition, would I be able to just do that?

Mr. Tom Wright: Hopefully in an environment where it's properly regulated, you would not be able to do that. Obviously I'm not a lawyer; I can't guarantee anything. I also can't compare our sport to other sports because I don't really know the other sports as well. I could maybe compare them to football.

I'll use as a very practical example the event that just happened in Montreal, UFC 158, which was held under the commission oversight of the Quebec combative athletic commission. Some four to seven weeks before that, every single fighter who was going to compete had to apply for a licence with the Province of Quebec. In doing so, they had to provide certain medical information, certain proof that they had ophthalmological tests, certain proof they had MRIs, certain blood tests for hepatitis B and hepatitis A, and all those kinds of things. There's a real regimen of medical testing that was required.

Every single corner or individual who was going to be supporting that fighter also had to apply for a licence, making sure they were properly trained, properly prepared.

Mr. Ryan Leef: These are athletes who have already participated in the past.

Mr. Tom Wright: Absolutely, these are athletes who have already participated in the past. In our case, only athletes who have either been competing for the UFC or have a long professional record of success in other promotions would actually compete with us. But it's not just for us. If there's another promotion that's working in Atlantic Canada or maybe in British Columbia, the commission in British Columbia would ask the same questions as the Quebec one did. It's not just us who are asked the same questions in Quebec, say, but every other promotion that is trying to bring forward a competition would have the same requirements made of them.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wright.

Thank you, Mr. Leef.

Our next questioner is Mr. Mai from the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Wright, for your presentation and your answers to questions.

I have a question with respect to provinces. You've mentioned that some of the provinces might not actually go forward. Can you tell us about the provinces that have gone forward with having mixed martial arts regulated, or have just gone forward with events, and also about those that have not or don't want to have them in their provinces?

Mr. Tom Wright: I'll answer the question this way. It's not that they don't want to; they haven't addressed it yet, perhaps. I have not necessarily spoken to every single province. The provinces where the sport is regulated in Canada and an oversight by a provincial commission exists are Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, and we believe the Northwest Territories. The sport is regulated on a municipal basis in British Columbia, Alberta, and New Brunswick. There are only three provinces where the sport is yet to be sanctioned and regulated on a provincial basis or a municipal basis, and those would be Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. In the case of Yukon and Nunavut, those territories would be similarly situated.

In the case of Saskatchewan, I can tell you that the province is considering this right now. I met with sport minister Kevin Doherty in Regina last Tuesday, or it might have been Monday. It's considering the regulation of our sport, trying to decide whether to do it provincially or municipally. I have not had the opportunity to go to Prince Edward Island yet, and I have not had the opportunity to go to Newfoundland and Labrador. In the end, I suspect I would.

Our goal is to have our sport sanctioned and regulated in all ten provinces and all three territories. I've stated the goal here in Canada. I've stated it to the people I report to in Las Vegas, because I want our country to be a leader not only in the business of our sport but in the regulation of our sport.

Mr. Hoang Mai: Before your sport was as popular as it is now, were there cases in which, for instance, something would be considered a criminal offence, and there would be convictions or anything like that?

Mr. Tom Wright: I have not heard of any convictions. I don't know about before I joined, but I'm virtually positive there have never been any convictions.

Mr. Hoang Mai: What about other countries? Are they still considering...? You mentioned that you want Canada to be a leader on that front, but are there other countries that have gone the whole way in terms of decriminalizing it, or taking it out of their criminal code, or something similar?

Mr. Tom Wright: My understanding is that Canada is the only country with a specific section in its Criminal Code that determines or states that this activity is actually illegal.

For instance, in the United States, back in 2001 when our organization took over the intellectual property of the Ultimate

Fighting Championship, our sport was sanctioned and regulated in only two states, New Jersey and Nevada. As of now, we're in 46 out of 48 states that have athletic commissions—only Connecticut and New York remain unregulated—and there are two other states, Wyoming and Alaska, that don't have athletic commissions. But I don't believe there was a section in whatever the United States equivalent of the Criminal Code is that makes it illegal in that sense.

Mr. Hoang Mai: Are you aware of other types of sport that are perhaps similar to MMA, but are still considered illegal in Canada? Is there something that is similar, some sort of illegal combat, that might then be allowed under Bill S-209?

Mr. Tom Wright: I am not aware of any, not that I've looked for any.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Wright.

Our next questioner is Monsieur Goguen.

• (1645)

Mr. Robert Goguen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Wright.

That's fine. I take note of your statement that you'd like to have MMA sanctioned in every province and, of course, in every territory. I understand that currently it's not sanctioned in Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, or the three territories. In British Columbia, I heard you say, and perhaps in Alberta, it's sanctioned by the municipalities.

That concerns me on two fronts. You talked about the need for a consistent regulatory framework. It seems to me that giving it to a municipality is perhaps not as airtight as giving it to a province, which would have a more uniform framework. That's my first concern.

The other thing is about the lay of the land. This bill proposes to give the province the option to opt in or opt out. They won't have to offer the sport. It will be their call. I think they would be better suited than would a municipality to get the lay of the land politically as to the acceptance of this type of sport.

I wonder if you could comment on that.

Mr. Tom Wright: I would be in violent agreement with you.

I believe fervently that mixed martial arts should be regulated on a provincial basis. One of the reasons we've worked as closely as we have and have supported the efforts of the British Columbia government in Victoria is to that end. I mentioned earlier that Bill 50 was passed in June 2012 in British Columbia. It called for the appointment of a provincial athletic commissioner. That work is going along and has been going along for the past eight months.

We've also started to have similar conversations in Alberta. In Alberta there's a Calgary Combative Sports Commission, which we dealt with for UFC 149. There's one in Edmonton as well, which we would have dealt with when we held an event there in June 2010. We as an organization would much prefer to deal with those on a provincial basis, like for the work that's going on in Saskatchewan, which I met with them on just eight or nine days ago.

Again, it's not my decision. I think that ultimately the Province of British Columbia decided to abdicate that responsibility in favour of the municipalities. You'd have to ask them why they did. I don't know why. We obviously felt that it was very important for the regulatory environment to be consistent across the province and within the context of a consistent Criminal Code environment across the entire country.

Mr. Robert Goguen: I guess your willingness to deal with the municipalities, provided that framework was provided by them, is a stopgap measure to permit the sport to gather more universal acceptance, pending the provinces perhaps buying in.

Mr. Tom Wright: In the case of Alberta, it was the only thing there, so we didn't have an option. It wasn't as if I could have gone to an Alberta athletics commission. You would go to Calgary or you would go to Edmonton, and I'm not sure what other municipalities in Alberta have an athletics commission. Lethbridge might, but I'm not sure.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Thank you, sir. That answers my concerns.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Wright, I have no other questioners on my list.

Does anybody else have a question for Mr. Wright?

I see none.

If you can provide the information to us quickly, meaning tomorrow, the clerk will do whatever he can to get it translated and circulate it. It will be translated, and you may not get it all if it's not translatable. Websites are impossible.

Mr. Tom Wright: I wouldn't know how to translate a website.

The Chair: No, you don't have to worry about that. You have to send it in. That's the clerk's job, not your job.

Mr. Tom Wright: Okay.

The Chair: Madame Boivin.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: All materials that are presented to the committee should be in both languages so those that are not—not to be difficult, but if somebody has a specific interest, maybe you can deal directly with Mr. Wright, no problem, but if we start this we go against our rules of bilingualism, and I would not be happy.

The Chair: Thank you.

We need unanimous consent for that.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I would not be happy.

The Chair: Mr. Wright.

Mr. Tom Wright: In terms of these websites, which obviously I can't translate, how—

The Chair: All we would like you to do, Mr. Wright, is send the information to the clerk. The clerk will then decide what he can and can't get translated, and we'll circulate it. If a committee member would like to see what you sent and it is only in one language, English, they could approach the clerk directly as an individual member of the committee and look at it that way.

● (1650)

Mr. Tom Wright: Fine. I just want to make sure I know what my marching orders are.

The Chair: Thank you very much for joining us, and thank you for the information. We're all done, and you're excused at this point.

Mr. Tom Wright: On behalf of the sport I represent, I'd like to thank everybody for their time and attention. I respect the process of what we're trying to do, and hopefully, I will provide you with some information that will help that process.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Committee, just before we adjourn, a budget has been circulated for our discussion on Bill C-394.

An hon. member: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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