



Tsi Nahò:ten Karihwanákere Nó:nen'k

PRESS RELEASE

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House of Commons acquiesces to horse owners, shuns Kahnawake with Bill C-218

For immediate release

(Kahnawake – 30, Onerahtókha/April 2021) The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke (MCK) expresses its outrage that the Canadian House of Commons passed the third reading of Bill C-218 on April 22, 2021. Despite the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada's acknowledgement of the strength of Kahnawà:ke's claim of Indigenous right, Parliament chose to ignore Kahnawà:ke's interests and placed its economy at risk, all while submitting to the demands of Canada's horse racing industry for protection.

"This gives the clear message that, for Canada's Members of Parliament, horse racing is more important than Indigenous communities," stated Ietsénhaienhs (elected chief) Gina Deer. This is an insult to Kahnawà:ke and to every other First Nation in Canada. Our treatment over Bill C-218 proves that 'reconciliation' and 'recognition' are merely buzz words used by federal officials and do not exist in the House of Commons. Canada's MP's would rather see Kahnawà:ke's economy collapse than jeopardize their own interests."

On March 23rd the MCK submitted a lengthy written submission and gave an oral presentation to the Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. The presentation provided notice of the detrimental effects that passing Bill C-218 without amendments could have on Kahnawà:ke, and included a reasonable and tangible proposed solution. Despite this, the Committee rushed to a decision in less than 48 hours. The MCK will now take its case to the Senate in the hope that it will at least give the representation the consideration they deserve instead of ignoring them as the House of Commons has done.

"The speed at which the Standing Committee made its recommendations on Bill C-218 is alarming and makes it evident that our representations did not receive proper – if any – deliberation," said Ietsénhaienhs Deer. "We simply asked for accommodations that would allow us – and other First Nations – to open discussions with the Federal government. Apparently, even this was too much to ask. Other First Nations watching the treatment of Kahnawà:ke over this bill should be very worried."

"The House of Commons has once again proven that it favors the interests of the rich and powerful over those of Indigenous peoples," added Ratsénhaienhs (elected chief) Mike Delisle, Jr. "Kahnawà:ke and other First Nations will be left out in the cold. We have built a legitimate multi-million dollar economy, and MP's would rather see it collapse than work with us on co-existence. It was the same with tobacco and is happening again with the gaming industry."

"Bill C-218 is a specific, tangible example as to why the MCK opposes Bill C-15, *the Act Respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*," added Ratsénhaienhs Ross Montour. "Canada's actions in C-218 are a clear indication that the House of Commons does not sincerely and meaningfully embrace UNDRIP. If Canada is unwilling to include protections for First Nations in an amendment to the gaming provisions of the Code to fulfill economic independence and self-determination, how can it be trusted to enact legislation that meaningfully implements the principles of UNDRIP?"

The Council of Chiefs assures the community that it has used, and will continue to use, every means at its disposal to raise its objections to Bill C-218, and to press for an amendment that will finally provide Indigenous communities a meaningful role in Canada's gaming industry.

The MCK strongly urges other First Nations who share our concerns about Bill C-218 or Bill C-15 to contact the MCK offices immediately.