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TV hit Heated Rivalry reflects Canadian values as LGBTQ rights threatened: Carney

OTTAWA — The Canadian TV show about two professional hockey players who fall in love reflects Canadian values in a world where LGBTQ rights are under threat, Prime Minister Mark Carney said.

Anja Karadeglija, The Canadian Press about an hour ago



This image released by Crave shows Hudson Williams, left, and Connor Storrie in a scene from "Heated Rivalry." (Crave via AP)

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OTTAWA — The Canadian TV show about two professional hockey players who fall in love reflects Canadian values in a world where LGBTQ rights are under threat, Prime Minister Mark Carney said.

"The world knows that Shane and Ilya are rising hockey stars who fall for each other as they face off in one of the greatest rivalries the game has ever known," Carney said in a speech at an industry conference in Ottawa, after he walked the red carpet with star Hudson Williams.

"But they're also two young men who are terrified of being their fullest self. And we live in an increasingly dangerous, divided and intolerant world. And the hard-fought rights of the 2SLGBTQ+ community are under threat, including in many of the countries where the show has record-setting audiences."

Carney said "a fundamental Canadian value is that people should be able to be whoever they want to be. To love whoever they want to love."

"Heated Rivalry" has become a global phenomenon in the past month. The show was developed for Bell Media's Crave streaming platform before being picked up by HBO Max. Its lead actors have appeared on stage at the Golden Globes, on U.S. late night talk shows and on the runway at Milan Fashion Week.

It all brought an unusual dose of star power to this week's Prime Time media production conference in Ottawa, which added a red carpet event to its programming.

On Thursday evening, dozens of people surrounded the red carpet as they waited for producers, actors and government officials to arrive. The crowd cheered as Carney and Williams stepped onto the carpet.

Williams looked excited as he stepped over to hug the prime minister. After taking a group photo with another one of the show's cast members, Sophie Nélisse, as well as creators Brendan Brady and Jacob Tierney, Carney was presented with the white fleece Williams wore in the series.

Williams clapped as the prime minister showed off the jacket to the crowd. Carney then joked that the sweater was "true soft power."

Carney also made plenty of jokes in his speech, including that as a politician, he's not "above taking credit" for the Canadian government's support in getting the show made.

"I might not have been here, but... I'm here now," he said, to laughs in the crowd.

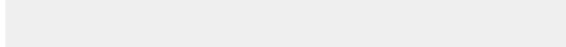
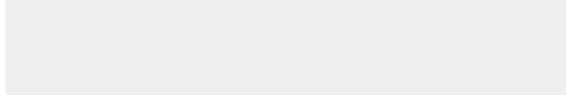
Earlier in the day, the creators behind the show defended the Online Streaming Act, which the U.S. has identified as a trade irritant.

"People have got to negotiate the way they've got to negotiate, but I think it would be really, really bad ... if we lost it," said show creator Jacob Tierney.

Tierney said requiring large foreign platforms to make a five per cent contribution toward Canadian content is not a "huge cost of entry." Large foreign streamers are currently challenging that contribution requirement in court.

"I don't think we're asking for anything unreasonable here," he said.

Brendan Brady, executive producer of "Heated Rivalry," said he has told streamers they have an opportunity.



"We want more competition in this country. You're coming into our system," Brady said. "Enjoy what you can do because what's going to happen is you're going to have a global platform to create more Heated Rivalries and that's a really cool thing. So stop acting like it's going to be a negative."

The annual industry conference is taking place as global streamers challenge Canadian content contribution and disclosure rules implemented by the CRTC through the Online Streaming Act.

The legislation updated broadcasting laws to capture online platforms like Netflix.

The CRTC has ordered large foreign streaming companies to pay five per cent of their annual Canadian revenues to funds devoted to producing Canadian content, including local TV news.

Some streamers are fighting that order in Federal Court, which in late 2024 put a pause on the payments, estimated to be at least \$1.25 million per year per company.

In December, a group of large foreign streaming companies also launched a separate challenge of a CRTC decision made under the legislation that would require them to disclose financial information.

That same month, U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer pointed to concerns about the legislation ahead of the review of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade deal. Greer cited the impact of the act on U.S. digital service providers.

The conference also heard Thursday from Artificial Intelligence Minister Evan Solomon and Culture Minister Marc Miller in separate addresses.

Solomon told the audience he had spoken with creators about the Online Streaming Act, while Miller acknowledged the U.S. position.

"I hesitate to speak publicly about this" given the ongoing negotiations, he said. "But there are red lines in and around culture, arts, protecting artists, that we can't and shouldn't cross."

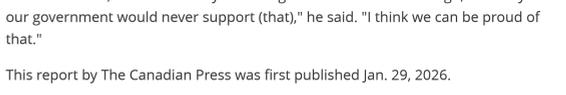
Miller did not specify what those red lines would be, or whether sticking to the five-per-cent contribution requirement would be one of them. He noted the CRTC hasn't completed the full regulatory process to finalize how much streamers should be required to contribute, adding: "I hesitate to pick a number."

Miller said "it's an amazing show."

"I had some American friends reach out to me and their reflection was, this is an awesome show, but at the end you see a government of Canada sign, and they're like, our government would never support (that)," he said. "I think we can be proud of that."

This report by The Canadian Press was first published Jan. 29, 2026.

Anja Karadeglija, The Canadian Press



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