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• (1110)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP)): First of all, I would like to apologize for being late. We are going to start right away.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for being here today. Let me introduce them: His Excellency Andrew John Pocock, British High Commissioner to Canada, Marcel Aubut, President of the Canadian Olympic Committee, Mr. Overholt, and Charmaine Althia Crooks, Canadian Olympian. I would like to congratulate you for all the work that you have done.

I am going to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pocock right away.

[English]

His Excellency Andrew John Pocock (British High Commissioner to Canada, British High Commission): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for letting me be here to talk a little about the Olympic Games.

I thought I'd start with a quick overview and then have a brief word about the Olympics and the Paralympics. Needless to say, this is an exciting year for us. We have not just the diamond jubilee, but of course we also have the enormous games of 2012. We're very proud to be hosting them: London is the only city to have hosted the Olympic Games three times.

The good news is that the preparations are in great shape. We're on time. Indeed, all the major venues were completed about a year ago to allow for extensive testing, and that's ongoing as we speak. To remind you of the dates, the Olympic opening ceremony will be on July 27, and the Paralympics start on August 29.

Amazingly, we're on budget. The total public sector funding for the Olympic Games is £9.3 billion, and this covers all the additional security, defence, and public transport provisions. Obviously, we see it very much as an investment in Britain's future in sport, but also in a whole range of other things, including infrastructure, transport, communication, employment and, indeed, the economy as a whole.

Olympic Park—and I hope some of you will get a chance to see it in the flesh—is a showcase of British design, construction, and environmental concern. We've used building methods throughout the whole process that have reduced carbon footprints, majored on recycling, and have contributed, we think, to a very green games.

No presentation would be complete without a few random statistics. Here they are: we're expecting a global audience of about four billion—a fair percentage of the planet. There will be 14,000 Olympic athletes and 4,000 Paralympic athletes. We're expecting 120 heads of state and government to attend the opening ceremony. By contrast, there were 89 in Beijing—and so we've seen a quantum increase. Moreover, 25,000 journalists will beam this to you blow by blow, and we're expecting about 330,000 extra visitors in the U.K. over the period of the games.

Let me talk briefly about the Olympics themselves. We have 57 days and counting to the start of what is to be the 30th Olympiad, so the marathon is over and we're in the final sprint, if you'll allow a slightly corny pun. The Olympic torch is in Britain, and is being run around the entire country, including the island of Ireland. It'll pass within about an hour of 95% of the whole population.

Olympic Park itself is one of the jewels of the whole process. It has transformed a site in east London that was derelict as the consequence of war, neglect, and industrial pollution, and it's turned it into the largest urban park in Europe. It's got a whole new ecology of wildlife, woodlands, wetlands, and waterways. It's intended to be not just a powerful environmental statement, but also a powerful environmental legacy.

Obviously sport is at its centre, but if there is a broader theme for these games, it is legacy, and legacy in terms of sustainability. It's in the DNA of the project. The whole place was designed to be light in terms of its footprint; the Olympic stadium, for what it's worth, is the lightest ever built, at a mere 10,000 tonnes of steel by comparison to some real behemoths in the past. It's not intended to be just architecturally stunning, but it's intended for future use, which has been a key consideration. We don't want white elephants in London, and six of the eight major Olympic venues are already contracted for use beyond 2012. For example, the Olympic stadium itself, after the games, will become first a premiership football ground, and then it will host the world athletic championships in 2017.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's a vision for the park for the next 20 years. We want it to be a new place to work, live, and play. It will have beautiful open spaces. It will have iconic architecture, and more important than that, it will have links to the rest of London, Britain, and of course Europe, because the games are about more than just either sport or, indeed, London. They are about the revitalization, in part, of the five poorest boroughs of east London, and we've seen substantial corporate investment already taking place.

A new area of east London called Tech City is a fast-growing cluster of small digital start-up companies, which is extending into the east end. We have a green enterprise district that is attracting sustainable technology start-ups. We already have the largest shopping centre in Europe very close to the games, with 10,000 permanent jobs resulting and a million shoppers showing up in the first week. There must be a recession somewhere, but I'm not sure it's in east London at the moment.

Central to all this is the transport infrastructure. We have turned what was the least well connected part of London into one of the best, with light railway, underground bus transport, and a whole range of other things. That is all virtually ready to go.

Let me talk briefly about what will be the 14th Paralympiad. We're determined to make this the most accessible games ever. Indeed, London 2012 is the first games in which both the planning and the organization of the Olympics and Paralympics have been fully integrated. Disability access is incorporated into everything—all the venues, all the open spaces, and all the public transport. Why, you might ask? There are three reasons.

The first reason is that the paralympic movement started in London. It started in 1948. London will have hosted the games three times, as I said, in 1908, 1948, and this year. In 1948, at a hospital called Stoke Mandeville just outside London, which was full of disabled World War II veterans, there was an archery contest in parallel with the 1948 games. From that very small beginning came the idea of disabled athletes taking part in the greatest games in the world. By 1960 they were a more formal part, and by 1984 they were fully integrated into the Olympic Games. We're very proud in London that the Paralympics are effectively coming home.

The second reason is disabled people themselves. There's a strong ambition that the games should change the way, as best we can, people look at disability and encourage the idea that disabled people should be allowed to lead more independent lives.

The third reason, of course, is that we want to encourage more disabled people to take part in sport. I've had the very great privilege of meeting a number of Canada's paralympic athletes in swimming, wheelchair basketball—your captain has already won medals in a number of games and seems determined to take the gold off us again—and wheelchair rugby. I can only ask you to imagine what wheelchair rugby must be like. There is an extraordinary level of fitness, confidence, and commitment involved. London is very pleased to have all of this.

I'll just end by saying that we're delighted and looking forward to welcoming Canada's athletes and, of course, the world's. It's very close. We're excited, but we're not complacent. There is still the question of delivering a safe and secure games that's also a friendly and accessible one, but we're on the case.

Thank you very much for listening, and I'd be happy in due course to take any questions.

•(1115)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you very much, Your Excellency.

I will now give the floor to Marcel Aubut from the Canadian Olympic Committee.

Mr. Marcel Aubut (President, Canadian Olympic Committee): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure to be here. Good morning, everyone.

[*English*]

I'm very pleased to have heard that the Canadian athletes are going to have special treatment in London.

[*Translation*]

It is an honour to be here with you today to provide you with an update about the preparations of the Canadian Olympic team, less than two months away from the Games.

[*English*]

Thank you for the invitation to join you today. I would like you to look at the screen. You will get the first glimpse of what we focus on at the Canadian Olympic Committee 24/7, 365 days a year.

[*Video Presentation*]

I am very pleased to be here with a member of the board of the Canadian Olympic Committee and former Olympian, Charmaine Crooks; and with the CEO of the Canadian Olympic Committee, Christopher Overholt.

The video you just saw highlights the relentless pursuit of excellence by our Canadian Olympians.

Honourable members, the Canadian Olympic Committee is respected in the worldwide sporting community for its professionalism and best-in-class programs.

You'll be surprised to hear the following information. Each time I say it, people have a tough time believing it: The Canadian Olympic Committee, which we represent, is the largest private sector funder of high-performance sport in Canada.

[*Translation*]

This is not to be confused with the role of the Government of Canada, which is the largest contributor to sport in the country. But when it comes to high-performance sport, the Canadian Olympic Committee is the largest private-sector contributor.

[*English*]

Continued strong and stable government funding is critical to success today, tomorrow, and in the future. It's absolutely critical.

In the most recent budget, the Harper government reiterated that support, even with a very tough budget. On behalf of the athletes and coaches of this country, as well as all national sport federations, we thank the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of State (Sport) for this confidence.

Having said that, our athletes will continue to demonstrate that continued support is really essential if we are going to prepare the next generation of Olympians.

•(1120)

[Translation]

The Canadian Olympic Committee's approach to preparing for the Olympic Games is more similar to the approach for Formula 1, which will be in Montreal in a week, than what is usually done in amateur sport.

[English]

It's really a Formula One approach as far as preparing Team Canada for the Olympic Games is concerned.

[Translation]

Our athletes and our coaches do not leave anything to chance in the preparations, and neither does the Canadian Olympic Committee. We are not leaving anything to chance in our efforts to provide athletes and coaches with all the tools they need to win medals and to be successful.

[English]

In terms of performance expectations for the games, the goal of the Canadian Olympic team is to finish among the top 12 countries in the total medal count. "Top 12 in 2012" was our slogan. This is a bold, ambitious goal and it will not be easy to achieve, but as you all know, excellence never is.

We anticipate sending a team of more than 250 athletes and 90 coaches to compete in London in two months.

At the Canadian Olympic Committee we work to ensure that Canadian athletes have the optimal conditions to perform at their best during the games. Our strongest expertise in this area has come from listening to the athletes and coaches themselves. That's the way we build and improve our programs, by listening.

We learned that they found Olympic competition to be very different from any other competitive environment. Why it's so different is the media attention. I'll give you just a few examples.

In 24 hours they become rock stars and a lot of them are not prepared for that. That's why we prepare them for it.

There's stress, not stress through the competition as much as having all their friends, parents, and everybody around. They want tickets, they want an accreditation, they want all kinds of things, and they are stressed for their families. I think they have enough stress and we should find a way not to add any more, and that's our job.

Accreditation is a good example of this. It's so limited, especially in London. I don't know what they did with accreditation, but they limited it so much because the whole world is going to be there.

It's through our analysis of those performances that we could deliver our strongest Olympic preparation series to date. It's the best we've ever done as far as preparation is concerned.

[Translation]

Our preparation includes a wide range of orientation events designed to prepare the athletes and the entire mission team for the very special and unique environment of the Olympic Games. This includes workshops for athletes' families and friends on what they should expect and on their role to support the athletes. Their families

and friends should not have too many expectations, just the right amount; they have to get used to the idea before they go. The purpose of all that is to better support the athletes, either by putting less pressure on them, or by encouraging them in a positive way by being in the right place at the right time, and avoiding to put extra pressure on them. That is just another way for us to make sure that the entire Canadian Olympic family will be ready to support our athletes in London at all times.

[English]

Here is how we are attempting to be the best-in-class as far as this preparation is concerned. I'm going to give you a few examples of what we are going to do and face over there, to show you how much we want to create the optimal preparation for our athletes.

Our first planning trip to London for these games took place in May 2007, more than five years before the games themselves.

Our operations team is responsible for planning all the logistical details for approximately 600 people for approximately 28 days, from July 16 to August 12—and when I talk about 28 days, they are days and nights. COC is absolutely responsible for all of those people for every minute of the 28 days. We are the only ones responsible. We cannot say that we will do this part, Chair, and that someone else is going to do that part; we are the only ones who do it. We are responsible for that 600-people team for every second of 28 days.

To give you an idea of the scope of our operation, a few weeks ago we sent our cargo shipment with clothing, equipment, and Canadian snacks to London. That shipment filled ten 40-foot sea containers. Our outfitting station in Langdon Park School in London, close to the Olympic village, will be the uniform headquarters—and that's just for uniforms. Athletes and the mission team will be fully outfitted by our official partner, the Hudson's Bay Company, with Olympic team clothing made in Canada.

Again, to give you an idea of the scope of this, over a five-day period, the outfitting team of 10 people, helped by a few volunteers, will pre-pack, one by one, over 600 team bags for all of our different athletes and mission team members. In each bag,

•(1125)

[Translation]

what will there be?

[English]

There will be 29 pieces of clothing and 13 sponsor and partner gifts.

Our athletes will be housed primarily in the Olympic village, of course, but also in a few satellite locations such as the Olympic Park, Dorney Lake, and Weymouth.

In the village itself, the COC will specifically provide many different services on-site. For example, athletes can find orientation information, computer stations, games coverage on televisions, etc.

[Translation]

They are also going to get supplements, nutritional snacks and drinks. We have a team that takes care of the tickets, to allow our athletes to attend some of the other events.

Do you want two? Well, we will select all those who want tickets to allow you to go. Do you just want two tickets? You will have to tell me for which event.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): I just wanted to tell you that you have about two minutes left.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Oh, okay.

We have a health and science clinic for the athletes staffed by top experts. We have a place called

[English]

the wellness centre to provide a calm and relaxing experience. It will also help athletes focus on performance. The technology is top of the line. We have a performance technology centre to analyze any performance for the next one, and we have a very large and quality gym.

Most mission teams will be hosted by the performance centre located in the large new student residence near the Olympic village. Almost identical facilities to those in the Olympic village will be available there for the balance of the team.

In addition to the athletes, coaches, team leaders and technical support staff at the core, there are a lot more people. It's a big team.

[Translation]

This team includes doctors, therapists, the operations team, the organizational team, the communications team and the RCMP staff responsible for security.

Speaking of security, we are very well equipped in this area as well. The security staff is specifically responsible for the security of the Canadian Olympic team and for protecting our athletes.

[English]

Wider Olympic security on the ground is being take care of by the host group, LOCOG, and they have all our confidence. LOCOG is like VANOC was in Vancouver; they are really well equipped for security. We also have our own robust emergency management plan in place in the event that a situation occurs.

Communications will be at the top. We will be able to communicate among ourselves. There are lots of facilities and we are going to be the best ever about communicating with all Canadians at any moment.

As you know we are doing the announcement of everything going on. We have syncro, we just did diving, and we do that every day. That will give our athletes the highest visibility, which is what we want to do as a priority at the Olympic committee. We want those athletes being treated as well as any professional athletes. They deserve it in representing our country so well.

On the ground, our communications team will work from the main press centre and the Canada Olympic House in order to keep Canadians fully informed as the games unfold.

[Translation]

Of course, given the scope of these operations, we only presented a snapshot of what we do to be prepared to win.

[English]

But you can see the incredible effort made there to win. We just want to win. We want this country to be so proud about having this team over there, representing all Canadians.

Now I would like to have the last video, just before I close.

Thank you for your time.

Go ahead.

[Video Presentation]

● (1130)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you, Mr. Aubut. At any rate, that gets us in the mood. We have clearly seen how strong the support is for our athletes. They will be going to an incredibly well-organized event. Thank you.

We now have the chance to welcome an athlete who has participated in the Olympic Games for the fourth time. This is the real McCoy, the real deal.

Thank you, Ms. Charmaine Crooks. You have our attention.

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks (Five time Canadian Olympian and Olympic Silver Medalist, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, and your excellency.

What a pleasure it is to be here with you all today and have the opportunity to share with you the journey of the Canadian athletes as they move toward London, 2012. As we heard, there will be about 14,000 athletes present, and every single one of them represents the passion and the perseverance that it takes to be a champion, both on the field of play and off.

I'm also honoured to be among the many past Olympians from Canada, over 4,000, who have competed for Canada, the alumni, as we help to support the Canadian Olympic Committee and all the partners in sport to help a new generation of athletes bound for the London summer games and beyond.

You heard President Aubut speaking of the support of the team, and that support, indeed, is second to none by the standards of other national Olympic committees. Having had a chance to compete on the Canadian team for over 20 years—I retired about 15 years ago now—I can tell you that our national Olympic committee is doing an excellent job in preparing today's generation of Olympians. From the excellence series, from the familiarization trips, from the new partnerships, and from the technical innovation of many of our partners onboard, we are doing the right thing for our athletes from coast to coast. We're also doing the right thing by including Olympians in the planning process as well. As you know, we will be led into London by our chef de mission, Mark Tewksbury.

Our support staff, the volunteers, the coaches, and the communities across our nation play a critical role to the success of every athlete who will be competing in London. I see from the experiences and from what we've heard today, and what I get to experience every day by being part of the Canadian sports system, that no stone will be left unturned to help our athletes perform at their best on the competitive sports stage.

We may even give your team, Mr. Pocock, a run for their money.

Mr. Andrew John Pocock: We look forward to running.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Exactly.

That stage has never been a more difficult one, quite frankly, for our summer athletes. Competing with over 204 Olympic committees, Canada's goal is to be in the top 12 in 2012. It's a goal that we all strive for, and a goal that we are all committed to on a daily basis.

Dreaming big is what every athlete does every day. I remember when my first dream was inspired as a young immigrant who had come to Canada, where sport helped me to build self-esteem. It also helped me to work as a member of a team and helped me to embrace my new community. Sport is where I first learned the power of striving for goals and achieving my best in excellence. That's why I'm so drawn to sport and why I'm so proud to be here as part of this team, to be able to present to you what is going to happen in London in about 50 days from now.

Like many athletes, role models also inspired me. There is no doubt that these athletes you saw in the video and whom you'll meet will do the same for our youth, as their stories and performances will be shared with Canadians from coast to coast. But to get there goes beyond the many years of hard work, dedication, and commitment for an event that often lasts a few minutes and, in some cases, a few seconds. Any technical advantage that can be put forward for athletes will and does make a difference, and the team behind the team will not take its foot off the pedal until every athlete has competed to the best of his or her ability.

That is the main focus, preparing the athletes, and that is how it should be. Whether these athletes go to London, no matter how they go, they will be surrounded by a supportive, inclusive atmosphere of fellow Canadians. Through their experiences, Canadians will be connected to those Olympic values they represent, of fair play, of excellence, and fun.

It's the excitement from those Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games that still resonates in the minds of Canadians. I know you all recall hearing the national anthem 14 times for a record of 14 gold medals on home turf. That continues to inspire all of us today and it motivates and buoys our team as we head into London. It was also a launching pad, those games in our country, to build a more sustainable sport culture that engages communities, builds legacies, builds capacities, and builds champions beyond sport.

•(1135)

This sport culture has many facets and you heard about some of them already. But we know that a vital part of that team is the national sport federations, the many volunteers who work tirelessly with athletes every day, and the network of training centres across Canada that allows our athletes to have a venue to train and perform

in. And, of course, we could not do it without our families behind us and world-class coaches, equally dedicated to high performance.

These athletes are doing it on a world scale and they're doing it under tremendous pressure. But they're doing it with a steely focus and a drive to win that is inherent in the campaign Give Your Everything. And if their experience was anything like mine a very long time ago when a lot of these resources were not as available then as they are today—and they do need more—I know that they are able and capable of handling that pressure, because all of Canada is behind them when the world has its eyes on them.

Finally, I'd like to thank you all again for the support that all of you have given to Canadian athletes. We know that going into London, they will know that they are standing on the shoulders of all Canadians.

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you, Ms. Crooks, for that vibrant testimony.

We will go into our first round of questions, of seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

So I will first give the floor to Mr. Calandra.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our guests today. I appreciate it.

Your excellency, I want to start with you. There's been a lot going on, obviously, in the eurozone and it's nice to be talking about something that is fun and exciting.

You talked about Olympic Park and how it has revitalized that area of London. It's safe to say that the Olympics is just a small part of revitalizing an entire community. I'm very interested in that because we, of course, will be hosting the Pan Am Games here in 2015. Would you talk a bit more about that?

Also, one thing I want to commend you on is this. When we talk about international events, the focus always seems to be on security at these events. While we know the security is well in hand and taken care of, it has been very nice to see a focus on the games, the athletes, and the revitalizing of a particular area of London, as opposed to all of the security that goes into it.

Would you talk a bit more about the projects surrounding the Olympic Park?

•(1140)

Mr. Andrew John Pocock: Thank you very much for that question. I'm very glad to answer it.

The Olympics have actually been central to revitalizing east London. Cast your minds back: It's the area along the Thames that used to be old dockyards, heavily bombed in the war, never really rebuilt. It had very poor transport infrastructure and a great deal of industrial pollution from the fifties and sixties—a real smokestack area.

When we bid for the games, we planned at the very start that this had to be about more than sport. Sport would be at the core of it; it's a huge festival of sport. It's the most complex sporting event in the world. World Cups may be slightly larger in some ways, but they're for one sport. This is 25 world championships happening at once. So sports is certainly at the core, but the games must radiate beyond the core.

We felt we weren't going to spend almost £10 billion of taxpayers' money just for sport. So we looked at two things in particular: the revitalization of a particular area of the City of London; and secondly, as I mentioned earlier on, legacy, and what happens after 2012. Of course, the two things are linked.

While I haven't actually been in Olympic Park, I've driven past it and have seen the pictures and the videos, and it is the most staggering piece of infrastructure I have personally ever seen. It is vast, it's complicated, and it's many layered. It's about architecture, but it's about all the environmental dimensions I mentioned, because it has to live after 2012. And it's about transport; no one was going to get to and from the games on what existed beforehand.

That combination, I think, of infrastructure, transport, and corporate investment has radiated like a beneficent bomb burst out from Olympic Park. There has been a huge amount of money poured into local communities in the form of jobs, in the form of contracts. That, we think, will last for decades, and it's designed to do so.

The Olympics is at the core of it, but it's also about revitalization through the economy and technology and thinking about the future. As I mentioned earlier on, six of the eight major venues will be reused. The Olympic Village will become community housing, in part, and there are a great deal of other spinoffs, including the technology and one or two other points that I also mentioned. So it's a huge, integrated package of economic uplift and sustainable use.

I'd be happy to give you more detail if you need it.

You mentioned the dreaded word "security". I was in Australia in 2000 and attended the Sydney Olympics, and they were marvellous games. They were remarkably friendly. The Australians, I think, brought into particular prominence the use of volunteers to bring people into the games and make them feel at home. They set a very high standard. We're trying to equal that in London and we have to find a balance between security and accessibility.

Australia had two advantages in 2000. One, it's a long way from anywhere. Border security is actually easier. Second, the games took place before 9/11. It was before the upsurge of the kinds of attacks that we've seen across the world. In the U.K. we have homegrown security concerns; they don't have to be imported.

What you've seen in the British press—and the British press loves hot stories—is the ring of steel around London. We have thousands of the Metropolitan Police. We have thousands more private security people. We have the British Army standing by quietly and off the scene. The Royal Navy is parked in the Thames. We have fighter aircraft in London for the first time since the Second World War. We have Rapier missiles perched on people's apartment buildings. That's all true. It's all necessary, it's all part of not being complacent or taking anything for granted.

But you're quite right that it's not the accent we want for the games. What we want is a friendly and accessible games. There will have to be the initial security check, but inside the park one hopes we will get something like the Sydney spirit—a London spirit that is open, warm, and freely mingling. The world is at our doorstep. We want to welcome it.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): A couple of minutes and a half.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Okay, good.

Mr. Aubut, I just want to congratulate the COC. There seems to be a real focus back on athletics and performance, yes, as well as supporting the athletes—not only the athletes at the games but also in the lead-up to the games. There seems to be a really different focus.

I wonder how you've come to that, and going forward, what resources we can provide to help continue that.

• (1145)

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Thank you for the question.

We call it a real turnaround. We arrived with a very ambitious platform. I come from professional sports. I learned a lot there about the business side of it.

We were able to build the best team. We have the number two from the Miami Dolphins and the number two from Nike.

I just told all those Canadians who were away to come with me. We were going to make something great for this country. There were already fantastic people at the COC, such as the chief sport officer, Caroline Assalian, and others. We even got the director of communications for the Prime Minister of Canada. You have to really look for the best.

To build a team that is making a transition and making the whole Canadian Olympic Committee what it should be we first put the athletes at the middle of everything we do.

What influenced me a lot was that there is a parade for the Stanley Cup and a parade for the Grey Cup. But what about a parade for the athletes? They do a lot more.

I had a hidden life when I owned the Nordiques. I was helping the amateur athletes in great secrecy. If you talk to Sylvie Bernier, Caroline Brunet, and Pierre Harvey, they will tell you that Marcel did something for them. There is no secret there. I really felt that those athletes had something special. I'm not saying that mine were not good, but mine were playing as a team and also were making millions of dollars. Those ones were not making any dollars, and they were playing, usually, individually. When I saw a family, a couple, just destroyed by the dreams of the kid, that really influenced me.

After I left professional hockey, it was just natural to make the whole circle and help my country as far as amateur sport was concerned. That's why I did that. I wanted to give back. But I wanted to give back with a very precise plan in mind, which is to absolutely put the athlete in the middle and to do it the way I've done anything before, with the best team of Canadians you can find. They are dedicated to the cause. That's why you see so many changes.

We want visibility for the athletes 365 days a year. We just discovered, and for me it is a discovery, that the best asset of this country is those athletes. That's the best we can offer.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you, Mr. Aubut.

[English]

Mr. Marcel Aubut: To have the chance to work with them is a privilege.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Matthew Dubé.

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

I would also like to thank the witnesses for joining us.

I appreciate your remarks, Mr. Aubut. I actually think that what is so interesting about the Olympics is the Olympic spirit, unlike in professional sport. We are talking about amateur athletes who do amazing things with a lot less, compared to a professional athlete. I feel that we can all appreciate that. That is what's so great for us in politics. Your victories go beyond the so-called customary divisions in the country. We are fully aware of the work that you do and we thank you for it.

Having said that, as a former athlete—and I think that anyone from the sport community will tell you the same thing—you always want to do better and to be more successful. I feel that's what you are doing in your work for the Olympics this summer.

I know that you had a chance to make requests and recommendations under the 2012 prebudget consultations and that they were submitted last summer. I would like to go back to that and find out what the impact of those consultations was on your preparations and on preparing to do an even better job than in Vancouver. We have seen some great accomplishments since the Own the Podium program started.

I know that a few initiatives were recommended, such as the creation of Canadian institutes of sport, a national initiative like the physical education literacy prize for children, and a child fitness tax credit, fully refundable to disadvantaged families. Those are very nice initiatives, but we have not seen any of them yet, unfortunately.

In light of that and of the accomplishments, what can we do in the future to further improve the preparations for the Olympics this summer and for future Olympic Games?

• (1150)

Mr. Marcel Aubut: When it comes to that, we are really very close to our goal. There is not much more left to do, aside from

working out the details and fine-tuning things. As for the Vancouver Olympic Games, we saw that, when governments and the private sector invested, the results were immediate. Own the Podium, which was created for the Vancouver Olympics, produced the expected results.

Immediately after the Vancouver Olympic Games, the government could have ended that program, since the games were finished. We insisted that the program not be abolished. We must seize the opportunity at every Olympic Games. It is not about making an exception because we are at home. Things do not work that way with athletes. We will have as many opportunities in London as in Sochi or Rio de Janeiro. So the government heard us. The Own the Podium program was kept alive, and for the summer Olympics, it was possible to keep most of the financial support provided for the Vancouver Olympic Games.

However, there is still so much left to do! We are lucky to have had this support, this interest, and no budget cuts, and so on. Athletes' needs are constantly growing. Things are getting more expensive at every games, and there is always more technology. We need to have access to that technology in order to remain competitive; otherwise, we will get left behind. As I was recently being told, since we were ranked number one at the Vancouver Olympic Games, the first thing other countries did was try to figure out how they could surpass us. Holding on to the number one ranking is one of the most difficult things to achieve. So that assistance needs to continue. There is a whole plethora of solutions.

For those who are asking how they can help us, we have about 50 solutions to propose. However, it is important to proceed in stages, one step at a time. I think it is our turn to show governments at all levels that the private sector is ready to do more. We are working on reaching agreements with Bell Canada, Suncor, Air Canada, the Royal Bank, Hudson's Bay, and so on, and our involvement surpasses anything previously seen in the history of the Canadian Olympic movement.

Usually, all that assistance drops down to zero following the Olympic Games. People have invested so much in the Games that they want to do something else with their money. There is a lot of volatility in the difficult economic situation we are currently experiencing. Despite that, we have convinced these companies to invest record amounts so that the efforts may continue. Then we can meet with governments again, compare their contribution with that of the private sector and let them know how more can be done.

We have an endless stream of ideas when it comes to that. Tax credits are a very good idea. There is also that famous amateur sport network we would like to create in order to raise public awareness about sports and promote them, and to be able to have recurring revenues from this type of operation some day.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you. I appreciate your answer. I think it is interesting that you talked about the role of the private sector and that you established a comparison with Formula 1, in terms of organization and scale. I do think that new technologies and improvements in communications will make it increasingly easy for people to have access to international events, in spite of time zones and everything else. At times, a sporting event may take place in the middle of the night.

I am thinking of a fairly famous example. In 1980, Miracle on Ice was held. One of the reasons why that was such a nice story was the fact that students were involved, young amateurs who had met a major challenge.

How do you reconcile the marketing aspect, the magnitude of the corporate element, and the healthy side of sports, which has been the very spirit of the Olympics since their origins, in Greece?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: I don't think that there is a paradox, a contradiction, between the two. Even if we show the best spirit possible, and we have excellent performances, good coaches, good programs and so on, we cannot do anything without financial support. Without that support, everything will eventually start cracking and fall apart. What is really needed is a combination of the two. We can avoid making the whole thing commercial and preserve competitive purity, discipline and the Olympic values we defend every day. There is a way to deal with that, but we must take all those elements into account. One does not necessarily cancel out the other. There should not be any concerns about that.

• (1155)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I would like to come back to a point, which may seem minor, but which I think is very important. This was mentioned when we talked about support for athletes' families. We all followed with much interest what Joannie Rochette went through when her mother passed away during the Vancouver Olympic Games. We realize how much of a cornerstone family is in athletes' lives. Family support in terms of results is very important.

My question, which is for everyone, is about what is happening in London, but also about how an athlete experiences such a situation. You mentioned it briefly. What can we do to help families and maintain this collective support?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Let's use the example of Joannie Rochette. There were psychologists, experts in virtually everything, on hand to support her. Why do you think the situation did not degenerate and she was able to return to competition, despite the situation? It was mostly due to the fact that she had those people and her team around her. She was surrounded by the top experts, who helped her calm things down and made her understand that life would go on. They made her understand that delivering another performance in that context was the best thing she could do. She was confident and won a medal.

This is a good example that shows we are ready for anything.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you, Mr. Aubut.

Lise St-Denis now has the floor.

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): My question is for His Excellency Mr. Pocock.

You talked about vision, and that interests me. You said that the 2012 Olympic Games will result in benefits in terms of technology and municipalities, revitalizing five boroughs.

Has Great Britain planned an amateur sports policy related to the Olympic Games, following the event?

[English]

Mr. Andrew John Pocock: It's a really good question and thank you. It links a bit to what Mr. Aubut has just said.

The United Kingdom has long been a champion of the amateur ideal, but in today's competitive world, amateur sport is very difficult to sustain at a championship level. We find that many of our Olympic athletes, and I know many of Canada's, are in full-time training. Sport is no longer, at the championship level, a part-time activity. It is a full-time, day and night, 365 day activity. That requires financial support. We have a double vision for sport in the U.K. What we want to see at the competitive level is support, both from sporting associations on the one hand and from the private sector on the other, for champion athletes who are at the pinnacle of their sport and who will compete in the Olympic games or in other forms of sport.

But your question is a shrewd one, because beneath that, what we'd like to see the Olympic Games do is to get young people—indeed people of all ages, including disabled people—to play sport, not at the championship level perhaps, but in a competitive and effective way. Like many other countries, we are facing in the U.K.—particularly among our youth—challenges of the digital age, with people sitting in front of their computers, the couch potato phenomenon. We face people who are perhaps overly concerned in some respects about health and safety aspects of competitive sport, particularly when it's contact sport. There are a lot of disincentives for young people. What we hope the games will do at the level below the championship one will be to encourage people to see sport as a chance to be excellent, a chance to reach their potential, and a chance to make themselves physically fit. When we saw in the video those beautiful images of human excellence, it was something inspiring.

I think the long answer to your short question is that sport at the top level will require enormous subsidies of different kinds, be they private sector or from the government. But beneath that, we do hope the games will inspire people of all ages and sizes to go back to playing sports.

[Translation]

Ms. Lise St-Denis: My next question is for you, Mr. Aubut.

I will be in Shawinigan on the day the Olympic Games kick off, as the Jeux du Québec will begin on the same day in that city. Is the Olympic organization planning to provide support for amateur sports, including the Jeux du Québec?

• (1200)

Mr. Marcel Aubut: We are one of the 204 countries with a legal Olympic committee. We are like a branch of the International Olympic Committee. We represent Canada and adopt the values and parameters of the International Olympic Committee. Therefore, high performance athletes are our priority.

However, our role in terms of Olympic values is much broader. We work on youth development. Our efforts consist in showing how the models created through the Olympic Games can benefit young people likely to experience problems related to drugs, school dropouts or alcohol. Sports are turning out to be even a big part of the solution for controlling health costs for Canadians.

That is what we are trying to do. Our mandate is much broader than simply making sure to win medals. That is how we are becoming something of a Canadian leader within our sports system, but also a major contributor to the improvement of our society. For instance, we ensure that a selection of talented athletes participate in the Jeux du Québec. That may provide those athletes with an opportunity to climb the ladder of sporting competition, with the Olympic podium as a crowning achievement.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: My last question is for Ms. Crooks. Still with regard to vision, do you ever work on educating the countries that forbid women from participating in sports? Are there any discussions on how those discriminatory policies can be modified? There is a whole portion of women from certain countries who cannot participate in the games because they are not allowed. Is that problem ever discussed? Are you trying to find solutions?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: First of all, thank you for your question.

I'm very proud that here in Canada we have an excellent organization, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity, which we work very closely with in order to further the leadership role of women in sport.

Also, when it comes to the participation of women in sport, we're probably internationally at about fifty-fifty. I was a member of the International Olympic Committee at a time when there were only 10 women of about 140 members. Now 20% is the new quota, which we believe will be reached during the Olympics this year when new members are put on board.

While the area of women's participation in sport has increased, there is still a huge gap in terms of female leadership in sport at the very high levels. I certainly welcome new and innovative ways to address that. There are a lot of great athletes and women from the business sector who are now becoming more involved in women in sport, but we also have a chance to showcase the leadership of women in sport by hosting events. We have events in Canada, such as the Women's World Cup, which will be coming here in 2015, as a way to showcase women in sport to get other young girls in that sport particularly. As well, if our athletes perform well, they can also inspire new generations of women in sport.

Clearly, the area of leadership is one that we do need to continue to address. I work with many organizations in trying to do that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you, Ms. Crooks.

[Translation]

I now yield the floor to Mr. Armstrong.

[English]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here today.

Charmaine, in particular, thank you for being here. It's great to have an Olympic silver medallist in our presence. I wish you had brought your medal with you today.

I have some questions for you. You said in your statement that our support is second to none in Canada for high-performance athletes. I

don't think this was always the case. In fact, I think when you were participating for Canada, amateur athletes struggled greatly in trying to find the time, the support, and the expertise in coaching. We didn't have the financial support backing our athletes.

Can you explain some of the differences that athletes are enjoying today compared to when you were participating for Canada?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: There are several. When you look at the technology, I think that's a big area. Hosting the games in our country was a real catalyst for the injection of more funding into sport. That really helped. Whenever we have a chance to host the games or different events, it helps immensely.

Back when we were competing some 15 years ago, we had the carding system, which still remains strong, and that's an excellent part. We also have new partners. There is the Canadian Olympic Committee, which is working even more closely with sponsors to leverage support for athletes, be that via its marketing strategy or other kinds of direct support to athletes. We also have the Canadian Olympic Foundation, which is also going to be strong in providing support for athletes. There are a lot of other organizations that are doing excellent work in identifying ways to support athletes, whether it's a specific need or a more general need. That is very strong.

Chris may be able to provide more information about what's happening internally in the COC.

• (1205)

Mr. Christopher Overholt (Chief Executive Officer and Secretary General, Canadian Olympic Committee): Thank you for the question, Mr. Armstrong, because it's something we're very, very proud of.

The progression in the effort to prepare athletes and coaches for the experience they have at the games has been tremendous. Going back to soon after Athens, the Canadian Olympic Committee, at the time under Carol's leadership, took a great effort to understand what had transpired in the Athens games and with the strategy toward starting to improve the process around the journey for the athlete and coach in preparation for the Olympic experience, which, as defined by the athlete and coach community, was so very different from any other experience they'd had prior to it—multi-sport games, the distraction, as Marcel mentioned earlier, of family, of media, and all the many things that represents.

You wouldn't need to go back too far to see some of those changes. And again we're very proud of what Carol Assalian and her team deliver at the games, all the work they do in advance. It was mentioned earlier that our first trip in preparation for London happened in May 2007. That's a standard operating procedure for us now. Our teams are already making trips to Rio and certainly have been for some time making trips to Russia in preparation for those games.

The work the committee does directly with the families and directly with the athletes: there's a whole series of seminars that take place over a number of years leading up to the games to prepare the athletes and start those conversations and answer those questions for them—media training, the work that goes into preparing their families' understanding of what they'll experience. So it's a very strong point of difference for the Canadian Olympic Committee today. It's world-leading, I would tell you, something we're very proud of and expect to continue to grow as we go forward.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Thank you.

There's another side to this. I was a school principal in my previous life. The athletes we're supporting federally, a pretty big part of them go into our schools and talk to our children. They do this regularly, and they provide inspiration and a great message. The message isn't win at all costs; it's more to strive to be your best in whatever you want to do, whether it's in the arts, whether it's athletics, whether it's academics. They bring a really strong role model to schools and to our youth. It's particularly needed today when we face challenges of child abuse, as Mr. Pocock was talking about.

Have you gone into schools, Ms. Crooks, and talked to students? And how often do athletes do that? They do it quite regularly as far as I've experienced.

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Absolutely. I think most athletes do that. I've been doing that since I was in high school, going into schools and speaking.

You're right, you talk to the kids there and you help to inspire them, whether it's to be the best in music, in the arts, what have you. The inspiration from sport transcends. It's a universal principle. As I mentioned earlier, one of the values of the Olympics is about excellence. It's about excellence in anything. But sport is our platform. If kids can be inspired by that, then I encourage every athlete to go back to their school and speak to their school about those stories.

As I mentioned, there are 14,000 stories of those athletes from all across the world. But here in Canada, we have a very strong message and a strong powerful story to tell. We hosted the games. We're still inspired by that. Going back to the schools, these athletes who are preparing for London and who are moving forward will also bring more stories to those schools all across Canada. So working with the school system to increase that I think is something we welcome through some of the education programs that happen with our Olympic committee.

Chris, you might want to speak a little bit more about that.

Mr. Christopher Overholt: It's absolutely the right question. We believe very strongly that sports, elite sport in particular, is an absolute laboratory for leadership. You don't need to look any further than a little way down the desk to see the type of leadership that Charmaine has provided, not only within the sport community but in her everyday life. Mark Tewksbury is an outstanding example of that and of course is our chef de mission for London.

The work the Canadian Olympic Committee does in the way that you describe, Mr. Armstrong, is so very important. We have a responsibility first, as you point out, to deliver excellence on the

field of play, and that is certainly our mandate with sport as our core business. But as Carol and I discuss all the time, our athletes as leaders in Canada are absolutely a touchstone for Canadians. Where sport is our core business and where our Canadian Olympic team is our brand, athletes sit at the very core of that, and that is the absolute emotional connection for Canadians.

That is the touchstone for pride, a symbol of excellence. And as Charmaine points to, that can transcend sport. It can be about educational excellence. It can be about excellence in business. There are so many wonderful things we can point to around what our athletes stand for.

• (1210)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: How much time?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Actually, you're just done. Sorry about that.

[*Translation*]

I yield the floor to Andrew Cash.

Thank you, Mr. Overholt.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of you for being here.

It's an honour for us to listen to you, Madame Crooks, and to have you here, your excellency.

It's going to take great discipline for me not to just want to talk about the Nordiques and Forsberg and Sundin. Being from Toronto, I want to tell you that we were Nordiques fans and we had to keep it a little quiet.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: They're going to come back. Don't worry.

Mr. Andrew Cash: I wanted to get into a bit more of the financial realities that face amateur athletes.

I just want to say as well that it is an interesting observation that Olympic athletes and amateur athletes at the highest levels also show great community activism and leadership in a way one would like to see professional athletes mirror, and which oftentimes they don't, so I think that's a great testament to the commitment of Olympic athletes and elite athletes at the amateur level. You and all of your colleagues are deeply appreciated, not just for your athletic prowess, but for your commitment to our community of Canada.

On the subject of the funding, which of course all of this activity flows from, I want to get a sense, first of all, of what the mix is between the private corporate sponsorship and the public investment.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: It's difficult to say exactly, because, as you know, there is Sport Canada and, through OTP, that is our best partner as far as generating the money goes. As for generating it in the sports sector, it's our duty, our job, and all of that. There is no secret here. This country does a lot with not so much. We are not equivalent yet with the G-8 countries as far as supporting our high-performance athletes is concerned. We are not there yet.

What is most encouraging, though, is that for a few years, since the preparation for Vancouver, I would say, people have decided to make sports part of our culture by investing more, and we got the results right away, which means that the money gave results. That is not the case in many other areas when you invest money, as you know. We all know that.

Mr. Andrew Cash: It's the federal government that's the main one.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: As for the ratio, most of the money comes from the government, but I would say that we could reach 50% of what the government brings as far as the additional sponsorship goes.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Okay. Do you have some kind of code of ethics or code of conduct when you are going through your list of potential corporate sponsors?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: We are very demanding. First of all, we have an opportunity to deal with the biggest corporations in this country, and usually they are very well equipped as far as a code of ethics is concerned.

Mr. Andrew Cash: What are some of the main aspects of this code of ethics that you're looking for?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Is there somebody who's an expert in that?

Mr. Christopher Overholt: Sure. I can take some of that.

If you'd like, I'll go back and provide just a little more clarity around what has already been offered from a funding perspective.

The Canadian Olympic Committee is 98% funded by the private sector. The wonderful support that comes from the federal government flows as core funding to the sport community and is evidenced probably most publicly in the contribution they make to support high-performance sport in the Own the Podium program.

With respect to the conversation and the question around the private sector, the place you start when you're looking for partners is around values, right? That's probably the early place to look for resonance in terms of what your message is, as the Canadian Olympic team: that the Canadian Olympic movement stands for a certain measure of values, of course. So it has been our effort, in the time that this team has been together, to align ourselves with partners that share the values, that see strength and opportunity, and that have resonance with the values we represent.

Again, this was a plan that was started long before any of us came together. If you go back to the seven or so years before Vancouver, many of those partners that were attached to the VANOC effort are renewed with us and committed to staying with us for the future. Values are where that conversation starts. Then you look for identifiable opportunities where the two brands together can have the opportunity for change, whether it be to drive bottom-line profitability for their partners or certainly for the country.

• (1215)

Mr. Andrew Cash: I guess I'm curious, then, because we know that yesterday the CLC called for the Canadian Olympic Committee to sever its relationship with Rio Tinto in regard to the medals I think they've been contracted to produce. What's the position of—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): May I ask for a very short answer, please, Mr. Aubut?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Our position is not to get involved in any union relations problems. That's not our job. Our job is to be associated with the best. Rio Tinto, everybody acknowledges, is an incredibly good name in the world, but they were mixed up here vis-à-vis the fact that they were making the medals for London, and they have a union problem locally. I don't think we should get involved in any of those regular relations, which can be up and down in life. Our job is to win those medals, whoever makes them. Rio Tinto, for us, is a name we are proud to partner with.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you very much, Mr. Aubut.

Thank you, Mr. Cash.

I yield the floor to Parm Gill.

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here with us, and also for the wonderful presentations.

I also want to congratulate you, Ms. Crooks, for your achievements in your life. They're incredible.

I have a question for you. Can you maybe share with us as to what's the best way Canadians can support their athletes in these games, from the athletes' perspective, and also from the perspective of the committee?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Thank you very much, Mr. Gill, for that question.

First of all, it would be by tuning in to watch these performances on our official networks, who are the supporters of the games, of course. Also, if athletes live in their communities, if there are ways to be part of some of the celebrations, whether they're going to the games or as they come back, I think that's also a way. But also, they can support some of the events that are across Canada where there are opportunities to meet athletes or support events where there might be some financial opportunities, or just to support them in principle for going and representing Canada. I think those are some of the small ways Canadians can support our athletes on an everyday basis.

There are also some other organized ways and some programs that the Canadian Olympic Committee and many of our partners are undertaking. Really, these athletes will be telling their stories, whether it's using new media to do that, or the interviews that you'll hear. The goal really is to make these athletes household names so that other Canadians can continue the inspiration, as we have talked about.

So those are some of the ways I would see as supporting our athletes.

Mr. Parm Gill: Very nice.

Would you also be able to share with us some of the main strategies used in terms of promoting our athletes and the London games that are coming up? Is social media part of that?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: I just joined Twitter a few months ago, and of course it is. It's a huge way of supporting that. The International Olympic Committee also has guidelines as to how athletes can use social media.

I know Chris and the team are working with communicating with the athletes on how to actually use social media in the context so there aren't breaches to some of our supporters. Chris may want to take that a little further.

Mr. Christopher Overholt: Sure. The question was what are we doing to promote our athletes, I gather, in their run-up to London. Certainly you've seen evidence of it today. The initial video that we shared with you is part of the core to our brand campaign. The way we think of our position next to all of that is that it's our job to heighten the conversation around sport in this country. It's certainly our responsibility to help tell our athletes' stories and to connect Canadians to those stories as sources of pride and inspiration. We do that in a number of ways, and we do it with a number of partners, so some of the things that have already been mentioned, whether it be through social media—Twitter, Facebook, certainly our website—have all received renewed attention in the time our leadership team has been together.

We work with important partners who help us get the message out, like our brand campaign. There were so many private sector supporters there in the media, as part of the creative process that went into that. And then there are our many marketing partners, of course, who not only help us tell those stories, but help us develop programs again for athletes in support of their journey toward the Olympic Games, and in support of their families' journeys, as has been referenced a couple of times today.

•(1220)

Mr. Parm Gill: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): You have one and a half minute remaining.

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill: Your excellency, what sort of experience can Canadians travelling to London for the Olympics expect?

Mr. Andrew John Pocock: I hope a very good one.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Andrew John Pocock: I'd be appalled if it wasn't. London is a huge cosmopolitan capital. I think in addition to the games, whether people have tickets or not.... And by the way, there will be huge open screens all around Olympic Park. Even if people don't have tickets, they can watch individual events.

The whole country is at their feet. The United Kingdom is a splendid mix, in a small area, of incredibly diverse populations and history.

I would hope that people would have, first of all, the glorious and well-renowned British summer. It is completely reliable, as you

know. It never rains in the summer in the U.K. I would hope they would have a very positive experience.

Just to give you a sense of what the country is feeling at the moment, we have two big events, as you know. One we share with Canada, the diamond jubilee. The weekend coming up is part of that. There's a festive atmosphere in the U.K., which might be a little counterintuitive, given the economic difficulties that Britain faces, and indeed that Europe faces. Nonetheless, there's a sense that the diamond jubilee is an extraordinary and unique occasion. Indeed, for our generation, so are the Olympic Games. People are looking forward to this. They're looking forward to welcoming the world.

We have a particularly warm relationship with Canada at every level, so I hope the Canadian visitors to London will have a very warm and positive experience—and will tell me personally if they don't.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you, your excellency.

[*Translation*]

We now move to Lise St-Denis.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Mr. Aubut, I have a question that is not easy. Is Canada helping developing countries become part of the Olympic Games? Is that considered? Is it ever discussed? What can be done about that?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Are you asking me what is being done to ensure that developing countries participate in the Olympic Games?

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Yes, or to enable them to do so.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: I think that the International Olympic Committee and the Pan American Sports Organization are working very hard to help developing countries establish real national Olympic committees, get organized and obtain some of the revenues from a system, a solidarity fund that actually stems from the success of the Olympic Games. Thanks to that fund, countries that want to create a national Olympic committee in Africa, or across the world, have the opportunity to do so and to bring athletes to the games.

Actually, when we go to the Olympic Games now, we are surprised to see the names of many countries we may have never heard before. It is a nice feeling. Then we see that a tremendous amount of work goes into providing countries with the opportunity to come to the games and have at least a team of athletes who will give it their all. I think that is very much in line with Olympic values. I think that is very good for the whole world. Great efforts are invested into making the games accessible.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Bravo!

Let's look toward the future. How can we improve the way the Olympic Games are planned and prepared? What can we hope for?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: It's very much a matter of making the Olympic Games accessible. Their organization has become so expensive, and they are so big. We are talking about 14,000 athletes, as it was mentioned earlier. The event has become so big and requires so much infrastructure!

We are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that the number of athletes and sports must be limited. The Olympic Games must stop their endless growth. Countries that would really benefit from hosting the Olympic Games must be able to pay for them. A tremendous amount of effort is being put both into winter Olympic Games and summer Olympic Games.

That was actually just discussed at a big meeting in Moscow that was held for all the Olympic committees from around the world. President Jacques Rogge is working very hard on that. He often talks about it. He said that he would like to leave behind an Olympic monster whose growth has been stopped, so that the Olympics can always be accessible. He is thinking about that. He spoke in Quebec City last week, as you know, and that was part of his speech.

• (1225)

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Okay.

My last question is for Charmaine Crooks. How did your winning an Olympic medal change your personal and professional life? What kind of an impact does an Olympic medal have personally and professionally?

[English]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Thank you very much for that question, Madame St-Denis.

First, sport was everything to me. As a young girl watching the Olympics and seeing those athletes do great things, I thought I could also do that. I got involved and was able to get a scholarship to go to university and study psychology.

I've always been drawn to things that challenge me, even today. I think that's the universal quality a lot of athletes who have been involved in sport have. The same life lessons you learn from sport about setting goals and motivating yourself and planning and working with a team are the same kinds of things we all carry in our professional lives. Sport has taught me those great valuable lessons.

We talked about athletes as leaders in many ways throughout the sport system because those same qualities are there. Whether you're leading a championship team or leading a business or being on a board of directors, all those qualities in sport are universal, and I think a lot of us can relate to that. That's one of the qualities the president was referring to. The universality of sport and those qualities really connect us well beyond the playing field.

I'm very privileged I had a chance to come to this country and have that opportunity to represent Canada and to be involved in sport, because it's given me so much. That investment we're all making in sport today is investing in all Canadians so they can have touch points to these qualities and hopefully through sport we will build better citizens and better communities.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you very much, Ms. Crooks. That's very touching.

I will *passer la parole* to Mr. Paul Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Ms. Crooks, there are a few things I always have difficulty watching: overtime hockey when it's a team I actually care about; a shootout in World Cup soccer; and the start of any Olympic event, whether it's a sprint or in the water.

Since I have you here, I'm going to ask you a selfish question, because I always watch, but I have to turn my head away from the TV at the start. What are you thinking about just before the gun is about to go off and a race is about to start? Are you thinking about anything at all?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Every athlete approaches their sport differently at that starting line. It's one I went through for Canada for 20 years.

That starts in practice. You practise for many years and you simulate those circumstances, but on the day anything can happen, whether it's a factor such as the weather or nerves or what have you. You really prepare yourself in practice for those kinds of situations.

I remember one of the games in Korea in 1988 and being in the stadium with 80,000 people. It feels as if humming is going on around you, but you're so focused on your performance you don't think about that. You're focused because you're prepared, and you know you had a good team to help you get there, just like what we're doing for our athletes as we're bringing them toward London. You're trying to manage those natural distractions around you, with everyone pulling at you in so many different directions. When you're on the day you try to relax, to remember what your coach told you, what you have to do at each point in your performance, and then you just let it happen, and it does.

I think for a lot of these athletes who are going to be competing less than 50 days from now.... Again, everyone goes through it in a different way, but that whole notion of focus and relaxation and having rehearsed your performance hundreds and thousands of times I think is a quality most of us go through.

• (1230)

Mr. Paul Calandra: At every Olympics there's always some story that comes out that has maybe less to do with the brilliant performance of an athlete. I think there was a swimmer in Sydney—and I may be wrong—who was from Africa....

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: He was from Burkina Faso.

Mr. Paul Calandra: It took him a very long time to finish. I think he was the only athlete from his country. It became just as much a story of how important the games are.

Mr. Aubut, I think you touched on it as well. Maybe we've learned this from the Olympics.

I remember when the torch was coming through my hometown of Stouffville at about 7:30 in the morning, and it was minus 35 outside, so I thought I would be the only person to greet the torch at that time. But at 6:30 in the morning, when we were supposed to gather, the town was completely full. All the students were out. All the businesses were out. It was unbelievable. Nothing really unifies a country like participation in sports. It's not always winning; it is how well they do, and you get to see how well they train.

I wonder about continuing that support. How are we doing on developing coaches so our athletes can perform at their highest level?

Mr. Marcel Aubut: First of all, we had the games in Vancouver. Vancouver was a huge success. For the first time in my life I saw a social project where there was no difference between men or women, French or English, black or white. All Canadians were 100% behind that project. There are not many of those instances. You cannot sense that often, unfortunately, but sport does that. It's very rare. Sometimes there has been a hiatus in a war because it's Olympics time, and sports is a good reason to have peace. It's the same thing to rally all Canadians behind one project. It's unique.

As far as the coaches are concerned, we are not doing enough for them. I am telling you, we are just waking up about those people. There is a woman, the chief of sport, who, since I have been involved, and since she joined, has been repeating to us that athletes are the centre of the action, and that's perfect, but their coaches are right beside them. We are starting to learn the lesson. We are having some programs now to reward coaches, to acknowledge their effort, to acknowledge what they do. They give their life to sport. Without them, there would be no athletes. We are on top of it. News will be coming after London about the very specific plan we have for them.

Do you want to add anything?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Actually, I am sorry to intervene. We hope to get back to this.

[Translation]

That's very moving; you are very confident. Unfortunately, your time is up.

I now yield the floor to Ms. Sitsabaiesan.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: This is boring. As soon as things start to heat up, everything is brought to a halt.

[English]

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your excellency, you mentioned that the London 2012 games is bigger than just the games, that it's about the importance of a legacy and rebuilding communities that may have been neglected or under-invested in over the times. You touched on the importance of transit in that legacy-building. In Toronto, we're excited about the upcoming Pan American Games. They are smaller than the Olympics, but they're still important for us.

What advice can you give us? What can the city of Toronto or Canada learn from the London experience to have an important legacy of building community with the Pan American Games?

Mr. Andrew John Pocock: Thank you very much for the question.

I am sure that Toronto is talking to London about this. One of the things we did in the run-up to our games was talk to Vancouver and Canada. Even though it was a winter games and a slightly smaller event, there were a great many lessons we could learn. We had everyone from athletes and coaches to organizers and security people

in Vancouver. I am sure Toronto is doing the same. There will be a spirit of cooperation.

I'm not an expert on this, but because it's a huge commitment of capital and time, I think what any city needs to do now is to think what they want, not just from the games, but what they want after it. There is no point focusing on a single event, vast though it is, or even two events in the case of the games, with the Olympics and the Paralympics. That's six weeks of competition, but it took us six years to get there. What we are doing is looking 20 years ahead. It seemed logical to us to design the games to be sustainable in the broader sense.

First of all, the games are physically in a community. What do you do for that community, and more importantly, how do you get that community involved in supporting the games themselves? There's that dimension. It's very important for all kinds of reasons. Buy-in is essential, and you won't succeed without it.

The second thing is the infrastructure. It places a huge burden on a city for a very intense period, but it is an opportunity to invest in infrastructure for the future. Communications and transport are the two big things we looked at.

The third thing is the environmental dimension. How do you leave as light a footprint as possible in terms of construction, but also leave a physical legacy, a park, waterways, or some contribution to the urban environment? That's a very strong dimension of London.

The last thing is perhaps the thing that dominates all our lives, and that is the economic legacy. How do you create permanent jobs, or jobs that are as permanent as possible in the locality? Much more importantly, thinking beyond, the key thing for us is it's the London games, but it's also Britain's games. Right across the country, there are efforts at cultural and legacy projects, from art and architecture, to drama and music. Indeed, there's a parallel cultural festival taking part at the same time.

The only advice is to think multi-dimensional. That will work.

• (1235)

Mr. Marcel Aubut: May I also add something?

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Thank you.

I also have a question for Madame Crooks afterwards, so thank you. Go ahead, Mr. Aubut.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: From the president of the IOC, Mr. Jacques Rogge, I learned, for the first time last week, that we are part of the G-6 countries. He said, "Canada, you are part of it", and I thought, what is he talking about, the G-6? I've heard about the G-20 and the G-8, but the G-6? He said, "Yes, you are one of the countries that has successfully delivered three Olympic Games in the world, and there are only six."

Here we are, we have lots of experience. It's always good to learn from others, and from the latest event, of course. But we have an incredible experience. You're going to see. You should be proud of the Pan Am Games. You're right about that. It's going to be very close to the Olympic level, and then Toronto would be a perfect fit for a future summer games. This country is very well respected in knowing how to do those things.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaesan: Yes, for sure. Thank you.

Madame Crooks, I'm inspired by your story. For other children who may be inspired by the games, how can we help or how are we helping them access sport, especially those who face socio-economic barriers or traditional cultural barriers to access sport? What are we doing? Or what can we be doing?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): May I ask for a very short answer, please?

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: It will be very short.

As I said before, investing in sport is investing in all Canadians, especially our youth. I think we collectively need to do as much as we can to break down those barriers to access, whether it's to facilities, to programs. There are a lot of excellent programs across the country that are working to give access to sport for kids. Obviously with the Canadian Olympic Committee you heard earlier that through the education programs in schools we're also trying to do that.

Anything that helps to break down those barriers so kids can go and just play and have fun and learn about sport is something I'll certainly support.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you very much, Madame Crooks.

We are back to Mr. Scott Armstrong.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: I'm actually going to pick up on that, because you didn't get a lot of time to answer. But before I give you a shot, I'm going to pre-empt that by saying it's not all about money to support students and young people involving themselves in sport. It really comes back to what we were talking about before with coaching.

If you have a motivated coach who really cares about the best interests of the children, it doesn't take a lot of money to put a good program together. I know I've done it. I've seen other people do it. One of the biggest differences we have in Canada compared to the United States is that coaching in Canada is primarily an amateur activity. In schools in the States, teachers who coach usually are paid some money, not always huge money, to do it. But in Canada it's primarily a volunteer activity. Those values that volunteers bring to anything they do carry through that sport.

It's not all about money, but maybe you can talk about ways we can support coaches into starting these programs.

● (1240)

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: First of all, thank you for that, and I certainly share your thoughts about the importance of coaching. For me, my coaches have meant so much to me, and they were all volunteers, particularly the ones I had in Canada. I went to school in the U.S. to train. At that time it was a good opportunity for me. But I think that if the athletes are the heart of sport, then the coaches are the soul of sport. They are part of that team, and we must do everything we can to support them.

I think Marcel spoke already about some of the programs that will be launched. I'm not sure if you want to add anything to that, Chris.

I certainly share your views about the importance of supporting our coaches.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Chris, maybe you can expand, because you were cut off earlier.

Mr. Christopher Overholt: Thank you.

First of all, as has been said now a number of times, coaches are core to our strategy for sport development in this country, absolutely.

Secondly, I want to pick up on the point that's being made around volunteerism. You wouldn't need to go too deep into our sport system to see just how important volunteers are to the development of sport at all levels in this country. That's true as much for the club as it is oftentimes ramping all the way up to high-performance sport. And that's something we identified fairly early on as this group came together.

There's a wonderful day that's celebrated by the international Olympic family that virtually nobody knows about, and it's called Olympic day, June 23. One of the efforts we're undertaking, and you'll see evidence of it in the coming weeks, and we expect this will be a growing program for us in the coming years, is to draw some attention to Olympic day, but to do so with volunteers in mind.

As a Canadian, I spent a little bit of time living in the United States in recent times, and one of things that exists in that country is a call to volunteers to build a better country in that way. As I've said already, we really believe that sport is a laboratory for leadership, and in that same way, we believe that volunteers can be authors of the development of those athletes to deliver that leadership to the country.

Volunteerism as part of the lexicon of our nation is not as prevalent as I think it can be, but it is very much prevalent in our sports system. So I think there is an opportunity for leadership there that you'll see us point to a lot in the next little while.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: One of the major challenges and barriers to providing an effective program, if you are a coach in a socio-economically low area, is equipment and facilities. I know the federal government, when it sponsors big events like the Women's World Cup that is coming up, is very involved in helping develop facilities and working with provincial and municipal partners.

One area we could improve on is the area of providing equipment. If we could provide the equipment, the uniforms, and that expertise, I think that's an area we should focus on. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Christopher Overholt: I would agree with any programs that provide more opportunity for kids to be attached to sport and to get involved earlier in life. In the sport community, in the family, we talk about not just high-performance sport, we talk about the continuum that is the development of athletes in the country, and it starts in the playground. It's often referred to as a playground-to-podium mentality in the development of an athlete. The old adage that it takes a village is absolutely true in the development of a high-performance athlete in this country. It starts at that level. So we would be supportive of any programs that initiate placing kids where they can try sport and see how it works for them.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: If you have a volunteer coach, you have a facility, and you have equipment, that keeps registration fees down. Keeping registration fees down makes that tax credit that's been put in place more effective, because it's not a huge tax credit. So there should be a push toward having those components all rolled into one program, because that would involve more young people in this country in healthy activity, and help us defray some of these health care costs that childhood obesity is going to lead to in future generations. It would be a very effective direction for us to go in.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.

Matthew Dubé now has the floor.

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

I would like to come back to the issue of including athletes in planning within Olympic committees. Ms. Crooks, based on how you talked about it, my understanding is that this was a relatively new approach. Could you tell us more about the importance of including athletes in planning?

As Mr. Armstrong said earlier, this is significant, as it is not only money that is important, but also the way that money is spent. And who better to talk about this issue than athletes, the people who are the main targets of that funding?

Could you elaborate on that? How can we include athletes in planning more in order to improve programs in the future?

• (1245)

[*English*]

Ms. Charmaine Crooks: Thank you very much for your question.

There are many areas where athletes are involved. If you look at the international level, there is an IOC Athletes' Commission, on which the current IOC member from Canada is Beckie Scott. I was a member of that commission for 15 years. My term on that has just ended.

From the Canadian point of view, we have several athletes commissions in Canada. The Canadian Olympic Committee has a very robust athletes council. We also have a committee of Olympians Canada, which represents the 4,000 alumni Olympians. We also have AthletesCAN in Canada. Also, a lot of the national sport federations have athletes committees.

If you look at VANOC, we had an athletes council related to that to give advice to the organizing committee, typically around sport. The Pan American Games has a very robust athlete advisory council as well. Our Canadian Olympic Committee has, on our governance structure, athletes who are integrated into that as well as representation from the alumni. From time to time, as far as working groups are concerned, the athletes are called on quite a bit to be involved, not just from a ceremonial point of view, but also for developing and implementing policy.

Regarding the whole idea of athletes' involvement, in many ways the International Olympic Committee has taken a lead role in that by encouraging the 204 national Olympic committees to include

athletes on their executives. In Canada, we're very well represented on our executive as far as the athletes are concerned.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Overholt, would you like to add anything?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher Overholt: Thank you, Monsieur Dubé.

I would say, as has been offered a couple of times already, if athletes are at the core of our brand, then naturally you want to have that experience involved in your business, and we do. So separate from the things that Charmaine has mentioned, certainly Veronica Brenner, Isabelle Charest, and Tania Vincent are all key members of our staff at the Canadian Olympic Committee.

In more recent times, Mark Tewksbury is our chef de mission for London, and we have already announced Steve Podborski for Russia.

So from a planning and execution standpoint, both every day in our business and as we prepare for games, we have some of the most profiled Canadian athletes involved in just about everything we do today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you.

That's fairly important, and I am happy to hear it.

Before my time runs out, I would like to come back to something you mentioned in the beginning, Mr. Pocock. You talked about the importance of Paralympic Games in encouraging people with various disabilities to become involved in sports. Athletes need infrastructure and tools to achieve an elite level in order to compete at the Paralympic Games.

Given that you come from the birthplace of the Paralympic Games, what do you think about the current situation in terms of encouraging participation in the that event?

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew John Pocock: Thank you very much.

I think they probably need all the help and encouragement and coaching and facilities that able-bodied athletes need, and then some. One is starting a little further back, I think, with disabled people.

The key reasons we're emphasizing the Paralympics, as I tried to say a little earlier on, is to do two things. One is to expand the horizons of possibility for disabled people. Many of them would simply not consider the prospect of competing in sport, at any level. Seeing this on television, perhaps having contact with some of the Paralympic athletes, will expand that horizon a bit. Second, and equally important, is it will give broader society a better sense of what disabled athletes, and indeed disabled people, can do. We hope that the chemistry between those two things will give a bit more motivation for the disabled to come forward.

Sport is such a good avenue. It not only contributes to physical well-being, but it involves them in teams, in community. It breaks the isolation that so often surrounds disabled people in their lives. They live in isolated apartments and this brings you into a broader community. Also, it's making people more aware, perhaps making coaches more aware, that it isn't just able-bodied people who respond well to discipline and instruction; anyone can.

We do hope that the Paralympics will be a showcase for what disabled athletes can do. As I say, I've seen up close and personally the quite extraordinary physical condition that self-discipline and hard training allows disabled athletes to reach. It's a catalyst, as well. It's not just a display, but a catalyst, both for the disabled to come forward themselves, and for people to reach out a bit more and provide some more facilities.

Thank you for the question.

•(1250)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Pierre Nantel): Thank you very much, Your Excellency. This was an amazing opportunity for us to take stock of the situation involving our athletes who are going to London, your home.

This concludes our meeting. On behalf of all the members of this committee, I would like to sincerely thank each and every one of the witnesses who have joined us this morning.

We will now suspend the meeting for about a minute, as we will move on to committee business in camera.

We have to say goodbye to you. I want to thank you once again for joining us.

Mr. Marcel Aubut: Thank you, everyone. Have a good day.

[*The committee continued in camera*]

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