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Chair

Mr. Gordon Brown

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. I'm going to call this meeting number 30 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to order.

The orders of the day are, pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday October 29, 2014, Bill S-211, an act to establish a national day to promote health and fitness for all Canadians. That is the business that we're going to deal with today.

This bill was in the Senate. It was carried by the Honourable Nancy Greene Raine, and she is going to be joining us shortly. There is a vote right now in the Senate.

As well, in the first hour we have from Sport Matters Group, Robert Elliott, and from Physical and Health Education Canada, Chris Jones.

We're going to start with Mr. Elliot for 10 minutes, then move to Mr. Jones, and then hopefully by that time Senator Raine will be joining us.

Mr. Elliott, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Mr. Robert Elliott (Senior Leader, Sport Matters Group): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good day, everyone. *Bonjour, tout le monde.*

First of all, thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee. It is truly appreciated and I hope that I'm able to add some value to your discussions about national health and fitness day in Canada.

I am pleased to be able to be here to support Bill S-211, which would recognize the first Saturday in June of each year as national health and fitness day across Canada. The Sport Matters Group, or SMG, is a group of individuals and organizations who believe that a values-based, ethical sport experience along with regular and accessible physical activity and facilities required to participate are integral to Canadian culture and the development of our people, communities, and nation.

We are keenly interested in sport physical activity and recreation at all levels and at all ages. SMG's collective voice promotes the value of sport and physical activity to Canadians and advocates policies, programs, and interventions that try to ensure every Canadian has access to the sport and physical activity opportunities to which they aspire.

Because sport and physical activity for all ages are important to the long-term mental and physical health of Canadians, Sport Matters pays attention to those factors that have a bearing on this health. My message to this committee is clear and simple: increased healthy, active living and sport participation is no longer a nice to have goal for governments in Canada; it is a must have. The facts that show the importance of an active, healthy lifestyle are well known, but allow me to share a sampling of those with you.

Only 15% of adults and fewer than 10% of teens meet the daily physical activity guidelines for health benefits. Canadian kids are spending seven hours and 48 minutes a day in front of a television, video game, or computer screen. Approximately one in four Canadian adults is obese. Similarly, 25% of Canadians aged two to seventeen are overweight or obese. Physically active youth have less anxiety, stronger social connections, and are less likely to abuse alcohol or drugs. They are less likely to develop chronic diseases and have stronger social cohesion, reducing risk-driven behaviour. Results from the Canadian health measures survey forecast accelerated disease development, increased health care costs, and loss of productivity due to declining fitness levels in Canada.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that we could reduce hypertension cases by 220,000, diabetes cases by 120,000, and heart disease cases by 170,000 over the next 25 years through healthy, active lifestyles. These changes alone could add up to a saving of \$2.6 billion over that 25-year period.

Last, nearly nine in ten Canadians believe that children do not get enough physical activity.

Physical activity is not just important to individuals, but it also has a massive impact on Canada's economy, as you're hearing. The Canadian Institute of Actuaries has determined that assuming current cost-of-living increases, health care budgets will consume 69% of total government budgets by the year 2037. We need to be greatly concerned about this as it leaves little for spending on other programs and activities. The actuaries also believe that all of this will reduce Canadian economic growth to a level of 1.5% to 2% per year over the next 25 years. This compares to the average 2.5% to 3% per year over the past 25 years.

Two separate documents released by the Conference Board of Canada this fall offer some very important facts about healthy, active living and the sedentary behaviour of Canadians. They provide insights into not only the benefits of leading an active, healthy lifestyle, but the drawbacks of being sedentary. Physical inactivity currently costs Canadian taxpayers approximately \$6.8 billion per year, or 3.7% of health care costs. Getting moving and active is associated with as much as a 30% reduction in all causes of mortality rates. The Conference Board report also highlights the fact that an increase of only 10% of Canadian adults sitting less and moving more would reduce Canada's health care costs by \$2.6 billion and inject \$7.5 billion into the economy by 2040. This study goes on to say that the benefits of such an increase would start showing by as early as 2020 if we could get that 10% of adults more active next year, in 2015. All of this reinforces the need for physical activity as one solution to the problem of inactivity and its detrimental effect on health care costs.

Bill S-211, and national health and fitness day, if passed, will not be a panacea that will solve these issues. Nothing is. However, it will provide important additional awareness to the physical activity issue. Passing this bill will see the federal government set a precedent for provincial and municipal governments to emulate. There is a critical need for governments to take on this leadership role in support of preventative health care.

- (1535)

If municipal governments take the initiative seriously, national health and fitness day will grow from its current 155 communities that have taken it on to likely over 300 or more communities.

I envisage many more programs like the 10,000 step challenge undertaken by the Plant Pool Recreation Association in Ottawa this past June. This type of program encourages Canadian families to get active in a fun and interactive way. The creativity of local groups is limitless, and with that creativity will come the excitement of programs that serve their communities best, which will lead to increased participation.

If communities want to use national health and fitness day as an engagement tool, they could open their facilities on a complimentary basis to citizens wishing to use them. This loss leader would not only get more people active that day, but it might just bring in more users for the facilities being operated by these communities. If municipal facilities offer this type of activity, perhaps the for-profit fitness club sector might also start doing the same, much like GoodLife Fitness clubs did this past year.

Studies like the Institute for Canadian Citizenship's "Playing together" report show that new Canadians as well as other sectors of the population would welcome a chance to try facilities and programs on a complimentary basis in order to learn more. Support from a Sport Matters Group perspective will continue. We believe in it and we will support national health and fitness day and ensure that our over 1,000 constituents are aware of how they too can support the initiative by working with the various levels of government as well as with national and provincial sport organizations.

The federal government should see this initiative as the start of a movement to get Canadians moving, one that allows tremendous engagement for government and unifies us all.

I urge the government to pass Bill S-211.

I'm happy to answer any questions committee members might have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We welcome Senator Greene Raine to the committee.

We'll give Mr. Jones 10 minutes and then, Senator, you can wrap up the panel.

Thank you.

Mr. Chris Jones (Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, Physical and Health Education Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members, for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of Bill S-211, an act to establish a national day to promote health and fitness for all Canadians.

What makes me excited about national health and fitness day is that it is focused on solutions, not problems. Also, the agreement across the political spectrum in support of this proposal leads me to think that action in this vein is timely and would be well received. The headlines are clear about the downward trend in physical activity and sport participation, and the upward trend in overweight, obesity, and non-communicable chronic diseases.

To be sure, while dedicating one day a year to active living will not suddenly change this tide, it is an important symbolic step by Parliament. Such a declaration of all-party support can potentially motivate Canadians to take greater responsibility for their health and fitness in all aspects of their daily lives.

As executive director and CEO of Physical and Health Education Canada, I hear the reports from our members and supporters who are on the ground in classrooms, gymnasias, and after-school centres across this country. There is a multitude of pressures bearing down on children, youth, and their parents that make it difficult to achieve targets for physical activity. The reasons run the gamut from child overscheduling, to the built environment, to video and computer screen addiction, to parental anxiety.

At the same, when physical education and physical activity programs are working well, children and youth respond. They express interest in the activities they are doing, and they seek out new ways to have fun.

Physical and Health Education Canada is this country's national voice for physical and health educators. We speak to school administrators, teachers, government officials, parents, and other stakeholders, and they all recognize that there's a problem. Rates of physical activity are at the lowest in history and trending in the wrong direction. Rates of obesity and overweight children and youth today are on the rise. Moreover, with a huge emphasis on math, science, and computing, only a third of Canada's school kids are receiving regular physical education four to five times a week from a P.E. specialist.

We need to put in place the conditions that foster physical activity. This means fostering a culture of movement in our workplaces, schools, community settings, and homes. So much of the conversation around physical activity is focused on rising rates of obesity. While weight can have a serious and harmful effect on the body, this narrowing of the conversation loses sight of the myriad other benefits of physical activity. Bob has alluded to a few of them. Children and youth who are active have reduced social anxiety and improved self-confidence. They're less likely to smoke or abuse drugs and alcohol, and they are less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour. They are more focused and better prepared to learn, and have an improved self-image, especially among young women. Physical activity is an avenue to teach social responsibility and leadership.

In recognizing the interconnectedness between physical health and social, emotional, and intellectual well-being, a new term has emerged, "physical literacy". A person who is physically literate possesses the basic movement skills that are the foundation of more complex activities. For example, someone who can kick or dribble can participate in activities like soccer or skating. Hopping or dodging might lead to track and field or dance. But it also applies more broadly. Physically literate people will be able to balance properly on a ladder, a skill that is essential for a roofer or a firefighter.

Physical literacy interventions are successful with children and youth because they foster intrinsic motivation, confidence, and competence along with fun. Once mastered, they hold huge potential to promote the adoption of lifelong healthy and virtuous behaviours. Because of this capacity to unlock motivation, physical literacy has increasingly featured as the DNA underlying new physical education curricula across Canada, and incidentally is the foundation block of the new Canadian sport policy. Physical literacy is the gateway to active participation, and more active children are healthier.

In 1970 federal leadership in the Canada fitness award program sought to create better attitudes towards personal fitness and to build skills and aptitudes useful beyond the formative years. While eventually discontinued, a renewed national effort based on current research and pedagogy is urgently required. We believe the federal government has the mandate and legitimacy to act once again in the interests of all young people throughout Canada.

MPs John Weston, Peter Stoffer, and Kirsty Duncan, and the sponsor of this bill in the Senate, Senator Nancy Greene Raine, have together recognized the inherent potential of national health and fitness day to act as a seed that may germinate into a broader movement, engaging and mobilizing Canadians to take responsibility for their health.

● (1540)

While culminating on the first Saturday of June, the entire week before could be positioned as a lead-up. This enables us to engage with schools and the education system to celebrate national health and fitness day.

In addition, as the 150th anniversary of Confederation approaches in 2017, Canada could make strategic investments in improving the physical activity of Canadians. A potential legacy of this celebration could be to position this country as making a concerted, proactive

effort to address key determinants of health. For example, currently all of Canada's governments combined spend roughly \$200 billion annually on health care, with only 2% of that sum devoted to health promotion, prevention, and physical activity initiatives.

Prevention is the single best medicine when it comes to improving the health of Canadians and cutting health care costs. As we know, the costs of physical inactivity, sedentary behaviour, and obesity are staggering. In 2001 the economic cost associated with physical inactivity was estimated at \$5.3 billion, which included \$1.6 billion in indirect health care expenditures and \$3.7 billion in indirect costs. A new report by the McKinsey Global Institute, released just last week, estimated that the global cost of obesity has risen to \$2 trillion annually, nearly as much as smoking or the combined impact of armed violence, war, and terrorism. We can begin to alleviate these costs by increasing investments in prevention from 2% to 3% of the national expenditure on health care.

The physical and health education sector applauds the efforts you are making to raise the profile of these issues. PHE Canada believes that every child deserves his or her own podium. Children who are physically active are better learners, lead more productive lives, and develop to be contributing members of society. The public, as our own opinion research confirms, overwhelmingly supports proactive initiatives in this area.

In closing, I would like to thank John Weston and Nancy Greene Raine for their efforts, reaffirm the value and importance of passing the national health and fitness day act, and urge the government to use it as a catalyst to enact other measures to get Canadians moving once again.

Thank you.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jones.

Senator, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine (Senator, CPC, Senate): Thank you very much. I might not take 10 minutes. I'm not going to read a script. I'm going to think about why this bill came forward—and I'd like to thank John Weston, in particular, and all the other people who have supported it—but more importantly, about why it's so necessary right now.

We really are facing a crisis in the inactivity levels with our young people and people of all ages. We've seen some very inspirational things. Even just yesterday, I watched as Hazel McCallion retired at age 93 and went out skating. Those kinds of Canadians are my heroes and I look up to the 80-year-olds and 90-year-olds who are still full of life and vitality. I look at kids playing in the playgrounds and I see the same potential. Then I see kids sitting on the steps, on the sidelines, on their BlackBerry or their iPhone—I guess they're all on an iPhone. But I really am worried about where we're going.

When John and I and a few others talked about how we would judge the 2010 Olympics, the big effort that was being put in, the huge cost.... How would we measure it? Would it be successful? What were the measures we would apply? We all agreed it wasn't going to be the number of medals that Canada won. It wasn't going to be that we put on a great games and we were on budget. It was going to be, did we change Canadians' attitudes towards their own personal fitness through this big effort? That was five years ago. Nobody then would have dreamed that five years later 50% of Canadian students would have their own smartphones and be so engaged in them. We really are at a crisis level. We cannot continue. The numbers are there. We know there's a tsunami and that it's not going to be pretty if it keeps on going.

I believe that kids instinctively want to run about and play and have fun. I sense that parents are a little confused. Somehow we've gotten parents to a situation where they are insecure in sending their child to the neighbourhood park. They might be considered a parent who's negligent if they don't hover over them all the time. Yet they don't understand that putting their child in front of a device or a screen for hours and hours on end is not considered child abuse. But, really, we have to change things. I grew up in an era when we were sent out to play. We played actively. We created our own play. I was never involved in organized sport. We just had pick-up games on the street and in the backyards. Now everything has to be so organized that the kids don't have time to play. I'm not against organized sport. We have fantastic sport, and we have some great people involved in sport, and in coaching and helping the kids out. But there needs to be unstructured play too.

I'm very encouraged by what is happening. First of all, I like what I am hearing from the physical educators of this country who are recognizing that physical literacy is a basic literacy thing, and it has to be treated as a subject. It has to be marked. It has to be measured. It has to be taken seriously. I challenge them to do what other sports have done, which is to have level one, two, three, and four in their program for coaching and training of the athletes, because we are not going to get university-educated physical educators in every classroom in this country. It's not going to happen. We know that. Ideally it would happen. We need the physical educators having people who can help them, so that the classroom teacher, who is now faced with 20 or 30 kids ranging from little round people who don't know how to move very well to little buzz-bombs who are full of sugar and ready to run, has help so that the kids can be active and they can be out there.

I'm very encouraged when I see programs like HIGH FIVE, which started in Ontario and is now spreading across the country. It's a program to train what I would call play animators, people who can be responsible for children in the public parks and help get them moving. It's like level one of physical education.

• (1550)

There are a lot of good things happening there. I'm really encouraged, and working with John and this great group of advisers we have had in this national health and fitness day initiative, we've seen public-private partnerships and collaborations in the business world to help get involved in programs that help fill some of the gaps out there.

A lot of good things are happening, but I would say that national health and fitness day is only the beginning. Just the other day I was reading the speeches that took place in the House of Commons at second reading. It was very interesting to see how many parliamentarians were recognizing the importance of the issue and speaking of their own personal situations on how they have come to realize themselves, usually through a little health crisis, how necessary it is. I was also very impressed that the support for what we're doing has come from all parties. This is truly a non-partisan effort.

The challenge that I think we all have here is to make it happen. We don't need more studies. We don't need more research, although research and study should be ongoing so we can measure when we start to make progress. But we do need a commitment from everybody to work at this. There is no simple answer. It's a combination of what we call health and fitness. It's physical activity and nutritious, healthy eating as well. So there are some challenges.

I'm going to close with that. I welcome your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Senator.

We will now go to a seven-minute round of questions.

We are going to start with Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Chair, it's a great honour to be here today. It's wonderful to welcome three people who have several things in common. You are all passionate about health and fitness. You are all very hard working in pursuing those interests. You have had great influence in the country in what you do.

Let's start with Canada's female athlete of the 20th century. Nancy, you said a few things that I thought were interesting. You said it's only the beginning. This bill would appoint the first Saturday in June as national health and fitness day. Is this only a token, or how will it really influence Canada against some of the trends that have been identified in what you've said and what we heard in the speeches in the House and the Senate?

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: Leadership at all levels, provincial, federal, and municipal, has a role to play in motivating Canadians to do things. It's a very broad field. It has to do with the built environment. It has to do with encouraging your municipality to open up its facilities as much as possible, to remove barriers, to reach out so that even people who may not be able to afford certain programs are somehow included. There is a lot to do.

I also think that we really have to look at the problem of obesity and overweight, which is really what we're trying to tackle, as two-phased. It's exercise and nutrition. If we look back to what we did about smoking, which we recognized was very bad for our health, there was a very broad effort to curb people's smoking in our country, and it has worked. But I would say it's relatively easy to say, "Don't smoke; it will kill you". It's hard to say, "Don't eat; it will kill you", because we need to eat. But we need to eat good food. We need to have a proper diet and not be eating empty calories, so there is a big job to be done.

I would suggest that we are in a situation where, when it comes to nutrition, there is a big advertising budget for food and beverages. I like to think of it as being like a game, and the game in the food and beverage industry is all about market share, earning a profit for your shareholders. That's their scoring. But if we're going to have a game, we have to have rules. We have to have referees and we have to have penalties if you break those rules. I think it's up to government to set the rules. I'm not sure we've done a good enough job on that, so that's a little challenge that we face.

• (1555)

Mr. John Weston: Thank you. Let me make sure we get a chance for other witnesses as well.

Mr. Elliott, you mentioned that 155 cities have proclaimed, even before the bill has become law. British Columbia is the first province, and Yukon has also come on board. What do you think it would take to bring on other cities?

Also, is this the right way to get people involved, through local governments and through the ownership of facilities such as rec centres and swimming pools?

Mr. Robert Elliott: Definitely, to answer that question, if we can scale it out to a community level, a local grassroots level, that's the way to have an impact on the largest number of Canadians. In my view, one of the places to start is at the municipal government level. I know there are some discussions going on with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to try to get more of their members supporting it and convincing their municipal facilities to take this on as a key initiative.

It's at that level that more Canadians are going to become involved. The more they are involved.... Obviously that's what we're after here.

Mr. John Weston: We are delighted that the FCM proclaimed in May, inviting all of their 2,000 members to follow suit, as did the Quebec Union of Municipalities.

Chris Jones, you mentioned the non-partisan aspect. In fact, this very morning there were members of Parliament from the Liberal, Conservative, and Green parties in the swimming pool at the Chateau Laurier, and we commonly...

Gosh, nobody from here was actually at the pool this morning.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Weston: The parliamentary fitness initiative invites us all to work together. Can you explain the significance of it? You've been at several activities at which you have seen MPs from all

parties: Bike Day in Canada, National Life Jacket & Swim Day. What do you think is the consequence of the cross-party support?

Mr. Chris Jones: I think there is a shared recognition that this is a non-partisan issue and that it goes to matters affecting the dollars that are going to be left for discretionary expenditure if we don't get a grip on this issue. All parties of all political persuasions recognize that at the provincial level, health care is now between 40% and 45% of the expenditure of most provincial governments. Some recent data I've seen have predicted that on current trends it could go as high as the mid-60s in percentage in some provinces. That will effectively leave no money for any other activities.

I think it's that mutual recognition of the problem and the need to deal with it at a systemic level that is driving this all-party support. I don't see this as a partisan issue at all.

Mr. John Weston: One of the most powerful things you ever said, Senator Greene Raine, was that athletes are not just athletes, but they're leaders. You live that in your role as a senator. You live it in your role encouraging health and fitness.

Can you expand a little on that? How do high-performance athletes like you relate to the rest of us Canadians?

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: I know, just from the number of kids who've come up to me over the years.... It's rather embarrassing when they come up now and they have grey hair and they say, "You came to my school when I was a kid"—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: —but you have a tremendous opportunity as an athlete at the national level to reach out and have an impact on kids. I don't know any athlete, any Olympic athlete or even high-performance athlete, who won't go and talk to kids at schools, at the playgrounds, if they're asked. My message to all of you would be to just ask and athletes will certainly be happy to become involved. I know there are many people in the sports world who have done just that.

But you know, we're all athletes. I'm always impressed when I see leaders in business, in politics, in the arts, who take a personal commitment to their own health. In reality, we could have the best health system in the world, but if you don't look after your own health, you're not going to be healthy. Everybody can be a leader in that.

• (1600)

Mr. John Weston: Do I have time for one more?

The Chair: No, you're out of time, Mr. Weston.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nantel, you have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I hear both arguments, from Senator Greene Raine and from Mr. Jones and Mr. Elliott.

Ms. Greene, I was with Mr. Weston and Mrs. Harper in May for the Trans Canada Trail. Clearly, from the angle you are taking, you seem to be talking about the way families behave with their kids. As a parent—now they're grown-ups—I remember saying, “That's a good movie, so it's going to be easy for 90 minutes; I'll have some time to breathe.”

The reality is that what you are actually saying is that it would be great that we make some quality sports time, quality time being moments to enjoy biking and doing these easy-access sports.

On the other hand, Mr. Jones, as a sports teacher...that's why I was asking Ms. Greene Raine. I don't know how to say that, *professeur d'éducation physique*.

The day that is being selected for that specific day is a Saturday. I understand it goes towards the families, and this is great. I think this has to be done day to day.

But in the schools there remains an issue of having fewer and fewer sports in the class curricula. Clearly, as you said many times, obesity is getting worrying and things have been changing. This committee has been facing these technological changes in the cultural world, and it affects, actually, the health situation of Canadians because there's so much in these little screens and people get stuck to them.

That day is to be aimed specifically at families, but how can teachers of sports jump in?

Mr. Chris Jones: In the promotion of the event the last few years, we at PHE Canada have promoted to teachers and the school system that they get active with their classes, and a number of them have done that. Informally speaking, I think it's going to be seen over time as health and fitness day week in practice, although it will culminate in and be celebrated formally on that Saturday. I think over time that's a direction we'd probably head in.

Teachers themselves are often parents. They have kids too. They're mindful of the lack of activity. The latest indications are that kids are spending about 8.6 hours of their day, or 60% of their waking hours, sedentary now, so clearly we need to find a way to engage them a little bit more. Physical education is part of it, but we know it's that period after school, from 3:00 to 6:00, which is also critical. In the after-school time slot, kids should be active then, and the reality is many of them are heading home to do homework or to game, or they have sibling child care duties. We need to find ways to get them active in that 3:00 to 6:00 slot. It's typically often at the school.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you.

[Translation]

As I was telling you the last time we were with Mrs. Harper, we may not agree when it comes to climate change, but I agree with you completely when it comes to physical activity.

I think you are indeed a hero with the ability to infect others with your enthusiasm to participate in sports and push yourself physically.

I ate many a Mars bar while thinking of you. If we can sell chocolate, then we can certainly sell sports and physical activity.

What can we do to make an initiative like the Trans Canada Trail more accessible?

Something I have learned in my three years in Parliament is that, when you're trying to solve a problem, it's always a good idea to look at what other countries have done. Where does Canada rank in terms of sport participation? Are we at the head of the class or the bottom? Where do we stand? What would you recommend?

• (1605)

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: I don't think I'm the best person to answer that, since I don't have all those numbers. But I do think physical inactivity is a worldwide problem. The top countries are those with good physical education systems in their schools.

Unfortunately, most Canadian provinces have dropped physical education in favour of computers. They have also done away with home economics classes, and that may have been a mistake.

I have often heard provinces say that there isn't enough time in the day for physical education. In Manitoba, however, all students take physical education every day. So it is possible.

In my view, that is what we should once again be aiming for.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Very good.

I'm going to give the rest of my time to Ms. Mathysen, who has a question for you about diet.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much for being here.

It's good to hear from you and always delightful to see you, Senator Greene Raine.

You all touched on the whole issue of sedentary behaviour.

Senator Raine, you mentioned the issue of good food, kids not getting good food, eating sometimes some pretty terrible stuff.

We heard just in the last few days from one of our Quebec members that 30 years ago, Quebec banned ads for junk food directed at children under 13 and that the childhood obesity rate has been reduced by 17%. That seems to me to be a very good step. When I was teaching I fought against this tooth and nail, the ads for soft drinks and chips and things in the schools. Because schools were lacking in money, they had been cut back in terms of their budgets, and they were actually engaging in ads over the in-circuit systems in the schools with companies that were advertising these things. We pushed back against it and I think it was a good thing to push back—

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen, you're going to have to wrap it up. We'll give the senator just a few seconds for a quick answer. Thank you.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Well, should we ban the ads?

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: I do remember my Mars bars ads.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: And the chips and pop.

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: I know there are a lot of Canadians and a coalition forming to come up with some solutions. Again, I think we have to look at the big picture. Basically, if we have to spend taxpayers' money to promote healthy eating and we're up against millions of dollars in budgets for products that aren't particularly healthy, then we're never going to win. We need to write some rules. I don't know what they are, but I think we have to work on that.

It's a combination. It's not just sport and activity and being physically active, it's the other side of the equation as well.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Mr. Hsu for seven minutes.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thanks for coming here today.

My first question is for Senator Greene Raine. We've heard a lot about the importance of engaging municipalities on national health and fitness day. I'm just wondering if the provincial governments and municipalities were consulted regarding the establishment of this day. If they were, did they have any reaction or advice?

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: We didn't formally consult the provinces. We decided to start here and then invite them to join. We've had a very good response, by and large.

The first bill that MP Weston introduced called on the municipalities to open their facilities free of charge on national health and fitness day. There was a little pushback; not all municipalities saw the value in that. Some municipalities have a lack of facilities and they're stretched to the limit to use them or even have enough space. Other municipalities are finding that their facilities are being underused, and they are in a position to and would probably welcome the opportunity to open up their facilities.

There are a lot of different things out there. By identifying one day, it starts to coalesce the dialogue around what can be done, and we want to share what municipalities are doing and what's happening around the country. It's not just municipalities, of course. It's first nations as well, and hopefully things will move forward.

● (1610)

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Elliott, I believe you spoke a lot about the economic benefits and, I guess, the unrealized value that could be unlocked by the right kinds of investment in getting people to be more physically active.

With that in mind, how do you envision the federal government contributing to a national health and fitness day? As a result of passing this bill, are there any specific initiatives or maybe investments or something that you'd like this committee to recommend to the government?

Mr. Robert Elliott: I think Chris Jones made some reference to this as well. A greater investment in prevention from a health care perspective is needed, given some of the numbers we've both talked about, and Senator Greene Raine as well, where we're looking at serious economic challenges down the road if something is not done about it.

I think if the federal government can take that leadership position and spend a little bit more money on preventive type of initiatives for

physical activity, health prevention, healthy active lifestyle promotion, and those kind of things.... We've specifically said to the Standing Committee on Finance that our numbers tell us that the federal government is spending now about \$9 billion a year on health care, and about 2% of that goes toward healthy, active living, physical fitness type of initiatives. If that can be increased to 3%...I'll say a mere 1%. I realize the number is about \$90 million, obviously. That's not peanuts; we understand that. But we just think that there needs to be a step made in that direction as quickly as possible to get us to a point where there's recognition. If it happens at the federal level, there are perhaps some provincial governments that are going to take heed of that and possibly start to put some more effort and investment into those types of initiatives at their level as well.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Correct me if I am wrong, but I think what you are saying is if it is a good investment, don't be afraid of investing more.

Mr. Robert Elliott: Investing more and—

Mr. Ted Hsu: Don't be afraid of the number of dollars if it is a good investment.

Mr. Robert Elliott: And don't be afraid to have the payback come further down the road than some other ROI might be.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Okay.

If I could, I will just drill down a little bit more. We can look at, from the national household survey, the participation levels of Canadians in physical activity, and we can see a general decline in the population from that data.

Are there specific groups or at-risk groups for whom you think the federal government could do something in particular to reverse this decline in physical activity?

Mr. Robert Elliott: There are probably a few of those. I think disadvantaged groups need extra attention. Those might be those at the lower income levels. Those might be first nations, as Senator Greene Raine just alluded to. I think there needs to be extra attention paid to those types of groups to be able to say let's get them more involved.

In my case I might have the wherewithal to put my kids in some of these activities and drive them there every Saturday morning—or all week; it's not just Saturday mornings any more. But to do that ferrying about all week, there are groups out there that just can't do that. I think those are the ones we need to place extra emphasis on.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Thank you.

Mr. Jones, from your point of view, how can the federal government collaborate with you or your organization to promote health and fitness?

● (1615)

Mr. Chris Jones: I think it starts from a recognition that this is a problem that exists in every jurisdiction in the country from coast to coast. While education is formally a provincial area of jurisdiction, I think that when there's an instance where it's happening in every subregion of the country, then there's a case for the feds to be involved.

I think of back in the 1970s when the Canada fitness award program was created—and funnily enough my organization actually created the fitness test that went along with that program 40 years ago. There is a precedent for that, and I would argue that some kind of national intervention—and we made this in our pre-budget submission—around diagnosing and assessing physical literacy would be a good place to start.

We think that can be done for about \$10 million a year, basically, for every school kid in the country. Remember that school is the one place you get every single Canadian kid for six and a half hours a day. In clubs and some of the other contexts, some children are unable to be in those places, whereas they are in the school system.

Mr. Ted Hsu: So there's really a place for some national spending and investment.

Mr. Chris Jones: I think over time. As Senator Raine has pointed out, we do need some kind of a symbolic day here first of all to engage and mobilize Canadians, but over time I think something like that could be beneficial.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Okay.

Perhaps I could ask the senator the same question. Are there specific investments or programs that you think this committee should be recommending to the federal government to back up passing this bill to establish a special day?

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: Definitely there are things the federal government can do, and I agree with my colleague Chris Jones here, because the schools are very critical in this. You have all the children in the schools, and if we're going to take physical literacy seriously, we have to measure it.

I think back to the Canada fitness awards. I was involved in those when they were starting up back in the sixties. We were measuring who could reach certain targets. A lot of kids have great memories of that, of how hard they tried to get their gold badge. But for some children, and probably a significant proportion, those were a negative experience because they couldn't achieve it.

I think we have to bring the awards back again and set those bars so kids know that they can improve and that they should be trying to improve their own fitness levels. We also have to recognize the most improved, and we have to look at programs that are specifically designed for those kids who fall through the cracks, who are coming into the education system already unfit and overweight and who haven't toddled as toddlers. Those kids exist today.

We need to have a two-pronged approach. If we do that, I think there is a role for the federal government to play in terms of writing the tests and putting together the program that all the school districts across the country would be free to buy into if they want to. Certainly we've heard that people are looking for this.

You know that from your experience, Chris.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Hsu.

We'll move to Mr. Yurdiga, for seven minutes.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Weston.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today. This is very important. I have grown children and grandchildren. As you know, we want the best for our children and our grandchildren. Moving forward, this bill will definitely make a difference, in my opinion.

In my community, there are many isolated communities that don't have access to rec facilities and there are very limited extracurricular activities. I think it's important that we use our existing school system to promote healthy activities.

My first question will be for Mr. Jones. How does Physical and Health Education Canada intend to promote national health and fitness day in schools?

Mr. Chris Jones: We already have begun to promote it through our website and through e-blasts to our membership. My board president has been very active in promoting it in her schools. Once it's proclaimed and given royal assent, we will be even more active in pushing it out to schools and to our provincial counterparts. There are provincial physical education associations.

I think you're pushing on a half-open door; a lot of people are going to want to do this spontaneously. There's a wellspring of people who have been waiting for an initiative like this. I think they see this as being truly a hand-in-glove kind of fit. Whereas Sports Day in Canada is focused a little more on competitive sport, this has the virtue of appealing to a range of different activities.

• (1620)

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

When I was growing up in our community, we didn't have a lot of rec facilities, and our school was a sort of magnet for parents and their children to come to and to participate in various sports activities, whether it was volleyball, or hockey, or whatever it was. Are there any plans to incorporate involving the children's parents in an exercise regime in our schools maybe once or twice a week or whatever it may be? Do you think that's an important aspect of getting parents involved with the children?

Mr. Chris Jones: Yes. I think you hit the nail on the head in a sense that parents do role-model behaviour for kids, and children take their lead from their parents. In my own life, I try to run fairly regularly, when the weather permits, for my kids to see that. I think that increasingly our philosophy with some of the tools we create for use in the school system is to involve parents a little bit. The Health Promoting Schools tool is one of them where parents are key players.

But I think we are running up against some of the traditional challenges of two-income families, with parents getting home a little bit harassed, tired, and having to get dinner on the table, so we really need to make sure that in that time slot from three to six o'clock the kids get good, quality physical activity. By the way, I want to credit Canadian Tire for the work they've been doing recently to push that notion.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

That's it for my questions.

The Chair: Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you, Chair.

This initiative has been designed to enable parliamentarians to be mini ministers of health. There's a parliamentary fitness initiative in which a volunteer coach comes out on a Tuesday and then a swim coach on a Thursday, without any regard to the level of competence of the MP or senator. In fact, some MPs who've never swam before are swimming not just for their health, but also as role models. The invitation goes to each MP to work with mayors and councillors to get more cities involved.

Is there a realistic dream, Senator, that one day every member of Parliament and every senator would come to Parliament Hill looking at the promotion of health and fitness as part of their mandate?

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: I think it's a target that we should have. I would like to ask the members of Parliament in the room today, how many of you have engaged with your mayors in your ridings to get involved in this? If you haven't, why not? We've tried to make it very easy. I would encourage you to do that.

This is the heritage committee. Think of the heritage of Canada. We were a country that was very new, raw, and rural. Everybody worked hard. Life wasn't easy. Life has become easier and easier. Now we have to think about how we're going to go back to some of our heritage activities. Yes, it's good to have facilities, and it's really important to have the schools involved, but good old-fashioned outdoor activity like hiking and biking, these things don't cost a lot of money. We need to find ways to engage people in them.

I've seen members of Parliament who've taken on organizing a run/walk in their riding with huge success, so I encourage you to do that and to do it on a regular basis. A lot of times people need an excuse to do something. These charity and special events that happen are really good that way. Once people start, they find out that it's fun to go for a walk with their neighbour or friend and get involved. Everybody has a role to play for sure.

Thanks, John.

Mr. John Weston: In a moment we're going to hear from someone who was instrumental in the 125th anniversary of Canada and helped create the Trans Canada Trail. We're talking about the 150th anniversary now, Mr. Elliott and Mr. Jones. Do you have any sense of energy, excitement, or urgency about making health and fitness part of our 150th celebrations?

Mr. Chris Jones: I can speak to that because I happen to work in the same building as the woman who runs the Canada Games. She has talked to me of her plans to make the Canada Games feature in a big way at the 150th anniversary. She and I have talked about how we could weave in a school dimension to that and how we could celebrate the physical education profession and its role in helping kids.

It's definitely in the works to have some kind of commemoration of the importance of that, and maybe as a way to catalyze more activity. I think our concern would be that as we celebrate 150 years of achievement in this country, a lot of that can be seen in architecture, policies, and many great things, but if our human capital is not in a good place, if we are overweight, sedentary, and obese, I think that will take away some of the celebration. It's very important that we use this bill and that forthcoming celebration to really drive this agenda forward.

•(1625)

Hon. Nancy Greene Raine: I think that taking on a real active role during the 150th anniversary would be great. We've talked about using the period between the national health and fitness day, the first Saturday in June, and Canada's birthday, July 1, to have a period where all across the country people are out doing things and being engaged.

Nowadays with social media and with the Internet there's an ability to track that and measure it. If we could get 20 million Canadians being part of this three-week festival of fitness during that time period, it would be great, and if we can celebrate it on the Trans Canada Trail.... The Trans Canada Trail to me is a magic thing. It just has such a connotation. It links Canada together coast to coast. In a lot of places, it's historic trails. It's aboriginal trails. It's old mining trails. It doesn't go everywhere, but our main artery doesn't go everywhere. Off that trail, there are all kinds of other trails. Every municipality has a trail of some kind. Building, utilizing, and celebrating all those trails as part of the 150th I think would be a really good plan.

The Chair: Thank you.

On that note, we're going to wrap up this panel. I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing today.

We will briefly suspend.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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•(1630)

The Chair: We're going to call this 30th meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage back to order with our second panel, which includes, from the Trans Canada Trail, Paul LaBarge, who is the chair, and Landon French, from Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities. I've actually played hockey with Mr. French a couple of times, and he's a not bad hockey player.

You both have up to 10 minutes.

We'll start with you, Mr. LaBarge.

Mr. Paul LaBarge (Chair, Trans Canada Trail): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

It's a pleasure to be here today. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee.

[*English*]

I have been involved in the Trans Canada Trail since 1992, which is either a tribute to my stupidity or a demonstration of dedication, I'm not sure which.

I can tell you that the comments that Senator Greene Raine made about the Trans Canada Trail are in fact truly evocative of what the trail means. This trail is within 30 minutes of 80% of all Canadians. This trail goes through a thousand different communities. This trail will ultimately link every community in Canada to each other, at a human pace.

We recognize, as Senator Raine said, that this trail goes through historic sites, goes through some of the most beautiful countryside in the world. This trail is accessible to all. This trail is free. This trail is probably the biggest gift that Canadians have made to each other in the last 25 years. This trail represents an opportunity for every individual to be active and to participate.

I think it's interesting that this committee itself previously recognized the significance of the Trans Canada Trail. Let me say back to you some of your own words:

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada or any agency authorized to undertake the organization of Canada's 150th anniversary celebrations consider ways to encourage communities and donors to assist with the completion of the Trans Canada Trail.

This trail is a legacy project from Canada 125, so the celebration of the 125th anniversary was to launch something that would be a legacy for all Canadians for all time to come.

In January 2014 the Prime Minister announced the federal funding of the Trans Canada Trail with these words:

The Trans Canada Trail will allow Canadians and international visitors alike to enjoy some of the world's most breathtaking scenery, while promoting health and fitness through a wide variety of recreational activities. Completing the initiative by 2017 would be an incredible legacy of Canada's 150th anniversary as the Trail would connect almost 1,000 communities and provide users with a unique perspective on our spectacular natural and cultural heritage.

You heard from your previous speakers about the levels of obesity. Well, I can tell you that those are only the tip of the iceberg. There is much more than that. I happen to be, in one of my other roles in life, the chairman of the University of Ottawa Heart Institute Foundation, and guess what? We see huge numbers in the demographics, huge numbers of people who are aging, overweight, out of shape, and suffering from heart disease. Consistently, the single best prescription is to get up off your butt and get out and take a hike. That's the truth of it.

By the way, that truth doesn't apply to just those people; it applies to seniors who are suffering from declining mental faculties. There is a clear demonstration between exercise and increased mental acuity. This a good relationship between exercise and reduced diabetes. The truth of the matter is that the most generally prescribed medical remedy is exercise.

The challenge you have—this is the question you asked yourselves just previously—is what do we spend the money on? Where do we put it? How do we get these facilities?

I can tell you that in New Westminster they held a plebiscite asking if they'd prefer to have a recreational trail or a new arena. They said they'd prefer to have a recreational trail, because it's accessible to everybody as opposed to being restricted in terms of its availability within the community.

• (1635)

I tend to be a little passionate about this, and there's a reason for that. I happen to be somebody who bikes, who walks, and who hikes. I've done it all over the world. I was talking with a guide in the Atacama Desert in Chile and he saw my business card for the Trans Canada Trail. He said, "Trans Canada Trail, that's one of the great trails in the world". I was talking with the Premier of P.E.I., and the Trans Canada Trail is second only to a non-existent person as the

second largest tourist attraction in P.E.I. You have Anne of Green Gables and you have the Trans Canada Trail. The premier believes that it is a significant part of their economic posture as well as providing an accessible route throughout the communities.

I congratulate you on passing this legislation, because I'm hoping it's the thin edge of the wedge. I hope it's the beginning of a demonstration of true leadership that will encourage all Canadians to consider their health and their well-being as a part of their daily lives.

In the early days people used to have to run and to hunt to survive. The only thing that has changed is you can drop the hunting, but you still have to get up and run because that's the truth of life. If you're not moving, you're into entropy.

One of the other comments I would make to you is that sitting is considered to be the new smoking. That's exactly the impact it has on your health. If that's the case, I have a prescription for you. Take a hike. Get up and walk. Walk where you go. Don't take that parliamentary bus. Run or walk, quickly or slowly. Just walk. It's good for everybody. It's good for you. You'll go into the House with a clearer head than if you had been sitting on the bus. That's the truth of it.

I can tell you as well that walking has proven to be a great source of comfort to people who are under stress. It's also a great source of comfort to people who are bereaved. They have groups that walk because it reduces tension and increases blood flow. Again, it's just good health.

One of the comments I also hear is that people are so busy. Yes, you are. Yes, we all are, but I can tell you something. You can look around this town; you can look at your public accounts, and you can see the cost of deferred maintenance when you don't look after buildings. Guess what, folks? Remember how they used to say your body is a temple? It's in need of serious work. If you don't maintain it, the deferred maintenance cost is very high, and it's showing up in our medical system right now.

I'll finish with a personal example. I had quadruple bypass surgery in 2008 and yet I was somebody who exercised every day. I was allowed to blame it on my parents, which is what most people do with their faults, but the point was made to me that if I had not been exercising, I would have died. After the surgery they said I recovered very quickly. I asked why that was and they said it was because I exercised. I leave that with you as a personal life lesson that is something you should take into account.

What we offer at the Trans Canada Trail is a chance for you to have a venue, right across Canada, that is historically and culturally significant, and represents the most accessible stage and opportunity for Canadians to celebrate fitness and health not only one day a year, but throughout the year.

Thank you.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Mr. French.

You have the floor for 10 minutes.

Mr. Landon French (Executive Director, Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Landon French. I'm the vice-president of community relations for Canadian Tire Corporation. I also serve as executive director of Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities. I have the honour of wearing two fun hats, in some cases. I say I've got one of the best jobs in the country because I get to represent a great brand and help kids get into sports, and it's great.

Some of the brands and banners we represent include not only the 500 Canadian Tire stores across Canada, but also Sport Chek, Sports Experts, National Sports, Pro Hockey Life, Atmosphere, Mark's, Intersport, and a few others. We have quite a bit on the go across Canada and we see many Canadians who are active every day.

Supporting this national health and fitness day is a fantastic opportunity and something that we wholeheartedly support. We thank everyone for working on this and bringing it forward. It will be a tremendous thing that we will support and help celebrate when passed.

I also want to recognize the Government of Canada's work on many other activities and programs such as the Children's fitness tax credit and funding from Sport Canada, which in 2013 allowed Jumpstart to help another 1,500 children get into sports across Canada, many of them into recreational facilities that were revitalized by this government many years ago. One example would be the Abilities Centre in Whitby, where we have a wheelchair program and other things going on to help those kids play when they wouldn't otherwise be able to play.

The year 2015 is a year of sport. It's something that's certainly caught our attention and something that we want to support wholeheartedly, particularly when you have some fantastic events coming to Canada like the Pan Am Games, the Parapan Games, and the FIFA Women's World Cup. We are working with Hockey Canada now to support the Century Tour and many other things like that across Canada.

Sport is clearly at the heart of our business. You may have noticed through the acquisitions, and some other things in our growth over the last little while, that Canadian Tire and this whole family of companies is now the fifth largest retailer of sporting goods, outdoor goods, and recreation products in the world. It's no surprise we're the largest hockey retailer in the world. That's something we're very proud of.

It's part of our DNA, sports and recreation, from the very first sets of camping equipment and tents that we started selling in the 1930s right through to the running shoes, skates, bikes, and other things that you'll find at our stores today.

We've done a lot of work to understand what's important to Canadians when it comes to sport and recreation. Our research has shown that it's part of our country. Part of being Canadian is to move and be physically active, and enjoy the great outdoors that we have and cherish. Three-quarters of the Canadians we talked to said, "if you're not moving, it's a very un-Canadian thing to do". It attracts people to this country and we want to support that in any way we can.

We've made a commitment over the last couple of years, as you may have noticed, to our customers, and our 85,000 employees, and Canadians from coast to coast to coast, that we will play a leading role in sport and physical activity in Canada, and help more kids and families get into the game and lead healthier lives.

It promotes teamwork. It obviously improves health as we've heard. It allows kids to focus on the classroom, which is essential. It brings confidence and self-esteem. It brings communities together, and as we've seen so many times it brings Canadians together. It is a community spirit that we want to foster. We believe it's essential as an activity as Canadians.

We've signed long-term partnerships to support that with the Canadian Olympic Committee and the Paralympic Committee, as well as Alpine Canada, Canada Soccer, Hockey Canada, Canada Snowboard, the Canada Games, and many other organizations that we will continue to support over the coming years.

Earlier today you may have heard that the Province of Ontario has agreed to support Active at School, which is a campaign that we launched about a year ago to encourage 60 minutes of physical activity in the school day. I'll give you an example of what happens.

I have a six-year-old and an eight-year-old boy at home. They are very active, as you can imagine, but the curriculum in the school board where they live in Ontario says that they are required to have 20 minutes of physical activity twice a week. We're working with school boards across Canada and ministries of education to encourage those boards to reduce the barriers, figure out what they need, whether it's equipment and structures, parent volunteers, what is needed to get kids active in Canada.

● (1645)

Active at School is a coalition of organizations. We have about 80 different organizations working with us right now. So far, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and as of this morning, Ontario are on board and supporting Active at School. We thank them all very much, and look forward to working with other provinces to get them on board. Next year we'll have over 300 schools committed to Active at School, with an hour a day of physical activity at some point in their school day as part of their daily routine.

These efforts are ongoing, but we noticed many years ago, too, that the financial barriers to being active are leaving kids on the sidelines and leaving kids behind. Too often, as you've seen, families struggle to keep their children engaged in the sport programs that they'd like to participate in. The high cost of fees, equipment, registration, uniforms, transportation, all of those things add up. They're really a heavy burden on families across Canada. One of the most eye-opening statistics that remains true today is that we estimate that about a third of Canadian families cannot afford to put their kids into the sports programs and recreation programs they want to participate in.

That's why we created the Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities program about 10 years ago. The premise of Jumpstart is to help kids get in the game by assisting with the cost of registration, equipment, and transportation. We also lend support to unique initiatives aimed at increasing access to sport and physical activity programming by working with local communities. We reduce those barriers across Canada. We have 330 chapters, led by volunteers, that help get the dollars from our stores. Those dollars are raised locally and stay locally in the communities where the money is raised. We have a network of 3,100 Jumpstart community partners, for example, the Boys and Girls Club, many municipal parks and recreation departments, and YMCAs, that we leverage to help get kids from financially disadvantaged families off the sidelines and into the game.

After 10 years, we have helped almost 900,000 children get into a variety of different sports and physical activity programs across Canada. It's something we're very proud of and will continue to accelerate over the next few years.

There's a lot going on at Canadian Tire. We certainly do want to continue to get not just children involved but all of our customers, Canadians, and our employees. With the help of the Canadian Olympic Committee and others, we have created flex programs so that we can hire athletes. Many of the folks you see at a Sport Chek store today are athletes from university programs and other programs. They study and they sell shoes, skates, or other things they're expert in. We give them the flex time to be able to train and also have a job. We have Olympians like Rosie MacLennan, who works just outside my office and helps us and advises us on a variety of different projects as well. We're happy to support them in those ways.

This is a fantastic opportunity. It's a great bill. It's something that we will be supporting wholeheartedly and that we look forward to working with you on over the coming days, weeks, and years.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to questions.

We'll go to Mr. Young for seven minutes.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. French and Mr. LaBarge, thank you for coming today.

As a child I had four brothers, and we had our own internal skate exchange in our house. There was a big box under the stairs, and on the first freezing day of the year, we'd all go down and fight over the skates. But of course our sizes had all changed. I don't think I ever had a pair of skates that actually fit in my whole life, because we were always doing the exchange thing.

I'm thinking of the fitness tax credit and I'm trying to do some math in my head. I think \$1,000 a year per child now would probably be like \$150 back in the early 1960s, perhaps; I haven't done it exactly. But if my mother had had \$750 at that time to buy skates for us, or to pay towards a skating program or hockey or something, our activity would have been five or ten times more. So this is a very powerful program.

In Oakville the number one sport per number of players is soccer. We have 12,000 young people who play soccer...and coaches, in Oakville. They even had enough money to build their own indoor...

This is very, very powerful towards fitness. In your marketing programs, because you're part and parcel of those, I know, can you talk about results you've seen from the \$500 fitness tax credit, and comment on how it might be more powerful, if you think it is, by taking it to \$1,000 per child per year for programs?

• (1650)

Mr. Landon French: I think it certainly helps. There is no doubt. It helps those families who truly need it, in combination with a variety of other things that a lot of the sport organizations put in place. Many hockey organizations, for example, have their own programs for children who come forward and can't afford to play, and we partner with some of those organizations to help cover the registration fees if someone else can pick up the equipment side of that.

It's hard to say definitively where we would feel or see the impact, but we do know that hockey is a sport that's quite expensive, tough to get into sometimes, and the numbers show that in the registration. We see soccer growing at an exponential rate, and we are happy to support both.

Mr. Terence Young: If your son or daughter isn't a goalie, how much does it cost to equip somebody for a season of hockey now?

Mr. Landon French: Well, I have a goalie at home. I have one of each at home, and it's not an inexpensive sport.

I can tell you this much. We've been working with Hockey Canada to talk about ways to address this, as well as with Bauer and some of the other manufacturers. We have starter kits that are in the \$99 range which provide—

Mr. Terence Young: What does that include?

Mr. Landon French: The Jonathan Toews Bauer starter kit has everything but skates, a stick, and a helmet in it.

Mr. Terence Young: You get—

Mr. Landon French: You get all the protective gear, everything except skates, which you have to size.

Mr. Terence Young: Well, Santa Claus could bring the skates and hockey stick.

Mr. Landon French: I would say that there are a lot of parents and hockey organizations and other organizations that would work together to help the kids get into the sport. I would just have to get them through the door, and I know there are a lot of parents who help, along with organizations like Jumpstart and our dealers and others across the country.

In Montreal this year, in partnership with the Montreal Canadiens Children's Foundation, we collected a thousand pairs of skates in exchange for pairs of tickets to a Red-White Scrimmage game at the Bell Centre. We will be distributing those skates back through to the community. I think there is a way to do it, for sure.

Mr. Terence Young: You said you think a third of families, their children can't participate in sports because of.... I suspect it's much higher than that, because if you do any kind of survey like that, people have pride. They're not going to tell you. They are going to say, "We're too busy" or whatever. They are not going to say, "Sorry, I can't put over the \$1,000" or whatever, so I think it's higher than that.

You've been working with the schools. I want to ask you something. We did a study in this committee on the video gaming business. It's a huge business. They produce incredible creative games that are incredibly engaging. My son is now 28, but when he was a teenager, when the next game came out, we had to buy it for him. I've seen this. This is powerful to keep him on the couch. What should parents, schools, and governments be doing to, as Nancy Greene Raine said, get them off the couch?

Mr. Landon French: I think you need to regulate that screen time. That's really what it comes down to, and that's a big responsibility of the parent—

Mr. Terence Young: That's the parents, not us.

Mr. Landon French: Right.

I think part of it, too, is that you can use technology to get kids moving. If they have these devices in their hands, how can we, the adults, develop the programs and the applications that make it fun to move? We've seen a huge increase in the personal devices that measure your heart rate, walking, all that sort of stuff, connected to phones, iPods, iPads, things like that. You'll see many of them under trees at Christmastime this year.

If those things can be developed in a way that connects with kids, in the right way obviously, and that makes it fun for them so they can track and do things, that would be a huge step forward.

Mr. Terence Young: You are saying to combine the two.

I want to ask Monsieur LaBarge something.

Our regional chair in Halton, Gary Carr, was a professional hockey player in a previous career. I've been talking to him. Every once in a while I see him; I run into him every few months. He is in great shape. He lost a ton of weight that he didn't want to have by walking. He and his wife walk a lot, so I started to do it with my wife. We go to the conservation areas in Halton. We have beautiful conservation areas, and we have access to the Bruce Trail.

I want to ask you something. I am talking about financial barriers. I know there are solutions elsewhere. Any family can go to the mall and walk around for free. However, to go to the Halton region conservation areas, it's \$16 if you want to go for a walk. They say, "Well, you should buy a pass for \$150." Some people don't have \$150. A lot of people live paycheque to paycheque. What do they do in other communities to give people access to a place where they don't have to pay \$16 to go for a walk?

•(1655)

Mr. Paul LaBarge: In fact, probably the most successful programs we've had are where the municipalities have made their municipality part of the Trans Canada Trail. I'll give you an example.

In Charlottetown, P.E.I., there is an old people's home that happens to be adjacent to the trail, where there's a section of 200 to

300 yards that's paved; it's the only paved section around. I was asking why that is. They said that it's because they want to make sure the people from the old people's home can use their walkers on the trail, which they can't do on a gravel surface.

The municipalities, provincial parks, federal parks, you sometimes have admission costs there. Probably the most frequently available trail has been through the municipal participation. Here in Ottawa, the NCC has been a huge participant, as well as the City of Ottawa. It's the same thing for the City of Toronto. Quite frankly, where the Federation of Canadian Municipalities gets on board, signs up, and builds trail as part of the commuting activities, as well as providing accessible exercise space that is safe for their residents, that's by far the best alternative.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're going to have to wrap up there, Mr. Young.

We're going to go to Monsieur Nantel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nantel, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. LaBarge and Mr. French, for being with us today.

Mr. LaBarge, we met at an event back in May, and you told me where things stood with the Trans Canada Trail. I remember you saying that, contrary to what I might think, things were going well in Quebec.

Mr. Paul LaBarge: They are going very well.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: We also talked about the fact that one of the major challenges with the trail was signage and visibility.

Can we do anything to get municipalities to do more about trail signage? I have the feeling that if someone were to look at a map on one of those notorious devices and notice that the Trans Canada Trail was close by, they would wonder what it was. In celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary, one would imagine that efforts would be made to encourage people to explore the country, take the train and get off at a certain spot, carry on by foot and so forth.

What can we do to get cities to do more about signage?

Mr. Paul LaBarge: It's more a matter of putting up signs. To be honest, we are making a lot of headway with municipalities in that they now recognize that the trail brings in tourism revenue.

Take, for example, the Parc linéaire Le P'tit Train du Nord recreational rail trail. I was talking to the park manager, and he told me that, in the course of a year, 550,000 people used the trail, which passes through a number of municipalities. And believe me, that trail has signs and visibility. People are aware of the trail.

So it has more to do with education. Once municipalities realize that people want to use the trail, that it is a place where people can be active and that it generates tourism revenue, they put signs up.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Okay, thanks.

This is actually an issue we should look into, especially since 2017 is looming.

Mr. French, when we last met, I told you that I had bought all the items sold by the foundation, all the PressureBalls that could be bought at my local Canadian Tire, Mr. Gagné's store.

The Canadian Tire chain is obviously at the centre of this active family initiative. I am also thinking of your latest campaign at Sports Experts called "Get Out and Ski". You have to see the advertisement. You see people telling themselves that it's winter time, and they want to stay warm and comfortable. They want to cook and wrap themselves up in a cosy blanket and, suddenly, a bunch of snow hits them in the face. That's when they realize they are in a northern country and should go outside. It's a great advertisement.

Do you feel that more could be done in terms of collaboration with schools? The situation you described is probably, and unfortunately, the same everywhere.

Do you have an impact in Quebec? Is the Jumpstart foundation working well everywhere?

• (1700)

[English]

Mr. Landon French: Yes, it's national, for sure.

In Quebec, we're very proud of camp Bon départ, which is in Wentworth, just north of Montreal. We work with the social service agencies across the province to bring 500 children to our camp there. The dealers in Quebec have built that camp over the past 25 years. It's amazing. Some of these children show up and they have all of their belongings in a garbage bag. They get on the bus. They're angry, and they're scared, and they're not sure what's going on because they've not been out of the north end of Montreal or in a rural area before. They come to the camp and they spend 10 days with the counsellors. They make friends, and we return completely different children back to the parents. It's a very heartwarming, and an important part of what our dealers do in Quebec.

I was in Quebec City last week and saw a cheerleading class. The parents of these kids get home quite late after school. Out of a school of about 400 children, 160 of them participate in Jumpstart-funded classes, either at lunch or after school, to keep them active and busy, and to keep some of them out of trouble.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Congratulations.

Can you quickly tell me whether Canadian Tire will get involved in this event? Can we hope to see a brochure promoting it in the store's flyer?

[English]

Mr. Landon French: Today's communications around Active at School are a good example of what we would be willing to do and what we are capable of doing. That's using our own communication channels, but also our different businesses, whether it's Atmosphere, or Intersport, or S3, in Quebec, as well as Mark's and our Canadian Tire Financial Services. We have a lot of different tools to put into place. Again, we can motivate our employees, which is a strong force of 85,000 people.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I remember an athlete who was welcomed in my region with all the Canadian Tire staff. That was very stimulating for young people.

I will not give the last minute of my time to my colleague. I will rather use it—and our witnesses will understand that this is necessary—to move a motion I mentioned at the last meeting. The motion reads as follows:

That the Committee undertake a study on the effects of the budget cuts to the CBC/Radio-Canada's social, cultural, heritage and real estate assets and those related to the production of Canadian content, and that this televised study concludes before March 31st 2015, and that the Committee produce satisfactory recommendations.

I would like us to vote on this motion today.

[English]

The Chair: Did you want to vote on it now, or do you want to let us finish the panel first?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: It doesn't have to be right away, but I do like the idea of voting now because our meeting is public.

If we can vote publicly later, that's also fine.

[English]

The Chair: Let's finish up this panel first.

There's about 25 seconds left, so we'll move to Mr. Hsu for seven minutes.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. French, I remember attending a Canadian Tire Jumpstart event at the Boys and Girls Club in Kingston, which was quite well attended, and I think a very good community to be present in.

I have a question for both you and Mr. LaBarge.

How can the federal government best collaborate with your organizations to advance the spirit of this bill that we're discussing today? What can the federal government do in particular? Can you provide specific ideas for the federal government to promote and encourage health and fitness? Particularly, do you have any ideas related to the 150th anniversary of Confederation coming up in a couple of years?

Mr. Paul LaBarge: There are probably two things that I would suggest. One is that I think completing the trail would be a tremendous statement, both in terms of the commitment to.... Well, it's not just both; it's commitment to our history, to our cultural origins, to our country in terms of its geography, and it's a commitment to the health and fitness of Canadians.

• (1705)

Mr. Ted Hsu: Are there particular resources that you need?

Mr. Paul LaBarge: We are in the position where, for instance, if we talk about signage, it's a matter of fitting signage into the kinds of grants that the government gives to support the infrastructure program for the trail. So that's one thing.

We have things like using, as a training ground, the military engineers for building 140 bridges that we need in Newfoundland alone. If we look at the various parks, there is, for instance, a section that goes from Canmore to the park centre in Banff. More of those kinds of initiatives will be elements that help to complete this. In terms of a particular event, I like Senator Greene Raine's idea of starting the celebration on June 1 and going through to July 1.

One of the wackier things we've come up with is instead of doing a relay that starts at one end and goes to the other—through the snow, sleet, sun, mosquitoes, bugs, and everything else—that you actually do it all in a contracted period, because we have 1,000 different communities, and we encourage people from each community to go in both directions and link up with their neighbours. To do that, we're going to have to have people with tents, canoes—we won't have a lot of use for skis—bikes, certainly mosquito oil, and various other things. There is a significant economic contribution there.

It also can become, effectively, an opportunity to showcase Canada and all of its communities by making this not only a cultural and community event but also a media event. In fact, if we really wanted to reach outside of our boundaries, we could use the Canadian Radarsat satellite to identify all of these linkages and put up a beacon whenever they meet, and we would be able to photograph those from space. There are things we can do that are all part of initiatives that relate to the economic and physical development of this country, which the government continues to support. Already they have a matching program. We're burning through it quite quickly because Canadians are being very generous. I would encourage the government to increase that matching program to make additional funds available, so that when there is a generous donation by, for instance, Canadian Tire, to the Trans Canada Trail, that gets leveraged for the benefit of all Canadians.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. French.

Mr. Landon French: From our perspective, I think there are a couple of things. First, your ability to communicate with Canadians is tremendous. You have to think about how to use the assets you have in that regard, whether it's the income tax form or other different ways you and the government have to communicate with Canadians, to get a message in there at the right time about getting Canadians to think about how much they have moved recently or how they can move more. I think those communication channels present a tremendous opportunity.

The other thing is the actual physical assets of the government and how they can be used from a recreational point of view. That doesn't have to be something elaborate. It can be simple. It could be trail space, or it could actually be other property that's not being used—gyms or rinks or things like that—that local communities can use and leverage. They'll create the programs. If the assets are there and the physical space is there, then it's amazing to see what Canadians will create. That's where we end up spending a lot of time partnering with community organizations to create the programs to get people moving. The assets that the Government of Canada has should be plenty to get Canadians moving, and there is lots of help from the trail, from us, and from many others to take advantage and make the most of those opportunities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hsu.

We will now go to Mr. Weston for up to seven minutes.

Mr. John Weston: Thanks to both of you, and Mr. LaBarge, thanks for your personal story. Some of what we're doing today goes back to a personal story of someone else who didn't have your good fortune.

Tom Hanson was a photojournalist on Parliament Hill. In 2009 he was playing pickup hockey—I believe he was in his thirties—and he dropped dead. I remember that after that sad event, the Prime Minister addressed all of us and said, “Consider your lifestyles, parliamentarians, and be careful.” From that came the parliamentary fitness initiative. Peter Stoffer, Kirsty Duncan, and I have exhorted our colleagues to participate in something, not only for ourselves, but also as role models.

I want to take this moment to thank my colleagues. Not once in six years has anyone taken exception to our relentless e-mails and letters.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Weston: We sign ourselves as the CFFOs, chief fun and fitness officers, and we try to make sure it's fun. As you have indicated, it has to be fun, as well as good for our health.

Let me first compliment Canadian Tire for that wonderful ad campaign, “We All Play For Canada”. It's patriotic. It makes you want to get up and do something. It's just first class, and it really seems to be the result of a good corporate citizen. Kudos on that.

Both of you have emphasized the importance of partnerships. You named at least a dozen organizations, Landon. You talked about Canada Soccer, the Boys and Girls Clubs, and the YMCA.

In terms of reaching our goal of 300 cities to proclaim national health and fitness day by next June—we're at 155—do you think that companies like Canadian Tire and the Running Room can play a role in getting them on board?

● (1710)

Mr. Landon French: We're happy to help, absolutely. Obviously, we have interests in almost every community across the country and relationships with many of those municipalities. We work with over 300 municipalities right now, with their parks and rec departments, on Jumpstart activities and programs, so we'd be happy to support that and help you in any way we can.

Mr. John Weston: That's great to hear.

Senator Greene Raine started to evoke a vision about Canada's 150th. You've added a little bit, Mr. LaBarge, on that. On the notion that you touch 1,000 municipalities today, that you're within 30 minutes of 80% of Canada's population, and that this modest initiative of ours has 155 cities already before the bill has even passed, can you build a bit on that, on this vision of celebrating on the trail or trails of Canada, promoting health and fitness, and taking advantage of what we've done here to promote the trail?

Mr. Paul LaBarge: Maybe I can go back and then go forward.

In Canada 125 in 1992, the single most successful program... By the way, the then-government of Mr. Mulroney allocated \$90 million for those celebrations. One of the things we observed was that the single most successful celebration was the cheapest one. It was the concept of the block party. It was the concept of a bucket with Canadian flags in it, some streamers, several copies of *O Canada*, and I think recipes for Nanaimo bars.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Paul LaBarge: Anyway, people would write in, suggest that they were going to have a block party and say how many people were going to be there, and they'd get the equivalent number of buckets required. It was on July 1 and it was the single most successful program we had in terms of the feedback from the public.

My view to you, and my advice, would be to capitalize on that. Capitalize on your fitness initiative. Capitalize on the fact that Canadians actually, as was noted by Mr. French, don't want to be spectators. They want to be participants. Deep down inside, they want you to ask them to do something together, because they actually really like their communities.

I think the opportunity is there to reach out to your mayors, each one of you as members of Parliament, and to reach out to all of the municipalities that you touch and say to them that this is our chance to do something together that reflects who we are as Canadians. If you combine the partnerships we have with organizations like Canadian Tire, partnerships that include even the financial institutions, life insurance, and so on, and if you bring all of that together in terms of affording people the opportunity to be with their neighbours on a day that is essentially about coming together, and to do it not as spectators, but as participants, to make them the centrepiece of the show, then I think you will have success. If we can join that together with the concept of activity, then it will be quintessentially Canadian.

Mr. John Weston: It's remarkable; you mentioned at the beginning that you started 25 years ago, that you are one of the original signatories of the Trans Canada Trail Foundation, and you're still at it today. Can you even remember what entity organized that matching program or that program with the packages that you just described?

•(1715)

Mr. Paul LaBarge: That was done by the Canada 125 Corporation, a corporation that was set up by the federal government. I happened to be one of the incorporators as well as the secretary during its existence. That was the organization that did that.

Mr. John Weston: The state of Idaho claims that it brings in about \$350 million a year in bike tourism. That's a profit because people go there to get on its trails. You talked a little about the potential of an economic benefit to Canada. Do you want to elaborate perhaps on what we might do toward 2017 by making people from other countries want to come and celebrate on the trails?

Mr. Paul LaBarge: Already in Quebec probably one of the biggest presences is Vélo Québec, and one of the reasons for the success of the trail in Quebec is the number of cycling routes. The 550,000 people on Le P'tit Train Du Nord is not an accident. That's a deliberate promotional activity. It's cross-country skiing in the winter and it's biking in the summer.

The Trans Canada Trail has donated to the Government of British Columbia over \$17 million in closed rail lines that have been converted into trails. The beauty of rail lines that are converted into trails is they never have a slope of more than 5%, which means they're readily accessible to virtually every person of every level of fitness. I know for instance that in the Niagara area we have trails that go through wineries. The same thing is now being done down near the Sandbanks, and it certainly is the case in B.C. as you go through the Okanagan. So you can now bike to the various wineries.

Again I come back to the fact that in P.E.I. it's the second most significant tourist attraction, and it attracts people from Germany, France, and England for bike tours.

The Chair: Mr. Weston, we're going to wrap up.

Thank you very much to our witnesses for their contribution to our study of the bill. Thank you very much, Mr. French and Mr. LaBarge.

Members, we're going to move very quickly. I think we can work through this clause-by-clause study very quickly, in a minute or two.

Pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of the preamble and clause 1, the short title, are postponed.

Shall clause 2 carry?

An hon. member: On division.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Why wouldn't we want a recorded vote?

The Chair: If you want one, call for one.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Can we restart this, please?

The Chair: We're going to back it up here now that everybody is at the table. There may be some reconsideration on where we're going.

(Clause 2 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall clause 3 carry?

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Let's do a recorded vote.

The Chair: I heard unanimity here. If you want we'll—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I don't need a recorded vote on this.

Mr. Terence Young: Do you want it on record that you supported it?

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra, are you calling for a recorded vote? You have the right to do that.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Sure.

The Chair: We did hear that clause 2 carried. There was not a recorded vote on that. So now I'm moving to clause 3.

(Clause 3 agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0)

An hon. member: Can we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: Absolutely.

(Clause 1 agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0)

The Chair: Shall the preamble carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall I report the bill to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The bill is agreed to and returns to the House for third reading. Thank you for everyone's contribution today.

Monsieur Nantel, you have the floor.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Chair, thank you for doing this as quickly as possible.

I want to congratulate Ms. Greene. Sorry, I mean Ms. Greene Raine. I always call you by the name you had when I was young.

I would like us to vote on the motion I moved earlier. I think this is an important issue. Many people feel that Radio-Canada's production facilities definitely have a heritage value. You will probably recall that 25,000 people took to the streets of Montreal, and another 2,000 or so did the same across the country.

I think the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage can certainly put questions to the Radio-Canada administration and other competent authorities regarding the latitude, relevance and assessment of those sales. Many people are worried about this, and I think the concern is valid, especially since, as I was saying at the last meeting, there's definitely a threshold related to the \$4-million amount that probably requires the government's involvement.

So I would like us to vote on this motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Do we have a speakers list on this? Does anyone else want to speak?

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Chair, in light of our guest here today, how many Canadians would have seen and cheered and rejoiced in the incredible gold medal victory of Nancy Greene Raine if it hadn't been for the CBC? We need to protect it, and we need to be very, very sure that it's properly funded. I think a study in that regard would be very important.

The Chair: Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Chair, I do agree that this motion is critical. I've heard from many people in British Columbia who are very, very concerned about the decline of the CBC, mainly due to funding cuts. I think a study at this time would be prudent, and we should expedite it.

The Chair: Mr. Hsu.

Mr. Ted Hsu: I just want to express my strong support for this motion and the intention behind it.

The Chair: Are there any other speakers?

Okay. We'll call the question on the motion.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Can we have a recorded vote on this? That would be great.

The Chair: If you're requesting a recorded vote, yes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you very much.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: The motion fails.

The meeting is adjourned.

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