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• (1615)
[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 88 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, as you know, pursuant to the House of Commons order of Thursday, June 23, 2022.

Now pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 20, 2022, the committee is meeting to continue its study on safe sport in Canada. We have the Honourable Kirsty Duncan with us for the first round.

Before that, if you don't mind, Ms. Duncan, we do have a little bit of budget to look at.

We have the request in front of us here. In order to conclude the study of safe sport in Canada, a supplementary budget was drafted and distributed to members on Wednesday. You did get this yesterday.

Is it the will then of the committee to adopt the supplementary budget in the amount of \$6,250?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's approved.

Go ahead, Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): I was just going to move approval of the budget.

Thanks, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you.

We have some time restraints. What is the will of the committee?

I'm suggesting one round of six minutes for each party after Ms. Duncan's five-minute statement.

Is that okay with everyone? Then we'll go into hour two, and play it by ear.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that makes sense. I just wanted to make sure it was okay with Ms. Duncan as well.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Good.

Welcome, then, to the Honourable Kirsty Duncan.

To be honest with you, we're very happy to see you. I'm sure it took a lot of courage for you today to come to committee instead of joining us by video conference. Thank you for coming in person. We did hug you. We did have some conversation.

If you don't mind, the floor is yours now, Ms. Duncan, and you have five minutes, please.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee and colleagues. Thank you for the kind and warm welcome.

I want to thank you all for undertaking this important study.

I must also thank not only the extraordinary athletes who made the year 2022 the year of athlete advocacy and courageously came forward with their stories of abuse, but also the athletes and their families who have come forward over decades. We owe them our gratitude, and we must do everything in our power to address the many years of abuse and the entrenchment of that abuse—emotional, physical, psychological, sexual and verbal abuse.

Canada's national sport system was never built to protect athletes and young people. It was built to have fit men for war. After Canada “failed” to win a gold medal at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, sport changed in our country. We felt it across sport and right down to the club level. The goals had changed, and the goals were to compete for Canada and to win medals for the nation.

In the 1980s, some sports federations and coaches put the health, safety and well-being of athletes far behind winning. Athletes were experimented on. They inserted fake bladders with clean urine and young athletes injected older athletes between their toes with performance-enhancing drugs to hide the drug use. The 1988 Dubin inquiry into the use of drugs and banned practices exposed the extent of the rot and made dozens of recommendations, which government implemented and which made Canada a leader in the war against doping in sport.

We need that same leadership now. Our athletes should not have to beg, for over a year now, for us to do the right thing and move forward with an inquiry into an outdated sport system. In 1988, an inquiry was called in less than two weeks, and it cost \$3 million.

My first recommendation is that the government hold an independent, comprehensive, systematic inquiry focused on the health, safety and well-being of athletes.

My second recommendation is that a systematic inquiry needs to start with the athletes, be trauma-informed and survivors must be fully empowered to speak their truths should they so choose.

In the 1990s, hockey player Sheldon Kennedy bravely came forward with revelations of years of sexual abuse at the hands of his junior coach. His story should have been a wake-up call to the Canadian hockey community and to the entire sport system. It wasn't.

I come at this discussion from the perspective of a high-performance athlete. As a gymnast, I did double back somersaults in the air from the floor. I ran the Boston Marathon many times, and I competed in half Ironmans. I have been a coach, a dance teacher and a judge throughout my life. As you know, I also served as the Minister of Sport, and I made safe sport my number one priority.

In the year I served as minister, I put in place the first broad strokes of a safe sport system, including a national helpline, a third party investigator, an agreement from every sport minister across Canada to make safe sport a priority, 13 safe sport summits, mandatory prevention training and funding, and the development of a coaching code of conduct.

With regard to my third recommendation, the spoken and unspoken rules of each sport, the power differentials that exist among the national sport organization—coach, trainer, medical support, members and others—and the concept of owning athletes and prioritizing winning championships over athlete health, safety and well-being need to be investigated.

My fourth recommendation is that Sport Canada's safe sport measures, accountability and financial instruments developed to ensure compliance need to be examined.

Fifth, national sport organizations and their collective power need to be investigated, as well as governance accountability and finances and how sport leaders circulated among NSOs and reinforced relationships and protections.

My sixth recommendation is that an inquiry review data on all forms of abuse in sport on a sport-by-sport basis.

My last and most important recommendation is that a thorough investigation be undertaken about whether cases of abuse were effectively resolved and perpetrators removed from the system, or were there passive enablers in place who protected the sport and the organization over the protection of young people?

● (1620)

The time is now for a national public inquiry. If Canada gets it right, we can better protect our athletes. We can also be a catalyst for a long-overdue global conversation on athlete health, safety and well-being, as we were in the aftermath of Dubin 35 years ago.

With your indulgence, Mr. Chair, I would like to say this very briefly to those who are living with cancer: Know that you're not alone and that I stand with you. I'm grateful for the life-saving medicine, science and compassionate and excellent care of our health care professionals.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you very much.

We'll do just the one round. As you all know, we have a vote at approximately five o'clock, give or take—you know the House and how it operates. We'll go with a six-minute round. All four parties will have six minutes.

Ms. Duncan, if you want to make a closing statement after that, you're more than welcome to.

We'll start with the Conservative Party and Ms. Gladu on video conference.

Go ahead, Marilyn.

● (1625)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Duncan, for being here today.

You were the Minister of Sport. You were a gymnast, a coach and a judge in competitive sport. You have seen first-hand all of the abuse that we have been hearing about from athletes and organizations. You've been clear that you think we need a national public inquiry. What is your hope? What do you think we would get out of that inquiry?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Ms. Gladu. I hear that congratulations are in order for you and your family on the birth of a new granddaughter.

I am hoping that with an inquiry we will see what we saw 35 years ago with the precedent set by former chief justice of Ontario Charles Dubin. He took a systematic approach. He left no stone unturned. He looked at everything—athlete rights, multiple sports, policies, procedures and finances. He exposed the rot and the extent of that rot. He made dozens of recommendations. The government chose which ones to implement. He opened the world's eyes to doping in sport.

I think we have an opportunity here, as hard as it will be. You folks have all done the hard work this last year, listening to these brave and courageous athletes come forward and hearing their stories. It's hard. These stories are decades old. This has been going on for decades. If we do not have an inquiry, we will not get to the bottom of this. In sport, abuse is decades old. It's entrenched. It's complex. In some cases, it's athletes who are abused and harassed by coaches and judges and other support staff. In other cases, it's athletes who become predators and assault those only tangentially linked to the sport system. In other cases, it's athletes abusing other athletes. It's complex.

The only way to get to this complexity is through a national public inquiry. I think we are finally at a moment in time where we cannot lose this moment. There is an understanding that this is a problem, and we cannot afford to fail our children. The time is now.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

I think we were all shocked when we saw the Hockey Canada incident that came out five years ago. You had begun the very good work of putting into place a national helpline for sport to report abuse, third party investigators and a number of measures, but then the government decided to shut down the ministry of sport.

Now we're seeing that the government has not really embraced a national public inquiry. Why do you think that is?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: As you know, Ms. Gladu, I served as minister from 2018 to 2019. You're right that in 2019 the position of sport minister was eliminated. At that time, I did ask what we would be doing on safe sport going forward. I was told that we had to get back to what sport was really about. I said, "So not protecting children."

I think what we've seen in the last few years is that athletes saw some momentum, but then there was a hiatus and there was frustration, rightly. Then 2022 was really the year of athlete advocacy.

What we've also seen through this committee is that there has been some absolute resistance to moving forward on safe sport initiatives. I can tell you that I faced it from Hockey Canada. There was resistance to moving forward with the helpline. I'm not sure why anyone would resist a helpline that athletes could call from across the country to say what their issue was.

There was also real resistance to the third party investigator.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Was the resistance from the government?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: This was actually, in some cases, from sport itself. The examples I'm giving you are from sport. What you have shown in this committee is that there has been real resistance to some changes in the sports system, and this is why your work and an inquiry going forward are so important.

• (1630)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I appreciate, Ms. Duncan, the actions you have suggested, and certainly the committee will take those under consideration.

Is there anything else you would recommend the federal government do to address this long-standing abuse that we've seen in sport?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

The most important thing is to get a national public inquiry under way. Our athletes are asking for that. It's time we really listened to them. We hear what they say the issues are. It is important to ask hard questions, and we have to gather the data and the evidence.

Back in 1988 that investigation took less than a year, and we've lost a year of protecting athletes, so let's move forward with a national public inquiry that is trauma-informed.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

We'll move to the Liberal Party now and Lisa Hepfner.

Lisa, go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, my colleague, Honourable Kirsty Duncan, for being here with us today.

You and I have spoken about these issues already, and I know that when you were named Minister of Sport, the key thing in your head was that it was about children. It was about protecting children, and they were always foremost in your mind.

You taught children. You were a dance teacher to children. That was your whole world.

You have talked to us a little bit about the things you, as sports minister, implemented. Tell us a bit more about those and about how you kept children and protecting children in the forefront the whole time.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Ms. Hepfner. You and I have talked long about these issues.

Outside of teaching at the university, my life was coaching and teaching dance. My whole life was devoted to young people. I really believe that every athlete should go to practice excited and looking forward to practice, to being in the gym, on the field or on the rink, and that they should look forward to being physically fit, to being trained by good coaches who want to develop good athletes and good people, and that they should enjoy sport and share the love of sport.

I also know the darker side of sport. While I have not experienced the horrific abuse that you have heard about at this committee, I am a former gymnast and I know what it's like to be told to eat Jell-o, laxatives, toilet paper and water pills, and what it's like to be weighed and shamed. I wanted to do everything so that no young person would ever face that going forward. That's why I said that my number one priority was ending abuse and having safe sport, and I said to the sport community and to officials that we are drawing a line in the sand and the days of hear no evil, see no evil in sport are over. We have a duty of care to our athletes, and we need to make it easier for athletes to come forward. There is a responsibility to get the perpetrators and the enablers out of the system.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Would you tell us what it's been like for you to watch these committee hearings over the past year and hear the sorts of testimonies that we've heard at this committee?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: I really want to thank this committee for their work and for what you've been hearing. It's hard to hear.

For some of us who grew up in a broken system, these stories.... The system was never built to protect athletes. It was about winning medals and international competitions, and then you had some sport federations turning a blind eye to the abuse that was happening. I'd talk about steroid abuse, for one.

I think about Sheldon Kennedy coming forward. This is decades of abuse. Now is the time to give our athletes the space to ensure that an inquiry is trauma-informed and that we listen, we hear their issues, we get as many recommendations as we can and we build a safe sport system going forward.

• (1635)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: It's complicated, as you well know as former minister, because a lot of these abuses are happening at the local level or at the provincial level.

What do you think the role of the federal government is in this?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: When I served in the role.... You're right. The federal minister is responsible for our Olympic and Paralympic athletes, and the sports system is complicated in this country.

I knew that, if I wanted to change things on the ground, I had to work with ministers across the country. I called each one, one at a time, and got them onside. We had teleconferences, and by the time we got to the winter games, we were able to sign the Red Deer declaration, which is the first time in this country that all ministers committed to working on safe sport.

I believe that safe sport needs to be on every federal-provincial-territorial meeting going forward.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: That was the perfect segue to my next question.

Can you tell us more about the Red Deer accord and what was decided there?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: It took a lot of work to get all ministers committed to taking action in their provinces to end abuse, discrimination and harassment.

What I'd like to see going forward, as I said, is that this be on every federal-provincial-territorial meeting. I'd like to see the data. I would like to know.... I know when I was able to put in the telephone line, the helpline, we started getting actual data on abuse in this country.

I think we need to see that from the provinces and territories. I want to see it by sport and what it looks like for emotional, physical, psychological, sexual, verbal.... I want to know if those cases are going up or down. Are they being effectively managed? Are we measuring whether these cases are being effectively managed? Do the claimant and the defendant feel that they were treated fairly? Has this been happening over time? How many of our families, coaches and support staff are going through yearly training on safe sport?

We need all of that information.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you.

We'll move to the Bloc for six minutes.

On video conference, we have Mr. Lemire. Welcome.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Duncan, I am very moved to have you joining us today and, especially, to hear your testimony. You have contributed greatly to the situation we know today, where there seems to be a virtually unanimous desire within the sports community. Organizations such as Own The Podium and the Canadian Olympic Committee are even in favour of launching an independent public inquiry.

During the discussions of a few months ago, we were somewhat alone in calling for an independent public inquiry, and you have advocated for it with the self-confidence that is your hallmark. I want to thank you for that.

I would like you to tell us about your experience. You were responsible for sports as the Minister of Science and Sport, and later as Minister for Sport and Persons with Disabilities. What is the greatest legacy that you have left in these roles?

[*English*]

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

Again, I want to thank you for your efforts. I want to thank everyone at this committee for their efforts.

I think the hardest thing, back in 2018, was literally drawing a line in the sand and starting a new conversation in this country about safe sport. This had been a taboo subject for many years. To start that conversation and to say that the days of hear no evil, see no evil were over....

I'm going to take you back to October of 2017. The #MeToo movement was making headlines around the world. In January of 2018, the U.S.A. gymnastics team's Larry Nassar received an effective life sentence after abusing over 150 gymnastics over two decades. I was appointed minister a month later. I did receive surprise that I was going to tackle safe sport. There was push-back.

As I said, I couldn't have come from the background I come from, with what I have witnessed and having spent my life protecting children, without starting that conversation. I think what your committee has done is that you have raised this conversation to the national level. I think the time is right to have this national public inquiry.

Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I would like to ask you the following question.

If you were still Minister of Sport, you could have launched the independent public inquiry. The violation of human rights and the imbalance of power, including the toxic culture in sports federations, are subjects you are familiar with.

Why did you not launch an independent public inquiry while you were minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you for the question. It's an important question to ask.

I had one goal, which was to put in as many protections as I could in the time available to me. When I came in, we started at needing to have a policy and needing to have a third party investigator. We were starting from zero.

I was literally building the start of a safe sport system. We've made progress. We have many kilometres to go to build that safe sport system in this country. That's why that inquiry is going to be so important. I think it's really the next step.

My job was to put in the protections. When I looked at what happened in the United States, I knew that should have provoked a national conversation on numerous sports. It didn't happen. It looked like it was always going to be a sport-by-sport reckoning. My job was to put in place those protections.

We're at the right place. It's the right moment in time now for that inquiry. Let's not fail our children.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I cannot help but draw a parallel. At the time, there was obviously a difficult situation with Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould. We could tell that the Prime Minister's Office was putting pressure on certain ministers to keep them in line, if I may use that expression.

Can we assume that this was the situation in your case, as well? Were you pressured by the PMO to talk about and promote a certain sport or to focus on the positive aspect of sport, rather than to dig deep, and go where it was painful, but necessary to go in order

to protect children, which is the cause you have dedicated your life to?

[*English*]

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: When I came in, in 2018, there was no mandate for safe sport.

I chose to do this. I chose to do this, because as much as I love sport.... I live sport. It's where I come from. It's where I get to twist and somersault through the air, and it's where I get to marvel at the talent, commitment and dedication of our athletes. But I also know a darker side, so I was determined that I would work on this.

It was not always easy. I was lucky to have someone from outside of government who was very committed to safe sport. When I went to Korea for the Olympics about two weeks after being appointed and I was asked what I wanted to do and I said, "safe sport", from officials there was surprise. I sort of took us through it. We've had #MeToo. We've seen Larry Nassar. I'm a former gymnast. I know this world, but there was surprise and there was push-back.

As I said, there was also push-back from some corners of the sport community. I think, again, that this is why the inquiry really matters. We have to shine a light on the darkest recesses of the sport system if we're going to make change, and the only way to do this is through an inquiry.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

As we know, we have 30-minute bells, so we have some time yet.

Is it okay for the committee to continue with Mr. Julian, and then we'll hear maybe closing comments from Ms. Duncan?

Go ahead, Michael.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): It is 4:45 right now. If there are 30 minutes to the bells and then there's obviously a 20-minute period. We're not going to get to the second round. Is that correct?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): I'm hoping to get to some of it.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Is it a hard stop at 5:30?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): No. We don't have a hard stop at 5:30. We actually have a stop at six, if it's the will of the committee.

What about you guys on video conference?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: If the witnesses for the second panel can stay, I'm fine to go to six.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): That's good.

Go ahead, Ms. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): I'm sorry, Chair, but just on that note, if I have this figured out correctly, we're going to have to vote at approximately 5:15. With the voting process, the earliest that this committee would be able to come back would be 5:35, which would then leave us with 25 minutes for that second panel. They would each have five minutes for opening remarks, which would leave us with a total of maybe seven to 10 minutes maximum to ask questions.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's assuming that we get here at 5:35. It could be 5:40.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: We could agree by unanimous consent to vote by app. In that case, we'd have a five-minute recess.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: If we have 25 minutes left, I would suggest that maybe we finish our final round with Kirsty Duncan and then allow her to do closing remarks, should you wish, Chair. We then perhaps allow our next panel, because I believe they're ready to go.... Why don't we allow them to do their opening statements and then go to vote? That's unless, of course, we could have unanimous consent from the committee right now that we agree to vote electronically, which I would be totally fine with.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): That's fine. Is that good?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): All right. We'll do that. Thank you, everyone.

You have six minutes, Mr. Julian. The time is yours.

Mr. Peter Julian: Ms. Duncan, it's so good to see you. We miss you. We wish you all the best and a speedy recovery. Thank you for being with us today.

I want to talk to you about what you endeavoured to bring to the sports ministry. We came into this study looking initially at just Hockey Canada, and then, over the course of the past year, the further we looked, the more serious things became. I note that you really made a serious attempt to address these issues well before they were part of the public domain. I thank you for that.

I want to quote from CBC news going back to January 27. You said, to quote the article, that the government failed to build momentum behind your efforts to prevent harassment, abuse and discrimination, and you even faced "push-back" from people within your own government when you made tackling abuse a top priority in your time as sports minister.

Could you describe that a little bit more? You've talked about NSOs and their push-back. Could you talk a bit more about push-back from the government?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Julian, for your kindness. It's good to see all of you too. It's nice to be back with you.

To your point, it has been sport's dirty secret for decades. This was not a well-known issue unless you came from sport or had lived through this. For some people who were from sport, they felt

that my doing safe sport could damage sport. We saw this back in 1988. There were people who thought that the Dubin inquiry would damage sport, but sport continued. The Paralympics and Olympics continued. Sport got stronger. Our athletes were stronger because of that inquiry.

I think there has been fear in some corners about going forward with a national public inquiry because it could damage sport, but I think we have a real opportunity here. Yes, it's going to be hard. This past year has been hard. It's been really hard. You're going to hear, whoever does the inquiry, should there be one, more hard stories, but ultimately sport will be better for it.

• (1650)

Mr. Peter Julian: You mentioned that, when you first really undertook these efforts, there were some voices saying let's get back to what sport is really about. You also mentioned in your testimony that the sports system was never built to protect athletes.

If you were sports minister today, what would you change? Having the wealth of that experience and knowing the push-back from within your government but also from within sports organizations, how would you change the approach as sports minister so that we could really ensure safety for all athletes and for the public?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I have to recognize that we do have a sports minister. I am grateful that she actually brought safe sport back onto the agenda. It had disappeared. She brought it back, as has this committee.

I can only talk about my time when I served in the role. As I said, it was difficult. It's not easy to start a new national conversation about things that have been taboo for far too long. It's been taboo to talk about how athletes have been treated as chattel and commodities whose main purpose was to win a medal, and preferably a gold medal. These were taboo subjects.

I really feel that we are at a moment in time. It has taken time to get here. The work you have done has really elevated this conversation. This is the time. We cannot afford to lose this moment. Our athletes are waiting. They've been waiting for 50 years.

Mr. Peter Julian: You followed the hearings with Hockey Canada, but we've also seen other national sports organizations, like Soccer Canada, where there were significant resignations from some of the individuals who may have helped to perpetuate the system you're speaking about.

What is your reaction when you see, for example, at Hockey Canada, the board of directors and the CEO resigning? What does that tell you about where we're going?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: We have a well-known hockey coach here and a much-loved hockey coach. I'd like to recognize that.

When I met with Hockey Canada, I addressed hard issues with them. I addressed not only abuse, but I also addressed lack of funding for women in hockey. I addressed the lack of funding for persons of all abilities in hockey. I was clear at the time: The culture of entitlement and toxic masculinity is not new in hockey in Canada.

When I was an athlete, in my teenage years and early twenties, we heard about the Junior A hockey players and the drugs and alcohol away from the arena. We heard, and pardon my language, the bragging about how many “puck bunnies” some guy bagged on the weekend. Where were the adults in charge? Where were the leagues, the provincial and national associations, demanding of their members principles of common decency?

I think that Hockey Canada has failed over and over to see the abuse, discrimination and harassment in hockey and to take sufficient action on issues that have played out over decades in the media.

• (1655)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

Did you want to say anything to wrap up here? We normally don't do this, but in this case I'll make the exception.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Waugh. I will take one minute.

Thank you for the warm welcome back. I have missed you all.

I want to recognize all of you and the work you have done over the last year to elevate this long-held dirty secret in sport and make it a national issue. It is because of your efforts that we have reached a moment in time where we can't afford to wait. Our athletes are begging us, saying that we need this national public inquiry. Some of them have spoken out to committees.

Let's all work together. There's an opportunity here to change sport in this country and to start a global conversation around athlete health and safety. I thank you all.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): We thank you. If we were all judges, we'd probably give you a 10 here today.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): For committee members, we're going to have a short turnaround, if we can. We're going to hear from Sail Canada and Gymnastics Canada. I think we can get that in before the vote at 5:15.

We'll make it a quick two-minute or three-minute turnover, and we'll hear from our second panel. They're both by video conference. Thank you.

We'll be back in about two or three minutes.

• (1655)

(Pause)

• (1659)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Committee members, we have about 10 to 15 minutes before we have to vote.

We'll start with Sail Canada first. We'll give them five minutes—Don Adams, the chief executive officer, and Hugh McGugan, the chair of Sail Canada.

Don and Hugh, welcome to the heritage committee. You have five minutes. I don't know how you're going to split it up, but after five minutes I'll interject and then we'll go to Gymnastics Canada and Ms. Smith.

Mr. Adams and Mr. McGugan, the floor is yours for five minutes.

• (1700)

Mr. Don Adams (Chief Executive Officer, Sail Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to speak on behalf of Sail Canada, at least in the opening remarks.

Thank you for this invitation today. Thank you for the work this committee is doing to create a better safe sport system. Thanks to Honourable Minister Duncan for leading this process and getting it under way. Her leadership within the sport community has been critical. This is a very important topic for us to address.

Sail Canada was established over 90 years ago. We've always been a driver in developing safe sailing practices in Canada. We welcome Canadians of all ages, all abilities and all interests, from recreational sailing to competitive sailing. Our tag line is “Sail for All, Sail for Life, Sail to Win”. We're very proud of our world-class athletes, but we're also very proud of every other sailor within the system. We have, over time, achieved nine Olympic and Paralympic medals.

Sail Canada works with 380 independent member organizations from coast to coast, including provincial sailing associations, sailing clubs, schools and class associations, each with unique needs and each committed to providing a safe sailing experience.

On the competitive side, the international racing rules of sailing have always emphasized reporting and disciplinary actions for maltreatment in sport, including penalties as far-reaching as lifetime bans from the sport. Sail Canada feels it is a leader in safe sport. We were charting the course of best practices even before we signed on with the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner last December.

In following Minister Duncan's lead, we have taken her recommendations seriously. We modified our harassment, bullying and discrimination policy in 2019. The same year, Sail Canada formed an inclusivity, diversity and equity committee. It also created policies to address that area.

We've also, under Minister Duncan's lead, created the hotline. We hired an independent third party investigator. A lot of work is being done in this area, but obviously a lot more can be done.

Sail Canada is an international safe sport leader. Recently we witnessed some world sport federations making decisions, including hosting competitions in countries that do not protect all communities. Sail Canada took action and sent a letter to World Sailing. We called upon them to ensure that we are working together to support, protect and include all communities that take part in sailing competitions.

Sail Canada supports the federal government's push for better safe sport environments, and last December Sail Canada announced that it would be one of the first to join the abuse-free sport program. We signed in December and put that in place on March 1.

Sail Canada went beyond the requirements of the Government of Canada in terms of scope. We worked with our provincial partners to create a harmonized safe sport policy for the whole sailing community and not just those at the national level. Sail Canada hired a safe sport officer to update and implement our safe sport package and to work with and assist our provincial partners, sailing clubs and schools in implementing these policies.

Sail Canada requires all staff, national community volunteers, certified officials, certified registered coaches and instructors, and all participants of Sail Canada regional and national championships to consent to our new code of conduct and the UCCMS and to be subject to OSIC if a complaint is lodged.

Sail Canada has set the tone for safe sport training across the country, for years providing seminars about safe sport to staff, volunteers, officials, and provincial sailing association staff and presidents. We require all staff, instructors, coaches and officials to complete safe sport training.

We recently presented a three-hour training session, which included participation by our national team athletes, development squad coaches and support staff, at which they focused on how to protect themselves from any safe sport issue and how to file a complaint if they felt they were being abused in any way. As of today six provincial sailing associations—not including Quebec, which has its own system—have passed the safe sport policy package and are in the process of rolling it out to their member organizations. Over half of the member clubs and schools have adopted safe sport policies, and the rest are working to do so.

There's still a lot of work to do to make sure safe sport objectives are efficient, attainable and able to guarantee an environment free of harassment, abuse and any other harmful conduct. We see that the following key objectives will ensure success for all NSOs.

First is to ensure there is a harmonized safe sport system in place for the whole system—at the club, provincial and national level—to avoid duplication and confusion with regard to which system is to respond, depending on the jurisdiction.

● (1705)

Second is to support sporting coordination from all levels of government—Minister Duncan referred to this, in terms of the Red Deer agreement—to achieve these safe sport objectives.

Third is to conduct cultural audits to confirm the effectiveness of our system and explore opportunities for improvement—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Can you wrap it up, Mr. Adams? You're past five minutes.

Mr. Don Adams: Sure.

All national sporting associations need to work together to get more women and other marginalized groups involved in sport.

Finally, all sports need the support of the federal government to deliver on these objectives, support our Olympic hopefuls, increase diversity and welcome the various diverse groups into the sport.

Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Mr. Adams, thank you very much.

I'm going to move on.

Wendy Smith, welcome to the heritage committee. You're late coming in, but the technical staff would like to see whether the audio is okay. I'm going to shut my mike off. They're going to ask you a few questions.

● (1705) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1705)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): We have a vote coming up in about six and a half minutes, Ms. Smith, but you're only going to get five minutes. We're going to suspend for the vote, and then come back after the vote and have questions and answers.

You have five minutes to talk about Gymnastics Canada. The floor is yours.

Ms. Wendy Smith (Chair, Gymnastics Canada): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you regarding the very important topic of safety in sport.

My name is Wendy Smith. I'm the newly selected chair of the board of directors for Gymnastics Canada.

GymCan is fully committed to providing a safe sport environment that is inclusive and free from maltreatment, discrimination and potential harm for all of our community—most importantly athletes, but also including coaches, judges, administrators and volunteers. Providing a safe experience is viewed not as an option but a necessity to ensure a positive environment for the growth of athletes and other participants.

To that end, GymCan has made a number of changes in the past several years to address safe sport matters in a more coordinated and transparent manner. Specifically, GymCan has worked with our provincial and territorial organizations to update and align all safe sport policies and procedures. We've implemented a reciprocity agreement across the country to ensure that all member provincial and territorial gymnastics associations are reporting and sharing information related to the outcome of safe sport complaints. This includes the publication of a suspended or expelled members list.

We've collectively worked with other sports leaders, the SDRCC and Sport Canada toward the implementation of independent case management systems across the country. We've worked together with our provincial and territorial partners on safe sport education initiatives at all levels of the sport.

At the national level, GymCan has signed on to the OSIC abuse-free sport agreement, which provides for a nationally coordinated and fully independent complaint management process. We've identified a full-time staff role dedicated to leading safe sport programming. We've hired Dr. Kacey Neely, who is an individual with significant experience and knowledge in the area of safe sport, to fulfill this role. Dr. Neely has a proven ability in the improvement of safe practices and safe environments.

We've initiated meetings and educational webinars for all national-level participants, which focus on a greater awareness of a safe and welcoming sporting environment. This education is ongoing and is being expanded to include administrators and officials.

We've continued to update our policies and procedures as they relate to the implementation of all safe sport programming, including case management. We've signed on to the true sport movement, which promotes fairness, inclusion, excellence and fun in all sporting activities.

We've worked closely with the Coaching Association of Canada in updating our coach education materials to properly reflect the latest safe sport research and methodologies. We've engaged the McLaren group to provide an independent review and a cultural review road map for gymnastics. We've reviewed and structured our internal practices, from hiring to evaluations to relationship with the community.

We have implemented many of Minister St-Onge's recently announced measures for accountability—specifically but not limited to board diversity, term limits, athlete inclusion and financial transparency.

GymCan is dedicated to separating the past from the future to make sure that history doesn't repeat itself. In addition to the previously mentioned actions, GymCan is recruiting a new board that is designed for changing the future, with an emphasis on change management, communications and strategy and with the intent to sup-

port both the sport and the business of gymnastics. We're in the process of hiring a new CEO with experience in strategic change and a demonstrated ability in implementing cultural change. We're embarking on addressing the McLaren group's report recommendations.

Finally, GymCan would welcome a public inquiry into safe sport practices in Canada. At the current time, national sports organizations are undergoing significant change to address safe sport practices and culture. However, these changes are happening largely in silos, with little shared experience among the sports. A national public inquiry would help to align sports organizations and leverage learnings and effective policies to hasten the improvement of all sports environments.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to address this committee.

• (1710)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Ms. Smith, along with Mr. Adams and Mr. McGugan.

Here's the procedure we have now. We are going to vote virtually in the House of Commons, so we'll do it right here, but we need to suspend for about 20 minutes. I wish for you to stay on because when we're done and wrapped up after the vote count, we'll come back right away and start our six-minute rounds of questions with the Conservatives, Liberals, Bloc and NDP.

We'll suspend the meeting, if we can, for about 20 minutes or however long it takes the House of Commons to count the votes. Thank you very much. We'll suspend now.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1720)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): All right. Our votes have been counted.

We have decided to do one round with Sail Canada and Gymnastics Canada. We'll start with the Conservatives for six minutes with Rachael Thomas or Richard Martel.

I think you're going to split it, so away you go. You have six minutes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

In the interest of time here, my first question is going to go to Ms. Smith.

Ms. Smith, I'm curious. Of course, we know that there were some pretty significant allegations that came against Scott McFarlane, a coach for Gymnastics Canada. That happened in 2018. He was charged. We know that he was acquitted; nevertheless, there were significant allegations that were brought against him.

He's not the only one. There's a whole history of allegations being brought forward against Gymnastics Canada and the way that abuses have taken place and the way that complaints have been handled, so my curiosity is this. As an organization that receives substantial funding from Sport Canada, I'm wondering if there's ever been a phone call from them or accountability in any way when these complaints have come forward from athletes.

Ms. Wendy Smith: I'm sorry. I'm not sure what the question was.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: When complaints come forward from athletes, such as a letter being written or a news article being published with regard to Gymnastics Canada and abuses that are taking place within the organization, has your organization ever received a phone call or any accountability from Sport Canada?

Ms. Wendy Smith: I don't know that we've received a phone call from Sport Canada. I'm newly in my position. I can find that information and get back to you.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Ms. Smith, you're new to the organization in this current role as chair. You just stepped in a couple of months ago, but you've been on the board for quite some time.

As a board member, did it ever come to your attention that Sport Canada had reached out to the organization and that there was any accountability?

Ms. Wendy Smith: I've been on the board since September of 2022, and I am not aware of Sport Canada calling us on this particular topic.

Again, I can find out more information and get back to you.

• (1725)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: That would be great. Thank you very much. I appreciate your agreeing to that.

I'm going to pass it off to my colleague for his questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Smith, you know that of any sport, yours, gymnastics, is the one that receives the most complaints about abuse and mistreatment.

You have accepted a huge mandate as chair of Gymnastics Canada.

What is your vision for the future? How will you succeed in changing the culture of silence that currently exists within the federation?

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Smith: I'm sorry; can I get an English translation?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Yes, it's a globe at the bottom. I'm sorry. I should have pointed that out.

Stop the clock, please.

The little globe on your right, if you press that.... If you look at the little globe, it will say "English" or "French".

Ms. Wendy Smith: Yes....

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Okay.

That would be the same for you, too, Sail Canada.

Mr. Martel, say a couple of words in French.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: One, two, three. Good afternoon.

I would like to ask Ms. Smith a question.

[*English*]

Is everything right?

Ms. Wendy Smith: I hear it in English now. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Good.

Go ahead, Mr. Martel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Smith, you know that of any sport, gymnastics is the one that receives the most complaints about abuse and mistreatment.

You have accepted a huge mandate, in my view, as chair of Gymnastics Canada.

What is your vision for changing, among other things, the current culture of silence within your federation?

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Smith: Yes, we have done much in this respect. As I've said, we've hired Dr. Kacey Neely to work as our safe sport director. She is implementing some processes and education.

We have also signed on to OSIC. There's an entire complaint management process in place. I did outline a number of them while I was speaking. Is there something more specific that you're looking for?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: I would very much like to know how you will be able to monitor the relationship between a gymnastics coach and young athletes, who often start as early as five, six or seven years of age.

You said that you have a complaint system, but how will you verify that everything is appropriate and that all is well? How will you go about doing that?

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Smith: A lot of this is with respect to education. At Gymnastics Canada, our safe sport framework has three pillars: policy, education and advocacy. Education is a big part of that. We're educating the athletes, we're educating the coaches and we're educating the parents so that they are aware of any inappropriate behaviour. We've made it very easy for people to come and report to us.

This may be why we're seeing a number of cases, because we have made it very easy to come and report cases to us, as opposed to another organization that may put up barriers against reporting safe sport issues so that they appear to be a safer area than we are.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: What about the coach in all this? Often, coaches aim for success, they want to win medals. There is that aspect as well.

When a coach does not behave as they ought to, is there any follow-up? Do you take care of that as well? Sometimes, a coach may think that they are on the right path, when often they are in the wrong.

Is there anyone to deal with the coaches in such a situation? Is it over for them from the first transgression? Will they be fired?

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Smith: No. It's independently sent to case management. Case management evaluates the complaint and what steps should be happening afterwards. They may recommend expulsion or suspension, or it may come back as a question of education, because the coach is perhaps using inappropriate language, for example.

The independent case management comes back with recommendations. We follow those recommendations.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel: I have one last question to ask you.

Gymnasts for Change Canada published an open letter in March 2022, addressed to the federal Minister of Sport. The letter talks in particular about children being raped and the psychological manipulation of young gymnasts for sexual purposes, presented in the guise of coaching.

How does Gymnastics Canada respond to that?

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Smith: Absolutely. We recognize that psychological trauma is a form of harm. We offer psychological help for anyone who has been through an abusive situation.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you very much, Mr. Martel.

We'll move to the Liberal Party for six minutes.

Mr. Housefather, welcome.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Smith, if a coach is suspended or terminated by Gymnastics Canada, or Gymnastics Canada becomes aware that a club throughout the country has done so because the coach has been alleged to have abused someone, do you have a national register that is available to all clubs that are part of the Gymnastics Canada family?

Ms. Wendy Smith: Yes, we do.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Is it available now on your website?

Ms. Wendy Smith: It is available. I'm not sure if it's on our website, but I can find that information for you.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Okay. I would encourage you to. Other sports federations have started putting that on their websites. I think it would be a good practice.

Mr. Adams, I don't know if Sail Canada has any coaches who have been suspended or terminated for these types of allegations, but do you have a national register of coaches?

Mr. Don Adams: We do, yes. We had one case back in 2014. That coach is banned for life.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Would that be available to everybody on your website, so that nobody would be erroneously...? I see Mr. McGugan nodding, so I assume that's the case.

Mr. Don Adams: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Perfect.

I have a question for you. I don't like getting into disciplinary questions, but you had a very public issue recently when you terminated Lisa Ross. I just have a few questions about that.

Wouldn't it be true that when Ms. Ross was terminated in March, she was the only coach in the high-performance group of nine who was a woman?

Mr. Don Adams: She was the only woman, but we don't have a high-performance group of nine. We have three national coaches who are male. We have three contract coaches who are male. Each of those positions is tied into a particular funding source. As you know, Own the Podium funds certain groups. Some coaches are tied to Own the Podium funding. Some are tied to just Sport Canada funding. Some are tied to other funding partners we have—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Basically, they all come from your budget. Basically, you're funded. The funding from Own The Podium or Sport Canada doesn't tell you to hire coach X with this money.

Mr. Don Adams: Yes, they do. With Own The Podium, we have to say that this particular coach is going to be coaching this particular athlete. We have a mutual agreement that this is the right coach for this athlete, and that funding is tied to that coach.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Okay. Let's get there.

Was Ms. Ross...? You're saying she was tied to a specific funding. We've spoken to Sport Canada. They've said that there has not been a cut in your funding at this point, and there's every expectation that funding will be continued next year.

What fund was she tied to? You've stated.... Let me start again. You stated, publicly, that she was cut due to funding.

Mr. Don Adams: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Can we agree that she was not cut due to performance issues?

Mr. Don Adams: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Okay. What specific funding was cut that was she tied to?

Mr. Don Adams: It wasn't funding that was cut. The gender equity funding, which was in place when we hired Lisa in 2020, was sunset in 2021. That was a gender equity fund. That was promoting women in sport, which is a very crucial issue. We had funding for that program. We had a line item that said we could fund this particular coach as a high-performance coach.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Has that funding in 2021-22 been cut?

Mr. Don Adams: It's been sunset, or whatever you call it in terms of government—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It's been sunset, but the funding is still there until such time—

Mr. Don Adams: No, it's not.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: You've stopped getting the money. You don't—

• (1735)

Mr. Don Adams: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: When did you stop getting that money?

Mr. Don Adams: We stopped getting that money at the end of the fiscal year 2022. We kept Lisa on for another year through some other funding that we were able to get, again, through the government funding, which was called “return to sport” funding. We had a line item there that also said we wanted to continue the position of a female coach. That funding, again, wasn't cut, but it is not available this current year, so we had to make the decision—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Would you be able to provide to the committee, in writing, just what funding you're saying she was tied to that was cut?

Mr. Don Adams: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It seems strange based on the information I had.

Let me just continue on. She alleges that she told you she was pregnant on March 8, and she was terminated nine days later. Is that true?

Mr. Don Adams: It was true that she told us she was pregnant, and we did the formal termination, but the decision to terminate Lisa was made in February.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I saw that. Who was the lawyer you consulted in February to discuss her termination?

Mr. Don Adams: We consulted two. The one I consulted first was a female Ontario lawyer. She said that because this contract was negotiated with Lisa—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: In Nova Scotia...so, you needed to discuss it with a Nova Scotia lawyer.

Mr. Don Adams: Then we found a Nova Scotia lawyer, Megan Thompson, another female.

We have records to show that as of... I contacted her on February 17. She gave me—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I understand. I get it. I saw your statement that you spoke to a lawyer before. It was Megan Thompson in Nova Scotia.

After you were informed that she was pregnant, did you reconfirm with the lawyer who you talked to in Nova Scotia that the termination remained permissible, given that discrimination based on pregnancy is a violation of the Human Rights Act, etc.? Did you reconfirm with your lawyer that she could be terminated at that point?

Mr. Don Adams: I did. Because we had already made the decision and it was for financial reasons, we were told that we still had the right to terminate that position because there was no funding for that position, and we didn't have the funding in our budget.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thanks.

Would you just give us, in writing, the funding information so that we could better understand that?

Mr. Don Adams: Sure. I can do that.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I think, Mr. Chair, my time is probably up.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): I can give you a little more time. Go ahead, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is my last question on that.

You understand, of course, it's not that Sail Canada has many allegations against it, and I don't want to, again, make allegations. For all of my understanding, you're a very well-run sports federation for the size that you are.

I do think that, of course, symbolically, this was a major issue. I encourage your board to look at the question of having a woman coach for high-performance athletes and to look at how you might be able to reverse the bad publicity you got with that decision.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

We'll go to Mr. Lemire for six minutes from the Bloc party.

We welcome Mr. Vis for the Conservatives, who is joining us now.

Go ahead, Mr. Lemire.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I have a point of order concerning Ms. Smith.

I would like to know why Gymnastics Canada refused to give us a copy of the report on the inquiry conducted by the Shearer Parnege law firm, which was submitted to the organization in April or May of 2018.

Gymnastics Canada was ordered to give us a copy and must do so. I call on Ms. Smith to submit to the clerk, before the end of the day tomorrow, a document with the sections she would perhaps like to see redacted. Agreements exist for that. The document must be submitted to us as soon as possible. This procedure must be respected; lawyers are usually familiar with it.

Ms. Smith, I appreciate your collaboration in this matter.

As for my turn to speak, Mr. Chair, I would like to ask Ms. Smith questions on the role played by Karl Balish within Gymnastics Canada.

[English]

Ms. Wendy Smith: The role of what...?

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I am speaking about the role Karl Balish played.

[English]

Ms. Wendy Smith: Previously, Karl worked as... I believe he was a high-performance director at Gymnastics Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: We were made to understand that Karl Balish had allowed coach Scott McFarlane to rejoin Gymnastics Canada. This person worked with athletes, despite having been fired from Tumblers Gymnastics Centre because of inappropriate behaviour toward a 13-year-old girl. He was subsequently arrested.

Mr. Balish also chose Dave Brubaker, Alex Bard and Michel Arsenault to lead national women's teams, from setting up the team to the coaching of an experienced team. Mr. Brubaker and Mr. Arsenault were arrested in December 2017. As for Mr. Bard, he was fired because of concerns regarding his behaviour toward female athletes and players. The CEO at the time, Peter Nicol, would have been informed of these problems, but chose to do nothing.

Why are things done this way at Gymnastics Canada?

• (1740)

[English]

Ms. Wendy Smith: Mr. Arsenault is currently suspended as a coach from Gymnastics Canada and in Alberta where he resides.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I would like you to tell us about the role of Ms. Gretchen Kerr, who was working for Gymnastics Canada as the athletes' well-being counselor. Many gymnasts informed us that Ms. Kerr ignored complaints about abuse and other problematic situations.

What was Ms. Kerr's role at Gymnastics Canada?

[English]

Ms. Wendy Smith: Dr. Kerr previously worked as a case manager. She also worked in other volunteer situations in Gymnastics Canada. She is currently not doing any work for Gymnastics Canada as a volunteer or as a paid person.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Is she still an employee of Gymnastics Canada?

[English]

Ms. Wendy Smith: No. She is not an employee of Gymnastics Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I was given to understand that she had resigned. Why did she resign?

[English]

Ms. Wendy Smith: I don't know if Dr. Kerr has been an employee of Gymnastics Canada. She was not an employee when I joined the board. She is not currently an employee.

As I said, she had done volunteer work in the past. She has worked as a case manager, and I do not know whether or not that work was paid, but she is not an employee of Gymnastics Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: My next question is for Mr. Adams.

I would like to talk about the situation of women within Sail Canada. How many women coaches are part of the Sail Canada national coaching team?

[English]

Mr. Don Adams: Currently, we have one contract woman coaching our top-level athletes.

We have other up-and-coming female coaches coming through the system who are more at the provincial level. We are engaging them in training camps and other projects that we're working on with our provincial partners to give them more experience and develop their skills, but we currently have one contract female coach.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You supposedly fired Ms. Lisa Ross because you did not receive the money from Sport Canada.

Did you submit a request to the program that encourages gender diversity? Was she hired solely for diversity reasons, or did she become a permanent member of the personnel because of her skills?

[English]

Mr. Don Adams: She was a full-time employee at the time, but no, we did not seek...outside of the legal advice, if I understood your question properly. She was a full-time employee whom we terminated for financial reasons, again, just because of our budget situation, which meant that we had to make a number of cuts going into this fiscal year.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: There seems to be some contradiction. On the one hand, you did not have money to pay her. On the other, the person who replaced her would have received higher pay. To put this into perspective, it would seem that she was fired because she was pregnant, basically.

Can you confirm or deny this information?

[English]

Mr. Don Adams: There are two things that are false.

First, because of our financial situation, we terminated Lisa's contract, which cost us—in terms of her salary, benefits and travel—about \$120,000 per year. We've contracted a female coach to provide similar services for \$20,000 a year. We're effectively saving about \$100,000 in our budget, which really allowed us to balance our budget this year but still provide the services that we need to provide to our athletes.

Second, as I said before, the decision to terminate Lisa was made in February. Regarding the decision about when to inform her, we picked the date of March 17 because she was doing some coaching internationally. In the meantime, we had those two dates. We had the termination letter.

We decided that we were going to give her notice after the European championships, which were going to take place on March 17. On March 8 she announced to us that she was pregnant, but we had the termination letter. We had all the documents in place. We made the decision between the high-performance director and myself that the best time to do that with the least disruption to our team would be March 17.

As I say, in the meantime, she announced that she was pregnant. We respected that, but it had nothing to do with the termination. We have many practices.... We've had within our own staff many who have had maternity leave, five in the last five years. There's no way we discriminate between women. Half of our staff are women.

The second in command is a woman, and we've had various maternity policies. We have one person who has just come back from maternity leave. We have one currently on maternity leave. There is absolutely no way that this had anything—zero—to do with her pregnancy, and all of our records will show that.

• (1745)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Mr. Adams.

Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

Ms. Smith, we've been around this table for a year. I will say this: Gymnastics Canada has had more complaints than any other sport. That's why some of these questions have been directed to you. I know you're brand new as the chair, but we would like some answers.

I've been around this table for a year, and gymnastics is right at number one for complaints. That's why you're here today. We are disturbed with what we have seen in the past from your organization. Unfortunately, I only have one round here, but let me just say that as the vice-chair here today I wasn't too happy with some of your answers. You have to come here better prepared. We've been

studying safe sport here for a year, and gymnastics is one of the sports that we are very concerned with in this country.

I will leave it at that. Our final question will go for six minutes to the NDP with Peter Julian.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair. I would like reiterate your comments to Ms. Smith.

We want to see the documents that we've requested, Ms. Smith. We want Gymnastics Canada to be fully accountable. Gymnasts for Change has been extraordinarily brave in stepping forward. We've had members of that organization, including Kim Shore, testify before this committee, and Canadians are expecting answers.

I think it's fair to say that we have been very disappointed with the lack of transparency so far, and the lack of responses to the legitimate questions that are being asked. This comes from all members of this committee. We want, in the same way that Hockey Canada initially was unable or unwilling to answer questions.... We have the ability to ensure that we get those answers, and we want to see the organization change.

I wanted to start off by asking a very simple question. Does your organization maintain a list of banned or suspended coaches?

Ms. Wendy Smith: Yes, we do.

Mr. Peter Julian: How many are currently on it?

Ms. Wendy Smith: I don't know the number.

Mr. Peter Julian: Do you have some sense of whether we're talking about a dozen, 100 or five?

Ms. Wendy Smith: It's not 100. It is more than a dozen.

Mr. Peter Julian: Could you share with us those numbers, along with an indication of whether these are coaches who have been banned or coaches who have been suspended? Also, if they've been suspended, what is the trigger to get them unsuspected?

• (1750)

Ms. Wendy Smith: I can share that list with you for certain. I would be happy to share the list with this committee.

Mr. Peter Julian: How many complaints are you currently looking at within your organization—ones that have been filed?

Ms. Wendy Smith: I don't know the number of complaints. They're not reported to the board, but I can find that information for you.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, that would be helpful, as well as the nature of the complaint and how it is being investigated. That would also be very important. This is information Canadians need to have, as well, to restore confidence in the organization.

Again, I would like to commend the work of Gymnasts for Change in bringing to light many of these abusive practices and helping us, as a committee, try to navigate the recommendations we'll be bringing forward to the federal government, so we can ensure safe sports in this country, including gymnastics.

I would like to move on to you, Mr. Adams.

What happened looks very bad on Sail Canada. Could you share with us what the total budget was for Sail Canada last year, and what it is for this year?

Mr. Don Adams: In terms of what we just finished, we had about a \$3-million budget in total.

I don't have this year's in front of me, but I've had to cut about.... The budget last year still left us with a \$150,000 deficit. I had to cut approximately \$300,000 from the budget for this year in terms of balancing the budget and making priorities move forward for this particular year, because we're in the year where athletes are qualifying for the Olympics. It's getting those athletes qualified. That's where the focus of our funding for this year is going.

We've had to, as I said, cut about \$300,000 from our budget.

Mr. Peter Julian: Were no other coaches cut?

Mr. Don Adams: No. As I said before, every coach who's funded, with the three national-level coaches—

Mr. Peter Julian: This looks very bad on the organization.

Mr. Don Adams: I appreciate that.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm going to quote from a CBC interview that was done with Lisa Ross:

Nine days after telling Sail Canada...she was pregnant...Ross was fired.

Ross was in Andora, Italy, where she'd been coaching Canadian sailors at the European championship. She was about to head to Spain for more competitions and training camps....

..."It was a five-minute phone call where I was fired, basically, without cause."

If you're saying there was a long lead-up to this and it was something considered for some time, why was she in Italy and heading to Spain for competitions—obviously assigned by Sail Canada? Why was her firing done in a phone call?

Mr. Don Adams: A couple of things.... One was that when we made the decision, we still had some athletes who Lisa was coaching. Her trip was already planned for the European championship. That's why, as I mentioned before, even though the decision to terminate her was in February, we made the decision that we would actually give her notice the moment the European championship was over, which was on March 17.

Because she was still in Europe and we didn't want her to go on to another competition at that point in time, we arranged the phone call. We arranged the meeting on March 17. That was the day that we said we would give her notice. That's all the documentation that we had. We had a meeting with her, and please respect that this was not an easy decision. We realize that the optics don't look good. That's all part of it, but all of the records will show that the decision to do this was in good faith.

When I had negotiated a contract with Lisa, she demanded that the termination clause in her contract be increased from what the

Nova Scotia labour laws required, which was six weeks. She demanded that she be given another week for every year that she worked, which I abided by. She also wanted her probationary period taken out of her contract, which I also was.... She was very clear that the funding came from the gender equity fund, having emails to that effect. She knew that this position could be terminated. She negotiated a termination clause in her employment contract, which I honoured, and gave her the extra notice.

March 17 was the day that we were going to notify her. We arranged a meeting with her. It's one of the most difficult decisions I've ever had to make in my 40 years involved in sport. Firing someone who had a family, who had done some service for us, but I think that.... You know, Lisa still has a career in sailing. She will be hired by other groups. I mean, she's a good coach, so—

• (1755)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Mr. Adams. We're going to wrap it up.

Ms. Smith, here's our concern as we're wrapping up our meeting here tonight: the Sport Canada governance report card. Gymnastics Canada placed 24th out of 62. You, as chair now, received a grade of zero out of five for board development, one out of five for conflict of interest policies and only three out of five for dispute resolution policies.

Do you see our concern around the board table here with Canadian Heritage? We're not happy with those marks.

Ms. Wendy Smith: Yes, absolutely, and we are taking measures to change that.

As I said to you, we are working on our diversity. We've implemented many of Minister St-Onge's recommendations. We've already implemented those, and we are also looking at strengthening other areas. As I said during my presentation, we are a board that is looking to change. We are definitely looking for a new future—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): You need to change.

Ms. Wendy Smith: Absolutely—we agree with you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): I'll go to Mr. Housefather, quickly.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to quickly ask if you would instruct Gymnastics Canada that they have no right to withhold documents from the committee because of legal privilege. That is not grounds to withhold documents from the committee. Mr. Lemire raised it briefly at the beginning of his point. I would like it if you wouldn't mind instructing Gymnastics Canada that they have to deliver the documents regardless of their claim of legal privilege.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

You heard the request, Ms. Smith. We need Gymnastics Canada to produce those documents for the committee

Ms. Wendy Smith: Okay.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): All right. Do I have a motion to adjourn?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I so move.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Kevin Waugh): Thank you, Michael.

The meeting is adjourned.

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