



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 073**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Thursday, March 30, 2023

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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry





## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Thursday, March 30, 2023

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 73 of the House of Commons Standing on Canadian Heritage.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*English*]

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

While public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer require mask wearing indoors, masks and respirators are still excellent tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases, so their use is encouraged.

I want to take this opportunity to remind all participants of some basic housekeeping. You cannot take screenshots or photos of your screen. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website, so you don't really need to take screenshots.

There is a globe at the bottom of your screen for those who are on Zoom, and, if you press it, you can get translation in English or French, or the original audio.

Any questions or discussion should be directed through the chair, and please do not speak until I recognize you by name.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 20, 2022, this committee is meeting to continue its study on safe sport in Canada.

Our witnesses today—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Madam Chair, before we get into that, I have a point of order. It's Kevin.

**The Chair:** Yes. I'd recognize that radio voice anywhere, Kevin.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thanks to everyone around the table.

As you know, we moved a motion Monday asking for the report that Henein Hutchison Robitaille gave to Hockey Canada several weeks ago, redacted by the law clerk, and we all have notice now that the letter is not here, which is a major disappointment.

Seeing further reports today that, in fact, the government may reinstate funding to Hockey Canada makes it even more of a challenge now. We've read the letter, and I'm very disappointed by it. I would like to have 20 minutes after the meeting closes so we can discuss in camera what we should do to bring the next action forward.

I'm just going to say this. I have seen names being mentioned in several news articles in the last two days, and it's not us, because we've not seen anything. We don't have the reports. The media wants this, but more importantly for me, Hockey Canada has to be transparent, and I'm really disappointed in the letter we received, Madam Chair, from Andrew Winton.

I would like to go in camera for the last 20 minutes of today, after we're done with Canada Soccer, to discuss what we should do going forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Waugh. I think your motion was passed unanimously when it was brought forward. Is there anyone opposing 20 minutes at the end of the meeting to discuss these issues? If you are, please put your hand up.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson):** Madam Chair, Peter Julian has his hand up.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

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

On the same point of order, I was quite perturbed, as Mr. Waugh is, that an order from this committee was disregarded by Hockey Canada. You'll recall that when we originally started to convene Hockey Canada to answer questions, they were reluctant to answer many questions because of the report's coming forward.

It seems to me disingenuous that they weren't willing to answer questions then. Now they seem to be less interested in providing the report to us, though we have the ability to ensure that we get a copy of that report.

I think this committee has worked in a very admirable way, in a way that is very rare on Parliament Hill, with all members of all parties working together. Certainly we've had information disclosed to us that we have not revealed, so I support Mr. Waugh's suggestion that we have an in camera discussion later on in this meeting to resolve that, but my feeling is that Hockey Canada has repeatedly spoken of the report in the context of not being able to provide information until the report is completed, and I believe we should be pushing Hockey Canada to provide that report.

**The Chair:** You are supporting Mr. Waugh's suggestion.

I'm asking if there is anyone who is opposed to Mr. Waugh's suggestion.

Anthony, go ahead.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do want to get to Canada Soccer and the witnesses.

I'm in support of Mr. Waugh's proposal to go in camera, but I want to just correct—I have to, I feel compelled to correct. Hockey Canada in their letter did not say they would not provide the report. They said if the committee wanted the report, despite the concerns they expressed to the committee, they would provide the report, and I don't want it to be unfairly portrayed that they refused to provide the report. The letter is very clear that they will provide the report. They wanted to express concerns to the committee.

I believe there is a way to manage receiving the report and also addressing the confidentiality concerns that perhaps Hockey Canada has. Certainly nobody on this committee wishes to impede potential prosecutions by the London police or by Hockey Canada itself investigating its own players, and I'm sure there's a way that we often use to keep the documents confidential by viewing them in certain ways that can alleviate everybody's concerns.

I just didn't want anybody to believe that Hockey Canada had said they refused to provide it. They said they would provide it. They just wanted to express concerns.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Anthony.

I want to reassure the committee that, if you recall, before we began the study on Hockey Canada, we met with the law clerk and the law clerk explained to us that we could get confidential information and maintain confidentiality.

I just want to reiterate what Anthony was saying.

Sébastien, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Obviously, I am adding my voice to the voices of those who want us to be able to hold this meeting.

I think it is necessary that the committee also affirm its wishes. As well, I would like us to address the question of renewed funding for Hockey Canada and of public funding. As I understand it, the

requirements seem very weak to me. If renewing the funding creates a precedent, I think we should discuss it.

Thank you.

• (1545)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Sébastien.

That still does not tell me if there is unanimous consent or if there is opposition to Mr. Waugh's motion.

Is there consent? I see your thumb up, Sébastien.

Is anyone opposed?

No?

I think he's just asking to discuss it in camera; that's all.

Clerk, with everyone in agreement, we will end the meeting with our witnesses with 20 minutes to spare. Can 15 minutes do, Kevin?

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Go ahead, Mike.

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, it takes about five to seven minutes for us to switch over to in camera.

**The Chair:** Okay. It will be 20 minutes then.

We will now continue to listen to our witnesses, and as I was about to say, our witnesses today, as individuals, are Nick Bontis, former president, Canada Soccer, who is with us by video conference; Vittorio Montagliani, president, Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football, by video conference; and Sean Heffernan, chief financial officer, by video conference.

Witnesses, I just want to let you know that if you are here as an individual, you will have five minutes. If you are here as a group, the group has five minutes, and I will give you a 30-second shout-out—and I mean that literally—when you have 30 seconds left, so you can wrap up your statement.

We will begin now with opening remarks from Dr. Nick Bontis for five minutes.

The floor is yours.

**Dr. Nick Bontis (Former President, Canada Soccer, As an Individual):** Good afternoon, and thank you, Madam Chair and members of this committee, for the invitation to testify today.

My name is Nick Bontis. I am a professor of strategy at the DeGroot School of Business at McMaster University, where I have been teaching for 25 years.

Outside of my university duties, I have devoted most of my volunteer time to soccer. I was first elected to the board of directors of Canada Soccer in 2012 and most recently had the privilege to serve as president.

I stepped down last month as Canada Soccer was in advanced talks on a new collective bargaining agreement with the men's and women's national teams. I believe that this agreement will be a landmark achievement that sets Canada apart from virtually every other FIFA member association in the world. I advocated for pay equity publicly, from the first day I was elected president, and did so throughout my term.

Serving as a volunteer for Canada Soccer and witnessing the progress and achievements of Canada's national teams have given me some of the proudest moments of my life.

I've been playing soccer for 46 years and it has contributed so much to who I am today. It guided me during my younger years at the youth club level, and it allowed me to develop my leadership skills when I played at university and as an adult. Even in recent years, soccer is still a social pastime that keeps me fit with my fellow old-timers on the weekends.

My experience as a youth coach and...how sports helps and shapes how young people develop mirrors my passion as a lifelong educator in a safe environment.

With this in mind, I wanted to address Christine Sinclair's comments at this committee when she testified a few weeks ago. While I do not recall using the language she referenced, I don't dispute it, and my exact choice of words is not the point. What matters is that she felt that I treated her concerns disrespectfully. I feel terrible about making her feel this way, and I have since communicated with Christine and her agent to apologize personally. It was a mistake. I take responsibility for it, and I regret it.

Few people have done more for soccer or women's sport in this country than Christine. She has not only inspired millions of young soccer players around the world; she inspired me as a player, as a coach and as an administrator. Unlocking the full potential of players who want to follow in Christine's footsteps was a large part of why I got involved with Canada Soccer.

Before I conclude, I wanted to express my thanks to the chair and members of this committee for allowing me to delay my appearance until today. I think members of Parliament will have a special understanding for the circumstances that made it extremely difficult for me to testify last week.

As you may know from media reports, for the past 14 months I have been the target of sustained harassment by a disturbed individual who issued threats and abuse toward me, my wife and my three children. During that time I received over 280 emails; my wife was subjected to numerous abusive phone calls, and my children received unwanted messages and were subjected to social media abuse.

Ultimately, I worked with a panic button under my desk in my office here at McMaster. Plainclothes police officers were stationed in the atrium of my building, as the harasser continued to ignore warnings and the cease and desist order that was issued to him. The situation escalated and intensified significantly in recent months, to the point at which a judge issued a search warrant; law enforcement confirmed his online identity, and he was ultimately charged with criminal harassment. However, days before he was set to appear, I

was notified by the primary investigator that he had succumbed to his mental illness by taking his own life.

The legal matter was scheduled to be heard in court today. Those of us who aren't used to being in the public glare read about this kind of situation, but nothing can prepare you for it. Every day I worried about the safety of my wife and kids. This may be something that politicians and their families can relate to, but I was not prepared for this. It was not in the job description.

I'm still processing these extremely distressing events. Unfortunately, the abuse continues by others. I appreciate the committee's patience in allowing me to defer my appearance until today. I want to thank Madam Chair for her compassion in my case.

As for today's hearing, I welcome the opportunity to talk about Canada Soccer. I believe the future of our sport has never been brighter, and there is so much to look forward to in the next few years. We have an amazing opportunity to unlock the potential of the millions of Canadians who love and support our game.

Thank you.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Mr. Montagliani, please.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani (President, Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football, As an Individual):** Good afternoon, and thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for the invitation to speak to you today.

My name is Victor Montagliani. I've had the privilege of being involved in soccer—or football, as I call it—in this country and internationally for over 30 years. I began as a player and later served in various roles as a volunteer for the game, beginning as a grass-roots coach and in other positions in the province of British Columbia. I was eventually elected to the volunteer position of president of the Canadian Soccer Association in 2012.

Given what I have observed and experienced in the evolution of the game over the past 30 years, I want to briefly provide the committee with my perspective on the development and heritage of football in Canada.

For as long as I've been involved, football in this country has fought an uphill battle. As a sport that has long roots among immigrant communities in our country—like the one I grew up in, in east Vancouver—the domestic game has faced challenges in attracting meaningful support from this country's media and corporate establishment. It is not about participation or enthusiasm. We know we are the biggest participation sport in Canada.

During my five years as volunteer president of Canada Soccer—from 2012 to 2017—the lack of interest and support from media corporations meant that Canada Soccer had to spend its own money for our women's and men's national teams to be shown on networks such as TSN, Rogers and CBC, rather than allocating that to the grassroots. To be clear, these expenditures, over a decade, allowed our fans to catch 95% of Christine Sinclair's goals and 100% of Dwayne De Rosario's goals, which would not otherwise have been the case.

However, it is important to know where we stood in 2011 and early 2012. We had no sovereignty and no equity in our own game. We had absolutely no domestic media market. We had very little professionalization and zero industry for football in Canada. We had zero relevancy in the international arena, especially in FIFA and Concacaf. We needed to shift our mindset and shift it fast.

Since then, we've become founding partners of the NWSL with U.S. Soccer and the Mexican federation, subsidizing the salaries of our women's national team players so they could prepare for the 2015 women's World Cup and the 2016 Olympics.

We hosted the women's World Cup in 2015—still, to this day, the greatest women's World Cup in history. We embarked on bidding for the 2026 men's World Cup, which we successfully won in 2018. We created an environment in which investors could come in and start the Canadian Premier League, which has also now set the groundwork for what we hope will be further investors for our Canadian women's professional league.

Of course, this has all been underpinned by the fantastic players in our country—our women's team and our men's team, which have won bronze, bronze, gold and, obviously, the qualification for Qatar in 2022.

Of course, Canadian corporations are private entities and can make choices as they wish, but it was obvious, when I was president of Canada Soccer, that we needed to take a different route and seek out new commercial partners—not only to encourage investment but also to encourage ambition. That meant looking beyond the usual suspects to find new, more dynamic partners with an appetite and a willingness to build domestic football for the long term.

The arrival of the new streaming platforms has provided great news for unlocking commercial opportunities that will help the game in Canada, as well as for Concacaf and FIFA, when the next rights cycles come up. Not only are these platforms shaking up the market; they are also enabling us to make long-term investments in the areas that have held the game back in Canada, namely infrastructure.

The discussions between Canada Soccer and what became Canadian Soccer Business were focused on providing long-term benefits for the growth of the game. No one would ever claim that every decision made or action taken was perfect. However, we must recognize the sacrifice and courage of the Canada Soccer family of volunteers, coaches and, ultimately, fantastic players. This has allowed both the men's and women's programs to break through the tier one ceiling of global football in the last decade.

We have the women's World Cup around the corner and, now, the men qualifying for the Concacaf Nations League for the first time in our history. Canada's future in this sport is very bright.

With that context, I look forward to discussing football with this committee.

● (1555)

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Montagiani. I'm sorry I did not recognize that the “g” in your name is silent, so I apologize for mispronouncing it.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagiani:** That's fine.

**The Chair:** We will now go to the final witness, who is Sean Heffernan, chief financial officer.

Mr. Heffernan, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Sean Heffernan (Chief Financial Officer, Canada Soccer):** Hello, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I'm Sean Heffernan, chief financial officer at Canada Soccer.

As you know, Canada Soccer is the governing body for the sport of soccer in our country. As a member of Canada Soccer's senior management team, I support Canada Soccer's mission to grow soccer in our country from the grassroots to the national levels.

My core responsibility is to oversee Canada Soccer's finances, including financial operations, planning, risks, reporting and record-keeping. I'm also responsible for reporting to the Canada Soccer board of directors on financial topics. Additionally, since the association has a small team, I give general business advice about operational topics to the general secretary.

My remarks today focus on three areas specifically: one, my role in the negotiations of the agreement with Canadian Soccer Business, or CSB; two, Canada Soccer's financial statements and filings; and three, Canada Soccer's transparency in providing the senior national teams with financial information.

With regard to the CSB agreement, the agreement provides valuable broadcast and streaming opportunities for both senior national teams, guarantees annual payments to Canada Soccer, and has secured new partners for investment in grassroots and high-performance soccer in Canada.

From December 1, 2018, until the agreement was approved on February 7, 2019, I was a member of the Canada Soccer negotiating team for the agreement. Prior to that, I provided advice on earlier drafts of the agreement. The negotiating team worked on four specific, limited issues for the agreement: term and renewal, signatures to sponsorship contracts, control of the Canada Soccer brand, and determining acceptable broadcast mediums.

Neither the negotiating team nor I had decision-making power about the agreement. Rather, the team negotiated on the previously mentioned issues, presented the negotiation outcomes to the board of directors, and answered questions from the board.

As has been noted publicly, including to this committee by Canada Soccer's general secretary, the CSB agreement has some shortcomings, including the length of the agreement, the unilateral term-extension option of the CSB, and the limited ability of Canada Soccer to share in upside revenue. To resolve those issues and build a healthier financial future for soccer in our country, Canada Soccer is developing a revenue-focused operating plan and holding discussions to amend the CSB agreement.

With respect to the financial statements and filings, Canada Soccer has always valued transparency, and our intention is to always be compliant with all applicable laws. As such, I want to speak to Canada Soccer's filing with Corporations Canada, as the topic came up at the committee on March 20. I assure you that those filings were made every year during my tenure as chief financial officer. While Canada Soccer has submitted annual Corporations Canada filings indicating changes in board membership and other administrative requirements under those regulations, our filings should have included the financial statements, which we did not provide. Canada Soccer's financial statements are now uploaded on Corporations Canada's website.

The late submission of those statements to Corporations Canada is regrettable, and I accept responsibility for that error, but Canada Soccer has otherwise always exercised a high standard of financial transparency. This is further illustrated by Canada Soccer's practice of publishing audited financial statements on our website. Those statements are also provided to Sport Canada, our members and our partners.

Finally, I wish to touch on my role in providing the senior national teams with financial information related to Canada Soccer. As the committee heard on March 20, Canada Soccer has been negotiating collective bargaining agreements with the men's and women's national teams since June 2022. Those agreements are based on the core principle of equal pay and will compensate each team at a world-class level.

During those negotiations, I helped provide the teams and their representatives with detailed financial information, audited financial statements and breakdowns of Canada Soccer's spending and budgeting processes. I continue to work on providing all follow-up information requested by the teams. The players and their representatives have always been welcome to ask me any questions.

I know the government is considering new reporting and transparency requirements for national sport organizations, and Canada Soccer would welcome direction from the Minister of Sport on that topic.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I look forward to answering your questions.

• (1600)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Heffernan.

We now go to the part of the meeting where there's a question and answer session. The question and answer will be included in the time; they are not separate times.

For the first round, which is a six-minute question and answer session, we begin with the Conservatives and Kevin Waugh.

Kevin, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our guests.

Mr. Bontis, I'll start with you. Why did you step down? Was it after the meeting here in Ottawa, when the provincial associations demanded that you leave as president of Canada Soccer?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Yes, that is correct.

I received a message from the chairman of the presidents' forum. I contacted him with the general secretary. They requested my resignation. I asked them if it was possible to have a meeting to explain myself, or to get further clarification on the reasons for the request. They declined that request. I then contacted my board and tendered my resignation.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** What was the issue with the provincial associations, so that from the meeting that you had here in Ottawa they asked you to leave?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I don't know. I asked them for an explanation. I wanted to set up a Zoom call and made an explicit request to set up a Zoom call either later that evening or the following night, to speak to the presidents.

The last time I had spoken to them was two weeks prior. I had instituted a policy whereby I had a bimonthly Zoom call with all of the provincial presidents, to discuss all the issues at hand with them and a senior staff member. We had one scheduled two weeks prior.

There was no mention at all in that meeting two weeks prior that there was going to be an issue with regard to my tenure.

Again, I found out that morning, and I tendered my resignation.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Are you saying they ganged up on you?

This is strange. You come to Ottawa for a meeting, and all the sport organizations—not just one, but all the provincial bodies—demand that you leave. There had to be something beforehand that triggered this. Tell us about it.

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I was not in Ottawa. I was away supporting our U-17 boys' team in Guatemala.

I found out about the request for resignation while I was still in Guatemala. I flew home later that evening, after I tendered my resignation that day.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I talked to several sport organizations in this country—it's \$9 for each player that goes to registration to Canada Soccer—and they obviously feel that moneywise there is an issue with Canada Soccer, not only with Canadian Soccer Business. You don't just walk into a meeting here, everybody flies to Ottawa and then a day later they're looking for a new president.

There must be some things underlying it in the grassroots, because this is where what terminated your contract with Canada Soccer started.

Can you shed any light on this?

• (1605)

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** No. I'm not aware, as I said before. I asked for reasons. I wanted an explicit opportunity both to actually have them explain it to me, and for me to explain where we were in addition to my presidency. I was not afforded that opportunity.

At that point, I tendered my resignation.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** You were president under tumultuous times. We had great times in soccer, thanks to the women's program winning gold in Tokyo and the men qualifying for the World Cup, yet those two teams in particular are more upset with Canada Soccer than ever before. The men's team didn't want to take to the field in Vancouver. The women's team didn't want to take to the field in the United States.

Instead of the grassroots kicking you out, we also have it from the top down. What is the problem with Canada Soccer and the national teams?

I know Mr. Heffernan started talking about negotiations that are coming up to two years now, which is not a good situation. Soccer is going to become, if it hasn't already, the number one sport in this country, yet the turmoil in the board has never been so toxic as we're seeing it. Why is that?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I was elected president during a global pandemic. It was a perfect storm. There was no soccer being played in this country at the grassroots level. Even our national teams had to go through World Cup qualification and tournaments. We were forced, because of the health policies in this country, to actually play our home games for World Cup qualification in the U.S., in Chicago and Florida. We had no fans. We had no opportunity to make revenue on those games.

The one thing I want to clarify that I was explicit on from day one of my presidency was that I would not move forward with any new agreement unless it had pay equity baked in, and I communicated that to the leaders of the women's national team, the four women you saw. In addition to their legal counsel, I had a Zoom call with them and through the general secretary I said to them that I was going to support pay equity.

Several months later, in June, as you've pointed out, I met with the men's players prior to the scheduled Panama match. I communicated with them also that I was 100% only going to support a deal that had pay equity baked in. The decision for them to boycott that match was theirs. I don't know what the reasons were, but I've maintained that position. We continued our negotiations throughout the summer. We continued our negotiations through the fall and winter—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Well, you're no longer involved, so you didn't continue that.

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** That's correct: I meant through the summer and the winter. I am no longer involved. I resigned a month ago, but my understanding through Sean Heffernan's statement is that he is now

leading the charge to provide them with all the information they require.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Thank you. My time is up.

**The Chair:** We now go to the Liberals and Anthony Housefather for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for being here today. It's appreciated.

Mr. Bontis, I'm very sorry about what you've gone through recently. Thank you for your fulsome apology to Christine Sinclair. I think it was very genuine, and I want to thank you for that.

I'm going to start with some questions about your opening statements.

First of all, you, Mr. Bontis, and you, Mr. Montagliani, both mentioned your volunteerism. Thank you for your many years of volunteer service.

Mr. Montagliani, how much money did you earn from Concacaf and FIFA in the last year?

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** At Concacaf, we have a very rigorous compensation committee—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Can you give me a ballpark number, please?

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** Yes, I'm explaining to you first the process—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I don't want you to explain. I want a ballpark number, please.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** You asked me a question. I'm more than happy to discuss that.

We have a policy at Concacaf. We have an independent committee that—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Mr. Montagliani, I want a number, please.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** I'm describing that.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I don't care about your description. I want the number, please. I think everybody here is aware that you can describe how you're compensated. I didn't ask that question. I asked how much money you earned from Concacaf and FIFA in the last year.

• (1610)

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** We have a policy at Concacaf—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Madam Chair, I would ask you to instruct the witness to kindly answer the question.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** I am answering the question.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** No, you're not.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** We have a policy, and the reason we have the policy is for security and safety reasons, because the confederation has security and safety issues throughout our confederation. Unfortunately, not every country is like Canada—



**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Madam Chair, the witness is now not answering the question. I would ask you to please instruct the witness, who may not understand that he is under oath before the committee whether or not he's taken an oath. I'm asking for a number. I'm not asking for anything else.

**The Chair:** We do not have a great deal of time, Mr. Montagliani. If the questioner asks you to give a concise answer, just please say the amount that he asked you for so we can move on.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** Yes, Madam Chair.

The issue is that the organization that I am the president of has a policy with respect to not disclosing that number.

**The Chair:** You are not going to disclose that number. All right.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Mr. Montagliani, it has been reported that you earned \$2 million from soccer in 2019. The combination of your roles at Concacaf and FIFA would lead to the assumption that you're earning a considerable amount of money from soccer, and on your comments about being a volunteer, you may well have been a volunteer, but it's led you into a very lucrative job at soccer.

You're refusing to say the number. I'm going to change positions.

Mr. Bontis, how much do you earn from Concacaf, now that you're on the executive of Concacaf?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Madam Chair, I'm uncomfortable sharing that number for privacy reasons. It is correct that for the 11 years that I was at Canada Soccer, I was a volunteer, and for the time I've been at Concacaf, there is a stipend that is calculated by an independent compensation committee.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** It's been reported that the amount is north of \$125,000. In any case, I am saying, gentlemen, that I will get back to this question, because I think it is relevant in terms of the amounts of money that you guys are earning versus what the women on the national team and the men on the national team are receiving from Canada Soccer.

Mr. Montagliani, you talked about the 2015 World Cup in your opening statement, and how this was the greatest World Cup.

How do you react to Hampton Dellinger, the Assistant Attorney General of the United States, who was appalled by Canada Soccer's behaviour over the turf war, in that this was the only World Cup ever not to be played on natural grass; it was played on turf. He said that reparation payment should be offered to the women athletes and that Canada should be eliminated as a candidate for hosting the men's World Cup because of its failure to properly host the women's tournament.

Why did you not allow natural grass to be used, and why did Canada Soccer refuse that?

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** It wasn't a decision by Canada Soccer. It was a decision by FIFA, which, at that point, allowed the World Cup to be played on either natural grass or artificial turf.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Mr. Montagliani, you're saying that it was a decision by FIFA, so FIFA ordered Canada to host this one tournament on turf, even though every World Cup before and after has been hosted on grass?

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** There were other world cups, mainly youth world cups, that were hosted—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I did not refer to youth world cups, Mr. Montagliani. I am talking about the men's and women's world cups.

You hosted the women's World Cup on a surface that no World Cup has ever been hosted on before or since, and now you have told me in your sworn testimony that FIFA told you to do it. Please produce for the committee the letter that FIFA sent to you or Canada Soccer ordering you to host the tournament on turf.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** Madam Chair, the decision to host the tournament on whatever surface was a decision made by FIFA. Part of that decision was also a legacy decision in which 24 pitches were built in Canada, all turf, and are still being used by our community of footballers. The decision was made by FIFA.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Again, I would ask you to please produce to the committee any proof that you or Canada Soccer have that FIFA told you to host the tournament on turf.

I am going to move now to Mr. Heffernan.

Mr. Heffernan, you were talking about the negotiating committee for an agreement that we'll be talking about a lot today, the CSB agreement. You said the negotiating committee had four limited things that it was told to negotiate. The agreement is multi-faceted, though, with dozens and dozens of clauses. Why did the negotiating team negotiate only four things?

You're basically saying that those other things were either forced on you or negotiated prior to the negotiating committee's being given the mandate. Please explain to me how the negotiating committee could negotiate only four parts of a very big, multipronged agreement?

• (1615)

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** The committee came into form in December 2018. The discussions with CSB took place before that, over a span of a year and a half, and substantial parts had already been negotiated before the committee was given the task of—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** That's what I was asking. Who negotiated the original parts of the agreement, not—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Housefather and Mr. Heffernan, but you are now 30 seconds over time. Can you please give a three-second answer?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Who negotiated the parts before, Mr. Heffernan?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** There were a couple of times, as illustrated in the letter that was provided to the committee earlier today, which describes the different stages at which different groups of people were involved in it.

That's what I can say if I am to answer quickly.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** We have not received it.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lemire, for the Bloc Québécois, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

I am first going to address Mr. Bontis.

Despite what you said in your preliminary remarks, there is a question I would like to address.

Christine Sinclair said that in the past, soccer players had no money, but the situation was the same for men and women. According to her, women players now have to fight for equal treatment. However, they are not bitter about the terms for the men's team and they believe the players have made huge gains for the national team athletes. The men also support their demands.

Mr. Bontis, we are talking about equal pay and, as we know, there is a significant discrepancy, but there is also a discrepancy when it comes to the right to play.

Why did you have the idea of creating a professional men's league but the women's league was not created at the same time as the men's? At what point did that occur to you?

We really get the feeling that the mindset at Canada Soccer puts women in second place, even when it comes to the right to play in a Canadian league.

[*English*]

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** With regard to the issue of the men's versus the women's league; it's not men's "versus" or men's "or". It's an issue of sequencing. In fact, as was testified earlier, the first investment that Canada Soccer made in a league was in the National Women's Soccer League. For almost nine or 10 years, as I recall, we subsidized the compensation of our national team players in that league. That league occurred before the arrangement of CSB and the CPL.

Let me also clarify that Canada Soccer does not own, operate or run leagues. What we do is sanction leagues. Private investors come in. We have a minimum standard in terms of what is required to launch a league, and then there are investors. The sequencing is actually our investment in the NWSL for approximately nine or 10 years. Then the CPL came into play, which, yes, is a men's league, but that was also as a precursor for our bid to host the men's World Cup in 2026.

Then there's the opportunity we've found at Canada Soccer to now prioritize the development of a women's league. We appointed a head of women's professional soccer at Canada Soccer, so that she can liaise with private investors and so that there is a smooth

transition to the sanctioning that will be necessary for the proposed new women's league, where there is one group of investors—one Project 8 group—that is expecting to kick a ball in a couple of years' time.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** You talk about private investors, but we have the feeling that the profits are also private and the money in their pockets should have gone to the women's teams.

Mr. Montagiani, you said that we should look at the process. So I am going to look at the process.

When you had the "brilliant" idea of persuading the board of directors to strip Soccer Canada of its assets, you got advice from the American team.

Who advised you?

[*English*]

**Mr. Vittorio Montagiani:** It wasn't the American team, per se, that advised us. The premise and the principles of what was started when I was exiting as president were very similar, if not identical, to what has transpired in the U.S. under what's called Soccer United Marketing, or SUM. There was a 25-year relationship between SUM and U.S. Soccer, which also not only created Major League Soccer, as we know, with three of our own Canadian teams in there, but also produced a multi-billion dollar industry in the game.

It wasn't the American team.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** When you talked to them, did someone on your board of directors defend the idea that women's soccer should also get priority in these agreements and a women's league should be created?

[*English*]

**Mr. Vittorio Montagiani:** The issue of creating a women's league was never not discussed. In fact, it was important, and as Nick Bontis already said, we had committed significant resources to ensuring that our women's national team was playing in, at that time, a very top league; the NWSL obviously still is a top league.

The sequencing was that by creating the CPL shortly thereafter—we're only three years after the kickoff—the environment would be created to bring on investors to create a women's league, which, by the looks of it, with the initiative of Project 8, is hopefully going to be a reality.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** In no case was it felt that demands had been made or that latitude had been provided so that in the wake of the women's team successes and their gold medal, a portion of the sponsorships would go to them.

Why was the women's team prevented from getting a portion of the sponsorships?

[English]

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** Who is the question addressed to?

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** You can answer, Mr. Montagliani.

[English]

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** On the question of sponsorship, when you.... Those agreements, whether it's the SUM agreement or the CSB agreement, are sponsorship agreements. We were leaving a previous sponsorship agreement with IMG, which was obviously a lot less.

It wasn't so much about sponsors. To create a league, it's not about sponsorship. A league cannot live on sponsorship. A league needs to have investors, deep-pocketed investors, and a good media deal. Sponsorships are not what—

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Looking back, would you say it was a good agreement? Would you make the same agreement, yes or no?

[English]

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** I don't know all the details and specifics of all the clauses of the agreement. I can tell you that the principle of this agreement is no different from what happens throughout the world. The aggregation of your assets is the only way to build equity in your game.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, and thank you, Sébastien.

I go now to the New Democrats and Peter Julian.

Peter, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to start off by saying as a former soccer coach how important it is for Canada Soccer to be transparent, how important it is for Canada Soccer to ensure that children and athletes are safe, and how important it is for Canada Soccer to reflect fundamental Canadian values.

We saw with Hockey Canada an inability or an unwillingness to answer key questions. I'm disturbed by the fact that Mr. Housefather's direct questions around salary and compensation have not been answered by our witnesses.

I find disturbing the allegations of six- or seven-figure incomes when you think that parents right across the country are paying into Canada Soccer programs and expect that Canada Soccer will be transparent in its finances and ensure that their kids are safe.

I want to go beyond the allegations around the salaries to allegations around gifts.

I want to ask you this, Mr. Bontis. What is the total value of the gifts that you've received from all sources in the past year?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I can tell you that the gifts that we give to our directors and have given to our directors for the past 11 years, since I started at Canada Soccer, amount to approximately \$250 per year and consist of a Christmas gift, which is primarily from the sponsor. For example, we currently have Nike right now, so the gifts

will be Nike polos, jackets or pants. That is the value of the gifts that we have on an annual basis, a gift at Christmastime.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Is that the value from all sources, including FIFA?

• (1625)

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** That's correct.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Can you confirm, as our witnesses did last week, that Canada Soccer paid over \$11,000 for new suits for you and other board members?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I can confirm that a couple of years back, when I was elected president, I had been wearing a suit that was issued to me for 10 full years. The suit was in very bad shape. We travel a lot as directors. I think I wore it on average 30 times a year over 10 years. That's 300 times. It was shredded. It was in disrepair, so the idea was that we would get new suits.

The request was made to the office of the general secretary. The office of the general secretary then negotiated the suits, which were for all 14 directors of the board. They amounted to \$791 each. The suits were custom suits with Canada Soccer branding, a jacket—

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I'm going to cut you off there. I think we would agree that \$11,000 is a lot more than \$250.

Can you confirm, as well, that when you travel, you travel business class?

We've had testimony to the effect that our athletes, who do an extraordinary job, were in the back of the plane in regular class, while our administrators were travelling business class.

When you travel, do you travel business class?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Madam Chair, the president of Canada Soccer may choose to travel in business class if the flight is three hours or longer. In the nine years prior to my being president and the last couple of years, I flew economy class. When we made a bid for the FIFA World Cup in 2018 in Moscow, I flew economy class.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** You confirm that you fly business class, and you are confirming that the players fly economy.

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** No, I—

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I would like to go back to the testimony of Christine Sinclair on March 9, when she said that the women's national team, the year they won Olympic gold, found out that the men's national team players were earning more than five times what a women's national team player was earning.

Can you confirm that figure, that our women's national team, the year they won Olympic gold, were earning one-fifth of what the men's national team were earning?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Can I clarify, Madam Chair, with your permission, a remark that was made earlier that the women fly only in economy class? That is not true. Just in recent months, the women flew business class to competitions in Australia, and in November, to competitions in Brazil.

With regard to the compensation, I think it would be best for the CFO of Canada Soccer to answer that question. He would have that information more readily available than I would.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Heffernan, can you respond to that testimony that we've heard?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** Could you quickly repeat the numbers that you have?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** The women's national team was earning one-fifth of what the men's national team players were earning in the year they won Olympic gold.

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** I'd have to get back with the exact calculation, but with the restitution payments, I think that math would not actually come out to the same number that they've reported.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I also want, Mr. Heffernan, for you to confirm what we found out last week. We had testimony at the time from Mr. Cochrane, saying that all your filings had been done by Canada Soccer.

It turned out not to be the case. Can you confirm that this week you filed financial statements for nine years in arrears that had not been filed up to that moment by Canada Soccer?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** I have a small correction. The filings were made, but they had deficiencies in them. Yes, the financial statements were filed this week for the nine years that were outstanding, although we had published them on our websites back in the last few years.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you for confirming that.

I want to move on—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Peter. You are 30 seconds over time. I'm sorry about that. You can come back to it in your next round.

We now go to the second round. It's a five-minute round, and I will begin with Mr. Shields for the Conservatives.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

We have three people here today. You've heard the testimony that we've had before us that came from women's soccer and some other people. We had Hockey Canada here, and they didn't give us answers. Eventually their whole board resigned.

You must have some understanding of what the public's view of Canada Soccer is. What do you think it is? What do you think the public thinks of you—all three of you sitting in those positions?

• (1630)

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** I'll start first. It's seven years since I was at Canada Soccer. I've been seven years as president of Conca-caf, so with respect to anything to do with Canada Soccer, other than obviously that they're a member of our confederation, I haven't been on the board for seven years.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** You have no idea what the public might be thinking of this board.

**The Chair:** Who are you addressing the question to?

**Mr. Martin Shields:** I addressed it to all three of them.

**The Chair:** All right, perhaps....

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Mr. Bontis.

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Sure. The sentiment out there is confusing, because this is a multi-layered, very complex negotiation. I've been criticized online, and personally, with the abuse that I and my family received about pay equity, which I don't understand, because I have come out quite clearly that I am in 100% support of pay equity. In fact, the agreement that we sent, the proposal that we sent to the men and women in June 2022, clearly articulates what we mean by pay equity. It means equity for the playing of games in terms of the price, the bonus structure—

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Thank you. I appreciate that. I think that indicates the problem. You don't understand.

Mr. Heffernan.

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** I think there are mixed views. There were times when we were at the World Cup where we had people celebrating the sport, when we were winning gold medals. We have people celebrating that, but at the same time I think the public also criticizes us as we continue to work on the collective bargaining agreements.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** You're right in what you just said. You have an organization. We're looking at the organizational charts and how it works. You can't be the president unless you've been on the board for a year.

Are you suggesting that should stay, Mr. Bontis? Would you have that stay?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Given that I'm no longer with Canada Soccer, I don't know what should stay or shouldn't stay.

I can tell you that it is a monumental task to be president of this organization, even if it is a volunteer position. I appreciate the spirit in which that rule was put in place—way before my time—which was that you probably needed some experience as a director or as a vice-president.

I can also tell you that including me, the previous president before me, Victor, and then the previous president before Victor, going back now maybe 15 years, every president was a vice-president prior. I think that's the type of succession planning that's necessary, only from an intellectual capital perspective, not from a political perspective.

I understand that the members have put in a recommendation to the governance committee to remove that stipulation, so that anybody at all who is 18 years old or older with a background check can be nominated for president of Canada Soccer starting next year.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** I think what I hear, in a sense, is like when we talked with Hockey Canada. They finally realized that if the public is going to support this board and support soccer, as we believe the grassroots people in this country do, it's time for significant change. I'm not sure people are going to believe whatever you're doing unless we have some significant change.

That agreement out there is going to be problematic for years to come. When you say you're going to try to change it, what power do you have to do that? There's no clause to renegotiate in there.

**The Chair:** Mr. Shields, would you direct your question to someone specific?

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Mr. Montagliani.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** I think that is a question for Canada Soccer in terms of the negotiation of the deal. That wasn't something that I was at Canada Soccer for, in terms of the negotiation of the deal you're referring to.

• (1635)

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Mr. Heffernan.

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** The deal was duly approved by the board of directors. In my role, I'm to respect those decisions and execute the decisions of the board of directors.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Where's the review clause that makes you think you have the power to change it?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** As indicated in my opening comments, the three things that I thought needed to be renegotiated were the length of the term, the unilateral extension and the upside of the revenue.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** But where's the clause to renegotiate?

**The Chair:** We're running out of time.

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** Unless they come under default through the resolution process, there isn't one.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Shields.

I now go to the Liberals.

Ms. Hepfner, you have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'll start with Nick Bontis.

For full disclosure, Nick, we go back many years, of course, in Hamilton. In my years at CHCH, you were a main business commentator related to your role at McMaster University. I don't know if you still play the same role, but Bontis on Business was a regular segment on CHCH.

We've spoken over the years also about your involvement in soccer. I have to say that it was with great disappointment that I heard at this committee some of the comments that Christine Sinclair

heard from you, in part because you're also involved at the local level, in the smaller clubs and with the kids who are coming up.

The young girls who are playing soccer on Hamilton Mountain and getting together at Mohawk Sports Park look up to people like Christine Sinclair. This is someone who is at the top of her game in the world. She is a hero to so many Canadians.

What message do you think it sends to those young kids playing soccer when they see someone who is at the top of her game still feeling disrespected by the board at Canada Soccer?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** In full disclosure, it's great to see and interact with you again, and I appreciate the question.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, I regret that statement. Christine Sinclair was one of the first athletes I met when I entered Canada Soccer in 2012. In fact, I was the head of delegation in their preparation tour for the Olympics.

I want to share this memory with you, because it still resonates with me today. I believe that the greatest moment in football history in our country was when Christine Sinclair scored a hat trick in the semifinals at the Olympics that summer. It was a beacon of light for me. Without getting into the details of the game, I think we remember a six-second goalkeeping rule by the Norwegian referee, but we'll put that aside.

In all the interactions I had with Christine from that moment on, I tried to do my best to speak to her whenever I had a free moment, just to tell her how much she meant to me. I had the great opportunity, as vice-president and as president, to present Christine with many awards—the greatest goal scorer in international soccer history being one of them—including for the achievements at the Olympics.

To answer your question, yes, it's regrettable. I am not only a Hamiltonian. I am a coach. I was a local youth coach in Hamilton. I tried to instill the values that are important as a coach. I can tell you that I take that role very seriously. I coached very young kids—seven, eight, nine and 10 years old—in the time I was a coach.

**Ms. Lisa Hepfner:** Thanks, Nick. I appreciate it.

It is too bad, considering that you have that respect for Christine Sinclair, that she did not feel respected by you.

I would like to move on, in the couple of minutes I have left, to the situation of Bob Birarda in Canada Soccer. This is something we've heard about in other sports. Predators face accusations. They leave their organization without being fully investigated, move to another part of the country and continue to teach. This is someone who first faced allegations in the mid-2000s, but wasn't convicted until just recently. He was allowed to continue coaching soccer.

What has Canada Soccer done to prevent this type of thing from happening again?

• (1640)

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** It's a very serious and important question. I would like to have that question answered in a more wholesome and fulsome way by Victor Montagliani, considering that he was present during the Birarda case. I was not.

**Ms. Lisa Hepfner:** That's fine with me.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** Yes, that's fine.

In terms of the specifics of the Birarda case back in 2008, the executive committee, which is a committee of eight people from the board, considered the allegation against Mr. Birarda as it related to inappropriate texting. The matter was investigated by an independent ombudswoman and legal counsel.

There were two conference calls that dealt with this matter. One was to suspend Mr. Birarda. The second was to hire an investigator.

The second conference call, weeks later, dealt with the recommendation by the investigator, through our president, to confirm that there would be no police undertaking in this matter, unfortunately. To your point, there was also the texting that was confirmed to be inappropriate for a coach-player relationship. Also, the identity of the players or player involved, as well as the details of the texting, were not revealed to the committee because of privacy and confidentiality issues.

With respect to the specifics of coaching, up until recently and going back to 2008, the only risk management tool that a club had was a police background check. If you passed the police background check, you could coach in Canada. Unfortunately, that is not a system that is tenable, to your point.

I think that recently there have been changes. I think Canada Soccer can speak to that. Some of those changes were started, in effect, in 2012 under the guidelines of Sport Canada. These are some of the things that I think the whole industry of player welfare and safe sport need to change, so that you can't just rely on a police background check. If the police do not interact with them or do what needs to be done, obviously this person—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Montagliani. You can expand on that in a future question.

I now go to the Bloc Québécois, and Sébastien Lemire.

You have two and a half minutes, please, Sébastien.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Heffernan, you have been in office for quite a while.

At PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada, were the professionals who do your financial statements aware of the agreement with Canada Soccer Business?

How long have the people at PricewaterhouseCoopers Canada been your auditors?

In what financial year do we find the documentation about the closing or disposal of the legacy fund?

[*English*]

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** PwC, PricewaterhouseCoopers, have been our auditors since 2007, from when we tendered, shortly after I joined the organization. Yes, they are fully aware of the CSB agreement and reviewed it in great detail.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** We hear talk about a legacy fund, and obviously, about the level of familiarity with Sports Agents Canada. A fund on the order of \$28 million is said to have been available.

Can you give us details or clarify the withdrawal that was made from this legacy fund?

[*English*]

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** I would need a greater understanding of what you're referring to, because I don't understand or know of any fund of \$28 million for a legacy. If I had further details, I might be able to refocus what it is that you're asking for.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Okay. We'll come back to it.

Mr. Montagliani, after everything we have read in the McLaren report, do you think you still have the legitimacy needed for sitting on FIFA and on CONCACAF, or for managing the FIFA world championships to be held in 2026?

[*English*]

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** Madam Chair, I think the McLaren report was quite clear in terms of the individual roles of the people involved. I was part of a committee of eight people who had two conference calls to make the decisions that were made. It was very clear in what was done, in terms of the report of the independent ombudswoman. As I volunteered to discuss with them, the McLaren report did identify institutional gaps with respect to policies, which I think have now been addressed, starting in 2012. They were also addressed recently by Canada Soccer with the hiring of Allison Forsyth, to ensure that those policy gaps are no longer there.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Montagliani. We have run out of time.

I'm now going to go to Peter Julian, for the New Democrats.

Peter, you have two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

To Mr. Bontis, I asked this question last week: While you were president of Canada Soccer, how many allegations of sexual abuse came to your attention and were investigated?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** In my role as director of Canada Soccer, starting in 2012, I was not aware of the Birarda case until there were further allegations, some time around 2019-20. I don't know exactly when there were some further allegations. Since that period of time and since I was president, I was not made aware of any other safe sport sexual allegation.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** No allegations of sexual abuse anywhere came to your attention as president of Canada Soccer. I find that surprising, but I'll move on to Mr. Montagliani.

You mentioned the Birarda case as one of inappropriate texting, but he has been sent to prison for sexual assault. This is a profound crime that took place within the organization, with players who were to be protected by the organization.

How could that failure have happened? Were you not aware, or when did you become aware, of the fact that he was committing this horrific and egregious crime of sexual assault?

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** Going back to 2008, and as the McLaren report outlined, we dealt with the sole allegation of his inappropriate texting at a national team camp in Vancouver. That was the process of that investigation.

With respect to what he was subsequently charged with, which came to light in 2019-20.... Those predated his time at the Canadian Soccer Association. He committed those offences while working at the grassroots or at private academies in British Columbia. In 2008, nobody was aware. I was certainly not aware of anything Mr. Birarda had done previously; nor—to my knowledge—was our committee aware of it. By the looks of it, neither were the investigators.

This didn't, unfortunately, come forward until the victims came forward in 2019-20, which led to the police being engaged and, ultimately, Mr. Birarda's being charged.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Your time is up, now, Peter.

I'll go to the Conservatives and Mr. Shields for five minutes.

Go ahead, Martin.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's Rachael Thomas, here, taking this question round.

**The Chair:** Rachael, you're going to do this. Okay. Thank you.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Thank you.

There have been questions with regard to salary and where you fly on an airplane. All these questions are technically yours and yours, alone...to have this information. I think what instigates the questions, though.... It's not necessarily that the seat number is important, but rather what it insinuates or symbolizes.

That is to say, there is this overall picture that, I believe, is being painted with regard to Canada Soccer that shows a couple of things.

One, there is this enormous elitism at the top of the organization. There is this leadership group that is out of touch with the reality of the players—in particular, the players on the women's team. There is this notion, or this understanding, that those at the top are being put before the players themselves, which is a problem. It's a problem for the players, fans and Canadians. It's a problem for the sport.

Further to that, I think the other thing being communicated to the public is that this is an organization run by men, for men. The women are not being fairly compensated. This comes down not only to equal pay but also to equal opportunity, equal treatment and equal resources. We have an organization run by an elite few, who are men. They run this organization for men, and it is to the disadvantage of the players as a whole, but in particular of the women. That's a problem.

We have a deal signed between Canada Soccer and Canadian Soccer Business. When we look at this deal, it smells fishy. I think that's where these questions come into play today. What we want to know are the terms of this deal, but there has been a refusal to be transparent about those terms.

We know a few things based on what we've heard from players and what we've seen reported in the media. We know this is a deal that was signed for 10 years. We know there's the opportunity to renew this deal for another 10 years. We know there was very little transparency and, therefore, zero accountability with regard to this deal. We're confused as to why this deal was signed, because it just doesn't make sense.

My first question is this: Mr. Bontis, did you gain in any way, personally or professionally, from signing this deal?

• (1650)

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I absolutely did not gain at all in signing this deal, as a director.

I can address your other comments, if you like, at this point.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** That's okay. There was no other question, Mr. Bontis. Thank you.

My second question is, was any part of this deal signed between Canada Soccer and Canadian Soccer Business done as a favour for the founders of Canadian Soccer Business?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Again, Madam Chair, absolutely not. No negotiating contractual agreements are done as favours for founding members.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** I will turn those same questions, then, over to Mr. Heffernan. Was any part of that deal signed as a favour towards the founders of Canada's soccer business?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** Not that I'm aware of.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Did you have anything to gain personally or professionally from that deal being signed?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** No.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Did anyone on the board have anything to gain from that deal, personally or professionally?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** Not that I'm aware of.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Mr. Bontis, are you aware of any?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** No, I'm not aware of anybody on the board who had anything to gain. In fact, in the minutes that were provided to your committee, you'll see there was one individual on the board who recused himself from those discussions because he was involved with another competing club.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Mr. Heffernan, this deal was signed for 10 years, with the opportunity to renew for another 10 years. Can you point me to another similar sports organization that has signed a deal like this?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** Not that I can think of.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Why did you sign it?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** I didn't sign it.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Mr. Bontis, why did you sign it?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I'm sorry. I did not sign it either.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** No, I apologize. I should be asking why the organization signed it.

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Well, the organization supported the contract. To your question about the 10-year and 10-year aspect, there is an opportunity within the first break of the 10 years to renegotiate the guaranteed payment. That's stipulated in the contract.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** It's 10 years.

It's 10 years, so what you're saying is that actually it's basically supposed to be a 20-year deal, but we're going to give it the first 10, and maybe, somewhere in there, there might be an opportunity to have a bit of a conversation along the way. Really, the intention, then, seems to be 20 years.

**The Chair:** Ms. Thomas, I will give leeway for an answer, but we're past the five minutes.

Go ahead.

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** The frame of reference, at least for me personally, in 2017-18, when we were negotiating the deal, was that we need a long time to actually provide resources for a league to sustain itself. Three previous men's leagues—CSL, CNSL, CPSL—historically all went belly up within that 10-year period, so—

• (1655)

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** That's why you sign a short deal and renew.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Bontis, and thank you, Ms. Thomas.

I'm going to go to the Liberals and Anthony Housefather for five minutes.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you very much.

I'm going to continue on Rachel's line of questioning.

On this deal, Mr. Bontis, you stated that there was an opportunity to renegotiate the base amount, which is essentially a guaranteed amount, but it can't increase. It's basically that despite the men's team qualifying for the World Cup and the women's team winning the Olympics, you get no bump in the amounts that you negotiated for the first 10 years. Then, in the second 10 years, if you don't agree on an amount with CSB, there's a fixed amount that's in the contract that's barely an escalation from what was in the first 10 years.

This is opposed to in the United States, where they had a similar deal, and it went up to \$30 million at the end. Here, you have almost no escalation. What Rachel said is actually the case. It's an unbelievable deal. We cannot understand how anybody could sign an agreement that fixes pricing for 20 years, no matter how well the soccer teams do.

Let me ask a different question, if it's okay, Mr. Bontis.

I understand that you didn't sign the deal. Mr. Reed signed the deal. At the last meeting, I had a number of questions about when this agreement was approved.

The representatives of Canada Soccer told us that it was approved in March 2018. I pointed them to a board meeting in December 2018 where it was clear that the deal had not been approved because the board had revisited...the deal was being renegotiated and the board had lots of things and mandates to get to the negotiating committee. They said, well, there was a conference call that happened later in December that wasn't minuted. Then the agreement was signed as of January 1.

Mr. Bontis, do you remember on what date Mr. Reed signed the agreement?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I don't remember the exact date that the agreement was signed, but you are correct in your characterization that the board agreed to the deal on March 27. A news release went public on our website on March 28.

The meeting you're speaking about, for November, as is in the minutes that you have a copy of, was for smaller, less substantive issues having to deal with—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Mr. Bontis, let me correct you: It was not for smaller and less substantive issues. As Mr. Heffernan stated, the negotiating committee was renegotiating four very important parts of the agreement, including broadcasting rights, term and renewal, etc., signing authority on sponsorship and broadcast agreements, which is why it's mysterious that we didn't get minutes showing where the board actually then approved the agreement.



Suddenly, after the last meeting, the board minutes of February 7, 2019, showed up. The board there fully adopted the agreement, meaning that it clearly didn't consider the 2018 motion to be valid, because it was completely readopted, authorizing the signing of the representation agreement and the funding agreement. Do you recall that meeting in February, which suddenly showed up in minutes that we never had before?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I can't speak to why there was a clerical error. I'm not with Canada Soccer anymore. It's a regrettable error. What I can speak to is that—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** You're on the minutes as having attended the meeting, though, Mr. Bontis. Do you recall having attended a board meeting on February 7, 2019, when the board adopted resolutions authorizing the signature of the agreement?

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Yes, the February 7 meeting was a reaffirmation that the—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** No, it was not. That is not what any of the motions say. The motion says, "The entering into by the Corporation of the representation agreement dated January 1, 2019...substantially in the form submitted to the directors," blah, blah, "is hereby authorized and approved". It doesn't refer back to 2018. It doesn't refer back to a previous approval. It's a new approval that has suddenly appeared.

Let me ask a different question, Mr. Bontis. Mr. Reed signed the agreement by himself. In the bylaws of Canada Soccer, it states that any agreement needs to be signed by the executive secretary and by a second signatory, either the vice-president or the president. Did the executive secretary of Canada Soccer ever sign the agreements? I don't see a signature on it.

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I don't recall. I did not sign it as vice-president, but I don't know if there was a—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** We have only Mr. Reed's signature, and it's a governance issue.

Mr. Heffernan, you are still CFO at Canada Soccer. Canada Soccer's bylaws, including the bylaws I found dating back to that time in 2019, state clearly in 1.10 that the executive secretary needs to sign. Did he ever sign that agreement?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** No.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you.

Let me ask another question, then, and this is a very important question. I understand that you wanted a men's professional league to be set up so we could bid on the World Cup. Why were the women's assets included in an agreement that made no commitment to ever set up a women's professional league?

Mr. Bontis...?

• (1700)

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** I would want to pass the question on to Victor, because he had that parameter in the original proposal that was put forward to the board early on in—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Which was after the day he left as president. I want to tell everybody that in the minutes, you see Mr. Montagliani's presence at board meetings long after he left as presi-

dent of Canada Soccer. In fact, they tried to pass a resolution authorizing him to attend all board meetings afterwards.

So, Mr. Montagliani, sure, tell us how, after you left as president, you were involved in the negotiations of this agreement and how you ended up with these terms.

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** After I left the Canadian Soccer Association, I wasn't involved at all with any of these negotiations. My attendance at a board meeting was upon the request of the president, and it's common. I get requested by a lot of my member associations to attend for the first five or 10 minutes, to give an update on—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Mr. Bontis just referred the question to you, saying that you had more knowledge than he, who was sitting on the executive the entire time and was vice-president at the time it was signed. That's very telling.

Thank you, Mr. Montagliani.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We come to the end of our question and answer session, because we're going to have to take some time to go in camera.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** Madam Chair...?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mrs. Rachael Thomas:** There seems to be consensus around the table that perhaps you could give each party another two- to three-minute round. We believe that it would still allow the time that's needed for the business.

**The Chair:** Is that clear? Is there anyone objecting to that? I am not able to tell what the agreement is. Is everyone in agreement?

Are there any hands up, Clerk? I don't see any.

**The Clerk:** No, there are no hands up. Everybody seems in agreement.

**The Chair:** Well then, let's move on. I think there are four, so we can give everyone two minutes each.

I shall go to the Conservatives, I don't know who's going to take that, but you have two minutes. Let me know.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to put my question to Mr. Bontis.

Despite all your good will, why was there no pay equity?

[English]

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** That's a great question.

Madam Chair, the fundamental difference between the women's national team and the men's national team, upon my arrival as president, was that the women's team had a collective bargaining agreement already in place—they're currently in the process of renewing the collective bargaining agreement—whereas the men did not. They negotiated based on camps.

To promise pay equity now complicates the negotiation, because all three parties—the men's team, the women's team and Canada Soccer—have to come together for an agreement.

It was only upon further communication with the men that I found out that they'd created a players' association and legal representation only on Labour Day of 2022. That's when I found out.

The truth of the matter is that the women had a collective bargaining agreement and were registered as a players' association through the Province of Ontario. The men had not been, and only in September did they do that, which then allowed us, as Canada Soccer, to be able to negotiate.

In good spirit, all three parties—the men's team, the women's team and Canada Soccer—have continued communications since September.

Last month I left, but my understanding is that those communications continue, as is obvious from Sean's testimony.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** The women's team was nonetheless convinced that there was no pay equity and they did not have the same benefits as the men's team. That's what you said.

[*English*]

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

I can assure you that the proposal that Canada Soccer presented to both teams guaranteeing equal pay is detailed. It's publicly available and it has been reported by the media. The World Cup prize money, as well, will be shared. It's not by percentage, just to clarify. It's dollar for dollar, making both the men's and the women's teams among the highest-paid national teams in the world.

If you take the fact that the men's team has already competed in Qatar and the women have not yet competed in Australia—and of course I want the women to go as far as possible—but assuming the women play only those three games in Australia—

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Please wrap it up, Mr. Bontis.

**Dr. Nick Bontis:** —each of the players would be receive an estimated \$135,000 as part of that compensation, just for the World Cup prize money.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I now go to the Liberals.

Who will take this?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I will, Madam Chair. Thank you.

I want to just come back briefly to the Bob Birarda case, because I think it's important for Canadians who are watching to understand what happened.

Bob Birarda was the U-20 national women's coach until 2008, and in November 2022 he was sent to prison for the sexual assault of underage players.

In 2008 Canada Soccer basically spun it as a mutual decision to part ways when it was announced that he was departing as the U-20 national coach. They explained that the move had to do with Birarda wanting time to attend to his own health and family, and they wished him well in the future.

The independent McLaren report, published in July 2022, states that the communication “that characterized Birarda's departure as being in the mutual interest of both parties without so much as addressing the harassment was a gross mischaracterisation of the circumstances and failed the victims of the harassment, their teammates, and the organisation as a whole.”

There was a robust harassment policy on the books of Canada Soccer when complaints were raised, but the executive failed to follow it at several levels, which are damningly delineated in the McLaren report.

McLaren also found that there was only a small cadre of individuals at Canada Soccer who even knew about the complaints. Other executives on the board were kept in the dark. No trace of the case exists in any minutes. A staff member interviewed as part of the McLaren investigation said, “This is what troubles me...that there are no paper trails.” They also said, “Everything was held behind closed doors and there is no record of what was done.”

In 2021 FIFA became interested in the handling of the sexual misconduct complaint, and Canada Soccer carefully altered the story, claiming the entire board was involved in the swift termination of Birarda, and that obviously wasn't the case.

Mr. Montagliani, when you were asked by the ethics committee at FIFA about this mischaracterizing message, you said that you had nothing to do with it, or you couldn't remember being a part of it.

Is that true?

**Mr. Vittorio Montagliani:** Madam Chair, I was never asked anything by the FIFA ethics committee. The FIFA ethics committee made a clear statement that its investigation had to do with the individuals—Mr. Birarda specifically—involved, so I was never asked anything by the FIFA ethics committee.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** You were never asked anything. That's interesting. Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you. The time is up, Anthony. I'm sorry.

Now I am going to go Mr. Lemire for two minutes.

Go ahead, please, Sébastien.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Madam Chair, I will be using the two minutes.

[English]

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I am going to use this speaking time to change the subject, but not because I wanted to give the guests a break today.

[English]

**The Chair:** Oh, is that Mr. Champoux?

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Yes, it's me.

[English]

**The Chair:** Oh, welcome. Welcome, Martin.

Please begin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to change the subject for two minutes.

As I said, it's certainly not to give our guests a break, given that they have a lot of information to disclose.

I want to introduce a notice of motion relating to freedom of expression.

For some time, we have increasingly been seeing the weakening of the culture and how it is often the first victim of freedom of expression. Whether it's on social media, in the media generally, or in civil society, people are increasingly afraid to express themselves freely, for fear of being cancelled. I think this is a very troubling.

I want to take this time to point out that books have been burned in the schools, that a cultural treasure like Michelangelo's *David* has been censored in Florida, among other things. This is a trend that is undeniably moving north. Recently, a reading of Michèle Lalonde's poem *Speak White* was even forbidden in a classroom in Trois-Rivières, because it contained the N-word in an artistic context.

The motion proposes that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of six meetings regarding the protection of freedom of expression and the means the government should have at its disposal to ensure its exercise.

I hope that we will be able to debate this motion at an upcoming meeting of the committee.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** [Technical difficulty—Editor] to discuss, can you be clear on the matter and the motion, Martin?

It's a study of six meetings to...?

• (1710)

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** It would be a study of six meetings regarding the protection of freedom of expression and the means the government should have at its disposal to ensure its exercise.

I am introducing the notice of motion so that we can debate the motion at an upcoming meeting of the committee.

I think my colleague has some speaking time left.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

There is now a motion on the floor.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** It's a notice of motion, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** It's a notice of motion.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, so you don't wish to discuss it right now.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you.

I will now go to Mr. Julian.

Peter, you have two minutes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I've been disappointed with the answers today. I want to go back to Mr. Heffernan and ask him, as chief financial officer, what evaluation he did around the issue of the contract with Canadian Soccer Business to estimate the value of the rights that were being accorded to CSB. Were their financial figures studied by the board? Did they include projections of the rise in value of those rights over time and over the period of the contract?

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** The analysis I did when the board evaluated the terms of the contract forecasted in comparison to what our current sponsorships were at the time. The guarantee was higher than what we were currently receiving.

As to the long-term forecast, it's really a trend line, because it doesn't take in the actions.

As to the increase in valuation, that exceeds my expertise, as I am not a certified business valuator on anticipating future growth.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Okay. I would like to ask, through you, Madam Chair, that Canada Soccer make that evaluation available to us.

I will say this. Across the country, we have parents who are providing money that goes through to Canada Soccer. We have not seen transparency. The words that Christine Sinclair spoke before this committee on March 9, I think, ring true: "Canada Soccer's approach [on finances] has reflected a culture of secrecy and obstruction."

I think it's fair to say that this is a problem in terms of the finances and the lack of answers we've had today. There's also a concern around the allegations of sexual abuse and how Canada Soccer treats these issues.

[*Translation*]

I hope we are now going to pursue our intention to get to the bottom of things...

[*English*]

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** If I could just make a correction—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Peter Julian:** ... and that we will be getting the information that Canadians need. There has to be transparency and, honestly, I think transparency is lacking today.

[*English*]

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** Madam Chair, could I just correct a point on the premise?

**The Chair:** This is unusual—

**Mr. Sean Heffernan:** He referred to it as an evaluation. It's a trend line.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I would still like the committee to receive the information the chief financial officer has just revealed to us.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Peter.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Madam Chair, is the speaking done? Can I add my name to—

**The Chair:** The speaking is now done if we are to follow through what everyone agreed to, as Mr. Waugh suggested. It's going to take some time to go in—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Can I ask a question to Mr. Julian?

**The Chair:** It takes time to go in camera. I'm sorry, no, the time is up, or we will not finish what we're supposed to do and what the agenda for the day says.

I shall thank the witnesses once more. I shall ask that the trend line be sent to the clerk as promised.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming.

With that, I will suspend so we can go in camera.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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