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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, and welcome to the 40th meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Monday, October 31, the committee will commence its study of women and girls in sport.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute it when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of French, English or the floor. For those in the room, you can use your earpiece, which is attached to your microphone. You can choose your language there as well.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking list as best as we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

In accordance with our routine motion, I am informing the committee that all of our witnesses, with the exception of Léa Clermont-Dion, have completed the required connection tests in advance of this meeting.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide this trigger warning. This will be a very difficult study. We'll be discussing experiences related to abuse. This may be triggering to viewers, members, staff and anyone with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or if you need help, please advise the clerk.

I would now like to welcome our first panellists for today. As an individual, online, we have Léa Clermont-Dion, who is a producer, author and political scientist. From Global Athlete, we have Rob Koehler, director general. From Gymnasts for Change Canada, we have Amelia Cline, lawyer and co-founder, and Kim Shore, co-founder.

We will provide everyone with five minutes for opening statements. We're going to be rather flexible here, but please watch me, the chair.

Our first panellist does not have the headset, so we're going to start with a sound check, if you don't mind.

Léa, could you work with our clerk right now?

[Translation]

Ms. Léa Clermont-Dion (Producer, Author and Political Scientist , As an Individual): Yes, absolutely.

[English]

The Chair: We'll start with our next witness. I'm going to pass it over to Rob.

You have five minutes for your opening statement. You have the floor.

Mr. Rob Koehler (Director General, Global Athlete): Thank you Madam Chair.

Dear members of the committee, in no way is my testimony today to negate the positive experiences that athletes and children across Canada have taken from sport. I would further appeal to those athletes who have had positive experiences to listen, observe and become allies of survivors of abuse.

We at Global Athlete have directly and indirectly heard from athletes in the sports of gymnastics, soccer, bobsleigh, skeleton, athletics, cross-country skiing, water polo, swimming, artistic swimming, boxing, canoe/kayak, rowing and figure skating. Their lived experiences must be listened to and must be taken into account, and these evil behaviours that surround sport must be removed.

The fact that athletes have turned to Global Athlete and not the current system should speak volumes; athletes fear and do not trust the sports system. Under the current framework, it has been terrifying and traumatizing for athletes to come forward. They are all brave survivors.

As leaders of this country, we need to make sure that abusers and the enablers are made accountable for their actions. The current sports system has dramatically failed athletes. For almost a year, Canadian athletes have been loud, and they have been mostly ignored—until today. We thank you for that.

This is the first step to answer their calls for a third party independent judicial investigation across the toxic culture of abuse in Canadian sport. Make no mistake: Abuse in sport is global. Canada now has the opportunity to be a leader, as it was in the Dubin inquiry, and to change the culture of sport in Canada.

The Dubin inquiry removed the right for sporting organizations to test their own athletes. It's time to address abuse in a similar fashion. Human rights and child rights must be at the centre of this change.

Over the past year, Global Athlete has been inundated with lived experiences of physical, sexual and emotional abuse that have not been met with adequate remedy. Canadian athletes have said their sporting organizations have failed them. All you have to do is look in the media. Athletes are actually taking lawsuits against their own sporting organizations because they have failed to act. This speaks volumes as to why sport cannot be trusted to regulate itself.

Abuse in sport is a human rights issue, not a sport issue. Abusers recognize the power imbalance that leaves athletes powerless and coaches and administrators as the almighty powerful. Athletes have shared lived experiences with me that have ripped my heart apart, and I know they would do the same to you.

The lack of action and desire to meaningfully tackle these complaints is disturbing and, without doubt, borderline negligent. The lived experiences are heavy. The least we can do is listen, assist and demand justice and change. Every victim of abuse needs justice to heal.

I will not get into the details of the abuse that I have heard from select athletes, but I will provide some common themes shared by them. Athletes do not trust the sports system or sport administrators to operate and act in their best interests. Athletes and parents fear retribution. When they do speak up, retribution becomes real. Sport has silenced athletes for years. Athletes are not believed. They are gaslighted to questioning their lived experiences and are forced through retraumatizing processes when coming forward. Allies of athletes who work in sport organizations try to come forward and are limited by confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements. These are not sport issues; these are human rights issues.

• (1105)

No confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement should prevent or stop anyone from coming forward to expose the truth. For decades, sport has operated under a veil of sport autonomy. This autonomy has given sport the ability to operate with ultimate authority and with little to no oversight or accountability.

Over the past months, we've witnessed how Sport Canada has limited scope and power, and how they fail to make sporting organizations accountable for their lack of action and wrongdoings. Instead of addressing the root problem, Canada has created more problems by empowering sport structures to oversee human rights issues.

The Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada was first appointed in this role, and then, based on anecdotal evidence, the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner was established. These are

all sport entities trying to solve human rights issues with limited powers and limited independence.

Sport is a small community, and there are far too many real or perceived conflicts of interest to adequately address these issues. Canadian athletes whom we've heard from are tired of band-aid solutions.

Dear members, on behalf of thousands of Canadian athletes, we appeal to you today to strongly support a third party independent judicial investigation. Your actions following this study must send a clear message to every child, youth and elite athlete that they will no longer be forced into silence and will be believed and protected when they come forward.

Madam Chair, members of the committee, thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Rob.

I'm now going to pass it over to Kim Shore for Gymnasts for Change Canada.

Kim, you have the floor.

Ms. Kim Shore (Co-Founder, Gymnasts for Change Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to this committee.

This feels like a watershed moment for sport, particularly gymnastics.

When you think of gymnasts, picture little children six to eight years old starting their competitive journeys, training 20 to 30 hours every week, oftentimes spending more time with their coaches than their parents.

These are the profoundly vulnerable little humans entrusted to coaches who promise to teach them to flip and fly. These are the children I speak for today and for whom we call upon this government and this committee to enact a judicial inquiry into human rights violations against athletes and a lack of mechanisms protecting children in Canada.

As a former gymnast myself, and mother of a former gymnast, I know the beauty and the potential benefits that sport offers if delivered with an ethic of care and a child-centric approach. However, the hundreds of reports we have received and the arrests made in the last seven months alone confirm our worst fears: Gymnastics is rotting from the top down and the bottom up.

I wonder how many of you would choose gymnastics for yourself or your own child if you knew what we do.

When you were a child, would you have chosen to repeatedly feel your physical safety was threatened by an adult bullying you to do dangerous skills that you knew could result in catastrophic injuries?

How many of you experienced a trusted coach pressing your legs into oversplits while you sobbed and begged for them to stop, but they just screamed at you to “shut up”?

Who here spent the prime of their life with their face stuck in a toilet bowl throwing up every meal? Who obsessively weighed themselves or were force-fed in hospital to treat an eating disorder, all the while with the soundtrack in their head repeating, “You're fat. You're too ugly to be a gymnast. You look like the Pillsbury Doughboy”?

How many of you have experienced confusion, nausea and panic when a trusted adult suddenly says, “I want to touch you”, or you had to choose between the safe haven of your sexually abusive male coach just to be spared from the outright cruelty of your female coach?

Have any of you lived in chronic pain since adolescence? Have you self-harmed because the voice in your head said, and maybe still says, that you're worthless, useless, lazy?

Lastly, imagine spending thousands of dollars on therapy just to become a functioning member of society.

Our Gymnasts for Change team is here today. My friends, how many of us can relate to these examples?

You are all standing. Stay standing, team, if the pain, misery and fear you endured as a child athlete was worth the medals you won.

This is a reality for many child gymnasts in Canada—violence, degradation, humiliation and some of the worst abuses you can imagine—yet still there is no plan for prevention.

• (1115)

Let's remember that the lack of diversity in gymnastics means these are often the most privileged children in our communities. If we can't even keep them safe, what does this mean for kids who are racialized or transgender, or who have a disability—children who are exponentially more vulnerable to maltreatment because of intersecting systems of oppression?

As awful as these examples of abuse are, survivors tell us time and again that what haunts them the most is not having been protected by the adults who had the power to do something, and who instead chose to protect their friends and the brand.

Gymnasts for Change Canada was a movement we hoped we'd never have to start. Collectively, we believed that if we informed the provincial governing bodies, Gymnastics Canada and, as a last resort, Sport Canada, somebody—anybody—would listen to us. They would act with haste to protect athletes. However, we were wrong. Nine other countries have already completed independent investigations into their gymnastics programs. They are two years ahead of Canada with efforts to dismantle these cultures of cruelty with legislative changes and binding mechanisms that protect athletes' human rights.

Let me be very clear: What we're discussing today is not a sport crisis: It is a human rights crisis happening in sport. Canada needs leaders with strong moral courage who will call for a national judicial inquiry to uncover a past that must never be repeated and to generate solutions that have never existed. The time for bold and brave action is now. Every child in Canada deserves to enjoy sport and grow up to be a better person because of their sport experience, not despite it.

I ask this committee, how can we continue to hear these stories and not act?

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Kim.

We're going to move on. We're going to do another sound check with Léa. I will pass that over to the clerk.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Léa Clermont-Dion: Good morning.

Is that better?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Alexie Labelle): Can you talk a bit more?

Ms. Léa Clermont-Dion: Yes. Can you hear me better?

Otherwise, I can try to do it without a headset.

[*English*]

The Chair: This is the chair speaking right now.

Thank you so much for being here today, but I recognize the impact it will have on our interpreters if they cannot get the proper interpretation. We've had too many health issues. We would like to invite you back another time to provide your testimony so that we can continue on today. I'm afraid we won't be able to hear from you today, but we will ensure we hear from you in the future. Thank you very much.

With that, we're going to start our rounds of questioning. We will be doing our regular six-minute rounds. I will be flexible with the time, but I will ensure every party has its allotted amount of time.

I'm going to start it off with Anna Roberts. Anna, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you so much for your bravery. It's a difficult and an emotional situation, and my heart bleeds for you. Thank you for coming and sharing your stories with us today.

I'm going to direct my first question to Kim.

I was reviewing some of your notes and some of the segments I watched. One of the things you said stuck with me: “This is an important first step that must lead to a national independent third-party judicial investigation led by human rights experts.” This is a quote you made. “We have been clear that the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner (OSIC) is not equipped to handle this investigation. They lack independence, power to compel and they are directly funded by Sport Canada who has time and time again failed Canadian athletes.”

What would you say to this committee about a third party being organized by athletes and people who are in a better position to understand what has happened? Could you elaborate on that?

• (1120)

Ms. Kim Shore: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

I'd like to hand that answer over to my colleague from Gymnasts for Change, Amelia Cline.

Ms. Amelia Cline (Lawyer and Co-Founder, Gymnasts for Change Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think it is critically important that any third party judicial inquiry be led by athletes and particularly by survivors.

Survivors have a unique experience in sport that they can bring to bear, especially, for example, when it comes to drafting the terms of reference for any sort of investigation. What we've learned from speaking with the other countries that have undertaken investigations such as these is that it is vitally important that the terms of reference be crafted in such a way that they will actually get to the root issues within the investigation. Even at the outset of any sort of effort to create an independent investigation, survivors need to be consulted.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Maybe you can answer this for me too, and correct me if I'm wrong.

Once a coach or individual has been charged, I understand that there's no registry.

Ms. Amelia Cline: That's correct.

I can really only speak to gymnastics because that's my experience. Gymnastics Canada has a list of those suspended and banned that is publicly available; however, there's no discipline history that is provided publicly. If someone is suspended for a year, for example, it will show up that they have been suspended. As soon as their suspension is over, their name disappears from that list.

There's no way for parents to know whether they're being coached by someone who actually has a discipline history, and certainly there is no national coaching registry that would show the discipline history of coaches in other sports either. There is the theoretical possibility that a coach could be banned from gymnastics, for example, and then begin coaching in soccer, football or hockey. There's no clear way for parents or individuals to track where these coaches end up after they've been disciplined.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: You mentioned that other countries are ahead of us by two years. From their example, what do they do to stop these particular individuals from getting involved in other sports?

Ms. Amelia Cline: In a number of different countries, they've tried various different things. Currently in the U.K., there are efforts under way to actually change the legislative framework around much of this: better safeguarding, with better and stronger child rights efforts.

Essentially, as we've been saying, this is a human rights issue as opposed to a sporting issue. This is really a child's rights issue, and legislative and policy change to essentially take a child-centric, child protection approach to these issues seems to be the discussion that's happening in other jurisdictions.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Would you agree that, just as it is for any other abuser, the record should never be expunged and should be released to the public and stay there permanently? Would that not help to ensure that these individuals never, ever have the opportunity to abuse a child again?

Ms. Amelia Cline: Absolutely, and I often use the example of other trust-based professions: teachers, doctors and lawyers. We all have public disciplinary records. That's because we're in such a position of power and such a position of trust with the public. It's recognized that we give up some of our privacy rights in an effort to protect the public if we abuse that power.

I see that being analogous to the position that coaches are in, especially in sports such as gymnastics. The people over whom they have power are these very vulnerable children. Why wouldn't we have a publicly available discipline record at that point?

• (1125)

Ms. Kim Shore: I would like to add that it's impossible for parents to make informed decisions about which coaches or clubs are safe for their kids to participate in. For example, on the banned-and-suspended list that Amelia referenced, there's no indication of what the charge was or what the breach of the code of conduct was.

This person on the list may have breached a financial aspect of their membership rights to Gymnastics Canada, but we don't know if it was finance, abuse of children or bullying and harassment of a peer. That is what Canadian parents and children deserve to know. It's who is interacting with their child and what kind of environment it is, so that they can make an informed decision on whether they put their child with this coach who has a history of abusing other children—I'm not sure who would do that—or choose the club and the coaches who are doing it well.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

Thank you, Amelia. I see that Amelia is trying to help me with my timing. Thank you. I appreciate that.

I'm now going to pass it over to Anita Vandenbeld. Anita, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to start by thanking all of you for being here and for speaking so openly with us. It is making a difference. It will make a difference. We very much appreciate this. I think I speak for all members of the committee when I say that we really are focused on protecting children.

I'd like to direct my first question to Ms. Shore. For many Canadians who are not involved in sport or who don't have children in sport, this is something that is quite shocking to see. The question that many of us have is how is it possible that this has gone on for decades? Have people been looking the other way? It's human of us to want to protect children, so somewhere something went wrong. When I talk to friends who were athletes, they all say, "Oh, we knew who the creepy coaches were". They knew. There's a whisper network. Everybody was sort of hush-hush, but nobody really said it.

I want to put an open-ended question to you about how this happened despite the fact, as I understand it, that there have been safety officers in gymnastics in Canada for 30 years. What is it that has gone wrong?

Ms. Kim Shore: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

Many things have gone wrong. To your point about looking the other way, wilful blindness is very prevalent in sport, particularly in gymnastics. We are taught as gymnasts that there's no crying in gymnastics. Put a smile on your face even if your ankle feels broken or your back has torn muscles. Put on a smile and go out there and do your job.

You said it's natural to want to protect children. What I honestly feel has happened is that gymnastics has forgotten that these are children. Coaches use the language "I'm here to produce elite athletes"—"produce". We don't "produce" children; we nurture them. We grow them. We teach them.

There is a very, to my mind, unfortunate and corrupt network of adults protecting adults. I can speak only to gymnastics specifically, but I have sat on both the provincial board of Alberta for gymnastics as well as the national board for Gymnastics Canada, and I have repeatedly seen friends protecting friends, information not coming forward, boards of directors who are uninformed, who know half the situation only, who rely on the narrative of a single person to inform them, and undoubtedly with that narrative comes not only a perspective but a desire to protect their friends and themselves and potentially their job. Yes, as adults in sport, we've all looked the other way.

As a parent, I was groomed. As an athlete, I was groomed. The worse grooming was as a parent, because I kept taking my child to gymnastics although she would come home and say, "Mommy, the coach hates me. The coach is mad at us. The coach yelled at us. Look at these burns on my skin I got from having to repeat a skill a hundred times over and over." As trusting people, we implicitly think that these people are there, as you said, with a second nature to protect children, so at first you start excusing the behaviour because you would never dream there was anything different.

● (1130)

[Translation]

The Chair: Just a moment.

[English]

We just want to make sure everybody can hear.

Andréanne, you had it too?

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): There were issues.

[English]

The Chair: Kim, just keep on going. I have stopped the clock regardless. Keep on going. I'm sorry for interrupting, but we just want to make sure everybody can hear.

Ms. Kim Shore: Thank you for being so interested.

I think as parents we mistakenly assume that the people we are handing our children over to, the coaches who have asked us to grant them professional respect and professional trust, are not safeguarding our children.

We need culture change from the bottom up and the top down in order to protect our children better, and we need people in positions of leadership who will put the needs of children ahead of their own agendas for career advancement or for the protection of the brand.

The Chair: Kim, we're having some technical difficulties. I'm looking at the interpreters. I've stopped the clock. We'll see where we're going. You have a minute and 12 seconds left, because I keep on stopping it.

We're going to suspend a second. We want to make sure everything is good.

● (1130)

(Pause)

● (1135)

The Chair: Once the interpreters are back in their space, I think we're back on track.

We will be taking this time and just adding this time at the end, since we've had to stop. We're really sorry about this.

Anita, you have a minute and 12 seconds left.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you so much for that very honest answer.

Ms. Cline, you looked like you wanted to add something to that, so I'll give the rest of the time to you to also respond.

Ms. Amelia Cline: Thank you.

Madam Chair, if you'll indulge me a few extra seconds, you referenced that Gymnastics Canada has had effectively the same harassment officer for approximately 30 years. We understand that Dr. Gretchen Kerr has been the go-to harassment officer for primarily most of the complaints that have come through Gymnastics Canada in the last 30 years. In those 30 years, unfortunately what we have now had reported to us is that abuse has thrived in that time. We have serious concerns and serious reservations about how complaints have been handled. We have received some very concerning reports regarding Dr. Kerr's conduct.

We will be circulating a five-page brief in which a story in that regard will be articulated to the committee. Essentially, it involves the sexual abuse of several athletes, some of whom were minors. Initially Gymnastics Canada told those complainants that because the person who was the perpetrator was no longer under contract, Gymnastics Canada could not investigate. They eventually opened an investigation when the Centre for Ethics in Sport insisted that Gymnastics Canada open an investigation.

I have a copy of the report that Dr. Kerr created. It essentially summarizes the allegations, but it makes no findings whatsoever of whether those reports were credible. It declines to offer any sort of discipline for that individual. Instead, it says that the complainants should report it to the massage college. It then recommends that if that individual ever reapplies to work for Gymnastics Canada, her file should be reviewed.

There is no discipline history for this person, who has allegedly sexually abused at least five athletes, some of whom were minors. We understand that there was no contact with the police from Gymnastics Canada when they received these reports. As a result, this individual could theoretically continue working, not just in gymnastics but in other sports, because there is currently no discipline history.

When you ask why this is has continued to be a problem for decades, these are exactly the problems we are concerned about.

The Chair: Amelia, thank you so much.

I'm now going to pass it over to Andréanne Larouche.

I'll remind everybody to put on your earpieces so you get the interpretation. Make sure the volume is up so you hear it right from the start.

Andréanne, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Cline, Ms. Shore and Mr. Koehler, thank you for being here today to contribute to this study, which is vital to the safety of girls in sport.

Let me start by saying that I spent my childhood in gyms, cheering on my sister who competed in gymnastics at a fairly high level. I saw the pressure she was under. The pressure on young girls was ever-present. I also saw the lack of body diversity you mentioned. Thank you for your sharing your stories.

Ms. Shore and Mr. Koehler, I saw you this summer at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. What did you take away from what you heard this summer? Why do you think

this study matters? Why are you here today? In light of what happened with Hockey Canada this summer, do you feel it's important to shine a spotlight on other sports?

• (1140)

[*English*]

Ms. Kim Shore: This past summer, we self-funded our trip to Ottawa to be present to hear the members of Hockey Canada defend themselves against complaints, allegations and accusations that Rob and my team, Gymnasts for Change, and I know all too well. We wanted to hear what they had to say first-hand, and we heard the same things from that group that I have heard from leaders in gymnastics for the last six years as a board member on two boards.

They were evasive. They were not transparent. Even when they were compelled to testify and hand over documents, they resisted.

That is what we fear. That's why a culture review of any sort—such as the one that Gymnastics Canada is currently paying for with the McLaren Group or, frankly, the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner—is not going to suffice. They agree that a culture review is not going to suffice because we can't hope that the NSOs, the national sports organizations, are going to voluntarily hand over all their dirty secrets to us.

Mr. Rob Koehler: I think what I've learned and what we've learned with the athletes from the 12 sports is evident. We have survivors with us today. They're not here from the sport of gymnastics because they want to be.

Sport has not been able to self-regulate, and it almost appears that they're more interested in protecting the brand than exposing the truth. We heard in the summer that Sport Canada failed in its duties. We've seen sport structures continue to be established to address human rights issues.

Sport can't self-regulate. No other industry in Canada or globally has the ability to regulate itself. I think what we've learned is that it needs to be taken away.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Koehler, Ms. Shore and Ms. Cline, you brought up the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner, the OSIC, which is the organization the minister, Ms. St-Onge, created.

Do athletes have confidence in the OSIC? If so, can you tell us why?

[*English*]

Ms. Amelia Cline: I don't believe athletes trust this system that has been set up. There are a number of reasons for that. It is still very deeply embedded within the sports system, which, as you've been hearing this morning, athletes do not trust.

A good example is that the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner is overseen by the SDRCC, the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada. On the SDRCC board, appointed earlier this year, is a person who also sat on the board of Gymnastics Canada. When he was initially appointed to the SDRCC board, he in fact was still an active board member of Gymnastics Canada. That is the body that oversees the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner. How does any gymnast have any trust in an office that is being overseen by the very people who would need to be investigated?

There are a number of different ways in which we are concerned that this office is not equipped to investigate these matters. There's no subpoena power, as Kim was alluding to. There's no ability to compel these NSOs to participate in any sort of review. There's no ability to enforce any recommendations that come out of a report from the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner.

We understand that the office is working hard to try to shore up some of those gaps, but at the moment it is not equipped to investigate the types of abuses we are seeing come forward.

The Chair: Andréanne, your time is up. I'll make sure, though, that we get around to you one more time. Your time is up.

Okay, Leah, you have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

I just want to start by thanking all of the witnesses today for coming forward with quite raw truths.

Madame Shore, I was very touched when you spoke about the fact that when you came forward to disclose abuse, people didn't believe you. I want to acknowledge how violent that is and how re-traumatizing that is. I want—I'm sorry, I'm emotional—to say that I hope you, all of you, have some justice here and that people will hear you and acknowledge your truth.

I just wanted to start off with that, and just to say that I absolutely agree with the witnesses that this is an absolute human rights crisis, and certainly a failure to uphold the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically, for example article 19, which states:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

I was really struck by one of the things that you spoke about, Ms. Cline, which is the fact that there is no requirement for coaches to have to take an abuse registry check. To have an abuse registry check is something that is required of all teachers—I was a teacher—and even for early childhood educators. I was also an early childhood educator.

Do you think changing the regulations to make that a requirement would make a difference in the protection of children?

• (1145)

Ms. Amelia Cline: I certainly do think that would be a very important change. I think what we have seen is, again, sport being able to operate outside of many of the other norms that other pro-

fessions already adhere to. It's never made a lot of sense to me that it has been an exception, given how vulnerable child athletes are.

I think developing a nationwide child abuse registry for coaches would certainly have an impact.

Ms. Kim Shore: I would like to add that the background check system in Canada is woefully inadequate. That is a very big part of this problem. It is almost impossible for employers, gymnastics clubs, soccer clubs, etc. to do adequate background checks on their potential hires.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I would agree with you, Ms. Shore, particularly with the fact that it seems as though coaches who have committed abuses are kept protected, and so their behaviour would never make it to a registry. That makes perfect sense to me.

Mr. Koehler, you said that sport cannot regulate itself, and that's clear to me, so I have a couple of questions.

One, who is currently appointing members to the regulatory board? Who is the one who appoints?

Two, what would an alternative look like for oversight? Who would appoint and what would the third party investigation look like?

Who currently appoints? What would the alternative would look like? What would a third party investigation look like?

Mr. Rob Koehler: Madam Chair, thank you for the question.

What we're seeing in sport and what we're seeing as the solution in sport now is to move sport people around into different positions. Having worked internationally and in Canada, I know personally that if I'm friends with someone, it's a lot harder for me to call them out. I have gotten past that now in my job, but it's a lot harder. There is an internal network of everybody knowing each other and everybody trying to protect each other. That's why you have to remove that from sport.

I use the example of anti-doping. I spent 20 years at the World Anti-Doping Agency. As a result of the Dubin inquiry, drug testing was taken away from sporting organizations. It's independent now. We have to do the same thing for abuse in sport.

The second thing is that if you listen to any survivor who has come forward, they are alone. They have no guidance and no support. What we would advocate is a touchpoint so an athlete can come somewhere to get the support, and they will have the guidance and they will make those people doing the investigations accountable.

An independent investigation, I think, could replicate what we have seen with the Dubin inquiry. It needs to be done by non-sport people. It needs to be judicial and it needs to make sure that everybody has the right to tell their story.

The final thing is that those people who were abusers or enablers need to be held accountable. I think that's crucially important.

• (1150)

The Chair: That's awesome. Thank you so much.

I'm messing with the time, of course. What I am going to do is four minutes for the CPC, four minutes for the Liberals, two minutes for the Bloc and for the NDP, and then we will finish up with two minutes for the Conservatives and two minutes for the Liberals. That will end the panels for today.

I'm going to now pass it over for four minutes to Dominique Vien.

Dominique, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to each and everyone of you for being here this morning. Your input is very enlightening and will inform the work we do.

It's very hard to listen to your stories. I have a multitude of questions, but not enough time to ask them all.

We are in the #MeToo era, and victims are speaking out. Athletes also want the truth to come out.

My sense is that, day to day, coaches tend to be the ones causing problems for the athletes. You said earlier that it was hard to screen coaches or that it wasn't done properly. I was astounded to hear that background or criminal record checks weren't done more often. These are individuals who work with vulnerable populations. In Quebec, people who work with the elderly in private seniors' homes are screened extensively.

As we speak, what is the process for hiring a coach?

The question is for all three witnesses.

[*English*]

Ms. Kim Shore: I'll start by saying that the legal system has let down sport as well. The legal system has particularly let gymnastics down. Even recently, we have had multiple coaches let off, stays of proceedings and acquittals, and that's if we can get enough evidence and enough brave witnesses to come forward to even take a complaint all the way through the legal process, and that's about one out of a thousand. If the legal system lets us down, then that person doesn't have a criminal record to be checked with the background check.

What we also are dealing with are hundreds of coaches who are indoctrinated with the mentality that to produce an athlete, you must use harsh techniques, you must shame them, you must guilt them and you must physically manipulate their bodies into positions, despite the pain or injury it causes. There's no registry for that, and there are no criminal charges for that. Children can be brutalized.

My colleague Amelia was overstretched in splits with her leg above her head by her male coach, who snapped her hamstring off her pelvis, and it took a piece of bone with it. There's no registry for that. We don't protect our children beyond the family. If a parent puts a cigarette burn on a child, they'll be called to task, but a coach who physically damages a child is not held to the same account.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to pass it over to Sonia Sidhu. Sonia, here are your four minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses and survivors for being with us, and thank you for your bravery. We need to work together on this.

My first question is this: How can we encourage sport organizations to meet higher standards for the government's accountability for safe sport, and how can we teach coaches about the gender-based gap?

Ms. Amelia Cline: I think there are a number of different mechanisms that can be put in place to fix some of these problems.

First, I think a key element in what we're seeing is that there has been very little accountability for these coaches who have acted abusively. As my colleague was saying, many of these emotionally and physically abusive coaches are never brought to account, and that's because, first of all, the criminal system will generally not charge them, even though what my colleague described was, in fact, assault. The criminal system will not charge it, and the complaint system that exists within Gymnastics Canada and within these provincial sport bodies is so retraumatizing and so arduous for complainants to go through that many burn out before there's ever a result.

In my case, when I tried to bring my abuse forward in 2021, Gymnastics Canada hired a case manager who told me to my face that I needed to manage my expectations about the outcome, that even though my alleged abuse was incredibly severe, he had seen enough of these investigations to know that I could not expect my coaches to be banned from the sport, and in fact that I could probably not expect them to receive a lengthy suspension.

That is exactly what the problem is: Coaches are allowed to do this with no expectation that they're going to ever be held to account by the organization itself.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

You gave the example of the U.K. discipline. Do you think any other country is doing something different?

Ms. Amelia Cline: I believe that there are several countries that are trying. This is somewhat like trying to move a mountain. It requires a lot of legislative and policy change, but the U.K. is trying, and Australia is also trying. Switzerland came out with a very robust report about their gymnastics and sports system.

There is also a very good example out of Norway in terms of how they deliver sport in general, not just gymnastics. They have less of an emphasis on early competition, early specialization, and instead on the joy of sport and the value of sport for movement.

I think that's an entire culture shift that we need to see here in Canada. We need to view sport not as the be-all and end-all for achieving a medal or to achieve Olympic greatness. It should be something that's considered a lifelong love and something that people can do all the way through to adulthood. That is the type of cultural shift that will, I think, inform and change policy in a profound way.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'll now pass it over for two minutes to Andréanne.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I again want to thank the witnesses for making the time to meet with the committee today.

Ms. Cline and Ms. Shore, in light of the rampant abuse of very young athletes in your sport, you called on the Minister of Sport to change the toxic culture in sport.

What are you expecting from the minister and from us, as federal elected representatives? How can we be part of the solution? What can we do to help you change the toxic culture?

• (1200)

[*English*]

Ms. Kim Shore: Thank you, Madam Chair, for that important question.

What we expect is what we hope for, and that is that our call for a judicial inquiry will be heard and acted upon. If I'm very honest, Gymnasts for Change has received a lot of attention, both from government and MPs as well as from the media. We feel we have been heard, but now it's time for action.

Ms. Amelia Cline: I would agree with that.

I would also add that we are hoping for accountability. What the survivors have not seen to date is any sort of accountability for the current leadership at Gymnastics Canada, which has been implicated recently in essentially covering up abuse. We're hoping that this committee can use its power to hold those individuals to account as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Koehler, you also called on the minister to do something, along with Gymnasts for Change Canada.

What do you expect from us, as elected representatives? What do you expect from this study?

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Koehler: I would support the call that the gymnasts have made and I would support the call from the 12 separate sport athletes who have spoken to us about their abuse, and that is to implement immediately a third party independent judicial investigation to, one, understand the abuse that's happened across this coun-

try and, two, to act on it, and, as Kim and Amelia have said, to make those accountable for abuse named and removed from sport.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Rob.

We're now going to pass it over for two minutes to Leah.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

You've shared many stories today that have had lasting impacts on your spirit and the spirit of your child. You then spoke about a failure to uphold human rights, particularly the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, something that we are obliged to do as members—to uphold human rights—especially the international conventions we've signed on to, including article 39, which states:

...shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.

From your perspective, what would that look like?

Ms. Kim Shore: You're addressing our spirit. I think I speak on behalf of at least the over 600 gymnasts who have signed our open letter: Our spirits have been broken.

I can't believe that the environment I endured when I was 13 years old and thought might have changed enough, with our society evolving, that it would be safe to put my child in the sport I loved, that I found beautiful and that was a part of my soul and became a part of her soul as well.... I never expected that what had been perpetuated when I was a child would in fact be worse now, 35 years later.

Those things that you read in the convention don't apply in Canada. I have not seen them at play in a gym in Canada in gymnastics. I don't see that in operation at all. Whatever we need to do to do that, to get that as a national standard, I'm in favour of.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to do our last two rounds. We're going to have Michelle for two minutes and then we're going to go over to Emmanuella for two minutes online.

Go ahead, Michelle.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Absolutely, two minutes will never do justice to what we need to do today.

I want to thank you. This is very powerful, and you inspire us. We're all very emotional. Children's welfare is our future.

Yesterday was National Child Day. It's powerful when you read that we rank lowest in child survival, including teen suicide and child mortality and health, including immunization and unhealthy weights and children's overall life satisfaction. This has a lot to do with it. This is definitely interconnected.

Amelia, I have so much to say, but I know you have testimony that you didn't get to give. I would like to give the floor to you to give it.

• (1205)

Ms. Amelia Cline: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

Many of my comments that I was initially going to give have been echoed in what my colleagues have said. However, what I would like to impress upon this committee is that while it's vital that survivors are heard, and we so appreciate this opportunity today, we could sit here for hours telling you stories that would break your hearts and break them over and over and over again, but that would be a useless exercise unless there is action at the end of it.

That is what survivors want to see, and that is what we have not seen yet. People need to be held to account.

As I was saying about the current leadership of Gymnastics Canada, despite all of the media attention and despite the fact that the CEO has been implicated in at least two situations in which abusive coaches were promoted under his watch, he still sits in his seat. The harassment officer that I referenced earlier is still in her seat. There has been no accountability yet, and that is really what we are searching for, because so many of us have been denied justice.

That is why we're here today. We hope this committee will do that for us.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to pass it on to Emmanuella for two minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking all of the witnesses for their bravery in coming today to share their experiences with us and to try to make sport better in Canada for the kids who are joining teams and getting involved.

I have a teaching background. I played sports myself, but not at the professional level in any way. I've coached.

I think it's not necessarily Gymnastics Canada alone, but something that's a problem across the board. Any time a child is away from their parents and is with an adult who is not related to them, unfortunately, more precautions need to be taken.

Kids are some of the main victims of sexual abuse, and we don't talk about these things with our kids. We don't talk about it in schools. We don't talk about it in teams.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are on what role can be played in protecting kids who are in sports, teaching them and having them know what is appropriate and what is not appropriate, and who they can go to. For example, if someone touches you in this

way, you go to the police. What are your thoughts on that, going forward?

I've spoken to Minister St. Onge. I understand what your main ask is. Because you've mentioned it several times, I'm focusing on something else. The minister will be speaking to her provincial counterparts. I'm wondering if there are any comments you have on the area I just discussed.

Ms. Amelia Cline: I think it's vitally important to be having conversations with children very early on about bodily autonomy in particular. This is something that I've discussed with many survivors. As gymnasts, we never understood that we had bodily autonomy. This played into not just sexual abuse but the physical violence that was done to us as well.

We did not realize that we could say "no". We didn't know that an adult manipulating us to the point of our screaming in pain was not appropriate, because we trusted that our coaches knew what was best for us. That was part of the grooming process. I think part of what then contributes to sexual abuse as well is that once you have been groomed to the point where a coach can do anything to your body at any time, of course it leads to their being able to sexually abuse children too.

I think those conversations, that education and that breaking down of the natural power imbalance that exists there are vitally important.

• (1210)

The Chair: Wonderful.

On behalf of the committee, I would really like to thank Amelia, Kim and Rob for coming and bringing forward their stories. As we indicated, this is going to be a very difficult study. If you need any supports, please contact the clerk. We are here for you. We recognize that today is just the beginning of this journey with us.

Thank you so much.

We're going to suspend just for seconds here, because we're going to get started with a new panel immediately.

• (1210)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Chair: I'm calling this meeting back to order.

We'll be starting with our second panel. Everybody is online with us, I believe.

On our second panel today, we have, as an individual, Teresa Fowler, assistant professor, Concordia University of Edmonton. We also have Shannon Moore, assistant professor, faculty of education, University of Manitoba. We have Allison Sandmeyer-Graves, chief executive officer, Canadian Women and Sport. From Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario, we have Belle Bailey, assistant, sport program director, and Christina Ruddy, director and co-ordinator, governmental relations and national strategy, both of whom are in the room today.

We're going to provide five minutes for opening statements to each group. As you know, we're starting a little late, so I'm going to try keep everything rolling today.

I'm going to pass it over to Teresa and Shannon.

Teresa and Shannon, if you're sharing your time, you have five minutes.

Dr. Shannon Moore (Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, As an Individual): Greetings.

My name is Shannon Moore. I am an assistant professor in the faculty of education at the University of Manitoba. I'll be sharing my time today with one of my co-researchers.

Dr. Teresa Fowler (Assistant Professor, Concordia University of Edmonton, As an Individual): Hi. I'm Teresa Fowler. As mentioned, I'm an assistant professor at the faculty of education at Concordia University of Edmonton.

We'd like to thank the chair and committee for inviting us here today.

Today we are going to share a few findings from a study we conducted in 2021 with 21 elite-level male ice hockey players about hypermasculinity and hockey. Our findings also echo testimony that has been presented already at this committee, specifically regarding Mr. Koehler's testimony regarding the silence of athletes, the lack of accountability, and that we need to believe and protect athletes; and also with Ms. Shore's testimony that spoke to a lack of diversity in sports and that adults who are in protective roles need to protect athletes, not the brand.

In Canada, men's ice hockey has been connected to our national identity. Researchers have made this connection due to enrolments, media attention and funding. This connection between nationalism and men's ice hockey is reinforced through sports being under the portfolio of the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Prioritizing men's ice hockey as heritage upholds a culture that is white, cis, straight and male-dominated. This culture is audaciously grounded in the mentality that winning at all costs comes at the expense of women's right to safety as well as men's physical and mental health.

While participants in our study identified as being resistant to this culture, they overwhelmingly spoke of their inability to push against it. One participant, for example, shared with us a moment from the locker room and the policing tactics that breed conformity. The coach "came into the room and like went single file and basically told every player how bad they were and what they did was bad, and at the end of his speech, he said that he was going to go hang himself in his shower and it was our fault. At 12 years old".

As Canadians, we need to question the national status of men's ice hockey and the privilege granted to those who play, especially when this results in the normalization of sexual assault and subsequent cover-ups. In our study, when asked directly, the participants acknowledged that sexism is pervasive within hockey culture; however, they often did not offer specific examples or engage with this concept in any meaningful way.

With that said, the participants shared stories throughout their interview that we coded as sexism and misogyny. The participants told stories of women and girls being used for props and for points

at team events. One participant shared that they had a coach do body shots off a 15-year-old girl at a rookie party. To these players, these were just hockey stories shared casually throughout the interviews. This superficial engagement with sexism in our data and in the larger culture may reveal why sexual assaults continue to happen, why cover-ups continue that centre on saving the team and the men involved rather than the victims, and why substantive change is elusive.

● (1215)

Dr. Shannon Moore: The consensus among researchers is that ice hockey socializes young boys and men into specific masculine ideals. Hockey masculinity involves aggression, dominance, stoicism and bravado. As players progress in the game to elite levels, these behaviours are expected, reinforced and rewarded. Yet, as the participants in our study made clear, these expectations were harmful to their physical and mental health. When people suggest that researchers do not understand hockey culture and are villainizing hockey over other sports, they ignore the voices of athletes like those in our study.

While reading through the data, we were struck by the participants' expressions of precarity. These elite-level players felt as though they were walking on eggshells. They were fearful of the consequences of any little mistake. The participants expressed insecurities about their position on the team and stated that they were lucky to be on the team, had to work very hard to stay or felt they couldn't take time for injuries. They felt that they needed to sacrifice their bodies for the team, which they justified because, one, they were part of a national sport, something bigger than themselves, and, two, there was the hope of making it.

Everything about the game is about the next steps, and the hope of mobility is used to keep people in line. As one participant stated, "If you're not going to do exactly what we're asking, if you're not going to give up everything you have, if you're not going to stand up for your team, then you're going to show up one day and your equipment is going to be in a garbage bag in a shopping cart out back. That's how they cut people."

Participants also spoke of being traded as teenagers, one referring to himself as a "suitcase". Others stated outright that their coaches did not care about them as people and saw them only as "money". They referred to hockey as a cutthroat industry and they knew that they were the product.

The sense of precarity that results from a process of commodification may help us understand, but does not excuse, how hockey players do not overtly or actively resist elements of the culture, even those that are damaging to their own mental health.

In the wake of the Hockey Canada allegations, we are witnessing a superficial response to a systemic issue. It sees that as long as the game promotes nationalism and maintains its national status, particular aspects of the culture will be promoted, ignored or excused. These cultural aspects will continue to harm the victims of the culture, who are assaulted, objectified, excluded and discarded in the name of winning at all costs.

Thank you for your time.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to pass it over to Canadian Women and Sport.

Allison Sandmeyer-Graves, you have the floor now for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Allison Sandmeyer-Graves (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Women and Sport): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

[*English*]

My name is Allison Sandmeyer. I am the chief executive officer of Canadian Women and Sport. My pronouns are she/her.

I'm joining you today from the traditional territories of the peoples of the Treaty 7 region in southern Alberta. The city of Calgary is also the homeland of the historic northwest Métis and of the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.

Before I begin, I want to express my deep respect and gratitude to the survivors of maltreatment in sport. We stand with you in seeking change.

We are motivated in our work at Canadian Women and Sport by our belief that safe, equitable and inclusive sport is a powerful vehicle to advance opportunities and equity for women in every area of society. I am here today with the goal of ensuring that sport lives up to this promise.

Maltreatment in sport is global and universal, as we heard Rob Koehler share, but women and girls are a particularly vulnerable group. Even more so are women and girls who experience overlapping systems of oppression, such as indigenous girls, transgender girls and girls with disabilities.

How did we get here? Despite progress, research and experience confirm that sport remains a male-dominated space in which patriarchy, misogyny and hegemonic masculinity are institutionalized and expressed culturally at every level of sport. Women and girls are systematically devalued, creating conditions that put them at risk of harm due to maltreatment or gender-based violence. This is normalized.

As we just heard, there is no doubt that this negatively impacts men and boys as well.

We recognize that many women have also internalized patriarchy and misogyny and that women can and do perpetuate gender inequity and cause harm themselves. This is a reality that must be accounted for in developing solutions.

Recent examples of these phenomena in the news include unchecked toxic masculinity, normalizing gender-based violence by male athletes against young women; gender inequity in the form of inadequate oversight and accountability, exposing young women athletes to unfettered abuse by coaches; and misogyny in coaching practices, expressed as the body shaming and weight policing of young girls. That's to name but a few.

We need a sports system that is values-based, that prioritizes the dignity, rights and well-being of participants above all else, reflected in how sport is designed, measured and funded. We need a sports system that reflects the needs and interests of women, girls and other under-represented groups by embedding their voices and perspectives in every aspect, from governance and strategy to program delivery. We need a sports system that is diverse, equitable and inclusive at its core.

Safety in sport is inextricably tied to the decades-long fight for women to be valued, respected and treated fairly in sport and beyond. Without gender equity, sport will not be a safe space for women and girls. Without safety, full inclusion for women and girls is impossible.

We firmly support the need for a multitude of safeguarding measures to mitigate harm by anyone in sport. As part of this, we must act with urgency to address gender inequity. This must be done with an intersectional focus.

Progress is undoubtedly happening, but it is taking too long and it is inconsistently realized across the sports system. The recent announcement of \$25.3 million in renewed federal funding for gender equity in sport is vitally important. However, it is clear from the testimony today that further measures are needed to accelerate progress. The goal must be structural and cultural transformation. Anything less will be insufficient.

To that end, our recommendations are the following.

First—echoing the other witnesses—we must seize on the all-party concern about abuse in sport to initiate a national judicial inquiry by the Government of Canada into maltreatment at all levels of sport to gain a full systemic view of the challenges and to design appropriate solutions. Again, an intersectional gender lens must be applied to this process, and as part of the inquiry, possible regulatory systems for sport should be explored.

In the meantime, we must move urgently to use the full force of the federal government as a major investor in sport to effect change. This includes imposing minimum standards for gender equity, diversity, inclusion and safeguarding for any organization receiving sport funding. This should not be limited to the core funding frameworks alone. Funding for high performance from Own the Podium, as well as for events hosting, infrastructure, projects and so forth, should all be contingent on groups' meeting these standards for values-based sports.

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Finally, I will pass it over to Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario.

Belle and Christina, if you could share your time for the next five minutes, I will pass the floor to you.

Ms. Belle Bailey (Assistant, Sport Program Development, Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario): [*Witness spoke in Anishinaabemowin as follows:*]

Kwey, Belle Bailey nid-ijinikáz. Pikwakanagan nid-ondjibà. Makwà ashidj mikinàk nidòdem.

[*English*]

My name is Belle Bailey. I'm an Algonquin from the Pikwakanagan First Nation, and I have been passionate about sport my whole life.

In 2017, I had the honour to be chosen to represent Team Ontario at the North American Indigenous Games as an athlete. In 2020, I was hired by Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario to help administer many aspects of the same provincial sports body. It is a role I am still in today and enjoy very much.

In 2023, I will be coaching the Ontario badminton team as we travel to Nova Scotia next summer to compete at the North American Indigenous Games once again.

I am here to speak to you today on behalf of Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario, and, for the remainder of this speech, I will be referring to the organization by its acronym, ISWO.

ISWO is the designated provincial aboriginal sport body for Ontario, serving all indigenous peoples and communities across the province, including first nation, Inuit and Métis living on and off reserve in rural and urban settings.

Our organization develops opportunities for participation in sport and cultural activities that promote wellness and positive lifestyles. We have implemented a women and girls program that is intended to increase opportunities for them to participate in sport, recreation and physical activity while empowering them through increased confidence, capacity and knowledge.

Recently, we developed a women and girls sport fund and organized the first-ever Sharing our Strength women and girls conference.

We would like to put forward the following observations.

First is that gender equality in sport in our country is grossly imbalanced. It is common knowledge that girls' sport participation rates decrease as they enter adolescence, leading to a dropout rate of one in three girls leaving sport by their teens. By ages 19 to 24, that number is reduced to a 34% participation rate. For indigenous women and girls, this disparity is even worse, with only a 24% participation rate starting in their teenage years.

Our second observation is that Canadian sports media don't provide proper representation of women athletes who could act as role models for youth. Studies show the 92.6% of content is solely related to men's sport coverage; however, additional research shows that Canadians want to watch women's sport content. The issue is that they can't find a place to watch it. As you can imagine, similar information on the representation of indigenous people in the sports media is almost non-existent. Representation matters.

Our third observation is that conscious and unconscious gender bias plays a huge role in all aspects of sport. Women's abilities and skills are systematically underestimated. This perceived inequality is a barrier to sport for women and girls. Men are viewed with the assumption that they are competent in sport. Women must first prove themselves and then fight every day to show that they are competent. Once the element of racial bias is added regarding indigenous people to the bias that already exists for women, one can easily see the uphill battle that must be fought.

Last is our fourth observation: This conversation leads directly to pay equity, as there is a correlation between lower wages being caused by the lack of media coverage and under-representation in leadership roles. While Canada has made strides in this regard, much more work is needed.

ISWO would like to make the following recommendations.

The first is to increase sports programming targeted specifically to women and girls that creates safe spaces for them to pursue physical activity and wellness opportunities. This will reduce psychosocial barriers to recreation, health and wellness. These opportunities can put women and girls on the sport pathway to participating in sport for life.

Our second recommendation is to showcase and celebrate more female athletes as a whole. This also includes showcasing more indigenous women and girls succeeding in sport. By recognizing and acknowledging athletic excellence and sharing the stories of success, we can continue to inspire and provide role models for younger athletes to look up to. As previously stated, representation matters. What you cannot see, you cannot become.

The third recommendation is that the Government of Canada's commitment to achieving gender equity in sport at all levels by 2035, in our opinion, is much too late. Recent surveys have shown that one in four girls aren't committed to returning to their pre-pandemic sports at a time when sport may be more important than ever. Let's move this timeline forward.

Last, number four is to increase support for building sport pathways and career pathways for women to increase the number of female athletes, certified coaches, managers and personal trainers, who in turn can serve as role models for younger athletes.

• (1230)

In closing, my name is Belle Bailey. I'm a proud Algonquin woman from the Pikwakanagan First Nation and I am here today representing Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario. We will continue to advocate for women and girls in sports and hope the committee will consider our recommendation seriously.

Madam Chair, we would like to express our gratitude to the committee for this opportunity to be heard. Thank you. *Meegwetich*.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to let everybody know at 12:30 that there are supposed to be bells for the one o'clock vote. At that time, I will have to take a vote on whether or not we'll continue to go at that time, so I'm letting everybody know that there's going to be choice for us. I'm going to say we should probably continue since we have all of these great people in the room, but I'm going to get started before the bells.

We will start with six minutes for Michelle Ferreri.

Go ahead, Michelle.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you again to all of our witnesses for being here today. I really appreciate your time. I know the whole committee does, those virtually and in person.

Ms. Fowler, if I may start with you, I had the opportunity to do some interviewing on the heritage committee with Hockey Canada. At that time, one of the witnesses, Mr. Smith, referred to the hockey players—it's almost subconscious, in a way—as though they were commodities.

I couldn't help but think that if we are treating our children or our players or our athletes like commodities, how will they then treat others? I am curious about what your thoughts on that are in terms of sport overall.

Dr. Teresa Fowler: Thank you for that big question. I'm sorry; the back-flow right away is putting me off a bit.

Again, our study is grounded in hockey culture. That's not to take away from the experiences that other folks have shared, but what we see in our work is exactly what you're talking about. It's how these players are commodified for the winning aspect and how that then empowers them to treat others.

It doesn't. Men in our study talked about wanting to speak up and speak out; however, nobody in the dressing room was, so therefore you just go along with what the coach says. When the coach is

telling you to win at all costs, those costs, unfortunately, come at the expense of women and girls, as we have learned this summer.

I think it's also important here to mention, and then I'll turn it over to Shannon so she can add, that researchers have been doing this work for decades. These stories are not new for researchers and victims. People have not been listening, so Hockey Canada, while it is certainly a tragic event, also offers us an opportunity, as others have said, to really shift the culture of sport.

I'll turn it over to Shannon.

Dr. Shannon Moore: Thank you very much. I appreciate that question about commodification, because it was a huge theme in our research. The participants spoke of how when they were 15—all of our participants were over 18—they felt the sport was a job as early as 13 and 14 years of age and how there was no joy in the game for them anymore. I know somebody referenced the notion of joy earlier. They did not speak about the sound of their skates on the ice, camaraderie, having fun. They spoke about it as the steps to get to their next level of the sport. We felt that this made them feel constantly precarious, as I mentioned, and that precarity was one of the reasons that they didn't speak out.

We could speak to many other reasons that we think our participants did not speak out about assaults that they witnessed or sexism that they witnessed, but commodification was certainly a huge theme that reduced people in speaking out.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much for that.

I know we've heard some really powerful testimony and some great ideas in terms of legislation. I think one of the pieces that I would love to see further conversation on—and perhaps you have the research—is parents' role in that commodification, of buying in to the coach's idea that your child is directly linked to their worth in the game. There is a lot of responsibility on parents in this conversation, in that they too are siding with the coach at the expense of the child.

I'm curious about your thoughts on that and what we can do as elected officials to implement policies to help educate parents better so that they're not pushing their agenda onto their child.

• (1235)

Dr. Teresa Fowler: Thank you for that. That is a good point. Again I'll turn it over to Shannon, because everybody is implicated in this culture—not only parents but fans and media, as was mentioned before, with respect to the amount of broadcast time for men's sports over women's sports. All of us are complicit in that.

If you ask what the government can do, we need to start by looking at where sport falls within the portfolio of the federal government. As we mentioned, it falls under Canadian Heritage. If sport fell under health, imagine what a difference that lens might make with respect to how we approach sports.

I'll pass it over to Shannon.

Dr. Shannon Moore: Thank you.

I think it's a lack of education in general. Certainly I am housed in the faculty of education, but one element that came out of our study is that there's a general lack of education for coaches and players for understanding healthy masculinity and the ways in which they potentially commodify other people in their lives.

Then, obviously, there is education for parents. There is just a complete lack of education around gender at all. Certainly they are constantly schooled in gender, but they do not discuss gender in overt ways.

We think that the locker room culture was a huge issue with this. It's a space in which the young men and boys do not have a coach. There's a lot of discussion in the locker rooms and there's the idea that you have to keep things in the locker rooms.

I would ask parents about how children are being "adultified" in this process of commodification. You have young children at 12 and 13 years of age never getting a season off. It's not that they go play baseball in the summer; they're now going to hockey camps because they need to get ready for the next steps. I would be asking parents how they are playing into the commodification and the adultification of their child.

Often we think we don't need to talk to men and boys in hockey because they're a privileged group of people. As Teresa's other research is showing us, they need to be talking about their experiences with masculinity in the process of being made into a gender through hockey.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'm going to interrupt now because the bells are ringing. I'm looking for unanimous consent to carry on with the testimony.

Fantastic. Seeing that consent, we'll carry on.

Jenna Sudds, you have six minutes.

Ms. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today and for the very important work that you are doing.

I'd like to start with a very basic question. I will direct that to Ms. Sandmeyer-Graves from Canadian Women and Sport.

First of all, I'll acknowledge that data shows that typically half as many women participate in sport as men. I'm wondering if you can share with us what factors you see in your work that help explain why that is.

Ms. Allison Sandmeyer-Graves: Thank you for the question.

Yes, it's true that women and girls participate at far lower rates than men and boys. As referenced, we have research that shows that during adolescence—those teenage years—girls who are play-

ing drop out at a rate of one in three from sport, while boys stay in sport and drop out at a rate of one in 10.

The question as I understand it is, what's going on? At the end of the day, it's complex and multi-faceted. The girls tell us that the most important factors for them are things that come up around access to sport. Girls still don't have the same number of opportunities and ease of access to play, for sure, but they also talk about quality of sport.

Sport has been designed by men for boys and men historically, so all efforts to include girls and women in sport are remedial. It's retrofitting. It's "bolting on", if you will. It varies from sport to sport, but sport is still largely led by men. Even sports dominated in participation by women have largely male coaches. If you look at sports like ringette and others, you see that they're really defined by men. They are designed and delivered through a male world view, and girls are saying that it's not working for them. They don't feel like it was designed with their needs and interests in mind. It stops being effective for them.

They also talk about things like safety. They talk about bullying. They talk about real struggles with body confidence and body image. In sport, your body is on display, and people are constantly interacting with it.

It's a multitude of factors, but what we ultimately have girls saying is that this is their discretionary time, their out-of-school time and their away-from-other-friends time, and sport ultimately isn't serving them.

Of course, safety is very much part of that. When you talk to girls about safety and when we talk about maltreatment broadly, it's not just about safety from sexual abuse and sexual harassment; it's psychological safety and emotional safety. It's safety among their peers. It's safety with the adults in the room. Looking at that holistically is really important when we start to think about solutions.

● (1240)

Ms. Jenna Sudds: That's incredible. Thank you very much. It's very apparent we have lots of work still to do.

I'd like to direct my next question to Ms. Bailey, who is here in the room.

You shared recommendations with us today. I think I counted three, the last one being that the government commit to achieving gender equity in sport. I'd love to give you the floor for you to talk a bit more about what that looks like to you and to expand upon that recommendation.

Ms. Belle Bailey: I'm sorry. Could you repeat that last one?

Ms. Jenna Sudds: I believe the third recommendation that you listed was around the government committing to achieve gender equality in sport. If you'd like to, could you expand upon what you think that should look like and what that means to you?

That's not to put you on the spot. If I'm putting you on the spot, I can move on.

Ms. Christina Ruddy (Director and Coordinator, Government Relations, National Strategy, Indigenous Sport and Wellness Ontario): Would you like me to go ahead?

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Christina Ruddy: When we talk about gender equality in sport, we're not looking at just the big picture of what we see on TV and stuff like that. It's also about grassroots equal opportunity. It's about the same opportunities for boys, girls and LGBTQIA2+. It's that they have the opportunity to even try for sport.

When we come from an indigenous perspective, we're also looking at the multiple barriers for indigenous people in sport, including poverty and distance, and we have to acknowledge the Far North. Most of those opportunities come to boys and men, not to women. We need to look at more investments in those who are further away from sports in their lives, who are placed further away by poverty, by nutrition and by all those basic things that are common in mainstream populations but not when it comes to indigenous peoples.

When we talk about gender equality, we're looking at a bigger picture: equal opportunity for boys, girls and all the different communities around that and what it could look like in the future. That could be absolutely beautiful, right? We recently attended the national aboriginal hockey championships. There is equal representation there between men and women. That's from our own community putting those youth forward to have those opportunities, but it takes the whole community and a national effort to do it.

We get equality in those places, but we don't get it at the grassroots level. That's where we need to look deeper: at the grassroots at home in our backyards and also targeting both women and girls.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to turn it over to Andréanne Larouche.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, want to thank the witnesses, here, in the room, and online, for their participation. It is becoming quite clear just how desperately needed this study is.

My first question is for Ms. Fowler.

When I sat on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, in the summer, I was deeply concerned. I believe you were one of the researchers who signed a letter that was received as part of the committee's study.

I see Ms. Moore nodding her head as well. Feel free to jump in, if you have something to add.

Why did you write the letter? What about the Hockey Canada situation this summer made you feel the need to write the letter?

• (1245)

[*English*]

Dr. Teresa Fowler: We decided that Shannon was going to go first, but you asked me directly, so I'll go.

We signed the letter as researchers who have been doing this work. As I mentioned, researchers have been doing this work for some of both decades, although not necessarily me. It was important for us to sign a letter to say, "Hey, we're here." We've been talking about this for a long period of time. Our colleagues have been sounding this alarm for a long period of time.

It's the question that brings us all here. If people have been sounding the alarm in men's sport, doesn't it make sense then that nobody is listening when women are sounding the alarm in other sports?

I'll turn it over to Shannon.

Dr. Shannon Moore: Thank you.

Thank you for going first again. It gives me a little time to collect my thoughts, so thank you for that.

I think we signed on to the letter because we do not see systemic changes. We see an attempt to brand the changes that are needed in sport and hockey with slogans, but there isn't a real attempt to listen to what researchers have been saying.

Although our third co-researcher was an elite-level male hockey player himself, people consistently try to find ways to undermine what we are saying, either because we are female athletes and parents or because our co-researcher, Dr. Tim Skuce, is no longer an elite-level player. Now ageism is used to discount what he is saying.

We signed on to the letter for exactly the reasons Dr. Fowler gave: It's because we think that people need to actually listen to researchers who are speaking directly to athletes who are afraid to speak in other contexts and listen to that research and actually do something about it, rather than using these superficial "silver bullet" attempts.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You said the solutions were known. You listed some of them in your opening statement and your first few answers.

Ms. Moore and Ms. Fowler, recap for us, if you would, what we need to take away from your recommendations.

[*English*]

Dr. Shannon Moore: I think we need to recognize that these issues are systemic and work to change the culture rather than having discussions centre on "bad apples". What has happened thus far is that people have been isolated and deemed not to represent the culture, and so the idea is that we will just cut them out.

We need to have discussions and workshops about sexual violence, consent and healthy relationships as part of team training. We need to make space for discussion about the brand of masculinity that's expected and promoted and rewarded in hockey culture. It is damaging not only to the people in the lives of these men and boys but also to the men themselves.

I will pass it over to Dr. Fowler to see if she has anything else to add to our recommendations.

Dr. Teresa Fowler: Yes. We actually mentioned, in the piece we wrote for The Conversation Canada, that we really need to—and that's what this committee is doing, which we're thankful for—in-terrogate these institutional practices that reward this particular brand of masculinity, and we need to consider all of the hierarchies that are contributing to this practice and go beyond the superficial.

As Shannon mentioned, the rebranding does nothing to change a culture. It just puts more lipstick on top of it.

What folks in positions of power in these organizations need to do is really reflect on how they respond to these incidents. Don't just brush athletes aside. Don't tell them to come back after the game. Really devote time to listening to our athletes and protecting our athletes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: I have about a minute left.

You talked about protecting athletes, so what are your thoughts on the complaints mechanism?

The minister talks a lot about the OSIC.

What do you think of how the complaints process has been structured? What mechanism is needed to make sure that victims are supported as soon as they come forward?

• (1250)

[*English*]

Dr. Shannon Moore: I'm sorry. I wasn't sure who that was directed to.

I think as soon as a complaint is filed, it should be taken to a secondary body. Teams and institutions should not be looking at themselves. I think we need outside institutions to do that.

Dr. Fowler, I don't know if you want to make other recommendations here.

Dr. Teresa Fowler: Yes, I definitely agree. Calls have already come through regarding other parties investigating these incidents. We really need to look back and consider how these incidents have been handled and say that this is not how we need to do it and move on from there and have people independent of the organization do the investigating.

The Chair: That's wonderful. Thank you so much.

We're going to pass it over now to Leah Gazan for six minutes.

Leah, go ahead, please.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

My first question is for Madam Moore or Madam Fowler.

One of the barriers to sport that were identified online at the Canadian Women and Sport website in 2021 was the lack of sport and recreational spaces for women, two-spirit, trans and non-binary people only.

I know you mentioned that in your testimony, Madam Fowler, and I'm wondering if you could expand on that and what that looks like.

Dr. Teresa Fowler: I—

Dr. Shannon Moore: Teresa, do you mind if I jump in before we go to you?

In our study.... I would feel uncomfortable speaking beyond our study, because I'm in the faculty of education; I'm not a sports sociologist. A lot of my recommendations are educational.

What we saw in our study was discussions of men and boys leaving elite-level sports because they felt the space was not safe for them. When we look at which brand of masculinity is privileged in sport, you are eliminating men who express femininities.

When you think about a gender binary, you realize there's such an assumption of the conflation of sex and gender in our society. We really need to push back at that and look at the ways in which these spaces are unsafe for males who express femininities. Even our co-researcher speaks about the fact that his son finds the locker room so uncomfortable because it is so loud. He does not know where there is a space for him.

Certainly beyond our research, other people would have things to say, but in our research it was how the spaces were not conducive to varied performance of masculinities.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

Dr. Teresa Fowler: To add to that, I feel like it's a bit of a paradox in that we need safe spaces for people who do not conform to these team standards.

For example, in Calgary, there's a hockey league with teams that are all gay male players. They play similar teams. There are obviously women's teams. We have these separate spaces for a reason.

I think the danger in that is it keeps the spaces separate. The danger we see in men's ice hockey, for example, is it is a very cis-straight and very heteropatriarchal environment with no room for anyone to be on any sort of continuum of difference.

While we certainly need safe spaces for folks to be able to express themselves, we also need to be mindful that we do not continue to keep these spaces segregated in a way that allows cultures like we see in men's ice hockey to flourish.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you very much. I totally agree.

Madam Bailey, you spoke about the importance of mentorship and role models, and the importance of others seeing others like them in sport. You spoke particularly about some of the work that you've done and some of the representation you've achieved as a mentor now and a representative at the North American Indigenous Games.

Can you elaborate on the importance of mentorship and role models in sport?

Ms. Belle Bailey: Yes. I can talk a bit about the mentorship and role models.

Personally, being a woman and being indigenous, I really didn't have anyone to look up to. It was a bit of a hard upkeep for me participating in sports. I would sit there and do my research of people I could look up to who were people like me, since I didn't have anyone in my life to do it.

I think it's really important to have that person to look up to, which is why I chose to be a coach. I chose to go that route and go and coach at the next North American Indigenous Games because I didn't have someone, and I want to be that person for another youth growing up.

• (1255)

Ms. Leah Gazan: That's wonderful. It's really inspiring, including what you shared about the Sharing our Strength gathering.

Can you expand on that?

Ms. Belle Bailey: Do you mean the gathering or the conference?

Ms. Leah Gazan: It's the conference. I'm sorry.

Ms. Belle Bailey: Yes, of course.

My colleague and I started the women and girls committee, and we're the co-chairs. We do it together. We decided there needed to be a space for women and girls to come together, share stories and listen to people who they could look up to. It was all about role models for this.

We invited entrepreneurs, cultural-based individuals and athletes to share their own personal stories and share if they had a business that no one knew about, so that more individuals could know about them.

We thought it was incredibly important to make this for women and girls because, as I said, there is not a lot of representation or a lot of representation that we know about. We wanted it to be something that people could go to. It's a safe space for them to share stories and to listen to others.

Ms. Leah Gazan: You indicated that participation rates are lower for indigenous women and girls. If there was more investment in mentorship and role-model programs, do you think it would encourage others to participate in sports?

Ms. Belle Bailey: Yes, 100%.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Great.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you so much.

I'm going to give everybody an update. We have nine minutes and 48 seconds until we vote, so looking at the time, what I'd like

to do is go through our last round. Then, once we go to vote online, the meeting is done.

What we're going to do is four minutes, four minutes, one minute and one minute. I'll start off with Anna for four minutes, go over to Adam, and then go back to Andréanne and Leah.

Anna, you have four minutes.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses. I think we have a great deal of work to do, and it's not going to stop, but it has to start.

I'm going to speak about behaviour in sports.

One of my constituents recently wrote an article—a male hockey player who won the Stanley Cup for the Chicago Blackhawks, Nick Boynton. Reading his story... I guess maybe I'm naive. I didn't think it would happen to men, but it did. He speaks about the abuse and he speaks about the fact that it occurs. We know that this occurs for women, but we need to also understand how we stop and educate coaches, both women and men, to ensure that they understand the importance of educating our children at a young age so that this behaviour does not continue into their adult life. What recommendations...?

I'm going to leave the question open to anyone who can answer it for me, because I'm really concerned about it. We have to stop it. We have to stop it at a young age, because if we don't, it'll just continue.

Maybe Dr. Fowler can start with that.

Dr. Teresa Fowler: Sure. Thank you. I appreciate the question.

I think one of the things we certainly have learned or that has been exposed this summer is how institutionalized the coaching profession is with respect to hockey. For example, you have players who are now coaching young children who perhaps have engaged in sexual assaults, who have perhaps engaged in sexual harassment or sexism. We have this ability in hockey where somebody retires from the profession as a good player, and then they move into a different role as a coach without any accountability, which was spoken about this morning.

Before we even get to the education piece, I think what we first need to start with is to stop letting predators coach our kids.

I'll turn it over to Shannon.

• (1300)

Dr. Shannon Moore: I don't know if you want to jump in, Allison, because I feel like we've spoken a lot already.

Ms. Allison Sandmeyer-Graves: Thank you, Shannon. I'd love to share a few thoughts.

I think that in Canada we actually have quite an asset compared to other systems in that we do have a national coach education system led by the Coaching Association of Canada and its PT partners. I would say that most would agree that coach education in Canada has been really focused on the technical and the tactical aspects of sport and really not with a strong emphasis on the social and emotional aspects of sport—the whole human, if you will, the whole human athlete. While there have been excellent modules and training programs developed, such as *Respect in Sport*—which, of course, is led by Sheldon Kennedy, an athlete who was abused by his coach—these have not been totally mainstreamed and normalized as mandatory coach education. We're moving there, but if we're talking about disruption, we have to go even further.

Along with that, as everyone has said, there have to be checks and balances on behaviour. If the coach is the ultimate authority over that daily training environment and there's no oversight on that and it's a homogenous group of people.... We know that diverse groups have greater checks and balances on behaviour. If in that environment everybody comes from that same lived experience and that same world view, you're going to have way less in terms of those checks and balances.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

I'm now going to move over to Adam. Adam, you have four minutes.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

This is my first time on the status of women committee, so thank you very much for allowing me to join. Prior to coming to committee today, I was able to join virtually before I replaced MP Sidhu, or will try to.

I just want to thank all of the voices, all of the incredible people who came and joined today to share their experiences. Their testimony is so valuable.

I also want to acknowledge that the burden of truth and the burden of that testimony is so often held by strong women, and exclusively women and victims, and that's something that needs acknowledgement. It takes a strong woman, but it's always women standing up against these things, and we need to call it what it is. The majority of the time this is men's violence against women, not just violence against women, not just coach violence against women. This is men's violence against women. As a man on the status of women committee today, I want to make sure that's very clear.

I would like to ask Dr. Fowler something.

First, I would like to thank you for saying something I have believed for a long time. I am a huge proponent of funding sport for and through health. Could you elaborate on that a little bit for the benefit of the committee?

Dr. Teresa Fowler: Sure. I have to first say that I am not a policy person. I understand policy only to spell it, but if we really think of the lens.... In research we talk about lenses, about how we approach our work, and there are different lenses to how we engage with our study. For example, as a sociologist, I read the world differently from the way that a quantitative person would.

If we trace back to see why sports is in the Heritage Canada portfolio, we will see that it stems back to a failed Olympic run when the men's ice hockey team didn't achieve gold medals. Therefore, now we need to invest in this national idea that ice hockey is “our” game, “our” sport, which again overrides our indigenous history with respect to those sports that have been here before us.

When you think about the lens that sports is viewed through from a funding or whichever sort of lens, having it within Heritage Canada raises red flags, because what are we promoting as Canadian heritage?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Dr. Fowler.

You can count on me to be looking up quite a lot of your research in the coming days. I appreciate that testimony.

I only have about a minute. My next question, Ms. Sandmeyer-Graves, will be over to you. We met in 2017 when the then minister of sport asked us to be part of a working group, which has resulted in quite a lot of progress since, but needs to keep moving forward. Can you give us your opinion, your views, on the progress to date, and what needs to happen in order to continue to see progress?

Ms. Allison Sandmeyer-Graves: I want to mention that it was actually an all-party or committee study of the heritage committee that really kicked off a lot of that work, and that led to an initial investment of \$30 million in sport, of which a portion went to addressing gender-based violence.

Our organization is the national voice and authority on this topic. We've seen a lot of progress. We've gone from talking about it to acting on it, which has been very positive. Over our 41-year history, the productivity of the last five years is noteworthy.

I think it's all incremental. It's glacial in its pace it seems at times. When you listen to the survivors speak, you realize that we're absolutely not moving fast enough. We're not being aggressive enough. We're not moving with enough urgency, and we're moving too much through an institutional lens. We need to put the athletes at the centre of this and not move at the pace that institutions are comfortable with. Move at the pace that society and these families and these athletes demand.

• (1305)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thanks, Allison. It's good to see you.

I'll close by saying thanks to Ms. Bailey for being an extraordinary voice and mentor for young indigenous women in this country. You're awesome.

The Chair: Awesome.

Okay, we're rushing.

Go ahead, Andréanne. When I start getting up and dancing, that means we're done.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I'll keep it short, then, Madam Chair.

In the bit of time I have, I'd like to thank the witnesses.

Can we keep the discussion going a bit longer after the vote?

I'm being told that we can't. All right, then.

Ms. Sandmeyer-Graves, if you could keep your answer to 30 seconds, it would be greatly appreciated, because I have another question. In your opening statement, you talked about the Own the Podium program. Is there anything you'd like to say about that or how it relates to today's study?

[*English*]

Ms. Allison Sandmeyer-Graves: I'm very sorry. I missed part of the question and the interpretation.

Would you repeat it, please?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: In your opening statement, you mentioned the Own the Podium program.

In 30 seconds, can you tell us what we should take away from the program?

[*English*]

Ms. Allison Sandmeyer-Graves: I understand.

Own the Podium is a major pot of money that is governed by a body called Own the Podium. It started with the Vancouver Olympics because we wanted to win lots of medals, and it continues today.

It directs millions of dollars to our national sport organizations. It needs to direct that money with values in mind, not just medals. It is a major lever for us to use in creating change.

The Chair: Allison, thank you so much.

Leah, I apologize. We are down past zero for time. Before I lose my job from the committee members, I do have to end the meeting today.

On behalf of all of the members of the committee, I would like to thank all the witnesses for coming in. Thank you so much for bringing your testimony.

As we've indicated, if there's any follow-up that you need to do, please reach out. If there are concerns, please reach out to the clerk or myself.

We will see everybody Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30. We're going to start on version one of our indigenous study.

Today's meeting is adjourned.

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