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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

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

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 53 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

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

[*English*]

Pursuant to the motions adopted by the committee on Monday, June 13, 2022, and Tuesday, September 20, 2022, the committee is meeting on the study of Hockey Canada.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of Thursday, June 23, 2022. Some members are sitting in person and some are attending remotely using the Zoom application.

I want 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 at the bottom of your screen to activate your mike. Please mute yourself when you're not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either English or French. You will see a little globe. That is your interpretation button. For those in the room, you know that you can use the earpiece and choose the desired channel.

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I wanted to ask the clerk one question: Is everyone miked with the House of Commons-approved mike? As you know, we have had some problems in the past with accidents.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore): Yes, Dr. Fry.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to begin the meeting.

As we see today, at the meeting we have representatives of Hockey Canada. From Hockey Canada, we have Pat McLaughlin, senior vice-president, and he is on by video conference. From the Oilers Entertainment Group, we have Bob Nicholson, chairman of hockey, who is also here by video conference.

I want to let the witnesses know that you each have five minutes to present. I will shout out when you have 30 seconds left so that you can wind up. If you haven't finished, you will be able to say what you need to say in the questions and answers.

We will begin, starting with Pat McLaughlin, senior vice-president, Hockey Canada.

You have five minutes, please, Mr. McLaughlin.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin (Senior Vice-President, Strategy, Operations and Brand, Hockey Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the committee for inviting me to take part in this important study today.

I want to start by recognizing the serious calls for change that have come from the members of this committee, from the government, from our members, our sponsors and most importantly, all Canadians. The fact that this is the fourth time for Hockey Canada to appear before this committee, I can tell you, is certainly not lost on me. We have heard you. Hockey Canada must change, and it must do so urgently. Canadians expect and deserve meaningful action, and our organization, quite honestly, has been too slow to act. I hope that Canadians will see that we're putting in place the necessary changes required to regain their trust.

The past summer, we outlined a comprehensive action plan to address systemic issues in our sport, and we are making progress. We said that we would reopen the independent investigation into the alleged sexual assault of 2018, and we have. We said we would implement mandatory sexual violence and consent training for our national teams, and we have. We said we would commission an independent full governance review, and we have. We said that we would become a full signatory to the OSIC, and we have. We also said that we would create a new, independent third party complaint mechanism, and we have done that as well.

At the same time, we recognize that there's a need to make room for leadership change. As this group knows and Canadians know, our entire board has resigned and our CEO recently departed Hockey Canada. Without question, we are in a significant transition phase. On December 17, we will be joined by a new board of directors, and that board of directors will be identified by a nominating committee that is independent.

I feel confident that I can speak for all of our staff and our members when I say that we're looking forward to this new leadership and the fresh ideas and perspectives it will bring in order to help move our organization forward.

Today, to assist the committee with your questioning, I want to provide some brief background on my role at Hockey Canada.

I am the senior vice-president of strategy, operations and brand, and I oversee a number of key areas within Hockey Canada. Some of those areas include business planning, the development of our strategic plan and the execution of that plan, general operations, marketing and branding, and alignment.

I will answer all of your questions today to the best of my ability. It's important to note at the same time that anything to do with respect to Hockey Canada finances, safe sport initiatives and legal matters are not within my current job scope.

I also want to point out that I joined Hockey Canada in the fall of 2018, after the alleged incident that occurred. I had no involvement in the handling of the incident or in the settlement discussions, and I only first became aware of the incident in May of this year.

As I wrap up, Madam Chair, I want to touch on a couple of quick things.

Our organization has made mistakes. Our failure to act sooner has had a significant toll on children, parents and volunteers, and I can tell you that we are deeply sorry for that. I want to be clear on this as well. Make no mistake: Without those folks, there is no Hockey Canada.

Making it right for our organization has had a heavy financial cost, a heavy organizational cost and an emotional cost. Our organization has also placed significant strain on our members.

However, I can also tell you that we are very optimistic for the future. We are listening. We've clearly heard the calls for us to do better, and we are working on being accountable in rebuilding the organization.

I'm going to be honest as I wrap up. We need the help of this group. It's a sincere comment. We do not have all the answers, nor do we profess to. It's my hope that we can work in a collaborative nature as a team as we move forward. With the help of this committee, we can work together to make hockey a safer sport for all those involved both on and off the ice.

With that, I thank you, Madam Chair. I'd be happy to take your questions.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll now go to Mr. Bob Nicholson from the Oilers Entertainment Group, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Nicholson (chairman of hockey, Oilers Entertainment Group): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My name is Bob Nicholson. I served as president and CEO of Hockey Canada from 1998 to 2014. I will do my best to address your questions regarding my time there.

Let me say up front that the allegations about the incidents at the 2018 gala and at the 2003 world junior tournament are an outrage. That kind of conduct has no place in our game or our society. I hope that both cases are investigated fully and that justice is done.

When I was CEO of Hockey Canada, I led an effort by our organization to improve player safety and prevent abuse of the kind we saw involving Graham James and the terrible experiences that Sheldon Kennedy and others bravely shared with us. Sheldon's testimony and those of the other victims demanded a real reckoning for our sport.

I believe we've made progress, becoming one of the first national sports organizations to work with Respect Group, beginning with programs aimed at coaches, officials, trainers and administrators, and later growing to involve parents and players.

I am grateful that I am still close with Sheldon and the others who were involved at that time. I'm proud of the progress we've made. It is clear that we didn't go nearly far enough, particularly regarding off-ice conduct. It is, perhaps, the failure to see that then that brings us here today.

As a sport, we all have a lot more work to do to ensure that we have a culture in hockey where everyone feels safe and welcome. This will require commitment and real action, not just nationally but also at the regional and provincial levels. I am hopeful that the work that Hockey Canada is currently doing, as well as the efforts of this committee and others, will make the game safer for everyone involved.

During my time as CEO, Hockey Canada's role was to develop and deliver programs to its 13 member branches across Canada. These branches are regional governing bodies that operate with their own volunteers and boards to deliver programs to over 600,000 youth across Canada.

As CEO, I had three priorities. My first priority was safety. We had to make the game much safer on the ice and address things such as hitting from behind. The game was suffering, and corrective action was needed.

My second priority, one that is important to me personally, was addressing the issue of sexual abuse. At the time, we were focused on players who had bravely come forward to discuss abuse they had experienced from coaches. The work we began with Respect Group grew out of those efforts. It was important work, but I must say I regret that there was not more focus on off-ice player conduct and on the culture of silence that appears to persist to this day.

My third priority was to restore the financial health of the organization. When I took over as CEO, Hockey Canada was in financial distress and largely dependent on government funds. We set a goal to improve our finances. We did that by developing partnerships and other new revenue sources that helped expand our programs while keeping participant fees relatively flat. We also put in place risk management mechanisms, including the insurance funds that have been at the centre of much of your work.

I am pleased to read in the Cromwell report the following comment:

The establishment of reserve funds to address the risk of uninsured and underinsured claims is not only sound, but the failure to do so would be a serious oversight.

It has been more than eight years since I left Hockey Canada, and there may be details I can't recall or to which I don't have access, but I can assure the committee that I'm here in a spirit of openness—

• (1115)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: —and I want to work with you to create a healthy environment around our game.

With that, I'll do my best to answer your questions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Nicholson.

We will now go to the question and answer segment.

Before I begin, I would like to let the committee know that Sébastien Lemire will be replacing Martin Champoux for the Bloc Québécois today.

We will begin the first round with Kevin Waugh for six minutes.

Kevin, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to our guests today, Pat McLaughlin and Bob Nicholson. Bob, of course, was for a long time with Hockey Canada, and before that the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, which of course went into Hockey Canada.

Mr. Nicholson, you referred to 2018, when you were not president and CEO of the organization, but you were in 2003 in Halifax at the world juniors. When did you become aware of the sexual allegations out of that world championship out of Halifax?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thank you for your question.

The rumour was conveyed to me by a media person on July 7 at the draft in Montreal. That was the very first time I heard anything about the 2003 incident.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Okay.

We're going to talk about the funds, because you've been there since day one. We find the national equity fund. Then we find the participants legacy trust fund. Now we have a third fund that Hockey Canada uses for settlements.

Mr. Nicholson, were you in charge of any of these funds since day one with Hockey Canada?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I was the CEO, but that area was really left to our insurance people. We had very good staff. We also had a committee that oversaw the insurance programs as well as some expertise. You had Barry Lorenzetti here. He was a big part of that.

All of that came to me, but I was not day-to-day hands-on to that.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: How many funds or other collections of money available for settling these sexual assault lawsuits were created while you were at Hockey Canada for your term there of almost two decades?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: The very first one was the equity fund. Then we moved into the legacy fund in 1999. The stabilization fund was there in 2007 and 2008.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: So you set up three funds. I noticed that in your address you said that Hockey Canada wasn't very fluid on money, but today, as you know, Hockey Canada is the richest non-profit sport organization in the country, with almost \$150 million in their bank account.

I want you to address these three funds, to tell parents who had to pay the registration fees...I would say 90% to 100% not knowing that these funds were set up. Parents across this country were shocked when the story broke in July that registration fees were in fact used for sexual assault cases.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I can tell you that when I left Hockey Canada, those funds were in the neighbourhood of \$40 million to \$50 million. There are other areas that the money was there.... The goal at that time was to make sure that we had enough funds if something drastic happened to Hockey Canada or the various levels below us.

The registration fee, when I was there, stayed the same, at approximately three dollars, and I don't think it's been raised since that time.

• (1120)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: One of the issues we've had around this table has been the non-disclosure agreements. We are not getting any answers from Hockey Canada on the non-disclosure agreements. You were CEO. Can you speak to the non-disclosure agreements under your term as CEO with Hockey Canada? How many were there?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I can't tell you the exact number of NDAs that were signed. I know that where there were payouts or NDAs signed under the Graham James situation...and there have been others that are there from staff in the past, but for me to say a number, I just don't have that.

You could go back to Hockey Canada. Hopefully, they would give you the number of NDAs that happened throughout my time with Hockey Canada.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: How about the names of people banned from participating in sanctioned teams and leagues? You mentioned Graham James, which, as you know, I'm familiar with from the province of Saskatchewan. He turns up coaching elsewhere. Nobody even knows about him or his past record. These are the sorts of things that in the hockey world we're astonished to hear. After banning Graham James in the hockey circles in this country, he shows up elsewhere.

Nobody has track of these people when their sexual allegations and what they went through should be known worldwide.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Kevin, thanks for asking that question. That was something that I got involved in.

Graham James went to Spain to coach. We contacted the International Ice Hockey Federation at the time, and we contacted Spain and gave them the information about Graham James. It was astonishing, but they allowed him to continue to coach.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left, Kevin.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

You must be sick of the allegations that have come forward since you left as CEO of Hockey Canada. Could you comment on that quickly?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I missed the first part of that, Kevin. I'm sorry.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're now out of time, Kevin. Perhaps somebody from your team can ask that question later on.

Thank you.

Now we're going to go to the Liberals and Michael Coteau for six minutes.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Over the last few months, it's been very challenging for this committee to get to the bottom of some of the accusations and even questions we asked previously around details like the secret funds. It took us a while to get to the point of figuring out that there were actually three funds.

I want to start off by asking Mr. Nicholson if there were any additional funds beyond the three.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thank you for the question.

I can only speak about the years that I was there. Those were the three insurance funds that were in place, to the best of my knowledge.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Do you know of any other, non-insurance funds that were put in place?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: To the best of my knowledge, no.

Mr. Michael Coteau: You were the CEO of Hockey Canada from 1998 to 2014. Is that correct?

Would you say that, ultimately—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt Mr. Coteau, but we're not receiving any interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. I shall pause while someone checks that out and fixes it.

• (1120) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1130)

The Chair: Michael, please begin. I'm starting the clock.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have about five and a half minutes left.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Okay. That's perfect. Thank you.

To go back to you, Mr. Nicholson, you were the CEO of Hockey Canada from 1998 to 2014. I would assume that in the creation, implementation and maintenance of these three funds, at least two of them were done under your watch. Is that correct?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Yes, it is.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Do you ultimately, as the CEO of the organization, take full responsibility for these funds?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: From an operational standpoint, I do.

You know, we had full-time staff who were working in insurance and risk management. They had a committee, and we had representatives from all of our 13 member branches, and then we would take those recommendations to our board.

Mr. Michael Coteau: We've heard the words used often in media and even in the community that these funds were intended to "cover up" these horrific incidents in many cases. Would you say that they were designed to do just that?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I can tell you that during my time a majority of them were around the Graham James.... Graham James was convicted. Five of the six at that time were under Graham James, and we signed NDAs. The reason we signed those NDAs at that time was as much to protect the victim. We have a couple of those individuals—Sheldon Kennedy and Theo Fleury—who came out and spoke, but the other ones we've protected with those NDAs.

Mr. Michael Coteau: You spent 16 years as the person in charge of Hockey Canada. Over those 16 years, how many cases came across your desk of alleged sexual assault. Do you know?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I can't tell you exactly. Again, the majority came through Graham James. There was one other incident that was a similar situation to that, and then there has been some discussion on a referee situation. I can't really remember. There were a couple more than that at that time.

Mr. Michael Coteau: During your 16 years as the head of the organization and having these cases come forward, do you know how many payments were made to victims of sexual assault?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I looked at that, and I think there were seven, but I'm not confident in saying that number.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I'm going to read a list of different sponsors. I'm assuming that over the 16 years you attracted a lot of these sponsors to your organization: Bauer Hockey, Nike, Canadian Tire, Telus, Scotiabank, Tim Hortons, Esso, Sobeys, Recipe Unlimited, Chevy Canada, SkipTheDishes, PepsiCo, BDO, BFL insurance, Swiss Chalet and The Keg.

All of those organizations have stopped sponsoring Hockey Canada. I'm assuming that you attracted a lot of that business to the organization. From your perspective, why do you think these brands have stopped supporting Hockey Canada?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: It's really tough for me to say. They made their own individual decisions to do that when a lot of this became public. It is too bad, but I don't want to speak for them.

• (1135)

Mr. Michael Coteau: You can't even speculate as to why they would leave sponsoring the organization. You were there for 16 years. You know these relationships well and what they're built on.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: You know, I didn't see them as sponsors. I saw them as partners, so they must have lost some trust in that partnership.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Nicholson.

Michael, your time is up. Thank you.

I will go to the Bloc Québécois for six minutes, please, with Sébastien Lemire.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Nicholson, in my view, you contributed to creating this toxic culture for a variety of reasons, whether good or bad.

In hindsight, it would appear that you were the architect to some degree during your mandate, including with respect to silence, inaction and dubious sources of funding.

What's the legacy of your 16 years as the head of Hockey Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. That only came through in French and did not come through in English to me.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Can I get my six minutes back, Madam Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't know if it will be the full six minutes, Sébastien. But all right, we will let you have some extra time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, the witness didn't hear my question and I have to repeat it. I'll go back to the start.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right. We will go back to six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was saying that the way I see it, the toxic culture that has been condemned, and all the scandals that we have seen, those of a sexual nature of course, but also financial, probably occurred during the 16 years that you were the head of Hockey Canada. I see you as the main architect behind all that, including the culture of silence. But then I would imagine your point of view differs.

I'd like you to talk to us about your Hockey Canada legacy.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I am sorry again, Madam Chair. It only is coming across in French. I'm not getting the English translation.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think that once again I will stop the clock, and I will pause and ask the clerk to please deal with this particular problem. I'll suspend the meeting until then.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I just think the witness may not be aware and he may be on the wrong channel. Could you perhaps instruct him on how to be on the English channel so that he hears the translation?

The Chair: I did at the beginning.

If you look at the bottom of your screen, you will see a little round globe. If you press that, it will also give you something that asks you to choose between English and French. If you press English, you will get the French translation done in English for you.

Could you try that, and then we can try again? I have suspended the clock.

I shall resume the clock. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Nicholson, I see you as the main architect of the Hockey Canada culture we are now aware of, for better and especially for worse. We've heard about all the financial and sexual scandals, and this whole cover-up corporate culture at Hockey Canada, which has remained silent and passive in the face of absolutely scandalous incidents.

I expect that your opinion is different. What legacy have you left after 16 years at the head of Hockey Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really felt that the legacy I left was that we had way more grass-roots programs to include young boys and girls to play in the game. We reached out across the country to make that happen.

Also, as I said in my opening statement, there was a merger of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association and Hockey Canada, and both the organizations were not in a very good financial situation. I felt that we were able to look at new revenue sources and also at international events that really helped us bring finances to the table to really give back to our 13 members. Our 13 members used those dollars from international events to help build national coaching certification programs, referee certification programs, and a tremendous amount of programs that were used coast to coast in the country.

That was what I felt best about. Also, looking at the risk in—

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: And yet, by creating these programs, did you never suspect that they might be used in a more malicious fashion, for example arranging the signing of all these non-disclosure agreements to buy the silence of victims?

We have learned that Hockey Canada was complicit in the non-disclosure of cases of sexual misconduct. Worse still, for decades, collusion and inaction were the organization's response when there were complaints of sexual misconduct. Hockey Canada was obsessed with the organization's image. Players from the 2018 and 2003 teams, for example, publicly declared that they had nothing to do with the alleged incidents.

What do you think of that, as the former head of Hockey Canada for 16 years?

Do you really believe that nothing happened, that you were not in any way responsible and that everything that occurred with the victims was consensual?

[English]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I think one of the key things is that from the programming point of view, I thought we did a very good job. When I look at the situations when I was there...and again I'm going back to Graham James. He was convicted. We signed NDAs to protect the victims—it was as much for that as anything. After I left Hockey Canada, and the 2018...that has been investigated a lot. I can't make that comment, because I wasn't there. I'm just getting bits of information on that, as you are—

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Hockey Canada claims that it is a victim of serious disinformation and cynical attacks. We heard it say so to this committee.

Do you have an opinion about the 15 cases of group sexual assault going back to 1989, the details of which have been reported in the media?

[English]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: When I was there.... I tried to be clear here on what we did at that time. I certainly can't make a comment on the other situations that happened when I wasn't there—I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: As for your role in the National Hockey League, what does the league think about your work and its own accountability? We know that it investigated the cases raised in June 2018, but the predators always went unpunished.

Can we expect the National Hockey League to do something?

If these cases involve members of your team, are you going to censure them?

[English]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: First of all, I can tell you that I know there's an investigation going on by the NHL. I'm not privy to the information from that. That will be dealt with at the National Hockey League office. I think that office, over the last while, has dealt with those situations as swiftly as they could.

I can tell you that if one of those players from 2018 was on the Edmonton Oilers, which there isn't, we would have to look at that very closely, get all the information and make the appropriate decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: We learned yesterday that Hockey Canada, the National Hockey League and its members had benefited from the federal government's largesse, having failed to file the required documents for non-profit organization status, including their administrative rules and their annual financial reports.

[English]

The Chair: You have 50 seconds, Mr. Lemire.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Does this practice of not submitting documents date back to when you were the head of Hockey Canada?

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid you only have 12 seconds to answer that question, Mr. Nicholson.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I'm sorry, but I couldn't get that question clearly. I apologize for that.

• (1145)

The Chair: Perhaps in your other round, Monsieur Lemire, you might be able to repeat your question. Thank you.

I'm going to move to the—

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam chair, if the witness did not understand my question, I will simply take back the 30 seconds and ask it again so that he can answer it.

[English]

The Chair: All right, go ahead. You have 30 seconds—however, not more than that.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

We learned yesterday that Hockey Canada, the National Hockey League and its members had benefited from the federal government's largesse, having failed to file the documents required to obtain not-for-profit organization status, including their by-laws and annual financial reports.

Does this practice of not filing documents date back to when you were the head of Hockey Canada?

[English]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: From the NHL standpoint, I'm not aware that money was received from the government for this. That would have to be addressed with the league office in New York.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now move to the next questioner, and that's for the New Democratic Party.

Peter, you have six minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

[English]

We have seen, over the course of the last few months, Hockey Canada appear before this committee. Each appearance has been, I think, more disastrous in terms of the erosion of public confidence. We've seen the loss of sponsors, the loss of government support and, above all, the loss of confidence from hockey parents across the country who scrimp and save to put their daughter or son into Hockey Canada programs.

We had the most disastrous appearance last month, on October 4, and subsequent to that, as we're all aware, the board chair resigned and the CEO resigned. The board has seemingly finally understood the message that has come from Canadians from coast to coast: The only way out is for Hockey Canada to come clean and to be transparent.

My first question today is the same question that I asked back on October 4, and that is regarding Navigator, the public relations firm that seemingly provided the advice around Hockey Canada's stonewalling and refusing to answer questions.

Mr. McLaughlin, I would like to ask you whose decision it was to hire Navigator. Will Hockey Canada finally come clean and tell us how much of the public's funds has been spent on Navigator for public relations?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Julian, for your question.

Before I start, there are two things, I think, that speak directly to your comments, Mr. Julian, and certainly from previous testimony as well that you've had in the hearings.

My two main concerns coming in today are, first, that I do the best on behalf of our organization to provide the answers that everyone deserves. I am concerned that in some areas if I don't have the answers it may look like I'm not trying to provide them, but I'm going to do my best. That's my commitment. The second is that in my opening statement I talked about the importance of us working together. For those who know me, I'm true to my word, and I truly mean that.

Specifically to Navigator, Hockey Canada staff were directed by the board in early July to contact Navigator. I contacted Navigator on July 5, and I had a follow-up discussion with them on July 7. They started to do work with Hockey Canada on July 8.

I can tell you that it's not a communications exercise that they had been involved with. This has been about, as you have said, transparency. They've given the board significant advice in terms of governance. They've helped us in terms of trying to find prominent Canadians to be part of our action plan—the oversight committee. They've also helped us on a day-to-day basis to work with the media. We have a small communications team that's primarily focused on events and communication.

I know that your next question will be about the dollar amount. I can tell you that as of the year to date, I've been told that our dollars have been about \$1.6 million with Navigator, and there have been no public funds that have been spent on that.

Mr. Peter Julian: I appreciate your finally providing that answer.

As part of the mandate given to Navigator, did that include being critical of journalists or journalistic coverage around the scandals that had been flowing around Hockey Canada? Was it part of Navigator's responsibility to go after journalists or to go after stories?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Again, thank you for the question, and I understand the nature of the question.

I know that you, Mr. Nater and certainly Mr. Housefather in the last hearings all spoke to Navigator and the disappointment...what you've read in the minutes. What I want to share with you is that the answer to that is no.

I want to share something with you and the committee that I feel is very important, if I could—

● (1150)

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm very sorry, Mr. McLaughlin. Thank you for answering that, but I have other questions.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Okay.

Mr. Peter Julian: When we talk about non-disclosure agreements, consistently with Mr. Smith in July and Mr. Brind'Amour and Ms. Skinner in October, the question has been raised about Hockey Canada releasing people from non-disclosure agreements.

Has anyone been released from non-disclosure agreements? Has there been any discussion at all within Hockey Canada in that regard?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Again, thanks for the question.

This is an area that's not my expertise. What I can tell you, though, is that I read an excellent article on the weekend—I believe it was in the Toronto Star—about the advancement of the thinking around NDAs. They used Hockey Canada as an example. There were a few experts who were part of that article, including a P.E.I. case where they said that our issues have certainly expanded the minds and the thinking in and around that and—

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm sorry, Mr. McLaughlin. I'll have to cut you off again. I have other questions—

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Okay.

Mr. Peter Julian: —but what you're saying is that no one has been released from non-disclosure agreements.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: To my knowledge, Mr. Julian, no one has been released.

Mr. Peter Julian: This is a rhetorical question: Why, when we've had this issue out for months?

I will now go on to the issue of the complaint process. You mentioned it in your opening remarks. If somebody has a complaint, if there are serious allegations of sexual violence or sexual abuse, what do they do at this point? Whom do they contact? Who is responsible for the complaint process?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thanks for the question.

Again, it's not my area of expertise, but I did talk to our safe sport vice-president to ensure I could answer this question to the best of my ability. If it's at the national team level—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: —they would work—I'll be quick—directly with OSIC. If it's at a non-national team level, we've instituted the third party mechanism, and all the member branches in Hockey Canada have special buttons on their websites to direct people to get that support should they need it.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a final question—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Peter. You have 10 seconds. You may not get an answer.

Mr. Peter Julian: —around severance payments for Mr. Smith. How much is Mr. Smith receiving in severance for having stepped down?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thanks for the question.

I actually report to Mr. Smith, and that would be a question for the board.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Peter.

Now we're going to the second round.

Before we do, I would like to again repeat this for people on the floor. Please turn off your microphones or mute yourself in some way after you finish speaking or while others are speaking. The echo causes a problem for the interpreters sometimes, because there's a huge echo. Thank you.

Now we're going to the second round, which is a five-minute round. Again, the five minutes are for the question and the answer.

We'll begin with the Conservative Party and Ms. Rachael Thomas for five minutes, please.

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

Mr. McLaughlin, I'm wondering if the current board of directors is in the process of choosing the next CEO.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

The current board of directors will not choose the CEO. That will be at the discretion of the new board. The new board will be in place after election on December 17.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I'm also wondering who put the five questions forward to Mr. Cromwell to investigate.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: On July 12, we had meetings with the board. We invited experts on governance to come in to help our board understand what a proper and appropriate governance review could look like.

The questions were built by experts and approved by the board. Then the process was moved forward.

We were fortunate that Justice Cromwell and his team have done an outstanding job and really provided a framework and a road map for us as we move forward with our new board.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I note that in the five questions that were put forward, there was a request that he look at two of the funds, but not the third fund. In fact, the third fund wasn't even disclosed. It was something that he dug up.

Why is that?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I can't speak to why that is, but I can tell you that I'm glad that he did. I think it's outstanding.

Again, it sheds a light on what you and your colleagues have talked about, which is that in the interest of transparency and much better communication, we have a great opportunity there to be much better. The work that Justice Cromwell has done is going to lead the organization moving forward.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. McLaughlin, I would agree with you. I do think there is an opportunity to do much better.

In your opening remarks, you gave a list of a few things that the organization promised to do and has followed through on. One of them was that the organization promised to do a "full governance review" and they did that. You're pointing to the Cromwell report.

My concern, however, is that this is actually the third independent governance review since 2014. In eight years, this is the third one that has been required because adequate action hasn't been taken. The culture of secrecy and cover-up has been perpetuated for eight years despite these three independent reviews.

I'm curious. Why should the Canadian public trust you now?

• (1155)

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

I can't speak to the previous governance reviews. I can only speak to how I operate, how our staff operates and how our members operate. At the end of the day, it's all about delivery and execution.

We have a significant mandate and we need to deliver for all Canadians. There's no room for error on that. That's why I can say that we're appreciative of the work that Justice Cromwell has done.

I can tell you that on October 15 and 16, we met with our members. The members have already advanced a number of the recommendations of Justice Cromwell and his team. Further dialogue will take place this weekend. The work will be in the hands of our transition board to help lead and drive forward.

I'm very hopeful as we move forward, with respect to the work of the governance review.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Nicholson, one thing that Justice Cromwell stated in his report, on page 95, was this: "Both the [National Equity Fund] and the [Insurance Rate Stabilization] Fund are used for purposes that are not fully disclosed in the financial statements." This phrase "not fully disclosed" speaks of secrecy, rather than transparency.

You stated that, as CEO, your goal was to make yourself transparent and financially accountable. Why didn't you fully disclose the need for this fund?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

I really felt that we did disclose the information to our members.

Remember who our members were. There are 13 branches—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Nicholson, with all due respect, Justice Cromwell would disagree with you. He said that it wasn't fully disclosed.

You might feel that way, but an independent reviewer is saying that isn't the case. Why isn't it?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: What I recall, and [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Thomas's time should be stopped. Mr. Nicholson's last answer wasn't audible to us. I think he's on mute.

Perhaps he could resume his answer, Madam Chair.

The Chair: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I think you may be able to hear us, but we can't hear anyone on Zoom.

I don't know if we can suspend perhaps for a moment. Again, I agree with Mr. Housefather that Mrs. Thomas's time should be stopped and Mr. Nicholson should be given an opportunity to answer the question.

The Chair: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Clerk: Dr. Fry, nobody in the room can hear you except me with my headset on.

Can you say "suspend" and I will inform the PVO?

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Thomas, we will resume. I'm giving you an extra few seconds, because this had started before we stopped the clock.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Mr. Nicholson, I'll go ahead and give you an opportunity to answer as to why you didn't fully disclose in the financial statements this fund that existed for insurance rate stabilization.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Yes. I really thought we did. I don't have the financial statements in front of me, Rachael. I felt that we gave those to our members. If they're not in our financial statements that you received from Hockey Canada, then obviously they weren't given out to them.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Nicholson, in your view, though, should that be made available?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Yes, it should.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You agreed that it would be important to be transparent about the use of that fund and the purpose of it. I'm curious as to why you feel that's important.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I think any of those funds are important. At the time, we were really trying to make sure they were there for our 13 members, who then deliver that information to the grassroots and all of the minor hockey associations. It was important for us to do that at our board table at that time.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Nicholson, why is transparency in an organization like Hockey Canada important?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: It's really important. You know, when I look at it, the board structure was a lot different when I was there. We had over 25 members—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Nicholson, I'm sorry. I'm just not getting to the "why". Why is it important?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Why is it important? It's so that all of our members—

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: —can give the information to minor hockey players and parents on how Hockey Canada uses its funds and its finances.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The time is up.

I will now move to Liberal member Anthony Housefather.

You have five minutes, please, Anthony.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you very much, Madam Chair

Thank you very much to both witnesses.

Mr. McLaughlin, your sincerity did come through to me, and I thank you for that.

Mr. Nicholson, I want to start by asking a question. When you were CEO of Hockey Canada, was it a standard practice to have employees, when they resigned, sign NDAs?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: There certainly were some who signed NDAs, but it wasn't all of them. I can't tell you, Anthony, how many there were, but in some situations, depending on the amount of knowledge they would have, there would be some type of clause.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Today Rick Westhead reported that two staffers connected with the women's national team in 2013-14 had signed NDAs, as had Dan Church, who resigned right before the 2014 Olympics.

Are you aware of the circumstances that led to those NDAs being signed?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thanks for bringing up that question. There is an NDA that is in place. I know that Dan Church and two other coaches signed those NDAs. I was fully aware of how they got to that position. I was not involved; we had other senior people doing it. It was an evaluation of a coach going into the Olympic Games. A decision was made, after meeting with a number of the staff and I think a majority of the players, that we would make a change in the coaching staff. An NDA was signed by Dan and by two other coaches, for sure.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you so much for your candour, Mr. Nicholson.

Let me just ask this: Did allegations of harassment lead to any of what happened, or was this simply disappointment by players and not allegations that would be of a serious nature that should have been disclosed?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: That's a great question. What I remember was really an in-depth evaluation from the staff and from the players. After all of those individual meetings happened, they thought it was in the best interest to make a coaching change for us to move forward to go into the Olympic Games.

• (1205)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's fair enough. I think this may be something that others will pursue.

Mr. Nicholson, from everything I've heard about you and from everything I've gotten, you're a very good businessman. You're somebody who has a lot of ability. Can I understand why there were no written guidelines related to what people should do at Hockey Canada when there was a claim of sexual harassment while you were there? You'd think that this would be one of the first things you would have the organization put in place.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: On that question.... You know what? I wish I could go back. I wish I could have put more policies in.

My job as CEO was to run the operations. Policies came from the board. I'm not deflecting that back to the board. I was the CEO and I should have been encouraging more policies. When I listen to you speak and others speak, that was something I would have liked to have done. I didn't, and I'm sorry about that.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: You can't cry over spilled milk. Again, I appreciate your reflection on it, because we haven't had so much reflection before.

Can I ask, while you were CEO, were you ever directed by the board to sign settlement agreements?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Yes, I was.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: When you were so directed, at the time you were there, did the board minute those mandates to you? Did the board put in their minutes that they approved a settlement agreement and authorized Mr. Nicholson to sign the settlement agreement, or were you left out on a limb, that one day you would have to prove that the board actually authorized you to do that?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: That's a very good question. I'm thinking about it right now. You know what? I was directed to sign those agreements from recommendations from our lawyers, from our risk management, from our insurance people. We took the settlements back to the board and then I would sign it.

My role—I will use Graham James again—was having our legal, our insurance, our risk and safety management, our expertise to work on the settlement, and then I had the role to meet with the victims. I had to meet with them several times, and then we came up with the final settlement fee. I know how difficult it was for those victims.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Anthony.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I appreciate that. Again, it put you in a very bad position. You were an employee who was being asked to sign something, with no written proof years later that you were mandated to do it.

In any case, I appreciate your testimony. I will ask Mr. McLaughlin questions in my next round.

Thank you, Mr. Nicholson.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Housefather.

I now go to Mr. Lemire, for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Nicholson, I'm going to repeat the question I asked earlier.

Not-for-profit organizations have special status that exempts them from having to pay sums of money to the federal government. But there are obligations attached to this status, including filing financial and administrative documents, such as by-laws. You decided not to disclose such documents, beginning in the early 2000s, which is when you became the chair.

Hockey Canada and its championship partners, meaning the Canadian Hockey League, which includes the Ontario Hockey League, the Western Hockey League and the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, all adopted this practice.

Does this practice have a broader objective, such as filling the coffers and not paying its share to society, or perhaps even to protect you from, or deflect, potential lawsuits against players?

Why did you not file these documents with the government, as you should have?

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I can't speak to each one of those documents. In the majority of my time with Hockey Canada, we had people from the government, from Sport Canada, sitting at our table. We met with Sport Canada individuals on an ongoing basis. With regard to all of the documents, all the bylaws, how we governed ourselves, those questions were asked, or I felt comfortable that Sport Canada was there all the time around Hockey Canada, so I thought that those were given to the government.

In regard to the National Hockey League, I can't answer that. That's something where you have to deal with the NHL office in New York.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: How many funds are there? We now know about three.

To your recollection, how many funds did Hockey Canada have which were not reported in the financial statements?

There has been talk of money shared equally between Hockey Canada and its subsidiaries.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: How are these funds reported?

Could there be other funds to deal with lawsuits, for allegations of sexual misconduct, for example, that come specifically from the subsidiaries?

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I would like to be able to give you more detail on that. I didn't have day-to-day access. I wasn't dealing with insurance and risk management back to the branches. We had insurance committee people. We had insurance staff as well as legal staff who would deal with that.

With regard to any of the major ones that came up, they would bring it to my table and we would take it to our board for approval.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's well over time.

I'm going to Mr. Julian for the NDP.

You have two and a half minutes, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

I find it outrageous that \$1.6 million was spent for Navigator. It was such a disastrous public relations strategy.

It's profoundly disappointing that nearly four months after Hockey Canada pledged to release people from their NDA, if they chose to be released, not a single one of those bound by non-disclosure agreements has been released. That's my comment.

Now I will go to questions.

Mr. Nicholson, to clarify what you said in response to Mr. Housefather, are you saying that in the 2013-14 women's national team, no players were asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: No. I'm not sure if they were asked, or if any did. I know the coaches were asked.

Mr. Peter Julian: Second, in terms of in camera meetings with no written minutes, were you aware that it was a practice while you were CEO?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Looking back, sadly, yes, there were too many in camera.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm going to move to the horrific allegations around the 2003 assault in Halifax.

Are you aware of who from Hockey Canada was present in Halifax in 2003? Have the Halifax police contacted you as they investigate those horrific allegations?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Again, I'll try to go quickly over the timelines.

On July 7, I heard of this rumour. On July 8, I called a couple of staff with Hockey Canada to find out if they knew about the rumour. They did not. I was then notified on July 22 that Hockey Canada was issuing a statement about the rumour to the Halifax police—

Mr. Peter Julian: I apologize. I don't have a lot of time.

Have the Halifax police contacted you about this?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: No. They have not.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I have been contacted by—

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Brind'Amour testified that championship rings are given to board members, at \$3,000 a pop. Is that a practice that started when you were CEO?

Can you comment on the \$5,000 that is alleged to have been spent by Hockey Canada on board dinners?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Let me start, first of all, with the rings. Everyone who was involved with the team got a ring. Over my period, we once bought them for the entire board. Maybe it was twice, Peter. I honestly can't remember, but it would have been once or twice.

We had board members who were with the team, and they would have gotten the rings as part of the group with the team—

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm afraid I have to stop you, because we've gone well over time. Maybe you can expand on that in another question, Mr. Nicholson.

I will now go to the Conservatives and Mr. Shields for five minutes.

• (1215)

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

Thank you to the witnesses who are here today. I appreciate it.

Mr. Nicholson, I'm going to read a statement from the Cromwell report:

Now Hockey Canada has adopted an informal approach that would see claims run first through the NEF, then the reserve sub-fund in the IRS Fund, then to the Legacy Trust, and finally to the remaining funds in the IRS Fund. To our knowledge, the Legacy Trust was not designed with the IRS Fund in mind and no formal policy exists to govern how Hockey Canada is to respond to claims.

You have made some statements that you wish you could go back. Does this leave you, as a CEO, saying that you missed something here, with that statement in this report?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks for that question. It's a really difficult one for me to answer.

As I stated earlier, we had an insurance department. We had committees that dealt with all of that. I oversaw that as the CEO who would have to bring any of those changes to the board for final approval. When I look back, I think we should have had more policies. We should have had more of a role in how all of that information went.

That's as deep as I can get into that. I'm sorry, Martin. I can't give you more information.

Mr. Martin Shields: All right. It's one of the challenges. When there are no policies in place, things go sideways. I think that's what you're experiencing and what you're saying.

There were 21 claims, but 10 of them were not sexual in nature. Were there not NDAs for those other agreements for injuries when you were there? Did they go through a similar process? Do you know?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I am not 100% sure on that. It probably isn't right for me to comment. Those were probably done within our insurance group and were not brought to my desk. If they were brought to my desk, I can't honestly tell you if there were NDAs or not.

Mr. Martin Shields: It would have been funded, though, past the insurance you had because these were above the insurance policies, so they would have gone into these funds. You're not aware of those, then.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I'm not aware of all those, no.

Mr. Martin Shields: When you talked about the AGMs and the in camera, one of the things you had hoped was that people under-

stood what you were doing, yet there were no line items for several of these funds in your financials. How would they have known about it if there are no line items for some of these funds? How were they explained if there were no line items? How would people know about them?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: We used to have what we called financial forums. We had the branch presidents, as well as their people who were involved in their day-to-day operations of the finances, as well as risk management. I'm assuming that all that detail happened at that time. I can't tell you. I didn't sit in at all of those meetings, but there was a lot of detail and a lot of flow of information that went back between our CFO and our financial committee, and then to our 13 members.

Mr. Martin Shields: After an AGM and an in camera meeting with no line items, the 13 members you're talking about would be in a very difficult situation if they were only hearing an oral explanation possibly. Isn't that right?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I can't disagree.

Mr. Martin Shields: Okay, thank you.

Then there is the \$1.7 million for the external review, the report. That's the number that's there, \$1.7 million for this governance report.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Mr. Shields, is that for me?

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I just wanted to touch on this. Mrs. Thomas also asked about the Cromwell report. Justice Cromwell himself, in the terms of reference, also certainly weighed in and provided his input with the terms before we moved forward with his work.

To answer your question, my understanding is that it's \$1.7 million. It's an investment in the organization's future. We're making significant transformational changes and we needed that work to be done. It's certainly not a competency that we have within the organization and we're appreciative of the work that was done.

It comes as an expense, but I look at it as an investment.

Mr. Martin Shields: Also, you have another \$3-million expense for Longview. Longview's involved in—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Martin Shields: What's Longview doing for you for \$3 million?

• (1220)

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: We've invested at this point about \$6 million in total. Longview is a piece of that. There's other work that's been done too. We made an investment in OSIC. We certainly expanded our safe sport department. There are a number of things, Mr. Shields, that are within that \$6 million that aggregate to be that investment we're making to move ahead—

Mr. Martin Shields: What's Longview doing?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Longview helped us early—

The Chair: Thank you.

I think the time is up, Mr. Shields. Thank you very much.

I now go to Ms. Hepfner for five minutes for the Liberals.

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

I would like to thank our witnesses for their testimony today.

I'd like to start my questions to Mr. Nicholson.

You said in your opening statement that we didn't go far enough on off-ice conduct, and that you wanted a culture where everyone feels safe and welcome in hockey. But you also seem to still support the existence of these reserve funds. I'm wondering if you agree that when you have a fund that pays off victims so that perpetrators don't have to face any consequences for sexual assault, you are not only condoning that behaviour, but you are enabling it, you are institutionalizing it.

Do you agree?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: When I look at the situations that I was involved in at Hockey Canada, and those individuals, and there were a couple of them, they were convicted in the courts. We had those discussions with the victims and I felt that we protected the victims in those situations as much as possible.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: You were in charge of Hockey Canada in 2003, which is when we had some of these allegations, so what do you say to the women who were victims of what we're hearing was a culture of gang rape among junior hockey players? What do you say to the women?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: That's not acceptable. Find the courage to come forward.

As I've stated, the 2003.... We're just hearing about that now. I hope that the investigations, and there are ongoing investigations, will be able to come forward. If these rumours are true, there will be severe circumstances for the individual players.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Sir, I read in one news report that of the \$20 that parents pay to put their kids in hockey, \$13 went to these reserve funds to, in part, pay off sexual assault victims.

Why do you think that outraged parents, and what does it actually cost to put kids into hockey so that they can have fun playing hockey?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I really feel that when you look at the funds for hockey and what the costs are, you see that there's the insurance fund, which when I was there was approximately \$11, and there's a fee of \$3 for individuals to play. That \$3 hasn't increased, I don't think, over the last number of years. Insurance might have gone up.

However, the real costs and fees to kids start to be charged at the provincial, regional and minor hockey levels. The majority of the funds that Hockey Canada generates go back to helping participants with the programs and that. Hockey Canada was fortunate to build a lot of revenue from international events: 18% of international events—women's world championships, world juniors—goes back to grassroots programming. I'm not saying it's for fees, but it certainly helps all of the grassroots programming that's developed in the country.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Mr. McLaughlin, as brand manager, I'm wondering if you can describe for us what it did to the Hockey Canada brand when all of the sponsors mentioned by my colleague earlier left Hockey Canada and when places like Ontario and Quebec pulled out of Hockey Canada. What did that do to your brand?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: There's no question that this has been extremely challenging, which would be an understatement. We had significant meetings with the members on October 15 and October 16. The members have made it clear that they're behind us, but they've made it clear that we need a lot of work to be done. With respect to the sponsors, I can share with this group that it's around \$23.5 million to \$24 million that our CFO has forecast will be the impact of where we are today.

Some of those dollars are due to the events we hosted—the world championships—during COVID. We had an obligation to the IIHF to host those, but more importantly, we wanted to provide an opportunity for our athletes to compete. It also came at an expense when you're running in a bubble with no fans and those types of things.

Specifically with regard to your point about the incident of 2018, we have sponsors that are in two or three categories. One category is that they're out altogether. The other category is that they've postponed or delayed, and there's another category where partners have said that they're going to reposition their dollars towards grassroots hockey, towards women's and girls' hockey, or towards para athletes. However, while that's great and we're very appreciative of the repositioning of the dollars—

• (1225)

The Chair: Would you please wrap up, Mr. McLaughlin?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: —the reality is that that's not dollar for dollar. It's cents on the dollar. It comes at a significant cost to us, without question.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I think we have time for a third round if everyone tries to be concise and sticks to their time.

In the third round, we would begin with the Conservatives—Marilyn Gladu—for five minutes.

Marilyn, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I must say it is really disheartening. I've been a parliamentarian for seven years now, and I was the chair of the status of women committee. From the beginning, we've been trying to reduce and eliminate violence against women and girls. I was presiding over...all of the military sexual assault history, of years and years of a culture that has really.... We've still not seen much improvement.

To see Hockey Canada in a similar situation, with allegations from 2003 to 2018.... I'm not sure how bad the situation has to be in order to have three funds to pay off victims, but this is really disturbing. I want to say that you can't change the past—and I hope that people will come forward, survivors—but you can change the future, so I want to focus on the culture change that's needed.

My first question is for Mr. McLaughlin.

One thing that's very important is understanding consent. Anybody who hasn't seen the video out on YouTube called "Tea Consent" needs to go take a look at that.

Have you been through the mandatory violence and consent training that you mentioned is part of your action plan?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thanks for the question, and thank you for the work that you did. I wasn't aware that was the work that you do. I share the concerns that you and all Canadians have.

I have taken the training. I found it to be incredibly valuable. There's a lot more that I have to learn in this area, but it was certainly very beneficial.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: What do you think needs to be done in order to change the culture of the players? I think there's been a lot of effort spent on coaches, and I think that was right, but for the players to understand that naked and unconscious is not consent, what needs to be done?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: It's a spectrum. To me, it goes back a little bit to Mr. Julian in previous hearings when he asked what we're doing around reporting of numbers and what we're doing around maltreatment, abuse and harassment.

There's a lot of work that we are doing. We're getting prepared to release a report in the next little bit that will share our first attempt to move forward and be better in this area. At the end of the day, a lot of it is around education.

We have a lot of work to do. I think we've been clear on that. We're not the experts; we are consulting with the experts. I think everyone here expects us to do that, and our members have been clear on that, so we come here from a position of.... Whether this is a power play or a penalty kill, running a world-class event or doing things through grassroots hockey.... We're not the best, but we feel we're good, and we can certainly get help on that, but at this stage that we're talking about, we need a lot of help.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Yes, certainly. Thank you.

I am also concerned that, although some of the allegations happened years ago, there don't seem to have been any consequences for those whom the allegations are against. Is your organization taking any action in that light?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I'm like you. I don't want to dwell on the negative past but focus on a positive future. What I can tell you is that we have an independent third party mechanism that's now in place. We have now joined OSIC, and I think that, working with those two expert groups, we'll be in a much better position as we move forward.

• (1230)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: This is a question for Mr. Nicholson.

You mentioned that Sport Canada was sort of in an oversight position, knowing what was happening at Hockey Canada all those years.

What control should the government be putting in place to ensure that we're not continually funding organizations that we then find out are having sexual assault issues or funding anti-Semites, and all of these different issues come up? What should the government do to show better governance there?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I think you're doing a good job with the way the committee is working now. I think you're getting a lot more information to put the right platforms and the right topics in it to move forward.

On transparency, I'm assuming that Hockey Canada has really learned from this and that they will change their ways. I think the other key thing is for you as government to put in those platforms—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: —that are really necessary for NSOs to get funding. A lot of it is around expenses. A lot of it is around communication internally within NSOs and then how they have to report to government.

I've even thought further of how you report to your partners, your partners being your 13 branches and all of your sponsors, because you need sponsors for sport to grow in the country for young boys and girls.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gladu.

I will now go to the Liberal Party and Chris Bittle.

Chris, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Housefather will take the questions.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Anthony.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I want to come to Mr. McLaughlin.

First of all, again, I thank you for your sincerity in your comments today. Your tone is very clear.

My colleague Mr. Julian appropriated some of the questions that I had for you about Navigator. I think that the story today is that you've spent \$1.6 million on Navigator.

In the Cromwell report, on page 192, it says that you're in charge of “developing and implementing Hockey Canada's communication strategy”, Mr. McLaughlin. You're saying that the board is the one that influenced you or instructed you to approach a crisis management company like Navigator. When it came to the board strategy in August, where the board took the position that it wanted to fight back and that it wanted to counter the negative media, are you saying that this came only from the board and that it was not Navigator's advice?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thanks, Mr. Housefather. I'm not sure that I'm allowed to compliment you on your nice blue shirt, so I won't.

To answer your question directly, we were advised early on in June—and not by Navigator—that in situations like this, boards and senior staff quite often are in a defence mode. They try to defend and justify. I think it took all of us—not just the board—a while to get through that.

I do want to share one example if I can, and it's important. It will get back to the board comment in a second. We had a staff meeting on August 4. We thought we were doing a really good job of communicating with our staff. I can tell you that it was a disastrous meeting. I left that call with some of my colleagues saying, “We are not doing a good job of getting the message out.” It was awful.

Shortly thereafter, we found the same with our members. Really, the comments in the minutes are probably not the best terminology, and that's no one's fault but our own. It's really about our creating a more transparent environment and doing a better job—for example, on the questions we're getting today around the NEF and the Legacy Trust Fund—to communicate with people in the detail that's required. We haven't done a good job with that. That whole turn, Mr. Housefather, was about trying to do a better job ourselves with those people who matter most within Hockey Canada's environment.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thanks.

I agree with you. Certainly, the communications left a lot to be desired.

Let me ask you another question. You are in charge of communications. In July 2022, Hockey Canada sent a memo to its members about the equity fund. The report says that “the NEF is used to pay insurance premiums, deductibles, uninsured and underinsured claims, in addition to funding a wide range of safety, well-being and wellness initiatives, including 'counselling and treatment for players'.”

Were you involved in crafting that statement?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I didn't directly craft the statement. I certainly saw it before it went out, but I didn't directly craft that statement.

• (1235)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Was this statement true?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I'm sorry; I missed that.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm asking you if this statement was true.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Again, I'm not being evasive. It's not my area of expertise. My understanding is that it is true. I know that a number of our members shared that on their website and with their members, and we also held virtual town halls to walk through questions that people had—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. McLaughlin, they did, and that's the reason I'm so concerned about it, because Justice Cromwell, on page 151 of his report, found no indication that any safety, well-being or wellness initiatives were ever paid for from this fund. Basically, you advised your members that the fund had all kinds of altruistic components in addition to paying out these claims, but it turns out that it wasn't true at all. It turns out that was absolutely false, and he acknowledges that in his report.

Basically, it seems to me that there was a communication strategy to advise the public that the fund had various good things in addition to the negative. That's what scares me.

Let me ask you a different question. In 2014, the financial statement said, “The National Equity Fund balance has been accumulated as a precaution against judgments that may be made against the Association as a result of current or future claims.” That is true. Then, it says, “The Association is currently involved in defending legal actions resulting from accidents and injuries involved in CHA play. Provision has been made for estimated settlements and fees related to these actions.”

In 2015, the wording in the financial statement was changed from “accidents and injuries involved in CHA play” to “defending legal actions resulting from accidents and injuries involved in sanctioned hockey activities”.

Do you know why the change was made from the 2014 to the 2015 financial statement to change “accidents and injuries involved in CHA play” to “accidents and injuries involved in sanctioned hockey activities”?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I appreciate the question. This is one of these ones, again, Mr. Housefather, to which I don't have an answer. It's not my area.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Fair enough.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I do apologize. I take note of your previous comment on our communication. I'm going to go back and have a look at that to see what needs to be done to rectify that.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's fair enough, because my concern, again—and this comes back to Mrs. Thomas's question—is that you're telling the world that the fund is meant to defend legal actions resulting from accidents and injuries in “sanctioned hockey activities”, which is a wider thing, versus previously “in CHA play”. Before, you were saying it was on the ice; now, you're saying it's sanctioned activities off the ice.

Mr. McLaughlin, would you say that the 2018 alleged sexual misconduct incident with the players assaulting a woman in a hotel room would be “sanctioned hockey activities”?

The Chair: Mr. Housefather, you are now well over your time. I understand you will have the next slot for questions. Maybe you can bring that up again.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, for sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, I will go to Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Lemire.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. McLaughlin, the players who take part in Hockey Canada's programs, including the hockey championships, are borrowed from Canadian junior hockey leagues. You mentioned that you are still a signatory to the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner, the OSIC. However, Hockey Canada is not an OSIC member.

Would you still be able to borrow players from your partners and allow them to play in the impending world championships?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Lemire, for the question.

The answer is yes, we will. We have an arrangement with the Canadian Hockey League, and the CJHL. We look forward to those players being part of our programming.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Does hockey Canada meet all its obligations with Sport Canada? And has your funding been restored?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: We have a number of commitments to Sport Canada for the funding to be re-established. As you mentioned earlier, we have signed with OSIC, which is a very important step for us.

We've also instituted mandatory sexual assault and consent training. All of our athletes, staff and volunteers are part of that.

We've been 100% compliant since September 1, which is really important as we move forward. We'll continue to build on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Indeed.

Earlier, you mentioned that Justice Cromwell was an expert in governance, that you were not, and that's why you had consulted him.

However, you also consulted the public relations firm Navigator, rather than experts in education, awareness, and prevention of sexual violence, assaults and bullying.

Isn't that a contradiction?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: That may be one way to look at it. I prefer to look at it and say that we needed help in a number of areas.

One of the areas where we needed help with was governance. Navigator helped us with that.

We have a lot of work to do on the education and sexual assault and consent training that you're speaking to. We worked with the Waterloo sexual assault centre and other experts—

• (1240)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: —to try to build us out to be much better than we are.

I look at it as an investment, the number. It's a multi-faceted approach that we need to take in order to move forward and drive transformational change.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: We learned yesterday that some documents were submitted by Mr. MacKenzie of the Canadian Hockey League, including a copy of the Heinen Hutchinson report that he had received in 2019.

Did Sports Canada receive the same copy of the Heinen Hutchinson report in 2019?

Why don't you want to make this report public now?

[*English*]

The Chair: Please be concise, Mr. McLaughlin.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thank you for the question.

I'm not sure what the CHL has done.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think that is the end of Mr. Lemire's round.

I'm going to go to Mr. Julian for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

I would like to come back to you, Mr. Nicholson.

On the issue of Dan Church and the 2013-14 women's national team, you talked about performance issues. I'm curious as to why an NDA would be signed in this context. If a coach was fired for performance issues, was imposing an NDA something that Hockey Canada did systematically under your tenure, or were there special conditions around this that, in the opinion of Hockey Canada, required an NDA?

Is something being covered up? That is my question.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Peter, for the question.

We didn't have set guidelines on NDAs.

I'll go right to Dan Church. I can't say too much, because we have a signed NDA with him. It was a number of very touchy subjects that were discussed with the assistant coaches and with a number of players on the team. I am sure that was the reason why it came back to my desk to have an NDA signed. It was a recommendation from our HR and our senior staff.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

I'm going to go to you, Mr. McLaughlin.

There's a labyrinth of funds and there are the balances of funds, including the national equity fund, the participants legacy trust fund and the stabilization fund. We have asked to find out what the fund balances are. Is that something you can provide to the committee?

My second question is around what you mentioned a few moments ago about Sport Canada. You seem to be on track to have Sport Canada funding re-established. Have you received confirmation from the federal government that they will be providing funds again to Hockey Canada?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I believe I stand corrected, Mr. Julian, but we have four requirements from Sport Canada. I know that we moved along on a number of them. We have not completed them.

We have not, to my knowledge, had any indication from Sport Canada that we're going to receive any funding. As this group knows, we have undergone an audit. We have a further two-year extension on that. I don't want to suggest that we're close to receiving our funds. I'm not sure where that stands. I know that we have four commitments.

We're happy to provide the balances of the funds that you've requested. I'll make sure that our staff does that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The time is up, Peter.

Now I'll go to the final group. That is the Conservatives and Rachael Thomas for five minutes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

Mr. McLaughlin, would you agree to send an update on what those four principles are that you have been asked to abide by, or changes that you have been asked to make by Sport Canada? Where are you in terms of that journey?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Yes, I will for sure. Thank you.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: My question is for Mr. Nicholson.

In the Cromwell report, Justice Cromwell said he found that the "causes of the current crisis are not of recent origin." Saying that they're "not of recent origin" points to the fact that actually it's an accumulation of factors over years.

You were CEO and president from 1998 to 2014, so the vast majority of those years were under your care, when we look at recent history. I am just wondering what responsibility you might take for the circumstances in which Hockey Canada currently finds itself with the sexual assault allegations that have been brought forward.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: I can only comment on the times that I was there on the sexual assault things that happened. I really felt that through Graham James and a couple of those other situations, we handled it correctly internally, from our legal...to our insurance, to our risk and safety management, but we didn't handle it correctly because we took so much of it in camera. When I look back at this, I look at all the documents we did on the negotiations on each one of those legal cases, and then we had to sit down with those victims. We were really thorough.

We were really thorough on that. I lived that. I know how many times I met with those victims. I wish we could change that we didn't go in camera—we did. We didn't have minutes taken. I think that's a big part of what Justice Cromwell was alluding to.

We had to focus more on the off-ice situations with players. I was dealing a lot with on-ice, the hitting from behind, the Brad Hornung situation. There was a lot of that.

• (1245)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Nicholson.

Mr. McLaughlin, I was reading through the website, and there's this document with regard to the Cromwell report, the governance review. As I was reading it through, I found the language very interesting, and seeing as you're taking responsibility for that, I thought I would ask you this question.

The phrases that are used here talk a lot about.... I'll actually just quote one of them. It says the goal is "to rebuild the confidence of stakeholders and the public". The document goes on to talk about basically the image of Hockey Canada and trying to reinstate that.

What I don't see, however, is any desire to actually rebuild the culture. Mr. Cromwell talks about a "toxic culture", so I find it interesting that in this document that isn't addressed, which makes it look like, then, simply a PR stunt, a finessing of language, a desire to regain the trust of the public without actually making meaningful change within the inner culture of Hockey Canada. This document doesn't address that. Why?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I didn't write the document, and that's not to excuse myself from anything, Mrs. Thomas.

What I would say is that that's not the case. We have taken this very seriously. Justice Cromwell's work is very important to us. We've taken a number of steps to be better. We have a number of steps more to be better, and we need to get to the root cause analysis of the culture of hockey—and we're going to do that.

What I can say is that we have a lot of work to do. We've consulted with experts, and we have a lot more to do, as I've mentioned. That's our commitment to Canadians, and we have a lot to do to move forward and be the organization, again, that people expect of us. We can do that, but we do need help.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I'm just going to jump in here, Madam Chair.

Mr. Nicholson, the rumours are big in hockey. I know because the Graham James rumours surfaced long before he was charged. You talked about 2003 rumours. We've heard those rumours before.

When does Hockey Canada have to act on those rumours? In most cases the rumours are true, as in the case of Graham James, and now in 2003.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, please.

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thank you for the question. It's a very delicate one, Kevin. You can't jump on it too much, because it's a rumour, but do your homework quickly and try to get to those sources and get the real, valid information so that you can.... I think moving quickly is really important, but you have to be careful with that, Kevin. I've been around hockey, as you have, and there are lots of rumours that aren't true, and we have to be cautious of that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That's the end of that round.

The final question time will be shared between Anthony Housefather and Chris Bittle.

Please be mindful that you do have only five minutes to share.

We will begin with Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I will be quick.

I want to come back to a question I had asked you previously, Mr. McLaughlin. I understand that you're not the person who writes the financials. I just want to again point out that the way the financials are currently worded, it says that the national equity fund is being used for "accidents and injuries involved in sanctioned hockey activities". Would you agree with me that whatever happened in that hotel room in London in 2018 was not a sanctioned hockey activity?

• (1250)

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: It was not a sanctioned hockey activity. It was an activity that was not part of our hockey teams. It was a celebration for a number of teams that had achieved great accomplishments and other individuals. So, yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Basically, you'd agree with me, then, that the published financials are misleading as to what this fund actually does and doesn't do. I would appreciate if you could take that back to the people in finance, Mr. Cairo and the others, who are writing these documents.

I'll pass it over to Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you so much, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Nicholson, in your knowledge, can you advise how many times Hockey Canada required an NDA for any of its players under its umbrella?

Mr. Bob Nicholson: That's a really good question, Chris. There may have been under the women's Olympic team in 2014. They may have been asked, but I'm not sure if any were signed. Other than that, I don't know of any other situations with any of our national teams being asked to sign NDAs.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you, Mr. Nicholson.

Mr. McLaughlin, I was hoping you could go back through the records of Hockey Canada and table with the committee how many times Hockey Canada has used an NDA with its players, for what purpose and in what years.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thanks, Mr. Bittle. I will take that back to the organization.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you so much.

We all have concern with the culture of hockey. I guess it was made abundantly clear that there's been no change, having watched what the NHL has done with Mitchell Miller...or I believe the Boston Bruins specifically, an organization that saw a player, saw the vile nature of the activity, and still tried to let them play despite the fact that there was a noted history.

I would turn back to our own national team and the pride that Canadians have in it. If this is still the culture in hockey at the highest level, what is it going to take for Hockey Canada to say no to our players? I appreciate the pressure to have the best team on the ice, but if at the highest levels they're still putting players in who shouldn't be there, then what will it take?

I don't think anyone has seen any consequences from what happened in London. What will it take for Hockey Canada to prohibit a player from wearing the maple leaf and representing Canada?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Is that for me, Mr. Bittle?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Yes, Mr. McLaughlin. Thank you.

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: Thank you.

You know, in the first hearing in June—I want to say it was Mr. Waugh, but if I'm giving him undue credit, that's okay—the suggestion was to compel our players, as part of our code of conduct and moving forward, that they would be...participate without question if there ever was an incident or alleged incident again. We've made that commitment. I think Mr. Waugh used the example that we cannot have someone who, when their career is done, continues to move forward as a coach or an official or in any other capacity. We've made that commitment.

As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Bittle, we have a lot of work to do from an education perspective and others. That's really where we are, I would say.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you so much.

So you'll agree with me...because there are different levels of burden of proof. The criminal level of "beyond a reasonable doubt" we've all heard. There's a different level for civil responsibility on the balance of probability. If a player probably was involved, will you commit to this committee that in actions like this—like Mr. Miller, like what happened in 2019—they will not be wearing the maple leaf and be on the ice for team Canada?

Mr. Pat McLaughlin: I'm not going to speak for the NHL, but I think our position is very clear: no.

The Chair: You have one minute, Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Nicholson, having seen what the Boston Bruins have done, are you concerned that at the highest level, hockey isn't learning its lesson? Or is this an isolated incident from a different organization that you're not involved with?

• (1255)

Mr. Bob Nicholson: Thanks, Chris, for the question.

I look at how the National Hockey League responded to the situation in Boston. I look at what the National Hockey League has been doing for the last number of months—the last year and a half, in fact—in regard to these situations. They're taking it very seriously. I'm not going to comment on what the Boston Bruins do or their organization, but I can tell you that it's a top priority. I was at the last board of governors meeting, and a good part of the board of governors meeting was a discussion on this type of situation, so it is being addressed at the highest level of the National Hockey League—for sure.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nicholson.

That brings us to the end of our session.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

Could we provide 45 seconds to each party for a closing statement or question?

The Chair: I think we could, but you guys are going have to be disciplined and stick to your time.

All right. What about 30 seconds? I don't know if the clerk can tell us if we have extra time or if we have a hard stop at one o'clock.

The Clerk: We began the meeting at 11:03 and we are allowed two full hours, which allows us to go to 1:03.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We shall begin.

I will begin with the Conservatives for a 30-second statement.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, if it weren't for the sponsorships pulling out of the men's hockey program, I don't think we would have been here today. The nearly \$24 million that has been pulled since June has brought us to this situation.

Thank you to Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. Nicholson. I think that since June, July and September, this was probably our best meeting. We didn't get a lot of answers, but we did get some—like Navigator and so on. I think those watching today want to see a lot more from Hockey Canada and the National Hockey League, and we can't wait to get cleared up on 2003 and 2018.

That's all I'll say. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to the Liberals.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. Nicholson. I found that their testimony today was refreshingly frank compared to previous testimony from Hockey Canada. I think this is good progress.

I think this committee and the media have worked together with Canadians to effect change.

I agree with Mr. McLaughlin. Now we all need to work together, including the executive team and the new board of Hockey Canada, to make sure that the culture is changed, that the organization is sustained and that young kids across Canada can enter hockey programs feeling confident—and with parents feeling confident—that this is not only one of our national sports, but a great sport and a safe sport to be part of. I look forward to that day.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

I'll go to Mr. Lemire for 30 seconds, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree with those who said this meeting has been constructive and interesting. I would encourage those who want to work together in future with a view to changing the organization's culture and giving our children a sport that is healthy and safe.

I would remind you that one of the goals of the four meetings held with Hockey Canada was to shed light on what happened in June 2018 and how Hockey Canada dealt with sexual harassment complaints. I think that an independent public investigation would still be a way of exploring these matters to ensure that we know as much as possible about this situation and to come up with recommendations to make sure that things like this never happen again anywhere in the world of sport.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

Now we have Peter Julian for 30 seconds, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Public confidence in Hockey Canada over the six months that we've been holding hearings so far has completely eroded, and it is in part because of stonewalling and a lack of transparency and accountability.

Today we got some answers, and I'd like to thank the witnesses for that, including on the outrageous funds paid to Navigator, but it is still an issue of accountability. Hockey Canada needs to, if those victims so choose, release them from NDAs and show accountability at all levels.

The jury is still out on Hockey Canada, and we will continue our work to ensure that Hockey Canada, as a national sports organization that represents our national winter sport, provides the transparency and accountability that are so necessary to Canadians again having confidence in the organization.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, Peter.

I think we have about one minute left before we adjourn this meeting.

I would like to echo what the members of this committee have been saying. My job as a chair is to talk about the integrity of the process of the standing committee. I would say that this is probably the first meeting when we did get some clear answers to the questions, so I want to thank the witnesses. I would like to say that it is, in fact, clear that this is a first time and we still have not had assurances of change, transparency and accountability.

I want to thank the witnesses for being patient. I want to apologize for the technical difficulties. Hopefully they will not happen again.

I want to thank everyone.

Without further ado, this meeting is now adjourned.

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