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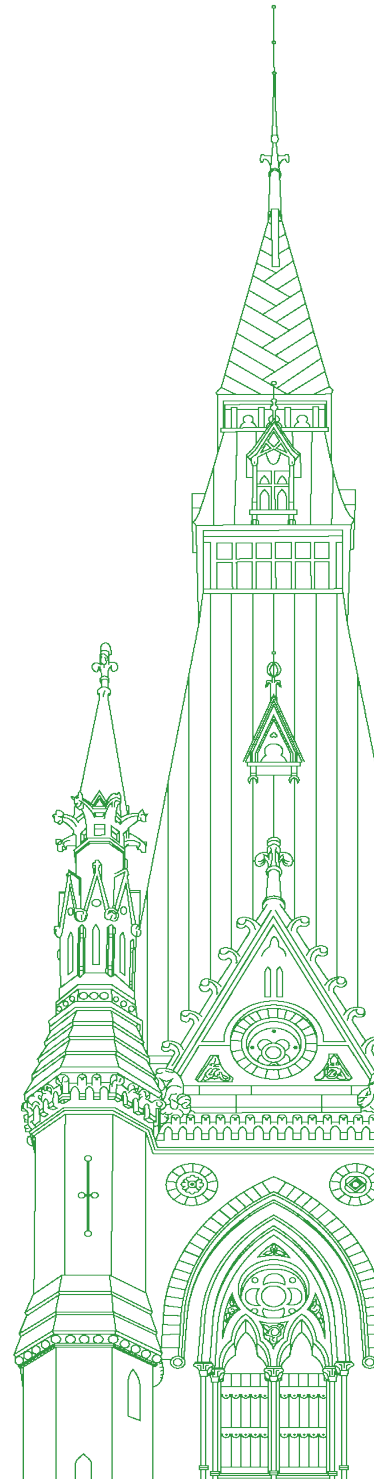
Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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Thursday, October 8, 2026

Chair: Lisa Hepfner



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 46 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Before we begin, I'd ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table in front of you. These measures are in place to help prevent feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all our participants, including interpreters. You'll notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before you speak. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on April 16, 2026, we are meeting today to discuss the report of the future of sport in Canada commission.

We have with us today the Honourable Adam van Koeverden, secretary of state for sports; and, from the Department of Canadian Heritage, we have Andrew Brown, associate deputy minister, and Emmanuelle Sajous, assistant deputy minister for sport. Welcome to all participants. It's nice to have you here.

In our second hour we will have just the officials. We have the secretary of state for just one hour, just to be clear with everyone.

Secretary of State van Koeverden, you have five minutes for an opening statement, and then we'll turn it over to questions from members. Go ahead.

[Translation]

Hon. Adam van Koeverden (Secretary of State (Sport)): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon.

[English]

Madam Chair, vice-chairs and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the future of sport in Canada commission's final report.

Abuse and maltreatment have no place in sport and no place in society. A strong sports system is one that Canadians can trust and believe in: one that is safe, inclusive, accessible, affordable and built to support people at every stage of their sporting journey.

[Translation]

That means continuing to improve safety, integrity and transparency at all levels of the system. It also means being accountable and getting results.

[English]

First, I would like to thank the commissioner, Justice Lise Maisonneuve, and her team for their leadership and the diligent work that went into developing this comprehensive report. It was the voices of survivors that broke the culture of silence. Their time, insights and lived experiences have created a pathway forward for a better Canada. Thousands of Canadians also contributed. Experts, academics, athletes, parents, coaches and sport leaders—thank you all.

I would also like to thank the ministers who preceded me in this file and worked to advance sport, specifically the late honourable Dr. Kirsty Duncan. She was a fierce advocate and leader, laying the groundwork for the important conversations that we're having today. I think we should have a small round of applause for Kirsty.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: One thing is clear: Canadians love sport. Canada is a country with sport in our DNA. We want to strengthen the Canadian sport system collectively.

The commission's report outlines that addressing systemic challenges requires leadership, time, sustained effort, collaboration across jurisdictions, funding and coordinated action. It also shows that we need to fix bigger, system-wide problems, changing how sport is managed across the country and addressing gaps in safety precautions.

We know that when safeguards are weak or absent, real harm can occur, so we as a government are taking action. The first action that I undertook, following the report's release in March, was to invest \$6 million over two years into mental health support for national team athletes and coaches. Since then, we have increased our support for safe sport, antidoping and match manipulation prevention initiatives to over \$19 million for this year.

We all ought to recognize how underfunded the sport system was for decades. This was a central theme throughout the report. Madam Chair, I'm proud to say that our new government has made the largest ever investment in Canadian sport, with \$1 billion to strengthen the sport system from playground to podium. I'm working closely with provinces and territories, indigenous partners, athletes, under-represented communities, sport organizations and the private and philanthropic sectors across the country to advance on the report's findings and recommendations.

Our collective mandate in sport in this country has changed. This federal investment is not more money to do the same thing. It's not good money after bad. The new government is delivering. This is real change for the right reasons and to get it done well and in a durable way that will build a safe, inclusive and resilient sport system that delivers both social and economic benefits and returns to Canadians for Canada.

I would like to thank the commission for outlining its recommendations in phases: immediate, short-term and long-term objectives. I can share with the committee that all of the immediate recommendations are either completed or well under way. We are advancing step by step, and many of the other recommendations are also under way.

In May, I met with my provincial and territorial counterparts responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation, and we're working together to advance and coordinate independent and safe sport complaint mechanisms. This means that every jurisdiction should have an independent reporting mechanism to which individuals can report allegations of maltreatment in a manner that is transparent, trauma-informed and procedurally fair.

We are also working with organizations like Sport Integrity Canada, which recently announced new educational resources for participants at all levels of sport and the launch of a legal advice service through the Canadian safe sport program. They have also expanded the CSSP public registry to sanction individuals who have been permanently or indefinitely suspended from sport.

It was at this very committee that parliamentarians brought these issues to the public realm.

• (1110)

[Translation]

As the system moves forward, transparency and accountability will remain a priority. To receive funding from the Government of Canada, organizations will need to show good governance and implement safe sport measures.

[English]

In the coming months, a new sport funding framework will be launched, with a revamped vision for 2027 and beyond. This will further address several of the recommendations in the commission's report.

This represents a new era of sport in our country, an opportunity to lead, grow, innovate and improve, all virtues strongly held by Canadian families, kids, teams and athletes. Whether in local communities or on the world stage, sport reminds us that when Canadi-

ans come together, we're a stronger and more ready country to stand up for ourselves, our values, our identity and our country.

[Translation]

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. I'll now turn it over to Mr. Kuruc for six minutes.

Ned Kuruc (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here today, and thank you for all your work on this file to date.

There was a recommendation for a centralized Crown corporation to govern sport in Canada. Can you let us know what your possible position is or whether you've given it that much thought? Where are you on that?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you very much, Mr. Kuruc, and congratulations on your recent appointment to critic in this role.

I would thank you for that specific question. This is a structural recommendation that was made in the final report of the future of sport in Canada commission, and it's one that the sport community and my office, as well as Sport Canada, have undertaken considerable time to research, look into and compare across jurisdictions.

It's important to note that countries like the United Kingdom and Australia, while different, have some similar types of institutions that govern sport at an arm's length from government or, in our case, from Sport Canada, which is a government department. This is not similar to UK Sport or the Australian Sports Commission, in particular.

In the preliminary report, I'll note that the commission outlined a variety of options, structures and potential ways to implement this sort of entity approach, and they are all worthy of deep consideration. That said, I once again thank the committee for outlining its recommendations in a phased approach—immediate, short-term and longer-term objectives. The entity, as stated in the report, leans more towards the longer-term considerations. The first thing that we addressed was the lack of funding, immediately, and the lack of funding directed specifically toward athlete mental health and well-being.

Ned Kuruc: I'm sorry, Mr. Secretary. I appreciate that you are still looking at it. You view it as very positive, but you're still doing some research on it. You're looking at very different examples. I can appreciate that.

The concerns that I have about that particular section relate to the fact that I came off about a year and a half at public accounts, and at public accounts, value for the taxpayer dollar was at the forefront. Unfortunately, my mind is still wrapped up in those types of discussions while I transition over here to heritage. Being on the public accounts committee, we saw a lot of Auditor General reports.

The fear that I have—and I would love you to take this into consideration—is that the taxpayer dollar is going to be used to benefit the athlete the most. I think you appreciate that, and I think you're there. We've had numerous examples of that, and I've brought some to give context for what I'm talking about because we don't want to go down that road. We don't want to, in the future, have a bad Auditor General's report. We're here to make sure that doesn't happen.

We have followed up on programs for first nations, Canada Revenue Agency contact centres, modernizing the pay system, international student program reforms and professional service contracts with GC Strategies. These were all noble initiatives like this one, but they were misappropriations of tax dollars, to say the least.

My question to you is maybe more of a consideration. What are your thoughts on that? We need to make sure that this money goes exactly where it's going. I think you agree. I can agree with that. I'm not going to paint you with this brush, but the government in the last seven years hasn't necessarily done a fantastic job of that, so I hope we can escape that routine or that cycle and see where we go.

We can also cite ArriveCAN, McKinsey contracts, Trans Mountain, future fighter capability, benefits delivery modernization—\$1.8 billion, \$8.7 billion. There's a lot of money here.

Can you comment on value for tax dollars, where your mind is on that and where your priorities are on that?

• (1115)

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you again, MP Kuruc. I share your priorities and your concerns around value for money for Canadians. In fact, on this additional \$755 million that's being invested directly into the sports system, I'd like to clarify that for a moment. I did say \$1 billion. That includes a \$250-million allocation specifically for sport-related infrastructure, which will differ a bit from the community pools and gymnasiums that we all want to see updated in our ridings. This is directed by a national sport organization.

A good example is in Etobicoke North, where we announced \$76 million for the construction of a national basketball training facility that will provide benefit to the community. It will provide upwards of 32,000 playing hours on court for kids in the local Etobicoke North riding and community, which, I would also note, is the former riding of the late Honourable Kirsty Duncan.

I share your priority and preoccupation that more of each dollar invested in sport should reach athletes. A big part of what we're doing with this novel investment at Sport Canada is insisting that national sport organizations reduce bureaucracy, reduce red tape and ensure that a greater proportion of every dollar reaches athletes, teams, coaches and facilities.

Thank you for the question. I really appreciate that.

Ned Kuruc: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Al Soud, you also have six minutes.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, as always, Madam Chair.

Secretary of State, good morning, and thank you for taking the time to join us today.

You are a four-time Olympic medallist, including one gold, and you have inspired more people than I believe you even know. My wonderful legislative assistant, Jade, is sitting over there. Her brother was named Adam after you.

In many ways, your path through sports is unique. You have gone to places that many won't, and you have won things that many won't. In other ways, it really isn't. You started playing a sport, you fell in love with the sport, and you got pretty good at the sport. Your story is effectively the perfect encapsulation of what we mean when we say "playground to podium".

I've heard bits and pieces of your story over the years. I'd like to offer you the opportunity to share that story with us here in committee today.

[Translation]

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Al Soud.

[English]

I've spent a lot of hours in committee over the years in this job, on the transport committee, the indigenous and northern affairs committee, the health committee, the environment committee and this one. I just got really emotional reflecting on the journey and what brought me here.

I came from a family of divorced parents, with a single mom. My dad was always around; I was lucky. I continue to be lucky to have a great dad. Both of my parents worked full-time. I grew up at the Chautauqua Co-op in Oakville, Ontario.

When I was 12, I started getting into quite a bit of trouble after school. Some of that trouble my mom knew about, and some of it she didn't. She was struggling. She's a pretty strong lady, an immigrant from Hungary. She walked out of that communist country at age two. She found herself on a boat at Pier 21 in Nova Scotia.

MP Hirtle, maybe you've been to Pier 21.

Ultimately, my mom found the canoe club in an ad in the newspaper. She initially thought, “I would love it if my kid wanted to do sport after school, but he’s just not an athlete.” I wore thick glasses. I had long hair. I liked Nirvana. I was a rebel.

The structure of the canoe club on the first day was exactly what I needed—the mentorship, the positive environment, the coaching and the friendships I made. I didn’t even know that I was going down to the canoe club to race. I thought maybe it was something to do with summer camp or overnight camping.

When I got down there, I met Larry Cain, Olympic champion, 1984; and Scott Oldershaw, part of a dynasty. His father started the Mississauga Canoe Club, not far from your riding.

I’m so fortunate that my mom checked the newspaper and that, instead of saying “no” in a rebellious and insolent way when I was 13, I said, “Yeah, I’ll go to the canoe club.” It changed my life, man, so significantly.

Years in sport taught me every lesson. I finished high school, and I went to university. It wasn’t an inevitable thing. When I was 17, I came home from practice. A national team member named Nathan had driven me home. He’s a good friend. He’s a big part of the New Zealand sports system now—he’s Canadian but works in New Zealand. He drove me home from practice, and my mom asked, “How’d you get home? You got home fast,” and I said, “Yeah, Nathan drove me home in a national team truck. It’s pretty cool. I got to paddle with those guys tonight.”

“What did he tell you?” she asked.

“Did you know that national team members get university covered in Canada through the athlete assistance program?” I responded. She put down her spatula and asked, “What time’s practice tomorrow?”

It became a family thing at that stage. There was no inevitable thing that was going to get me to university, but the athlete assistance program made it possible for me to attend university. It gave me a goal, and I didn’t get into trouble after school anymore.

Man, I thought we were going to talk about policy. You’re making me cry.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1120)

Fares Al Soud: I can’t stress enough how much we all appreciate your taking the time to share that with us.

There’s a lot of good in Canadian sport, and you’ve just described much of that, but there is also some bad. You said in passing the other day that if this is happening, it’s because of the courage and bravery of the survivors and because of three phenomenal women—one of whom was Dr. Kirsty Duncan—who used their experience and their positions to call attention to abuse in sport and to try to create a system that was better for everyone.

As we now look to the commission’s report and to the path forward, how do you believe we best honour those voices and ensure that we can make the change that they wanted?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: That’s a fantastic question. You’ll note that you asked me to reflect on my experiences, and not once did I think about an Olympic podium. I didn’t think about winning the world championships, not until the mic turned off and I was like, yeah, that is what I value. I value the community connections, the friendships, the mentorship, the positive track I got onto as a teenager.

You know, still, mostly in men’s sport, there’s bad culture that we need to address. Education, the right people in coaching roles, campaigns and really positive role models are the things that will get us there. Sport Integrity Canada is doing an excellent job with those modules, that training.

A couple of years ago, I raced at my 20th or so national championships. It was just a canoe club event in Welland, Ontario, at the nationals. They said, “Hey, if you want to race in the C15, there’s a safe sport module that you have to complete.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Yeah,” they said, “Get online. You need to do this module.” It took about 30 minutes to watch some videos and do a survey. It was really a sort of full-circle moment for me. I said to myself, “Well, now I’m here wanting to compete, and I have to do some training. It’s good.” Even national team members and former national team members need to do that. Every coach, every volunteer, everybody who’s working in a sport context supported by Sport Canada is undertaking that education so that sport environments are safer, more inclusive, more accepting and more mindful of the harm that can occur when people let the emotion of sport or the desire to win advance on the priorities of joy in sport. That’s important. Let’s focus on the joy and the positive aspects of sport, physical activity and recreation, because that’s where the magic happens.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lemire for six minutes.

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

Adam, allow me to address you like that. You have often answered my questions by calling me your friend. That is the way I’ll greet you.

Today, we are completing a four-year cycle in which you have often played the bad guy, defending indefensible things when answering questions about safe sport, particularly on behalf of ministers who were often absent from the House. You've experienced this from the inside. Your background, as you have just testified, certainly deserves to be recognized. I recognize your personal desire to follow through on many of the elements in the report.

Honestly, do you believe that we could have given you this much latitude today, as minister, to bring about profound change in the sport ecosystem, particularly when it comes to safe sport and the protection of victims, if it hadn't been for the four years of work the committee has done on the subject and the many questions you've had to answer in the House, including mine?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: I want to start by thanking you, my friend, for your leadership and your voice on this committee. Thank you for representing your constituents in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, your province and the nation of Quebec. You have a unique perspective in the House of Commons, and you also have a perspective on issues specific to sport. One of the opportunities we had was playing soccer together. Honestly, I think politics is an opportunity to learn from others.

[English]

I've learned a lot from you, as a friend and as a colleague.

[Translation]

Canada is a sport nation for many reasons. In my opinion, it's because Quebec is a sport nation.

Your perspective on this committee is very important.

Quebec's sport system is a good example for the rest of the country. I could not imagine Team Canada without Marie-Philip Poulin, Mikael Kingsbury, our king of freestyle, our flag bearer, Alexandre Bilodeau or other athletes like Cindy Ouellet, the champion of two Paralympic sports.

Sébastien Lemire: I would also like a lot more Quebecers to be part of Canada's team, but that's another story. In an ideal world, we would have our own national team. It makes no sense for a single Quebecer a year to be selected as part of the Canadian team, given Quebec's demographic weight and the talent we have. I'll come back to that.

As you know, I've been very critical of Sport Canada's inaction—more than its action—over the decades. I think one of the things that would most advance sport is to set up an independent entity. You could be called upon to be its senior leader. It would be a matter of separating sport from heritage and the gold-medal obsession, which makes funding conditional and, obviously, shapes all the reputation protection mechanisms that have helped preserve the culture of silence around offending coaches, among others.

We're calling for an independent sport entity to be set up. One of the recommendations was to focus more on health to encourage accessibility, good practices and healthy living habits. Can you tell us more about the future vision of this new entity? Can we expect more results when it comes to children's sports?

• (1130)

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you again.

[English]

I'm sorry that I let my admiration speech go on a bit long there, but it just goes to tell you how much respect I have for you and your work.

We could spend a lot of time brainstorming in this meeting or in another about the future structure of the multisport service organizations at arm's length from Sport Canada. I don't know if that brainstorming is necessarily conducive to this committee, but I would tell you again that Quebec is an incredible example of how to ensure that sport is safe, accessible, affordable and inclusive for all participants.

I was recently in Montreal during the UCI world championships, the cycling worlds. I was with Cycling Canada. The FQSC is the Quebec provincial cycling organization. They were doing a HopOn program for the kids.

[Translation]

In French, it's the Embarquez bicycle program.

[English]

It was the most organized “try it” day I'd ever seen. Quebec has it so vertically aligned in schools, in community. At the Canada Games, the Quebec team is always so organized.

I love that at this committee, and in government and in the House of Commons, there are times when we find common ground. We find things we can agree on. We can always find areas of disagreement. I think Canada is strongest when we're unified.

My colleague, our friend MP Hardy, sitting next to you, was gesturing during your recommendations about a Quebec national team. We'll find some agreement with Gabriel there. We'll find some disagreement between you and me, potentially, but when we're looking at the multisport service organization network in Canada, what I think we can agree on is that the status quo is not perfect. There's overlap. There are probably too many organizations that are doing the same thing, and that leaves gaps in the system as well, but I would just say again—potentially in closing, as I imagine we're getting close to the end of the time on this—that Quebec continues to be the gold standard for sport systems at the provincial level in Canada. There are some really extraordinary examples of other programs in Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and British Columbia that ought to be emulated by other provinces.

I look forward to working with the new government in Quebec at our future FPT table in Quebec City, or possibly even earlier. If you would like to introduce me to the new sports minister, when we know who they are, then I would be excited to continue the work, because, once again, Quebec continues to lead the way.

[Translation]

Quebec has a world-class system and serves as a model for all of Canada.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Adam.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lawton, you have five minutes.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Secretary, for being here.

The commission suggested in its report enhancements to the Canadian sport governance code to better enshrine DEI. One of the comments made in the report regarding board members of sports organizations is that they “should all be individuals who are committed to equity, diversity, and decolonization.”

Do you agree with that standard for board members of sports organizations?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, MP Lawton.

I do note that sports organizations, those funded by Sport Canada and others, are independent organizations, and they've taken some really great steps forward on their governance models to ensure that they—

Andrew Lawton: Thank you. It was a yes-or-no question, Secretary. Do you believe the board members need to be fully committed to decolonization to be board members of sport organizations?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: MP Lawton, on these questions and the issue around DEI, as you put it, it's three words: diversity, equity and inclusion. If there's one of those that you strongly disagree with, I would like to know why. I think this acronym is being weaponized and used occasionally as something that it's not.

Sport Canada has a diversity, equity and inclusion priority, and we—

Andrew Lawton: Normally, as an athlete, you'd want to go in the shortest time possible, Secretary. I think you're trying to go in the longest time here.

Do you believe it is the responsibility of a national government agency to decolonize pickleball?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: These are somewhat rhetorical questions in the sense that you're trying to draw something out of me. First of all—

Andrew Lawton: An answer—yes. Thank you.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Yes. Sure.

When we work with the Aboriginal Sport Circle, which is the governing body of a multisport service organization and just published a new indigenous sport strategy for all Canadian sports, which I suppose would include pickleball, we want to ensure that

we're taking an approach that includes all indigenous people in Canada. Whether that is undertaking a decolonization approach, which you and I could probably stand to learn something about—I'm not indigenous—or—

• (1135)

Andrew Lawton: What sport do you believe is excessively colonized in Canada?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Oh, I'll give you a great example.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: I am very fortunate to have participated in a sport that relies on an indigenous invention. The kayak was invented by people of the north, by Inuit, 4,000 or 5,000 years ago, prior to the building of the pyramids. I never thought about that, as a white guy from Oakville, until after I was done kayaking for my career.

I had the chance to go to Labrador and meet a guy named Ross Flowers. To connect with his culture, as a southern Inuit guy, he built a kayak with his bare hands from seals he shot, wood he harvested and tools he made himself with his bare hands. I got to paddle in that boat. While I was on the water, I smelled the hides warming up. I felt the reindeer scratching my back. I was not sitting on a carbon-fibre, high-performance kayak seat the way I had paddled almost 200,000 kilometres, upwards of three or four times around the equator.

I tasted the salt water of the Labrador Sea. I smelled this boat. I felt it in a different way. I experienced kayaking from a decolonized perspective.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you. You didn't need a government agency to do it, or a mandate ensuring DEI on boards for sport organizations.

I'm glad you had that experience—

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Andrew, could I respond to that?

Andrew Lawton: I have other questions, Secretary.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Could I respond to that? It was a comment.

Andrew Lawton: No, because I have further questions. Thank you.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Well, if I could, Mr. Lawton—

Andrew Lawton: Let me ask you about the IOC decision to “sex test” athletes. You basically came out after this and said that sportswomen are against this. I have heard from many women and girls who do not believe they should be expected to compete against biological males who have a competitive advantage, especially when we're dealing with upper body strength, yet you have said, and I'm quoting you directly here, that it is a “stupid conservative pseudo fantasy” that biological men are beating women in sports.

I can give you a number of examples of this happening, which you are well aware of. Why do you believe this is not a real problem? Why was it not in the 1,000-page report on the state of sport in Canada?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you for the question, Mr. Lawton.

In response to your previous one, I hope more Canadian athletes and Canadians in general have an opportunity to experience what I did in the kayak, which was the decolonization of my sport.

Andrew Lawton: That was not the question, Secretary.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, MP Lawton.

First of all, the IOC and other international sport federations are independent in nature. They undertake their own eligibility priorities. We at Sport Canada respect them.

What I think we should focus on is the fact that women have come forward to tell their stories. Women have been brave and courageous. Survivors have demonstrated tremendous resilience in sharing with us their experiences and how we can create a safer, stronger sport system for all participants in the future.

You know, I don't know if it's terribly productive for two men to sit at this table debating rhetorically the definitions of various categories that other international sporting organizations are—

Andrew Lawton: Okay, then I'll ask you this. A briefing note to your predecessor says, “The most current peer-reviewed science demonstrates significant male advantage in sport, amplified through and after puberty”. Do you agree or disagree? It's from your government.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: I would like to read the report before I provide my full endorsement of a paper.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you.

I seek unanimous—

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Auguste.

Andrew Lawton: I have a point of order.

Pursuant to the minister's request, I seek unanimous consent to table the report he's asked for.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent to table this report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Ms. Auguste, you have the floor for five minutes.

Tatiana Auguste (Terrebonne, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to Secretary of State van Koeverden for being here.

In your story, you talked about the joy of sport and how, in your recollection of your Olympian career, what you really remember is joy and the fact that the community you created for yourself was the defining thing for you.

We talked about major Quebec athletes. I sincerely believe that the young people in my riding of Terrebonne would not have been able to cheer on Steven Dubois in speed skating had it not been for that joy in sport and had Steven not been able to do everything he could to advance as far as he did.

From that perspective, we would certainly like everyone to take joy in sport, but that's not necessarily the case. There are mental health issues. All Canadians know that taking care of mental health is fundamental to overall health and well-being, whether you play sports or not, whether you're a high-performance athlete or not.

Could you provide an update on how the government's renewed annual investment in mental health is delivering on the commitment to athlete well-being?

• (1140)

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you for your question and for your work on this committee.

Yes, I agree. Terrebonne's Olympic champion Steven Dubois is an example of the power of community sport, incredible resilience and opportunity when a country invests in both high-performance and community sport.

[English]

I've gone to the skating rink that Steven Dubois and his team train on, and when the national team isn't training on it, it's kids learning to skate for the first time, families taking their kids around for a couple of laps or little kids learning to figure skate. It's a community investment. I believe, when it's done well, an investment in sport isn't necessarily just for high performance, just for the community or just for the grassroots. It really can, on a continuum but also in an instant, have an impact on everyone. Skating clubs like the one Steven Dubois trained at....

I know other athletes from Terrebonne, like Kim Hyacinthe, who's from your community and is a track star. She grew up running in elementary school and high school, because in your community there are good high school and elementary school sport programs. That's awesome. That created joy but also opportunity.

From the perspective of mental health, when we talk about mental health, when we destigmatize mental health and when we focus on solutions for mental health, we normalize those conversations. When a young athlete or even somebody who looks up to Clara Hughes or Steven Dubois sees them talking about it, they see it as a position of strength. They say it's like going and doing a chin-up. Talking about their own mental health is like exercising.

That's what young people are seeing now. They're seeing that it's not a weakness to stand up and say, "I'm having a rough time. I need a break. I need a change. I need some time. I want to talk about these problems." That openness is leading to better mental health outcomes for all Canadians.

It would be a privilege for me now to mention my big sister Clara Hughes' early work on that in helping create programs like Game Plan for national team athletes. It doesn't help just national team athletes, though, because people follow these Olympians, Paralympians and world champions on social media. They read the newspaper, they read their biographies and they think, "Wow, these athletes are brave. They're courageous, they're strong and they're talking about their challenges and issues."

Oftentimes, those mental health struggles have nothing to do with sport. They have to do with trauma or hard things people are dealing with in their lives or relationships. It's the stuff everybody goes through, so athletes, more and more, are great examples for society, and the advancement on mental health is thanks, again, to their courage, bravery and willingness to speak up.

[Translation]

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you.

My second question is about affordability.

I will refer once again to your story. You talked about your economic situation at home and the fact that your mother found an ad in the newspaper that, obviously, became a safeguard in your life. You talked about how important affordability was to you. However, affordability remains a major barrier for Canadian families who want to participate in sports and recreation in their community.

Could you tell this committee what the government intends to do to remove financial barriers and ensure accessible sport programs for more people?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you for the question.

How much time do we have left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: We're out of time, so give a quick answer.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Okay.

[English]

There are lots of examples. I wanted to know how much I could do in French. I'm just going to speed through in English.

We've asked every national sport organization to lower barriers to access in sport for positions of affordability, access and inclusion. There are all sorts of reasons why somebody might not be able to participate in sport, and we want to reduce all of those barriers to make sure that physical activity is more likely to be a part of everybody's day. It's not necessarily to create more champions, but when more people compete in sport and everybody's doing physical activity and they have a hobby that they love, you're more likely to have more champions too. It's a nice by-product, but it's not necessarily the specific goal or motivation for the new investments.

We're working with lots of great charities. Monsieur Lemire mentioned Sport'Aide in Quebec. We have KidSport and Jumpstart. All of these organizations are working really well to make sport low or no cost. It's also why we've seen sports like—

● (1145)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. van Koeverden.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes.

Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, I have a special request for you.

Since the minister is here and it fits into our schedule so far, can I do my second and third turns consecutively?

The Chair: No.

Sébastien Lemire: No?

The Chair: Let's follow the normal procedure, please.

Sébastien Lemire: Okay.

Adam, I would ask you to give ridiculously short answers, which I haven't from the start, with all due respect.

First, you praised Quebec's leadership in setting up the ombud for integrity in sport and recreation, the Quebec code of governance of non-profit organizations, or NPOs, for sport and recreation, which was introduced in 2000 and revised in 2025, the Act respecting safety in recreation and sports, and a centralized complaint mechanism. Quebec has also set up shared services within these groups.

There's a huge fear in this report about centralization. Quebec is the model, but there is a danger of a race to the bottom. Organizations like Sport'Aide are important, and I want to acknowledge Sylvain Croteau's leadership.

I'm reaching out to meet Quebec's new minister of sport, recreation and outdoor activities.

As such, are you committed to respecting Quebec's jurisdictions and its leadership?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: I'll answer very briefly: yes, 100%.

[English]

It's a priority that every province remains with its integrity and is able to make decisions that are best for its province. Every province is different in Canada. The problems facing athletes in Saskatchewan are different from those facing athletes and participants in all levels of sport in Prince Edward Island.

I want to re-emphasize that Quebec continues to be an incredible leader. When we invest in countrywide, nationwide, pan-Canadian solutions...I want to say what a profound, positive impact they have in Quebec. The World Anti-Doping Agency and the Sport Integrity Canada initiatives we've undertaken are good examples. All of that testing happens in Montreal. The head offices of the World Anti-Doping Agency are in Montreal. When we invest in organizations like Own the Podium, which is a pan-Canadian approach to excellence in sport in Canada, we get centralized opportunities in Quebec, like at INS in Montreal, so that Quebec athletes and those who aspire to be on a provincial or national team have more opportunities.

Those investments have been—

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: I have to stop you there, because our rule-abiding chair prevents me from being more flexible with you.

The Government of Quebec and its newly elected premier want to set up a national hockey team to represent Quebec on the international stage. Are you going to oppose Quebec's wishes, especially with precedents that include the Scottish national soccer team and even the Welsh soccer team?

[English]

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Monsieur Lemire.

The federation of Canada is very different from the federation of the United Kingdom. I think that's a conversation that will warrant a response of more than 30 or 40 seconds.

There are many opportunities for Quebec to compete as a sovereign nation, not the least of which is at the Canada Games, which will be held in Quebec City in early 2027. I hope we can go and watch some hockey together at one of those competitions. There are other examples, too. There's a francophone games. There are other international competitions where that might be appropriate.

I would also ask Quebec athletes what their initiatives, priorities and preoccupations are. The athletes I competed with from Quebec on the national team.... Caroline Brunet carried the opening ceremony's flag in the Sydney Olympics. She's a kayaker. She's a woman whose poster I had on my wall growing up. She is a proud Canadian and a proud Quebecker at the same time. She won the world championships for Canada and Quebec at the same time.

I also had Alwyn Morris's flag on my wall when I was a kid. He proudly held the eagle feather on the top step of the Olympic podium in 1984. He's a proud member of the Mohawk nation and a proud member of team Canada at the same time. That's what makes Canada great.

Scottish and Welsh players play for Great Britain—

The Chair: Thank you—

[Translation]

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: —and the Quebec players played for Canada as well.

Sébastien Lemire: I'm out of time, so I can't respond to that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Hardy, you have the floor for five minutes.

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. van Koeverden, thank you for being with us today.

You say that sport is part of Canadian identity because it is part of Quebec culture. I couldn't agree more. Many Canadian things started in Quebec. It's a great source of pride.

Even though we're in opposition, I think it's important to recognize the good things that are happening. You announced one of the largest historic investments for Canada. That is a tribute to our athletes and young people. It's very good news.

However, as was mentioned a little earlier, we have to be careful not to fund bureaucracy and, ultimately, make sure that athletes get enough money.

My question, which is somewhat similar to the one my colleague asked earlier, is what are you going to do? I've been listening to your answers for a while now. What are you going to do to ensure that the bureaucracy doesn't get the money, but rather the athletes, players, young people or seniors who are more physically active, as opposed to announcements that lead nowhere? I want to know how you measure the money invested and the result achieved.

• (1150)

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Hardy, thank you for your question and for your work on this committee.

[English]

I want to say that I share your preoccupation. The reduction of red tape and bureaucracy is a natural priority and pillar of this new investment.

We don't have to look forward to and hope for change in that regard. We can look at past results from the last six months and something that we were able to do just this week.

The first investment that landed in sport initially landed with athletes, and that is an adjustment to the athlete assistance program. Athletes in Canada on national teams, almost 2,000 of them, were the first recipients of this new investment.

That same athlete assistance program is what allowed me to quit my job washing dishes at the age of 17 when I first made the national team, and it paid for my tuition here in Canada at McMaster University. It was \$375 a month back then, in 1999, and we were able to increase that monthly tax-free stipend for Canadian athletes to \$2,300.

I'm also proud that this government, over the last 11 years, has increased that athlete assistance program four times after previous governments did not increase that stipend. That has led not only to better results for Canadian athletes but also to better outcomes socially, because when athletes are experiencing poverty, they're not able to train and compete at a high level. That is for the top 2,000 athletes in the country.

We also invested in a program in connection with the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic program, which is called NextGen. NextGen is all about the bridging of competitive sport with high-performance sport and making sure that young people across the country, including in Quebec, have the funding and resources necessary to take the next steps.

That funding has also landed within the national sport organizations. A priority of every single dollar is that a greater percentage of each dollar invested finds its way to being invested in sport—in practice, in coaches and in athletes, and not just in more people working in sport.

[Translation]

Gabriel Hardy: That's great. I'm pleased to see that our athletes, who represent our nation, will actually for once be able to make a living from doing what they love.

I am pleased about the \$750 million measure put in place, but I would like to understand one thing. We know that every dollar invested in prevention through physical activity can yield between \$3 and \$20 in return. The accepted average is about \$13. That means that the investment is profitable.

What can we do to ensure that it's not always up to a governmental choice? What can we do to ensure that people who make the right decision to stay active can do so? You said that other governments had not done things as well as they should have.

However, one of the things I hear about all the time is the tax credit for physical activity that used to exist, particularly for young people. Is this a measure that should be reinstated to reward families who make the right choice to be physically active? Few of them are millionaires. These are average, hard-working families who find it expensive. Could we reward them by leaving more money in their pockets instead of waiting for money that varies according to the government's choices?

[English]

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you again for the question.

Again, those are really good points. It's important to note that every dollar that is invested with an organization from Sport Canada comes from an innovative non-government application for the funding. It could come from a national sport organization, a charity or an organization that does work in implementing sport and delivers sport in community. Those are not government decisions.

Ultimately, the amount we invest with each organization lands with a family, a team or a club somewhere in Canada where sport is being delivered. I want to emphasize that those implementation choices and decisions are innovations from Canadians, not from government.

You referenced the children's fitness tax credit of the previous government. I anticipated that question, and I did a bit of math. Here you go. A family of four in Lethbridge with five-year-old twins in 2012, with a \$70,000 income, invested \$1,000 in sports. With the universal tax credit, which used to be what they called the CCB—it's been changed a lot—and the tax credit you referenced, they would receive \$2,550, taxed, from government benefits. That was the same if your family made \$70,000, \$700,000 or \$7 million. That's the previous impact of the Canada children's fitness tax credit.

What we did as a government in 2015 was that we rolled all of those boutique tax credits that benefited people of all income levels and, actually, the lowest income levels the least.... They were not eligible for tax credits because they paid so little tax to begin with. We changed that to the Canada child benefit. We've included child care, dental care and school food programs so that a family of four in Lethbridge in 2025, with twin five-year-old boys—if you give me one second, I'm just at the point where I'm going to make my point—would receive \$11,328.25 tax-free, compared to \$2,550 taxed.

● (1155)

[Translation]

Gabriel Hardy: However, you're comparing—

The Chair: The time is up. I'm sorry.

Mr. Ntumba, you have the floor for five minutes.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, Mr. van Koeverden. We met for two days in Brossard and Montreal for the bike championships. You seemed to me a very committed, dynamic person who leaves no one behind. You bring people together and, naturally, highlighted your employees rather than disdaining them. Everyone here understands that you are an outstanding person.

You know the importance of a safe and inclusive environment to succeed in sport. You embody it.

In Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, my riding, we are lucky to have amazing people like Charles Hamelin, the Olympic champion who lives in Sainte-Julie and is a role model in the community.

You recently announced investments. Can you tell people how the announced investments will concretely enable young people, families and athletes in our communities to benefit from safer, more inclusive and more honest sport?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you for that question and for the time we spent together during my visit to Montreal. I really enjoyed myself. It was also incredible to see you in your work environment. You are a great leader in Quebec and Canada. Thank you.

[English]

Thank you for giving me a bit of a tour during our visit.

You're correct that the sport investments we're making characterize a brand new era for Canadian sport, where we're investing truly from playground to podium.

One activity that happened before you arrived is the Embarquez activity in Jeanne-Mance park in Montreal, where Cycling Canada and the Quebec provincial cycling federation created an opportunity for bike safety and a physical literacy opportunity. They brought bikes, they brought helmets, and they brought kids out. It was just so much fun. That environment was awesome. It was created by the world championships and the emphasis on cycling. Look, we're not talking about competitive cycling. We're talking about mobility and a kid's ability to confidently ride their bike to school in a safe way.

There is a delineation, I suppose, between safe sport and safety in sport. We talk about safety in sport. We talk about concussions, wearing helmets and knowing the rules and the laws, particularly when you're on a bike. Safe sport is about environment, culture, attitude and how we treat each other.

This committee so far, I'll say, has been an extraordinary example of teamwork and sportsmanship. I came to politics to work together across party lines to focus on solutions, and that's what I think sport teaches us. Yes, we don't agree on everything. We may have different priorities. We're from different places and different backgrounds. We speak different languages.

[Translation]

I feel that having a chance to practise French and learn a new language over the past seven years has been a real privilege.

[English]

This experience over the last year, with the leadership and encouragement of Prime Minister Mark Carney, whose love and admiration of sport and whose vision that it's truly a nation-building activity.... When we can come together, learn from one another, learn new skills, mentor, be positive and treat one another with respect, our whole country will be stronger.

[Translation]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Thank you.

I don't know if you've ever seen the film *Coach Carter*. It shows how organizations and schools do everything to get young people off the streets through a coach who teaches kids discipline, respect and getting good grades. That leads me to my next question.

Sport organizations need reliable funding to implement ongoing safety initiatives. Could you talk about the annual funding that the federal government provides to Canadian sport organizations for safety?

• (1200)

[English]

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, again.

Our new investments have five pillars: Build, protect, perform, participate and host.

What you're asking about is the protect pillar. Every single dollar invested in national sport organizations is rooted in good governance, transparency, accountability, safety and security for all participants. It's not a boutique program. It's not something they apply for separately. It's not an option. Every single dollar is rooted in those pillars of accountability.

The sport system—coaches, athletes and sports people—loves to improve. It's inherent in sport. We practise to improve. We show up at 5:30. I went for a nine-kilometre run this morning, because I want to be healthier, fitter and happier. It's because we want to be better. The sport system wants to do better. It's done a really great job inventing new policies, creating new opportunities, promoting these initiatives, encouraging athletes to undertake new initiatives and working with organizations like Sport Integrity Canada, the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada and Canadian Women and Sport.

I want to give a shout-out to Noni Classen, who came to the commission from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. I have their pen here.

The Chair: Secretary of State, I'm sorry, but we're out of time for that question.

I know it is noon. However, members have noted that I've given you quite a bit of latitude in answering your questions.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Would you have an extra 12 and a half minutes, so we can do one more round?

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor for five minutes.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Secretary, thank you for taking the time to be with us, and thanks for the additional 12 minutes. We appreciate it. It's very generous.

I want to pick up where my colleague left off.

There seems to be a desire in this country—and, I would say, even around the world—to figure out how we include trans athletes in sport, and how we do that in a manner that is safe for all those who wish to participate.

To that end, I'm curious as to what your government's official position is with regard to trans athletes. More specifically, I'm curious as to what your position is with regard to biological men participating in women's sports.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, MP Thomas.

As I stated earlier, eligibility in gender-based categories in international sport is always determined by independent organizations like the WNBA, the International Olympic Committee—

Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry, Secretary. My question is clear. What is your government's official position on this important question?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, MP Thomas.

It's a nuanced issue. It's not cut and dried. It's not simple. Ultimately, we are dealing with human beings who deserve dignity, respect and an opportunity to play.

Organizations like—

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden, it's just yes or no. Does the government have an official position on this?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: The government has an official position on trans athletes in sport.

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden, if I may, I would ask for that position.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: In order to answer your question adequately, I need to provide you with the reality that it's not Sport Canada's role to undermine the independence of the international sport organizations and federations that determine that eligibility.

When you talk about trans athletes, what I don't want to see is the notion that if trans people don't belong in sport, they don't belong in society either. This seems to be a position of the alt-right, in order to make—

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden—

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: —trans people feel as though they do not belong in society.

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden, with respect, my question is very clear. You said that your government has an official position with regard to biological men participating in women's sports. Can you please state that position for the committee?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: MP Harder, 99.9% of people who compete in sport are not going to compete for Canada or on a professional team—

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden—

• (1205)

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: —and the vast majority of people—

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden, my question is very clear. I'm not sure why you're skirting it. You've said that the government has an official position, and I'm not sure why you're refusing to provide that position today.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Can I tell you why?

Rachael Thomas: Maybe we could just agree to have that position tabled with this committee. Would you agree to table that in writing?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: My position and Sport Canada's position—

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden, it's a very simple question, yes or no. Would you agree to table that with our committee? We probably don't have the time to get to it.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: MP Thomas —

Rachael Thomas: It seems very long and convoluted.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: —it's more than available on Sport Canada's website.

What I don't want to do is make a tiny—

Rachael Thomas: Okay. We'll just pause there.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: If I could answer your question—

Rachael Thomas: No. Mr. van Koeverden, you've had plenty of time to answer my question. You're actually refusing to do so.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Well, you only want a yes or no. That's not really an adequate answer.

Rachael Thomas: No. My yes or no question was this: Do you have a position? You said yes, and I have been asking you for that position for more than three minutes and 25 seconds—

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: My position is that we should not be using sport—

Rachael Thomas: —and you've refused to give the government's official position, so I'm going to go to my next question, then, Mr. van Koeverden.

There are individuals—world-class female athletes—who have spoken out on this issue, including April Hutchinson, a team Canada powerlifter, and Linda Blade, a former Canadian track and field champion and a prominent sports performance coach. These individuals have spoken out on this issue, and they have been discriminated against and sidelined because of the position they've taken to protect female sport. They have concerns with regard to the safety and well-being of female athletes competing against biological men.

A briefing note that was created for the minister of the heritage department says, “The most current peer-reviewed science demonstrates significant male advantage in sport, amplified through and after puberty, and that testosterone suppression in transwomen does not mitigate the legacy effects of male puberty.”

In other words, it would seem that these female athletes who are raising concerns have a legitimate leg to stand on, backed by scientific, peer-reviewed articles.

Meanwhile, Secretary, you stated that this is simply “stupid conservative pseudo fantasy”. That's a direct quote....

Do you still stand by those words?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: What I don't want to happen is for sport—

Rachael Thomas: No, Secretary—

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: I can't even get a word in edge-wise, MP Thomas.

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden, it's a very simple question. Do you still stand by those words?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: What I stand by—

Rachael Thomas: Is the concern that these female athletes are raising simply stupid, conservative pseudo fantasy, despite being backed by scientific, peer-reviewed research?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: That comment of mine that you're using was not directed at the peer-reviewed science that you stated.

Pay equity—

Rachael Thomas: It was directed at those who have raised concerns.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: —a higher incidence of concussion and ACL injury, a lack of opportunity, less infrastructure that's built for women.... When I talk to women athletes in this country—and I do every day—there's a long list of priorities and concerns that they want me to address.

Rachael Thomas: Mr. van Koeverden—

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: This is rarely among them.

Rachael Thomas: My question is very simple now. Why are you avoiding the topic?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: I'm not.

Rachael Thomas: Why not talk about the safety of female athletes?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: The safety of female athletes is paramount. There are more men in the NCAA currently accused of rape than there are trans women athletes.

Rachael Thomas: Do you give legitimacy to the voices that have raised this, then?

The Chair: I'm going to pass the floor to Ms. Hirtle for five minutes.

Alana Hirtle (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Secretary of State, it's lovely to see you.

I'm going to pivot a bit from what I was going to ask.

What role can and should sport play in social inclusion, reconciliation and community development?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, MP Hirtle.

We work really closely with an organization called the Aboriginal Sport Circle. They provide sporting opportunities for indigenous youth across the country, with provincial and territorial organizations directly in community. They work on the North American Indigenous Games. They ensure that there's equity among indigenous youth in territory, both on reserve and off reserve, so that there are not only cultural but also competitive opportunities for all young people.

Sport brings us together in really unique ways. We've all had the opportunity to see a cultural performance before a sporting event, as we did at the men's FIFA 2026 World Cup, where the host first nations provided a really profound cultural demonstration, not just for Canadians but also for the whole world. That was pretty profound.

Sport isn't just an educational experience. It's a unique opportunity to showcase our culture, our differences, our similarities and what we're really good at as human beings. It's not the only way to come together, but it certainly is my favourite, and it's a great way to stay healthy while doing it.

When we invest together across borders, for reconciliation, as you put it—to ensure that we're building the future Canada that we all know is possible—I think sport is one of those positive vehicles of change that we can all rely on to do that good work.

● (1210)

Alana Hirtle: Absolutely. Thank you for that.

I'm also wondering if you have thoughts on how technology and innovation can be leveraged to enhance athletic performance as well as safety.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: That's a great question.

Often, sport is the innovation ground for technological advancement. I just thought of this really cool helmet design from Brampton that accommodates a young Sikh boy or girl's hair in the top of their helmet, allowing them to ride a bike more safely while being respectful of their cultural needs. It's those types of things.... That's for sport, recreation or a little kid, but maybe it will be used in a construction context, motorcycling or something like that. There are always these innovations in sport that create technological advancements.

Sport's competitive. There's money in professional sport. There's money in the Olympics and the Paralympics. When we invest it to get better results, we also see those innovations permeate throughout society. Canada's been at the forefront of that. It's something that we all ought to be proud of, particularly in Nova Scotia. I would say the Atlantic provinces are super innovative.

Alana Hirtle: A hundred per cent. We've had to be over the years. Necessity is the mother of invention.

I was going to ask your colleagues this question, but perhaps I'll head it off with you.

My colleagues across the table here have been talking about accountability. Strong accountability requires proactive monitoring measures, so can you please explain to the committee how the Sport Canada accountability unit oversees its organizational performance and ensures compliance with the funding terms?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Absolutely. That's a great question.

It's an opportunity for me to point out that every dollar that is delivered to national sport organizations has the potential to be audited and reviewed. We can look at and scrutinize every one of those investments and the deliverables that we expect from every national sport organization and their partners. That's important because it's public funding, but it's also important for safety, accountability, transparency and the good governance of our sports system across the country.

We undertake that. There are lots of good examples. When performance is not what Sport Canada expects of our NSOs or other bodies, there are accountability measures that are undertaken. I could provide examples if you'd like.

Alana Hirtle: I only have a few seconds left. Is there anything you might like to add that you didn't have a chance to?

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: I'll cede my time to the chair so we can continue with questions.

The Chair: Perfect.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you will have an additional 30 seconds of speaking time. You have the floor for three minutes.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you as well for offering us this third round.

I think there is a fundamental question that the minister will be happy to answer. It isn't a simple question, but oh well.

The question looks at situations in which executives have ignored, minimized and ultimately stifled concerns related to abuse,

particularly in relationships between coaches and athletes, all for the sake of achieving results and medals. There was a form of counterbalance to power that often worked to the disadvantage of athletes, who feared that it could damage the reputation of sports or even jeopardize a given sport's funding.

The commission also documents reprisals against people who have reported those situations and acknowledges that there has been interference in the investigations. That calls to mind the obsession with independent third parties that are often biased themselves. There has been manipulation. In short, testimony has highlighted a deeply concerning reality: the safety and dignity of individuals, which become secondary when the protection of reputation, funding or results takes precedence.

When violations have been proven, what consequences should the executives concerned now face? What will organizations, particularly if they're more centralized, be required to do to right wrongs, acknowledge harms done and provide support so that meaningful redress can be provided to the people affected? More importantly, how will the government ensure that new policies, training or governance requirements accompany real accountability for decisions made by these executives?

● (1215)

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you again for your question.

[English]

Every single recipient of Sport Canada investment must be a signatory of the Canadian safe sport program. They all are. That's novel, important and paramount to all of these investments.

Work was undertaken to establish the "Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport". It's the UC-CMS. It's a large document that is now fundamental and foundational for all national sport organizations.

When issues of abuse, maltreatment, bad governance or a lack of transparency arise, the consequences from the Government of Canada, and Sport Canada specifically, are a sanction, a removal of funding.... If Sport Canada is in a role—

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Can I take the liberty of asking you another question? I think we can see where things are going, and these are things you have also mentioned and that are ongoing.

However, will the mechanisms also apply to past cases? Will there be any review of decisions for actions taken in the past, in cases where reports have been suppressed, whistle-blowers have been discredited or investigations have been impeded? Are you open to that?

[English]

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: The modern values of the sport system applied to every national sport organization on an ongoing basis. I won't engage in hypotheticals such as "What if this comes up? What if this arises?" It really depends on the context of the case being raised.

Thankfully, Sport Integrity Canada, the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada and other organizations that are focused on the triage or treatment of complaints and issues as they arise have more resources, funding and opportunity to be innovative, gather good insight and take best practices from other countries. These are modern, world-class organizations, specifically the SDRCC and Sport Integrity Canada, for which we've vastly increased resources and invested in. They're the gold standard.

It's more common, actually, that other countries visit our country to learn from us than that our country is learning from others, at this stage. We should be proud of that progress, but we continue to be open to new opportunities.

We're taking an athlete- and survivor-centred focus approach that relies on courage, bravery and the resilience of people to step up and provide that feedback when necessary, if necessary. Again, it's an opportunity for me to emphasize the courage and bravery it took for the people to arrive here, in the same chair as I'm in, to provide their testimony about the difficulties and harms they have faced through the sport system. That took tremendous courage and has led to where we are today, which is a with much stronger sport system in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Secretary of State Adam van Koeverden, for your testimony today. Thank you for giving us a bit of extra time and for your fulsome responses.

I will suspend for a minute to give the secretary of state some time to leave the room.

I believe we have another official joining us for the second part of our meeting.

Hon. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, everyone.

• (1215) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1220)

The Chair: Let's resume, colleagues.

We have Mike Reddick also joining us for this second hour. He is manager of sport system policy, accountability and data.

None of you, I expect, need time for opening statements. We're just going to continue on with our speaking list, starting with Mr. Kuruc.

Mr. Kuruc, it's your turn to ask questions. You have five minutes.

Ned Kuruc: I apologize.

I want to ask about the case in front of the Human Rights Tribunal dealing with the Canadian women's track pursuit team.

Cycling Canada didn't select any women in the track pursuit to compete in the world championships. The Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada denied their appeal, and now it has gone to the Human Rights Tribunal. Cycling Canada suggests that budget limitations are one of the reasons it decided not to send the women's team. Despite the government's announcements for funding athletes, it seems as though funding still isn't reaching Canadian athletes in this case. We've heard there has been some substantial funding that has reached Canadian athletes, but women in Canadian sport deserve better than this.

Can I get your attention on this and your comment on this? Where are we going on this?

Andrew Brown (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Canadian Heritage): Thank you for the question.

I absolutely agree that ensuring that we are providing equal opportunities for men and women in sport continues to be a priority for the Government of Canada. It is a component of the funding framework we have in place now but is also one we are revising to ensure that we are making the sport system better.

With respect to this specific case, I think one of the important things is that this is exactly why we're also funding an independent tribunal, the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada, to actually hear these particular cases. This is one that was brought forward earlier this year, and the decision was rendered by SDRCC in August, I believe. It indicated, essentially, that the decision was based on the facts that Cycling Canada had before it.

Ned Kuruc: Thank you.

Is there any intention of holding Cycling Canada accountable? Have you had meetings with the women's track pursuit team? Have you had some dialogue there?

Andrew Brown: I'll say two things.

First, Cycling Canada itself is an independent organization in terms of the sorts of decisions that it makes with respect to members of a national team and the participation of our men's and women's national teams in international competitions—in this case, a qualifier for the LA 2028 Olympics.

As well, as I mentioned, the SDRCC is an independent organization hearing about complaints and rendering decisions, so I think it's important that we at Sport Canada acknowledge and recognize the independence of both Cycling Canada and the SDRCC.

• (1225)

Ned Kuruc: That's fair enough.

I would urge Sport Canada to have a meeting with the women's track pursuit team. Is that possible? How would that work?

Andrew Brown: Certainly, we do speak with national sport organizations such as Cycling Canada on a regular basis. It would probably be less common that we would reach out directly to specific athletes or a team.

Ned Kuruc: I appreciate your answer. The only reason I ask is that it has been escalated to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, which is a very serious issue. I would advocate that your office meet with them, if possible, because there have not been too many instances where we have seen Canadian athletes, and specifically women athletes, have their cases escalated to the human rights tribunal. I would advocate that, if that's possible.

Andrew Brown: I'll certainly take that recommendation away.

At this time, where that team has brought forward a case before the Ontario human rights tribunal, we also need to recognize and respect its own process. I'll note that we wouldn't want to be seen as interfering in that particular process.

Ned Kuruc: That's fair enough.

My second question is about Bowl Canada, which has reached out to me. It is a not-for-profit organization.

People may or may not know that five-pin bowling is a Canadian invention. It was invented in 1909 by Canadian Thomas F. Ryan, and it was voted the third-greatest Canadian invention of all time. It's quite fantastic.

Now, this isn't necessarily—

The Chair: We don't have time for an answer to that question, but that was a very good intro.

Ned Kuruc: Their funding was stripped, so can you please look into that? It's part of Canadian Heritage.

Thank you very much.

Thank you, Chair, for allowing me to say that.

The Chair: That's fair enough. I'm happy to give you that time.

Mr. Myles, you have five minutes.

David Myles (Fredericton—Oromocto, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thanks to Mr. Kuruc for bringing new information to the table. I like this committee, because I learn something every single time. I had no idea five-pin bowling was a Canadian invention.

We spoke about this a bit on Tuesday, when Dr. Pipe was here. There's been a philosophical change from Own the Podium to “playground to podium”. There is a difference between those two philosophies. One is based on participation and accessibility, but the idea of making it to the podium still stands. The idea is that we will still produce very competitive athletes.

Mr. Brown, can you or one of your colleagues speak about the shortcomings of the Own the Podium philosophy and why there was a change at this point to a more inclusive, accessible approach?

Thanks.

Andrew Brown: I can begin.

This is a really important part of the change. We heard the secretary of state speak already about the pillars: Build, participate, perform, protect and host. Those are the key elements of his vision for the sport system moving forward. Notably, in particular, I'm going to focus on “participate”, “protect” and “perform”.

What we saw was that with some of the changes brought about to the sport system with the creation of Own the Podium before the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, a lot of the efforts of our sport system and our national sport organizations were driven towards performing and getting to the podium. Unfortunately, there were also some negative impacts of that drive towards performance that may have contributed to some of the challenges we've seen in terms of safe sport and thinking about the grassroots and participation. Those are the reasons for the emphasis now on participation and ensuring safe sport, or the “protect” pillar, in particular within the sport system.

These are exactly the sorts of things that the government is doing right now with the additional money that was received through the spring economic update. Additional money going out to our national sport organizations in this fiscal year is providing them additional funds to work on building participation and ensuring safe environments for all participants.

We are not neglecting but are continuing to work towards “perform” as well. That continues to be important, but we need to make sure that these areas that may have been neglected in the past are adequately supported with resources.

It's fair to say that national sport organizations that have already been receiving money are all going to be receiving more money. Those decisions are still being finalized, but that's going to help out all organizations, including Bowl Canada, that have been receiving funding from Sport Canada.

● (1230)

David Myles: It's notable that the podium is still part of that equation, and that it and the idea of high participation are not mutually exclusive.

We've talked about this a little, but to get more into it, how do we work with the provinces and territories effectively to make sure that the participation rates are high? That involves schools and education facilities. What are the roles that the federal government can play in that collaboration?

Andrew Brown: That's a wonderful question. There are a number of opportunities for collaboration with provinces and territories, as well as other partners, frankly.

You touched on the infrastructure. That is one of the key pieces itself. As the secretary of state mentioned, about \$250 million was set aside, specifically to support sport infrastructure. That's thinking about some of the large projects that have been identified by national sport organizations but also through the build communities strong fund.

There's also funding available at the community level. In fact, the minister spoke with his provincial and territorial counterparts, and we brought our Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada colleagues to that last meeting to talk about what some of the opportunities are, so that should help in terms of the infrastructure.

The next part, though, is how we can actually get more participants in sport. That's something where, again, we're looking at partnerships. This is pushing the national sport organizations to partner with organizations at the local and community levels to get children in particular involved in sport, exactly like the sort of HopOn or Embarquez projects that the secretary of state was talking about. Those are opportunities to introduce people to a range of sports across the country and get them excited.

I could probably turn to my colleagues to see if they'd like to add more on that.

The Chair: We don't have time. I'm sorry.

I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Lawton for five minutes.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Pursuant to the motion on notice, I move:

That, given the prevalence of vandalization, destruction and removal of public statues, monuments and historical landmarks across Canada in recent years, the committee undertake a study, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), on these incidences and the important role these public symbols play in shaping Canadian heritage and identity; and that the committee dedicate at least four meetings to this study and prepare a comprehensive report with its findings and recommendations.

I'd like to speak to that motion as well, when permitted.

The Chair: I will say that the motion is in order. You have given the committee proper notice. I have a speaking list already begun with Mr. Myles, Mrs. Thomas and then Mr. Lawton.

Oh, are you going to start, Mr. Lawton? Okay, go ahead.

• (1235)

Andrew Lawton: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

We have seen in the last five years quite a significant wave of vandalism, destruction and removal of public statues and monuments. In some cases, this has been the result of vandals and thugs who are trying to denigrate things that are very dear to communities across this country and to the country itself. Those should be condemned. Criminality should be prosecuted.

The most egregious decisions, however, have been the ones made by lawmakers when city councils, legislatures and governments have capitulated to the mob and, rather than defend this country, have opted to give in and cover up or remove some of these statues. In some cases, we've seen this be undone. We have seen in other cases.... Notably in Kingston, for the last five years, the future of the Sir John A. Macdonald statue is basically unknown. It's been noteworthy that the Liberal whip and member of Parliament for Kingston Mark Gerretsen has not wanted to confront this, has not wanted to speak up for this bit of Canadian heritage, despite being the member for Kingston, which is a city of tremendous value to the story of Canada and the story of John A. Macdonald.

We are now more than ever at a time when people are rallying around the flag and embracing Canadian identity, but we don't get to pick and choose which parts of Canada we get to love and support when we want to be patriotic. We have to acknowledge the founding of our country, the story of our country and people like Sir John A. Macdonald, whose vision really created the country we know today and without whom there would not be a Canada, who worked so hard to keep a very fractious coalition together in Confederation. That coalition has endured, thanks to the work that was done around then by Sir John A. Macdonald.

When we look at examples over the last few years of this, we see the statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in Montreal that was pulled down and spray-painted. Premier Legault at the time was very swift in saying that it should be fixed, repaired and protected. I was very grateful for that, because not a lot of other political leaders were doing that.

In Winnipeg, statues of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II were pulled down. The late Queen Victoria statue's head was thrown into the Assiniboine River, and that statue was declared beyond repair. Again, there was a lack of political will to put forward the defence that was necessary for that.

In Hamilton, the council voted to keep a statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in Gore Park, but then it was taken down, spray-painted and hammered. Effectively, the mob overruled a decision that was a democratic one. This has happened in Victoria, Vancouver and Toronto.

It has even happened with war memorials. In Surrey, a World War I soldier statue was pushed off the Cloverdale Cenotaph. In Regina, the Victoria Park cenotaph was spray-painted two days in a row. In Chatham, they had a cenotaph that was defaced with swastikas, and this has been a problem that veterans there have acknowledged.

This has also touched some of the communities of the members of Parliament present here. In Mr. Myles' town of Fredericton, I know the Fredericton police were trying to find the people responsible for damage to a legion a couple of years ago. The Legion's Field of Honour memorial was vandalized twice. I believe that was in 2023. In Ms. Royer's riding, in Port Moody, I believe it was—or Coquitlam, I can't remember which.... Actually, it was in Port Coquitlam, so in a neighbouring riding. I apologize. In Port Coquitlam, there is a Terry Fox statue—again, a Canadian icon I think we'd all support—that was vandalized.

Statues and monuments are an important way for us to acknowledge and pay tribute to Canadian heroes, Canadian identity and Canadian heritage. I think it's very important for us, as the heritage committee, to have a study on the scope of this and actually put some leadership forward on how we protect and preserve these pieces of public art.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Given the amount of time we have left in this committee and given our speaking order list, I will say to the department's sport officials that if they would like to leave, I think we are done with questions for them.

I don't want to force you to stay and listen to this debate that is not related to your roles in Parliament. I thank you for your time today.

We'll move on to the speaking list.

[Translation]

Mr. Hardy, you now have the floor.

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in Montmorency—Charlevoix. This is the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, and what has more to do with heritage than Quebec? What has more history than Quebec? As we know, here in Canada, everything began in Quebec. Everything began in my riding, Montmorency—Charlevoix. According to official documents, the first francophone mass was celebrated in Isle-aux-Coudres in 1535, when Jacques-Cartier arrived. The first meeting between the first nations and Champlain took place in Baie-Sainte-Catherine in 1603. We have so many historic sites in Montmorency—Charlevoix.

I was very sorry to learn something in recent months. This is an issue I have often raised here: the cross of L'Isle-aux-Coudres. It's a cross that was erected almost 100 years ago. We will be celebrating nearly 500 years of history in Isle-aux-Coudres in 2035. That cross was dismantled this summer, on the pretext that it was too worn, too dangerous. The amazing thing is that it's a cross made of granite. In theory, stone monuments are supposed to last a very long time when they're properly maintained. That can be seen all over the world. In theory, stone monuments are not supposed to fall apart. However, what has happened in recent years is that there have been cuts, which means that the minimum amount of maintenance was carried out until it became too dangerous to keep the cross in place. Under the pretext that it was dangerous, it was dismantled, but what's surprising is that it was said that the cross would not be rebuilt, because of budget cuts. We're talking about \$75 million in cuts that have to be made year after year.

Parks Canada is responsible for that. I have a document that indicates \$24.6 million in 2026-27, \$45 million the following year and \$75 million for subsequent years. Parks Canada's budgets are being cut, but the result is that, unfortunately, we're told that these monuments will have to be removed because they are too expensive to maintain. If there's one thing a nation must defend, I think it's their history, culture, language and monuments, which enable every generation that follows to know where they come from so that they can better understand where they're going.

I think it's very important for us to do this study, because I think we need to re-emphasize the reasons why our monuments are important. We should talk about how we should maintain them and why, over time, we should be proud to have our monuments and to bring in people, both for tourism and for the history and values that get passed on so that people know where they come from.

Another thing was mentioned in the news. It's the famous statue of Champlain, which has become a major issue across Quebec. It was removed under some pretexts or following discussions in Ontario. This didn't take place in Quebec. Once again, there's a certain desire not to live in the past as it is and to say that this past should be changed. Our monuments and statues are being removed.

I think this is an absolutely necessary and important study. I think we owe it to ourselves, as a committee, but also as Quebecers and Canadians, to ensure that we pass on to future generations the history of where we come from. We should not hide it, and we should not be ashamed of it. On the contrary, we must maintain it, because I believe that, for us as a nation, it's truly a priority to leave a legacy for future generations and to ensure that we also honour those who, over time, have come before us, with their stories, their strengths and their flaws.

As for the famous Isle-aux-Coudres cross, I don't think we should erase crosses from the history of Quebec or Canada. They are part of our history and our values. They have to remain there, and that has to stop being seen as an expense. It has to be seen as an investment. With the Liberals, these are often investments. Well, that's what this is. Investing in keeping our monuments and statues in place is an investment that's more than profitable. If we forget where we come from, we have a serious problem for the future.

This affects me directly, and I think it's very important for this study to take place.

Thank you.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardy.

[English]

Mr. Myles, you're next on the list.

David Myles: Thank you very much.

Thanks to all the members, and thank you to Mr. Lawton and Monsieur Hardy for the thoughts.

I share the same concern. I think many of us do. I'm a member of the Legion in Oromocto, part of my riding. I'm a proud member of the Legion. I share the same concerns.

We've been really good in this committee in terms of good faith, with what motions are coming next, what studies are coming next. We've talked about this in committee business. We have been working towards other motions and are getting there. I think it's important for us to continue that work and our gentlemen's agreement, as we have we spoken about. Though this is an important study, and I think we all share the concerns, I would move to adjourn this debate so we can talk to the others.

I know you think that's funny, but the good-faith agreement that we've talked about in the gentlemen's agreement.... I think good faith goes both ways, without surprises, without these kinds of things—

• (1245)

The Chair: Mr. Myles, given that you've already moved to adjourn debate, you can't continue to debate.

David Myles: Thank you very much. Then we can talk about Bill S-211, and we can get ourselves sorted for what the program will say to that.

The Chair: It is a dilatory motion. We will go to a vote on whether to adjourn debate on this topic.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The motion has carried.

Mr. Myles.

David Myles: I wonder if we might take a second to speak about the timing of Bill S-211. We spoke about it just briefly. I'll just lay out what we were thinking. I know there was a bit of confusion at the end of the last meeting, and I just want to address that. I apologize for the confusion, first and foremost.

What we are proposing is, as we said last week, two days of the study. What it would look like would be that the first hour would be the presenters of the bill. We would add witnesses for only one hour of the first meeting. The second meeting would be clause-by-clause—I was saying line by line before, I'm learning—and amendments, because we do have some amendments. I think there are some simple amendments from your side. None of them are too complicated.

I would suggest that if we get through clause-by-clause and amendments, we are prepared to go to a draft report, because we have draft reports to get through. If we don't, and if it takes the two hours, it takes the two hours. I think, either way, we're into that second meeting. That's what we're proposing, and I'm happy to hear your thoughts on it.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Hardy, you have the floor.

Gabriel Hardy: I have a simple question. It's something we have talked about together. I'm not answering Mr. Myles's questions directly. However, before he moved the dilatory motion, he mentioned an informal agreement. I'm just trying to understand something.

Basically, we're going to move motions to have them accepted here. There are already a few that aren't being accepted. What is expected of us? Do you want us to not move any motions without talking to you in advance? Do we have to move motions for studies that we think are worth doing just for you to vote against them, every time, until it suits you?

I just want to fully understand how we're going to work in the future.

David Myles: No, it's just that we had already discussed the other motions we were committing to. Honestly, with amendments, we're trying to reach a consensus where everyone wants to do these studies. We talked about a number of things in camera. We try to deal with these motions when they arrive, in good faith. We asked for a bit of time for this. Thank you for giving us some time for this. You have every right to show up with other motions. That's

natural. However, it's also natural for us to discuss motions together. We are already in discussions, together, on other projects. That's the idea.

• (1250)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lawton.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you for that.

This was not a surprise. I mean, this motion was put on notice verbally at the last meeting. I think everyone knew that this was something we were intending to raise. As far as I'm concerned, and I'm not saying this declaratively, I have not received any communication from any members of the Liberal side of this committee regarding proposals for previous studies that we have put forward and may or may not have discussed in camera. I don't want to divulge that with any depth. I would also note that we have not reached any agreement or adopted any motion for a Conservative study.

We have put forward suggestions in good faith. This time it was once again suspended, not because there was a lack of recognition of what we were trying to study, but because there was apparently—I don't want to put words in Mr. Myles' mouth—some imputation that it was presented in bad faith, which certainly was not the case. I thought this was an issue that affected our communities. This is in good faith, and I would welcome support for a study that the Conservatives have initiated, as has been discussed in the past.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Auguste has the floor. It will then be Mr. Myles.

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you, Madam Chair. However, I'm going to yield the floor to Mr. Myles, since it isn't on the same topic. I could go after Mr. Myles.

[English]

David Myles: I would like to move to resume debate, for which I guess we need unanimous consent, on what we spoke about—the motion that we spoke about in camera. I think if we have unanimous consent, we can resume debate on that.

Andrew Lawton: Could we have a brief suspension, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Absolutely.

• (1250)

(Pause)

• (1250)

The Chair: We're back.

Mr. Lawton, I think you still have the floor.

Andrew Lawton: It's Mr. Myles. I had just asked for the suspension.

The Chair: You're good, then.

Andrew Lawton: Yes.

The Chair: Is it back to you, then, Mr. Myles?

David Myles: I had asked whether there was unanimous consent to continue the debate.

● (1255)

The Chair: All right.

We have unanimous consent to resume debate on a previous motion that was submitted to this committee in camera. Is that correct?

Some hon members: Agreed.

The Chair: I'm looking for hands to see who wants to talk about it.

Mr. Myles, go ahead.

David Myles: Thanks. I appreciate this.

Thanks to Ms. Thomas as well for the continued dialogue throughout this. I appreciate being able to get to a yes.

We considered the motion. I think it's strong and reasonable. We have a couple of amendments. We'll share the amendments. You can take a look at them and let us know what you think.

I don't think it changes the thrust of the study. It just focuses a bit on some organizations and initiatives that work on some of the unity questions brought up in the question. There was a difference between what was tabled and what was originally brought forth at the committee in the number of meetings. Just to let you know, our amendment is based on the original, which was four meetings.

I'll just take a second and pass these around.

With our amendments, it would read as follows:

Given that:

Canada is a diverse country defined by its rich cultures, artistic expression, natural landscapes and regional uniqueness; and

Canada faces an evolving global and domestic environment that presents new challenges to our shared sense of identity and belonging;

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage undertake a study of no fewer than four (4) meetings to examine organizations and initiatives that contribute to Canadian national identity, and that help foster greater community connectedness and shared sense of belonging;

That the committee invite the Minister of Identity and Culture to appear for no less than one (1) hour as part of this study;

That the committee report its findings to the House; and

That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lawton.

Andrew Lawton: Thank you.

I'm just reading this right now.

My first reactions to this are that, under the original motion, it said no less than "four (4) meetings" to examine the current state of Canadian national identity, social cohesion and shared sense of belonging. In the amendment, if I'm reading this correctly, it's "to examine organizations and initiatives that contribute to". That strikes me as significantly narrowing the scope, because we'd be looking only at groups and programs that connect to the issue, rather than the issue itself. I'm not sure if that was the intention of it.

If I read that, I think we would certainly be able to look at organizations and initiatives if we're examining the state of Canadian national identity, but I'm worried that, in this case, we're effectively auditing whatever heritage-oriented groups may be called to testify without getting at the bigger picture, which is that we're trying to acknowledge what is the state of national identity.

I'm throwing out an example here, but the state of national identity could involve polling on how Canadians identify with certain symbols. That wouldn't fall under examining "organizations and initiatives". I think we're narrowing this instead of looking at the broader issue here.

The Chair: I would just note that parties can invite whatever witnesses they can.

I have Mr. Myles, then Mrs. Thomas and then Mr. Lemire.

David Myles: I agree with the chair that there are no limitations on which organizations you ask. You can ask a polling firm to come and talk about those exact details. What I think it does is give it a bit of a focus, instead of being a potentially open—completely open—question with no focus. I don't think that any of the questions that could be presented in the previous study cannot be addressed in this study.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas is next.

Rachael Thomas: I would just reiterate, I guess, what my colleague is saying, and that is that we've gone from wanting to discuss an observation or an issue that faces our country, which is an exploration of where we are at in terms of unity as a nation, in terms of identity as a nation and in terms of social cohesion and belonging. Where are we at? Let's take the temperature of that. That was the initial motion.

Now, we're saying, "No, no, no, we actually don't care about taking the pulse of the nation. We actually just want to talk to organizations that are doing wonderful things." That's great that they're doing wonderful things to help foster greater community and connectedness and shared belonging. That's great, but we haven't taken the time to actually understand the real issues and why these organizations and initiatives are even needed.

● (1300)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Lemire, you have the floor.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I read this motion, and I ask myself the following question: Wouldn't it be worth having the motion give the context of the growing desire for independence that can be seen in Canada, particularly in the election of a Parti Québécois government?

We remember what Canadian Heritage did in the past in response to the 1995 referendum. I'm talking about the sponsorship scandal, no more and no less, and the funding that was linked to a lot of collusion and practices [*Inaudible—Editor*]. Would it be appropriate to include that in the perceived threat to Canadian unity and the tension addressed in this motion?

I'm just asking the question, but I don't expect support from my colleagues around the table.

[English]

The Chair: Seeing no one else on....

I see Monsieur Hardy.

Gabriel Hardy: I'm not big enough. I need to train more.

David Myles: I can teach you.

Gabriel Hardy: Yes, okay. Let's train together.

[Translation]

I'm going to echo my colleagues. Perhaps there was talk of four meetings in the discussions, and five were ultimately proposed, but I think five meetings is great. This is a very important topic. Far be it from me to want to support anything related to the country's separatist movements, but we're still at a time when our youth are struggling to find their place and when Canadian values, our identity and our culture are being somewhat challenged. People are having a hard time knowing what it means to be Canadian.

I think it's important to have a study on the current state of Canadian national identity. I sincerely believe that the Quebec nation has a huge role to play in this, because we have long defined who we are, our values, our history and our language. I think we have a great deal to contribute to Canadian unity. We could be a positive influence and a bit of a team captain in that regard.

I think it's extremely important that we talk about social cohesion. A shared sense of belonging is vital for the years to come. On the other hand, your leader, your Prime Minister, keeps saying that we live in a divided and dangerous world. However, in a divided world, what people want to know is how to unify, and that's exactly what we're asking for here, national unity.

The motion as it stands proposes five meetings. You're proposing at least four. Perhaps we could agree to do more than four. I sincerely believe that it's important to not be too specific and to mention the current state of affairs in Canada and how we can help. I think this is a study that's really needed.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Kuruc.

Ned Kuruc: Thank you.

To echo my colleagues, meetings to examine organizations and initiatives.... With respect to Mr. Myles, I understand where you're going when you say you want to put some focus on it, but with four different meetings, we need to explore a lot, and it shouldn't be limited to just organization initiatives. What we don't want it to get to, which would be great, is marching people in here who would just pat us on the back and say everything is great. I think there's a lot to discuss. We need to know what that is and what the temperature of

Canada is, and national unity is the focus of this. It shouldn't be limited to what is outlined here, in a sense.

Over these four meetings, or whatever we finalize, I think the exploration part of it.... Let's see where that goes and what we touch on. The exciting part is defining and studying what national unity is, because Canada is so diverse and so vast. There's so much to talk about. There are so many people and things to touch on and get their response on that I feel this is a bit limiting and it doesn't do what I feel Canada is....

It's very large and big. There's so much to it and so much to explore that we should open it up, in my opinion.

• (1305)

The Chair: I have Mr. Lawton and then Mr. Myles.

Andrew Lawton: I have a subamendment that I hope will bring us to common ground. My subamendment would be to add after "examine", "the state of Canadian national identity and shared sense of belonging, including", and ending it there.

As subamended, it would read, "to examine the state of Canadian national identity and shared sense of belonging, including organizations and initiatives that contribute to Canadian national identity and that help foster greater community connectedness and shared sense of belonging".

David Myles: I'd love to suspend for a second and take a look at it, but thanks for that.

The Chair: We're at the end of our time. I'm not sure that we have time to suspend to talk about this more.

[Translation]

Ms. Auguste, I see that you have a point of order.

Tatiana Auguste: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's just that I understand that there's an amendment, but it would be really good, for the good of both official languages, to have the amendment in French as well, please, to know specifically what it entails.

The Chair: Absolutely.

We don't have time to complete all of that today.

Tatiana Auguste: That's okay.

Sébastien Lemire: Hear, hear.

[English]

Andrew Lawton: Madam Chair, may I move to suspend the meeting?

Rachael Thomas: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] procedure. We either stay here and have this conversation all the way to the end, or....

• (1305)

(Pause)

• (1305)

The Chair: We're running out of time, colleagues.

I have a suggestion. I would need unanimous consent, but I think we need to deal with Bill S-211 before we finish today. If I have unanimous consent, can we find agreement on whether or not we have two days for Bill S-211? We can have a deadline for witnesses, so that we have time to do that when we come back.

We can suspend the debate on this topic and resume it when we come back after the break. We can have some committee business time when we come back.

We need to resolve whether or not we're going to call witnesses for Bill S-211 today; otherwise, we won't have time to call the witnesses.

Andrew Lawton: On a point of order, I moved to suspend. I believe we need to dispense with that first.

● (1310)

The Chair: I was asking for unanimous consent to deal with Bill S-211 before we suspend, so that we can be prepared for witnesses, if we agree to that.

Do we have unanimous consent to deal with that quick issue before we suspend debate on the motion before us?

Is anybody opposed to dealing with Bill S-211 quickly before we suspend debate on the motion?

Rachael Thomas: I do not give consent.

The Chair: Okay. We cannot deal with that.

All right. We are out of resources for the day.

Rachael Thomas: The motion to suspend that's been moved is a dilatory motion. It has to be dealt with.

The Chair: Yes.

On the motion to suspend the debate on this, we'll take a vote.

Andrew Lawton: It was a motion to suspend the meeting.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: I will then entertain a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Andrew Lawton: Has anyone moved it?

The Chair: I'm entertaining a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Madame Auguste.

[*Translation*]

Tatiana Auguste: I move that we adjourn the meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: On the motion to adjourn the meeting, call the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The motion carries. The meeting is adjourned.

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