

Politics

Hockey Canada's response to scandal 'boggles the mind,' says Trudeau

Organization says it won't be making any changes to its management

Catharine Tunney · CBC News · Posted: Oct 05, 2022 11:45 AM ET | Last Updated: October 5



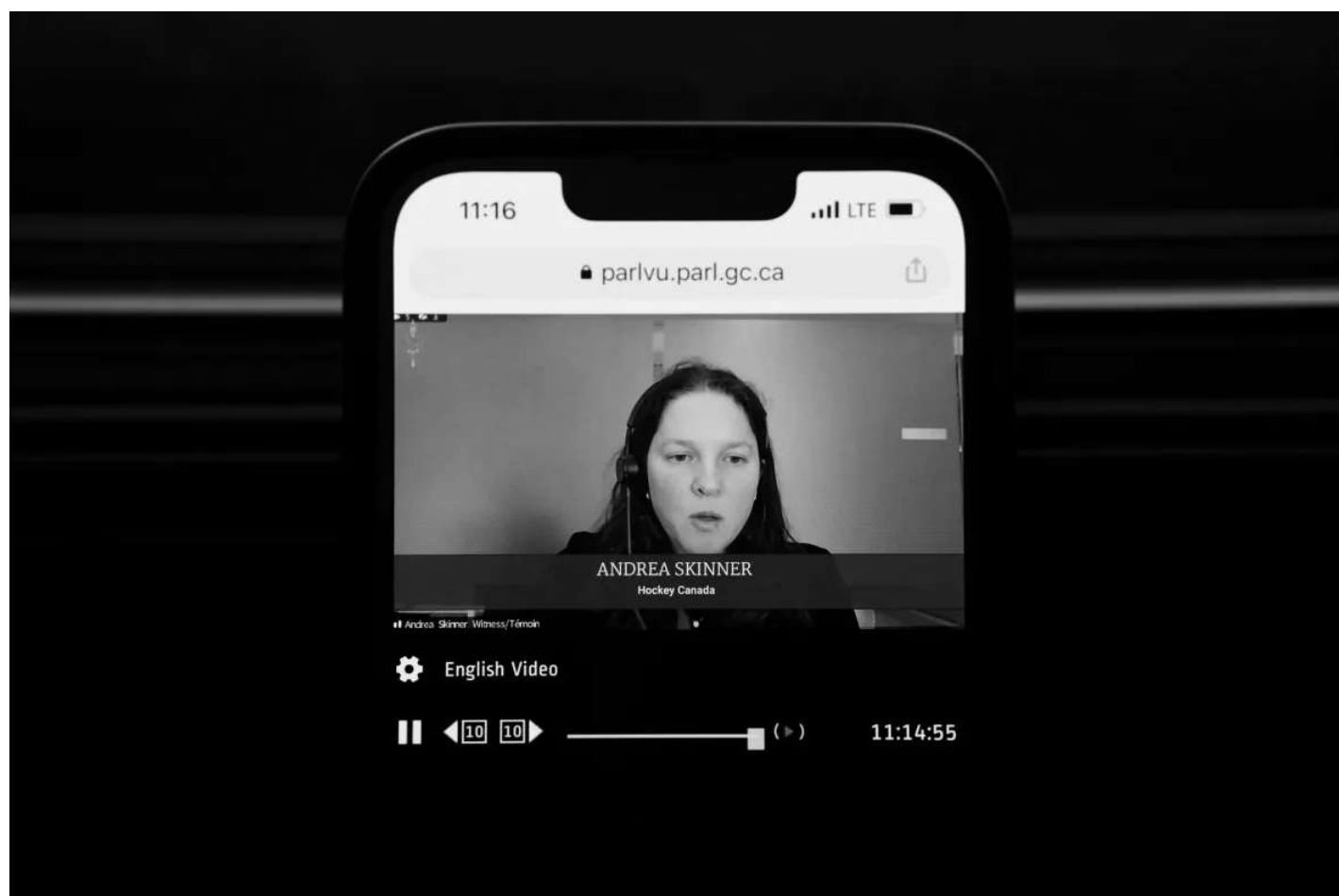
A Hockey Canada document is reviewed by a member of Parliament during a hearing of the House of Commons heritage committee, which is looking into safe sport in Canada, in Ottawa on Tuesday. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the posturing of Hockey Canada — an organization accused of mishandling allegations of gang rapes — "boggles the mind," while the federal sports minister says it's time for members of the embattled organization to "clean the house."

Pressure is mounting on ice hockey's national governing body for a change in its leadership after a widely-panned appearance by one of its executives in front of a parliamentary committee Tuesday.

Interim board chair Andrea Skinner defended Hockey Canada, saying it has an "excellent reputation" and arguing against scapegoating "hockey as a centrepiece for toxic culture."

Skinner said Hockey Canada won't be making any managerial changes, defying a request from federal Sport Minister Pascale St-Onge — who has said she believes mass resignations at the governing body are necessary to restore public trust.



Andrea Skinner, interim chair of the board of directors at Hockey Canada, appears virtually as a witness before the heritage committee in Ottawa on Tuesday. She said the organization won't be making any managerial changes. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

"I think that would be very impactful in a negative way to all of our boys and girls who are playing hockey," Skinner said Tuesday.

"Will the lights stay on at the rink? I don't know. We can't predict that. To me, it's not a risk worth taking."

That response seemed to mystify the prime minister.

- [MPs grill Hockey Canada chair over secretive multimillion-dollar payout to sexual assault victim](#)
- [Feds say the move to reform Hockey Canada is on after Hockey Québec cuts ties with national body](#)

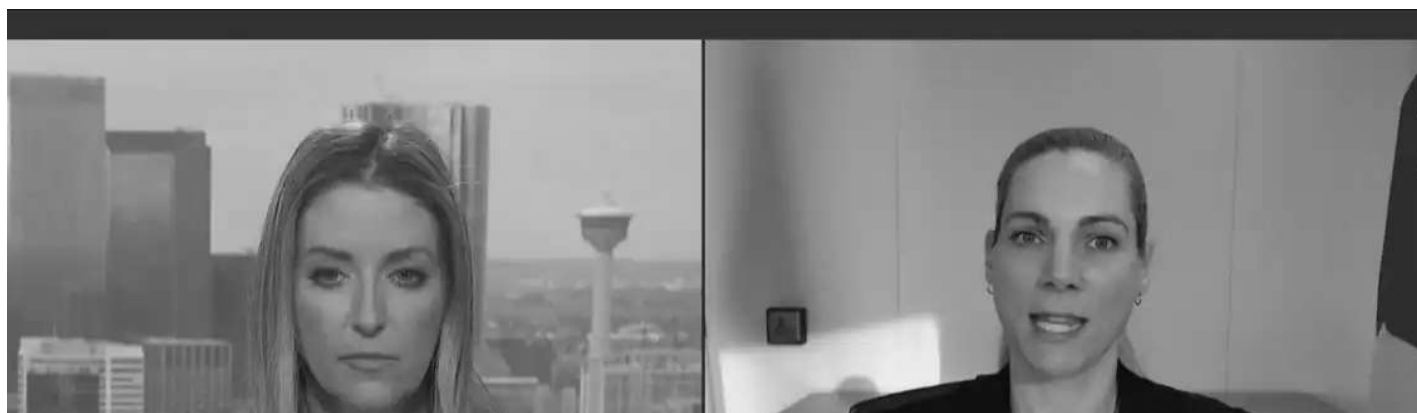
"I think it — it boggles the mind that Hockey Canada is continuing to dig in its heels," he said Wednesday before heading into a caucus meeting on Parliament Hill.

"Parents across the country are losing faith or have lost faith in Hockey Canada. Certainly, politicians here in Ottawa have lost faith in Hockey Canada."

In an interview with CBC's *Power & Politics*, St-Onge said she felt saddened by the fact that Skinner, a woman, has become the "face of the boys club" and she and Hockey Canada are not grasping the seriousness of the situation.

"We're witnessing an organization that seems to be more interested in protecting themselves and their jobs than protecting the public, the women and the players in their own organization," St-Onge told host Vassy Kapelos.

WATCH | Hockey Canada's interim chair a 'scapegoat,' sports minister says:





Hockey Canada's interim chair a 'scapegoat,' sports minister says

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Pascale St-Onge says she's saddened Andrea Skinner, interim chair of Hockey Canada's board of directors, is the face of its 'boys' club problem.'

Hockey Québec cuts ties

At least one regional federation has heeded St-Onge's call for change.

Hockey Québec voted Tuesday night to cut ties with Hockey Canada in the wake of new allegations against the sporting body.

The Globe and Mail, citing documents obtained by the newspaper, reported Monday that Hockey Canada put player registration fees toward a second fund "for matters including but not limited to sexual abuse."

WATCH | Calls for leadership change:



Trudeau, sport minister call for Hockey Canada leadership change

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister of Sport Pascale St-Onge have thrown their support behind Hockey Québec's decision to cut ties with Hockey Canada following new allegations against the sporting body.

In a resolution first obtained by [La Presse](#), Quebec's provincial hockey federation states that it no longer has "confidence in the ability of Hockey Canada to act effectively to change the culture of hockey with the structure in place."

It also said it will no longer transfer funds to the national organization.

"I think the decision that Hockey Québec took shows that reform [is] being engaged. It also sends the message to the leaders at the organization that are holding on to their jobs that Hockey Canada doesn't belong to them, it also belongs to their members and they want change," St-Onge said Wednesday.

"Since the leaders of Hockey Canada are holding on to their jobs, the voting members need to clean the house."

CBC News has reached out to the other 12 regional hockey organizations for comment.

The executive director of the Ontario Hockey Federation said the group is monitoring the situation.

WATCH | Testimony 'appalling, Singh says:





Singh says Hockey Canada testimony was 'appalling'

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NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh says he is 'shocked at the complete lack of understanding' within Hockey Canada of public outrage over sexual assault cases in the sport.

Phillip McKee said the group already had requested through Michael Brind'Amour, the former chair of Hockey Canada's board of directors (who has since resigned), that Hockey Canada not collect the \$3 participant assessment fee for the 2022-2023 season.

"He confirmed he would take it to the board of directors. It is our understanding now that this request was never directed to the board before his departure. Based on this information, the OHF has once again, reaffirmed our formal request," McKee wrote in an email to CBC News.

"The OHF remains committed to protecting the game of hockey on and off the ice this season for our members. We are also committed to being transparent about our operations to our members, the communities, volunteers, families and players who rely us to play the game they love."

A spokesperson for Hockey Saskatchewan says it has "no comment at this time."

Hockey Nova Scotia said its board of directors will meet next week to review next steps.

Hockey Canada has faced a torrent of criticism over its secretive use of player registration fees and other investments to compensate sexual assault complainants.

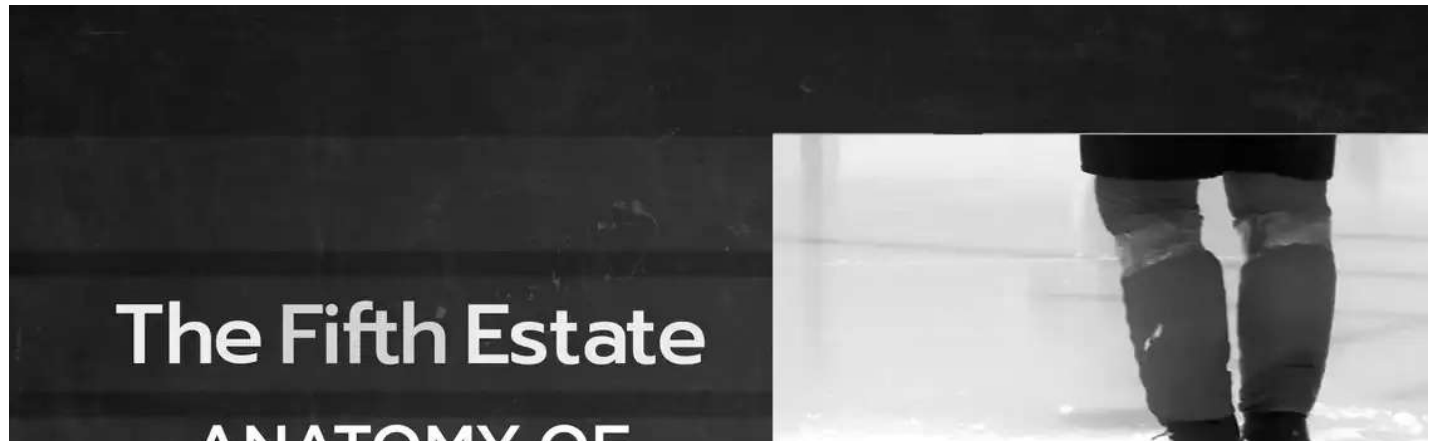
- **THE FIFTH ESTATE** [Anatomy of a scandal](#)
- [Feds renew call for change at Hockey Canada in wake of new allegations against organization](#)

This summer, after a number of news outlets broke stories about the existence of these funds, Hockey Canada revealed it had paid out \$8.9 million in settlements to 21 complainants with sexual misconduct claims since 1989.

Through a review of public records, CBC's *The Fifth Estate* has identified at least 15 cases of alleged group sexual assault involving junior hockey players that have been investigated by

police since 1989 — half of which surfaced in the past decade.

WATCH / The Fifth Estate *investigates sexual assault in hockey:*



Anatomy of a Scandal

11 days ago | 44:25

Hockey Canada is on the defensive over allegations that some members of its gold-medal winning World Junior team in 2018 took part in a group sexual assault, and the organization didn't do enough to hold players accountable. The Fifth Estate examines the national shame inside Canada's game, and the disturbing history that suggests this was not an isolated incident.

Conservative MP John Nater, a member of the Commons heritage committee, said he hopes other provincial organizations follow Hockey Quebec's lead.

"I think we need meaningful change at the top of Hockey Canada. Obviously, the CEO has to go and other management has to go as well," he said before his own party's Wednesday caucus meeting.

"Right now, we need to put pressure on the organization, we need to put pressure on the 13 voting members to ensure that there's a board in place that's going to make those meaningful changes at the top."

His Conservative caucus colleague MP Kevin Waugh, a former television sports journalist, called Hockey Canada's response to calls for a change in management "arrogant."

"They've doubled down and it's disgusting, really," he said, before citing Hockey Canada's decision to hire Navigator, a crisis management firm, to help it deal with the wave of bad press.

"They spent a lot of money on Navigator. It's a company that's trying to put the narrative of that they're great guys, nothing's wrong, we're going to change, everything will be fine. But that's not the case."

MP calls Skinner's comments 'Trump-like'

Skinner's appearance before the heritage committee on Tuesday triggered bewilderment, sometimes even laughter, among the assembled MPs — who, despite their partisan differences, were universally critical of Hockey Canada at the meeting.

Bloc Québécois MP Sébastien Lemire said Hockey Canada is "living in a bubble" and is "disconnected" from public opinion.

- **Hockey culture suffers from a 'systemic problem' of sexual violence, minister says**

Nater read aloud excerpts from Hockey Canada board meeting minutes that showed the organization was intent on "shifting the narrative" around the scandal.

"Settlement payments must be viewed in a positive manner, not a negative manner. Repetition required to state the narrative," Nater read from the minutes.





Pascale St-Onge, the federal minister of sport, speaks with reporters before question period in the foyer of the House of Commons on Tuesday. (Adrian Wyld/The Canadian Press)

The Ontario MP told the committee he found "it deeply troubling that the organization is more concerned with shifting the narrative than actually meaningfully implementing change within this organization."

Skinner, a lawyer by training, said the media was trying to turn the public against Hockey Canada and its leadership team by publishing stories critical of its handling of violent sexual assault in the sport.

Liberal MP Anthony Housefather described Skinner's efforts to blame the media and MPs for her organization's woes as "Trump-like."

Audit of spending approved

St. Onge has agreed to audit Hockey Canada's finances over the past six years in response to allegations that the sports body's directors availed themselves of high-cost hotels, dinners and jewelry.

Last month, NDP MP Peter Julian wrote to the minister asking her to "make sure that Hockey Canada uses government funds and hockey parents' registration fees in an accountable and transparent manner."

Questioned by Julian before the committee, Brind'Amour confirmed that championship rings for board members cost \$3,000 each.

"I believe this is a situation that arises when our national teams have the good fortune to win a championship," Brind'Amour said.

WATCH | MPs demand new leadership at Hockey Canada:





▶ MPs across party lines demand new leadership at Hockey Canada

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Today, all parties grilled the interim chair of Hockey Canada's board of directors, Andrea Skinner. Federal MPs, as well as Minister for Sport Pascale St-Onge are demanding change in the leadership of the organization, something Skinner said she has no plans to do.

With files from Ashley Burke and John Paul Tasker

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