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**By GREG WESTON**

No matter how reviled Canadians may have been by images of Chinese security forces beating Tibetan monks to a pulp, public support for a retaliatory boycott of this summer's Beijing Olympics has all but evaporated.

Canadian skating icon and silver medalist Elvis Stojko recently issued an impassioned plea for our current team of Olympic athletes to "take a stand" against China's repression of Tibet.

But unlike Canada's popular decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Games over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, athletes sitting out this year's competition shouldn't expect a medal for standing on principle.

A recent public opinion survey by Nanos Research exclusively for Sun Media suggests barely 10 per cent of Canadians think our athletes should boycott this summer's Games in protest over Tibet.

(The poll was taken just before China was hit with a series of devastating earthquakes, a massive tragedy certain to diminish Canadians' appetite for a boycott even more.)

The findings of the Nanos-Sun survey are a dramatic drop from another national poll only two months ago that showed 37 per cent support for Canada giving Beijing a pass.

The Ipsos Reid survey was taken in March at the outset of hostilities in the Chinese crackdown.

Pollster Darrell Bricker predicted at the time that any "shocking" images of Chinese brutality, or the growth of pro-Tibet movements in other countries could quickly inflame Canadian support for a boycott.

The "shocking" certainly happened in pictures of dead protesters.

Then came weeks of what became an almost farcical journey of the Olympic flame from Greece to China. A symbol of peace and harmony, the Olympic torch instead ignited massive demonstrations almost everywhere it was carried.

In London, the flame ended up on a bus after unruly demonstrators threatened to extinguish the torch, if not the runners trying to carry it.

But far from Canadians increasingly demanding a Beijing boycott as Bricker predicted, the latest Nanos-Sun poll shows public opinion has actually softened dramatically.

Over 40 per cent of those polled said they think "nothing should be done because Tibet is an internal Chinese matter."

Another 30 per cent said they thought world leaders should leave their seats empty at the opening ceremonies as a suitable protest.

Interestingly, the numbers of those who support a full-blown boycott by athletes did not vary much among the regions.

The greatest support for doing nothing was in the West, and nationally was much higher among men than women.

More than anything, Canadian public opinion seems to have finally accepted the reality that boycotting the Olympics mainly hurts the athletes, while doing little to correct political misbehaviour.

When Canada joined most other western countries in boycotting the 1980 Games in Moscow, the Soviet troops stayed in Afghanistan, their athletes cleaned up on gold medals, and 212 Canadians lost a chance to live their Olympic dreams.

Four years later, the Soviets and most Eastern Bloc nations retaliated by boycotting Los Angeles, among other things helping Canadians to their best ever medal score.

In 1988, the Soviets were still in Afghanistan, but everyone got together that year for the Games in Seoul anyway, one big happy Olympic family again.

But just as Olympic boycotts don't change political behaviour, nor does holding the Games in countries with abysmal human rights records.

If Olympic organizers want to get politics off the podium, they could start by not awarding the Games to democracy delinquents like China in the first place.



The image is a promotional graphic for Ford's Family Pricing program. It features a blue background with a sunburst pattern. At the top, the Ford logo is displayed in a blue oval. Below it, the words "FAMILY PRICING" are written in large, bold, white capital letters. A yellow ribbon banner with the word "Welcome" in a white cursive font is positioned below the main text. At the bottom, the text "ONCE AGAIN EVERYONE GETS FORD FAMILY PRICING." is written in bold, white capital letters. Below this, the phrase "click here" is written in a smaller, white, lowercase font.