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Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (1635)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 50 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of June 23, 2022, and therefore, members can attend in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[English]

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me. Please note that we may need to suspend a few minutes, as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, November 14, 2022, the committee is commencing its study of privacy concerns in relation to the ArriveCAN application.

[Translation]

Before we begin, Madam Clerk, can you confirm that all head-phones and microphones are working properly?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): They should be working properly, Mr. Chair, but you never know.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now like to welcome our witness today.

[English]

I want to welcome, from IBISKA, Mr. Narindar Khabra, who is the president.

Mr. Khabra, you have five minutes to address the committee.

I want to welcome you today. Thank you for taking the time to be with us.

Mr. Narindar Khabra (President, IBISKA): Thank you very much.

As you said, my name is Narindar Khabra. I'm the president of IBISKA Telecom Inc.

IBISKA is an Ottawa-based consulting company that was incorporated in 1995. We have over 26 years of experience in working

with private industries, as well as with the Government of Canada, providing consulting services in the areas of IT—information technology—and information management.

Our focus is all in the areas of either business, program/project management or, on the technology side, enterprise or infrastructure services, which include cloud computing, data centres and networks. We also do quite a bit of work in cybersecurity and IT security, and we also do business in applications and IM architecture.

IBISKA is qualified under the Government of Canada's supply arrangement. Many of those are there right now, such as TBIPS, SBIPS, or different names. We have actually been working with the Government of Canada with multiple departments. We have a number of multi-million-dollar and multi-year contracts at this time, so we're providing services to many different departments at this time.

This leads me to talk about why I'm here right now. I was invited to speak here as part of ArriveCAN, so I want to talk a little bit about how we are doing business with the CBSA.

On March 25, 2021, the CBSA issued a request for proposals to all TBIPS tier 2 companies. There are close to—I'm estimating—80 to 100 companies that are qualified to do business with the federal government at that particular tier. The CBSA put out a request for proposal during that time for the IT security services, which means that they wanted to have a firm that could actually produce and work with them and look at all their applications, all their data centres, all their systems or networks so that they could be authenticated and authorized.

On May 10, 2021, we responded back to the department, and on June 30, we were awarded the contract by PWGSC. The total amount for that contract is just over \$8 million, but that does not include all the taxes. Including tax, it's \$9.278 million.

This is the work they call an omnibus contract, which means that the CBSA asks us to provide the qualified resources so that they can actually go there and utilize them on any different applications, any different systems or any different networks, which will include cloud computing or anything like that. Basically, we do not write the applications and we do not do project management. We do none of that business. The only thing we do with the CBSA is the cybersecurity authentication and authorization.

I think what I want to say right now is that the total contract is \$8 million. This contract is what they call a task-based contract, which means that a company cannot actually do any business until a task is issued to the company. We have presently a number of different task authorizations from the CBSA. We provide consulting services to them, and they actually ask the individuals to work on these particular networks, systems or applications.

For the time being, I just want to say that looking at what we have right now, we see that we have actually invoiced so far on this contract, even though the contract is \$8 million, just a little bit less than \$1.4 million since we got the contract on June 30, 2021.

Out of that, my understanding is that we have invoiced just over \$101,000 on ArriveCAN, which was until March 2022. Since that time, we have also invoiced approximately just over \$80,000. There is also a part-time individual who was working on this contract and is actually providing services right now to other applications as well.

I'm assuming that right now, we might have actually invoiced approximately \$200,000 as of the end of October.

• (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Khabra, we're beyond the five minutes. I'm sure there may be questions related to some of these issues that will come up during the questioning.

I understand that this is your first time before a parliamentary committee. Just so you're familiar, we will have six-minute rounds to start. We will be starting with Mr. Barrett on the Conservative side. Then we will go to the Liberal side, and then to Monsieur Villemure with the Bloc and then to Mr. Green. There will be subsequent rounds after that.

I want to welcome a couple of members to the committee this morning. Ms. Kramp-Neuman is here, and Mr. Dong is here as well.

With that, I will start the first round of questioning with Mr. Barrett. You have six minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Thank you, sir, for joining us today.

You listed the contract amounts that were awarded and the amounts that you've invoiced. I'm wondering if you'd be willing to provide to the committee those invoices that your company has billed the government. Would you be willing to send those to the committee?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Obviously I do have to get permission from the CBSA. If they allow me to do that, yes, I will.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. We'd appreciate that, for clarity.

You offered a few different numbers there. CBSA has actually offered a few different numbers, and some of their numbers don't.... Depending on the day, the number is different. I want to make sure we're getting a full picture of what was asked for, what was billed and what was delivered.

You said you have a separate contract that you're doing for CBSA that is not related to ArriveCAN. Is that correct?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No. As I said, this is a contract for the overall—any applications or any systems that CBSA develops or has in operation. Whenever they are introducing new applications or a new system or network, there is always a process whereby a security check has to be done. Authentication has to be done. Security authentication and authorization has to be done as part of the process.

What we have is the omnibus contract. They are allowed to request us and give us the resources, and these individuals will be used for whatever applications or systems they are developing at this time.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is all of the billing for CBSA? Is that your only business with the government?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No, sir. As I said, we have multi million dollars with other departments, many of them.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. Is it possible that any of the work being done under any of the other contracts is contributing to the ArriveCAN project, or are they siloed and very distinct and unrelated?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: There is no.... I really can't tell exactly. We have a number of contracts with Shared Services Canada. We have to provide services to Shared Services Canada. We have no idea of how these individual departments relate to each other.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay.

Do you use any subcontractors?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes, we do.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did you use any subcontractors on your work on ArriveCAN?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As I was saying, we did not.... I'm sorry. Our contract is not ArriveCAN. We have one consultant that was used by CBSA to do the security authentication and authorization.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm not sure I understand. The Canada Border Services Agency said that you are a vendor of theirs on ArriveCAN. Is that correct?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I don't know, but when you say ArriveCAN.... We are also a vendor of them, but they have other projects, what they call the PCI project. We also have another project there—

• (1645)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, the CBSA has said they've given you \$8 million.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: That has nothing to do with ArriveCAN.

Mr. Michael Barrett: They said they gave you \$8 million for ArriveCAN.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I don't know why they said that. We're not doing ArriveCAN with \$8 million.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did they give you \$8 million?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: We have \$8 million to do multiple projects. ArriveCAN is one of them. There are many others that we have.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is \$8 million your full book of business with the Government of Canada?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No. I just said we have business with DFAIT, we have business with SSC and we have business with National Defence. We have business with all of the different—

Mr. Michael Barrett: It seems odd to me that CBSA would say that they've paid you \$8 million for ArriveCAN—

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No, sir. They did not pay me \$8 million.

I don't think they would have said that, because we asked them, and they said.... What I saw in The Globe and Mail was \$8 million, which is obviously incorrect. We asked CBSA where they got that, and they said, "No, we did not say that." They said they have approximately \$110,000.

That's what my understanding was, so I'm not sure exactly where that \$8 million is coming from.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm also not sure where the \$8 million went.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Sir, can I explain to you how it works with the government?

The government gives you a contract. The contract is here. You can see it. If you want a copy of the contract, we can give you the contract.

It says that the contract is this much. You have to authorize.... We have to receive a task authorization to do any work. The government is not obliged to use the maximum. There is a minimum the government is obliged to do when they give a contract to private industry. In this case, it was \$20,000. If they never used this contract, the government was only obliged to pay \$20,000.

The other thing is that if the government comes and says, "You guys get a contract right now worth \$20 million. We want you to do this. We're going to pay you this and we want you to do this", this is the overall contract over two years. The government can use it, but that doesn't mean the companies can actually invoice them.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That's my time. I appreciate it.

I think we have a shared lack of understanding of where that \$8 million went.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Next we'll go to Ms. Hepfner for six minutes.

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

Through you, I would like to thank this witness for joining us today. We know that it's intimidating sometimes to appear before a parliamentary committee, but we really appreciate your participation and your words here today.

I'd like to start by asking about your company's history of doing IT security with the government. It goes back to 2006. Is that right?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No. It's been since 1996.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Your company has been doing IT security work for the government since 1996.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I'm sorry. No. Do you mean just the IT security business?

We've been doing the IT security business since around 2000. The government did what they call.... They chose a number of the only companies that were able to provide IT security services. The year 2006 was the first year they introduced which companies they wanted to select. They selected six companies, and we were one of the six companies they selected to do business with.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: What type of security clearance do your IT security employees have?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Our IT security employees.... To give an example, I looked at the security clearances of all the people we have within the CBSA. We have so far provided 14 people to work there. Of them, eight of them have top secret and six of them had secret.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: When your company works on sensitive projects, what sort of measures does it put in place to ensure the integrity and security of those projects?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: First of all, we obviously have to look at these individuals' security clearances.

With any contract we do with the federal government, we hold their security clearance. As a company, we hold the security clearance. The reason we hold the security clearance is that any time somebody's security clearance is terminated, they come to us and we have to terminate it. At that time, we know that the individual doesn't have security clearance.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Did you personally use the ArriveCAN app when it was mandatory for Canadian travellers?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes, I did.

• (1650)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Were you confident in the security of your personal information?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes, I was.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: I'm wondering if you can talk about the error rate with this app.

First of all, do you know of any security or privacy breaches that ever happened with ArriveCAN?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Not to my knowledge.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Okay. Do you know anything about the error rate of the app?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I would not know.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: You don't know. Okay.

We've heard in question period a couple of times from the Conservative opposition that this type of application could be hacked in a weekend. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that contention.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I really cannot talk much about that, because we did not do the applications. We had no involvement in the applications, and I don't know how complicated the application is. The application is developed for other departments. It does take much more time to do that.

That's all I can say, because I have no idea exactly what the application is. We do applications for other places, like ISED and DFAIT and other places. It does cost a lot of money.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Does it take more time when you're trying to ensure the security and privacy of people's sensitive personal information?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: It definitely does.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Can you go into that in a little more detail?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: First of all, when the application is developed, obviously people have to do testing and they have to do verification. Then, obviously, they have to make sure that it actually meets all the criteria. Only then does the IT security specialist authorize security for the applications.

There are many different aspects of developing applications. I'm not that familiar with the business and I don't do it personally, but there are different components of developing those applications.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Okay. Thank you, sir.

In our last meeting on this topic, we had a witness who said, quote, "Do not deliver public services through apps and app stores, full stop."

From your experience of working on IT projects, what do you think about that statement? Do you think the government should have modern ways of providing government services or do you agree that we should never use an app?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Well, if you want to be a third world country, I guess you don't need any apps.

I can tell you one thing from my experience, our experience as a company. We do a lot of security business with the federal government, and Canada is one of the best countries in the world to have protective security for data. We can say that: one of the best, if not the best.

CSEC has actually put out the guidelines and all of this, which means that every department has to follow those rules. It all depends, you know.... Everything is available for individuals to do that, but it all depends on whether they have done it or not.

Lately the government has been very careful from the security point of view. Things are much more intensive nowadays, with the security check being done on every application, every system. Personally, I feel very confident that we are very secure.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khabra.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Khabra, do you have your interpretation device on?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Villemure.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Khabra. Welcome and thank you for being here.

I'm going to pick up on some of the questions from my colleague to my right.

I'm going to summarize to see if I've understood.

Did your company sign an \$8 million contract with the Canada Border Services Agency, yes or no?

[*English*]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: We had a contract with CBSA for \$8 million, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Right. So the answer is yes.

As part of this contract, \$110,000 was spent for the ArriveCAN app, right?

● (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I didn't hear that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: As part of this contract, \$110,000 was spent for the ArriveCAN app, right?

[*English*]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I think I need to increase the volume. I didn't hear that.

The Chair: The volume may have to go up.

[*Translation*]

I stopped the clock, Mr. Villemure.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you.

Of the \$8 million contract you were awarded, was \$110,000 spent on the ArriveCAN app project? Yes or no?

[*English*]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As of March 2022, we invoiced \$101,867.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Okay.

Your contract required the government to spend \$20,000 if it did not use the contract in question. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I'm sorry. I'm having a hard time hearing this.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: The terms of the contract with the government guaranteed you \$20,000 if there was no further billing.

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes. I—

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Okay.

You got the \$8 million contract. Did you do anything other than the ArriveCAN app with that amount?

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes. As I said, we have invoiced for approximately \$1.4 million. The rest of the work is other than ArriveCAN.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Okay.

Like my colleague, I'm having difficulty understanding this.

You had an \$8 million contract. Of that, \$110,000 went to the development of the ArriveCAN app, and the remaining \$1.4 million went to other contracts.

Can you shed some light on that? I don't understand it.

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: CBSA has more than one application. I don't know exactly how many it has. One is called the CARM application and one is called the PCI application, and there are many other applications for the projects it has or for the introduction of new systems and all these things. Every one of those has to go through security authentication and authorization, because that's part of the process the government has introduced, which is in the TBIPS guidelines. They have to be done as part of that process. We do have consultants who are required to go through the whole process. ArriveCAN is only one application. There are many other projects and applications. We actually get involved with all the application systems at CBSA.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: So several apps have been developed for a value of \$1.4 million. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I'm assuming so, yes—apps or systems.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Okay.

Will the rest of the contract be completed eventually? Do you have any plans?

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes, it is ongoing. Our contract, as I said, is initially for two years. It expires in June 2023. There are three one-year option periods that the government can decide to exercise if it would like to.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: With regard to the ArriveCAN app, what exactly did you do?

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: What our consultant did, when the application was developed.... I'm not completely familiar with that. If there are any additions done or any changes in any aspect of that, if you make a change to the applications or to the systems, they have to go through security authentication and authorization. That's the process. Every time you do that, you have to pretty well go through the process.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Did you develop the ArriveCAN app?

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No, we did not.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: What state was the ArriveCAN app in when you got the contract?

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Our contract started on—

The Chair: No, excuse me. I think Mr. Villemure asked, what state was the...? At what point of development, I assume, or what state was it in when you were contacted by the CBSA?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: With regard to ArriveCAN, I have no idea, because we were not involved with the ArriveCAN application.

Our individual consultants started working in October 2021.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: What did they work on?

● (1700)

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As I said, we worked on the security authentication and authorization of the application.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: So you were just dealing with the security side.

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: That's right.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Okay.

What precautions did you take to protect personal information?

[English]

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As I said, we were not involved with the applications. We were not involved in developing the applications. We were actually able to test the application to see if it was working.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, I would be happy to give the floor to the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

[*English*]

Mr. Green, we're going to you next. You have six minutes, sir.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much.

I would like to join my colleagues in welcoming you to this committee, sir.

You're probably hearing a bit of confusion and frustration in terms of us being able to unpack your role in all this. I'm getting an early sense—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Green. We're having trouble hearing you. It looks as if you have your microphone down. Could you speak up a little more, if you don't mind?

I have stopped the clock.

Mr. Matthew Green: Is that better?

The Chair: That's perfect. Thank you.

I'm going to restart your time, Matt. I'm giving you six minutes, okay?

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

I'll go back to those earlier comments, sir. You're hearing some confusion around your role in this. Intuitively, it feels to me like an opening comment that.... Perhaps if the government had been better in communicating the nature of this particular contract, we would not be here today. This being unpacked months later is a testament to the lack of our ability to come to terms with the total price and what that means.

I'm going to ask some basic questions for my own edification, some of which have been asked.

You talked about a “task-based contract”, and about an omnibus contract in referring to all the other scope of work you had. To be clear, you have not received \$8 million. That's just the scope of work for which you would have sign-off from the government, task by task, which you identified as being at \$180,000.

Is that correct?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes, it is.

Mr. Matthew Green: You have not received \$8 million.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No. The only thing is that the \$8 million is on a piece of paper. That's where it is.

Mr. Matthew Green: It's just the contract, correct?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes, it's a contract. It's a commitment.

Mr. Matthew Green: In other words, it's like a retainer or scope of work. Piece by piece, you would go through it and bill back to the government, then receive the payment.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay.

Were you provided any direction from the government on what your scope of work must include?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No.

The only thing we get is a statement of work from the government. Since it's omnibus, they cannot put in every application or system they're going to develop in the future. They're asking about the people who are qualified to do this particular task and are who are applicable to almost every application or system. Who are those people? We provide those people, and then they will assign the work to them while they are there.

The first thing they do is meet with them. “This is where you are, and tell us how much time you're going to need to do this.” When you're finished with this particular project, you move to the next one, then the next one.

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay. That satisfies me. Thank you.

You mentioned that cybersecurity was the subject-matter expertise you provided for this contract. Is that correct?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: That's right.

Mr. Matthew Green: Are there any other parts of the \$8-million contract, outside of the \$110,000 used for development, that are used for costs related to other aspects of ArriveCAN, such as updates, maintenance, operations or indirect costs?

● (1705)

Mr. Narindar Khabra: We were not involved in that at all.

Mr. Matthew Green: Initially, in this procurement, the government contemplated that ArriveCAN would require \$8 million set aside for cybersecurity. Is that your testimony here today?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No. As I said, our contract had nothing to do with ArriveCAN. As I said, this is omnibus, which means that the CBSA issued a requirement that they needed resources so they could do cybersecurity for any of the requirements they would have over the next five years.

Mr. Matthew Green: Correct, so that's inclusive of all products that you're offering the government.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: No, it wasn't the government; it was the CBSA.

Mr. Matthew Green: It was the CBSA. My apologies; that makes sense.

When fulfilling your contract, what considerations for privacy did you have within the contract or the Government of Canada in relation to ArriveCAN?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As I have said, many of our consultants have “secret” security clearance, and most of them have “top secret” security clearance.

Mr. Matthew Green: You were offering them the highest level of privacy and security in terms of the service.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Definitely we do, yes.

Most of our people working within the cybersecurity area are either top secret or secret. We don't have anybody.... Most of them are at that level.

Mr. Matthew Green: I might jump off the technological diving board here for a moment. I'm not a technical expert, but I would ask if you would be willing to share with us some examples of the types of tasks that your consultant would have done for the initial \$100,000-plus.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I can read it to you, but this is a very generic kind of thing. It says what a task will be:

Tasks Activities may include, but are not limited to, the following: Attend a kick-off meeting with CBSA Technical Authority to discuss the objectives and requirements;

Provide advice and guidance in a meeting discussion forum or in writing, regarding IT security topics, as required;

Develop IT Security vision papers, strategic assessments and policies/standards;

Collect, collate and prioritize IT security and information infrastructure protection requirements;

Perform Information System Security Implementation Process (ISSIP) activities for CBSA Protected and Classified information systems as identified in Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC) IT Security Risk Management: A Lifecycle Approach (ITSG-33) <https://cyber.gc.ca/en/guidance/overview-itsg-33>

Develop and prepare project management documents to support ITSCD projects using PWGSC/Shared Services Canada procurement tools/services, such as:

Collaborative Procurement Solution Process;

Joint Procurement Solution;

SMART Procurement Process;

Analysis and integration of IT security controls throughout the technical solution architectural design process; and

Conduct oral presentations and briefings to ITSCD and CBSA senior management.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khabra. I appreciate that.

Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, may I just suggest, given that he's already got that printed out, that he might be willing to leave that with the committee for the consideration of our analyst? He's already read it in.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Khabra, it's all on the public record. I'm sure you have no problem supplying that to the committee.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I do have some other notes on that one, but I can send an email to you guys.

The Chair: That would be terrific, sir. Thank you.

Is that okay, Matt?

We're going to move on to the next round, which is five minutes. We're going to be starting with Mr. Kurek.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Khabra, for coming before the committee today.

I'm very curious for some more details, so please table that documentation you've referred to.

You've also mentioned a number of meetings and whatnot. I think it would be valuable for the committee to be able to see this to understand some of the scope that's included.

Specifically, if I'm understanding correctly, within the scope of work that your company was contracted to do, was it when the security incidents were brought forward? Is that when your company was brought in? Was it to fix them? You're basically paid when you're asked to do work, so can you provide a little bit of detail as to when your company was asked to do the work?

● (1710)

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As I said, it is not when the incidents are there. It's when the applications or the systems are developed or when there are any changes to be made. The security aspect has to be there, because otherwise we will not be secure.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Does your company design the security side of that or test it? What exactly is your company's role on the security side of things?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As I said, we do consulting services. We provide resources, which have the expertise to do all these things, to the government. They're actually at the customer site. If the customer wanted them to do the testing, they will do the testing. For example, if a vulnerability assessment is done, it may require individuals to actually go and test the system or communication lines. Sometimes people have to do that.

Mr. Damien Kurek: If you're hired to test for vulnerability and security, do you then provide a report to the government? What's the process that actually...? If the government asks you to come and conduct a service, like a vulnerability assessment, what happens after you've done that assessment?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: There is always a deliverable. The individuals write the report and everything else.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: There's the deliverable part of that, and it's delivered to the government.

Mr. Damien Kurek: It's these deliverables that I'm very curious about, because this is incredibly sensitive information being compiled and brought into this app. We heard some concerns about web-based versus app-based and the use of Apple and Play Store.

I'm curious as to the results of that. When you talk about deliverables, do you provide an assessment? Do you give it an A+ or an F-? What is the end result there?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As I'm saying, it's called a security assessment—an assessment is done—and authorization.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Are those assessments like a document that you would then email to your customer, which is CBSA, in this case?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: We don't email it. It's written. The consultant will actually.... We are not privy to a lot of information. This is a private....

Obviously, when they're developing applications, as a company we are not privy to that. However, individual consultants who work on a particular project or application will provide that document to them.

Mr. Damien Kurek: At the end of this assessment and this consultation, there would be a document that has something filled out that says that it is secure or it's not secure, or that A could be improved but B was acceptable. I'm trying to understand here. Is that....?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: That's my understanding, yes.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Your company doesn't maintain those records. CBSA has them.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Exactly. Keep in mind that these are secret documents. The companies cannot actually keep it unless they have a document safeguarding facility.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Is it evaluating work that's been done by CBSA in-house?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: Yes.

Mr. Damien Kurek: That's done, presumably, on site. Would they go to a border station or would they be doing it from their office? How do they know what they're evaluating?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I was not aware of where they were doing it. Most likely they will be at a customer site, wherever the customer wanted to work with them.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Kurek.

Next we have Mr. Bains for five minutes.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Khabra, for joining us today and providing a wealth of information here on the security side.

You mentioned that most of your work is based on security and authentication. You also indicated that Canada's security's been intensive lately, and even the best in the world.

Can you expand on that? How lately has that work been done compared to, say, when you first began? You've been doing this for many years.

• (1715)

Mr. Narindar Khabra: As you know, that technology had changed over a number of years. We have been involved in the security side of it for many years. Changes have been happening over a number of years.

In the past, people just got a threat and risk analysis, which is what the threats are, what the risks are and how to mitigate those kind of things. Nowadays, it's much more into the area where, with

anything you develop—data or anything that people are trying to develop—people are looking to authenticate and authorize at every stage of the system. It is not only the technical side of it, but also the business side of it.

As I'm saying, CSEC has been really involved with different things. They do actually put out the guidelines for the whole government department.

As the technology has changed, obviously the process of security has also changed so far.

Mr. Parm Bains: In your view, those measures were taken with the ArriveCAN app.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: It is my understanding that it was done, yes.

Mr. Parm Bains: Are you aware that the Privacy Commissioner reviewed the ArriveCAN app and found no major concerns? Is that right? Did that information come back to you?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I'm not aware of that, so I can't comment on it.

Mr. Parm Bains: In a letter to the opposition critics, the Privacy Commissioner wrote that “At this point, we are satisfied that exceptionally strong measures have been adopted...to ensure that the identity of users is protected and not disclosed to the Government of Canada.”

Can you explain what those measures were or how those work?

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I cannot comment too much on those things because, as I said, our involvement with ArriveCAN was making sure that the application was working and was secure.

That's all I can say on that.

Mr. Parm Bains: Okay. How many employees do you have, and how many of them worked directly on the ArriveCAN app? You may have mentioned that earlier.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: To the best of my knowledge, it was one person.

Mr. Parm Bains: It was just one person. Okay.

Thank you. Those are all the questions I have at this time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have two and a half minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, but I don't have any questions to ask.

The Chair: Okay.

Back to Mr. Green.

[*English*]

Mr. Green, do you have any questions?

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm done, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

We have no more questions on the Conservative side.

On the Liberal side, we have Mr. Fergus. You do have a five-minute round.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): First of all, thank you very much, Mr. Khabra, for coming in here today. I appreciate the work that you do and the knowledge that you bring to the authentication process and security process for the work you were contracted to do.

Mr. Khabra, if I could speak frankly, we have seen before on this committee that we have perhaps not been too kind to business people who have been called to testify here, and it's hardly a reputational boost for the committee as a whole, or perhaps certain politicians in particular.

In your line of work, I'm certain that any insinuation that you're being investigated by the House of Commons privacy and ethics committee would be unnerving—at least, I think it would be unnerving to me.

I want to give you a chance to set the record straight for those future potential clients who might be watching today. How can we reassure them to take us seriously as politicians trying to investigate, frankly, the excellent work that you have done?

• (1720)

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I guess the only thing I can say is that, as I said, obviously we do a lot business with the federal government. I can tell you that our business with CBSA is less than 2%. We do business with many different departments. We provide services to National Defence and many different high-security departments.

The only thing I can say is that when we do talk to other departments or private industry, the federal government has much more protected information than private industry, for example. It's very well developed. In terms of the security aspect, the applications and systems in the federal government in Canada are very well developed.

At the same time, I think we are fortunate to be living in Canada, where we have an open government. We do respond to a lot of these ATIP requirements that come to us. We do that because this is an open government. We do provide that information. Nothing is hidden. On this contract and any task authorization that comes before us right now, the only thing we will not give, for comparative purposes, is somebody's name, due to privacy. Other than that, any information is available to people when they ask for the ATIP. It's all there.

Looking at Canada right now, I feel that the security aspect is very valuable to protect, but at the same time, I don't mind coming here to answer you, because at least this is open. People can ask questions, and something might come out of those. If something is

not working, at least we can correct it. We can have lessons learned in this case.

I feel pretty privileged to be here. We are very well protected here, I think.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Excellent. Thank you for reminding us, Mr. Khabra, that we do live in an open society and we can have those questions asked.

I appreciate your coming here today. Again, it just appears to me, speaking frankly, that you might not have been the right person to have been invited to this committee here today, but we thank you for the work that you did and we thank you for your frankness and responding to us openly.

Mr. Narindar Khabra: I'm also glad that I could clear my name here. The news media said we got \$8 million. We did not get \$8 million.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Right. I think that was a very important point to make. We will make sure it gets reflected in the record. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

That concludes the round.

Mr. Kurek, do you have one more thing you'd like to add quickly?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Yes. Thank you, Chair.

I do appreciate, Mr. Khabra, that for many of us, sometimes the interplay between technology and everything is a challenging subject. I'm glad you had a chance to talk. I appreciate your comments as well. Certainly I have more questions for the government about the way they've reported on the contracts that you've had.

Mr. Chair, I would move the following motion, if I could:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a) the committee order the Canada Border Service Agency to produce all reports, briefs, and memoranda written by IBISKA and its consultants related to the ArriveCAN application, and that they be submitted to the committee within two weeks of the adoption of this motion.

The Chair: Has the motion been circulated?

Mr. Damien Kurek: It has not. I just read it into the record for the first time. I'd be happy to speak to it, if it's in order.

The Chair: We have just a few minutes left for this business. We do have committee business that we need to get to.

The motion's on the floor. I'll allow you to speak to the motion.

• (1725)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank the witness, because some of the technical details that were asked in the process of trying to get to the bottom of...

Specifically, Mr. Chair, I would note just the details of the services that—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, would there be consensus to excuse the witness?

The Chair: Yes, that's fine. I was just getting to that. We will do that before we discuss the motion.

The other thing I would keep in mind on the motion is the fact that we can't compel a private business to submit something in both official languages, but we can have it translated. That's one thing to keep in mind.

Mr. Khabra, I really want to thank you for being here today, sir. I know it was said a couple of times that your first time in front of a parliamentary committee can be intimidating, but I want you to be assured that you accorded yourself very well today, sir. I want to thank you for that, and on behalf of Canadians, thank you for being here today.

We'll dismiss the witness.

I'm going to return to Mr. Kurek. Let's see if we can get through this quickly.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the discussion that we've had today. The reason I moved the motion that I did... I think the testimony was very helpful. Certainly it helped me understand the specific privacy implications that we're addressing here.

Conservatives and the media have been asking questions about ArriveCAN when it comes to the scope of this committee's study and the privacy implications of that, and then we were asking the other day about some lobbying implications, which are, of course, within the scope of this committee as well.

I moved the motion because the witness talked about his team and the level that they go to to ensure that their clients—in this case, Canada Border Services—are given a high-quality product. However, as the witness articulated, they don't keep those evaluations and whatnot. They're hired to conduct a service, and when that service is fulfilled, that documentation is left to ensure that they're fulfilling the obligations related to privacy and security on their company's end of things. I think the focus needs to move—I would suggest, rightly—to the CBSA.

I think it's quite reasonable. My understanding, if I am correctly interpreting the testimony, is that it's not a private business's record. It's a record that would be within the CBSA's system, since they are the ones that hired the private contractor—in this case, the company that the previous witness has—to fulfill a service. Therefore, the CBSA is responsible for that.

I think it would be very helpful, especially for privacy implications, if we could see that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kurek.

The motion's on the floor. Do we have any other discussion on the motion?

Go ahead, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): I'm not a regular member of this committee, but as a normal practice, could that motion be emailed to us? Maybe we can take a break of a couple of minutes so that we can have the discussion.

The Clerk: We only have the English wording.

The Chair: We only have the English version, Mr. Dong, so it would take us a few minutes to translate it.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I can read the motion again. I'd be happy to do so.

The Chair: Would that satisfy you, Mr. Dong?

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I believe, of course, in consensus and trying to make it work, but Mr. Kurek, you'll have to forgive me. At the beginning of the Parliament... As a Quebec member, I'm reluctant to do that, because if we start now, when we are all in agreement and we're all doing it in good faith... I would hate for this to become a habit, because I know which official language ends up being on the losing end of this.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, if it's helpful, the interpreters have the English language. They can interpret it in French, if that's helpful to you.

Hon. Greg Fergus: What I would suggest is that we take a pause for a couple of minutes. We can come back in committee business and deal with it then. I'm certain that Mr. Kurek can lean on some resources in his party to circulate it in both official languages.

• (1730)

Mr. Matthew Green: I have a point of order.

This is an at-hand motion on a topic relevant to the witnesses in the study. There's nothing procedurally out of hand by having somebody speak to a motion on record. I'm not clear...

I'm concerned now that there's a precedent so that any time there's an at-hand motion, there's going to be this suggestion that we have to have it distributed, and that's simply not the case.

The Chair: I appreciate the intervention, Mr. Fergus.

Just to speed things along—and I'm going to seek Mr. Ville-mure's concurrence on this, as well—is it okay if we have the interpreter read it into the record so that you can understand it?

The clerk has just advised that she has the text at this point, so that's helpful.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): Do you want me to distribute the English and French text to everybody?

The Chair: I would like it to be distributed in English and French.

I know that Mr. Fergus is not intending on delaying this process. We need to make sure that everybody's clear on what they're voting on.

We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• (1730) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1730)

The Chair: We're back.

My understanding is that everybody has received Mr. Kurek's motion.

Is there any other discussion on Mr. Kurek's motion?

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

• (1735)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, I don't think there's any other discussion on the motion. It has been circulated. We're ready for a vote.

The Chair: I'm actually looking to see if we can get any consensus on this before we get to a vote.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I have a comment, Mr. Chair.

I know I can't amend my own motion, but I'd be happy to expand the timeline to three weeks to ensure there's enough time for the documents to be found. I know I'm not allowed to amend my own motion, but I'd be happy to receive that from someone, or whatever the case may be.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kurek.

It's funny what can happen over a dinner table discussion.

If everybody's in agreement with that, we'll push the timelines back to what Mr. Kurek proposes.

Are we good with that?

Hon. Greg Fergus: I say we put it back until... What was your... ?

Mr. Damien Kurek: It would be three weeks, as we suggested.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I hope we're not coming in over the Christmas holidays.

The Chair: It's three weeks instead of two. I'm just trying to keep everything on track here.

Mr. Damien Kurek: It would be business days, right?

The Chair: Let's keep the conversation between us.

We have three weeks—

An hon. member: Are we recording...?

The Chair: We're in public right now.

Do we have consensus on three weeks? I'm going to look around the room. I'm not seeing any shaking of the heads. I see Mr. Green.... It will be pushed back to three weeks rather than two. We have consensus on the motion. There's no need for a vote.

I'm going to adjourn the public part of the meeting and we are going to come back in camera.

I'm going to remind Mr. Green that you have to sign back in, sir.

Is there anybody else?

Ms. Saks, Mr. Bains and everyone who is online will have to sign back in.

The public portion is adjourned.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1735) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1805)

The Chair: I will call the meeting back to order. We are now in public as a result of a motion that was passed by the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor.

Mr. René Villemure: I'll read the motion that was put on notice on November 14:

That the Committee undertake, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), a study of foreign interference, particularly in the 2021 federal election, through the use of funds from foreign-influenced organizations affiliated with the United Front of the Communist Party of China, and the threats to the integrity of democratic institutions, intellectual property and the Canadian state itself that arise from this foreign interference; and that the committee report to the House.

• (1810)

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, the motion has been moved. It is on the floor.

Mr. Villemure, do you have anything you want to say?

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Mr. Chair, the purpose of this motion is to discuss the integrity of the state. As everyone here knows, this issue was raised in question period in the House. The *Global News* report, published about 10 days ago, casts doubt on the public's confidence in the Canadian government.

Through this motion, I would like the committee to dispel that doubt so that the integrity of the state is not called into question or, if necessary, corrected. One of the things we do in this ethics committee is to ensure that the public has confidence in the democratic institution of the government. That is our fundamental mission.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I am very open to the idea of studying the issue of China's interference in the 2021 election. I would probably be the first person to support the motion of my honourable colleague Mr. Villemure.

However, I should point out that this is already being studied by another committee. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and we are currently studying this issue. We have already heard from witnesses, including the Chief Electoral Officer. There is a long list of witnesses. It isn't recommended or advisable to do the same study twice on the same subject and with virtually the same parameters.

I sincerely ask my colleague how the study he is proposing in his motion would be different from the one that another committee is doing right now, for which the following motion was tabled. It's much longer and much more complex, but it certainly encompasses what we're studying here.

[English]

It reads:

That the Committee, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi), conduct a study concerning foreign interference in Canadian elections, provided that:

- (a) the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner of Canada Elections be invited to appear jointly for two hours at a televised meeting at their earliest opportunity;
- (b) the Chief of the Communications Security Establishment and the Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service be invited to appear jointly for two hours, at their earliest opportunities, provided that one hour be televised and the other hour be in camera; and
- (c) the parties represented on the Committee submit their lists of proposed witnesses, in order of priority

I can continue.

Mr. Chair, we're doing this, and it would just be a really inefficient use of our time if we were to take this on. I look to my colleagues to explain how this differs from the other one, and if that's the case, then fine.

• (1815)

[Translation]

That said, I don't think there's a relevant difference between the two.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, thank you for that. It's a fair request. I don't know whether Monsieur Villemure wants to address that or not, but I will give the floor to Monsieur Villemure.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: I'll be brief, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the point made by my hon. colleague. However, I have two concerns.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will soon be undertaking another study on a subject that will result in this study being postponed to a later date. I think his aspect of the bill is complementary to that of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I don't want there to be any duplication, but I don't think that's the case here. Still, I think we have the opportunity to move forward more quickly.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, I see your hand.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, remember that I was saying it was a long one, and of course my Internet research wasn't as quick as some other people's.

There was a second motion that was also passed, a motion that is much longer, which, again, I think.... Forgive me again for doing this.

We passed a motion that was adopted by my colleague. It said:

That

- (a) given the Global News report published by Sam Cooper on November 7, 2022, revealing that intelligence officials informed the Prime Minister and several cabinet ministers in January of 2022 that the Chinese Communist Party actively worked to influence the 2019 Federal Election, the committee extend its study of Foreign Election Interference by four meetings to investigate this report;
- (b) the committee recall Elections Canada, CSIS, and the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force to testify on the report referenced in (a);
- (c) the committee invite The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, to testify on the report referenced in (a);
- (d) the committee invite The Honourable Melanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to testify on the report referenced in (a);
- (e) the committee invite Jody Thomas, National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister, to testify on the report referenced in (a);
- (f) the committee order the production of
 - (i) all relevant briefing notes, memorandums and documents which are in the possession of the relevant government Departments and Agencies, provided that,
 - (ii) the Departments and Agencies tasked with gathering these documents apply redactions according to the Access to Information and Privacy Act;
 - (iii) these redacted documents be deposited as soon as possible, but not later than 14 days after the adoption of this motion, with the Clerk of the committee to be distributed to all members of the committee in both official languages.

That was a motion that was adopted. It's pretty complete. It's also pretty tight, with four extra meetings.

Again, I appeal to my colleague. Please don't make me repeat my work again. Give me new things to work on, because I do sit on PROC and I sit on the ethics committee, and it's the exact same thing. I think it really is a doubling of work of members of Parliament, and that shouldn't be on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Go ahead, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Chair.

It's by pure coincidence that I showed up today.

If memory serves me correctly, in 2020 I moved a similar motion. I now have the text in front of me, and I will just share it. I'm sure that the members of this committee will find it amusing.

It was November 16, 2020, and I moved:

That the committee

—this committee—

study ways to further protect Canada's democratic and electoral institutions from cyber and non-cyber interference, including studying how new domestic and international stakeholders, as well as other orders of government, can work together to strengthen Canada's whole-of-society preparedness, resilience and civic engagement in the face of evolving threats to democracy.

The NDP permanent member at the time was Mr. Angus. He responded that:

Mr. Dong's motion does not belong at our committee. When Minister Gould brought issues of electoral protection, she did not send that to the ethics committee; she sent it, I believe, probably to PROC. Electoral issues have nothing to do with our committee.

Later he added that:

Just so we don't waste any more time, I believe the issue of election preparedness is something that is under the mandate of PROC. Could you determine if that's the case, so that we're not tying up our committee with something that is not within our mandate?

That was his question to the chair.

What I want to ask the current chair is, what are your thoughts on whether or not it fits in the mandate of this committee?

Thank you.

• (1820)

The Chair: That's a very interesting question, Mr. Dong. I have had the opportunity to look at the motion. I've had the opportunity to speak to the clerk as well.

The mandate of the committee, as defined, is fairly broad in terms of what we can study as far as privacy and ethics are concerned. I'm of the opinion that the motion is in order and that this committee can, in fact, study this issue, based on the motion that's been provided by Monsieur Villemure. That would be my position on this particular motion.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Han Dong: Now it's coming back to me. I remember that one reason I moved that motion was that at the time, following the Ontario election in 2018, there was an investigation and actually a conviction. The information of 60,000 clients of the 407 was shared and used by a certain party for their electoral advantage. At the time, that was the reason.

My point is that it was investigated and people were convicted. At the end of that, I called for a study on the incident.

Again, I'm not a permanent member of this committee anymore, but my memory of my impression of this committee at the time was that when you run parallel investigations.... There may or may not be an investigation going on right now. I don't know. If there is, then there's no point of studying it. If there is a covert investigation, I don't know if this committee will be helpful in running something similar. It may jeopardize the result or the process of that investigation.

That's all.

The Chair: Okay, I appreciate the intervention.

I'm not seeing any further discussion on this, so I am going to ask whether we have consensus. If not, then we can go to a vote.

Madam Clerk—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, since there are two motions to study the same subject in depth, I'd like to know what Mr. Villemure thinks about it.

Mr. René Villemure: I like to think that the perspective can be different. The expertise I bring to the committee is a little bit different from that of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We all agree that this is an important topic, and I would like us to have the opportunity to address such a complex issue from a different angle. I don't think that can be brushed aside.

Will the findings be the same? I don't think so, but if they are, we'll all be satisfied that an issue of this magnitude has been properly examined.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, I offered that up as a point of clarification for you from Mr. Villemure. I had already seen that there were no other hands up.

• (1825)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, my hand is up.

The Chair: It's up now, but it wasn't up earlier when I called for the vote. I want to make that perfectly clear. I see your hand now, but when I went to Mr. Fergus, the hand was not up.

You asked, as a point of clarification—

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Mr. Chair, respectfully, it's a little bit challenging sometimes with the room and the back-and-forth. Just for clarity, I hadn't realized you had called a vote.

The Chair: Right.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I appreciate your point. It's just to clarify.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Villemure offered a point of clarification to you, Mr. Fergus. I'm going to accept that as a point of clarification.

I'm going to ask if we have consensus. If we don't have consensus, then I'm going to go to the vote. I'm going to ask the clerk to call the vote.

Madam Clerk—

Hon. Greg Fergus: Can I seek a point of order, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Just to clarify, Ms. Saks, maybe I did miss your hand. The clerk had seen your hand, so I want to make sure that if you have something to say, I give you the opportunity to say it. Please go ahead.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

Just to clarify, I don't believe you actually called the vote. I don't recall hearing it. That aside, I appreciate our being able to walk back the time.

I want to lean in a bit on the concern of doubling. I also appreciate the unique perspective and expertise from my colleague Mr. Villemure as a professor of ethics. There's no question that's extremely valuable.

I had a point of clarification with him. There's nothing preventing him from actually going to PROC, participating in the discussions there and offering that lens within a full and comprehensive study at that committee. In that way we're not wasting valuable House resources and time, and what's happening in this committee. I've done it many times. I've joined committees on pieces of legislation or issues of interest in which I have expertise.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I would like Mr. Villemure to let me know if he has actually considered the ability to attend and participate in other committees that are available to him as a member of this chamber. We've done that quite collaboratively on other tables. I'm not really sure if he has considered that so that we can actually focus on the work of the committee here. It seems that PROC is the appropriate place for this study, and I'd like to ask that question.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Villemure, do you want to explain that?

Mr. René Villemure: I think the committee is the right place to look at this issue. Furthermore, the motion is broader than the one presented to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

[*English*]

I see Mr. Fergus' hand.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Am I allowed?

The Chair: Yes. I allowed Ms. Saks, so as far as I'm concerned, the debate is continuing right now. If you have anything additional you'd like to add, Mr. Fergus, please go ahead.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Through you, Mr. Chair, I'd like to speak to Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, the question I'd like to ask is, is there anything you're not happy with?

In terms of this study, are there any witnesses who weren't invited who should have been? The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has not yet completed its study. Is there an angle that we're not looking at that you would like us to look at? If so, we can do that.

Frankly, what is the point of doing work twice? You said you wanted to introduce a new approach, but you didn't define it. Anything is always possible in the Standing Committee on Procedure

and House Affairs. We're halfway there, we can always add more. We've just added four more meetings on this. It's a very serious issue.

I can't refer to what we discussed in camera, but I can tell you that our schedule is already quite full. It's no secret that we have to work on other issues. I don't think we can do anything else. However, if there is something else we can do, Ms. Gaudreau and I need to know.

We could easily add that to the agenda of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. No one is denying that this is a very important issue. I personally supported the other motion calling for this study. It makes no sense to have two different committees doing the same study.

Those of you who work with words and have a sense of ideas, if you have something to say, please make it specific. It will allow me to make sure that these issues are addressed, that they are discussed before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Mr. Chair, I'm asking my colleagues not to duplicate the work we're doing elsewhere.

• (1830)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Villemure, do you have anything to say? There are two hands raised.

Mr. René Villemure: I'll hear the other comments first.

The Chair: Okay.

It's 6:30 p.m.

[*English*]

The meeting was supposed to finish at 6:30, but we're going to continue.

I have Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I will be frank. I don't feel like I've gotten clarity on the justification for doubling today, but that being said, I don't want to prevent us from having a complete discussion on it. I recognize House resources, our translators and the late hours on a Wednesday, and I'm wondering if there is a contemplation or a willingness of the committee to adjourn now and continue this discussion in our subsequent meeting, just because I still have questions I want to ask about this.

I'm a bit frustrated, frankly, Mr. Chair. We're already doubling up on OGGO's ArriveCAN. I'll be frank: There's work we need to get done here, and it just keeps getting pushed off, with a doubling of resources. I don't think it does justice to the skills and the expertise of this committee to hold up what is already being done in other committees when there are other ways to work among colleagues in the various places where we sit in committee work.

I'd like to put that out as a friendly recommendation, although I do see Mr. Green's hand up. I know Ms. Hepfner's hand is up. I leave that to the will of the chair to decide how we move forward, but otherwise we're going to be—

I see there are more questions.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: I've not heard you formally move to adjourn debate on the issue. In the absence of that, I did see Mr. Villemure's hand up and I will go to him first.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to call for a vote.

• (1835)

[English]

The Chair: Do you want a vote for the question on the motion?

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: There are still hands up. That's the problem I have right now, Monsieur Villemure.

[Translation]

I have a list of speakers. The discussion continues, because people want to speak to the motion. The next person on the list is Ms. Hepfner, then Mr. Bains and, finally, Mr. Green.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green: I have just a quick point of order, sir.

The Chair: Go ahead with your point of order, Matt.

Mr. Matthew Green: On Zoom, it typically goes by the order of the hands, and you'll note that it is likely that my hand was up before Mr. Bains'.

The Chair: I see that now. Thank you for that, Mr. Green.

I'm going to go to Ms. Hepfner and then Mr. Green after that, and then Mr. Bains.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I just wanted to underline, I guess, that this seems to be happening a lot. I also sit on the Standing Committee for Canadian Heritage, and the same thing is happening. We're getting motions to

study things that are already being studied, almost to the word, in other committees.

I understand that I'm a new member of Parliament and that maybe this is the way it should work, but it does seem to me that we're not being as efficient as we could be as committee members. We have different mandates in different committees, so I really don't understand how we keep getting these same studies with the same witnesses and the same parameters. I know that, like my friend Monsieur Villemure, you can sub out on other committees. You can appear on PROC. We've seen it happen many times.

I guess I'd just like more clarification. I've been really gratified to see how much you can accomplish on a parliamentary committee, and now I feel like we're just spinning wheels and that it's a game or tactics or something. I don't understand. I would really like to accomplish more as a parliamentarian, and I feel that if we're just doubling up all the same studies for tactics or whatever reason.... It just doesn't make sense to me. I'm hoping for better clarity before we move forward.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hepfner.

Next we'll go to Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, I want to note, on the topic of tactics, that it is very clear that a Liberal filibuster is under way on this particular topic. I'm not clear that adjourning this meeting will put us any closer to a vote.

I know that my friends in government have the ability to speak at length on a number of issues—both related and unrelated, both repeating and new—so I'm glad that we're having this discussion in public.

I just want to go on the public record and say for the people who are tuning in and watching with interest around foreign interference that filibustering this motion does not serve to remove the type of cynicism we're seeing across the country, particularly in my community. We have another Hamilton MP there, and she would likely have heard a lot of feedback on foreign interference.

I'm not sure that an adjournment, which was mentioned earlier, would get us any closer. I would see us right back into this as soon as we began again. I hope that the committee will allow for a vote to happen so that we can move forward.

However, to talk about efficiency and then filibuster is a bit much for me.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Go ahead, Mr. Bains.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree. Like everyone else, I believe this is an extremely important study. However, I think we saw, even witnessed earlier today, that we're doubling up on a similar study being done in another committee. We also maybe saw not the best use of our time in the first hour.

I've made this comment before as well. If we look at the study that's being done in another committee, why not...? As it was described by my colleague, with the number of witnesses and all of the people who have been asked to join that committee and ask and answer the important questions, we can look at what's coming out of that committee. What is the result? What is reported?

Then, if Monsieur Villemure has any issues with gaps in the findings, the results from that, or if the witnesses are not to the liking of this committee, we can review those results, come back to it and move to look at the study further.

• (1840)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Parm Bains: The duplication of the work, again, is an issue. If we see that the findings are not moving things forward or if there are gaps in something....

I would move to adjourn the committee and come back to this at a later time.

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn.

When you say "adjourn the committee", I assume you mean "adjourn debate".

Mr. Parm Bains: Yes. I mean this meeting and its debate.

The Chair: That's non-debatable, so I'm going to ask the clerk to call a vote.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is the question on the meeting?

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Bains, but just to be clear, did you say "adjourn the meeting"?

Mr. Parm Bains: It's to adjourn the meeting for today and come back to it.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead.

The Clerk: The motion is—

Mr. Matthew Green: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Procedurally, is there a hard stop at 6:45, based on the technical requirements of this committee?

The Chair: The clerk has been on this since we extended beyond 6:30. I don't have an update on the available resources.

Madam Clerk, if you can provide that to Mr. Green, I would appreciate it.

The Clerk: I could, but there's a motion on the floor to adjourn. Shall I proceed with it?

The Chair: Yes, I would proceed with the motion to adjourn and the vote on that motion. Thank you.

The Clerk: The motion that was moved by Mr. Bains is to adjourn the meeting.

The vote is five yeas and five nays.

The Chair: I vote against.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The meeting will continue.

I have Ms. Saks first, to be followed by Mr. Barrett.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I may, I'd like to respond to the comments of my colleague Mr. Green and, as a matter of fact, many colleagues around the table who talk about the spending we do in this place and what it gets spent on. There are comments and critiques on visits abroad and so on and so forth, yet we are so cavalier in the willingness to double up the high cost of House resources and the time of our interpreters and the clerk's time. At least on the government side, my colleagues and I do not want to double up the work of committees but actually do the work that Canadians want us to do, and do it in an efficient manner that gets to the heart of the issues at hand, with strong recommendations to take back to the House. That's what Canadians want us to do, Mr. Chair.

With regard to the comments of my colleague Mr. Green, whom I respect immensely—he does great work—my point of debate is that we should not spend the extra resources of the House on work that is already being done, really, for these political points rather than for the real work of getting to the heart of the issue when my colleague Mr. Villemure has been offered alternatives that are well within the purview of committee work to get to the heart of the questions that he has raised. It works both ways. Do we want to get work done in this committee? Do we want to see answers to the questions that Canadians ask us?

I've seen it time and again. I sat on the heritage committee over a recent issue and just watched as the francophone community, as the Jewish community—many communities—wanted really important answers from officials on a very upsetting process, and Conservatives filibustered for well over an hour and wasted the time of officials who took the time to come in to answer the questions of the public.

Therefore, I would use caution in throwing stones about who is wasting time. I'm trying to make sure that we don't waste money. I'm trying to make sure that we don't waste resources. You just voted against not wasting time and not wasting resources, only to have an entirely new study brought up into the committee, something that's already being studied elsewhere.

This is not the first time that this has been done in this committee room. I see colleagues shaking their heads, but let's have a frank and honest discussion about this. You wanted it in public. The public is seeing this, and the public is seeing that there is a willingness by the opposition to double up—to triple up in cases—motions that are word for word the same, with the exception of a semicolon or a letter, in order to waste time.

So, yes, I will stand up for that. I will fight against wasting time on an entire new study when there is space in a committee to do this work and when members of this committee could well use their time to ask the key questions to get the lens and perspective they want at the appropriate place where these things are being studied.

Mr. Chair, I express my deep and profound disappointment at my colleagues' unwillingness to understand that I came here to work on studies like the ATIP study. We've agreed to the ArriveCAN study, even though it's being studied in OGGO. However, the opposition continues to waste the time of this committee for doing actual work.

While my colleague Mr. Green may be frustrated by seeing repeated comments against the wasting of House resources, I will say respectfully, sir, that I don't want to see us wasting good taxpayer money by the doubling up and tripling up of studies.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1845)

The Chair: To update the committee and Ms. Saks, I've been advised by the clerk that we have interpretation for another 10 minutes.

Mr. Barrett, you have the floor.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure whether there's some confusion about who moved the motion, but it wasn't the official opposition. I keep hearing that the government members' argument is against the Conservatives. I'm a little confused by that. They're saying we're wasting time with the ArriveCAN study and bringing in the same witnesses. I would ask, which witnesses on ArriveCAN appeared at OGGO and then appeared at ETHI? Where has that happened? We haven't doubled up on those witnesses, but it certainly could be germane to do so.

The witness who was here today, having received.... CBSA said he got \$8 million, one of the largest contracts awarded in a \$54-million project. He said he got \$100,000. I don't know whether people thought that was a waste of time. I think it's quite telling that CBSA thinks they spent \$8 million and the vendor says they haven't billed them or received that much. That raises serious questions.

Ms. Saks was talking about Conservatives wasting time. We hadn't even intervened in this discussion. Frankly, however, it's quite an important issue. If there is concern that this is wasting time—that studying foreign interference in our elections is wasting time—I disagree. If Ms. Saks isn't comfortable working past 6:30 at night, get a substitute.

Mr. Chair, we're going to support this motion and we're prepared to debate it until the end of resources. Should the filibuster and

wasting of time and resources by government members like Ms. Saks continue, we're prepared to continue this discussion in other meetings.

It is certainly disappointing when people look for disagreement when there wasn't any to begin with.

• (1850)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

I'm going to tell everybody to cool their jets a bit here. We don't want to get into any sort of personal attack, on all sides. Let's keep to the motion on the floor.

Mr. Fergus, you now have the floor on the motion.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to continue in the way you just suggested and lower the temperature.

Mr. Barrett, I want to say that you are not responsible for this motion, nor is the official opposition. I am certainly not pointing fingers at the official opposition. I want to make that clear.

I think it is important to talk about duplication of efforts. With regard to the ArriveCAN study that we have, you are correct: Let the record show that there hasn't been a duplication of witnesses, but that doesn't mean there hasn't been duplication of a whole bunch of resources, not the least of which is the time of members of Parliament.

For us to do this.... Duplicate studies cost money. We pass motions—the routine motions of all committees—whenever we engage in a study. Sometimes, if there's travel, it can be very expensive. Even when we're just in the House, a duplicate study, at this point, costs \$9,000. That's just in here. That's not counting any of our time or the time of our staff resources, who are paid by the people of Canada.

It's important that we try.... If we're going to bring something new, then bring something new. As much as possible, make sure we use all of our resources, in the widest possible terms—financial, time, intellectual—as efficiently as possible.

What we have here.... When there were....

[*Translation*]

I must say that I was a little disappointed with the reaction when I asked a question. I think that the chair of this committee wanted the mover of the motion to answer legitimate and relevant questions from committee members to determine what differentiates the motion from other motions for studies on the same subject.

Instead of taking the time to listen to what members had to say to about how Mr. Villemure's motion to study foreign interference in the 2021 federal election was different from the other motion and deserved to be considered by the committee, the committee instead moved to adjourn the meeting and proceed to a vote. However, other people wanted to speak. It wasn't very polite, frankly.

I understand that when you have a goal in mind, you only want to achieve that goal, regardless of the questions asked about the initiative.

It would have been polite to at least answer the relevant questions that we wanted to ask. How is this process different from the study that's currently being done in another committee? Are there things that we're discussing at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that aren't considered enough for studying this issue in depth? Everyone agrees that this is an extremely important issue. Our credibility in the eyes of the public is at stake. That's very important.

We want to ensure the integrity of our democratic institutions. We are studying that. What's more, not only have we started a study, but we've extended the time for that study. We've also made sure that we can discuss it. We've also expanded the mandate of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

• (1855)

What more should be studied than what we are already?

The door is always open for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to come back to this issue if we want to add witnesses or pursue a certain angle of inquiry. All of that is possible.

I don't understand what we're trying to accomplish here. I have to say it.

It's very important, but if I don't get an answer, I'm not getting much room. Maybe we should have a discussion outside of this committee to see what we can do to really address your needs and your concerns. From there, we can try to find a reasonable and cordial way to decide what we want to do. I think that's very important.

Again, I would ask all my colleagues to consider this.

Conducting work for the purpose of political jockeying could contribute to increasing cynicism of Canadians toward our institutions. We have no interest in doing that.

I told you, and it was important to mention it, that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs had already heard testimony from Mr. Perrault, the Chief Electoral Officer. He didn't ap-

pear once, but twice. I had the opportunity to ask him several questions. Your colleague from the Bloc Québécois, Ms. Gaudreau, was there. She asked some very pertinent questions to get a better understanding of the situation and where we are at. We invited the Commissioner of Canada Elections, Ms. Simard, to come and present her report. She is currently investigating this matter. These people are required to appear before a committee that invites them to appear.

Do we want to waste their time by requiring them to give the same opening remarks and perhaps answer the same questions from people who didn't have the opportunity to ask those questions at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs?

At what cost will they do that? I'm not talking about the financial costs. I mean the impact on their investigative work to find out who is responsible for this foreign interference in our elections.

How did these schemes manifest themselves here in Canada?

There's a cost to doubling the work of others. I don't think it's helpful, Mr. Chair.

• (1900)

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Fergus.

[*English*]

I really hate interrupting you, because I was listening intently.

We have a situation with resources right now. I am going to make the decision to adjourn this meeting, and we're going to have to have further discussion among the whips as to what the next steps are. Unfortunately, we're going to have to adjourn the meeting at this point.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'd like to confirm, Mr. Chair, because I hadn't finished what I wanted to say, that I will have the floor when we get back.

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sure members will be intent on listening to what you have to say when we do return.

I apologize to the committee, but resources being as thin as they are, and with the situation that we are in, I am going to adjourn this meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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