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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 83 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, October 17, 2022, the committee is resuming its the study of the ArriveCAN application.

I'll remind you not to have your earpieces near your microphone, as it causes feedback and potential injury. In accordance with our routine motion, I'm letting everyone in the committee know the witnesses appearing by video conference have completed the required connection test in advance of the meeting.

Mr. Firth, we will turn things over to you, for five minutes.

Mr. Kristian Firth (Partner, GC Strategies): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon.

I am grateful to finally have the opportunity to correct the mistakes, omissions and falsehoods that have been voiced at and by this committee, and in the newspapers, over the past number of weeks.

The first one is with respect to my summons. I readily accepted the committee's invitation to appear, as I did last year, when I was the first to show up and testified for over two hours. I told the committee that because of parenting responsibilities this week, I could be available for one hour, but the committee preferred the two hours I'd be available the following week. I was portrayed as a reluctant witness who was playing hard to get. This is actually far from the truth.

Without this opportunity to appear here today, GC Strategies would continue to be bound to the confidentiality agreement with Botler that was conveniently presented to me for signature right before it started feeding the media with information. It wasn't out of choice that GC Strategies remained silent after learning of the numerous allegations made by Botler, especially being on the other side with contradicting information.

I welcome the opportunity to again explain my business and the contracting processes for government departments that have existed for several decades. The system has outsourced many contracting functions to the private sector. I was not around when this practice was established, but presumably the belief was that a competitive private sector could operate better than an increased bureaucracy.

The system provides that only qualified private sector vendors can bid on and receive government contracts. Becoming a qualified private sector vendor is not easy or quick. Many checks for security and reliability are required. GC Strategies has been a qualified vendor since 2015. There are between 600-700 such qualified vendors in Canada, competing on a daily basis to provide services to government departments and agencies.

These vendors range from very large companies that do work in-house to smaller vendors, such as ours, that put teams together on a case-by-case basis. This competitive system forces qualified vendors to continually deliver quality services at competitive rates, or they would simply not be able to secure work.

Because we rely on teams on a case-by-case basis, it is imperative that we cultivate relationships with service providers and advance their interests. However, we also need to maintain connections with departments to understand their needs and understand where the market is heading.

That is my business, and I'm proud of it, as I'm sure all other vendors in Canada are proud of theirs. You may not like the system that is in place. You might think the government can do the job better itself. You may not respect our work, and that is your right.

I, like all people running a business, make mistakes. We try to learn from our mistakes, but, in all honesty, we'll likely make more. GC Strategies made a mistake by sending the wrong version of the resumé, which ended up being submitted to the Government of Canada for the task authorization; however, this regrettable mistake was not intentional, and it in no way determined the awarding of the contract.

In short, the CBSA had pre-qualified the owners of Botler to do the work, as they were the only two resources with knowledge of their software. Botler was approved before any resumé was submitted or a task authorization created. This is all relevant to the specific events surrounding Botler.

Botler was a client I recruited because I thought it could fill an important need for the government's compliance with Bill C-65. I thought its specific product would be useful for many departments. I spent the better part of two years working with Botler and introducing it to various departments. The CBSA was one of them, but there were many more. I was even working with Botler to get it qualified as a vendor, so it could fulfill contracts directly, eliminating the need for vendors like GC Strategies.

The Botler pilot was delivery based, so Botler would get paid only when it delivered. It delivered the first two deliverables and was then paid everything it was owed. At no time did GC Strategies ever receive money for those deliverables that we did not immediately pass on to Botler.

Botler stopped delivering what was required of it, and the CBSA terminated the contract. I was asked to gather from Botler all new work that was done prior to termination and submit that to the CBSA for a review and payment. Nearly two months passed. At that point, Botler submitted the remaining four deliverables, along with an invoice. The deliverables were then submitted to the CBSA, and they were not approved. The documents were unreadable, and once a version came through that could be evaluated, the CBSA determined the work to be substandard, and it refused to pay.

That leads us here today.

Let me be clear. The Botler pilot project was in no way connected to ArriveCAN. GC Strategies made no money whatsoever after working with Botler for two years, including the pilot. GC Strategies, Dalian and Coradix each had their own individual contracts to complete work on ArriveCAN. At no point did GC Strategies work with or act as a subcontractor on Dalian or Coradix's contract for ArriveCAN. All work done for the ArriveCAN app by GC Strategies was done using our own contract.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start with six minutes for Mr. Brock.

Actually, it's Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The name of your company is GC Strategies. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, it is.

Mr. Michael Barrett: How many staff work at GC Strategies?

Mr. Kristian Firth: We have two employees, but we outsource our finance and legal—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you do app programming or design?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, we do not.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Your role in terms of IT contracts for the federal government is that you're the middleman between the government and the people who do the work. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: We are responsible for bringing in individuals and building teams that the federal government would not have access to, as it does not have them on staff. It also does not have recruitment capabilities.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The recruitment capabilities of direct messaging people on LinkedIn.... I'm sure a value could be ascribed to that, and we're actually going to see what that value is. You worked on the \$54-million ArriveCAN app. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, it is.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The work on that app is now under RCMP investigation. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You're not aware of the RCMP investigating any of the work related to GC Strategies or anyone that you were contracted by or subcontracted to?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct. My understanding from the testimony that I've heard—and it was clarified by some honourable members—is that right now the RCMP is investigating only the Botler accusations, not ArriveCAN.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did you work with Botler?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I worked with Botler for two years as their representation. We were in partnership.

Mr. Michael Barrett: How much money have you made so far from contracts with the Government of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. I don't have those numbers in front of me. I wasn't prepared for that question. I apologize.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You weren't prepared to tell the committee, when we're here to ask you about your contracts with the government, how much you've been paid by the government for your contracts.

Mr. Kristian Firth: This is the ArriveCAN application study. This isn't a "contracting with GC Strategies and the federal government" study.

I've already given up all the information that I have on the application, on ArriveCAN, which is the basis of the study. I've given two hours of testimony. I've given hundreds of pages of documentation, and we're awaiting the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You had to be summoned to appear here today, sir. You don't even have the basic details about the work you've done for the government.

How much money was GC Strategies paid to not do any programming or app design for the ArriveCAN app?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I think I clarified in my opening statement that the reason I was summoned was that one hour was not sufficient—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I heard your opening statement, sir. My question is with respect to your billing for ArriveCAN.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Can you repeat the question, please?

Mr. Michael Barrett: How much did you get paid for your work on ArriveCAN?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. I've already given up all this information. You have all of my invoices—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, are you refusing to answer the question? It's a very straightforward question. As you said, this is a study about ArriveCAN. It seems to me that it would be quite pertinent for you to be able to tell the committee how many millions of dollars you, with your two-person company, were paid to do work on an app that you did not do any programming for. How much money were you paid?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I would be more than happy, once I get that number, to give you the answer in writing. I do not have that number with me right now—the exact dollars and cents. I apologize.

Mr. Michael Barrett: If I said the number was \$9 million, then, you wouldn't be able to dispute that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. I could dispute that.

Mr. Michael Barrett: With what number?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I can tell you that it wasn't \$9 million. Again, it's publicized in the media. It's somewhere between 15% and 30%. That's the number that everybody is going with.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay.

It's quite interesting that you're not interested in sharing the number, because of the amount of work that was not done by you on the app and the amount of money that you collected for work that was done on the app.

Are you familiar with the testimony that you gave at this committee—you talked about your previous appearance—in which you talked about relationships?

I am going to ask you this: Do you use relationships to get work from the Government of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: My relationships come from meetings I've had since 2009 with multiple clients. We would go through a competitive process to win business, like every other one of the 600 or 700 vendors that go through the same thing.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is your client list relationship-based?

Mr. Kristian Firth: My client list is people I continue to have meetings with from when I first picked up the phone for a cold call and still do to this day.

• (1550)

Mr. Michael Barrett: We've heard testimony at this committee that you leveraged relationships with key people in the government in order to guarantee business, and that that's how you solicited the participation of subcontractors. Is that a fair characterization?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That is accurately the testimony you heard, but that's not what happened. You're making reference to a testimony and taking it as gospel.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Are you saying the witnesses lied to the committee?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I'm not saying that at all. I'm saying the reason the business came about was that we continually had meetings and identified opportunities. It's about being ahead of it, getting partnerships with people who understand where the market is going, and being able to use procurement processes to get them in, while staying within PSPC guidelines.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, you said in reference to your relationship with Mr. MacDonald that you'd been with him his whole career in government.

Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That was an embellishment.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is it an embellishment by you?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct. While I sell to the federal government, I also have to sell to my clients and be—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Therefore, by selling, you lied to them.

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, that's not necessarily the truth. There's an—

The Chair: I'm sorry. That is our time.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Firth, in a lot of the conversations we've had on this issue in the last number of days, there's been some conflating of Botler AI and the ArriveCAN app work.

Again, can you state whether you engaged with Botler AI on any ArriveCAN work?

Mr. Kristian Firth: They were completely independent.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Okay.

You were working with the Botler AI app. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I was representing them—they were my client—and working with them not just on the Botler pilot but also by continually trying to get them new meetings and into different departments.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Help me understand what “representing them” means.

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's a partnership. We agreed, after many meetings and conversations, to go into a partnership whereby they identified me and wrote scripts for me as a partner representing them for business development for Government of Canada clients.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Is that a formal partnership? Is there an agreement of some sort? Is there a contract that goes into that partnership, or is it a handshake?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It was trust.

I worked for two years for no fee or retainer—actually, for nothing. The fact that this was... There are emails back and forth, where I'm having scripts created by Botler that they'd like me to use when I'm introducing myself and...how the partnership is set up. There was my logo on presentations where they were billed. It clearly said, “in partnership with”.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Is it normal to enter into these kinds of partnerships? Usually, when I see businesses, there is a formal agreement that spells out exactly what the expectations are and exactly what the compensation is.

Was there ever such a document in this case?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It was built a lot on trust.

The reality is that it's hard to go into an agreement when, initially, you haven't set up a meeting. We just went off trust. We were partners, and it worked out from the perspective of understanding that they were represented. They got a pilot, and they got paid.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Why did the CBSA terminate the contract for Botler AI in December 2021?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I can't speculate. I'm sorry. I wasn't part of that decision-making.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Did you have a contract with CBSA for Botler AI?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I didn't. That was with Dalian and Coradix.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Okay. You have no understanding of why that was terminated.

Mr. Kristian Firth: No.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: How many deliverables were expected of Botler AI under that project?

Mr. Kristian Firth: There were six.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: How many did they deliver?

Mr. Kristian Firth: They delivered two and got full payment for two.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: You mentioned something in your earlier testimony about the quality of work.

Can you speak to that a bit?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Do you mean the quality of Botler's work...?

• (1555)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I think so. That's what I heard in your testimony.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

The first two deliverables were up to standard, and CBSA approved them [*Inaudible—Editor*] and paid.

The other four were ones that came two months after they were asked to hand over everything that had been delivered up to that point. There was silence for those two months. Four deliverables were then sent in February. At that point, the CBSA couldn't read them, to start with. When they asked for a format they could read, it came back. They decided it was substandard and would not release payment.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: To clarify, as well.... They got paid for the first two. Those were also deemed substandard work, and CBSA still—

Mr. Kristian Firth: No.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I apologize.

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. Those two were accepted. That's why CBSA paid for it.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: It was the remaining four that were substandard. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Was there ever an expectation on your part and Botler's part that this pilot project would lead to a government-wide acceptance of Botler AI, which would lead to a contract as I understand it from previous testimony that could have been north of \$20 million?

Was there an expectation of that at GC Strategies and also Botler AI at any point, that this would lead to a larger contract in the tens of millions of dollars?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It would be naive of me to expect that. I have been doing this now for close to 20 years, and an enterprise sale for the federal government is very rare.

The truth was we were trying to make steps to at least be considered. It's "get yourself a pilot"; get yourself in other departments so you can at least start getting momentum, so you have a pathfinder. At that point there has to be a threshold, once you have been in enough departments, where it's cheaper to do an enterprise licence at a volume discount than it is to keep paying the licensing fee, but there is never a promise of an enterprise purchase. It would be naive of me to say that. I know how much work goes into that and what has to happen.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Why were you working with Botler AI? What was the motivation to work for them for two years without any formal agreement?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Right at that time there were civil suits and harassment cases being settled by the armed forces for \$900 million. The RCMP were making settlements for \$100 million for misconduct and harassment. This could have been an opportunity for all government employees to have a front line where they could have somebody, a bot, or somebody to speak to, to identify what the problems were and at least have some sort of sound voice to actually go up against.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you.

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

Ms. Vignola is next for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Firth, as my colleague said, there may have been some conflating of the contract with Botler AI on harassment and the one on ArriveCan. Despite this, we need all the information to understand what links you to this, and above all, what your role was.

I'd like to know, for ArriveCan, whether you worked directly with Dalian Enterprises and Coradix Technology Consulting.

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I did not. I never worked with Dalian and Coradix at all on any ArriveCAN work. They had their own contracts, and I had mine.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Basically, you only worked with them on the pilot project.

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Were you the prime vendor for ArriveCan?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Did you have any subcontractors?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. I don't understand.

I was the prime contract, and we had five or six other subcontractors working below us, each delivering different parts for ArriveCAN.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Did you know if your subcontractors had subcontractors themselves?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: I was aware that they did not hire subcontractors. My subs did the work.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: All right.

How do you ensure, not only for ArriveCan but in general, that you provide the federal government with adequate and accurate information on your subcontractors?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: This involves interactions back and forth, so if we're using the subcontractors term as an individual, then there's multiple back and forth, validating and ensuring the information is accurate.

- (1600)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: In that case, how do you explain that Ms. Dutt's and Mr. Morv's number of years of experience were increased on the resumé's provided?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: As I mentioned, that was a mistake. The wrong draft was sent through. There were multiple drafts moving back and forth between the ones.... There were three or four versions at any one time.

Again, I admit I unintentionally sent in the wrong version.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: How is it possible to have the wrong versions of a resumé?

I'm trying to understand. When I make up my resumé, I don't get my own years of experience wrong. How could three or four versions have been out there? How do you explain that?

I don't understand it.

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Before I was in sales, I was a recruiter. You typically get the resumé submitted by the resource. There is no grid or evaluation matrix that matches 100% to the resumé you have in front of you. It might be missing some information on technology

and other bits and pieces, so there is a second version that's created that would have all the details and information in there, which would be compliant.

At that point there are conversations back and forth to understand what is accurate and what is not, and what can be claimed and what cannot be. "Is this technology in this resumé or is it not?" It's a working document that goes back and forth.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: All right. Thank you. I find that extraordinary.

With respect to ArriveCan, from what I understand, you supervised the work. You can confirm or deny that. How many person-years were billed for the initial stage of ArriveCan?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: First of all, we don't supervise the work. As a prime contractor or prime vendor, you're responsible for nothing to do with project management and nothing to do with budget management.

I don't have the exact number, but if you were to take the 23 resources working on the project and times that by two years, that would give you the days or hours that were put toward it.

I think I remember from somebody's testimony that there were 8,200 days. If you were to divide that by just 16 resources, not the 23, that still returns less than two years' worth of work per resource.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: That equates to less than two years of work per resource, but in total, nearly 32 years of work were billed for the initial stage, so basically for ArriveCan's visuals.

Are my calculations wrong?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: It wasn't just the front end. There was accessibility, back-end integration and object character recognition. There was also backing it to the legacy systems.

For that we had 23 resources and one-time billing. That could have been for two years. If you did 23 or even 20 to 23 resources—for an approximation—for two years' worth of work, that would be the number that would have been presented for what was invoiced for doing that work.

The Chair: That's your time, Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Johns, go ahead for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Firth, I'm just going to go back to the Globe and Mail story that stated that "Coradix had submitted forms to the agency about their [Botler] work experience without their knowledge or permission."

It states, “Ms. Dutt said a two-month summer internship at Deloitte on her résumé was inflated in an invoicing points form to say she had 51 months of experience working for the accounting firm.”

The Chair: I'm sorry. Let me just pause for a moment. I'll pause your time.

Apparently, we're having translation issues.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I have to turn the volume all the way up to hear the interpreter, so as soon as they change interpreters, I'll get another audio shock.

I'd like to stop that from happening.

• (1605)

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Johns. You can start again. You're at 20 seconds.

Mr. Gord Johns: As I said, Mr. Firth, Coradix had submitted forms to the agency about the Botler work experience. They stated that Ms. Dutt said a two-month summer internship at Deloitte was on her résumé and was inflated in an invoice points form to say she had 51 months of experience working for the accounting firm.

Did you make those changes?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I have one quick question. Invoice points form—what does that mean?

Mr. Gord Johns: I'll get to the point. Did Botler give you their CV?

Mr. Kristian Firth: They did.

Mr. Gord Johns: They gave you their CV. They said they sent it to you only once. That is my understanding.

Is that true?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Gord Johns: Did you inflate it from a two-month summer internship to say that they had worked at Deloitte for 51 months?

Mr. Kristian Firth: This was one of the versions that we talked about, and how we'd go back and forth with the resources to validate.

Mr. Gord Johns: Who did you go back and forth with?

Mr. Kristian Firth: This is, again, the wrong version. It was my mistake. I sent the wrong version.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm asking you a question. You're under oath. Who did you go back and forth with?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I didn't go back and forth with the resources. There was not time to do so. There was pressure from CB-SA to get the résumés from Coradix. That flowed down to me, and in turn I made a mistake and sent the wrong résumés.

Mr. Gord Johns: Botler supplied you with a résumé. It was changed. Who changed it?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I made the edits, but again, the wrong version was sent.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Firth, the government received forged worked experience for Ritika Dutt and Amir Morv of Botler. Hun-

dreds of thousands of dollars were awarded based on fraudulent points invoicing. That's incredibly serious.

On Tuesday, Colin Wood told us that he simply submitted the documents that GC Strategies provided to Dalian. If that's true, then you're responsible for fraud.

I want to give you a chance to respond to that.

Mr. Kristian Firth: You're calling it fraud. It was a genuine mistake that was not made with intent. This is not fraud.

Mr. Gord Johns: You're telling me you changed a résumé with someone's experience of two months to 51 months, that that's not fraud, and also that this doesn't give you a better chance to get other contracts from the Government of Canada in the future. I bet your competitors would have a different view of that.

Mr. Kristian Firth: This was a solitary mistake, made once, that I'm owning up to. This is not something I do frequently to gain business and get a competitive edge.

Mr. Gord Johns: In the game of—

Mr. Kristian Firth: The wrong version was sent through.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

Have you done any work with Deloitte as a subcontractor or ghost contractor?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I don't think so.

Mr. Gord Johns: What about Pricewaterhouse Coopers?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I don't have this information in front of me. You're asking about clients I've had in the last eight years that I don't have.

Mr. Gord Johns: You wouldn't even know if you had contracts with someone, an organization, like Pricewaterhouse Coopers. You wouldn't be able to recall that.

Mr. Kristian Firth: We've had hundreds of task authorizations. I'm sorry. I can get back to you in writing on any question you pose about subcontractors. I can get back to you. I just don't have that information in front of me.

Mr. Gord Johns: How much money did you get paid for the Botler contract and Dalian and Coradix? Was it \$350,000?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No.

Mr. Gord Johns: Did GC Strategies get that much?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I received zero payment at all for any work done with Botler.

Mr. Gord Johns: You never got any funding from Dalian or Coradix.

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Gord Johns: You just wrote a cheque to Botler for \$112,000 out of the goodwill of GC Strategies.

Mr. Kristian Firth: The federal government paid their prime, which was Dalian and Coradix. They, in turn, because we had a contract between the two of us.... I then paid the full amount owing to Botler straight away.

Mr. Gord Johns: You paid it from GC Strategies—

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Gord Johns: —and you billed out Dalian and Coradix.

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. I invoiced.... It was a zero per cent pass-through. No money was made at all. Whatever CBSA paid Dalian and whatever Dalian paid me, I paid Botler, and they cashed both cheques.

Mr. Gord Johns: You got paid and then you paid them. I'm trying to get to the bottom of this. I'm trying to understand this.

You got paid from Dalian and then you paid them.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes. That was with zero margin and zero money made.

• (1610)

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

In terms of the set-aside, it's my understanding that you did this, that Botler was doing some work on the set-aside. Can you explain that, what we've heard at testimony already?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Once the presentation was approved by the president, at that point CBSA would go back and look at existing contracts they currently had and what would fit better in a statement of work on a competitive contract that existed.

They chose Dalian and Coradix's contract.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay. In an email about a payment, you said you would let it slide and you would recover it later because you were certain you would get more government contracts.

You were basically going to take payment for this deal out of another deal.

Would that be accurate?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. That's your interpretation.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay. What's your interpretation of that email? It would be good to explain that.

Mr. Kristian Firth: You win some, you lose some.

Up to that point, having represented them for 12 months, I had made zero dollars. I got the pilot. I didn't get any money off this one. In sales, sometimes you win some and sometimes you lose some.

I was looking out for the next one. It was not to recover money, but my understanding was.... I thought we had something. Again, I continued to work with them—even after I got zero dollars—to try to get new meetings, to understand that I would get money eventually, on one of these contracts.

Mr. Gord Johns: When did you first start doing contracts and business with the Government of Canada?

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm afraid that's our time. You'll have to take that up in the next round.

Colleagues, before we continue, I have to suspend for a very brief moment, because we have Mr. Anthony finally joining us. We need to suspend for a voice check.

• (1610)

(Pause)

• (1610)

The Chair: We are back. Mr. Genuis has a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): On a point of order, Chair, the committee summoned Mr. Anthony to be here. He didn't have his Zoom updated. He's 45 minutes late. We wanted to hear from him for two hours.

I suggest the committee invite him to go on his way today, and we can have him back for another time, when he can be here for the full two hours. We summoned him to be here for two hours. We welcome him to come back next week for two hours.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think that's unanimous, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Anthony, the will of the committee is to have you come back at another time for two hours. You're excused. You can leave us right now, and we will find another day to have you back for two hours.

We'll advise you of the time.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Is there a reason he can't stay?

The Chair: You're welcome to stay and listen in, if you want. However, my understanding is we will not be asking any questions of or inviting any comments from you.

Mr. Brock, you are up for six minutes, please.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Firth, there are a few things I want to remind you about before I ask you some questions.

With respect to parliamentary privilege—which every member enjoys in this committee—it's a contempt of Parliament, sir, to mislead this committee by giving a false statement or false evidence; to refuse, unless related to cabinet confidence, to answer any questions; or to fail to produce documents that this committee might require someone to produce.

Although you have not sworn on a holy book, this parliamentary privilege binds your conscience and binds your responses to always provide us with the truth.

Do you understand that, sir?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, I do.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Firth, in light of all the criminal allegations that have been levied against you, Dalian and Coradix over the last several weeks.... Specifically, these offences have been in the spotlight: the offence of theft over \$5,000, forgery, fraud over \$5,000, and impersonation. All these, if prosecuted by indictment by a prosecutor in this country, could result in a conviction, with someone serving a sentence greater than two years.

Are you aware of that, sir?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, I am.

Mr. Larry Brock: Under this cloud of serious and significant criminal suspicion, have you retained legal counsel?

• (1615)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, I have.

Mr. Larry Brock: Has legal counsel—without my asking what legal counsel has informed you—impressed upon you the importance of telling the truth?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, they have.

Mr. Larry Brock: Has legal counsel instructed you not to answer certain questions?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, they have not.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

One area that you have been presented with, sir, which gives me great discomfort as a parliamentarian, is the issue regarding résumés. Quite frankly, sir, whether you call it a mistake, whether you call it a lack of intent or whether you refer to it as an embellishment, in my respectful submission, that is a lie. No one believes you. No one in this room believes you. We have national reporters in this room, and I doubt very much that they believe you, because your story is so fantastic, it's simply unworthy of belief.

You, sir, at all material times, received only one version of the CV from both Ritika Dutt and Amir Morv. There was one CV. There was one résumé. That was not ambiguous. That was not confusing. You took it upon yourself to manipulate both of those résumés to ensure that Botler qualified for government funding. You did that without the express permission or consent of either of Botler's executives. In doing so, sir, you have committed a serious criminal offence.

Do you have anything to say about that, or are you going to continue on this line of "I made a mistake"?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm going to tell the truth, and it was a genuine mistake, because there are multiple versions of the résumé. They may have given me one, but as a recruiter, you make different versions of résumés, and the wrong one was sent through.

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, who made multiple versions, you or somebody else?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I did. I started my career as a recruiter, so I'm—

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, what on earth would compel you to modify one version of the résumé received by both individuals? Why did you have to modify it and create different versions without their consent or permission? Why?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Because accompanying every résumé going to the federal government, there's a matrix, an evaluation matrix. That is a score that you get to be compliant, to be a certain category on the contract—

Mr. Larry Brock: You lied to ensure that they qualified.... You embellished—

The Chair: I'm afraid that—

Mr. Larry Brock: You manipulated the facts.

The Chair: —is our time. You can continue on the next round.

We'll have Ms. Atwin, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being with us today.

I had some questions here, but your opening statement led me to want to ask a few different things.

Specifically, you mentioned that Botler did not complete the work up to CBSA standards regarding the final deliverables, and that it was rejected. We have not heard this from the CBSA that I'm aware of. How do you know this information?

Mr. Kristian Firth: They would have relayed the information to Dalian and Coradix, who would then have told me.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: According to The Globe and Mail, GC Strategies is listed on a subcontracting document as a subcontractor to Dalian. Is that correct? Are you a subcontractor to Dalian?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Can you explain how Dalian and Coradix can subcontract to a non-indigenous entity if they were given an indigenous contract through a set-aside?

Mr. Kristian Firth: My understanding for an aboriginal set-aside.... I'm not an aboriginal set-aside company, but for a contract, I think, after listening to Mr. Woods' testimony, that it's to encourage aboriginal entrepreneurs to build companies, and I don't think you need to be aboriginal to be on an aboriginal contract.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Okay—

Mr. Kristian Firth: Again, I'm not an expert. I'm not on the aboriginal set-aside.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Do you currently have any contracts with CBSA that are active?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I have one that's active, but there are no resources on there.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Can you please describe your relationship with Cameron MacDonald, who was a former director general with CBSA?

• (1620)

Mr. Kristian Firth: When I first started as a junior salesman in 2009, we were encouraged by our VPs to use GEDS, which is the government electronic directory, to make cold calls, get meetings and try to identify opportunities within organizations. Mr. MacDonald picked up the phone in 2009, and we've been having meetings from then until the present day.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: When did work begin? When was this contractual...?

Mr. Kristian Firth: The meeting was in 2009, and 11 years later I had my first contract from Mr. Cameron MacDonald.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Who approached whom to engage Botler in selling its software to the federal government?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Nobody approached me about Botler. There was a conversation happening with the CBSA, understanding that more recently there had been accusations made in the Vancouver Sun and other media outlets around harassment and some things on public safety.

At that point, there had to be some sort of product out there for some small Canadian firm where we could try to identify some opportunities. At that point, I researched firms that were out there. Botler was Canadian, and they were from Montreal, so, should there be a government contract eventually, it would be easy for them to get government security clearances, and that's when I reached out to them.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: You also mentioned that your commission rate was between 15% and 30%. Is it standard to have a variable commission rate like that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It depends, because a lot of the commission you get is for a per diem, so, if I had a per diem for \$1,000, and there were two resources, one requesting \$850 and one requesting \$750, that would be the range and difference. Again, it's always the difference between the pay rate and the bill rate that determines it. It's not a flat fee.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: What would be your hourly rate?

Mr. Kristian Firth: What is my rate for what? I'm sorry.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Just on a general contract, what would be your average hourly rate?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I usually work in per diems, not hours, so I'm guessing somewhere around \$110 an hour. It's somewhere between \$90 and \$120.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Going back to this subcontractual relationship with Coradix and Dalian, was this arrangement negotiated with them directly, or was it with the federal government or with both?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Once the pilot was approved, CBSA reached out to Dalian and Coradix and said that they were going to use their vehicle.

In turn, they reached out to me and said that I would be working with Dalian and Coradix, and that they deemed this to be the most suitable contract. At that point, Dalian, Coradix and I had a conversation.

Until that point, though, we had no idea which contract would be used until CBSA told us.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Have you ever had any allegations of this nature made against you or a company you were associated with?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Never.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: You also mentioned your concerns with our previous witnesses feeding the media.

Can you elaborate on this? What specific information do you take issue with?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I take issue with pretty much the majority of it.

They were paid....

It does bring suspicions to me. As we found out later on, they were actually feeding the media around the time that they decided, after not speaking with me for a year, to then make me sign a confidentiality agreement, understanding that I couldn't defend myself and put contradictory evidence towards it.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: You also mentioned that some of your—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Atwin. That is our time.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Vignola, you have two and a half minutes. Then Mr. Johns will have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Firth, where was your office located in Ottawa when you had one?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: We were on Bank Street between Queen and Albert, I think. It was 151 1/2 Bank Street.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

When you appeared before this committee on October 20, 2022, you stated that you had billed \$9 million for time, material and engagement on the ArriveCan app, over two years.

If I average the amount you give us earlier, which you say is between \$90 and \$120 an hour, that comes to \$105. If I divide \$9 million by \$105 and then divide that by two, that's almost 43,000 hours of work per year. Those hours were billed by GCstrategies.

Did that cover only your own work, or did it also include that of your subcontractors?

• (1625)

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: We don't get paid to do the work on them. It was going to be only the subcontractors.

First, the hourly rate I gave you was on average for across the whole of the federal government. It was a bit higher for ArriveCAN, because the specific technologies that were required were not normal.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

I simply want to remind you what you stated in October 2022:

We were not given \$9 million. We billed \$9 million for time and material, and for engagement.

Was that time, material and engagement for the both of you at GCstrategies, or for all the subcontractors?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Our invoicing for the federal government was to pay all of our subcontractors that were used on ArriveCAN.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: You didn't get any of that \$9 million.

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, we received commission on the \$9 million.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: How much did you get?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. As I said to the honourable gentleman before, I do not have the exact numbers.

All of the information was given to you. There are all of my invoices to the federal government and all of my invoices to my sub-contractors. All of the information has previously been provided.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Firth.

Mr. Johns, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: He supplied you with a résumé that said he had seven years of experience. However, you submitted a résumé that said he had 12.

Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I don't have the document in front of me. I'm sorry.

Mr. Gord Johns: Ms. Dutt said she had done a two-month summer internship at Deloitte. As I mentioned earlier, and you agreed, you submitted one that said she had 51 months of experience.

That's a total of just over seven years of experience that they had. My understanding is that for the task authorization, they needed 10 years, so you inflated it to meet the task authorization. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: The wrong version was sent over. I made apologies for that. That was the wrong version.

Mr. Gord Johns: That made it so you were eligible for the task authorization.

Mr. Kristian Firth: If it was finally approved.... There was back and forth.

You must appreciate, as well, that there are other categories on this contract. If they were deemed non-compliant or if, after the back and forth, they had not made that matrix, there were 14 or 15 other categories we could have used for that.

Mr. Gord Johns: Do you do this as a standard practice with your business?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Not at all. I'd say it was a mistake. I own it. It was a mistake.

Mr. Gord Johns: Had you ever done that before, in order to meet the threshold for a task authorization?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No.

Mr. Gord Johns: I hope, if anybody watching is feeling a little uncomfortable right now and doing their due diligence by reviewing some of the résumés submitted in the past, that they're going to come forward to this committee. That's something I would like to hear.

Can you tell me who Mr. Vaughn Brennan is to you, and what relationship he has with you?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Vaughn Brennan was one of the consultants we placed on assignment in the last three or four years. Outside of that, we're not friends. It's a purely professional relationship. He is a consultant, and we find him work when he needs it.

Mr. Gord Johns: You heard there's dirt that Botler identified—that you had dirt on many public officials.

Is that true?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I never, ever said that, let alone continually boasted about it. I have no dirt on anybody.

Again, these are accusations made. Is that correct?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes.

Mr. Kristian Firth: The answer is no. I have no dirt on anybody

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Firth, you are without a doubt the least believable witness I have ever heard appear before a parliamentary committee.

You referred earlier to something you had said about your relationship with Mr. MacDonald. You said it was “an embellishment”.

Would you say you're someone who often engages in embellishment?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Your claim about Mr. MacDonald was a rare instance of embellishment. Is that your testimony today?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

I want to drill down on the résumé issue. I know this has stuck in the craw of many members.

You sent two false résumés that we know of, and you've admitted as much. You said it was an accident. We have no way of knowing how many false résumés you've sent. What we know is that we have two whistle-blowers, and we have two instances of false résumés. That's a pretty abysmal record when it comes to submitting accurate résumés.

Can I ask whether you would be willing to table for the committee all the different versions of the résumés for Ms. Dutt and Mr. Morv that you have?

• (1630)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Would you be able to table them within 24 hours?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I can do 48 hours.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think the committee would agree to 48 hours.

This alleged “accident” with the résumé.... I want to understand the anatomy of how these alleged accidents happened.

How does this process unfold? Do you create multiple résumés—the true ones and the false ones—and try to remember to submit the true ones, as opposed to the false ones you created for some unknown reason?

Walk me through how that mistake got made, allegedly.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

There are two versions. You have the one sent in by the resource. You then have the one that is compliant against the matrix, which is also the evaluation grid. Those are the two versions you have. Then there will be one in between, which is where you've gone back and forth and authenticated that the technology is correct—if there is technology missing, because, again, no single résumé ever matches completely with a government matrix. There are always conversations back and forth between a resource and a recruiter or sales, in order to identify things they may not have put down.

We deal with résumés with 190 pages' worth of experience for some of our consultants. We have others that—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Let me jump in, because there are some things you're saying that make sense, but there are some things that don't.

I would understand if you got a résumé that was too long, that contained errors or that didn't contain important information, and you said, "Hey, we need to get more background on your educational experience. You missed identifying specific skills." If that's what you mean by "fit the matrix", maybe that's a conversation you had with them.

What seems to have happened here, though, is that, in order to make it compliant with the specifications they were asking for, you changed some numbers. Asking someone to provide further information is one thing. Massively inflating a number associated with a particular field or taking someone with a bachelor's degree and editing that to say "Ph.D." is not just making it systematically compliant. That's making substantive data changes.

How did it happen that you made substantive changes to the data on a résumé and, in this case, didn't consult with the resource?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Again, the second version is making it compliant. Even back and forth, you can identify that they would never be compliant, that they don't have that time.

At that point, you then go back to the sub and ask, "What other categories do you have that are level 2 and would have seven years or five years?"

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, so you enter the false information that would make it compliant, and then you send it back to the resource to ask, "Is this true?"

Is that your process?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's a conversation. You phone them up, and you say.... You go back and forth because phoning is going to be quicker than going back and forth—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I know, but your first step is entering false information that would be compliant with the contract—or at least different information—and then you go back to them and ask, "Can I submit this revised version?"

Is that your process?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. You need the back-and-forth, because the revised process would be—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. You go back and forth and say, "Okay, we've changed the numbers. Is that okay?" If they say it's okay, you send it, and if they say it's not okay, then you negotiate, but your initial step is to change the number they put in. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's to make them compliant, and then you start a conversation.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You make them compliant by changing the number in terms of the amount of experience or the amount of time. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's also an exercise for—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, it's not "also" anything. I want you to answer the question.

The Chair: We have to end it right there.

Mr. Jowhari is next, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The résumés of two subcontractors came to you, and you looked at those résumés. You compared them to a Government of Canada standard template, and you started filling those templates.

Then you transferred some of that data over, and then there was some information that was missing. You sent it back to the subcontractor, and that's the back-and-forth that you are talking about. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay.

In the process of sending these back and forth and having your conversation with those two consultants on the phone—because it's much faster—how many other points on the metrics, or what you call a scorecard, needed to be discussed or were missed?

● (1635)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Again, because of haste and because of pressure from CBSA on Coradix and down to me, the conversation never happened, and the wrong version was sent.

However, I can tell you that the information included in there would be a small bullet point, like, "gave presentations to senior executives". These are things that go in there that are harmless, which need to be qualified.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: That's fair enough.

That information was transferred into the government standard template. In haste, the résumé was sent over, with no conversation back and forth between your office and the consultants. That's understood.

What is the implication of a change from two months' experience to 52 months' experience in determining the rate? What does that do? Does it increase the rate? Does it qualify? What does it do?

Mr. Kristian Firth: This was a fixed-price contract. This was not based on per diems, so whether it was this grid or this category or a different category or a different grid—a level 3 or a level 2—they are fundamentally costing the same.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Yes, thank you. I got the answer. This was a fixed-price contract.

Can you tell us what a fixed-price contract means?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It means that it's deliverable based, and it's not based on time and material—

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay.

Mr. Kristian Firth:—so a per diem is not relevant in a fixed-price contract, and neither is a category.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: That's usually what “fixed price” means.

At least the change in the number of years of experience would have had no impact on the dollar value, but it would have an impact on their being qualified to do that job. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct. Botler were already predetermined to be the resources working on this—

Mr. Majid Jowhari: That's fine.

Mr. Kristian Firth:—because they were the only two people who know the software and build it.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: That's fine.

It was a fixed price, and there seems to be a discrepancy between the \$350,000 as a fixed price and \$336,000, with Dalian and Coradix charging \$14,000 on top for whatever, but that's really understood. At least we know the number, and we know how to reconcile.

Can you talk about the relationship between you, Dalian and Coradix as it relates to the Botler AI pilot?

Mr. Kristian Firth: We are competitors, but we are working together, because I am representing Botler, and they have the contract with the client. Although we're competitors, we're professionals.

The government, as the prime, would work through Dalian and Coradix, who in turn would work through me for Botler.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: The government had the relationship with Dalian and Coradix, and you had the relationship with Botler.

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Why, in this case, did they need to go through you as an intermediary? Although you're claiming there was zero cost, because there was anticipation that in future business dealings you may be compensated, why would that intermediary be needed? Why couldn't Dalian and Coradix go directly to Botler rather than having three subcontractors coming under you, and then going to CBSA, doing the work, and then getting paid by the CBSA, to Botler, to you...?

This is where I—

Mr. Kristian Firth: It is confusing. Understand that Dalian and Coradix probably had an indication, because I had been working with them for two years prior—

The Chair: Mr. Firth, I apologize. I know it's confusing and a lot to unpack, but we're out of time for the round. Perhaps we can come back to this the next time around.

We'll go to Mr. Barrett, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, have you been contacted by the RCMP concerning allegations that named your company specifically in The Globe and Mail on October 4? The RCMP is investigating. Have you been contacted?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I have not.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You won't tell the committee what you were paid on ArriveCAN for your two-person company that did no IT work on an IT project, but you said that your commission was up to 30% of \$54 million. You won't tell us how much, but that would be up to \$16 million.

Is that what you're saying, that it could be up to \$16 million for a company that does no IT work to do IT work?

• (1640)

Mr. Kristian Firth: We were never paid \$54 million. Our piece was the front-end web development and our mobile development, which was—

Mr. Michael Barrett: You said the number was 30%. You won't tell us how much. It's up to \$16 million.

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, it's not: \$54 million included \$10 million for a call centre. It included other vendors they used: \$54 million was not through GC Strategies contracts. That was only—

Mr. Michael Barrett: You won't tell us how many millions. You're summoned before a parliamentary committee. You won't tell us how many millions you were paid on this, but we do know that you submitted fraudulent résumés that increased the billing rates and falsely qualified vendors. We know that you lied about your relationship with Cameron MacDonald to oversell yourself to subcontractors. That's unbelievable.

Have you ever met with government officials outside of government offices, outside of government business hours?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I have not.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You have not.

Have you ever met Marc Brouillard, the former CTO for Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, I—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Have you ever met him in a hotel?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I don't have that information. I can look in my Outlook. I don't think so.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You don't know if you met him in a hotel.

Do you know if Cameron MacDonald has a cottage?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I don't know if Cameron MacDonald has a cottage.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you know if he had one?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I do not know if he had a cottage.

Mr. Michael Barrett: How many projects have you worked on with him?

Mr. Kristian Firth: We first met in 2009. The first contract I had was in 2020, 11 years after we had our first call.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Can you table all the documentation you have for projects that you've done with Mr. MacDonald?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: When were you approached by Mr. MacDonald about Botler?

Mr. Kristian Firth: This was a conversation not about Botler but, again, identifying the systemic problem in the federal government with harassment.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What was the price for the CBSA Botler pilot?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I believe you'd have to ask Coradix and Dalian. I don't have the final price. I was not dealing with the government directly.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You can't tell us about the target price for the enterprise implementation of the Botler solution for the Government of Canada that you were working on.

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, because I do not know exactly how many people are in the public service. I don't have that number.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you know what your commission would have been on the Government of Canada-wide implementation of that project?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, because the deal was never done. I don't have that number.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You entered into this without knowing what you'd get paid for it. It was just goodwill by the guy who committed fraud to increase billing rates on résumés for subcontractors. It was just you doing a nice thing for Botler and the Government of Canada.

Mr. Kristian Firth: As I mentioned, it was not fraud. It was a mistake. Increasing that did nothing to the rates. The rates are fixed price. This is not per diem based.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, you said previously that you were paid primarily per diem. We know that the per diem rates are set based on the experience of the subcontractor. How could it not affect the price if you change the experience of the person who is doing the work—if it increases the per diem rate?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's a fixed price. It doesn't matter if the per diem was \$20 or if it was \$900; the fixed price for the deliverable would be \$54 or whatever the number was. It doesn't go off time or material; it goes on fixed price and deliverables.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Fraudulently changing the résumé to qualify someone and inflating the number of hours that they have is ab-

solutely going to affect the price of the contract and whether or not the person is going to be able to do the contract.

Mr. Kristian Firth: As I mentioned, it's different categories. After it was deemed they were not compliant with those, there would have been a different category they would have been compliant for, and per diems don't matter on a fixed-price contract.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is your testimony that you did speak with the persons named in those résumés? You spoke with them by telephone about the changes you made, the fraud you committed on those résumés. You spoke to them; you did a back-and-forth on the telephone with them about the résumés. Is that your testimony today?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. As I mentioned to previous gentleman I was speaking with, I didn't do that. Because of haste, the wrong ones were sent in and they were never qualified by the resources. That conversation never happened.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Bains, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witness for joining us today.

As many have mentioned, there's a lot to unpack here, and I'm not sure where to pick up.

You talked a bit about meeting Cameron MacDonald in 2009. Who approached whom to engage Botler in selling its software to the federal government?

• (1645)

Mr. Kristian Firth: I was approached by CBSA to identify a real problem within the government, which was the harassment and the misconduct that's going on in multiple departments, in the armed forces and in Public Safety.

It was then suggested that maybe there must be a technology or a solution out there that could help the federal government, with an automated solution that would act as a front line of defence for people who are going through misconduct or harassment. At that point I identified Botler, and I reached out to them and suggested that we meet up and I could walk them through some opportunities that might be available in the Government of Canada.

Mr. Parm Bains: How did you identify Botler? What process did you go through?

You went out and you looked for.... You're clearly someone who looks, who connects.... You're a recruiter in a sense, and that's your history. You find the capable or able third party solutions to do the work. Is that right?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Parm Bains: What was the process you went through there?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It was a simple Boolean search, by identifying with buzzwords. Then, after that, I identify automated solutions, because they're usually easier to install than to actually have a team come in and integrate. Also, being Canadian was huge, because if there were going to be federal government contracts and people doing work for the government, they have to be able to get government security clearance.

Mr. Parm Bains: Who identified Botler software as being able to meet federal requirements under the amended Canada Labour Code? This is where you talked about a matrix, that it has to be compliant, etc. Who finally said, "This is the one"?

Mr. Kristian Firth: We had subsequent meetings with labour relations at Correctional Service Canada and other ones, so we would go there and Miss Dutt would ask specific questions. The whole time on their website [*Inaudible—Editor*], they were completely compliant with Bill C-65, so we knew that the solution could do that, and there were subsequent meetings we had in other government departments with labour personnel to identify if it would fit within there.

I do remember several meetings, whether it was Correctional Service Canada or Shared Services Canada, with labour relations people, and that's how we identified that it would be suitable.

Mr. Parm Bains: How many people are involved in that process? There's labour relations.... Are you talking about a lot of different departments?

Mr. Kristian Firth: The majority of people we met with would have been HR and labour relations.

Mr. Parm Bains: There are a number of people who are going through this process to make a decision in the end.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes. There's cybersecurity to see how this is going to impact other things that are happening on the network, so there were several people within each meeting who would have different questions regarding the software.

Mr. Parm Bains: Where do Coradix and Dalian come into the picture at this time? If you're arranging for Botler to provide the services, why did it go through Coradix and Dalian?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I was working with Botler for over a year before Dalian and Coradix even knew about it. I was getting meetings; I was helping them with marketing material; we were doing sales pitches to organizations. It was only after the pilot was accepted at CBSA that they were contacted by CBSA, saying, "We're using your contracting mechanism, and GC Strategies is working with Botler." That was the first time around the Botler conversations that either knew who they were working with.

Mr. Parm Bains: When we're talking about the mistake that you made with the inflated numbers.... Apart from just those inflated numbers, you talked about a matrix of other things. It appears that, obviously, there have been a lot of different people making decisions for this to come through. What are the other pieces of the matrix that need to be fulfilled?

The Chair: Answer in about 20 seconds, Mr. Firth.

Mr. Kristian Firth: It would be different technologies that they may have used in the past. It could be more functional responsibilities, like whether you gave team meetings or gave presentations to senior executives. Each matrix is different for each category.

Again, it has no bearing at all on the price of the deliverables. Every category for a fixed-price contract has no bearing at all, because that's per diem based. That's time and material. This is a fixed price.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Firth.

We have two and a half minutes with Ms. Vignola, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Firth, did you do a sales pitch to Brenda Lucky?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, we did not.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Did you do a sales pitch to Julie Leese and Philippe Johnston at Transport Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: We did to Philippe Johnston. I'm not sure if Julie Leese attended.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: After those pitches, did you manage to make a sale at Transport Canada or the RCMP?

Did you make a commission?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. We had subsequent meetings thereafter, but no deal was made and no commission was made.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Are you in the Registry of Lobbyists?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I am not. I do not get employed by the people I work with. I don't charge a retainer or a fee. Actually, my model is completely against lobbying acts, because I want to get paid on the contract when it comes in.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: All right.

I'm trying to understand all this. You say you are not under investigation by the RCMP based on a series of allegations we have received.

However, the RCMP is investigating allegations of misconduct by three businesses involved in developing ArriveCAN.

So you say you are not one of those three businesses.

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, not at all.

I'm just saying that I have not been contacted by the RCMP. The last time I heard testimony here, it was clarified that the RCMP was investigating only the Botler accusations and not ArriveCAN.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: All right.

Very quickly, could you tell us if, other than your telephone conversations, you have had any contact with Cameron McDonald?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: During ArriveCAN, there were certain applications that needed to be integrated—there were NFC capabilities—so there would be meetings in the CBSA offices.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I meant meetings in person.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Johns, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: You indicated, Mr. Firth, that you've known Mr. MacDonald for “his whole career in the government”, but you admitted that that was embellished. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I've known him for my whole career.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

Mr. MacDonald directed Botler in February and said to “please work with Kristian”—they have this recorded, by the way—to “let Kristian work his magic”.

Can you explain what the magic is?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I mean, I can't speak on behalf of Cameron, but I can speculate. Some people call it magic, but I call it time and role. Government contracting is somewhat cumbersome, and it's very confusing to clients.

Mr. Gord Johns: You can understand the appearance to Canadian taxpayers when they see a résumé changed—that this might be what he alluded to.

Mr. MacDonald suggested answers for executives. He wanted to start by saying, “I will start by saying that I was not personally familiar with GC Strategies during the time in question.” How do you feel about Mr. MacDonald suggesting something like that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that? You cut out a bit.

Mr. Gord Johns: He said, “I will start by saying that I was not personally familiar with GC Strategies during the time in question.”

Mr. Kristian Firth: For Botler?

Mr. Gord Johns: This is what he recommended around selecting a company on the ArriveCAN app.

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry, but I'm confused. Is it Botler or ArriveCAN?

Mr. Gord Johns: It's regarding the hearings here in Parliament around ArriveCAN.

Mr. Kristian Firth: GC Strategies was selected by the CBSA and PSPC. I cannot tell you who the person was who selected us, but we were selected by the CBSA and PSPC.

Mr. Gord Johns: Was it Mr. Utano?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Again, I cannot tell you who the person was at the CBSA who directed us [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Gord Johns: Have you met Ms. Daly before?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I have had an email exchange with Ms. Daly, and I've met Ms. Daly.

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes. I think the day after Botler filed its first complaint, Ms. Daly wrote you and asked you to pay Botler, and the next day you did.

I have a question. Botler alleges you said the resulting price increase would suck for Canadians. Did you say that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry, but can you repeat that?

Mr. Gord Johns: Botler alleged during the resulting price increase on the contract that you said this would suck for Canadians.

• (1655)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Was it the price? I'm sorry. I'm not familiar with that at all.

Mr. Gord Johns: You're not familiar with that.

Is there anything you could tell this committee you may not have told us, but you think you should have?

The Chair: You're going to have to save that question for your next round, Mr. Johns, but I certainly understand.

Next, we have Mr. Brock, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Firth, I'm sure the millions of Canadians who either are watching this or will learn about this in the press or seek out the transcript of this particular meeting will be very, very grateful that the RCMP has access to this particular evidence.

I can understand why you would take active steps in misleading this committee, and Canadians, with respect to your role as it relates to fraud and forgery with respect to modifying without permission and consent these résumés to the government.

What I can't understand is why you would deliberately lie to this committee on a very innocent question that was put to you by my colleague, Mr. Barrett, when he asked if you knew whether or not Mr. Cameron MacDonald from the CBSA had a cottage, and you said, “No.”

Do you want to reflect on that answer?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. MacDonald never referred to it as a cottage. It's a chalet. It's not a cottage.

Mr. Larry Brock: I am so grateful for that clarification, Mr. Firth.

Are you kidding me?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That is the only—

Mr. Larry Brock: Are you saying you knew all along he had something that was equivalent to a cottage, or a cabin, but because a different word was used to refer to it, you had the licence to say, "I don't know"? Is that what you want us to believe?

Mr. Kristian Firth: You were asking a specific question about a cottage, and I answered honestly. He never mentioned he had a cottage.

Mr. Larry Brock: He has a cabin, though, doesn't he?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's a chalet.

Mr. Larry Brock: It's a chalet. Well, why didn't you offer that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That was not the question that was asked.

Mr. Larry Brock: I see, so you have a very limited ability in terms of telling this committee the truth. Is that correct, Mr. Firth?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. I'm answering the questions correctly.

Mr. Larry Brock: The RCMP is going to have a field day when it comes to interviewing you.

Mr. Kristian Firth: I answered the question honestly with the question that was put to me.

Mr. Larry Brock: I see. Well, let's ask you some more questions, then.

Have you ever had, or claimed to have, influence on any government officials?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I have not.

Mr. Larry Brock: Do you remember, sir, some of the allegations you have probably read about that Botler actually taped conversations with you—hours and hours of conversations with you? Do you want to reflect on that question again?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. I've read everything you've said. I've read everything that was in the newspaper.

Mr. Larry Brock: Well, sir, I'll remind you what you said on audiotape that has been recorded. You told Botler during the very first call, on November 8, 2019, and these are your words:

So we have essentially the ear of the president right now of CBSA, which is, I guess, really the equivalent of the minister or like the deputy minister, and my client who is leading.... He's a very high executive responsible for innovation cloud.

You go on to say:

for the next step of getting the proposal over to the president, because this will land on his desk, one hundred per cent. Like, this is going, you know, above the ADM level.

If that's not influence, or claiming to have influence, on any government official, sir, I don't know what is.

I'm going to ask you again. Do you want to be truthful or not to this committee? Do you want to continue to lie that you did not ex-

aggerate, or claim, that you had this great influence over officials at the CBSA? Yes or no?

• (1700)

Mr. Kristian Firth: I was working with one person who—

Mr. Larry Brock: Answer the question. Let's start with that.

Is it yes or no?

Do you agree that these are your words that you uttered to Botler on November 8, 2019, bragging about your influence on government officials?

Do you accept that or not, yes or no?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Sousa, go ahead for five minutes, please.

You might be on mute, Mr. Sousa.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore): Mr. Sousa, is there any possibility that your headset is muted?

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Can you hear me? Okay.

Mr. Firth, you say you've been at this for over 20 years.

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's been since 2009 or 2008.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Has it been under various administrations?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Have there been various bureaucrats and civil servants over that period of time?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Have you been doing it the same way throughout, using that process?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You've been a qualified vendor since 2015 under this scenario.

Mr. Kristian Firth: That is correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: How many subcontractors do you have, thereabouts?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Do you mean today?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Yes.

Mr. Kristian Firth: There are probably 25 to 30 right now.

Mr. Charles Sousa: When you deal with them.... Understandably with Botler you didn't have a fee. You didn't establish a fee with Botler.

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You do establish fees with other subcontractors, and then you go forward?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

As I mentioned previously, there's no flat number. You have a bill rate for the client to work with and you have a pay rate for the resource. The difference between them is the margin, or the fee.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Botler made reference.... I don't know who they're talking about. Are you the ghost, or is that somebody else?

Who's this ghost contractor?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I still don't fully understand what that terminology means.

The reality is, from what I understood when I was listening to their testimony, that it's somebody who appears on a TA and doesn't do the work but claims to get paid.

That is exactly what Ms. Dutt did on the Botler one. She was named on the TA and openly, in testimony, said that she was not the one doing the work, but then did accept payment.

Mr. Charles Sousa: When you made reference to the embellished résumés, was that in regard to the pilot project?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Are you saying that this résumé made a difference or did not make a difference in getting the approval of the contract?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It was already predetermined that the contract was going through. We just had to find the right matrix and the right category. It still would have gone through, because there were 12 or 14 different categories that would have allowed this to go through.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Botler's expectation, from some of the discussions we've had, was that they were anticipating a much bigger payoff on this deal.

Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I think there were conversations about the euphoric state of being an enterprise sale. There was never any promise to that. That was just what you always aspire to get.

Mr. Charles Sousa: They would have had no contacts or no ability to deal with CBSA, if it was not for you.

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You're the one who brought them in.

Mr. Kristian Firth: My network allows us to open the door. That doesn't guarantee a contract. They still need to sell the software and the organization still needs to find a need for it.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Why would you sign a confidentiality agreement with Botler after the fact?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I had nothing to hide. I didn't think there was going to be this coming against me.

It makes sense now—with all this information that's been brought forward from day one, like recordings, text messages and sharing emails—that they wanted, essentially, to not allow me to respond.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You are responding.

You're aware that the RCMP is investigating the allegations made by Botler, but not ArriveCAN. Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: However, you haven't been approached by the RCMP.

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You have been approached by CBSA, because they did an internal review, did they not?

Have they talked to you?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, they didn't. They would speak only with the vendor they're dealing with.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Which vendor was that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That was Dalian and Coradix.

• (1705)

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's right, because you're the subcontractor for Dalian and Coradix in this scenario.

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You're saying that in this pilot, you made no money. It was just a flow-through.

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct. I made no money with Botler in the whole two years I worked with them.

Mr. Charles Sousa: What was confidential that you had to sign? I don't understand.

Mr. Kristian Firth: It was all the electronic communications that went back and forth between myself and Botler: text messages, documents that had any of our names on them, anything that had any presentational material, two-pagers—anything that essentially mentioned the word “Botler” and involved me or the federal government.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Why would Botler not want that divulged? Obviously, they are now making allegations and complaining that they weren't paid. You're saying that, in fact, they didn't do the work required.

Mr. Kristian Firth: They were paid in full for the two deliverables that were accepted. Because CBSA deemed the remaining four substandard, they were never paid.

Mr. Charles Sousa: How was that—

The Chair: I'm sorry. That is our five minutes. You might have another opportunity in the next round.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Briefly, I'll go back to the résumés.

I think I understand your process. You said you receive résumés and make them compliant before sending them, but you check in with resources to make sure your edits are okay.

Is that how you described the process?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That's correct.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

I'm a potential subcontractor. I send you a résumé. It says I have four months of IT experience. The contract requires four years of IT experience, so you change “four months” to “four years” to make it compliant. Then you check in with me and say, “Hey, is it okay that I made this change?” before sending it.

Is that right?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's more a case of me identifying whether they can even pass the grid.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can you just answer the question?

You said you make it compliant. Then you check with the resource—that it's okay with them.

You change the four months to four years. You check in with me. You see whether it's okay. Then, if it's okay with me, you send it on the basis, presumably, that I have signed off on it.

Mr. Kristian Firth: I check in with you. At this point, we're going to identify whether it's even feasible to be in this category, which is why you do the version.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You do the revised version by changing the numbers to make it compliant; then you check in with the resource; then you send it in. Is that right?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's also an exercise for myself, to see how far a stretch it is. That's important, though.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. However, that exercise involves changing the numbers.

Mr. Kristian Firth: It does, but I can do that myself.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's excellent. Well, it's not excellent, actually, but thank you for clarifying.

In the case of Botler, though, you were working so quickly that you missed a step. You intentionally changed the numbers, but you didn't have time to check in with them. You just sent in the résumés without checking with them.

That doesn't sound to me like a mistake. That sounds to me like cooking the numbers.

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. To me, it was an honest mistake and I have apologized in public.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's a mistake in a moral sense, but I don't think it's a practical mistake. You described a process in which you change the numbers as a matter of routine.

Mr. Kristian Firth: If given more time, and not executing in haste, I would have identified that this resource could not have met this grid. Therefore, I would have gone back to Dalian and Coradix and asked for a different category.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's obviously a problem that you change the numbers, then go back and ask for permission. It's great that Botler did the right thing here and blew the whistle. However, in many cases, if you're routinely changing the numbers, people may shrug and say it's okay, based on you telling them that it's okay when, obviously, it's not.

I have some additional questions, though, sir, that I want to ask you.

You said, in response to a previous question.... You were asked whether you'd ever met Marc Brouillard, former CTO of Canada, in a hotel. You said no, at the time.

Do you have any interest in correcting that answer?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. I said that I didn't recollect. I cannot remember every meeting I have had with everybody in the last 12

years. I'm sorry. I can go back into my Outlook and give you the answer quickly.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's a different answer from the one you gave.

We could check in ATIP. You submitted to find out whether you'd met with him in a hotel, sir. It is ATIP A201800247. Ironically, the ATIP came from you.

We have gone back and forth about this cottage versus chalet issue.

Have you ever been to this infamous cottage or chalet owned by Mr. MacDonald?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Never.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

I think there will be some follow-up on that point, sir. It feels a bit like we're on *The Maury Show* here.

Going back to October 20—your appearance before the committee last year—you said, “We are not in any conversations for budgeting or cost controls. We have quality control. If a resource isn't performing, we will then work with the government to replace that.” You're not involved in conversations on budgeting or cost control. You told the committee that a year ago.

Sir, was it true, what you told the committee at that time?

• (1710)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

The Globe and Mail was able to get access to an email you sent, though, on January 26, 2021. In that email, you talked explicitly about budgeting. You said:

CBSA were pissed at the overall pricing and threatened to pull the contract.

You also said:

Your cost, plus 15% for me and 20% for Coradix etc, it rose to close to \$500k! I was not prepared to slow the process down and stop our first client from purchasing so I removed myself from the equation completely and gave them a 15% discount.

Attached is a contract that shows...

You're sending emails that provide explicit budgeting information. Given that we have now put that email on the record, would you be prepared to admit that what you told the committee on October 20 regarding budgeting was, in fact, also a lie?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry, no. This was about ArriveCAN. It was a specific question asked about ArriveCAN: “Are you responsible for contracting or budgeting on ArriveCAN?” The answer is not at all.

I was not even responsible for this response here or anything to do with budget control. I removed myself from the deal. Giving the Crown a discount is not budget control—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You said you—

The Chair: That is our time, gentlemen.

Mrs. Atwin, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Firth, the federal government has various policies, regulations and directives to ensure that the procurement process is transparent and carried out with integrity. We're certainly here to make sure we continue to do this.

As a supplier, are you familiar with these policies?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, I am.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: In pursuing federal contracts, have you ever asked for clarity on the government's contracting rules by posing questions to a contracting officer or through another mechanism?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. We have those integrities and provisions we have to sign whenever we are submitting an RFP. It enforces ethics and ensures that everything is done professionally and properly.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: The code of conduct for procurement "applies to all vendors and their sub-contractors who respond to bid solicitations and/or provide goods and services to Canada. In fulfilling the terms of their contracts, vendors and their sub-contractors are required to comply with all applicable laws and regulations."

How have you demonstrated a duty of good faith and honest performance before and during any procurement process with the federal government that you have been a party to as a vendor or sub-contractor?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that, please? I can't hear you very well.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Sure. The code of conduct for procurement "applies to all vendors and their sub-contractors". How have you demonstrated a duty of good faith and honest performance before and during any procurement process with the federal government that you have been a party to?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Sometimes, when we submit a bid, we also get a permission to bid from the resources. Typically, whenever there's an RFP that comes out that's competitive, a lot of our competitors will submit the same people. What we always try to enforce in our bids, when we can, is.... Typically, we'll submit a permission to bid to ensure that the resource knows they're being represented properly and correctly.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Did you do that in this circumstance?

Mr. Kristian Firth: We didn't. They would already have been competitive. It was a contract that had already been awarded to Dalian and Coradix, so it wasn't a new contract.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: A Public Services and Procurement Canada official told Botler that this was a matter internal to Botler, GC Strategies, Dalian and Coradix. Do you agree with this assessment?

Mr. Kristian Firth: What was the matter regarding?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: It's about the fact that the CBSA is investigating alleged misconduct, and they're saying that this is an internal matter between these entities. Do you agree with that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, I can agree with that.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Then, in your view, what gaps does this reveal in the federal contracting process?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I don't think it reveals any. The reality is that it would have been a perfect execution if the four deliverables had been done on time and been of the standard the CBSA would have approved and paid. This was not a contracting issue. This was a performance issue.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: You also mentioned that your work through GC Strategies, engaging pathfinding services that you provide, all stays within the PSPC guidelines. Do you think anything should be changed regarding these guidelines after this experience?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes. Again, as I said, I tried to work with Botler so they could bill directly to the federal government.

My understanding is that these processes were put in place in 2003. They haven't really changed much until now.

I think there needs to be a better ability.... If they want to eliminate the middleman, as they're saying, or a vendor, then they should have the ability to invoice or go directly to some of these people who have the software and have the product. Unfortunately, at this point, that doesn't exist.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Botler AI was not a qualified vendor. What were they missing, based on your assessment? What criteria did they not meet to become a qualified vendor in their own right?

● (1715)

Mr. Kristian Firth: It's pretty arduous. You'd have to be in business for at least probably one to two years, build up your corporate references and get projects in the private sector or work through other people. At that point, your qualifications would get you on TBIPS, THS, ProServ and SBIPS. At that point, you're eligible and a qualified vendor to then go after competitive RFPs that are posted on Buyandsell or Ariba.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: In general, have you learned anything from this experience? Was there anything you would do differently in order to not end up before us here today?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes. I would probably, at this point, work directly only with the federal government and eliminate the middlemen, essentially.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Mr. Johns asked you a question before his time was cut off in terms of anything else you'd like to tell us, or if there's something we need to know or any points of clarification. The cottage or chalet thing is raising a bit of concern for me. Is there anything else you'd like to add to the record right now, for our knowledge?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, not right now. There's nothing.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: That's all for me, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Atwin.

Ms. Vignola, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Firth, have you ever suggested to a subcontractor that they would receive a certain amount of money from another contract that had not yet been awarded?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. Can you clarify that question? I don't think I understood the question.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Suppose one of your subcontractors worked on Project A for a government department. Have you ever told the subcontractor that they would earn an extra amount for Project B, which the subcontractor did not work on?

Have you ever done that?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: We only ever invoice the federal government for work completed, that's been signed off by a federal government employee.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: So you never made any promises of any kind to anyone? Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Again, we only invoice for work completed and signed off by the federal government.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'm not asking what you billed. I'm asking you what you promised.

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. I have no recollection of ever having these conversations.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Earlier, my colleague asked you if you received any money from the contract with Dalian Enterprises and Coradix Technology Consulting. You stated that you hadn't received any money for the two years of work done for Botler AI.

However, the question was whether you got a commission from Dalian and Coradix for the work done for them.

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: No. I did not receive any money from Dalian or Coradix.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: So you were a subcontractor who didn't get paid.

Is that what we are to understand? You volunteered?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: My intentions were to collect a fee, but that didn't work out, so I did not make any money on this contract.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: You made no money on this contract, but you emailed Ms. Dutt, and I'll read the quote. It says, "let it slide and look out to the next one to recover".

Is that correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: That is correct.

Mr. Gord Johns: This is contract performance fraud. It is invoicing for work done on other projects.

Do you deny this written evidence, or are you saying this means something else?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm saying it means something else.

The truth is, it means that in sales you win some and you lose some. I was continuing to represent Botler in the partnership. Even when I would make zero dollars, I was still trying to get them sales. This was nothing to do with making it up on the next one; it is just understanding that hopefully there will be a next one, and I'll make the 15%...the commission I would on that one. This is not paying for CBSA's commission and missing out on the next one.... That was never, ever the interpretation.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

It wasn't just fake numbers. You made up [*Inaudible—Editor*] for Mr. Morv's experience. The company doesn't even exist.

Do you agree with that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes. The mistake there was it should have been project one instead of his name. Again, it doesn't matter whether it's the bullet points.... I was making it compliant. The same process happens whether it's adding.... They gave meetings to senior executives. They provided JAD sessions. The bullet points were in there. That's when you do the back-and-forth. If it looks like it's too much of a stretch, you just don't do it—

• (1720)

Mr. Gord Johns: Who did you back and forth with?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I didn't on this case. I'm just talking about typical process.

Mr. Gord Johns: Did CBSA reject the deliverables and the contract before or after Botler made misconduct allegations on September 27, 2021?

Mr. Kristian Firth: December 23 was when the termination email went to them, with CBSA asking...so the timing would be that the accusations were made before the termination.

Mr. Gord Johns: Would you describe a cottage as under \$100,000, with two bedrooms, and a chalet...? How would you describe the difference between a cottage and a chalet, and how did you know Mr. MacDonald had a chalet and not a cottage?

Mr. Kristian Firth: It was because in a meeting we had, he referenced the fact that he had a chalet once. I don't know what the generic square footage is—or bedrooms—for either a cottage or a chalet. I'm pretty sure it's different for all of them.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Mr. Barrett for five, and then we'll finish with Mr. Kusmierczyk for five.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What is the last invoice you submitted for ArriveCAN work to the Government of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry. I don't have that, but I can provide that to you.

I didn't come here with.... I've already provided every kind of information I have.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You didn't come here with information that GC Strategies didn't do work on ArriveCAN but billed the taxpayers for it. Got it.

The answer is October 2023.

I'm going to read you a transcript of a leaked audio file. It's of you. You said, "We did the ArriveCAN app, which is one that everybody has to use to come across the border, in two months. And that has like 27 pages, 15 workflows, e-declarations, facial recognition, NFC capability of the passport." If it took you two months to do the work, why are you still billing taxpayers in October of this year?

Mr. Kristian Firth: October 2023 was not ArriveCAN invoicing.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm pleased that you suddenly found the documents related to my question.

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I'm going off the timeline—

Mr. Michael Barrett: The problem we have here today is that for all of my questions, we have to assume that you've lied about absolutely everything.

Sir, I've never said to a witness in my parliamentary career that they have lied to a committee, but you just did. I'm not sure if you thought you were clever, pulling at the source off your shelf. "It's not a cottage; it's a chalet." It's embarrassing. What you're doing is disrespectful to members of this committee and it's disrespectful, frankly, to the Government of Canada, which is paying your rent.

Taxpayers should be very concerned that a dollar has flowed from the Government of Canada to your organization, because everything you've said here today is absolutely unacceptable for a contractor for the Government of Canada—

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm sorry, but I haven't invoiced the CBSA since May.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, that was not a question. That was—

Mr. Kristian Firth: October 2023 doesn't make sense.

Mr. Michael Barrett: —a statement of fact.

Mr. Chair, can you please call the witness to order?

The Chair: It's your time, Mr. Barrett. Please continue.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, I'm going to ask you some questions that we dealt with previously. We're going to see if we get different answers this time, because that seems to be the pattern with you.

Do you use relationships to get work from the Government of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, I do not.

I'm sorry. What is your interpretation of a relationship, please?

Mr. Michael Barrett: What is your interpretation of a cottage versus a chalet?

We have records of you meeting at a hotel with the CIO for the Government of Canada, and now you're telling this committee, "I don't have any recollection of that." I have to tell you, if I meet with the top person from an organization, I'm going to remember that meeting, particularly if I've had to comply with an access to information request concerning that, and then furnished that request.

Sir, you're being dishonest and disingenuous in all of your answers to our questions. I appreciate that you're embarrassed about the work that you've done and about the things that you've said, but you are required to be honest when you come before a parliamentary committee, and this clever act that you're trying to put on is not fooling anyone.

I'm going to ask you some of these questions again.

Have you ever met with government officials or anyone employed by the government in a private residence, yes or no?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. What was the nature of that meeting?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm assuming.... I don't know the exact meeting you're referencing. It's not like I've had hundreds of these things. The truth is that I don't know which one you're talking about. I've had meetings—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I want to know about all of them.

• (1725)

Mr. Kristian Firth: I don't know which one you're.... I'm sorry. I cannot comment.

If you could direct your exact question to me in writing, I'd be more than happy to respond.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, you're here providing oral answers to oral questions for a standing committee of the House of Commons.

Mr. Kristian Firth: I don't have the answer.

I'm sorry. I do not have the answer.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Well, your answer changes. I have about a minute left in my time and I'm interested in what precision we can get on any of that.

You've had so many meetings with government officials in their private residences outside of working hours that you can't even remember. You can't remember how much money you were paid to work on the ArriveCAN app. You can't remember meetings that you had in hotels with chief officials for information technology for the Government of Canada. I'm not sure what confidence your clients can have in you if you can't remember these very basic details.

Sir, I'm going to ask that you table for this parliamentary committee all bank records related to your business and the Government of Canada: GC Strategies, the Government of Canada and Botler. For anywhere that nexus exists, this committee and I would like you to table the bank records.

Are you willing to do that? Answer yes or no, sir.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes. It's between the government and myself to Botler. Is that what you're asking?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Everything concerning—

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm asking for clarification on your question.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sure. It's everything concerning GC Strategies, the Government of Canada, Coradix, Dalian and Botler. Anywhere there's an intersection of any of those companies, the committee would like your bank records.

Will you furnish them within 48 hours?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I'm not prepared to do that. I'm sorry.

For what purpose, please?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Kristian Firth: This is private information.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee order the production of those documents.

The Chair: Do we have committee approval?

I will interject. I assume that, as with other sensitive documents, we will keep them within the committee.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Until or unless the committee decides otherwise, yes, sir, we will.

An hon. member: Chair, could we suspend for a moment?

The Chair: Yes.

We're just going to suspend for a moment.

• (1725) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1725)

The Chair: Colleagues, we're back.

I'm going to ask our clerk to read that into the record so we're all clear and in agreement.

Go ahead.

The Clerk: My understanding is that the motion reads:

That the committee send for all bank records related to the business of GC Strategies, where there is an intersection between GC Strategies, the Govern-

ment of Canada, Coradix, Dalian and Botler; and that the documents be sent to the clerk of the committee by 12:00 p.m., on Monday, November 6, 2023.

The Chair: Is that clear, Mr. Firth?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Yes, I heard that.

The Chair: It is an order of the committee.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

We will now finish up with Mr. Kusmierczyk for five minutes, please.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Obviously, we've heard a lot of things today. Some really interesting testimony and information have been established.

I want to provide you the opportunity to explain to us the actions of Botler AI from your vantage point.

We see, for example, Botler AI has tape-recorded you. They have asked you to sign an NDA. They've reported on misconduct and potential fraud to the CBSA, in fact presented a detailed report on that. They've also gone directly to the media and they have brought their allegations here to this committee.

Help us explain those actions from your vantage point, and how we should be viewing those actions.

• (1730)

Mr. Kristian Firth: First, it's very discouraging when you're trying to work with a small Canadian company to try to get them contracts with the federal government to solve real problems a lot of Canadians are actually facing. You do that with good intentions. You work for two years on trying to get their foot in the door and get them the meetings they need, and, again, at that point they had to close the door.

The truth is that I feel like it has been a bit traumatic, understanding the fact that voice recordings, text messages.... Again, it was all good intentions, even trying to get them on their own vehicle to eliminate our company so there will be no third party, so there will be no ghost contracting, whatever the terminology was that was brought up. The truth is that I did everything I could to get them contracts, to get the word out there, get them to help Canadians and get them on their own supply arrangements so they could go direct, and then none of these accusations would ever happen again.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: You can understand that from my perspective I'm seeing a company, Botler AI, that's putting everything on the line: its reputation, its integrity. They've gone public with this. I'm trying to understand from your vantage point why they would do that.

Mr. Kristian Firth: I think there were good intentions when we first started the pilot to get the work done. That's why the first two deliverables were done on time and they were paid. I think there was the understanding that things were failing and that things weren't working. Those four deliverables.... Again, they were terminated December 23. In my experience, termination is usually for performance.

With the fact they went dark for nearly two months, it seemed like they were scrambling to get the last four deliverables drafted up for submission. I helped them get a line of credit, so whether they were over-leveraged and they needed the last four remaining.... I'm not sure what it was, but being in debt typically makes things a bit more real, and at that point you become desperate.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Botler AI also alleges that Cameron MacDonald, who was the director general at CBSA at the time, was providing real-time coaching by text message while you were pitching Botler AI to then president Ossowski and senior leadership at CBSA.

Did that happen?

Mr. Kristian Firth: There was communication between Mr. MacDonald, Botler and myself. Again, Mr. MacDonald identified that there was a real problem. I think he just wanted this young Canadian company to be successful and understood that there are certain ways. He was doing his best, in my understanding, to help out Botler. That's my interpretation.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Is that a conflict of interest, to have an official coaching you to basically say the right things to get the bid through, to get the deal? Is that—

Mr. Kristian Firth: I believe that the intentions were to help with the presentation but by no means.... At that point, the president still needs to like the software. There are more things to that. There still needs to be an understanding of software and making sure that it's a fit with the new organization.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Is that a regular thing? Is it a regular thing for an inside official to be coaching a company on what to say, pitching their product to other senior officials? Is that normal?

Mr. Kristian Firth: I can't comment on what's normal. I'm not in everybody's meetings.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Did Mr. Cameron MacDonald tell you to inflate the CV that you submitted?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, he did not.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Who told you to inflate the CV that you submitted, to change the numbers? Who asked you to do that? Did anyone ask you to do that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: No, nobody did that. Again, that's part of my process for when I'm doing résumé submission.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Okay, and I have one final question. I know you answered this before, but why did Botler AI need GC Strategies? Why couldn't it just contract its work directly with CBSA or Dalian or Coradix? Why did it need GC Strategies?

Mr. Kristian Firth: They were not a qualified vendor. That's why we aligned ourselves, originally. Any time they wanted to work with the federal government, they could work through us.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: How much time...? Is that it?

Thank you.

The Chair: That's it. Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Before I ask to adjourn, I know Mr. Genuis had something, then Mr. Jowhari. Be quick, please, because we are short on time.

• (1735)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I know we're short on time today, but I think you would probably find agreement for the committee to bring Mr. Firth back for another two hours. Let's just skip a step and say we'll summon him back for two hours to continue this important line of questioning.

The Chair: Are date and time to be determined by the chair?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, that's determined by the chair. We trust you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I will arrange that with the clerk and Mr. Firth.

Mr. Jowhari, go ahead, please.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: On the same thing, we would like to request that Mr. Cameron MacDonald be called back to the committee for two hours, as well.

The Chair: I think he is coming next week—on Tuesday, actually.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You can move that motion at the end of the meeting, when he's here.

The Chair: Mr. Firth, thanks for your time.

There were several requests for information from you. There was one on the versions of the résumés, within 48 hours. We're going to set it at noon on Monday, November 6. For anything else, unless otherwise stated, we have a committee requirement of three weeks, so there's that.

Mr. Sousa, did you have something, before we adjourn?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Are we asking Mr. Firth to come back for two hours alongside Anthony, or are we asking them for separate times?

The Chair: It wasn't specified, but I think it would make sense to have them together. There would be a summons for both, if necessary.

Colleagues, if there's nothing else, we are adjourned.

Thanks very much.

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