



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 105

Thursday, February 22, 2024

Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



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• (1100)

[English]

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

Good morning. Welcome, everybody, to meeting 105 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, fondly known of course as the mighty OGGO.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, October 17, 2022, the committee is meeting to consider matters related to the ArriveCAN application.

As a reminder to everyone, please do not put earpieces next to the microphones as it causes feedback and potential injury to our valued interpreters.

Welcome back, Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano.

I understand we'll be starting with an opening statement from you, Mr. MacDonald. Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald (Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Canada, COVID and Pandemic Response Secretariat, As an Individual): Members of the committee, Canadians have every right to know about ArriveCAN, its costs and its value.

[Translation]

We testified for the first time in November, and we're doing so again today. On November 7, we testified before you, and we told the truth. We didn't give "our" version; we told the truth.

[English]

We provided fulsome answers when asked questions by members. Our testimony and evidence contradicted several previous witnesses. We testified that current and former CBSA senior executives had misled Parliament. Just 10 days after our testimony, the CBSA initiated an investigation of Mr. Utano and me based on a complaint that had been filed a year before, in 2022. The CBSA then expanded hastily to look for anything throughout our entire tenure at the CBSA that could demonstrate a hint of misconduct.

In December 2023, without interviewing us or a single witness, the CBSA prepared a report called the preliminary statement of facts. The reality is, this document is nothing more than a collection of baseless accusations, unsupported by any corroborating evidence, with accusations of wrongdoing supported by cherry-picked emails and calendar entries. It should be called the preliminary statement of falsehoods.

This was not given to us until MPs received it. We were always willing to participate in the CBSA's investigation. However, we didn't even know what we were accused of. We requested disclosure of the Botler complaint; the CBSA refused. In any event, no one was interviewed, and the CBSA told us that we had to give them an answer by January 5.

This is a red herring. The CBSA had already crafted the document by December 18 and 19 and had sent it to our employers.

It is very troubling to me that the CBSA states that Botler, the author of the complaint, demanded a contract in exchange for creating these allegations. Even more, to participate in the investigation, the CBSA says that Botler demanded another contract.

I note the CBSA acknowledged that the Botler complaint was mostly about a breakdown in their own business relationships and was a result of a misunderstanding of procurement practices. This has nothing to do with ArriveCAN.

The entire preliminary statement of falsehoods is designed to paint us in the worst possible light. Every single allegation was false, wrong and taken out of context—every single one. They can all be addressed with supporting evidence. You see, unlike others, we never deleted anything because we didn't have anything to hide. However, the extent to which the emails and calendar entries were manipulated is incredible.

One example that shows how ridiculous the preliminary statement of falsehoods is based on a single calendar entry for a family dinner. The CBSA concluded that I had a close, personal relationship with a consultant because the contractor shared the same name as my own mother.

Now, only based on the preliminary statement of falsehoods designed to torpedo my career, my credibility, by false claims, my employer has suspended me without pay, without even first attempting to have a discussion with me. I'm named in the press repeatedly, often with the suggestion that I did something wrong. Just two days ago, the Prime Minister himself stood in front of the national media and said that it was clear civil servants committed misconduct and that there are investigations and there will be consequences.

This comes after I simply told the truth and informed this committee that I did not make the selection of GC Strategies. In fact, they were not my recommended choice. I've already provided evidence through my testimony previously.

The Auditor General has said there was a glaring disregard for management principles. I have always adhered to core principles, processes and procedures, including closely tracking and managing the costs of ArriveCAN. In fact, I delivered a detailed costing of \$6.3 million to my colleague DGs and my supervisor, Minh Doan, just prior to my departure.

I'll just point out to this committee that the Auditor General's report reflected exactly \$6.3 million.

I'm concerned that the complaints come from people who tried to extort contracts from the Government of Canada. I'm very concerned that colleagues of mine have been coerced to take part in this investigation against their will. I'm very concerned that thousands of emails have been deleted to hide the truth. The CBSA is delaying access to information requests that I need in order to defend myself, and now the Prime Minister has pronounced guilt to the entire country.

• (1105)

[Translation]

I'm prepared to answer all the committee's questions, and I'll uphold the principles of truth and transparency.

[English]

However, it is worrying to me that parliamentary privilege has not protected us as we are now facing reprisals.

For the record, I have served in the civil service for 23 years and until now my career stood unblemished. However, I am suspended without pay based on untested, unproven and false allegations.

We have had to turn to the court to ensure fairness. We testify here looking for the same. The journey ahead may be challenging, but I'm committed to facing it with unwavering honesty and integrity.

Thank you for your time and attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. Utano, the floor is yours.

Mr. Antonio Utano (Director General, Information Technology Branch, Canada Revenue Agency, As an Individual): Thank you.

Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of this committee.

We appeared before you on November 7, 2023, and told the truth. We have co-operated and will continue to co-operate with Parliament and speak truthfully.

I echo everything Mr. MacDonald said in his opening statement but will add the following.

I was the executive director who became the acting director general of the border technologies innovation directorate in May 2021 after Mr. MacDonald left for Health Canada.

We were responsible for the execution and technical delivery of the ArriveCAN application. What we were not responsible for is signing contracts, as we did not have contracting authority. We were not responsible for approving budgets for ArriveCAN. We

were not responsible for selecting GC Strategies to work on ArriveCAN. This was Minh Doan's and the president's decision. We were not responsible for, nor did we have the mandate for, many of the flaws the OAG had enumerated in their report.

I have worked in public safety my entire career, for over 20 years, with an unblemished record. I started at the RCMP working on highly sensitive files with top secret security clearance. Anyone who knows me knows I'm a straight shooter. I take offence to what the CBSA has done to us after all we did was speak the truth.

There have been absurd suggestions of bribery. Have a look at this knapsack. Is this bribery? Does this committee really think I can be bribed for a \$17 knapsack? Every single person who worked on ArriveCAN was offered this souvenir. This bag was disclosed to the values and ethics office of the CBSA, as well as our vice-president's office.

CBSA is punishing us because we told the truth, because we told this committee they have been misled by senior officials from the CBSA. I question and highlight why the CBSA, Health Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency are working in concert to punish us. To note, both Health Canada and the CRA did not want to participate in the CBSA investigation, yet they supported suspending us anyway.

I'm now questioning even more why the Prime Minister has publicly pronounced guilt and has said there will be consequences, when after more than a year, the RCMP has not investigated. I'm questioning the investigation, as there is clear evidence of bias and the report is tainted and flawed.

The very starting point is problematic. The person who conducted this investigation and crafted the report was himself involved in the original vetting process of Botler AI in late 2020. Who is Botler AI? They're the ones who wrote to the CBSA back in October 2022 saying that if you're concerned about misconduct, look no further; Botler has an answer. Botler prepared a report. They specifically said they would only share it in exchange for a contract.

Furthermore, I find it interesting that in October 2023, they told this same committee that the CBSA was at risk of extortion. A month later, as the CBSA has indicated, Botler AI would participate in an interview only if they were given a contract for their services. Is that extortion, really?

I am left to question what is really happening here. There are people charged with criminal offences who are suspended with pay. We were suspended without pay based on unsubstantiated allegations and while on medical leave. In the employment world, this is just shy of capital punishment.

All we did was expose the fact that parliamentarians have been misled. We didn't just say so; we provided evidence. On that note, just like the bag, we have evidence that every one of the allegations raised in the report is false, misleading or taken out of context. Had the CBSA conducted the investigation leading to the creation of these reports professionally and honestly, they would have insisted on interviewing witnesses, especially us, and looking at the evidence. Instead, they crafted a document that was designed to show us in the worst possible light, and they were successful. As a result of these reports, our security clearances have been pulled and we are suspended without pay.

I understand that some members are concerned that we spoke to members of this committee when we were contacted. However, understand that we were trying to defend ourselves against this CBSA and our home departments, all three of which have the resources of the federal government targeting us.

• (1110)

We are not even drawing a salary. Of course, we spoke to a committee member when they reached out, as we would have to any committee member who had shown an interest. We've also had to turn to the court because the CBSA will not co-operate and disclose key information required to defend ourselves.

The CBSA acted unfairly, continues to act in bad faith and created a fabrication to distance itself from any accountability.

I am happy to take any of your questions.

In closing, isn't it ironic that the people who are pointing fingers are the ones with the dirtiest hands?

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

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

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): In the Auditor General's report, she said, "We found situations where agency employees who were involved in the ArriveCAN project were invited by vendors to dinners and other activities."

Mr. MacDonald, were you invited to dinners, meals or other activities by any ArriveCAN vendors, yes or no?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: If I was invited to any dinners or activities with vendors, I disclosed it to my supervisor—

Mr. Michael Barrett: That's not the question, sir. The question was—and I'll repeat it for you—were you invited?

• (1115)

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'm telling you the truth. I had been invited, but—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay, so that's a yes.

Mr. Utano, were you invited to dinners, meals or other activities by ArriveCAN vendors?

Mr. Antonio Utano: Do you mean at the time, during ArriveCAN? No, and if any—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Were you, at any time before or after the ArriveCAN project, at an event, meal or activity with any of the

vendors who were contracted by the Government of Canada to work on the ArriveCAN project?

Mr. Antonio Utano: The short answer is I was at one dinner, and that was disclosed to my boss, who was Minh Doan at the time. In fact, my boss was present. Any activities or suggestions of gifts or hospitalities were openly and transparently disclosed.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You waved a bag around when you were making your opening statement. Did you bring bottles from any whisky tastings you were a part of?

Mr. Antonio Utano: There are no bottles from whisky tastings. That—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did you participate in any whisky tastings that were sponsored or paid for by vendors who were paid by the Government of Canada for the ArriveCAN scandal?

Mr. Antonio Utano: This is a perfect example of things being taken out of context. If I could, I'd like to address the—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have a series of questions. If you can answer the questions, I'm sure you'll have the time to get to those particular details.

Did you accept free alcohol from vendors who worked on ArriveCAN, yes or no?

Mr. Antonio Utano: In the plural, no. There was one Zoom call event—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald, same question....

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I had a package arrive at my house.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What was in the package?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: There were little vials of whisky.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There were vials of whisky.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes. These were after contracts were in place.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Would these be the size that you'd get at a hotel or on an airplane?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: They're smaller.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay, and how many bottles were there?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: There were four or five.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Like the bag, these were disclosed.

What was the name of the professional standards office that you referenced, Mr. Utano?

Mr. Antonio Utano: That was the values and ethics office of the CBSA.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did you disclose to the values and ethics office your participation in the consumption of these products provided to you by a vendor who had been paid \$20 million for work on this project?

Mr. Antonio Utano: The disclosure happened to our VP on multiple occasions, as per the policy.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Why did the bag get disclosed but not the free drinks?

Mr. Antonio Utano: The bags were asked about in advance, and we were asked if it was acceptable. We took the steps and procedures ahead of time because we were aware of it ahead of time.

The allegations and the development of this report insinuate that we didn't follow procedures. We did, sir.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did you eat meals or snacks or consume beverages at any time that were paid for by these vendors, and if so, which vendors?

Mr. Antonio Utano: Are you asking me?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes.

Mr. Antonio Utano: We did consume a shared platter. I had a few nachos, a couple of chicken wings and half of a beer.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you know the date?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I don't have the exact date in my mind.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Could you undertake to provide the date to the committee?

Mr. Antonio Utano: It would have been after we were allowed to—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, I'll let you check your records, nail that down and provide it to the committee, along with the names of anyone else who was in attendance.

Mr. MacDonald, it's the same question to you, please.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I think I had three zucchini sticks and half of a beer—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Was that at the same event?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It was at the same event.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is that the only time you shared a meal that was paid for by these vendors?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It was paid for by vendors.

I just want to make sure the committee is aware that, number one, in the preliminary statement of falsehoods, there are allegations that there were dinners. Those dinners were not necessarily vendor-oriented dinners or paid for by the vendors. That's why I'm answering the question honestly. I paid for my own meals.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I haven't asked a question about that, but you did attend dinners with them. That's what you're saying.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I have attended dinners with different vendors over the last three years, which were disclosed, per the policy, to my supervisor.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's interesting to me that the bag was disclosed to a professional standards office but the free drinks and food were not.

Mr. MacDonald, are you being investigated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I don't believe I am. I haven't been contacted by the RCMP. I think even the statement of facts shows that the CBSA says themselves that I didn't do anything.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's the same question to Mr. Utano, please.

Mr. Antonio Utano: It's the same. I have not been contacted, and I'm not aware of being under any investigation.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The Auditor General says the RCMP is investigating certain individuals pertaining to ethics and conflicts of interest. The Auditor General said so herself. Do you have any idea who is being investigated?

• (1120)

Mr. Antonio Utano: I'm not aware of who is being investigated.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. MacDonald, I'll ask you the same question.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'm not aware of anybody who's being investigated.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There are millions of dollars being passed around. A vendor was allowed to write their own contract for the CBSA. It doesn't make sense that some whisky or meals or zucchini sticks would be sufficient in terms of influence.

Do you know of any other individuals who work for the Government of Canada who received any material benefit from vendors that you can share with us today?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'm not aware of any. Certainly, when I was at the CBSA, as I testified last time, I did not see any wrongdoing.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'll ask you the same question, Mr. Utano.

Mr. Antonio Utano: It's exactly the same. I'm not aware of anybody who has received any sort of gift or hospitality that influenced them or influenced their actions.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Barrett.

Mrs. Atwin, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us again today.

Mr. MacDonald, I'll start with you. You mentioned in your opening statement that you believe a 2022 complaint initiated the review process. Can you provide any insight on the subject matter of that complaint?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I wish I could explain it to this committee. We've asked the CBSA a number of times to provide the information from the Botler complaint. It's been completely withheld. I really wish we could understand. I know that Botler has gone on TV and online a lot and talked about it. I believe it was sent to Ms. O'Gorman and a bunch of other people, but they're holding on to it pretty tight and won't allow us to see it.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: You also mentioned that some of your colleagues are being coerced to participate in the investigation. Can you further explain that or clarify it for us?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Sure. The document itself says that six people were invited to participate as witnesses. One of those people initially, as I understand it, rejected the offer to participate, which was her right, and certain steps were taken to pressure her into participating. I have some information around it, but not a lot. Due to the fact that anybody who participates needs to sign a non-disclosure, they won't even talk to us anymore.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: A lot of what we're seeing out of the Auditor General's report is with regard to missing information or time sheets and invoices that would have been approved and that didn't have supporting documentation or, again, the required information.

You were not the one to authorize those tasks or to sign off on these time sheets or invoices that were incomplete.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: That's a great question. I hope I can enlighten the committee a bit.

We never had the authority to put in contracts. We never had the authority to put the TAs in place. We had what was called a "technical" authority. We could sign off on the scope of the task.

I also want to mention that we are not the finance group, so we don't have responsibility for invoicing, reconciliation, the overall financial system or the system of record. That would all be within the CFO group within the procurement team and within the finance branch. We were responsible for the technical delivery and execution.

We did have managers who oversaw the consultants who worked on ArriveCAN. They would have been responsible for signing off on the time sheets of the consultants. I believe they were all done in order. What would happen after that is the time sheets would go to the vendor. The vendor would reconcile them and submit an invoice. Once all the paperwork was submitted and it was in the proper format, I was asked to sign. Then it would go to finance to sign off. They would do the last verification to make sure that all of the tasks and all of the procedures were followed in order to sign off.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you.

One of the biggest pieces of this, or I guess one of the biggest frustrations, especially for Canadians who have been following along, is the ballooning of costs.

Can you enlighten us on that? Was there an original budget? Was there a number or a target you were aware of at an early stage?

It's just to help us understand how it got so far and how it got to that almost \$60-million price tag.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Thanks for the question.

Minh Doan once said, at the early onset of the pandemic, that a rising tide floats all boats. At the onset of the pandemic, we were asked to digitize a form. The budget for that was about \$50,000. When it went to building a mobile app and releasing it, the initial budget, from a prototype perspective, was about \$400,000, as we've testified to previously and showed evidence of.

However, there was continuous change and everybody started injecting their requirements. Not only were we dealing with the Public Health Agency, but we were dealing with the rest of the IT branch, with the travellers branch and the commercial branch.

From my vantage point, there was never a budget allocated. However, I will point out that there's been talk about an ATIP, and there are 780 pages in it. I've gone through it. That was known to the CFOs of PHAC, of IRCC and of CBSA. They were able to recover \$12.5 million from IRCC and PHAC the second year after I was gone. They actually put in a budget request for \$25 million the third year.

That's not far off from the \$60 million, when you add \$6.3 million plus \$25 million plus \$25 million. The residual, I would suggest, is probably just other people putting their hands in the purse.

• (1125)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Who might those other people be? Could you enlighten us?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Sure, no problem.

As an example—it was after my time—Service Canada asked for about \$8 million for a call centre. I didn't validate those costs, but I would imagine they already have a call centre, since they're Service Canada.

The IT operations team was asking for new resources, but they didn't take on the operation. There were project managers, I'm sure, working against ArriveCAN and being costed against it. Obviously, the Auditor General found a glaring hole with project management.

Overall, the only thing I can say is that these two guys weren't responsible for the \$60-million budget or the oversight of it. I'm kind of incensed at the fact that the rest of the CBSA has tried to insulate themselves from their own accountabilities.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you for that.

Mr. Utano, I have about 10 seconds ticking down now.

Is there anything you want to add to Mr. Barrett's line of questioning? I know he was short on time as well and cut you off a bit about the timing of those whisky tastings or dinners.

Mr. Antonio Utano: The calendar items and emails have been cherry-picked across five years. They were selected to try to do maximum damage with the compression of our calendar items, which most times were not even attended.

I just want to reiterate that we followed the policy. We did disclose to our boss and, for those bags specifically, to the values and ethics office. We did follow the policy and code of conduct.

The Chair: Thanks, Mrs. Atwin.

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. MacDonald, in a letter addressed to the committee in January, you wrote that, during your appearance before us on November 7, 2023, you advised us that we'd been misled by the current and former executives at Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, regarding who made the decision to award the ArriveCAN contract to GC Strategies.

Who misled us?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'll try to respond in French, Mrs. Vignola.

As I told you in November, the decision to award the contract to GC Strategies was made by my supervisor, Minh Doan. I read the letters written for the CBSA president. They indicated that it was Minh Doan and the then CBSA president, Mr. Ossowski.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I wasn't aware of that.

There's a third factor, which is that the office of the chief information officer asked that his notes be sent to the current president, Ms. O'Gorman.

I don't know why none of the three public servants were able to provide an answer when asked that question. It's unbelievable.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: In your opinion, who were those individuals trying to protect?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: That's a good question.

I felt that they were trying to scapegoat us and say that we were the ones who made that decision. As you saw during Minh Doan's testimony, when he came before the committee the first time, he said that he had no part in it, that it was his team's doing. Then, he said that he did decide on a certain direction.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: You believe that they're attempting to protect themselves. Is that correct?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Of course. If there's another reason, I don't know what it is.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Understood.

In your opinion, why would those individuals try to protect themselves?

• (1130)

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Honestly, the facts and information you've been presented with lead me to believe that decisions were made by the former president, Mr. Ossowski. I think that many people opposed it. Minh Doan and Kelly Belanger were promoted without a competition. Minh Doan received a bonus as Canada's chief technology officer. Erin O'Gorman says repeatedly that she doesn't know, she wasn't there, that she's made a lot of changes, but we can't see them.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

If I understand correctly, people are just trying to protect the job they have now.

In that same letter, you advised us of the aggressive tactics allegedly used against Mr. Utano.

Why are you the one telling us about those aggressive tactics, not Mr. Utano?

Mr. MacDonald, I'd really like you to keep your earpiece in when I'm talking, since it can get technical at times. It's a matter of respect. Thank you.

Why were you the one to advise us or who decided to tip us off about the aggressive tactics being used against Mr. Utano?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

I wrote a letter to the committee because I'd run out of options. I knew that Mr. Utano had been suspended without pay. I thought it would happen to me too, and the next day, I got a letter advising me that I'd been suspended too.

I'm someone who fights for their rights, and I've tried very hard to provide evidence and be honest with the committee. It's extremely important to me.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Ultimately, by informing us of the situation, you were raising the red flag about something that would likely affect you too, while protecting Mr. Utano and trying to prevent both of you from being suspended without pay.

Have I got that right?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No. That's not necessarily the case.

Following our appearance, we received a letter advising us that there would be an investigation. We knew nothing, at that time, about the preliminary statement of facts and what CBSA had actually done. We didn't see that document before it was provided to you. When I wrote the letter—

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Pardon me. My time is running out.

You're saying that you didn't get the preliminary statement of facts before we did. However, a member of this committee obtained the document before any other member, and he said that you were the ones who gave it to him.

How can we reconcile both those versions?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: That's a good question.

In order for CBSA to send it to the committee clerk, it first had to send it to us.

A few days later, Mr. Brock asked to speak with us. He spoke with our lawyer. The investigation report had not yet been sent to the committee member. That was at the beginning. Only a few excerpts were shared to show clearly that the document hadn't been done professionally.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Those few excerpts were still several dozen pages long.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Our lawyer dealt with the member of Parliament. It wasn't us.

I think that some 300 pages were shared. That is as clearly as I can state it. That said, it wasn't the full document.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks. We have to move on.

We'll have Mr. Bachrach, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start, Mr. MacDonald, with the claim that you were not interviewed as part of the CBSA investigation. I believe, if I understand correctly, you stated that you were invited to be interviewed, but only after the preliminary statement of fact had been sent to other people in the organization.

Is that an accurate characterization of what you told the committee?

• (1135)

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: To set the record straight, we had a few exchanges between the time I was notified of the investigation being opened after my testimony and January 5, which was the last one. Those exchanges happened with my counsel. We were asking for information and disclosure.

The CBSA refused to disclose any information at all. On January 5 we got the final warning, where they said if we didn't do it, they were going to close the investigation. Part of the reason we went to the courts was to make sure that the CBSA couldn't close the investigation.

As we found out through the disclosure of the document—which only happened because there was a production order from this committee—the CBSA had to share it with us. Otherwise, they weren't planning to share it with us at all. We had one page that had six line items on it, and it said specifically that the allegations were from Botler from 2002, but they opened up the investigation, I believe, 10 days to the day after I testified here at OGGO.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Did you receive a request to participate in the investigation? We had the CBSA investigator before committee, and our understanding is that you were invited several times to participate in an interview as part of the investigation and you declined those requests or did not respond to them. Is that correct?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Actually, that's not correct.

I'm on sick leave. The first time they emailed me, they emailed my work address. The second time, they emailed my home address and we responded. We've responded, I think, four times in total saying that we would participate in the investigation.

We have asked a number of times for them to disclose information so that we can prepare for the investigation and prepare for the interview. We're happy to do that; we just want to have information so we can prepare to come in and defend ourselves.

Mr. Antonio Utano: Can I please add to that, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It's Mr. Bachrach's time, so it's up to Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm sorry. It just seems a bit like a misrepresentation that you said you weren't interviewed, but you were clearly invited to be interviewed as part of the process, and you de-

manded to have certain documents, which they didn't provide, and as a result you didn't participate in the investigation. It seems like the opportunity was open to you.

I'm going to move on to a different claim.

Mr. MacDonald, you claimed that you didn't sign contracts for ArriveCAN.

Mr. Utano, I didn't hear you make the same claim.

Did you sign contracts for any ArriveCAN vendors?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I just want to confirm that we were never the contracting authorities on any of those contracts. We were the technical authorities.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: In the Auditor General's report, she clearly highlights the fact that you were responsible for choosing GC Strategies as the vendor for the contract. Is that accurate?

Mr. Antonio Utano: It's not accurate.

First, we never had the authority to make the decision. We presented options. If we had had the authority to make the decision, why would we have presented options in the first place?

Second, we presented evidence to this committee and to the Auditor General on who made the decision.

Third, what she was referring to, I believe, was a requisition. A requisition is step one of six in contracting, but that starts only after a decision is rendered.

I'm going to repeat this. Once the decision was made by the VP, Minh Doan, and the president to move forward with GC Strategies, we were then told to execute and move forward.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: It's all a bit unbelievable, based on the facts that have been disclosed so far, but I'm going to move on to the RCMP investigation.

Mr. MacDonald indicated that he has not been invited to participate or be interviewed as part of that investigation. Have you, Mr. Utano?

Mr. Antonio Utano: As I said earlier, no, I have not been contacted, nor am I aware if I am part of the investigation.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Do either of you expect to be contacted by the RCMP as part of this investigation?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I don't expect to be contacted, but if I am, I'm happy to comply.

If I could just answer you, Mr. Bachrach, I don't know what we've said that you find unbelievable. We provided evidence both to this committee and to the Auditor General that it was not us who selected GC Strategies. It's unfortunate the Auditor General didn't have the time to incorporate that into her report. We did speak with the Auditor General very late in the process, but it's very clear that we did not.

These came from CBSA's own notes, notes which were shared with the president, President O'Gorman. I don't take offence to your statement that it's not believable. I just don't understand what isn't believable. We don't have the authority to put contracts in place, and we clearly didn't make this decision. Those are the facts as they are.

• (1140)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: The thing that's unbelievable is that if you read the public reporting on this matter—the articles that have appeared in *The Globe and Mail*—if you read the preliminary statement of fact and if you read the report by Botler, it very clearly indicates that you had an intimate role in the ArriveCAN contract and GC Strategies.

Mr. Firth described you as someone who's been a friend for as long as you've been working for the government. Is that an accurate statement?

The Chair: We're out of time, but if you could, just give a quick response.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It's not an accurate statement, and it's already been testified to that it was an inaccurate statement. If the member wants to watch testimony from previous witnesses, including me and others, the member will know that this is not accurate whatsoever.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Block, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of you for joining us today to provide further testimony on the issue of ArriveCAN.

My first question is in response to Mr. Utano's answer for my colleague Mr. Bachrach.

Did I hear you say that you were the individual who signed off on the contract requisition to PSPC for the first ArriveCAN contract awarded to GC Strategies?

Mr. Antonio Utano: To be clear, the requisition was the beginning of the process to put a contract in place. It wasn't the actual contract. That was only done after the decision was rendered on which direction and vendor to go with to work on the ArriveCAN application. That decision came down from our VP and president at the time.

Mrs. Kelly Block: But you were the individual who signed off on that requisition.

Mr. Antonio Utano: I haven't seen the document the OAG was referring to, but it sounds in and around that same time frame and area.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

I guess my next question does refer to the Auditor General's report.

Why did you not pursue the alternatives given to you by PSPC to make this contract competitive? In other words, the Auditor General mentioned a suggestion that would have allowed a shorter bidding period of just 10 days, which would have worked with necessary timelines. Why did you not pursue that?

Mr. Antonio Utano: That's a good question.

I'll start off, and if he wants, he can jump in after.

I have a couple of things, just to put some more context to it.

Ten days is the timeline that would be put on the street, if you will, for vendors to participate. However, leading up to that, there's the development time to curate a proposal. That takes weeks if not months to do.

Second, when we worked with PSPC, we worked in conjunction with them and our internal controllership, with a targeted goal to move forward with an RFP as quickly as possible.

The third thing is that we were given direction from our superiors that we would not be able to stop. We didn't have the luxury of pausing during the pandemic, so we followed that direction and we were working with the experts in procurement and contracting. We did the best we could with the tools we had, but we never had the authority to just make unilateral contracting decisions. I just want to reiterate that.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: If I could, I'll add just a couple of things. The first contract that happened with GC Strategies was, I believe, for about \$1.4 million. We were told at the time that it was exceptional circumstances. The borders had closed. We had no idea where ArriveCAN was going. We had no idea what it would turn into, and we were told, "Go get this done. We need to get something out there."

I have to admit, the CBSA—and I say it as an agency, not Mr. Utano or me—did push back at PSPC. Oftentimes, people say that something can take 10 days, but it can also take 10 weeks, so—

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you for that. I appreciate that explanation.

Mr. Utano, you just said something that piqued my interest. When you talk about curating a proposal, who is responsible for curating a proposal?

Mr. Antonio Utano: As far as roles and responsibilities go, I can tell you that as the acting DG or DG, we don't have the responsibility to write RFPs. We don't write RFPs. We don't do evaluations of submissions, and we don't select—

Mrs. Kelly Block: Who does?

Mr. Antonio Utano: It's done in collaboration with the team. There would be technical authorities and others involved in that.

• (1145)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Can you tell me who was responsible for signing off on the second contract awarded to GC Strategies for ArriveCAN?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Maybe I'll start with that.

GC Strategies met with the commercial branch and travellers branch—I wasn't part of it—and they did what they call a “technical bake-off”. There were two companies showcasing their technology. I believe the commercial branch chose GC Strategies and wrote a justification for a national security exemption. That justification went to the CFO, Jonathan Moor, who then wrote a letter to PSPC seeking approval for the national security exemption.

I provided this evidence to all committee members.

That letter actually states that they had a preferred vendor who had done work with Transport Canada, hence the commercial ties.

We took that on because we were the IT team, but the genesis of the second contract was additional scope to tie into ArriveCAN that came from the business line.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

Who was responsible for signing off on the third contract awarded to GC Strategies? As a follow-up, who would be responsible for documenting all of these contracts?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: To try to answer your question as quickly as possible, the third contract was for accessibility. I believe it was also done under the national security exemption banner, which provided PSPC and the CBSA with availability to do a sole source.

The reason GC Strategies was chosen for the third contract was kind of like if you were adding scope to a kitchen renovation: You're not going to hire a net new contractor to come in, but you have to have a new contract for it. That's what PSPC said. The original two didn't have that in scope, so we needed a third contract.

I hope that answers your question.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have minus 20 seconds.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Bains, it's over to you.

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

Again, thank you to both Mr. Utano and Mr. MacDonald for joining us here today.

Regarding the preliminary statement of fact, did you authorize your counsel to share the preliminary statement with any MPs prior to Mr. Lafleur's appearance?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Not in full—no, sorry. Is that prior to Monsieur Lafleur's appearance the first time or the second time, sir?

Mr. Parm Bains: I mean his last appearance.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I don't remember the date I received a copy of the preliminary statement of facts, to juxtapose it against Mr. Lafleur. Once I received the preliminary statement of facts, I made sure my counsel had it. In and around that time, I believe a committee member asked for information surrounding it. I know that both Mr. Utano and I said that it was acceptable, and we agreed that certain elements could be shared.

Mr. Parm Bains: Certain elements, but not in full....

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No.

Mr. Parm Bains: When you appeared last, you told the committee that this started off as a replacement for pieces of paper that cost about three dollars each. When we think about the \$40 million in transactions on ArriveCAN, I like to think of it as an overall cost saving for the Government of Canada. Do you still stand by that past statement?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I was surprised that the AG didn't have an element of that in her report.

I think all factors regarding the value of the app need to be considered. As I've said, GC Strategies brought in some really good consultants, and they did a good job of building the app while I was there.

The fact of the matter is, she did express that it was taking more than the quarantine time to get provinces the information. There was also a cost to doing that.

From my vantage point and having a background in understanding how to count, I would say there was definitely a cost avoidance. I can't say there was a cost savings, but had they stayed on paper, it certainly would have cost more than ArriveCAN did.

Mr. Parm Bains: From your testimony, you didn't have a model to follow when you built ArriveCAN. As you know, this software app is not what the government usually purchases, which is commercially off the shelf, readily available to industry. In those cases, IP ownership is retained by the developer, but in this case the IP is retained by the Government of Canada.

Does the rapid development and IP ownership represent value, in your eyes?

• (1150)

Mr. Antonio Utano: President O'Gorman came in and testified that they did not throw away non-recoverable engineering costs in developing it. They're using it today. They're processing 300,000 passengers per month. That's what I believe the testimony was.

The intellectual property belongs to the Government of Canada, and that was absolutely by design because we eventually want to get to the point where we—and when we say “we”, it's our staff—have the capabilities and ability to develop and work with this technology moving forward.

Mr. Parm Bains: Mr. MacDonald, I want to quickly go back just one more time to the preliminary statement of fact. When you found it acceptable to share it with members of the committee, which member did you share it with? Who reached out to you or your counsel? Was it our chair or...?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No. Mr. Brock reached out a couple of times and asked for information to have insight.

Maybe I'll just make sure the committee is aware that our door was open to anybody and it remains open, so if anybody would like to speak or know more about what's going on, I'm happy to and I think Mr. Utano is. Some of that information is very personal—

Mr. Parm Bains: Can you please provide or share the timeline of when you received the request and from whom you received the request, from among members of this committee, and dates, if you can recall? Maybe share that in writing, please.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: We can follow up after. There hasn't been a lot of back-and-forth, but I will endeavour to do it as soon as we can, yes.

Mr. Parm Bains: I'm going to continue on with another line of questioning here.

The Chair: Be really brief, Mr. Bains.

Mr. Parm Bains: There is one thing I want to clarify. The opposition keeps repeating that this was supposed to cost \$80,000. Is it possible that this app could cost \$80,000?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No, the app could have never cost \$80,000. The \$80,000 was to build a digital prototype that moved paper onto, basically, an online form that could be used on a mobile phone. It was used to demonstrate that you could digitize something, which is something the Government of Canada has been very interested in doing. Through doing that it demonstrated there was a doorway to building an app.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Bains.

We'll go to Mrs. Vignola for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I'll give the witnesses time to put in their earpiece.

Mr. MacDonald, between 2007 and 2015, that is, before the creation of ArriveCAN, where in government were you working?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I was at Public Services and Procurement Canada, in the real property sector. As director general, I was responsible for a portfolio that included construction projects worth several billions of dollars.

I got out of the IM/IT field, meaning information management and information technologies, for approximately three years.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Please remind me how long you've known Mr. Firth?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: The first time I met Mr. Firth was around 2010, when I worked at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. I didn't know him at all before then. We didn't meet often. We weren't working together, and his company GC Strategies didn't exist yet.

I changed jobs a few years later. I wasn't responsible for project delivery. As I just mentioned, I then left IM/IT entirely. I had no contact whatsoever with Mr. Firth for approximately eight years, I'd say.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: In 2010, Mr. Firth was a shareholder or co-owner of Coredal Systems Consulting. Is that right?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I have no idea. I'm sorry, but I don't know.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: The majority of contracts were with Transport Canada, which you mentioned earlier.

The following question is for both witnesses.

According to the Auditor General's report, there was little to no documentation relating to nearly half of the 25 most significant updates made to the ArriveCAN app. Consequently, the Auditor General believed that, out of 177 updates, the result would be identical, meaning little to no documentation.

How do you explain that?

• (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to ask for a very quick answer.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'm sorry. The interpretation cut off at the last word. I think she was asking about testing.

The Chair: Could you repeat the last bit, Mrs. Vignola, and we'll try to get you an answer?

It's a translation issue.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: What explains the lack of documentation or the total absence of documentation justifying the updates made to the app, particularly with regard to the 25 most significant updates?

[*English*]

The Chair: We're past our time.

Can you offer a brief answer, please?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I can jump in with a brief answer.

There are a whole host of documents, and I'm not sure if the OAG was provided with them. OICs triggered every single technical change. They reflected orders in council that were ordered and then brought down.

Moreover—I don't know if it was presented to the OAG—from a technical perspective, we used an online tool that would track all the different changes. Also, we eventually had a project manager put in who tracked every single version and the origins, if you will, or the genesis of each version and the changes.

I apologize that I don't know what was presented to the Office of the Auditor General, but I can assure you that there is documentation there.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Bachrach, we'll go back to you, please, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. MacDonald, when you appeared before the committee on November 7, you provided a significant number of documents, including emails from your time at the CBSA.

How did you obtain those documents?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I kept records of some of the documents that I had when I was there.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: At the time, you were no longer an employee of CBSA, but you did retain emails from your time there.

Were those emails your property or were those the property of the CBSA?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: You would have to ask CBSA. Given the nature of what's happened, I'm pretty glad that I have them. It seems like a lot of emails have been deleted. I would suggest it's not just Minh Doan's, but other people's, too.

If CBSA thinks that I've done something wrong, they can add that to the preliminary statement of falsehoods.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: If your opening statement on November 7 you said, "I received an unsolicited, jointly branded GCS and Botler proposal".

On January 18, Ms. O'Gorman, the president of CBSA, said, "I don't agree that that was proper procurement. It was not an unsolicited proposal."

Who are we to believe here?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Ms. O'Gorman also said that she wasn't part of the investigation and was insulating herself. I don't know how she has all this information with which to testify when she says that she doesn't know anything and that she only got briefed when the PSF, the preliminary statement of facts, was created.

I think Ms. O'Gorman has not told the truth a few times during her testimony and had misled this committee, to be honest. Whether you believe me or not is up to you.

I've come here, I've told the truth and I've provided evidence time and time again. That's where things stand.

I think Ms. O'Gorman and I are at odds. Given the situation and what's happened, I can only conclude that she's not telling the truth when she appears.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: We have Ms. O'Gorman, we have the Auditor General, and we have the Botler report. We have all of these things, and you're essentially saying that all of these people are not representing the truth and that the committee should believe you.

I'm finding it a little difficult to follow how we're to understand all of these contradictions that keep popping up in the testimony.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: That's fair. You read the preliminary statement of facts, so you will have seen that Botler tried to get a

contract, not once but twice, in order to just proceed with work with the CBSA.

You will have seen—

• (1200)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: To stop you there, Mr. MacDonald, is that contract—

The Chair: We're past your time. Do you have a very quick question, Mr. Bachrach?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm wondering if he can provide evidence that Botler is trying to seek a contract for compensation for the work they did, because that's not my understanding.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It says it clearly in the documents, so I don't know how to understand it other than Botler sought a contract to provide the misconduct report that they used as the allegations. In Mr. Utano's report, it says that they sought a contract in order to present as a witness or participate in the investigation, so....

Mr. Antonio Utano: Can I just add to that really quickly?

The Chair: We're really out of time. Perhaps—

Mr. Antonio Utano: We're not saying that. CBSA said that.

The Chair: Thanks.

We have Mr. Brock, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon, gentlemen. Thank you for your attendance.

I want to use my opening round with both of you to put a fine point on this issue.

This discussion has to end, and it needs to end today, as to who's responsible for the selection of GC Strategies. Canadians want to know. Canadians are rightly angry that this two-person firm working out of their basement, doing no IT work, has collected almost \$20 million in taxpayer funds. I can understand why the Justin Trudeau government wants to shield themselves from any responsibility.

I know the Auditor General was unable to precisely identify which individuals. She made a suggestion, Mr. Utano, that perhaps you should accept responsibility for it. Her words were that you signed the requisition on behalf of the agency, which "amounts to the exercise of delegated authority and carries with it responsibility and accountability", but prior to that particular statement, did you not meet with the Auditor General's team?

Mr. Antonio Utano: We met with the Auditor General for approximately 30 minutes once, I am told, the report was already drafted. Essentially, I believe we were just a box to be ticked.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. MacDonald, did you meet with the AG team?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: We met with AG team the same day as Mr. Utano and—

Mr. Larry Brock: Did the issue as to who chose GC Strategies come up?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes. That was one of the first questions that came up and—

Mr. Larry Brock: You provided documentation to support your theory as to who chose GC Strategies.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes, I did, prior—

Mr. Larry Brock: Who was that person, again?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It was Minh Doan and the president.

Mr. Larry Brock: You're saying it was Minh Doan.

Did you supply any information by way of an ATIP to the AG?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes. I supplied the same information that I put forward to OGGO to show the three components of all of the selections of GC Strategies.

Mr. Larry Brock: Within that ATIP, there was a briefing preparatory package that contained an item that I brought to the attention of departmental officials: “Whose decision was it to contract to GC?” I'm going to read this out, and I want an explanation. It says:

My office made the decision to pursue the contract with GC Strategies.

The two proposals for the work were presented to the CIO and President, and the decision was made to proceed with GC Strategies as their proposal and approach aligned with what the CBSA was looking for, particularly rapid staff augmentation.

The Deloitte proposal was a managed service using their Cloud instance. This would have involved additional risk, and did not align with our direction to build Cloud/Mobile competencies within the Agency.

Who were they referring to?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: They were referring to Minh Doan and John Ossowski. It was written like that because Minh Doan had a fake heart attack and Kelly Belanger took over for him, so the notes were updated so that Kelly Belanger could attend OGGO with Erin O'Gorman, as she did—the record will reflect it—and that's why it was written there.

However, the question you have to ask yourself is this: Who was the CIO and who was the president when the decision was made?

Mr. Larry Brock: My next question is this: Who was the CIO at that time?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Minh Doan.

Mr. Larry Brock: It was Minh Doan.

And the president?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It was John Ossowski.

Mr. Larry Brock: You've identified individuals who have misled the committee. I'm not going to use the word “misled”: I want to know who lied to committee, who lied to parliamentarians, who lied to Canadians. Identify those players, please.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Frankly, if you look at that package that I provided to the OAG, there are three components.

The first one shows clearly that Minh Doan and John Ossowski were the ones who selected. The second—

Mr. Larry Brock: Did Minh Doan lie to Canadians?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Minh Doan has completely lied to Canadians on multiple fronts.

Mr. Larry Brock: Did John Ossowski lie to Canadians when he appeared at committee?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I can only assume that's what he did, because this is what Erin O'Gorman's own documentation in preparing for OGGO says. Even Erin O'Gorman pretended that she didn't know who selected GC Strategies, yet she was briefed on it.

• (1205)

Mr. Larry Brock: Right.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Specifically, the third component says to please send this and the national security exemption request from Jonathan Moor—which Minh Doan was copied on—to Erin O'Gorman's own office. It just doesn't make any sense that nobody knew.

Mr. Larry Brock: When Erin O'Gorman appeared at committee last week, she was shocked that we were focusing so much attention on her. Did she lie to committee? Did she lie to Canadians that she had no responsibility or no knowledge as to who chose GC Strategies?

Answer yes or no, sir.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

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

Mr. Jowhari, go ahead, please, sir.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, sir.

Good morning, gentlemen. Welcome back to our committee.

I'm going to pick up where my colleague MP Bains left off.

I felt that the answers that we got from both of you gentlemen around the commitment to get us some timelines may have left the door open.

I would like to specifically ask you both to provide to the committee—within one week, as per our procedures in the past—the timeline in which you received the initial statement of fact, the timeline in which it was given to your legal people and the timeline in which Mr. Brock reached out to you or to legal people, as well as the scope of the document that was given to Mr. Brock.

We know that the clerk received the document on February 9, and it was roughly about 10 days afterward that we were in a position to be able to receive that document.

Shortly after the appearance of the CBSA investigator and within hours after that testimony, there was a letter from a legal representative that said to ignore everything and to please not communicate any contents to the public in a public way. It seems that today we have completely disregarded all of those.

Can you commit, both of you—and I want a yes-or-no answer—that you will provide all those timelines within one week to the committee?

Mr. Antonio Utano: Yes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. MacDonald...?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay. Thank you very much for that.

Now, let's go back. Both of you kind of referred to the initial statement of fact as initial statement of falsehood. Without getting to the detail, which I committed to in the past, I will not direct my question there.

Where do you believe the falsehood is? Around what parameters is the falsehood there?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: First of all, I want to say thank you for respecting that privacy. It's meaningful to both of us.

It appears to us that somebody who knew us basically just went into our emails after consultations occurred and just started collecting things and putting things together with a narrative and a story-line that indicates wrongdoing.

Not only is the entire document couched in words that would make you believe something was wrong, but there's also "could have" or "might have". These are not facts at all.

I just want to remind this committee that when Mr. Lafleur—who is not the lead investigator, but the executive director of the team—came here, he admitted that these were allegations. Even Ms. O'Gorman referred to these being at a point in time, so the question is that if this is a point-in-time document, why did they decide to release it at that time to our bosses and have us suspended with pay? Why would Erin O'Gorman make a phone call to our bosses? That's not a formal thing to do when you're dealing with such a serious subject.

How come there's no writing? How come there's no email or documentation that shows what she talked about with our bosses?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: That's fair enough. Thank you.

I just want to understand. The follow-up question will get into the details, but I've made a commitment that I'm not going to talk about it to ensure the integrity of this process.

What are your thoughts about the AG report?

I am asking because the AG is telling us that there are a lot of documents missing. You specifically told us that in your role as a technical person, you sign a lot of documents, such as technical specs, time sheets and all of that. The AG seems to not be able to find that, yet you seem to be in a position to be able to say that this application could not have cost \$80,000 and that it's \$6.3 million. I thank you for at least bringing into perspective a number we could ground ourselves around in the development of this application.

With 15 seconds to go, can you explain to me what documents you can or cannot sign and what you have and have not signed?

• (1210)

The Chair: Mr. Jowhari, we've been letting everyone run a bit longer, so I'll allow a bit more time than 15 seconds to answer your question.

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

Mr. Antonio Utano: Can I just quickly address a point from the previous question, sir?

The reason we think there are a lot of falsehoods and that this document is not at all accurate is not just that it has no evidence, but it also doesn't take any context into consideration. There are timelines in there when I wasn't even at work. I was dealing with a personal medical issue for two months, but there were inferences made, leading our being in a negative light.

I'll just pause that with respect to some points in the PSF—

The Chair: Thanks. Let's get to Mr. Jowhari's question.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: On behalf of Mr. Utano and me, I will say that we both have a deep respect for the AG and we don't want to undermine her report.

The fact of the matter is that we weren't interviewed until after her report was written, and we have absolutely no idea what information was provided to her or what information was deleted so that it couldn't be provided to her.

I won't speak to anything other than the fact that she's always represented herself and her organization professionally. However, it wasn't that hard for us to find information that Ms. O'Gorman should have had about who picked GC Strategies; the AG wasn't provided with it, but she was provided with the preliminary statement of facts, which had nothing to do with her audit.

It just goes to my point that there was obviously an attempt by Ms. O'Gorman to try to slight us.

The Chair: Thanks, gentlemen.

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano, I want to drill down on the mechanics of the internal investigation.

I assume that you're familiar with Mr. Lafleur's testimony here on February 5. He's conducting the internal investigation.

He confirmed in his response to my questions that he is not an independent investigator and that he's not able to act independently. He's subject to the internal chain of command at the CBSA. I emphasized at the time that I thought this was a deeply flawed process. Determinations of accountability require a proper external investigation in which powerful people, CBSA leadership and politicians, can be held accountable.

The RCMP is investigating, but we also need to identify wrongdoing that falls short of criminal behaviour.

Why do you think the government is pursuing this internal investigation instead of an independent investigation into who is responsible?

Mr. Antonio Utano: The really brief answer is that it's an attempt to scapegoat us and point fingers at us.

If the question is around why we think there's an issue with the internal investigation, I can answer that further, but I want to let Mr. MacDonald answer, as well, on why he thinks....

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It's clear that this ArriveCAN issue has drawn national attention. It's clear that Botler itself has tried to influence the media and is a marketing machine. From the statements that it has made out loud, it's clear that it has also engaged with people that it calls "leadership", which is obviously a lot higher than Erin O'Gorman, so I think Erin O'Gorman and the CBSA are pretty much holding on to these allegations as hard as they can.

I don't know what the fabric is between those three things, but it sure seems like Minh Doan, John Ossowski and Erin O'Gorman are saying that nobody else at the CBSA, PHAC or PSPC knows anything, but these two guys here were the ones who were responsible for contracting \$60 million worth of work so loosely that nobody can account for anything.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

There is a serious discrepancy in the testimony around the timeline of this investigation that I think is important. Mr. Lafleur said that they initiated an investigation in November of 2022, but you said that the investigation was initiated into your conduct after your testimony in November of 2023.

Did the internal investigation specifically looking at allegations against you two begin in November 2022 or November 2023? What evidence can you provide to support your position on that point?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: The document is classified as "protected B", but I believe it's my personal information, so I'll verify that I can share it.

I received a letter saying that the investigation for the Botler allegations from 2022 was initiated 10 days after I testified here at OGGO on November 17, 2023, I believe. Mine said "initiated", and Mr. Utano's said "reinitiated", which just doesn't make any sense to us.

• (1215)

Mr. Antonio Utano: Can I add some more clarification?

I learned in November 2023 that something was opened and closed. I believe Ms. Dutt from Botler confirmed that she got a call from Pierre Lessard, the chief security officer, saying exactly the same thing that we told them in 2021 and exactly the same thing that PSPC told them in the summer of 2023, which was that this was a matter between them and their business partners, not the Government of Canada, and that it appeared to be a misunderstanding on how procurement contracting works in the Government of Canada.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're saying that you have written documentation—which you can share with the committee, I hope, as soon as possible—to confirm that the government's telling you in November 2023 that they were either initiating in one case or reopening in another case an investigation.

Can you supply that to us? It explicitly contradicts the testimony that we received from Mr. Lafleur. Answer quickly, because I want to get to another question, but is that correct?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I can confirm it. If I'm able to provide it, then I will.

Also, the document says they are entering the fact-finding stage, which clearly goes into this.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: If what you said is accurate and if it's supported by the document, it would very clearly contradict the testimony that we heard from the investigator.

You referenced the Prime Minister's words and suggested in your opening comments that it wasn't just a matter of other people in CBSA trying to put the whole blame for what happened onto you two. You referenced the Prime Minister's comments. What do you think is motivating the Prime Minister's words? Why is he invested in the outcome of this investigation?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I can start.

It's a great question. The answer is that we don't know.

We've been trying to access information to defend our characters and our ability to defend against what's happening with this investigation. Our ATIP requests have been delayed and blocked. Access to the original allegations has been denied. We keep trying to ask CBSA to clarify, but we've been denied. We don't know. That's the issue.

There's been a cover-up and a doubling down, if you will, to try to protect and withhold information from us. Information has been deleted. We just saw an announcement from the Government of Canada that the internal ATIP machine within CBSA has been down for the last two weeks. Something is going on. This is what is concerning to us.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I would just add that I'm not a politician and I don't want to get into politics, but there's a lot of it going on right now. When we see what's happening with the OAG report and with this, it just seems as though there's been a lack of accountability overall.

I was kind of shocked when I saw the media reports on the news that the Prime Minister had said what he said. You can't say there won't be consequences when you're saying that there is an investigation, and in this case we haven't even been contacted by the RCMP. It just doesn't make any sense to me.

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

Colleagues, we're going to take a short five-minute suspension to use the facilities, etc. We'll be back in five minutes.

• (1215) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1225)

The Chair: We are back in session.

We're over to Mr. Sousa, please, for five minutes. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair and witnesses.

I have a preamble here.

Based upon Mr. Utano's and Mr. MacDonald's opening statements, I don't believe that anyone's been charged here. I don't believe that anything has been laid against anyone. Neither the Prime Minister nor any other elected officials are stating that. What they're stating is that if anyone is held accountable, they should then be appropriately dealt with. I think all of us have recognized that, and that's why we're going through this process.

I do appreciate Mr. Utano's recognizing that ArriveCAN would have cost more had it been done another way, but there is value in the intellectual property of the work that has been done. I think that's also critical to reaffirm.

Mr. MacDonald, I appreciate your recognizing that you've known Mr. Firth and first met him in Stephen Harper's days in 2010.

Now I'm trying to understand the confusion between this preliminary statement of facts that has come out. It's not the final result; it's just a preliminary indication of what you did as part of the investigation.

As we go through the investigation, there is a next step. The next step, of course, is to provide interviews and to reach out to you and Mr. Utano. I think you've already responded via your lawyers as to coming forward, having an interview and going forward in this.

Can you please confirm that you have actually held back on providing interviews with the investigator?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Maybe I'll start.

When you say "held back", I think what we've done is maybe pushed back for our rights.

We have asked for disclosure. We know that Botler provided some form of email to Erin O'Gorman and what they refer to as "leadership". There was also a request for a misconduct report, and the CBSA received the misconduct report some weeks later. That's what CBSA wrote in the document.

We've asked for that information in order to prepare for our participation. We will continue to do so.

Short of the fact that we received notification that said that they initiated—

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's fair enough.

We have a situation in which an investigation is under review. You have concerns about sharing your evidence to ensure that the truth is made and that we get to the bottom of it, and we all agree with that. I believe the investigation is also looking, for that matter, and the RCMP is making its investigations. I don't know to what extent that's happened, because that's part of the integrity of the investigation.

Certainly when we're dealing with this now in public and individuals are having conversations with you on the side and we're here before this committee, we're prejudicing the possibility of a proper outcome, in my opinion.

Notwithstanding, I don't want to discuss the actual details of the preliminary statement of facts, because that's where we're trying to protect you as well, in that circumstance.

You mentioned that one of the members.... Well, he's not a full-time member of the committee; he's part time. He comes in and he's reached out to you. When did that first happen? When were you first approached by a committee member?

• (1230)

Mr. Antonio Utano: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sousa, I think we've answered that question and I think we've committed to providing those timelines. To be completely honest, I don't have the exact dates and timelines in front of me. We did work with our counsel, and communications did happen through our counsel.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Did you give your counsel authorization to share documents with other members of the committee?

Mr. Antonio Utano: We authorized our counsel to do what is in the best interest of his clients, which would be us.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Were you aware that your counsel was providing information?

Obviously, you're telling me that neither one of you actually shared information with a member of the committee.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: What we have said is that initially there were elements of the report that were shared. That's the truth.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Who shared them?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It was shared through counsel.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You did not have a direct conversation with members of the committee.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: We have had direct conversations with that member of the committee, but we did not share elements—

Mr. Charles Sousa: You've been having conversations with a member of this committee. The investigator appeared before this committee without other members of the committee having information at hand or having seen those documents, and then there was questioning of the issues within that document that we did not want to be—

The Chair: You're going to have to wrap up, Mr. Sousa, with a question.

Mr. Charles Sousa: To each witness, have you directly, or through your legal counsel, confirmed that you will participate with the CBSA director general's security and professional standards investigation, yes or no?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: He's not a director general. He's an executive director and he's not a lead investigator, but we have confirmed in writing with him more than three times that we are willing to participate.

We're just looking for a fair shot.

Mr. Antonio Utano: We want to add, on the record, sir, that we've asked for disclosure. We've asked for the original allegations. We've asked for our ATIPs to be processed. We only got a copy of this PSF because of a motion here at OGGO. That was not disclosed to us during or before the request to come in for an interview.

We've always articulated that we are ready and willing to participate, but let's have a fair and transparent interview, and let's have that disclosure, as we've requested.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vignola, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. MacDonald, do you know Caleb White?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No, I don't believe I do.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Do you know Heather Wallace?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

Had you felt any pressure from your superiors to select GC Strategies?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No, there was no pressure.

I'd proposed the firm Deloitte. Mr. Utano and his team proposed GC Strategies. The two proposals, mine and his, were sent to Mr. Doan. Apparently, the decision was made with the president, but it was Mr. Doan who advised me of the decision to work with GC Strategies.

Once the decision was made, it was our job to achieve the required deliverables.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: There was no pressure as such from Mr. Doan to select GC Strategies.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Minh Doan and I disagreed about Deloitte. Actually, Mr. Doan said that the firm was in the penalty box, but it wasn't a discussion subject to duress or harassment. At that time, it was really—

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Who proposed the firm OnePlan?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: That's a good question. It was Kelly Belanger and Carol Sabourin.

Kelly Belanger was director general of project management. She was responsible for providing cloud computing and tools for the project. The suggestion to use OnePlan came from them. They were the ones who talked to Mr. Firth and the other consultants working on the file. The scope—

● (1235)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Who wrote—

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: We weren't the ones who wrote—

[*English*]

The Chair: That is our time, Ms. Vignola. We will get back to you.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach, please.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. MacDonald, do you acknowledge that the emails you presented to the committee on November 7 were the property of CBSA?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I haven't been shown anything that says that.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Were those emails ones that were exchanged during your employment at CBSA, using their—

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: When everybody else exchanged emails in their testimony, were those emails the property of the CBSA as well?

When Mr. Doan testified after I called him a liar and proved it, he came back and said that he had found emails that were deleted, apparently, but he was able to find them.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: The question was a fairly straightforward one, Mr. MacDonald. Were those emails sent or received using your CBSA email account?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay.

Do you acknowledge that those emails, because they were sent as part of your employment with CBSA, the property of CBSA?

Mr. Antonio Utano: May I answer that question, Mr. Chair?

When an ATIP is received, we are to divulge our emails. That then becomes the property of the Government of Canada as a whole, or even of the requester. They pay a \$5 fee and they get access to all of our emails, so at that point, it's a good question. If an ATIP is processed and emails are released, who owns the emails?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: The question was whether those emails that you brought to committee on November 7 are the property of CBSA. Because those emails were part of your employment there, they weren't yours to disclose to the committee.

As my next question, were you then surprised that your security clearance was revoked after that November 7 meeting? Was part of the reason that your security clearance was revoked because you were disclosing emails that were the property of CBSA?

Mr. Antonio Utano: Mr. Chair, I can answer that.

Our emails were released through ATIP requests, and we did not process ATIP requests. We don't have that many. We don't work in the ATIP office.

I think what we're saying, then, is, did the ATIP office release documents that were the property of a certain agency? I don't think so. The emails belong to the Government of Canada and Canadians. That's why we have an ATIP process—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Were the documents you brought to the November 7 meeting all in the public domain?

Mr. Antonio Utano: They were ATIP—

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Every document that I provided.... I provided no documents that were protected.

Furthermore, let's go back to the investigation. No part of the letter we received and the preliminary statement of facts suggests that I provided secret information to jurisdictions that I shouldn't have.

I appreciate the line of questioning and I'm happy to answer your questions. I will always tell the truth, but—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I was just seeking clarity on—

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: —my suspension wasn't due to the fact that I testified at this committee and provided evidence, as is being suggested.

The Chair: That is your time, Mr. Bachrach.

We will go to Mr. Brock and then to Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Chair.

Despite the unsuccessful efforts of my Liberal colleagues today and throughout this week to try to spin the narrative that Canadians received really good value for the \$60 million wasted on this “ArriveScam”, and we often hear that it saved lives, there's really no empirical evidence to suggest that one life was actually saved. However, the Liberals continue with this narrative, and I think Canadians would actually prefer the independent voice of the Auditor General on the issue of value, and not the voice of biased Liberal members.

I'm going to put out a phrase to you from her report:

The Canada Border Services Agency's disregard for policies, controls, and transparency in the contracting process restricted opportunities for competition and undermined value for money.

I emphasize “value for money”, so the focus that I have, for the amount of time I have left, is to really drill down on the guess that the Auditor General made with respect to what this fiasco cost Canadians. It's almost \$60 million, but that doesn't include the

probably millions of dollars that were paid to the federal public service.

Can you offer any suggestion as to how many millions of dollars, on top of that \$60 million, were actually paid to the professional federal public service?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I'll start with that.

With respect to responsibilities on the oversight of what this whole thing cost, that does not fall on the technical delivery teams, so to give you an estimate on what it cost to pay public servants, I don't have that answer, Mr. Brock.

• (1240)

Mr. Larry Brock: However, you can confirm that federal public servants did work during the number of years that the 177 different applications of this “ArriveScam” was being rolled out. We did have federal public servants working: Is that correct?

Mr. Antonio Utano: That's correct—

Mr. Larry Brock: Okay, and there's a cost.

Mr. Antonio Utano: —and not just within the agency, the CBSA; we also have to look at PHAC and the other agencies. We're not responsible for providing that whole—

Mr. Larry Brock: Absolutely, okay, and we don't know what that number is, but it's going to be more than the \$60-million estimate.

We also have evidence from the Auditor General that millions of dollars were paid out to contractors who did zero work on ArriveCAN, but did unrelated work.

Do you have evidence, for the time you were at CBSA, of entities coming forward in the knowledge that there was a pot of unlimited resources to take advantage of and seeking millions of dollars or hundreds of thousands of dollars for projects unrelated to ArriveCAN?

Go ahead, Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I don't have any evidence of wrongdoing, just to be clear. What I will say is that there were divisions, federal public servants, who wanted to associate with ArriveCAN so that they could get the funding they needed to move their initiatives forward.

Mr. Larry Brock: Could you give some examples, sir?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Well, there were a few in the commercial branch. There were a few others in the travellers branch. We had some corollary projects that we had already started—some no-touch mobile, the e-declaration, some of these things that we were trying to work on—and if you just put it under an ArriveCAN tag line, it was easier to achieve the funding and get the budget you wanted from the finance branch.

Oftentimes what people would do was if they had overall agendas, they would associate it with what was going on in the pandemic and then ArriveCAN. They would get the budget for it, and then they would move it closer to it.

Mr. Larry Brock: Essentially, they were lying to access taxpayer money by using the tag line “ArriveCAN”. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I have to be honest with you: I wouldn't call it a lie. I would call it perhaps an exaggeration.

They would align what they were hoping to achieve as their target with what was happening with ArriveCAN to obtain their outcome. It was a stretch.

There's a very big difference between a stretch and a lie, in my opinion, but I never saw anybody nefariously lie so that they could get access to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Let's say they were loosely coupled.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. MacDonald, I believe in black and white. I don't believe in grey, okay?

If people were accessing taxpayer funds in a way that had absolutely nothing to do with the ArriveCAN application and development, they were misleading government officials to access taxpayer funds. I call that misleading. I call that an absolute lie.

How many millions of dollars can you estimate were actually spent on individuals or organizations that you've just described?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I left after the first year. I wouldn't even be able to hazard a guess, but I would say the number would be higher than a million if you totalled it from my vantage point.

Mr. Larry Brock: Okay.

Is that my time?

The Chair: That is your time.

Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for your testimony.

The challenge for our committee, of course, from the very beginning, has been to separate what is fact from what is fiction. My grandma use to say, “Eat the fish, spit the bones.” We're trying to separate what are the fish and what are the bones.

I wanted to ask you this. Our Conservative colleagues continue to repeat that this was an \$80,000 app that ballooned to \$60 million. Is this true?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No, it's not true. As I've said before, the prototype was about \$80,000. To get an app was about \$400,000.

I really wish Canadians would understand what it costs to actually convert paper into digital in the timelines that we had.

This was included on two different mobile platforms, not to mention the changes. We went all the way to making the app mandatory and making it mandatory to submit it before you came into the country, to collecting sensitive information on a protected cloud, to making sure that it was protected in the first place.

There's no way that this app would have been done in a weekend, as other people have tried to suggest—

• (1245)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. MacDonald, how much did the app cost, the app itself, as a ballpark figure?

Mr. Antonio Utano: We've left the agency since then, but as a ballpark figure, I'm going to guess between \$12 million to \$14 million for the actual app itself.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: That's for the app itself.

Mr. Antonio Utano: Purely the app.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Is it fair to say, Mr. MacDonald, that the rest of the cost—above, let's say, the \$10 million to \$12 million—was for the back-end supports, the data storage, the Service Canada call centres, and all the things that make the system run? Is that correct?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes, that's 100%.

In fact, in my prior testimony, when I told you that Minh put Deloitte in the penalty box, the data office was trying to go with Deloitte, and Minh told them the exact same thing, so half of those costs moved over to our side, because it was all kind of orientated around cloud and storage and whatnot. We bore a lot of those costs.

I mean, to think about the data pipelines, the security and the ability to do the back-end infrastructure, what we had to do at one point was validate that people had actually crossed the border. If you submitted through ArriveCAN, the data was going to the province and the province was checking on people, but if they never got on the plane, they were wasting their time. We had to do verification checks to make sure that everybody who said they were coming across actually made it across, and then we would send that data over.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Let me ask you question.

Mr. Utano mentioned \$12 million, but I heard you say \$6 million before. Can you clarify the cost of the app itself?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: The overall cost of the first year of operation that I was tracking—I left right after that—was \$6.3 million. That included security, hosting fees, validation, independent reviews, the build of the app, etc.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The deputy leader of the Conservatives stood in the House of Commons and said that the ArriveCAN did no work, and I quote. Is this true? Is this fish or bones?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It's definitely politics.

From our vantage point, I think we can show that there were over 40 million transactions done on the app using the web mobile platform. These were processed and were passed on to PHAC.

I do recall that in the early days there were many studies about the speed at which people could transact, not to mention the cost. I've talked about the cost. I mean, they used to take the piece of paper, put it into a biohazard bag and ship it in a truck to Ottawa so that people could manually enter it into a spreadsheet, so efficiencies, I think, were there. That was why the decision to proceed with an app and make it mandatory was made by the government.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Okay. I appreciate that.

I have a question for you.

This week, did you speak with Mr. Brock ahead of your testimony here today?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Who are you asking?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I'm asking both of you.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes, we had a discussion with Mr. Brock.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. MacDonald, can you tell me what you discussed with Mr. Brock this week, ahead of your testimony here today?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Mr. Brock wanted to know a little bit about what I provided to the OAG. He wanted to know what my thoughts were, and he wanted clarification on the details around the office and who the CIO was. He wanted to confirm his assertion that Minh Doan was the CIO and that John Ossowski was the president at the time.

I don't remember what else we talked about—

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. MacDonald, did he ever tell you which questions he would be asking you ahead of time?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No, he never told me what questions.

He kind of indicated that he wasn't necessarily happy with some of the testimony of other people and he really wanted to zero in on certain things to get to the bottom of where he didn't understand the connection point.

Some of it I wasn't able to answer because I wasn't there anyway, not that it would be difficult for me—

The Chair: That should wrap up the answer.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'm sorry.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we're past the time.

Ms. Vignola, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. MacDonald, who created the task authorization for OnePlan?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It was a long time ago.

I do recall that there were meetings between Kelly Belanger's team and her executive director.

I don't know whether other members of her team were present. They discussed the scope of the work and tasks needing to be executed. I think that we signed the task authorizations for the required deliverables.

However, Mr. Utano and I weren't part of the discussions about the scope of the work.

• (1250)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Understood.

You weren't responsible for creating the task authorization, then. We were told that GC Strategies created everything and that it was plugged into an already existing contract.

Can you confirm or refute that?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'm going to try my best to answer your question.

I believe that Kelly Belanger's team and her executive director determined the needs. We used the contract. GC Strategies' third contract was used. If I remember correctly, at the end of the discussion, given everything that was going on, it was determined that perhaps it was an opportunity to use that contract, which focused on accessibility. That contract was originally created because of pressure from the Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board Secretariat to ensure that the app was accessible to Canadians.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Are we to understand that the tens of thousands of pages provided to the committee were “cleaned up”, like all the documents provided to the Auditor General, so as to protect others by making you the scapegoats?

We learned that a majority of the complaints laid before the Information Commissioner concerned CBSA, and we also know that, in the past, whistle-blowers have been punished for speaking out against mismanagement at CBSA.

Do you believe that CBSA, given its practices, particularly with regard to contracting and passport management, should be placed under third-party management?

[*English*]

The Chair: I asked for a quick answer. Could you get to the question, please?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Should CBSA be placed under third-party management?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I apologize, Mrs. Vignola, but the sound cut out at the end of your question. I'm going to try to respond to the best of my ability.

If I understood your question correctly, you're asking whether I believe that CBSA should retain contracting authority?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: No, that's not what I asked you.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I apologize, there was an issue with the sound at the end of your question.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Clearly, there are problems with—

[*English*]

The Chair: You're way past your time, I'm afraid, but there are some more rounds after—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Nonetheless, it's not my fault if there's an issue with interpretation.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes, that's true.

[*English*]

It's cutting off.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Chair, I'll give Ms. Vignola a couple of seconds of my time if she wants to finish.

The Chair: We'll take a couple of seconds to check the interpretation for the gentleman, please.

Ms. Vignola, do you want to start again with the question? We are past time, but we still have plenty of time left. Go ahead, please, and then we'll get the answer from the gentleman.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

I'm going to ask my question from start to finish to ensure that you understand it properly, and I'll do it slowly.

Are we to understand that the tens of thousands of pages provided to the committee, as well as to the Auditor General were “cleaned up” so as to protect others by making you the scapegoats?

Through the Information Commissioner, we learned that the majority of access to information complaints concerned CBSA. Furthermore, we know that whistle-blowers were subject to reprisals after flagging passport mismanagement.

For all those reasons, do you believe that CBSA should be placed under third-party management?

• (1255)

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

The Chair: If you're able to give a brief answer, go ahead. If not, I'm sure we'll get back to you in the next round.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Okay.

The fact of the matter is that I couldn't tell you what documents were provided to the OAG or for these investigations. I won't suggest that they were cleaned up or doctored. I wouldn't know. I was surprised that the people they're accusing of doing all this work—the inventors of ArriveCAN, if you will, as we've been tagged through this investigation and everything—weren't even interviewed until the end.

My last comment would just be this: I think it's pretty clear that tens of thousands of emails were deleted by Minh Doan, and if that's the case, then I don't know that the information could be doctored; it just was never provided.

The Chair: Thank you very much, everyone, for your patience with the translation.

I'm sorry about that, Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Bachrach, please go ahead.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Utano, you indicated in your opening remarks that you were previously employed with the RCMP. I believe I recall hearing you say that in your remarks.

Do you trust the RCMP to complete a full and impartial investigation on this matter?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I do trust the RCMP, yes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I guess what I'm trying to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] repeated assertions by both of you that there's been no misconduct and no wrongdoing in these matters around the procurement of the ArriveCAN app—

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Chair, I apologize for interrupting Mr. Bachrach, but I can't seem to hear. The sound is not coming through.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

We'll suspend for a couple of seconds while I get the clerk to check with Mr. Bachrach.

Now everything seems to be working again.

Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk, for pointing that out. Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

Picking up from where I left off, we've heard these repeated assertions that there's been no misconduct and no wrongdoing in the procurement of the ArriveCAN app, and yet we have the RCMP currently conducting an investigation. Are you suggesting that this investigation is unnecessary?

Mr. Antonio Utano: We're not sure if we're even involved in the RCMP investigation. We haven't been contacted by the RCMP in their investigation. We did assert that we're concerned with the internal administrative investigation. There are conflicts of interest and there is bias and missing context in all the allegations presented in the PSF. The RCMP did not create the PSF.

Moreover, we have evidence demonstrating that continuity of evidence was not even maintained. You've heard about the accusations around the deletion of emails. Now you've heard also about information that's being withheld, never mind that the original allegation is still outstanding, despite our asking for disclosure.

This has nothing to do with the RCMP. This is all to do with the internal administration that's being led by the CBSA—

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I guess what I'm saying, Mr. Utano—

Mr. Antonio Utano: —so yes, I do have severe concerns with the CBSA administrative investigation, for those reasons.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: You have repeatedly expressed concern about the Auditor General's findings. You've expressed a lack of belief in the preliminary statement of facts from the internal investigation and you have trouble with the Botler report, yet the RCMP seems to think, based on what they've been given, that there is a basis for an investigation.

I'm trying to understand these two perspectives. One is that there's nothing to see here, and the other is that there's lots to see here and that it's very important and that we need to get to the bottom of this.

How should the public understand that discrepancy?

• (1300)

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'll jump in.

Number one, I just want to clarify—

The Chair: Give a relatively short answer, please.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Some of these are not easy to answer quickly, sir.

We're not questioning the AG's findings; we're questioning the inputs. If the AG wasn't given the proper inputs, then she wouldn't be able to have the proper outputs, and I think everybody understands that. We're not questioning her or her office at all. I want to be very clear about that.

If the RCMP has something to investigate, both Mr. Utano and I feel that they should be free to conduct their investigation.

What we feel very strongly about is that the CBSA is trying to cover something up. They've doubled down and created this false preliminary statement, just to basically destroy our credibility. They shared it with our employers when it clearly wasn't ready. There are clearly facts within it that are just so false and incorrect that it's unbelievable. That's what we have a problem with. That's why we went to the courts, Mr. Bachrach.

Just to be clear, we're not asking for the investigation to go away; we're asking for an independent investigation because we don't believe the CBSA is capable of doing one.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We have Mr. Barrett and then Ms. Atwin. Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In a response to a previous question, you said the app cost \$6.3 million. Was that at the conclusion of your time at CBSA, or are you saying that's the cost of the app?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Thank you for the question.

That wasn't the answer I was trying to give for the cost of the app. The \$6.3 million was the aggregate cost that I was tracking over the first year, which is what the AG put in her report.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Then it increased tenfold in the following year.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It increased—

Mr. Michael Barrett: It increased to \$54 million, and then to at least \$60 million by the Auditor General's accounting.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I think the Auditor General's accounting, from what I recall—I'm using rough numbers—was that it went from \$6.3 million to \$25 million and \$25 million. I say that knowing that it doesn't add up to \$60 million, but it adds up to pretty close to that, whether it was \$27 million or \$28 million.

Mr. Michael Barrett: So the app cost \$60 million.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I would say that the program of ArriveCAN—

Mr. Michael Barrett: The question is, sir, whether you disagree with the Auditor General's findings that ArriveCAN cost \$60 million. Do you agree, yes or no?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I agree that the costs that she tracked were—

Mr. Michael Barrett: It was \$60 million.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It was \$60 million, yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you think taxpayers got good value for money with this app? It's a pretty straightforward question.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I think that what we were looking at while we were building it when I was there was how we could keep having people move through airports, how we could get information to provinces and territories—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you think it's good value for money for the at least 10,000 people who were wrongly quarantined for 14 days? They were placed under house arrest under threat of jail. Do you think that they think it's good value for money?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Quarantine didn't even exist when I left.

I guess I would say that with that question, you can see the complexity of what was created in the decisions that were made by PHAC, CBSA and others.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's a very expensive product that failed Canadians in a terrible way.

In your opening statement, you said you believed that people were being extorted for government contracts. Who was that? Just give the name, please. Who was being extorted?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I can answer that.

It's not what we said; it's what CBSA said. It was that sharing the misconduct report was in exchange for a contract of services and for participating in the interview—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm looking for the names, sir.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Ritika Dutt and Amir Morv are the owners of Botler. They are the ones who put in the allegations initially. They sent them to Erin O'Gorman and "leadership". Then they asked for a contract to be able to give the misconduct report, and another contract to participate—

Mr. Michael Barrett: What tech would GC Strategies have been able to showcase in the technical bake-off that you mentioned?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Thank you for the question.

I wasn't there and I'm not 100% certain, but I believe there was a company in Ottawa that they partnered with that was hugely into data and analytics and had done some work at Transport Canada. There were two companies, and I think they showcased what they were capable of doing and what they had done before.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Wouldn't it have raised red flags that you had a company there showing off another company?

GC Strategies was making 30% on a \$20-million contract, which, as I pointed out yesterday with some quick math, is enough to hire 10 full-time public servants for 25 years. GC Strategies was making 30% on a \$20-million contract to make introductions. Then the introduction was made.

These guys were using Google searches. Did no one see something wrong with using a middleman that was cutting 30% off of this? Did no one see that this was insane?

• (1305)

Mr. Antonio Utano: Maybe I can opine in here.

With respect to skill sets and costs, the public service and public servants are not Lego pieces that can be interchangeably used in the same way.

For example, we did reach out to CDS, which is the Canadian Digital Service, looking to leverage that in a program whereby we would bring in expertise. The annual cost would have been \$400,000 per person, plus the EBPs, the employee benefits.

These skill sets are not interchangeable or—

Mr. Michael Barrett: We're out of time here.

Who has deleted records related to ArriveCAN?

Mr. Antonio Utano: The reports that we have seen in the media have pointed to Minh Doan.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you know of anyone? Can you assert? If you can assert that anyone has deleted records, I just need the name. I'm very short on time. I just need the name.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Minh Doan has deleted emails, and we did not have our accounts locked down until after we testified. We are very concerned that our emails have been deleted, because they won't give us records of who's accessed our emails.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Would you say that this is a cover-up?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I believe there's the potential for it, and all we've been trying to do is seek justice, fairness and transparency.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Why do you think that there's a cover-up?

Mr. Antonio Utano: It's a great question, and we want to know as well. We've been asking for information and disclosure.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: If we have the time, I told you guys about Minh Doan threatening me, and nobody did anything.

Kelly Belanger was nowhere to be found. The OAG keeps on saying that there was a lack of project management. Her husband was convicted of sexually assaulting young girls and he got convicted and went to jail, and she wasn't around. I had been asked, and Mr. Utano had been asked, to help her out while she was gone for family problems.

Erin O'Gorman didn't do anything when she found out that I was threatened. Mr. Doan had threatened somebody else and been docked pay, so she knew there was a pattern of this behaviour. When we talk about why there would be a reason or a separation, I never had any problems when I was at the CBSA. I got asked to go to Health Canada because of my record at the CBSA and my record previous to it.

Therefore, I don't know. Neither does Mr. Utano, who had a spotless record. We're just trying to get the right information. We're trying to have transparency and now, after everything that's happened, we want independence from what the CBSA has done.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You don't trust the Trudeau government to review their own scandal.

The Chair: That is our time, gentlemen. Thanks very much.

Ms. Atwin, please go ahead.

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

Just right off the top, for Mr. Utano and Mr. MacDonald, are you able to table the communications between you and your lawyers and CBSA regarding the claim you made that you would meet with investigators?

Mr. Antonio Utano: Barring any disruption with respect to solicitor-client privilege, we can take that back and take a look at it, for sure.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Okay.

I have an article here. It's from The Globe and Mail.

Our media friends have been following this very closely. This is from an October 4 article entitled “RCMP probes alleged misconduct in outsourced CBSA contract”, and this is the quote from it:

Those recorded conversations show Mr. MacDonald directed Botler in February, 2020, to “please work with Kristian” and “let Kristian work his magic.” The conversations also reveal that Mr. Firth described Mr. MacDonald in November, 2019, as a friend and said, “I’ve been with him his whole career in the government.”

Mr. Firth referred to various senior public servants as friends.

Mr. Firth also urged the two Botler entrepreneurs to single out Mr. MacDonald for praise when meeting with other senior government officials.

Mr. MacDonald, do you have a response to that? How did you feel reading that in the media and how would you characterize that? Is it truthful?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I would characterize it not as truthful at all and as cherry-picked information from Botler, who were apparently recording everything that everybody does and then decided to put in misconduct reports two years after their failed business dealings.

Number one, I don't think the member was here when I first testified, but I did explain and I went through a whole critical path of timelines. I held up a big piece of paper and I explained that when Botler says that I tried to pressure them, there was no chance that that could be the case because, one, I wasn't the client, and two, the decision to go ahead with Botler didn't happen for almost another year after that.

Number two, in terms of Mr. Firth knowing me for my entire career, it's false. He clarified that he knew me his entire career. I've already explained the timelines and dates of when I knew Mr. Firth, and we didn't have a close personal relationship whatsoever. I met him three times out of an office, and half of that was during a pandemic when you couldn't go into an office in the first place.

In terms of singling me out—because I'm trying to answer your question very directly—I don't know why Mr. Firth would do that. I certainly didn't ask him to do that. I wasn't part of that conversation and I wasn't videotaped or recorded or whatever it is that Botler does as part of that, and I won't speculate, but I never asked Mr. Firth to do anything. It's unfortunate. I didn't like it at all and I think the reporter's aware that I didn't appreciate the report, but it happened and I'm dealing with it as best I can.

• (1310)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you for that.

I started with that because that was what initiated so much in these past few months in our committee testimony and hearings.

Was there misconduct in the procurement process, as far as you know, under you, at CBSA during the time for the ArriveCAN development?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: If we start with the Botler allegations, I believe PSPC reviewed those. I believe they did a legal assessment and told Botler that this was a private sector matter. I believe CBSA, through Botler's own testimony, told Botler the same thing. I hope that clears up that point.

With respect to the Auditor General and the procurement ombud's report, with respect to my time and tenure at the CBSA, I

don't think I was named as having done anything wrong. I don't think any public servants were named as doing anything wrong by the procurement ombud. I don't know of any wrongdoing. I certainly did not witness any and I wouldn't have stood for it had I seen it.

Frankly, maybe I'll pass it to Mr. Utano for the other two years that ArriveCAN was there. From what I understand and the reviews that were done, there were some questions between contract 1 and contract 2. I've clearly stated that we were responsible for contract 1. The justification for contract 2 was written by the business and was signed off by the CFO. It was sent over to PSPC and they signed off on it, and they indicated that they already had a contractor in mind for that work.

For contract 3, it would make no sense to go with a different vendor—as I explained, it doesn't make sense to hire a different plumber to do more work in your bathroom than you originally engaged for—but PSPC did insist on a new contract.

I'll leave it at that. That was the only thing I was there for.

Mr. Utano, go ahead, please.

Mr. Antonio Utano: Thanks.

I did not witness any sort of misconduct.

I want to make a comment on the Botler issue.

As I said in my opening statement, what's concerning to me is the request for contract services in exchange for a misconduct report and the request for a contract in exchange for participating in an investigation. For me, that's what raises a lot of red flags.

As far as authorities go, I'll say again that we were not the contracting authority; we were responsible for the technical delivery and technical authorities. We also put in place systems and checks and balances.

I want to reiterate something, because I heard a comment about a shadow procurement. Let me be very clear: There was no such thing. There was no shadow procurement. It was impossible to even trade that. You need six people to turn the key at the same time for any sort of contract to be let. We had an internal team that was taking in requests and we had CBSA procurement and PSPC was the overall government authority. We also had.... I don't have evidence for you, but if you.... This was omitted, and this is what's concerning to me—the omissions of data and papers. That is what I'm questioning. You'll see that there were monthly and weekly meetings for procurement—

The Chair: I'll have to get you to wrap up, Mr. Utano.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Mr. Chair, please, if the member would permit, there is a distinction that needs to be made between a technical authority and a contracting authority. When we testified the last time, because you brought up the media, I brought this up.

The Botler allegations kept calling us the contracting authorities. We did not have that authority. We could not sign for contracts and we could not implement things that added cost to the government. We could, however, sign for scope. There's a very big difference, and I think that shows the naïveté of the people who made the allegations in the first place and it was what caused the snowball to roll.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, as you are aware, we've been letting everyone run a bit long, and that's partly because we have a long meeting today and I sense that there are a lot of important questions.

We're down to our final two rounds, so I have to keep everyone down to their exact time in order to be done on time. I want everyone to please be aware of that.

Mr. Genuis is talking about how that will be after him, but no—please be cognizant of your time, because we need to stick to it.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: We've had multiple witnesses who have been reluctant to appear and who have cited health issues. This has been a serious and repeated problem for us as we have tried to get to the bottom of this scandal.

Mr. MacDonald, you referenced in passing someone having a fake heart attack, which is quite a serious allegation.

Would you be willing to flesh that out a little bit? Who did that, when, and for what purpose?

• (1315)

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: The reason I say that is that after Minh Doan threatened me, I reported his threat to my supervisor, who called over to Ted Gallivan, the executive vice-president at the CBSA. I don't know what their discussion entailed; I only know that the feedback that I heard was that it seemed likely, because of behaviours of Minh Doan, that Minh Doan would be going on sick leave within a week and a half. This was prior to OGGO happening.

Mr. Doan went on sick leave, and I got a text message from Kelly Belanger saying that Minh was in the hospital having his heart checked and that he wanted to say thank you for the message I sent, the one that got me in so much trouble with the reporter because I had sent him notes on what he should say at OGGO.

Then, miraculously, he comes back to work, moves over to Treasury Board and gets promoted to be chief technology officer. That certainly couldn't be a less stressful job than what he was in before for someone who had heart problems.

Then we have OGGO coming up again, and I'm under the understanding that Mr. Doan is now on medical leave again and can't participate.

I can tell you that I'm not going to disclose my medical issues, but I have a doctor's note for seven months from my family doctor, who's known me since I was eight months old, and I'm still coming here because it's a matter of integrity and it's a matter of importance for me, my children, my wife and my family to know that I'll stick up for myself and that I'll tell the truth.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

We'll persist in challenging all aspects of your testimony, but we do appreciate that you are here when others have chosen not to come and we've had to go to great lengths to get them to come.

You allege that Botler received a contract in exchange for making certain allegations. Is that correct?

Mr. Antonio Utano: Just for clarity, we didn't say that; CBSA said that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

You've talked in the context of this situation about Ms. O'Gorman, Mr. Ossowski and Mr. Doan, but you've also referenced "leadership" in a somewhat oblique way. Is the implication that there were higher-ups involved in these conversations with Botler, people at the political level or people at PCO? Is it beyond those three people?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Yes—well, I mean, our life has been pretty much turned upside down, and we've been trying to figure things out. There aren't a lot of people who are giving us information, but through our discovery, we can tell you that Botler was very close with Minister Miller. They even knew his chief of staff by name and waved to her in an interview. We know that they sat at the top of Department of Justice Canada and that they were given a seat at the table with the top of the Department of Justice Canada. We know that Amir Morv was in videos with Justin Trudeau and we know that he was part of a speaking engagement on AI where Justin Trudeau was kind of the guest speaker.

From my vantage point, I don't know who my MP's chief of staff is by name, but yes, when they say "leadership", it means either the Clerk of the Privy Council or politicians, in my view.

Mr. Antonio Utano: Can I add one more thing?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Please.

Mr. Antonio Utano: I also want to highlight that through an ATIP, we found an email directly from Ritika Dutt to the president, John Ossowski, in March of—

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It was March 8, after we started the feasibility study.

Mr. Antonio Utano: —2020. Unbeknownst to us, there were some other dealings going on in partnering with some other project, although we don't have the details. Mr. MacDonald and I were unaware of this, but through ATIPs we discovered that there were direct conversations right to the top about working on other initiatives.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: “Right to the top” being...?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I can confirm—

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It basically says that the Minister of Justice had already approved a scope for work that had nothing to do with the feasibility study, so—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I just note, of course, that we heard recently that if the Information Commissioner has concerns about information being not provided in a criminal way, she refers that to the Attorney General, who is the same person, the justice minister who apparently has these relationships.

Are you concerned, regarding the Prime Minister, that we have an internal investigation subject to the existing chain of command when the Prime Minister sits effectively at the top of that chain of command? Are you concerned about the risk of political involvement?

The Chair: Give a yes-or-no answer, gentlemen; we're out of time.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'd rather not weigh in on that. That's way too political for anything I'm involved with.

I'm concerned that we're not getting a fair fight and that information is being withheld that would allow us to defend ourselves from these egregious allegations.

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Bains, please go ahead, sir.

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

Once again, I want to go back to Botler.

Did you ask Botler to develop a pilot or do any other IT work?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Thanks for the question.

This is the ironic part about Mr. Lafleur being the lead investigator. Mr. Lafleur was actually part of the vetting process for Botler when we decided on the scope.

The initial proposal was for them to do a feasibility study with six milestones and do a small regional pilot. HR and security decided against doing the pilot, which is why you'll see prior emails from me to Ritika Dutt saying that we want to do all of this. It was after their demo and the president's decision that HR came back and said that they only wanted to do the feasibility study, so that was what was contracted.

It was after the kickoff that Ritika Dutt wrote to John Ossowski directly—she didn't include me or Mr. Utano—and said that Justice Canada had approved this pilot and that they wanted CBSA to take it on. This is where they would monetize their Botler for Citizens to move into “Botler for workplace”. I think this is why they testified that they were going to make \$28 million a year across the govern-

ment. It was because they were trying to position their tool to be one for internal government workplaces and they would get paid on licensing.

Mr. Parm Bains: Was that in the CBSA's HR department?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: She wrote directly to the president of the CBSA, John Ossowski, even though he testified that he had no contact with her after the initial presentation. The ATIP doesn't lie.

Mr. Parm Bains: They didn't do any work on ArriveCAN or—

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: No.

Mr. Parm Bains: What actual work did they do?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: That's the funny part. If you look at their complaints and at their reporting, they did a lot of work. They were building things. They were building tools. They were doing configuration. However, they were hired to build six documents as part of a feasibility study, and that's it. We never hired them to do anything more.

If they engaged then-president Ossowski and had approval from the Department of Justice to do some type of public safety pilot or some work in configuration, it had nothing to do with the contracting that we had, and we were not aware of it whatsoever. That is why we've been so vehemently—

Mr. Parm Bains: We're under the impression that they didn't do any work and they didn't get paid out. That was previous testimony.

Considering all the relationships that you indicated that they have, they didn't end up with anything, did they?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Our understanding is that they got paid for two of the six milestones.

Frankly, they testified here that they didn't know who Dalian and Coradix are, but they used Dalian and Coradix to obtain a line of credit so that they could build stuff. However, building something wasn't part of the feasibility study.

This is where Antonio and I are completely confused as to where Botler got direction and who they were working with. It certainly wasn't us. The scope from us was a feasibility study.

Mr. Antonio Utano: I don't have evidence, but I think there was an assumption from Botler AI that Mr. MacDonald and I were aware that this other initiative was going on, but we were not. It was unbeknownst to us. We were not part of those email chains.

When human resources asked us to stop the feasibility study—I'm calling it “project one”—they are the client, so we stopped it. What happened, I think inadvertently, is that we caused issues with this other project that we were not aware of. I think it explains why Botler is so angry.

Mr. Parm Bains: You feel that they've misled the committee.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I do, 100%.

Mr. Antonio Utano: Yes.

Mr. Parm Bains: You suggested that Mr. Doan was not permitted by his seniors to select Deloitte for ArriveCAN because it was in a penalty box. I think you alluded to that again today.

You speculated that was due to a risk management project called the CARM project. Mr. Doan stated that this decision was more likely due to Deloitte's lack of cloud capability, while Mr. Ossowski did not recall directing anyone to not work with Deloitte.

I asked Mr. Doan specifically who made the decision. I think we've come to the point that he made the decision on ArriveCAN. I think we've uncovered that. Perhaps you can shed some light on that piece, sir. Can you give insight into why Deloitte was not selected for ArriveCAN?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I thank the member

I know that Mr. Jowhari is familiar with management consulting and IT. I welcome any member here to look at the two options that we have provided as evidence.

Nowhere in the Deloitte option does it talk about Deloitte's cloud. Nowhere in the Deloitte option does it talk about a completely outsourced option.

On the other option, where Minh Doan told this committee that there were no logos or no anything, there was a logo. It was Distill Mobile, which was subcontracted through GC Strategies.

I maintain that I was told—and so was the former chief data officer—that Deloitte was out of bounds and that they were in the penalty box because the CARM project was in the red. That's the truth, and it's also verifiable. I've already given this committee the names of the people who can verify it.

● (1325)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald. I'm afraid that we have to move forward.

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

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I will repeat my question from earlier, to which I did not get an answer.

Should the Canada Border Services Agency be put under third-party management, under supervision, in order for things to be cleaned up and what's wrong to be fixed?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: That's a very good question. I have an opinion, but I'm not sure I'm in a position to answer yes or no to your question. There are definitely some very serious issues that need to be addressed.

Despite the testimony of the president and other people from the agency, from my viewpoint with some hindsight, I don't see how the issues are progressing toward a resolution. I don't understand the targets, the steps or the ways in which the CBSA is addressing these issues. So it is not up to me to answer yes or no to your question.

That's a very good question, though. I think it should be put to someone who has more experience in this area than I do.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: If I understand correctly, the only thing that prompted this questioning was Botler's artificial intelligence and the so-called pilot project. There seems to be some confusion about each player's role. I'm a bit gullible. I can understand certain things.

I get the impression that, currently, based on a defence strategy that may be reasonable, an attempt is being made to create reasonable doubt regarding Botler's complaint.

Is that the case?

[*English*]

The Chair: Answer very, very briefly, gentlemen.

Mr. Antonio Utano: We doubt, with respect to what the CBSA told them, the terms and conditions that they put on the table to participate in the investigation and share the report.

The other thing that's concerning, Madame, is that we have been asking for disclosure of these original allegations and we still have yet to receive them. We believe there are others in that letter that we have not yet become aware of.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have to move on.

Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to return to the somewhat astounding statement that Mr. Doan had suffered a “fake heart attack”. I don't think any of us would want such statements being made about our personal health in such a public forum.

I'm just wondering this, Mr. MacDonald: Do you have any medical expertise that would allow you to make that statement before committee?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Perhaps I said something I shouldn't have, although what I do have is a Reddit article from a public servant who was with Mr. Doan a week before his testimony. They said that he was drunk on his butt, telling jokes and talking about ArriveCAN vulnerabilities. If somebody was that close to a heart attack—I do have a little bit of medical knowledge—I don't think that he should probably have been drinking to the point of being drunk on his butt.

I made the statement. If it's disrespectful, I take it back, and I apologize, in full and without reservation, to Mr. Doan for making it.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I don't think there's any dispute, Mr. Chair, that it is disrespectful. The question was whether it is a fact.

You seem to have taken great umbrage, Mr. MacDonald, at other people making statements that are not factual when they involve you. However, you've made a statement concerning Mr. Doan that I don't believe is supported by fact. What are we to make of this? Is this appropriate, given the context of this fact-finding exercise that we're participating in right now?

• (1330)

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Frankly, I just apologized, and I removed or tried to rescind my comment. I unreservedly apologize for making it. I can't do anything more than that.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's fair enough.

Mr. Chair, do I have a few more seconds here for another question?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay.

I'm going to go back to the CBSA investigation and your reluctance to participate in it without the CBSA disclosing information prior to your participation. Do you know if it's CBSA policy to disclose information to interviewees prior to their interviews?

Mr. Antonio Utano: Maybe I can answer that.

We had not refused to participate. In fact, it was the absolute reverse. Second, the investigator was aware we were on medical leave when it was originally asked.

Third, what is against policy is not maintaining continuity of evidence and articulating that and sharing that information.

Fourth, I think disclosure is part of fairness and transparency, and that is part of the policy under the Treasury Board Secretariat.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is your time.

We're going to Mrs. Block and then Mr. Jowhari.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to circle back to what actually brought us to today's meeting and go back to the fact that the subject of our study is ArriveCAN, notwithstanding your desire or your wish that Canadians would understand the challenges and the great work that was done on ArriveCAN.

I think that what is incredibly egregious to Canadians is the awarding of a contract to a two-person firm working out of their

basement that had no IT experience and did no IT work. In fact, both the Auditor General and the procurement ombudsman raised serious concerns about this contract to GC Strategies. The procurement ombudsman stated that the requirements for that third contract were overly restrictive, such that only GC Strategies could win the contract, and the Auditor General in fact revealed that they were at the table when the requirements were being created.

I know that in your testimony you've said that you're a technical authority and not contracting authorities, and that what you do is sign for scope. I need to understand that, because while you stated on November 7 that you were never in a position to put contracts in place and make contracting decisions, you did sign off on funding and the scope.

My question to you is this: While you didn't have the ability to execute, did you have the ability to influence the scope and the request for proposals, in that you were defining what was needed? Was either of you involved in the discussions for the development of the requirements for this final contract with GC Strategies?

Mr. Antonio Utano: Maybe I'll take that one, because Mr. MacDonald was gone by that time.

What I can confirm is that I was not involved in the development of that RFP, the request for proposal. I was not involved in the requirements. There was a separate team of people who were involved in developing that. I haven't....

I'm sorry?

Mrs. Kelly Block: That answered my question. You were not involved.

I have another follow-up question. Where was the CFO in all of this? Again, in your testimony on November 7, Mr. MacDonald, you stated that the CFO is the contracting authority and is "responsible for expediting contracts". When all of this was taking place, where was the CFO?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: Initially, the CFO was at the table. What we were not discussing was dollars and cents at every meeting, but every week we would be in front of deputies, in front of PHAC, and showing them screens about what was to be delivered. Most VPs were at the table with us.

When we needed funding to be able to put something in place, the CFO's organization would be the one to approve it and endorse it. Then it would be the CFO's procurement organization under, at the time, a place called "comptrollership", that would do the reviews of all of the contracting and see what was going on.

At the EC table, which is the president and the VPs, there are, at a minimum, quarterly reviews of expenditures, forecasts and everything that's going on. It would be more appropriate to ask the CFO—and his team, frankly, since he has a large team that supports him—what was going on and where they were.

Certainly they were aware that we were putting contracts in place. He was the one who sent the NSC over to PSPC. Certainly, as we were expending funds, we continued the financial cycle. I reported when I left. I knew it was \$6.3 million, because I was tracking all my expenditures. Those were all going to the CFO's organization to be rolled up in aggregate as part of the agency's overall financial position.

• (1335)

Mr. Antonio Utano: Can I add something to that?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Sure.

Mr. Antonio Utano: I don't want to leave the committee with the sense that there were no discussions or governance; there were. The reason we were working 12- to 16-hour days was that there were ongoing meetings throughout every day, three, four or five times a week, usually three to four times a day—everything from low-level technical meetings to working with PHAC and their seniors and our seniors. There was so much going on, and it was a busy time. I just want to make it clear: Everybody was aware of what was happening. Decisions were being made at the most senior levels, and they were aware of the costs.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I understand that, and yet the Auditor General found that there was glaring mismanagement, a waste of taxpayers' dollars, and not enough evidence to be able to determine the cost of ArriveCAN.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Mr. Jowhari, please go ahead, sir.

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

Mr. MacDonald, am I right in understanding that in one of your responses you talked about the Prime Minister in his response in an interview implicating you and Mr. Utano, and passing a judgment in an ongoing investigation? Did I understand that correctly?

Mr. Antonio Utano: We can go back to the opening comments, but with the Prime Minister opining in on this, it felt like it was, yes, directed at us.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay.

Let me read what I have been able to secure in the last hour. I quote: "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Tuesday it's "obvious" contracting rules weren't followed during the development of the controversial ArriveCan app." The Prime Minister called the application controversial and said the rules were not followed. That is something directly out of the AG's report, and in no way does it implicate you or Mr. Utano.

"Trudeau said that while the app was developed at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, such projects still need to follow rules even in difficult times." This is exactly following what the AG re-

port also highlighted and in no way implicates you or Mr. MacDonald.

The article continued, "He said investigations are ongoing and there will be consequences in cases of public servants failing to abide by the rules."

He did not specifically talk about any investigation. We all know and are aware of one that has to do with the CBSA, and the other one we have heard about is from the RCMP. He is saying any public servant failing to abide by that rule will be punished. Nowhere does it mention you.

What led you to believe that any of those three statements, which are basically available on media, implicates you or Mr. MacDonald in any way?

Mr. Antonio Utano: The PSFs were shared with OAG. The PSFs were based on allegations unfounded, untested, without context, and even saying no evidence.

What's leading me to say that is the—

Mr. Majid Jowhari: The Prime Minister never referred to any of those. Why would you feel that it was done?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: The reason, sir, is that if you watch the video, you see that the question was based upon two public servants being suspended. I'm not aware of any other public servants being targeted by the CBSA. I'm not aware of the CBSA or the OAG, or any other member of PSPC....

Actually, I think PSPC answered at the public accounts committee this week that nobody has gotten into any trouble for anything that's happened. I don't think it's a stretch to think that the Prime Minister was referring to us when the question and the genesis of it came down to the fact that there were two public servants who had been suspended from their job.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: First of all, the Prime Minister never referred to two public servants; you talked about public servants, and there are many public servants. I think that is a little bit of a stretch.

Let's go back to the evaluation.

Thank you very much for tracking the cost for the year that you were there. At least we have a base to start with. The Auditor General also said that this application could have cost us as much as about \$60 million. We also heard that the processing of paper applications or paper processing would have cost around \$3. At 40 million transactions at \$3 apiece, it's about \$120 million.

If it's a \$60-million application, that's \$180 million just in cost avoidance, not valuation. Even if this application was topped at \$60 million, we'd avoid potentially twice or three times the cost that the government would have incurred. If you look at it from a cost avoidance point of view, there was some value.

However, I'll ask you a question as a technical person. If there was an e-commerce application that had 18 million users and had anywhere from 40 to 60 million transactions within two years and helped facilitate transaction of goods in the billions of dollars, if we wanted to raise funds for that application and market it, what would it be valued at?

• (1340)

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please.

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: It sounds like the member is actually questioning the OAG's report more than we are.

Frankly, we were looking forward to a section in the OAG's report about cost avoidance, if not cost savings, with respect to paper. It wasn't there. I don't question the OAG or her decisions; I just respect the fact that there was a cost to paper, and the app removed that. I agree with the member.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: How much would it cost? Would it be valued at \$100 million, \$200 million, \$300 million...?

The Chair: We're past our time, Mr. Jowhari.

Do you have a two-second answer?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I'm not an valuation specialist. It would be worth more than \$60 million.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll now go to our final round.

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

Mr. Larry Brock: Thanks, Chair.

In her report, the Auditor General states that the CBSA's "documentation, financial records, and controls were so poor that we were unable to determine the precise cost of the ArriveCAN application."

She further stated and opined that in her multiple decades of service to this country in the role of the AG, as well as in her audit work, she has never seen worse record-keeping in her life. That was attributable to the CBSA.

Were the two of you responsible for poor record-keeping, yes or no?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: We did not have information management responsibilities, especially with respect to project management and invoices—

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

Mr. Utano, would you comment?

Mr. Antonio Utano: No, we were not responsible for overall financial—

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

We all know that Mr. Minh Doan, the vice-president, is alleged to miraculously have had four years of relevant emails disappear, either by corruption or by intentional deletion. There has been some suggestion that this represents roughly 1,700 emails.

Is that figure accurate, or is it much higher?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: The figure would be much higher. It would be in the tens of thousands.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

Do you believe, sir, that there's an effort by political officials and senior management at CBSA and other departments to destroy incriminatory and problematic documents related to ArriveCAN, yes or no?

Mr. Cameron MacDonald: I would have no knowledge of anything political, but based on the state of affairs and observations by the AG, I can only assume that there's no way public servants would behave in such a reckless manner. It's just impossible.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

Mr. Utano, what are your views?

Mr. Antonio Utano: I just want point out that there was a concerted effort to hold back information. That's what's concerning.

Whether it's through ATIPs, through access on the internal investigation or what's alleged about us, it's all being held back, and that's what's concerning.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm ceding my time to Mr. Genuis.

The Chair: You have three minutes, Mr. Genuis.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for their testimony.

All of the different things that we're hearing are very concerning. I'm particularly concerned about the problems with all of the different allegations as part of this issue. I think we need to ensure there's a proper and thorough investigation.

With that in mind, Chair, I would like to move a motion in relation to a proper investigation.

I move:

That the committee report to the House its ask that the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada investigate all the allegations of wrongdoing related to ArriveCAN, and report to the House by October 1, 2024.

Chair, this would allow for the important independent investigation we need to have from the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada to get to the bottom of some of these allegations.

This would be an investigation by an officer of Parliament that is not at risk of interference and is not subject to the internal chain of command. I hope that there would be the support of this committee for this very simple proposal to ask the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada to investigate these allegations.

Thank you.

• (1345)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I understand that the clerk has it and is sending it out to everyone right now. I will start a speaking list.

Go ahead, Mr. Jowhari.

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

Perhaps I can ask, while we wait to receive this motion—it's at least a much shorter one that we can really keep a focus on—if I am right in understanding that we are now asking a fourth independent group to launch an investigation.

The AG has completed her investigation. It seems there was a motion for us to go back and expand or launch another investigation much broader than that; I don't know where that's gone. We know that there's an internal CBSA investigation going on. Through media and through others [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] led to believe that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and who the participants are. Now we are asking for a fourth investigation to be launched.

Wouldn't it be more logical for us to wait for the outcome of the two investigations—at least the one that we know of and the other one that we've heard is going on—and get the result of them to be able to assess whether a fourth investigation is required? I don't know what the basis of such a request would be without the outcome of at least one known investigation and another one that's alleged to be going on.

Are we going to now task another group with getting to the bottom of this, which we do welcome, and then extend the number of meetings we'll have for ArriveCAN from unknown to extremely unknown, and from somewhat planned, we believe, to completely unplanned going forward? Why do we need another investigation when the outcome is not out yet from the ones that are ongoing or are believed to be ongoing?

At this point, without that, I'm not supporting this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We have Mr. Genuis, Mr. Brock and then Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

I'm sorry to see that this may not be as simple as I thought it would be.

Let me state what I think all members know: There are different officers of Parliament and different organizations with very different mandates. Obviously, we have the RCMP looking into allegations of criminal activity. I suspect we will hear from them at some point. There's the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General is acting as an auditor, with specific scope to look at a set of things related to money and value for money, processes, etc. We have the procurement ombudsman's report, which has a distinct mandate related to procurement.

The role of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, as an officer of Parliament, is to investigate wrongdoing and to investigate clearly allegations of problems in integrity in relation to people in government. We have allegations of reprisals against public servants following their committee testimony of the destruction of documents and of extortion. There are many serious allegations flying back and forth, with senior public servants accusing each other of lying to parliamentary committees. These are very distinct issues related to integrity within government. I think that the Public Sector

Integrity Commissioner has the right mandate to investigate those specific issues and, crucially, has the advantage of independence.

We oppose efforts by some to bury this matter or to limit the scope of the investigations. There was a clear agenda, I think, on the part of the government to want to have this limited to an internal investigation that ultimately they can control. When we have an officer of Parliament responsible for making investigations into public sector integrity issues, I think that is a clear and appropriate way of getting to the bottom of this situation.

Look, if we wait until other reports are complete before this process starting itself at all, then we are just continually pushing off actually getting to the truth. I think it is right and responsible for this committee to ask for the support of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner as an independent actor, as someone with credibility and as someone who will look at issues distinctly different from those in the other reports.

Again, I hope this motion will have the support of colleagues. It's a simple, straightforward motion. There's no extraneous commentary in the motion at all. I think it's something that all members should be able to support to allow proper investigations to take place.

● (1350)

The Chair: Now we have Mr. Brock, followed by Ms. Vignola. Then we'll go back to Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Further to my colleague's comments—and I agree absolutely with his content—I'm rather disappointed in Mr. Jowhari for conflating a number of investigations when we're trying to establish some independence with respect to those investigations.

We've heard about the internal investigation launched by the CBSA. We've heard evidence directly from the investigator that he is in no way truly independent. We've heard commentary from Mr. Utano and Mr. MacDonald that they have rephrased the PSF to a “preliminary statement of falsehood” and not facts.

All committee members should remember my opening line of questions to Mr. Lafleur. I challenged him on the basis that he is establishing conclusions on a preliminary basis. Perhaps he should have rebranded the report as allegations and not facts. There's a big difference between a proven fact and an allegation. He's clearly established that he reports to his supervisor, who ultimately reports to the deputy minister, so there's absolutely no independence.

What's more troubling is that the former clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, with his decades of public service experience, said that he has never in his lifetime ever heard of mistreatment like that given to these two public servants, who were on a medical leave for some real, legitimate issues related to threats and stress. We heard from Mr. MacDonald back in November about how he was threatened by complete strangers and was essentially ostracized by Justin Trudeau's government and its officials, which is appalling on many levels.

We need to have someone who is truly independent report to the House, taking a look at all the circumstances as to why the government and the senior officials at the CBSA have centred out these two individuals to suspend them without pay while on medical leave. According to Michael Wernick, there's no precedent for that type of administrative manoeuvre. With the evidence that we have heard at this committee, it's abundantly clear that they are being scapegoated, that there are a number of people—senior members of the CBSA, and now with potential ties to ministers.... We heard earlier this week that all the DMs were reporting to their minister throughout the implementation of the ArriveCAN app and also to the Clerk of the Privy Council, which is the ministry of the Prime Minister. Indeed, there is political interference and manipulation in this process that needs to be fully vetted.

If my colleague Mr. Jowhari truly lived up to the mantra that Justin Trudeau pronounced during the 2015 election—that this would be an open government, a transparent government and an accountable government—and truly believed in those values, he would seek a completely independent investigation.

I will definitely be supporting this motion.

Thank you.

• (1355)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brock.

Ms. Vignola is next.

[*Translation*]

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

I understand my colleague Mr. Jowhari's questions about the number of investigations that are currently under way.

That said, this investigation, however, is not about the ArriveCAN app. Its goal is to find out whether reprisals were taken against public servants in the course of their work, following their appearance before this committee. If so, we want to know what reprisals were taken.

That's pretty reasonable. It's normal. We have just passed a piece of legislation that protects whistle-blowers, so we need to walk the talk. If you are dealing with whistle-blowers, you have to protect them.

In my humble opinion, this investigation is very necessary to ensure that the people who need to be protected are protected and that they do not get threatened in any way, shape or form, like Mr. Sabourin did.

He did ask for help in a number of places, including from his member of Parliament. The only people who responded were Jean-Denis Garon and Julie Vignola.

So I invite you to think about that to avoid being on the wrong side of history.

We want to get to the truth and get a full picture of that truth.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

Go ahead, Mr. Jowhari.

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

Had we had the preamble and reasoning for launching another investigation, explaining how the scope of this investigation varies from the others and how it complements them, and had it come without the typical soapbox-style blaming of the government around transparency and all of those partisan things, it would have been a much better start. Once again, had we had this motion prepared and sent to us, and had we had an opportunity to be able to talk about it a little bit better....

Given that the scope of this investigation now seems clearly different, worthy and complementary to the others, I'd like to say that we fully support the idea of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner investigating this matter. Probably it would be a good idea for the committee, through the chair, to send a letter to the PSIC asking whether they're investigating, and if they are, if there is a timeline on that.

I will not dignify the comments that my other colleague Mr. Brock has made about our government not being transparent or accountable, dating back to the platform in 2015 when the Prime Minister talked about an open government. What Mr. Brock forgot is that we also said that we will hold a high level of integrity. This is where we are trying to find that balance between integrity and openness, etc. I strongly suggest that we come off the soapbox, start focusing on getting to the bottom of this and stop the rhetoric.

Thank you, sir.

• (1400)

The Chair: Thanks.

We have Mr. Kusmierczyk, Mr. Sousa and then Mr. Genuis.

Keep in mind our resources.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Yes, I will make this very quick.

I too support the motion to ask the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner if they are conducting an investigation. If they are already doing so, then I support their getting involved for some of the reasons that were already spelled out. There absolutely seems to be a conflict, with counter-accusations being made between public sector employees. This almost feels like a street fight between public servants.

We also heard testimony from one of them that they felt that they didn't receive some of the protections that they believe they required for sharing their information and testimony. I do feel that it is right to bring an investigation by the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner into this discussion.

I do, however, agree with what my colleague said on two things. One is that I think there is a preliminary step to ask whether an investigation is already being conducted. The reason I want to ask that is that we have to be careful. Those are independent bodies. They are independent actors, the commissioners. They're independent of any political pressure. I want to make sure that we're careful of that and not be seen as influencing them in any way. I think it would be proper to ask whether they are already conducting an investigation. They may have information to bring to light that's important.

The other thing I wanted to emphasize—I've been saying this for the last number of weeks—is that I'd really appreciate it if the members around the table would cool the rhetoric with the political mudslinging and basically preening for the cameras just to get clips. Let us just stick to the facts. This issue is too important. The integrity of the procurement process and confidence in our public service and our public sector are important. I would just ask my colleagues around the table to cool it with the rhetoric and the mudslinging.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mr. Sousa, Mr. Genuis and then Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Chair.

I want to reiterate that the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, even by name, is all about maintaining integrity, and certainly it's not up to public officials to direct these independent bodies to do their job. They've already identified that they have the independence to do so in order to maintain integrity. I mean, we've heard from the Auditor General, the ombudsman and the Information Commissioner, all of whom have a duty and a responsibility, and they take great pride in ensuring that they're not interfered with in regard to the work they do. Let's maintain that integrity, as we should be maintaining integrity throughout these committee hearings.

Even today's overall discussions have an impact on this very issue in maintaining integrity in the investigation by sharing information that was confidential in the first place. I want to reiterate that I think our first step is to ask the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner if in fact they may already be investigating. If that's the case, let's find out before we proceed to make a motion to direct them.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Sousa.

I go to Mr. Genuis and then Mr. Taylor.

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

Just briefly, it seems that members of the government would prefer if the official opposition took a more tender approach in the discharge of our functions. That's something we'll discuss among ourselves, and we'll report back regarding our conclusions, but unless I

misunderstood, it seems that there's agreement on the proposal I put forward, so we're ready to proceed in due course.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bachrach, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also agree that an independent investigation by the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner is well warranted, based on what the committee has heard to date. I don't believe it's necessary for the committee to first ask the commissioner if an investigation is already under way or that passing this motion would in any way compromise the independence of an investigation or interfere with an investigation that may have already begun.

An investigation by the commissioner, I believe, would be substantively different from the inquiries that have already taken place. The Auditor General focused on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the procurement around ArriveCAN; the RCMP is looking into the potential for criminality; and, of course, the CBSA's review is an internal review, and as has been established already before our committee, is not entirely independent. I think, given the severity of the allegations and the fact that there are disputes over what has taken place, having the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner conduct a full and independent investigation is certainly an appropriate step at this point.

I agree with my colleague that it seems we have a direction as a committee, and I hope that we can now move to a vote.

• (1405)

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Bachrach.

I was just going to suggest that. We do seem to have the support of the Bloc, the NDP and the Conservatives, and general agreement from the government side. Are we able to agree to move forward with this?

Mr. Sousa, do you have your hand up?

Mr. Charles Sousa: I do.

The Chair: Are you in agreement with everyone else or the only one not...? Do you intend to speak to this, Mr. Sousa? I'm sorry. I know it's tough because it's virtual.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Yes, I do. I want to provide one more opportunity to provide a written submission to the Integrity Commissioner to ask whether the matter is being investigated and is within our jurisdiction, and whether such an investigation could be undertaken without compromising the ongoing investigation by the CBSA and the RCMP. I know what we're saying. I know the concerns. We want it, but at the same time I want to make certain that we protect the ongoing investigations that are under way.

I think we should hear from the Integrity Commissioner to reaffirm that and put it in the motion. Yes, okay, let's ask because we want to see it, but let's make certain that we protect the integrity of all of these investigations. I would like to put that into the motion if it's possible, and then agree to it. I don't think it hampers the motion. All it does is reaffirm that in the opinion of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, this will not compromise the integrity of the ongoing investigations.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Sousa.

Can we move to a vote, colleagues?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I think we're almost ready to vote, and I definitely call for a recorded vote on this. I think that's important.

Mr. Sousa brings an interesting point forward, which is to actually bring the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner here to committee so that we can have a conversation about this potential investigation, if this falls within her purview, and maybe ask questions about her work and the process. I don't think that's a bad idea. I think we can do both of those things at once.

We would like a recorded vote on this, but I'd love to hear what other committee members feel about the testimony and bringing her as a witness.

The Chair: I think we'd be happy to call her as a witness. We can call the vote and then we can prioritize. We have a couple of

open days coming up, but we could certainly invite her. It would be wonderful to have her in, period, if that's the will of the committee.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Perfect. I'll take that to mean that I will find time to invite her.

Can we go to a recorded vote?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues, very much.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, thank you for that suggestion.

Mr. Utano and Mr. MacDonald, thank you for joining us again. We appreciate all your testimony.

Colleagues, thank you for your patience and allowing everyone to go over a bit. For lots of the questions asked, I think it was very important that we got proper answers.

With that, unless there's anything else, we are adjourned.

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