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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley





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• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 106 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The committee is resuming its study on the changeover of the public service health care plan from Sun Life to Canada Life. Then at the very end, as I had mentioned, we promised Ms. Vignola a couple of weeks ago that we would get to her motion. As soon as we're done, we'll attend to the production order motion that Ms. Vignola had.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, October 17, 2023, the committee is meeting on the study of the changeover of the public service health care plan from Sun Life to Canada Life. I will remind everyone as always not to have your earpieces next to the microphones as it causes feedback and potential injury to our very valued interpreters.

We have Ms. Hart and Mr. Szant with us today.

I understand you have an opening statement for us, sir. Please go ahead. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Seth Szant:** Thank you very much.

Good morning everyone.

My name is Seth Szant. I'm a pension and benefits officer and negotiator with the Public Service Alliance of Canada. I'm appearing on behalf of our national president, Chris Aylward. With me is my colleague, Sasha Hart, who is the PSAC general counsel.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak on this very important matter.

Of our 225,000 members, the majority work for the federal government, where the benefits are provided through the public service health care plan. In addition, hundreds of thousands of retirees who are former PSAC members are members of the same plan. While we negotiated the terms of the plan itself, it's the employer's obligation to administer and to provide those benefits. On July 1, 2023, Canada Life took over the administration of the plan. Since that time, to say that things have been a total mess is an understatement.

The ability of our members to contact Canada Life for routine issues, questions and reimbursement for regular services has appeared to improve. However, many problems remain. We believe that there need to be discussions on ways to make things right for

what has gone on and to fix the existing problems. Phoenix was bad enough. Our members have dealt with not getting paid properly or on time for years. Now accessing their benefits has become incredibly difficult. The employer has repeatedly fallen down on providing the basics of compensation for our members.

I would ask the committee members to consider some of the following situations. Each one is a real life situation of a PSAC member or retiree who has contacted us asking for help.

One member who suffers from a neurological disease was unable to complete positive enrolment and couldn't get in touch with Canada Life to fix the issue. As a result, they discontinued their pharmacotherapy, suffered from multiple seizures and were hospitalized. A cancer patient who requires biological therapy medication that costs \$5,000 a month had their claim seamlessly covered with Sun Life, but then it was denied by Canada Life. They ran out of medication because they couldn't reach anyone at Canada Life and they couldn't afford the out-of-pocket costs. Another member's spouse requires medication that cost \$2,300 per month. It was covered without issue previously. Canada Life then halted their coverage and months of unresponsiveness led to over \$8,000 in out-of-pocket expenses.

I would ask you to put yourself in these people's shoes and imagine the stress and difficulty. These members should have been focused on fighting their diseases, but instead they were needlessly spending time agonizing over how to get their medicines covered. For some this meant a decline in their health.

For months, members who called Canada Life had at best a fifty-fifty chance of even getting into the queue to wait on hold. The other 50% would simply hear a message saying to call back later. For months, the average wait time for those who were lucky to get through was over half an hour. The contract that the government has signed with Canada Life stipulates that over 70% of calls should be answered in 20 seconds or less.

We also saw problems with insufficiently trained agents offering incorrect or misleading information and very slow processing times for claims. Again, the contract stipulates that 95% of claims that are submitted electronically should be processed in five days, but routinely there was a five-week delay.

If Canada Life cannot adhere to the service standards in their contract, they must provide fee credits back to the Government of Canada. They were given a six-month grace period where such credits did not apply. We're still puzzled about why this was allowed to happen. Canada Life forced our members into terrible situations without even coming close to the expected service standards. These standards remain unmet as far as we know, but we haven't been provided with the figures that we need to verify this.

All that said, we're seeing two continued major problems with the administration of this plan.

The first relates to international claims. For members who are posted abroad working in Canada's embassies, consulates, military bases or for anyone who is travelling, the entire system is actually currently down and has been for two weeks. This is a result of a cybersecurity incident. However, even before this complete shut-down, service for members outside of Canada has been a major issue with an enormous backlog of unprocessed claims. There are currently more than 3,500 claims that are over 60 days old waiting to be adjudicated and paid.

● (1105)

The second major problem relates to a process of prior authorization for drugs. This is a new process where people who take certain drugs—usually due to their high cost—must navigate system approvals before any coverage.... This system is failing our members and causing serious health issues for many. I'd be happy to elaborate further if there are questions.

Again, certain problems are definitely getting better, but many problems remain and there isn't an easy fix here. Fundamentally, we believe our members need to be made whole for their pain and suffering, which includes those who have suffered adverse health consequences and those who have suffered financially.

Thank you very much for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, sir.

We'll start with Mrs. Kusie, please, for six minutes.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Sazant and Ms. Hart, for being here today. It's very much appreciated.

The negotiations with Canada Life on the new health care agreement were meant to be between the unions, retirees and the Treasury Board. Do you feel your organization was properly included in these conversations and the creation of the new plans and its terms?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you very much for the question.

I'd like to differentiate between two separate processes that happened on July 1, 2023.

One process was the implementation of what was negotiated between the parties—the unions, the retirees and Treasury Board—to implement a number of changes to the plan itself. Canada Life was not party to those discussions and had nothing to do with those discussions.

The second change that happened on July 1, 2023, which is at issue here, relates to the change in insurance providers. Sun Life used to administer this plan, and on that same day, again, in a completely different process, Canada Life took over the administration of the plan. What we're hearing in terms of these problems relates to the administration of the claims and the delays in reimbursement of members' claims. On the issue of moving to Canada Life, this was not something that was negotiated. This was not something the unions were party to, nor the retirees. This was a change that was entirely under the purview of the employer.

● (1110)

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you for that.

I'm sure you're aware that this committee has been seized with the ArriveCAN study. Since both of you are here today, I thought I would take the opportunity to ask some questions relative to that study as well. We've been studying the increase in use of both sub-contractors and contractors by the government.

What would you say is the feeling of public servants relative to the consistent use of outside contractors instead of relying on internal expertise? Would you have any comments on that given your presence here today?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Again, I appreciate the question.

I think as a general principle we've seen lots of difficulties and problems when it comes to the hiring of outside contractors. I do want to caveat here that I'm certainly not an expert on contracting out or contracting in. I can speak to this particular issue, which is the contract with Canada Life or with Sun Life, which is something that has traditionally been done, where there is an outside company that administers and adjudicates benefits. I wouldn't want to get too far into the concept of contracting out or contracting in. That's definitely not something I feel that I'm able to do.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Certainly, Mr. Sazant, I appreciate that.

Being a pension and benefits officer, I would genuinely feel you have the pulse of the public servants.

It was found that resources used on outside contractors on ArriveCAN were paid almost double the amount per day that public servants were paid for the same work. Has this been an issue that the union has encountered before? Is there any instance you can think of where this has occurred?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Again, without speaking to specific examples, I will say that we believe our members provide very good value for money and do excellent work. Oftentimes.... We certainly have seen studies that bringing things back in-house often does save money, rather than cost more money. Again, these are general comments, and I'm going to keep those comments there.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Certainly.

I'll go back to the plan. Would you say that the members, in your discussions with them, have appreciated the benefit increases, or has this been overshadowed by the major changes to coverage in things like physiotherapy and prescription drugs, for example? Perhaps we'd want to go back to that for a moment, please.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** The changes in coverage were quite extensive. I think there were over 70 benefit increases that we negotiated to many different provisions. The plan hadn't been updated in any meaningful way since 2006. Some minor changes had occurred since that time, but as I'm sure everyone can imagine, changes to health care provisions.... Costs for health care have increased, and there had not been increases in the plan since 2006, so we did negotiate many increases. In the course of negotiations, there's going to be some give-and-take, of course, and we have certainly heard from members as well. However, on balance, we believe that what we negotiated provides some very strong value for our members.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Mr. Sazant.

In your opening statement, you indicated a recent breach, which is providing difficulty for Canadians posted abroad. As a former diplomat, I'm very troubled by that. With ArriveCAN, we also saw an instance of a lack of security as a result of clearances not being issued. Would you be concerned about increases to security risks due to the continued use of not only contractors but subcontractors as they relate to ArriveCAN and to this breach and the results for public servants abroad?

• (1115)

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you.

We don't actually know what the breach is at this point. I'm not privy to the information. The union is not privy to any of that information. Obviously, we would expect that these outside companies would take our members' sensitive information quite seriously. We certainly have some concerns over that. However, it has been two weeks that the entire site has now been shut down, and anyone who's travelling abroad or who lives abroad has been unable to put in a reimbursement for their claims. Our primary concern relates to that.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you for your work.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Bains.

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

Thank you to our guests from the Public Service Alliance of Canada for joining us today.

Can you just explain the plan administrator and the plan itself? You indicated that the union had negotiated a lot of the plan. What part of the plan did it negotiate? Was it the terms, the delivery of it, the benefits or all of the above? Maybe speak to the pieces that you negotiated and then to what is happening with the administration of it.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** The short answer is yes. The terms of the plan were negotiated jointly between all of the unions with members in the federal public sector, as well as the retirees' organization and the

Treasury Board. We negotiate the terms of the plan. Sun Life and Canada Life do not dictate what is covered. That is dictated by the outcome of the negotiations between those parties.

The negotiations for this plan concluded back in August 2022. This was a full 10 months before the changeover from Sun Life to Canada Life. Canada Life knew 18 months before the changeover that it had obtained the contract, so for 18 months it knew it had the contract. Ten months before the implementation of the contract, it knew the exact terms that it would be responsible for adjudicating, so there was significant lead time. When July 1, 2023, came along, there were no surprises to Canada Life at that point, yet the administration of this plan—and people's ability to call in to have their basic questions answered and their claims adjudicated—was just in complete disarray for months.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Ultimately, even given that they had such a lead time, for the delivery of the service they were still unable to.... You indicated that the wait times have gotten better. I believe I recall, maybe in the summer, that the wait times were a certain number. Where are we at now with the wait times? Is it 30 minutes on average? Is it less than a minute? Where are we with the wait times on these calls?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** On the wait times to call into Canada Life, again, there have been significant improvements there.

We're provided with some general information at the union, but we're actually not provided with all of the information that relates to the call centre metrics. As I understand at this point—

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Do you have an indication of, say, backlogs? Have they caught up? Maybe you could speak a bit about that.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Absolutely. I can provide some information on backlogs. We have significant information about backlogs that relate to the international claims. That's one issue that I can certainly speak to right now.

For any international claims, there are currently 7,000 claims that are more than 30 days old that have not been adjudicated. There are 3,500 claims that are more than 60 days old that have not been adjudicated. Certainly, if asked, I can talk about the system of prior authorization, where we have approximately 1,000 claims that have been made that are at least two weeks old—people asking for specific medications—and have not been adjudicated.

When it comes to Canada Life in a more general sense, I'm certainly happy to get back to you on the numbers of exactly what that backlog is.

• (1120)

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Yes. Could you email the committee in writing on that?

All of those service improvements you were saying...you indicated that they have been made. What are some of the main concerns you're hearing from members in general?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you very much for the question.

The issue of coverage for any international issue is a significant issue that we're hearing about. This relates to people who are out of country, whether travelling or posted abroad. This is incredibly problematic because those who are posted abroad—

**Mr. Parm Bains:** I'm going to stop you there just because of the time. This seems like that's one of your main concerns, because you've mentioned a number of times that for the international piece we're looking at somewhere over 7,000 claims. What concrete actions have been taken to mitigate this now? Have you heard anything? How is Canada Life tackling that now?

**The Chair:** You have about 30 seconds for an answer, please.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** The service is contracted by Canada Life to a company called MSH. Again, we're at arm's-length from Canada Life. We don't interact directly with them. It's the employer's obligation. They have the contract. We don't even have a copy of the contract between the employer and Canada Life. We can't intervene with Canada Life. What the employer is doing here, we're not entirely sure. I'm sure that steps have been taken, but we don't think they're sufficient.

**The Chair:** Ms. Vignola, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Sazant and Ms. Hart, thank you for being with us.

Mr. Sazant, we have received briefs and, of a more personal nature, emails from people who have been harmed by Canada Life. I'll give you two examples. The first is the case of a new dad who hasn't received benefits related to his parental leave for over two months, despite numerous calls to the insurance company that have gone nowhere. The second example is that of a woman who received a prescription from her oncologist for a very specific drug to control her cancer. Canada Life has refused to cover the treatment, despite repeated explanations from the oncologist. So it would appear that a Canada Life agent thinks they know more about cancer pharmacology than an oncologist does.

Are you able to give us any statistics on the number of people whose health, financial life and life in general have been put at risk as a result of Canada Life's practices?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you for your question, and I will answer in English.

[*English*]

We don't have specific figures to respond directly to your question about how many people's health is in danger. We have heard, I will say, from countless members who have had serious concerns about issues with their health and issues where Canada Life has been unresponsive and they've been unable to get through. We have specific concerns about how many people's health has been put in danger. I certainly couldn't put a number on it, but I would imagine that number is awfully high.

With respect to the situations that you raise, these are very common situations, unfortunately, that we hear from our members about. I wish these were one-off situations, but I think those are both very good representations of what we have been hearing from our members and the concerns we have.

One of the issues I think this may well be related to is the system of prior authorization for drugs. You mentioned someone who has issues—specifically, who has cancer—and is trying to get approval for a drug. There is a process in place for certain high-cost drugs whereby people have to get approved for that drug. This system is in place, and it is fundamentally failing our members.

There was a system that was negotiated between the parties. This was something the employer insisted upon as part of the deal in our negotiations for the provisions of the plan. We asked many questions about this. If a member is refused, how do they appeal? How long will it take for Canada Life to turn its decision around? We were told this would be quick, this would be swift and this would be painless.

Now, here we are, eight months into this contract, and we are getting figures showing there are more than a thousand people who have been waiting for more than 16 days for even an answer from Canada Life. You point to someone who's been denied, but there are many people who are just sitting there, waiting to be told whether or not they're able to get the drugs they need. They're waiting on a decision from Canada Life, and their health is at risk.

We absolutely have major concerns about the way this is going.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

With respect to the cyber-incident at MSH International, did health care plan members learn of it through the media, like I did?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Yes.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** So the company didn't reach out to help those individuals, other than to tell them to call an overwhelmed call centre. Is that correct?

[*English*]

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I want to be clear. There may have been communication to members about this. I am not aware if that has happened.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** As a member of that plan, I received nothing.

Canada Life demanded that members' and their dependents' 10-year benefit history be transferred to it, even though the dependents were now adults and were no longer covered. Is it customary for a company to require that 10 years of personal data be transferred without even notifying plan members and their dependents?

[English]

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I just want to be clear. Your question relates to keeping the data, the safety of it and how long it will be kept for.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** No, I'm talking about transferring data collected by Sun Life over the last decade to Canada Life.

[English]

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I'll be frank and say I'm not.... This is a level of detail in terms of the provision of data that's going from Sun Life to Canada Life. Obviously, security's a major issue when we're talking about any participant's data.

Again, we've not been provided with the contract. We have asked for the contract between the government and Sun Life, and between the government and Canada Life. We have been refused the provision of that contract, which will likely contain those provisions, so we're actually not aware of what those provisions are.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Doesn't the mere fact that no one was informed of the transfer worry you?

[English]

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Absolutely. There's an awfully long list of issues that we're concerned about when it comes to the provision of our members' information and the administration of this plan.

I appreciate the question. Absolutely, we have significant concerns.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Bachrach, please, for six minutes.

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

Thank you to Ms. Hart and Mr. Sazant for being here today. Obviously, this is an issue that's very concerning. I hope the committee can get to the bottom of what went wrong.

I'll just take it up to 10,000 feet and ask where you think things went wrong. Obviously, you don't have all of the information. You said you don't have the contract and you weren't privy to the process by which it was negotiated, but something has clearly gone sideways here. Either the government failed to negotiate a contract with Canada Life that is in the interest of your members, or Canada Life has failed to uphold the terms of the contract and has left your members high and dry.

Which of those do you think is the case?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I don't know that it's necessarily an either-or question. I think there are going to be some issues on both sides. I'm concerned that, as I've mentioned, there is a six-month grace period in the contract when there are very few safeguards. I think that people are probably surprised at the level of how poorly they performed according to the call centre metrics and the other provisions they're supposed to be following.

Without getting too speculative, I think there are definitely significant shortcomings that happened on the part of Canada Life. I think, relative to the contract the employer signed with Canada Life, there's some bearing there of why we're in this mess.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Staying at that 10,000-foot level, what does accountability look like, and who should be responsible for ensuring that your members are made whole?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** We would say that accountability lies primarily with the government, as they negotiated this contract. We would expect, for example, that they would enforce the service level standards that are contained in that contract. In terms of making our members whole, that's a priority for PSAC.

Recently PSAC filed a policy grievance against Treasury Board arguing that, in terms of the poor transition of the plan's administration, it failed to protect the rights of members to a functioning health care plan as well as caused adverse impacts on members with disabilities and other intersecting identities.

As part of that grievance, we are asking for general damages for the pain, suffering and stress that this transition has caused. We are asking for financial compensation for those who have incurred financial losses as a result of the poor transition as well as a declaration that the way this has been managed has indeed breached the collective agreement as well.

● (1130)

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Reading through some of these examples, these stories, it seems like these are difficult situations to account for financially, because these people's lives have been profoundly affected. That would certainly be a start, recognizing the depth of the impact imposed on these folks.

You mentioned the issue of prior authorizations. Can you describe how well that was working under Sun Life, under the previous contract? Is this a long-standing problem that has been a problem for people for a long time, or is this really something that has cropped up with the new contract with Canada Life?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** This is new, because this was a new provision to the plan itself. This was something the employer very much wanted to introduce to the plan. During negotiations, this was something that we felt we did not have much of a choice about in terms of ultimately settling with some form of prior authorization in place.

Our concerns during that process related to members appealing and concerns about members with very fragile health conditions who would need approvals or, at very least, a decision to then examine other options within a reasonable time frame.

We're absolutely stunned that it appears as though the system is just not working at this point. There are no answers. Again, this is a totally new system. We were assured that this would work seamlessly, that people would get their answers quickly and that we would have the chance to appeal. Clearly, that hasn't been the case.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** You mentioned MSH International, the subcontractor responsible for the coverage for members working abroad, and the issue of the cybersecurity breach.

Whose responsibility is maintaining the cybersecurity of the claims system?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** That's an excellent question.

The company, MSH, is the one that is feared to have been breached. Whether Canada Life is ultimately accountable for the breach itself is a question I don't know the answer to. Ultimately, Canada Life is the one responsible and accountable for the administration of the benefits generally, whether it's subcontracted or not.

To directly answer your question, I'm not sure who ultimately will be accountable within their own contract.

**The Chair:** That's perfect timing.

Mrs. Block, go ahead, please.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

It's been some time since we held our first meeting on this issue, but I'm happy to return to it and ask some questions of you.

We learned at the very first meeting that it is not the industry standard to conduct manual enrolment when transitioning plans, but that this was actually a requirement put in place by the federal government. The purpose was to use the transition to refresh data and use Canada Life to remove those who should no longer be eligible for benefits.

Were you aware of that requirement that was put on this transition by the federal government?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you very much for the question.

I think there had been some discussion about positive enrolment to ensure that those who are in the plan are correctly in the plan. In a general sense, I will say that, as the union, we don't object to that. We think that's fair.

That being said, clearly the process that was used was absolutely atrocious. Loading in all of these things at the same time led to a huge bottleneck. I think we also saw significant problems where a number of our members and retirees all had a lot of difficulty navigating this process.

While there was awareness, this isn't something that we asked for. Obviously, this created significant problems along the way.

• (1135)

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Thank you.

You also spoke about a six-month grace period where there were very few safeguards. Really quickly, what would you have expected to see during that six-month grace period?

I know you provided examples of individuals who discontinued their medications because they couldn't get through to Canada Life on the phone. In a short answer, what kinds of safeguards would you have wanted to see?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Absolutely.

I'm referring to the service standards that exist in the contract around how quickly they must respond to calls and how quickly the administrator must reimburse the benefits, and the fact that there was essentially that six-month grace period before any of those standards were enforced.

Certainly it would be our position that this is just unacceptable. It seems like maximum advantage was taken of the fact that there were no safeguards there. We would certainly question the wisdom of providing essentially completely open-ended service standards in those first six months.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** I appreciate that.

I know a number of my colleagues have raised the issue of the breach, whether there was one or more. I want to follow up on those questions because I think breaches of information, security and data are very concerning.

Had you or your members been notified about the possible data breaches after the changeover was made to Canada Life?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you very much.

I just want to be clear. The recent breach dates back about two weeks ago and is specific to MSH, which is the international provider under the plan. As representatives, we have been notified that there was a breach. I'm not aware that general notification has gone to members about the breach. We're not aware any more than other people in terms of... What we've read in the media is really the extent of our knowledge of what's happening with the breach right now.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Is this not deeply concerning to you, as representatives of the public service and members in this plan, that you have not been given any details about the breach and you've only had to read about this in the news?

It raises very serious concerns for some of us at the committee—I'm going to speak to what we've recently been dealing with—given that the Auditor General and procurement ombudsman both reported that security requirements for contractors and subcontractors were not met and sometimes were reduced, as identified in the procurement process for ArriveCAN. This could be being replicated in other departments.

I hear what you're saying. If this led to data breaches in the process of smaller groups of Canadians, though it's still a significant size, it does raise serious concerns about the safety of the data collected. That's not only through ArriveCAN particularly because of the sensitive nature of the information, but given your members and any kind of data that may have been breached and the fact that you've not been told exactly what's happened.



Would you agree with that?

**The Chair:** Give a quick yes or no, please.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Absolutely, we have concerns.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

Mr. Jowhari, go ahead, please.

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

Welcome to both of you.

Mr. Sazant, you opened your remarks by talking about the impacts this transfer has had on PSAC members. You shared some of those in detail. I want to acknowledge the fact that this was not an easy period. Our side is very much committed—as I'm sure every member of this committee and the House is—to ensuring those issues are addressed very quickly. We acknowledge there were challenges and some of these challenges had potential life-changing implications. It needs to be mentioned, acknowledged and communicated through you, the counsel, back to the members that we acknowledge that, we hear that and we are here to work collaboratively to ensure that it goes....

It was also good that Ms. Hart talked about how the process for making the members whole is going. You highlighted the number of factors you're working on around general damages, financial compensation and reviewing the declaration.

Mr. Sazant, you mentioned the fact that this plan had not been updated since 2006. In your opening remarks, you talked about how close to 70 new benefits and updates were given.

Can you give me a sense, in general, of how many benefits PSAC members are receiving? Is it 100, 500 or 1,000? Where does this 70 line up? Is it 10% of the benefits? How significant are those benefits?

• (1140)

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you for the question.

I think these things are tough to quantify. When I referred to the benefit improvements, it was.... For example, we talk about the different paramedical maximum for psychological services. The maximum that somebody can be reimbursed for psychological services has increased. That would be one of the increases I'm counting.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** What was the number it went to?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** There was a substantial increase for psychological services: from \$3,000 to \$5,000.

In terms of benefits, it's tough to quantify. There are a lot of benefits in there that relate to drugs or different medical supplies people may need. We wouldn't really go through and count them.

At the end of the day, there was a negotiation process that happened. There was an update to quite a number of benefits that have a maximum eligible amount. Having not been updated for 15 years, you can imagine that same dollar amount is worth significantly less 15 years later. That was part of the process.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** As an advocate for mental health, I want to thank you for doing that negotiation. That is one of the areas I looked at, because—just for transparency—I wanted to avail myself of it. I realized that it has substantially increased. Thank you for that.

I would like to understand what the impact of these 70 new benefits is from a process point of view. Naturally, whether it's Sun Life or Canada Life, there are new benefits coming in. What's the impact on the process? Is it a new process that has to be defined or an existing process? Does claim processing have to be put in place? How significant is this?

If we had Sun Life, would it be as easy, or would it still have had a huge impact?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you very much for the question.

The vast majority of those benefit increases were of the variety I just spoke about. It's a simple change in the maximum eligible amount. As I mentioned, for psychological services and many of the other benefits, it was simply an increase to how much members are able to take out.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I only have 30 seconds left.

I want to go back to that. Basically, what I'm hearing you say is, "We just increased the amount." For example, was cognitive therapy covered under the plan? Was it only psychotherapy? Was it psychology or any of those?

I believe there is also an expansion of the types of services, especially as they relate to mental health. That also expanded, whereas before it was not there.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** That's correct. There was some complexity, but my point was simply that most of the benefits were a matter of just a number change.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

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

The agreement between Canada Life and the Government of Canada didn't require that all members be enrolled in the public service health care plan as of July 1; only 85% had to be enrolled. The agreement didn't require any oversight by the Treasury Board Secretariat until January 1, 2024, or any acceptance testing for users or the contractor in terms of communications and information services to plan members.

Do you believe that Canada made the wrong decision when it didn't require testing or ensure that all members were enrolled in the plan as of July 1?

• (1145)

[English]

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I'm sorry, but I'm struggling to understand the question with respect to trials before 2023. I apologize. I was listening to the translation. I'm still not sure that I understand the premise of the question.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** There was no test bed, no acceptance testing was done with the contractor or users to make sure everything was working. Did Canada make a mistake when it decided not to have a test bed and not to require that all members be covered immediately?

[English]

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I want to ensure that I'm correctly understanding. You're talking about, with the conversion, moving from one contractor to the other to make sure that everything was smooth and in place.

The public service health care plan has an administration authority that is responsible for oversight of this contract. They worked very diligently for 18 months before the move from Sun Life to Canada Life. They spent 18 months working to ensure that things would go smoothly. Now, obviously, that was not the case, but there was substantial work that was done beforehand. I want to be clear that this was not just a "let's flip the switch and see what happens". There was significant work that did go on behind the scenes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

Ms. Hart, you heard my questions and you know the issues. As a lawyer, what action do you recommend union members should be taking, and will they do so?

[English]

**The Chair:** Give a brief answer, please.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** In terms of our recommendations to members, we are in the process of making sure that our members have all the information they need to be able to assess whether their situation would be best dealt with through the PSHCP appeal process or whether their situation would be appropriate for the grievance process.

We are prepared, certainly, to assist our members to file individual grievances to address some of the issues that they've experienced and to get compensation through that venue, as well as through the broader systemic policy grievance that we are filing in each affected bargaining unit.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I have to cut you off there. Thanks very much.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead, please.

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

I'm coming into this study partway through, so there is some testimony that I'm less familiar with.

Assumedly, PSAC has talked to the government about these challenges. I'm wondering if you can characterize the government's

response, whether it's been adequate, whether you're familiar with some of the testimony that the committee has already heard and what we should make of that.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** We were certainly paying close attention during the testimony at the last meeting of this committee.

We hear concern, absolutely, from the employer's officials, but we're concerned less about what they say and more about what they do. Again, we do see some improvements happening, but we think there is still an awfully long way to go here.

We certainly will need to see our members be made whole at the end of this process—those who have suffered health consequences or financial consequences. This isn't theoretical. We're still in the process of... I was speaking with a member very recently who's carrying more than \$8,000 on their credit card because they don't have any way to be reimbursed.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** We haven't seen the full terms of the contract, but I think we can assume that the six-month grace period makes it difficult to secure accountability from Canada Life to force Canada Life to make those members whole for the problems that occurred during that period.

Do you believe that it's then the government's responsibility to make your members whole for things that they suffered during that six-month grace period?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Yes, it's responsible for that portion and beyond. We believe that ultimately it's the employer that's accountable to provide the benefits they have promised to our members.

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

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

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

I'm going to address my questions to Ms. Hart, general counsel for the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Thank you for being here.

We have seen, in the course of the last eight years with this government, significant growth simultaneously in the public service and in spending on outsourcing. You would expect that these things would be, in some sense, inversely proportional. If you had more capacity in the public service, you would have less outsourcing, or, if you had a declining public service, you might see more instances of outsourcing. Strangely, we're seeing growth on both those levels. We're expanding the public service, and we're sending more work outside of government.

This committee, as you know, has been doing work on the arrive scam scandal, which seems to demonstrate that, not only are we outsourcing, but we're outsourcing the process of outsourcing. In the case of GC Strategies, they were not hired to do work; we outsourced the process of doing the outsourcing. This is particularly bizarre to me. It seems that the public service, if they don't have the capacity to do certain work internally, should at least have the capacity to directly identify the people who can do the work and do that outsourcing work directly rather than having multiple layers of outsourcing in between.

I want to ask if PSAC has made representations to senior levels of the public service or to ministers directly about these issues of outsourcing. What kinds of conversations have you had with ministers about this, and what kind of feedback have you gotten?

• (1150)

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I think this might be one of the issues where, in order to provide a more fulsome response, we may want to submit a brief to the committee afterwards.

I can say, as my colleague mentioned previously, the issue of outsourcing is of huge concern to PSAC. It is an issue that is raised at the bargaining table. It is an issue that is constantly raised at political levels. We would definitely agree with what you've said, and we share those concerns, absolutely. We will continue, through the avenues that I've mentioned, to try to address the problem of over-outsourcing. As my colleague said, we do think that it's more efficient to use the members we have.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you.

I think this committee is very interested in PSAC's perspective on this issue so, if you have additional thoughts, you can provide them to the committee in writing.

There are different aspects of the arrive scam work we've been doing. There are the particulars of the scandal, of course, with missing records and rigged processes, but there's also the question of how this government is allowing so much money to be spent outside as well as inside government.

I want to ask you about another aspect of that, which is the concern about reprisals against public servants, following testimony at this committee. We had an instance where two senior public servants appeared before this committee and, in response to questions, gave testimony that was critical of the people they reported to. They were told immediately after that they were under investigation. They were subsequently suspended without pay in the middle of an investigation. How rare is it that this would happen? What are your reflections on this suspicious timeline, this suspicious train of events?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** PSAC is concerned about any incident of reprisal and retaliation. This is why we see things like adequate whistle-blower protection legislation, which we have been advocating for for years upon years, as being absolutely critical.

In terms of the specific situation you've referred to, I don't know that we have details on those individuals, so I'm not able to speak to that, unfortunately.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** That's okay. Perhaps I can ask you on a general level.

I'm getting the impression from what you said that you think whistle-blower protections are not adequate right now. Can you comment, on a policy level, on whistle-blower protection? In a hypothetical case in which somebody may have seen something on a scandal issue that they want to share as frank evidence with a parliamentary committee.... They have an obligation, frankly, to respond truthfully to questions that are asked.

Do you think the protections are adequate for public servants to be able to do that or not?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** We would say that they definitely need to be improved and enhanced. We have made submissions in various forums before on this issue, and we would be happy to collect and gather that for the committee if that would be useful.

I'll turn to my colleague as he may have something to add on this issue as well.

• (1155)

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I simply want to add that we have brought whistle-blowing to the bargaining table for multiple rounds now. We've tried to get better language into our collective agreements, because we have heard fears from our members about reprisals in whistle-blowing. Every time we have been uncategorically rebuffed at the bargaining table.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** That's interesting.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you to our witnesses. I appreciate your testimony. This is very important.

If you want to follow up in writing on the whistle-blower protection as well, that's fine. I'm very concerned about it. It directly impacts our work as a committee.

**The Chair:** I'll now turn it over to Mr. Kusmierczyk.

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

Thank you very much for being here with us today and shedding some light on this concerning issue. Again, to see the challenges that our public sector workers and retirees have faced during the transition is reprehensible, but we're happy to see that there is some progress being made here to iron out those challenges.

You mentioned this was the most significant update that we've seen in the PSHCP since 2006, with over 70 changes that had been hard-fought and won. I wanted to ask you about one in particular. In the communications that I've read and heard, it was depicted as a significant victory for the LGBTQS community. Some of the changes that were introduced were specifically around coverage for gender-affirming care.

Are you able to speak about those changes that were introduced, and why it was so important for your membership?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Absolutely. Thank you for the question.

Yes, a new benefit was introduced for a lifetime benefit related to gender affirmation procedures. We're certainly proud to have been victorious in bringing in a new benefit for our transgender members. This benefit covers processes and procedures that may not be covered by the public plans. This is something that has been growing recently in private insurance plans, such as the public service health care plan, to provide for gender-affirming procedures and to provide coverage for those procedures.

As the landscape expands, this is something that we're seeing more and more often, and we're very happy to be victorious on introducing this benefit.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Coverage is expanding for gender-affirming care—life-saving care, many would argue.

Is there a concern among the membership about the conversations that we're hearing from the Conservative Leader of the Opposition and the Premier of Alberta that there are limitations that are going to be placed on gender-affirming care, which is often described as life-saving?

Have you heard membership concerns on that issue?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Absolutely. As a union we represent all of our members, and we take great pride in introducing new measures that provide significant benefits for our transgender members and our LGBTQ members. Any time that we believe there are discussions out there that may be negatively impacting some of our equity-seeking groups, this is absolutely a serious concern for us.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Is it one step forward in terms of coverage here federally, and then one step backwards in terms of access in a province like Alberta?

Is that a fair depiction?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Again, I'm not an expert in terms of exactly what's happening in Alberta.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Gotcha.

I want to ask you about another change: the reimbursement of pharmacy dispensing fees capped at eight dollars per fee.

Can you speak a bit about that and how we arrived at that specific number?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you for the question.

Again, the pharmacy dispensing fees used to be unlimited. This was something that was changed in the negotiations. This was something that was, again, insisted upon by the employer. It was an employer proposal to decrease the pharmacy dispensing fees.

In the overall context of negotiations, again, our goal was always to improve the benefits as much as possible. However, as with any negotiation, there was going to be some give-and-take. This was something the employer brought forward and pushed very hard for. Ultimately, it's part of the final deal.

• (1200)

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I want to ask you about digitization. There's a significant difference in claim resolution times between paper and digital submissions.

Can you talk about how the membership feels about digital submissions? Have you heard feedback? Has there been an increase in the digitization of services and whatnot through Canada Life?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you for the question. I think there are a few aspects to this.

The plan covers active members or employees. It also covers retirees, some of whom will have different levels of comfort with digital methods. I think this is also underpinned by a number of failures in terms of people being able to adequately submit electronically. There have been all sorts of problems with people being able to make their submissions.

Our primary concern is ensuring that our members get their benefits provided and that they're reimbursed in a timely way by whatever means is going to be most convenient for them.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** How much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have minus 30 seconds.

I have Mrs. Kusie next.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Further to my colleague's question about whistle-blowing, would you please share the response from your membership relative to the legislation at the Senate currently, Bill C-290?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I want to make sure I understand your question.

How do our members feel about that legislation?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes, what is their reaction to the contents of the bill? Do they feel it goes far enough or not far enough? Are there changes they would be interested in making?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I think this is a critical and important question, and I know it's one that PSAC is highly engaged in. We have submissions that we have prepared in the past on this. Because I don't have those with me, I wouldn't want to speak out of turn and be inaccurate in terms of what positions we've taken on that, precisely.

If it would be acceptable to the chair and the honourable member, I would love to be able to provide those submissions to the committee.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Sure. That sounds good. It's further to the documentation you're providing for my colleague Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Yes.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Are you receiving regular updates from Treasury Board as to the administration and changes relative to the plan itself? How are those communicated, please?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you very much for the question.

We receive biweekly reports on certain call centre and administration metrics. We are continually engaged in meeting with them to ask further questions and to clarify and refine some of that data with respect to how things are moving there.

Yes, we are made aware, but we believe that, as new problems crop up, there are continually new questions we need to have answered.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** How was communication set up between Canada Life and members to ensure the transition would be as smooth as possible?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Communications were discussed quite substantially. There are committees that discuss the aspects of communications we believe need to be sent out to members. Again, it is an obligation of the employer to ensure members are made aware. This was a decision made unilaterally by the employer—by Treasury Board—to change from one insurance provider to the other.

Regarding the communications that needed to go out, those decisions were made by the employer.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** It's very concerning to me that this decision was made unilaterally.

Were members made aware of when they would require additional documentation to receive the same coverage for certain drug prescriptions?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** On many of the changes to the benefits, there are submissions that are required to ensure that they meet the requirements of the plan.

We have been engaged in constant conversations about different aspects of the plan where there may be different information required by Canada Life compared with Sun Life. Some of those, of course, relate to the negotiated changes in the plan, but on other provisions, we're hearing that there is documentation required by Canada Life that's different from what used to be required by Sun Life, and that's of significant concern to us.

Again, I think we're getting very deep into the weeds on some of the issues we see there. We are consistently in communication, and when we hear from our members on anything related to this, these are issues that we raise. We ensure that we do whatever we can to clear their path forward to getting those benefits.

• (1205)

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Right. It may be deep in the weeds, but I think it's a fundamental question relative to access to the reimbursement. In my experience, far more documentation is required.

Ms. Hart, in your experience as general counsel for PSAC, have you ever formally approached the Prime Minister or ministers in relation to the substantial increase we've seen of the use of outside consultants—60% in fact—in this government? Have you ever raised, on behalf of your membership, with a minister or the Prime Minister this significant increase in the use of outside consultants, as has been brought to light with ArriveCAN?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I will preface my answer by saying I have been at PSAC for six months now, so I can speak only to that short period of time.

That's certainly a point I've made here that I'm happy to provide more information on in terms of how our leadership has escalated this issue up at the political levels. I'm happy to make inquiries internally about that. However, I can say that, even in the short time I've been here, I've seen it is a major priority for PSAC, both, as my colleague said, at the bargaining table and in the other forms of advocacy that we're engaged in.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hart.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Chair, I know my time is up, because I used this incredible thing called a stopwatch. Would I be able to ask Ms. Hart to please submit that in writing?

**The Chair:** Yes.

Please do that if you can, Ms. Hart.

Mr. Sousa.

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

Thank you, both, for being here.

I appreciate the deliberations and the concerns that you've raised. These are concerns that are evident for all of us, because we certainly want to make and would like to see an easier transition between providers in providing the care necessary for employees. I appreciate your deliberations on that issue.

Do you have discussions with TBS? You get weekly reports. Is that right?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** We get biweekly reports.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** You are seeing the advancements and the considerations that are being addressed.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** There is no question that there has been improvement over recent months. I've made reference to that quite a few times.

Again, I think the starting point that we're measuring improvement from is pretty atrocious, so as we see improvements, there are still other problems and other issues that we need to see resolved.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Are you of the impression that they're not trying to improve? Is there push-back on this issue?

Is there a desire to provide something better for employees, in your mind, by all parties and stakeholders concerned?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I don't think it would be fair to characterize it by saying there is push-back to trying to improve the situation. I think all parties want to improve the situation.

Our concern remains that we're eight months into the transition to a new contract and we're still seeing major problems occurring. Also, our concern relates to ensuring that, ultimately, people are going to be made whole for health problems that have happened, and what that would even mean is a question.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I think those are shared concerns. I think all sides have the same dilemma here. We're all trying to improve upon it. That is my impression, at least from what I'm hearing and from the discussions you've been having with the other side and the employer in this case.

In that respect, when we hear about whistle-blowers and this notion, are you concerned that the government or the employer is acting to punish people for reaching out and expressing their concerns, when we're all trying to find a resolution? Is that a concern for you?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I want to be clear that, as PSAC, I was called here as a pension and benefits officer. When it comes to issues related to whistle-blowing, I'm not an expert there. That's not something I can speak to in any meaningful way.

• (1210)

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Are we not freely expressing and sharing the deficiencies, so we can find improvement? Is that not happening? Is that not explicit?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** As I've mentioned, in my role, we meet frequently with Treasury Board officials and the goal is to improve the situation.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** We're going over these issues. We're going over the issues that have shortcomings that we're trying to resolve. I don't think anyone is being held back, harmed or punished. The idea is to try to find resolution.

What is your opinion now of the pharmacare program that's being proposed?

We're fortunate. Those of us who are watching TV know that employers of government including elected officials have a health plan. There's an opportunity to support the many Canadians that don't. How do you find our pharmacare program, which is being proposed alongside the NDP?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I haven't seen the details of exactly what is being proposed there. It's difficult to comment on PSAC's position on what that pharmacare could look like.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Can you comment on the idea of why it's being proposed? Why do you believe government is looking at trying to provide similar services to all Canadians?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** On record, I think we've been general supporters of public pharmacare. Certainly we'd be very pleased to have a good look at exactly what is proposed, but in a general sense, public pharmacare is something that PSAC has supported.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** For members who are in the union and others who have this benefit plan, do you believe it should be available to others outside?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Again, we believe in public pharmacare. We believe that people should be able to access the medicines they require.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** The transitions are tough. When we talk about outsourcing, who within government would be prepared to do some of the work that you're looking at to resolve...?

**The Chair:** Give a very brief answer, please.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** It's difficult to answer this. When it comes to outsourcing, I'm not sure that this is an example of outsourcing. The administration of benefits is traditionally done by an outside company.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mr. Sousa.

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I'm going to ask my previous question again, but I'll be a little more specific: Do the unions intend to take legal action against the employer in the same way they did for Phoenix?

[*English*]

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Yes, I can confirm that.

One of the legal avenues that we've taken and that I've mentioned is the grievance mechanism. That is a mechanism we see as possibly allowing us to get around a negotiating table to resolve that grievance.

We're seeking remedies for our members in the context of that grievance, including remedies such as general damages, remedies under the Canadian Human Rights Act and things like that. We are certainly exploring other possibilities as well in terms of legal avenues.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

I'll give you an idea of the problems MSH International is causing. I just received an email from a gentleman who is abroad and has not received any news about his claims, which amount to a few thousand dollars. He needs to submit more, and he doesn't even know if the claims he submitted have already been looked at or received. That gives you an idea of all the stress it's causing.

Since I have less than a minute left, I'd like to introduce a motion that we can discuss later. It reads as follows:

The Committee requests the Auditor General of Canada (AG)

- i. To conduct an analysis of the contract between the Government of Canada and the Canada Life Insurance Company in relation to the Public Service Health Care Plan;
- ii. To compare the services offered by Sun Life of Canada with those offered by Canada Life;
- iii. To report to the Committee as soon as possible.

The motion should have been sent. If it's not yet been sent, it will be soon. Thank you.

• (1215)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Did I hear correctly that you're just reading it into the record for future debate?

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead, please, sir.

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

I note Mr. Sousa's remarks on universal pharmacare, which I very much welcome. I am delighted that we were able to drag his party kicking and screaming to the place where they're expected to table legislation in the House this week. It's going to be a tremendous win for all Canadians, and we're going to continue to push until that legislation is passed into law so that Canadians can access the kinds of benefits we're talking about today.

I have only two and a half minutes. I'm not going to accept an interruption, but I will note that all three of the stories shared with us today about members of the PSAC who have gone through really difficult circumstances involved the medications they needed to live healthy lives.

My question on that note would be this: What should the government learn from this experience with Canada Life as it moves towards, hopefully, the timely implementation of universal pharmacare in Canada? What should it learn from the problems we've experienced with this company?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Clearly the provision of benefits in this case has been a major problem. Whatever systems are in place here will obviously need to be refined, and we need a better understanding of where to go from there.

I think it's interesting that the public service health care plan is the largest private plan that exists, with over 1.5 million members plus many other dependants who are covered under the plan. Scale is obviously something that will have to be considered very closely going forward.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Could you elaborate on scale? It's scale in what sense?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** My point is that, when we're talking about the provision of benefits for large numbers of people, there are going to have to be systems in place that will respond to that. Again, I believe that, obviously, the system would be different for whatever public plan will be in place, but that's something that will have to be considered quite closely.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Ensuring that they're prepared for the enrolment process and the rollout of the services under a public plan, I think that's very well taken.

Mr. Sousa, in his previous remarks, indicated that the government is working to make things better, and you've acknowledged some improvement over recent months. However, it doesn't necessarily address the first question that you brought to us, which is how we make people whole who have been negatively affected by Canada Life's treatment of their cases and their requests.

Does that remain an outstanding piece in your mind despite the improvements that we've seen?

**The Chair:** We're past our time. Could you offer a short answer?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Yes, that absolutely does, and that's something my colleague Ms. Hart has referred to numerous times here. That is something we'll absolutely be pursuing going forward.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mrs. Block, go ahead, please.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I believe that the devil is always in the details. While we have members from two parties here patting each other on the back for something that I think could end up being another boondoggle, I will just point out that you pointed out that you were not given the contract as the representative of the public servants who are the members of this plan.

What reasons have you been given for not being provided a copy of the contract between the government and Canada Life?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** We've simply been told that we're not entitled to that information.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** That's very interesting.

We have often heard the government's excuses regarding the withholding of documents, and we share in the frustration of having important information withheld. They have refused to disclose the EV contracts, though they claim that they are amazing for Canadians. They have withheld documents across all departments in regard to our McKinsey study and are being accused of withholding information regarding our ArriveCAN study.

I'll ask you if you are at least aware of any actions the federal government has taken to date to ensure that Canada Life is at least complying with its contract?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** We're, in fact, not provided with that information either. It's something that we've requested. We will continue to request that, but since that six-month grace period expired as of the start of this calendar year, we're still not aware of whether or not they're in compliance with their contract at this point.

• (1220)

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** It's really hard to ensure that they are when you don't know what's in the contract and you're not being given any updates as to whether or not they are complying.

I'm going to turn the rest of my time over to my colleague Mrs. Kusie.

**The Chair:** You have three minutes, Mrs. Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you very much.

I talked before about the security clearances, as was brought up by the Auditor General.

In light of the two recent breaches, one including a Canada Life subcontractor, MSH, which was previously brought up by my colleague, are you concerned that subcontractors are not properly vetted?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** That's significantly outside of my area of expertise.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay.

My colleague also touched on this, but I'll continue on this.

Was your organization consulted on the decision to implement a manual enrolment process instead of the standard automatic enrolment process for public servants? This was brought up as a significant choke point in the initial meeting.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** You're testing my memory quite well here.

We had numerous discussions over the last three years or so, where there were discussions about a number of issues prior to moving benefit providers. That included the negotiations, which I believe took well over two years to conclude, from start to finish.

I'm sure there was some discussion at some point about a positive enrolment process. I won't say that we were not consulted, but I will also be very clear to say that this isn't something that sticks out very strongly in my mind.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** That's interesting because it was a major point in our first meeting.

My next question was going to be relative to the stress on your membership relative to this process and the additional strain of the transition. Would you have any further comments on that?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Again, our overriding interest here is ensuring that members are able to access their benefits in a reasonable and timely way.

We've seen over the last eight months now some serious problems with that. Even as improvements happen, we have significant concerns with where this is going. We still see some major barriers out there. Our interest is in ensuring that this all gets resolved and that members are made whole.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I'm going back to procurement, which we've discussed here somewhat today. The Treasury Board recently released a new standard for procurement called the "Manager's Guide: Key Considerations When Procuring Professional Services".

Has this question booklet helped the public service reduce its reliance on contractors and provided any clarity to public servants?

**The Chair:** Give a short answer, please.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Again, this is significantly outside my area of expertise.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Kusie.

Ms. Sidhu, welcome to OGGO. You have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions today will be about the coverage for workers living with type 1, type 2 and gestational diabetes.

Mr. Chair, I would like to ask Mr. Sazant about the continuous glucose monitoring supplies. Specifically, we know that there's a new benefit for the workers with type 1 diabetes.

Help me understand the number of workers with type 1 diabetes who are now covered with this benefit and how this benefit helps them.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** Thank you very much for the question.

With respect to coverage for diabetes, quite a few changes were made to the plan. Some were significant improvements, and there were some caps that were insisted upon by the employer, which were not there previously.

I certainly do not have the exact number of members we have who may be suffering from type 1 diabetes, but we did negotiate a number of improvements to the coverage for diabetes. We are certainly pleased to do so, as obviously things have changed quite significantly for members with diabetes, with the different types of products out there.

• (1225)

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Mr. Sazant, what is the average wait time for claim processing for continuous glucose monitoring devices?

How can it be improved?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I'm sorry. The wait time....

We get general information with respect to wait times just for the call centre in general. That wouldn't be specific to people who have type 1 diabetes or any other specific condition. It's that there's a call centre that people call into and we could provide data on that.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** Diabetes testing supplies are part of daily life for Canadians living with diabetes. Could you describe to the committee the claims submission process under the Sun Life plan and now under the Canada Life plan?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I think, in general, submitting a claim to either company should broadly be the same. I don't think there would be significant differences between the specific claims processes, whether that's a paper claim or an electronic claim. Their processes may differ slightly, but I think that, in general, there's going to be a very similar claims process.

Perhaps I'm not fully understanding the question here.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** My question was about the blood-testing requirement and the rationale for removing it.

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I'm not quite familiar with exactly what.... There was nothing that was negotiated with respect to that, so on something this specific, I would certainly be happy, with a better understanding, to get back to you in writing.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** My next question is about diabetes monitors with coverage, with or without insulin pumps. Could you explain to the committee the importance of this provision for workers living with diabetes?

**Mr. Seth Sazant:** I think this is a good example of some of the issues where, under the previous iteration of the health care plan, there were sometimes some outdated or strange provisions that provided different levels of coverage for someone who was diabetic who used an insulin pump versus someone who was diabetic who did not use an insulin pump. It was certainly the union's position—and this was ultimately part of the negotiated plan—to get rid of some of the artificial distinctions in coverage.

As we go forward, certainly we would expect to have continuous discussions about the ways that we can amend the health care plan going forward to ensure that there are no artificial barriers in place for our members.

**Ms. Sonia Sidhu:** I've received emails from Canadians describing issues with information sharing between the old plan and the new plan, specifically the physician forms submitted under the old plan. What recommendation can you give to this committee to make sure that these issues are resolved quickly and that claims are processed efficiently?



**Mr. Seth Sazant:** We've heard from a number of members who provided information from their physicians to the old plan that this was not passed forward, and that is of significant concern to us. It puts burdens on members financially, as well as on the Canadian health system generally.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sidhu.

That is our time, colleagues.

Ms. Hart and Mr. Sazant, thanks for joining us today. You've been wonderful witnesses.

Colleagues, I'm going to suspend for a couple of moments to excuse the witnesses. We can take a very short break, and then we'll be back in perhaps five minutes.

• (1225) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Thanks, everyone, for your patience. We are back.

As we discussed a couple of weeks ago, we come back to Mrs. Vignola's motion. She was kind enough to agree that we could continue with the witnesses and that we could come back to it. After we tend to this, I'm hoping that we can discuss our schedule going forward with regard to the supplementaries and a few other studies.

Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

I have a motion requesting that documents be produced—as if I didn't have enough to read already. I'll read it out to refresh your memory. The interpreters have the translation, and you were also emailed the text of the motion a few moments ago. It reads:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1), the committee order the government and Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to produce, in both official languages, a copy of all contracts, communications, memoranda, calls for tenders and proposal submissions with GC Strategies in the context of the COVID Alert application, as well as all government or internal communications from any government agency or department in connection with the COVID Alert application, and that they be submitted no later than March 15, 2024, provided that these documents are free of all redactions.

COVID Alert is another app that was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was supposed to tell us whether people around us had COVID-19, which involved sharing personal information. It more or less worked, and I would say “less” rather than “more”. It was pretty bad.

In December 2020, GC Strategies was awarded part of the contract that it had not been awarded at the outset. That company was added to the contract. I'd like to be able to wrap my head around how that happened. How could simple consultants infiltrate an existing contract? This time, were these people able to provide services commensurate with what they had submitted in their bid, or did they once again work on résumés and submit names to, in the end, provide resources other than those originally promised?

In addition, GC Strategies is run by Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony, who also owned CoreDal Systems Consulting Inc., and I will have another motion requesting that documents be produced

about that company. For now, however, I suggest that we start discussing the motion I have just put forward.

• (1235)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Does anyone wish to speak on that? Are we fine with the wording of this motion?

Mr. Bachrach.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** In the English translation of the motion, the last clause states that “provided that these documents are free of all redactions.” Is that the same point Mrs. Block was just making?

**The Chair:** No. I was chatting with the clerk about that. That's a translation thing. I think the intent is “provide to us”—

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** It should be “and that these documents shall be free of all redactions.”

**The Chair:** Yes, I think the French communicates that better.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Yes, that was my suggestion.

**The Chair:** That is the intent. Of course, it also says “PSCP”, but it's intended to be “PSPC”.

That was a good point, Mr. Bachrach.

Are we fine with this, colleagues?

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I have an amendment I want to bring forward. I think we're in general agreement with the thrust of this motion. Again, I thank Madame Vignola for bringing it forward.

What I would ask is that at the first part of the amendment, after “copy of all contracts”, we remove “communications, memoranda, calls for tenders and proposal submissions”.

I have another amendment we can discuss after this amendment.

• (1240)

**The Chair:** Your amendment is to eliminate “communications, memoranda, calls for tender and proposal submissions”.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Yes, that is correct.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Okay.

I totally understand my colleague and his wanting to make sure that we don't get buried in a tremendous amount of communications. Nevertheless, we managed to get details on the COVID Alert app through the elements related to a contract. I'm talking about restaurant meetings or bottles of whisky. It's nothing major, but when we're able to get an overall picture, we can see the context and understand it better.

That's why I asked for all documents related to the COVID Alert app. It's to get the full context. Having only the contract doesn't give us the context that explains how the two consultants managed to insert themselves into a contract that was already under way.

[English]

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I very much appreciate what Madame Vignola is saying here today. I think she hit the nail on the head when she said that.

My concern here is, again, that we're going to overwhelm the folks who produce this material. Our focus right now is on the contracts. Let's take that first step. Let's look at what the contracts have to say. Let's see what is in those contracts—which is the focus of our study—then make that determination before we again overwhelm the system with a production request that is going to produce, like Madame Vignola mentioned, an overwhelming amount of documentation. I think the contracts will give us a foundation from which to work. I think that's the first step.

We'd like to see this proceed. We think it's a good motion and a good necessary step forward. However, like I said, we want to balance it out with making sure we judiciously and responsibly ask for documentation. I think the contracts are a very good step.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Let's agree that we won't be able to agree on that. I understand my colleague's concerns, but the contract doesn't provide me with the context for the awarding of the contract. To fully understand the contract, I also need to know the context and how it happened.

We won't agree on the subamendment, unfortunately. I completely understand the quantity of documents that represents, since I read them. I spend my days reading them. However, I need the context to do a comprehensive objective analysis. There you have it.

[English]

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Are we talking about the amendment today?

**The Chair:** We're talking about Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment, which is to take out “communications, memoranda, calls for tender and proposal submissions”.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** May I...?

**The Chair:** Yes. Go ahead, Mr. Sousa.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I appreciate that the concern is that we're trying to obtain as much information as possible to determine how it came to be with respect to some of these contracts. Certainly, it's appropriate, which is why we've been at this committee for some time relative to this. However, I think we've obviously had some concern expressed, even by the chair, in terms of the volume of translation, material and information that we've asked to be produced. For us to go back to ask again for more, in light of the fact that we have quite a bit of information already on hand that hasn't determined what I think we're trying to obtain....

I don't want us to find ourselves bogged down in a situation of futility on a matter currently under investigation by a number of bodies, and we certainly have taken quite a number of steps to try to obtain some information. All the material and all the communications from a number of departments that may or may not be relat-

ed to this—even though we're trying to suggest it be so—becomes quite an undertaking. I think we have already requested some of this internally.

The scope is so broad in this request that I think we need to be more specific, and that's why some of the amendments made by my colleague feel appropriate in order to delve strictly into what is being discussed here and getting to the bottom of how that decision came to be.

This is one amendment. I think we'll probably have yet another. I propose we take this amendment and proceed forward, so that we can get the most value from our request of the civil service to divulge information.

Thank you.

• (1245)

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Call a vote.

**The Chair:** Are we ready to vote on Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment?

We have a tie. I vote no.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** We're back to the original motion.

Colleagues, are you comfortable with my perhaps offering a compromise?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** It depends what it is.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** It's to move it up to March 1....

I understand Mrs. Vignola's issues, but I understand what you're saying as well about the number of documents by the 15th and that we're not going to get them by that time. Perhaps we ask for contracts, RFPs and the proposals, and perhaps move the time up—that greatly reduces the amount—with a promise that we immediately revisit the motion when we're back if Mrs. Vignola needs more context.

Rather than the communication, memoranda, etc., it would be contracts, RFPs and submissions.

This is open for discussion. That was all.

Mr. Bachrach.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I appreciate the attempt to find a compromise. It's difficult to know where to land on this, because, of course, we don't know how many documents we're talking about. Perhaps previous document orders have given people a sense of the volume that we're talking about, but I think we want it to be realistic in terms of the timeline and to get the answers the committee deserves and the public deserves.

My instinct would be to keep it broad, as Mrs. Vignola outlined in her original motion. I have no idea about the practicality or practicability of that, so I'm hesitant to support trimming it down without knowing whether that's necessary. How many emails can you send about a topic like that? It's hard to say.

**The Chair:** Yes, it's hard to say. I'm just being realistic. I'm cognizant of the time and the translation services as well. It's taken us three days just to get a one-page letter translated, so that's my concern about the date. That's why I'm just putting it out there, from a pragmatic point of view.

Go ahead, Mr. Bains.

• (1250)

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Just quickly, in addition to the translation and the magnitude of the documents, I'm concerned about the costs associated with producing them and then translating and doing that.

**The Chair:** The amendment has been defeated. We'll go back to the original motion. I just put out a solution, but we'll go back, just to keep it proper.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I have another amendment. I'll bring forward a second amendment, and again, this one is with regard to the last sentence. It would delete, after the words "COVID Alert application," the following: "as well as any government or internal communications from any government body or department related to the COVID Alert application". Can I speak to it very quickly?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but can you just repeat that?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Sure. I'm trying to get my computer up and running.

It would delete—and I'll quote—after the words, "COVID Alert application"....

**The Chair:** Is that "in the context of the COVID Alert application", etc.?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** It's the second part.

I'm sorry. I apologize because my computer right now has decided to turn off, but I'll quote the words.

**The Chair:** Okay, so it is after "or department in connection with the COVID Alert application".

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Yes. It would delete the words, "as well as any government or internal communications from any government body or department related to the COVID Alert application". Does that make sense, Chair?

**The Chair:** It would then be "in the context of the COVID Alert application, and that they be submitted no later than March 15, 2024, provided that these documents are free of redactions". Is that correct?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Yes, that's correct.

**The Chair:** Mrs. Vignola, go ahead on the amendment.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Naturally, that removes a great deal of information and documentation, and I can understand that.

At the very least, we would have access to communications with Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, in connection with the COVID Alert app and GC Strategies. We wouldn't have access to those of other departments. However, since Health Canada was responsible with PSPC for the COVID Alert app, I would add the communications from Health Canada. That's the compromise I'm willing to make. Instead of seeking all communications from all levels of government related to the COVID Alert

app, I would ask for communications between GC Strategies, PSPC and Health Canada.

[English]

**The Chair:** Are you proposing a subamendment, Mrs. Vignola?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Yes.

[English]

**The Chair:** Are you saying "proposal submissions with GC Strategies and PHAC"?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** The revised text of the motion would propose that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1), the committee order the government, Public Services and Procurement Canada and Health Canada, which were responsible for the COVID Alert application, to produce in both official languages a copy of all contracts, communications, memoranda, calls for tenders and proposal submissions with GC Strategies in the context of the COVID Alert application no later than March 15, 2024, provided that these documents are free of all redactions.

Is that clearer to you?

[English]

**The Chair:** Just to be clear, you're keeping Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment. You're just changing to it to PSPC and Health Canada.

Mrs. Vignola is accepting your amendment, but subamending it to be Health Canada and PSPC.

Is that correct?

• (1255)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Yes, that's correct.

[English]

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Mr. Chair, again, I appreciate that we're working through a compromise here. I think we've shown in previous meetings, including last week's meetings, that we all actually work well together and we find a path forward.

On this one, with all internal communications and all memos, my concern is that we're going to be committing staff and resources to basically going on an expedition every time the word "alert" is mentioned. I think this has potential.... We've asked for the production of papers. This committee has asked for the production of papers in the hundreds of thousands of pages for previous studies.

On our side, we've agreed to a lot of that production of documentation, but I'm looking at what it has delivered compared with what we have asked in terms of the resources and the commitment that's taken. I don't see the cost-benefit of that. The cost is tremendous. Again, it's hundreds of thousands of documents that we have already asked for, which are in the process of being provided, translated, sent out and distributed to the committee.

Again, my concern here is fairly simple. I think we agree with the intent of the original motion. We want to look at the alert app, especially as it pertains to GC Strategies. Looking at the contracts and—as the chair suggested—looking at the RFPs all makes sense, but here we're going to be looking at assigning precious resources and staff to basically go on an expedition. That's what I'm concerned about.

I think we have to be judicious. That's part of our role here. We have to be judicious. If we find something in the contracts or in the RFPs that requires or prompts us to ask for additional information, I think that makes sense, but to do this all at once here at the start of this.... I think the cost-benefit analysis doesn't bear it out. It puts incredible stress and strain on already depleted, stressed and strained resources.

Again, we're not talking about a few pages that we've asked for. We've literally asked for hundreds of thousands of documents to be provided to this committee.

I ask my colleague—who has been very reasonable, pragmatic and patient, I may add, on previous motions that were brought forward—to work with us. We have a motion that I think we could all support. It is always wonderful to see when we have unanimous support. Let's bring a motion forward that is more surgical, more specific and that is balanced—one that doesn't close the door to the additional production of papers if the more refined, surgical and specific motion finds evidence that requires that.

Again, we're not closing the door on an expanded production motion, but let's be surgical, let's be responsible, let's be pragmatic and, hopefully, let's pass this motion unanimously, because we think the spirit of the original motion is a good one.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Mr. Genuis, but just to be clear, technically Mrs. Vignola's subamendment isn't really a subamendment because it doesn't change Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment. The will of the committee can consider it as such if we choose to.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Before I get into my substantive comments, Chair, I do think we should avoid the kind of procedural fuzziness that has happened previously.

We should have amendments and subamendments that change amendments, and we should have separate amendments that can be moved once previous amendments are defeated, because I think we could get into a situation where there is some confusion about the results.

I think the will of the committee would be to operate in accordance with the established procedures around amendments and subamendments.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Let me just interrupt.

We will come back to you, Mrs. Vignola, after we deal with the amendment, and then we can perhaps make a change as discussed.

We'll go back to debating Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you.

Mrs. Vignola has, I think, tried to engage in a certain spirit around compromise, but fundamentally, I don't think that the Liberal members across the way are that interested in a compromise. They're proposing to amend a document production motion to effectively make it not order the production of the documents that would be required to answer the basic questions involved.

In the absence of an apparent will to compromise from the members across, I think we should just pass the original motion that Mrs. Vignola put forward. The original motion was a good motion. We support it, so let's get on with doing what, I think, the majority of this committee is interested in doing.

The broader picture, Chair, is that, as we prosecute the arrive scam scandal, we see that Liberals are very concerned about resources when it comes to the small matter of producing documents for a parliamentary committee but seem completely unconcerned about the use of the resources involved in the scandal in the first place. Sixty million dollars spent on an app is no problem, according to them, but our trying to get the documents that would allow a parliamentary committee to investigate it is suddenly a resource issue. This is what's going on. This is the burying of information we see from the Liberal government. We have a majority on this committee that wants this motion to pass, so let's just pass it in its original form.

Thanks.

**The Chair:** We have Mr. Sousa and then Mr. Kusmierczyk.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** He's going to talk about what I want.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thanks.

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

Again, like I said, we're trying to find a balance here. Contrary to what Mr. Genuis has said, we have been good partners throughout, whether it's on the ArriveCAN app, whether it's on the study we just talked about this morning in terms of the Canada Life issue or whether it's this issue. We have been good partners. We're always looking to move forward, and, if we need to produce documents, we agree to it. If we need to call witnesses, we agree to it. We've been good partners every step of the way. That's been our track record. We're trying to do it responsibly, and we're trying to balance it against, again, the stress and the strain that is being placed on resources and translators.

Having said that and upon reflection, I believe that Madame Vignola's compromise is one that we can agree to. We believe that it does restrict the broad scope of the original motion, and it makes the motion much more specific. We want to be able to find a way to move from my amendment to what Madame Vignola suggested.

Is it possible to maybe read out where we're trying to get to and then work with the chair and the clerk to find a path forward for that? Is that okay?

**The Chair:** You're going to read it out. Yes, please go ahead.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** What we're trying to get to, and I don't know—

**The Chair:** This is not on the amendment. This is what your proposing to get to.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I'm trying to get to this point, and I'm wondering if Madame Vignola would agree to it.

The motion would read, “That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1), the committee order the government and Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) and Health Canada to produce, in both official languages, a copy of all contracts, communications, memoranda, calls for tender and proposal submissions with GC Strategies related to the COVID Alert application no later than March 15, 2024, provided that these documents are free of any redactions.”

It accomplishes what we're trying to do here, which is basically narrowing in scope a little bit the original motion, which was just so broad, to focus on PSPC and on Health Canada and to tighten it up a bit in terms of the focus of the motion.

Does that make sense?

• (1305)

**The Chair:** It does.

To get there, you would have to withdraw your amendment. Then we would redo that.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I'm happy to ask for unanimous consent to withdraw that amendment.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** You could withdraw both of your amendments by UC, actually.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** The first one was voted on and was—

**The Chair:** It got defeated. You are withdrawing.

Do we have UC for that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Amendment withdrawn)

**The Chair:** Can we assume that he has read in his new amendment?

I'll have the clerk read it back a final time to make sure we're all on board with the amendment Mr. Kusmierczyk is proposing.

Thank you for that compromise, sir.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl):** With the second amendment being withdrawn and a new amendment being proposed, it would read, “That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1), the committee order the government and Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) and Health Canada to produce, in both official languages, a copy of all contracts, communications, memoranda, calls for tender and proposal submissions with GC Strategies in the context of the COVID Alert application, and that they be submitted no later than March 15, 2024, provided that these documents be free of all redactions.”

**The Chair:** Are we fine with that? Then we'll approve the amendment.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** No. We've heard the amendment, but we don't support the amendment.

**The Chair:** That's what I'm asking. You wish to....

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** We could vote on the amendment, though.

**The Chair:** Let's vote on the amendment, then. Go ahead.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I think we're back to the motion as amended now, if I am correct.

**The Chair:** That's correct.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** I still have that outstanding concern about the language at the end.

It seems as if, when we're reading it back, we still have in the English version, “provided” that they are unredacted. By my read, this would suggest that, if there are any redactions, they don't have to provide any of the documents.

I would prefer the wording—

**The Chair:** The French is clearer.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** —“and that these documents be provided free of redaction.” I think we'd achieve in English what we're trying to do.

**The Chair:** Are we in agreement with that, colleagues? We don't need to vote.

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** Wonderful. It's “and that these documents be provided free of redactions”.

Can we vote on this motion as amended?

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, colleagues.

Before we break, just quickly on the upcoming schedule, supplementary (C)s have come out. Because I am an estimates geek, I'm trying to schedule them in. We've sent out invites to the ministers. As always, we will work around the scheduling of the ministers. TBS is not available Wednesday. We are trying to get PSPC for this Wednesday. Otherwise, we have March 18 and 20, so we'll try to work around that.

We've sent out an original invite to kick off Canada Post. We're just waiting to hear back, so we'll fit that in. We are going to be sending out invites very soon regarding the red tape reduction.

If everyone will allow me the discretion to work with the last week of March and the first two weeks of April, we can fit in the ministers for the estimates. Usually the PBO—

**Voices:** No, it's....

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. March 18 to 22 is the sitting week of March. I apologize.

The intent is to have the PBO for an hour, as usual, and the ministers and then their attending staff for the second hour as well. When we nail down the president of Canada Post, that would kick off our meeting. We would also kick off with red tape and squeeze that in.

We don't know the date of the last supply day, but, as is our custom, we will still bring in the ministers on their estimates even after the last supply day. We'll work around that if everyone is comfortable.

Mrs. Vignola, did you have your hand up?

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I just wanted to talk about the first week of March. I love seeing my colleagues, be it in a week when committees are sitting or on break weeks. However, I'd like us to be able to spend the first week of March in our ridings. We need to agree on that, so that our faces don't end up on milk cartons.

[*English*]

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Do you really think that's going to make a difference?

**The Chair:** On the box it will say, "Have you seen my MP?"

We will do our best.

Mr. Kusmierczyk

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Looking at the calendar, when would we start the red tape study?

**The Chair:** Wednesday is our cut-off date for our red tape witnesses. As soon as I get the witness list, I think we know who we wish to prioritize. I'm getting a sense that a CFIB or chamber-type person would appear, depending on when the ministers would be available. The ministers will trump, because we have to work around them. If we can get someone on Wednesday, I'm hoping for the week of March 18 or the week of April 8. Again, it's depending whether a minister is available. That is going to bump the others because we need to get them in.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** That makes sense.

**The Chair:** If you can work on your side for the ministers, we'll go from there.

Colleagues, thank you very much. I appreciate it. It was a very good meeting. We had wonderful witnesses again today.

I want to thank our fill-in clerk for filling in for our two other clerks, who are both sick today. Thank you very much, Ms. Vohl.

Of course, thank you to our valued interpreters and our valued analysts. Thank you, everyone.

We are adjourned.

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