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Chair: Mr. John Williamson



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• (1005)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to meeting number 121 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[English]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[Translation]

Before we begin, I would like to remind all members and other participants in the room of the following important preventive measures.

[English]

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times.

The following measures have been taken to prevent audio feedback incidents. The new earpieces are black in colour; please use only these earpieces and not the older, grey ones. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of the meeting on your desk. When you're not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the middle of the sticker for this purpose, which you will find on the table, typically to your right, as indicated. Please consult the cards on your table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

As you can see, the room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and to reduce the chance of feedback from an ambient earpiece. These measures are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption and to protect the health and safety of all participants, in particular our interpreters.

[Translation]

I thank you all for your co-operation.

[English]

As a reminder today, all comments should be addressed to the chair.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee is resuming consideration of Report 1 of the 2024 reports of the Auditor General of Canada, entitled "ArriveCAN", referred to the committee on Monday, February 12, 2024.

[English]

I would like to welcome our witnesses. From the Canada Border Services Agency, we have Erin O'Gorman, president. It's nice to have you back. We also have Chulaka Ailapperuma, director, from the same agency.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we'll turn to our round of questions.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman (President, Canada Border Services Agency): Good morning. At my appearance here on February 13, I spoke about the findings of the Auditor General's report and the procurement ombud and how they're informing the actions I had taken to improve procurement processes and financial controls at the Canada Border Services Agency.

[Translation]

As I mentioned, I set up teams to overhaul and strengthen financial controls and project oversight. A new governance system is in place to oversee the approval of all contracts over \$40,000.

[English]

We've reduced our consulting footprint. At the start of the fiscal year, we had 25 fewer consultants than at the same time last year, and today we have 68 fewer consultants working at the CBSA in the IT branches than we did when I was here in February. We're undertaking this reduction carefully and with purpose, making sure that we transfer knowledge and skills to our internal teams as we go.

[Translation]

However, we must continue to rely on outside expertise. In addition to the CBSA processes to validate the skills of contract resources, individuals working under contract with the agency must also certify their qualifications and experience to support the ongoing assessment of value for taxpayer dollars.

[English]

We will also be requiring vendors with active IT service contracts to certify that none of the resources they provide to CBSA are actively employed as public servants who have not disclosed this information. Should it be discovered that this is not the case after they have certified, we will terminate the resource and likely the contract. All CBSA employees will have to validate their conflict-of-interest declarations and will renew these declarations on a recurring basis. In addition, all employees involved in procurement will be required to certify that they do not have conflicts of interest, real, apparent or perceived, relating to individual procurements, at the outset of each process.

[Translation]

The fact remains that we cannot have documentation for all scenarios. That's why I say, trust but verify.

I want to be clear: My working assumption is that, as public servants, we comply with the rules of our workplace. That's why our code of conduct is so important.

[English]

On May 6, the CBSA published a refreshed code of conduct for employees at the CBSA. It's been updated to reflect current scenarios with more inclusive language, so that all employees can see themselves in the code. What hasn't changed are the fundamentals of the code: respect, integrity, stewardship and the pursuit of excellence. What also continues to guide us is the important mandate the CBSA has to serve and protect Canadians and the professionalism and dedication with which CBSA employees deliver on this mandate every day across the country and around the world.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We'll now begin our first round of questioning.

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

• (1010)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. John Ossowski is the former president of the CBSA. Is that correct?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did the CBSA enter into a paid contract with Mr. Ossowski surrounding his testimony on ArriveCAN?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: In the federal government, when former public servants are called to testify before commissions of inquiry, in litigation, before the FPSPREB or perhaps at parliamentary committees, it's not uncommon for them to be brought back on a casual contract to facilitate their access to the information and support they need to prepare themselves to testify on behalf of the Crown.

Therefore, I brought him in on a casual contract to facilitate his access to the information that he sought to prepare. That's the convention that I was working under when I made that arrangement. If it turns out that this was not required for him to access the information that he needed, I'll take responsibility for that.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Ossowski left the public service and now works for a big consulting firm. Is that right?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't know that he still works there, but I do know that he was working with a consulting firm.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Was PricewaterhouseCoopers, the firm at which he was working at the time you brought him in on contract to get aligned before he testified at committee, doing any business with the CBSA?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: They weren't doing any business.

I'm not sure I understand the comment "get aligned". He asked for access to documents he'd had when he was in the position of president, to prepare for the—

Mr. Michael Barrett: We'll circle back to that, ma'am. The question is this: Does PricewaterhouseCoopers have any contracts with the Canada Border Services Agency?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: No.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do they have any contracts with the Government of Canada?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I presume so. I don't know. I know what's happening in the CBSA.

Mr. Michael Barrett: How much was Mr. Ossowski paid?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I believe he billed one day for his preparation for testimony, and that was approximately \$500.

Mr. Michael Barrett: He set the terms of the contract—the price for it.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: No. He was brought in at a certain level. I believe it was an EX-1 level, but I'd have to confirm that. Then he signed a letter of offer that included conflict-of-interest declarations and the fact that this would be the mechanism by which we would facilitate his access.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What documents did he have access to?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: You'll have to ask him. I believe he's appearing on Thursday.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm asking you, actually. You're the president of the Canada Border Services Agency. You brought in someone who works for a consulting shop that does consulting with the Government of Canada, and you wrote them a cheque. You wanted to get back to this.

I'm very interested in who he met with, so I'm not going to ask Mr. Ossowski. I'm going to ask you who he met with and what he saw, because this is really important. What it looks like to me is that we have a former executive who's involved in a massive scandal, a \$60-million scandal, with the department that has investigations that include the RCMP kicking people's front doors in. Therefore, I think it's pretty interesting that he's getting paid by his former employer, and it looks to me like he was getting paid to get his story straight.

Who did he meet with, and what documents did he see? I'm asking you, not Mr. Ossowski.

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I don't understand the insinuation about getting stories straight. As I just said, it was to access information that he wanted to review in order to prepare to come and answer the questions of this committee.

I'm not aware that he met with anybody other than the person who was obtaining those documents for him. They were not new documents. They were documents that existed when he was the president.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did any of them require a security clearance?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: We validated that he has a security clearance. I don't believe that any of the documents were classified, but again, I didn't review the documents that he accessed. However, I can say that the documents were—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Who would have done that due diligence to verify that he ought to be seeing the documents he saw?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: They were documents that existed when he was the president of the CBSA.

Mr. Michael Barrett: He had access to all of the documents that existed when he was the president of the CBSA.

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: He had access to his emails. Then he requested specific documents to review—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Would you table a list of those specific documents that he requested access to?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: Yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: On what date did this occur?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I'll have to get back to you.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Will you get back to us?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: Yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay.

Also, is there certainty that he didn't meet with anybody?

• (1015)

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I'm not aware that he met with anybody, but again, I think that question is best posed to him.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Was he furnished with any information—briefing materials, talking points, anything of that nature?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: He wasn't furnished with any talking points. He did see material, as I have said.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Was this prep material for committee?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: They were documents he wanted to review before coming to testify here.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes, I get that he wanted to see them. What I'm asking is what type of documents they were.

We know that your department prepares you in advance of your committee. To say that he wanted to see them—okay, fine; I believe it's in your collective interest that you all were aligned on what he said when he came to committee, because this is a massive scandal that your agency is facing. Did he ask to see the same type of prep materials that he would have asked to see when he was the president, such as the alignment on messaging that the department was using?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: There's no alignment and there's no messaging. I asked for material to prepare myself. He wanted to review documents that existed when he was the president of CBSA to refresh his memory to come and testify.

Again, he is coming on Thursday. I believe these questions are best put to him.

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

Ms. Yip, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for taking the time to come again to speak on behalf of CBSA.

Ms. O’Gorman, did you learn anything new from Kristian Firth's testimony before the House on April 17?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I believe I was generally aware of all the points he made. I apologize if I'm missing something, but there was nothing specific that jumped out as particularly new information.

Ms. Jean Yip: Okay. Has CBSA requested that any funds be repaid to the government from GC Strategies or Coradix and Dalian?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: We are going through all the documentation and those contracts to determine whether restitution is warranted. I'm working closely with our colleagues in the public services and procurement department to do that work, and would rely on them to seek restitution. Certainly, that is what we are looking at.

Ms. Jean Yip: Is it that department that would lead in the effort to recoup the funds?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: We would have the documentation that would give rise to any questions as to whether restitution is warranted, but we would work closely with PSPC to seek that restitution.

Ms. Jean Yip: What is CBSA doing to ensure that résumés from prospective contractors and subcontractors are not being copied and pasted from requirement rubrics?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: There are several things. To the specific question that you've asked, we are having potential contractors attest to the CVs that are put forward to CBSA. We are separating the review of those contracts and having it done in conjunction with our procurement group. We've also implemented a quality assurance function that will pull those CVs and their evaluations on a regular basis, to do checks on them.

Ms. Jean Yip: What is CBSA's policy or rule regarding work-related meetings with stakeholders and prospective contractors that take place off-site?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Our code of conduct was clear about both real and perceived conflicts that arise when employees are engaging with consultants and contractors outside of the specific business at hand. That being said, at CBSA we have put in a requirement that employees are to disclose any interactions with contractors outside of a contracting process, just to make sure that's clear to everybody and there's transparency around that.

Ms. Jean Yip: What about gifts?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: The code spoke to the receipt of gifts. Employees are not to accept gifts from contractors. There's a provision in the course of diplomatic relations where some kinds of gifts under a certain value can be received and those over a certain value declared, but that's covered in the code of conduct.

• (1020)

Ms. Jean Yip: Do you know what the values are?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I can get back to the committee on that. It's enumerated.

Ms. Jean Yip: Okay, thanks.

During Mr. Firth's testimony on April 17, he explained that it is a regular practice for contractors to replace resources on the guidance of the client all the time, depending on whether there were discrepancies with their experience, whether they were not working very well or whether they needed to move on to another project.

Do you agree? Is this common practice?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't know whether it's common practice. I understand that, when certain resources are put on a contract and those contracts are in place for some number of years, they will move on to other jobs or not be available at the time.

I can't speak as to whether it's common practice. Certainly, if consultants or contractors aren't performing, that's a separate issue, and we would absolutely seek to remove them from the contract and have somebody else, so I would see those as two different issues, but I can't speak to the frequency with which that takes place.

Ms. Jean Yip: Did the CBSA provide guidance to GC Strategies, instructing them to subcontract out the work?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: No.

Ms. Jean Yip: You mentioned in your opening statement that your mandate is to serve and protect Canadians. Do you feel, moving forward, that this is something the CBSA can continue to do? What are your thoughts, given this experience?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I've never for one moment doubted the CBSA's ability to serve and protect Canadians. Every day they find contraband. Last year, they welcomed about 86 million travellers. They are welcoming and processing asylum seekers. We are working with police partners on all manner of investigations.

If you're referring to the situations that have arisen with regard to the lack of contracting paperwork, we are addressing that on all fronts, but I wouldn't want to confuse the extremely important need to be beyond reproach in our contracting and in our transparency with the work of serving and protecting Canadians every day.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. O'Gorman, I'll have some questions for you a little later.

Mr. Ailapperuma, you were involved in almost every stage of the CBSA process to award contracts to GC Strategies. Your name appears in a lot of places.

I would like to start with the document that the Auditor General gave us, which includes all the invitations that agency employees received from GC Strategies. Your name appears four times. You apparently received emails inviting you to events in September 2019 and April 2021. Can you tell us whether you were at those events?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma (Director, Canada Border Services Agency): I did not attend any events in 2019. I did attend two events in 2020.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: You were at two events in 2020. What were they?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: There was one event that was related to virtual whisky tasting. The other one was an event at Lansdowne Park.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: What other agency employees attended the whisky tasting?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: From my recollection, my senior managers attended those events, as well as some of my colleagues.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Can you please give us some names?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: It was Mr. Utano and Mr. MacDonald, who were my senior managers, and Mr. Steve Lauzon attended one of the events, the whiskey tasting, and then the other attendees were consultants.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Your senior managers were at the event. Were other people at the agency informed of these invitations? Did you follow the process in the code of conduct requiring that an employee inform a senior manager when a consultant tries to give them a gift, whether it be cash or a gift in kind like this?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I did not specifically inform anyone. My superiors were aware that I was attending.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Why did you not inform anyone? Is the reason that it is common practice at the CBSA to accept gifts like these and so you did not need to inform your superiors?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: No, I don't think it is common practice.

At that time, ArriveCAN was a very intense project. We were spending long hours working on ArriveCAN. I saw this as a team celebration, and I wanted to socialize with some of my teammates.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: However, I imagine that you read your code of conduct and know that public servants are not allowed to accept gifts, especially from consultants.

Can you give me the date, or at least the approximate date, of the 2020 whisky tasting?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I will have to get back to you on the exact date. I do not have it, and the—

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Do you know in what season the event took place? Was it in the spring, summer or fall?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I believe it was in the spring.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: It was around April 20, when a multi-million dollar contract was signed by GC Strategies.

On the one hand, a multi-million dollar contract was awarded to GC Strategies on a non-competitive basis. On the other hand, several employees from the CBSA, including you, were invited to a whisky tasting, but no one saw fit to declare that invitation.

You say that you don't think this is common practice, but do you think it was entirely acceptable? Do you regret accepting the invitation and not informing your senior managers, or even the president of the agency at the time?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I made an error in judgment, and I do regret not informing my superiors as well as going to the event.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: You acknowledge, then, that it was an error in judgment. That's great.

Were Mr. Ossowski and Mr. Doan aware of these events?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I do not know.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: You have no idea whether Mr. Doan, who was overseeing your work, was aware of the invitations and the social gatherings attended by public servants and consultants.

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I do not know.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay.

You were also copied on the emails exchanged between Mr. Utano, from the CBSA, and Ms. Durigan, from Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC. In them, doubts were raised by the department about the non-competitive awarding of the three-year contract that GC Strategies finally obtained in April 2020 thanks to the efforts of Mr. Utano.

At any point, did you ever think that the department was right to think a contract that large should not be awarded non-competitively? There was time to call for tenders. Did you not conclude it was a bad idea to award the contract without a call for tenders? Was there a point at which you realized that this was not acceptable and that the department was right to raise such issues? Did you talk to Mr. Utano about it, or did you turn a blind eye?

[English]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I was not involved in the contracting processes at all within CBSA. My role was to lead the technical development of the application.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, your time is up.

[English]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being present today.

I'll start with the CBSA regarding the conditions that the customs union president, Mark Weber, gave testimony on to this committee, which highlighted some of the key issues that are persistent within the CBSA that have led to conditions that made a scandal like ArriveCAN possible.

He made very clear that the number of supervisory officers exceeded the number of border officials, so it's a very management-heavy work environment, resulting in extreme workloads for those at the front lines. Of course, those at the supervisory level do not necessarily have to be directly supporting that work. There was a lack of consultation of the union's employees with regard to this kind of application, the ArriveCAN app.

How can technology replace border officers when Canadians' data privacy and safety are involved?

• (1030)

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I've spoken to Mr. Weber about the concerns he's raised about the span of control, and those conversations are constructive and ongoing.

Of course, we have many different workplaces and work locations and situations in the CBSA—Toronto Pearson has many, many BSOs, and remote ports of entry have only a couple—so it's hard to put a number on span of control. Sometimes there are fewer people under a chief or superintendent by virtue of where they're located. I don't want to undermine his concerns, and I remain happy to have that dialogue with him. He certainly has a perspective I'm interested in.

I don't foresee technology ever replacing border service officers. The fact is that right now people do put their information into the kiosk or through advance declaration. What we are aiming to do, however, is free up border service officers to do higher-value work and targeting, rather than collecting papers and keying in information.

I don't want to speak for Mr. Weber and his team, but that's where I think we can have a constructive dialogue—on where we are using technology to allow people to focus on the higher threats.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you for that, Ms. O'Gorman.

I think where our unions, particularly those for public service workers, are concerned is that we saw this pattern of concern in the last government's scandal with the Phoenix pay system. We saw public servants lose their jobs in favour of an application that just doesn't work.

In this case, I think it's very reasonable that the president of the customs union is concerned over the fact that there could be a more heavy reliance on this. The Auditor General makes a point of this in exhibit 1.2 of the audit of ArriveCAN in relation to the continued heavy reliance on external resources to develop ArriveCAN, particularly for the period of April 2020 to March 2023. You can look at that in the report, on page 7.

What evidence can you suggest to public servants and the union that you are, in fact, trying to reduce the reliance on external resources, given the fact that the most recent application, ArriveCAN, relied so heavily on them?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I do not foresee CBSA needing fewer border service officers. The fact is that travel volumes are increasing and commercial volumes are increasing. Efforts to—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I'm sorry. I mean to make the app. On technological development, there's an increase in reliance on external resources. Do you have a plan to actually begin the work to see

CBSA have these kinds of public servants within the CBSA as an example of how you can rely less on external contractors?

In looking at an appendix, for example, to a document we asked for, for evidence: "Appendix B: Contract Values for GC Strategies, Dalian and Coradix". This is a new document since you've been present at this committee. This committee asked for information in relation to these three companies, which have a few or a handful of individuals within them. They reported that since January 1, 2011, the period we requested information for, the CBSA was one of the main external receivers of contracts. As a matter of fact, the previous company, Coradix, which helped the former government and the CBSA in particular, took in almost 42 million dollars' worth of contracts.

It doesn't seem to me like you're undergoing the work of trying to reduce this reliance. It's been going on for over a decade now.

• (1035)

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: As I said in my opening remarks, I have actually reduced the number of contractors to the tune of 25%, and several since I appeared here last time. We have 180 systems, and most of them are legacy, so what I don't want to do is precipitously decrease our reliance on the few people who know COBOL and then find ourselves unable to address a system problem. We're doing it deliberately, but we're actively doing it and our senior level 1 committee is reviewing every contract before we put it in place.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I appreciate that, Ms. O'Gorman. That's the answer I was looking for in many ways, the evidence that you're doing this work and that it's going to actually happen, because this continued reliance creates a vulnerability. As I said before, since 2011, almost a billion dollars' worth of contracts have gone to shady insiders between both governments that have existed in that period of time.

My last question is this: What consultations have happened with the unions in light of this scandal? What lessons have been learned, key lessons in particular, that you can share with the union that would actually create some confidence that one, there will be a reduced reliance, and two, their skills will be respected?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: The issue of what you're talking about, and particularly ArriveCAN information coming to light, does come up at our union-management meeting, but the unions are consulted on any initiatives, including our current traveller modernization initiative, our CARM initiative. Therefore, I believe there's good and frequent and open dialogue with employees and bargaining agents and representatives on an ongoing basis. However, I'm always happy to add more if the feedback is that these aren't sufficient.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Beginning our second round, Mr. Nater, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us here today.

It appears that Mr. Ossowski was only invited back to be a contractor with CBSA after he was caught in a fib, telling the committee that he had never met with GC Strategies when we know that was not the case and that he had in fact met with GC Strategies and Kristian Firth on a Zoom call.

My question to you is this: Was Mr. Ossowski hired as a casual employee or as a contractor?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: He was hired as a casual employee.

Mr. John Nater: He was a casual employee, which means that you, as CBSA president, are responsible and accountable for his actions. Is that correct?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: Yes. I signed the letter of offer.

Mr. John Nater: Therefore, the fact that you came to this committee without the information on what information he accessed, I think, is rather troubling, so I look forward to your providing this committee with all information that he accessed during his time as an employee while also being with PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I would point out that there are 16,000 employees in the CBSA, so—

Mr. John Nater: I’m going to stop you there. There may be 16,000 employees, but there’s only one whom you hired back who was the former president of the CBSA, so there is an increased degree of accountability there.

How many consultants do you currently—

The Chair: Mr. Nater, I’m going to just pause you there. I think you just reiterated the question that Mr. Barrett asked before. You’re just reiterating that you’re expecting the documents, but Mr. Barrett has already requested them.

Okay, that’s fine. It’s just so it’s clear for the witness as well as for the analysts.

Thank you, Mr. Nater. You have three minutes and 50 seconds.

Mr. John Nater: There are 16,000 employees. How many consultants currently are hired by CBSA?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I can come back to that. I don’t—

Mr. John Nater: You told us 68 had been reduced, so I want to know how many in total. You don’t have that number at your fingertips here?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: No.

Mr. John Nater: You’re able to say “16,000 employees”, yet you’ve been asked about consultants and you’re not able to tell us the total number of consultants here today at a meeting about consultants and consulting practices?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I’m happy to come back with the list of contracts that are currently active in CBSA, but that information is also largely posted. Any contracts over \$10,000, I believe, are posted on the website, so that information is available.

Mr. John Nater: You’re able to tell us 68 have been reduced, but you don’t tell us the total number.

Mr. Ailapperuma, could you describe this Lansdowne Park event? Was it a dinner? Was it drinks? What was this event?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: It was an evening meal. It would probably have ended around 7 p.m.

Mr. John Nater: Was there any discussion with any of the attendees about any of the business dealings with CBSA? Was CBSA business discussed at all?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: No. It was a team event. It was discussing ArriveCAN work but not any contracts. Like I said, it was a hard project to work on. We were working long hours, and it was really just socializing with team members.

Mr. John Nater: The business of ArriveCAN was discussed, then.

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I wouldn’t say any financial or contractual discussions were had. It was the day-to-day grind of ArriveCAN that was discussed.

Mr. John Nater: The Conservative Party introduced an opposition motion, calling for the recall of funds paid to contractors who actually did no work.

Ms. O’Gorman, you mentioned in response to a previous question that you were working on it. Are you recommending that any of those funds be reimbursed?

• (1040)

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: Absolutely. If we’ve found contractors who were paid who did no work, we will absolutely work with PSPC—

Mr. John Nater: You’re saying “if”. Have you recommended any funds be reimbursed?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: We have not as of yet. We’re going through the material.

Mr. John Nater: To whom did Fred Gaspar report when he was vice-president at CBSA?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: Me.

Mr. John Nater: Why did he leave CBSA?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: He had an opportunity at Transport Canada, and that’s where he works now.

Mr. John Nater: From December 2 to December 8, 2022, Mr. Gaspar took a trip to Bahrain. Are you aware of this trip?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I believe that was in the context of the World Customs Organization.

Mr. John Nater: Are you aware of whether he did anything else while he was on that trip?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: No.

Mr. John Nater: Did he undertake any personal business while on that trip?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I don’t know.

Mr. John Nater: Did he attend the World Cup while on that trip?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I have no idea.

Mr. John Nater: You never asked him? You never asked why inflated costs were incurred for a trip to that region of the country during the FIFA World Cup, and you didn't ask if it was perhaps because of an interest in seeing a World Cup game?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: There was a WCO meeting. He would have attended as our representative. If he took extra time at his own cost to see and do something else, I don't believe that is out of bounds.

I don't know if he went to see the World Cup, but if he did, I'm not sure that would be inappropriate.

Mr. John Nater: Well, at the cost of tens of thousands of dollars to Canadian taxpayers, I might disagree.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Mr. Chair—

Mr. John Nater: Could you provide us with a list of all meetings that he undertook while in Bahrain?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Mr. Chair, I think it's important not to let it stand, without any evidence that I've seen, that somebody is accused of spending taxpayer money on personal activities. I'm not aware of that. If there's information to suggest that, I would be interested in seeing it.

I am happy to furnish the meetings that Mr. Gaspar attended while he was at the WCO. If he met other people on his own time, then that's a question for him.

I've not seen anything to suggest that he was using taxpayer dollars to do inappropriate things. If that's the case, we will look into it, but I think it's important not to let that accusation hang out there without any further information.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman. As is my custom, you have the last word. I'm sure we'll return to this.

Ms. Bradford, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For Ms. O'Gorman, is CBSA reviewing Diane Daly's involvement in the ArriveCAN procurement process since Kristian Firth's questioning in the House of Commons on April 17?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Stepping back, as the committee is aware, there was a set of allegations put forward by a company called Botler AI. Those allegations were examined by our professional integrity division, which has undertaken various investigations relating to that.

Diane Daly was involved. At this point, I don't know the status of the investigation and whether she's being investigated or whether she is a witness.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you. Are there appropriate uses for subcontractors in procurement?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'll say this. Certainly there is a demand for companies to gather resources, take those resources to bid on contracts and furnish those resources to help departments carry out certain activities. It is particularly common in the IT space.

There's a certain amount of overhead that's offered by those companies, where the individuals don't have either the capacity or an

interest in doing it themselves. I believe that Public Services and Procurement is well placed to testify to that, and it has.

Questions come up for me when those often small companies subcontract to multinational firms. I don't understand why that would happen. I'm not suggesting it is offside or illegal, but I do find it questionable. When the value added of the resourcing companies is to deal with the overhead of bidding, why would they then subcontract to major firms?

I think transparency around that would be very helpful, but is it offside to subcontract? No. It's done. The value added of some of these companies is to do that subcontracting, but why a two-person company would subcontract to a multinational, I don't understand.

• (1045)

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Does consulting with companies occur before a contract or RFP is issued?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Again, I'm not the contracting expert, but my understanding is that a company would gather resources and, with those resources, bid on a request for proposal that's put out. They would then align those resources with the types of skills that are being sought through the request for proposal.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Why was KPMG selected as the subcontractor to GC Strategies?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: As I have gone through the material and the information that has come to light, I've had that question as well.

I don't know that it is not permitted in the contracting rules. These are commercial relationships between companies, and there is one accountable company that holds the contract and is responsible for the resources that it furnishes.

I can understand the questions. As I said, I've had the question as to why large companies would be subcontracted. Perhaps there are resources that work for both of those companies. I don't have insight into those commercial relationships, but I understand that there's a lack of transparency in explaining those relationships.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Why was the CFO branch of CBSA not made aware of PSPC's recommendation to execute a non-competitive process with the second of GC Strategies' contracts?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: As I've testified, for some reason CBSA had a system whereby, if the contract was being led by PSPC, the IT group would deal directly with PSPC. That's not a best practice. That has stopped since I have come to the CBSA. Everything goes through our procurement group. They do a challenge function, and they interface with PSPC.

I don't know if it was like that because it was during the pandemic and people were moving fast or because that's how it was set up, but that's not how it happens now.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you are next for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ailapperuma, I will continue in the same vein as my earlier questions.

During the entire saga of the contracts awarded to GC Strategies, Mr. Utano had a number of exchanges with the Department of Public Works and Government Services on the nature of the contract that was to be awarded to GC Strategies. You were copied on a number of those emails, which I have in front of me, dated March 27 to 30, 2020. In them, Ms. Durigan from the department questions the use of the national security exception for the contract.

When you learned about this through the emails, did you think at any point that there might have been a problem with the way in which a non-competitive contract worth millions of dollars was awarded for a three-year period using the national security exception? Did you ever wonder about that?

[*English*]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I did not have any reason to think there was anything wrong happening. My role, again, was to lead the technical development of ArriveCAN; there was a team responsible for procurement, and I was cc'd on those emails for information purposes only.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: You're telling me that an acting director of the CBSA disagrees with the findings of the Auditor General that these contracts were awarded in an extremely flawed manner that should never have been allowed. You did not see a problem at that time and you still do not see a problem. Meanwhile, you are acting director of the CBSA. Is that a fair summary?

• (1050)

[*English*]

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: At the time, I was a manager reporting to Mr. Utano, who was the executive director. I did not have any procurement-related or contracting-related functions at the time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay. However, you do have such duties now, since you are acting director. That said, even managers should ask questions. Besides, when a manager is promoted to director, it usually means they're assumed to have a certain level of judgment. They should be able to say that there's a problem and that public funds should not be wasted like this. They should be able to sound the alarm.

I feel it is my duty to remind you of something. Since 2003, your salary at the CBSA has been paid by taxpayers. The money that you squandered by awarding these multi-million dollar contracts to GC Strategies is taxpayers' money. It's not your money, it's not GC Strategies' money. It is taxpayers' money. You tell me that you were a manager and that you did not have any say. Now you are acting director and you still don't seem to have any say. What you

are telling us is that people couldn't care less about taxpayers' money. It's shameful.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Next up is Mr. Desjarlais for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Who at the CBSA directed Botler and KPMG to work with GC Strategies?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: My understanding, from some of the documents that I've seen, is that it was Mr. MacDonald, but I'm awaiting the outcome of an ongoing investigation, so I'm not comfortable saying that without a final assessment.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It seems to me that internal lobbying networks have largely corrupted the CBSA in this instance. Given that there's an ongoing investigation, I believe that is, in some evidence, an admission there is at least some, or partial, truth to that fact.

Wouldn't you agree?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'll take issue with the corruption comment. I don't know that I've seen evidence of corruption. I've seen evidence of—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I can remind you of the evidence of corruption. For example, the CBSA paid \$33,222 of legal bills for Mr. Cameron MacDonald to prepare for an appearance at the OGGO committee to talk about his public service job. That's an annual salary for many Canadians. That's a lot of money, to put it in other ways. In this instance, that he would get so much money—according to a recent filing, he would get \$33,000—in protection from the CBSA to try to get his story straight in some way, at an OGGO committee meeting, in addition to the fact that you've just admitted that there's an ongoing investigation.... I find issue with the fact that there could not be an instance where you can perceive corruption.

I mentioned a fact earlier, which was that we got a government document, known as appendix B, about the value of contracts between three companies—GC Strategies, Dalian and Coradix. These three companies, since 2011—pause there for a moment, because it's been going on for over a decade—have siphoned over \$1 billion out of the public service into these contracts, including a profit and including a network that would have enabled these people to continue to deprive the public service and also to continue to deprive Canadian taxpayers.

That's in addition to the fact that there is this unethical relationship between members like Mr. Utano and Mr. MacDonald, who were going to big, fancy events, including a wine tasting—

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, your time has expired, so we'll have to come back to you.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I wonder if I just can summarize my question: Is there corruption?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I would appreciate the opportunity to answer.

I sincerely take issue with the term you're using, particularly as it relates to people where there are ongoing processes.

There is a Treasury Board policy that provides for paying legal assistance for employees. That was followed. I don't believe that the lawyer is being used to get stories straight. I think people have rightfully sought legal advice. There's a provision for having that paid by the Treasury Board, and that was taken.

I want to be clear that I don't agree with your terminology.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Barrett, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I want to circle back to the number of consultants that you have reduced. You said the number was 68.

What is the total number of consultants that CBSA is using?

• (1055)

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'll have to come back....

Is your question in the IT?

We have a number of contracts across the organization that relate to both informatics and guard services training, so we have a lot of contracts. We have been reducing our reliance on IT contracts.

I can come back with a list that we currently have.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Let's get a full list of all the contracts. You said the number that you reduced was 68, so it would be interesting to know what that reduction is from.

It's important to note that CBSA officers are currently considering taking job action. Part of their grievance is excess management. When taxpayers are also paying for more outside consultants and more outside management, that's going to impact the travelling public and commerce in Canada.

I want to talk about Mr. Ossowski's access to documents when he was hired for a day to prepare for his committee appearance.

As the president of the CBSA, are there any documents that you don't have access to within the CBSA?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't think I would have access to all of the documents from my computer, but my assumption is that I could access any of our holdings.

Mr. Michael Barrett: PricewaterhouseCoopers has historically done extensive business with the Canada Border Services Agency. Currently, you've said they're not doing any business.

Mr. Ossowski is recruited by PricewaterhouseCoopers from being the head of the Canada Border Services Agency. What better way is there to get business with the CBSA than to hire its former president, who understands its workings?

Mr. Ossowski came back to your employ to prepare for a committee appearance, but only after he'd been caught lying, so there's an integrity question about the individual.

You hired the individual, knowing that the lie has been told, and then gave him access to the information that he would have had access to. You said that, well, he was the president.

Would it not be commercially valuable to PricewaterhouseCoopers to have one of their top consultants, the former head of the CBSA, get the office door unlocked and logged on to the computer?

You said you signed his letter of offer, but, to be honest, you seem a bit laissez-faire or unconcerned about what he accessed and who he talked to. It doesn't seem to have occurred to you before today that perhaps there was a commercial interest with someone who had demonstrated dishonesty in front of a parliamentary committee.

Does that concern you?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Again, I'm going to take issue with the language around lying. Mr. Ossowski testified to the fact that he had not recalled meeting or being in a meeting where individuals from GC Strategies were on the screen.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Ma'am, he said he wasn't in the meeting, and he was in the meeting. By any other definition, that's a lie.

Let's move on to the substance of the question. We won't litigate whether or not he lied. I'm asserting it; you refute it. We'll accept that.

Are you not concerned about at least the appearance of the circumstances that you created by hiring Mr. Ossowski? It seems like it was in his interest to get this offer of employment from you for the day, not in the interest of the CBSA. What was the advantage to the CBSA, if not to get the story straight, a characterization with which you take issue? If it was just so that he could access his emails, why not pay him a dollar, so that he was technically employed? Why are we giving the guy \$500? It seems like a good get for him for the day.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Again, if hiring him on casual to give him access to documents to prepare for the appearance.... It's in the Crown's interest that former officials come and can testify to what they did and why they did it while they were in their jobs. That was the rationale for bringing him back.

If he did not need to come back and could have accessed the information and the documents that, again, date back to his time as president, then that's on me, and I would happily provide that access going forward without any framework of employment around it.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Can you provide to this committee a list of all of the other occurrences where similar treatment has been offered to former employees of the CBSA in relation to their testifying before parliamentary committees during your tenure as CBSA president?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: There is nobody.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It was special access, then. It seems like special treatment for Mr. Ossowski.

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: There haven’t been retired people who are former officials invited to the committee. The other employees who have moved departments were also given the offer to access or tell the CBSA what documents they might wish to see to prepare for their own testimonies.

• (1100)

Mr. Michael Barrett: He’s the only one who was paid to prepare before—

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: It’s because the others are employees.

Mr. Michael Barrett: They’re not employees of the CBSA.

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: No. They are employees of the federal government, the Crown.

The Chair: That is your time.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses, especially Ms. O’Gorman, who has appeared before this committee before and who has answered all questions from members here on the very important matter of ArriveCAN, which, of course, is being addressed in a number of other committees as well.

For my part, I feel that I have really asked all the questions that I need to ask. However, we have the witnesses here today, so I would like to perhaps give Ms. O’Gorman a chance to clarify any issues, any questions, that she hasn’t had a chance to, starting with this question of reimbursing former employees when they’re called back in front of committee.

Ms. O’Gorman, can you tell us how that works and why this is done in this way?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I’ll share my understanding of it. My understanding is that it is a practice when former officials are called to testify, as they are in litigation after they have retired and as they are at the labour relations board for grievances after they’ve retired. In this case, an individual was called to testify before a parliamentary committee after he had retired. It’s in the Crown’s interest for those individuals to come prepared. In order to prepare, sometimes they require access to documents to refresh their memory of activities and decisions that were taken—and the rationale—while they were doing the job.

I did put a formality around that employment to give him access to it. As I’ve said, if that wasn’t necessary, that’s on me. It certainly wasn’t an effort to enrich Mr. Ossowski. It absolutely was not an effort to align any stories. He prepared the way he needed to prepare. I’m happy to provide a list of documents that he accessed, but as I said, you can ask him on Thursday.

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan, I’ve just paused the clock. Can you just move your microphone kind of out and down a little? Maybe just say a few words.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Is that better now?

The Chair: It is, yes, thank you.

You have two minutes and 40 seconds, please.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Ms. O’Gorman, thank you for that answer.

This policy is in place, in fact. When you say that it’s in the interest of the Crown, it is to help parliamentarians in their work with committee. Is it a time limitation, because I understand that, for ArriveCAN, for example, the contractors and subcontractors who are being questioned have been working for the Government of Canada for 13 years, including of course, for the former government under Stephen Harper.

Is there a time limitation?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I’ll just be clear that there’s not a policy in terms of bringing people back. The issue that I was focused on was the access to the information that he sought to prepare. As I said, if there didn’t need to be formality around that, I’ll own that decision. You may wish to ask him on Thursday whether the amount he received was worth it.

Again, this will be, I think, his third time appearing, so, as I said, this relates to the provision of documents that he wanted to see.

The framework of the agreement goes until the end of June but is tied to appearances before the parliamentary committee.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I think I’m going to have to go back to previous questions that have already been asked, but perhaps you can share an update with the committee regarding the CBSA’s internal investigations into ArriveCAN procurement.

• (1105)

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: They are ongoing, and people are being interviewed, as I understand it.

There was a motion before the Federal Court to seek a stay of two of those processes, and we are waiting for the decision by the Federal Court, so we won’t conclude on a couple of those until the Federal Court has ruled.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Is there anything that you could share regarding the claims of Minh Doan’s missing emails?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: That work remains under way.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you.

The Chair: Turning now to our third round, we have Mr. Nater for five minutes.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

Has Mr. Ossowski been in contact with anyone at CBSA since he was summoned to appear before this committee on Thursday?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I recommend that you ask Mr. Ossowski.

Mr. John Nater: No, I’m asking you, as the president of CBSA. Has anyone from CBSA been in contact with Mr. Ossowski in advance of his summons for this Thursday?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: If he has asked for documentation, I don’t know.

Mr. John Nater: You don't know. Okay.

We know that the RCMP has raided the home of GC Strategies founder Kristian Firth. I would like to know what documentation CBSA has thus far provided to the RCMP.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'm not tracking that. The RCMP doesn't come through me for requests of the CBSA. They don't report to me. They will conduct their investigation, and they will seek the information that they feel is necessary. I'm not going to track that. It's an investigation. They are free to come and obtain any information that they feel is necessary.

Mr. John Nater: Your lack of curiosity about an ongoing criminal investigation involving your department is surprising. You're not going to track the information that is being collected or is being asked for, considering that there are quite literally criminal investigations ongoing involving employees at your department. That doesn't trigger any curiosity on your part.

I want to go back on a—

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Mr. Chair...

Mr. John Nater: It wasn't a question, but—

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: It's a statement about how I'm conducting myself.

I'm not going to ask people to report to me on whether they've been interviewed by the RCMP or what documents they've been provided. It's an investigation by the police. I am running CBSA, but I am not going to keep logs of what the police do. They will do what they do; they don't report to me. It's not a lack of curiosity; it's respect for the police investigation.

Mr. John Nater: You are right. The RCMP does not report to you, but the 16,000 employees you noted do report to you, and the documents that are contained within the CBSA's possession are relevant to you as president of the CBSA. The fact that you're not tracking what documents are going out from the CBSA to the RCMP is surprising, frankly, because we know the challenges the CBSA has had with documentation, because of the report we had from the Auditor General—paper trails not existing, paper trails and emails being deleted. We know that Minh Doan's emails magically disappeared.

I want to know what you, as president of the CBSA, are doing to maintain the integrity of the documents within the CBSA so that they are being preserved and kept intact, so that they're not magically disappearing when there is an ongoing RCMP investigation that includes the Canada Border Services Agency. What's being done?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: If I asked employees to report to me on what documents they may have provided to the RCMP or in interviews, I would be sitting here being accused of interfering in a police investigation. The RCMP has every right to come and obtain the documents it feels it needs. I don't feel the need to track that. Similarly, when the Auditor General comes in, her staff work with the team to get the documents they need, and nobody reports that to me. I don't interfere with that.

My expectation is—and I've made that clear—that the documents that anybody in those positions, be it the Auditor General or the police, wish to seek and obtain are handed over.

I don't know what you're talking about in terms of the magical disappearance of emails, but I can tell you that the RCMP is gathering the information it feels that it needs.

• (1110)

Mr. John Nater: I can tell you which emails have magically disappeared. They were Minh Doan's, your former—

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: We don't have evidence of that.

Mr. John Nater: Mr. Chair, I think it's very clear. I see you're defending Mr. Doan, and that's your right, but the fact is that this has been very well litigated in the media in terms of emails disappearing, so I'm concerned about the integrity of the data and the documents that are maintained at the CBSA.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: You'll understand if I don't take media articles as a factual basis to act with regard to employee conduct.

Mr. John Nater: You're saying that the story in The Globe and Mail is false.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I'm saying that we're conducting our own investigation. You're stating that articles in the newspaper are equivalent to determined facts, so I'm saying we continue to look into it; we continue to investigate, and that's the basis upon which any action will be taken.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Up next is Ms. Khalid. You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I was listening to a lot of the questioning here by my Conservative colleagues. It always astounds me as to how they never let the facts get in the way of the political jargon they put out there. For example, just today we heard that Bahrain was the place where the World Cup and nefarious things happened, but actually the World Cup was in Qatar. I'm not really sure how that really plays out with the narrative of Mr. Nater.

Again, thank you, Ms. O'Gorman, for being here today and for answering questions yet again on this important topic. I think the sentiments of the committee are very much the same in that something happened here and taxpayer dollars were used. We are trying to get to the bottom of what happened and how we can improve the process. I think that your open and honest testimony here has been quite inspiring, so perhaps I'll start with asking you this.

I know the last time you came here you talked about the CBSA's plan moving forward, so perhaps you can start by giving us an update on the plan in response to the Auditor General's recommendations.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Sure. Thank you.

We've made 22 commitments. I commissioned an internal audit as well, and that's under way. That's also giving rise to commitments to address some of the gaps in the processes that existed in the department.

I can group it into a few categories.

One is training and guidance. It needs to be ongoing. I required retraining of executives and managers with delegated authority, and we continue to put out improved guidance.

Quality assurance and controls is our second line of defence, as it were. I don't want to keep finding out about gaps through our audits. That's an expensive way to find out that we don't have coverage and that our documentation isn't in order.

Then there's conflict of interest. I indicated that we've also done some work on that, both on the side of contractors and employees.

Then there's organizational changes. I mentioned something a few times, because it is quite significant in terms of the operations of the department, and this is contracts going through, one by one, to a senior review committee. That's giving rise to a lot of discussions about whether we even need contracts in some cases.

Next is reprioritizing what we need to do.

Then there's bolstering the capacity of our internal procurement team, which has increased by 20%. It's a credit to that team that the attrition rate has decreased to 7% from 35%, so we have a very engaged and knowledgeable team. It's fanned out across the organization to support other divisions and sectors in their procurements.

Then there's improving our information management practices. The policy is quite clear on documents of business value. I don't think there's business value in having 18 emails back and forth versus decision documents that are clear and can be found with all of the other relevant documents, be it in a procurement file or investigation.

Those are the areas we're working across. We're more advanced; we've completed nine of our commitments and should have the rest done in a year. It also speaks to the culture. It's not about new rules and processes. It's about fewer priorities. It's about exposure to where we're going in terms of contracting, where we need contracts, discussions about what we can do internally. It also is happening at the level of the culture of the organization.

• (1115)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks very much for that.

I always wonder about the role of the procurement directorate. In a recent article, we found that the organizations or the companies the Conservatives are really going after to try to connect to corruption and the Liberal government were actually brought in by the Harper Conservative government 13 years ago and have then continued the process.

Perhaps you can shed some light on the role of the procurement directorate at the CBSA. How new is this? How does this go beyond governments of the day? Is there actual corruption happening here by ministers or by the Prime Minister?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: The procurement group has always existed. They existed in a smaller form and, as I've testified, they existed in a way that they were not the point person on all of the procurements, so that's changed. They're there to assist their colleagues who have to get their work done, and sometimes getting the work done requires outside contractors, whether it's because we don't need that skill set in an ongoing way, or we can't recruit that skill set, or that we need specialized resources for a limited period of time.

They work with their areas across the department to determine what needs to be delivered, whether procurement is necessary and, if so, what's the best way to carry out that procurement and obviously be a liaison with PSPC when those procurements are being led by that department.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. O'Gorman, your testimony raises a number of questions. I don't think the issue is which document you're going to provide to the RCMP. The last time we had you at the committee, a few months ago, you were very clear on the fact that your role going forward would be to look to the future, but also to clean up the CBSA and ensure that an incident like ArriveCAN doesn't happen again.

What I see today, and what you may have heard as well, is that a number of agency employees who clearly violated the basic code of conduct not only are still on the job, but have also been promoted. I'm not just talking about Mr. Ailapperuma. Mr. Lauzon and others also behaved inappropriately.

What have you done to clean things up? At the moment, we are not seeing any results. Apart from suspending two employees, you don't seem to have done much of the cleanup that the agency needs.

[*English*]

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: There are two issues.

One is that it's the ongoing work of the professional integrity division and what they are examining based on the documents that have come forth over the course of the past couple of years. I have made it clear to them that I have expectations that they will deliver high quality as fast as is reasonably possible.

Through the course of looking back, they will come to decisions and recommendations regarding what they've found. They will work with human resources colleagues, and when an investigation is completed, and if it's founded, then the next step is to determine whether there are any mitigating factors and take appropriate discipline.... They have a grid that can compare discipline for various—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you.

Could you provide that report to the committee? We are very interested in the findings, since they show the progress the CBSA has made following the Auditor General's study. Can you provide us with the findings of that report, and when would you be able to provide them?

[*English*]

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I referred to ongoing investigations, so I don't have a document or a report. I have previously expressed that these are internal examinations of employee behaviour and conduct.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: That's fine, but I'm asking you a question. Committee members, the public and taxpayers, who pay employees' salaries, want to know what is going to happen to the employees who showed poor judgment, broke the rules and squandered taxpayers' money. People want to know that.

As president of the agency, how are you going to provide those answers to taxpayers, who elect the people you are speaking with right now?

[*English*]

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: There are a few things there.

There's the issue of hospitality. Is there a link to wasting taxpayers' money there? I'm not sure.

There is a values and ethics issue at play that we will be looking at with employees who have engaged contrary to the code of conduct. I said previously that we are looking—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Can you answer my question, please?

The Chair: I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I'm just looking for an answer, Mr. Chair. She didn't answer my question.

The Chair: You'll have another turn.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Chair, I didn't get an answer.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's over to Mr. Desjarlais for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Utano provided oversight of a budget of \$54.5 million that he was responsible for at the CBSA, in addition to overseeing 66

contractors. Are there any internal or external reviews into the \$54.5-million annual budget and the 66 contractors Mr. Utano oversaw, especially in light of the fact that he pushed for specific contractors, including KPMG?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: You referenced a \$54-million budget. Can you tell me where that comes from?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I believe it came from his operating accounts for the total amounts that were approved for GC Strategies, for example, and other contractors, from a total fund of \$54.5 million. It could be more. Maybe you have more information on missing documents that you could suggest to us that—

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I apologize, but my question is this: Is the \$54 million in reference to the cost that has been put out for ArriveCAN?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: On the total amounts that we were able to obtain from the documents provided to the Auditor General, in addition to an affidavit that was submitted that cites \$54.5 million at the CBSA, the question is not so much on the amount but rather on the accountability and transparency of that fund, particularly as noted in the affidavit, or even just the overseeing of the 66 contractors.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I apologize. What are you looking for?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: In an affidavit that was submitted in a lawsuit, he submitted the fact that he was responsible for \$54.5 million in addition to overseeing 66 contractors. It's the affidavit from the lawsuit against the CBSA. Are you familiar with the lawsuit against the CBSA?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Is that the Federal Court...?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Yes.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Have you reviewed the affidavit?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: No, not personally.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I see.

In relation to the affidavit, it has been submitted that he was responsible for \$54.5 million at the CBSA in addition to overseeing 66 contractors. My question is this: Given this information, whether you're just receiving it now or you had it previously, are there any internal or external investigations or reviews into that specific responsibility?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't know what we would review there.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It could be conflicts of interest, fraud, corruption....

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: That's certainly part of what I would expect our investigators to be looking at. I don't think they would break their work down by budget.

I guess that's where I'm struggling with the question. They are looking—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: What about the 66 contractors?

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, I'm afraid that is the time. I do plan to give you another round.

I'm turning now to Mr. Barrett.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I want to talk about the dinner at Lansdowne. What was the venue?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I believe it was Joey's.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What date did this happen on?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I apologize. I do not have the exact date.

I can provide it to you.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Please do.

How many people were there?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: If I recall correctly, there were maybe five people. It was between five and 10 people.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Who were they?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I was there. Mr. Firth, his partner—I forget his name, but I believe it's Mr. Anthony—and Mr. Utano were there. I don't recall if Mr. MacDonald was there, but he may have been. Some other key members...contractors like Mr. Murphy....

That's about the number of people I can remember, sir.

• (1125)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Murphy is a contractor with...?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: He was one of the subcontractors through GC Strategies.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Was Minh Doan there?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: No, sir.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What was for dinner?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I believe I had a burger. There were appetizers and whatever Joey's food was.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What about drinks?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: People had drinks.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Was it beer, wine, mixed drinks or soda?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I had a beer.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What did you say the discussions were about?

You said it was about the work...the day-to-day of ArriveCAN.

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: Yes, we were working long hours, and we were talking.

My conversation was mostly about the challenges of implementing ArriveCAN from a technical point of view.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What would Mr. Anthony and Mr. Firth have contributed to those conversations? They don't do any technical work. They bill more than 1,500 times. Their business is contracting. It's not IT work.

There was no grind. You talked about the grind of ArriveCAN, but for GC Strategies there was no grind. It was only grift. Their business was drumming up more business. It wasn't about programming.

What were their contributions to those discussions?

You're talking about programming. I'm not a programmer. If someone started into a conversation with me about programming, they might as well be speaking a language I don't understand—literally, in that case.

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: That's absolutely correct. I didn't have much conversation with Mr. Firth or Mr. Anthony about programming. I was mostly speaking with the team members that I was working with.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There were only five of you. Two of them were Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony. Did they just talk to themselves?

Who organized this dinner?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I believe it was Mr. Firth.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Firth organized it.

Did anyone talk to him?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: Other than greetings and offhand conversations about how life is, I didn't speak to him specifically.

Mr. Michael Barrett: We have five people sitting at a table. The host invites the two government employees, a subcontractor of GC Strategies and the two principals of GC Strategies. The government employees don't speak to the dinner hosts at a table of five people.

This room has a very long format. It would be lost on people who are watching this webcast that, for different reasons, this room is set up with a very long table. Five people sitting at a table at Joey's is a bit more intimate than that. To not talk about the only business that GC Strategies does seems a bit incredible. You'd agree that this sounds....

We have this dinner, and drinks are flowing. We have contractors and subcontractors of the government taking people out, and no one's talking to them. That doesn't sound believable.

Do you think that sounds believable?

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: I apologize if I said no one talked to them. No one talked to them about coding. We were talking about people's lives, their day-to-day family issues, as if it was a social gathering. We absolutely did not talk specifically about any contracting issues or any financial matters.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Five people who have only ArriveCAN in common sat down in a bar, and they didn't talk about ArriveCAN. They talked about kids' soccer schedules.

Mr. Chulaka Ailapperuma: If there was anything about ArriveCAN we talked about, it was about the challenges of implementing ArriveCAN.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Obviously, they know nothing, because they're not programmers.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going back to Mrs. Shanahan for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Chair. Again, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Chair, I'm hearing a bit of noise. Are the interpreters okay? I'll move the microphone again.

• (1130)

The Chair: Let me just check.

Oh no, you're correct. I'm getting a thumbs-down, so I have paused the clock.

Maybe say a few words, Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I have to take my glasses on and off, and I think that moves the microphone or the boom around. I apologize.

The Chair: We're good. I'm seeing smiles from the interpreters.

We'll go back to you, please. I'll resume the clock.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Again, I'd like to especially thank Ms. O'Gorman for being here today and answering all the questions that members have been putting to her.

Chair, I think you'll agree that our committee, public accounts, has a lot of important work to do on ArriveCAN. We've had multiple meetings. I think we've had over 15, 16 or 17 meetings on ArriveCAN. However, we also have other work to do in reviewing the Auditor General's reports, as well as getting out some of our draft reports from previous studies. Our work plan has been changed many times on multiple occasions, with short notice, and without consultation with all members.

Therefore, Chair, I move the following motion, which reads:

That, given that the chair has yet to table a subcommittee report for subcommittee approval, in relation to the committee's future business, it be agreed that:

- (1) the committee dedicate its meeting on May 21 to follow up on the committee's recommendations (i.e. "spring cleaning");
- (2) the committee dedicate its meeting on May 23 to witness testimony from officials on "Report 6: Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act—2030 Emissions Reduction Plan";
- (3) the committee dedicate its meeting on May 28 to the consideration of draft reports;
- (4) the committee dedicate its meeting on May 30 to witness testimony on "Report 1: ArriveCAN";
- (5) the committee dedicate its regular meeting on June 4 to witness testimony on "Report 2: Housing in First Nations Communities";
- (6) the committee dedicate its meeting on June 6 in the first hour to the appearance of Minister Bill Blair on "Report 1: ArriveCAN" and the second hour to the appearance of Minister Patty Hajdu on "Report 2: Housing in First Nations Communities"; and

that the chair table reports from the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure at the next committee meeting for approval by the committee.

Chair, I believe that a document with the text has been sent in both English and French to the clerk. I propose that you may want to suspend while members look at that, but I am certainly able to speak to the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, I assure you that I'm going to come right back to you. I just want to have a quick word with the clerk here for a second. Wait one second, please.

• (1130)

(Pause)

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you. I see hands up.

Ms. Shanahan, we're not currently in committee business. Your motion certainly is noted—with a small edit from the clerk, which I will get to at the appropriate time—so you're welcome to bring this up when we get to committee business after hearing from the witnesses.

This is not a matter-at-hand motion, so I will rule it out of order so that we can get back to our witnesses and then come back to committee business, as per the schedule.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

With all due respect, I challenge that decision.

The Chair: It is certainly your right to do that.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You can't move a motion on a point of order.

The Chair: Technically, you're right, Mr. Barrett. You cannot move a motion on a point of order. However, as the mover of the motion, she does have the floor to respond to me.

Mrs. Shanahan, just say, "I challenge the chair," without calling a point of order.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I challenge the chair on his decision.

The Chair: All right, can we have a roll call, please, and perhaps just explain that this is...?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Hilary Smyth): Yes. Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 4)

The Chair: That's very good. I'm just going to suspend for three minutes and then come back, and then I'll recognize speakers.

• (1135)

(Pause)

• (1140)

The Chair: I'm going to bring things back to order.

Ms. Shanahan, there is a slight change, and I'm looking for a friendly change so we don't need an amendment to it.

As you know, I give the clerk discretion to work with witnesses on their availability. The clerk informs me that on May 23 we have the secured transportation study in place of the net zero study, and the net zero study will be on June 6.

With your permission, we'd like to swap that in your motion.

You're signalling "no" to me.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: No, because June 6.... We know how difficult it is to get confirmation of ministers, and it's very important to the members. I think we go into later in June.

The Chair: I see. Your motion proposes that we bump the study on June 6 and have Minister Hajdu in.

• (1145)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: We have both ministers, Bill Blair and Patty Hajdu, on June 6.

The Chair: Could my amendment to your motion be that, instead of the net zero study on May 23, it be the Transport Canada study?

Both, I'll just point out, were priorities of government members. I'm looking for your permission to swap one of your studies for another.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: We can have an alternate date for the Canadian net-zero emissions, as long as we can say that takes place before the June 20 meeting. To the best of the ability, I'm going to look for some appropriate wording, but we understand that that's normally how it happens. It's on a best-efforts basis.

Part of the friendly amendment, which I believe has to be proposed by someone when we can see the wording on that, would be to, on a best-efforts basis.... Let's say that it must be scheduled, because I believe—

The Chair: No, if you want to extend your motion and move another date, you have to make that amendment. I'm looking for your permission to schedule national trade corridors on May 23, because that is when the clerk has lined up the witnesses. Yes or no?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Not without a guarantee that we have—

The Chair: I'm not making guarantees, Ms. Shanahan—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Hold on, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Shanahan, you're not negotiating with me for an expanded motion. You've tabled your motion. You can come with a sub-amendment—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Hold on, Ms. Khalid.

You can come back and propose another date, but I'm not in a position to expand your motion. I'm asking for a clerical change, per what the clerk's reporting to me, to do transportation on June 23.

Yes, Ms. Khalid. You have a point of order.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Chair.

I have two points. One, I believe that Mrs. Shanahan cannot amend her own motion. Two, I do believe that you as chair need unanimous consent in order to move a motion to amend any motion on the floor. It's just a friendly reminder, Chair.

The Chair: I'm looking for Ms. Shanahan's agreement, because if I don't have it from her, obviously it's not going to go anywhere.

Ms. Shanahan, do you want to accept the clerk's change through me to put transportation on May 23? If the answer is no, we'll just open up the debate on the motion, and we can deal with the consequences later.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I can't do that in good faith without knowing that we will have report 6, so maybe other members can put forward what I would call friendly amendments. That can be from any member, including from the Liberal side.

The Chair: I see hands going up.

Mr. Genuis, you signalled prior to my suspension that you would like the floor. Are you with us to take that? If not, I'll move to.... Mr. Genuis, are you ready?

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Chair, I am here, but I think Mr. Nater is going to make the comments I was going to make, so I'm happy to hand it over to him.

Mr. John Nater: Very briefly, Mr. Chairman, this is obviously eating into time that we could use to hear testimony—damning testimony, I would say—from the Canada Border Services Agency.

This is really just confirming what was done in our subcommittee, which you, as chair, have been directed to undertake. I really don't see why this is being brought forward at this point, especially since we have committee business scheduled immediately following our testimony. I move that we adjourn the debate and hear from the witnesses from CBSA on the damning ArriveCAN report.

The Chair: I cannot adjourn debate on a motion unless you're signalling that you're supporting it, in which case you just want to....

Mr. John Nater: Well, if everyone's ready to deal with it right now, let's go. Otherwise, I move that we adjourn debate and hear from our witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Nater has called for us to adjourn debate on the motion. As the clerk's getting ready, this is to adjourn the debate now. We go back to the witnesses, and then we go into committee business and can pick things up again there.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 4)

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

• (1150)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks very much, Chair. I appreciate the opportunity.

I have been quite clear over the past number of months that I have the honour of being part of this committee. We can do things in two ways. We can have a collaborative approach as to how we are going to run our committee, or we can have a not-so-collaborative approach in which we try to find “gotcha” moments and clips and try to bring in matters from other committees into ours. To be quite frank—and I really take points from Ms. Shanahan, who I learn from a lot because she's a veteran of this committee—that's not what the role of this committee is.

Chair, you've had the opportunity to table subcommittee reports. We have a rolling work plan. The fact that we are sitting here in our constituencies, the majority of us, trying to balance the support for our constituents while also trying to make sure that we're doing the important work in Ottawa.... It's very difficult. I have constituents I have had to cancel meetings with because I get to see your lovely face, Chair, and my constituents are annoyed by that.

I think that we have had so many opportunities to come together, to build work plans and to say, “Okay, committee, we are all on the same page here. We all want to work together. Here is what and how we are going to govern ourselves over the next couple of months.” You have had so many opportunities, Chair, to do that, and time and again we see that things change on the fly.

In fact, in our last meeting in Ottawa on Thursday, you indicated that we would be having a committee meeting on Thursday of this week—

The Chair: May I interrupt?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I am speaking to the motion, Chair, if that's okay.

The Chair: No, you're not, actually. The motion is about the schedule.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Indeed, and I will quote to you, Chair, the language of the motion:

That, given that the chair has yet to table a subcommittee report for subcommittee approval, in relation to the committee's future business, it be agreed that:

Therefore, what I am talking about is, unfortunately, your failure to table subcommittee reports and come up with a workable work plan and the fact that, unfortunately, you pre-empt the committee. You had given indication that you were calling a committee meeting for Thursday, yet here we are on Tuesday for a three-hour meeting. I am more than happy to discuss that.

However, Chair, we need to have a work plan, and that is what this motion is really all about. It's about creating that work plan and holding you to account, Chair, because, quite frankly, every single member on this committee has the same objectives. The public accounts committee has a very clear mandate that we are all in agreement with. The facts are that the work plan keeps changing; that we get duped every single time on when committee meetings are going to happen, when they're not going to happen, what the agenda is and who the witnesses are; and that constant amended notices of meeting have led us to this point, when we are now putting forward a motion to say, Chair, if you're not going to do your job, let committee members come together and do your job for you.

• (1155)

The Chair: There is a point of order, Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair. I would just remind Ms. Khalid that it is in our Standing Orders not to speak disrespectfully of the chair. The position of chair is an important position, and we have faith in our chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Absolutely, Chair, I have faith in you, and I know that you can do the right thing. I am not speaking ill of you. I am just calling out what has happened over the past number of months that I have been a member of this committee, to try to bring some order to this committee.

Chair, I know that you're trying to do your best. I know how difficult it is for the clerks to find witnesses and fill in the schedules, etc. However, the fact that we keep amending our meetings and the fact that we keep calling unexpected meetings is difficult. The meeting here today has cost taxpayers over \$10,000. Can you imagine \$10,000 for three hours in which we could have been supporting our constituents and had this in our sitting week?

Therefore, what I'm trying to say to you, Chair, is that this motion is a proposition as to how we are going to conduct ourselves over the coming weeks. We have five long weeks in Ottawa when we are going to be able to do all the work that is on your agenda and on all of our members' agendas. We just need some kind of decorum. We just need some kind of ability to have certainty, not only in our own schedules but also in the schedules of our constituents, so that when they schedule meetings to come to see me, for example, I don't have to cancel on them at the last minute just so I can appear here.

Therefore, Chair, I submit that to you. I am very much in support of this motion, and I'm hopeful that members of our committee are also, because what this motion would do is give us clarity. It would give us a concrete work plan, for which we have been waiting for a very long time, for months in fact, with a work plan that keeps changing and we keep fidgeting around with. Here we are in a surprise meeting on a Tuesday. I don't know why we are doing this, but I'm hopeful that this motion brings concreteness and stability to our committee.

Again, Chair, I respect the work that you do, and I look forward to continuing to work with you, I'm hoping, in a more collaborative way than we have so far. I'll leave my remarks there, Chair, and I look forward to continuing with this debate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Up next is Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you, Chair.

You know, this motion came about because we want some certainty about a work plan. As my colleague, Ms. Khalid, has brought up, we never know what the plan is. The emails keep coming from the clerk, amending and so forth. There are so many changes. It's just that we would all like to have everybody agree on a work plan that works for everyone.

I would really like to also remind the chair that we still have some outstanding reports to look at. I think it's about six or seven, and some of them date back to 2022. I really think we need to get back to that.

That being said, I'd like to propose a friendly amendment that we dedicate the meeting for May 23 to witness testimony from officials on the report for the national trade corridors fund and Transport Canada.

Then we dedicate June 11 to the environmental report.... I'm sorry, I just need a moment to get the right wording of that. It's report 6, on the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act.

• (1200)

The Chair: All right. I'll just see if the clerk.... Is that clear?

You're moving an amendment to Mrs. Shanahan's motion that we will study the report for trade corridors on May 23 and we will study report 6 on Canadian net-zero emissions on June 11.

Ms. Jean Yip: That's correct.

The Chair: Is there discussion on that, or should we call a vote?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: They're all accepted as friendly amendments.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We'll go back to the discussion.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Chair.

I appreciate the friendly amendment brought forward by my colleague because indeed it's the kind of accommodation that we can normally expect in this committee, where members discuss, either in the subcommittee or in committee business and usually in camera, what the work plan is going to be going forward, so there's some clarity and certainty in the work that we have to do. We all take it very seriously, and we want to be prepared.

Chair, I have to say that last Thursday, we had committee business in public for an hour, and we discussed at great length a Thursday meeting that we would be having this week, without any clarity as to the witnesses that were going to be called. In fact, members on the Liberal side found out that other members on the Conservative side had prior knowledge about whether or not witnesses would be able to attend. That was shown by a motion—

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan, first of all, that was put to bed.

Second, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. You appear to have advance knowledge of Minister Hajdu's availability in a few weeks, which I'm aware of and the clerk's aware of, but no other members are aware of.

I'll go back to you, but let's not go down that road. Please speak to your motion and save your skulduggery.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Indeed, Chair, and I hope that you're not impugning any motives—

The Chair: You were the one doing that, Mrs. Shanahan. It's back to you.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Well, Chair, you know, this is why we normally have these discussions in an in camera meeting, where members can speak freely, share information and so on.

For some reason, well, not for just some reason but because of weeks and months of, frankly, some members not being able to have full access to all information that was made available to other members, because of multiple changes to a work plan, because of the work plan not being sent out on a timely basis, and because of a subcommittee report not being submitted to the committee for approval and then being subject to change after the subcommittee has spent considerable time working on it, I am presenting this motion, and I'm very happy to receive the friendly amendment that has been put forward today. I'm looking forward to some very constructive work by this committee in the weeks to come.

I will leave it there. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Arya, you have the floor, please.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): I have just a short comment, Chair.

I'm not a regular member of this committee, but I was on this committee from 2015 to 2019, when I was first elected. Conservative Kevin Sorenson was the chair, and we had NDP member David Christopherson, who was a very active member of the committee. I fondly recall those four years, when the committee worked very well. In fact, in the entire four years, there was not a single dissenting report from any of us. We had a majority then, I should say, and it appears that things have changed now. That's all I wanted to say.

I'll say another thing, Chair. In fact, before our committee in 2015, the departments used to send different levels of officers to the committee, but we put our foot down and insisted that the deputy ministers themselves be available for every single meeting, and we enforced it. At our insistence on the Liberal side, we made sure that the deputy ministers appeared on behalf of the department.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Bradford, you have the floor.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to speak in favour of the motion, as amended with a friendly amendment. As a new MP, I know we have two roles. One is our parliamentary duties, which take place here in Ottawa. The other, equally important, if not more so, is our duty to our constituents back home.

At this time of year, we have very few weeks dedicated to that. In fact, this is our final week here in the constituency until the House rises on June 21. Consequently, we have a lot of meetings booked here, often quite a bit in advance. The schedule is very jammed.

I reiterate the comments made previously by Ms. Khalid and Mrs. Shanahan. We get these things booked, and then, all of a sudden, they're upended, and we have to cancel on our constituents. It sends a very poor message.

With ArriveCAN, we've had—I don't know; I've lost track—probably 17 meetings on this, and I think half of them have happened during constituency weeks, which should not happen. Now we're at the point where we're recalling witnesses we've previously heard from, and they don't really have anything new to add.

Last Thursday, you said that we were going to have a meeting on Thursday, so I had to get coverage, which was difficult, because I have something—

The Chair: Ms. Bradford, just to jump in, this is not about the motion. This is about not wanting to sit in recess week.

We'll go back to you.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: I'm sorry, Chair. It's about the need for the motion.

I'm sorry that this motion is necessary, but it has become quite evident over the past couple of months, with these unexpected meetings that happen during constituency weeks, that we need a program. We need a plan, so that we can be prepared. We need to know who the witnesses are and when they're coming, so that we can prepare and so that we have some good, valid, relevant questions. That's what we're trying to accomplish here, Mr. Chair.

I think that this plan...and we need to stick to it. By passing this motion, we need to say that this is our work plan, and we won't be altering it. The witnesses will be lined up, and we won't be having any extra things added on that are going to disrupt this work program, because we have reports that we need to table and get done, so that we look like we're effectively conducting the work that we're elected to do. We need to get on with it.

Our wish is that this brings some structure and clarity, which I feel has been missing with all these additional things that have disrupted and pushed our reports back so that we don't get things tabled in the House. It's just so that we have some structure and advance knowledge of what's coming up and who the witnesses will be, so that we can proceed on an ongoing basis.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to add on to what my colleagues have said but also to kind of expand on all of the points that this motion outlines.

When we talk about spring cleaning, there's a lot that's on the plate of the public accounts committee's agenda. There's a lot that's pending. I know that our last meeting was in camera, so I can't go into specific detail about what was edited or discussed in reports, but I do recall being alarmed at having to change dates, given how much the reports have been delayed and pushed back because of calling and recalling the same witnesses again and again.

I think that point one is very, very necessary, and we definitely need to have a spring cleaning of what is on our agenda and how

we are going to conduct ourselves going forward. I think that having that conversation is going to really clear up and, hopefully, prioritize and triage what is on our plate and what we need to get done as soon as possible.

For point two, the meeting for May 23 dedicated to officials on "Report 6: Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act—2030 Emissions Reduction Plan" is something that Canadians really want to hear about. That report is a significant one in terms of the climate today.

We are about to go into a significant fire season, and we are going to see a lot of forest fires over the summer. We are going to have multiple conversations about what climate change means to all of us and how we as a government and, specifically, as the public accounts committee are going to ensure that we hold government to account in terms of what the action plan is with net-zero emissions. I think that this report is very important for us to get on the radar and tabled in the House. We do need to discuss it as a committee. Again, that report is a very, very important thing to be included in this motion.

The third point is the consideration of draft reports. As I alluded to earlier, Chair, there are so many reports that we just have not gotten to that we should be getting to. In fact, we've had to amend some of these reports based on the delay. I think that it is important for us to get these draft reports tabled, because the work of the Auditor General is important. The work of this committee is important. If we just hold on to all of these reports, how are we going to further the work we're trying to do? How are we going to further the recommendations we are proposing, based on the Auditor General and based on what we've heard in this committee? I think sitting on them is doing a disservice to our committee and to Canadians. I really think that is an important part of this motion as well.

As the chair, you've indicated that ArriveCAN is very, very important. This motion also speaks to that, to say that the May 30 meeting be dedicated to witness testimony on report 1 on ArriveCAN, because we do care, Chair, about what you think, about what all members of this committee think, what impacts Canadians and what is important to them. Including this as part of the work plan for the next couple of months is very important because I, for one—and I've said this on the record so many times—am so disappointed with how ArriveCAN happened. I can't believe how much money we've spent on this. I think it is important for us to put out that final report on what exactly happened here and how we are going to reconcile the 13 years, Chair, of multiple governments that have had challenges with contracting. I think ArriveCAN is a good example of how we can do that.

On the housing issue with first nations, I know that Mr. Desjarlais has been very, very vigilant in ensuring that we speak about this. I know that our government has had a lot of interventions on this as well and done a lot of work.

• (1210)

I think that's another really good thing for us to talk about to ensure that this is triaged and prioritized in what we do from today until we rise at the end of June. Again, I really think this is important.

The two ministers, Minister Blair and Minister Hajdu, do need to appear, because that is the will of the committee. We've passed motions accordingly. We have talked about this and collaborated on this. It is difficult, as members have said, to get the agenda and the time from ministers, so if we have those times confirmed, I think it would be really helpful for us to be able to schedule that and make sure that we are getting them on the record on a lot of the issues that we have been discussing in this committee.

Chair, I have talked point by point on all of the issues that have been raised in this motion, and I'm really hopeful that you and all members of this committee can support this work plan. Quite frankly, we have not seen a workable work plan—or any work plan, to be quite frank—over the past couple of months. We're just trying to propose something that would be helpful to guide this committee and give some kind of order to the prioritization and triaging of how this committee operates.

I'll stop there, Chair. I look forward to a positive vote on this.

Thanks.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: Thank you all for ratifying, with a slight amendment, the work plan that was sent to you all.

We're now going back to our witnesses.

Mr. Brock, you have the floor.

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

Ms. O'Gorman, you appeared at the OGGO committee on October 24, 2023. You informed this committee before your appearance at that meeting that you'd visited the PCO at 80 Wellington at 2 p.m. You then attended the OGGO committee at 3:30 p.m., and, the next morning, you visited the PCO at 80 Wellington again. This is all pursuant to your calendar.

Did you meet with PMO officials?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: No.

Mr. Larry Brock: Did you meet with PCO officials?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't know the specific meeting that you're talking about, but if I was at PCO, I would have been—

Mr. Larry Brock: Ma'am, I just repeated the meetings that you attended. One was on October 24, one hour before your committee appearance, and the other followed your committee appearance, on

October 25. I'll ask again: Did you meet with PMO officials on both of those dates?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I would have to review my calendar. I don't recall meeting in person with PMO officials in any meetings. This was more than six months ago.

Mr. Chair, is there a specific question that the member wants an answer to? Pointing out dates of meetings from six months ago, I'm hard pressed to—

Mr. Larry Brock: Ma'am, this is important. This is an important question, and we want an answer to it.

Whom at the PMO and the PCO did you meet with before and after your appearance at the OGGO committee?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I would have to review my calendar. I don't have it in front of me.

Mr. Larry Brock: You'll provide this committee with the names of everyone you met with in the PMO and the PCO.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Mr. Chair, the member is stating as a fact that I met with the PMO. I have not agreed to any facts. Please let that be clear.

The Chair: I stopped the clock, Mr. Brock. There's a request for information. I believe Ms. O'Gorman said she would check her schedule.

I just wanted to clarify that. I want to double-check. I don't want to put words in your mouth.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I believe the member has my schedule, so if the people aren't listed, I can see if I can go in and find that. I will take that back.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Brock, you have two minutes, 50 seconds. It's back to you.

Mr. Larry Brock: Ms. O'Gorman, did you talk about the Arrive-CAN issue?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: As I said, I don't recall those meetings. I don't have the information in front of me. I have spoken to PCO—

Mr. Larry Brock: I'll stop you right there. Ms. O'Gorman, it is really funny that now, some several months removed, you have great difficulty remembering your attendance at the PCO and PMO, yet when the question was put to you by me at an earlier appearance, you remembered exactly attending, and you told us at that time that it was a mere coincidence that you were attending before your committee appearance.

I'm now telling you that this is what you had said previously, so it's very coincidental, madam, that you can't remember now. Clearly, this was about your appearance at committee, and it was clearly about the ArriveCAN study.

Do you dispute that?

• (1220)

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I do. I absolutely dispute that. Your question was not, "Did you meet with the Privy Council Office or the Prime Minister's Office before your appearance, to discuss your appearance?" Had that been the question, I would have said no. I have never met with PMO with regard to any of my—

Mr. Larry Brock: Ms. O'Gorman—

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Mr. Chair, may I finish my—

Mr. Larry Brock: Ms. O'Gorman, this is my time.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I believe there was a statement that was erroneous that I am fixing. If the question was asking if I met with the Prime Minister's Office—

Mr. Larry Brock: Ms. O'Gorman, this is my time and—

The Chair: Order, order, order.

Ms. Yip, do you have a point of order? I think I am going to preempt it, but go ahead. I see your hand up.

Ms. Jean Yip: My point of order is that the witness should be allowed to answer, and also that 80 Wellington is the PCO and not the PMO.

The Chair: Thank you.

I just want to bring a little order.

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: The question is—

The Chair: Ms. O'Gorman, hold on. I'm going to turn it back to Mr. Brock. This is his time. In this process, with other questioning, if there's something you feel you haven't been able to answer, another member can certainly turn to you; but unfortunately all members are on the clock, and they have discretion about how they would like to use that time. I know that can be frustrating, but I just want to clarify that.

Mr. Brock, you have about a minute and a half. We'll go over to you, please.

Mr. Larry Brock: Ms. O'Gorman, you are going to table all the names of all officials at the PMO and the PCO whom you spoke to before and immediately after your committee meetings on this ArriveCAN study.

You are also going to give us details as to what you discussed, because I know there's an email from October 2022, that the PCO was very interested in the ArriveCAN study. You were cc'd, and actually there was an email directed to you regarding that, so you wanted to provide information to the PCO on the ArriveCAN study.

I find it extremely suspicious, and I'm sure Canadians do not believe you, ma'am, when you say that it was merely a coincidence, and that before and after your meeting with the PCO you did not discuss your testimony or the ArriveCAN study. We'll wait for your information to be received.

The RCMP is investigating thousands of emails deleted by Minh Doan, a former employee of the CBSA. Have you been able to recover some of those emails, yes or no?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: The team is investigating the allegation. I don't think it's been established that—

Mr. Larry Brock: Have you recovered some of those emails, yes or no?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I don't believe it's been established that the emails were deleted.

Mr. Larry Brock: Have you recovered some of those emails that were not provided to the RCMP or the Auditor General? Have you since found and been able to recover some of those emails?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: I have not understood from either the Auditor General or the RCMP that they were not provided with emails that they were seeking.

Mr. Larry Brock: Ma'am, there is evidence—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: I'll hear that point of order in a second.

Mr. Brock, your time is up.

I heard a point of order. Is that Ms. Khalid?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, and that's exactly the point. Mr. Brock was way over in his time.

The Chair: Mr. Arya, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. O'Gorman, in your testimony you mentioned the contracts worth more than \$40,000. Is that a new procedure that you mentioned?

Ms. Erin O'Gorman: Yes. I've established governance that any contract at CBSA that is being renewed, extended or established goes through a committee that's chaired by the executive deputy head.

Mr. Chandra Arya: I know concerns have been raised due to this ArriveCAN scandal, but sometimes adding red tape makes life difficult for various departmental work. Sometimes, in an emergency—40,000 is a big number, I understand—in the bigger scheme of things, work needs to get done quickly. Are you adding more red tape to the approval process?

• (1225)

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: I don’t see it as red tape. I see it as visibility across the organization. The committee can meet quickly if there’s a need, but what I’m trying to institute at CBSA is that, as these things don’t come up at the last minute, if everything is in order it’s a short discussion and people proceed.

Mr. Chandra Arya: You mentioned that you are trying to reduce the consulting footprint. That’s important. I agree with that, because overreliance on consultants is not a good thing in the long run. You also mentioned that you need to transfer the knowledge to the internal team. In fact, every time a consultant is hired, part of that should be that the knowledge of this external contractor goes to the internal team, so that the expertise will become available in-house as and when needed. Obviously it has not been happening for too long a time. Is it in an informal way that you are instituting it, or is there a formal way of doing this?

Ms. Erin O’Gorman: Mr. Chair, to the previous question on the number of contracts, in February this year we had 243 IT consultants working in CBSA, and as of May we have 175—I undertook to get those numbers.

We are making a concerted effort to do a knowledge transfer and have a plan for all the work we are doing by virtue of having consultants there, and what the long-term plan is. We will always have consultants. It wouldn’t be economical or feasible to hire across the agency all of the depth of IT talent we need. Some people we need to come in quickly. As I said, we have people who know computer languages but who don’t really want to work for government. They’re retired. We need their expertise. Again, there too we’re looking in quite a concerted way to do a knowledge transfer and do that work ourselves.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: There’s a motion to adjourn the meeting. I’ll have the clerk call the roll on that, please.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: Thank you for your extended appearance today.

This meeting is adjourned. We’ll see you back here on Thursday.

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