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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley





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• (1615)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)):** Good afternoon, colleagues.

I call this meeting to order. I'm sorry for the delay. Of course, we had votes.

Welcome to meeting number 84 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

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

I have a friendly reminder. Do not put earpieces next to the microphone, as it causes feedback and potential injury to our interpreters.

Very quickly, before we start with our opening statements, I have an update on the papers we've asked to be tabled here.

Mr. Firth has been in contact with our committee regarding bank records related to GC Strategies. According to his accountant, because the payments are older, it's going to require one or two extra days to produce the information. We originally planned to have them already, but it's going to be two more days, which I think is acceptable.

On the second order for production of documents, the different versions of the résumés for the two Botler witnesses have been received and are now with translation.

We're going to start with Mr. MacDonald, I understand, for a five-minute opening statement, and then we'll go to Mr. Utano.

Please go ahead, Mr. MacDonald.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald (Former Director General, Business Application Services Directorate, Canada Border Services Agency):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the parliamentary committee.

I have submitted the text of my opening remarks, but I'm going to add some words today because of some events last night.

There has been a concerted effort to portray Mr. Utano and me as corrupt. The narrative is compelling, but it's based on untrue allegations. The falsehoods and innuendos have been plastered in the national press. Senior CBSA officials have distanced themselves from us.

[Translation]

Our careers have been put on hold. Our lives have been disrupted.

[English]

Last night, I received an email from a Ms. Simmons, someone I do not know. It said that she hoped I would go to jail, and that among other things, I was corrupt, greedy and a sorry excuse for a human being. She hopes I am ashamed and that I will seek redemption.

These are all based on falsehoods. There was no cozy relationship, no conspiracy and no fraud involving Mr. Utano or me.

I'm grateful to have the opportunity to finally present the truth, address the extraordinary allegations that have been raised by Botler AI, and show through facts that you have been misled.

[Translation]

I will begin by providing you with some background on the ArriveCAN application.

[English]

During COVID, a serious need arose for a national mobile application to enable Canadians to re-enter the country. CBSA's contracting authority, the finance branch, authorized the sole-source, and PSPC negotiated the terms and authored the final contract. Our innovation team was given fewer than five days to pursue options. Six companies were evaluated. GC Strategies and Deloitte were the only vendors willing and able to satisfy the requirements in the narrow time frame.

I was not involved in the GC Strategies vetting. Two options were presented to my superior, then vice-president and chief information officer, Minh Doan. Minh Doan specifically rejected Deloitte as an option. Deloitte had, in fact, been my preference. As a result of the direction given to proceed by Mr. Doan, GC Strategies was recommended to the contracting authority. I was the director general of innovation. The decision was never mine to make.

[Translation]

For 12 months, until May 2021, I led the team responsible for the development and expansion of the ArriveCAN application.

During my participation, all task authorizations provided to GC Strategies were met, on time and on budget.

[English]

Prior to my departure, I provided a costing for ArriveCAN. It was \$6.3 million. This was shared with my colleagues and supervisor.

[Translation]

Botler AI's allegations against me are unfounded.

[English]

Most complaints are opinions. Under the slightest scrutiny at this committee, they began to collapse. They told this committee they believed their chatbot would make them \$26 million a year. Their disappointment has turned into a campaign of baseless accusations against Mr. Utano and me.

The facts are these: In 2019, Dalian Enterprises competed fairly for a general services IT contract. On November 19, 2019, I received an unsolicited, jointly branded GCS and Botler proposal for Bill C-65. The HR department was the client and decision-maker for the work with Botler. A feasibility study was asked for by CBSA that had six parts. There was never a pilot in scope. My VP instructed me directly to help them deliver an executive-appropriate presentation. I advised my VP that CBSA would use an existing contract. The proper contracting processes were followed. PSPC has validated this.

I have had an unblemished reputation in the public service for 23 years. I have competed openly for every single promotion I have ever received, starting from an entry-level position as a student. My actions have always been guided by a commitment to the public interest. The allegations that have been painted are incomplete and inaccurate—a misleading narrative.

The reality, along with the accountability of the leadership of CBSA.... The result is that my reputation and the careers of good public servants are being shattered.

[Translation]

I thank the members of the committee for the opportunity to share the facts openly and honestly.

[English]

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

Mr. Utano, please go ahead.

**Mr. Antonio Utano (Former Executive Director, Border Technologies Innovation Directorate, Canada Border Services Agency):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

[Translation]

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to answer your questions concerning your study on the ArriveCAN application and, more recently, concerning the allegations put forward by Botler AI regarding the work undertaken when I was at the Canada Border Services Agency.

[English]

Directly and by innuendo, it has been conveyed to this committee that I have committed wrongdoing. I have not. My reputation and career have been attacked, and damage has been inflicted on

me both personally and professionally. Today, I will present the facts, and I will speak clearly and honestly about all my actions. I welcome transparency and accountability.

We have provided a brief to this committee with evidence that will substantiate all statements and facts outlined below.

Regarding ArriveCAN, at the onset of the COVID pandemic, I was an executive director at the CBSA, responsible for the prototype and design division, which included the mobile centre of excellence team. In early March 2020, the Public Health Agency of Canada, PHAC, asked the CBSA for urgent assistance to develop technical capabilities needed for contact tracing at the border. No such capabilities existed at that time.

The technical team was responsible for assessing technical solutions needed to fill this operational response in an extremely urgent timeline. Option analyses of this magnitude typically take months, and we were given less than five days. The technical team assessed six in total. Internal development was determined as not feasible, given a shortage of skill set and capacity, and the urgent timeline. An outsourced option was deemed necessary.

The two possible outsourced options were presented. These were the Deloitte and GC Strategies solutions. Both options were sent to the vice-president and chief information officer, Minh Doan, for consideration and a decision. At a team meeting, we were informed that the Deloitte solution was discounted, leaving mobilizing the GC Strategies solution as the only option.

The ArriveCAN app and all its technical components evolved considerably throughout the pandemic from the original concept design. It was created through a collaboration of CBSA employees and over 19 technology vendors. One of these was GC Strategies.

The entire agency's pandemic contact tracing response cost \$55 million. This was not all technology development. The breakdown of the spending is published information, and I have included it again for reference.

All GC Strategies task authorizations related to ArriveCAN followed all procurement guidelines. Contracting was overseen and managed by PSPC. My responsibility remained to ensure that the technology requirements were met and delivered on time, and they were.

I will now address the separate issue of Botler AI. To be clear, Botler AI did not work on ArriveCAN and was in no way part of the ArriveCAN program. My involvement with the Botler feasibility study was limited.

On September 27, 2021, shortly after I assumed the role of acting director general, I received an email from Ms. Dutt, with a c.c. to my team. The email raised two issues. The first was a late payment to Botler from the prime contractor, Dalian and Coradix. The second was discontent regarding a private partnership they had established, specifically on the collaboration between Botler AI, Dalian and Coradix, and GC Strategies.

The CBSA responded to Ms. Dutt within 24 hours. This included resolution to the delayed payment, and we reminded Ms. Dutt that the contract between CBSA and Dalian and Coradix had contractual privacy clauses preventing CBSA from discussing private or proprietary matters with subcontractors. Ms. Dutt's letter raised no concerns and no allegations about the CBSA or any of its employees, past or present. In fact, in a follow-up email the next day, Ms. Dutt praised the good relationship and positive experience she had enjoyed to date, working with the CBSA and its employees. Moreover, she expressed her appreciation for the prompt action, and the matter was considered closed.

In December 2021, CBSA's human resources branch declined further work and requested the cancellation of the Botler AI task authorization, citing capacity and staffing issues. The TA was cancelled, and I had no further contact with Botler AI.

I will close on a personal note. I have worked in the technology field for over 24 years. I've dealt with highly sensitive files, operations and Five Eyes partnerships, both domestically and internationally. I understand the seriousness of ensuring that my actions remain bound to the professionalism demanded of a position in the federal public service. I have always upheld these values.

Thank you for your time. I'm willing to answer any questions you may have.

• (1620)

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

We'll go to Ms. Kusie, please, for six minutes.

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

On November 4, 2019, two young entrepreneurs, Ritika Dutt and Amir Morv, were contacted by Kristian Firth of GC Strategies regarding a Government of Canada project.

On November 30, Firth stated that he had had a great chat with Cameron from CBSA and that they would act as fast as they could to get Botler a commitment.

Over the course of their interactions, Ms. Dutt stated that Firth had repeatedly stated that the CBSA was very interested. Firth repeatedly communicated that Cameron MacDonald would need to receive benefits as consideration for his role and influence in bringing Botler to the Government of Canada.

Firth stated that MacDonald had then CBSA president, John Ossowski's ear, and that for MacDonald, it was more than credit. Firth just wanted to be sure that MacDonald was taken care of.

The principals met with MacDonald several times. During a meeting called by MacDonald on January 22, 2020, at the Marriott Spin café, MacDonald confirmed over drinks with the principals

Firth's statements regarding implementation of Botler as a CBSA pathfinder for the entire Government of Canada-wide implementation.

During another in-person meeting, called by MacDonald on February 6, 2020, which was also attended by Antonio Utano and others, MacDonald provided precise instructions and wording on how to pitch Botler to the president to ensure success.

During the period, MacDonald continued to provide intelligence to Firth on internal high-level executive meetings regarding Botler that were above his pay grade. MacDonald provided direct instructions to be provided via Firth to Botler and the principals in order to guide interactions with other CBSA employees. MacDonald also assigned work delegated to him by his superiors to Botler for completion at the last minute.

Firth regularly asserted MacDonald's influence and insisted that Botler provide whatever was asked by the CBSA, as MacDonald had what he called a very big stick and could get what he wanted. Firth said the CBSA knew where MacDonald was going in the organization and how fast.

Over multiple years of interactions with both Firth and the CBSA mid-management, it has become evident that conscious efforts were made by both parties to isolate and control the flow and narrative of information to the CBSA executive leadership. In this instance, the leadership is defined as the agency's president, vice-president and C-level executive.

As early as November 2019, while Firth was actively communicating messages from MacDonald to Botler, as discussed earlier, Firth stated that Vice-President Doan didn't know that they'd been communicating back and forth with MacDonald.

Firth, on behalf of MacDonald, intervened on multiple occasions when Dutt communicated important information with Ossowski that was targeted at the ministerial and deputy ministerial levels.

Imagine that you are a young entrepreneur, and you've been promised by your contact that the sky is the limit. Your concept and technology can be implemented across the entire Government of Canada, because he knows the man. The man works together with your contact to create magic. The man has contacts and knows what he wants. The man owns a chalet, or is it a cabin?

Picture now that you enter into what you thought was a contract. You'll work hand in hand to create your idea across government, and what do you have to worry about? It's the Government of Canada.

Suddenly, things start to go wrong. You complete some work. You complete some more work, but you don't get paid, so you inquire. You do a little digging, and you're concerned by what you find, so what do you do? You do the right thing. You file a complaint, because when you file a complaint, it will be taken seriously. It will go through the right channels, and it will be addressed, because it's the Government of Canada. Or will it?

Mr. Utano, what did you do when you received the first misconduct report?

• (1625)

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** The correspondence from Ms. Dutt on September 27 was not a report but rather an email. It raised two issues, as I indicated in my opening statement. One was a delayed payment matter, and the other one was a concern about Botler's relationship in the partnership between GC Strategies, Dalian, Coradix and Botler AI. It was nothing more. There were no allegations. I've actually provided the email in this package, for reference.

In fact, I was aware of the email when it first came in. I knew that my team was addressing it, and within 24 hours we successfully resolved the issues, so much so that Ms. Dutt sent a follow-up email the next day, which I also included in this package, expressing her gratitude. Given the nature of the email and the prompt resolution, it wasn't necessary to forward it to my superiors, or Ms. O'Gorman.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Mr. Utano, why is Ms. Dutt saying otherwise now?

She's saying that this was the first instance of submitting that misconduct report in September 2021, which apparently you turned a blind eye to.

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** First, I would like to address the turning a blind eye. That's not true. The facts are right here in the brief.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Did you escalate it when you received that report?

Did you bring it to the attention of the vice-president, based upon the procedure as outlined for internal disclosure to a senior officer?

**The Chair:** We are basically out of time, unless you have a very quick yes or no.

We'll have to get back to it.

• (1630)

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** There were no allegations in the email.

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

Mr. Jowhari, please.

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

Mr. MacDonald, can you explain very briefly what your role was as director general of BTID?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, the role had been recently created. There was a reorganization in the IT branch, and they decided to go through with the reorganization during the pandemic.

Essentially, I had the responsibility for cloud functions. I had the responsibility for the mobile centre of excellence. I had the responsibility for a prototype and innovation section. I had enterprise architecture, among others.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Did that role entail meeting with vendors?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes. It was definitely part of my role.

CBSA is a mainframe shop. It's very old technology. I was required to meet with vendors for new technologies.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Can you tell me when was the first time you met with GC Strategies?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** The first time I ever met GC Strategies would have been late 2018 or possibly early 2019.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** What were the circumstances around that meeting?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Firth would have requested a meeting to talk about my business priorities and see what work was going on.

Mr. Firth would send different packages of partnerships that he had been fostering throughout the private sector.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** It seems that you had a relationship with GC Strategies.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I had no relationship, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** It seems there was open communication between your office and GC Strategies and partners around the fact that they could come visit you, ask you what your priorities are and share what they do.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I met with IBM. I met with Microsoft.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I'm not interested in those. I'm interested in GC Strategies.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I had open interactions with many vendors.

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

Can you tell me when your similar interactions started with Dalian and Coradix?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Around August 2019, Coradix won a fair and competitive contract.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Was that the first time that you had an interaction with them?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I may have had interactions throughout my career with Dalian and Coradix, but there was no business that I'm aware of.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** What was your role in the, I believe, \$21.1-million open contract that was given to Dalian and Coradix?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I was just the director general. There was a procurement team and a technology team that would have done all of the requirements and assessments, working with our procurement team at CBSA.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Did you recommend Dalian and Coradix to HR or to CBSA?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No. I have no role in procurement.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** That's fine.

When did you become aware of Botler AI?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Kristian Firth sent me an email about Botler AI on November 19.

It was a proposal that he submitted, jointly branded with a proposal to do a pilot.

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

Is it customary for you or any department to receive unsolicited proposals?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, we receive unsolicited proposals from the private sector all the time. From Mr. Firth and GC Strategies, in particular, I would say I would get six a year.

We get them from all types of vendors. During the pandemic, we got more.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Can you tell me how GC Strategies knew about...? Well, I assume they followed Bill C-65.

How would they know to put a proposal to you for the AI application?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I believe Mr. Firth was meeting with multiple departments. Bill C-65 was coming down across the entire government.

I received an unsolicited proposal. My understanding is that they went to nine different departments and did the same thing.

I couldn't tell you.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay.

Did you at any time guide GC Strategies or Botler AI partners in how to prepare for the presentation? Did you guide them at any time, on a real-time basis, as they were presenting these...?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I provided some evidence. I have a bilateral note from a meeting with my boss at which I was told to meet with Botler and to prepare them for an executive-ready presentation.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** What does "prepare them" mean to you, sir?

• (1635)

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** It means they should have an understanding of the CBSA. They should have an understanding of the government context. They should understand what the business problem is that the CBSA is trying to solve.

At the time, when they were presenting, they did multiple presentations. On December 6, I was not there for the VP presentation. Minh Doan told this committee that he did not follow up and he did

not write to Kristian Firth, but he did, and I can submit that email in writing to the committee.

After that, he told me that they were very green, that they presented themselves well, but they were long and they didn't present their technology. He had a problem with that. I have emails that I submitted to the committee that show this.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay.

Did you at any time guide either GC Strategies or Botler to in any way embellish their résumé to fit the profile? We've heard repeatedly that their résumé was embellished, and GC Strategies has acknowledged that.

Was there any time where you directly or indirectly communicated to GC Strategies that you wanted Botler AI, and if their résumé fit, the job was theirs?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No. At no time did that ever happen, sir.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay.

What is the general IT supply and service agreement with Dalian and Coradix?

**The Chair:** Please be brief.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** At CBSA, they had what were called omnibus contracts. The reason it was \$21 million is that it was supposed to last four or five years.

Antonio and I started within about six months of each other. We were borrowing other people's contracts to get work done when we needed it, so we put in place our own contract. It was supposed to last four or five years. Dalian ended up winning that competition competitively. It was out on the street for vendors to bid on. That's why that contract was around.

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

Mrs. Vignola, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. MacDonald, in your presentation, you said that you would have preferred Deloitte, which was already very involved with the Government of Canada in the procurement of personal protective equipment.

In the email you sent to Mr. Doan in November 2023, you wrote that you had found a company in Montreal and that you had contacted GC Strategies to assess the options and move forward. My understanding is that this happened after Mr. Firth sold you on Botler in his email, unless you had found Botler and then went through GC Strategies.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I was not there at all in 2023. I was already at Health Canada. I wrote the email to Minh Doan because he had asked for my help with his appearance before this committee. It's been a year.

[English]

Mr. Doan asked for my help on October 27, 2023. A member of his inner circle called me.

[Translation]

This person called me to tell me that Kelly Bélanger and Minh Doan were considering telling this committee that I was the one who made the decision to select GC Strategies.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Okay.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** On August 28, 2023, I received a call from Minh Doan telling me that Minister Marco Mendicino wanted someone's head on a platter, but that he did not know whether it would be the head of the chief financial officer, Mr. Moor, or his own as chief information officer. Then he changed his mind and decided that he was going to tell the committee that I was responsible. I told him that I had not made the decision and that I had given him two options. I also told him that this is what I would say to the committee.

However, Mr. Doan became ill and did not appear before the committee. On Monday morning, I told my former supervisor, Nancy Hamzawi, that I was being threatened. She told me to talk to my supervisor, who was the associate deputy minister at the time, Heather Jeffrey. I did so on Tuesday morning. She then called the CBSA to say that I was being threatened, and then she met with me to tell me not to talk to the CBSA or Minh Doan because of what was going on. She told me that the CBSA was aware of the situation and that I should step away and stay away. That's what I did.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** So two weeks ago, when Minh Doan told this committee that he had no part in the decision, according to you, that was false. You say that he was the one who imposed GC Strategies, while you wanted to select Deloitte.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** That is a lie told to this committee. Everyone knows it, and we have our team here behind us. Everyone knows that it was his decision to make, not mine.

Others could also confirm that, when he made the decision to eliminate Deloitte, he said it was because the president said that no one could work with Deloitte because of a project involving the CBSA assessment and revenue management branch that was not going well.

The night he made the decision, I called the Deloitte partner to tell him that he would not be selected because of the problems with that project. He told me that my colleague Sandy Kyriakatos, the chief data officer at the CBSA, also told him that she wanted to select Deloitte.

• (1640)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** In the email that Kristian Firth sent you on November 19, 2019, he calls you by your first name. Is it because he already knew you, and if so, where did you have contact before 2019?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I only had contact with Mr. Firth in 2009, and then no further contact until 2018 or 2019.

Also, almost everyone calls me “Cam” or “Cameron”. That is normal, because I am a fairly informal person with everyone, not just with him.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** In your presentation, you said that you had not taken part in the review of GC Strategies' solution. Who was involved in that review?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Utano was the team manager. There was a cloud director, a mobile centre of expertise manager, and maybe four to eight other technicians and developers who analyzed the products, companies or solutions that could be put in place.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** So was it Minh Doan who made the decision to award the contract to GC Strategies?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** He made the decision to select GC Strategies, and he gave me permission to leave to develop the solution. He knew he had only two of the five days we had given him to make a decision. If he had not wanted to choose that solution, he could have said that we had more time.

[English]

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

Go ahead, Mr. Johns, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Thank you very much to both of you for your testimony.

I just want to be clear from the outset. This committee is not trying to destroy anybody's career, especially that of hard-working public servants, but we need to get to the bottom of this, and we want to make sure that situations like this don't occur again.

Mr. Firth acknowledged that he mistakenly sent Coradix the wrong versions of Ms. Dutt's and Mr. Morv's CVs, in which he had inflated their experience.

Mr. MacDonald, he said he went and did a back-and-forth. Was it a back-and-forth with you before he altered the résumés?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Never, Mr. Chair. As the DG, I don't deal with any of the CVs or security clearances. It's done by a procurement team.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I appreciate that. Coradix submitted these documents, this altered résumé that Mr. Firth admitted to, to Public Services and Procurement Canada. Subsequently he received a task authorization to deliver Botler software.

To the extent that you are aware, would Ms. Dutt and Mr. Morv have been eligible to perform work for this task authorization had Mr. Firth not inflated their experience, given, Mr. MacDonald, that you know the alterations now that you've been following the committee on what took place?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I'm not aware of the particulars of the contract. I've been following these meetings, obviously.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** They had seven years' work experience, and suddenly that was inflated to 12 years.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I don't believe that they would have qualified under the—

**The Chair:** Let me just pause, and I've got your time paused, Mr. Johns.

We apparently have bells ringing right now, unfortunately. I assume that we have 25 minutes. I'm going to double-check, but if they are, can we have agreement to continue until five minutes before the vote time?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

I'll have your time restarted, Mr. Johns. Don't worry.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** That's great.

Would they have been eligible to perform the work for the task authorization if they had revealed the true experience that they put on their résumé and sent once to Mr. Firth?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I don't believe so—not under the categories that Mr. Firth presented them in.

I don't validate that. That would have gone through PSPC. It would have gone through CBSA procurement and a procurement team.

I didn't see the CVs. I've never seen the CVs.

• (1645)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay.

What gaps does this reveal in the process? I'm just trying to fix things here, moving forward.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** When I think about this from a technology standpoint as a user of contracts, I would think that some of the gaps that may exist would be what Mr. Wood brought up. If you don't have the people attest to their CVs when they're submitted, then it is possible that something could be done between the submission from themselves and that to the Government of Canada.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Do you believe CBSA, as the purchasing organization responsible for assessing the contract securities programs finding, should have a role in that?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** The CBSA would have gotten this from PSPC.

My understanding is that the CBSA does a secondary security check. They don't just take what PSPC gives them, so I don't think CBSA would have had any responsibilities in that regard.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Given what you're hearing, and you heard Mr. Firth's testimony last week.... I assume that you heard that on Thursday.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** He's admitted to altering the résumés.

You're quoted as saying, "Let Kristian work his magic", in an email.

Would you not send an email like that, knowing that he's altered résumés in a situation like this?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I don't believe I sent that in an email at all. I believe I read that for the first time in an article that was written poorly.

I know you might not be able to see this, Mr. Johns, but I took that article—I couldn't sleep—and I read out every single timeline that that man quoted, and represented it.

I just want to say to people that the CBSA did not—

I'll stay here all day, Mr. Johns, so you don't need to worry about your time. We can give everybody six more minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** It doesn't work like that.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** We sat here. It was postpandemic when we did any contracting at all.

When I supposedly said that was February 2019, before the pandemic. I was talking about their being introduced to me as being in partnership and navigating through the complexities.

I wasn't talking about anything nefarious. I wasn't talking about anything bad.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I don't want to do that to you right now. I'm trying to fix this, and I'm really glad that you're getting a chance to tell your side of the story.

Ms. O'Gorman just wrote a letter to this committee. She's asked PSPC to temporarily suspend all CBSA contracts with GC Strategies, Coradix and Dalian. This is pretty serious.

Would you agree that the CBSA wouldn't be sending a letter like this if it wasn't serious, if there weren't concerns—real concerns—that are being brought forward here?

I'm not talking about your involvement, but there must be some substantial concerns for Ms. O'Gorman to write this letter. Do you not agree?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I guess the only question I would ask is this: What has CBSA learned in the last two weeks that it didn't already know?

The CBSA had the email from September 27, which had no allegations. There wasn't a report of wrongdoing whatsoever. They sat here at this committee and didn't defend Mr. Utano or me. I think the CBSA should speak for themselves.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay. I can give Mr. Utano a chance—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but that is our time, Mr. Johns—perhaps you can do so on your next round.

Mr. Brock, you have five minutes, please.

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

To both Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano, although you've not been sworn to tell the truth, when you attend committee, as part of the parliamentary privilege there's a component that you are required to tell the truth. You are required to give us fulsome answers. I just wanted to put that on the record, because I know you have legal counsel present.

Both of you have independent legal counsel. Is that correct?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** We have the same legal counsel.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Is it from the DOJ, or is it private counsel?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** We weren't provided with any support whatsoever from the federal government when this happened, so we had to get our own support.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** That was probably a very wise move on your part, because the Auditor General is expanding her review. It started off as ArriveCAN, but because of the story from The Globe and Mail in early October and her concerns about the same players and the same government agencies, she has expanded that review.

More importantly, the RCMP are investigating not ArriveCAN, but the CBSA—all the employees, all of the executives, including both you, Mr. MacDonald, and you, Mr. Utano—as well as other government agencies and the three companies at issue right now—GC Strategies, Dalian and Coradix—as to what truly transpired, as to whether or not there was some criminality, all right? I can understand why you'd want to have counsel.

Putting that aside, both of you, in your opening statements, were very quick to impugn the credibility of the whistle-blowers—I call them the whistle-blowers, the brave two entrepreneurs from Botler AI—and you were prepared to actually throw the press under the bus, particularly The Globe and Mail.

I just want you to be aware, sir, because you used the phrases a lot—that these are allegations and you're here to tell the truth—so I'm going to give you the facts.

What you need to be aware of, sir, is that The Globe and Mail, which started this investigation, analyzed thousands and thousands of pages of documents, released pursuant to access to information requests, that came from the CBSA. The Globe also reviewed extensive documentation compiled by the entrepreneurs themselves, including contracting records and audio recordings of their conversations with IT consultants and both you, Mr. MacDonald, and you, Mr. Utano. We have hours and hours of conversations that are actually recorded, so in my view these aren't allegations. This is fact. This is evidence.

• (1650)

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** I haven't asked you a question yet, sir, okay? This is my time, and this is how I'm ultimately going to frame the question to you. I wanted you to be aware of that, sir. Okay?

When we go back to taking a look at why Botler would have the need to record you, it's very, very clear early on, when you take a look at all of the stories, that they thought it extremely unusual that it was the CBSA—you in particular, sir—who sought them out, and sought them out not directly by yourself or by one of your employees, but rather by a middle person, Kristian Firth, from GC Strategies, because their work previous to this particular engagement was directly with the Department of Justice. They had civil servants.... They reached out directly to Botler. They did the work. They got paid. There was no middleman, no “ghost contractor”, as we like to refer to GC Strategies. I want to bring that to your attention, sir.

Now, you also claim that it wasn't you who initiated the concept of CBSA engaging with Botler. You say it was actually Firth's idea. You know that Firth testified last week. Firth is on record as saying

that it wasn't his idea but your idea—that you had researched it, and you wanted him to approach Botler.

Both sets of facts can't be true at the same time. You're saying something completely opposite, so who's lying to committee, Mr. Firth or you?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I don't believe Mr. Firth said that, and I think you can check his transcripts. I think Mr. Firth said that he reached out to Botler after speaking to a number of CIOs around town. He had talked to me, and he had understood that Bill C-65 was important. At the time, there were news clips that CBSA had undergone a whole bunch of sexual harassment claims, and that's why I told him that it was one of my priorities.

I want to bring to your attention, since everybody is talking about facts—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Thank you. I don't want to hear about anything else, sir. You answered my question—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I'm going to interrupt both of you, because I'm afraid that is your time, Mr. Brock.

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

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

Thank you, Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano, for joining us today.

You said that you preferred Deloitte. I just want to find out Mr. Doan's role in all of this process.

We asked him a question. He said that he has a team that makes a decision. I asked how many people were part of this team, and he said there were “1,400”. I asked if 1,400 people were “making this decision” and then he said that there were six directors. Then I think we asked for some names of who those people are.

You preferred Deloitte. What was the process used to select GC Strategies, and what was Mr. Doan's role in all of that—

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I can start, and maybe Mr. Utano can help me.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** —and/or the team that he mentioned?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** They're doing an assessment. There are three or four companies—some of them are big; some of them we already worked with at CBSA; some of them are outsource; some of them are insource. I see one floating to the top. I'm like, “This isn't good.” I also see about 100 requests coming in. It's the middle of the pandemic. That's why we were given only five days to do all of the options assessment. HR is coming. Commercial is coming. Travellers are coming. I wanted to bring in some Clydesdales—Deloitte—to be able to help out.

I worked in the evenings with Deloitte and the partner, and he put in an innovation team. I told them the same requirements that the technical team had to work with. They came up with a concept. Mr. Utano and his development team came up with a concept. On March 24 he sent the options for GC Strategies and I sent the option for Deloitte into Mr. Doan. Subsequent to that, I had a meeting with Mr. Doan, where he told me that Deloitte was not an option because of CARM.

• (1655)

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

The technical team, the mobile centre of excellence, looked at a lot of other options, but the theme around it was in surge capacity. They wanted to participate in the development. They saw that was a better approach in the long term. They worked in developing this concept and forwarded it to me, which I then forwarded directly, actually, to my CIO, Minh Doan, and then left it there for a decision and a reference.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** You said “they”. Who are “they”?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** We had a technical team—a very small mobile centre of excellence team—that was just getting off the ground and working in mobile. When this pandemic hit and the Public Health Agency of Canada came to us in urgency, requesting this capability for mobile to deal with the contact tracing, we had to look for options. We went to our teams and asked them for options.

This one surfaced as a viable option. It was based on a few things, or more than a few: security; the ability to provide a secured, protected e-cloud; the ability to have secured resources; the skill sets, etc. When they took all that into consideration, a viable option that came to the top, if you will, was this proposal. Again, I just forwarded it on to the CIO.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Then the CIO makes the...or who finally makes the decision?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** At that point, the CIO would have had two proposals, two viable proposals—

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Which were....

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** When you all get your packages, you'll see that there's a Deloitte proposal that was sent by me and there's a GC Strategies proposal that was sent by Mr. Utano.

I had a meeting with Mr. Doan afterwards. Mr. Doan told me that Deloitte was not an option. We talked about the fact that there would need to be a sole-source contract. I have an email in my package from March 24 that I sent Mr. Doan, letting him know that we would have to talk about methods of supply and suppliers, because we didn't have any contracts in place at the time of the pandemic. We would need resource categories that were outside of what we had within the Dalian contract.

We had that discussion, and I was told this: You need to do what you need to do. These are exceptional circumstances. I trust you to get it done.

The whole thing was around whether or not we could have a release within a month or not.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** In your time at CBSA, on the many projects, did you use GC Strategies to source talent all the time? You said they brought forward six a year.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** We used primarily our general IT services contract, which was with Dalian. Our understanding is that Dalian has subcontracted various resources through GC Strategies and other companies. My understanding is that this is their modus operandi. For the most part, it's how they work. There were GC Strategies-represented subcontracted resources working, secret cleared, within the CBSA when the pandemic hit. They were the ones working with the technical team that helped to develop the GC Strategies proposal.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Did you ever encourage contractors to—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Bains. That's our time.

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

[*Translation*]

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

I'm listening and I'm ultimately trying to understand how procurement works and how it has worked, not only with Botler AI, but also with ArriveCAN.

The best example I can give right now is Botler AI's case. The Dalian and Coradix companies, basically two guys, find computer technicians and other computer specialists—such as programmers, designers, network architects, and so on—and provide those resources to the Government of Canada. On the other hand, we have GC Strategies, which does exactly the same thing—that is to say finds specialists in various computer areas. In that case, one uses the other to find contacts, and each time, a profit is made because each party collects its share. If one takes a minimum share of 15% and the other does the same, you end up paying a share on a share to have employees. I think that's huge, massive.

Mr. Utano, was there no one on your teams, absolutely no one, who was able to develop an application for the division of prototypes? Did you not have this in-house specialization instead of paying millions of dollars in profits to four guys?

• (1700)

[*English*]

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** Mr. Chair, the answer is no. The level of complexity that was developed for the mobile application—and I want to remind the committee of this—has progressed to what you see today. It started with a basic digital form, and we were able to do that internally. It then progressed to pre-border, at-border, post-border, transactional, and then holding on to very private information of travellers to Canada.

[*Translation*]

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

So you did not have that specialization at the time. However, has the government now started to take action to fill this gap? These applications are essentially the tool of today and tomorrow. Will we eventually stop paying millions to subcontractors' subcontractors?

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm afraid that is our time. Perhaps you can save it for the next round with Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Johns, go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Utano, CBSA's policy on internal investigations into alleged or suspected employee misconduct requires you to provide any misconduct reports to your vice-president, which was Minh Doan.

Did you provide the September 27, 2021, Botler report to Mr. Doan, internal affairs or any other supervisor?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** I am going to say yes. The email from September 27 that I received from Ms. Dutt was not a report but rather an email that raised two issues. One was a payment delay and the second was a concern about Botler's relationship in the partnership between GCS, Dalian, Coradix and Botler AI—nothing more. There were no allegations in that email.

In fact, Mr. Johns, I provided the actual email in the package. If you look under tab 23 you'll see the actual email. I want to confirm for the committee that I was aware of the email when it came in. I knew that my team was addressing it, and within 24 hours we successfully resolved the issues—so much so that Ms. Dutt sent a follow-up email the next day expressing her gratitude. Given the nature of the email and the prompt resolution, it wasn't necessary to address it.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** The next day, Ms. Daly ordered that a payment be made to Botler, and Botler got a payment. Can you explain why that happened so quickly?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** Part of the resolution was that we reached out to our prime contractor, with whom we had the contract, Dalian and Coradix, and reminded them quite frankly that when we pay an invoice, we expect them to pay their employees. That was the resolution. Dalian and Coradix confirmed that they were going to make that payment. They were apologetic, and then the matter was closed.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** You put forward in your statement, although you didn't get a chance to finish it, the following:

I have lost faith in the public service, in those who in a position of authority had the opportunity to uphold these same values. Yet here at the Committee, given the platform to do so, chose not to.

Who are you identifying there? Is there anyone who has come forward to testify at this committee who, you feel, has not been up-front and has not told the truth?

**The Chair:** Could we have just a brief answer, please?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** The opportunity to access the email was there, Mr. Johns. I was disappointed that the email of September 27 was not accessed and presented at this committee when our leadership came here to speak to the committee.

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

Mr. Barrett, you have five minutes please.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Was GC Strategies named in any legal documentation for the work done with Botler, Mr. MacDonald?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I wouldn't be aware of any of the legal work done that you're referring to. I apologize.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** In the official documentation for the project, was GC Strategies listed?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** The only official documentation that I am aware of, that I was privy to, is a task authorization for a feasibility study. There was never mention of a pilot. There was never mention of GC Strategies whatsoever.

• (1705)

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** GC Strategies was not named on the task authorization.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Neither is Botler.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** They were subcontractors, though.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No. On the task authorization are Dalian Enterprises and Coradix. I am not privy to or aware of or provided with any subcontracting arrangements. I am not involved in any of the discussions that take place between third party partnerships.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** You would never know, then, were it not for the public reporting on this, that payment to Botler flowed through GC Strategies and that GC Strategies then took a percentage for its involvement.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I left the CBSA before any of the deliverables or payments would have been made. I wouldn't be aware of the payment structure or what their agreements are.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** On what date did you complete your time at the CBSA?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I think it was May 3. I got pulled over pretty quickly, and I didn't go back to my official records, but it was around May 3 that I started at Health Canada.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** After Botler asked the CBSA to stop payments because of misconduct, Diane Daly of the CBSA demanded that payments go through GC Strategies. Is that correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I'm not privy to those emails. I wasn't around at that time.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** You've said that you're not friends with Mr. Firth of GC Strategies. Is that correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** That is correct.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** You didn't have much to do with him.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I've met Mr. Firth three times out of an office place in my entire life.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** It appears that you placed a high amount of trust in him to deliver on a project that you deemed to be of exceptionally high importance. That's the appearance of it. Why?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** The only thing I can tell you about my experience and the only time I had worked with Mr. Firth before Botler was on ArriveCAN, and I can tell you that the consultants he brought to the table delivered. I recognize that not everybody likes the policies of ArriveCAN, but we delivered and delivered and delivered. That year that I was on, we never missed a deliverable once.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** In fairness, I would say that you delivered a very expensive price tag to Canadians, and that you delivered a lot of Canadians into quarantine who did not meet the necessity to have been ordered into quarantine. They were illegally detained. Those are also outcomes for that project as well.

We've heard one witness who was caught lying to this committee; that was on full display. We've heard assertions that there have been others, so we see, based on the allegations that we've heard from Botler, that there's a network of people who are not following the rules, who are breaking the law. That's why there's an RCMP investigation. You've pushed yourself quite hard against this so that you're not associated with it.

I'm very curious about the motives of everyone involved, about the people who would be lying, so I'm going to ask you a couple of questions. I'd like you to respond as quickly as possible, please.

Based on what you know, was Mr. Firth honest and truthful in all of his presentation and responses to the committee?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** I'm going to circle back to that.

Was Mr. Doan truthful and fulsome and honest?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Was Mr. Ossowski truthful and honest in his presentation to this committee?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I couldn't say more than that I don't know that he really represented or stuck up for the people who would have expected him to.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Was Ms. O'Gorman truthful, fulsome and honest?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I wouldn't think so.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Would you be able to detail for this committee, in writing, the areas in which they were dishonest and not fulsome in their replies?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Would you be able to undertake to provide that to the committee in...?

What's the standard time, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** It's three weeks.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Would you be able to provide it within a couple of days—two days?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I believe that you have a lot of it in my submission already, but I will undertake to do it within 72 hours, if that's acceptable.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** I appreciate that. Thank you.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** You're welcome.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Barrett and Mr. MacDonald.

Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk, please.

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

Mr. MacDonald, the brief that we have received states, "Botler AI wanted to circumvent the procurement and contracting structure and contract directly with the CBSA." Can you explain that?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Utano would be better to explain it, because that happened after I left.

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** I provided those subsequent emails after resolution. Miss Dutt had comments in those emails asking if they could engage in a direct contract, to which we replied that we would have to go for a whole new contracting process. Her dissolution or removal from the partnership was totally up to her, but we would have to go to CBSA's contracting and procurement department to even begin those conversations.

• (1710)

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** They wouldn't qualify as a vendor. Is that correct?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** I'm not the procurement expert; I'll be completely honest. Since there's a separation of roles, responsibilities and duties, I would lean to my procurement colleagues in that.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, maybe I can help the member understand.

My understanding is that in quarter three of 2021, at some point Botler did qualify on an invitation to qualify for AI companies, but that's not a standing offer, and that doesn't mean you qualify to work with the federal government. It means you can qualify for the RFP process, so it would be an invitation to qualify for RFPs. It wouldn't necessarily make you certified with PSPC for a standing offer for the government just to go give you a contract and do work directly.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** You couldn't just grant that contract directly from CBSA. There would have to be a whole new process around it. Is that correct?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** That's correct.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Okay.

I understand that whenever contracts are issued, there are layers of approvals, I imagine. It's not that President Ossowski, Mr. Utano or Mr. MacDonald writes a cheque to Botler AI; there are layers of approvals. Can you speak to some of those layers? Were they implemented in this case? Knowing that it was a national emergency, were those still applicable in this case?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I'll be as brief as I can, but I really think it's important that this committee understands this.

As the technical authority on the contracts, which is something that the articles and Botler got wrong.... We are the technical authorities; we are not the contract authorities. We are allowed to sign off that we have the funding and the scope. We are not allowed to sign off or push the button to execute any type of contract, negotiate contracts or do any type of invoicing.

At the CBSA, within us, there was a comptrollership, which is under the CFO area. They are responsible for expediting contracts. If it's above a certain threshold, it goes over to PSPC, and they expedite it. I think that's the genesis of some of the problems that were exposed here. They kept calling us contract authorities, which we are not. We were never in a position to put these contracts in place and make contracting decisions.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** You basically state whether the horses can finish the race. Is that correct? You sort of give an opinion on whether the horses in front of you can finish the race.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** If we picked the wrong horses, we would be told that we couldn't use them.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Okay, I understand.

What type of relationship in this process did you have with PSPC? What role did PSPC play in your day-to-day conversations on this particular contract with Botler AI?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Perhaps I'll start off and move it to Antonio.

When the pandemic hit, we needed help really badly. We started working with PSPC almost immediately. I wouldn't say that we cut the comptrollership/finance area out, but we just went directly because we knew we needed their help. Within a few months, we had started to work with them on developing a memorandum of understanding whereby we could help pay them to get some access to their resources to help us do contracting.

Maybe from there I'll pass it over to Mr. Utano to finish off, because he would have worked with them for another two years during the process.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Could you also answer whether ultimately PSPC approved those contracts?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** All contracts for ArriveCAN were ultimately reviewed and approved by PSPC, going through our CBSA contracting team.

When Mr. MacDonald left, I continued those conversations on those weekly bilaterals. We were meeting with them weekly because the pandemic was continually changing, and the requirements were changing. We wanted to make sure that they were always apprised of the situation and the operational demands. We always sought their advice and their guidance before advancing any sort of procurement or work, so, as a contracting authority, we engaged them all the time.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** You delivered an app that was basically utilized 60 million times by Canadians. It kept Canadians safe and kept things moving across the border, and you delivered it on time and on budget. Is that correct, Mr. Utano?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** That's correct.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** The Conservatives wanted to use—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Kusmierczyk. We'll have plenty of time afterwards.

Before we start with Mr. Genuis, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Barrett asked you whether you could detail some of these issues. You mentioned that they were in your package. Because we will not have them translated in time, would you be able to pull those items out and list them separately in a smaller amount, so we can get them translated faster?

• (1715)

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, the clerk has been fantastic. If somebody could write down what it is they want from me, I will undertake to get back to the committee as soon as I possibly can.

**The Chair:** We will do so. Thanks very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

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

GC Strategies clearly got a very good deal here, so getting to the bottom of this matters.

Who made the decision to hire GC Strategies? I understood from your opening statements that you both said Minh Doan was responsible for that decision.

Is my understanding correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes, it's correct.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** You are both nodding yes.

Mr. Doan very clearly and explicitly testified before this committee, when he appeared on October 24, that they were investigating and trying to find out who.... To his knowledge, they weren't aware of who....

To be clear, based on your testimony, Mr. Doan was lying when he appeared before the committee.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I don't understand, Mr. Chair and honourable members, how they could be investigating who made the decision on ArriveCAN for a year. It's quite clear. If they had asked anybody on our team, they would have said the same thing.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Can you provide us with additional documentation to support your version of events, and are there documents we should request from Mr. Doan that would verify your version of events?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No. The only things I haven't provided, which I can provide the committee, are some names. I won't say them here, but I can provide some names of people who can substantiate what I've said here today.

In your packages.... I can pull them out, if you like. Mr. Utano can also pull his out.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Okay. We're at a bit of a disadvantage, because they haven't been distributed yet. I understand the circumstances around translation.

You would undertake to provide to the committee in writing, but not in public, the names of individuals who can verify your version of events.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Okay.

You implied that Mr. Doan wanted to make you the fall guy for what happened here. Would that be a correct interpretation of your version of events—that he made a decision, or that someone somewhere decided you two were going to be the ones made to wear this? Therefore, you would not be supported by the department and would be made to appear responsible for the decision.

Is that your version of events?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

I felt incredibly threatened during a phone call with Minh Doan on October 28. I talked to my old supervisor, then my boss, on the Monday and Tuesday morning following that.

I think Mr. Utano can tell you that he had a very similar experience with Mr. Doan as well.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** You also referred to a conversation that was relayed to you—maybe it was the same one—in which it was reported that Minister Mendicino wanted someone's head on a plate.

Could you explain further why that was? What was that for, and whose head did he want?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** That was my discussion. That was the day Minh Doan threatened me.

The discussion started off with Minh Doan telling me that within CBSA there was a lot of work going on to prepare for OGGO. This was almost a year ago. I believe Mr. Mendicino was not happy. Mr. Mendicino wasn't there when ArriveCAN kicked off and when all of this was going on, but there was a lot of news about ArriveCAN.

Minh was worried that either he or Jonathan Moor was going to get fired, so he was talking about somebody's head on a platter. He said that, because Jonathan Moor had made a whole bunch of mistakes from an accounting perspective about how much ArriveCAN cost, it could go his way, or it could go Mr. Doan's way, because Mr. Doan was the CIO at the time. Then he turned.... We were on the phone, but he stopped the conversation and said, "You know, Cam, if I have to, I'm going to tell the committee that it was you." He offered me the opportunity to say it was Mr. Utano, or to tell Mr. Doan it was Utano and me, to which I said, "If you do that, I will have to respond," and we ended the conversation.

That night is the night I wrote him the notes. I stayed up until about three o'clock in the morning trying to figure out how to find some way to meet in the middle. That's why the notes were written exactly that way—so Mr. Doan could come to this committee and present without having—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** You're referring to the email you sent. I was going to ask you about that.

Essentially, you were trying to be honest. What you're telling us is that you were trying to be honest but also avoid giving the direct answer you gave the committee today.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I was trying to give him something that he could work with. He told me that he had never been to committee before. I believe his first appearance was two weeks ago. He was very nervous about it, and I tried to give him some help.

• (1720)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Well, no wonder....

The implication of what you're saying is that he made the choice to hire GC Strategies and had some reason for doing so, and also that he came and told the committee that he didn't make the decision and didn't know who made the decision.

Essentially, you're telling us that someone's head was going to be on a plate because somebody got rich, somebody benefited from this. Someone's head was going to be on a plate, and he wanted it to be yours and not his.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I believe Minh Doan made the decision to go with GC Strategies because of the fact that he had been told he could not use Deloitte. Deloitte was in a timeout penalty box, so to speak.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Who told him they were in the penalty box?

**The Chair:** Answer very, very briefly.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** My understanding is that this came from above.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Can you clarify what you mean by "above"?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but that's your time, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Powlowski is next, please.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Mr. MacDonald, you said that you felt threatened by Mr. Doan. What was the threat?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** First of all, there was the threat of employment. I had moved on to Health Canada. I had already been gone from the project for a year and a half.

In my opening statement, I think I told the committee that when I left, I delivered a costing, and it was \$6.3 million. Now, all of a sudden, in the news and everything else, they were talking about \$55 million. Mr. Doan was talking about people getting fired.

I also didn't want my name to come out at this committee. I worked really, really hard during the pandemic, and the thought of being blamed for something that people were painting as bad when we did everything we could to respond during the pandemic.... The whole thing was just a horrible interaction.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** It seems that the horrible interaction continues with this committee. I'm not normally on this committee, and the committees I'm on aren't quite this kind of inquisitorial process.

In looking at the fairness of this, some people are given five minutes to ask a question, but you're given one minute to respond. It's your reputation that's at stake here, so I'm giving you the time to respond to some of the questions that perhaps you didn't have time to respond to.

I think specifically you were referring to the Globe and Mail article about the RCMP probe. You had your big sheet of paper about the timelines and what was wrong. Do you want to take a bit of time to expand on some of those things that you think they got wrong?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Sure. I guess the reason I did a timeline that was linear was that when I read the article, there were so many dates that kept popping up, and sometimes they had the year and sometimes they didn't have the year.

I feel that I have been misrepresented by Botler as having pressured them to work with Kristian Firth. They were introduced to me by Kristian Firth. They went around town presenting together as partners. They presented to my VP without my being there, as partners. My VP responded, calling them "the team".

I feel attacked after the fact, from a Botler perspective, even with Mr. Utano...the email where they're saying that they made these allegations. You guys will get a copy of it. I don't understand why Botler didn't provide a copy to the committee when they started off, because any normal, common-sense person who reads this email will know there are no allegations. They certainly didn't mention me on September 27. Then, all of a sudden, on Twitter, they're dropping all of these audio clips that are clearly edited. They're clearly put together in a way that provides anybody who listens to them with a focus that just doesn't exist.

From my vantage point, Mr. Chair and members of this committee, I don't think Botler was treated unfairly.

I'll make one final point, because you gave me the time and I really appreciate it. I've been trying to make it a couple of times.

When the Crown has a contract with anybody, there's a task authorization. I provided it in my package, and I think it's really important for members to understand this. What Botler did... The contract was for a feasibility study in six parts. In other words, we're paying for somebody to refurbish the kitchen. They went out back and built a swimming pool, a jungle gym and a garage and wanted to charge the federal government hundreds of thousands of dollars for doing it. The Crown wouldn't pay for that. The Crown pays for what's in the contract.

If people went through the ATIP and read all the documents, they would see that it talks about a discovery plan, a feasibility study, a fit-gap analysis report, a pilot plan and metrics and an executive summary. Nowhere in there does it say "a pilot". It's a chatbot. Why would the federal government ever pay \$26 million a year for a chatbot?

I'll stop there, Mr. Chair.

I take my reputation seriously. I have worked awfully hard to earn one, and I feel that it's been sullied by some of the things that have been said at this committee, in the news and by Botler themselves.

• (1725)

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** If I have any time remaining, Mr. Utano, I give you the same opportunity to respond to anything that you yet haven't had a chance to respond to.

**The Chair:** You have about 45 seconds.

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** Thank you. I'll be real quick.

I take allegations very seriously. If they are presented to me, I will action them. That means that on September 27 there were no allegations. I just want to read the reply from Ms. Dutt. She wrote:

Good afternoon Diane,

Thank you so much for your prompt action and response, it is much appreciated!

Please accept my sincerest apologies for all of this inconvenience to yourself and the CBSA, you have all been nothing short of amazing to work with, and I am so sorry that it had to come to this.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

Next, we have Mrs. Vignola for two and half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Utano, could you tell me in a few seconds whether the Government of Canada has taken the necessary measures to ensure that there are people in the public service who can develop applications?

[*English*]

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** My priority was always and continues to be to develop our resources and employees. Just before the beginning of the pandemic that was the intention of starting small with a team called a mobile centre of excellence, bringing in the resources not to do but to teach and learn.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Do we now have the resources to develop applications?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** It actually takes many years to develop the skills needed to develop this type of software.

The ArriveCAN application was very complicated.

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

Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano, listening to you speak, I get the impression that there is a certain culture of silence, harassment and intimidation within the Canada Border Services Agency. Am I wrong?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I'll start answering, and Mr. Utano will follow.

You're right to a certain extent. I don't think it's always very serious, but when it happens, people don't necessarily have a door to knock on to talk to someone and receive help. In our case, it is clear that there was some information, but no one was there for the two of us.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Is that common?

[English]

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** It only happened once. In my career, these are the first types of events that have damaged my character, my integrity and my trust in some leadership. I don't know what the right response is, if it's frequent or not. I've never had this experience.

[Translation]

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

I have a number of other questions to ask you, but I only have six seconds left.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Johns, please.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. MacDonald, do you have any idea why Deloitte was in the penalty box?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** My understanding from the discussion was that there was a big project called CARM, something about risk management. It was the CBSA assessment and revenue management project. I believe it was worth about \$350 million or so, and it wasn't going well at the time.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** What does that mean?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I believe it was not on time and not on budget in terms of where the project milestones were supposed to be. The company had been put on time out. No work was to be done, even though there was a global pandemic.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. Doan threatened you. Can you clarify exactly why he would threaten you, and what the threat was?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I got a phone call on, I think it was the 27th, from a member of his inner circle. I can provide her name and information to corroborate this. She told me that Kelly Belanger had told her not to call me. Minh had been making comments, saying I was the one who had made the decision that it would be GC Strategies, even though the entire team, which was helping to brief Minh Doan all the way, had not said that.

When I talked to Minh Doan the next day, he had already asked me to help him with the committee. This is why it was a bit jarring for me. He was pretty upset. At times, he was almost crying. At times, he was almost yelling. He basically said that somebody's head was going to be on a platter. He started by saying it was between him and Jonathan. He then quickly switched it, saying that if he was asked, he was going to say it was I who had made the decision.

• (1730)

**Mr. Gord Johns:** He made the decision. Is it correct that he made the decision?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes, he made the decision. I brought him two options. He took one away and told me to go, and I went. He knew it was GC Strategies—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** He came to our committee and said it wasn't he who had made the decision.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Johns and honourable members of this committee, I have members of my team who came here to support me. If the CBSA had even just asked my team, they would have known who made the decision. It was clear. Everybody in government knows the DG wouldn't have made a decision like that.

Mr. Doan.... I don't know. He was the one who got a non-advertised appointment. I competed successfully in an open competition for my EX-4. When Mr. Doan was asked that question, he answered it a bit differently. You'll have to ask him how he was promoted.

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

Mr. Genuis, I understand that you're starting off.

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

I suspect there will be general agreement of this committee, in light of the testimony we heard today, to ask Mr. Doan to come back as soon as possible, for a full two hours, by himself.

Is there agreement on that point?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** That's perfect, thank you very much.

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

I think we'd do that probably as soon as possible, Chair, but we give you that discretion as always.

Mr. MacDonald, I think it's very important that you said that Mr. Doan heard "from above" that Deloitte was in the "penalty box" and that is why GC Strategies was selected. That phrase does include some euphemisms that I want clarity on, though.

What precisely do you mean by "from above"?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Doan was the vice-president and CIO of the CBSA. There was only one person who was above him.

My understanding is that all the VPs had been told that they could not work with Deloitte until the current project was back on track.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Then above him within the public service would have been the president. Above that is the political level, so....

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I did not understand it to be a political decision. If you're going to be calling Minh Doan, I'm sure you can ask him what he meant.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Would anyone at the political level have been involved in these discussions, as far as you know?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Not as far as I know—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** You weren't in rooms where they were.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** For ArriveCAN, I was in one meeting with the minister's office. They asked me if it was secure and if it was scalable, to which I answered in the affirmative. That was only one meeting.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** At what stage in the process was that meeting?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** It was very early, like at the very beginning.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Was that before or after GC Strategies was selected?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I don't know that GC Strategies was selected at the time. It would have probably been concurrently, when we were kind of going.... GC Strategies was not brought up. No contracting was brought up.

They just wanted to make sure it was secure, because we were going to be collecting—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** If they were asking if it was secure, presumably they were asking that in the context of a particular application or company.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No. It was because we were taking away paper and we were going to be using digital means.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I wonder if you could follow up on that point regarding the timeline.

By “penalty box”, do you mean they weren't to receive any contracts?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** That was my understanding. Again, Mr. Doan can explain.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** It is sort of surprising to me that you would have this kind of informal process of companies being in the penalty box and therefore not getting any contracts, which means other companies get them automatically.

Is this normal, where someone just sort of decides that this company or that company is not going to receive any contracts for a while and you're going to give them to whoever else bids?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I would say no. I wouldn't think it was normal at all, but I will preface that by saying that this was like the second week of the pandemic, and there was craziness everywhere.

The reason that the sole-source and the national security exemptions exist is for emergencies. This was declared a national emergency.

In terms of the decisions around why we could or could not use a particular company such as Deloitte, that was not my decision to make.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** In the time I have left, I want to probe the point you referred to just at the end when you said Mr. Doan got a “non-advertised” appointment. There was sort of an implication in what you said.

I would like you to provide a bit more on that. Are there certain relationships or access points that he has? Do you think his appointment broke protocol in some way?

What were you getting at with that comment?

• (1735)

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, the only thing I can say is that it was alluded to or inferred at this committee that I had benefited because of ArriveCAN and that I had gotten a promotion because of my work. I wanted to make sure this committee was aware

that I fully competed in a competitive process that was open and fair. As a result, I was in a pool, and I was selected afterwards.

Mr. Utano, as well, fully competed in a process. The others can speak for themselves as to how they were selected. My base assumption is that when I left the CBSA, Mr. Doan was an EX-4. He was promoted to an EX-5, and others were promoted in the agency.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Finally, to put a sharp point on the process of selecting GC Strategies, Minh Doan chose them, and part of why he made that choice is that Mr. Ossowski, who was the president at the time, had told him that Deloitte was a no. Is that...?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I will let Minh Doan answer for why he discounted Deloitte. I told you already what I heard from Mr. Doan. I had brought my boss two options. I came out with one and the decision to go.

I went. He was aware that I went forward with it, obviously, because we built ArriveCAN and we delivered it.

I left about 13 months after ArriveCAN was kicked off. Mr. Utano continued it. Mr. Doan was the CIO for the entire time.

When this committee started asking questions, Mr. Doan was still the CIO.

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

Mr. Sousa.

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

There are a couple of things happening here today. There's Botler, and then there's ArriveCAN. Was Mr. Doan involved with the Botler deal at all?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Doan directed me to work with GC Strategies and Botler, who were working in partnership, and get them ready for an executive presentation.

Mr. Doan did not get involved in any of the contracting or subcontracting or any of that. He was aware, and he had a meeting with Kristian Firth and Botler when I was not present, on December 6. It's part of your package. He also followed up with them himself, by email, when I wasn't on the email, and I have that email, which I can share with this committee.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** We appreciate it.

GC Strategies and Botler had no contract with CBSA. It was all done through Coradix and Dalian. Is that right?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** The RCMP is not reviewing the ArriveCAN application or process. They are reviewing the allegations being made by Botler. Is that correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** To my knowledge, and I believe to Mr.—

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Have you been approached by the RCMP?

I know, Mr. Utano, you worked with the RCMP for some time. Have either of you been approached by the RCMP in this review?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** I have not.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** No one has approached you or asked you any questions relative to the appointment of Botler or Botler's allegations. Okay.

You mentioned that the CTO does not approve the contract; the CFO is actually the one who cuts the cheque or approves it. Would they approve it without your input around the contract meeting these requirements? Would they have to rely on you to provide that information as well?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Maybe Mr. Utano is best placed to answer, but I'll just start off by saying that we would fill in the paperwork for the justification that talks about the technical requirements, why a sole-source justification is required, urgency in terms of time and whatnot. There's usually a back-and-forth with that, because they vet this stuff really thoroughly. They make sure that everything is done to the T.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** There's a threshold as well, by which it meets approvals. Is that correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** The CFO organization at CBSA is called a comptrollership. They have their own governance for all of contracting, which is separate from the IT branch.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** How did that affect the decision with regard to the Botler proposal?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Botler would have been a task authorization on an existing contract. I've provided it for your thing. It would have come through as Dalian and Coradix. They would have looked at it for form and fitness. They would have looked at it for compliance within the contract, because the contract itself had a scope and had categories, and PSPC would have done the same thing.

When the contractor then, the prime contractor, who is Dalian, responds to the request, they respond to it with an estimate of the cost, the resources, the security certificates and everything, and that goes through the contracting people. We do the vetting in terms of the contracting team outside of the PSPC, to ensure that they meet the grids, that it's fit and that it's compliant, and then I would sign the task authorization.

• (1740)

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** There have been references in regard to the modus operandi of GC Strategies and how they act. They're sort of a two-man show, but they assemble all the experts to provide for contracts, as they did for ArriveCAN.

That's not what they did with Botler. They actually partnered with Botler to try to come forward with an opportunity to do a big deal thereafter. I think that's part of the reason that they're upset, because that didn't come to fruition.

They also made reference to a cabin or a cottage or a chalet. Is that you? I mean a lot of allegations are made about your relationship with Firth. Can you explain?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I just want to be unequivocal about this. I've never had a contractor, a vendor or anybody at my house or at my cottage. I have a little cabin in the woods. I go there some-

times—especially during the pandemic—to get away from things, as I was working extremely hard.

I've met Kristian Firth three times out of a workplace in my entire life. Two of those times were after the pandemic and after ArriveCAN started. Two of the three times were with Mr. Utano and my mobile development team. I was there for about 15 or 20 minutes. I have had lunch with Kristian Firth one time, after the pandemic, before I left the CBSA. I paid my own bill. Those are all the interactions I've had with Mr. Firth. I've had only a professional relationship with Mr. Firth.

I do have fairly informal relationships with people, as I've told this committee. People call me "Cam" all the time. They know they can reach me. I leave my calendar open. I answer my phone. I try to be as open and available as I can to employees, staff and peers.

I was asked to work with private sectors, so anything new or innovative, or anything that sounded interesting, I would obviously be interested in. Mr. Firth had partnered with several different companies in the private sector. He told this committee that he worked with 22 other government departments. He had some \$40 million dollars in sales, and he had been fairly successful at doing it. People talk in town.

Mr. Utano can testify to the fact that we called a couple of different departments and did a reference check to see if the work was good—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. That's time. Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. Brock.

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

Thank you, Mr. MacDonald, for clarifying your secondary residence. There was quite an issue last Thursday as to whether or not...cabin, camp, tent, chalet. Thank you for clarifying that.

There is another area I want clarified, sir. I've listened very carefully, and if you said it once you may have said it a half a dozen times, as well as you, Mr. Utano, in terms of being very unequivocal in your responses that it was Mr. Doan who was responsible for retaining GC Strategies with respect to this Botler contract.

I want to confirm that again. That is your evidence. Is that correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I will try to say it to you as clearly as I can, but I need a minute. I will give you as much time as you want. I don't have a hard time to leave.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Can you reduce it to 30 seconds?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Doan saw the proposal that I sent him after I received it and asked for a meeting. Mr. Doan had a meeting with Botler and saw a demo. He told me to get them ready for an executive presentation. I have my notes—they are in there. The president, the VP of HR, the CFO and others saw the Botler presentation. They were interested in it, and there was general consensus that we should go ahead with some work.

I worked with my peers at the DG level to develop a statement of work, which was for a feasibility study, not a pilot. I emailed my boss and told him that I was using an existing contract, and I sought permission to go ahead. I received endorsement to go ahead.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Again, you and Mr. Utano did not specifically seek out GC Strategies to be the ghost contractor. Is that correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No. We received a proposal from Botler and GC Strategies.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** So the answer is “correct”.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** That's correct.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** How do you then reconcile, sir—and this is a question for you, Mr. MacDonald—a year and a half after you leave the CBSA, that you write an email to Mr. Doan, as well as to other members of CBSA—Ms. Sabourin, Mr. Utano and Mr. Bird—on October 29, 2022? I'm quoting various passages in this particular email, attributable to you. One says, “You asked me for advice on the key question of 'Why GC Strategies' but I also think we are all grappling with 'Who selected GC Strategies'.”

If you're so unequivocal today—November 7, 2023—why were you equivocal on October 29, 2022?

• (1745)

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** As I explained, Mr. Chair, I wrote that email to Minh Doan after I had been threatened. I wrote that email trying to give Minh Doan words that he could use at this committee.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Thank you.

I'm going to caution you, sir, and if you don't want to answer this I can understand. Your lawyers are present. There is some really damning information in this email, which in my view, as a former prosecutor, encroaches upon criminal law in terms of interfering with witness testimonies.

You're actually specifically coaching them on what to say with anticipated questions put to them.

I'll give you some examples:

I will start by saying that I was not personally familiar with...GC Strategies...during the time in question

If pressed: Come on, we want some accountability here. Who decided? How did this company get a contract for almost 9 Million dollars? Who made money off of this? Who is getting rich off of taxpayer dollars

Mr. Chair, I stand by my statement that I don't believe there was a single person, and I'm not actually aware of any rules being broken or wrong doing. That is not how we operate at the CBSA.

Why are you coaching witnesses who have been compelled to attend at a committee to tell the truth? What on earth compelled you to give these suggested answers to them, sir?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I was emailed, by Minh Doan, a briefing package. I believe it was Wednesday of that week.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Did he ask for your advice on what to say?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes, he asked me for my help.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Did he ask your advice on what to say at committee?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** He asked me for feedback on his briefing—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** I'll ask again. Did he ask your advice on what to say at committee, sir? Yes or no.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Generally, yes. The reason I can say that is because his briefing package was just full of facts and data, and it had no verbiage. He commented to me that he did not have the words to use, which is why I wrote what I wrote.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** Did someone coach you on what to say today?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I practised. Yes, I did.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** No. Did someone other than you coach you on what to say?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** How about you, Mr. Utano?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** No.

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Jowhari, please.

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

I'll be sharing my time with my colleague, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. MacDonald, can you explain the difference between a pilot and an assessment, as you call it?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** A lot of times people call things pilots, but they just jump right in and they don't have any ability to measure its success or failure or its cost or its benefit. You try something, like, let's try this app. Then afterwards you're stuck with it, because everybody likes it, but you don't know—

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** There's a pilot, then, and there's a feasibility study. From an output point of view, is the feasibility study output the same as a pilot output?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Not at all.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Can you tell me what a pilot output is, in your opinion?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** The reason we would do a feasibility study is so that when you actually run the pilot, you can measure whether it was successful or not.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Is it fair to say that if we were going to do a pilot, they would be configuring their system based on all the data, to be able to prove that it worked?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** A hundred per cent.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Whereas the feasibility study is whether there are going to be proper milestones, and those milestones, those six milestones, happen to be what—

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** A hundred per cent. You would look at whether it would even work in the first place before you would go and buy something.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I believe that after two of those six milestones were completed, there was a decision made to stop. There is a contradiction about why it stopped. Whereas we are hearing from Botler that it was fully configured and they were ready to go on a pilot, we then hear CBSA saying no, that on the feasibility study two of the milestones were done and the rest of them stopped because they were not compliant or there was a shortage of staff and funding for that.

Which one is true?

• (1750)

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

Two of the milestones were completed and paid for. The client was CBSA's human resources branch. They issued a note to us—and it's in the package—requesting that we cancel the TA, citing reasons of capacity and lack of employee resources that they could commit to the project. We then executed on the request and cancelled the TA.

The other four milestones of a feasibility study were never done.

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

I will yield the rest of my time to Mr. Kusmierczyk.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Mr. Cameron, the ArriveCAN project—because this is the ArriveCAN study—came together in five days, as was mentioned by the players.

In a normal situation, in a non-national emergency situation, unlike what COVID represented, how long would a process like this take on average?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Several months.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Would it be two months, eight months, 12 months?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** At the CBSA, it would be even longer. Minh Doan did say he had 1,400 people. There were so many distributed teams, different technology stacks and everything else. Easily, it would be four to six months.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** You were asked to do a six-month project in five days, to pull it together.

Can you put that into context for us?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** It was very fast-paced; it was very intense. Our teams worked incredibly hard. I had really incredible people whom I worked with. They were professionals. They knew very quickly what there was and what there wasn't on the table with which to work.

Maybe Mr. Utano wants to finish.

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** The business requirements were never defined when the pandemic hit. We never had the whole picture. That was the challenge. We started with a basic digital form—fairly simple, fairly straightforward—but then the complexity came with pre-border, at-border, post-border, notifications, accounts, etc.

The complexity, the technology and the infrastructure never existed when the pandemic started.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** In your 20-plus years, have you ever seen a project this complicated come together this fast?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** I've heard quoted that it was one of the most complicated integrated projects in our time.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I appreciate that context.

My Conservative colleagues would have provided you \$200,000 to complete this ArriveCAN project. What would have happened to travel along the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor if you had a \$200,000 ArriveCAN app? What would have happened to Canadians, to their information, their private information, had you been given only \$200,000 to create the ArriveCAN app, as my colleagues across the table would have done? What would have happened to privacy, to trade, to medicines coming through the border...? Could it be done?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** What we built through all those months and years could not, no, not for \$200,000—it would have been impossible.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** What the Conservatives would have had built for Canadians to use in their time of crisis would have been junk.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** It wouldn't have worked.

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** It wouldn't have worked.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** It would not have worked.

Thank you.

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

We have Ms. Vignola for a final round, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. MacDonald, in your presentation, you said that the feasibility study had six parts, each worth \$70,000, and that the work did not include a pilot project.

Do you know how much of that \$70,000 was going to Botler AI, GC Strategies, Dalian and Coradix?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No, as public servants, we do not have that information. We never get into discussions about the financial aspects of our partners' activities.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** In evaluating a contract and its financial aspects, would it be a significant improvement and easier to say that having “sub-sub-sub-sub-subcontractors”—I'm exaggerating, but sometimes I feel like it's not such an exaggeration—is not profitable? If we award a contract to someone, we must not have two, three or four subcontractors. Would it be a solution to say that we're stopping this madness?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I'm an information and technology specialist, not a contract specialist. I don't think it would work very well if we knew everything. We want to leave space for the private sector, to engage together to solve problems, without politics. That's only for the private sector, but I don't have any expertise in contracts.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Okay.

With regard to ArriveCAN, GC Strategies received \$9 million for finding specialists. Other companies were also approached. Do you remember which ones they were, as well as the part of the work they did?

• (1755)

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes, there were more than 20 companies in total. If it's okay with you, Mr. Utano can answer in more detail.

[English]

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** There were over 19 technology vendors we partnered with our CBSA internal employees, and 19 other vendors. Examples were Amazon, Blue Ink, TEKSystems, BDO..., and I'm just going off memory, Madam.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Among the companies that were approached, did a number of them have a strategy of using subcontractors or “sub-subcontractors”? Is that common practice?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes. As I understand it, many of the technology companies or computer companies that the government works with use subcontractors, particularly in the case of unique or complex projects.

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

Are we still continuing to put money into ArriveCAN now that it's really optional?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** I don't know, as we're not at the Canada Border Services Agency right now.

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

[English]

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

Next is Mr. Johns, please.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Mr. MacDonald, in the brief you provided the committee this morning, you described Ms. Dutt as trying to “circumvent the procurement and contracting process and contract directly with the CBSA” despite not being an approved vendor. Are you aware that Botler AI is an approved vendor?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I have been made aware that Botler is an approved vendor. They became, as far as I understand, an approved vendor, but on a pre-qualified list, which is not a standing offer with the Government of Canada, and they did so only, to my understanding, in Q3 of 2021, well after I signed the TA.

Also, I think in Mr. Firth's testimony he said that he helped them to qualify on this invitation-to-qualify list. I'm not aware of Botler's—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** It's my understanding that Botler has been a qualified vendor under band 2 of the AI source list since November 2020, which allows it to provide work for up to \$4 million before taxes. The Treasury Board makes this information publicly available.

Now, Botler is able to contract directly with the federal government, so it's very concerning to me that you described these many

contracting layers with every pass-through. I'll call it “taking a cut”. You described that as a regular contracting process. You described Ms. Dutt's efforts to get accountability from your contractors as circumventing normal processes.

Do you consider this case to be a standard example of procurement procedures being properly followed? I'm asking specifically about the layers of subcontracting and the lack of any consent or discussion regarding timelines, deliverables and payment amounts.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I think what's important to understand is that I am not the contract authority. The task authorization with Dalian and Coradix went through CBSA's contracting authority and PSPC. PSPC validated it. It was reported that they validated it and found it was proper and within the contract. That's important to know.

The other thing that's important to know is that the band 2 you're talking about is a pre-qualified invitation. It is not a standing offer. Anything the government wants to do would have to go out as an RFP, and Botler would have to compete for it. It's not a standing offer for the government to just go and give a contract to somebody.

As for the rest, you'd have to talk to PSPC. I'm not a contracting expert. I just follow the paperwork people tell me to. I did it, and I think it's been validated as—

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Okay. However, you're responsible for understanding the follow-up procurement procedures.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Yes.

**Mr. Gord Johns:** PSPC is not a babysitter.

Mr. Utano, you have a subcontractor who no longer feels comfortable associating with your contractors, who's writing to you about non-payment and contract-related issues, and who's asking you for a clean agreement. They're telling you they have no legal or signed agreements with any of the parties, and that they gave no consent for any of the terms.

Are you saying this does not count as a report of misconduct—that none of what it contains could be misconduct?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** With respect to the private relationships and partnerships companies enter into among themselves, that is outside of our purview and scope.

In fact, if I look back at the article of October 6, someone named Anita Chan from PSPC gave the exact same response to Ms. Dutt. We just simply can't do things as we think or feel. We have to follow policies and procedures.

Moreover, we signed privacy clauses with the primary contractor. We are not allowed to discuss proprietary information between CBSA and the primary contractor, Dalian and Coradix.

• (1800)

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

We'll go to Ms. Kusie for five minutes.

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

Why do you believe Botler was known as the president's project?

Either of you can answer.

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** At the very beginning of it, I had limited to no real exposure to the president on this project, to be quite honest with you, so I don't have an answer for you.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Go ahead, Mr. MacDonald.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** The president was seized, at the time, with the cases of sexual harassment at CBSA. He was trying to do everything he could to find tools or services to reduce it.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald, you indicated to the committee that you would be willing to give any documentation necessary to us so we can get to the bottom of this.

I'm asking you both, please, whether you would be willing to submit your calendars and meeting invitations from the period of January 2019 to June 2023.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair, I have no problem with CBSA submitting those. I can submit from May 3 until now, since I've been at Health Canada, but I don't have access to my calendar from CBSA.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Okay. Thank you.

We'll work with CBSA to obtain those.

I want to go back to something my Liberal colleague said. This was about the \$54-million price tag.

Do you agree with that \$54-million price tag? Do you think this application was worth \$54 million?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** If you're directing the question to me, I left when ArriveCAN was at \$6.3 million. I believe, out of the \$54 million, there were things outside of IT—\$7 million went to Service Canada to do things. When I look at the cost over three years, I think.... If you look at major IT systems, and I would consider this a major IT system.... I think it's less expensive than people are making it out to be.

I want to underline this: We know everything that happened now, so it's very easy to rebuild something that's been built. It's called a model. We didn't have a model to follow when we built ArriveCAN. They were coming up with things in real time. This started off as a replacement for a piece of paper that cost about \$3 each. When we think about the 40 million transactions on ArriveCAN.... I like to think of it as an overall cost saving for the Government of Canada.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Do you think the app could have been designed for less money than \$54 million?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I think if we had taken an approach of knowing all of the business requirements when we started, we probably could have saved some money, but we didn't know what

the requirements were. We didn't know what the waves of the variants were going to be, and we didn't know how to necessarily....

I'll leave the politics aside. The business requirements came from PHAC. All we were trying to do was streamline the border and get information so that the streamlining of those people crossing the border could be quicker. That was what our goal was.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** What I'm hearing you say is that it could have been designed for less money than the \$54 million it was designed for.

Did you want to add something briefly, Mr. Utano?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** I would agree with that comment in a normal circumstance, but not in a pandemic, I think.

Number two, we were on that trajectory of developing our employees to become autonomous in this capability and these skill sets, but it takes time. Unfortunately, the pandemic hit as we were trying to establish that.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes, exactly.

My colleague.... On the \$9 million to GC Strategies, that money certainly could have been saved there.

My last question is this. The principals of Botler have indicated that senior government officials could potentially be receiving kickbacks, both direct and indirect, both for ArriveCAN and potentially for other contracts as well.

Do you have any direct knowledge about senior government officials, either bureaucratic or elected, receiving any form of kickback?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I have absolutely no knowledge of any senior bureaucrat receiving kickbacks. I can honestly tell you that I have never received one, and I competed for my job in a way that was opposite to the inference that was made at this committee.

• (1805)

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** That's my testimony as well. I am not aware of anybody who is receiving those sorts of kickbacks.

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

With the last of my time, Chair, I will briefly ask where we are with the PSPC witnesses on Thursday, please.

**The Chair:** Very quickly, we have three for Thursday. We are getting a bit of a runaround to have them appear, unfortunately. They've verbally said they'll be here but are refusing to put it in writing. I suspect that's probably where we're going.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Summon them.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** What did you say, Mr. Jowhari?

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Summon them.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes. Thank you. What a great idea, Mr. Jowhari.

**The Chair:** I suspected that.

I'll ask for the committee's permission to leave it with me with the names that I have.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore):** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** They agreed to be summoned. That's perfect.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Do you require me to read anything into the record, Chair?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. These are the ones for Thursday. We are summoning for Thursday, officially. I'll just read them off, because these are the ones that we have posted. We have Angela Durigan, Anita Chan and Silvana Mansour.

That is your time.

Mr. Sousa, it's over to you, if you wish to finish up.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Thank you.

Botler's engagement was prior to the pandemic. Is that correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** No contracting was done until after the pandemic started. The first initiation, if you will, or the first series of meetings was prior to the pandemic, yes.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** You made mention that they were not Botler specifically and not GC Strategies specifically, but certainly the contractor. That's who was put in place, yet they delivered a pool instead of a kitchen. I think you were making a reference to that.

They were not really doing the deliverables that were anticipated. Is that correct?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Botler keep saying that they did all of this work and that they were out all this money. They configured their platform as, I think, a specific example. We never asked them to configure their platform. We never asked them to do any IT work whatsoever. We asked them to prepare an evaluation of whether or not their platform would even be suitable for the CBSA.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** In comments they provided to this committee, I asked specifically if they were compliant and if, in fact, there was any disagreement with their price in their contract, and they said no. They said they had complied with the issues, but now you're telling us that was not the case.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** All I can tell you, sir, is that I helped write the statement of work. I worked with colleagues in HR and finance to develop a statement of work, which was translated into contracting things. There are six deliverables here. None of them are a pilot or a configuration of technology.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** That's fair enough. I'm trying to get clarity, just to make sure that we have understood it.

The bottom line is that this committee is concerned. We're concerned about the allegations that have been made. We're concerned about supposed nefarious activities.

You've heard some of the lines of questioning, talking about people not speaking the truth and basically being on the take. We're concerned that that kind of activity exists. A court of public opinion is taking hold because social media is picking up on it too. Obviously, you've been targeted in some of these respects.

I'm going to give you an opportunity to clarify some of that once again, because this is one of my final opportunities to ask you questions on this issue. We want trust in the system. It's a system that's been existing for how long? How long have you been involved in this?

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** It's been 23 years.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** That's with multiple parties and different governments. Is that correct?

Do you see value in the work that companies like GC Strategies provide? You obviously use them.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** Mr. Chair and members of this committee, I can understand and appreciate some of the questions that are being asked and why they're being targeted the way they are.

When you're doing a whole bunch of renovations on your house, a general contractor is beneficial because they are a single throat to choke. In the case of the private sector and its partnerships, my understanding is that PSPC welcomes partnerships.

I think there's a lot of discussion around this table around whether or not subcontracting is useful and good. As a guy who has worked in IT for 19 of the 23 years I've been in government, that's not for me to decide and it's not for me to judge. I think that governments of any colour can decide to change policies if they would like, to allow or change the methods of subcontracting. That's a discussion that may need to take place. That's a study that this committee may want to undertake.

In terms of nefarious activities and some of the things that have been suggested at this committee, I have never seen that in my entire life. I've never seen something called ghost contracting. I have never witnessed, nor would I turn a blind eye to, anybody stealing from the government. I know Mr. Utano wouldn't either.

• (1810)

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I'm not sure how much time I have left.

Mr. Utano, it's been alleged in this committee.... You have to speak the truth; you're obliged.

We heard from the whistle-blowers—the individuals who came forward with these issues.

Are they telling the truth?

**Mr. Antonio Utano:** Mr. Chair, with respect to the allegations that were levied against me in the September 27 email, I've provided the actual email and the responses. From that perspective, I believe they've misled. They've misled people in that direction.

Anything else outside of that that does not involve me in particular, I will leave it to the committee.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Mr. MacDonald.

**Mr. Cameron MacDonald:** I believe they misled this committee. They worked with GC Strategies. They went to 10 different departments.

They've systematically told this committee that they thought they were going to make \$26 million a year and that Mr. Utano had told them that they were going to make \$26 million a year.

There were no such commitments made. There was no contract put in place. The CBSA would never have contracted for the federal government. Even in terms of that, as I've clearly stated, the client for Botler wasn't IT. The client was HR. If the client didn't want that work, they didn't do the work.

I left a month and half after the Botler work started. I can't speak to the work and I can't speak to the complaints. I can't speak to the allegations that came a year later. All I can tell you is that the CBSA has never contacted me about ArriveCAN or Botler. The RCMP has never contacted me about Botler.

I've done my best to provide a fulsome recollection of events so that this committee understands what my actions were. I can speak only for my actions.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano, thank you for your time today.

I need about two minutes of time with everyone.

You gentlemen are welcome to hang around and listen to OGGO intricacies, but otherwise you are dismissed.

Colleagues, on the 21st and the 23rd we had shipbuilding. We've been adding witnesses at a fast past for this study. We will not have time.

I have canvassed many of you, suggesting we push back the 21st and the 23rd for the shipbuilding line by line to later, if everyone is in agreement with that.

I suspect we have the supplementary estimates coming on the 9th. Therefore, we have to fit the ministers as well as the PBO in, unless anyone has an issue with that, specifically.

The other one that's just come up is that Thursday is the three witnesses that I mentioned for PSPC. We've been approached by Mr. Mills, who has appeared often in OGGO with PSPC. He's the ADM. He and Levent Ozmutlu, DG of the strategic policy sector, have asked if they can join the three witnesses from PSPC on Thursday as well.

I'll leave it up to you if you wish that.

Mr. Jowhari.

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

I just wanted to clarify this. I've just been informed that the three witnesses from PSPC did not refuse to come. They are fine with coming. They've asked for some senior people to join them. A correspondence has been sent to the chair. I suggest the chair share that. I definitely support having those two senior officials join the three witnesses.

I should have done my homework better to understand who those three are, but they are junior staff. Therefore, in my opinion, there does not need to be a summons sent, because they are coming.

All we're trying to decide is whether we can have two other members joining them. I don't see any issue with that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** We are a bit over the time we had planned, and I'll just say that the committee already made the decision to summon them, and if they're going to come anyway, it's a moot point, right? The point is, they're going to be in these chairs, and I think there are reasons the committee needs to hear from these people. People are welcome to be in the gallery, but I think we want to hear from the witnesses we want to hear from.

Chair, I just want to ask about Josée Bastien.

• (1815)

**The Chair:** I'm not familiar with who that is.

**The Clerk:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** That is the retired person we have not been able to get a hold of or track down.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Oh, okay. Would that person be relevant to have with this panel as well?

**The Chair:** I am not sure who chose him as a witness.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** All right. I guess we can come back to that, then.

**The Chair:** Yes.

It's Mr. Kusmierczyk and then Mr.—

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Can we get a resolution on whether the DG and the ADM could join as well, at the same time?

**The Chair:** Can we get agreement for that?

I understand what you were saying, Mr. Genuis, but—

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** We just want to hear from more witnesses.

**The Chair:** It will be all five of them. That is what we're suggesting.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Just bring them along. You don't have to ask questions of them.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** You don't have to ask them questions.

**An hon. member:** You guys don't have to, but we have questions, 100%.

**The Chair:** Can we maintain a speaking order, please?

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I think it matters. I asked to hear from Mr. Doan alone for a reason, because somebody can pass things off to someone else when you have a large group.

We can also have these other witnesses come subsequently, but just given who seems to have been directly responsible and given also that we have a dynamic right now of, frankly, senior public servants accusing other senior public servants of lying to the committee, I think, under the circumstances, it might be judicious to have people testify alone or separately, without having everybody's bosses coming with them.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, go ahead.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** If you look at the last couple of meetings we've had—and Mr. Johns wants to speak there, so I just want to make sure we're not ignoring him—we've had testimony from Botler, from Mr. Firth, from Mr. Cameron and from Mr. Utano, and there's contradictory information that can't be either corroborated or contested, so here we are suggesting that we actually bring more witnesses to the table to include those at the junior level as well as folks at the senior level, who would have insight at a certain level, a higher level, and who could answer questions.

I think we should have them there together. They actually offered to come to committee. We want to get to the bottom of this, and I want to say that—

**The Chair:** Can I just interrupt for a minute?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** —that's the reason I want to have the senior folks here as well.

**The Chair:** Mr. Johns, I know you have your hand up, but I'm getting some nods around the table, so can we just agree that the two—the ADM and the other one who was mentioned—

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** That's fine, yes.

**The Chair:** —and we'll just settle that.

We're running close to our time as well.

Mr. Johns, do you need to address...?

**Mr. Gord Johns:** I was just going to go exactly there, that it's been standard practice in this committee to allow staff to come. I guess the answer to that is just don't ask them the questions if you don't want to.

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

We did have a motion to summons them, because we were not getting confirmation in the regular way that they would attend.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** They will be here with the DG and the ADM.

**The Chair:** I will take your word for it that they will physically be here; therefore, we will not summons them.

• (1820)

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I appreciate that. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks very much.

If we're fine, we are adjourned.

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