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Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the 33rd meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

I trust everyone had a very happy Thanksgiving.

The committee is meeting to discuss—

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

On the original audio, we're getting the French translation coming in.

The Chair: I thought you were worried about my Thanksgiving wishes.

Hang on a second, please. We'll look at this.

I'm told that we'll correct this. I'm going to ask for a temporary suspension until we correct the issue.

• (1100)

(Pause)

• (1110)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order. Thank you to the technicians for quickly and astutely getting this straightened out.

As I've indicated, this is meeting number 33 of the standing committee. We're meeting here to discuss a request by four members to undertake a study of the development cost of the ArriveCAN app. This discussion will be in public. In the second part of the meeting, the committee will meet in camera to discuss committee business.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to make sure we maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether participating virtually or in person.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind all participants in this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

With that said, we had a request last week pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). I will now turn the floor over to Mr. McCauley, who gave the notice of motion on Friday on this subject, to move his motion.

Mr. McCauley, go ahead.

• (1115)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to read the motion that we put on notice. It says that the committee undertake a study of the development of the ArriveCAN app, with a focus on the costs to develop and launch the app; that the committee dedicate a minimum of six meetings to the study; that the committee produce a report and report its findings to the House; that the committee send for all documents related to the planning, contracting and subcontracting of the app development....

I'm sorry, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegna): There were certain revisions. I think what you may be reading is an earlier version than the one that was actually put on notice.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I think it's the most recent one I have.

The Clerk: I mention that simply because the version that had gone out to the committee members mentioned that the documents were to be in an unredacted format.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Forgive me. I'm reading off the wrong form. I'll start again. I apologize. I'm new at this. It has only been seven years on this committee.

I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the development of the ArriveCAN app, with a focus on the costs to develop and launch the app; that the committee dedicate a minimum of six meetings to the study; that the committee report its findings to the House;

that the committee send for, in an unredacted format, all documents related to the planning, contracting and sub-contracting of the app development and launch, including all requests for proposals (RFPs), all documentation related to the contractors and sub-contractors, that the committee send for a breakdown of the costs incurred by GC Strategies for the ArriveCAN app, and a list of all contractors and sub-contractors involved in the development and launch of the app;

that these documents be provided to the clerk of the committee in electronic format no later than noon on the 10th business day following the adoption of this motion; that federal departments be required to submit documents in both official languages; that the clerk of the committee be instructed to transmit all documents received to the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel (OLCPC) and that the OLCPC be asked to make redactions that pertain to personal information and that the clerk of the committee publish the documents redacted by the OLCPC on the committee's website;

that the committee invite the following witnesses, in addition to any further witnesses the committee may consider relevant to appear:

Minister Jean-Yves Duclos,

Minister Patty Hajdu,

Minister Marco Mendicino,

Minister Bill Blair,

Minister Helena Jaczek,

Public Services and Procurement Canada,

Public Health Agency of Canada,

Public Safety Canada,

Canada Border Services Agency,

Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony, GC Strategies,

Richard Hyatt, Founding Partner and Fellow at the Rotman School of Management's Creative Destruction Lab,

Zain Manji, Lazer Technologies,

TribalScale,

Fahd Ananta, Roach Capital,

Gautam Lohia, Apply Digital CEO,

Nick Van Weerdenburg, Rangle CEO;

that if departmental officials appear alongside a minister, that they would also be required to appear on a second panel separate from the Minister; and, that these meetings be televised if possible.

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Is there anything further?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I think it's important, considering the massive costs of this program and the controversy around ArriveCAN.

The massive cost is \$54 million. We've seen that a couple of tech companies have stepped up and recreated the app for what they said would be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, not \$54 million. They would do it over a weekend.

It also goes into some of the further studies we're looking at on outsourcing government contracts.

Canadians are appalled that in Edmonton we have veterans on the streets having to go to food banks, yet somehow there's \$54 million for an app that the experts are saying could have been done for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

It's very important that we see how this debacle—for lack of a better word—has happened, how a company with almost no employees received such a large contract and was allowed to subcontract out so many times to so many different companies, how the process happened, and how the costs overran so much. Also, who authorized the continuing cost increases for this app? Canadians deserve to know how the government is spending its hard-earned tax money, and why \$54 million.

This reminds me of a book I am reading now called *Victory on the Potomac*. It's about U.S. defence reform. It talks about \$650 hammers and \$1,000 toilet seats. This reminds me of that issue. Canadians deserve to get to the bottom of it.

I hope the rest of the committee will support this study.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

I see that Mr. Housefather's hand is up. I'm assuming he wants to add to the debate, as opposed to dealing with translation issues.

Mr. Housefather, go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's correct. This time the translation is not going over the original audio, so I was able to hear everything my colleague Mr. McCauley said.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to move an amendment to Mr. McCauley's motion, and then I'm going to speak to the amendment.

I propose to amend the motion:

1. That the first paragraph of the motion be modified by changing the word "six" in the third line to "two" and deleting all words in the third line following the word "study";

2. That the second, third and fifth paragraphs of the motion be deleted;

3. That the fourth paragraph of the motion be modified by replacing the paragraph with the following:

That the committee invite the following witnesses:

Public Services and Procurement Canada

Public Health Agency of Canada

Public Safety Canada

Canada Border Services Agency.

That after hearing from these witnesses the committee will determine whether other further meetings are required and the witnesses the committee considers relevant to appear.

Mr. Chair, I have provided the amendment to the clerk in both official languages.

As soon as you're ready, Mr. Clerk, I'm happy to speak to my amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

To all members, that amendment has been sent out to you at this point in time. Mr. Housefather, just give us a second to get that information out and then I will ask you to comment on it.

I'm assuming everyone has received the amendment. We are now discussing the amendment as proposed by Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Housefather, you have the floor.

● (1125)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to start by saying that I do believe the committee should look into ArriveCAN because of all the publicity that's come out over the last week.

I don't agree that we need to consider what may be a molehill a mountain and start with six meetings, and drag in five ministers and all of the people who were involved in the disruption contest to try to recreate the app, when that has literally nothing to do with the creation of a complex and secure app.

I think the right way to go about this—because we have to take very seriously Canadians' concerns about what is alleged to be a high cost—is to bring in the four departments that are involved. These four departments can provide their understanding of what happened, the contracts and whether or not the costs were what they are being speculated to have been. Then the committee can decide, once we've heard from the people who were actually involved in these contracts, whether or not we wish to go further and ask for documents to be produced and other witnesses to appear.

Obviously, many people out there don't feel that those who created an app over a weekend were doing something that is consistent with developing this type of an app that the government had millions of people use. So now we want to hear from those people who don't agree. This is really a group of people.... It is on their wish list to hear that the app was too costly.

I don't believe that's a fair way to begin, but I am willing, after two meetings and after we've heard from the departments, to go further if that is what the committee is willing to do because the departments have been unable to satisfy us with what they have come forward with.

I do want to say, though, based on what I've already undertaken to do since I first heard these costs, that I come from this industry. I want to look at what I already know to be misleading information related to the numbers Mr. McCauley cited. Whether the number is \$54 million or \$52 million, which has been cited, one thing is clear: \$25.377 million, or \$25,377,165 that is being included in this figure, comes from a competitive contract that was awarded earlier this year, on May 16, 2022. The requirements were for the services of a contractor to maintain and support various CBSA applications, which would include ArriveCAN but also many other IM/IT applications.

This contract was awarded more than two years after ArriveCAN went live. This contract covers many different CBSA services, not just ArriveCAN. Yet somehow this \$25.3 million is being lumped into the cost of the development of ArriveCAN. So right away we can see that the number being used is clearly incorrect and highly inaccurate.

What we seem to have found is that the cost to develop the first version of ArriveCAN was approximately \$80,000. Subsequently, there were more than 70 updates done to ArriveCAN. The 70 updates were done because, at various times over a two-year period, the regulations changed and travel was different, so ArriveCAN had to be adapted. Those 70 updates over the two-year period cost a total of \$8.8 million.

So if you're looking at the cost of development of ArriveCAN, as opposed to multiple other direct and indirect costs of different things—for example, different apps that Public Safety has out there; telephone support lines that handle calls for Canadians seeking help with this app and other apps; the support for accessibility requirements for those with disabilities, meant to enable people who are visually impaired to use the app; the necessary level of security when dealing with a program that handles Canadians' personal information and touches on border security; costs associated with coordinating with provinces, territories and other countries to verify

that the provided proof of vaccination was authentic; indirect support, maintenance and upgrades of this and other apps....

● (1130)

All of these numbers are being thrown in and out all together. They don't relate to the costs of the development of the app, which to the best of my understanding at this point, if you're looking at direct costs, was \$80,000 for the first version that was launched. It was \$8.8 million for the 70 subsequent updates.

I want to say that the officials we would bring in would be much better placed to deal with this than I am. It is important to hear from them, so that they can answer the committee's questions—and I'm sure they will be tough—and Canadians' questions as to the direct and indirect costs of the app.

I do have to say, Mr. Chair, that one thing we need to be careful about, again, is not creating mountains out of molehills or mountains out of hills. At this point, we don't have the necessary information to throw out the numbers that are being thrown out. To the best understanding that I have at this point, they are inaccurate.

I also want to talk about the issue—because I do come from this industry—of a primary contractor versus subcontractors. In this case, there was one primary contractor. The Government of Canada engaged one company to do this work. That company subsequently won the competitive contract that was awarded earlier this year for the \$25.3 million that I mentioned, which related to going-forward support and maintenance for this app and many other Public Safety apps. That primary contractor cannot be conflated with the specialized people it used to develop the app.

We contracted with one party. Many companies in this industry don't just keep employees forever. They have certain work that rolls in at certain times. They have a small number of employees who go out and seek work and manage the work, but then they handle specialized subcontractors, usually individuals who are hired to work on the projects that they secure. They go and get the people who better understand the area of the app they're asked to roll out.

For example, here, privacy and international privacy law would be very important to understand because you're getting vaccination proof from many different countries. You need specialists to write the documentation and specialists to link this to the back office of the CBSA for security. You need usability for our people, to be able to have millions of people on different iOSs using the app on different platforms.

Here we had one company that hired 23 people as subcontractors to help it deal on its contract with the Government of Canada. That is not unusual in this industry. Anybody who's involved in this industry will tell you that this is very common. I wanted to deal with that misconception, Mr. Chair.

Finally, I also want to deal with a third misconception, which is that you can create an app over the course of a weekend that is identical to an app that people are creating, like ArriveCAN, which has serious back-office requirements, like password lookup, passport deals and airline flight timetables across borders and jurisdictions.

When you're dealing with an app like this, you have training, documentation and a requirement for language—not just translation, but finely checking the wording to make sure it complies with regulations. You have procurement and licensing. You have deployment. You have parallel development platforms for testing the next version. You have source code repositories. You have backups. You have physical alternatives if the digital one goes down. It has to work in many degraded conditions. You have to have user testing on a wide range of phones and system language settings. This includes testing scanners and the QR codes that you scan on arrival and long pauses while someone finds their flight number while in line.

• (1135)

This is not the same as just copying every interface and screen from the existing app or the navigation fields of every drop-down. It's an entirely different process, and anybody who is involved in the industry will tell you that this is sort of like you've built a house and you added on at some point, with the help of different architects, 70 different rooms, which are the updates to this app, and then you—multiple times—redesigned and rewired the house, and then somebody comes and takes a picture of the house. That's sort of what the hackathon could be compared to, and it's not fair to compare an apple to an orange.

Mr. Chair, just based on what I understand related to how this works, my recommendation again is, let's call in the departments. Let's have the experts from the departments in two meetings—from all four departments—explain to us exactly what they did, exactly how they contracted and exactly what costs are directly related to the development of the app and which are indirect or not associated with the app.

Then, the committee can, at its discretion, based on what we've heard, determine whether further meetings are required, whom we need to hear from and what documents we need to get, but let's do it with the full and clear understanding of what actually happened, versus lots of hypotheses, lots of speculation and lots of numbers being floated around that do not seem to me to be accurate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather. I appreciate that.

Again, just for clarification so that everyone is aware, we are debating the amendment at this point in time.

I have Mr. Genuis first, and then I have Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

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

I'll just be 90 seconds on this. I think we need to get to a conclusion on it.

I will say that I have a great deal of respect for Mr. Housefather. I would have more sympathy for his arguments if the Cadillac price had gotten a Cadillac product.

I think it's pretty clear from what we're hearing from constituents that the performance of the app was disastrous, and that, for me, is an important factor to take into consideration. People who should

not have been told to quarantine were told to quarantine, and then were in this weird limbo of having done everything right but being ordered by a glitch in a piece of technology that was extremely expensive.... The price should be commensurate with the quality. For me, that's an important factor.

I would also say that the motion my colleague put forward initially sought to recognize two important principles. One is ministerial accountability for the actions of their departments, and the other is the value of hearing from outside expertise. I agree with the principle that we should hear both sides on this subject. One side is outside expertise that may be critical of the actions of the government, and the other side is that of ministers accounting for the decisions of the government. To call not ministers but public servants, and not to call outside experts, means that we are respecting neither of these principles, that we're not hearing both sides and that we're not able to ask questions of those who are ultimately accountable for those decisions.

I think this amendment misses the opportunity to hear from external experts, who are supposed to be more neutral on the question, and it gives a pass to ministers, who should be accountable for the decisions they are accountable for.

On that basis, I don't support this amendment.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Next is Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

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

Always with a view to reaching consensus between all parties and reconciling each party's vision, so as to remove politics and partisanship, I agree to a minimum of two meetings to start.

I would suggest meeting next with senior officials from the Department of Public Services and Procurement, the Public Health Agency, the Department of Public Safety and the Border Services Agency. I would add to the list Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony of GC Strategies. If possible, I would like us to request a list of contractors and subcontractors, the list of requests for proposals, the unredacted breakdown of expenditures, with supporting invoices and a list of actual contracts.

I believe that's a happy medium between what was originally requested and the amendment that was proposed. We could agree on those aspects, which I have in writing and can send to the clerk so that he can word them appropriately. That's what I propose, without much ado. It's important to know what it's about.

I always base the questions I ask witnesses on documents that we have received, to keep the questions fair and relevant and get the facts right. Call me a doubting Thomas if you will, but I do like to get a visual aid so I can have a complete record.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola. Are you proposing an amendment to the amendment? If you have it in writing, we can give it to the clerk. Thank you.

Mr. Housefather, it's not really a subamendment. She's making some proposals to your amendment. I'm going to ask the clerk to read that out to you, so we can see if you're comfortable accepting it as your amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

• (1145)

[Translation]

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Vignola moved to keep the two meetings and four witnesses listed in Mr. Housefather's amendment, but to add the two witnesses from GC Strategies. She would like to see the committee require production of the list of contractors and subcontractors, the breakdown of expenditures, the list of contracts, the requests for proposals and all invoices.

I move that the deadline for obtaining these documents be established. Would it be the one in the original motion?

I therefore ask Mrs. Vignola what deadline she would like to set for submitting the documents.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Mrs. Vignola, the question is about the deadline. Is the proposal that you have similar to what was in the original motion, or do you have a different time frame? Is it still noon on the 10th business day?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I tend to agree with the 10th business day deadline.

The Clerk: You mean the deadline in the original motion, which is noon on the 10th business day following the adoption of the motion.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes.

The Clerk: Thank you.

I'd like to check something to make sure I understand what the committee wants.

You want to receive unredacted documents. Is that right?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes, we'd like the documents to be unredacted.

Did I also mention that we'd like to call the ministers to appear, if that's possible?

The Clerk: No, you hadn't mentioned that.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: It's one hour with the ministers and one hour with the bureaucrats.

What witnesses did you...? Did you have the two from the hackathons?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes.

The Clerk: The witnesses Madam Vignola told me were the four departments outlined in the original amendment of Mr. Housefather. I believe they were Public Services and Procurement Canada, the Public Health Agency, Public Safety Canada, and the Canadian Border Services Agency, as well as two people from GC Strategies, Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony.

Those were the only witnesses suggested to me.

The Chair: Mr. Housefather, I see your hand is up. Right now there's a bit of banter, which is good. I'm hoping to try to get that resolved, so that we can get everything.... We're sort of on the borderline here.

With that said, we have a proposal by Mrs. Vignola, and whether Mr. Housefather would accept that as an amendment to his motion.

I'm going to go to Mr. Johns first.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

• (1150)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): With regard to Mrs. Vignola's proposal, which I support, can we add one more witness? I'd like to add Mark Weber, the president of the Customs and Immigration Union, to appear as a witness as well. I think Mr. Weber would provide testimony on how frontline workers were consulted on the development of the app and their experiences with it. I think it's important testimony to hear.

Would everybody be okay with that as an addition?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that, please?

Mr. Gord Johns: It's Mark Weber, the president of the Customs and Immigration Union. I'm hoping he can appear as a witness. Mr. Weber could provide the important testimony that's needed on how frontline workers were consulted on the development of the app and their experiences with it.

I have one more friendly amendment. I'm hoping I can put it forward now, because it's easy for Mr. Housefather and Mrs. Vignola. I'm a bit concerned about the proposed focus on the development and launch of the app. We'll miss why the costs for the app have continued to accumulate well past the launch. What are the new or recurring costs that have been encountered? Maybe a friendly amendment could include reference to the maintenance of the app.

If you look at paragraph one and you go past "undertake a study on the development", I would add "launch and maintenance of the ArriveCAN app". We could then strike out "with a focus on the costs to develop and launch the app", so it would be all inclusive.

In paragraph two, after “app development”, we could add “launch and maintenance”. I can bring this to the clerk, if that will help.

The Clerk: Paragraph two has been removed now.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you're basically asking for a friendly addition to what's been proposed.

The challenge we have here is that now we have an amendment to the motion and then a subamendment that wasn't really a subamendment, which was the amending motion to be done. Now you're adding another subamendment to the subamendment—a friendly subamendment.

There's discussion, and that's good. We can hopefully try to come to an agreement to get this straightened out.

At this point in time, we have an addition from Mr. Johns, and we have Mrs. Vignola's changes, which really are some additions to Mr. Housefather's amendment—just so everyone is aware of that.

Now, we have Mr. McCauley, who has the floor to hopefully iron it all out for everybody.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks.

I hate to pile on, but I think we're getting to a solution.

If we start with the two days, we just have a few more witnesses from our original list that we want to hear from: Mr. Hyatt and then the two companies that performed the successful hackathon. I'm not sure how we add on to Mr. Johns', Mrs. Vignola's and Mr. Housefather's amendments. I think we're getting there if we could add those three in.

The Chair: Mr. McCauley is pointing out an issue: that as we add on one person here and there, all of a sudden we run out of time in those two days. There appears to be a suggestion—and there's some sort of nodding—about maybe taking those two days and making them three or four so that you can fit in these people. I'm just throwing that out there at this point in time.

It's good to see that there's discussion to try to resolve it. However, I want to make certain that we keep this orderly so that we don't lose the structure of what's going on.

Mr. Housefather's hand is up. We've heard from Mr. Johns, Mrs. Vignola and Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Housefather, hopefully some of this is acceptable to you and you could maybe add a little bit more to it.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the collegiality of the committee. I'd like to try to bring everything around to one amendment that everybody agrees to.

Let's start with the two additional witnesses that were proposed by Mrs. Vignola, to bring in the company, which I think is absolutely fine. Mr. Johns' request to bring in the person from the CBSA union is fine. I'm in agreement with adding those two witnesses to the list of witnesses, which I have now put into section three of my amendment. Instead of just saying, “Public Services and Procure-

ment Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Safety Canada and Canada Border Services Agency”, it would add the individuals from the company proposed by Mrs. Vignola and the individual proposed by Mr. Johns.

I am not in agreement with the proposal of Mr. McCauley because, again, this assumes that the hackathon is remotely connected to the actual development of the app. In the event we were to take those witnesses who somehow believe that their hackathon was related, then we would want to bring in any number of people who would say that it wasn't. So, I don't believe that this has anything to do with getting to the bottom of what the actual interaction between the government and the contractor was and what those costs were.

I agree with the additions of Mr. Johns and Mrs. Vignola. I consider them friendly, and I'm happy to add them.

With respect to the other request of Mr. Johns—to use the word “maintenance” and not just say “with a focus on...development and launch”, but to say “undertake a study on the development and maintenance of the ArriveCAN app”—I'm happy to do that as a friendly amendment as well and add that to my amendment.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

I agree with Mrs. Vignola, who has moved that we ask to receive the documents within 10 business days. I have no problem with the list she read out either.

Mr. Chair, I hope that, given these changes, we will come to a consensus to allow the majority of committee members to support the amendment.

I can draft the revised amendment, but the clerk can also do that. That's fine with me either way, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Before I go to Mr. McCauley and then Mr. Kusmierczyk, Mr. Housefather has basically read off and pointed out some of the changes he's agreed to from Mr. Johns and Mr. McCauley, so at this point in time, rather than having to redraft, I want to make certain that everyone is comfortable with those amendments as proposed by Mr. Housefather, as we discussed. It's just to make those changes to his amendment.

We're just talking about the changes, just so everyone is comfortable. That way we have that on the record, and now we're discussing the sort of amended amendment as we go forward. Is that okay?

We have Mr. McCauley, and then Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, Chair.

Mr. Housefather, I appreciate your comments and your attempt to find a solution, but I have to say that it seems that, rather than pushing to bring transparency to this whole issue, you're pushing to avoid transparency. The two companies that did the hackathons and Mr. Hyatt, who was quoted in the article, I think are very important experts to address this issue of the cost overruns and the massive costs to Canadian taxpayers.

I do not want to sit and listen to bureaucrats come in front of us to read talking points about how great this program is, how many lives it saved, etc. Canadians want to hear why this cost so much. What were alternatives to using GC, and how could they have delivered this program for a lot less money? I think excluding industry experts would basically neuter this study.

I'm not sure why it appears to me that you're trying to hide and neuter rather than bring light to this massive cost. We're willing to move from six meetings to two. We've made a lot of compromises, but I don't think we're going to compromise on this. We do need to hear from other experts. We're hearing from someone from the union on how they were consulted. We're hearing from outside people. I certainly think Canadians, Canadian taxpayers, are owed it to hear from these other companies, as well as Mr. Hyatt.

We're happy to give on a lot of things, leave the ministers for now, shorten the meetings and shorten the witness list, but I think these three that we have should be included.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, of course I will be supporting my colleague's amendment. I believe it is clear. I believe it demonstrates collaboration. It finds that common ground, and it's common sense. It acknowledges the work that Mr. McCauley has done raising this issue and important conversations with this committee. This is an important conversation. Canadians have questions, and they want to make sure that we establish the facts.

I do believe we're going to be able to establish some critical facts when the officials come here for two days, with some additional witnesses that Madame Vignola and Mr. Johns have proposed. I think that is a very good start to this conversation. In addition, the fact that the amendment accepts Madame Vignola's suggestion or recommendation that we produce the documents within 10 business days also underscores that we take the urgency of this matter very seriously and that we want to get to the bottom of it, ask some questions and establish some facts on the ground.

This amendment is clear. It is commonsensical and it's collaborative. Again, it demonstrates the urgency of this matter.

At the same time, I just wanted to add that, in terms of moving it from six to two meetings to start, I also consider the fact that there is some important work that we want to get to as a committee. Working on diversity in procurement is a study that we want to get into. It's the same thing with advancing our study on naval procurement, the outsourcing of federal contracts. This is a really good

start. It's timely, and we're going to get some answers for Canadians when the officials come to committee.

For that reason, I fully and wholeheartedly support this as a commonsensical, common-ground and collaborative path forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk. I appreciate that.

Just so everyone is aware, we're talking about the changes and additions to Mr. Housefather's amendment, as opposed to what was originally proposed.

Mr. McCauley, go ahead.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate, Mr. Kusmierczyk, what you're saying.

Can we settle on, perhaps, Mr. Housefather re-amending the amendment to the amendment to add a third meeting as a compromise among all four parties?

We would be happy with the changes that Mr. Housefather has brought forward, if we could add the third meeting to add our witnesses, whom we consider extremely important to this issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Right now, there is a proposal to change it from two to three meetings. In recognition of all the added names, that might be something worth considering from a time point of view.

At this point in time, I see Mr. Housefather's hand is up.

Mr. Housefather, go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to go back to the comments from my friend Mr. McCauley, whom I have great respect for.

At this time, I do not support the witnesses who are being proposed for this third meeting. The committee at this point, under the revised amendment, would have two meetings with the departments, with the company that was actually involved in the contract, and with somebody who was representing employees who were involved in the discussions.

The parties that Mr. McCauley is suggesting had no involvement whatsoever in the development of ArriveCAN, and no involvement whatsoever in the contract process. They had no involvement at all. They are simply people he wants to bring in who have a fixed and specific view without actually, I think, having the background or the knowledge of what happened, to say there was an overcosting that was considerable and they could have done something very fast that would have delivered a different kind of product.

Should the committee, after the two meetings where we get the background from the department and the people actually involved, feel like delving further into the issue, the amendment that is proposed allows the committee to add additional meetings and additional witnesses.

Rest assured that if Mr. McCauley wants to bring in the people he named, who have a very fixed view of exactly what happened and were not involved themselves in creating the app, to support this hypothesis that Mr. McCauley is bringing forward that there was overcosting, there's an equal number of people we can bring forward as witnesses who would say the exact opposite, who would say the hackathon has no relationship whatsoever with the development of this kind of app.

I wouldn't just agree to add the witnesses Mr. McCauley wants to bring, because they're witnesses on one end of the spectrum, who had nothing to do with the underlying question that we're looking at, which is, what happened?

After we find out what happened, after these two meetings, if there's a desire, Mr. McCauley is free to bring in a request for additional witnesses. If the committee wants to hear from that group of witnesses, we would propose other witnesses who would have a different point of view.

There's no need to have the debate right now, before the committee actually knows what the real costs are for the development of the app, what the real costs are with respect to the maintenance of the app, how many of these contracts were related to other Public Safety applications and not just the ArriveCAN app, and how many were related to telephone support and other things that were unrelated to the development of an app.

We're putting the cart before the horse by jumping beyond what we have now called for, which is the two meetings and having the people who were directly involved come to the table, who can add the most light to these questions.

Adding the documents as requested, and adding the additional witnesses as requested, I am very open to what was proposed by Mr. Johns and Mrs. Vignola. Again, we've come to a relative consensus. I don't think it's fair to say that simply because we don't agree to add the witnesses related to the hackathon at this point, we're not being open and transparent. I think we are. We've arrived at a general consensus even if, unfortunately, one colleague is not happy with it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

I believe Mr. McCauley is going to try to explain what witnesses he is proposing at this time.

Mr. McCauley, go ahead.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Housefather, I think you will find that the three parties sitting on this side of the table agree these witnesses should appear.

Your comment about us having witnesses.... Your fear seems to be that these three proposed witnesses will only give one side. You

said, "Well, we can bring in an equal number of people to say the opposite." I think, with the witnesses from PSPC and others, you are bringing in an equal number of people.

Having sat on this committee for seven years, I can guarantee you that every single time PSPC or any government department comes in, they are defending one side, and that's their side. No one from PSPC is going to show up and say, "Yeah, you know, you caught us. We blew the bank on this." It's nonsensical to have a one-sided study only to hear from the bureaucrats saying how great a job they're always doing, saying there are no cost overruns and no government could have possibly done it better, so let's not hear from anyone else on this—case closed and let's move on.

I appreciate what you're trying to do, but we're trying to figure out why the costs have gone so high and are so overrun when people have come forward saying, "You know, we could have done it for a heck of a lot less." If we only hear from one side—the bureaucrats saying what a great job they've done, how many lives they've saved and how much money they've saved Canadians—we're not going to hear the full story.

I think my colleagues with the NDP and the Bloc have recognized, per our original witness list, that we've compromised and whittled it down quite a bit. I think they're comfortable with the compromise of adding them to a third meeting—or two meetings and then the third meeting is one hour—but I think they need to be part of this discussion.

Perhaps Mr. Johns will be a mediator.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm trying to find a solution here.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, wait a second, please.

Before we do that, I'm going to ask the clerk to read out, so everyone is aware, the names of the witnesses we have at this point in time. Once that's done, I'm going to ask Mr. McCauley to add the names of the witnesses he believes we don't have on the list at this point in time. After that, I'll go to Mr. Jowhari, and then Mr. Johns.

Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The witnesses in Mr. Housefather's revised amendment are as follows: Public Services and Procurement Canada; Public Health Agency of Canada; Public Safety Canada; Canada Border Services Agency; Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony, GC Strategies; and Mark Weber, president, Customs and Immigration Union.

Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. McCauley, what are your additions?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: They are, from TribalScale, Sheetal Jaitly; from Lazer Technologies, Zain Manji; and from Rotman School of Management's Creative Destruction Lab, Richard Hyatt.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now that we have clarification on what is being proposed, I'm going to Mr. Jowhari.

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

My colleague Mr. McCauley has, on the record, a number of times, referred to a huge cost overrun. At this point, I realize the numbers being thrown out...we need to do a deep dive on them. I'm not going into that level of detail. My understanding of when we do software development... I have to hear that there was a budget and that budget was blown, because my colleague constantly referred to budget overruns and expenditure. I agree with the expenditure and on doing a deep dive, but constantly referring to it as a "budget overrun"....

I know I'm getting a bit technical, but a lot of people are watching out there. When we pick the term "budget overrun" and \$54 million or \$52 million, that means there was a budget. I'd love to know what the budget is. I'm going to ask whether there ever was a budget, whether there was a budget overrun, and what the cost breakdown is. All of those questions are valid questions.

I suggest we refrain from those terminologies until we have a good understanding of what the cost elements were and what decisions were being made. I don't think my colleague, Mr. Anthony Housefather, is objecting to Mr. McCauley having those witnesses. It's a matter of timing. Timing allows us to do the two meetings as amended, in order to get a solid understanding of the breakdown through all the documents, and to ask the tough questions we are all going to ask of the departments and other witnesses. We could then collectively have another meeting, where we decide and say, "Hey, look, now we want to hear from other witnesses", and submit our list.

I think there is agreement to move forward, and I suggest we actually move forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Johns, I believe you've deferred your position to Mrs. Vignola.

Mrs. Vignola, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like us to agree. I also want to make sure I understood, because I'm listening to the conversation in both English and French. We established a minimum of two meetings, with the understanding that we may have a third meeting to which we would call the witnesses proposed by Mr. McCauley to appear.

Did I hear what was said correctly?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Jowhari, go ahead.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

I think the third meeting is going to be witnesses, including the witnesses of Mr. McCauley. We might want to bring others who might be in a position to provide.... I don't suggest we limit the third meeting—if and when that happens—only to those witnesses.

Thank you.

The Chair: What I'm hearing is that we're good with two meetings, with the possibility of a third. I'm sitting here wondering why we don't say "up to three meetings".

The Clerk: The motion says at least two.

The Chair: It says at least two. Okay, I get that. Thank you.

I see Mr. Housefather's hand is back up. I'm going to go back to Mrs. Vignola to finish, because she had the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: So I understood what was said. We will have a minimum of two meetings, with the understanding that, if something smells fishy, a third meeting would be possible. We would invite the witnesses proposed by the Conservatives to that meeting.

So I got it all right. Thank you.

• (1215)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Housefather, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to present my views in French. I believe it's related to what my colleague Mrs. Vignola said.

I believe we agreed to have two meetings with the witnesses already named in the amendment. If the committee deems it appropriate, we can have additional meetings. The three witnesses proposed by Mr. McCauley would appear at the third meeting.

However, as I said earlier, other private sector representatives have a completely different take on the matter. Therefore, I don't feel that department officials are the right people to contradict Mr. McCauley's witnesses, who already have a very clear position.

I feel we should reserve the right to invite other private sector representatives who have an opposing view. That's why I don't agree that we should just add these three people. However, after two meetings, if my colleague feels it's appropriate to add more meetings and she wishes to do so, I will support her.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Johns, go ahead.

Mr. Gord Johns: I just want to be clear that we're voting on two meetings, but not limiting it to that because we might come back and want to bring every minister here, as well as the witnesses the Conservatives proposed. We may want to add to that list as well.

Let's just start with the vote on the two and get these two meetings going. Then we'll decide where we're going to go with the next meetings moving forward after that, because I don't want to limit it to just a third. It could be up to six, if necessary, or beyond.

We'll start with the two, just so we can get a scope of what's going on here from the government side, and then we'll come back with a list for future meetings beyond that. I think the Conservatives have put forward some names of people I would like to hear from as well.

Let's start with these two meetings and go from there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Just so everyone is clear... Ultimately, the wording in it that helped me was that it says "minimum of two meetings". The "minimum" part allows that the committee, at any time, can go and add more to it, if that's what the committee chooses to do. There's nothing to prevent the committee from saying, as Mr. Johns has indicated, that after one or two we may want to add some more because of what we've heard, etc. There is that avenue for that.

At this point in time, we have an amendment on the floor. I'm going to ask if there is any further discussion on the amendment. I'm looking around the room and I'm not seeing any, so we'll go to a vote.

Mr. Clerk, could you read it out so everyone is clear on what they're voting on? You were probably going to do that, but I just want to make certain.

The Clerk: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

These are the changes that, to my understanding, are part of the revised amendment proposed by Mr. Housefather: changing six meetings to two; adding "launch and maintenance" after the words "on the development" in the first paragraph; deleting the words "with a focus on the costs to develop and launch the app" in the first paragraph; and striking all words following the word "study" in the first paragraph.

In the second paragraph, it would essentially be that the committee send for, in unredacted format, the following documents: list of contractors and subcontractors; the broken-down list of costs—in French it's "*liste des dépenses ventilées*"; unfortunately, I'm not that good at translating on the fly—list of contracts; the request for proposals and the invoices, and that the documents be provided to the clerk of the committee in electronic format no later than noon on the 10th business day following the adoption of this motion.

Also, the list of paragraphs includes that the committee invite the following witnesses: Public Services and Procurement Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Safety Canada, Canada Border Services Agency, Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony of GC Strategies, and Mark Weber, president of the Customs and Immigration Union.

Finally, it says that after hearing from these witnesses, the committee will determine whether other further meetings are required and the witnesses the committee considers relevant to appear.

If I may ask, Mr. Chair, did I get that all right?

• (1220)

The Chair: I'm looking to Mr. Housefather to make certain that he's okay with it. That is correct.

We will now call for a vote.

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

The Chair: We are now discussing the motion as amended. Is there any discussion on the motion as amended? I'm looking around the room to see if there is any discussion. I'm not seeing any. Therefore, I would ask if there is support for the motion as amended or whether someone requires a vote.

Does anyone disagree with the motion? I'm not seeing anything.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

At this point in time, we are coming to the end of the public portion of the meeting. We will be going in camera. We had a two-hour time limit and we started at 11:15, so we basically have another 50 minutes. It will take us about five minutes to go off and then come back in.

Before we do that, as we are still in public, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee. I've been working with this committee for the last two years and it has been my pleasure to be working with you on this committee. I want to thank you for your professionalism and your respect for the committee chair and for everything we've done here.

With that said, I'd also like to indicate that in my seven years as a member of Parliament, I've served on many committees, and it's been a great honour for me to work with the clerk of this committee, who does a fantastic job. I want to thank the analysts, who have done fantastic work here, as well as the technicians and all the interpreters. I want to thank you for that.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I have to say a few words too.

I've sat on a few committees, and I've sat with you, Mr. Chair, on Veterans Affairs, and we've worked together in many roles. I have to say that you've done a great job of bringing people together and trying to find ways to work together and hold government to account. I have to thank you for the way you work with other parliamentarians and for taking on this role in such a collaborative way.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Chair, besides the fact that we're both lifelong and long-suffering Leafs fans, which has bound us together—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: —I purposely wanted to be back on this committee. I think this is an excellent committee that does excellent work, and I truly believe that Canadians are served well by the work of this committee.

We find common ground on this committee. We work collaboratively together. We don't always get everything that we want on every vote, but we always find that all of us here come together, put our heads together and try to find a common ground that advances the concerns and the issues that are important to Canadians.

Mr. Chair, you've been an incredible part of that. It's something that I talk about to my colleagues with great pride, and it has a lot to do with your leadership on this committee in making sure that it is one where there's respect for ideas and for the members who sit around this table. This is a great testament to your leadership, your ability to bring people together and your ability to communicate.

I want to say thank you, sir, for your service. It really has been a pleasure working with you over the last number of years.

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you. This wasn't supposed to be that. It was purely....

Ms. Thompson, go ahead.

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): I'll be very quick.

As the person who is probably the newest around the table on this committee, absolutely, thank you. In coming into a committee where there is history with the members who sit around the table, I will say as a person who is new to Parliament and also new to this

structure that you were absolutely supportive in terms of your ability to be inclusive and absolutely collaborative. I admire how even in the challenging conversations you were able to make space for all voices.

You will be missed. Thank you so much. It has been a pleasure to get to know you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I will be just as brief.

It's been a pleasure working with you. We may have given you a few more grey hairs than you expected at times...

The Chair: I know.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: ... or perhaps we made you lose a few. We'll have to wait and see.

You've been an outstanding chair, you've always had open ears and tried to build consensus.

Thank you very much for these past two years.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. It is much appreciated.

With that, we will suspend temporarily. We will be back in camera in about two or three minutes.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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