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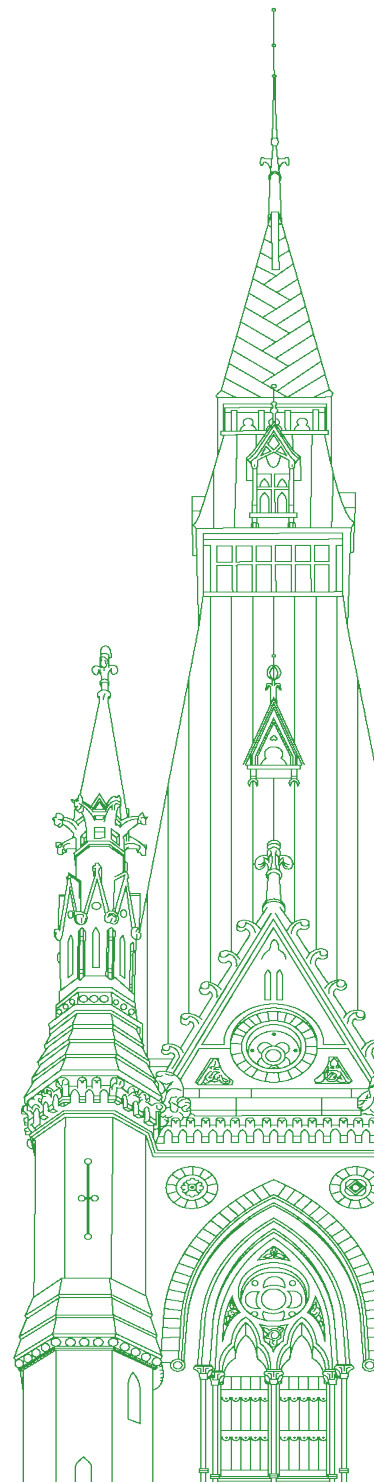
Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Tuesday, November 14, 2023

Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



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• (1200)

[English]

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

We hope Mr. Sousa is okay in his nightmare storm.

Welcome to meeting 86 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.

As a reminder, do not put earpieces near your microphones, as this causes feedback and potential injury to our valued interpreters.

I'll give you just a quick update on the order for the production of documents. We have received the items from Mr. Firth. They are now sitting with the translation bureau.

Before we start with Mr. Brock, I just want to welcome Patrick back as our clerk today. Patrick reminded me that he was our clerk on OGGO about seven or eight years ago.

Welcome back. It's nice to have you back after so long.

We have Mr. Doan with us.

Do you have an opening statement, Mr. Doan?

Mr. Minh Doan (Chief Technology Officer of the Government of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): Yes, I do, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Brock.

Hold on for just one moment, Mr. Doan.

Mr. Larry Brock: Before the opening statement.... I made inquiries with members of the committee.

Given the nature of the finger-pointing and the attempts to cast blame on other parties as to who chose GC Strategies, given the RCMP investigation, and without suggesting that at any point in time Mr. Doan has attempted to mislead this committee, I think it prudent, sir, to have this witness sworn to tell the truth or to affirm to tell the truth by whatever mechanism binds his conscience.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Brock.

I think there have been discussions among all the sides. I understand that we have an agreement for that.

I see nods, so we have unanimous consent.

I'll turn things over to our clerk to administer that.

Ms. Carine Grand-Jean (Committee Clerk): Mr. Doan, we will have to swear you in. You will have to repeat the following after me:

I—state your name—do solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of any oath is according to my religious belief unlawful. I do also solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Mr. Minh Doan: I, Minh Doan, do solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of any oath is according to my religious belief unlawful. I do also solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

• (1205)

The Clerk: I confirm that the witness has been sworn in.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Doan, we'll turn things over to you for five minutes, please.

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon.

Since giving my testimony, allegations have been made against me. I thank the committee for the opportunity to address them and elaborate further. Prior to my appearance on October 24, it had been six months since I left the CBSA. I asked for all of my emails from the agency related to the allegations. I received a package. Within that package, I found no exchanges with Kristian Firth. Subsequently, and in preparation for today, I requested and was given access to a broader search, which is when I found emails where either I or Mr. Firth were on the distribution list. I am providing them today. Given how complicated it is to access emails in a department you no longer work in, I will direct any further requests of this nature to the agency.

Early in the pandemic, PHAC contacted CBSA to see whether we could build an app to replace a paper form. We had days to pull together this proposal and weeks to launch the first version. I asked my team to explore options. Mr. MacDonald took the lead. Within 48 hours, he and his team did a very quick assessment of options that were narrowed down to two broad technical approaches. One option was an entirely outsourced solution developed and hosted by Deloitte. The other option involved a combination of public servants and staff augmentation to leverage the existing code expertise in our cloud infrastructure.

Let me be clear. At no time was a choice presented to me between a Deloitte solution and a GC Strategies solution. As was pointed out numerous times, GC Strategies is a staffing agency that provides rapid access to IT professionals. They do not develop solutions. I'm submitting to the committee the proposal and emails I found around the time of these events. You'll note that nowhere in either option presented, or in their associated emails, is GC Strategies ever mentioned, nor do I have any recollection of it being raised.

The decision I was asked to make was whether to fully outsource the work or to have my team oversee the application development. I had concerns about the outsourced solution, handing off full control of a time-sensitive project exclusively to an outside firm, and about the fact that our data would be hosted on their IT infrastructure instead of our CBSA cloud. I wanted my team to retain the ability to direct the development and resources. In making this decision, I did not choose or direct the selection of GC Strategies. I chose a strategic direction that met our urgent need for speed and agility at the time. Importantly, I also did not contact GC Strategies to solicit a proposal. As the CIO, I ruled out the entirely outsourced approach. I stand behind that decision, and I am fully accountable for that decision.

I particularly want to address the serious accusation Mr. MacDonald made that I threatened him during a call. I never threatened him. CBSA was preparing to testify and nobody knew who initially brought GC Strategies in on ArriveCAN. I called Mr. MacDonald, whom I trusted to answer this question. During the call, it remained unclear who had brought GC Strategies into ArriveCAN, but we agreed it was not me. I remember indicating to him that, if pressed at committee, I may have to redirect the question to him. To be clear, this was not a threat or intended to be one. It is fact. This committee will call further witnesses as required. If coming to this committee to answer that question was perceived as a threat by Mr. MacDonald, that was never my intention. I never said I would blame him, nor did I lay blame at his feet during my appearance one year later. I still don't know who initially contacted GC Strategies to solicit a proposal. I was in no position to threaten his job or career. He was an ADM peer working in a different department.

I have a note written by Mr. MacDonald the day after the call. It was published in *The Globe and Mail* on October 4. It states that I was not personally familiar with the GC Strategies company and that the decision to select this vendor was not made by me. That written statement by Mr. MacDonald is also consistent with what appears to be Botler's report that the committee quoted on November 7. I don't have the report, but I heard allegations that there were "conscious efforts...to isolate and control the flow and narrative of

information" to the vice-president, and that the vice-president "didn't know that they'd been communicating back and forth".

The past few weeks have deeply affected my professional and personal life, my family, children and friends, and my mental and physical health. Today I will openly answer all questions related to this study. However, on the advice of legal counsel, I will not answer unrelated questions about my career or my personal life. Enough harm has been done.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doan.

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

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

Thank you, Mr. Doan, for your attendance today and your opening statement.

It would be prudent of me, sir, to remind you of a couple of things. I specifically asked that you be sworn for a reason. When witnesses attend at committee, there is a parliamentary privilege that, whether people are sworn in or not, it would still be considered a contempt of Parliament to mislead the committee by giving a false statement or false evidence or to refuse, unless related to cabinet confidences, to answer any questions or to fail to produce documents that the committee might require someone to produce.

That is generally what happens.

I specifically asked that you be sworn given the swirl of accusations that are flowing around from senior government officials as to who retained GC Strategies. You were sworn because now this attracts Criminal Code consideration.

I understand that you have a lawyer, sir, and it is very prudent for you to do that since there are provisions in the Criminal Code that penalize perjury, deliberately giving misleading evidence, which, if founded—if there's a finding of guilt and proof beyond a reasonable doubt—could land a witness in prison for up to 14 years.

You have both of those issues to contend with. I say that not to intimidate. I say that not to concern you. I say that not to force you to clam up and consider your instructions from legal counsel. I say that because, sir, I want to give you a safe place in this committee. There were a lot of accusations hurled at you by Mr. Cameron MacDonald, and I have some serious reservations regarding his truthfulness with respect to those accusations.

This is your opportunity, Mr. Doan, to finally set the record straight.

He, on a number of occasions, has accused you of.... Given his position as director general of innovation, this ArriveCAN app surely would fall within his mandate as an innovative product, but he's accused you of selecting GC Strategies.

You, on the other hand, sir, when you testified on October 24, 2023, not once—I counted—but on four different occasions over the course of that two-hour meeting, during questions from numerous members of this committee from all political stripes, claimed that you still don't know who ultimately selected GC Strategies. In fact, you even went so far as to say that you've been trying to find the answer for close to a year. You made reference to your team making that decision, but then your team consists of 1,600 employees. That doesn't make sense. Then you narrowed that down to potentially six directors general. I narrowed that down to Cameron MacDonald, who's largely responsible for innovation.

We have numerous competing theories as to who chose GC Strategies. I can understand and I think Canadians can understand why no one wants to take ownership. This is a two-person consulting firm that doesn't produce a product, that doesn't operate out of a bricks-and-mortar entity, that largely works out of a basement, and that has, over the course of a number of years but in relation to ArriveCAN, hit the taxpayer lottery of \$9 million for doing nothing other than finding professionals to do the work. It's a pretty good gig. I bet there are millions of Canadians who would love that opportunity.

I can understand why you and others who've testified don't want to be attached to this particular company that is under police investigation.

I have about a minute and a half, sir. I'm going to have numerous opportunities to question you in the course of two hours, but I'm going to give you this opportunity to give me the straight goods.

Was Mr. MacDonald lying to this committee, as he's accused you of doing?

• (1215)

Mr. Minh Doan: The question I was asked at committee, and I answered truthfully, was, "Who picked GC Strategies?" As I said in my opening statement, I chose the direction of in-house there and, in the material I found, there's no evidence that the decision was tied to a particular company.

I stand behind that decision. That decision allowed us to build ArriveCAN. That decision allowed us to build changes over two and a half years as the pandemic evolved.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Doan, I'm going to stop you right there.

I have 30 seconds. Please answer the question.

Was Mr. MacDonald lying to committee on November 7, 2023, when he placed the entire responsibility for that decision to hire GC Strategies in your lap? Was he lying or was he telling the truth?

Mr. Minh Doan: Mr. MacDonald said that I made the decision. I did make a decision, to be clear. I made a decision on a technical direction.

Also, in evidence and as posted on The Globe and Mail in his own handwriting, he writes that I did not make that decision, nor was I even familiar with the company.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Sousa, go ahead please.

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

I appreciate your being before us. I recognize the complexity of what's happening, and I want to try to simplify that complexity to some extent.

What was your involvement with the Botler contract?

Mr. Minh Doan: CBSA was handling a lot of sexual misconduct. It was in the news. It was an issue that we were all seized with, given how serious it was.

We were briefed at a meeting with the executive team that the misconduct was increasing and that we needed a different way to solve this problem.

I was the chief information officer at the time. The president turned to me and asked me if there was a different way from a technology perspective, an innovative perspective, to solve this problem or make a difference, because everything we'd done so far wasn't making the difference that was required to stop this. I turned to Mr. MacDonald, who, again, was DG of innovation, and we were looking for innovation. We were looking for something different. We were looking for a different approach, because the traditional approaches around training and awareness weren't sufficient.

Mr. MacDonald took that and went away and found a company—that would be Botler AI—that would use artificial intelligence to help provide a different way for potential victims to have a conversation with this anonymous bot to see if they actually did suffer sexual misconduct and to give them a very safe space. I found the solution very promising.

A demo was made before me and a number of my directors general in which I saw a lot of promise in this technology and in this way of achieving a safe space for victims to potentially consult, get guidance and then decide on what actions they wanted to take.

I saw enough promise—

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'm just going to stop you.

There was no contract with GC Strategies or Botler with CBSA at that point or at any point.

Mr. Minh Doan: This was late 2019, and I saw enough promise in their demo.... Also, I was moved by Ms. Dutt's personal story around harassment and discrimination and why she created the company, so I recommended that this was worthy of being presented to the president.

Unfortunately, in the beginning of March 2020, the pandemic hit, and that meeting was delayed by several months before we were able to get in front of the president and the vice-president of HR.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Why did it not proceed?

The agreements, or the possibility of having a contract with GC Strategies and Botler, albeit through subcontracting with the other two organizations, didn't proceed because.... I'm being told conflicting stories. You're saying it was delayed because of the pandemic. Others are saying it didn't happen because they didn't fulfill the requirements necessary to do the work.

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: I thank the hon. member for the question.

At the end of 2019, I was shown a software demo. I saw that it had a lot of potential, but I didn't have the necessary authority to approve the pilot project. I therefore proposed to make a presentation to the vice-president of human resources and to the chair to see if there was any interest in such a project. It took place much later, in 2020. Once approval was obtained, we used an existing contract with Dalian Enterprises and Coradix Technology Consulting to begin work with Botler.

According to what I recently heard in testimony before the committee, Dalian Enterprises had a subcontract with GC Strategies. I wasn't aware of that at the time. Following that, and I don't know how it went, GC Strategies subcontracted with Botler.

Unfortunately, the way the information is shared, we only know which primary contractor these companies have contracted out to.

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. Charles Sousa: Has the RCMP contacted you in regard to allegations made by Botler?

Mr. Minh Doan: No, it has not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Was Botler at all involved with ArriveCAN?

Mr. Minh Doan: No, it was not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Is the RCMP investigating the ArriveCAN contracts?

Mr. Minh Doan: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Charles Sousa: ArriveCAN discussions and the appointment of GC Strategies have nothing to do with the issues regarding Botler and their pilot research AI project. Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: That is correct. The two are entirely different things. One is potentially to see if we can find a different way to address sexual misconduct. The other one was an application to handle COVID.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Doan, is it normal to use contractors to assemble potential skills and individual firms and others to provide for the work?

Mr. Minh Doan: Absolutely. We have very skilled public servants, but sometimes, depending on the urgency or type of skill, such as an emerging skill like cybersecure AI, we don't have the skills in-house, or it will take too much time to train. It's normal to look at staff augmentation and other vehicles to find those skills, those hard skills, to help complement, especially in urgent times. Something like the pandemic, I think, would qualify as extremely urgent.

Mr. Charles Sousa: However, is it normal for a subcontractor like Botler to engage in work without a contract and without an understanding of what they were supposed to do?

Mr. Minh Doan: In terms of Botler and how that contracting and subcontracting would occur, unfortunately, in my understanding of this.... It would have to be confirmed with colleagues at PSPC. The agency deals with the main contractor. Who they subcontract out to and how many times they do that is not something we know. That is something that only PSPC, the contracting authority, would know.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen. That is our time.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Garon, go ahead, please. Welcome back.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Doan, you stated during your appearance on October 24 that you weren't involved in the decision to give a mandate to GC Strategies, adding that the decision had been made by members of a committee.

How many people were on that committee?

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

I would like to clarify something. As I said in my presentation, I made a technical policy decision. It led to the awarding of the contract to GC Strategies. I'm responsible for that decision.

As you'll see in the briefing binder that I provided, a lot of people worked around the clock, for two or three days, to put together a proposal that would identify which direction to take.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: You talked about a committee, and I want to know how many people were on that committee. Was there one person, three, thousands?

Mr. Minh Doan: I'm sorry, but I don't recall. I don't recall using the word "committee". In terms of governance, I want to make it clear that these are decisions that were made in a day or two. These were not normal decisions.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: You made a strategic decision that led to the awarding of this contract, which is highly questionable. In addition, you have no idea of the process that led to the awarding of this \$9 million contract or the number of people involved in the decision-making process.

It's hard to believe.

What are your comments on that?

Mr. Minh Doan: You will see in the briefing book that the initial request to develop an application to solve this problem was made on March 22, 2020. Two days later, we already had two options to consider. A day or two later, we had to make a strategic choice to determine the direction to give to the project.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: You've made a strategic decision, and you acknowledge that you're responsible for it. That's great; it's a big step.

That decision was made by a group of people. You don't know who they are, you don't know how many people were in that group, and you don't know how the decision was made. And yet you claim to be responsible for that decision.

You'll agree with me that you have a strange definition of responsibility.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: You'll see in the documents provided the names of all the people who were involved in developing the proposals and options. This work has helped to find a solution to the problem and to choose a technological orientation.

For me, accountability means that I'm responsible for the policy decision I've made, and I stand by that.

• (1225)

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Approximately how many technology experts were there at the Canada Border Services Agency?

Mr. Minh Doan: During the years I was vice-president, the number of employees varied from 1,200 to 1,400.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: So we're looking for a needle in a haystack. You're telling us that you're responsible for a decision that was made by one of the 1,500 people who were at the agency.

As parliamentarians, that's what we're looking for.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: No, sir, I'm not saying that we should look among 1,200 or 1,400 people.

You'll see in the documents provided the names of the main people who took part in research and development to identify the options. We know the names; we know who was involved in this work. We have all the e-mails related to that.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Is it possible to have the names of those people sent to the committee?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, it's possible. The information can be found in the briefing book that I'll give you.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Okay.

That leads me to another interesting question. Within the Canada Border Services Agency, there seems to be an army of people who are experts in technology, who are qualified to do this type of work.

Do you think it's normal for us to have to deal with an outside firm to select people who can carry out this contract, when there seems to be an army of specialists within the agency? Don't you find that strange?

If you were in our shoes, would that seem like an intelligent, effective and transparent way of doing things?

What's your opinion on that?

[English]

Mr. Minh Doan: I've been an IT professional for 25 years. I have a bachelor's degree in computer science. I've been doing this a very long time.

The idea for an application started on March 22. We launched the first version of ArriveCAN on April 29. That is incredibly fast by private sector standards. It was secure. It was on multiple platforms. It was successful, and it kept iterating. Even using any public servant, nobody can do it that quickly. This required skills that we did not have at the time.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: I'm talking about the selection process; I'm not talking about the programming or the delivery of the application.

Is it normal for an agency with hundreds of specialists to have to deal with an outside agency that clearly lined its pockets and wasn't qualified to make the decision as to which firm should deliver the product?

I'm not talking about those who program the product. I'm talking about the practice of doing business with an intermediary. Is that normal?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, that's quite normal.

As part of the awarding of contracts, if we were to search for all the different types of candidates we need, whether it be cybersecurity, cloud technology or developing an app, it would be impossible to do that quickly. We did it in six weeks. We need an intermediary who already has the necessary relationships, who will do the security screening, who will review resumes, and so on.

If we had had to do it ourselves, it would have taken six to eight months, if it was feasible. We need someone to tell us what resources are needed.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: If you had had to make that decision, would you have given the mandate to GC Strategies?

Mr. Minh Doan: We needed technology advice. Ultimately, we brought in GC Strategies. I'm responsible for that decision, and I have no regrets.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen. That is our time.

Mr. Johns, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Doan, I want to offer you an opportunity to clear your name. A government official has come to this committee and directly accused you of lying and threatening them. Other witnesses have indirectly accused you of lying or omission. Your name, as you even stated yourself, is all over the press. I'm sure that your many years of work in the public service are important. I want to offer you one more chance to tell the whole truth to this committee. I will offer you a chance to address the allegations made against you.

However, first, can you please address any statements you've made to this committee that you've reflected on, if you've realized you misrepresented something or left something out, however small, however unintentional? I want to offer you a chance to address the allegations made against you.

Mr. Minh Doan: As I understand it, there are three allegations.

The first one is that I misled the committee. I did not. When I answered about the emails.... When I looked through the package that was received, I searched everything. I found nothing. For me, lying is knowing the truth and deliberately saying something else.

The other allegation is that I picked GC Strategies. As you've heard many, many times already, I picked a technical direction. Nowhere in all of the material that I've found, or in my recollection, was it implied that the direction would be GC Strategies. That is the other allegation.

In terms of harassing and threatening—as I said in my opening statement, and I welcome the opportunity to say it again—I was in no position to threaten Mr. MacDonald.

• (1230)

Mr. Gord Johns: You're saying that Mr. MacDonald was lying to this committee when he said that you selected GC Strategies.

Mr. Minh Doan: Mr. MacDonald's interpretation I can't speak to. I did decide on a certain direction, and we ended up with them. Depending on how you see this, that could be seen as my implicitly deciding on a company. I was explaining this to a neighbour of mine, and in the simplest terms it's as though I ask you, "Would you like to go to Europe or South America?" You respond, "Europe," and I say, "Well, you decided Paris." If that's a view of the reality, my decision at the time.... I did not know that GC Strategies was involved in that strategic direction.

Mr. Gord Johns: Well, Mr. MacDonald says he had never heard of Botler until November 19, 2019, when he was approached with an unsolicited proposal. However, we know from recorded conversations that Mr. Firth had been communicating with Botler long before that, telling them it was MacDonald who had discovered Botler and wanted their software to solve CBSA's Bill C-65 needs.

When were you aware that Mr. Firth was communicating with Botler on MacDonald's behalf? Were you aware at the time or after the fact?

Mr. Minh Doan: I learned these things only recently, in the news and the allegations.

I have material here from Mr. MacDonald that says at least twice, "I found Botler."

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

Did the CBSA president task you, MacDonald or anyone else with filling the CBSA's need in response to Bill C-65? What was the president's initiative on this?

Mr. Minh Doan: We were being briefed at the executive committee about the problems around sexual harassment. The president would have been there, as well as the deputy and the associate deputy. At the meeting, or perhaps thereafter—my memory is not clear—the president looked at me, as chief information officer, and asked, "Is there a different way of using technology to solve this problem?" I said, "I will look into it."

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Doan, the CBSA has now suspended all contracts with GC Strategies, Dalian and Coradix. My understanding is that they're still allowed to do business with other departments within government.

Now you're the CTO. Do you not see a problem with this? The CBSA is not doing business with them right now and has suspended all activities, and the RCMP is investigating, yet they can still get contracts within government. It sounds absurd to me.

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

The decision by the Canada Border Services Agency and Public Services and Procurement Canada to suspend contracts follows allegations that have been made. I'm not aware of the details.

[English]

I've not been briefed. I do not know what led to that decision, or I was not informed—

Mr. Gord Johns: Wouldn't this concern you, as the CTO? You should be looking at this and making the decision as to whether to recommend that the government should suspend them from all government departments until this is thoroughly looked at and the police have done their investigation.

Mr. Minh Doan: As chief technology officer at Treasury Board, I set technical direction for the government in terms of major IT. These are things like cloud use, cybersecurity, desktop and others.

My role within the office of the chief information officer is not around procurement. Different deputy heads are delegated to make procurement decisions. From where I sit, I give direction on technology and ensure that the major projects of different departments are aligned with the enterprise standards.

Mr. Gord Johns: In your understanding, there is nothing you can do now, given that you know the CBSA has suspended activities with these companies. There's nothing you can do in your role as CTO.

Mr. Minh Doan: I would offer that it is something that PSPC would have a more informed opinion on.

Mr. Gord Johns: Don't they rely on the CTO to give them advice?

Mr. Minh Doan: Actually, no. They do not.

Mr. Gord Johns: The CTO has no input at all if they see a company that is being accused of violations getting further contracts with the Government of Canada.

Mr. Minh Doan: My role is around the technology direction. It is not around values and access of companies. Different parts of the organization, primarily PSPC—

Mr. Gord Johns: That's regardless of the values.

Mr. Minh Doan: My role—

Mr. Gord Johns: The values don't matter.

Mr. Minh Doan: My role, as the chief technology officer, is not to be involved in that type of procurement activity. There are different parts of the organization that do that. I set technical directions. I was not consulted on this—

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen. That is our time.

Mr. Genuis, please, go ahead.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Doan, from what I understand, there were initially six companies that were identified that could have built this app. Is that correct? What were the six companies?

Mr. Minh Doan: I'm not aware of what the six companies were. I know of three of them. One of them was Apple; the second one was Deloitte, and the other one was a hybrid solution that would have used most of our existing coding and technology.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That so-called hybrid solution was the GC Strategies one.

Mr. Minh Doan: That ultimately became the GC Strategies one, yes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

It seems that one of the core points of contention comes down to who chose GC Strategies. Some \$54 million went through this company. It was a two-person company working out of a basement, with no in-house IT expertise whatsoever, and it did very well financially off this contract. Therefore, everybody wants to know who actually made the choice to hire GC Strategies. Everybody who might have been responsible for that decision is telling us they weren't involved.

You have testified that you did not choose this company. However, you've also testified that you were presented with two models of service delivery. One of those, you say, was fully outsourced, and the other one was partially outsourced. You made the choice, without knowing which company was associated with which bid, to choose the partially outsourced solution, as opposed to the fully outsourced solution.

Is that your testimony, essentially?

Mr. Minh Doan: I chose a direction. It was partially outsourced as, actually, staff augmentation.

If I can clarify one part, GC Strategies did not receive \$54 million. I've heard numbers here at \$9 million or \$11 million. They did not receive that—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, \$54 million was spent on Arrive-CAN, and it went through GC Strategies.

I want to focus on the piece about the decision you made. You were presented with a choice between a fully outsourced option and a partially outsourced option, and you gave the direction, made the decision, to say you wanted the partially outsourced option. Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: I made that decision.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Pardon me?

Mr. Minh Doan: I made the decision to go to a model that would use staff augmentation and our existing cloud, and that would leverage existing code. I made that decision.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You made that decision, and you are telling us that at the time you made that decision, you had no idea that there were specific companies associated with specific options. Nobody mentioned that GC Strategies was presenting this option and that Deloitte was presenting this option. You made that recommended technology direction in complete ignorance about which companies were behind which option. Is that what you're telling us?

Mr. Minh Doan: That is not what I am telling you.

I would like to remind the committee that this was not \$54 million in March—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's not my question, sir. Answer the question. You have an obligation to answer the question. That's part of the way this process works.

Mr. Minh Doan: I am answering the question.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, you're not. You're telling me that you were not ignorant of which companies were involved. When you were presented with those two options—a fully outsourced option and a not fully outsourced option—are you telling me you knew at that time that Deloitte was behind one of them and that GC Strategies was behind the other?

Mr. Minh Doan: I did not know that GC Strategies was behind the other, and all the evidence I found will support what I just said.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Pardon me? Can you repeat that, please?

Mr. Minh Doan: I am saying that I was aware that one of them was Deloitte, and I was not aware that the other one was GC Strategies. All the evidence I found that supported that decision around that time will support what I said. There was no mention of GC Strategies.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Then someone came to you and said, "We have the option of fully outsourcing to Deloitte, or we have the option of a partial outsourcing solution, but we're not going to tell you what company is involved," and then you made the decision. Is that how it happened?

Mr. Minh Doan: About 10 days before this started, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic. About five days—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sir, that's not what we're talking about at all. Could you answer my question?

Mr. Minh Doan: This is an important context. Five days later, Canada closed its borders. Four days later, we unprecedentedly closed the border with the United States.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sir, you're already accused of lying to this committee. I think it's in your interest to be forthright and direct, and you have an obligation to be forthright and direct in any event.

Is my description of events correct? Specifically, when presented with this choice, you were given either fully outsourced to Deloitte or this partially outsourced solution in which they didn't tell you what company was involved, and you made the decision in the absence of that information. Is that what you're claiming?

• (1240)

The Chair: Give a very quick answer, Mr. Doan.

Mr. Minh Doan: The decision wasn't to partially outsource. It was staff augmentation, and it was to build an app to replace a form. That was all it was. It was not a \$54-million decision. We didn't know that simple app would become—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sir, you're not answering my question.

The Chair: That is our time, gentlemen.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I would ask you to call the witness to order on this point. He has an obligation to answer.

The Chair: That is our time. Perhaps on your next round we can get to that.

Thanks very much.

Mr. Jowhari, please go ahead for five minutes.

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

Thank you for coming today, Mr. Doan.

You were presented with an option to fully outsource as opposed to staff augmentation using existing cloud and existing code. Can you explain the existing code piece that you were talking about?

Mr. Minh Doan: The CBSA, at the time, already had an application called “eDec”, which is short for eDeclaration, so we had some basic understanding of mobile development. Now, I won't pretend eDeclaration was anything near ArriveCAN in terms of complexity. Part of the work we're doing on innovation, following direction from Treasury Board, is to start experimenting with cloud and to do more things on cloud, given the different benefits and the security that it brings.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

There was existing code based on something you had.... I think that's the one that cost about \$80,000 to start with. Am I...?

Mr. Minh Doan: For the first version of ArriveCAN, to replace a simple paper form, yes, it cost \$80,000.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: That's subsequently about \$6.9 million to implement all the 70 changes that came over the two-year period.

Mr. Minh Doan: This is where it becomes the \$54 million, but that \$54 million is misleading. Only a part of that number, to your point, was actually for application development.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I want to go back and talk about your knowledge of the suppliers. Who would provide those services? Would it be Apple or Deloitte, and would it be part of an outsource approach or a combination of outsource and staff augmentation, as you call it?

Where did the name Deloitte come in?

Mr. Minh Doan: To my understanding, Deloitte was contacted by Mr. MacDonald to very quickly come up with a proposal.

When I say quickly, it was about 24 hours. The pandemic was there. We needed a solution quickly, so there was a proposal there. I've included it in the material.

The proposal was very rudimentary. It's basically mock-ups of what the screen could look like and where it could eventually go.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Deloitte was asked—your claim is that it was by Mr. MacDonald—to put out a proposal within 24 hours.

Mr. Minh Doan: To be clear, I don't know who contacted whom first. At that time, as CIO, I was getting approached by every single vendor—like IBM, Accenture and others—with offers to help deal with this global pandemic.

Did Deloitte reach out to Mr. MacDonald? Did Mr. MacDonald reach out to Deloitte? This was happening so fast that I'm not sure anybody knows for sure.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: There is a claim that you told Mr. MacDonald to go with GC Strategies as Deloitte was in the penalty box due to a very large project being off track.

Is this a true statement?

Mr. Minh Doan: As I've said many times, I picked a direction. I did not pick GC Strategies. I did not name them. I did not ask them for a proposal.

In terms of Deloitte being in the penalty box, my decision on this was not about what they were doing with us on a different project. My concern was this: It was fully outsourced to a third party, and sensitive data wouldn't be on our cloud—it would be on their cloud. The decision was about the lack of flexibility and the lack of agility, which is why I preferred staff augmentation instead of a fully outsourced solution on something so mission critical.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Is it fair to say that you at no point made reference to Mr. MacDonald, directly or indirectly, about not extending the contract to Deloitte or not going with outsourced solutions with Deloitte, as Deloitte was in the penalty box for something? In your mind, that conversation never took place.

Mr. Minh Doan: I don't recall using the term “penalty box”. I don't watch a lot of sports. That's not a term that would be very familiar to me.

In terms of extending the contract that we have with Deloitte, that would have been another project led by another vice-president. I would not have that decision.

• (1245)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I would take that as no, you did not have that conversation with Mr. MacDonald, specifically talking about the penalty box.

How often did you meet with Mr. MacDonald on ArriveCAN?

Mr. Minh Doan: You'll see evidence that in the early days.... When I say early days, I do mean days. It starts on the 22nd. You'll see emails on the 23rd. Emails start at seven in the morning and end at 11, and then would start at seven in the morning again. We would talk all the time.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Did you talk to—

The Chair: That's your time, I'm afraid.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Doan, you were the chief information officer at the time. If I understand correctly, you were informed one morning that a mobile app was needed. You decided to choose a hybrid solution rather than contract out the work entirely. Once that decision was made, it was no longer your responsibility, but that of the procurement officials. However, no one contacted you to give you any feedback. Afterwards, it was through the media that you learned the name of the firm selected.

What you're telling us is that even though you weren't personally responsible for awarding contracts, your opinion was never sought, even though you were the chief information officer. You were never asked for your opinion on which companies could carry out a contract and which did not.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

First, I want to be clear: I did not learn that we were working with GC Strategies through the media. Second—

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: My question was about the procurement process.

As chief information officer, you made a policy decision, but you never heard about it again. The contract was awarded by procurement officials, so it was their fault, in your opinion.

I don't know if you or Mr. MacDonald are telling the truth. However, there are good reasons, if only circumstantial, to think it's Mr. MacDonald. It seems that you exercised very little power despite the position you held.

Mr. Minh Doan: There's a reason why tasks are delegated to the executives who report to me. If I have to be involved in every decision, at every level, and in every contracting process, nothing is going to happen in government.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Doan, since the beginning of the meeting, you've been telling us that the circumstances were exceptional and that it was necessary to act quickly. However, you justify what happened by invoking normal circumstances.

Isn't it normal for you to be called upon in extraordinary circumstances?

Mr. Minh Doan: As has already been mentioned, the first version of the application cost \$80,000. Personally, I don't think I should be consulted on something that cost \$80,000 and was developed in four weeks.

As was mentioned at this committee on November 7, I was informed that this was the way to go, and that's the way I went. I trusted Mr. MacDonald, since he had been given certain powers in order to speed things up.

I would like to remind the committee that, at the time, the ArriveCAN app was not my sole responsibility. It's a fairly simple application, which replaces paper-based processing. At the time, between 1,200 and 1,400 employees reported to me. Many had contracted COVID-19 and had to go to the hospital. Because of that, there were backlogs. That's what happened. Certain powers needed to be delegated.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doan. I'm afraid that is our time.

Mr. Johns, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Doan, are you saying that because you don't follow sports, you don't know what it means when a company is put in the penalty box?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: That's not what I said. What I said was that I don't follow sport very much. However, that doesn't mean that I'm not familiar with that expression. That said, there's a difference between knowing an expression and using it regularly.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: It was alluded to that Deloitte was in the penalty box. We can come up with whatever we want—sidelined, pushed out, on pause. Why? Why was Deloitte on pause?

Mr. Minh Doan: The CBSA was in the middle of a major project. If memory serves, it was over \$400 million; do not quote me on that, but it was in the neighbourhood, to give you an idea. It was a major IT project to modernize its revenue collection. It was a managed service, and the system integrator was Deloitte. That major project had a lot of difficulties. There were difficulties around time, scope and costs.

Now, to be fair, with my 25 years of experience, all major projects in IT have difficulties. It doesn't matter which partner it is. It doesn't matter if it's outsourced or insourced. The difficulties—

Mr. Gord Johns: Why are they all not in the penalty box? Why is everybody else not in the penalty box? Why was Deloitte specifically in the penalty box?

• (1250)

Mr. Minh Doan: Again, I don't remember using the term “penalty box”. We were working with them on a major project. From a major project perspective—

Mr. Gord Johns: On a \$400-million project, you'd think you would have a really good idea of what they were doing wrong. I mean, why were there cost overruns? Why was it taking too long? If you're punishing them, they've done something wrong. What did they do wrong?

Mr. Minh Doan: I don't know who punished whom. There was no punishment involved. With these major projects the problems are joint. It could be around business requirements. It could be around changing scope. It could be that it's taking some time because the technology has evolved. It's not necessarily one party. In my experience, it's usually both parties who need to sort through it and negotiate it and make change requests as well.

I don't know who said they were being punished—

Mr. Gord Johns: Typically, you don't punish or put a company in the penalty box, especially a company that size on a project that size, without something going on.

This is really a big problem for this committee. We can't get straight answers from anyone, it seems, on the questions we're asking. I'm trying to get to the bottom of this—just some straight goods.

Can you tell me anything that this committee should be aware of on why Deloitte was in the penalty box or pushed out or whatever you want to come up with?

The Chair: I'm afraid that is our time. Perhaps you can get back to it in your next round, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Duncan, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Doan, at the beginning of my comments here, I just want to remind you of the swearing of the oath you took here this afternoon. A witness who refuses to answer questions or fails to reply truthfully may give rise to a charge of contempt of the House. In many rounds now, we've been asking some basic questions and not getting answers. We've been getting skating around it.

I'm going to try to build on what Mr. Genuis said earlier. The words you're using very specifically are that you “picked a technical direction”, but Mr. Genuis did ask you about this in a previous round. Again, when you made the decision to go in-house with a hybrid model, can you confirm that you were completely unaware, in that hybrid model, of who those outsourced contracts may be with?

Yes or no, did you know that GC Strategies or anyone was involved at that time?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for your question.

The testimony and the evidence support what I'm saying. Nowhere does the hybrid option mention GC Strategies. No document or email mentions GC Strategies.

[English]

Mr. Eric Duncan: Here's the thing. You made a decision to go with an in-house model, a hybrid blend as you call it, and picked a technical decision. You had no clue who would actually be working on the project. You're telling Canadians that this is the case, and that you made a decision worth tens of millions of dollars of sole-source contracts. You said, “We'll do it in-house. It doesn't matter who the outside contractors are.”

Wasn't that even a thought for you, when making a decision one way or the other, that you might want to know who it is?

Mr. Minh Doan: I've said it previously, but I will repeat it. It was not a multi-million dollar decision. It was not a \$54-million decision. It was a decision to have one application up in six weeks, to replace a piece of paper, that cost \$80,000. I trusted my DGs, who were delegated to do these things, to get it done. Mr. MacDonald got it done.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Well, your decisions led to four sole-sourced contracts between April 2020 and May 2022, valued at \$43.1 million, so I would argue your decisions did have some consequence.

I want to provide you with the opportunity to respond. You've been to the committee, and there have been many challenges with some of the testimony we've heard, to say the least. Many accusations have been made against you regarding your being the one who made the decision and your being aware of what was going on.

Your wording today has picked a technical direction, and you reference other people on your team who were the ones who made the final decision to go with GC Strategies, among others. No names were given.

I want to provide you the opportunity again: If it wasn't you who made the decision, can you provide the name of the person who did?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: I thank the hon. member for his question.

I was the one who decided what the technological direction would be. So I'm responsible for that decision.

I think what you're asking me is to tell you who contacted GC Strategies to ask for a call for tenders. There's a difference between the two actions. I chose the technological direction.

I didn't know who called GC Strategies, and I still don't know. As I understand it, this is part of an investigation that the Canada Border Services Agency is conducting.

[English]

Mr. Eric Duncan: I go back again.

If it was not you, you have not gone through any of the research or any of the documents that you've asked for and been given. Everyone is pointing the finger at you, saying you're the one who made the decision. Your quote is that it was only a "technical direction", yet nobody in all the testimony that we're hearing is taking responsibility for what happened.

Who is going to take responsibility here? Do you take any responsibility for what happened here?

You haven't provided the name of the person through all the documentation notes you have been given and been going through. You haven't pinpointed how tens of millions of dollars of sole-sourced contracts got awarded over multiple years. The whole starting point is that you're not sure who it was, and it doesn't really matter to you.

If it wasn't you, do you accept responsibility, and if you don't, who should?

• (1255)

Mr. Minh Doan: As the CIO, I take full responsibility for the decision to go in that direction. That decision allowed us to deliver ArriveCAN for over two and half years. You mentioned that it was a multi-million dollar decision. It was not.

At the time, we did not know the pandemic would evolve the way it did. All the messages were that it would be over soon. We didn't know variants were coming. We didn't know vaccine certificates were coming. We didn't know about exempt travellers and everything that ArriveCAN had to do.

I made a decision. I stand behind it. It cost \$54 million, and it was value for money. As far as I'm concerned, it saved lives.

Mr. Eric Duncan: I think there are many Canadians who would struggle to understand how, at the beginning of all of this, you were making a decision to go in-house and have a hybrid of outsourced blends and multiple companies. You just made a selection and didn't happen to ask at any point whether to outsource or to go in-house, with the hybrid model of having consultants and other firms getting sole-sourced contracts.

It never bothered to cross your mind, in making one recommendation or another, to ask who might be the partners playing and delivering on things. I think Canadians are going to have a very difficult time believing that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Bains, please, go ahead.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Once again, thank you, Mr. Doan, for joining us today.

Just to go back to the Deloitte piece, it was screened out of the process. Was that related to the firm's performance on CARM?

Mr. Minh Doan: To clarify, there was no process. The decisions here and materials.... We got a request from PHAC on the 22nd. Options were developed in about 48 hours, and we had to make decisions in 24 hours. This was not a process.

Mr. Parm Bains: Mr. MacDonald said it was because of CARM.

Was that true? Was that a true statement?

It was a program that was being worked on by Deloitte.

Mr. Minh Doan: The concern I had wasn't what was being done with CARM. That was being led by another vice-president. A major project like that would have difficulties over the years, and it's been years. The CBSA is still working on CARM.

The decision—

Mr. Parm Bains: It wasn't the performance on CARM, as Mr. MacDonald said. Is that right?

Mr. Minh Doan: My concern was a fully outsourced resolution. It was something we would need in six weeks. There is no way—with an outsourced solution like that, with all of the moving parts—we would have had the version that we had out that quickly.

Also, my concern was—

Mr. Parm Bains: I'm going to stop you there for a second.

Why are we here? We moved forward with a hybrid model. You made that decision. You said that was your decision, and that in the end, you stand by that decision.

Now we're here because there's a contract dispute between GC and Botler. Is that true? Is that why we're here?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: I thank the hon. member for his question.

I think we're here because of the allegations made by Botler. We already had these discussions last year, and the same questions were asked.

Why did it cost \$54 million? Why did we do business with a relatively small company? We followed the rules.

[English]

We followed the rules of PSPC on procurement. No rules were broken as far as I'm concerned, and the allegations I'm not part of, I'm not investigating.

Right now, the decision and the concern I had around the Deloitte solution was that the information wouldn't be on our cloud, and I have documentation here that also attests to the fact that our cloud is secure and will give us the nimbleness and agility to proceed.

Mr. Parm Bains: Going further into Botler's claims, they maintain that it's retaliation. We've also heard that their work was inadequate where there was a lack of resources to commit to the project. This is their work on the CBSA app that was cancelled.

Do you have any knowledge of that? What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Minh Doan: I've heard the various testimonies. Now, in terms of this particular project, to be clear, this was something that another company was doing. We were not the IT developers here. We were not the IT delivery. The client was human resources, given the nature of it. My understanding was that two of the six deliverables were delivered, and for reasons.... Mostly, from what I recollect of how busy everybody was within HR and labour relations with the pandemic, there was not enough time to dedicate to this pilot. Now for the specifics of that and that decision, I would refer you back to the CBSA.

• (1300)

Mr. Parm Bains: To your knowledge, have there been any changes at CBSA and across the government in recent years to change practices around subcontracting?

Mr. Minh Doan: I believe I heard that CBSA have done a lot of changes—I'm no longer there—around how procurement occurs, how procurement is governed, learning from some of the lessons from things like ArriveCAN and others. I believe those are under way. I would refer you to the CBSA for that.

In terms of changes to subcontracting, PSPC colleagues were here to speak to that. I believe the OAG and the Office of the Procurement Ombudsman are doing various reviews.

If they find gaps on how to improve that, I sincerely believe that my PSPC colleagues will take those into consideration and take the necessary actions.

Mr. Parm Bains: Mr. MacDonald said you specifically instructed him to help Botler deliver an executive-appropriate presentation. Is that like coaching somebody to deliver an appropriate presentation? Is this the case?

Mr. Minh Doan: Botler is a relatively young, new company that didn't necessarily know how to approach government, so no.... The answer to your question is not no, but if we were going to bring this presentation that I saw, which was very technical and probably too long, to a deputy minister, I said it needed to be more succinct and it needed to be more pointed in terms of the business problems that we were trying to solve and the outcomes. We were not—

Mr. Parm Bains: Is that regular practice?

Mr. Minh Doan: Absolutely. If we're going to a deputy minister and if I get a presentation at my level that's two hours, I will tell them, "You have 30 minutes, and you probably want to get your point across in 15 to allow the deputy to ask and answer questions." That's not shaping the story.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Doan. That's your time.

Mr. Brock, go ahead please.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Doan, I'm going to go back to my opening line of questioning for you, because I asked you on two, possibly three, occasions and you didn't give me a straight answer. My colleague, Mr. Duncan, reminded you about a refusal to answer questions. I'm not interested in your version of a particular question I put to you. I expect a direct response to a direct question.

You identified a number of areas in which Mr. MacDonald has accused you of lying. I'm asking this very simple question, now a third and possibly a fourth time: Was Mr. MacDonald lying at com-

mittee when he said the decision to retain GC Strategies on ArriveCAN was yours and yours alone?

That is a yes or a no, Mr. Doan.

Mr. Minh Doan: That is not a yes-or-no question.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm asking for a yes or a no, Mr. Doan.

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you, but that is not a yes-or-no question.

I made a technical direction in terms of where to go, that the—

Mr. Larry Brock: Again, Mr. Doan, I'm not interested in your explanation. Why is it impossible for you? It was easy for Mr. MacDonald to accuse you of deliberately lying. Is this something that your lawyer has instructed you not to opine or comment on?

I'm asking you specifically: Was Mr. MacDonald being truthful with respect to all the lies that he claims you made when you testified specifically that it was your decision to retain GC Strategies? It's a yes or a no. Are you incapable of answering a yes or a no?

Mr. Minh Doan: I'm under oath, so the words that come out of my mouth are going to be very, very specific because of that.

The question that was asked of me is who picked GC Strategies. I did not make the decision to go with GC Strategies; I picked a direction.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm going to stop you right there.

You did not make the decision to go with GC Strategies. Mr. MacDonald claims that you did. Is he telling the truth or is he lying?

Mr. Minh Doan: If his interpretation of that question is who picked the technical direction that led to it, then that is his interpretation.

Mr. Larry Brock: He didn't use the words "technical direction". I'm glad you brought up technical direction, because why was it impossible for you to phrase how you were involved with GC Strategies when you last testified before committee? You went through all these mental gymnastics to try to make us believe that it wasn't your decision alone, that it was your team, and you had 1,600 employees.

No one believes you, Mr. Doan. I wanted to give you a safe environment to finally come clean with the truth, and it appears that you are incapable of doing it. Someone has to accept responsibility for giving \$9 million of taxpayer money to GC Strategies on the ArriveCAN app. That is a fact. That is reality. Mr. Firth from GC Strategies confirmed that.

I'm asking you: Are you accepting responsibility for that, or is Mr. MacDonald lying?

• (1305)

Mr. Minh Doan: As I said many times, I take full responsibility for the technical direction I took that led to GC Strategies—

Mr. Larry Brock: I'll accept that as a yes, so he was telling the truth that the decision was yours, that it wasn't his.

He looked at six options before he presented Deloitte and CG Strategies. How incompetent can you be, sir, when you're unable to identify for a committee the names of those four other companies? Why is that?

Mr. Minh Doan: You will see in the evidence that this happened over 24 hours, so lots of things were—

Mr. Larry Brock: One hour.... You're the chief technology officer. Why can't you identify the other four companies? We know Deloitte. We know that it's in the penalty box. We know it's GC Strategies. Who were the other four?

Mr. Minh Doan: I was not involved in that period of time, at that level. I trusted Mr. MacDonald to do the work and do the assessment over a 24- to 48-hour period of time. I was managing closing the order—

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Doan, I'll stop you right there.

Did it not raise red flags to you that he presented only two companies in all of Canada that were capable of doing a delivery on this ArriveCAN app? We know that Deloitte was out of the question. Mr. MacDonald knew that Deloitte was in the penalty box, didn't he? That was widely known at the CBSA.

Mr. Minh Doan: He did not present two companies; he presented an option, and the other one was an outsource. He did not, at any point in time—

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, he claimed that Deloitte was his preferred choice. Was he telling the truth, or was he lying?

Mr. Minh Doan: I have no evidence of that. Actually, I have emails that recommend using our cloud, using eDeclaration, from Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'll ask the question. He claims that he presented two options to you, Deloitte and GC Strategies, and he said to you, as he testified at committee, that his preferred choice was Deloitte. You turned that down, because you probably confirmed that Deloitte was in the penalty box, and you directed him to go with GC Strategies.

Again, Mr. Doan, for the fifth, sixth, seventh time, who is lying? Are you misleading, or was Mr. MacDonald misleading when he said that decision, that direction, was not his but yours and yours alone?

The Chair: We'll have a very brief answer, please.

Mr. Minh Doan: There's an evaluation matrix in here developed by the CBSA that supports my decision and does not recommend the Deloitte approach. That was—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doan.

We have Mr. Jowhari, please.

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

Mr. Doan, was there at any time any concern raised by your superior about ArriveCAN?

Mr. Minh Doan: I'm not clear on what the concerns are that you're alluding to.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Was there any concern about the cost, about the timeline, about the responsiveness at any time, from any of your superiors....

Mr. Minh Doan: No, not at all. We were having different releases pretty much every 30 days responding to moving OICs and public health measures that were evolving every day: new variants, vaccine certificates, different types of workers. We were working around the clock, and we were delivering over and over and over, over a period of two and a half years.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

I recall that Mr. MacDonald indicated that you indicated that the superior or people above were “not happy” about ArriveCAN. Can you recall any conversation that you may have had with Mr. MacDonald around your superior not being happy about ArriveCAN?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: I thank the hon. member for his question.

No, I don't recall that at all.

We had general meetings, committees, and town halls where our deputy ministers and other deputy ministers congratulated us on our work. They knew how much work and stress it was, all the overtime we were putting in. The outcome had to be secure. We were proud of the work done, and so were our superiors throughout the pandemic.

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald also claimed he understood that you had said that the minister, that somebody, was not happy up there and wanted somebody's head. Do you recall any conversation you had with Mr. MacDonald around an individual, a superior—whether it was the president of CBSA or anybody else—who was not happy and wanted somebody's head?

Mr. Minh Doan: I was not briefing the minister or the minister's office about this at this time or in the fall of last year.

Nobody was looking for a proverbial head. The question that was raised last year was, why did it cost \$54 million and was it value for money? One of the sub-questions that was making the media was, why, among the 30 or more companies that we worked with to develop ArriveCAN, would one of those companies be relatively small? There were no allegations of wrongdoing. Nobody was looking for a head.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

Who raised that question? Who specifically raised that concern or question?

Mr. Minh Doan: Nobody raised that question. Nobody raised that concern.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Neither a minister nor your superior raised the question that there was media, news, and they wanted to get to the bottom of it.

Mr. Minh Doan: I was not briefed on the concerns of the minister's office. I was and still continue to be very proud of the Arrive-CAN work. GC Strategies was one among 30-something companies we worked with to deliver this, and it was tireless over two and a half years.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Was there ever a concern raised around the \$54 million?

Mr. Minh Doan: There were questions to make sure that we could justify and explain, because it was proper—

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Who raised those questions?

Mr. Minh Doan: The entire agency—everybody. We defended those numbers.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Did at any time a minister or a representative of a minister reach out to you or to your department directly or indirectly to inquire about the cost of the application?

Mr. Minh Doan: Not to me, no.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay. You also do not recall having any conversation about wanting somebody's head, that somebody up there wants somebody's head.

Mr. Minh Doan: As I said, last year there were no allegations of wrongdoing. It was just, "Can we explain the \$54 million?", which I believe CBSA did, and I still stand behind it.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: With 30 seconds to go, if there were any allegations of misconduct, lying and intimidation, who would you directly raise that to? Who would be your superior?

Mr. Minh Doan: For any issue at that time, during that period, it would have been Mr. John Ossowski.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: What role does the Clerk of the Privy Council play as it relates to raising these concerns of allegations?

Mr. Minh Doan: At my level, I don't directly interact with the clerk. Any interactions would be higher than me.

In terms of serious allegations, I would raise what I think needs attention, then trust that the deputy ministers would raise it to the appropriate authorities after that.

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

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Doan, I'll tell you why I'm not inclined to believe you. On the one hand, you're telling us that the situation was urgent and that you had to carry out processes that normally take time. In that case, you had to complete them within 24 or 48 hours. Everything was urgent. Usually, the processes can take weeks or months, but in this case, everything was done in one or two days.

On the other hand, there were technical specifications that had to be met. You got a report, and then you decided on the technological direction. The work was then contracted out.

It seems to me that, in a time of crisis, when things happen extremely quickly, the state of emergency would be reason enough for the senior official to give his opinion and to be consulted on the awarding of a subcontract to any company.

You said that you followed the usual processes. However, don't you find it odd to tell us that all this work was done in 48 hours, because the situation was exceptional? That implies that it was not done as usual.

What version should we believe, as parliamentarians, between the two versions of the story you've told us today?

Mr. Minh Doan: I thank the hon. member for the question.

People were dying in this country. People had to go to the hospital.

• (1315)

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: I'm not asking you who did or didn't go to the hospital.

First, you told us that it was done on the fly, in two days, and that extraordinary measures had to be taken. When we asked you whether you had been consulted, you told us that the processes had been followed.

Are you telling me that the processes can be followed without consultation?

I asked you a specific question, and you're not answering it.

Mr. Minh Doan: The procurement and contracting processes were followed. Public Services and Procurement Canada was consulted at all stages.

In terms of governance, in terms of decisions on technical needs that were made in 24 hours, 48 hours or 72 hours, the processes were not followed. There were gaps in documentation, but we were in a crisis and in the middle of a pandemic.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: So you're telling us that in a crisis situation, when you were the chief information officer, you weren't consulted about the firms under consideration.

In a crisis situation, when you were at the top of the hierarchy, no one saw fit to consult you so that you could have a say in technology.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: Given all my responsibilities at the time, including the closure of customs, I delegated decision-making to executives, which my position allows me to do. I trusted Mr. MacDonald. As I already told you, he made a decision for the first version of the application, which cost \$80,000.

I also had to manage my entire team, which has 1,200 to 1,400 employees. I had to manage the closure—

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: You are saying that you relied on Mr. MacDonald. That is what you just said.

Is that right?

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid that is your time, Mr. Garon.

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Did GC Strategies and all of its resources working on CBSA projects have proper security clearances? Had they all received and signed completed security briefings and screening forms?

Mr. Minh Doan: To the best of my knowledge, contract authority procurement teams within CBSA would have verified all those things before work could be started.

Mr. Gord Johns: These ghost contractors and unnamed resources pose, as you know, a significant risk to our national security and to the data and privacy of all Canadians. Ritika Dutt and Amir Morv never signed an NDA or any other confidentiality agreement with CBSA, nor did any of the pass-through contractors that were enlisted under them.

Is this normal practice? Is it permitted by government procurement policies to not require contractors or consultants to sign NDAs?

Mr. Minh Doan: I believe there are two parts to that question, in terms of NDAs and subcontracting.

The first part is the term “ghost contracting”. I must admit that, in my 25 years of experience, it's not a term with which I am familiar. It's not a term I have heard. If what you are referring to is subcontracting, that practice, I believe, has been explained many times.

The Government of Canada deals with the contractor in question. The main contractor then has, following PSPC guidelines and rules, the ability to subcontract whoever they need to in order to get the work done. Those subcontractors and those engagements.... The Crown or government—in this case, CBSA—is not privy to that. The only one who would know that and could probably speak to your question is PSPC.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay. Basically the subcontractors don't need to sign NDAs. That is what you're saying, and they can have access to the private information and data and privacy of Canadians without signing an NDA or any other confidentiality agreement. That's basically what you're saying, is it not?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

No, that is not what I said.

All the groups or subcontractors working on a project have to follow the same rules, including those relating to security.

When a candidate is submitted to us, regardless of the subcontracting level, the rules have to be followed—

[English]

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

We have Mr. Genuis for five minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Doan, in general, when did you first become aware of the existence of GC Strategies?

Mr. Minh Doan: I didn't become aware of the existence of GC Strategies until well into the pandemic.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: When?

Mr. Minh Doan: I would have to go back into my records to confirm.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, but you're saying it was well after the awarding of this contract.

• (1320)

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, I am.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're telling us that at the time this contract was awarded, you had never heard of GC Strategies, never heard of Kristian Firth. You had never met and had no awareness of them whatsoever.

Mr. Minh Doan: There are over 30 companies that worked with—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is that what you're telling us?

Mr. Minh Doan: That is not what I'm telling you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can you give me a direct answer, sir? When did you become aware of GC Strategies? You said it was after the awarding of this contract. You said that earlier.

Mr. Minh Doan: I interpreted the question as when I was aware that GC Strategies was on ArriveCAN. That was well after the pandemic.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No. When were you first aware of GC Strategies in general?

Mr. Minh Doan: When I look through my records, I see there was a meeting in 2018 where I was a member of a board of IT professionals, and they came and presented to that board about a generic set of services and offers that were there.

It was a large group setting. I do not have the materials still. I could never define it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do you recall that meeting, though? Was that the first time you learned about the existence of GC Strategies?

Mr. Minh Doan: I have a meeting invitation and notes that they were there presenting, among probably others. I do not—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do you recall that meeting?

Mr. Minh Doan: I do not recall that meeting.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. We know that GC Strategies did work for CBSA prior to ArriveCAN. When, in your recollection, did you first become aware of the existence of GC Strategies?

Mr. Minh Doan: Other than their being a presenter at a board meeting, after that I know that GC Strategies was on the letterhead when the Botler demo was presented to us.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Sir, I think everyone on this committee would be familiar with the phrase “make it look like an accident”, and that's starting to seem to be what this is sounding like. Nobody is going to admit, apparently, to choosing GC Strategies, but all kinds of factors were lined up in such a way that made it seem like it was the only choice.

You were at the centre of this choice, apparently. You say that you chose between the fully outsourced option, which you knew was from Deloitte, and the staff-augmented option, which you say at the time you didn't know who it was coming from.

Who brought this choice to you initially? How was it presented to you, this technical choice you tell us about?

Mr. Minh Doan: The material is here. There are essentially a bunch of emails. One says we're going to Deloitte. There's a deck that is presumably from Deloitte, with mock-ups and screens. There's a different deck that says this is the insource option—the material is here. In that second option I talk about, there is no mention of GC Strategies anywhere.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You were presented with two options. One had Deloitte. One was presented as an insource option, but it didn't have the name of the company involved. That's really weird. Did you think it was weird at the time? Did you say, "Hey, why is there no mention of the company or companies involved?"

Mr. Minh Doan: These options were developed over 48 hours. There's a very real possibility that at that time things were moving so quickly nobody even knew what company or staff augmentation would be required. There are many companies out there that do this type of work, so the first thing is, let's land on a technical direction.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You were presented with a fairly detailed deck explaining an insource option, though. Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: The deck was not fairly detailed. It was developed in 48 hours. It was mostly mock-ups and screens of what the first version that cost \$80,000 could potentially look like. You cannot do a fairly detailed deck in 48 hours.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, but it had the mock-up; it had the precise costs in it, and there was a company that was behind it, but that company wasn't presented in the deck. That's what happened, right?

Mr. Minh Doan: There was no precise cost in this. As I said, it was developed in 48 hours. It was basically asking, in what direction do we want to go? There were early screens of what replacing a paper form could look like. At that time, I don't believe anybody had—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: But you were presented with—

The Chair: That is your time, I'm afraid, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Sousa, go ahead, please.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Chair.

Let's get a sense here of what is happening.

We have a number of contractors you've dealt with over many years. How long have you been on your job, Mr. Doan?

• (1325)

Mr. Minh Doan: I've been an IT professional for 25 years, in my current role six years. For about five to six years I was the vice-president and chief information officer for CBSA.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Then, over that period of time, over decades, has GC Strategies been a supplier to government in those years? Do you know?

Mr. Minh Doan: From what I've learned and what I've seen, they have been providing services for a number of years to various departments.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Over various years, under various administrations of government?

Mr. Minh Doan: If memory serves, but I don't know exactly, I think they've been in business in the range of 12 to 15 years, if not longer. I don't know for sure.

Mr. Charles Sousa: How about Deloitte? Do you know how many contracts they have going with the government, or thereabouts?

Mr. Minh Doan: I don't know for sure, but they are a multinational company that provides system integration professional services and consulting. The number must be very, very high.

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's fair, so you have these two organizations, one that's been around many years dealing with various governments over a number of contracts. There's Deloitte, an international company doing great work on a number of contracts, and your decision, from what I understand—and correct me if I'm wrong—is that you were concerned about the integrity of the cloud and the safety of the information, that it should be more in-house versus on someone else's platform? Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: I preferred to use our existing resources, our existing cloud and our existing code. Another factor in that decision was speed and agility. As I said, after that week, frankly, the first version was launched about five weeks after that. When we deal with a multinational like that, that is impossible. Multinationals are properly documented. Everything is a change request. Everything is a negotiation. When you deal with a multinational, by the nature of it, it is much slower. There is no way we would have had a solution in five weeks, dealing with a multinational like Deloitte.

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's fair enough.

The issue with Botler is a separate issue altogether. GC Strategies didn't have a contract. That's completely different. Now, though, you've got ArriveCAN and you're in the midst of a pandemic, and things are not normal. As much as you want to be able to proceed in a normal fashion, you're not in a normal state at this point. You're reacting to a lot of incoming...but you're maintaining the integrity that you think is appropriate regarding the procurement process.

Explain to us what you mean by making a technical decision versus the procurement itself.

Mr. Minh Doan: In the early days, the technical direction was to do staff augmentation, which would require companies giving us access to technical resources fairly quickly. As the pandemic evolved and ArriveCAN evolved and got more and more complicated, more companies were involved and successive contracts were engaged and necessary as well.

From my recollection, specifically on GC Strategies, the first three contracts were sole-sources and the last contract was a competitive process, which they won.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Then you were not aware in the decision that you were making to have more internal control, that GC Strategies would be part of that deal. You weren't looking at GC Strategies as a supplier at that point.

Mr. Minh Doan: No. I was not aware that that direction was implied, and I'm not sure, even 48 hours later, that it was even a known thing. In terms of—

Mr. Charles Sousa: Then, as it proceeded, contracts were signed, and GC Strategies became a supplier—one of 30, I think you explained. How much were GC Strategies to make in their contract? Do you know?

Mr. Minh Doan: There's a breakdown in my material of how much each of the contracts was worth. What I understand is that ultimately, although I've heard contradicting numbers here, the numbers I have in my memory are around \$11 million over four contracts, over several years. To be clear, as a business model, they're not personally making \$11 million. Depending on the rates they're charged by the subcontractor, they would make somewhere between \$1.5 million and \$3 million, according to my math, over the span of four contracts and almost two and a half years.

Mr. Charles Sousa: GC Strategies would have solicited and gotten a number of other subs or service providers to do the work.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, absolutely.

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

We're going to do our final round now, colleagues. We're a couple of minutes ahead, so I'm going to add one minute to each of the six interventions, starting with Mr. Brock.

You have six minutes.

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

Mr. Doan, I'll go back to Mr. MacDonald's statements from the last time he appeared at committee. We talked about a number of lies that he claims you made. Now, specifically, I want to talk about the alleged threats.

Mr. MacDonald claims he was directly threatened by you on more than one occasion. You claim that didn't happen—that you did not threaten. Both versions of the facts cannot be true at the same time.

I'll ask you this again: Is your version truthful? Was Mr. MacDonald lying to this committee about your threatening him with respect to the exposure of GC Strategies, yes or no?

• (1330)

Mr. Minh Doan: My version is truthful. I never threatened Mr. MacDonald. I said that if we couldn't come to an answer, the committee may turn to—

Mr. Larry Brock: I will, by extension, claim that Mr. MacDonald was lying to this committee. I know you have an aversion to using that language, probably as a result of some legal advice, so I'm not going to push you on it. Clearly, you claim now, under oath, that your version is accurate.

Did you seek advice from him on your initial upcoming testimony at this particular committee? He claims you were very nervous, emotional and, at times, crying. You were desperate to get some guidance from him, even though he had been removed from CBSA for close to a year at that point. You wanted guidance on how to testify at OGGO.

Is that correct?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

What I said earlier is that I did not threaten Mr. MacDonald. I would like to clarify that. I did not threaten him. I said—

[English]

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, did you ask for advice on how to testify at your first committee meeting, yes or no?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: I asked Mr. MacDonald, who was there at the time—and this is in my briefing book—whether he could help clarify the facts and the situation during that very difficult period for the Canada Border Services Agency, in March 2020, because he was more in the loop than I was.

We were preparing—

[English]

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you for that.

I have an actual copy of the email that Mr. MacDonald wrote on October 29, 2022, at 11:28 in the morning. It was sent directly to you. It was cc'd to Kelly Belanger. It was cc'd to Carol Sabourin, to Antonio Utano and to a Josh Bird.

This was the subject matter of the Globe and Mail story that broke on October 4, 2023. I'm not going to read to you, sir, the exact seven pages of the email, but certain excerpts from it. Mr. MacDonald says to you, "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'." He wrote that in the October 29, 2022, email.

Let me stop you right there. At this point, despite your telling this committee about all of the information, that you "picked a technical direction", you were prepared, sir, to take the advice of Mr. MacDonald to claim ignorance—that you weren't aware as to who directly chose GC Strategies—because you said that on four occasions in your previous testimony. You said it was part of "my team", and you weren't able to identify with clarity, as you are today, sir, with respect to the technical direction. That concerns me.

Mr. MacDonald's email contains several suggested answers for the executives. As an example, "I will start by saying that I was not personally familiar with GC Strategies during the time in question", the document states, although it is unclear which executive would be expected to deliver that line.

The email also predicts some of the questions they will be asked:

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 was getting rich off of tax payer dollars?

In the document, that's followed by a recommended response:

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.

This exchange, this email, with coaching on what to say and anticipated questions by committee, is so disturbing on so many levels, sir. It's akin to obstructing justice. In my former career as a Crown attorney, it would elicit a police investigation if this type of evidence came out with respect to a trial or a hearing. Parliament is a little different, but it's still disturbing to me, sir, on many, many levels that you sought coaching specifically on what to say and to not accept responsibility for GC Strategies.

Have you been coached today, sir, on what to say and what not to say?

• (1335)

Mr. Minh Doan: I have not been coached today on what to say. There is an email that documents what I actually requested of Mr. MacDonald, in which I said that, leaning particularly on his time in the first year, when all of this was being stood up and the various moving parts, I would appreciate his view or additional edits to any of the material in preparation for the agency's appearance the following week.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Doan.

Mr. Sousa, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Doan, how many contractors were involved with ArriveCAN? I think you mentioned 30. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

If memory serves me, there were more than 30 contractors—but I will ask the agency for the exact figure.

[English]

Mr. Charles Sousa: GC Strategies is one of those contractors. The claims are that GC Strategies was making a cut on the deal, and that they didn't deserve to make money because they didn't do the actual work.

Are the other 30 contractors that you signed in the same arrangement?

Mr. Minh Doan: These types of organizations do security screening work. They do vetting. They connect. They have a network that can give you very, very quick access to the skills you need that would be impossible to get yourself in terms of contracting, finding them and getting in touch with them.

That's the work these companies do.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I appreciate that. So the other companies would have taken their cuts too, presumably.

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

Among the thirty or so contractors, there were many that were offering different things, and it did not always involve a staff increase.

We worked with Amazon, for instance, for cloud computing. We also worked with Microsoft. Certain very specialized companies were offering security services for mobile applications, for instance, to help us interpret the certificates.

[English]

In terms of 30-something companies, the CBSA can provide the list of who they are and what they did. Only a number of them would be in the subcontracting business.

Mr. Charles Sousa: We're trying to assess value for money. In this committee, we're also trying to assess any kind of nefarious activity that may have occurred as a result of the selection of GC Strategies, because there are alleged claims by Botler that they are this ghost contractor. I'm just trying to understand the process.

My understanding is that GC Strategies was a partner with Botler, and they had no contract, but they were trying to promote Botler's opportunities in another venture. Then ArriveCAN comes to be. GC Strategies already has a long history of activity with government over many different administrations. They were selected through this hybrid situation that you put forward as an alternative to using Deloitte. GC Strategies was selected, and we're trying to understand how that took place.

You've made it clear that the buck stops with you. You take full responsibility for the administration of the ArriveCAN app. You're saying that it took on a life of its own, to some extent, because of the activities throughout the pandemic.

Who actually signed the contract with GC Strategies?

Mr. Minh Doan: There are four contracts with GC Strategies. As I said, the first three were sole source and the last one was competitive. To my understanding, CBSA has already provided those contracts. Actually, those contracts are public knowledge. You can find those contracts, as well as who signed them.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Did you sign it, Mr. Doan?

Mr. Minh Doan: No, I did not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Do you feel there was value for money in those contracts?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, I do. We delivered ArriveCAN in all its complexity.

Without ArriveCAN and still using paper.... Different quotes were named. Mr. MacDonald said three dollars. I'll buy that number. Take 30 million successful submissions at ArriveCAN and multiply it. I think the math explains itself, in terms of \$54 million versus paper. That's a one-to-one calculation.

There are other impacts of using paper. Paper takes time, around seven days, to digitize. Once a traveller comes in and submits a piece of paper, it would take up to seven days for that electronic information—which is usually error-prone, because it's handwritten—to get the facts and do the necessary public health measures, to do follow-ups or contact tracing, or to make sure that people are staying home if they need to.

There's the direct cost of replacing paper and all of the benefits of having real-time, immediate electronic information.

In addition—

• (1340)

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Firth has been alleged to have close relationships with senior members of the bureaucracy in the civil service. Referencing conversations with others, with Botler in particular, have you had a relationship with Mr. Firth prior to this situation?

Mr. Minh Doan: I did not have a relationship with Mr. Firth either prior to it or after it.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Do you know of anybody in government who has been having an ongoing relationship with Mr. Firth?

Mr. Minh Doan: No, I do not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: When the opportunity presented itself, how was GC Strategies brought forward? Did we seek out suppliers? How does this work?

Mr. Minh Doan: As I've said a few times, the decision to go in the technical direction that led to GC Strategies was mine. I'm accountable for it. I still do not know who picked up the phone and asked them to solicit a bid in the first place. I believe the CBSA is investigating this matter.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you.

Do you have anything more you want to add before we wrap up?

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the opportunity. I think people need to understand that I'm not making this up in terms of what we were living at the time.

On March 11, the World Health Organization called a global pandemic. Five days later, the government sent most of its employees home. At the same time, we closed our borders internationally. Four days later, we closed, unprecedentedly, the border with the United States.

This is the reality that as CIO I was accountable for. I had to enable both the changes at the border and the changes for employees.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Doan.

Mr. Garon is next, for three and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Doan, allow me to recap.

If I understand correctly, you had to make a technical decision. You could either opt entirely for subcontractors or choose a hybrid approach?

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: When you received the report, there was a proposal from Deloitte to subcontract the entire project, and there was a second option.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: In addition to the confidentiality and cloud computing issues, you said among other things that Deloitte was a big multinational and that the size of such companies could be problematic. It can mean that the product is not delivered quickly.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: Those multinationals have the necessary experience and expertise to take on huge projects. Typically, a company such as Deloitte would not be chosen to develop an \$80,000 application.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Okay, I understand.

So you are saying you knew that Deloitte was an option for the first solution and that you did not know the other company. Given that the size and type of company were factors to be considered, didn't you want to ask some questions since you had to make a decision about the type or size of company that would be the right fit? If that was important at that time, even if it wasn't in the report, why didn't you ask any questions?

Why was the type of company important for the first option but not for the second? You chose the second option and then, suddenly, that didn't seem to be important any more.

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

The way you worded the question suggests that there were two companies. There wasn't a second company.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: No, there were two options and you were only familiar with the company associated with the first option.

Why didn't you inquire about the size and type of company for the second option since you were not familiar with it?

My question is very specific, and I am waiting for an answer.

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

There was no company associated with the second option. I am not sure company size is a factor that we consider.

[English]

They made pre-qualified lists. They had to follow very specific rules with PSPC. In our decision-making around this, I am not in the habit of asking, of the hundreds of companies and vendors, how big each individual company is. I asked for a specific technical direction, and in that technical direction, at the time, there was no association to any specific company.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: The type and size of company were important to you for the solution that involved the entire project being subcontracted. You are saying though that this did not occur to you, that it is not important and that you do not typically ask for details about the second option.

You can appreciate why we find it strange that the contract was then awarded to a company with two people working from their basement.

Why didn't you ask any questions when this report was submitted to you? You had the right to ask questions about the type of company that would find the expertise.

• (1345)

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

I don't know how many employees Deloitte has. I know it is a multinational. I was not referring to the number of employees, but the way—

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Why didn't you ask any questions about the second option? Why didn't you ask about the type of company? I think that would have been only natural. That is my question.

[English]

The Chair: Answer briefly, Mr. Doan.

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: There was no company associated with the second option.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

Mr. Johns, you have three and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns: Sir, can you tell me again what you think GC Strategies made after costs?

Mr. Minh Doan: I gave you my quick math depending on rates. We are not privy to the rates that these companies charge, etc.

Mr. Gord Johns: What's the amount that you just quoted earlier in this committee when you said what you think they made on their \$11-million contracts with ArriveCAN?

Mr. Minh Doan: In watching these appearances, I heard them say that their typical rates are between 15% and 30%. I did the math of 15% to 30% of \$11 million. That is not a factual statement of mine. That is what I heard them say. I do not know what rates they charge, and the rates change depending on which subcontractor they deal with. To my knowledge, and it can be corrected, only PSPC would know that information. I do not know that information.

Mr. Gord Johns: Let's say it's 20% on \$11 million. That's a couple of million dollars. They've done \$55 million with Canada as a whole outside of ArriveCAN in total. This is a \$10-million reward for two individuals over a couple of years. Do you see anything wrong with that, given that they don't have an office or any staff?

We understand that it's value for money and that their job is to do screening and vetting, to connect to people. I mean, they altered resumé; they fraudulently changed resumé. That's how the screen-

ing went. In terms of vetting, no one signed any security briefing or screening forms. There was no NDA or confidentiality agreement that was ever signed.

This sounds like a disaster in terms of value for money. Would you not agree that there should be some changes?

Mr. Minh Doan: The allegations around a CV changing.... I'm not part of any of those investigations and can't speak to that.

In terms of the subcontracting model, this exists everywhere. It exists in the private sector, the construction business and others. It is a model that is common—

Mr. Gord Johns: It shouldn't exist in the federal government.

Do you not believe you could hire a firm for \$10 million—or, actually, two individual employees within the department—to do this kind of work?

Mr. Minh Doan: For ArriveCAN, we needed access very quickly, as I said, to many different types of skills, such as cybersecurity and others, that we didn't necessarily have at the agency.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm asking you this: Do you think you could hire someone with those kinds of skills for that kind of money?

Mr. Minh Doan: The Government of Canada is working very actively to increase our IT skills and resources, but we're in very hard competition with the private sector, which offers much more generous compensation packages for skills in cloud, artificial intelligence and others.

The other reality is that it takes the government a long time to hire somebody from the outside, so—

Mr. Gord Johns: It doesn't for that kind of money.

Ms. Dutt sent an email—the second email—with allegations of misconduct in December 2021. Botler's project was terminated the very next day. I have to say that the timing of this stinks of reprisal, especially since, just a couple of weeks earlier, CBSA was telling Botler they were assigning new resources to aid the project.

What changed? Why was Botler's project terminated?

I asked PSPC this question, but they couldn't answer. If you can't, I'd like CBSA to answer this in writing.

Mr. Minh Doan: From what I've heard in these committee appearances, there were no allegations in 2021 raised by Botler. Mr. Utano spoke to this. There was a contracting dispute. PSPC was engaged, and the issue was resolved, from what I understand, fairly quickly.

The allegations of wrongdoing by Botler surfaced in November 2022—

Mr. Gord Johns: Resolved? They were turfed.

The Chair: That is our time, I'm afraid.

Mr. Genuis has six minutes. Then we'll finish with Mr. Jowhari for six minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: During his testimony one week ago, Mr. MacDonald said the following:

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."

Mr. Doan, in that section of his testimony, was Mr. MacDonald telling the truth?

• (1350)

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

I did not inform Mr. Mendicino of that. As I told you, last year, there was no allegation—

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Doan, I'm going to jump in here.

I asked you a very simple question. We've had you for almost two hours and you've struggled to give direct answers to simple questions. I'm not going to go off this one.

In that section of his testimony, was Mr. MacDonald being truthful, yes or no?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, I'm being very careful about my statements, because I'm under oath. I understand what that means—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You still have an obligation to answer questions before a parliamentary committee. You have an obligation to answer those questions, sir. Not doing so is contempt of Parliament.

Again, were Mr. MacDonald's statements truthful, yes or no?

Mr. Minh Doan: I am trying to answer the question.

There are different elements of that quote you read to me, in terms of what is truthful and what is—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Were some elements of that quote untruthful, then?

Mr. Minh Doan: Last year, nobody was looking to—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Are there any elements of that quote, sir, that are not accurate?

Mr. Minh Doan: I can get you that in writing.

Can you repeat the quote for me?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sir, I have limited time. The quotation was directly from Mr. MacDonald's testimony. You heard it.

Was Mr. MacDonald's statement truthful—

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, I'm going to interrupt you for a second.

Please repeat the quote. I will allow the extra time.

Mr. Doan, I'm going to read right from the swearing-in of witnesses part in *Procedure and Practice*. It states, "refusal to answer questions or failure to reply...may [result in] a charge of contempt". This has been repeated to you several times today. There have been a lot of direct questions. I normally don't do this, but there have been very specific questions, and we'd like very specific answers. Taxpayers deserve that. Canadians deserve that. Parliament deserves that.

Mr. Genuis, I'm going to turn it back over to you. If you want to repeat the quote, I will not take away your time.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

The quote is:

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."

In that section of his testimony, sir, was Mr. MacDonald being fully truthful? Answer yes or no.

Mr. Minh Doan: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Which parts of that quotation are not true, from your perspective?

Mr. Minh Doan: I've written them in order.

The first one is about Mr. Mendicino not being happy. I would not have known that. I would not have been privy to that. I don't know where Mr. MacDonald got that. I'm not saying that it came from me—it did not come from me. I was not briefing the minister or the minister's office.

Number two—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Let's jump in on that point specifically.

You're saying you didn't have a direct conversation with Mr. Mendicino. Did somebody else tell you that Mr. Mendicino wasn't happy, and did you relay that information to Mr. MacDonald?

All he said was that you said it. Did you, in fact, say what he says you said?

Mr. Minh Doan: I do not recall saying that about Mr. Mendicino or relaying any information that would have come to me. At that time, that was not the concern.

Can I answer numbers two and three?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do you recall being told at any point that Minister Mendicino was not happy?

Mr. Minh Doan: No. I do not recall that.

Can I answer two and three?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Could you go on with the other errors in his statement that you believe were made?

• (1355)

Mr. Minh Doan: Number two is that either I or the CFO would be fired. I had no fear for my job this time last year. I stand behind the decision. I think it's value for money. I don't think that at any point in time I was afraid for my job. I don't think a public servant doing their job delivering on something like ArriveCAN would be fired—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Did you at any point tell Mr. MacDonald that you would tell the committee it was he who made the decision?

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for that.

I did not threaten to blame him. I was here on October 24. I had an opportunity to do so, with all the allegations around his name, and I still did not.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're suggesting that this conversation between you and Mr. MacDonald is entirely fabricated.

Mr. Minh Doan: I had a conversation with Mr. MacDonald. I reached out to him. There's evidence of this. I reached out and asked him for facts and data, because he was there at the time. I had the conversation. The point of the conversation was to help us understand who invited GC Strategies into ArriveCAN the first time.

We absolutely had a conversation.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. You're saying these various particular points are not accurate.

With respect to the minister's office, did you have any information shared with you about the perspective of the minister or the minister's office in relation to this procurement?

Mr. Minh Doan: I do not recall anything from that perspective, either from the minister's office or from the minister. I was not briefing the minister on this topic.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Did you receive any direction along these lines regarding Deloitte, regarding the selection or regarding how people felt about it, from Mr. Ossowski or Ms. O'Gorman at any point?

Mr. Minh Doan: I do not recall getting any direction on any of these matters. This would be in terms of technical direction. This would not be something that a deputy minister would normally get involved in.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

To summarize your testimony, you were given two options. You knew that Deloitte was behind one of the options. You did not know that GC Strategies was behind the other. You chose the option that involved a company that you weren't aware of. You don't

know who made the decision regarding GC Strategies. You at no point heard from or consulted with your bosses within the department. Mr. MacDonald fully fabricated significant aspects of your conversation with him.

I find that testimony quite unbelievable, frankly, but that's what you have to say.

The Chair: That is our time, Mr. Genuis.

Perhaps, Mr. Doan, you can get back to us in writing on that.

Mr. Jowhari, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

I have one question on ArriveCAN, and then I'll move on to Botler.

You talked about staff augmentation. Why wouldn't Deloitte be considered as a firm able to provide staff for your staff augmentation?

Mr. Minh Doan: Deloitte can provide that, and to my knowledge, in my experience with them in terms of the system they integrate, it's major projects, major deliveries—hundreds of millions of dollars. To my knowledge I do believe that's a service they offer, but that is not what they bring in terms of value. They bring a whole solution.

What we have here with GC Strategies is a task base. You have an overall contract and then I need very specific roles—I need to define a statement of work. I give Deloitte the task, and they provide the subject experts and the per diems, and they will move forward. Deloitte is more when I need an entire solution that may cost millions of dollars. They have the expertise to build the solution and maintain it.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I want to go to Botler now. You mentioned...and there is an email dating back to November 2019 in which you had instructed Mr. MacDonald to look for a vendor and he suggested that he had found Botler. You asked for a presentation; a PowerPoint deck was sent to you, and you provided the feedback that it's slim on content and it's basically restating the problem. You instructed Mr. MacDonald to go back and work with them to beef it up. Is this true?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

If memory serves me, Mr. MacDonald found a company, Botler AI, that was very interesting. I trusted the company because I was quite familiar with what they had to offer in terms of technology and artificial intelligence. I agreed to meet with their representatives. They gave a demonstration of their solution. I was very impressed by the demonstration of their technical tool, and by Ms. Dutt in particular.

Then I suggested that it be presented to the vice-president of human resources and to the president. Unfortunately, the pandemic hit and it took much longer than expected. When we presented the solution to the vice-president of human resources and the president, we decided that it was promising enough to launch a pilot project. As to changing the PowerPoint presentation, the only advice I gave him was to be more specific—

● (1400)

[English]

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

You mentioned that you had recommended that they go forward with the pilot. What's your definition of a pilot, sir?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: I recommended that it be presented to the president. I did not make the decision about the pilot project. I know there has been a lot of discussion about this.

[English]

I've heard a lot of exchanges in terms of feasibility study and pilot. You'll see in my material that the terms are used interchangeably. There are times it's called a pilot and times it's called a feasibility study. In terms of the nuance between the two, there is one, but it's very thin.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Based upon the deliverable that was agreed, the six deliverables, do you think it was a pilot or do you think it was a feasibility study?

Mr. Minh Doan: The first deliverable is a feasibility study, but eventually what you do from a feasibility study is you have a piece of technology and you say, is this a viable piece of technology? Does it work? Does it deliver? Does it meet the business requirements? Once you've generally said—and given the circumstances and other elements, it's not just a technical feasibility—and once you've decided, “Hey, this is possible,” then you move to generally what's called a pilot. Let's pick a region; let's pick users, and let's see in the real world if it works, but it's not a full production solution.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: CBSA approved deliverable one and deliverable two and paid for them. The feasibility, which was deliverable one, was approved, and whatever the scope of deliverable two was, it was also approved. Based on Botler AI, they spent almost a year working very closely with CBSA to capture all the policies to be able to put it into the application, and all of a sudden things stopped. Is that a true understanding of what we've heard in the committee?

Mr. Minh Doan: My understanding of events was that the clients, in this case human resources and labour relations, were dealing with the pandemic at the same time. They did not have the time to dedicate the resources to this pilot, to the feasibility study. The next step would have been a limited trial, but we did not get there, and it was not necessarily a reflection of Botler but the availability of the resources within HR to dedicate to properly engaging in this pilot.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: My understanding is that the subsequent four deliverables were prepared by Botler and were sent through GC Strategies to CBSA, but they were not deemed to be of acceptable quality. Is this a true statement or not?

Mr. Minh Doan: I heard that only at committee. I would refer that question back to CBSA.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay.

When did you become aware of, let's say, the embellishment of the résumés of the two partners at Botler AI?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

I read that in the Globe and Mail recently. I can find the exact date, but it was when the articles started coming out.

[English]

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay.

In your opinion, why was the project cancelled?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

I think it was because we didn't have the time. From other testimony, I know that the product quality was not adequate. I do not have that information, however.

[English]

I wouldn't want to speculate on what the reason was, so I will refer that back to the CBSA.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

Before we finish up, Mr. Doan, thanks for joining us today.

You mentioned earlier how ArriveCAN saved lives. Would you provide something in writing to us quantifying that statement? We've heard repeatedly by people at the witness stand about how it has miraculously saved lives. Could you let us know how many and quantify exactly how it saved lives, if you're making that statement? You can get back to us in writing with that, please.

Mr. Genuis, you have your hand up.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, Mr. Chair.

I think we don't face the same resource constraints today that we maybe normally do. The witness has been fairly evasive, but has provided some somewhat more direct answers just in the last few minutes. Would it be the will of the committee to extend for another round and use the time we have while he's here? We can always call him back in the future, but I would suggest that we use the time we have now to go for another 20 minutes or so and get in another round.

● (1405)

The Chair: Sure.

Let me just canvass the room on availability and if there's desire.

I have Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Can we take a two-minute recess?

The Chair: Sure. We can suspend for a couple of moments.

● (1405)

(Pause)

● (1405)

The Chair: Colleagues, we're back.

The witness has agreed to stay a bit longer.

Mr. Genuis, it's been agreed that we'll do five minutes for the Conservatives, five minutes for the Liberals, two and a half minutes for the NDP and two and a half minutes for the Bloc. We will finish there.

Mr. Genuis, why don't you go ahead for five minutes, please?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. MacDonald also said during his testimony that, "Minh Doan made the decision to go with GC Strategies because of the fact that he had been told [that] he could not use Deloitte."

Mr. Doan, was that statement by Mr. MacDonald accurate?

Mr. Minh Doan: I was never told not to use Deloitte.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Did you imply in conversation with Mr. MacDonald that you had been told not to use Deloitte?

Mr. Minh Doan: I did not imply not to use Deloitte. What I asked and what the concern was about was the outsource solution...

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

You were presented with two options. You came back and said, "Well, I prefer the partial option," in effect.

Did you ask any questions? Did you say, hey, could you explain what companies might be behind it? Did you have any inkling of what companies might be behind it? Did you make any inquiries along those lines?

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

You will see in the documents that I will provide that those decisions were made in 24, 48 or 72 hours. The decision was not about choosing a company. It was a question of determining whether we had the internal capacity to do it by increasing staff.

I preferred an approach that gave us more control and flexibility. The other decision was not a decision against Deloitte. I want to be very clear about that. It was a decision against completely subcontracting such a critical solution, which would have deprived us of the flexibility needed to make all the changes that were anticipated.

• (1410)

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Thank you, sir. I'll jump in there. I think I understand what your testimony is in this regard. Effectively, you are pointing the finger at.... The implication of what you're saying is that Mr. MacDonald repeatedly lied to this committee and, whole hog, fabricated events.

You worked with Mr. MacDonald a lot. Are you surprised by that? What's your response to having discovered that, in your view, he has presented testimony that isn't accurate?

Mr. Minh Doan: I had a lot of trust in Mr. MacDonald. He got a lot done over many years, and he helped to put us on a path that allowed us to do ArriveCAN. I was very disappointed, hurt and personally affected, and my career has been affected by some of the testimony that was provided.

There was a lot said over the two-hour period when Mr. MacDonald was here. I can't opine on every single statement, but some of them that were directed at me have personally affected me and my mental health since that time. I've been disappointed by it. I was surprised by it. That was not the Cameron MacDonald, or Mr. MacDonald, who I worked with over many years. He was somebody who worked hard, as you will see from the emails. He would work until 11 p.m. and would start again at 7 a.m., so I was disappointed and upset by that testimony—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Did you have a relationship with Mr. Firth at all?

Mr. Minh Doan: I did not.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Have you ever met him?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, I have.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Have you met him outside the office?

Mr. Minh Doan: I have not met him outside the office. He was present at the Botler demo in November. I don't remember if he was virtual, but I believe it was so because of the pandemic. He was also present at the meeting where the demo was provided to the president.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, thank you, Chair.

Chair, we clearly have a significant conflict in terms of testimony between senior public servants, and I find that dynamic very disturbing.

I'd like the committee to request that phone records and text message records of conversations between Mr. Firth and Mr. MacDonald, and any records that may exist between Mr. Firth and Mr. Doan dating back for the last five years—phone and text message records between Mr. Doan and Mr. Firth, and between Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Firth—be provided to the committee within two weeks by the individuals on both ends of those exchanges.

I hope I have agreement from the committee to make those requests.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I see thumbs-up around the room. Wonderful. Our clerk has it all written down, and he will follow up with the appropriate departments. Thanks very much.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry, Chair. It was not departments, but individuals. Thank you.

The Chair: Yes, that too.

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

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Doan, can you hear me okay? I understand there hasn't been a sound check done on me. Is there a problem?

The Chair: You're loud and clear.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Okay.

Mr. Doan, you've been asked to provide evidence that ArriveCAN saved lives. Having studied public health, I would think that finding that kind of evidence is going to be very difficult. Always, when you have a policy intervention on a macro level like that, finding proof that it actually affected outcomes is going to be difficult, but I would suggest that is particularly so during a pandemic, when there are all kinds of policy interventions taking place at the same time. To say what caused what is practically impossible.

Let me ask you, Mr. Doan, do you think that evidence is available to you to pass on to the committee?

Mr. Minh Doan: No, I do not believe that evidence is available to me.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Mr. Doan, Mr. Genuis entered into his question the testimony of Mr. MacDonald about what happened when there was a discussion between you and Mr. MacDonald as to who decided to choose GC Strategies. In that, it was specifically mentioned...something about somebody's "head on a platter", Mr. Mendicino, and who was going to take the fall for that.

You've said some of that isn't true, but you had that conversation. Could you tell me the contents of that conversation? I'm not sure how, many months later, you're going to recall all the specifics as to who said what, but can you let us know, in general, what that conversation was about?

• (1415)

Mr. Minh Doan: I reached out and called Mr. MacDonald and asked him for more facts and data in a period of time that was fairly poorly documented. We exchanged, and I asked him the question, "Do you know?" He said, "No."

We did have a conversation where he proposed what I'm talking about today, which was, "Minh, you chose a strategic direction that led to GC Strategies"—I've had the same conversation here at committee—and I said, "Well, that's not a direct decision to choose GC Strategies."

We couldn't come to an agreement on this very important difference. I said, "If you can provide anything that you can, this is the situation that we face."

I did say that if we couldn't come to a point where some more factual information and documentation was made available, I might have to refer him to the committee, and that is also a fact. That was it.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: From what you said, the point of contention in that meeting was who chose GC Strategies. When you actually talked, neither of you could decide who actually made that decision.

Mr. Minh Doan: His point of view is that because I picked a direction, I made the decision. After that he wrote a note, and in that note, which was meant for me to say, it says I was not aware of the GC Strategies company and I was not part of the decision. That was in his handwriting—pardon me, I mean his personal—

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: "I" meant Mr. MacDonald; he wasn't aware.

Mr. Minh Doan: No, he wrote that for me. He was not going to that committee appearance.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Okay. I'm sorry if this question has come up before, but it seems as though the two of you were the main actors in this. If it wasn't you, who could have made the decision?

Mr. Minh Doan: The decision had two parts. One was technical. I've been clear that I made that decision. The other one was who called GC Strategies and asked them for a bid in the first place. I don't know who that was.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Mr. Jowhari, do you have any further questions?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: No, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Doan, it's like we are watching you and Mr. MacDonald throw the ball back and forth because you keep throwing it back and forth. Mr. MacDonald says you made the decision. You say you did not make the decision, but you admit that you are accountable. You have a strange notion of accountability though: you are accountable for a decision for which you say you are not responsible.

In a process such as that, you typically make technical decisions.

Typically, who chooses the company that will be awarded the contract? When is that decision made?

Mr. Minh Doan: Thank you for the question.

It depends on the value of the contract, but it is the delegated manager who makes that decision.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: In this case, to whom does the delegated manager report?

Mr. Minh Doan: As I said, I do not know who decided to call GC Strategies to invite them to bid.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: That is not what I asked. I asked who, typically, delegated powers to the manager?

Mr. Minh Doan: The delegated manager is delegated by his boss.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: This is ridiculous. You're doing it on purpose. Who is his boss?

I think you are an intelligent man and are able to understand my questions.

From whom did the manager receive that delegation?

Mr. Minh Doan: It was from me; I am his immediate supervisor.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: So you make a technical decision and someone else chooses the company that will receive public funds. You delegated those powers to that person.

When I ask who delegated the powers to that person, I have to ask you four times.

So it was someone who reported directly to you that chose the company.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: I'm sorry, I thought you were asking how the person received delegation powers.

You were actually asking who delegated the powers to Mr. MacDonald. I did.

• (1420)

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: If I understand correctly, typically you make the technical decision and powers are delegated to a manager to make that decision. That person reports to you.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: So you could have found out which company had been hired for this. You could have found out.

Is that correct?

Mr. Minh Doan: There are several levels of delegation.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead just briefly, Mr. Doan.

[Translation]

Mr. Minh Doan: He had the authority to make that decision without consulting me.

[English]

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

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Thank you.

[English]

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Did the CBSA president task you or Mr. MacDonald or anyone else with filling the CBSA's need in response to Bill C-65? What was the president's initiative?

Mr. Minh Doan: It wasn't a task. At the end of a briefing with the executive committee around the sexual harassment cases that were happening in CBSA, he turned to me, as chief information officer, to ask if there were any innovative ways. It was a question to look at what was out there in industry that could potentially solve sexual harassment in a different way. I then turned that to my DG of innovation to look for a solution.

Mr. Gord Johns: Going back to the standard practices, we've heard about standard practices, and I find them outrageous when it comes to the procurement here. PSPC admitted that there's literally

no limit on what the commission's contractors can pocket on government contracts. If we have a project like Botler's software, where the contractor takes 15% or 20% and the subcontractor takes another 15% to 30%, then the people doing the work get what's left. Let's say \$100,000 of federal government money is spent on a project like that. It could end up being only \$56,000 that goes to the project work.

The government could get the exact same thing for half as much based on that. There are contracts with even more layers and deeper commissions than that, as you know. The government is admitting that it doesn't know how deep these commissions go.

The Treasury Board Secretariat is mandated to make policy recommendations to protect tax dollars. As a CTO, you do everything you can to stop this runaway gravy train by imposing a limit on commissions. Why hasn't the government hired its own IT recruiters? By the numbers we're seeing, you could hire 10 IT recruiters at the Governor General's salary, based on what GC Strategies got, and still save millions of dollars a year.

Mr. Minh Doan: My role as chief technology officer is setting enterprise direction on IT. There are different parts of the Treasury Board that set directives on expenditures and other policies. I can't speak on behalf of all of Treasury Board.

Mr. Gord Johns: I find that hard to believe. As the CTO, you can't make recommendations to hire in-house to save millions of dollars of taxpayer money and have that expertise in-house. You're saying that you have no say in it, no involvement in improving efficiencies and saving taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Minh Doan: In terms of the technology direction, decisions and enterprise standards I set, that is fundamental to what we do, not from a procurement perspective but also taking into account the different cloud technologies and others to ensure that the additional solutions we deliver are delivered as effectively as possible. Absolutely, taxpayer dollars are front and centre in the technology perspective.

The element around procurement is a different part of Treasury Board Secretariat and PSPC, but taxpayer dollars, in terms of the investments and technology investments we make, are front and centre in everything we do.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We are done with that round.

Thank you, everyone, for your patience, as always.

Mr. Doan, thank you for hanging around for an extra 25 minutes.

Unless there's anything else, we are adjourned.

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