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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): I call the meeting to order. Good morning, everyone.

We'll get started. We do have quorum.

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 35 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, also known as the mighty OGGO.

Today we're continuing our air defence procurement projects study.

We have witnesses from 11 to 12. From Thales Canada, we have Chris Pogue, chief executive officer; and from the Conference of Defence Associations, we have Yuri Cormier, executive director.

We'll start with five-minute briefs from both of them.

Mr. Pogue, perhaps you would like to go first, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Pogue (Chief Executive Officer, Thales Canada Inc.): Thank you very much.

Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

As noted, I am Chris Pogue, the CEO for Thales Canada, part of the Thales group of companies, a global technology leader with 80,000 employees operating in 68 countries.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation for this opportunity to discuss defence procurement, with a specific emphasis on Canada's air defence needs.

I also want to come before you, recognizing that I have served 20 years in the Canadian military and now almost 20 years in the Canadian defence sector. Throughout this time in the industry, my north star has always been to serve those who serve. I can say that the same spirit exists within our team. With over 2,000 employees of Thales in Canada and considerable investment in Canada, one example being \$40 million annually in R and D executed right here, we are building a safer, greener and more inclusive future that we can all trust—developing Canadian capabilities in augmented intelligence, cloud computing and collaborative defence and security.

The point of today's gathering is that change is the status quo, and never has there been more need for change than what is urgent today. With war raging in Ukraine, Canada's chief of the defence staff is pushing for industry to move to wartime footing. Western leaders are looking to shore up friends to reduce trade barriers and

supply chain risks, underscoring the need to acquire the interoperable solutions best suited to supporting allied missions.

To act, however, industry needs more than a demand signal. It needs orders framed with predictability and timeliness. Those orders can enable faster delivery of outcomes, and in better ways. When it comes to procuring wartime capabilities, slow and steady cannot win this race, nor will going it alone. Canada must move in step with its allies. Winning modern wars is made possible only when allies co-operate seamlessly.

Our closest allies are willing to help Canada meet its most urgent air defence needs, with capabilities that would ensure allied interoperability while protecting our own forces in Baltic deployments. Companies, including Thales, have answered Canada's call for the capability to protect our people and to defend our interests. We remain concerned, however, that Canada's procurement system inhibits the ability to act on some of these offers, not for lack of motivation but for lack of flexibility.

Today Thales equips the United Kingdom, among our closest allies, with short-range air defence capability to defend against threatening planes, helicopters and drones. This capability is currently deployed in support of NATO missions. Along with training, this capability has been provided to Ukrainian armed forces, where it has proved to be an effective system against Russian aggression.

It is in Canada's best interest to protect our soldiers well. It is also in Canada's best interest to ensure NATO interoperability within this current context. Canadian air defence capability is critical to industry, and industry is ready and equipped to serve those who serve with a field-proven capability.

Today's conflicts won't wait. They move fast and develop almost instantly. Industry and government share a responsibility to use every creative means they can to move Canadian capability from the world of delays and deliberations into the hands of our armed forces and NATO allies.

Deploying Canadian forces to the Baltics creates an urgent air defence and force protection need, and there is an immediate and interoperable solution available. Canada needs to take action. Acting today will also provide a transformative opportunity for the development of Canada's ground-based air defence capability of tomorrow.

Canada must continue to tap into the promise of new ways of working with industry. There are guideposts of this promise, for example relational and trust-based contracting, which is already being used today by the Royal Canadian Navy. It offers the potential to maintain continuous capability, incremental field innovation by design, and to incentivize collaboration. In my 20 years of service and 20 years in the industry, this may be the most significant procurement shift I've ever seen, with a great potential to deliver faster and more capable solutions. Perhaps we will turn to it later in the dialogue this morning.

In closing, I urge all of us to address Canada's immediate need to acquire air defence capabilities to defend our interests and protect those who serve.

Thank you.

• (1105)

The Chair: That's great. You finished early—wonderful.

Mr. Cormier, you have five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Dr. Youri Cormier (Executive Director, Conference of Defence Associations): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Good morning, everyone.

Let me start by thanking the committee today for calling the CDA as a witness for your study of Canadian air defence procurement.

The Conference of Defence Associations was founded in 1932 and today serves as an umbrella group for 40 member associations who represent over 400,000 active and retired members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Our goal is to foster a facts-based rational approach to Canada's defence and security policy.

Now, for full disclosure with the committee, I want to mention that the CDA Institute, our sister organization, counts Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Airbus and Pratt & Whitney as past and current clients. However, the bulk of our income is obtained through competitive grants, private donations and ticket sales to our events, and the above four represent a minute fraction of overall revenues.

Having said that, the key thing here is that we do not have a favoured aircraft in this fight, nor would it be appropriate for a think tank like ours—a charity organization, a non-partisan organization—to take sides. We trust that through the analysis of capability requirements and industrial benefits, the government apparatus is very well equipped to make a reasoned decision.

It has been a long-held CDA view that Canada's North American air defences need to be fully modernized, and a future fighter is a key part of that process.

In March 2022, Canada picked the Lockheed Martin F-35 as the preferred bidder to supply 88 new fighter aircraft. This decision comes late, in our view. Indeed, a lot of what we know today about the F-35 we knew already in 2012. The last thing Canada should want to do now is to delay any longer. The RCAF and our national industrial base have waited long enough.

We need a robust defence industrial base in order to deliver much-needed materiel to the Canadian Armed Forces in a way that is economically sustainable for our country and that delivers high-value jobs to Canadians. Having said that, let's be careful not to forget the “B” in ITBs. Economic benefits are a key outcome of military procurement and the means to sustain it, but they are merely a benefit, not the end goal itself.

Delivering the right capabilities for the right price at the right time is the fundamental role of military procurement. If government focuses too strongly on ITBs and loses sight of what the CAF needs, we wind up paying far too much for the wrong capabilities that arrive too late.

Bureaucratic risk-averse procedures are key contributors to rust-out. Recognizing the need for parliamentary oversight, we think it should be extended to grant political cover to procurement issues where bureaucrats dare not tread, in order to speed up the process. Now that we have selected the F-35, we should go quickly to contract and make sure that we get the full range of integrated sensors for it to operate at it best.

Canada also needs to put in place full logistics and support, maintenance, infrastructure and information technology upgrades and training programs in support of the decision.

The F-35 will boost our ability to confront new generations of airborne threats. These threats include cruise missiles, hypersonic weapons systems, ballistic missiles, UAVs and fractional orbital bombardment systems. The F-35 cannot come soon enough, as the war in Ukraine has demonstrated the dangers of hypersonic weapons and suicide drones.

We also have witnessed the powerful effects of ultra-modern air defences on the battlefield. In addition to the F-35, Canada will need a robust ground-based air defence system that includes shoulder-held anti-aircraft missiles and a counter-drone capability.

In a future conflict in which Canada is called on to enforce a no-fly zone or police the skies over NATO countries, the F-35 would be our most effective platform for such a mission.

Since SSE was written, the geopolitical environment has rapidly declined. Russia has engaged in a full-scale war in Ukraine, and we have seen distressing levels of escalation in the Indo-Pacific.

Vladimir Putin's Russia has become extremely dangerous and unpredictable. It is also our next-door neighbour in the north.

Air assets are therefore crucial to protecting our sovereignty. Just last week, American F-16s were scrambled after two Russian Tu-95 Bear-H bombers entered the Alaskan air defence identification zone.

Being able to support our allies in NORAD and NATO is not only key to our national sovereignty and security. It's also important as a means whereby a middle power like Canada can help uphold the rules-based order, which is so central to our strategic interest.

• (1110)

Our economy and values depend on the rules-based system, and we also depend on our allies to sustain it. In exchange, both need to be able to depend on us, so we must be equipped and ready to do our fair share.

[Translation]

I will stop there.

I will be pleased to answer your questions, whether it be in English or in French.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Cormier.

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

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

Good morning, everyone. Witnesses, thank you so much for joining us today.

I will start my questioning with Mr. Cormier.

The first question I have is, do we have a disconnect between what we think our reputation is in the world and what it actually is? Can you comment on this and maybe provide us with some examples?

Dr. Youri Cormier: Yes, I think there is a disconnect, in the sense that for much of our national story, we refer to ourselves as the peacekeepers of the world. Canada used to provide 60% of the world's peacekeepers, and the last time I checked, there were 40 Canadian peacekeepers out of 120,000 peacekeepers on the planet. We're definitely not where we like to think we are.

Recently the French ambassador came out in the National Post and called us on it. He said we weren't present in peacekeeping the way that one of our closest allies was expecting us to be. He also went so far as to say that we were trying to hitch a first-class ride using a third-class ticket.

I think there's something there to be said. The French ambassador is saying this out loud. In my job, I meet with a lot of military attachés—our allies—and some of our ambassadors, and this is the kind of stuff that you hear all the time in camera.

What we heard from the French ambassador last week is just saying out loud what a lot of other people are thinking.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

I'm going to follow up on some of the remarks you made in your statement. You stated, "Bureaucratic risk-averse procedures are key contributors to rust-out."

Can you comment further on that?

Dr. Youri Cormier: If you look at what we're using right now in the Canadian Armed Forces, it kind of speaks for itself. There are the Netherlands' old tanks, old British submarines. We're looking at old Australian jets. We have this way of shopping at the thrift shop and getting what we pay for here in Canada.

If we're going to be a G7 country, I think we have to stop having this preference for a Dollarama approach and remember that we're the ninth-largest economy on the planet. If you look at what Australia is doing in the meantime, they're the fifteenth-largest economy on the planet. The Canadian economy is 30% larger than the Australian economy, and we go around telling ourselves we can't afford to get this equipment and be out there in the world.

The reality is that if the Australians can afford it, so can we. It's just a question of political will and consensus building amongst parties, and using the podium. I'm speaking to politicians here. We can't just go to the electorate as though they are focus groups and deliver whatever they want.

Full disclosure: I'm a professor of political philosophy and war theory, not an expert on costing or ITBs. However, I remember teaching courses on Plato and classical political theorists. One thing that keeps coming up is the role that politicians have in being the educators of society, being able to go to the electorate to educate them on needs and requirements, so that they get informed and together we build a national consensus on Canada's role in the world.

• (1115)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Perhaps a good segue to that is another comment you made in your opening remarks. You stated, "Recognizing the need for parliamentary oversight, we think it should be extended to grant political cover to procurement issues where bureaucrats dare not tread...to speed up the process."

When you talk about political will and perhaps the role of parliamentarians, what would you recommend to give the oversight that we do not have as parliamentarians?

Dr. Youri Cormier: I think parliamentarians have the necessary oversight but don't always use it as much as they could. What I mean by that is that if we are worried that public servants are too risk averse or are slowing down the process to avoid risk, maybe they need political cover. All-party consensus is maybe a way to go to the people who are working in these departments and giving them support. I think that when cabinet and Parliament stick together and say they need something soon, there's a way to get it quickly.

The best example is in Afghanistan. We needed equipment. It was delivered. We were able to conduct our operations. Let's continue doing that.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Following up on that, you also declared that the March 2022 decision to pick up the Lockheed Martin F-35 as the preferred bidder to supply 88 new fighter aircraft "comes late in our view".

Indeed, a lot of what we know now about the F-35 today, we knew already in 2012. The last thing Canada should want now is to delay any longer. The RCAF and our national industrial base have waited long enough.

Full disclosure, I was on the OGGO committee back in 2012. I recall many of these conversations, and the launch of this project.

What are the costing impacts of these delays? What are the impacts on the industry?

Dr. Youri Cormier: For that, I'm not going to give you a direct number, because I would have to take my calculator out, and I would probably get it wrong.

The main thing is that some companies are packing up their offices and leaving Canada, because there are more serious markets out there. They quit mid-process on bids, and when this happens, you wind up with fewer competitors in the game. It's not good for the buyer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

Ms. Thompson, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin the questions, I would like to ask for 10 minutes at the end of this meeting to be able to discuss Thursday's meetings, specifically, bringing—

The Chair: I'm aware of that already from Mr. Housefather.

Thank you.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Are we good for 10 minutes at the end?

The Chair: We'll see how we're doing for time.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: I'd like to push a little on this. It's important for us to be able to have the conversation, simply because witnesses are coming Thursday, and—

The Chair: Yes, I realize that, Ms. Thompson, but it depends on our second hour. We have a hard stop at one o'clock, and I don't wish to take away time from Mr. Johns' witnesses.

We'll see in the second hour, but we will try.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Mr. Pogue, could you please share how the current project management style at your company helps in gaining successful business contracts with the private sector and government?

Mr. Chris Pogue: Within the company, the project management processes we have are well defined and based on project management principles, PMP, and the professional certification of project managers.

Principally, that drives the way in which we develop a work breakdown structure, the work we're going to do, the way costing people have helped cost it. We make sure that the program can be effectively delivered to the end state, as well as managing the day-to-day interactions with all the stakeholders, frequently suppliers, as well as, obviously, the customer, whether it be the navy, the army, the air force, or whomever, and the Coast Guard in some cases.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Could you share with this committee the business relationships between Thales Canada and the federal government?

• (1120)

Mr. Chris Pogue: By business relationships, I'm going to assume you mean the major contracts we have under way today.

The major contracts under way today would be through the AJISS Arctic/offshore patrol ship and joint support ship in service support contract for the Royal Canadian Navy. We are an electronics system integrator as part of the NSS to the individual shipyards that are building parts of the national shipbuilding strategy. We serve the Canadian Army with some software development applications, as well as a recent contract for the tactical control radar.

Another major customer of ours is the Coast Guard, where we deliver bridge support to the electronic systems integration for the bridges they operate from when they take those vessels to sea.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Mr. Cormier, as executive director of the Conference of Defence Associations, can you tell us about your role in your organization's affiliation with the Canadian aerospace industry?

Dr. Youri Cormier: The only relationship is a sponsorship that exists between the two organizations, and their participation at some of the events we put on.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Mr. Cormier, on October 3, 2022, an expert institute contributor discussed the challenges of Canadian procurement, including the idea of giving the Department of National Defence full responsibility over procurement.

In your view, should Canada have a single organization responsible for procurement, and if so, which organization would that be?

Dr. Youri Cormier: There's no simple answer in the sense that it depends on what powers you give to that organization, and how much work you demand of it. It can take more time or less time. It really depends on the political oversight and the systems in place.

The other thing we need to keep in mind is that, if we're going to be using four or five organizations looking at this, we need to make sure they're all appropriately funded, so there's no bottleneck in one place while people are waiting in a backlog with other departments. I think that's the bigger question.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Again, it's along the same line of conversation in terms of centralization. Are the levels of fiscal authority delegated to the Department of National Defence and Canadian Coast Guard for procurement reasonable? If not, what should change?

Dr. Youri Cormier: I don't think I'm the right person to answer that one.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Okay. Thank you.

I'll go back to you, Mr. Pogue. Do you have knowledge of what challenges your industry members face in Canadian military procurement bids?

Mr. Chris Pogue: The challenges I think all industry, including Thales, faces are predictability and timeliness, and anything we can do to remove ambiguity. Industry makes decisions based on clarity, and they struggle with ambiguity. However, businesses can adapt to almost any situation. Those adaptations may not always be what we want to have happen, but they will adapt.

I think the keys for me would be predictability and timeliness.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Mr. Pogue, I'll go back to you. As executive director of Thales Canada, can you tell us about your role and how your company contributes to the Canadian aerospace industry and how your company deals with Canadian military procurement?

Mr. Chris Pogue: We deal with Canadian military procurement through the methods available to us today. We engage in procurement when they have workshops. We engage in open forums. We engage in responding to requests for information and to multiple versions of RFPs, requests for proposals.

We also engage in terms of our own investment in Canada. Maybe I'll just use an example of that an investment in the project we call Thales Synergy we have made using our AI@Centech initiative out of Montreal, which is an AI centre of excellence, to help reach out to small and medium-sized companies in Canada. This is somewhat reflective of the ITB concept, and it helps them bridge that gap between small and medium business and sometimes between medium and large business to help them reach a global export market through the 68 countries that Thales operates in.

We would engage on all levels, because I think to be part of the Canadian defence community, you need to engage on all levels.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was six minutes on the dot.

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Pogue, Mr. Cormier, thank you for being here with us today. Your testimony is important, because it will help us to better understand and improve the procurement process, especially in the area of air defence.

Mr. Pogue, Thales secured a contract in 2011 that was later cancelled in 2015. Last year, a new contract for the acquisition of three radar systems was signed with Thales Canada.

Can you tell us why the contract was cancelled in 2015?

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. Chris Pogue: Thank you for the question.

I wasn't at Thales during that time frame, so I can't offer you much insight as to the nature of the contract at that particular time. What I can tell you is that with the existing contract for the tactical control radar, we are working with a number of suppliers. We are working closely with the government to ensure that what we deliver will meet the Royal Canadian Air Force needs. It is a balancing act.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I understand that you can't talk about it.

My next question is perhaps a touchy one, but it is not malicious.

Do you think the decision taken in 2015 to end the contract for the supply of two radar systems was more of a political decision rather than a decision based on facts and needs, especially now that you have signed a new contract for three radar systems?

[English]

Mr. Chris Pogue: Again, it's not a touchy question; it's a worthwhile question. I don't think I could answer it honestly as I don't have any awareness. It's difficult to take on a hypothetical without having been there at the time.

I will stress only that today we're moving forward with a program that I believe will deliver effective capabilities for the Royal Canadian Air Force.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I guess you can't compare the contract signed in 2011 and the current contract, given that you weren't with the company.

Unless you could?

[English]

Mr. Chris Pogue: Can I compare the two contracts? Again, I would want to go back and take a look at them. I would want people to look at them. If it's important to the chair that we compare those two contracts, I would certainly undertake to provide a written response. Beyond that, it's virtually impossible for me to speak to a contract from 2014-15.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: If it is possible, I would ask you to send us a document outlining the comparison.

Your team submitted a bid based on the Rafale jet, then withdrew because it would have been difficult to meet the information exchange and interoperability specifications.

Looking at the contract for replacing the fighter jets, do you think that the fact that France is not a member of NORAD or a Five Eyes country went against Thales?

[English]

Mr. Chris Pogue: I can't speak specifically to the hypothetical of whether that was a disadvantage or not. The only thing I could say you would have to do is look at the requirements and the operational need of those requirements and then assess your decisions based on that.

As I mentioned, industry will adapt to requirements. They will adapt to what is the operational demand. Beyond that, I would be purely speculating, and I don't think it's worthwhile for this committee to have my speculation.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Mr. Cormier, the federal government has gone back on decisions made previously concerning replacing the fighter jets and the radar systems in Canada's north, and has started the entire procurement process all over again.

What is the impact of this decision being felt right now in terms of national security?

Dr. Yuri Cormier: You have to remember that Canada is never alone in the world. We always work hand in hand with our allies. I'm not going to say that China or Russia are worrying all of a sudden because Canada hasn't updated its infrastructure or its aircraft. Our allies have done it, so there are enough F-35s in the sky. The Americans are at the ready. Canada, however, is giving its allies the impression that it is benefiting from the fact that they have made the investments, whereas Canada has not. We are counting on our allies' shield and power of deterrence, and I think that our behaviour is starting to have an impact.

If Canada wants a seat at the table, it has to be a bit more serious and invest more. AUKUS was set up and we only learned about it the next day, in the news. That is perhaps a sign that our allies are not including us in their conversations.

For me, it's a problem.

• (1130)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: You have 14 seconds.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

There will be difficult questions after the break.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Pogue, would you provide that in writing as Mrs. Vignola asked.

We have Mr. Johns for six minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you both for being here. I really appreciate it.

We've seen what's happening with climate emergencies right now in Canada. We saw obviously the hurricane on the east coast and forest fires in B.C. last year, where there were hundreds of military personnel and equipment deployed to British Columbia, and the flooding here in Ottawa. Right now, there are smoky skies still in B.C. People can barely breathe. I think we've had two millimetres of rain where I live, and normally we've had a few hundred millimetres of rain by now in the same period of time from August to October.

The military is going to be called upon more and more for climate emergencies, and firefighting is going to be a big part of that component. I have Coulson Aviation in my riding. They do a lot of firefighting around the world, in Australia, Argentina, the United States, you name it. They're one of the largest global aerial firefighting companies, especially night firefighting, in the world.

Mr. Cormier, could you speak a little bit about the need for extreme weather considerations when it comes to the design of our military equipment? Maybe you could give us some thoughts on.... You know where I'm going with this.

Dr. Yuri Cormier: It's a tough question. It's one of the key things that we hear from the chief of the defence staff right now when he takes these matters to the public.

The Canadian Armed Forces is a limited instrument. As you keep pulling back on domestic security issues and domestic operations, you don't necessarily have the capacity to do external work with our allies. It's a very tough balancing act. There is a variety of ways forward. There are talks of creating a civilian force or using the reserve force in a way that's a little bit different from the regular forces for domestic operations.

We usually talk of the whole of government when we look at all of Ottawa. We call that whole of government. I want to take it to the next level. We need whole of government pan-Canada style where we go in and bring the provinces and the mayors to have this conversation on how we create a much more resilient Canada so when Fiona hits, you don't have someone going out there saying they need a thousand troops without necessarily explaining what exactly those troops are going to be used for. It's more of a political message to make a demand for a thousand troops without having a list of requirements of what's that going to look like on the ground.

What we need is a local capacity. We need to pay for it. We need to find ways to transition resources from the federal and provincial levels to the cities so they can build infrastructure that is resilient and have local capacity. Funding groups...whether it's the Red Cross, or St. John Ambulance, or Team Rubicon, there are lot of organizations that can do much more work on these matters and help take a bit of the pressure off the Canadian Armed Forces. That's one way to look at it.

I hope that answers a little bit of your question.

Mr. Gord Johns: Just looking at what we have, I know the Americans have firefighting capabilities. They use C-130s. They actually put firefighting tanks on their CH-47s and Black Hawks. That's common practice down there.

Do you see opportunities for us in Canada to create a pan-Canadian kind of role with the military equipment we have, but also using some of the opportunities just to refit the existing infrastructure that we got so we can work with the provinces and support them in a more efficient and effective way?

Dr. Youri Cormier: I think we will wind up putting the cart before the bulls, because you have to ask yourselves if we want the Canadian military to do more work on domestic operations or if we want to alleviate the pressures on them. Once that decision is taken, and we've built the resiliency across Canada, then we can have that conversation.

Having said that, I think there are a lot of capabilities existing in the Canadian Armed Forces that are able to react to emergencies. That's why we call on them. Whether it's logistics, it's a willing mobilized, highly effective workforce that's able to do first aid work and so forth, or having the equipment that's able to carry out medical emergencies, these are all things that the military is actually quite good at.

There might be other places where you wonder why we ask the military to cut down trees that have fallen three or four days after a storm, when in fact there are local companies that are better at it and who could use the resources to rebuild the local economy. We're actually taking jobs away from local resiliency by having the armed forces do non-emergency work after the emergency has passed. That's a good question we need to ask ourselves.

• (1135)

Mr. Gord Johns: Those are great answers, actually. I really appreciate that.

Do you believe that we should be procuring equipment specifically designed for climate emergencies instead of using defence equipment that should be used in another space, in other roles and modes?

Mr. Pogue, you're welcome to jump in as well. I'm sure you have some thoughts on this as well.

Mr. Chris Pogue: I will only offer that when I was in the military, we used C-130s in search and rescue missions, so I'm familiar with what you refer to. I think Youri's idea of ensuring that we effectively use the existing infrastructure in Canada that's designed to do this as opposed to the military is probably a great balancing act. It creates local jobs. It creates local capacity. That local capacity

that works in those local communities understands the community better than someone from outside. I think there's a lot in that suggestion.

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes, I think we're seeing that. Again, Coulson is contracting out all over the world. They are actually not doing business in Canada. It's just one of those typical made-in-Canada stories where they are heroes all around the world and then we're not using them in the right way.

Maybe you can speak about stories like that and more of a pan-Canadian effort where the provinces are—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to interrupt that story. Maybe you can get to it in the next round.

Mrs. Kusie, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here with us.

[*English*]

Mr. Cormier, can you please make it clear on the record whether your organization gets any funding from the government?

Dr. Youri Cormier: We don't have any permanent forms of funding with the Canadian government, but we do apply for a variety of grants through the MINDS program with DND. They are competitive grants open to the Canadian public. We have applied for them and have obtained them quite regularly in the past few years. I think we currently hold three grants that we're doing research work on.

The other place where we occasionally get funding is when we host events. Canadian government employees have a tendency to register in great numbers. For the Ottawa Conference on Security and Defence, I believe that in the past two years we've had 20 different government departments present. We do sell tickets to the government.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: In your opinion, Mr. Cormier, what do you think the reasons are for the current delay in signing the F-35 contract? Why do you think that signing this contract is being delayed?

Dr. Youri Cormier: I'm not privy to what exactly is going on behind the scenes, but I will say—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: What do you think is going on?

Dr. Youri Cormier: I'm not going to go too far down the speculative—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Oh, please do.

Dr. Youri Cormier: Here's what I would say: Any form of delay at this point in the process is, to me, unacceptable.

I say that because there's only one fighter left. We already read the entire ITB proposition. The value proposition has been studied in the previous phases and it's been agreed to. At this point, we should be going straight to contract. It's missed opportunities to just cut to the chase.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Yes, indeed.

My colleague, Mrs. Block, indicated that she had been on this committee previously. This is my first time on this committee, but I feel as though this subject has been around since the first *Top Gun* movie.

As a former diplomat, I have a lot of interest in your comments and responses to my colleague, Mrs. Block. I wanted to expand upon them a little further. You said, "The F-35 cannot come soon enough, as the war in Ukraine has demonstrated the dangers of hypersonic weapons and suicide drones."

Perhaps you can explain to the committee what we have been deprived of in terms of capability by not currently having the F-35 and therefore not having this technology and the comparative capability to share with other nations to defend democracy versus Russia or China.

What have we been deprived of and what could we have contributed had we had this capability?

Dr. Youri Cormier: Part of it goes back to what I was saying a while ago where the relationship with our allies is harmed by the fact that we're not paying for the deterrent umbrella that they are providing Canada right now. That's a big part of the equation.

The other example would be if there were a situation right now that demanded immediate action to enforce a no-fly zone somewhere on the planet. If there was an emergency and Canada was to send the equipment and capabilities we currently have, we might wind up in a situation where we're not providing the right level of cover. Civilians could be killed in the process. Canadian Armed Forces members could be killed in the process.

We're not as equipped as we would want to be if it were necessary to have this no-fly zone created.

• (1140)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: As well, I appreciate your reference to our historic contributions to peacekeeping. As I mentioned, I was at foreign affairs at 125 Sussex. I always enjoyed going past Pearson; the bus stand is metal. It is something very significant for this nation that we have lost.

In your opinion, do you feel there could be further delays in the F-35 purchase?

Dr. Youri Cormier: I don't think there's any reason for further delays. I expect that the next phase could go very quickly if there is a will to actually get to that place.

I'm just happy that the decision was made. I think it's a really good place where we have to be. Once this decision is made, I think there is...

The reality is that the Canadian Armed Forces have been depleting their capabilities for 20 years now or perhaps more. We haven't

capitalized adequately on the Canadian Armed Forces. There are currently holes throughout the entire enterprise.

Now that we've done the F-35, I don't think we should keep harping on it. I think we should quickly get it over with and start thinking about what other elements and capabilities the Canadian Armed Forces need now. Let's move to those and then create that tendency to move fast on them.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Bains, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

My first question is for Mr. Pogue.

Can you please share how the current project management style helps your company gain successful business contracts with the private sector and government?

Mr. Chris Pogue: As I noted earlier, the project management style we deploy reaches out to all stakeholders. We focus on the engagements we get with the military, when they have open forums of what sort of requirements they have and what sort of expectations they have for the future. We respond to requests for information. We respond to multiple requests for proposals. It's all part of the engagement.

Once we're in a contract, we manage it very closely with the customer and the additional stakeholders—sometimes there are industrial technical benefits involved—all as part of an end-to-end, comprehensive way of treating the delivery of capability to the men and women who serve.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you.

On September 8, Thales announced its intention to expand its North American presence, having hired up to 1,000 new employees and with the intent of hiring 300 more. How many of these jobs will end up in Canada?

Mr. Chris Pogue: It's hard to speculate on exactly how many jobs will end up in Canada. I think what you're seeing in that announcement is Thales's significant commitment and investment in the digital transformation we're seeing across the commercial sector and across many militaries. Thales is very well positioned with previous acquisitions to deliver promising results around digital transformation.

The other place that's seeing significant growth is the use of augmented intelligence to help effectively deal with the large data problems and make more effective decisions.

Those are areas in which I see us increasing the number of people who are part of the Thales family. Those programs exist in Canada, too, so there's certainly an opportunity to expand upon the presence we have in Canada as those programs come to fruition.

Mr. Parm Bains: Is that all across Canada, or based more in specific regions within Canada?

Mr. Chris Pogue: Due to the nature of the way we service the military customer, it would be all across Canada, because we are serving from coast to coast in some respects. In some cases, when it's the digital capability and growth around commercial and banking services, it will tend to be more province by province.

It depends on what particular domain we're talking about.

Mr. Parm Bains: What's your position on Canada's decision to pursue the negotiations with Lockheed Martin to purchase the F-35?

Mr. Chris Pogue: To Yuri's point earlier, there was a competition and an exercise, and they've made a decision based on what they believe Canada's requirements are. Now it's time to move forward and deliver the capability.

• (1145)

Mr. Parm Bains: Mr. Cormier, to what extent can industry predict government procurement needs without annual updates to defence investment plans?

Dr. Youri Cormier: I find the best way to create that flow of information is to continually have conversations between academia, the business sector, the Canadian Armed Forces and parliamentarians. At the Conference of Defence Associations, we try to create these fora where these conversations can happen. A lot of the security gaps need to be known in order for innovation to deal with them, but I think it works both ways.

I think capabilities are determined by what kind of technology is out there, so the more we get conversations going, the better.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you.

I have one more question for Mr. Pogue.

When it comes to diversity, how is Thales working to promote diversity within its business?

Mr. Chris Pogue: We're very proud of the inclusion and diversity initiatives, from our CEO down. It is a metric that we measure. We have all signed on to a commitment to those programs. While there's not a one-size-fits-all diversity and inclusion policy, we are deploying it as best we can in all the regions we operate.

I think the commitment and that effort will make a difference in the long term. We're very proud of what we're trying to do.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds, Mr. Bains.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you to our witnesses. Those are all the questions I have for today.

The Chair: We'll go to Mrs. Vignola for two and a half minutes, and then Mr. Johns for two and a half minutes, and then we're going to break to set up for the next round.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

My question is for Mr. Pogue and Mr. Cormier.

Investing in air defence, whether it be aircraft or radar systems, is important. Can you please talk to us about the impact of these investments, not only for the businesses involved, but for the entire sector, i.e. research, universities, industry stakeholders. If applicable, please tell us about any social benefits.

Dr. Youri Cormier: First of all, you should know that whenever I go to Mirabel and to Montreal, I am reminded how much the aviation industry really is a jewel in Quebec's crown.

The procurement system is set up in such a way that research is encouraged and the amount of research done for a project adds quite a bit of value to the bid. I think that these are factors that, put together, can really be advantageous to Canada and to Quebec as a society.

However, we also have to remember that the process needs to be an uninterrupted one. You can't let 10 years go by between each procurement project. Quebec aviation businesses need to be constantly working in order to avoid expansion and contraction or boom-and-bust cycles.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Pogue, what do you think?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Pogue: Maybe I'll simply pick up on the boom-and-bust concept.

I think these large-scale programs create a unique opportunity to develop the next generation of engineers. These engineers will work on those programs and have staff to work with them, and they'll go on to other things. Those other things might be their own companies.

That ecosystem that we build avoids that boom-and-bust cycle because they'll move into export markets, or they'll do different things. Particularly, some of the investment that's coming to Canada, the \$40 million I referred to earlier in R and D, in augmented intelligence, in quantum computing, things we're directly investing in that are part of that next generation of programs.... Those things will be done by Canadians in Canada, and they will reach a global market from Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

I have another question for both of you, but you may have to provide your answers in writing, given that I only have two and a half minutes left.

My question has two parts to it.

First of all, how can we improve the procurement process?

Secondly, is there a procurement process that could serve as a model or an example, one that we could adapt to meet our needs, where applicable, if that hasn't been done so already?

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid, gentlemen, that I'm going to have to interrupt because we're at two and a half minutes, but if you could provide it in writing—

Mr. Chris Pogue: I would be happy to provide it in writing. The work we're seeing with the relational contract under AJISS, I think, is really a promising milestone.

The Chair: I think Thales, being around the world, certainly could share with us who perhaps is doing it better.

Thanks very much.

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

• (1150)

Mr. Gord Johns: I'll ask both of you this.

Mr. Cormier, I'll start with you.

Do you believe that Canada should have a single organization responsible for procurement? If so, which organization do you think it should be?

Dr. Youri Cormier: Similar to what I said a while ago, it's not so much how many procurement organizations there are; it's how well they work together. Whether there are four or one, it depends on what kinds of powers you give them and what kinds of resources you give them to make sure the processes go quickly and effectively.

I think that right now we tend to go towards the fact that there is duplication or that there might be inefficiencies built into the four-group model, but that could be resolved within this model or within another model. It's a question of creating that political oversight, giving a little bit of room to breathe to some of these public servants who are risk averse because they feel that they need to be risk averse. There are a variety of solutions going forward, and I'm not going to suggest that there's one that's better than the others.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Pogue, you talked a little about diversity earlier. I'd love to hear more about your company in terms of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and call to action 92, where it's very explicit, calling for “meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships,” ensuring “that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs,” and providing “education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples”.

Can you speak a little bit about any work that your company is doing in this area and maybe some areas that you need to improve and work on?

Mr. Chris Pogue: I would say that, inevitably, there are always going to be areas that you can improve and work on.

An area where we are actively engaged is with the indigenous community in Canada to help them be part of the defence system.

The synergy program I referred to earlier is for small and medium-sized businesses. It can engage with them and help them cross that chasm into global markets. As we see expanding our footprint in Canada, we fully expect it will be done in concert with the indigenous peoples to the point where I can imagine a day in the fu-

ture when our chief engineer is from that community and he or she grew up working in Thales programs.

Mr. Gord Johns: Have you read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action?

Mr. Chris Pogue: Yes, I have.

Mr. Gord Johns: Great.

Do you believe that, in your company, call to action 92 should be posted in the staff room, be part of your policies, be at the front and centre of your company's operations?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds for a quick answer.

Mr. Chris Pogue: I think it should be part of the way we think about things we do every single day. If posting it helps us think about it, then it should be posted.

Mr. Gord Johns: Do you think it should be embedded in your policies?

Mr. Chris Pogue: I think it's embedded in our policies by virtue of the diversity and inclusion policies we have across the group. It would already be included by virtue of that approach.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Pogue.

I'm afraid that's time, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Pogue and Mr. Cormier, thank you for joining us today.

Again, if there's anything you wish to share, please send it to the clerk. I think there were issues.... Mr. Cormier, you were going to get back to us on suggestions for the F-35 procurement, but I'd certainly be very interested, as well, in your thoughts on—you touched on it—de-risking or creating a culture that is less risk averse...in our procurement. I'd certainly love to see that, as well.

Again, gentlemen, thanks for being with us.

We are suspending for about 10 minutes, in order to set up our next witnesses.

Thank you.

• (1150)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: We are back in session.

Welcome, witnesses, to part two of meeting number 35 of government operations and estimates—as I call it, the mighty OGGO.

We'll have several witnesses today. We're going to go from 12 to about 12:45. Then we're going to stay public, and we're going to discuss the schedule going forward.

We have witnesses today from the the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. We have Jennifer Carr, president; and Eva Henshaw, vice-president. From the Public Service Alliance of Canada, we have Michele Girash, national political action officer; Liam McCarthy, director, negotiations and programs branch; and Howie West.

We're going to start with a five-minute opening from Mr. McCarthy.

We are short of time, so I ask that you do keep it close to five minutes or less than five minutes but not longer.

Thank you. Go ahead, Mr. McCarthy.

Then we will hear from Jennifer Carr.

Mr. Liam McCarthy (Director, Negotiations and Programs Branch, Public Service Alliance of Canada): I'll do my best. There's a lot to say on this important topic.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to address the committee.

The PSAC is the largest union in the federal public service, representing over 230,000 workers, the majority of whom are in the federal public service.

Let me begin by saying that the strategic policy review announced in the last budget must include unions to determine how best to provide public services and not waste or offload the responsibilities to the private sector.

There's been an ideological drive towards contracting out that is not evidence-based nor in the best interest of Canadians. As an example of it not being in the best interest of Canadians, in late 2020, PSAC published a report showing that contracting out of cleaning services at DND can cost 35% more. DND spending on those contracts alone was \$68 million more than if it had done the work in-house. We know it is only a sample of what is really going on across all departments and agencies.

The procurement process to contract out work favours corporate secrecy over the rights of Canadians to know how funds are spent and how services are managed. During our examination of the privatization of public sector work, we have submitted dozens of ATIP requests for documents that we know exist, but with limited success. This lack of transparency shows the government values its relationships with large corporations over the public's right to know.

It's also important to point out that the Public Service Employment Act and the Employment Equity Act exist to make sure that the public service is representative of the population it serves, and contracting out undermines those very important efforts. Jobs that are contracted out are more precarious than jobs in the public sector, and the human resources committee's all-party report on precarious work was tabled in the House in 2019. It called on the government to review human resources policies and budgeting practices to ensure that they are incentivizing hiring employees on indeterminate contracts. It's time for the government to heed its committee's advice on that front.

Across the departments and agencies, we see a wrong-headed preference to offload management and human resource responsibilities, and that has contributed to this problem. I will run through a couple of examples of some of the problems associated with contracting out.

Veterans Affairs Canada has a \$570-million contract for rehabilitation services that will transfer the work of case managers to a profit-making corporation that was established just to obtain the

contract. Their priority is to make money and not to serve veterans. Services to veterans and their families will suffer, and the role of case managers, the key to supporting veterans trying to navigate the system, will be undermined and reduced. We are already seeing concerns about veterans' personal information being shared with private contractors without their consent.

Canadians who call 1-800-O-Canada looking for help with important life situations such as unemployment, sickness, maternity and parental leave benefits are unlikely to know that they aren't speaking to a Government of Canada employee. They're talking to a precarious worker, paid a low wage with no benefits, no job security and no real connection to the very department the caller is seeking help and information from.

At CFB Comox, new buildings were recently added to the base's infrastructure without appropriate attention being paid to staffing and facility needs. The added work made it impossible for the existing staff complement to meet the maintenance needs, so now the base has contracted out that work to the private sector instead of staffing up to meet those requirements.

Another example is the requirement of the government's ability to fulfill access to information requests, and those requests are quite extensive. In our very submission to the review of ATIP legislation last year, we were able to show that understaffing and contracting out the work of ATIP officers has resulted in unacceptable time lags and inconsistencies.

Also, to give one more example, one would expect that customs and immigration duties at Canada's airports would be performed by CBSA employees, yet at Pearson airport, as an example, many security and service-oriented duties such as escorting travellers, answering phones and monitoring the needs of clients are now contracted out to GardaWorld.

What we're recommending is the following:

The government's default premise should be public sector delivery instead of contracting out. Commitments should be further reflected in the public sector collective agreements that we're currently negotiating. The government needs better metrics, including tracking contracting out and use of temporary agencies. The government should audit all current contracts and require justification and business cases for all use of contractors and temporary agencies.

- (1205)

There need to be staffing envelopes in every program so that they have the proper—

I'm sorry. Is that my time?

The Chair: Mr. McCarthy, I'm sorry, but your five minutes are up. If you'd like to send the rest of your comments to the clerk, they will be distributed to the committee. Thanks very much.

Ms. Carr, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Carr (President, The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada): Thank you.

As noted, my name is Jennifer Carr. I am the president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada. I am accompanied by vice-president Eva Henshaw. The institute represents over 65,000 public service professionals. Most of our members work for the federal public government.

Years of unchecked spending by government departments on contracting out has created a shadow public service of consultants and temporary staff operating alongside the government workforce. Contracting out means higher costs and lower quality of services for Canadians. There's less transparency, less accountability and a loss of institutional knowledge. When work is outsourced, the related skills and expertise leave the public service when the contract ends. The real cost of contracting out is way too high. We have wasted money. We have poor hiring practices. We erode the capacity and we create safety concerns.

The government, according to a Carleton University research project, spent an estimated \$15 billion in the last fiscal year on contracts across the core public service departments and agencies. Our members, especially the 20,000 IT professionals, are calling out the government for its overreliance on contracting out. The institute has filed over 2,500 grievances concerning work that was outsourced rather than being assigned to already existing expertise inside the government. We have to ask why.

From our research, between 2011 and 2021 the federal government outsourced over \$21 billion in IT work to IT consultants, management consultants and temporary help contractors. Spending on outsourced personnel increased from \$1 billion in 2011 to nearly \$2.2 billion in 2018, an increase of more than 113%.

Hiring contractors skirts all internal hiring practices and the goals of the government, including those regarding regional development, bilingualism, and equality and equity. Canadians cannot afford any more failed outsourced IT projects. We have only to look at the disastrous Phoenix pay system as a glaring example.

From our research, in the last fiscal year, we saw \$2.3 billion spent on information technology service contracts, while at the same time the government spent \$1.85 million on its own IT workforce. The bottom line is that it spends more on contracts than it does on public servants that deliver vital IT services. I want to share with you two clear examples of how this breaks down, how a contractor costs more than hiring a federal public service member does.

At the Department of National Defence they hired one IT architect. The cost was \$360,000 per year. This contract was repeated for over eight years. The equivalent public service salary, including pension costs of 17%, would be \$148,000 a year. The difference is \$1.5 million, for just this one resource alone.

At Shared Services Canada, three IT resources for a contract of five years cost \$14.1 million. This contract was tendered and posted for another four years. This would be an equivalent of three public servants, with pension costs of 17% calculated already of \$1.85 million. The difference for this contract to the public purse was over \$12 million.

IT is not the only profession that is seeing high numbers of costly contracting services. The federal government spent \$2.1 billion on contracted out health services. With retention and recruitment being an ongoing issue, the federal government has been using contracting out to private nurse employment agencies as a band-aid solution for years. They're parachuting in nursing staff on a temporary basis to look after patients in remote and isolated first nations communities, which is one role for federal public servants, without offering them the consistency or quality of care they deserve.

There is no doubt that it would be far more cost-effective if we invested in a fully funded, permanent public sector solution. This opens the door to outright privatization in what should be publicly delivered health care for first nations communities. We urgently need plans that meet the needs of the Canadian northern population and give health care workers who care for these populations the support and resources they need to do their jobs.

• (1210)

Our call to action is that each one of us has a stake in the fight against outsourcing. This is about fairness. It's about giving Canadians reliable services and stopping the waste on outsourced projects like Phoenix. We need to modernize our hiring policies to create efficient timelines for hiring—

The Chair: Ms. Carr, I'm afraid I have to cut you off there. Like the others, if you wish to submit anything in writing, that would be wonderful.

We're going to start with Mrs. Kusie for six minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all of the witnesses for being here today.

I checked National Newswatch this morning, as I do every morning at 6 a.m., and the top story was "Ottawa's pandemic hiring boom adds billions to federal payroll". Specifically, it mentioned there was a 12% increase in federal employment in two years—35,000 new jobs over the last two years. That's over 5% a year, which outpaces the private sector as well as the economy.

When we look at where those jobs were added, ESDC, which is “responsible for passport processing and Service Canada offices, added 8,500 positions. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, which has been dealing with the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine—along with a huge backlog of visa applications—hired 1,750 people.” We have these incredible expenditures and additional employees.

The CBC article also states that in emailed statements, “PHAC and ESDC both said that more than half of their new hires were non-permanent positions, while the CRA noted that its workforce rises and falls with the tax season.”

Based on the dismal numbers we received this morning on extreme expenditure yet poor delivery of services to Canadians, how should we be using—or not using, in this case—outsourcing to better deliver value for money for Canadians?

I'll start with Madam Carr.

Could you please respond to that?

• (1215)

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Of course, those are the hiring areas where we have seen a lack of stability in the public service. I'd like to counter that. This is because of years of under-resourcing and cuts that happened way before this time.

With the passport situation, it's my understanding that public servants were crying out to the government to put proper resourcing behind passports, knowing that, when we implemented the 10-year rule, there would be a crunch for people with new passports making its way forward.

This is what I call catch-up after years of under-sourcing, and people getting by and doing more with less. When there is a cry for services, some of it can be outsourced, but public servants need to do passport applications and the vital work of checking and making sure that applications are done in a correct, fair and transparent process.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you for that, Madam Carr.

Previously, in another life as a consular officer, I completed that passport training myself, so I know how rigorous it is.

What I think you're referring to, Madam Carr, is another quote from the former parliamentary budget officer. I'm going to read that here. It is very much in alignment with some of the comments you have made here today. Perhaps you can support this quote and even provide more information around it. It goes back to your comments about the band-aids.

This quote from him was incredibly alarming. Former parliamentary budget officer Kevin Page said, “There is no strategic human resource plan you know for the Government of Canada. There's no evidence whether or not we've made really good hiring decisions with the significant increase in the complement of the public service.”

There is no human resource plan, Madam Carr. It's unbelievable to me that, after seven years in government, this government has not determined how to effectively determine the human resource

organizational structure of a single department, never mind all the shortfalls we're seeing.

Can you comment on this quote, please? Perhaps you could expand upon your statement in your opener about the necessity to stop with the band-aids to get value for money for Canadians through better organization, structuring and planning in our federal government.

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Thank you for that comment. For sure, that is one of those things. I'm going to pass it over to my VP, Eva Henshaw, to talk about her work with the chief information officer, and why we are so short-staffed and what is happening.

Eva.

Ms. Eva Henshaw (Vice-President, The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada): Thank you.

I know that the chief of the information office is currently looking at the IT resources. They have stated that we are short by 8,000 employees in the IT offices. That alone is quite alarming, since we only have approximately 17,000 IT workers across Canada.

It doesn't surprise me to see those quotes, because when you look at the budgets and the plans that come up from the departments, you see that the overall resource plans for human resources of the public service are not there. They do not want to increase their footprint of public servants, for whatever reason—we're not sure. However, we do see their plans on other budgets that are increased on a yearly basis in which they are able to contract out resources through those budgets and not the public servant budgets.

The Chair: I'm afraid your time is up, Ms. Kusie.

Ms. Thompson is next for six minutes, please.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm going to ask the same question of Ms. Carr and also Mr. McCarthy, beginning perhaps with you, Ms. Carr.

Departments are required to consider internal staff before outsourcing a project, but you say that this doesn't happen enough. Could those make-or-break policies be strengthened, and if so, how?

Mr. McCarthy, this will go afterwards to you.

• (1220)

Ms. Jennifer Carr: That goes into the 2,500 grievances we have on the table right now. These are not areas where we don't have the expertise in-house. These are not projects that our public servants are not prepared to deliver or perform. On the ground and in the capacity, our members are seeing contracts being placed for outside workers to come in and do exactly the same job—sit next to them and do the same project—and are crying that this is a public servant job.

It has to do with the hiring practices. It also has to do with the “de-professionalization” of the role of HR within the public service. They took away the HR resources and they left hiring up to the managers. When a professional like an engineer or an IT professional, who has no expertise in hiring...it's much easier to put a contract together with an outside agency, to say, “Hire what I need”, versus coming up with criteria to hire within. Especially in the Department of National Defence—I don't have the actual numbers right now—we are seeing a reliance on what is called internal contracting out to DCC, Defence Construction Canada, which has way beyond extended their mandate to provide services to the Department of National Defence.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

I'll go to Mr. McCarthy.

Mr. Liam McCarthy: I'll make a quick comment and then turn it over to Howie West.

There is a pervasive culture inside senior management toward contracting out. It's often viewed as a bit of a panacea in terms of ways of delivering public services, so that will be a challenge, even with policy direction change, to reverse that particular culture.

I'll ask Howie West to make some more specific comments.

Thank you.

Mr. Howie West (Work Reorganization Officer, National Programs Section, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Thank you, Liam. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Madam Thompson.

The problem is quite straightforward, really. There are lots of constraints around how contracting is done, but as you realized from your session last week with departmental heads, there are absolutely no constraints around the decision to make or buy. That's a long-lasting practice.

Because there are no constraints around that decision, people tend to buy more than make. There are internal rewards for that practice in terms of taxes, if you overextend your salary-wage envelope. Not only does that have a financial impact on a department manager who is thinking about something that needs to be done, but it also has a psychological impact. If you know that the organization is taxing you if you hire as opposed to contract, then you tend to do what the organization tends to want.

There is a systemic failure there, and that's been brewing for about 20 or 30 years, since new public management came in. It's an ideological problem.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you. I'd love to get another question in for both sides. I'm sorry to cut you off, but time is short.

Do you support the plan to phase in a requirement that 5% of federal contracts go to indigenous businesses, and what challenge does that policy face?

Again, that question is first for Ms. Carr and then for Mr. McCarthy.

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Certainly, when it comes to diversity and inclusion, and making sure that there's a benefit to all populations in Canada, I do support that. I do think though that it is not going to stop contracting out. In fact, you might have what I call “tokenism”. You'll have big firms hiring people who have first nations experience, or they'll have somebody on their board, but it will not change. These are million-dollar contracts, and making sure that they are actually in the hands of first nations people, I believe, might be a big challenge.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Mr. McCarthy.

Mr. Liam McCarthy: Of course, as a union we're very much in support of a greater role for indigenous communities and working through how services are delivered for indigenous communities. We've been very active in terms of some of the transfers that have happened in the past around education and health care, and there are a lot of important questions to work through in that regard. Obviously, in terms of contracting, there would be “devil in the details” kinds of issues there, but absolutely, we're always interested in furthering the interests of indigenous communities.

• (1225)

Ms. Joanne Thompson: On the same theme, this is for Ms. Carr first, and then Mr. McCarthy.

What sort of special expertise does outsourcing let the government access that it doesn't have in-house?

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt here. There are only 14 seconds remaining, so perhaps you can put that in writing to the committee.

Ms. Jennifer Carr: We definitely could.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mrs. Vignola, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. McCarthy, Ms. Carr, I really got the impression that you rushed through your opening statements. Could you please forward your prepared statements to us?

What you had to say was extremely interesting. I would like to give you each an extra minute to provide the information that you weren't able to earlier.

Let's start with Mr. McCarthy.

Mr. Liam McCarthy: Thank you.

I will do so in English, because my notes are in English.

[English]

I was close to the end, but I'll just say that one of the main things is to make sure there are staffing envelopes for new programs so that they have the proper capacity to deliver the services effectively when they are launched without having to resort to contracting out. Also, access to information legislation should be revised to require transparency in all of our contracts, including disclosure of wages and benefits for workers, profits, equipment, supply costs and so on.

In short, what we are looking for is a change in approach, as I've discussed, around culture, enhanced transparency and accountability on government contracts. Doing so reduces the significant risks that the public faces associated with contracting out.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Ms. Carr, over to you.

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Thank you very much.

I will also speak in English.

[English]

What we need are modern hiring policies that create efficient timelines for hiring so that it's not easier for managers to hire contractors. We also need to break the continued dependence on contractors, because it creates a vicious cycle where the knowledge and skills are never transferred to the public service. This creates a reliance on keeping those contracts alive, such as with Phoenix. We need to modernize the IT procurement process by investing in IT expertise in-house and have a stronger control on IT spending. It's also time for a major shift in the outsourcing policy of the federal public service. Your committee can help us improve our public services while saving billions of dollars in runaway costs for outsourcing.

If you permit me, with Indigenous Services, at least if we did the hiring inside, we could make sure that those jobs were actually going to first nations people, using the public service criteria for equity employment hiring.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you both.

According to a report published in March 2021 by the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, the federal public procurement process for services is making gender inequality worse by giving private contracts to a predominantly male industry, like the information technology sector, whereas contracts for temporary help services, for work that is less well paid and precarious, are more often given to females.

Mr. McCarthy, have you carried out an intersectional or a gender-based analysis of workers hired through these types of contracts for temporary help services? If so, what were your conclusions?

Mr. Liam McCarthy: I'm going to ask Ms. Girash to answer your question.

[English]

Ms. Michele Girash (National Political Action Officer, Public Service Alliance of Canada): Thank you for the question.

I assume you're referring to our report, "In the interest of safety and security", which is our analysis of contracting out at DND. In that report, we did not look specifically at a gender difference in those contracts.

I can tell you that most of the contracts we looked at are contracts for cleaning services, facility maintenance services or kitchen services. In fact, those contracts pay workers significantly less, even though they cost the government, on average, 35% more. We know that the government, by contracting out, is incentivizing precarious work for workers who are already marginalized. Bringing that work in-house will ensure that those workers have the protections of things like the Employment Equity Act, which they don't always have when they're contracted out.

The federal contractors program under the Employment Equity Act only applies to those contracts over \$1 million. We could have scores and scores of \$500,000 contracts out there that don't apply to the Employment Equity Act.

We think it's imperative, in order to further gender equity issues, to bring that work back in-house, so that the federal government can provide a fair and decent workplace for all workers on its work sites.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: We often hear that it is hard to recruit staff for the federal government or any other level of government, because the salaries on offer are not as high as those found in the private sector. There seems to be a ring of truth to this, given the figures we have been given. For a one-year contract, for example, even if you take benefits into account, there is still a gap.

Salary aside, and assuming there is no labour shortage in Canada, what explains the difficulties encountered in recruitment?

How is it that a government job isn't attractive, whatever the level of government?

[English]

The Chair: I'm afraid I have to interrupt, because that's the end of the time again. I will ask again if you can respond in writing.

Ms. Jennifer Carr: I will put that in writing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Johns, you have six minutes.

Mr. Gord Johns: Ms. Girash, you touched on something about the gap in what people are getting paid for the outsourcing. It's costing the taxpayer even more money than it would to hire a public servant.

In 2018, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights discussed privatization as a cause of poverty, while still costing governments more.

Do you believe the government is aware of global research on privatization and has made efforts to incorporate the findings into its decisions on outsourcing?

Ms. Michele Girash: That's a two-point question.

Given that the human resources committee of this House studied precarious work, and one of the recommendations in the report on precarious work was that the government work to bring temporary help agency work back into the public service and that it incentivize permanent and indeterminate hiring, I absolutely think there's an awareness. That was a unanimous committee report, without dissent, so I think it's aware.

To the second part of your question as to whether it uses that awareness in its hiring, I don't think the evidence shows us that it does or it wouldn't be contracting out at the rate that it is. We have to be clear that a lot of this work is lower paid, especially for something like cleaning.

I can give you an example. At CFB Greenwood in 2018, they were trying to contract out the cleaners. We saw job postings for the new jobs that were at minimum wage, and our members told us, "You know what? I don't get rich cleaning base Greenwood, but I can put my kids through hockey. I'm going to have to leave Greenwood and move to Halifax, because I won't be able to afford to stay here."

I think any manager knows what's happening when they contract out and that, even if the same workers are hired back in a situation like Greenwood or something like that, they're going to make less money.

Mr. Gord Johns: Ms. Carr, staffing shortages in certain areas of the public service have been pointed to as a rationale for outsourcing. Do you have any information on how these shortages came to be and what can be done to build more internal capacity in the public service?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Thank you for your question.

I must say that we are in a different situation, because we represent the professional groups.

I want to talk about some of the things in staffing and recruiting, especially for northern nurses. The fact is, they watch agency nurses who come in and have flexibility in their workload, in where they work and how they go to work. They're paid almost three times as much as our public servants, and they get a sense of work-life balance.

They don't have to deal with Phoenix issues. They are paid every two weeks and they're not waiting six months for their overtime cheque to arrive. They're not fighting with their employer in terms of getting the respect they need.

Agencies are allowed to give huge bonuses for working on days such as Christmas or during the pandemic. Our workers on the front line received zero pandemic pay.

That's why we're having some issues in terms of retention and recruitment. Our nurses are burning out and walking over to agencies, getting paid better and having a work-life balance.

In terms of why we're at the point we are, again, it's because staffing budgets have not increased. That makes it harder to hire people. We're doing more with less, and we're being told that we can't hire because the salary envelopes haven't been increased.

Again, when we talk about IT professionals, we are not keeping on pace with our agencies, especially in the core public service, so a disparity in pay would make somebody leave one department to go to another that is paying more.

These are just some of the highlights that we need to fix at the bargaining table, but we also have to realize that the impact of the government's inability to pay people properly and on time is making a huge recruitment and retention issue for the federal public service.

• (1235)

Mr. Gord Johns: You're leading me to my next question.

Recently, the Department of Natural Resources was seeking bids for two senior ATIP consultants—you probably read about this—with an estimated cost of about \$469,000 a year. I imagine that this is quite a bit higher than what ATIP specialists are paid within the public service.

Do you have any information on the cost differences between hiring public service workers and contracting out to the private sector?

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Again, I'm just telling you from our examples, one resource for one resource.

An IT architect at the Department of National Defence was contracted out for \$360,000 a year and is repeated again for eight years. The equivalent public servant, with benefits, was at \$148,000. Again, the difference on this one hiring alone was \$1.5 million over eight years.

You could hire so many IT professionals or invest in other areas for public servants if you would just look at hiring internally instead of relying on outsourcing.

Mr. Gord Johns: We just had the CBSA union here. They talked about how they could have hired 500 employees for what Arrive-CAN cost.

Ms. Girash or Mr. McCarthy, maybe you want to speak about ATIP consultants and this \$469,000, where this is going and how out of control it is.

The Chair: We need a very brief answer.

Ms. Michele Girash: We did submit to the committee our written submission to the evaluation of the access to information legislation last year.

You can find in there some information from round tables we held with our members, who are the junior ATIP officers to Ms. Carr's senior ATIP officers. Repeatedly, they talked about having temporary help agency workers in their workplaces who were there because there were so many vacancies and because the volume of work was so great that they couldn't keep up. Yet if you look at—

The Chair: I'm sorry. I have to interrupt, but I have some good news. We're going to go to four minutes and four minutes, and then two and two to finish.

I understand that the Conservatives are up next, but they're giving their time to Mr. Johns, so I'll give Mr. Johns four more.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Ms. Michele Girash: Four more minutes? That's great.

If you look at the tenders for ATIP officer temporary help agency work, you will see tenders for two, three and four years. This is not temporary help agency work. This is work that indicates that the staffing envelope for that work or the staffing in place for those departments is not sufficient to meet demand.

Yet our members also tell us that they could, as Ms. Carr has said, make more money in the private sector, and if they went to the private sector, they could also pick and choose the files they work on, so they wouldn't have the difficult files that an ATIP officer often has to work on.

We're ending up with mixed workplaces, with public sector workers and temp agency workers working side by side. We're ending up with inefficient processes for access to information processing, and we're ending up with pay discrepancies. None of this is serving the public or serving what that legislation is meant to do.

Mr. Gord Johns: When departmental decisions are made about contracting out, are there any obligations to consult with public sector unions, or an attempt to fill positions with public service workers first? If so, can you share how that's actually playing out in practice?

Mr. McCarthy.

Mr. Liam McCarthy: There are really only obligations around if people are losing their jobs, essentially, if people are being displaced. As you probably heard on our new-found expertise around ATIPs and such, that's how we try to find out a lot of that information about all of the other things that could be coming up, and what have you.

There isn't enough information that flows with regard to contracting out, and the people who deliver the frontline work and the unions who represent them aren't able to give their valuable opinion on those issues. Then we end up with disasters like Phoenix, accordingly.

• (1240)

Mr. Gord Johns: PSAC members have identified reducing contracting out and privatization as a key priority in the current round of bargaining right now. PSAC's website notes:

Our bargaining teams are putting forward new contract language calling on Treasury Board to use existing employees or hire and train new employees before contracting jobs out, share information and consult with PSAC prior to using contractors, and review the use of temporary staffing agencies.

Has Treasury Board been receptive to those proposals? If not, where do you think its resistance stems from?

Mr. Liam McCarthy: Frankly, it stems from the culture I spoke to earlier of preferring contracting out. The real challenge at the

bargaining table is that you have contracting out problems at both ends.

At one end, for example, our cleaners would make a bit more nominally, but when you contract it out, they're having to pay for the profit margin, and then they find all of the problems that are associated with contractors who want to deliver as little as possible for as much as possible. There's not always an agreement as to what the contract said, so there's a lot of expensive work that goes with that.

At the other end, as Jennifer was saying, there are many discrepancies that Treasury Board hasn't been amenable to, where it has to contract out, because, for example, we can't hire power engineers for many of the plants at military bases, so it ends up contracting out for much more. The answer is, clearly, to make sure that at a minimum, these jobs reflect market realities, and we bring that kind of data to the table.

It shouldn't be a problem in the first place. We should, as a large employer with a lot of capacity, be able to deliver these kinds of things effectively and internally.

Ms. Jennifer Carr: If you'll allow me to interject—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but the time is up for Mr. Johns.

We'll go to Mrs. Vignola for two minutes, and then back to Mr. Johns for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I have another question for Mr. McCarthy and Ms. Carr, but I would ask Ms. Carr to go first.

Currently, when the government wants to hire, it finds itself competing with private recruitment firms, in a way. What's more, the government retains private recruitment firms who are charging an arm and a leg. The recruitment of contract employees takes place via two different ways: the recruitment firm and the direct hire of future contract employees.

What would the government gain by taking control and having its own firm or specialized government unit for recruitment? That way, private firms would be recruiting for private companies, rather than for the government.

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer Carr: Basically, it's a power dynamic shift. Temporary agencies were that. They were hiring for three- to six-month contracts. They weren't hiring for long-term duration contracts.

What has happened now is that we are using them for multi-years, so they are not subject to the same equity, diversity and inclusion, bilingualism, and other things that the federal government should be supporting, because those are the base requirements of being a federal public servant. You want to make sure that you have the best and the brightest, but what is happening is, and I'll take the northern nurse situation—

The Chair: Ms. Carr, I apologize. We're out of time again. It's a very short session.

I apologize, as well, as it was supposed to be Mr. Jowhari before the two of you.

I'm going to Mr. Jowhari for four minutes.

You can finish it up.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): That's no problem. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses.

I could follow up on the same theme around the public service's staffing process taking too long and our ability to hire the talent that we need in a relatively short period. In previous testimonies in previous committees, when we heard about the length of time it takes to hire internal staff, it was anywhere from six months to almost a year to get through the process to get the right talent. With the advance of technology, especially in IT and how fast it's evolving, I'm not sure whether the experience you had six months or a year ago that went into the application might be as relevant.

I'd like to hear from both of you. I'll start with Madam Carr.

What do you think about reform? What type of reform in the hiring process do we need to look at? What other reform can we put into the types of IT outsourcing that we're looking at?

If each one of the panellists could cover at least about a minute and a half on it, then it will be my four minutes.

Thank you.

• (1245)

Ms. Jennifer Carr: I'm going to hand that off to my VP, Eva Henshaw. She's been working with the chief information officer.

Go ahead, Eva.

Ms. Eva Henshaw: Thank you.

One of the reforms we were looking at that I think would benefit the public service is.... Currently we're looking out for people to apply and they apply for a position. If they're successful after six months of going through the process, they go into these pools. When they're actually contacted to see if they're interested in a position that has come up, unfortunately they've found work somewhere else, because the process has taken so long.

I think around the reform we need to start looking at pools of skill sets instead of having pools for specific job descriptions. If these pools of skill sets are opened up to the public, they will have a better view of what's available out there, knowing that those skill sets are there. People would be able to update those skill sets in reality, at a moment's notice, so that it's always up-to-date. Then the information will be there for the public service to better fulfill those positions that are required.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: It almost looks like the pool of IT resources that are out there. When we look at outsourcing, we could apply the same concept to this pool of in-house resources and expand it.

Ms. Eva Henshaw: Yes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. McCarthy.

Mr. Liam McCarthy: Yes, there are definitely improvements that can be made.

I'll pass the question over to Howie.

Mr. Howie West: We have a central organization in the federal government that is responsible for the oversight of staffing. That's the Public Service Commission. Part of the problem with the time it takes to staff is that the Public Service Commission at this point tends to play an oversight role. That oversight role is one in which they're trying to find new IT solutions.

The whole staffing process involves a lot of different people. All of those people are very busy with other work.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I have to cut you off there, as our time is up.

Like before, if you wish to submit anything in writing, please do so.

Next is Mr. Johns for two minutes, and then we will let our witnesses go.

Mr. Gord Johns: Just to finish this, I want to make sure that we thank you for your service. Really and truly the unsung heroes of the pandemic were public servants. They delivered services. They came to work through COVID and made sure that they took care of Canadians. I can't say enough to all of you and all of your members about that incredible contribution. It's historic. It doesn't go without being recognized. We know you're dealing with the fallout later, with passports and these things. I do appreciate your being there.

What can you see as the risks to the Canadian public that arise from increasing reliance on outsourcing?

I'll go to you, Ms. Girash, for 30 seconds, and then I'll go to Ms. Carr or Mr. McCarthy.

Ms. Michele Girash: I think the risk is that the government underwrites the risk. If a private contractor fails, as we saw at the beginning of the pandemic when Carillion failed in the U.K., the government picks up the pieces. The government underwrites that risk.

We have an example—I think it was cited in the first day of testimony here—from our military base workers whose work was contracted out. Facility maintenance and yard maintenance was contracted out. The base needed to do central training exercises, as they do on an ongoing basis. The private contractor failed. The fields and the outside area were not taken care of. It was not safe for the military members to go in and do their exercises.

I should say that our members submitted a business case contrasting their ability with the private contractor. It was still contracted out. The base commander then ordered the public sector workers to do the work. They didn't have the expertise anymore and they didn't have the equipment.

This is a simple lawn maintenance example. Imagine it's something else, like something at an airport or something that is critical to Canada's safety and security. It's a big risk.

• (1250)

Ms. Jennifer Carr: From my workers, I just [*Inaudible—Editor*] health care workers—

The Chair: I'm afraid all I'm doing with you today, Ms. Carr, is cutting you off. I apologize.

I'm afraid that's all the time we have today, witnesses. Thank you very much for joining us. We'll let you go.

We're going to continue on with our internal public meeting. We're going to stay in the meeting. We're not going to suspend because we have a hard finish in nine minutes.

Mr. Housefather, did you want to go?

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to touch on the issue of our witnesses for Arrive-CAN.

We've invited members of the four different departments to come. My understanding, and perhaps it was erroneous, was that we asked for production of documents. As an attorney, for my entire career, you would get the documents you would ask for in discovery and prepare for your cross-examination or examination of a witness based on the documents, so you could be as knowledgeable as the people who are coming in to testify.

I don't really understand the purpose of having the departments before we get the documents. My understanding, Mr. Chair, and perhaps the clerk can correct me if I'm wrong, is that we gave 10 working days to the department last Monday, which would bring them up to next Monday or Tuesday, I think.

Could we postpone the—

The Chair: I'll address that, but just for the sake of time, Mr. Barrett, did you want to go first, quickly? Then I'll address Mr. Housefather.

There's just a shortage of time.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Housefather's points are well taken. I was not a party to the discussions last Monday. That's fine.

I don't know what the direction is with respect to Thursday's notice of meeting and the witnesses who have been invited. I am very curious on the date that document production is owed.

Seeing how there was an agreement in principal, I understand from conversations with members from all parties this morning that ministers would not be coming until we had the documents.

In that same good faith interest, instead of moving motions to invite ministers or invite them for a specific day, I would just ask you, Mr. Chair, to canvass the room to see if there is an agreement in principal that once we have received those documents in both official languages, following that and in preparation for that, the clerk

could invite ministers to appear. Could an invitation go to ministers today saying that the committee is going to receive documents and, in anticipation of receipt of those, the committee would like them to appear?

As much as I would love them to come next Thursday or next Monday, that's not my experience. My expectation or my belief would be that they would come when it suits their schedule based on this committee's scheduled meetings. That would likely be the week following our November week break.

In the spirit of collaboration, could we get that agreement in principle without a motion being passed?

The Chair: Sure. Certainly, I will canvass the room.

Very quickly though, for next Thursday, it was my direction that we had no witnesses planned for any of our ongoing studies. Unfortunately, with switchover of chairs and not having had a planning committee, we had nothing.

Just because of the scramble from the emergency meeting we had, the witnesses weren't available for the first period. My assumption was they were therefore aware they would be called very shortly. I saw that we had no witness set up for Thursday. They were ready because they were kind of put on notice, so I decided to put them in for next Thursday.

Otherwise, we would have had nothing planned for Thursday. We would have wasted a day. That was my decision to do that. That was why.

Is there a desire for Mr. Barrett's suggestion?

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I want to be sure I've understood the proposal correctly, and I want to make sure that it is in keeping with what we negotiated in the initial motion. We will hear the witnesses once we have received the documents.

If I understood correctly, if we don't have any witnesses lined up for Thursday, we will not hold the meeting. That said, we can always discuss the committee's future business.

[*English*]

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: If we don't have witnesses, we could discuss work plans, just to make the meeting completely relevant. If we hear from witnesses without really knowing why and go fishing, the meeting may lose its relevance and effectiveness.

In my humble opinion, if you agree, we would be better off not hearing from these witnesses before we receive the documents. We could discuss the work plans, especially since we have not been able to meet over the past week, even though we have been running around after each other for various reasons.

What do you think?

[English]

The Chair: I see Ms. Block. Then we'll go to Mr. Johns and then Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Keep it to 30 seconds, please, because we're finishing.

Mrs. Kelly Block: It's really tight.

I have two things.

A letter was sent. We had the conversation about the study on ArriveCAN. I would have assumed that because it was timely and somewhat urgent, we would have build it into our immediate schedule.

The second thing would be this: When is the production of documents at its 10 days?

The Chair: Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I just see lot of urgency with six studies. We have six studies now that we're working on. I can't think of another committee in government that has six studies. We haven't completed a single study yet, so I think we need a meeting on Thursday to talk about our plan. We have to get organized.

We have a new chair, and I think it's an opportunity, Mr. Chair. However, I agree that we need the documents before we see the public servants. Then let's decide which ministers and who we want. We're going to want to bring forward some witnesses after we've heard from the public servants, but we want to hear from them before we start putting names forward. That's where I'm coming from in terms of thinking we should get organized.

We have to get our priorities in order.

The Chair: My intent is that we would do that on Monday. We'd do a sub, and then we'd use up Monday because we have no witnesses, but we do have witnesses for Thursday.

Mr. Gord Johns: I think Ms. Vignola also had an urgent study we were doing on the Governor General's expenses.

I think prioritizing how we are deciding on this.... It's not that I don't want to get to the bottom of the ArriveCAN, because, trust me, there are a lot of questions that we have, and we want to get moving. I just think that it's important that we're organized.

The Chair: Mr. Kusmierczyk, please be brief, and then we'll have Mr. Barrett very briefly.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): There's no need to repeat. I think Gord and Julie [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] sensible plan forward.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, and then we will have Mr. Housefather and Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Michael Barrett: For clarity, the official date with the 10 days for the document production, Mr. Chair, is—

The Chair: October 31, Halloween.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That'll be a treat.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: That was a set-up.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I do agree with the sentiment that we need to have a meeting to set some priorities, including with regard to ArriveCAN and also for the studies that other members of this committee have proposed prior to the past week. We do need to hear from those officials.

However, again, Mr. Chair, I would just ask if you could canvass if there is an agreement in principle that once we've seen those documents and once we've had officials, we can anticipate inviting the ministers. If we wait until after, we'll be inviting the ministers in a month. We could lose a month. Then we're dragging this out into the return—

The Chair: Be really brief, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: This is dragging it out until after the return in January.

The Chair: We'll have Ms. Block, Mr. Johns, and the Liberals, on that.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I think I was after Mr. Barrett.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett asked before, and now he's asked again. Is there a will for his suggestion to have the ministers?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Not right now.

The Chair: No, it would be as soon as the documents are out.

● (1300)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: After we have the documents and have heard from the department, then I'm open to hearing this discussion on who we need to hear from after we have heard from them, but I don't know what minister at this point. I think we need to hear from the departments.

I understand the timeliness issue, too.

Mr. Chair, can I make one suggestion?

The Chair: Be very quick because we're done in 30 seconds, and then I will make a comment.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I promise to be really quick.

Mr. Chair, if I might, I would suggest that on Thursday we do a planning meeting; for Monday you have the clerk invite witnesses for a different study; on Thursday we have the departments, and then you add another 30 minutes at the end of Thursday's meeting to discuss what other witnesses we need to hear from after we've heard from the department.

I think that would be a fairer way to do it, and that way you'd get there before the break week.

The Chair: Mr. Johns and Mr. Barrett to finish up.

Mr. Gord Johns: Clearly, I'm excited about the outsourcing study, and it weaves into ArriveCAN, so perhaps there's a way we can work these two together, because I think there is some continuity here and obviously they're important.

The Chair: Go ahead Mr. Barrett, and we'll finish up before we turn into pumpkins.

Mr. Michael Barrett: If officials have been called for Thursday, let's hear from them on Thursday and let's have the planning meeting on Monday.

The fact that for the outsourcing study we don't even have ministers summoned or invited is a challenge. If we are inviting ministers and then expecting them to just arrive the following day, we're going to have no success, and these studies are going to drag out. We're going to have six or seven studies and we're going to be dealing with them in February or at the end of January when we return in 2023. We just need—

A voice: We need a whole plan of government.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Barrett.

I'm going to thank everyone for the comments. We're going to finish up.

I'm going to suggest that we stick with the Thursday. We have witnesses already. We had difficulty getting them the first time around. For Monday, I would suggest that we do our planning meeting, but we have witnesses already, so I'm going to say that we'll stick with that, thanks.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Chair, should we vote on this in terms of the plan for next week?

The Chair: For Monday, sure. For Thursday we're going to stick with our witnesses.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I would like to move that we not call those witnesses this Thursday, and that we have them after we get the documents.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, we have a situation in which the committee initiated this work on a matter that's in the public interest, and you've expressed that the clerk had difficulty—

An hon. member: That wasn't what we agreed to do. You guys are railroading—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm not railroading anything.

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt. We do have a motion but we have to finish this.

An hon. member: Point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry but let me finish. Why don't we continue for five minutes—Mr. Barrett, you're still speaking—and the clerk will check about services. We were told there was a one o'clock cap. I'll have them double-check. If there is a one o'clock cap, then we're going to have to call the vote, because we can't adjourn, but we can't continue.

Mr. Barrett, why don't you go ahead and we'll check with services while you're speaking.

Mr. Michael Barrett: First of all, Chair, I don't believe the Standing Orders allow for a vote to be put at committee while there are still speakers who are seeking the floor. I would implore you to check that as well.

We have a situation now where there was an understanding that the committee would not hear from ministers until documents were

received. My understanding is that this is what's unfolding. There was a motion put forward a week ago today that prescribed that ministers be called. Now, that was not the motion that was passed. The motion was amended. There were to be two meetings, with more meetings as required.

We had a half-meeting where we heard from GC Strategies. We heard from GC Strategies on the same panel that we heard from the union who represents our CBSA officers. Hearing from GC Strategies without having seen the documents is as problematic as hearing from anyone else. It would always be great to have that information, but I also think we're in a situation now where we're going to have to read it once and check it twice, hearing from the officials about what their role was, what the process was that unfolded in the awarding of contracts for this app, why government services weren't used, and why in-house IT wasn't used; and then, taking a look at the documents, determining whether we need different officials. Do we need those same officials to return?

Frankly, the information that we're operating on was given to us by the government. It was signed by a parliamentary secretary. Some of it was wrong. It's not outside of reason that we're going to need to hear from some people twice. The need for multiple document sets has evidenced itself. Seeing the documents that private companies have as well as the documents that the government used—that's going to prove to be important. Solely relying on what's being tabled is not sufficient. It's thanks to public reporting, in this case in the Globe and Mail, that we found out that a million-plus dollars to one company didn't actually happen.

There's a lot of work to do here. I think the further we push this off, it will turn this into a process that will stretch into the new year. We're going to run out of runway unless this is the sole issue that this committee wants to devote its attention to between now and Christmas, and I don't see a will for that. Getting some of this done, getting some of that work done, I think is important. If these witnesses have been invited....

Mr. Kusmierczyk said I was "railroading" them. I had no idea witnesses were coming this Thursday—none. I'm not railroading anyone. I want to talk to officials. I want ministers. But I understood that there was a conversation, a sidebar, where folks said that's not the spirit of what we discussed last Monday, when you weren't here. Okay—so I put forward an informal proposal that we invite ministers. Frankly, those ministers can say no.

We're not doing any planning. If we're just running meeting to meeting, now we're pushing off the witnesses who we know we're going to have so that we can have a meeting to talk about inviting those witnesses. That doesn't seem like it's going to be a very good use of time. We're going to end up at the November break week. Then we're going to be into the last five weeks before the end of this year.

I just don't see us getting through this, Mr. Chair.

● (1305)

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Vignola, and then Mr. Kusmierczyk.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I want to be very clear: there is no question of putting this study off indefinitely, of postponing it indefinitely. We all want to get to the bottom of this.

On the other hand, I don't see how it's effective to invite witnesses and look at the documentation if we end up saying that we didn't get the right people to testify or that we need to ask them more questions after discovering other information in the documents provided.

I remind you that our salary and that of the technicians, as well as the committee rooms, are paid for through taxes and taxpayers' money. Taxpayers are already struggling to make ends meet.

I am talking about effectiveness and efficiency.

We have a number of people on this committee, and we can analyze the documents from all angles. Afterwards, we may decide to invite a particular witness to answer our questions. We will ask them specific and sensitive questions, which will help us get to the bottom of this.

If it turns out that these questions need to be put to senior departmental officials or others, that's fine, but it needs to be done in an efficient and cost-effective manner. That's the whole point of it. It's been said that the ArriveCAN application was expensive and didn't work as well as it should have. Finally, we are inviting people to testify, but we don't know exactly what questions to ask them. Once we receive the documents, we say to ourselves that we didn't ask the right questions and that we have to start the process over. At this point, we are the ones who are costing a lot for nothing. What I want is for us to be efficient. We need to get things moving.

If we want to hear from ministers, we will invite them to testify. If we have to invite half the public service, we'll invite all of them to testify.

In my view, we cannot be fully effective if we do not have access to the documents before we put questions to public servants. "Efficiency" and "cost effectiveness" are the key words.

On Thursday, we should not hear from witnesses. As I suggested earlier, we could use that time to properly plan the meetings and to come up with a plan B.

It is not always possible to hear from witnesses on the date we want, but we could have a plan B. Talking to each other is how we'll be able to come up with that plan. We will receive the documents on Monday, October 31. On the following Thursday, we could meet with officials, ministers, or anyone else we find relevant to our study.

In my opinion, that would be more logical, more efficient and more cost-effective.

● (1310)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Vignola.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, sir.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Chair.

Madam Vignola eloquently stated it—more eloquently than any of us could in this situation.

I've been on the committee now for three years. What really sets this committee apart is our emphasis on logic and precision. Madam Vignola mentioned those words in her statement as well.

Again, I think there was a consensus when we were talking earlier that it didn't make sense, didn't make any logic, for us to call witnesses before we have all of the evidence that is required—the written evidence. It just makes logical sense to wait until we have that information.

My comment about railroading was basically, from what we heard from members of different parties around this table, that it didn't make sense to call witnesses on Thursday. Then, under the pretense of time running out for this meeting, all of a sudden we hear that we're going to bring witnesses before we bring the written evidence. That's what I was trying to flag too.

Again, let's be logical. Let's be precise. It makes sense that we get the evidence first, before we call the witnesses. When we get the evidence and hear the witnesses, of course, it makes logical sense, if required, to call ministers—the appropriate ministers—to testify.

The Chair: Next is Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Chair, I can appreciate that there have been a lot of moving parts, certainly, with a change in membership on this committee, a change in chair and trying to make sure that we have a calendar with meaningful work to do.

Having been a member of Parliament for 14 years, and after sitting on many different committees and undertaking many studies, I find it passing strange that we would expect any public servants to come here with all of the documentation to speak to a study, which we suggested we would like to undertake, without knowing which direction we want to go in.

In my experience, when a committee determines that they want to undertake a study, they start with the public officials. They start with the departmental officials to get an understanding of the issue, to get the background and to understand what has transpired to date. We won't even know who all of the public officials are that we would want to hear from until we have that background.

I think that is truly the spirit in which we recommended that we start with public officials: to get that background to start the study. We will know from there which direction we need to go in and who else we would like to hear from, and then we can zero in on which other officials we may need to call.

I truly believe that is the spirit in which we believed we were inviting the departmental officials to appear first.

● (1315)

The Chair: Mrs. Kusie is next.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Chair, in terms of the points my colleague Mr. Barrett made about having officials appear, we see how it always does provide us with new information—which I think Canadians need—in an effort to really bring this to light. I don't think we can lose sight of that.

To Mr. Johns' point, I recognize that there are a lot of studies on the books, but I also think it's very prudent of us to always consider those matters that are of the greatest urgency for Canadians. I think that in this case we definitely have a situation where we see evidence—the documents we have, not even necessarily that we have received, but which the media have received and uncovered—brought to light not only for this group but also for other Canadians, perhaps not as clear evidence, but as a great indicator that there might be more we can obtain in having these ministers and other witnesses come here in an effort to shed some light on this. I think we really have to consider that.

I think it's very important that we all take some time in this room to reflect upon what Canadians, our voters, would actually think if we were seen to be complicit in not bringing this information to light as soon as possible. I certainly wouldn't want my citizens thinking that I'm an accomplice to further information being covered up, but rather, being a party to shedding as much information as possible, as soon as possible, on an issue that on a daily basis continues to be reported on since breaking.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I think it's very important that we give some consideration to that, and that we—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mrs. Kusie has the floor, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I'm hearing my colleague say that it's unfortunate that I have the floor, which is really hurtful, because I usually think we have nice conversations and interactions—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mrs. Kusie. I'm going to interrupt you. We have a point of order.

I'm sorry, Mrs. Vignola. I just could not hear what you were saying.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I have a point of order.

As we want this study to take place, to have a full and complete analysis, I cannot accept, with all due respect to all of my colleagues here, being told, in barely concealed words, that I am complicit in trying to hide information.

I cannot accept that. I have supported the motion from the beginning. I want us to be able to do a study and see it through to the end. It is not true that I am withholding information.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt, Mrs. Vignola. That's not a point of order, but your comments are very well taken. I would suggest that we all avoid such language.

The floor is still yours, Mrs. Kusie, and then we have Mr. Chong.

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

I apologize if this was found offensive, but, frankly, it's a risk everyone around this table runs in not agreeing to resolve this as soon as possible.

My goodness, it will be six years in the spring that I've been honoured to be the representative for Calgary Midnapore. I certainly have found many meetings and many forums objectionable in addition to not only the items that have been discussed but the manner in which they've been brought forward and—perhaps even to use my colleague's term—railroaded through other committees I've been on.

Again, I think we just need to really consider that not having those witnesses here as soon as possible really reflects on not only the work of this committee but our work as parliamentarians and, I would say, this House as well.

We are brought here in good faith by our constituents to discuss the most pressing issues and matters, and as I've said, as is evidenced by the information that has been uncovered about Arrive-CAN in addition to other issues that, again, my colleague Michael Barrett has brought up, we have recognized the necessity of having these important conversations and meetings to reveal as much as possible as soon as possible.

I for one definitely would like to get to the bottom of this as soon as possible. As is evidenced even by the studies we completed today and the witnesses we had here today, these matters can drag on for, my goodness, years, approaching on decades, I think, if we look to the procurement study we had in the first hour.

We cannot make light of this, that it is possible that we do not put the things that are most important first. As such, I would ask that we really consider that this is a priority for us to get to the bottom of as soon as possible and to continue to call upon these witnesses and uncover more information.

In fact, the government should also take a footnote from one of their departments, because, as I said, there are studies coming out on a regular basis.

I see now that the border agency is reviewing the list after the wrong firm was linked to the app. In fact, we see now that it wasn't just one firm. In fact, there are three firms at this point—hard to believe—but we had ThinkOn, then ENY and then Maplesoft, but then it turned out to be the wrong Maplesoft.

My point, Mr. Chair, is that it should also serve as an indicator that there are people in the government who take this very seriously and recognize that more work and more steps have to be done. I think it's just something we absolutely have to pay attention to when even this agency is recognizing that this is something important.

I'm very fortunate to have the opportunity to follow the news. I don't know Huey, but I do know the news. I have here two owners of the IT firm that we had as witnesses. I see this was also a story, the making up to potentially \$2.7 million for hiring the team that helped build ArriveCAN, as reported in the National Post. This is just another example of information that was revealed to this committee as a result of having witnesses.

Again, I'm looking here now at one by Bill Curry of The Globe and Mail. There was another. Was that a CBC article? At least two of the major news houses in the nation think this is of utmost importance for us to be dealing with. I don't think we should take this lightly.

● (1320)

In fact, I'm very interested to see the documents that we will be receiving as to the other third parties who were contracted, or were they? I think that is what we've learned from the research that we've seen so far in the media as to who they were, the amounts that existed and whether they were in fact contracted.

This actually reminds me of when I ran the budget at missions around the world. It was always a three-part test. You had to sign off in three places: first when the order was placed, another when the goods were delivered, and finally when the goods were received. It was a three-part process for the delivery of procurement. These were at single missions around the world, not entire departments or entire projects, but rather at my own mission in El Salvador, for example, where I had to complete this three-step process.

I can say with pride that if you were to look back on the documents of my time in those roles, you would see that we followed these procurement processes to the letter, because we recognized that it was important to do so at the time. This is really another example, when I think back to the importance of demonstrating to the public that we have followed the procedure and that the government has followed the procedure and received value for money. It's something that unfortunately doesn't seem to be resonating with this committee here today.

To talk further about it, I think about.... Sometimes I don't think we've always had success when we've had ministers come to committees in getting the answers that we had hoped for. Other times, maybe we have had success. I would use the examples of our two guests from GC Strategies as the kind of experience where we did find out new information from witnesses who were here. Again, I don't think that we can lose sight of it.

It's interesting. Even as I was going through my own questioning process to the employees from GC Strategies, I was actually having to refresh the procurement process in my mind because I was asking about whether the contract that they themselves received was a sole proprietor contract, with the unique distinction that it was a natural emergency given the pandemic. I do personally accept that

rationale, but then, as a sole contractor, when they subcontract, what is the stringency of procurement rules that they must follow? Are they required to do an open RFP or RFQ, or go through a multi-vendor process in an effort to determine the subcontracts?

Do you know what? I think we're going to find out some of that as we continue this ArriveCAN process. That's something that is super fascinating to me, in fact, in this new role as shadow minister for the Treasury Board. Somewhere in my boxes in my basement, I do still have all of my instruction manuals for the position that I held of the management consular officer at the different missions. I would like to go through that and actually refresh my mind of the procurement so that when I come here I can certainly hold these ministers and this witness to the same standards that I was held to as the manager of different missions abroad.

● (1325)

I'm reflecting upon that time and the responsibility that I had as a proud public servant for, my goodness, close to 15 years. I took the responsibility of the public spending very seriously—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: —and I also recall how I—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt.

Mr. Housefather, on a point of order.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It's about relevance, Mr. Chair.

This is utterly irrelevant to whether or not we wait until after we receive documents to hear from certain witnesses. This has gone so far afield that I have to call relevance.

The Chair: Thanks for your point, Mr. Housefather, although I think it's tradition that we allow a very wide leeway when we are debating issues.

Mrs. Kusie, please continue.

● (1330)

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

I think it is relevant. I'm talking about how I, as a public servant, was held to the very high standard of value for money and demonstrating where the money I spent as a public official was actually spent.

I think that's all that we're asking for in this study and

[*Translation*]

as soon as possible.

[*English*]

I want to go back to another point that Mr. Barrett made, and that was about how difficult it is to land officials. They have very demanding schedules. I think it's very important that we consider how hard it is for them to accommodate our schedules.

In addition, it was just brought to my attention by my colleague here about when this committee, before my time, did a study on the Governor General. At that time, apparently they had officials here before the documents, so apparently there is a precedent for where this has occurred before. This would not, in fact, be the first time. Yes, there is a first time for everything, but this would not be the first time—definitely not.

That's actually a very good point about the Governor General, if we think about the things that were uncovered even on the Governor General's spending. I certainly have a lot of respect for the office of the Governor General. As a former diplomat, I take great care in terms of hospitality, and the necessity to demonstrate good hospitality as Canadians, both home and abroad. Of course, that study indicated that as much as we want to display goodwill and hospitality to others, certainly even that has its limits. I definitely think that we learned in that case.

Of course, we do not want to be penny-wise and pound foolish. Again, I think when we look at some of the expenses, a lot came to light even with that study.

My point, getting back to this, is that was another study where we were able to bring to light for Canadians just—

The Chair: Mrs. Kusie, I'm sorry to interrupt. I've had a couple of requests for a two-minute washroom break, so I'm going to suspend for two minutes.

• (1330) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1335)

The Chair: We are going to resume. I thank everyone for their patience while we dealt with other business.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you. My last comment was, interestingly enough, that although I did not sign for Madam Payette when she was the Governor General, I did sign her expense reports when she was at NASA in Houston, as consul for Canada to Dallas.

On that note, I will, Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to share some of my lived experiences relevant to the discussion we're having here today.

The Chair: Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, I hope that we've reached a consensus and then we may not have to vote on a motion if that's okay.

We would say that on Thursday, we will have a planning meeting. For Monday, we will ask you to call witnesses for the outsourcing study or whatever study we're able to draw witnesses for. We will have the officials here on Thursday after we receive the documents, and then we will go from there.

Mr. Chair, if it's okay, I'll withdraw my motion and hopefully there is a consensus for that.

• (1340)

The Chair: That's wonderful. I think we have consensus for Thursday for planning. For Monday we'll look for witnesses for either outsourcing or diversity in procurement, and we should have the documents Monday and they should be distributed by then, but not in time for committee. Thursday we will resume the Arrive-CAN study, with the witnesses from this Thursday.

Thank you, everyone, for your patience. I think we have agreement. We'll say so.

Translators, thank you very much. Clerks and analysts, thank you very much. We appreciate your patience in dealing with this rather awkward moment.

Thank you, everyone.

We are adjourned.

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