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Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)):
Good afternoon, everyone. Happy new year.

I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 97 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, also known as the mighty OGGO.

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

I will remind you to not put earpieces next to the microphones, as that causes feedback and potential injury. I will also inform everyone that the witness appearing by video conference has completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

We have Mr. Brennan joining us virtually.

I believe you're in Toronto, Mr. Brennan. I understand that you have an opening statement for five minutes. Please go ahead, sir. The floor is yours.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan (Professional Consultant, As an Individual): Thank you.

Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, my name is Vaughn Brennan. I am grateful to be here today and for the opportunity to respond to the claims and allegations made against me in the media and in testimony given by others who have appeared before the committee.

The story is compelling, but the allegations levelled against me are false. It's been said that I am a political insider who rubs shoulders with ADMs. I've been referred to as the man who developed the \$500-million business case that led to the creation of Shared Services Canada and as a lobbyist with extensive government connections in Ottawa. Concerns have been expressed regarding comments I made about millions of dollars being "a drop in the bucket".

Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, I am not a lobbyist; nor have I ever been a lobbyist. I have been working as a professional consultant in Ottawa for over 20 years, and I have made some contacts during that time. However, I do not rub shoulders with ADMs and do not have extensive government connections; nor have I ever claimed to.

The suggestion that I am Mr. Firth's mentor is false. I am not Mr. Firth's mentor; nor have I ever been his mentor. I do not know Mr.

Firth personally, but I have dealt with him professionally several times over the years. I can't speak to conversations between the witnesses and/or to witnesses and reports, as I wasn't privy to them. However, I reiterate that the claims and allegations raised against me are false.

I'm a professional consultant, husband and father. As a professional consultant, I work with both the public and private sectors in the national capital region. In the public sector, my services include demonstrating how Government of Canada priorities and direction will align with industry standards and best practices, business architecture consolidation, change management, organizational design, and business and IM/IT transformations.

I met Mr. Firth over 10 years ago and have maintained a professional relationship with him. Mr. Firth contacts me with work opportunities that he feels might fit my skill set. Over the past 10 years I have completed two separate pieces of work through GC Strategies for the CBSA.

First, I developed an inventory of transformation projects for the transformation office, following industry-standard change management principles. Second, I identified how the CBSA could standardize the adoption of the Agile project management approach across the department for greater efficiencies.

It was Mr. Firth who introduced me to Botler—Ms. Dutt and Mr. Morv—in November 2019. In September of this year, Mr. Curry from The Globe and Mail informed me of allegations of fraudulent invoices and résumés relating to Ms. Dutt and Mr. Morv's engagement on a task authorization associated with a contract awarded to Dalian and Coradix.

I was not listed on the TA or subcontracted by Ms. Dutt and Mr. Morv to work on the feasibility study. My contract was directly with Botler to provide advisory services, research assistance, document compilation and report writing.

After our meeting in 2019, I spoke and interacted with Ms. Dutt and Mr. Morv on occasion. I was thrilled to work with Botler, a small Canadian business whose strategy might help the federal government prevent and handle harassment-related issues. I was asked to draft a marketing letter addressed to Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland. The letter was amended by Botler and GC Strategies, at which point we talked about sending it to Minister Freeland's chief of staff as well. The Government of Canada Employee Directory Services, or GEDS, available to all Canadians on the Government of Canada website, was used to make sure Botler's marketing approach aligned with the hierarchy in the DPMO's office. The majority of our marketing discussions were based on hypothetical scenarios.

In early 2021 I signed a contract with Botler—spanning February 1, 2021 to August 1, 2021—to support Botler's research and marketing strategies. In total, I invoiced Botler \$2,565.10 for my services.

It's been stated that I mentioned a licensing fee as being "a drop in the bucket". While this is accurate, my statement has been misinterpreted. My remark was conjectural and based on the results of a review of publicly available data regarding harassment concerns at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Department of National Defence, Correctional Service Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency, as well as on the findings outlined in the Auditor General's report. For example, in September 2022 the Federal Court of Canada certified a \$1.1-billion class action lawsuit against the RCMP over allegations of bullying and harassment.

I was invited to testify before the committee regarding the CBSA ArriveCAN app on October 31, 2023. I initially declined the invitation because the narrative was around the ArriveCAN app. I have never worked on the ArriveCAN app.

My personal and professional lives have suffered greatly because of attacks on my reputation and integrity over the past several months. This has negatively impacted my wife's, my children's and my mental health and well-being.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to address the claims made about me and to share the facts openly and honestly.

Thank you.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brennan.

We'll start with Mrs. Kusie for six minutes.

Mrs. Kusie, I wish you a happy new year.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Chair, I wish a happy new year to you, to all committee members who are here today and to those who are subbing in for other committee members.

It's a pleasure to have the government operations committee functioning once again. Congratulations to everyone on the committee for having it named the best committee in the House of Commons. That's a big achievement for everyone.

Mr. Brennan, thank you very much for taking the opportunity to be here today.

ArriveCAN has plagued this nation. This is the touchstone of scandal in a government that has become synonymous with scandal. I could go on and on about other scandals that we've seen, for example, the green slush fund and the WE Charity scandal. As a result of these scandals, so many individuals, including current and former Liberal ministers, have been thrown under the bus. This week in *The Globe and Mail*, we saw that two public servants have also been thrown under the bus by the Liberal government, because Liberal ministers are not willing to take responsibility for their oversight of the ArriveCAN scandal. In this particular case, it has led to CBSA and RCMP investigations. These continue to plague not only former employees of the CBSA and the public safety department but also individuals throughout the public service who are asked about their willingness to speak up as to what they have seen, their communication with senior executives and their communication with ministers.

The unfortunate thing is that, in our uncovering of this over the fall, most of the feedback I received personally and on my social media was related to you and your relationship with the Deputy Prime Minister and her office. I think that this is only one of many individuals who are implicated in this scandal, not to mention these two individuals who were able to skim \$11 million by working in their basement and doing very little. As well, they committed crimes of fraudulent résumé changing and perhaps even collusion.

We have you here today because we fundamentally want to get to the "who" at the highest level.

Mr. Brennan, you have begun some of this in your testimony, and I thank you for doing that. How many executives would you say you know personally in the Canadian public service?

● (1215)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Would you like these by title, with approximate numbers?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Sure.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I did a search in my phone for ADMs I cross paths with and I found three.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay. Which ones were they, please?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: As for directors general, I would have to go back and look.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Which departments were those, please?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: They would have been people I've done work for.

It would have been PSPC, and two of the three people are retired.

As far as DGs go, I found eight projects that I had done in the past.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Eight individuals or eight projects with those three ADMs?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It was three projects with those three ADMs and eight projects with DGs that I had contact with. Again, most of those people have retired. I deal primarily with directors and managers.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: What is the nature of these relationships that you have with these executives within the federal government?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Because I'm a business architect with change management and a skill set that focuses primarily on business process engineering, it has to do with government resource management. This would include HR, finance and how we work through reconnecting or connecting and consolidating business processes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Do you ever have more informal meetings, say, over coffee?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, never.

Primarily, the work that I do is literally at the working level.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Moving on from executives in the federal government, what connections do you have to current Liberal ministers and their staff?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely none.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Then how is it that you were able to connect with the Deputy Prime Minister's office?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I never connected with the Deputy Prime Minister's office.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Why was it implied in the media that you did?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, it was misquoted.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Did you say it? Are you saying what you said wasn't accurate, or are you saying that—

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It was a text taken out of context.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: What was the actual context of the text, if it wasn't that?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: The actual context used GEDS, an electronic directory service, to identify people in roles who may look at the letter.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: You're saying, then, that you have no other connections with any other Liberal ministers, if we were to go through all of your communications. All right, then.

The Chair: I'm afraid that is our time, Mrs. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Mr. Sousa, over to you, please, for six minutes.

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

Welcome, everyone. It's good to see everyone since last year.

Mr. Brennan, thank you for being here today and talking about what is accurate and what is misinformation.

What you're telling us at the outset is that you haven't had any direct contact with ministers and/or elected officials in regard to the work you do. Am I accurate in that?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That's absolutely accurate.

Mr. Charles Sousa: As you know, the investigation that's proceeding is internal as well as with the RCMP regarding Botler, not ArriveCAN; that's not under investigation. However, the consequences of some of what's being discussed at this committee bring caution in terms of how things are operating, and we want to make certain that they're done appropriately. Of course, we take that very seriously.

Have you been contacted by the RCMP?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I have not been contacted by the RCMP or any auditors.

• (1220)

Mr. Charles Sousa: Have you been contacted by any investigators, internally or otherwise?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I have not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: As for the advice you provided Botler, you said a bit at the outset about having some discussions, and I think their goal was to expand their pilot program to government departments. They came to be because Botler didn't have.... Explain to us how that came to be. What was the advice that you were providing them?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I was introduced to Botler through GC Strategies. My background is actually in business process re-engineering, so I was engaged—again, I'll pull up the exact wording—to provide advisory research, document compilation and report writing to Botler.

As far as whatever business they signed.... I don't know if it's a pilot project, a proof of concept or a feasibility study. I've heard all three.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Yes, and I want to expand upon that, because there was no contract, from what I understand. Did you understand that? Did you understand that they had a contract or did not have a contract with the government?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I understood that Botler and GC Strategies were working with CBSA.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Was it your impression that they had a contract at that point?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You were providing advisory work before—

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: To Botler specifically.

Mr. Charles Sousa: —to Botler, to do an application, to write—

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It was for their business, yes. They are in the space of looking at proactively managing harassment in the workplace.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Was there a directive that they received from the government to do this? How did you premise it, or did you just hear from them as to what you needed to do?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I heard from them. Again, I signed a small contract with Botler to provide them consulting services.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'm trying to understand, because, to your point, we have some misinformation as to what they were to do, what their role was with government. We're hearing conflicting testimony on that too, that they put forward a huge Cadillac when they were looking only for a tricycle, that a lot of work was done that was not asked for.

Do you understand how that came to be?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I honestly can't comment, because I don't know the business that Botler.... You would have to ask Botler directly.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Fair enough.

You have clients in your business, and you have dealt with GC Strategies in the past. Were you approached by GC?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes. In my world, or my business of consulting services, I work with what I call "tier 1" companies, which are the big solution firms: the Deloittes, the Pricewaterhouse Coopers. They use me to round out the skill set of their solutions team. Or I go to a tier 2, and those are companies like GC Strategies that will contact me when they feel that there's an opportunity that fits my skill set.

Mr. Charles Sousa: In your advisory role with this particular project, did you have any discussions with other contractors? GC Strategies and Botler weren't the ones contracted here. They were subcontractors.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I did not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Your only point of contact was with GC Strategies and then with Botler directly.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Well, it was with Botler primarily, because I was contracted to Botler, but I was not contracted through GC Strategies. I was contracted directly with Botler.

Mr. Charles Sousa: It was with Botler. That's fair enough.

Your contribution to this project was, at one point.... Your bill was \$2,000 plus.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes. My contribution wasn't specifically to the project. It was specifically to help them understand, if you will, how the business.... Information architecture is very specific to what data and artificial intelligence is trying to map to. Treasury Board has a number of directives, if you will, and strategies that they would like everybody to follow. Purposefully, my role was to help Botler understand what those strategies were from Treasury Board, whether they were IM/IT, security or data strategies. There was actually something in the works—I won't get into details—that Treasury Board was working on for AI.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Are you contacted directly by Treasury Board or any ministries to do work, or is it always through a contractor?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It's always through.... I call them my paper. They're the contracting vehicle for me.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Do you mean Deloitte and so forth?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes.

The Chair: That is your time, gentlemen.

Thanks very much, Mr. Sousa.

Mrs. Vignola, please, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Good afternoon, Mr. Brennan, and happy new year.

Esteemed colleagues, I wish you a happy new year.

Mr. Brennan, is TEALAV Consulting registered as a lobbyist? I know you said that you weren't a lobbyist, but is the company in the registry?

• (1225)

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I am not registered as a lobbyist. That is not my business.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Similar to what my colleague Mr. Sousa said, this study isn't focused on the contract with Botler AI or even the contract with GC Strategies, but rather ArriveCAN and its costs. The Botler AI situation revealed a practice that seems to be accepted by Canada, but that raises a number of questions about various things such as overcharging and multiple intermediaries. It also raises questions about the mechanism for monitoring expenditures, but especially results.

You're a business process expert. What could Canada do to improve the procurement process for IT services and artificial intelligence, in particular, so as to avoid multiple intermediaries and overcharging?

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: From an industry perspective, I hazard to go there only because I'm not an expert. I'm still doing a data science course.

From a Government of Canada perspective, I have to comment and again give kudos to the Treasury Board for stepping up and starting to address AI and the AI space. It does pose a lot of opportunities for the federal government.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I take it that you can't suggest any improvements for the procurement process. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'm sorry, Chair, that I misunderstood. Thank you for the clarification.

To be candid with you, it is a space that I try to stay away from, and that's why I go through these other firms. It's actually quite a bit of overhead for me. If I were to open my company and try to contract directly with the federal government, there would be considerably more overhead than I can manage while I try to actually do consulting. I have no suggestions, because I purposely stay away from it.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Your answer is quite enlightening. You mentioned that doing business with the federal government and submitting a bid entails significant costs, and that's difficult for small businesses, which also have to provide dozens of pages of documents when they respond to requests for proposals. Thank you for confirming that.

The Botler AI situation also revealed that the contracting policy with Indigenous businesses can quite easily be circumvented by using a business owned in whole or in part by an Indigenous person as a front. I know that you don't deal directly with the Government of Canada, as you just said, but rather with companies. Nevertheless, you have some expertise in procedures.

How can Canada ensure that there are real benefits in the communities where Indigenous businesses are located? Could you give us your outside perspective to enlighten us a little?

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Chair, thank you very much for this question in particular.

Again, as a consultant I have no visibility to a company bid. I'm one of many that would go into an RFP, if you will.

If I could suggest, the resource bid is the resource hired. At a minimum, the resource that has bid on that RFP would be offered the first right of refusal. I can give you so many examples in which my CV was used to win business and I didn't find out until weeks later that they had either substituted an employee, a colleague or another consultant, or changed the terms and conditions. I would absolutely ask for what I call "resource bid is resource hired". That way at least the federal government would get the resource that it is looking for, and the resource and quality it's looking for, as well as what it's paid for.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: What you're saying is quite fascinating, because it reveals a lot about the purpose of this study and situations where resources have been assigned to carry out a contract and, after a few months, it becomes clear that this is not the case, but that expenses have nevertheless been incurred.

If I understand your situation correctly, you don't authorize tasks, you didn't work directly on the app or the sexual harassment app pilot project and you don't know anyone personally in the Minister of Finance's office—

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Vignola, you're out of time. Could you wrap up with a quick question, please?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes.

Why have people said exactly the opposite of what I just said to you?

[*English*]

The Chair: For that, Mr. Brennan, I ask that you provide it in writing, or perhaps during Ms. Vignola's next round you can answer that.

Mr. Johns, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Again, happy new year to everybody on the committee. It's nice to see you all.

Mr. Brennan, can you talk about what your relationship is with Mr. Kristian Firth?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It's purely professional. He calls me when he has opportunities that might fit my skill set.

Mr. Gord Johns: What did you mentor him in?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I never mentored Kristian Firth.

Mr. Gord Johns: Have you ever made statements such as, "I am loyal to Kristian"?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Not to my knowledge, no. With the "tier 2" community I have several relationships, business relationships.

Mr. Gord Johns: In terms of—

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Oh, actually, let me recant. I can tell you that when I was approached by Botler to go direct, I asked Botler to have a conversation with GC Strategies, because Kristian introduced me. That would be the only way I have ever mentioned I was loyal, but I'm not loyal business-wise. It's the way he introduced me. I don't know what the relationship was with Botler at the time.

Mr. Gord Johns: Have you ever worked on one government project and invoiced for that work on another government project?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not.

Mr. Gord Johns: Similar work...?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not.

Mr. Gord Johns: Have you ever double-invoiced for the same work?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I absolutely have not.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm just going to quote some excerpts from a call from Mr. Firth on January 26, 2021, regarding you. Mr. Firth stated that you'd been paid well to be able to do this, so it gave you an opportunity to double dip.

Do you want to comment on that?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I can't comment on third parties. I can't comment on his quote.

Mr. Gord Johns: Why would he say that? Why would he say something like that?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That would be his business opinion.

Mr. Gord Johns: Do you find it somewhat suspicious and pretty alarming that he's talking about you?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, I can't comment.

Mr. Gord Johns: Were you named on the Botler task authorization 2021002043?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I was not.

Mr. Gord Johns: Under which contractual agreement or task authorization did you reach out to the CBSA's vice-president of transformation?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Under...? I did not reach out to the vice-president of CBSA's transformation.

Mr. Gord Johns: Here's another excerpt from an email from Mr. Brennan—from you—on March 9, 2021. It reads, “Just a heads up in that I've reached out to a group under the Transformational [Vice-President] in Organizational Culture and Change Management to get their feedback and any possible insights.” Then later it reads, “I'm working with the Change Management office with a colleague to set up a meeting with the Culture office.” Maybe you can speak to that.

• (1235)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely, I can. That was the first task authorization that I mentioned, which was for the inventory of transformation projects. I was already on that contract.

Mr. Gord Johns: What was the nature of your relationship with the former deputy minister, Mr. Ossowski?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: None.

Mr. Gord Johns: None.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I never communicated. I never got to communicate.

Mr. Gord Johns: Have you ever transferred internal government information or communications to third parties who are not the intended recipients?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: You would have to clarify. I don't understand the question.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay, I will.

On March 25, 2021, you forwarded an internal CBSA email from the president to Botler and Firth. The excerpt from the email is, “It's with mixed emotions that we announce the departure of Pat Boucher, Vice-President and Chief Transformation Officer, from the agency...Pat's last day at the agency will be April 19, 2021. Geneviève Binet, the Director General of Enterprise Transformation in CTOB, will be assuming his responsibilities on an interim basis. We know we can count on your full support for Geneviève and CTOB in this time of transition.”

Was there not something in my original question about transferring internal government information or communications to third parties who are not the intended recipients?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It's a sharing of knowledge.

Mr. Gord Johns: What's your involvement with the Department of National Defence?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I started my career inside of Lockheed, way back when, but to be candid, the last time I worked at National Defence, I believe, was in 2016, and it was on the defence renewal.

Mr. Gord Johns: Who's your good friend from General Jonathan Holbert Vance's office, the chief of the defence staff's office? There's an excerpt from an email from you on February 5, 2021, that says a “good friend has been in the Vice's office for 18 years”. Who are you referring to?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That person is retired.

Mr. Gord Johns: Who is it?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It was a lady who was an executive assistant.

Mr. Gord Johns: What's her name?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I can't recall her name, actually.

Mr. Gord Johns: A good friend has been in the vice's office for 18 years, but you can't remember who it is. You're under oath.

I'm sorry. Mr. Chair, I need help here.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I think her first name is Joanne, but again...

Mr. Gord Johns: Can you put that in writing to this committee? You're stating that it was a good friend in the vice's office. You're being asked a direct question. Now you can barely remember the person's first name. It doesn't sound right. It sounds like a lot of witness testimony we've had at this committee, where people just refuse to answer.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It's not that I'm refusing to answer—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt here, Mr. Brennan.

I'm sorry, but that is your time.

Mr. Johns has a point, though. Would you be able to get back to the committee with the name of that person, please?

We're going to go to Mr. Brock now for five minutes, please.

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

Good afternoon, Mr. Brennan. There are a couple of loose threads that I want to continue discussing with you, based on questions you've received from colleagues.

I get the overall impression that you wish to distance yourself from any formal or informal relationship with Mr. Kristian Firth. I can probably understand your motivation to do that, given that he's testified twice at this committee. His credibility is certainly an issue. He's been caught in a number of lies, and he's under investigation by the RCMP.

I am going to give you an opportunity, sir, to reflect on my comments as I ask you further questions about your relationship with Mr. Firth, but before I do that I want to go back to the original Bill Curry article in The Globe and Mail from early October. It really sets out, towards the latter end of the article, your involvement in the Botler controversy and scandal with the government.

Specifically, the reporter reached out to you. You indicated to the reporter that your reference to having inside knowledge was a fabrication. You clarified that and said you had "fibbed" in an effort to put pressure on Ms. Dutt to take more action on the file".

We're all adults in the room. The last time I heard the word "fibbed" was in relation to my five-year-old twins. They're 14 now, and they certainly don't use the word "fibbed". I use the word "lied".

Do you admit, sir, that you definitely lied to Ms. Dutt to take so-called action on the file? Is that correct? Am I reading that correctly?

• (1240)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I did not lie. There were open conversations around the use of GEDS, and that is what I used to identify people inside the DPMO.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm going to stop you right there. You said you didn't lie, but you used the word "fibbed". What's your definition of "fibbed"?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Well, if they don't recall the conversation, then the interpretation would be that I fibbed.

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, you're quoted as saying that you "fibbed" in an effort to put pressure on Ms. Dutt to take more action on the file." You were admitting this to Bill Curry, a reporter for The Globe and Mail. If that's not a definition of a lie, I don't what is.

What is your definition of "fibbed"? I can understand why you have some great difficulty in this, because you want to maintain your credibility, sir, but you've admitted to a reporter that you lied to a client with whom you had a contractual relationship.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: We had marketing discussions based on hypothetical scenarios.

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, you deliberately lied to Ms. Dutt, a principal owner of Botler AI, who had a contractual relationship with you to do a service on their behalf to make a connection with the government. You've now admitted to all of Canada, and certainly to this committee and to Bill Curry, that you deliberately lied to her. You wanted to exaggerate. Is that correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That's incorrect. Ms Dutt was part of those conversations and well understood that it was a marketing effort and that we had several hypothetical scenarios, given that the workplace harassment management and GC AI adoption strategies were still evolving.

Mr. Larry Brock: Did you lie to Bill Curry, then, by saying that you lied to Ms. Dutt? Is that a lie upon a lie?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It wasn't a lie upon a lie, sir. It was basically trying to get—

Mr. Larry Brock: It's your definition of "fibbed". Okay, I'll take that. I don't know if Canadians will, but I'll accept that for the purposes of the time that I have.

You then further responded to Bill Curry in an email and a follow-up phone call. You're quoted as saying, "I did not and do not have any contacts within the Liberal government nor in the PCO."

Setting aside the PCO, based on what I've heard so far for the past half-hour, that statement again would be a lie, because you've already referenced a number of government officials. It's not just, as you put it, "I deal directly with directors and managers." You've dealt directly with deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers, if not ministers themselves. The question I put to you is this: Why are you continuing to lie, sir?

The Chair: I have to cut you off there, Mr. Brock.

I'm sorry, Mr. Brennan, but you'll have to respond in Mr. Brock's next intervention.

Mr. Jowhari, welcome back. Happy new year. Go ahead for five minutes please.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and happy new year to all of my colleagues and all of their staff.

Mr. Brennan, over the next five minutes I'm going to frame my questions to you around three different pillars. I want to start with ArriveCAN, which is really the focus of this study. I have a number of quick questions.

Sir, did you ever work on ArriveCAN?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I did not.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Did you have any type of discussion whatsoever with GC Strategies or anybody at CBSA who had anything to do with ArriveCAN?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I did not.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Are you aware of any investigation of ArriveCAN by the RCMP, or have you been approached by the RCMP in relation to ArriveCAN?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I have not.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: You've had nothing to do with ArriveCAN, which is really the focus of this committee right now under this study. Thank you for that.

The next area I want to focus on is Botler AI. Your relationship with Botler AI as you have identified it was that you were hired on a separate contract by Botler AI to provide consulting services for a period between February 1 and, I believe you said, August 1, for the total sum of \$2,565.10. Can you briefly tell us what the scope of that work was?

• (1245)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Under the contract I can't identify specifics, but I can say that it was primarily for research, document compilation and report writing.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: It has been alleged that you boasted about your relationship in order to secure a \$2,565.10 contract. Can you comment on that, sir?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I can't comment, but to your point, it would be very ludicrous for me to do that.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Are you aware that there's an investigation by the RCMP, as well as an internal investigation by CBSA, around Botler AI?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I am not aware, and I have not been contacted by them or by auditors.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: You have not been contacted by the RCMP. You were not contacted by the internal audit area or anyone in there. As you've suggested—or at least the way you explained it—the Botler AI contract for \$2,565.10 was for some sort of consulting, and there was somehow this urge to be able to boast about your relationship with the ADM, which looks like it was around three other projects.

Let's talk about the third and final area that I want to focus on, which is your responses to the media. Why would the media frame this as something like your having some kind of a relationship with the Minister of Finance and the deputy, and your having prepared a letter? Why would the media do that?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: To be candid, I can't comment on why they would do that, but I can share with you that all of the conversations I had with Botler—specifically marketing discussions—were based on hypothetical scenarios. Those hypothetical scenarios were based on the fact that workplace harassment is quite a hot topic and the fact that the federal government hasn't landed on an approach yet—and neither has industry, quite candidly—with AI. Those conversations that were taped have all been taken out of context, because, again, they were about hypothetical and speculative matters.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I'm hoping in the next round I may get a chance to explore those hypothetical scenarios. Did you ever draft a letter directly to the Minister of Finance or to the office of the Minister of Finance or the deputy finance minister or anybody in there? Did you personally draft a letter?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I was asked by Botler to draft a letter for Chrystia Freeland. That letter went from me to GC Strategies to the Botler executive, and they submitted the letter.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: If your contract was with Botler, why would you send it to GC Strategies?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I was directed to do so by a Botler executive.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: A Botler executive directed you to draft a letter and send it to GC Strategies.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Jowhari, but that is our time.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: You are right, sir. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Vignola, go ahead, please, for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Brennan, if I understand correctly, the Botler AI contract was reached with Botler AI alone.

Who put the two of you in contact? Can you remind us?

[English]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I was put in contact with Botler AI through GC Strategies.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: How did GC Strategies introduce you to Botler AI? How did it show Botler AI how important you were?

[English]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: GC Strategies introduced me to Botler based on my background in business processes for engineering. I guess they felt it might be a good fit.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: According to GC Strategies, Botler AI needed your expertise to restructure those processes. That's why they put you in touch.

Can you tell us the general topic of the research you had to do?

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: If I may say so, the industry in and of itself and primarily the Government of Canada are facing significant fines or having to fund, if you will, all kinds of harassment issues, and this was an opportunity, if you will, to proactively look at that. That was what I believe Botler's value proposition was—to proactively look at managing harassment.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: To that extent, your research consisted in compiling data on the number of harassment cases to be revealed. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: My background is in business architecture. The federal government follows several frameworks. I believe you have an IT background. For those frameworks, the data would have to match, as would the infrastructure and all the associated processes. I was engaged to investigate how those processes could incorporate the proactive management of HR issues.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Mr. Brennan, I asked you about who your good friend in the chief of the defence staff's office is, because I want to find out some more about sensitive information from DND. Have you ever shared any sensitive information from DND with outside parties?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: If I was contracted to do so, yes.

Mr. Gord Johns: There's an excerpt from a call from Mr. Firth on January 26, 2021, regarding you. Mr. Firth stated, "He got that \$5 billion use case pushed through. And then he also, the same time as well, the stuff that he's done for DND that he can tell us about, is pretty huge. That I know a little bit about when he's had a few scotches...."

Can you speak about what this is related to and how you feel about this information being spoken to publicly?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Sure. I don't know how to respond to that. I can't comment, because it's a third party comment that I can't comment on.

Mr. Gord Johns: Have you ever shared information from DND with outside parties?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I have not, unless I've been contracted to do so.

Mr. Gord Johns: Have you ever reached out to government officials or to officials on behalf of private companies when you did not have a contract with said department or officials?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I have not.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay. I have an excerpt from an email from you from February 5, 2021, in which you state, "I have calls into Health Canada (mental health), PSPC/TBS (accessibility/Yasmine Laroche, TBS), and Privy Council (racism). Coming together, this is shaping-up to be a 'whitepaper' and will need to cull content to be more succinct."

To go back to the fact that you were not on this contract, why would you be reaching out to these officials if you were not on the contract?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Botler is a small company. They contacted me over and over, several times, to look at what they could do. I was helping them, and there were a lot of marketing discussions. As soon as an email like that was sent, the strategy would change. The marketing discussions were based on hypothetical scenarios, possible white papers, opportunities that might or might not arise, and I can tell you specifically—

Mr. Gord Johns: You were doing this as a charity. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, they were a small company starting up, and I was hoping to help them formulate.... I'm not a marketing person. I'm specifically a business process engineering guy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brennan.

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

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

Following up on our line of discussion regarding lies and fibs, I want to clarify something on which I'm not sure I understand your position.

In relation to the email that ultimately went to Deputy Prime Minister Freeland and her chief of staff Broadhurst, who brought the idea forward? Who was the genesis of creating this particular document?

• (1255)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It would be Botler, the Botler executive.

Mr. Larry Brock: Your evidence is that Botler approached you. Botler, apart from working with Justice Canada on a previous project, had zero inside knowledge with respect to any government employee or a member of the government, and they said, "I think this is a great idea. Mr. Brennan, what do you think, and can you help us draft it?" Am I led to believe, sir, that is how it started?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No. I can actually shed a little more information on that.

As you may remember, around Christmastime, CBC actually published a whole article on what was happening in the Governor General's office. In the Governor General's office, Madame Payette, I believe, had a few issues.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm sorry to interrupt, sir, but my time is limited.

Perhaps you could just help me. You're steadfast that it was Botler's idea and not your idea or Kristian Firth's idea. Am I correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: So—

Mr. Larry Brock: Could I have a yes or no, sir? That's a yes.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: At the end of the day, my idea was specifically to look at—

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, thank you.

I'm looking at an email from your company. You're the owner and director of TEALAV Consulting Inc. It's an email dated January 25, 2021, at 4:33 p.m. to Kristian Firth. The subject is "Following up on Privy Council opportunity". It doesn't say they just picked up an idea or a thought from Botler. It says, "Following up on Privy Council opportunity".

In the email, you say to Kristian Firth, in reference to your conversation with him that afternoon, “I pulled together research and a suggestive path over the past two to three days to compile a deputy minister level email illustrating what I feel is pertinent to the value Botler AI can provide.” You identify the honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister, Government of Canada, and you include a draft letter. The only thing that was missing in the draft was details with respect to Ritika Dutt's phone number.

This, sir, did not come from Botler. It did not come from Ritika Dutt. It did not come from Mr. Morv. It came from you. You did the research. You reached out to Kristian. You worked on this over three or four days. Then I have a series of emails back and forth between you and Botler, with Botler making some suggestions for changes to the email and you providing the email address for Chrystia Freeland and her chief of staff.

Do you want to reflect on what you told the committee earlier, sir? Are you prepared to admit now that this was your idea, that you thought of it? You cleaned it up and you provided all the details to Botler to send this email directly out to one of your government contacts in the Privy Council Office, did you not?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes—at Botler's direction.

Thank you.

Mr. Larry Brock: Ultimately, they have to give you direction, but you created the letter, did you not?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Based on Botler's requirements and requests, yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: You drafted it. It went back and forth. Finally, you and Botler settled on a final version. You gave Botler all the email details. Botler sent it off. Is that correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: At Botler's direction, yes, I provided a draft, if you will. I also went into GEDS and pulled down an email address, yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: We're making progress now.

Is that time? It is, unfortunately.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Powlowski, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Sir, I wanted to follow up on a question from Mr. Brock earlier, not in this round but in the round before. He quotes you as saying, in the Bill Curry article in *The Globe and Mail*, which I looked for but couldn't find, “I did not and do not have any contacts [in] the Liberal government”. Then, Mr. Brock alleges, your comments today are not consistent with that.

Now, if I heard you right, you said that you looked on your phone and you had three ADMs, and two of them are no longer in government. I don't see that as inconsistent with your statement that you don't have contacts with the Liberal government. ADMs are members of the bureaucracy. They're not associated with the Liberal Party or elected members. Am I wrong on that? I just wanted to clarify that.

• (1300)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Your clarification is correct. I do not have any of those relations.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Okay.

Mr. Johns mentioned someone within Defence. Again, that's not someone who is associated with an elected party.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No. This is an administrator, an executive assistant, if you will, somebody who had spent their career at National Defence. She's a wonderful person. I just can't remember her name right now. She's the mother of a friend of mine.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Well, I personally can't see any smoking guns involving you.

I wanted to ask you this, because you described yourself as a business architect and somebody who looks at and is expert in government resource management. As far as I can see, one of the accusations from the opposition with respect to this whole matter is this contractual chain of command. CBSA contracted with GC Strategies, who in turn contracted with Botler AI, who in turn contracted with you. One of the accusations was toward GC Strategies, the initial contractor who subcontracts. They get so much money for basically doing what? That's the accusation—that this is a really inefficient system, that they take money for basically doing nothing. Certainly, we've had some response from various people who say, no, that's not the case.

You mentioned yourself the difficulty of contracting with governments, per se, and the amount of time it takes. Can you just lay out for the Canadian public what you think is the value added from companies like GC Strategies, who in turn subcontract? Is this a big waste of our taxpayer money?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: If I may, in order for me as a consultant, with my expertise, to take all the courses I have to take to stay current and certified, if you will, along with the fact that I actually need to go and deliver on projects, to say that I've done these projects before, I don't have the time to actually do a lot of the administration, to go out and do the sales and marketing, to actually manage all of the security, and to manage all of the other components, if you will. I use tier one and tier two companies for that. They literally come to me when they need my skill set, so there is a huge advantage.

For example, I've submitted CVs on RFPs that are over 78 pages long. The reason they're that long is that I actually have to go and map my expertise to that requirement in order to get points. Even doing an RFP is well over 70 hours of work. That's almost two full weeks of not working, when I could be making money.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Now, why doesn't the government just contract with you directly, rather than going through...? Why doesn't the government have within the government the people who do what GC Strategies does, basically, and asks you down the line? Would that not be a saving of money and a more efficient system?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'm not an expert in that space, but I can tell you that there are not a lot of me's out there. For them to use me, pay for my fees, and then, when I'm done, move on—to carry that individual and that skill set is a significant amount of overhead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Can you maybe tell me how this has affected you, all these allegations, both personally and with the family?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I actually have switched to private sector consulting. It's very hard to do business with the federal government, and then, when you actually have this kind of scrutiny, it's... I basically lost my business in the federal government.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes, please.

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

Mr. Brennan, just for background, did you previously work for the Government of Canada?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I did not.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

There's a text message quoted in a Globe and Mail article that is purportedly you, saying, with respect to the letter that was sent to the Deputy Prime Minister's office, "They are trying to find a 'home' for this opportunity and there is internal negotiations as to how best to position."

Can you confirm that you sent that text?

• (1305)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes. I did send that text.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Was that text an embellishment, or was it an accurate description of your knowledge of what was happening inside the Deputy Prime Minister's office?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It wasn't an embellishment as much as it was a hypothetical, using the government electronic directory services, which is an org chart, if you will, to identify and speculate on possible people who may or may not be trying to find a home for this.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. I don't know what that means at all. You sent a text that implies that you have some knowledge about a conversation going on inside the Deputy Prime Minister's office, that the conversation is about "trying to find a 'home' for this opportunity". Did you know that they were trying to find a home for this opportunity and that there were internal negotiations going on? Clearly, you can't infer from looking at GEDS whether or not there are internal negotiations going on.

Maybe just try answering that again. Did you know that there were internal negotiations going on around this, or were you guessing?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No. I was absolutely guessing. I did not know.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Sir, I think, just following on Mr. Brock's comments, the problem is that you seem to have a different definition of lying than everybody else does. I'm not trying to be a jerk about this, but you sent a text saying, "They are trying to find a 'home' for this opportunity and there is internal negotiations as to how best to position." Now you're telling us that you didn't know that to be true, but you wrote that in the text message as a guess about something that might be true. You said something that you didn't know to be true as a guess. How is that not a lie?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It's absolutely not a lie. It's a hypothetical scenario.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That doesn't make any sense to me. The people who received the text clearly thought you were saying something true, but you were describing a hypothetical that could have been. Can you explain this more?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely. It was a text. It was a real quick hypothetical: This is my guess as to what's going on. End of story.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Are we missing any context around this text that would have explained that, or did you just say, "They are trying to find a 'home' for this opportunity and there is internal negotiations as to how best to position"?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, it was a hypothetical. I had no idea.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You had absolutely no idea what was happening inside the Deputy Prime Minister's office, allegedly.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I had absolutely no idea.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Sir, I have to say, with respect to this investigation in general, that our goal at this committee is just to find out what actually happened. It's to get to the truth. People with nothing to hide should be able to give us frank and clear answers. What makes me and I think many members of the public even more suspicious about what's gone on in the context of this procurement is that we have witnesses give obviously absurd answers.

To Mr. Brock's question, you couldn't distinguish.... You said you fibbed about something and then you said it wasn't a lie. Then, here, you're telling me that you did send a text. The text you sent claims to have explicit knowledge of what happened inside the Deputy Prime Minister's office. You're saying you didn't have that knowledge that you claimed to. Now you're saying, well, it was because you were describing a hypothetical scenario.

You weren't engaged in some kind of cosplay game. You were telling your client what you claimed to know was happening, and you're telling us you didn't know what was happening. How am I to make sense of this?

The Chair: I'm afraid that is our time, Mr. Genuis. Perhaps we can get back on the next round.

Mr. Serré, welcome to OGGO. You have five minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will yield my time to Mr. Sousa, if I may.

The Chair: Mr. Sousa, you have four minutes and 52 seconds.

• (1310)

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you.

Can you explain something, Mr. Brennan? When you talk about writing a letter and submitting what you did, is that not why you were hired?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I was specifically hired for my business architecture background. They needed help in other scenarios, and I stepped in to help.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Did you bill them by the hour or for the whole job?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It was by the day. There were a number of activities I would do in a day, and then I would provide deliverables, whether those be an advisory note, research, an update, industry insights, standards, compiled documents or suggestions for areas of the federal government that might fit with what they were looking to do. Again, I consistently provided possibilities that would help them with their strategy.

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's fair enough. When you produced the letter addressed to a department, or when you made references to phone numbers that were publicly available, you were offering them something they were asking for.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'm trying to determine what untoward activity occurred here other than your attempt to provide an opportunity for this company to get a job, because they were looking to promote themselves and you were facilitating that promotion. Is that correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes. I did that, with the best of intentions, for \$2,565.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Brennan, how long have you been acting at this job?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: As a business consultant, I actually have a large firm. I actually opened my doors and started working on my very first contract with the federal government in late 2004.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Which government was in power?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Can you tell me who did the economic review? To be candid, I don't know.

Mr. Charles Sousa: My point is that you worked under different government parties, and throughout that period of time you would have had relationships, in your business practices, with a number of public servants.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Did you ever have a personal relationship with a Conservative minister?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Did you have any contacts with elected officials from other governments?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: To my knowledge, I did not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: That practice has been consistent, has it not? Has your practice been consistent in dealing with the civil service as opposed to dealing with elected officials in any party?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely. If you went back 20 years and an auditor took a look, you would not see any invoicing for any kind of lobbying or any of that kind of activity. It's very specific to business process engineering and that type of consulting.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I guess there have been some allegations—and that's what this is, and we don't want to jump to conclusions, which I think is being done at times—that you have had to do the job on behalf of Botler, which doesn't have a contract with the government. Neither does GC Strategies, by the way, in this instance. It wasn't them who had the contract either. They're both subcontracting without having their own contracts within the system. It's all very convoluted, and they're all aspiring to obtain something from the government. Was that why they came to you for advice?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No. Specifically Botler came to me for advice to understand how the federal government.... Specifically inside of Treasury Board they have several plans and priorities, and in those plans and priorities they identify the plans and priorities in information management technology, security services, finances and HR applications. I work in the resource management space.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You have familiarity from many years of experience with, as I understand it, governments of various political stripes, and that is where you offer value to them. When you said you fibbed, what did you actually fib about? You seem to have an understanding of the system, such that you could provide direction. That's why they hired you. Is that correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely. That's the reason they hired me.

Mr. Charles Sousa: What did you fib about?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I guess it was someone's perception of my text. They were actually in the meeting with me, and if they didn't recall, then their perception would be that I fibbed, and I did not. We were all at that meeting together, and we used the government electronic directory services to identify people.

• (1315)

Mr. Charles Sousa: You've done this for many companies subsequently, or—

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I—

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

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Brennan, if I understand correctly, you personally have never submitted a bid to the government. You have always worked under contract to someone else.

Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes, that is the case.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: In your presentation, you talked about the \$500 million used to create the Shared Services Canada framework. In that case, you were a consultant, not the person who held the contract.

[English]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'd like to make a very quick qualification. In 2003 the economic review committee put in place 100 CIOs to identify shared services. They came up with a \$6.3-billion spend in the federal government.

In 2005, they created a group inside of PSPC, and they broke out that \$6.3 billion into three different areas. The contract I worked on was with one of those solutions companies inside of Public Works, so it was actually a \$6.3-billion solution, which they broke out into data centre services and telecom services and networking services. My specific piece, my third, was specific to desktop hardware, software and services.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

I'm going to go back to what you said earlier to my colleague. In a nutshell, you said that if the government had a resource to play the role of GC Strategies, which is literally that of a headhunter, it would not be profitable. GC Strategies received \$9 million for its role as a headhunter for ArriveCAN.

How many public servants in Canada earn \$9 million for something that's going to last a few months?

[English]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That's a good point. I'm speaking about maybe the overhead to carry someone with my skill set, but that's a good point.

The Chair: We're done with your time.

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

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Brennan, in the last round you said Botler contacted you repeatedly. By what method did they contact you?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: During the relationship, if you will, that we had from 2019 through to probably June 2021, we used email, voice mail and telephone.

Mr. Gord Johns: Can you provide us with records of all of those contacts and information back and forth?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Unfortunately, I cannot. I'm under an NDA, if you will—a contract with Botler. They will provide them for you.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

You sent a text to Botler on February 1, 2021. It said, “DPMO's reached out to Justice & CBSA. Contact was not able to offer context but be ready for questions if asked...”

Who was your contact in the Deputy Prime Minister's office?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, that's another speculative and hypothetical scenario. I do not have any contacts.

Mr. Gord Johns: Why would you write that, then?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, we had several marketing discussions back and forth, and the texts were all based on hypothetical and speculative conversations.

Mr. Gord Johns: It says that they reached out. You wrote that.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes. It was absolutely hypothetical.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay. Under what contract or task authorization were you doing this work, and under what contract or task authorization were you being compensated for this work?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: For which work do you mean?

Mr. Gord Johns: I mean reaching out, in terms of your text to Botler—the one I just talked about—to the Deputy Prime Minister's office.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I was not under any task authorization. I was not under any contract.

Mr. Gord Johns: Okay.

Have you ever engaged in or attempted to engage in unregistered lobbying activities?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I have not. [Inaudible—Editor]—

Mr. Gord Johns: Some of the work that you've mentioned today, which you say you're doing effectively pro bono, sounds like lobbying to me. Can you please tell us if you've been getting paid for any of that work? Would any of it have been considered lobbying?

• (1320)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not.

Mr. Gord Johns: My understanding is that you actually came to Botler via Mr. Firth. Isn't that correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: In 2019, yes, Mr. Firth introduced me to Botler.

The Chair: That is time, Mr. Johns. You'll have one last round.

Mr. Casey, welcome back to OGGO. I think the last time we saw you at OGGO, it was about eight years ago, at the Canada Post study.

Go ahead, Mr. Casey.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I believe this is the CPC round.

The Chair: Yes—because I'm brand new at this.

I apologize, Mr. Casey.

Mrs. Kusie, go ahead, please. You have five minutes.

Thanks, Mr. Jowhari.

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

Mr. Brennan, you say that you have been in business for 25 years, yet TEALAV has been around for only five. What other company names have you operated under, please?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I've been in business for around 20 years, not 25. Previous to that, I had a sole proprietorship under my own name.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: It was under your own name. Did you have any contracts with the Government of Canada during those 15 years, prior to your current company?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Not directly, no.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Again, can you clarify, please, how many contracts you've had with the Government of Canada?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'd have to look up those records, but I'd have to say it was in excess of 15.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Across how many departments was it, please?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'd have to take a look again, but I believe it was about five or six.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Would you be able to provide that information to the committee, please?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I could.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

How many times have you partnered with GC Strategies, please? How many contracts have you done with GC Strategies?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I believe I've done about five or six, but I'd have to get you those records.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay.

How many times have you partnered with Mr. Firth specifically, please?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: None. Zero.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: None. Zero. Okay.

How would you describe the nature of TEALAV, please?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: The nature of it...?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: The nature of your consulting business. What value do you bring to your clients?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I provide industry best practices, business architecture, change management, organizational design, and business and IM/IT transformations.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Why would you say you're not a registered lobbyist, when you are directly coaching businesses on how to pitch their products to government officials and members of Parliament?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, my understanding of the specifics around lobbyists is that... I've never set up meetings. I don't make those calls. I don't connect. What I bring is industry standards expertise, if you will—I'm certified in several different architecture

formats—as well as providing where the federal government is going.

I worked on a lot of that at Treasury Board, so I understand what they need. From resource management, that's HR, IT—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay, but the products and services you are providing are for government, and you are interfacing with government. Don't you think those should require that you be registered as a lobbyist?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not. All those standards are actually documented and on Treasury Board's website.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I disagree with your definition of a lobbyist, but I will leave it there.

What were your payment expectations when working with Mr. Firth and Botler AI to connect them with ministers and other officials?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: There was no such arrangement, and...yeah.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: How do you get compensated, then, if you're telling me there are no expectations when working with Mr. Firth and Botler AI?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, I worked with Botler AI directly, specifically under a contract. Then I worked separately, again with GC Strategies, on other opportunities.

I didn't work with them together. If Botler had a relationship with GC Strategies, that was their relationship.

• (1325)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Your business started in 2015, the same year that GC Strategies started. Did you start these businesses in tandem?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, we did not.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: You have been consulting with each other since that time, though.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'd have to give you a start date. I'm not sure specifically when we started. It could have been earlier or later, I guess.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Were you involved with Mr. Firth in the creation of ArriveCAN?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Did you ever have any communications with him relative to ArriveCAN?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No, I did not.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: What percentage of your business, would you say, is conducted through the federal government?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'd say it's about 70%.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That's quite a high margin.

How often would you say you consult with federal departments, agencies or Liberal ministerial offices?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Never.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Never. Okay.

Why did you have Ms. Ritika Dutt email Chrystia Freeland, the Deputy Prime Minister, and, more relevant here, her chief of staff, Jeremy Broadhurst?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I did not. That was a Botler decision.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That was a Botler decision, yet both my colleagues, Mr. Brock and Mr. Genuis, I believe, have asked questions that indicate otherwise.

The day after the email was sent, you informed Ms. Ritika Dutt that the Liberal government was looking for a home for the Botler opportunity. Who was your contact who provided that information?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, that was hypothetical, based on a text, and I do not have any of those contacts.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to Ms. Lattanzio for five minutes.

Welcome to OGGO. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will yield my time to my colleague, Marcus.

The Chair: Mr. Powlowski, go ahead, please.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Thank you.

I want to get back to the quote in The Globe and Mail about how you “fibbed”. My understanding was that it was about your contacts in government and hearing back from them.

I've heard, I think, on this panel that you were talking about a hypothetical or it was a misquote, and you were referring to GEDS. Maybe I'm dense, but I'm just not clear on the context.

Did you say you fibbed? What were you talking about? That seems to be one of the main fingers being pointed at you. You said you fibbed and now you're saying you didn't. I just want to clarify what that's all about.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Thank you for the opportunity to explain.

There were conversations with Botler and the team around using GEDS to identify, if you will, the hierarchy within DPMO. That was how we came up with the names. That's how we had the discussions.

When I asked the question, I was told that they didn't recall that conversation, so then my perception would be that they fibbed.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Botler fibbed when they said they didn't recall that there was that conversation.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes. Whoever it was said that they didn't recall.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Okay. It wasn't that you fibbed.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That's right. Well, at the end of the day, it would look as though I fibbed.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: How would it look as though you fibbed?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: If they didn't recall the conversation, it looked as though I fibbed.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Okay. I see.

You also mentioned an NDA you had with Botler. I assume that's a non-disclosure agreement. Is that kind of standard in the industry? Why would that be there? I think the public perception is that if you have a non-disclosure agreement, you have something to hide, but maybe that's just the standard, so maybe you could explain that for me.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes. It is a standard in the private sector. It's usually focused on protecting their intellectual property and any conversations around it.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I want to ask you something about the bureaucratic process, because you said your expertise is in business architecture and government resource management. I'm a long-time doctor. I worked in a hospital for a long time. I was continually frustrated by the bureaucracy and the fact that the bureaucracy seemed to be there to perpetuate the bureaucracy rather than to help us on the front line. When you talk to police officers and teachers, they all feel the same way. Certainly I think the perception in the government and when we talk to you is that there's this big spider web of consultants. You were paid as a consultant for Botler, which was subcontracted by GC Strategies, which was contracted by CB-SA. This is consultants on consultants, consultants consulting consultants who consult other consultants, and it's all about where you're going to meet to decide when the next meeting is. This is all like a big misuse of government money.

That's been my perception, and it's not just with our government. I'm sure the Conservative government bureaucracy was there. The provinces and the municipalities have their own bureaucracies. Everyone has their bureaucracies. Can you explain this to me? I am a bit of a doubter with respect to bureaucracies. Where's the efficiency? Why do we have all this? Do we really need it, or are we just paying people for spinning the wheels?

• (1330)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I honestly don't know how to answer the question. I was contracted directly by Botler as a private sector enterprise. It had nothing to do with the project. I was actually hired by Botler to help them with their business.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Why does Botler hire you? What's your expertise, or is it just that you've been doing this for a longer time and you know the way government works?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes and no. My expertise is specifically on Treasury Board guidelines and plans, if you will. There is also the fact that I have an amount of private sector understanding as well to help them with their business.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: That's why Botler wanted you to write the letter for them, which would go to Finance—because you have knowledge regarding how things work.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No. Writing that letter was really outside of my skill set. That's a marketing activity for the most part. What they were hiring me to do was to help them understand how their AI data would connect to standard federal government practices.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I'm sorry, but what do you mean by their AI?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It's their artificial intelligence. They're a data company. That was the value of what they were trying to provide the federal government. It's a proactive way to manage harassment issues, if you will. They would capture that data and meter, measure, manage it, if you will, so they could proactively manage harassment. That was the understanding.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brennan.

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

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Brennan, earlier you responded to a question from Mr. Johns about how you've never double-dipped. Do you still stand by that, sir?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I do, yes. Thank you.

Mr. Larry Brock: I believe you also indicated that what you originally billed Botler was something in the \$2,000 range. Is that correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'm sorry—you broke up on me.

Mr. Larry Brock: I understand you indicated in evidence earlier that you billed Botler something in the neighbourhood of \$2,000 for your work.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That is correct.

Mr. Larry Brock: Can you forward a copy of that invoice directly to the committee?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I can.

Mr. Larry Brock: Why, sir, do I have another invoice with respect to your work for Botler, dated March 23, 2023, addressed to Kristian Firth at GC Strategies for work involving your consulting with the government and Botler, in the amount of \$12,825.50?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Perhaps I can provide content.

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, were you paid that amount?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I absolutely was not.

Mr. Larry Brock: You were not. Okay. Why did you prepare an invoice for almost \$13,000 for the same work for which you invoiced Botler \$2,000?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: The invoice was originally for Botler. Their lawyer told me that it belonged to GC Strategies. I was led to believe that Botler had gone bankrupt, and I threw that invoice on top of the pile.

Mr. Larry Brock: You just happened to inflate the value by six times the original amount, fleecing the taxpayer. Is that right, sir?

• (1335)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not.

Mr. Larry Brock: Do you understand, sir, that Botler has hours and hours of taped recordings? Do you understand that, sir?

There is an audio recording that was made between Botler and Firth, in which Mr. Firth refers to you as the guy who wrote the business case for Shared Services for \$5 billion. Firth asks Botler whether, if he gave you to them free of charge, they would like to have you work with them.

That was dated October 26, 2020. On the same call, Mr. Firth says he'll tell you to bill a few days here and there, and then he, Mr. Firth, would charge it to CBSA.

What is going on here, Mr. Brennan? Taxpayers have a right to know if they're being fleeced by you.

Did you work free of charge?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I can't comment on third party conversations.

Mr. Larry Brock: Did you have a side deal with Mr. Firth?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not.

I can't comment on third party conversations.

Mr. Larry Brock: What were you actually paid for your so-called consulting for Botler AI to various government ministries? What were you actually paid, sir?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I absolutely can't comment on third party comments.

I don't understand your question. You're asking me what I was paid for—

Mr. Larry Brock: What were you paid, sir, for your services?

It's a simple question.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: From?

Mr. Larry Brock: From the government.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: From the government for work that I did on the—

Mr. Larry Brock: On the Botler case.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I was paid by Botler. It had nothing to do with the federal government's taxpayer money. I was paid \$2,500 by Botler. Let me get that exact number again—

Mr. Larry Brock: [*Inaudible—Editor*] You're going to send us the actual bill, okay?

Why didn't you tell this committee that you're also employed as the sole director of Fairmeadow Crescent, another consulting business here in Ottawa?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I am not. I've never heard of Fairmeadow Crescent. That's an address.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm sorry, sir. I have some evidence here through the open government source that you're listed as the director. It has your name, Vaughn Brennan, with an address of 1889 Fairmeadow Crescent, Ottawa, Ontario.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That's a mistype. I have only one company: TEALAV Inc.

Mr. Larry Brock: That's still in operation.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It is.

Mr. Larry Brock: All right.

I'll yield my time to Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Brennan, what's your relationship with the company Abysol?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Oh, my gosh. We're going back to 2013.

I worked with them in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Were you a director of that company?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I believe I was listed as a director, yes, but it was dissolved shortly thereafter.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Was that speculative and hypothetical, or were you actually a director?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No. It was the actual....

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. I don't find this funny.

Can we request copies for this committee of your text message exchanges with Kristian Firth? Would you provide them to the committee?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: If I have them, I will.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Let's get those text messages, going back five years, and let's get them to the committee within 48 hours.

Are you agreeable to that, Mr. Brennan?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I don't know if I can do it in that time frame.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. When can you get them to us?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: If I have them.... I don't know if I.... I went looking for texts, and that number seems to have disappeared as well. I went looking for those texts that you quoted, and I don't have them.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's remarkable.

Mr. Chair, is there agreement from the committee to order the production of those text messages within a week?

The Chair: Colleagues, can we agree on a week?

Mr. Brennan, you can certainly get back to the clerk with what you have. If you have difficulty going past that time, you can let us know.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Thank you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's messages within five years, and we will receive them as a committee within a week—just to make sure that's clear.

The Chair: Thanks. That is our time.

We are now going to Mr. Sousa, please. Go ahead.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you.

Mr. Brennan, it seems to me we've been discussing three issues with regard to your activity. You've had accusations made against you.

One is that you've been lying with regard to certain issues with respect to the semantics of the word "fibbing". Another one, most recently made by Mr. Brock, is that you've overcharged on issues that you've worked on. The last one is around this notion of lobbying.

We've discussed the issue of what happened with regard to the fib. For the benefit of this committee, can you explain the billing that you did with regard to Botler?

• (1340)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Sure. I was contacted in February last year by a law firm, and that law firm asked for significant pieces of information. We were in discussions, if you will, of whether they were in the scope of the contract, or not, that I signed with Botler.

I said I would go and do that work if they paid me for the time I sat on meetings for Botler—not for the federal government, but meetings that I sat on for Botler. If they paid me for those, I would go and do that extra work, and that's where that invoice came from.

When I sent the invoice to their legal firm, they sent it back saying, "No, this belongs to GC Strategies." I was led to believe that they were no longer in business, so I just sent it back and threw it on the pile, thinking that it might just be...you know, along with GC Strategies, that I'd get paid for the work they were asking me to do.

I have not heard anything from them since.

Mr. Charles Sousa: All you've been paid by Botler or with regard to this activity was the \$2,000 plus?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's all you received.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely.

Mr. Charles Sousa: The third issue that's come up is around lobbying. You know what lobbying is, and you know the Canadian lobbying registry.

You're familiar with the term. You're familiar with the activity, the limitations and the requirements, so can you explain to this committee why you're not a lobbyist? This is just for the purposes of making it very clear what you do and what you don't do.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I am actually a business process.... As I said previously, I work in business resource management, identifying, if you will, new business processes, consolidation, efficiencies and the effectiveness of different processes. I do not set up meetings. I do not have high-level meetings with anybody—not with any elected officials or anybody in power.

My business model is specific to my CV, and that's how I make my money. I don't even have those relationships. I don't have a Rolodex to even be conceived of as a lobbyist.

Mr. Charles Sousa: When you drafted a letter with regard to enabling Botler to reach out, that was on behalf of Botler. Who signed that letter?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Again, I used GEDS, because I don't know who's who in the zoo.

It would have been the Botler executive who signed that letter.

Mr. Charles Sousa: They're the ones who actually wrote the letter, which you just helped draft. Is that correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: It was a draft, yes.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You're not lobbying. You're not receiving compensation for your contacts. You don't have contact directly with elected officials or, in some cases, bureaucrats, unless it's come as a result of the contract that you're performing—the three or four different ones that you've mentioned.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That's correct, yes.

Mr. Charles Sousa: In terms of charging your billing with regard to this and whether you double-dipped.... You received only \$2,500. You did not receive additional monies. You—

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: And that was with Botler. It wasn't even with the federal government.

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's fair enough.

You are alleged to not be telling the truth here today because of a misquote or a quote in the paper.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: A text.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Chair, that's all I have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sousa.

We'll go to Mrs. Vignola, please, for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Brennan, I won't go through everything that my colleague just listed, but exaggeration was brought up. In your opinion, does Mr. Firth have high-ranking contacts? At any point in your conversations, did he himself talk about high-ranking contacts?

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I don't recall the conversation, and I can't comment on his relationships.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

I wonder if it's possible that people sometimes interpret or say things related to—I don't know if you're familiar with Jean de La Fontaine's fable in which the frog thinks it's a bull. The frog is very small and it very loudly proclaims that it knows everyone and is therefore important, whereas it isn't important at all, or at least not very important.

Isn't this situation similar to the frog that thinks it's a bull?

• (1345)

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I'm sorry, but I don't understand the question.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'll use more common language, because I realize that the fable is part of francophone culture and anglophones may not be familiar with it.

Was this whole mess we're talking about caused by someone who claimed to be much more important than they were to rally people around getting a contract to design a sexual harassment app?

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I apologize, but I don't understand the question. Are you asking me if I or if Botler inflated their knowledge?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'm talking about GC Strategies.

[*English*]

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: I can't comment on GC Strategies, because I don't know. He conducts his own business

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Johns, please go ahead.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Brennan, you said it was Botler who wanted you to write a value proposition to Deputy Prime Minister Freeland, but on January 25, 2021, you sent Kristian Firth an email with a draft letter for Deputy Prime Minister Freeland. You referred to your conversation with him that afternoon and said, "I pulled together research and a suggested path over the previous two to three days to compile a deputy minister level email illustrating what I feel is pertinent to the value Botler AI can provide."

You and Kristian had already discussed this, and nobody from Botler is even cc'd on this email. You sent it only to Kristian. In fact I don't think Botler had ever seen this draft, because their contact information, their phone number was still left blank. I just really want to be clear here, because you're under oath. Is it your testimony that Botler asked you to draft a letter to Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland on their behalf?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely.

Mr. Gord Johns: I also want to confirm as you sit here that you did not receive any payment for doing this work on the Botler project, including drafting this letter. Is that correct?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: The work that I provided for them was not specific to this.

Mr. Gord Johns: Hypothetically, if you had gotten paid for that draft, would that have been considered lobbying?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No.

Mr. Gord Johns: You don't believe that's lobbying.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not.

Mr. Gord Johns: Had you been paid for the draft, would that have been considered lobbying?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Absolutely not. They asked me to draft a document. I was actually contracted by them to draft a document.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm going to go back to the question I asked you earlier on tabling all correspondence with Botler AI. You cited an NDA. I'm going to put forward a motion right now to this committee that we request a production of documents that go back five years and that it be viewed in confidence only by the committee because you're concerned about the confidential nature of it, and then we would review whether that should be held in confidence.

Mr. Chair, I move that we request these documents.

The Chair: Is everyone clear what Mr. Johns is looking for? He's looking for the documentation between Mr. Brennan and Botler, as I understand it, but the intent is that they will not be made public. They will be viewed within the committee only, much as we've done with McKinsey and for other documents in the past.

Is that correct, Mr. Johns?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Jowhari, go ahead.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Fundamentally I don't have any issue with that. I would like to have it in writing in both official languages, and then I commit that our side will engage in that discussion. Traditionally we haven't had any issue, but let's get the wording, because we are requesting the production of documents. We generally agree, but when it comes to the wording... The result is not what we're looking at, so I just want to get the wording. As I said, in general we haven't had an issue. Please have it in both official languages and then distribute it. I will commit to having that conversation tomorrow when we're meeting.

The Chair: Is that fine, Mr. Johns, that we can get it in writing and discuss it tomorrow?

• (1350)

Mr. Gord Johns: That sounds good.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Jowhari.

We're now going to Mr. Genuis for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

I think at this point it's important to take stock of and summarize where we're at in this whole ArriveCAN scandal and series of hearings. There are a few things that we know as a committee.

Number one, we know that \$54 million was spent on an app and spent through a two-person company that did no IT work, was given the contract and subcontracted all of it. Also, we know that the RCMP are investigating contractors that have a relationship to this project.

We know the procurement system is broken. Government members—Liberal members—have testified to this at this committee. They've talked about the unwieldy and complicated nature of our procurement system and about how we have had substantial growth in the public service, as well as substantial growth in spending on bureaucracy. We have a bizarre procurement decision around ArriveCAN, and we have a procurement system that is broken overall and is leading to a proliferation of consultants hiring consultants hiring consultants, who have never done better than they are doing right now.

We also know that this committee has been repeatedly lied to by various witnesses in response to various kinds of questions.

Kristian Firth contradicted himself terribly in the course of his own two-hour testimony. We have a witness today, Mr. Brennan, who has told us that what he put in text messages previously was not true: Either he was stating untruths in text messages or he is stating untruths to us as a committee. We further have Cameron MacDonald and Minh Doan, two senior public servants, accusing each other of lying to this committee about who was responsible for the decision to procure ArriveCAN. We have multiple instances of people lying or accusing each other of lying. In some cases, we don't know who it is, but in the case of Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Doan, we know that one of them is lying.

Now, just this week, we have a story coming out about severe professional consequences against public servants who have testified at this committee. We now have a story that Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano have—incredibly—been suspended from the public service without pay in the middle of an ongoing investigation.

Clearly, this procurement decision—and procurement overall—has significant problems with it, but what I'm most struck by is the cover-up we are seeing in the context of these hearings. It should be fairly easy both for public servants and for consultants to appear before this committee and simply tell us the truth. It is not a stressful proposition to appear before a parliamentary committee if you simply plan to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but when we have people who say, for instance, that a text message they sent was “speculative and hypothetical” when it has every indication of stating direct knowledge of what happens inside government, then it raises other questions, and specifically why there is this ongoing multi-dimensional cover-up from both public servants and consultants.

It makes me wonder if one of the reasons people are so reluctant to be forthright and answer direct questions is the kinds of reprisals we've seen. When you have senior public servants who are a bit more forthright, in the case of Mr. MacDonald and others who have been, and who then see negative professional consequences after they've testified before this committee, it maybe elucidates why there has been a reluctance for people to come forward, but it also raises the question of what's behind all of this. What is being covered up? What would we find out if we actually got the frank, honest and clear answers that we want from public servants and consultants?

Let me propose what I think is more than speculative and hypothetical regarding Mr. Brennan's testimony. I think it's very likely that he does have a contact inside the Deputy Prime Minister's office, that what he said in his text messages was accurate, that he wasn't just making things up in repeated communications with other individuals in the text messages, but that he was telling the truth at those times. Now, for whatever reason, he is embarrassed about and reluctant to acknowledge that he somehow had intimate knowledge of the workings of the Deputy Prime Minister's office, and he is running away from the suggestion that he has any kind of contact or relations within government.

• (1355)

It just doesn't make sense to me that somebody would say outright falsehoods in text messages and then dismiss them as, "It was just a text message. It was just a hypothetical scenario."

He was making statements to other people he worked with and making specific claims about the kinds of conversations that happened inside the Deputy Prime Minister's office. The only logical explanation for Mr. Brennan's repeatedly making claims about having intimate knowledge of what was happening inside the Deputy Prime Minister's office is that he actually had such knowledge.

Needless to say, this whole ArriveCAN affair stinks. It demonstrates the broken procurement system that exists under this government, but it makes me extremely curious—and I think it will make the public extremely curious—about what is being covered up. What will we find when we can actually get to the bottom of what took place?

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

Mr. Jowhari, please, you have five minutes to finish up for us, sir.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Wow. What a great clip that's going to be.

Mr. Brennan, a number of times, you talked about hypothetical and speculative scenarios that you were working on with Botler to help them. You've already said you completed the work that you did for \$2,565.10, and there was this goodwill whereby you were trying to help this company. You worked on a number of hypothetical and speculative scenarios with them and the draft of that letter to the minister's office—however it was founded, whether it was through Botler or with direction from Botler—and to Mr. Firth.

Was there any expectation as part of this work that if and when a Botler AI solution was licensed and rolled out, you would somehow be compensated or you would have some type of compensation as part of that? Might that be the reason that there was an invoice of \$12,000 sent to the lawyers, as per your claim?

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: No. I'd actually discussed the opportunity of being part of the company when we first met with Botler, and that was not an option.

Again, the \$12,000 invoice was literally to address the extra work they were asking me to do.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay. That's perfect.

Can you now talk about the hypothetical and speculative...? Can you explain to us, for the next two minutes and 10 seconds...?

Give me a scenario of when you would use that terminology as it's relevant to the work you did for Botler.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Sure. We could go right into what the architecture is and how Botler could map what the federal government might be looking at doing.

The federal government is looking at a data strategy and a data artificial intelligence strategy. Botler is an AI company, so what would the scenarios be, if you were in hypotheticals, of what the federal government might standardize? The same way that the federal government has a standard HR application, how would it look

at mapping its data to that HR application? What would be the hypotheticals? What would be the speculatives, if you will, in the same way that any of those conversations we had in texts were all hypothetical and/or speculative?

It's part of the marketing process. As you learn, you know, "That's going to work. No, that's not going to work. That might work." So—

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I apologize for interrupting.

You had an understanding of Treasury Board strategies, specifically around AI and specifically around the organization structure process engineering, because those guys are the ones who set the guidelines.

You ran into Botler AI, and they said they had an application that made you feel, "I really want to be part of this." They said, "No, but help us. We'll pay you," and you said, "Fine." You then came back and said, "If you present the application or if you consider these functionalities within this application, it's very much aligned with what the government might be looking for."

If my understanding is wrong, just tell me I'm wrong. I don't have any problem with that.

You said, "As it relates to the data, if you amend your solution like this or if you enhance your solution like this, it's a better fit. If you incorporate these types of processes into your AI process around HR, it will be a better fit for that."

Those are the hypothetical and speculative situations that you are talking about. Am I right in understanding that?

• (1400)

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes. That's actually part of it, along with the conversations we had. Apparently, there are hundreds of them taped. A lot of those conversations were, again, speculative and/or hypothetical, based on where the government is and where Botler was and where they would want to go—

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Basically, you were trying to help them align their development with where the government was going to go, so that they would be successful in being able to launch that application or sell that application.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: Yes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: What you were talking about hypothetically and speculatively was very much the alignment of the potential future development of a solution to fit the government's need.

Mr. Vaughn Brennan: That's correct.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay.

I have only about seven seconds left, which I will yield.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

Unless anyone has anything else, we'll dismiss Mr. Brennan and adjourn....

Mr. Sousa, go ahead.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Before we adjourn, I just want to confirm: Are we doing in camera tomorrow, as requested by the president in her letter?

The Chair: No. It will be a public meeting tomorrow.

Mr. Charles Sousa: It's not in camera.

The Chair: No. It's public.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Okay.

The Chair: That's wonderful.

Colleagues, we are adjourned, so—

Yes, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Could you give us an update as well on the situation regarding the request for Mr. Firth to appear before the committee?

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Firth and Mr. Anthony were summoned to appear a second time, and for a second time they have stated the same reasoning

that was behind the first one. I think everyone received the letter. They wish not to appear. We'll have to discuss a step forward at a future meeting. A second summons was issued for them. Again, they are, I guess, refusing to appear for the same reasons as the first time, with identical reasoning.

I suspect we'll deal with that either tomorrow or when we're back on January 29.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, the bottom line is that these guys need to appear. I think the committee has been clear about that.

If they're watching, I mean—

The Chair: The committee has been clear. Twice the committee has asked them to be summoned, and again, twice they've used the identical reasoning behind their not appearing. We'll have to discuss next steps either tomorrow or when we're back in January. We are sitting on Mondays now, so I think it's January 29 that we're back. We will have to deal with it then.

If there's nothing else, colleagues, we are adjourned.

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