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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting 132 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Just as a reminder, please keep your headphones away from your microphones at all times. Try to leave them on the right-hand side of the circle.

We start with an opening statement by Mr. Mills or Mr. Laporte.

Mr. Mills, the floor is yours for five minutes. Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. Michael Mills (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Good morning, Chair.

Before I begin, I acknowledge that we are gathered today on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe Nation.

Joining me today are Catherine Poulin, assistant deputy minister for departmental oversight; Dominic Laporte, assistant deputy minister for procurement; and Kirk Albert, acting director of special investigations and internal disclosure.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to continue the discussion on the important issues around government contracting.

[English]

Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, is the federal government's central purchasing agent and, as such, procures goods and services on behalf of other departments and agencies when the value of their requirements are beyond their own contracting authority. PSPC is therefore responsible for the majority of federal contracting, but this is a collaborative relationship among departments and agencies, which are responsible for identifying what needs to be done, how it can be done and when it should be done. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of each department and agency to decide whether to seek expertise outside of the government instead of doing so by working in-house.

[Translation]

As the associate deputy minister of PSPC, I welcome the work of your committee and the findings of the Auditor General, the procurement ombud and others.

This work demonstrates that PSPC still has a long way to go to ensure that the procurement of information technology and business consulting services remains open, fair and transparent and that the processes are effectively administered.

[English]

PSPC is working with TBS to strengthen procurement, and here are some of what we are doing: implementing a government-wide requirement that departments explore whether internal resources can be used to perform the work required prior to initiating procurement processes; a new Treasury Board directive on the management of procurement to ensure managers are clear on their roles and responsibility in connecting with government contracting; communicating with departments on how we are strengthening procurement instruments; having a more robust challenge function on procurements; and implementing new mandatory procedures to ensure all contracting authorities retain contractual decisions on files, particularly for professional services contracts.

[Translation]

At PSPC, we're working to rethink the tools used for procurement. We're also working to move beyond national master standing offers. In the interim, we're taking steps to change how these non-competitive national master standing offers are administered. This includes making sure that justifications are on file and a challenge function is exercised whenever any federal department or agency wants to use these non-competitive instruments.

[English]

To this end, PSPC created a new dedicated position of chief of contract quality assurance and records compliance. This new function will ensure that critical elements of decision-making throughout the procurement process are properly documented. It will also focus on actively monitoring compliance with procurement policies, procedures and best practices.

To further safeguard the integrity of federal procurement, this spring PSPC launched the new office of supplier integrity and compliance, which allows the government to better respond to misconduct and wrongdoing.

[Translation]

As you can see, PSPC is working hard to modernize procurement in order to make it simpler, faster and digitally driven. The focus for all of us is on driving value through competition.

[English]

When our client departments need IT or professional services, we want to ensure that they have procurement processes that deliver the most capable resources at the best value. We are implementing actions to respond to the results of audits and reviews of procurement in order to improve procurement and ensure value for money for Canadians.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mills.

We start with Mr. Barrett for six minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Clara Visser, a government contractor, was recently charged for committing \$250,000 in fraud under your watch. Can you tell us what the name of her company is and for which projects she worked?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin (Assistant Deputy Minister, Departmental Oversight Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you for the question.

I don't have this information on hand. I don't know the name of her company or what contracts were used by Clara Elaine Visser.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: You don't know. None of the witnesses here today know the name of her company or the projects she worked on.

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Ms. Visser was awarded several contracts through several prime contractors on behalf of several federal government departments and agencies. However, I don't have the details of these contracts on hand today.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is that information you'll undertake to provide to the committee in writing?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: We can certainly check our records and see what we can provide for you in this regard.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: To be very clear, the name of the prime contractors, the name of her company and the projects she worked on is the information that we're looking for—and, of course, your department has those records. You said that you'll see what you're able to provide. Of course, PSPC is able to provide the name of prime subcontractors and the contracts they work on. Is that not correct?

• (1110)

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Yes, exactly. We'll check our records and send you the necessary information.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes, I must say it's disappointing that you come to the government operations committee today not equipped with information that, of course, is in the public interest and would be relevant to questions we would ask. It doesn't speak to transparency. We find ourselves in this place only by virtue of answers being demanded by Conservatives at committee.

Are you able to tell us how many more cases of fraud—the number, aside from Ms. Visser—have been reported to the RCMP?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Thank you for the question

As our minister announced in March, three cases of fraudulent overbilling were referred to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Does that include Ms. Visser?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Thank you for the question.

These cases don't include Ms. Visser's case, which was referred to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in fiscal year 2022-23. This was the first case of fraudulent overbilling that we referred to the RCMP. In 2023-24, we referred three new cases to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. These three cases were announced by the minister in March.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: In addition to Ms. Visser, is there a number greater than zero of cases that were referred to the RCMP before this spring? Answer yes or no, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Sorry, but I must ask you to repeat your question. I didn't quite understand the nature of the question.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: How many cases, other than Ms. Visser's, were referred to the RCMP before this year? There were three this year and Ms. Visser's case in a previous fiscal year. How many others were there in addition to that? A number...

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: There weren't any other cases. The first case of fraudulent overbilling referred to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was Clara Elaine Visser's case. We then referred three new cases to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 2023-24.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Have the RCMP contacted PSPC regarding criminal investigations of consultants that were not referred to them by you, investigations they initiated on their own or were initiated by complaints from other sources?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Thank you for the question.

As far as I know, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police hasn't contacted us about the cases referred to in your question.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: How much money is suspected by your department as having been given out to fraudsters or been the subject of fraud? You say there are three other cases. What's the total value of the suspected fraud?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Thank you for the question.

It would be difficult for me to establish an estimated amount of fraud. As we know, the nature of fraud is to remain hidden and to avoid detection. Without looking at each case individually, it's extremely difficult. I know that international and other government organizations say that fraud could account for 0.5% to 5% of spending. However, I could only establish the amount of fraud on a completely hypothetical basis.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Which departments are affected by the cases that were referred to the RCMP?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Thank you for the question.

First, no department is immune to this type of fraud. That said, I think that we heard that 36 departments and agencies were affected—

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm sorry, Chair.

I'm looking for the specifics of those departments. You say there are 36. Can you provide the list of the 36 to the committee?

The minister said that the cases total around \$5 million. Is that the right number?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: Yes. That's a good estimate.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: We're getting a little more specific: It's \$5 million. I'm sure there's information to support that. Can you provide that in writing to the committee, the estimate that's been compiled? Initially you said it would be difficult. The minister found it less difficult. That information was gathered for him by you and your colleagues, and I'd like to get specifics of that. It's about \$5 million. You say it's across 36 departments. I'd like a list of the departments and the estimates that correlate to each department. Are you able to do that for us, please?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Poulin: We'll check our records to see what we can do. We'll send you as much information as we can.

• (1115)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just as a reminder, I'm sure you're aware that this committee passed a motion that we require any requested responses within a three-week period.

Mr. Jowhari, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good to be back.

I move that we resume debate on Mr. Green's motion regarding summer meetings, and I'd like to go on the list for speaking.

The Chair: Hold on. Just give me two seconds.

Thanks for your patience, everyone. Normally we'd go right to a vote on this. However, upon consultation, I'm ruling such out of order because we are already in summer. It's an invalid motion now because we are already in summer.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Chair, on your ruling on the vote, I challenge the chair.

The Chair: You're challenging my ruling that it is out of order. Now we can go to a vote.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 4)

The Chair: I am overruled, so we will now vote on resuming Mr. Green's motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: Annette Verschuren Thanks.

Before we resume, I'm going to suspend for about a minute so I can send out a copy of that motion so everyone has it. Just bear with us for a minute.

In the meantime, though, I had a speaking list. I had Mr. Jowhari. I saw Mr. Sousa. Was there anyone else from Zoom?

All right, we're going to suspend for a few minutes so we can have the clerks find that motion and send it out to everyone.

• (1120)

(Pause)

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you for your patience, everyone.

Our clerk has sent out the motion in both official languages, so everyone should have it.

Go ahead, Mr. Jowhari. The floor is yours.

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

I want to open by saying that we came here prepared. We came here prepared to discuss the outsourcing of contracts. It is something that was actually put on the list back in February 2022 and hasn't gone anywhere. It's good that we're actually getting back to some business at OGGO. It is a relevant topic. This is something that all the departments have been actively working on, and there are a lot of good stories as far as what the government is doing and what the departments have been successful in doing.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Mills talked about all the initiatives the government has done to ensure that not only do they review, but also that they put new policies in place, so that we are ready to have that conversation. Yet we see our colleagues open up by wanting to do a deep dive on a case that's in front of the RCMP, and they're trying to prosecute this case as it has already been publicized on social media even before this meeting.

On that note, we would like to say that if it were about this, we would have engaged. However, now that we're going down the path of playing the partisan game, no, we're going to take the approach of having no meetings, unless there is an emergency, for the summer. This is a path that's available to us, and this is the path that we're choosing to take.

Had we not gone down that road and not taken that approach... As as you can see, we provided the list of all the speakers and we are all ready to engage on that, and we would have engaged, but not now.

On that note, I yield the floor back to you, Chair. Those are the points I wanted to make: that we are ready to engage, but not if it's partisan, not during the summer and not for non-emergencies and the case that's in front of the RCMP.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sousa, the floor is yours.

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

As was mentioned in that motion before we recessed for the summer, it was clear that the will of the committee should prevail and an opportunity for its will to prevail wasn't allowed or provided for. It has not been the case.

We've had a number of motions put before this committee to try to provide better decorum and some fairness in terms of how we proceed, so I support this motion, and I think some others do as well.

I say that we should move to vote on this issue, and let's stop being judge, jury and executioner on some of these other files. I understand the publicity, but there are motions, and there are activities taking place to manage that process already. In this case, I'd rather that we do our work in the constituencies, where I am right now, and where I believe others should be as well.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Barrett, Mr. Brock and then Mr. Julian.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead, sir.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm not surprised, of course, Chair, that Liberal members of the committee want to try to cover up the corruption, failures and fraud that have run rampant after nine years of their government. Here we have departmental officials in front of us. We have matters that have been referred to the RCMP. But like so many of the examples with respect to procurement, what Liberal members want is commercials about how well everything is going. They don't want any accountability. We heard that about the arrive scam app. It was supposed to cost \$80,000. It cost many orders of magnitude more than that. They tried to thwart and shut down investigations at absolutely every single turn.

We found out, of course, that it cost \$54 million, and that the contractors who worked on it have had their front doors kicked in by the RCMP. We know now that it has been just the very top layer of the onion that is this Liberal government. After nine years of Justin Trudeau, all they can do is try to shut down these basic tools for accountability that we have. While I know it brings them great pain to step away from their back deck and their swimming pool, we have important work to do on behalf of Canadians.

I know for a certainty that folks in my community, and I know for a certainty that folks in ridings across this country, 338 ridings, want accountability for this corrupt Liberal government. That's what they want. They want it in the summer, not just when Liberal MPs feel like it or will tolerate questions from the public. We have these officials here today. I have questions prepared for the officials. They're not allowed to answer our questions during this motion that's been put forward, which is a tactic to shut down accountability. It's increased, as we've uncovered more corruption and more examples of the cover-ups that the Liberals have tried to perpetrate.

On my questions, it's so interesting that they find them political. How many cases of fraud have been referred to the RCMP? There's nothing political about that. Canadians have a right to know. They have an interest in knowing the volume of fraud that is being perpetrated on the government. Canadians are lined up at food banks in record numbers. They're struggling to get by and are teetering on the brink of insolvency in record numbers. What they see is contractors like the grifters at GC Strategies who were banking tens of millions of dollars and doing no IT work on IT contracts. We've learned that it's just the tip of the iceberg, with ghost contracting and double billing. But these guys were adding no value.

We know now that there are contractors who were employees of the federal government, this Liberal federal government, who were being used as subcontractors because, we were told, the government didn't have the capability in-house to do it. Well, by virtue of the person working for the government, we know that they have the capability in-house to do it.

Have the RCMP contacted the Trudeau Liberal government regarding criminal investigations into consultants that were not referred by the government to the RCMP? I fail to see how that's a political question. The Liberals don't want that accountability. They don't want that spotlight on the corruption they're presiding over or on the insiders lining their pockets while Canadians struggle.

How many billions of taxpayer dollars does the Liberal government spend on high-priced consultants every year? That would be the question I would address to Mr. Mills, who's in front of the committee today. He's not allowed to answer, because the Liberals are shutting down the questioning of these witnesses. The amount is more than \$20 billion dollars.

• (1130)

I could ask for precision from Ms. Poulin, who talked about the percentage of fraud on total contracting, and for her to extrapolate what the forecast would be for opportunity for fraud or suspected fraud within the federal government, but I can't ask because the Liberals are blocking us from asking questions. They're using procedural shenanigans to stop us from getting accountability for Canadians.

Ms. Clara Visser is one of these consultants who were charged for fraudulent billing. We know that there are another three who were referred to the RCMP.

Canadians want to know how many more of these fraudsters and scammers are stealing Canadian tax dollars. Canadians see half their paycheques vaporized by government, and they don't know how much of the money, the taxes that are collected from Canadians, is going to cases of fraud and corruption, with fraudsters as the beneficiaries.

How many government employees, Mr. Mills, are employed as consultants? Well, he can't answer me because of the procedural shenanigans by the Liberals. We want to know how many government employees are employed as consultants, and we have the taxpayer paying twice to get the service one time.

I fail to see what's political about that except that a corrupt, tired government, after nine years, is terrified of the accountability, of Conservatives holding up a spotlight on the corruption they presided over. If the claim by the Liberals is that, "Well, you know, we're going to let the process unfold," we know that they voted against having the Auditor General investigate their arrive scam. We know that. We know they try to block these. They're on the record. The Prime Minister, the cabinet and the Liberal members of this committee voted against having the Auditor General investigate, so what interest would they have in Canadians not knowing about fraud and corruption? Well, it's because they're their buddies. These are Liberal insiders and grifters who are dining out and lining their pockets while Canadians are lined up at food banks. That's why they're blocking it.

On double-dipping, my question to our witnesses is that, in an industry that's growing under this government, there were 79 cases last year and 84 cases this year of double-dipping, people getting paid by the government and getting paid by the government to be contractors. How many of them are in a conflict of interest?

I hope that the witnesses we have today will take the opportunity to take good note of my questions because I maintain curiosity for myself and on behalf of Canadians looking for answers, and although you won't be formally asked by the committee to provide those answers, you of course could furnish those in writing, through the clerk to the committee, because Canadians want to know.

Fifty per cent of consultants are in conflict. Do we know whether any of the government employees who are double-dipping are also suspected of any of the fraud or corruption beyond their conflicts of interest? We have some who are in a conflict—that's been established. Have we established whether there is also suspected fraud? Have they been cleared of allegations of fraud and corruption in those cases in which conflicts of interest were identified?

• (1135)

That's an important precision for Canadians. We have an appearance of a conflict. Okay. We have an actual conflict. Okay. Is it criminal in nature? Is there alleged or suspected criminality? Canadians want to know. It's not partisan. That's not partisan. That's what we're supposed to do here at the Standing Committee on Government Operations. That's the purpose of our role as parliamentarians 12 months of the year, including in July.

We know that on the list of consulting companies PSPC has created, many of them don't execute the function. They don't perform the work under the contract they've received, like GC Strategies. Some have just two employees. Five of those examples are Solutions Moerae Inc., with two employees and \$78 million in contracts; Messa Computing Incorporated, with one associated member and \$34 million in contracts; Mobile Resources Group, with one associated member and \$28 million in contracts; Access Corporate Technologies Incorporated, with two associated members and \$9 million in contracts; and Hackett Consulting Incorporated, with one associate member and \$8 million in contracts.

The Liberals say that talking about this is political. Why? Are they connected to the Liberal Party? Are they connected to Liberal ministers? Are they connected to Liberal members of Parliament? Is that why it's political? My questions to officials aren't about Justin Trudeau unless he's connected to those companies, which is, I guess, the contention of the Liberals who are blocking us from asking these questions of the officials who are seated at the table in front of us.

What value did Canadians get from Solutions Moerae Inc. for \$78 million? That's my question. What value did Canadians get from Messa Computing Incorporated for \$34 million? What value did Canadians get from Mobile Resources Group for \$28 million? What value did Canadians get from Access Corporate Technologies Incorporated for \$9 million? What value did Canadians get from Hackett Consulting Incorporated for \$8 million? Without officials being able to answer, having the officials muzzled by the Liberal MPs, we're just left to speculate on the value or the reasons for these contracts having been awarded. Is it because the PSPC minister directed that these companies be awarded these contracts? Are there connections between the Liberal Party and these companies? Is that why the Liberals are muzzling the officials who are before the committee today? We don't know, because the Liberals are blocking us from asking the questions.

We could suppose that there are individuals who are perpetrating fraud on the government, which is not delivering and not executing on its fiduciary responsibility to protect Canadians' tax dollars and not doing its job. We have grifters and fraudsters and scammers who are taking advantage. If the charge of the Liberal members is that this is too political, well, is it because you feel responsible for it?

• (1140)

The Liberal government is responsible for its failures. It is responsible for allowing the grifting and the fraud to run rampant.

I'd like to know from our witnesses today if high-priced consulting middlemen are still being used throughout the government. Has the minister done his job to stop the racket from continuing?

If the answer were yes, the Liberals would, of course, want this questioning to go ahead. They'd want the officials to say, "Of course, the minister has taken strong action."

However, we're now left to see that they're muzzling the departmental officials.

Is it not true that at this very minute there are middlemen, like GC Strategies, just soaking Canadian taxpayers and more examples of people like Clara Visser who are perpetrating fraud on the government and picking Canadians' pockets?

Maybe the minister doesn't know, so I would, of course, ask if the minister has been briefed on the value Canadians are getting for the hundreds of millions spent on the middlemen who do no actual work. Was the minister briefed? What was the date? Did the minister request it, or was it offered by the DM or the ADM? If the minister didn't request it, or if the minister wasn't briefed, I would propose that perhaps we hear from the minister as to why they didn't take an interest.

It's very interesting that, instead of basic accountability, the Liberals immediately see this as a political crisis. I think it's very telling that they see this as a political crisis. Is it because they can't handle any more crises? We know that they're refusing...the Prime Minister is refusing to even meet with his Liberal caucus, but I don't expect it's because they're concerned about these issues, or they'd have the opportunity today to ask officials questions and show their constituents that they're concerned about the cost of liv-

ing crisis after nine years of Justin Trudeau and his inflationary spending. They're collecting more in taxes...they've raised taxes on the middle class, which they've been very effective at shrinking—the middle class, not the taxes. The taxes grow; the middle class shrinks. Are Canadians getting more services for it? What has been the increased benefit to Canadians for the \$20 billion?

We know what the increased benefit has been for the likes of Kristian Firth and GC Strategies. We know what it's like for the scammers and the fraudsters who are stealing from Canadians. We know what the benefit is for them. No one was holding them accountable.

Imagine the delight and the joy on the faces of the grifters and the thieves who have been perpetrating and carrying out their crimes against Canadians and stealing thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions and tens of millions of dollars in individual cases. Then, in many of those cases, we find out that in the government operations committee—don't worry—they're going to stop asking the hard questions that have produced action from a government that was caught completely flat-footed and completely unaware and, in the best case, that they just didn't understand that they needed to protect Canadian taxpayers.

• (1145)

The worst case is that they're complicit, connected and more worried about the consulting class than they are about Canadians, who work incredibly hard and see their earnings vapourized by inflation and their paycheques more than halved by taxes.

What a gift the Liberals are giving to the corrupt by attempting to stop accountability. You can picture it: They have their countdown clock to each break in parliamentary proceedings, "Well, the House isn't sitting upstairs, so there's no way committees can meet." Of course committees can meet. My constituents are well represented if I'm in Ottawa for four hours. Does it mean I might need to pack a few more meetings into another day? Absolutely, but when I see them, I don't hear from any of them that, "You know, you guys have too many committee meetings in Ottawa. It seems like it's getting a little too political down there, you asking for answers about all of that money that's hemorrhaging out of Justin Trudeau's Ottawa." Do you know what? That's not something I hear from people.

I hear that they're struggling and want change: They want change by this government and they want a change from this government. They want a new government, but in the meantime they expect that, after what was a devastating loss for the Liberals in Toronto—St. Paul's, losing a safe seat in Toronto, they would see some kind of change in terms of their posture and approach, and that they'd take Canadians' concerns seriously.

I don't know if you heard, Chair, that there was a cabinet shuffle last week—real change from a government that promised real change, a really innovative change. Just like shuffling chairs on the *Titanic*, they moved one guy from over here to over there. When one of their ministers decided to flee the sinking ship, they moved another guy, who was already in cabinet, into that spot—real change.

I don't think they got the message, Canada, because here we are today, talking about fraud, conflicts of interest, waste, scandal and mismanagement, and instead of asking a single question of officials, what's the very first thing the Liberals do? They want to pass a motion to block all meetings in the summer. That tells you everything you need to know about a government that, after nine years, can't even calculate the waste.

We have officials at the table. It's addressing corruption, and they said that, "Oh, it's political that we want to talk about it." I haven't heard anything mentioned that's not about accountability for the government.

I fail to see what those Liberal members could be doing that they can't spare two hours. The majority of them are joining virtually, so they're still in their constituencies. They can have a meeting immediately before and after with constituents, but if they're busy it doesn't need to be a regular member of the committee. All members of the House are associate members of this committee and can be brought in as substitutes.

● (1150)

I'm a sometimes regular and sometimes associate member of this committee. The work is very important. Ms. Block, Mr. Brock and I are participating in the meeting today, but many other colleagues are very interested. They offered to make themselves available for the meeting, because they're hearing the same things we're hearing. They're hearing from their constituents and from Canadians when they're visiting other communities that they're concerned about affordability. They're concerned that after nine years, this Liberal government seems completely unconcerned with their plight. These Liberals are very comfortable with \$20 billion going out the door to consultants in a year and having nothing to show for it.

When we dig into and peel off just the first layer, we immediately start to find fraud and corruption. We're seeing that there are entities and individuals in the private sector who are carrying out this fraud and corruption. The government has been investigating and suspending employees now that we've turned up the heat. They were taking no action on it.

It's just like the billion-dollar green slush fund that they didn't want to talk about. There was going to be a consulting report about that. It was all good. They were going to handle it. We pressed on that Liberal government. We demanded accountability. What did we find? The chair, another appointee, is now under investigation for conflicts of interest. The Auditor General's report was damning. All of the Liberals voted against it, which is damning. They ultimately had to shut down Sustainable Development Technology Canada because it was so corrupt. I think more than 180 conflicts of interest were found. They had directors in the room, which the Liberals were fine with, who were voting on giving their own com-

panies money. They said, oh, they talked to their lawyers and they said there was no conflict, so there was no conflict.

I know that Canadians don't see it that way. It took incredible pressure, incredible pressure, and we had to drag them kicking and screaming every step of the way. We've gotten part of the way there. We're achieving some accountability. We're getting some answers. We're going to need to get Canadians their money back, because that's an important part of this too.

I think that's one of the main messages that should come out of this. The Liberals are prepared to disengage from the accountability mechanisms. Conservatives are taking a very common-sense approach, that if you steal from Canadians, you will be caught. We will get the money back. You ought to be jailed. That's not something we can control. We'll refer the matters to the police. The police can refer to the Crown. The Crown can take it to court.

● (1155)

What can we do? We can root out the corruption and get the money back. Why is it that the Liberals don't want to get the money back? Who got the money? Who got Canadians' money that these Liberals don't want to get back? Is it because they know them? Is it because they're Liberal insiders? We could ask the officials some questions, but the Liberal procedural shenanigans are blocking that from happening.

Public servants are working as consultants and consultant contractors with the government, and we know that it's a growing industry. It's a growth industry for bureaucrats who choose to engage in it and ticked up to 84 identified cases in 2023-24, and we know that half of them were in a real or apparent conflict of interest.

Alinea International is an international development consultancy providing "technical and management expertise". They've received \$14 million in government contracts since 2016.

Think Digital is a digital consulting firm that has received nearly \$400,000 in government contracts. One of their employees was a candidate for the Liberal Party of Canada in the 2019 election. Ah—now we're onto trouble. Is that why the Liberals are doing their procedural shenanigans today? Is it to stop us from asking questions and make sure that their failed candidates and buddies are getting their \$400,000 in government contracts?

Canadian Equality Consulting Inc. specializes in diversity and inclusion consulting and has gotten more than half a million dollars in government contracts since 2021.

H2 Analytics, intelligence and defence consultants who help “decision makers turn information into intelligence”, got \$2.4 million. If they work for the government, why is the government paying them a salary, benefits and pension contributions and then also paying them consulting fees worth millions of dollars? That doesn't make sense. It doesn't make any sense at all. Why are we allowing that to happen?

I know that when we passed a motion about banning the practice of double-dipping, we had, I think, national defence who said that they were fine. After a parliamentary committee passed a motion condemning the practice, we had a department say, “No, we think it's fine.” That's the contempt that this Trudeau government has for Canadians: Even when elected officials condemn a practice, a department says, “No, we're good with that. We think it makes good sense to pay government employees with contracts as well to get them paid twice.”

It's absurd. Is that what is political that the Liberals don't want to talk about? Is it the absurdity of the policies that they've not just presided over but that they have departments promoting and saying they're going to keep doing them? They think it makes sense to hire someone because they're the best person for the job and then to hire them as a consultant because they're the best person for the job. How is it possible that they're both the best consultant and the best employee, and they're getting paid twice? Shouldn't we be using that person's expertise in-house? We hear all the time that we need these outside contractors because we don't have the in-house expertise.

● (1200)

All those middlemen companies, billing what amounts to hundreds of millions of dollars, are not adding any value; Google and LinkedIn, maybe. Or maybe—maybe—we have departmental officials telling companies like KPMG that if they want to get the contract, they have to be a subcontractor to a two-person outfit with a couple of jokers working out of a basement who are just marking everything up 30%. It's not added value. It's not bringing in any expertise. It's incredibly expensive.

It's certainly not like the government is presiding over financial management that sees us in some kind of boom time. They've spent more money and racked up more debt than all governments before them combined. That's their legacy. They'll often brag that no one has spent more on housing—and gotten worse results; that's the part they're leaving out. No one has ever spent so much to achieve so little. I guess that would have to be the Liberal campaign slogan. That's why we haven't had an election, to say nothing of the lack of confidence Canadians have in them.

I get asked very often—very often—if it's frustrating or disheartening to see what's happening here. It is absolutely frustrating. It is disappointing when you see Liberal members of Parliament willing to shut down a key accountability mechanism that we have here, a tool to use on behalf of Canadians. That's disappointing. It is disheartening. But I have great heart and hope for our country, because in spite of the challenges that have been foisted upon them by Justin Trudeau's Liberal government, they continue to work hard. They will persevere. They know that, because life wasn't like this

before Justin Trudeau and it won't be like this after he and his government are gone.

It's deplorable, Mr. Chair, to have Liberal MPs come here and say that it's not important to get accountability for Canadians and that it's too political. I'm sure it's too damaging politically for their government, but we're not going to abide by that and let them say that they're awfully busy. Well, get busy with the right things. For these meetings they don't even need to leave their constituencies. It's two hours. Ask some officials some questions. Do the work. This is the work. This is part of the job.

So of course I don't support the motion in this form, Chair. I have more questions for officials. If this is going to get shut down, I will speak again to at least advise the officials of what my questions are for them and give them the opportunity to get back to us with some of those answers, because Canadians deserve the accountability. When I talk to them, when I hear from them, they're demanding accountability. That's the function that we're providing for them.

I'm interested to hear what some of my colleagues have to say about this, but if this meeting is not going to go forward with questioning officials, I'll have more questions to pose to the officials, even if the Liberals are going to block the bureaucrats from answering them.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Brock, you're up next.

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

I have much to say, but I start by offering my sincerest apologies to Mr. Laporte, Mr. Mills, Mr. Albert and Madame Poulin for this shameful display of a cover-up, between the Liberal government and the NDP coalition partners, because we're all here to do a job. You all have jobs to do when you get back to your respective offices. We are taking you away from your respective offices and the good work that you do day in and day out, and it's no different for politicians. As parliamentarians, we're parliamentarians all year long. We're not parliamentarians when the House is sitting. We don't take a three- to four-month break and not worry about our responsibilities to Canada and to address ongoing issues that are of a prevalent concern in Canada, which is the issue with respect to the fraudulent billing and the broken procurement system we have in this country, which allowed fraudsters and grifters to take advantage of a broken system that didn't provide the appropriate oversight.

The Liberal government, and the members on this Liberal committee with their NDP partners, don't want to get to the truth. When I say we're parliamentarians for the entire year, that's exactly it. As my colleague Michael Barrett articulated, members of my community in Brantford—Brant, my constituency, know that I have to work year-round, and work from time to time and for extended periods of time in Ottawa in addition to my responsibilities to my community. In essence, parliamentarians can walk and chew gum at the same time. As my colleague indicated, 90% of the Liberal members of this committee and the NDP member are not physically here in Ottawa. They're taking advantage of what Parliament has allowed, in terms of a hybrid format, to do just that—walk and chew gum at the same time—to take meetings before and after.

I too had an extremely busy day today and a very busy day tomorrow, but do you know what? We all have incredible staff and we can reschedule meetings. When I tell my constituents, "I'm here fighting for you, to be your voice, to ask the tough questions," they want me to do my job. They don't want to see me flipping hamburgers, stuffing a hotdog or handing out balloons and other trinkets to children. They expect me to do my job as a parliamentarian. When I have the ability to spend time in my constituency, I do that, all while balancing a family life. I'm the proud parent of twin daughters at 15 years of age. I can tell you, that's quite challenging.

It really angers me...and for you, witnesses, this isn't your first rodeo. You've all been either party to or heard how many of your colleagues across a number of departments prepared and attended in person—even though you have the ability to appear virtually as well—and, after working hard on and giving opening statements, got one round in from the Conservatives, only to be met by gamesmanship by the Liberal bench, supported by their NDP colleagues.

• (1210)

For me, it has happened at least a dozen times since January 1. In my view, it is so disrespectful to you as professionals. That's why I offer my sincerest apology.

However, should we be surprised? Where there's controversy, there is risk. The government clearly knows they're not currying any favour with Canadians. Depending on the poll, they're at least 20 points down and have a leader who refuses to smell the coffee and realize he is the most disliked Prime Minister in the history of this country and who is completely tone deaf to the reality and tone deaf to his own caucus, who quietly and quite often publicly voice their displeasure with his leadership. They will take cues from a failed leader as a Prime Minister. They'll take cues from a Prime Minister's Office who loves to control and mitigate the damage.

We've been exposing the damage of this issue every single week at government operations. That's the mandate of government operations: to take a look at problems, to identify those problems, to get the full picture and to look for solutions so the problem can be resolved in the future. If these members view that to be political or acting as a prosecutor, as Mr. Sousa has often indicated from time to time.... "We're being too prosecutorial. Mr. Brock, you've given up your former career as a crown prosecutor. You're a parliamentarian now. It's time to be nice and throw the softball questions to witnesses."

That's not our job. Our job is to ask the tough questions and get the answers to what Canadians are asking.

We talk about political gamesmanship, and that is exactly what happened today, because there are a lot of problems with this issue that need to be explored.

We all remember the famous slogan that Justin Trudeau used in 2015: "Sunny ways", Canadians, "sunny ways". He even then wrote an open letter to Canadians, and I'm going to read various passages of that letter. It was dated November 4, 2015, and it starts off with "My dear friends"—

• (1215)

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There's a point of order, Mr. Brock.

Yes, Mr. Jowhari, please go ahead.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: First of all, I want to thank you for the latitude you've shown for the spectrum of conversation that we're having, and I also want to thank all of my colleagues for their patience. However, I'm not sure...any Canadian can now see exactly why we call this "a meeting of politicization" more than anything else.

The Chair: What's the point of order, please?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Having said that, I'm looking for the relevance of referring to byelections and referring to...you know, it's all about, too, the fact of the motion we are debating.

What's the relevance?

The Chair: I do find it relevant, but we do always offer a very wide berth for such debate. The motion put forward, because it's not very specific, allows an extremely wide area to debate.

Continue, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: Partway through this open letter to Canadians, the Prime Minister says the following:

Our country faces many real and immediate challenges—from a struggling middle class to the threat of climate change. If we are to overcome these obstacles, Canadians need to have faith in their government's honesty and willingness to listen. That is why we committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in Ottawa. Government and its information must be open by default. Simply put, it is time to shine more light on government to make sure it remains focused on the people it was created to serve—you.

But in order for you to trust your government, you need a government that will trust you. When we make a mistake—as all governments do—it is important that we acknowledge that mistake and learn from it. We know that you do not expect us to be perfect—but you expect us to work tirelessly, and to be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest.

Before the election, we also made a commitment to bring new leadership and a new tone to Ottawa. Moving forward, we will pursue our goals and objectives with a renewed sense of collaboration. We fully understand and appreciate that partnerships with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments are vital to deliver the real, positive change that we promised you.

To close, I am deeply grateful to have this opportunity to serve you—and every Canadian across our great country. I am committed to leading an open, honest government that is accountable to Canadians—

—let me repeat, “accountable to Canadians”—

—lives up to the highest ethical standards, brings our country together, and applies the utmost care and prudence in the handling of public funds.

Thank you for having faith in me. Thank you for putting your trust in our team.

We will not let you down.

What an absolute joke, an absolute lie. We're talking about fraud in this committee. In my respectful opinion, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed the biggest fraud on this country and Canadians. Everything I read out in the record, he has done the complete opposite. Take that last line about applying “the utmost care and prudence in the handling of public funds”. Would we be in the mess we are right now, would we have the amount of public debt we have now, if he actually, for one minute, had respect for one dollar of taxpayer money? Would we be spending over \$21 billion on outside consultants and contractors with no oversight?

Would we be in the situation where we've expanded our federal public service by 40%, increasing salaries substantially? Have Canadians looked at their level of service across this country and said, “Wow, I've received 40% more in value of services”? I think if all four of you, and Canadians who are watching this right now on my social media, were to contact my staff in my constituency office, they spend all day long either on hold with various departments or dealing with issues that should be handled by our professional public service.

● (1220)

They have very little time to do anything other than government work. I am sure I am not alone in that assessment. I'm sure this is not just a Conservative issue. I'm sure my Bloc friend and colleague, Madame Vignola, would probably concur with me, because I've been talking to various MPs from across this country who are facing the very same thing. I'm sure every constituency of the Liberal bench and the NDP member who is appearing virtually also have similar stories, because that's what's happening. We are not getting value for our tax dollars.

I hear that daily from constituents. I hear that daily from Canadians from coast to coast to coast on my social media. They applaud me daily for my diligence in asking the tough questions. I have often said, “You know, you can take the prosecutor out of the courtroom, but you can't take the prosecutor out of the politician.” It's a strategy and it is a method that I've honed and developed for 30 years. I know that when I ask a question based on that response, there might be another 10 questions I'm going to have to ask. It's like peeling that proverbial onion, and I know that various journalists from across this country have remarked, in my view, very correctly that the rot in this government that this committee and other committees are exposing is just the tip of the iceberg. We have a mandate as parliamentarians and as proud members of the mighty OGGO to ask those tough questions.

This is not political gamesmanship, as Mr. Jowhari has remarked on a number of occasions. It's not acting as a prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner, as Mr. Sousa often remarks. It's asking the questions that Canadians have been asking us. I can only speak for myself and my Conservative colleagues, and I dare say I will probably speak for Ms. Vignola: We take our responsibility as parliamentarians extremely seriously. Our role is to listen, to advocate and to seek solutions. The Liberal government bench doesn't want anything to do with it. I made the time to be here as did other members who are physically appearing here. Mr. Jowhari, I had great faith. I saw Mr. Jowhari when I walked into this room. I said, “Great. We actually may complete a two-hour meeting here in the summer.” How disappointing it was to hear, the moment he got the floor, that he wanted to shut this down and prevent any further summer meetings.

Just like Mr. Barrett, I wanted to ask some very relevant and pertinent questions that I think Canadians wanted to hear me ask, and Canadians wanted to hear from you, the officials, as to your thoughts on this. I know my colleague Mr. Barrett mentioned whether or not there was a fear among the Liberal members on this bench that some of the questions we would be putting to you would expose political bias. I'm going to give you an example of what I feel they wanted to shut down. The nice thing about this is I've got the floor, and Mr. Jowhari, all the Liberal members on this committee and Mr. Julian can't shut me down, because there is relevance to what I'm about to put to you.

● (1225)

There's a company called Think Digital. I don't know if all four of you are familiar with it. I'm not expecting an answer, of course. Think Digital is a consulting and coaching firm. Think Digital has received nearly \$400,000 in government contracts over the past two years. Nearly half of the contracts they received were sole-sourced. Two contracts were awarded by PSPC.

I'll leave aside the discussion of sole-sourcing, because that literally could take on a life of its own. We know that there are rules that allow sole-sourcing, but we also know, through various reports from the AG and the procurement ombud, that there were serious, serious violations of those rules to allow Liberal-friendly consultants and contractors to receive government funds. A classic example of that was GC Strategies.

Now, maybe this is what they didn't want you to answer: There are Liberal Party of Canada links to Think Digital—surprise, surprise. The CEO of that company, Ryan Androsoff, is a Liberal Party activist and donor to the Liberal Party of Canada. A consultant of Think Digital, Winter Fedyk, made 78 donations to the Liberal Party of Canada and was the Liberal candidate in Regina—Lewvan in 2019. She is listed as a 2023 mentor on the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation website. Trudeau minister Terry Beech appeared on the consulting firm's podcast just three months ago.

Now, on the surface there are red flags galore. You don't have to be a Conservative opposition MP, for the Canadians who are watching this, to ask the big question, "What the hell is going on; do you need to have Liberal ties to secure hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayer money?" On the surface, it certainly sounds that way, doesn't it?

I would be putting a number of questions to the PSPC. Is there a process? Does the government vet and screen for Liberal Party links before handing out \$400,000 in taxpayer money? Does it raise any alarm bells, or the red flags I referenced, that the CEO is a Liberal activist? Does it raise any alarm bells that one of the current employees ran for the Liberal Party and made donations? We already know about the Liberal-friendly linked firm like McKinsey receiving over \$200 million since Justin Trudeau took office. Has Minister Duclos asked for a review of firms receiving government contracts that have direct ties to the Liberal Party of Canada?

If you responded, "I'm not aware", or "No", I would be asking you if you would be willing to commit to undertaking such a review.

I guess the big question that's on my mind and Mr. Barrett's, and I'm sure on Ms. Vignola's and Canadians', is this: What value did Canadians receive in these contracts? We have two million Canadians using a food bank every month. I attended my own local food bank not too long ago. I was shocked to hear the statistics about the number of people in my community using food banks. Surprisingly, people using it out of necessity were the very same individuals who had once donated. They had once donated when food prices were under control, when we didn't have runaway inflation and when we didn't have the punitive carbon tax that is making life so unaffordable for everyone in my community and in communities across this country.

• (1230)

This is the unfortunate legacy of Justin Trudeau's Liberal government.

Rent prices are out of control. Bank economists are warning about mortgage defaults coming. There are tent cities right across Canada. We have \$400,000 to a Liberal friendly company; contracts, half of which were sole-sourced; and a failed Liberal candidate who then gets rewarded at the taxpayers expense. How is that delivering value as per Justin Trudeau's promise in 2015? He lied repeatedly over the last nine years as to how he is delivering for Canadians. It's a mockery of the intelligence of Canadians who now see through this government's jargon, bullet points, talking points and appearances in front of cameras. We often say this government gets an "A" in big, flashy announcements with all kinds of constituents or Canadians behind them, but an "F" for follow-up and for delivering.

We have significant issues with the \$10-a-day day care program that is supposed to be benefiting all Canadians from coast to coast. Tell that to families in my community who are on wait lists. Tell that to families in the county of my constituency who don't have access to transportation. Tell them to take one of those \$10-a-day day care spots.

Let's talk about the problems with the dental care program. Every time we bring up the reality of what Canadians are facing day after day after day, what do we hear from the government?

Take, for example, our Deputy Prime Minister and finance minister Chrystia Freeland, who says that Canada has a AAA credit rating. You tell that to the single mother in my riding who is deciding to go without feeding herself to ensure that she puts food on the table for her children and who goes to Goodwill or the Salvation Army and, through the generosity of other neighbours, picks up some used clothing. She's able to buy clothing, barely, for her children. Do you think when she's struggling at the cashier... We all know spending \$100 on groceries today might net you one to two bags, most likely one bag. Do you think, when she's struggling to pay for those groceries, she has Chrystia Freeland ringing in her ears? "I should be proud that, as a nation, we have a AAA credit rating." It's tone deaf.

We've been raising these issues with the government every single day in the House. When we're not sitting in the House, we are raising those issues on our social media channels. The government refuses to listen.

The Liberal bench and the NDP bench say, "We've never had it so good as a nation. Trust us."

Do you know what? I have been in Mr. Sousa's riding. I have been in Mr. Jowhari's riding. I have not been in Mr. McDonald's riding, but I look forward to that opportunity. I've been in Windsor as well, and I've talked to those constituents. They are not immune, and they're not living in silos because they have a Liberal member. They are feeling and facing the same dire economic consequences of this failed Liberal-NDP government.

• (1235)

That's the reality, and those members should be listening to those voices. It's no wonder that all the members of this Liberal bench are facing the prospect of losing in the next election because this is the reality. This is the failed government that they defend day after day, and are doing it today in this shameless example of partisanship.

Justin Trudeau, in that letter to Canadians, talked about having the most ethical government, perhaps the most ethical government this country has ever seen. As my colleague Mr. Barrett articulated, not only does he have the legacy and distinction of being the only Prime Minister to accumulate more debt than any other Prime Minister of this great nation combined, he is the first Prime Minister found guilty of ethical violations. Let that sink in.

The first one was with the Aga Khan for a Christmas vacation. The Prime Minister claimed that thought he was complying with the ethics rules. Clearly, he didn't read the legislation, nor his handlers. We know that the Prime Minister doesn't like to read. That's quite evident. He gets read to by his handlers, so perhaps the handlers didn't take the time to properly inform him that there were obviously some ethical issues in accepting that vacation, but what stands out in my mind....

Even before my career as a parliamentarian I was a political junkie—all my life. I follow it religiously. I could be involved in the most complicated and protracted homicide trial as a prosecutor and I'd always find time to watch the news, to keep up on what's happening in Ottawa. I remember, when the story broke by The Globe and Mail about the interference in the SNC-Lavalin issue, the Prime Minister looked Canadians in the eye by staring at the reporter's camera and said that the story that broke that morning in The Globe and Mail was false, and that he took no steps to interfere in the decision-making of Canada's first indigenous Attorney General and Minister of Justice. You see, the Prime Minister has a penchant for lying. He's a very good liar, and that's a classic example of a lie. He was cornered. He was caught. He doubled down, stared Canadians in the eye and said, "I didn't interfere."

The Ethics Commissioner thought otherwise. The Ethics Commissioner interviewed everyone, literally, who touched that particular file, and found in summary protracted interference activity, not only by the Prime Minister but various ministers and the Prime Minister's Office itself, Katie Telford and Gerald Butts, two of his prized handlers—Katie Telford is right now chief of staff, and Mr. Butts is off in New York City. However, what was revealed in Commissioner Dion's "Trudeau II Report", which I read, is extremely troubling...as a former officer of the court. They're on record, as communicated by former...Privy Council, Michael Wernick.... They confirmed that they didn't want to hear about the law. They didn't want to hear about legalities.

• (1240)

It was just get the deal done. Give SNC that deferred prosecution agreement. Here we have the Prime Minister's chief of staff disregarding the laws of Canada and disregarding the Criminal Code of Canada to get the deal done. That is disgusting. It is appalling. That's why I am just so vigorously entrenched in this whole concept that a national police service, the RCMP, needs to revisit this SNC investigation issue. There is a lot more evidence that they need to consider.

Getting back to the ethical standards, it's no wonder, when you have the Prime Minister so easily breaching our ethical standards, that he sets an example for his entire government. It's no small wonder that various ministers and various MPs, including backbench MPs, have followed suit and have been found guilty of ethical violations. There was a point in time with our Canadian governments that there was a concept of "one and done". If a member committed an ethical violation and was found guilty, or was even suspected of an ethical violation, that could result in a member's ouster or resignation. Who has resigned in the Liberal government after having been found guilty of ethical violations? Zero. That's because there's no accountability.

When he says in his open letter to Canadians that they're going to make mistakes and that they need to apologize to Canadians and do better, have you heard any heartfelt apologies from the Prime Minister or anyone from the Liberal government? No. They created a culture of incompetence. Canadians are fed up. They were sold a wrong bill of goods.

Former prime minister Stephen Harper tried to warn us. He tried to warn us. All of his predictions about what Justin Trudeau was really about have come true. We didn't listen. I did, but the majority of Canadians in 2015 did not. Here we find ourselves in that situation. That was a line of questioning that I wanted to bring to your attention.

Before I move on from Think Digital, I've actually researched on the open data portal the contracts that were provided to Think Digital. One thing that really concerns me in a contract dated December 13, 2023, for a value of just over \$70,000, is the work description: "Tuition fees and cost of attending courses including seminars". Is the Government of Canada now in the business of providing free tuition and costs to a Liberal-friendly company? It certainly appears that way, doesn't it? That was \$70,000.

It wasn't a one-off. I found another example dated March 2, 2022, for \$12,870 for fees and the cost of attending seminars and workshops. The government has retained Think Digital and has given them the authority to attend various seminars and workshops to gain greater knowledge and skills at taxpayers' expense.

• (1245)

What about all the other consultants out there in Canada who are playing by the rules? Maybe they're not contributing to the Liberal Party of Canada and not making donations. They're probably going to have to fund those courses and that tuition on their own. However, when you're a failed Liberal candidate, there's a little bit of loyalty that the government will extend to you.

What type of message does that send to Canadians? You're not a Prime Minister for all. You're not looking out for the best interests of Canadians. You're looking out for the best interests of Liberal supporters. If you financially contribute to the Liberal Party of Canada—wink, nudge, wink, nudge—you're going to get your just desserts. You're going to get your benefits. They'll find a way to get it done. "Sorry you didn't win the election, but we'll benefit you. Just stay in touch." That's the message Justin Trudeau wants to send to his cronies, and that's what this committee wants to examine. That is what this committee needs to examine. That is what Canadians demand this committee examines.

Another area that I wanted to get into is the constituents I speak with and the Canadians from across the country who respond to my social media and are very grateful for the work I'm doing and to my colleagues for exposing the rot in this government. They're saying, "Good job. Keep at it. Keep digging. Keep peeling that onion, but when are we going to get our money back?"

One of the questions I would be putting to you, Mr. Mills—I just need a moment to find it—is this: When Minister Duclos, your minister, with the President of the Treasury Board, Anita Anand, made the announcement in March of 2024 about the three cases of suspected fraud that went to the RCMP, where there was an estimation of \$5 million in fraudulent overbilling or activities, the minister is on record as saying that day that his department has “revoked or suspended the security clearances of the contractors and”—this is the emphasis—“is taking action to recover the money.”

That was four months ago. There have been no announcements by Minister Duclos, the Prime Minister or anyone in government about the efforts to collect that money. This is what I'm hearing daily from Canadians: “This is our money that was illegally given to these fraudsters and grifters, and we want it back.”

Just think, globally, if there were an appetite by this failed, tired government to actually recoup those losses, what it could do to our national debt. However, I have concerns. We hear from the Canada Revenue Agency that, despite its ballooning staff force, they don't have the means to collect even the overbilling for the COVID payments, and they're writing off tens of millions of dollars in cases where taxpayer money was wrongly sent to Canadians. You've heard the horror stories of just how fast and furious money was being distributed by this government with no scrutiny and no channels of investigation. “You put the claim in, and we're going to trust you, and we're going to accept it at face value. We don't care if you're in prison; we'll get it to you. We don't care if you're deceased; we'll give it to you. We don't care if you live outside of Canada; we'll give it to you.”

• (1250)

Now, after the coast is clear, the dust has settled and we take a look at the tens of millions if not billions of dollars that were wrongly sent to individuals, we don't have the staff. We don't have the proper mechanisms to recover it. That's not good enough. We're a G7 country. My God, we are first world country. Find the tools to get the job done and recover Canadians' money. That's what they expect.

I was going to bring to your attention an opposition motion brought by the Conservatives, supported by the Bloc, supported by the NDP, and I believe supported by independents and the Greens. It was an opposition day motion heard February 27, 2024. This was regarding the ArriveCAN issue. The vote, which passed, was the next day, February 28.

The last aspect of that motion I will read into the record, as follows:

(b) call on the government to collect and recoup all funds paid to ArriveCAN contractors and subcontractors which did no work on the ArriveCAN app, within 100 days of this motion being adopted, and for the Prime Minister to table a report in the House demonstrating that taxpayer funds have been repaid.

This was the will of the Canadian Parliament, voted in favour of by every opposition member—except the government, of course. One hundred days from February 28 would have been June 6. That passed over a month ago. From June 6 to today's date, 46 days have passed. What have parliamentarians heard and what have Canadians heard? Nothing but crickets.

The obvious question to your department is this: Has the minister given you direction? Has the minister adopted a regime to recoup the tens of millions of dollars given to Government of Canada Strategies, also known as GC Strategies, and its grifter Kristian Firth? What have you done? Is it in process? Has the government recouped anything to tell Canadians, “We are the stewards that we said we would be for the taxpayer”?

That's just one example. I personally, along with Mr. Barrett and Ms. Block, really wanted to dive deep into the number of cases that have been referred to the RCMP. I understand it from my past background that the RCMP wanted to attend committee and provide as much information as they could. The end result was that we didn't learn a lot, because they're in the middle of investigations and they want to preserve the integrity. I get that from a legal perspective. I don't get that from a parliamentary perspective. That's why I kept asking the questions of the commissioner. Could they give us a sense as to how many cases of potential criminal activity, largely fraud-related, the RCMP was currently investigating? They couldn't give me a number, but I asked if it was more than six. I believe it was the deputy commissioner who confirmed that, yes, it was more than six.

We know, because Minister Duclos and Minister Anand confirmed, that three of those cases went to the RCMP. We now know, as confirmed in your responses to my colleague Mr. Barrett, that we have another individual who defrauded the taxpayer for a quarter of a million dollars. That's four.

• (1255)

The question I put to Minister Duclos when he last attended at, I believe, OGGO, left a very sour taste in my mouth. I don't know if he consulted with anyone here, but I was going to ask you.... In fact, some of you may have been seated beside him when he testified. He confirmed very proudly, as did Minister Anand in March, that this was simply the first wave and that other waves would be announced in the very near future. But he went further. He said back in March that 10 to 15 other cases of suspected fraud had the potential of being referred to the RCMP. Those were his words, not mine.

When he attended recently, I believe in early June, I followed up on that. It wasn't a gotcha question. There was no malice behind it. I was being inquisitory and asked the minister, out of the 10 to 15 cases he had announced in March, how many of them had he or his department referred to the RCMP. It was a simple, straightforward and basic question. Of course, in the usual fashion for Minister Duclos, I got a word salad. He wouldn't answer the question. I asked it again. He wouldn't answer the question. I asked him a third time. He wouldn't answer the question. I asked him a fourth time. He wouldn't answer the question. I gave up after my fifth attempt.

Why is it so difficult for you to give me a number? If it's zero, tell me it's zero. Are you still considering? Tell me you're considering. If you referred, tell me what you referred. I'm not asking for specifics. I'm not asking for names. I'm not asking for dollar value. You told Canadians that 10 to 15 were being investigated in the second wave.

Naturally, Mr. Mills, that would be the question I would put to you. I was very disappointed in your minister for his absolute refusal to answer a basic question. I think it's a relevant and important question that Canadians need to know. Maybe we'll have the opportunity at some point in the near future to ask these questions.

I'm glad to see that all four of you are taking notes. When we do meet again, perhaps you'll have answers for us. You'll be prepared to give us responses. Maybe there are details you can't provide to us for confidentiality reasons. I don't know. But at least you've been forewarned. You've had a glimpse into the types of questions we would be asking.

In addition to that, I would be asking you—

● (1300)

The Chair: Mr. Brock, I apologize. It's one o'clock and we are out of resources. We're booked until only one o'clock, so I am adjourning at this time. Sorry.

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