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Chair: Mr. John Williamson



Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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• (1500)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): Good afternoon.

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 105 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[*English*]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application.

I remind members that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee is resuming its study of report 1 of the 2024 reports of the Auditor General, entitled "Report 1: ArriveCAN", which was referred to the committee on Monday, February 12, 2024.

[*English*]

I welcome back our witness, Mr. Mark Weber, national president of the Customs Immigration Union. I appreciate your being able to accommodate us so quickly, and thank you for joining us once again.

Do you have a point of order, Ms. Yip?

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Yes. We've had six meetings already on the ArriveCAN report from the Auditor General and we will have had nine by the end of the week, but we've yet to see a work plan or a witness list. I would really appreciate it if you could distribute the work plan and witness list.

The Chair: Sure, Ms. Yip. You have what I have to date, and if you'd like to get in touch with me after, we can certainly talk about that.

I'm already planning for the Tuesday when we return, with the Auditor General's next reports coming as well. It's one reason that we're meeting this week: Because of those upcoming reports there will be more work for us to do.

You have everything that I have at this point, Ms. Yip.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): It's on the same point of order, Chair.

The Chair: These are not points of order, but go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Well, perhaps it's a point of clarification. As we are working quite tirelessly under your leadership on this committee, Chair, it's easier for us to know what we're planning for and to know what the ultimate conclusion is as well, for us to decide.

Quite frankly, I haven't seen any opportunity for Liberals to provide witnesses, either. I would like to be given that opportunity, because I think that, just as much as you are concerned, Chair, we are concerned as well and we would like to have witnesses presented on this as well.

The Chair: All right. Well, Ms. Yip is the vice-chair, so [*Inaudible—Editor*] can get in touch with me right after this meeting, you can lay out your concerns and we can discuss witness lists.

I will turn now to Mr. Weber.

Mr. Weber, you provided us with opening remarks the other day. We don't need you to repeat those. We've heard them and we have copies, so we'll go directly to questions.

Ms. Block, you have the floor for six minutes. It's over to you, please.

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

Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Weber. I'm not usually a member on this committee, but I certainly am very much interested in the issue around the ArriveCAN app.

I believe you appeared at the committee that I am on as a permanent member, the government operations and estimates committee. It was quite a long time ago, almost 18 months, that you appeared at OGGO. I was reflecting on your opening statement at that time and have had a chance to look at the one you made here at PACP. I would say that your sentiments haven't really changed too much, although we've learned an awful lot, given some of the investigations that have taken place—the Auditor General, the procurement ombud and others—so I'll probably reflect a bit more on what we heard in OGGO.

I think it would be fair to say that the development of the ArriveCAN app has been and continues to be riddled with misconduct and mismanagement. During your previous testimony at the government operations committee, you stated that the government did not consult with “frontline officers—not when the idea was first proposed, not when the app was initially developed and definitely not at any point during one of the more than 70 updates that the app had to undergo”.

If the government wasn't developing this app to assist frontline workers and keep our borders safe, can you provide the committee with any sort of comment on what you believe the point of this app was?

Mr. Mark Weber (National President, Customs and Immigration Union): To answer the question at large, on the app and its development long-term, we believe the goal of the app is to replace officers. Specifically, the result of it is that it makes our borders less secure. It eliminates interactions that our officers have with travellers.

We've seen comments from the CBSA in the media. We've seen promotional videos and such. For example, a traveller is driving up to the border and flashing their phone at a screen. The gate opens and they drive through. The tag line is something to the effect that they can't believe they just cleared customs. Think about what that actually means. I don't know if the agency is waiting for a smuggler or someone who's trying to bring something into Canada that we don't want to come in to self-declare. It's never going to happen.

I hear this from our frontline officers daily. Even though we are in the midst of contract negotiations—we've been working under an expired contract for almost two years—and obviously pay, benefits and all those things are part of their concerns, one of their main concerns remains border security. Every day they see it being eroded. It's concerning for all Canadians. Those are very difficult circumstances for our members to be working in.

• (1505)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

During that same testimony, you called ArriveCAN “one example in a long line of far-reaching technological band-aid solutions in search of a problem, solutions that ultimately fail to enhance border security and effectiveness in any real way”. I think that was an apt description for this app, as it is largely no longer in use. Instead, there has been a return to the status quo. That app, which cost at least \$60 million and counting, according to the Auditor General, is simply collecting dust, I would say.

How would that \$60 million have effectively increased the efficacy of border officers if it had instead been invested in hiring more officers and purchasing X-ray machines, an observation that I think you made last week as well, and boats for border services? Do you think there would have been a better and longer-lasting effect on border security and our officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: Absolutely. Our estimates are that they could have hired approximately 600 officers with that. Six hundred is above the number that we're able to graduate each year to become officers. Given that we're short between 2,000 and 3,000 nationwide, 600 officers would have been a big help. Of course, an offi-

cer, unlike a machine, can do interdiction, can do enforcement and can do the things that we're really there for. An app cannot do any of that.

Mrs. Kelly Block: You also mentioned that the ArriveCAN app actually created issues for frontline officers and made their job more difficult. You testified that the implementation of the app turned frontline officers into IT consultants rather than border officers, and while we've seen that this career change may have been very lucrative under this government, it certainly didn't help us to maintain safe and secure borders, as we saw over the last couple of years. Can you describe for us how it actually made life more difficult for our frontline officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: Given that it was made mandatory, our officers spent almost all of their time helping people complete the app. We had ports with no Wi-Fi and had people coming into the office, having to print it out and do it. We had travellers who refused to do it and who didn't know how to do it, and travellers who didn't have smart phones. It was very obvious to the officers working the front line that all of these things would not work, but again, we weren't consulted during the development. No one asked anyone working at the border how this would work at the border.

Mrs. Kelly Block: We know that the app still exists and people have the option to use it. Given what you've shared with us today, do you think it is prudent for the CBSA to continue to fund this project or app while ignoring the pressing issues facing our frontline officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: I think funding always has to go, first and foremost, to officers, especially with the deficit that we have in frontline staff. Again, we're not dinosaurs: We know that technology has its uses, but it has to be there to assist officers. If the idea is that technology replaces officers, that's a big concern, security-wise, for all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I turn now to Ms. Yip. You have the floor for up to six minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

Thank you for returning as a witness. Can you please tell us what you have heard from your union members in terms of how ArriveCAN provided efficiencies to the previous paper-based system?

• (1510)

Mr. Mark Weber: In terms of the information that we needed for our purposes for our customs officers, really all we needed was to be able to verify that the person was vaccinated, which everyone was able to do by simply showing us their vaccination on their phone or a printed-out copy. All of the other information that ArriveCAN made mandatory for us to acquire wasn't for us: That was for the Public Health Agency of Canada, so for us, it seemed like we were spending our time collecting information for others that, in large part, we don't know or think was used. There were questions such as, "What hotel you will be staying at? What's the address where you're going to be staying?" As far as I know, no one verified where anyone was staying. The hundreds of hours that our officers spent helping people collect this information at the border...we don't believe it was really used at all.

Ms. Jean Yip: Do you feel that this allowed officers to perhaps focus more on specialized tasks at all?

Mr. Mark Weber: No. Again, the majority of our officers' time during COVID was helping people complete the app, making sure they completed the app. One bigger issue we had was that we're not considered peace officers under the Quarantine Act, either, which is something I'm hoping is looked into before.... Ideally, we won't have another pandemic, but I think it would be naive to think there isn't going to be one. It's something we absolutely need as frontline officers who are stopping people at the border from coming in when they are sick.

Ms. Jean Yip: Could you talk a bit more about peace officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: Do you mean specifically under the Quarantine Act or in general?

Ms. Jean Yip: Both.

Mr. Mark Weber: We are peace officers; we're just not considered peace officers specifically under the Quarantine Act. If someone presents to us and is visibly ill, which is one of the things we're supposed to look at as officers at the border, we don't have any legal authority to detain them. All we can really do is call the police or call the Public Health Agency.

Sometimes we'll get someone on the phone, if there is someone available, and another agency will show up to deal with the traveller. Really, we currently have no ability to stop that person at the border with the powers we have under the Quarantine Act.

Ms. Jean Yip: Do you believe we should go back to a paper-based system?

Mr. Mark Weber: Do you mean paper-based specifically for gathering COVID-related information, or do you mean in general for customs purposes?

Ms. Jean Yip: I mean in general.

Mr. Mark Weber: In general, there are uses for that and there are uses for an automated system. One of the uses we can see being worthwhile with an app like ArriveCAN is that if people could do their declaration on the ArriveCAN app, that would be there for the officer to look at when the traveller presents themselves to the officer. That would be useful.

The difficulty we're seeing with it right now, though, is that the ArriveCAN app and other technologies they have at airports, such

as PIK machines, are being used to entirely replace the officer. You're depending on travellers to, hopefully, self-declare, I guess, if they're planning on bringing something in that we don't want to get in.

Ms. Jean Yip: You feel that there's still value in using the app and seeing an officer.

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes. Again, technologies are useful as long there is that interaction with the officer and there's an officer there.

Yes, we're open to any technologies that can help. Right now, what ArriveCAN is being used for and the way it's being used are not useful in terms of our border processes and keeping Canadians safe.

Ms. Jean Yip: Do you think that going back to a paper-based system would—I think you did kind of answer this question—reduce wait times at the border crossings and the airports?

Mr. Mark Weber: It could.

Again, to reduce wait times, you need people at border crossings and airports. That's the main thing you could do. There's nothing that's as efficient or as secure as a properly staffed border.

We see this at airports with the introduction of PIK machines, which have now largely replaced officers. The idea was that they would speed up the process, and now we see the same lineups or longer waiting to deal with a PIK machine rather than an officer. If the technology is used with an officer, there's usefulness to it. If not, we really don't see the point.

Ms. Jean Yip: Okay. Thank you.

I'd like to put forward a motion at this point:

That, given the grave concerns surrounding the CEO of Dalian and former 2021 People's Party of Canada candidate David Yeo, the committee hold one meeting and call:

(1) Deputy Minister of National Defence Bill Matthews

(2) Assistant Deputy Minister (Materiel) Troy Crosby

(3) Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources—Civilian) Isabelle Desmartis.

I'm moving this motion, and I hope there is a quick resolution.

• (1515)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yip. The clerk has received that, and we'll disseminate it.

Mr. Weber, I apologize. We're going to try to get through this quickly.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): This could find easy support there, but we need to amend it to include the minister and the individual, Mr. Yeo. It seems to be an easy thing to add. The subject of the motion should be invited to appear as a witness, along with the minister, because ministerial accountability is the cornerstone of our Westminster system. I will put forward both of those as amendments to the motion, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now debating the amendment to the motion.

We'll hear from Mr. Julian, Mr. Brock and then Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I hope we can dispense with this quickly, because I have a number of questions for Mr. Weber. I thank him of course for the service of the CBSA agents and members of this union across the country. I'm supporting the motion. I also think the amendment makes sense. I think we can dispense with this rapidly and then hopefully move back to witness testimony.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have Mr. Brock and then Ms. Khalid, Ms. Shanahan and Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): I'm pleased to hear, Mr. Chair, that the NDP is in support not only of the motion, but of the amendment.

It was rather disappointing last week that we had Mr. Weber here at committee, essentially doing what he's doing today. Unfortunately, Liberal members filibustered the time we had available to hear Mr. Weber, and we had to let him go.

At the crux of this are full transparency and accountability. I think the motion brought by MP Yip goes only so far. Certainly, the amendments brought by Mr. Barrett close the gap and allow this committee to truly function as a committee and get to the heart of the matter, because all of them have important information to share. For that reason, I'm in full support of the amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks very much, Chair.

I appreciate the amendments put forward. I think it's important for us to really get to the bottom of an issue and find the right witnesses to do so. My thing is the minister doesn't have any role in hiring at all.

I completely agree with having Mr. Yeo come and present. I'm wondering whether it would be more practical for us to focus just on the people who can actually answer the questions, rather than go down the partisan "the Liberals are the reason the whole world is

wrong" path. Let's just try to get to the bottom of this by using the deputy minister and Mr. Yeo as witnesses on this.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

I, too, would just like to reiterate that our objection was not to Mr. Yeo. That's certainly not the case. Our objection was to the way in which the motion was sprung on us at the last meeting. I'm glad to see that this is a more fulsome discussion of what it is we're trying to achieve here.

I agree, as well, that in keeping with this committee, which normally has a work plan and a set list of witnesses, which would be the deputy minister and not the minister.... I remember so well long-time NDP member Mr. Christopherson making the point that we should not let deputy ministers off the hook; that it should be deputy ministers who answer questions in public accounts, because we're dealing with process and not policy; and that if we ever let that go, it would undermine the credibility and the fact-finding of the public accounts committee.

I agree with inviting Mr. Yeo and the deputy minister, but it is not necessary to have the minister. The minister was not involved in this process.

Thank you.

• (1520)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To begin with, I still haven't received the motion, not even by email, so I'm not sure of the exact language in the French. I'll need to see it in writing before deciding anything.

As for the substance of the motion, overall, I agree with Mr. Julian. I appreciated his comment. It was simple and straightforward.

We support the motion and the amendment. It goes without saying—ministerial accountability matters. What's more, it's important for the committee to hear from the CEO of Dalian as well, given how much the company has received in contracts since 2004.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

[*English*]

You'll be next, Mr. Brock, but just hold on. I want to confer with the clerk.

Ms. Jean Yip: Mr. Chair, could I ask for a quick suspension so that Madam Sinclair-Desgagné can receive the motion in French?

The Chair: Sure. I'll suspend—

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: We're just working on that. It will be out shortly.

Mr. Julian, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, every committee member should receive the motion and the amendment in both official languages, not just Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

The Chair: That is correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: That needs to be clear.

I agree with suspending the meeting until the motion and the amendment have gone out to everyone.

The Chair: That's precisely what I was about to do.

We will now suspend for a minute or two.

• (1520) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1520)

[English]

The Chair: I'll call the meeting back to order.

You will all have, in your email boxes, the motion in the two official languages. The amendment we're debating is to add Mr. Yeo and the minister as witnesses.

I see that Mrs. Shanahan has put her hand up, but first I have Mr. Brock.

I'll turn the floor over to you, sir.

• (1525)

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

I'm listening to my colleagues from the Liberal Party, and what makes me so curious—not only in this committee but in pretty much every other committee studying the arrive scam app and all the other scams that this Trudeau government is facing—is how quick they are to defend the ministers. They speak about ministerial accountability, but those are hollow words, because at the end of the day, the buck stops with the minister—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Larry Brock: —and the buck stops with the Prime Minister of Canada.

The Chair: Just one second, Mr. Brock.

Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Just going with the rules of this committee, it is not normal for us to have ministers appear before public accounts, and I think that—

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, you're welcome to put your hand up to raise this. It is not a point of order. While it is not practice, it is not unheard of as well.

I'll turn the floor back over to Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: As I was indicating before the interruption, Mr. Chair, the buck stops with the minister in charge and ultimately the buck stops with the Prime Minister of Canada. What I have been seeing over the past several months among my Liberal colleagues, as we have literally pulled away layer by layer of this proverbial onion to discover the true rot of this particular scam, is the concept known as “plausible deniability”. We've heard from presidents and we've heard from deputy ministers that notwithstanding the raging fire that was the arrive scam app within their various departments, no one felt it prudent enough to inform ministers—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm so sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, you can be as sorry as you want, but what is your point of order?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Chair, this is a respectful parliamentary committee meeting, and it's not fair for members to be calling other members names and basically maligning their character. This is absolutely unfair, and I think you should have intervened.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Brock, I would ask you to get to the point of the intervention addressing the amendment.

Mr. Larry Brock: My point is that the Canadians I'm engaging with, Mr. Chair, from coast to coast are wondering why there's a proverbial firewall between the scandal and the government—the Prime Minister and the ministers.

This emphasizes the point even more that we definitely need to hear directly from the ministers, because all we're hearing in the House are the ministers repeating the same line over and over again: “I didn't know. I wasn't informed.” That's not good enough.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

My first intervention was on the amendment. You clarified that. Frankly, we have had ministers on an exceptional basis at this committee.

I'm always concerned about precedent for future public accounts. What we do here matters. We should not let deputy ministers off the hook—definitely not—because we're really talking about a problem in the civil service. I'm confident it's just a few bad apples, or insufficient processes and a lack of.... As the Auditor General pointed out, yes, it was an emergency situation, but that doesn't mean the rules are thrown out the window.

I know we're going to get to the witness motion, as originally intended. I want to hear from our NDP colleague, but I have no problem with hearing from any and all on this issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I really want to get back to questioning Mr. Weber. I know he has a lot of important information to give to this committee on behalf of his members, so I'll just say two things.

First, ministerial responsibility means that the minister should be appearing.

Second, in reply to my Conservative colleague, I lived through the Harper regime, and from 2011 to 2015, Conservative ministers never took responsibility for the various egregious scandals we saw—the ETS scandal and the Phoenix scandal that continues to reverberate today—and I don't want to go back to those days when there wasn't ministerial responsibility.

I believe it is incumbent upon this committee to have the list of witnesses who were involved. This is shocking. As a temporary member of the committee for today, I think it's absolutely essential for public accounts that we have the ability to question the minister, the deputy minister and the individual in question. That's why I'm supporting the motion and supporting the amendment.

I hope we can come to a conclusion rapidly so we can come back to questioning our witnesses, who have a lot of valuable information for this committee and for Canadians.

• (1530)

The Chair: Thank you.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Very good. I'll move now to the motion.

Are there any speakers to the motion? I'm seeing none, so Clerk, could you please call the vote on the motion as amended?

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: Very good.

We're now turning back to Mr. Weber.

Ms. Yip, you still have a minute left. Would you like to take advantage of that time?

Ms. Jean Yip: Yes.

Perhaps you could start by telling us about some of the strains that the pandemic placed on the CBSA frontline workers. I realize that you probably have about 45 seconds. Even if you just started your answer, that would be great.

Mr. Mark Weber: The primary strain was dealing with the ArriveCAN app: collecting information that really wasn't for the purposes of Customs and working with an app that went down frequently, was not very user friendly and was not usable by many people who were crossing at the border.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just to update everyone before I turn to our next line of questioning, I am seeking extra resources so we can hear from our next witness as well. It's not my intention to keep people here into supper-time, but we will go a bit beyond five o'clock just so we give our next witness the adequate respect he deserves for coming in here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you may go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Weber. Thank you for coming back.

I'll get right to the questions I've been wanting to ask you for a while now.

Have you read the Auditor General's report, Mr. Weber?

• (1535)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes, I've seen it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Great.

The Auditor General's findings in paragraphs 1.42 and 1.43 raise questions about misconduct on the part of employees at the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA.

First, I'd like to hear your views on the code of conduct in place. Does the union have any say in the code or its application?

Second, were you advised of any breaches of the code of conduct?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Weber: Regarding specifically what happened around ArriveCAN, we've not been asked or consulted. We didn't have anything to do with procurement. We weren't involved in any of that or had any knowledge of that.

Regarding the CBSA code of conduct, our knowledge of how it works is that it's really lacking in specificity. The CBSA code of conduct is so broad and overarching, and it covers the actions of our members at work and at home. I think a good way to put it is that, really, if they want to get you for something, that covers absolutely everything, which is a real problem with it. We'd like to see it really tightened up and narrowed so that our members know exactly what they should and shouldn't be doing.

The other issue we have in general with how the investigations were done is that we see at the CBSA a very two-tiered system where members—frontline officers—are investigated for almost everything. Largely, the CBSA's management style is to investigate rather than to manage.

On the other hand, if we bring forward serious misconduct of management and upper management, consistently there are no investigations. It's really like screaming into the wind. I bring things forward to the upper management of the CBSA for which, honestly, if our members had done them, I would be advising them there's a good chance they will lose their jobs, but they are simply not investigated.

It's really disheartening. It creates a toxic atmosphere at the workplace when we see what's going on with the ArriveCAN investigations and when we hear the testimony of professional standards investigators. It's hard for our members to see, given what they've experienced in their careers, and it's really hard to know whether the proper things are being investigated as they should.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: That's very interesting.

Precisely on that subject, could you tell me whether you've had discussions on changes that the code needed? I'm talking about changes to add specificity, improve its application and, most importantly, ensure better compliance by employees in some cases?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes, we have had discussions around the professional standards policy, how they conduct investigations, the code of conduct itself and the discipline grid the CBSA uses. We have had those consultations with management, and we're not really seeing any change in how those things are done.

Again, how you're treated as a manager and an employee at the CBSA is absolutely night and day. That's the fundamental issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you.

What level of management was involved in those discussions?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: It's upper management up to the CBSA president.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I see.

That means the president of the agency would have been informed that the code of conduct wasn't necessarily suitable and, most importantly, lacked so much clarity that employees didn't know what they were supposed to do or how to follow the guidance. In some cases, the guidance merely comes down to common sense, although I'm less partial to that expression these days. As you rightly pointed out, investigations have to be conducted clearly and fairly.

You've seen cases of perceived misconduct and cases where the investigation didn't necessarily focus on the right thing. Is that correct?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: Absolutely. We've seen heavy-handed discipline. We've seen investigations where there need not have been any. There could have been a simple conversation with an employee. CBSA, as I said earlier, in general manages through fact find-

ings and through investigation. That has gotten worse and worse over the years despite the fact that we keep adding more and more managers to the workplace. You would think there would be some ability to manage. That's really not what we see there.

My understanding is that discipline is supposed to be corrective and not punitive. We see our members regularly disciplined with no training and really no knowledge of how they could have done anything differently in the first place to not be disciplined. It's quite a challenging atmosphere for them to work in. When they see the behaviour of managers and report that behaviour and see that really nothing happens when it's on that side, it's very disheartening.

● (1540)

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Why isn't anything changing, in your view?

I know we don't have a lot of time left, but can you talk more about that?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: Change takes time. The union does everything it can to represent members. I think we're successful at representing members in large part. We bring those issues forward to the employer.

I do have hope the new CBSA president, Ms. O'Gorman, is seeing a lot of the things that need to be changed. CBSA is a big ship to turn around. We keep plugging away at it. However, change is needed quite desperately. It has become a more and more difficult place for our members to work in.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: We've actually heard that many former employees left the agency very frustrated.

Are you familiar with Mr. Sabourin's case?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: No, I'm not familiar with that.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Luc Sabourin was a CBSA employee. He was a whistle-blower who spoke up about things he'd been asked to do that were completely inappropriate. He reported the situation to management, but it backfired on him. He was bullied and forced to leave the organization.

I'm actually surprised that the union isn't familiar with his case, because it was—

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

[English]

Mr. Julian, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Weber, for your incredible patience with us today and at previous meetings of public accounts. You also appeared in front of the public safety committee just a few weeks ago, and we thank you for that appearance on behalf of CBSA officers and public sector employees right across the country, who do fabulous work on our behalf.

You referenced at that time and referenced again in your statement today the massive cuts that were made to CBSA officers across the country in 2014 under the former Conservative government. This is connected, of course, with the rise we've seen in auto thefts, and generally tied to the issue of ArriveCAN is the fact that those positions have not been fully restored.

Can you tell us a bit about the dramatic impact of those Conservative cuts and where the government should have gone in terms of making investments in frontline CBSA officers so that we would have in place functioning systems at the border?

Mr. Mark Weber: I think the investment has to be in people. We haven't seen those numbers go up. Since 2015, CBSA has added about 2,000 managers to their ranks, which is specifically what we don't need. We're already inundated with managers at CBSA. We have workplaces where we have as many—or in some cases more—managers as we have people doing the work to process travellers and interdict.

I could give examples that are extreme. In North Portal, Saskatchewan, on any weekday, you'll have seven managers and five officers.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm sorry. Did you say seven managers and five officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: Yes, there will be seven managers and five officers. I visit workplaces regularly where the numbers are about even. It has become so top-heavy and dysfunctional in some cases.

I can tell you a personal experience. I've worked as an officer in the secondary area at Pearson airport with one other officer, a line-up out the door and four superintendents who do not process any travellers. We see this added—

Mr. Peter Julian: What were the superintendents doing?

Mr. Mark Weber: That's an excellent question.

They were apparently supervising us. I don't want to be mean and say they were doing close to nothing, but it was pretty close to that. A lot of our officers take every acting opportunity they can simply because they're exhausted, and an acting superintendent assignment is a bit of a four-month break for them to not do much of anything. That's the sad reality of it.

Mr. Peter Julian: That is stunning to me when the ArriveCAN app is adding to what is simply the withdrawing of investments that are so important to making sure that our frontline officers are getting the supports they need.

I want to move along to the issue of managerial procedure. Given what you're saying—for example, border stations where there are

more managers than there are frontline border officers—how would you describe the current working atmosphere at the CBSA? Would you consider it toxic? Would you consider it good? What words would you use to describe the workplace culture now at the CBSA after the Conservative cuts and the Liberal refusal to restore those cuts?

● (1545)

Mr. Mark Weber: In general, I would say it's poor to toxic. That has to do with the staffing numbers, which have not gone up. That has to do with an overreliance on technology. Both of those things combined have seen our officers working really hard to do the job they signed up to do: to protect Canadians and keep things out of Canada that we don't want to come into Canada. That's why they take the job. Often the sense they get at the workplace is that they really can't do that anymore, which is disheartening and a really difficult condition for them to be working under.

Mr. Peter Julian: You mentioned that you have hope things may change. What advice would you give public accounts in terms of recommendations we should be making to the government to ensure that a debacle like ArriveCAN.... We've seen other debacles under the Conservatives. We saw Phoenix, which, again, the Liberals continued.

What recommendations can you make that would actually ensure that our borders are effectively invested in and that border services officers can do the terrific work they do in the most effective way possible? What things should we be recommending?

Mr. Mark Weber: Our borders need to be staffed. We desperately need staff. As I said, we need between 2,000 and 3,000 officers countrywide. We need to stop replacing officers with technology. That has to be there to assist officers, not replace them. An app is not going to interdict anything. I think an overreliance on technology is really embedded in the CBSA.

The former CBSA president, John Ossowski, sits on the advisory board of the Future Borders Coalition, whose main mandate is advancing technologies to largely speed up the border. There's not too much focus on security. They have been pushing for an advancement of mobile app technology since pre-COVID, in around 2018. We really need to stop thinking there's a magic technology bullet that's going to fix the situation at our borders.

I think the other thing the agency could look at is going the next decade without hiring another manager. You would likely still have too many.

Mr. Peter Julian: Certainly, in North Portal, Saskatchewan, attrition would make a difference.

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

Beginning our next round is Mr. Brock.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Chair.

A couple of the narratives have been circulated here in Ottawa and across Canada. One is that the ArriveCAN app saved lives. From the Prime Minister down to ministers and rank-and-file Liberal members, they've all claimed that. It has recently been debunked by some Liberal members who have a medical background, as well as the public health department. There was no empirical evidence that it saved lives.

What do you feel, sir, as the union president, with respect to some of the concerns along those lines? Do you feel, personally, that the app did in fact save lives?

Mr. Mark Weber: It's difficult for us to tell.

Again, our officers' job during the pandemic was largely to collect information for another agency. The app did a poor job of collecting it. It was really an uphill battle to keep the border moving and help people provide the information that was legally required of them to get through the border.

There was no way around it for us.

Mr. Larry Brock: In response to a question put to you by Mrs. Block about how that \$60 million could have been better utilized at your agency, I think you referenced that upwards of 500 to 600 new officers could be hired. At the current pace, what is the CBSA operating at in terms of a management deficit and frontline officer deficit?

Mr. Mark Weber: Again, we're between 2,000 and 3,000 short countrywide. We can graduate under 600. We have one college. If they graduate the maximum number of officers per year, it's approximately 592 per year. They are not at the maximum because we don't have enough people to take from the line to train them. That's how short we are.

Mr. Larry Brock: Another erroneous narrative from Justin Trudeau, our Prime Minister, is that he was responsible for adding thousands of new positions to the CBSA. I think it's inaccurate, and he often says it was the Harper government that slashed frontline officers.

You were asked a question when you appeared at SECU that noted, "over the last eight years the current government has added only approximately 25 frontline officers to the CBSA." Is that correct?

• (1550)

Mr. Mark Weber: Those numbers sound about correct, yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: There were 25 officers. Okay.

That's why we have the porous borders. That's why we have an influx of illegal guns. That's why we have containers that are not being properly scanned. That's why we have a problem with opiates entering our country. That's why we have a problem with car thefts.

There are not enough resources to utilize the technology that exists. There is no current appetite with the current Justin Trudeau

government to properly secure our borders. Is that an accurate statement, sir?

Mr. Mark Weber: I would say the lack of staff has made everything you've mentioned more acute, absolutely.

Mr. Larry Brock: Do you feel the current president, Erin O'Gorman, has engaged the union in a meaningful way or has made any meaningful progress for frontline officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: In terms of hiring more staff, I'm not aware. She's the president of the CBSA. The budget being what it is, I believe there's a limit to how many officers can be graduated given the money available.

In terms of advancing some other issues around the toxicity in workplaces, there have been some positives. I have to remain positive and keep trying at it. I've been doing this a long time. I see hope there.

Mr. Larry Brock: We talked about punitive correctional measures being utilized across the board, particularly at the CBSA. We know there are two individuals who deem themselves to be whistleblowers who used to work at the CBSA and brought forth evidence implicating people from the CBSA, including not only past president Ossowski but current president O'Gorman and Canada's chief technology officer, Minh Doan, who has now been accused of deleting up to 30,000 emails surrounding his involvement in the ArriveCAN scam. They have not been disciplined at all, yet two individuals who pointed fingers have been.

How do you feel as a union president about the measures taken by President O'Gorman and about instructing presidents and deputy ministers of the other ministries?

Mr. Mark Weber: It's difficult to know. We're not on the inside of the investigation.

We see this with our members all the time. Who is on leave without pay pending the outcome of an investigation? What is investigated? Who was interviewed? All of those things often seem quite arbitrary to us as well.

The Chair: Ask a very quick question, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: On the face of this outrageous fleecing of taxpayers, did any frontline border officers get a performance bonus like management did?

Mr. Mark Weber: None of our members have ever received one of those.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor for up to five minutes, please.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Chair.

As the member of Parliament for Châteauguay—Lacolle, where I have the Lacolle border, a very busy border crossing and a number of folks in my entourage who do work at the border, I want to say to Mr. Weber how much I appreciate the work the agents perform. I can understand that it's very intense at the best of times. Of course, during the early days of the public health crisis, when really no one knew what was going on, we had to close the border and knew what that meant for workers, for the officers at the front.

Maybe you can describe briefly those first few days when the emergency order to close the border was put through. What did that look like?

Mr. Mark Weber: It was confusing. A lot of members would go to the news to know what they were supposed to do that day—to give you an idea of how chaotic and disorganized it was at times. There was often little direction. When travellers would show up, we weren't exactly sure what the procedure was early on, so it was difficult. I mean, pandemics happen. That was an emergency. No one knew where it was going to go. We did the best we could through it.

Once the ArriveCAN app came in, members brought concerns forward to the union, which we tried to bring to the employer. Really, there seemed to be no willingness to take our input. Had our members been consulted early on, I think a great deal of what happened would not have happened.

With what we see coming out with the investigations, had we had certain whistle-blower protections and the ability to bring information forward with some mechanism to do that, I think things would have been a little different now, but our members don't really have that.

• (1555)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: That's certainly duly noted. It's always a best practice, isn't it, to consult the users. I think that should be taken forward regardless of the circumstances.

Was it useful to have a printout, something tangible that an officer could keep afterwards? I'm thinking of what must have been horrendous wait times as the borders were closed. No doubt there were officers who had been exposed to COVID and could not show up for work.

As we learned from the Auditor General, the ArriveCAN app did provide better-quality information more rapidly for quarantine purposes, of course, and for data that needed to be transferred to other bodies such as the provinces and health agencies. I heard you say earlier that the ArriveCAN app does have its uses—does it not?

Mr. Mark Weber: In collecting information that other agencies wanted, yes, there was usefulness to that. What we questioned at the border was that we didn't know anything about what was being done with that information. Finding out what address someone is staying at seems somewhat pointless if no one is going to go to where the person is saying they're staying. In terms of follow-up, we didn't know if that was happening.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I agree. There were definitely issues with the app, and as we heard, it needed a lot of updates and so on. We'll be discussing that further.

You are representing the frontline workers. Would you go back to a paper-based system today?

Mr. Mark Weber: No. I think what we really needed at the border at the time was for people to show they were vaccinated, which most people had on their phone. They were able to show it to us. You had the option of printing it out if you didn't have a phone through which you could do that, and that took mere seconds. For our purposes, that's really all we needed.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Very good.

On my part, I am always speaking to young people and advocating that, because of our close proximity to the Lacolle border crossing, this is an excellent career.

I hear my Conservative colleagues talking about how we need more frontline resources, but Mr. Poilievre and his Conservative caucus voted against funding for CBSA and the RCMP in December. Were you aware of that?

Mr. Mark Weber: Was I aware of the vote? I was.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I meant that they voted against applying resources.

If I have any remaining time, Mr. Chair, I would like to give it to Mr. Julian.

The Chair: I'm afraid your question went over, but you got the answer you were looking for, I believe.

[*Translation*]

We now go to Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to know whether you received any complaints about ArriveCAN from employees. Did any of them raise questions or concerns about the application with the union?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Weber: We did. Our members contacted us daily throughout the pandemic about their concerns around ArriveCAN. Extreme frustration, I think, would best describe the experience of our officers trying to get it to work while not really having the authority as peace officers under the Quarantine Act to stop anyone and not having the ability to issue fines. As I said at an earlier committee appearance about IT consultants, that's really what their jobs became, in large part, during the pandemic.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: That's quite interesting.

Did anyone report any complaints or misgivings about the application itself, not necessarily its deployment?

I realize that it was mainly management, not CBSA officers, making the decisions about the consultants, but did you receive any complaints regarding the people involved in deploying the app?

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: At the time that we were using it early on in the pandemic, no. Given what has come out, obviously I hear from members about the whole procurement process and the decision-making around that, but at the time, no.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Can you tell us more about what you've heard recently from members regarding the whole procurement process?

[English]

Mr. Mark Weber: Our members have watched a lot of the testimony. They watched me give testimony here. We all really want to know what happened. It is concerning.

One of the big things the union would like to see... I appeared at another committee for Bill C-20, which is about the public complaints and review commission. One of the things we pushed for there was an ability for members to use it so that when we see wrongdoing, we're able to bring that forward as well. Currently, we're really lacking the protections of the mechanism to do that. That's something we think is important to have in place if we want to see organizational change.

Surely everyone would want to know when things are going wrong at the agency. Right now, the mechanism we have for that is for me to bring it forward to managerial counterparts at CBSA, and as I said earlier, largely speaking, that just seems to disappear after I say it.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

You're next, Mr. Julian. You may go ahead for two and a half minutes.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Weber, my front door looks across to Washington state, so I'm very close to the border and go across the line very frequently. I'm always impressed by the incredible professionalism of the CBSA officers. They're highly specialized and well trained. They do an incredibly effective job.

I think this committee would be unanimous in saying thank you for all the work you do on behalf of members and that members do to ensure that our borders are operating effectively and appropriately.

You mentioned this in your presentation:

This is to say little of the agency's decision to spend dozens of millions of dollars on the private sector, instead of choosing to invest in its workers and reinforce their capacity to act on behalf of Canadians. At a time when our members are being nickel-and-dimed at the bargaining table, this is nothing less than a slap in the face.

This is something that started under Mr. Harper and the Conservative government. It's this obsession with privatizing and outsourcing what are important public services to maintain and enhance.

As you've mentioned, we would be hiring hundreds more border officers if that money hadn't been spent on ArriveCAN. If we couple this with Phoenix, which started under the Harper government—it cost \$2.5 billion and still doesn't work—it's another example of outsourcing that hurts people, hurts our public service and hurts people who are devoted in service to the country.

What things should we be investing in? You've mentioned front-line border officers. What can we invest in regarding training facilities for the next generation of border officers? What things should we be doing, instead of the outsourcing we've seen over the last decade and a half?

Mr. Mark Weber: Obviously, as you said, it's officers, technology that assists and doesn't replace officers, and training facilities. Currently, as I said earlier, we have one in Rigaud, Quebec, that can graduate a maximum of about 592 officers a year, which doesn't even cover attrition. With only that facility, we're never going to catch up.

We either need an expansion of that facility or need a second facility so we can graduate enough officers to get our numbers back up to where they should be.

The Chair: Thank you—

Mr. Peter Julian: How much would it cost to set up a second training centre?

The Chair: Go ahead, please.

Mr. Mark Weber: I'm not aware of what the costs are. We have, essentially, a second satellite training facility in Chilliwack, which I think is usable. We've heard of places that are available in the Windsor area that could work.

Different plans are floated, but they never seem to come to fruition. The money really needs to be invested in an ability to get enough people on the front line and working.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll turn now to Mr. Barrett.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In facilitating the flow of legitimate travellers and trade, the border service officers I've had the opportunity to interact with as a member of the travelling public.... It's always stressful at airports, but I frequently have the opportunity to interact with them in their professional capacity when I'm crossing at land borders at Prescott and in Thousand Islands at the Lansdowne port of entry in my community. There's outstanding professionalism.

Because I speak with them—they're members of my community and they're my neighbours—I know that it's a stressful job, and the job has not been made easier by this \$60-million arrive scam app.

When I crossed into the United States, the questions on COVID-19 weren't "Have you completed the ArriveCAN app or its equivalent?" and "Are you vaccinated for COVID-19?" However, the process whereby they would detect deception or interdict firearms if they believed they were there was to ask, "Are there any firearms in the vehicle?" That would occur.

Why is it that the government believed your officers couldn't be trusted to use their training and techniques to determine whether someone was being deceptive about having been vaccinated, and instead spent \$60 million on an app into which they could scan the documents?

• (1605)

Mr. Mark Weber: I wish I had the answer to that question.

I think over the years, an overreliance on technology has been built up. It started with the automated machines at the airport, as I said. The initial plan around that was for people to self-declare and for us to not interact with them at all, which is largely what we see at airports now. It's frightening to think about, but that has grown and grown so that we now see constantly what they call "border modernization plans" from the CBSA, which all mean more technology and fewer officers.

Mr. Michael Barrett: We have a beautiful facility in Lansdowne, which I know you've seen. It needs more people, though.

Technology that's operated by officers includes X-ray scanners. How many X-ray scanners could be purchased with \$60 million?

Mr. Mark Weber: I wouldn't have those numbers. We can find out and provide that to you.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you very much.

These X-ray scanners are important for detecting drugs and weapons and even for vehicles, which of course are a hot topic.

As for detector dogs and dog handlers, that's an investment the Trudeau government could have made. That's a technology that can pay for itself—for example, in detecting currency. Is that right?

Mr. Mark Weber: Absolutely, our canine teams are vital to what we do. We're short of those as well, just like we're short of officers. Definitely, the money could have been put towards that, yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I just want to be clear. With \$60 million spent on this app, you won't be surprised to hear from me that I don't think it's money well spent. The Auditor General said that it wasn't good value for Canadians' money.

I've heard from your members that it has frustrated them in their ability to professionally execute their responsibility to protect our

country. Do you think this money should continue to be invested in this app, or should this money be diverted into human resources in the form of frontline border service officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: Absolutely, the money needs to go toward border service officers. We can do absolutely the full gamut of what's needed at the border, including keeping our communities safe. The technologies we have, such as ArriveCAN, simply do not do that.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You've seen all kinds of committees. You were at committee 18 months ago. I think Mrs. Block said it was government operations. We've had past and present heads of the CBSA. Do you think they're listening?

Mr. Mark Weber: I hope they are. It's certainly not for a lack of my repeating it over and over.

I think there is a definite disconnect. I spoke to this earlier too. The upper levels of CBSA management rarely if ever have come from the front line. I'm often having to show or explain to people who have never worked at a border exactly what the gaps are at the border, which can often be an uphill climb.

I've had many talks with the current CBSA president. I had hoped there was some listening happening there, but the situation on our front lines at most of our ports of entry is quite dire.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Is the Minister of Public Safety failing frontline CBSA border service officers?

Mr. Mark Weber: In terms of not having enough of us there, I would say there is a definite failure, yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's spot-on.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks very much, Chair.

I find the line of questioning by my Conservative friend here very interesting, because just this past December he voted against giving more funding to the CBSA so they could perform their jobs at the border and be safe in how they do that.

Regardless, Mr. Weber, can you tell us what the nature of your job is and what the nature of your union is? How do you support your workers?

• (1610)

Mr. Mark Weber: I'm the president of the union, and we support our workers in representing them—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have a point of order, Chair. I apologize for interrupting the witness.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: On the issue raised by Ms. Khalid—

The Chair: This does not sound like a point of order—

Mr. Michael Barrett: —I was happy to vote non-confidence in the government—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: —just like those border service officers don't seem to have confidence.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No, not at all—

The Chair: I've told all of you that I'm extending the time—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You voted against the CBSA and funding the CBSA.

The Chair: If you all interrupt me—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You voted against them. Please own up to it.

The Chair: You're back on the clock, Ms. Khalid. Go ahead. I believe Mr. Weber had the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Go ahead, Mr. Weber. You were telling me about the services you provide members of the union.

Mr. Mark Weber: We ensure they're treated fairly and that the rights they have under our collective agreement are upheld.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Specifically, what kinds of things would members come to you for?

Mr. Mark Weber: For grievances, health and safety representation.... Really, for any issue they have where they're not being treated as they should be, they come to the union.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: How many agents do you think called in on a leave of absence between 2020 and 2021?

Mr. Mark Weber: I'd be guessing. We can get those numbers for you and provide them. I don't have them.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's interesting. I would think as—

The Chair: I'm sorry. Would you like those numbers, Ms. Khalid? That was an offer. Is that something you would like?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes. I would very much like to know what those numbers are.

Could you tell us, perhaps in more general terms if you don't have specific numbers, what the morale of CBSA agents was like during COVID times? How were people using and abusing the systems or how were they going through the borders? How were CBSA officers feeling?

Mr. Mark Weber: I would say that morale was low. People were frustrated. Again, we had very little ability to enforce anything, so we ended up spending the vast majority of our time at the border trying to get the app to work and trying to get people to complete the app as they needed to.

Morale was low then, and it didn't get much better, obviously, during COVID. People had other concerns and worries as they dealt with COVID in their normal lives—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You're saying the morale was still very low, regardless of whether the app was used.

Mr. Mark Weber: The morale was low. There were different challenges all the time. Right now, again, it's about staffing, it's about not having a collective agreement, it's—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Right, so morale is low right now because of various challenges, not just because of an app.

Can you perhaps help us understand what kind of training was provided to CBSA officers when using the ArriveCAN app?

Mr. Mark Weber: It was next to none. It was online.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Basically, we just threw our officers in to deal with the pandemic, to deal with a very anxious public and then to use an app that they had zero—next to none—training on. Is that correct?

Mr. Mark Weber: Largely, yes. There was some very cursory training and—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's fine. Thank you.

Why do you think you're here today, Mr. Weber?

Mr. Mark Weber: I was asked to appear to provide information around the rollout of the ArriveCAN app.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Is that with respect to the Auditor General's report? Are we talking about the financial cost of the app, or are we talking about the versatility or usage of the app, in your opinion?

Mr. Mark Weber: You ask the questions, so it's about whatever you ask me. I'm here to help.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: What is your objective? What is it that you want on the record today?

If there's one thing you could say to this committee about the ArriveCAN app, about how CBSA officers dealt with having to use it during COVID—without any training, as you said—and about having to deal with health issues and low morale, what message do you have for our committee?

Mr. Mark Weber: Our officers did the best they could under the circumstances, which were extremely difficult. We would like, going forward, to not see the app continue to be used and continue to be expanded to replace officers at the peril of the safety of all Canadians.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Is that because the app cost too much, or is it because of other factors that you, as a union representative for CBSA officers dealing with HR issues, dealing with low morale and health issues...? Is that the cause of it?

Mr. Mark Weber: I'm not sure I understand the question. Could you repeat it, please?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You're saying that the ArriveCAN app should not be used going forward, so I'm asking if it's because you think the app is not good for the border. Is it because it is replacing CBSA officers? Is it because it's impacting them and their mental health, their ability to work and their low morale, as you've outlined?

Is it the cost of the application that you think is too much, and those resources could be placed elsewhere? We've seen the Conservatives refuse to allow for more resources to be given to the CBSA.

• (1615)

Mr. Mark Weber: Resources are a concern, obviously. As I said, we need more people. It's the security aspect too. When we're expecting travellers to self-declare that they're smuggling, we're asking for a lot of things to be coming into Canada that shouldn't be there. That's essentially what we're doing now.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is all of our time.

Mr. Weber, I want to thank you for coming in. I understand there's some information you're going to provide to this committee afterwards.

I'm going to suspend for one minute to excuse Mr. Weber and have our next witness come in. We'll get started in about 60 seconds.

I suspend this meeting. Thank you again.

• (1615)

(Pause)

• (1615)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I'd like to welcome, from the Association of Canadian Financial Officers, Dany Richard, the president. Thank you for joining us today.

We're running a little behind schedule, but just so everyone knows, it's my intention to get us through three rounds. That will take us to 5:30. The last round is going to be somewhat truncated. The government and official opposition members will have four minutes, and the other two parties will have two minutes each. I will do everything I can to get us finished by 5:30.

Mr. Richard, you'll be given five minutes for an opening statement. It's over to you, please.

Mr. Dany Richard (President, Association of Canadian Financial Officers): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Dany Richard. I am the president for the Association of Canadian Financial Officers. We are North America's largest union that exclusively represents accountants, comptrollers, auditors and other financial professionals. We have more than 7,000 members in over 70 departments within the Canadian federal public service and at Nav Canada. The majority of our members hold a professional designation such as CPA. They play a pivotal role in ensuring the effective management of the public purse.

Having reviewed the Auditor General's report on ArriveCAN, I was severely disappointed with the findings and the implications

for the integrity of internal controls and financial oversight within the federal public service during the pandemic. You don't have to be an accountant to understand the importance of maintaining proper financial records.

Had our members been properly consulted in this process, establishing a governance structure is something that any one of them would have immediately identified as essential, but during the rush of COVID-19, certain basic best practices were ignored in the interest of time. Corners were cut, and that comes with a risk—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order from Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: This is a key witness, but the camera is remaining on you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, that is most definitely something we want corrected.

Pardon me, Mr. Richard. Back to you, please. You're welcome to start the sentence over.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Richard: I was an accountant for the federal government for 10 years, and I, personally, saw how a proper financial framework can help to ensure that every taxpayer dollar is taken into account and put to good use. While I'm disappointed by the report findings, I cannot say I'm surprised.

[*English*]

As a union, our job is to defend our members' interests. All too often, we receive a call from a member who is faced with a difficult choice: Should they blow the whistle by speaking up at the risk of jeopardizing their career or do they simply flag their concerns and walk away? It is incredibly difficult to support and encourage our members to do the right thing when too often, even if they speak up, their advice and recommendations are ignored.

This was all but confirmed when we surveyed our members at CBSA, PSPC and PHAC about their involvement in the development and implementation of ArriveCAN. Of the nearly 1,000 members we have across all three departments, fewer than a dozen members reported their involvement with ArriveCAN.

Unsurprisingly, five of our members said they witnessed something that didn't sit well with them. Most of those individuals indicated that they had flagged their concerns to management, so why were so few of our knowledgeable and experienced financial professionals in these departments consulted? Why did those small few who were consulted, who did the right thing by raising their concerns, get pushed aside?

Now, let me be clear. I believe in the government's financial framework when it is adhered to. When the Financial Administration Act is followed properly, it ensures responsible fiscal management within the Canadian government.

The governance rules are clear, but what do we do when the rules put in place for sound financial stewardship aren't being followed? As financial professionals, we have the ethical obligation to speak up, but this ethical obligation gets bypassed by hiring consultants to be yes-men—for untold amounts. Instead, we should be relying on the institutional knowledge and expertise housed within government at no additional cost to the taxpayers. This is why we must reduce the reliance on contractors, listen to our in-house experts and find better ways to protect whistle-blowers on occasions like this so that people aren't afraid to speak up.

The data on this fear is clear. In the last annual public service employee survey, only 55% of our members at CBSA said they would feel comfortable initiating a formal complaint without fear of reprisal. It's hard to challenge someone when the very person you're challenging is the one who will be assessing your performance at the end of the year. Simply put, whistle-blowers often become scapegoats.

Our members can ensure blunders like this don't happen, but we must let them do their job instead of pushing them aside. We shouldn't be contracting out work that can be performed by public servants at a much lower cost, all while reducing taxpayers' confidence in how their tax dollars are being spent. I often hear that consultants are needed as they do the work cheaper, faster and better, but what happened with ArriveCAN is a clear example as to why that's not always true.

I thank you for your time and welcome any questions you may have.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

With an eye on the clock and the resources, the first round, which is normally six minutes, will be five minutes.

Mrs. Block, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Richard, for joining us today.

I appreciated your opening statements. I also appreciated an article I read that I believe you wrote back in 2021. I may ask some questions about that article as well.

In your opening statement, you referred to hearing complaints from your members at PHAC, CBSA and PSPC. You also mentioned that members are afraid to raise complaints for fear of reprisal and will often just flag concerns and move on.

Do you know who your members raised their concerns to?

Mr. Dany Richard: We don't have the exact details, and I can tell you why. Our members are afraid. In preparation for this committee appearance, we sent out a survey urgently last Friday to hear from them. The survey was anonymous. People gave us information, but they didn't want to give us their names.

I had a few people reach out to me personally—because they know me—and say, “Dany, you cannot name me on this.” They're concerned for their well-being. Blowing the whistle doesn't do you any good. In terms of their exact involvement, they don't want to highlight it because they're concerned for their well-being.

Mrs. Kelly Block: If your members who have concerns were to raise them with someone within the organization, would it be the CFO?

Mr. Dany Richard: It depends on which level they're at. Generally speaking, we always advise our members to raise it to their immediate supervisor, and most often that wouldn't be the CFO. It could be people at various levels. That said, I've been president since 2016. When a member tells me they've seen wrongdoing, I will tell them to raise it, document it and then let it go.

I'm embarrassed that I have to say that to my own members. What I'd rather say is that we're going to fight it and we're going to help them. However, because they're not protected, we have to tell them they need to do the right thing, and the right thing is to raise it to the employer at any level. I say raise it, document it and then let it go, because I can't tell you one case I've ever heard of that had a favourable outcome for a whistle-blower.

• (1625)

Mrs. Kelly Block: For me, that is absolutely concerning. I recognize that just recently we had a colleague introduce a private member's bill in regard to whistle-blowing, and I recognize that it is an issue.

You also stated that fewer than a dozen of the 1,000 members you have across these three departments were consulted on the ArriveCAN app and that they all raised concerns. I think what this does is raise concerns for us. It raises two that I can think of right away. The first is that so few financial officers were consulted. The second is they raised concerns but those concerns were brushed aside. It does seem to be par for the course with the current government to disregard concerns about overspending.

Have any of your members—and you may have already answered this for me—reported reprisal actions related to ArriveCAN?

Mr. Dany Richard: No, they have not. However, I think it's because they know not to push too hard.

Look at the stories we hear in the media about what happens to whistle-blowers. Remember, the majority of our members are accountants, and they have a code of conduct with an obligation to raise anomalies. They have to do it. I'm happy that they do, but because we're not protecting them, it's hard for them to go further.

None of them has raised to us specifically that they've been reprised against, but when you look at the government's own internal survey, the data is clear. Our members are saying, "I don't feel comfortable raising issues. I fear reprisals."

Mrs. Kelly Block: I want to move to the point about consultants and procuring the services of consultants.

You mentioned that consultants are used, you believe, to sidestep financial accountability by replacing public servants with consultants. In the article you wrote, I believe back in 2021, you stated, "At any given time, an alarming percentage of the public service workforce is in what our colleagues at PIPSC have dubbed the shadow public service."

I'm wondering if you can tell us a bit more about that shadow public service and what it is costing Canadians.

Mr. Dany Richard: Often, when people want a project to go forward, our members can be seen as barriers, as sticks in people's wheels, as if finance and accountants are not conducive; they're not helping. They ask how they can bypass them and say, "We know what we want to do, so let's get the results." Then, instead of going to an accountant, they outsource and go to a firm that will deliver exactly the results they're getting.

I've seen members who do costing reports or financial forecasts being told, "We don't like that number." Members will say, "Well, the number is what it is. I'm not here to give you the result you're looking for. I'm telling you that this is what the number is." The shadow public service could be used to say, "If we want to bypass the internal controls, let's outsource the work. Let's go to people who will give us what we want."

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richard. I'm sure members will come back to that. I need to move on.

I'll turn now to Ms. Yip.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thanks for coming to the committee.

Can you describe to the committee who your union represents?

Mr. Dany Richard: Certainly. We represent accountants, comptrollers and anyone who works in finance or audit. They're primarily our members. We have 7,000 members across Canada in over 70 departments.

Ms. Jean Yip: What are the departments?

Mr. Dany Richard: There are over 70 of them. It would probably be easier for me to name the departments that we don't represent.

Ms. Jean Yip: There are 70. I'm sorry. I only heard seven.

Mr. Dany Richard: I'm sorry. There are 70 departments.

Ms. Jean Yip: Okay.

What is your role?

• (1630)

Mr. Dany Richard: As national president, my full-time job is made up of primarily three things.

I go and listen to what my members have to say. What are their issues and what are the problems they are facing?

I interact with senior management to see what's going on and how we can resolve their issues. Generally speaking, this seems to work well. However, at any level of middle management, sometimes there can be issues.

We work with our members, we work with senior management and we work with other unions to collaborate as much as we can together.

Ms. Jean Yip: How do you work with senior management to resolve some of the issues, especially if members are fearful of reprisal?

Mr. Dany Richard: It depends on the department. Generally speaking, we try to have a positive relationship with senior leaders. Overall, if something were to arise as an issue with our members, we know that if we escalate it, generally speaking it will get resolved, the key word there being "generally".

Sometimes, our members are not willing to risk it. I can speak to an example I've seen.

I've been president since 2016. Our members are sometimes even afraid to call us to let us know what's going on, because they're afraid that we might call the employer and rat them out, which is not our role. When you contact your union, it's confidential. We want to help our members.

If a member raises an issue, we will try to escalate it at the lowest level. Sometimes it's middle management or a lower level, but if we can skip a level and get back to the basics to avoid a grievance or a complaint, that's what we like to do. Ultimately, if it doesn't work, that's when we have to apply some formal recourse.

Ms. Jean Yip: What needs to be done to lessen this fear of speaking up? What could we do?

Mr. Dany Richard: We need better measures to protect whistle-blowers. If only we could see more positive cases of someone speaking up instead of having to sacrifice their career. Also, mental wellness is not good. There's financial instability because they had to change departments.

We need more examples of people who did the right thing and it ended in a favourable situation, but too often—you'll hear this in the media all the time—someone spoke up and their life became a living hell. If you're a bad actor, you're going to try to cover up your tracks, and that's at a cost to our members all too often.

This is even though our members.... Keep in mind that they work with the numbers, and numbers don't lie. When you keep accurate records, those records remain there. Often, our members are in a situation where they're able to provide some evidence as to what they're alleging, but even then, despite that, bad actors can try to cover up their tracks.

Ms. Jean Yip: The Auditor General commented on the poor bookkeeping that made determining the exact price of the application impossible. Is this lack of standards something your union is looking into?

Mr. Dany Richard: It's not our role to look into the lack of standards. Generally speaking, the Financial Administration Act, when it's followed, works very well. Internal control is only good if it's followed across the board.

I don't want to make this point, but we're talking about the CBSA. If you're trying to secure the border and you put border officers all across the border, but once a month there's a free-for-all, it defeats the whole purpose. It's the same thing for financial controls. If you do things willy-nilly and decide when you apply them, when they're in and when they're out, it doesn't work.

Internal controls need to be applied consistently to avoid blunders.

Ms. Jean Yip: During the pandemic, almost all of the federal public service was working from home. How do you believe this has impacted the quality of the work completed?

Mr. Dany Richard: For our members, I can tell you that working remotely is something we're able to do. The majority of our members are working with numbers, spreadsheets and audits. This is something we can do remotely, and I think we've shown for the past two years that it has not only worked well but increased productivity because they're able to really focus in and get the work done.

Don't get me wrong. I think there's value in being in the office every once in a while, but our members have shown the ability to work remotely and get the work done. I would argue they are more productive working from home than they are in the office.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Next we go to Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné for five minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Dany Richard for being here today.

Mr. Richard, you mentioned a survey you sent out to your members last week.

I would really like you to tell us more about that, without naming any names, obviously. It's important to respect people's anonymity.

Mr. Dany Richard: Of course.

I am the national president of the Association of Canadian Financial Officers. I don't work at CBSA, but we have members there.

I spoke with my team to find out whether any of our members had concerns they wanted to share with us. I wasn't surprised to hear that the answer was no. I have no doubt that they had con-

cerns, but I think our members are sometimes afraid to communicate with us.

Knowing that I would be appearing before the committee today, my team and I decided to send out an anonymous survey in an effort to gather some information.

I can tell you that I was disappointed to see how little involvement our members had in a transaction of this nature. As we all know, for anything money-related, it's good practice to bring in a financial officer or accountant, not just at the end of the process, but also at the beginning and in the middle of the process. To find out that only 12 of our one thousand members across the three departments were involved is worrisome.

It's worrisome because it means that the importance of financial officers is not recognized. Our job isn't policing. Our job is making sure that taxpayer dollars are being well spent, so it's important to let us do our job.

After we gathered the information, two of our members called me to insist that I not mention their names, precisely because they feared reprisal.

• (1635)

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: What have those members reported to you?

Mr. Dany Richard: Unfortunately, I can't speak to the nature of their involvement, as that would make it possible to identify them.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay.

While protecting their identity, can you tell us whether they mentioned professional misconduct at the Canada Border Services Agency?

Mr. Dany Richard: What I can tell you is that our members tried to do their job and were told there was no time for that.

Again, internal controls were set aside because there was no time to perform them.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay.

So those internal controls should have been done while Arrive-CAN was being developed.

Mr. Dany Richard: It was during the development of the application.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Exactly.

My understanding, while still being sufficiently vague but making it possible to understand the situation, is that some people may have raised red flags internally during the application's design.

Mr. Dany Richard: That's correct.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay. That's noteworthy.

How many officers are there at the Public Health Agency of Canada?

Mr. Dany Richard: Off the top of my head, I would say there are about 50.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: How many of those officers are able to prepare a budget?

Mr. Dany Richard: The vast majority are.

I don't know them all personally, but if one of my financial officers was not able to prepare a budget, I would be very disappointed and I would have a discussion with them.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay.

I don't know if you heard the previous testimony. We learned from the Auditor General's report that the Public Health Agency, which was supposed to manage the design and rollout of ArriveCAN, didn't even prepare a budget or follow up.

I take it that the officers you represent were not necessarily included, whereas normally, when an organization has a project and prepares budgets and a follow-up, it is supposed to include officers who are able to prepare those budgets.

Mr. Dany Richard: That's correct.

It's not even a matter of accounting. My 16-year-old nephew is asking me how this can happen when he himself knows that there must be a documented record and internal controls.

I can assure you that, if any of our members had been consulted on this, we could have done some basic things. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. Internal controls have been in place for decades. We don't need to discover them, we just need to implement them.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: If the Public Health Agency has 50 or so officers and they are all able to prepare budgets, why do you think they were not asked to manage the applications?

Is it a process related only to the ArriveCAN application? Is this application the tip of the iceberg or is it an isolated case?

Mr. Dany Richard: I don't know the details, but based on my experience in a number of departments, in general, internal controls work. When they are set aside, the door is opened to malicious actors who can divert funds so that they end up in the wrong places.

There are two reasons why there is a tendency not to consult our members. First, instead of seeing financial officers as an added value at the beginning of the process, people see them as difficult individuals who always put obstacles in their way, when that is not the case. We're just trying to make sure, when we're asked for so many thousands of dollars, that it makes sense.

• (1640)

The Chair: What about the second one, very quickly?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I was asking you if this was just the tip of the iceberg or if it was an isolated case.

Mr. Dany Richard: Second, we need to be involved in all stages of the process: the beginning, the middle and the end.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

You have the floor for five minutes, Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Richard, thank you very much for your testimony and for all the work your members do every day to ensure that taxpayers get their money's worth. That is an extremely important task.

My first question is about something you raised in your opening remarks—the fact that the public service is increasingly contracting out. In what way does that make the work of your members more difficult when it comes to providing financial advice and guidance on government programs, when a lot of the contracts are carried out outside the public service?

Mr. Dany Richard: When they don't have access to the tools, the authority, the documents and the information they need, it makes their job more difficult.

When you go to the doctor, for example, they have to perform a health check to find out what your situation is. If you hide information from the doctor, their diagnosis may not be the best. It won't be adequate. The same is true for our members. They are financial professionals. Most of them are accountants who have done audit work. They know how to do it and they have the required tools, but if they are not given the necessary information and are set aside, they cannot do their job. Why use an outside firm to figure out how to prepare a budget and a carry out a financial analysis when we already have that expertise within the public service?

Our members often tell me about cases where a consultant has been hired to carry out a project, but they are the ones who have to write the report. The consultant does everything, and then they go to the financial officer to ask if it's okay, and the financial officer corrects their work. Ultimately, it's as if the final report had been prepared by the financial officer, since all the changes they recommended were made to the report.

It is insulting to our members to hear that there is a lack of knowledge within the public service, given that external consultants who are hired need to work with them to prepare their report.

Our members must be trusted and given a chance to show their expertise. I'm not saying that consultants should never be used. When there is a lack of knowledge within an organization, it absolutely has to be done, but too often consultants are used automatically.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you for your response.

[English]

I've been in Parliament for a long time and have seen numerous scandals with contracting out. On ArriveCAN, we're looking at \$60 million. The Phoenix system that started under the Harper government is now at \$2.5 billion and counting. The ETS scandal under the Harper government was \$400 million. I could go on and on with the Harper government and the current government and numerous scandals.

At any point, have you seen governments, namely the former Conservative government, consulting with the expertise in your union, the financial accountants who understand the best way to go forward? Were you ever consulted—I mean your members—on Phoenix or ever consulted on ETS? You've mentioned that they were not really consulted on ArriveCAN.

Mr. Dany Richard: That's a very broad question.

Generally speaking, if we are consulted, which is not often, it's as an afterthought. It's not at the beginning of the process to ensure we're getting things right: Are we putting in place proper due diligence, proper accountability?

We're trying to bring our members front and centre to ensure that we can avoid blunders like Phoenix by costing them out and asking, "Does this make sense?" We recently had the public service health care plan. How much is that going to cost?

We have financial professionals in-house who can help cost these things out, budget and forecast. This is what we do professionally, but we need the tools, the authority and the data to do our job.

Mr. Peter Julian: You mentioned whistle-blowers and the important role they play. I remember vividly the case of Sylvie Therrien, who was a whistle-blower under the Harper government. She talked about the misuse of EI funds, and the Harper government just canned her. They basically summarily fired her. There are many other examples of whistle-blowers under the Conservatives and under the current government who were either intimidated or fired.

What are the protections we need to see so that we have a culture where whistle-blowers can come forward with this information and not be raising concerns of dismissal or being summarily fired, as we see in so many cases?

• (1645)

Mr. Dany Richard: OGGO issued a report in 2017 on what needs to happen to improve whistle-blower protections, particularly in the public service. There's a long list of recommendations, but the number one recommendation is to ensure that when a whistle-blower speaks up, they are protected.

I'll give an example.

If I work for any department—it doesn't matter which one it is—and I feel uncomfortable because I feel I was sexually harassed, I will be protected as the victim. They will remove me from the workplace to ensure that I am protected at all costs.

If you blow the whistle and you stay with the same team, we put the burden of proof on you. People you have accused will try to cover it up. With the amount of stress these people get put through because they're simply not protected, we need to ensure that whistle-blowers are protected.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now start our second round.

Mr. Brock, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Richard, your evidence so far, in the half an hour we've listened to you, in my view, is a serious indictment

against the Justin Trudeau government. The concerns regarding the culture of fear are extremely disturbing for professional public servants. That has expanded under Justin Trudeau by 40%.

In 2015, he promised to cut back on external consultants, yet for the last fiscal year, Ottawa spent \$15.7 billion on external consultants, totally bypassing the professional public service. It was an 88% increase. I want to raise that as a concern.

Sir, based on your years of experience of financial matters, accounts from your members, the RCMP commissioner testifying they are investigating ArriveCAN, the AG's report, PSPC officials claiming they are sufficiently suspicious of criminal activity surrounding the ArriveCAN procurement process, documented evidence of forgery and potential fraud, and the mountain of media reporting, do you believe, in light of everything I have presented to you, which I'm sure you have been listening to and reading on your own, that there is a strong element of criminal wrongdoing with ArriveCAN?

Mr. Dany Richard: Unfortunately, I can't comment on that. It's not my area of expertise. I can tell you, based on the findings of the Auditor General, there was a clear lack of respect of the financial framework that's in place.

Mr. Larry Brock: Have you had any particular direct communication with the ministers responsible for the membership you represent?

Mr. Dany Richard: No.

Mr. Larry Brock: Okay.

You've also read in the newspaper about Mr. Yeo, one of the principals of Dalian, who was gainfully employed not only as a member of the Department of National Defence, but also as a sub-contractor. In this particular case, Mr. Yeo and the other company he's affiliated with, Coradix, are responsible for receiving upwards of \$40 million to \$50 million in taxpayer funds. It's another two-person company, much like GC Strategies.

Do you believe the ability to moonlight as a member of the public service while being accused of fleecing taxpayers at the same time is an isolated incident in the public service?

Mr. Dany Richard: I believe so, yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: You've not heard of any other accounts of this happening.

Mr. Dany Richard: No, not to my knowledge. Now, that's not to say it doesn't exist.

Basic due diligence could easily pick this up. As a public servant, you have a code of conduct. There are certain things you're not supposed to do. We have rules and controls in place to prevent this from happening.

Mr. Larry Brock: What are your thoughts on ministerial accountability? All I've been hearing so far is the minister is completely oblivious, there's a raging firestorm happening in the ministry and there's plausible deniability: "No one told me. I didn't bother to ask."

How do you feel about ministerial responsibility with this particular scam?

Mr. Dany Richard: Ministerial responsibility is important. Even at the deputy levels, the buck stops department by department. We need someone who's accountable, but for organizations such as PSPC, ESDC and DND, we're talking about hundreds of millions or billions of dollars. This is very difficult for one person. That's why we need financial officers to do their job of due diligence, of financial stewardship, to protect these deputy ministers to allow them to do their job.

You can't have one person verifying every single transaction. Due diligence is important. Our members can help specifically with that task to ensure taxpayers' money is being not only accounted for but well spent.

• (1650)

Mr. Larry Brock: Do you think it's a function of incompetence at the deputy ministerial level, or is there an active attempt by ministers to shield themselves from this raging firestorm of fleecing the taxpayer?

Mr. Dany Richard: I couldn't speak to that, unfortunately. I wouldn't know.

Mr. Larry Brock: All right.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Larry Brock: That's fine. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to say, Mr. Richard, how much I appreciate your testimony here and your obvious dedication to and able representation of your members regarding what I would call a professional code of conduct. Can you speak to that? You mentioned the designations of some of your members. What are some of the ethical and professional standards they must adhere to?

Mr. Dany Richard: Generally speaking, every public servant adheres to a code of conduct. For our members, however, for those who have certain designations, the bar is a bit higher.

I'll give an example. If you see something wrong and you didn't do anything wrong, you're a witness to something. If you're performing an audit and an invoice was paid and you detect an anomaly and something doesn't pass the smell test, you have a duty to report it. The challenge with this is that even though you haven't done anything wrong—you're just doing your job—there could be consequences to you personally.

Our members are faced with this situation. They know that ethically they have to report. How do they do this without committing career suicide? How do they do the right thing that they know they're supposed to do, that they have to do? They need to manage their careers. This is why it's one of the most difficult things and one of the most difficult conversations I to have with my members.

Unfortunately, I have to let them know they've done nothing wrong and they need to report it—to their supervisor, to whoever they want. However, we need to make sure we document it, because if ever something happens and there's a scandal, we need to be able to show that they did the right thing and raised it with management. The—

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Can I ask you about that, Mr. Richard? What kind of documentation would be recommended in this case? I say that knowing, of course, that we have the Auditor General's report and the report of the Office of the Procurement Ombudsman. I would think that members of your union who were involved in the processes under study would have been interviewed, would have been met with.

What kinds of records would they have been able to provide? Indeed, why not provide them before an audit takes place? Why not channel those concerns and recommendations directly to the Auditor General's office or to the procurement ombudsman?

Mr. Dany Richard: It's unfortunately a matter of them not being protected.

Again, they have to do the right thing, which is flag it to the employer. If there's an anomaly, if there's a suspicion, if it doesn't pass the acid test, we need to flag it. Once they've flagged it, we always tell our members to document it because it's not about what you know; it's what you can prove.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: What does the document look like? Is it like—

Mr. Dany Richard: It could be as simple as an email.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: —an email or a report?

Mr. Dany Richard: I'll give an example. When a consultant has been hired, we've seen amounts completely changed and conclusions to reports that are a complete 180° and don't make any sense. We tell our members to send an email raising their concerns and to document them. This way, at least the ball is in the employer's court and you are protected.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Where is that email sent? Is it sent to a supervisor?

Mr. Dany Richard: It's to anyone under managerial responsibilities. It could be a director, a senior leader, a CFO or a direct supervisor.

The moment we inform the employer of our findings, it reduces the risk for our members, because they flagged what they saw and they informed their appropriate chain of command of the anomalies or discrepancies they saw.

• (1655)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I'm going to ask you this. Of course, you've testified already and we know that many employees were working from home. Could there have been better oversight if employees had been working in the office? Would this have made any difference to the reporting mechanism or to the physical interactions we have in an office? "Hey, by the way, did you see that project? What's going on there?" It's that kind of thing.

Mr. Dany Richard: From our members' standpoint, we deal with proof and evidence. Anything that happens needs to have a paper trail. I can only speak from our members' standpoint because everything either goes through an email or is an invoice. There's always a paper or electronic trail.

It wouldn't make any difference from my members' standpoint, because we need to substantiate whatever it is in the documents or the invoices.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Coming back to the workforce, it's really critical that we have financial record-keeping happening and oversight.

I'll use the question that we had for the PSPC regarding the CAF authorizations and so on. How come somebody didn't catch that? We saw that the public service was dramatically cut back under the Harper government when Pierre Poilievre was the Minister of Employment.

The Chair: Ask your question, please, Mrs. Shanahan. You're way over your time.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Do you worry about cuts like these coming back and what they would mean for accountability and transparency?

Mr. Dany Richard: Yes, I do.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I'll pick up on my earlier questions.

You said that, in general, the internal controls worked. That's all well and good. However, the Auditor General told us about cases of non-compliance with processes at Canada Border Services Agency, Shared Services Canada and Public Services and Procurement Canada.

Do you think that the ArriveCAN case, which the Auditor General went over with a fine-tooth comb, is an isolated example?

Mr. Dany Richard: I can't comment on that. In general, when internal controls are applied, there aren't any issues and nothing to report. When internal controls are ignored so that things can be done more quickly, these types of situations may arise. However, I don't have any information on the matter to show that this involves a certain percentage or a certain amount of money. I can tell you—

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I understand that you can't provide figures, but I imagine that you receive complaints. You recently received some complaints from Canada Border Services Agency employees. I imagine that you receive complaints of this nature at other times as well, and that this hasn't just happened in the past few weeks.

Mr. Dany Richard: Yes. I'll give you an example.

Section 34 of the Financial Administration Act states that, when an invoice is received from a supplier, someone must be able to certify that the goods or services were delivered. That's normal. If I ordered 10 chairs, I must check whether I received them all. Obviously,

it's harder to verify whether \$10,000 or \$100,000 worth of services were delivered, especially if there aren't any breakdowns. Clearly, this area is more conducive to fraud.

To answer your question, yes, our members do sometimes share their concerns with us, or ask us questions about situations that they see. This doesn't necessarily mean that these are fraud cases. It may just mean that more oversight is needed.

I can't say that there are in fact fraud cases. However, I can tell you that anomalies are reported, and that's normal.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Julian, you have the floor for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Mr. Richard, you just said that you were concerned about possible budget cuts in the public service. In December, we spent 30 hours voting. The Conservatives voted 120 times, over and over again, to cut a number of programs and services in Canada.

What expertise would we lose as a result of the cuts that affect your members? On average, how many years of experience and training do your members have? What would we lose if the Conservatives came back to power and implemented the budget cuts that they voted for in December?

● (1700)

Mr. Dany Richard: In terms of governance, it's good practice to review expenses. You have to consider whether the expenses incurred are a good investment. When you cut things by 2%, 5% or 10%, without necessarily reviewing each case, you may make cuts that shouldn't be made. In general, every dollar invested in financial auditing provides a return on investment.

On average, our members are 40 years old, and most of them are accountants. This means that they have a bachelor's degree, which includes an internship, or a graduate degree. They want to do their job. If you want to find out where to save money, ask the accountants.

Mr. Peter Julian: Well put.

[*English*]

You mentioned earlier the Financial Administration Act and the fact that if it had been followed, we wouldn't have had this myriad of scandals we saw with ETS under Harper, the Phoenix scandal we've had under both Harper and the current government and the ArriveCAN scandal we have right now.

Why is it not being followed? Is it being overridden? Is it because the political deciders are simply saying it's not important to follow? Why is it being overridden so often?

Mr. Dany Richard: It's case by case. In this particular case with ArriveCAN, I can only tell you what I've heard from two members. I can't reveal their identities, but they were basically told, "We don't have time for governance."

Don't get me wrong. There's a time and place to tolerate a bit more risk, but you have to realize what kind of risk you're taking and what your risk mitigation strategies are.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Richard. I'm going to give Mr. Julian another two minutes at the end, so I'm going to have you briefly wrap it up there.

Mr. Barrett, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There's been \$21 billion spent on outside contracting by the NDP-Liberal government, and it looks like they're going to continue that trend. Is that acceleration to historic levels something that concerns your members?

Mr. Dany Richard: Yes. Look, there's a time and place for using consultants. There's nothing inherently wrong when it's done for the right reasons, but when it becomes the de facto practice, it is an issue.

Mr. Michael Barrett: On the failed arrive scam program, which we saw both the NDP and Liberals vote to continue to pour more money into, two of the highest paid contractors received a combined total of \$27 million, with 30% commissions on the \$27 million going to four people.

I'm sure that would not meet with the approval of your members—the expenditure of those funds on four people, instead of investments in more resources, personnel or training for your members.

Mr. Dany Richard: I can tell you that had my members seen this, flags would have been raised.

There's something known as a price review. I'll give an example of a chair. If you're selling a chair to the Government of Canada, are you selling me that chair at a price you would normally charge someone else in another company, or are you charging me more because I am the Government of Canada? By doing a simple market comparison, we could say these rates make sense. Does the work you're asking to be performed take that amount of time normally?

Mr. Michael Barrett: You talk about flags being raised. These are two companies with four employees doing \$27 million in business. Is that something that would raise red flags?

Mr. Dany Richard: If my members had been consulted and had compared it to what something is normally worth in the market, yes, they would have raised a flag. Again, I can't speak to this particular example, because I don't know if that's normal or not.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you believe that Canadian taxpayers got good value for money with the ArriveCAN app?

Mr. Dany Richard: I can't comment because there's not even a financial record of how much was spent. To assess the value for money for Canadians, you need to know exactly how much was spent, and we can't even do basic.... Based on the Auditor General's report, we can't even identify how much ArriveCAN actually cost.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Would you say there was good financial oversight or project management?

• (1705)

Mr. Dany Richard: No, there was definitely not good financial oversight.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Have you ever seen a project that has been as mismanaged as ArriveCAN, which the Auditor General said she believes cost about \$60 million? I'm sure you would agree that it's an indictment of financial record-keeping when you have the Auditor General saying she can't definitively say what the project cost was.

Mr. Dany Richard: I've never seen something of this nature. For my members, it's very frustrating, because if any one of them had been consulted, you could have just let us do our job. We don't need to reinvent the wheel. This is basic bookkeeping. It is easy to prevent these things.

Mr. Michael Barrett: How long did you work for PSPC?

Mr. Dany Richard: It was for approximately 10 years.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In your decade at PSPC, how often did you see bait and switch, as described by the procurement ombudsman, used in contracting?

Mr. Dany Richard: I have seen a few occasions—and I think some of our members have been there as well—that had suspicions. I say "suspicions" because, again, we can only know what we see. If we don't see all of the information, it's difficult for us to make an accurate assessment of the situation.

Mind you, sometimes that's part of the strategy. If the information is not being flowed through one point of contact, we can keep certain people in the dark.

Mr. Michael Barrett: With ArriveCAN, it was detailed that almost three-quarters of the resources were bait and switched. Did you see anything or hear reports from your members of anything at that level?

Mr. Dany Richard: Not in my personal experience, no.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What about reports to you by members?

Mr. Dany Richard: Some members alluded to it but, again, they couldn't prove it.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Why do you think the government cut your members out of this process? We've heard the Auditor General say that the public health emergency was not a valid excuse to throw the rules out the window, the ones your members operate by every day. Why did they cut you out and why hasn't the government conceded that doing that was wrong?

Mr. Dany Richard: I can't speak to the government's part, but I can tell you that generally speaking, when you are dealing with financial officers and auditors, it can be perceived as lagging in time. If you want something done quickly, maybe you don't want accountants and auditors in there. However, if you want something done well and to bring value to Canadians, you want financial officers in there. You want accountability, you want properly documented records and you want people, when they're signing an invoice, who know what they're signing for.

Although it could be perceived as saving time, you're not going to save money. That's for sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You didn't save any money with this thing.

The Chair: I'll turn now to Ms. Khalid.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To follow up on the questions from my Conservative colleagues, we have had so many meetings on this. I think we're all equally quite alarmed by how much money was spent on this app and how this panned out with the lack of documents.

I'm a little frustrated with how the Conservatives are trying to pin this on Justin Trudeau signing documents and being nefarious and all of that, but I think I'll leave it to Mr. Richard.

Sir, who exactly do you represent?

Mr. Dany Richard: We represent financial professionals. Again, they're accountants, comptrollers, auditors and members who are there to ensure financial integrity and to ensure that the Financial Administration Act is being respected.

However, if our members are not allowed to do their job.... For example, if someone were to come to me and say, "Hey, Dany, your member didn't do proper bookkeeping", I'd say they were never privy to the information and were never consulted. If a member didn't do their job, I'd be the first one to ask, "What were you doing? What were you thinking?"

There's accountability here. It's not just for our members as financial professionals—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I agree a hundred per cent. It's about accountability and holding the right people to account, rather than trying to diminish the value of our democratic institutions at this point.

I think you do a very important job, Mr. Richard.

Perhaps you can help us understand how the 30,000 jobs that the previous Conservative government cut impacted where we are today with the CBSA and this ArriveCAN issue.

• (1710)

Mr. Dany Richard: Whenever you make job cuts, there are a few ways of doing it. The most popular one is through attrition. It's perceived, for lack of a better word, as the easiest one. However, when you let people go through attrition, where does the work go?

I'll use a simple example. Let's say there's a two-person unit and one person retires. They say they'll save money and they're not going to backfill this position. What about all of those tasks, those duties and the workload? Who do they go to? They now fall on one person, who is asked to do not only their job but their co-worker's job.

Inevitably, you're going to have way too much workload and you're going to be unable to do your job. You're going to have some performance issues and you're going to be stressed out. Anytime you cut jobs, it's going to have consequences.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You're absolutely right.

When those 30,000 jobs were cut, it was Prime Minister Harper in power, and the current opposition leader, Pierre Poilievre, was the Minister of Employment. I think it speaks a lot to what the long-term impacts of policy decisions really are.

With regard to the Auditor General's report and its questions around how public service procurement happens, what do you have to say? We are talking about middle management making decisions that did not record all of the financial contracts that were made. What do you think are the next steps we can take to ensure that this does not happen?

We are absolutely on the right track. Yes, the government is there to account. Yes, ministerial responsibility is there. However, at the end of the day, where is the public service on this? How are they ensuring that they are fulfilling their accountability requirements to ensure they're not taking advantage of the public dollar?

Mr. Dany Richard: There are a few things.

First, we need accountability. The Financial Administration Act was not followed. Someone has to be accountable for that. Someone looked the other way. Something happened. I don't know why and I don't know who, but something wasn't done properly.

Second, if we're protecting whistle-blowers, we need to make sure, as I was saying before, that when someone sees something that's not right, they're more likely to speak up. They'll want to do the right thing.

Third, we need to reduce the reliance on contractors and let our members do their jobs. We are eager professionals looking forward to being able to dig in there, find anomalies and find dollars for the taxpayer to make sure they are spent wisely, to make sure that we can add value. However, we need to be let in. Open up your doors. Let us in. We want to be an ally.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I really appreciate that, and I think you raise a really good point. We have to make sure that our public service is capable and trusted enough to take on those contracts and consulting roles to fill in those gaps where necessary.

As we are talking about—

The Chair: Ask a brief question, Ms. Khalid. You're at your time.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: —the retention of employees, Mr. Richard, what do you think the next step for our public service is at this point?

Mr. Dany Richard: Specifically with regard to ArriveCAN, there needs to be accountability. We need to reinforce the message that the rules in place exist for a reason. Our members can help you. Just let us do our job.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to our third round. As I said, members will have four minutes. I will probably remind each of you when you have 30 seconds left so we don't go over.

Mrs. Block, you have the first four minutes.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to look at the opinion piece you wrote back in November 2021. In it, you talk about the familiarity that Canadians have with the important work of the Auditor General. Then you go on to observe that "it's the 6,000 accountants, auditors and financial management professionals working away in programs and departments who are tasked with ensuring public funds are spent appropriately in the first place." Does this include CFOs?

Mr. Dany Richard: Our members don't represent CFOs, no. However, the Auditor General often looks after the fact, only at the past. Our members, if they are positioned well in the front end, can prevent blunders from happening in the first place.

Mrs. Kelly Block: It is my understanding that chief financial officers are responsible for or have a procurement organization that works under them, and they actually sign off on funding requests. Is that their role?

• (1715)

Mr. Dany Richard: That's correct.

Mrs. Kelly Block: You also made this statement in your article: "The staffing system as it currently exists rewards and prioritizes those who know how to work the system, not those who are most qualified and capable." Can you explain what you mean by "work the system"?

Mr. Dany Richard: Yes, certainly.

I don't think it's any secret. Generally speaking, if you work with numbers, you tend to not necessarily be a people person. You might be an introvert. I say this because we have members who do fantastic work. However, they're not necessarily the most popular when it comes to being sociable, interacting with their coworkers, going out or making a name for themselves. Often what happens is that people who get promoted.... Who is liked? Who is someone I get along with? Often, maybe you don't get along with an accountant who's asking you some questions.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Right. Thank you.

In testimony before the OGGO committee, Botler AI raised the issue of kickbacks, and then again this week, on CTV, alleged there have been bribes. Do you have any concerns about this or about any potential criminality?

Mr. Dany Richard: I've never witnessed kickbacks. I haven't heard any members raise kickbacks, so I can't speak to that. However, it's always a possibility.

Again, that's why you have a code of ethics, that's why you have internal rules and that's why you monitor transactions to the best of your abilities. You can never eliminate risk, but you can reduce the risk, you can mitigate the risk and you can ensure that proper controls are put in place to reduce the probabilities of things like this happening.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay.

You responded to one of my colleagues that one way of ensuring the door is not open to fraud is by having the proper controls in place. Do you believe that the CFO at the CBSA did his or her job in ensuring that public funds were spent appropriately on the ArriveCAN application?

Mr. Dany Richard: I couldn't comment about the CFO. I can tell you someone did not. I don't know who that person was, but someone did not do their job.

There's accountability. Normally, if you follow the money and the paper trail, you'll find out who that is, but when there is no paper trail or electronic documents, it makes it very difficult to find out where the crack was in the armour.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Ms. Sidhu.

You have the floor for four minutes, please.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Richard, for your testimony.

Mr. Richard, you talked about someone needing to be accountable, but what new protections for whistle-blowers would you recommend that do not already exist? You already gave some recommendations, but which ones do you think should be there?

Mr. Dany Richard: There's already a task force working on this right now, and we have someone on the committee. There's a report from OGGO in 2017.

There are multiple measures we can take, but I think the most important is one that I mentioned. A whistle-blower needs to know that when they speak up, they will be protected, because you cannot jeopardize your career and your livelihood. Imagine the stress you're being put through when you did the right thing. You spoke up and all of a sudden everyone is attacking you. You ask yourself, "Should I have done this?" You might regret this decision for the rest of your life.

The most important of all the recommendations is to find a way to protect the whistle-blower.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you—

The Chair: Ms. Sidhu, just hold on. I'm going to suspend for a few seconds. I'll be right back.

• (1715)

(Pause)

• (1720)

The Chair: I'll bring the meeting back to order.

Ms. Sidhu, you have three minutes, please.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know that during the pandemic, a lot of employees were working from home instead of at the office. Do you think they were better off-site than they were working in the office?

Mr. Dany Richard: The levels of productivity, I have no doubt, have increased, but there are intangibles that happen when you're working in the office. That's why I always tell my members that going into the office every once in a while makes sense.

We're in the game of information, so you might walk into someone who says they're working on a project, and my members might say they weren't consulted on this or didn't know they were working on that. It allows my members, through an unofficial function, to sometimes overhear information they then can ask questions about—not in a bad way. You could be an executive and just forget to consult with your financial adviser. Having these conversations, these water cooler talks, can help our members do this.

I genuinely believe—I can't speak for all of the public service here—our members have definitely shown that working remotely not only works but works well. I would argue it increases employee morale because we're able to do what we do best, which is work with numbers. We love it.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: I also want to ask about some consulting companies. When we're talking about taking advantage of the procurement system, how can the system be changed to be more resilient? Are there any solutions you can recommend?

Mr. Dany Richard: Our members don't deal directly with procurement. They're not procurement officers. They'll do some costing and they'll do some analysis.

I can't speak specifically to procurement, but I will tell you that when it comes to consulting firms—I won't name names—there are bigger firms out there. When our members know a firm is coming in, the general sentiment is to ask why, and we'll look at the task we've asked them to perform and say that we could have done it internally. Why is this being outsourced? That makes no sense to us.

It's even more insulting when our members are then asked, “By the way, can you help out the consultant with their analysis and do the forecast?” Well, here you are, with someone at a thousand dollars a day, whereas our members don't cost that much. I would argue that with our members you will get better quality and it will get done faster and at a cheaper price.

I've seen this happen time and time again.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is the time.

We're moving now to Madam Sinclair-Desgagné.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for two minutes

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: To pick up on what you were saying, Mr. Richard, many financial officers must feel insulted, in this case. The number of consultants hired has been increasing since 2016. The number of public service employees has increased too, but most of the new hires are people in operational roles to manage the consultants. A huge machine is used to manage the consultants, even though the necessary expertise is already there. I

must add that this dependence on outside expertise is partly the result of the cuts that the Conservatives made to the public service when they were in power.

I'll refer to the ArriveCAN case and the testimony that you recently received. If the people who spoke to you anonymously were listened to and their advice taken seriously, would it have made a difference, or would they have been bypassed? How could they have helped to avoid this situation?

Mr. Dany Richard: I can assure you that, if our members had been not only listened to, but also consulted, none of this would have happened. When it comes to finance, we must be consulted and listened to.

I'll use the example of the doctor again. If I go to see my doctor because I'm a few pounds overweight and not in the best shape, he'll tell me to watch my diet and exercise more. He'll give me a check-up and make recommendations. Our members do the same thing. Give us the information, and we'll verify compliance with standards and make recommendations.

However, ultimately, we aren't the ones making the decisions. Even if the doctor tells you to stop eating donuts in the morning, you can continue to do so. In a similar fashion, even if our members point out the risk of failing to apply internal controls, in the end, they don't make the decision. They make recommendations, but they don't act as police.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Julian, you have the floor for two minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Richard, you mentioned the management consultant who was getting a thousand dollars a day. I'm reminded of the Harper government's contract for \$90,000 a day with a consulting firm. It was \$90,000 a day to trim federal spending. It is unbelievable, I think, to Canadians watching that any government would spend \$90,000 a day to save money. Of course, the result was the debacle that we now know as Phoenix, at \$2.5 billion, which started under the Conservative government. We've seen the Liberal government with ArriveCAN and the \$60 million that obviously has not gone to the public good.

I have to come back to the point you just made in French with Madam Sinclair-Desgagné. If the Harper government or the current government had sat down and consulted with your members, would we be saving far more in financial resources and be more effective with federal programs? We've seen the Harper government splurging on Phoenix and ETS, and with the current government, there are many examples as well, including ArriveCAN, where money has simply been wasted.

Mr. Dany Richard: Absolutely. When you're looking to save pennies and dollars, how about a talk with the people who are managing, who see the dollars going in and going out, who take care of the budgets and the forecasts and who see the expenditures? I'm not saying we have a secret recipe here, but I can tell you from speaking to a lot of my members that it's often insulting when you don't consult with the people at the ground level who see all the ins and outs.

We can definitely make recommendations on where we can save money and where can we add value for Canadians. Our members see every penny that goes in and every penny that goes out. This is where we should start. Increasing the number of financial officers, of auditors, we have is a return on investment. It's not an expenditure. It's a return on investment that's worth the investment.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Barrett, you have the floor for four minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Jamil Jivani, who is a common-sense Conservative from Durham, was elected in a landslide victory. He received an absolute majority, with a whopping 57% of the popular vote. His nearest rival, who only eked out 22.5% of the vote, had a visit from the PSPC minister to help him get that 22%. I don't know what help he got from the PSPC minister, and I have a question for our witness about that. I am excited that Mr. Jivani, of course, is going to help common-sense Conservatives axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

Mr. Richard, when you were a financial adviser at PSPC, you obviously gained quite an understanding of operations in that department. The former minister for PSPC, new to her role in the summer of 2022, claimed that she was never briefed on ArriveCAN and had no information. It cost \$60 million or so, and there are thousands if not tens of thousands of pages of documents that we believe have been destroyed. We aren't able to prove they existed because the Auditor General can't get her hands on them.

Is it believable that a minister wouldn't have been briefed on this? If so, would it tell you that it was deliberate that the information wasn't briefed to the minister? How does it come to pass that a project of this nature wouldn't have been presented to the minister?

• (1730)

Mr. Dany Richard: Was she briefed on it or not? I couldn't speak to that.

I can tell you that if my members detect any anomalies or anything that needs to be raised, they'll raise it. They don't necessarily raise it to the minister's level, because there are many layers before we get there.

Again, we don't represent executives. However, we represent members and financial professionals. It is their duty and responsibility, if they are presented with information that makes no sense to them, to escalate it. They wouldn't do it directly and skip three or four levels. There is a chain of command we have to respect.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Some of the information we know now has been accumulated over nearly two years, since this was first escalated and raised by Conservatives, so your members would have seen some of this information. Would any of that get fed into their

reporting workflow and what they've understood to come to pass? That information would then get passed up to their managers and to the ADM, DM and minister.

What's the formal process? Because it's only coming out through reports from independent officers to Parliament, does it only go to the minister, and your members don't interact with the information?

Mr. Dany Richard: Generally speaking, if we were to follow the formal process of how things are supposed to operate, my members would have been involved on the front end, not the back end. Then, had they seen anomalies... Maybe they were involved and they didn't see any anomalies. However, based on the survey we did, I can tell you that for this project, a lot more of our members should have said, "Yes, we were consulted and we were involved."

Based on the limited available information I have based on the survey we did, I can tell you that not enough of our members were consulted or kept apprised of the situation throughout this process.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is your time.

Ms. Khalid, you will round us out with four minutes, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To go back to something my colleague said about the Durham election, 27% of the population voted, out of which 57% were so greatly voting for... I forget the candidate's name; I'm sorry—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Jamil Jivani is the next MP for Durham. He mopped the floor with the Liberal.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, turn your microphone off, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Please turn your microphone off. It is my turn. I didn't interrupt you.

The Chair: That is noted.

Ms. Khalid, the floor is yours again.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much.

It really says how much misinformation is propagated through the Conservatives. Right now—and I'm sure they'll make a clip out of it—they say X, Y and Z, and they did this and they did that, with corruption and all of that. Over the past 24 hours, I've had to deal with a lot of hate mail with a lot of threats to my person based on disinformation spread by the Conservatives.

I'm leading into a question here.

When we propagate the disinformation that oftentimes our Conservative members are leading with, whether it's respect to vaccines, the purpose of the ArriveCAN app, how our CBSA operates or how our public service operates, how do members deal with that? What kind of punishment do they receive from the disinformation the Conservatives love to spread about them?

• (1735)

Mr. Dany Richard: I'm not sure I get the question there. I'm sorry. Could you repeat that? I'm not sure I follow the question.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Let me ask you this. How do disinformation campaigns impact the members you serve, the members of our CB-SA and our public service, whether in relation to anti-vaccine campaigns or arrive scam campaigns—whatever they call it—when they're dealing with the general public in providing a service to Canadians?

Mr. Dany Richard: I can say this. Whatever happens in the media or at a political level finds its way down to our members. Remember, our members are in the trenches. They're not senior management; they're the doers of the work. They see the numbers, the financial statements.

It can sometimes be difficult to tie what we are trying to achieve at a very high level with what they're saying. We're saying that we believe in integrity, that values are important, that we need to do due diligence and have value for money. However, when we see a report like the one from the Auditor General, it makes our members very frustrated because this whole thing could have been prevented had we just adhered to the existing financial framework.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I just want to clarify.

Could it have been prevented...in that we spent too much money, that this app was a waste of time or that COVID was a conspiracy? Where are we on the spectrum here?

Mr. Dany Richard: I couldn't speak to the amount of money, to how much this should have cost. All I can tell you is that basic fundamentals in accounting best practices were not respected. At the end of the day, had our members been allowed to do their jobs, all of this wouldn't have happened.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Do you think Mr. Trudeau was the reason your members were not able to have their due diligence done on this app?

Mr. Dany Richard: I don't know who is accountable. There's not enough evidence to suggest.... Again, we would normally follow the paper trails, but unfortunately there are no paper trails.

The Chair: That is the time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Richard, for coming in today and for staying a bit late.

I'm now out of resources.

This meeting is adjourned.

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