R. v. McDonald, 2017 NWTSC 65

S-1-CR2016000020

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

IN THE MATTER OF:

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

- vs. -

RONALD VINCENT McDONALD

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Transcript of the Rulings (Bail application and s. 598 of

the Criminal Code) by The Honourable Justice L. A.

Charbonneau, at Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories,

on August 8th A.D., 2017.

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APPEARANCES:

Ms. A. Piché: Counsel for the Crown

Mr. C. Davison: Counsel for the Accused

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Charge under s. 271 Criminal Code

No information shall be published in any document or

broadcast or transmitted in any way which could identify

the victim or a witness in these proceedings pursuant to

s. 486.4 of the Criminal Code of Canada

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1 THE COURT: Mr. McDonald faces a charge

2 of sexual assault for events that are alleged

3 to have occurred back in May 2015. He elected

4 to have a jury trial on this charge. That

5 trial was scheduled to proceed in Norman Wells

6 commencing at 2 p.m. on July 31st, 2017.

7 Mr. McDonald did not appear before the

8 Court at that time. A warrant was issued for

9 his arrest. He turned himself into the

10 custody of the RCMP detachment in Yellowknife

11 on the 2nd of August, at 2:20 p.m.

12 Two issues must now be dealt with. The

13 first is bail and the second is whether Mr.

14 McDonald has lost his right to be tried by a

15 jury by operation of section 598 of the

16 Criminal Code. Different legal frameworks

17 govern these two issues but the evidence that

18 relates to the reasons why Mr. McDonald did

19 not attend Court in Norman Wells is relevant

20 to both issues. The two hearings essentially

21 proceeded together.

22 First, with respect to the allegations and

23 the procedural history of this matter, as I

24 said, the events that gave rise to the charge

25 date back to May 2015. Mr. McDonald and the

26 complainant did not know one another before

27 these events. On the evening in question, it

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1 is alleged that they were both at a bar in

2 Norman Wells and consumed alcohol there, and

3 that they later found themselves at a house

4 party at a residence in Norman Wells, with

5 five other people in attendance.

6 The complainant was seen at one point

7 going from the kitchen area to the living

8 room. Some time later two people, who were

9 described by the Crown as "independent

10 witnesses", walked into the living room and

11 allegedly found Mr. McDonald on top of her,

12 making thrusting motions. It appeared to them

13 that he was having sexual intercourse with

14 her. It appeared to them that she was

15 unconscious. According to the witnesses, her

16 arms were limp. One witness said that she

17 appeared "dead to the world."

18 Mr. McDonald's clothes were off. The

19 complainant still had clothes on the upper

20 part of her body, but her pants and underwear

21 were off.

22 The two individuals pulled Mr. McDonald

23 off and told him to leave the house. It is

24 alleged that it took several minutes to wake

25 the complainant up. She is expected to

26 testify that she experienced a blackout that

27 night and has no memory of what happened to

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1 her; that after she woke up she felt like

2 someone had sex with her; and that she would

3 not have consented to having sex with Mr.

4 McDonald that night.

5 The incident took place in the early

6 morning hours. It was reported to the RCMP in

7 Norman Wells at around 8 o'clock that same

8 morning. Mr. McDonald was arrested at 9:30 at

9 his place of work and was released on a

10 recognizance. A copy of that document was

11 marked as Exhibit A on the hearing.

12 Mr. McDonald had never appeared in court

13 in person on this charge prior to his arrest.

14 His counsel, Tracy Bock, appeared on his

15 behalf at all stages. That was done pursuant

16 to a Designation of Counsel filed in December

17 2015 in the Territorial Court. The

18 preliminary hearing was waived. A pre-trial

19 conference was later held in the usual course.

20 There were some delays in scheduling the

21 trial because for a time there was some

22 uncertainty about Mr. McDonald's

23 representation. Once it was confirmed that

24 Mr. Bock would be acting and once counsel

25 submitted their available dates, a trial date

26 was set. Last April, a docket scheduling the

27 jury trial to commence July 31st was issued.

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1 At the end of June, a further pre-trial

2 conference was held with the assigned trial

3 judge. At that pre-trial conference and in

4 the context of discussions about possible

5 admissions, Mr. Bock said that he was having

6 some difficulties getting into contact with

7 Mr. McDonald.

8 During the brief court sittings in Norman

9 Wells on July 31st, Mr. Bock made certain

10 representations to the Court. He told the

11 Court that, first, he had informed Mr.

12 McDonald of the date and location of the

13 trial. Second, that although he had

14 difficulties contacting him at one point, he

15 had been able to get into contact with him on

16 July 24th; that he had a conversation about an

17 hour and a half with him on July 26th; and

18 that during that conversation Mr. McDonald

19 promised he would be in Norman Wells in the

20 afternoon of Sunday, July 30th.

21 Mr. Bock also said that he spoke with Mr.

22 McDonald again on Sunday, July 30th at about 6

23 p.m. At that point, Mr. McDonald told Mr. Bock

24 that he was in Grande Prairie. Mr. Bock told

25 him to drive to Yellowknife and get on the

26 morning flight to Norman Wells. Mr. McDonald

27 told Mr. Bock he did not have any money for

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1 the flight and had planned to drive.

2 Some additional facts were put before the

3 Court by the Crown at the hearing of these

4 applications. The first has to do with

5 information obtained from the Fort Liard

6 detachment.

7 On July 31st at 8:40 a.m., Mr. McDonald

8 went to the RCMP detachment in Fort Liard and

9 spoke to Corporal Nicolas Brodeur. Mr.

10 McDonald told him that he was due in court in

11 Norman Wells on Tuesday, August 1st, to appear

12 on an assault charge. He told the officer

13 that he was not aware that it is not possible

14 to drive to Norman Wells in the summer. He

15 said he was broke and could not afford a plane

16 ticket.

17 Corporal Brodeur made some inquiries,

18 determined that Mr. McDonald was due in court

19 that same day in the afternoon. He told Mr.

20 McDonald that if he was not in court a warrant

21 would likely be issued for his arrest. Mr.

22 McDonald said he would keep driving and check

23 in with the RCMP once he arrived in

24 Yellowknife.

25 The Crown has made an admission of the

26 fact that the website Mapquest, which can be

27 used to map driving routes to various places,

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1 including in Canada, erroneously shows it is

2 possible to drive from Fort Liard to Norman

3 Wells. The system generates a route and

4 states that the driving time between those two

5 communities is 12 hours and seven minutes.

6 The website is wrong. There is, in fact, no

7 way to drive to Norman Wells in the summer.

8 There is a way to drive in the wintertime, and

9 I suppose I can probably infer that the route

10 that appears on Mapquest is maybe a route that

11 is available when the winter road is open.

12 The Crown also referred to a number of

13 pending charges that Mr. McDonald faces in

14 Ontario. There is a charge for committing an

15 indecent act in public dating back to

16 September 14th, 2014. On that charge he was

17 released on an undertaking with several

18 conditions, including one that he notify the

19 police of any change of address and

20 employment.

21 There is a simple possession charge dated

22 October 2nd, 2014, and a failure to appear

23 charge from October 16, 2014. There is a

24 warrant for arrest on that charge which was

25 never extended outside Ontario.

26 There is also a theft-under charge for

27 London, Ontario, dating back to October 23rd,

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1 a failure to appear charge dating back to

2 November 11th. This is also, in 2014, a

3 failure to appear to provide fingerprints on

4 November 18th, 2014, and a failure to appear

5 in court on November 27th, 2014. Again, there

6 is a warrant for his arrest on those, and

7 there was never any attempt to extend the

8 warrant outside of Ontario.

9 During his testimony, Mr. McDonald

10 acknowledged that he did not comply with the

11 condition to advise the police in Ontario of

12 his change of address when he left that

13 province. He also admitted that he knows

14 about the arrest warrants, and testified that

15 his intention was to deal with the Ontario

16 matters once he had enough money to get a

17 lawyer to assist him with the charges.

18 Mr. McDonald has a criminal record, which

19 was marked as an exhibit on the hearing as

20 well. The convictions span from 1985 to 1998.

21 They are all from Ontario. The longest jail

22 term that he ever received for offences was 40

23 days.

24 The convictions include a variety of

25 offences - theft, possession of property

26 obtained by crime, assault, drinking and

27 driving. They also include failures to comply

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1 with court orders, more specifically two

2 breaches of recognizance, one breach of

3 probation, and one failure to appear.

4 That is the information that the Crown

5 presented at this hearing.

6 The defence presented evidence as well. I

7 heard information about Mr. McDonald's

8 background and personal circumstances directly

9 from his counsel, and also to some extent

10 during Mr. McDonald's testimony. But the

11 focus of the testimony was why he was not in

12 Norman Wells for the start of this trial on

13 July 31st.

14 Defence also called Mr. McKinley, who is

15 Mr. McDonald's friend and who had agreed to

16 drive him to the NWT to attend his trial. Mr.

17 McKinley testified about his recollection of

18 their trip, which also goes to the reason of

19 Mr. McDonald's nonattendance. Mr. McKinley

20 confirmed, as well, his willingness to act as

21 a surety for Mr. McDonald if he is released.

22 Mr. McDonald is originally from Ontario,

23 and he has two children, 17 and 21, who still

24 live there. He said that he is making child

25 support payments in relation to the

26 17-year-old and is also trying to catch up on

27 some arrears.

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1 He works as an insulator. He left Ontario

2 to go west and get work. He has lived in

3 Edmonton, Cold Lake, and for the last year or

4 so, in British Columbia, in Coquitlam.

5 Mr. McDonald described his efforts to get

6 to Norman Wells for the trial. In short, he

7 said that he had no money to buy a plane

8 ticket so his plan was to drive with his

9 friend Mr. McKinley. Based on a route that

10 they looked up on Mapquest, they believed it

11 was possible to drive to Norman Wells

12 year-round.

13 He said his lawyer did not tell him the

14 exact date of the start of the trial but only

15 told him that it was going to be the first

16 week of August. Mr. McDonald testified that

17 he interpreted this to mean that he needed to

18 be in Norman Wells for Tuesday, August 1st, as

19 opposed to Monday, July 31st. He said he

20 wanted to work on Saturday, which was July

21 29th, to make as much money as he could before

22 leaving.

23 Initially, he testified that they left

24 after he finished work. Later in his

25 evidence, he clarified that he did not work a

26 full day and that they left at around 2 p.m.

27 He acknowledged that he had a conversation

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1 with his lawyer on Sunday, July 30th. He

2 thought they were further on than Grande

3 Prairie when this conversation took place,

4 closer to Fort Liard. At least, that is what

5 I understood him to say. He said at that

6 point he still thought he could get to Norman

7 Wells by road, even in the summer, and that

8 his lawyer thought the same thing.

9 I was not entirely clear on Mr. McDonald's

10 version about when he realized it was not

11 possible to drive all the way up to Norman

12 Wells. He said something about speaking to an

13 old couple that they met on the road who told

14 him that there was no road to get to Norman

15 Wells. But he also mentioned speaking to the

16 police officer about this in Fort Liard, if I

17 recall correctly.

18 Corporal Brodeur says that when Mr.

19 McDonald arrived, he told him they were trying

20 to get to Norman Wells by road and the

21 corporal told him that was not possible. Mr.

22 McKinley also said that it was in Fort Liard

23 that he learned that they could not actually

24 drive to Norman Wells in the summer.

25 Mr. McDonald denied having been trying to

26 avoid the consequences of this trial. He said

27 he wanted to get it done and put it behind

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1 him. He denied being concerned about the

2 possibility of having to go to jail. He said

3 he was quite confident he would be acquitted

4 and his lawyer was also quite confident that

5 he would be acquitted. He denied being

6 concerned about the possibility of receiving a

7 lengthy jail term. He said he thought he

8 would get a couple of months of jail, at most,

9 if convicted.

10 With respect to the evidence of Mr.

11 McKinley, he explained that he lived in

12 Ontario until recently. He met Mr. McDonald a

13 year ago by text messaging and somewhat by

14 coincidence. If I understood the evidence

15 correctly, their phone numbers are very

16 similar. There is only one digit difference,

17 and Mr. McDonald, trying to text something to

18 himself, accidentally sent a text to Mr.

19 McKinley and exchanges started from that.

20 Eventually Mr. McKinley decided to relocate to

21 BC. The plan was that he and Mr. McDonald

22 would get an apartment and live together. Mr.

23 McKinley decided to tour national parks as

24 part of his trip west.

25 As I understood his evidence, towards the

26 end of June he was in the Yukon, still, and

27 agreed to give Mr. McDonald a ride to the

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1 Northwest Territories for his trial. Mr.

2 McKinley understood that Mr. McDonald had to

3 come to Yellowknife for court and had to be

4 here for August 1st.

5 He said that they left British Columbia at

6 5 p.m. He described the route that they took

7 in very good detail. And he said that 24

8 hours after they left, they were in Grande

9 Prairie.

10 He said that while they were in Grande

11 Prairie, Mr. McDonald had a conversation with

12 his counsel and that was when Mr. McKinley,

13 after that conversation, learned that they

14 needed to get themselves to Norman Wells and

15 not Yellowknife. So he mapped a new route

16 using his GPS, and it showed a way to get to

17 Norman Wells by road. So they headed in the

18 direction of Fort Liard and stopped on the

19 edge of town.

20 At that point, Mr. McKinley still thought

21 the court date was August 1st. He stopped in

22 at the RCMP station in Fort Liard on Monday

23 morning. That is when Mr. McKinley says he

24 learned it was not possible to drive to Norman

25 Wells in the summer. From that point on, they

26 decided to go to Yellowknife and got here

27 Monday afternoon.

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1 I found Mr. McKinley to be a careful and

2 thoughtful witness. He appeared to try his

3 best to be precise and complete in his

4 answers. He corrected himself or added to

5 some of his answers on a few occasions to add

6 clarity. I believed him. I believed his

7 evidence. I believe he was doing his best to

8 try to assist his friend to get to court. It

9 is apparent he is very loyal to him, but I do

10 not think he was trying to mislead me in any

11 way.

12 By contrast, I found Mr. McDonald's

13 evidence very confusing. Some of his answers

14 were vague, others were long and somewhat

15 rambling and confused. Other times he was

16 evasive. Some of his answers were not at all

17 responsive to what he was being asked. He

18 contradicted himself. And I find some of the

19 things he said quite implausible.

20 Mr. McKinley's evidence supports Mr.

21 McDonald's general story about the plan to

22 drive up to the north for his court

23 appearance. But there are some

24 contradictions, some subtle, some less subtle,

25 and the sum total of these differences, in my

26 view, calls into question Mr. McDonald's

27 credibility and sincerity when he says he was

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1 trying to get himself to court.

2 There is the question of time of departure

3 and how his evidence evolved on that point,

4 and its difference with Mr. McKinley's

5 account. I recognize, as Mr. McDonald's

6 counsel said, that often people are wrong

7 about time. It is not so much the difference

8 between their evidence that I found

9 interesting, but the evolution in Mr.

10 McDonald's testimony during cross-examination,

11 as though he wanted to say they left earlier,

12 giving more time for the drive. It is a small

13 detail and I would not draw any inference from

14 it if that is all there was. It is simply a

15 small piece in a larger picture that

16 demonstrates, in my view, some shifts and some

17 self-serving elements in Mr. McDonald's

18 evidence.

19 Another interesting detail has to do with

20 Mr. McDonald's phones. In the context of

21 talking about whether he stayed in touched

22 with his counsel in the time leading up to the

23 trial, he said that he changed phones at some

24 point because he had two phones stolen, and he

25 also said something about his e-mail account

26 getting hacked. By contrast, Mr. McKinley

27 said that throughout the period of time he has

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1 been acquainted with Mr. McDonald, he has

2 always used the same phone number to

3 communicate with him by phone or text. The

4 number never changed, he said. Mr. McKinley

5 did not seem to have any trouble staying in

6 contact with Mr. McDonald using that phone

7 number. And that, to me, calls into question

8 Mr. McDonald's explanations, or attempted

9 explanations for difficulties in communication

10 between him and his counsel.

11 Again, it is a detail and on its own it

12 would establish nothing, but I find it

13 curious.

14 One contradiction I find important between

15 their testimonies is that Mr. McDonald said

16 they mapped a GPS course to Norman Wells from

17 the start. Mr. McDonald, of course, knew his

18 trial was to be held in Norman Wells. Mr.

19 McKinley, however, said they were heading for

20 Yellowknife. That's where he thought his

21 friend had to go. It was only after the phone

22 call with the lawyer when they were in Grande

23 Prairie that he realized that their

24 destination was actually Norman Wells, and

25 that was when he looked for a new route on the

26 GPS.

27 Mr. McKinley was getting his information

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1 from Mr. McDonald. It is difficult for me to

2 imagine how there could have been

3 miscommunication and misunderstanding about

4 their destination, considering the whole point

5 was for Mr. McDonald to get somewhere for his

6 court proceedings. If Mr. McDonald arranged

7 for a ride, but somehow gave his friend the

8 wrong destination, the obvious question is why

9 would he do that if he really wanted to get

10 where he was supposed to go?

11 Then there is the whole confusion about

12 the trial date. I find it difficult to accept

13 that Mr. Bock would have been as vague as Mr.

14 McDonald claims he was, when he told him about

15 the trial date initially. I would find it

16 surprising that any lawyer would simply tell a

17 client that the trial is on "the first week of

18 August" without reference to a specific date

19 and time. That would be a very odd way to

20 communicate a trial date to a client,

21 especially an out-of-town client who will have

22 to travel a fair ways to get to court.

23 But even if I give Mr. McDonald the

24 benefit of the doubt about that, even if there

25 was an honest mistake initially about the

26 trial date, I do not accept that there could

27 still have been confusion about it after the

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1 Sunday phone call. Everyone seems to agree

2 that Mr. McDonald and Mr. Bock spoke on the

3 Sunday night, July 30th. Mr. McKinley said

4 that after that he knew what their destination

5 was but he still thought the court was August

6 1st.

7 Mr. McKinley was getting his information

8 from Mr. McDonald, and it simply does not make

9 sense to me that after speaking with Mr. Bock

10 on Sunday, the eve of trial, Mr. McDonald

11 could still have been confused about when his

12 trial was starting. The whole point of the

13 conversation was that he needed to get himself

14 to court. I find it very hard to believe that

15 Mr. McDonald could have been honestly confused

16 about his court date at that point, yet the

17 next day he tells Corporal Brodeur he has to

18 be in court on Tuesday. And clearly he does

19 not make the timeline clear to his friend at

20 that point either. And, again, the obvious

21 question is why?

22 There are other things about Mr.

23 McDonald's evidence that trouble me.

24 Witnesses are sometimes nervous.

25 Sometimes they are honestly mistaken about

26 certain details. I have taken this into

27 account as well as the fact that Mr. McDonald

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1 and Mr. McKinley drove long hours after they

2 left British Columbia and this could have had

3 some impact on their ability to remember small

4 details, although Mr. McKinley certainly

5 seemed to remember things quite well. Mr.

6 McDonald was testifying about events that

7 occurred not weeks, not months, not years

8 before, but days before. It is hard to

9 understand that he could be that confused and

10 vague about such recent events - events

11 associated with trying to get to court;

12 conversations was his lawyer; events that

13 would have been important at the time they

14 unfolded. Yet, he remembers having bacon and

15 eggs before turning himself into custody.

16 That is odd.

17 Mr. McDonald claims that Mr. Bock thought,

18 like him, that it is possible to drive to

19 Norman Wells in the summer. We did not at

20 this hearing hear from Mr. Bock. Considering

21 that Mr. Bock has lived in Yellowknife for

22 some time, I would find it surprising if he

23 thought there was an all-season road to the

24 Sahtu region. This is a topic that is raised

25 from time to time in the news. It is

26 discussed by politicians, and it is actually a

27 topic of choice for one columnist in one of

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1 the local newspapers. But leaving that aside,

2 even if I accept that Mr. Bock thought it was

3 possible to drive to Norman Wells in the

4 summer, it makes complete sense that despite

5 this, his advice to his client would have

6 been, on the eve of trial, to go to

7 Yellowknife to catch a flight. That is what

8 Mr. Bock told the Court he told his client,

9 and I have not heard a satisfactory

10 explanation from Mr. McDonald for why he did

11 not do just that, or at least attempt to.

12 As of Sunday and the time of that phone

13 call, it was entirely unrealistic, and it

14 defies logic, for Mr. McDonald to have stuck

15 with the plan to drive, even if there was a

16 road. His only chance to get to court on time

17 would have been to head to Yellowknife and try

18 to get on that flight, just like his lawyer

19 said he should. Heading in the direction of

20 Fort Liard was a plan that was doomed to fail

21 even if there had been a road.

22 Mr. McDonald denied on cross-examination

23 that he was concerned about having to face the

24 consequences of his trial. He denied having

25 wanted to delay things. He said he was quite

26 confident he would get acquitted, and so was

27 his lawyer. Maybe Mr. McDonald is very

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1 confident. Still, one would expect anyone to

2 be at least a little concerned or a little

3 worried heading into a trial on such a serious

4 charge.

5 He also denied knowing he would face a

6 lengthy jail term if convicted. He said he

7 thought he would get a few months. I also

8 find that hard to believe. It is possible

9 that Mr. McDonald does not realize the exact

10 extent of his jeopardy, although I would

11 expect that to be part of the discussions

12 counsel would have with their clients as a

13 matter of course. But one way or another, I

14 find it highly implausible that he sincerely

15 thinks that the sentence for the rape of an

16 unconscious woman would be a sentence of a few

17 months considering he has been in court before

18 and he has received 40-day sentences before

19 for things like breaching his probation,

20 theft, and drinking and driving. Mr. McDonald

21 has some experience with the criminal justice

22 system. I find it difficult to believe that

23 he could be this naive about the extent of his

24 jeopardy on this charge.

25 The other problem, of course, is that Mr.

26 McDonald's version of his dealings with Mr.

27 Bock are, in several respects, not just not

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1 confirmed by Mr. Bock but they are contrary to

2 what Mr. Bock said on the record on July 3st.

3 Of course, misunderstandings and

4 miscommunications can happen and they happen

5 all the time, but here we are not talking

6 about one mistake or one miscommunication. We

7 have a whole series of serious

8 miscommunications between Mr. McDonald and his

9 counsel, and we also have serious

10 miscommunication between Mr. McDonald and Mr.

11 McKinley.

12 I find they are not particularly plausible

13 areas for miscommunication in the context of

14 what was taking place - a lawyer talking to

15 his client about a trial date on a serious

16 charge; a friend getting another friend's help

17 to get him to where he needed to be for

18 something important. I find all of these

19 misunderstandings and miscommunications defy

20 common sense and render Mr. McDonald's

21 evidence very, very suspect.

22 Defence counsel has pointed out that it

23 does not make a lot of sense if Mr. McDonald

24 was trying to avoid court that he would have

25 undertaken the trip at all. He could have

26 simply done nothing and remained in BC.

27 It is a good point, and I have given that

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1 point serious consideration. But somewhere

2 between long-term planning to defeat the

3 process and a series of mishaps that

4 accidentally defeat a person's sincere

5 attempts to get to court on time, there is a

6 broad range of possibilities. Perhaps

7 initially Mr. McDonald was quite confident

8 that he would be found not guilty. Perhaps he

9 was initially looking forward to this all

10 being behind him and he believed he could

11 drive to Norman Wells and that is why he made

12 these arrangements and asked for Mr.

13 McKinley's help. And perhaps it is only as

14 time moved closer that he started to become

15 more worried about the outcome of this case.

16 But whatever the case was, I do not accept

17 or believe that things unfolded in the manner

18 that they did because of mere mistakes and

19 misunderstandings. There is just too much

20 here that does not hold together, does not

21 make sense, and is implausible about what Mr.

22 McDonald's version of events. I think that

23 there came a point where he did not want this

24 trial to go ahead. He did not sincerely want

25 to get to where he was supposed to be when he

26 was supposed to be there.

27 The first issue I have to decide is bail.

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1 The Crown opposes Mr. McDonald's release on

2 the primary ground only and there are a number

3 of concerns on the primary ground.

4 Because of my conclusions about what

5 unfolded last week and Mr. McDonald's attitude

6 towards this case, I obviously have

7 significant concerns about whether he can be

8 trusted to honour his obligation to appear in

9 court the next time this trial is scheduled.

10 I have great concerns that if released, Mr.

11 McDonald may again, when the times comes, try

12 to avoid facing trial for this charge. But

13 those are not the only two concerns I have.

14 The criminal record raises concerns

15 because it includes breaches of court orders,

16 including failure to appear. Because it is

17 dated, on its own it would not render Mr.

18 McDonald's detention necessary. It is simply

19 a factor among others.

20 I am concerned, as well, about the

21 outstanding charges in Ontario. Mr. McDonald

22 was asked about these in his testimony. He

23 does not appear overly concerned about these

24 charges. He did not comply with the condition

25 that required him to advise the police of

26 changes in address and employment, and he gave

27 no explanation for not having complied with

Official Court Reporters 23

1 that condition. It is obvious he simply

2 ignored it.

3 He is aware of the outstanding warrants

4 and he has done nothing about that either.

5 His explanation for doing nothing at this

6 point is that he was waiting to have money so

7 he could get a lawyer to help him with those

8 matters. I find that explanation feeble and

9 unconvincing. Mr. McDonald's attitude about

10 his Ontario charges seems to me to be quite

11 cavalier. It does not inspire a lot of

12 confidence about his attitude towards the

13 charge that he has pending in this court.

14 Another factor is Mr. McDonald's lack of

15 ties to the NWT and the somewhat transient

16 lifestyle he has had over the past few years.

17 He would have to return from a long distance

18 away to face trial, and that will be expensive

19 no matter where the trial is scheduled. The

20 problems that were encountered on the last

21 occasion will exist the next time the trial

22 date is set as well.

23 Over the past three years Mr. McDonald has

24 lived in different places. He was in Ontario

25 as of the fall of 2014 when some of the

26 charges that he faces there were laid. Since

27 then he's lived in Edmonton, Cold Lake, he has

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1 spent some time in Norman Wells and for the

2 last while he has been in Coquitlam or

3 Vancouver. The lack of stability is a concern

4 as far as the primary ground is concerned.

5 The failure to comply with this process on

6 the NWT charge is also a concern. He has

7 reported but he did not comply with the

8 requirement that he notify the police on the

9 change of address. That type of condition is

10 crucial for the authorities to keep track of

11 an accused person. When he was asked about

12 having not complied with that condition, he

13 was evasive. At first he seemed to imply that

14 he was not aware of the condition. He later

15 had to acknowledge that the recognizance has

16 his signature on it and that the conditions

17 are all written on the document. There is no

18 adequate explanation for why he did not comply

19 with that condition which, again, suggests a

20 cavalier attitude towards the court process.

21 Another indication of this cavalier

22 attitude is that knowing he had missed this

23 court date last Monday, Mr. McDonald, after

24 arriving in Yellowknife, did not turn himself

25 into custody right away. He did various other

26 things on both the Monday, the Tuesday and

27 part of Wednesday. He took care of things

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1 that he felt were important. He tried to

2 speak to a lawyer beforehand. He got

3 breakfast. He turned himself in almost two

4 days after having arrived in Yellowknife,

5 knowing that a warrant issued on the Monday

6 after he failed to appear for his jury trial.

7 It goes without saying that Mr. McDonald's

8 failure to attend court on July 31st is also a

9 huge concern on the primary ground. A

10 considerable amount of resources were wasted

11 as a result of his failure to attend.

12 Witnesses were subpoenaed, some having

13 travelled from outside the NWT. A number of

14 jury summonses had been issued and served on

15 community members and people were

16 inconvenienced by having to attend court for

17 nothing. The court party travelled to Norman

18 Wells at very high cost and to absolutely no

19 use. The matter is getting quite dated and

20 now it is going to be delayed even longer. So

21 all that to say, there are significant

22 concerns on the primary ground.

23 Against those serious concerns, I find the

24 release plan that is being proposed is quite

25 weak. I want to make it very clear that I do

26 not at all doubt Mr. McKinley's sincerity. He

27 obviously cares about Mr. McDonald. He wants

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1 to stand by him and he has already gone out of

2 his way to help him. I also accept that

3 despite his loyalty to Mr. McDonald, he would

4 be diligent and responsibile if he were to be

5 named as his surety. He has acted as a surety

6 before and he understands the obligations of a

7 surety. He has been in the position before,

8 he said, where he has had to call the police

9 on someone, when people he was a surety for

10 did not comply with conditions. He said under

11 oath that he would do that if he became aware

12 the Mr. McDonald is in breach, and I believe

13 him when he says he would.

14 But Mr. McKinley has only known Mr.

15 McDonald for about a year and he has known him

16 mostly from a distance. I appreciate over

17 that year he did visit Mr. McDonald once in

18 BC. The current plan is that they would look

19 for an apartment and move in together but at

20 this point it is still a plan; it has not

21 happened.

22 While I do not doubt Mr. McKinley's

23 sincerity, I have grave concerns about whether

24 he would actually be in a position to exercise

25 the influence, control, and supervision and

26 would ensure Mr. McDonald's attendance in

27 court for trial.

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1 As I already noted, some of the

2 information Mr. McDonald gave Mr. McKinley

3 about his court date this time was not

4 accurate information. This raises concerns

5 about whether Mr. McDonald would give accurate

6 information to Mr. McKinley in the future.

7 The reality is that Mr. McDonald could

8 decide to pick up and leave without regard for

9 his obligations and his pending charge just

10 like he did when he left Ontario, leaving his

11 problems with the criminal justice system

12 behind. If Mr. McDonald decided to go, and

13 even if Mr. McKinley reported that to the

14 authorities right away, Mr. McDonald could be

15 long gone and it could take time before the

16 authorities could locate him.

17 Given my findings about Mr. McDonald's

18 attitude towards his charge, his lack of ties

19 to the NWT, his transience over the past few

20 years, and the other aspects of the evidence

21 that I have referred to, I conclude that there

22 is a huge risk that Mr. McDonald will, as he

23 has in the past, move without advising the

24 authorities. And that even if Mr. McKinley

25 did his best to supervise him, Mr. McDonald

26 could disappear from the map as it were, and

27 just as is the case with his Ontario charges,

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1 the Norman Wells charge might not get dealt

2 with in a timely fashion.

3 For those reasons I am satisfied that his

4 detention is necessary to ensure that he will

5 attend his trial when it is rescheduled.

6 The second issue is whether he has

7 forfeited his right to be tried by a jury.

8 Section 598 of the Criminal Code provides

9 that a person who has elected to be tried by a

10 judge and jury and fails to attend trial is

11 not to have a jury trial unless that person

12 establishes that there was a legitimate excise

13 for his or her failure to appear.

14 The right to a jury trial is a very

15 important right. It cannot be taken away

16 lightly.

17 The Supreme Court of Canada have

18 confirmed, when it examined the constitutional

19 validity of this provision in R. v. Lee,

20 [1989] 2 S.C.R. 384, that placing the onus on

21 an accused to establish the existence of a

22 legitimate excuse is not contrary to the

23 Charter.

24 The case talked about the underlying

25 rationale for the provision.

26 When people do not attend for a jury

27 trial, there are concerns about the financial

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1 costs to the system but there are also

2 concerns about another kind of cost - the

3 erosion of respect for the criminal justice

4 system when citizens are ordered to appear in

5 court for jury selection only to be sent home

6 because the accused has not appeared.

7 Section 598 says, and the case law is

8 clear, that the onus is on Mr. McDonald to

9 show that he has a legitimate excuse for not

10 having appeared on July 31st. An honest

11 mistake as to trial date does constitute a

12 legitimate excuse for the purposes of section

13 598. That was made very clear in R. v. Harris

14 [1991] O.J. No. 1509.

15 At paragraph 8 of that decision, the Court

16 said that nothing less than an intentional

17 avoidance of appearing at trial for the

18 purpose of impeding or frustrating the trial,

19 or the intention of avoiding the consequences

20 of the trial, should deprive an accused of his

21 or her right to a jury trial.

22 As counsel have properly noted, if I were

23 to conclude that Mr. McDonald was merely

24 careless, that is not a sufficient basis to

25 deprive him of his right to be tried by a

26 jury. That was the conclusion I reached in

27 R. v. Wedawin, 2008 NWTSC 98.

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1 The legitimate excuse put forward by Mr.

2 McDonald is that he took steps to attend his

3 trial and was defeated in those efforts by a

4 combination of his financial situation,

5 misunderstandings and his miscommunications

6 with his counsel about the date of trial, and

7 a mistaken belief that it was possible to

8 drive to Norman Wells in the summertime.

9 I accept that the error about the

10 existence of the road is an honest mistake.

11 Mr. McDonald had not spent a lot of time in

12 Norman Wells, or in the Northwest Territories

13 for that matter, on the evidence, and he may

14 well not have known that there was no

15 all-season road to Norman Wells, and certainly

16 the fact that the program Mapquest erroneously

17 shows road access to Norman Wells would have

18 confirmed that mistaken belief.

19 But based on the whole of the evidence,

20 and for reasons I have gone over at length

21 already, I do not accept that Mr. McDonald

22 made an honest mistake about when he needed to

23 be in Norman Wells. His claims are contrary

24 to what his counsel told the court. There are

25 unexplained and, to my mind, unexplainable

26 shortcomings in what he told his friend who

27 was trying to help him get to court. It may

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1 not be possible to pinpoint exactly when Mr.

2 McDonald's desire to avoid the consequences of

3 his travel crystalized, but I conclude that at

4 some point during all of this he made choices

5 that ensured he would not make it to his

6 trial. I conclude he was playing games.

7 The claim that he never was told with

8 precision the date of his trial is dubious, at

9 best. The idea that he could still not have

10 known his trial started July 31st, after he

11 spoke to Mr. Bock on July 30th, is entirely

12 implausible.

13 The issue in Wedawin was very different.

14 Mr. Wedawin had not been particularly careful

15 or prudent in his plans to get himself to

16 trial. He had waited until the last minute to

17 book a flight from Gamèti to Behchokò. He

18 went on a Friday, and at that point the two

19 flights available between the two communities

20 were both full.

21 The trial was supposed to proceed in early

22 December. The winter road was not yet open.

23 Mr. Wedawin had not tried to see if anyone

24 would give up his or her seat on either

25 flight. He had not checked if there were

26 cancellations. Certainly he could have done a

27 lot more to try to get himself to trial.

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1 But, he had also often travelled between

2 these two communities. He had often made his

3 arrangements at the last minute and he had

4 never had any problems. In fact, it is

5 apparent from paragraph 20 of the decision

6 that in that case, even the Crown was not

7 forcefully arguing that his conduct amounted

8 to wilful blindness.

9 The situation is very, very different

10 here. We are talking about travel from

11 British Columbia to Norman Wells by someone

12 who had never done that trip - about planning

13 to drive an exceedingly long distance having

14 never done that trip. In Wedawin, the

15 accused's sincerity was not at all called into

16 question. There would have been no basis to

17 call it into question. That is another

18 important difference between that case and

19 this case.

20 I am not satisfied that Mr. McDonald has

21 provided a legitimate excuse for not having

22 attended his trial. For that reason, I find

23 he has forfeited his right to be tried by a

24 jury.

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1 Certified to be a true and

accurate transcript pursuant

2 to Rules 723 and 724 of the

Supreme Court Rules,

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8 Lois Hewitt,

Court Reporter

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