

Fifth Session – Forty-Second Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Legislative Affairs

Chairperson
Mr. Shannon Martin
Constituency of McPhillips

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Thursday, June 15, 2023

TIME – 1 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

**CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Shannon Martin
(McPhillips)**

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Bob Lagassé
(Dawson Trail)**

ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4

Members of the committee present:

Hon. Mr. Goertzen, Hon. Ms. Morley-Lecomte

MLA Fontaine, Messrs. Lagassé, Martin, Wiebe

APPEARING:

*Ms. Shipra Verma, Chief Electoral Officer,
Elections Manitoba*

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

*Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year
ending December 31, 2022*

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Clerk Assistant (Mr. Tim Abbott): Good afternoon, everyone. Will the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to order.

The—before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

Mr. Bob Lagassé (Dawson Trail): I nominate Shannon Martin.

Clerk Assistant: Mr. Martin has been nominated. Any further nominations?

Hearing none, Mr. Martin, please take the Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Our next item of business is the election of Vice-Chair.

Are there any nominations?

Hon. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Minister of Mental Health and Community Wellness): I nominate the M-L—sorry—Bob Lagassé. Sorry, is that wrong? *[interjection]* Mr. Lagassé.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Lagassé has been nominated. Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Lagassé is elected Vice-Chair.

This meeting has been called to consider the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2022.

Are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long we should sit this afternoon?

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I would suggest that maybe we could start with two and a half hours, so until 3:30, and then maybe revisit if the committee needs more time at that point.

Mr. Chairperson: The suggestion has been made that this committee sit for two and a half hours and then revisit.

Are there any comments?

Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Standard is to recommend two hours and to revisit, and I'm prepared for—suggest that.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, so the question before the committee is whether or not the committee will stand—or will sit for two and a half hours and then revisit. Yea?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: No? Hearing a no.

Mr. Goertzen: I'd recommend two hours and then revisit.

Mr. Chairperson: The suggestion has been made that the committee sits for two hours. Is that agreeable?

An Honourable Member: And then revisit.

Mr. Chairperson: And then revisit? *[Agreed]*

Does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement, and would he please introduce officials in attendance?

Mr. Goertzen: Very quickly, of course, I'll recognize the Chief Electoral Officer, Shipra Verma, who is in attendance. And she may wish to provide information

on other staff who are with us in the Chamber this afternoon.

In the interest of time, because I know my colleague has indicated there are lots of questions and perhaps on both sides, I just want to thank Elections in Manitoba for the work that they do; both, of course, in general elections, but in by-elections—but in between elections, we know there's lots of work that is done in terms of educating the public, preparing for elections, ensuring that our elections are fair and well prepared for. And there is lots of discussions about fair elections these days in Canada and around the world.

And so we very much appreciate and know that the work the election officials do is critical. And because they're busy preparing for October, I know my friends across the way won't want to keep them too long, as they have much work to do.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable minister.

Does the critic for the official opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Wiebe: I just wanted to begin by sincerely thanking Ms. Verma and all of the staff at Elections Manitoba. Thank you for your work that you do not just during elections but leading up to elections, and also thank you for making yourself available here to answer some questions and really, I hope, engage in a productive discussion that will benefit everybody in Manitoba.

As the minister alluded to, you know, democratic integrity is a top issue that is being discussed around the world, and it's something that many—not just here in Canada but around the world—are focusing on as our democracy is threatened like never before in many places. It's so important for us to convey to the people of Manitoba that we, here, have a robust and strong democratic system, and that our elections are free and fair.

That is absolutely the most important thing. Integrity is the most important thing. But we also know that there are increasingly, as I said, pressures around the world, but here—even here in our own province, on that democracy, and we do need to ensure that that integrity is upheld.

We've recently seen attempts by an out-of-province corporation, the Canada Growth Council, to try and interfere in elections here in Manitoba. We know that this group has spent thousands of dollars to pay for billboards here in Winnipeg. We also know

that this group has spent thousands of dollars to send out mailers to people's homes and is engaged in a mass text message campaign and social media campaign to try to influence our election—advertisements that are, quite frankly, blatant lies and, in some cases, even forge headlines, which, I think, raise a whole number of other issues that hopefully we can delve in here this afternoon.

Under Elections Manitoba law, if a third party does spend more than \$2,500 in the pre-election period—which, as I said, it's very clear that this corporation, this Canada Growth Council, has—they are required to register with Elections Manitoba. But we know that the Canada Growth Council has failed to register, and we know that that is breaking the law.

So, this level of interference is unprecedented and—in this province, and it is the most blatant attack on our democracy since the vote-splitting scandal from the 1990s. It's why we undertook, as the official opposition, to write two letters to the elections commissioner to express our concerns and lay out some of the most egregious violations of the rules that we found.

* (13:10)

It's also concerning that the Canada Growth Council is an out-of-province corporation and that it's broken the law by spending that \$2,500 on elections communications during the pre-election period and failed to register with Elections Manitoba. This is out-of-province money, and it's dark money. It's money that we don't know the source of, we can't trace or track or be held to account, and it's flowing into our province in a way that is specifically designed to influence people's vote in the next general election.

So, it raises a very fundamental and serious question: Why does the Canada Growth Council—an out-of-province group—care about the outcome of our election here in Manitoba, and why are they trying to influence it illegally and why are they in—so invested in spending thousands of dollars to do so?

We know that Elections Manitoba is committed to delivering these free and fair elections that are held to such a high degree in terms of the work that Elections Manitoba does, so we're worried that this will impede on the work that Elections Manitoba is trying to do throughout the province.

We're also worried that this will set a dangerous precedent, quite frankly, and in theory a group could budget for breaking the rules. They could set aside money to cover any kind of fines or lawyer fees or,

you know, any kind of repercussions alongside the budget for doing the advertising itself.

So, in this way, our democracy—our democratic integrity—is for sale, that our transparency—our electoral transparency—is for sale, that the delivery of the truth—or the supposed truth—is for sale. And that is a real concern. They can determine what the price would be to interfere in our elections, and that's wrong. And even if the group is fined in the end, the damage to our democracy and to the integrity of our democratic system has already been done.

So I'm going to ask just a few questions on this, and I do appreciate the role of the elections commissioner in this, as well as the Elections Manitoba CEO, and I do hope that, as an expert, Ms. Verma will be able to shed some light on what the rules are and what they could be in order to enhance our—or, to safeguard our democracy in the future.

Alongside this, we are all also, of course, concerned about the provincial government's improper changes they've made to blackout rules to try and boost their party's chances in the polls. The provincial government is spending upwards of \$1 million of taxpayers' money on partisan advertisements on radio, billboards and more that attempt to paint them in a good light. And, you know, they've continued to do so throughout the various by-elections and so there's no reason to believe that they would do any different during this blackout period, despite the rules that are in place.

We think that's unfair. We think most Manitobans would understand it to be an unfair advantage of incumbency and we know that taxpayer funds shouldn't be used on partisan advertising during an election period.

And, finally, I do have some questions on the issues we saw with regards to election reporting in Alberta, with regards to the move to—as a separate issue—the move to vote-counting machines, some questions with regards to the by-elections that we had within the province over the last year and, of course, preparations for the 43rd general election and more.

So, with that, I just wanted to once again thank Ms. Verma for her work, for the staff for their work, and we look forward to learning more about this and standing with you as you try to provide free, fair and accountable elections here in the province of Manitoba so that Manitobans can have full confidence in their electoral system and that we can, at the end of

the day, increase participation in our democracy and enhance it as we move forward.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member.

Does a representative from Elections Manitoba wish to—making an opening statement?

Ms. Shipra Verma (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Manitoba): Good afternoon, Mr. Chairperson and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me and my staff to discuss our tabled report and also for recognizing and appreciating the work that we do.

I'm joined today by deputy chief electoral officer, Ms. Debbie MacKenzie, and director of elections finance, Ms. Tracey Nylen.

Today, I'll give you a brief overview of the 2022 annual report and provide an update on election preparation activities carried out by my office so far in the year. I'll also speak to the recommendations which have been made in the annual report.

Our report speaks to our annual activities for the year, including the conduct of by-elections held in Fort Whyte, Thompson and Kirkfield Park and preparations for the 43rd general election expected on October 3rd, 2023.

During each by-election, we used and tested many of the procedures that we will be seeing in the upcoming general election. These changes reflect the modification proposal and the new legislation you all played a pivotal role in implementing.

The Fort Whyte by-election was held on March 22nd and used the modifications first introduced in the previous election. In addition, we saw the expanded use of vote-by-mail to ensure voters felt safe participating during the pandemic. That modification was approved by this committee to be used for any by-election held before April 1st. As such, it only applied to Fort Whyte.

Bill 11 passed on March 16th, bringing modifications to the voting process into legislation for the next two by-elections: Thompson on June 7th and Kirkfield Park on December 13th. The legislation was implemented to add real-time strike-off of voters for election day advance voting, the new voting book format, a combined voting book and voters' list for election day and the use of political information portal for parties and candidates. These by-elections gave us an excellent chance to further test and refine these procedures, laying important groundwork that will

allow us to introduce vote-counting machines for the use in the next general election.

As we approach the election, my office dedicates considerable effort to election preparation. This involves several important activities, including procurement, recruiting, training personnel, updating and refining systems and procedures and actively engaging with the public through outreach efforts.

To implement these amendments smoothly and successfully, we have updated our procedures and identified the equipment needs. Through a competitive bid process, we have selected vendors for vote-counting machine hardware, ballot printing, equipment needed for the electronic strike-off, such as laptops, scanners and printers. Subsequently, we have also been able to update training materials, identify changes to staffing needs, update our internal system for the count and reporting election night results.

To give voters and other stakeholders an idea what to expect, we held a series of demonstrations outlining the key changes. They were held for a number of stakeholder groups, including the advisory committees under The Elections Act and The Election Financing Act, government and opposition caucuses, our colleagues at the independent offices and Legislative Assembly staff, academic and media.

In addition, returning officers have been active in communities across the province, holding registration and recruitment events and offering other outreach events to community groups and schools. Your Power to Choose, Elections Manitoba's education program, has returned to offering in-class workshops province-wide. Of note, facilitators have delivered 25 workshops in the northern electoral divisions in the 2022-23 school year.

We have also been holding information sessions for political participants to clarify their roles and responsibilities under legislation. Available online or in-person sessions are open to candidates, official agents and any campaign staff who wish to attend. We have also developed a web-based record-keeping tool as a convenient way for parties and candidates to record their transactions, file their returns and also assist in their audit process. We are encouraging all campaigns to use this tool.

Finally, I would like to speak to the recommendations in the annual report. We have made no new recommendations and carried forward the following: under The Elections Act, to make the nomination deadline consistent for any election, fixed-date,

nonfixed-date and by-elections; to extend the time frame for revision and allow revision to begin as soon as the writ is issued or as directed by the CEO; to allow the unique identifier attached to voters to be shared with all political participants, including the candidate; to introduce a telephone voting option for Canadian Armed Forces members who are unable to return their ballot by mail in time to be counted while serving outside of Manitoba; finally, leave given to office staff interpreters to work in a returning office be consistent with the leave timeline for registration agents.

* (13:20)

Under The Election Financing Act, the recommendations are: to use the Manitoba Voter Register as a source for eligible voters when registering a party rather than the voters' list from the previous general election; to change the date for a constituency association to file their financial statements from January 31st to March 31st, making it consistent with the party filing deadline; consequentially, to amend section 70 to include a time period of recovery of late filing fees of 30 days of receiving the notice from the CEO. Additionally, we continue to recommend the establishment of a single address authority for Manitoba.

This is a time of modernization for Manitoba voters. The driving force is to improve service access for voters and other stakeholders. We are looking forward to delivering a free and fair election using new tools that will offer voters, candidates and campaign staff improved service with greater efficiency.

We deeply appreciate all of you and your colleagues and the time you took to listen to our ideas to modernize, ask good questions and ultimately lead us to the new legislation that would serve Manitobans.

This concludes my opening statement, and I'll be happy to answer any questions which you may have.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank Ms. Verma.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Wiebe: Thank you, Ms. Verma, again, for your opening statement and your participation in the committee here today.

As I said, I did have some questions with regards to third party advertisers. I thought maybe we could just start by giving, if you could, a brief overview of what those rules are for third party advertisers here in Manitoba.

Ms. Verma: Third parties or any individuals, organizations other than the candidates or the political parties or any other political entity who incur or engage in election communication in—either in the pre-election period—which is 90 days before the election date, starting June 7th for this year—or during the election period, in any communication that promotes or opposes a party or a candidate or any issue associated with a party or candidate, the communication must be made to the public, and it should be through advertisement.

There are certain categories included and excluded in the legislation. Items like editorials, personal views, are excluded. What is included is advertisements such as on billboards, on media, in—on the Internet or—paid advertising, basically, is part of the third party election communication.

The spending limit in the 90-day period is \$100,000, and the spending limit during the election period is \$25,000. Any third party which incurs \$2,500 expenses at any time—pre-election or the election period—are required to register with us. The registration information or the name of the third party, once registered, is posted on the website.

Post-election, they are required to file an election communication return, which will include all the expenses which they incurred, either monetary or non-monetary, along with the list of the contributors. It's a very high-level overview of third parties.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I take your point about it being high level, but it does obviously seem that these rules were put in place, you know, for a reason, that they contribute to, again, the integrity of our elections, understanding the sources of third party advertising.

Can you just explain what prompted the introduction of these rules? Do you know the genesis of these rules, or what was the reasons behind implementing some of these more stringent rules?

Ms. Verma: Third party legislation came into force in Manitoba in the early 2000s, but it received royal assent, I believe, 2016. I may be wrong on that, so I'll have to confirm that date.

The intent behind third parties across Canada or even in the US is to—there are certain principles under campaign finance, which is to create a level playing field among the political participants, and also to provide transparency and disclosure. So, in Manitoba, there are contribution limits of how much a candidate or a party can spend in a pre-election period or the election period.

Third parties, as—again, as the fundamental rule is to create the level playing field and transparency, there are no contribution limits, but to manage and to ensure the public knows who the influencers are—potential influencers—and who are the players, that's why third party came in, so that nobody can circumvent the spending limits which are available for the candidates and parties. And if somebody is—a potential third party is coming into the play during the election, the voters and the public are aware of who they are and what are they spending.

Also, the—similar to communication for parties and candidates, the authorization needs to be clearly visible so that, again, the source of the third party is known to the general public.

Mr. Wiebe: So, just a few questions I had from that.

So just in terms of the authorization, that's—in a digital ad, it would be, you know, a clear indication: paid for by or authorized by. Is that what the—who—what you're referring to there? A radio advertisement would be, you know, this advertisement was authorized by—I can't remember the exact wording, but you're talking about that sort of clear indication who the advertiser is. And, in this case, it would be the name or the title of the organization that is considered a third party.

Is that what the—what you mean by that, Ms. Verma?

Ms. Verma: Yes, that's what I'm stating. We know who is making the ad or who is the author behind the ad.

Mr. Wiebe: And, again, when you're talking about—I think the words you used, you know, Manitobans can have confidence in who is doing the advertising—what level of disclosure is required when a third party registers with Elections Manitoba?

Do they need to indicate financial records of their organizations? Do they need to indicate shareholders or directors of the corporation in this case? What level of detail is required by that third party to indicate, you know, place of residence or, sort of, you know, where the money is coming from?

Ms. Verma: At the time of registration, the third party is required to—there's a registration form they're required to complete, which includes their name, the legal address, where documents can be served and the principal officers who can be the primary contact in case we have any questions or follow-up items.

Mr. Wiebe: You had mentioned some of the—I believe you had talked about it as limits for spending, but it's a very—relatively low threshold in order to be required to register. So, the—you had talked about \$100,000 in the pre-election, I think, or maybe during the election, but that it is an upper limit. The lower limit, as you said, \$2,500.

Once a third party spends that amount, they are required by law to register with Elections Manitoba. Do I have that right?

Ms. Verma: That is correct. Once they have spent \$2,500 either in the pre-election period or the election period, whichever comes first, they must register with us.

Mr. Wiebe: And, in terms of the deadlines for registering, is that—would the expectation be that before the amount is spent—that that \$2,500 is spent—that the—essentially, the deadline is before it's spent? Or is there—once you've spent that amount, then you have a certain amount of time to register? Can the CEO just explain how that process works?

Ms. Verma: Once \$2,500 are spent, then they shall register, and the intent is forthwith or immediately. There is no specific time limit which is stated in the legislation.

Mr. Wiebe: I just—I didn't quite catch that.

You said that there is no time limit. What is the expectation, though? Within—is there some sort of expectation or standard that you would expect?

* (13:30)

Ms. Verma: It says as soon as possible, yes.

Mr. Wiebe: And, with regards to the communications, I mentioned just a few—radio advertisements, billboards, digital ads—does the legislation specifically contemplate what kind of advertising or what formats would be eligible or captured within this directive of the \$2,500?

And, if so, you know, obviously things are changing and evolving in terms of how communications are done. Is there some way that the—that Elections Manitoba has to sort of stay on top of this to make sure that, as expectations change, that they would also be able to capture those forms of communication as well?

Ms. Verma: The legislation states the communication has to be two kinds, which are commonly known for third party: there's express advocacy or issue advocacy.

Express advocacy is when you specify a candidate's name and/or the symbol or anything which is clearly associated with the candidate to vote or not to vote. Issue advocacy is when there is an issue clearly associated with a campaign to support or oppose the issue.

The kind of advertisement or communication is a paid advertisement, if we have to say it in base, simple terms. So, the paid advertisement we have—it says, Internet. Now, Internet contains, like, social media, and there's new formats coming of—for the social media, too. So, it's like a catch-all category.

Mr. Wiebe: Right, so that would presumably capture, as you said, sort of overt advertising; you know, you're scrolling on Facebook and an advertisement pops up.

But, this potentially could also capture word search rankings, the ability to ensure that if somebody searches for something, your result pops up first; any kind of algorithm, either manipulation or information that's purchased from advertising groups on the Internet that you could then use to promote your brand or your message out there.

So, really, I mean, it's any kind of spending that a third party that—would do that promotes their brand or their idea or, in this case, a set of ideas. That's, kind of, the understanding when it comes to digital advertising?

Ms. Verma: That is correct. Any amount which is spent as a paid ad using the social media or to boost your search, you pay an amount for that. So anything you're paying to publish a message to the public is captured under election communication, advertisement expense.

Mr. Wiebe: Going back to accountability of third parties to indicate, you know, not just how much money is spent on advertising, but, I guess, on the other side, how much money they're bringing in in order to do that fundraising.

How much control or requirements are there within Elections Manitoba to disclose that information?

Ms. Verma: The third party reporting requires not just the cost of the amount paid to publish, but also the data production cost is also to be included in—as an election communication expense.

The return which has to be filed by the third party, we are—they are required to provide an itemized list of

all these expenses, along with the name of the contributors. There is no contribution limit for third party, but they do need to disclose the contributors.

Mr. Wiebe: And is that—to follow the similar format to provincial political donations where, first of all, there's a limit in terms of disclosure—I think it's \$25; anything above \$25 needs to be disclosed. Is it subject to any kind of limits on how much can be donated or given?

And then, I guess—likewise, I mean, is there any kind of requirement to disclose names or pass that information directly along to the public or is it just to Elections Manitoba? How is it tracked, to what level of detail and are there any limits?

Ms. Verma: So, in Manitoba, of all candidates, parties, constituency associations, they are required to disclose all contributions, even below \$25. That should be in cash or donation in kind—monetary or donation in kind. The requirements are they have to be for campaigns, candidates, parties and constituency association leadership contestants. It has to—they have to be individuals and residents of Manitoba with an aggregate limit of \$5,000.

For third parties, because they can be an organization, too—it can be a union or an individual—there are no limits to contributions. So, it could be—they're not necessarily individuals or residents of Manitoba; they could be anyone. But third parties have a spending limit, so they don't have any contribution limit. With regard to disclosure, they need to provide the name and address of the contributor.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, and again, is there any lower limit to the reporting for those contributors?

Ms. Verma: No.

Complete contribution has to be reported, even if it's \$1.

Mr. Wiebe: What about residency of those contributors?

So, again, here in Manitoba, we have fairly stringent rules with regards to who can donate to a political party. Certainly, we know that out-of-province donors are not allowed in the province of Manitoba. That's not—you know, it's unlike other provinces; we are more strict in that regard. But I think it's—gives Manitobans some confidence that those who are contributing to our political system in terms of their monetary contribution are doing so as residents, as people who live here.

Are there similar restrictions on third parties about their contributors and their residency? Is that disclosed, or is it restricted in any way?

Ms. Verma: There are no restrictions for contributors.

They may not be residents of Manitoba. However, contributions of \$250 or more, similar to the political participants' contributions, are disclosed publicly.

Mr. Wiebe: And, again, within the province of Manitoba, with regards to political donations and political contributions, we have strict limits on donations from unions, from corporations.

In the case of third parties, are there any limits on corporations donating to a third party in order to advertise, or is—would they fall under the same disclosure requirements that if it's over \$250 it would be public and, in that case, it would be the name of the corporation that would be publicly disclosed?

Ms. Verma: There are no restrictions on contributions for third parties, so anyone can contribute to a third party—resident or non-resident. For disclosure, any contribution \$250 or more will be publicly disclosed. It will have the—if it's a numbered company, then the number of the company will be disclosed or the name of the individual.

So then, as I said, the total amount contributed is disclosed.

Mr. Wiebe: So, just to make a fine point on this, corporations from without—outside of the province, headquartered in Saskatchewan or Alberta, even outside of the country, they are eligible to donate directly to a third party who can then, within the province of Manitoba, advertise within the limits as set out by Elections Manitoba.

Ms. Verma: From a residency perspective, there are no restrictions for contributions to a third party.

There—only restrictions which are there are: no anonymous contribution can be accepted by a third party; the contributor must use their own money or property, and no contribution in expectation of compensation.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, I mean, I—we were using the example of Saskatchewan or Alberta or Ontario, a Canadian example.

But if there was a group from the United States, from Europe, from Russia, from China, that wish to influence the Manitoba electoral process, they would simply need to contribute to a third party, and then

they could effectively advertise up to the limits as set out by Elections Manitoba.

* (13:40)

And other than a disclosure of, say, a numbered company or some sort of other entity that they are operating behind, they could have basically unfettered ability to impact our elections.

Ms. Verma: As the rules stand today, the legislation which has been developed or approved by the Assembly: there are no residency limitations on third party contributions, there are no limits on the amount for the contribution other than the funds should be their own, they should be contributing at their own will and not in expectation of compensation.

The only limit for a third party are the spending limits, which is \$100,000 in the 90-day period prior to the election period and \$25,000 during the election period.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm wondering if the CEO has contemplated the idea that a third party—or, sorry, a corporation, could set up multiple third parties; there could be multiple registered third parties all representing the same goals or same interests, potentially, again, from overseas or from out of province, certainly, that they could then essentially sidestep these limits, which are, you know, quite robust, quite frankly; \$100,000 is quite a bit of money in terms of our electoral system to have an influence.

Has the CEO contemplated that sort of scenario where, you know, these—this dark money is coming into Manitoba in a way that is very untraceable and could essentially stack on itself to carry the same message and have influence in our elections?

Ms. Verma: There are provisions in the legislation which say no circumventing of the spending limits. There are no collusions with the—with any—between third parties to maximize the spending. So, those provisions are there in the legislation currently.

In case we receive any information or evidence of such an activity occurring, these matters will be referred to the Commissioner of Elections, who has quite a lot of powers to investigate and, if needed, prosecute.

Mr. Wiebe: So, as I said at the outset, we are currently in a situation where there is a third party that has come into Manitoba in a way that we haven't seen—quite frankly, haven't seen before.

And their aim is to influence our election and is to use money to do advertising, to put out a message—in this case, you know, a very American-style attack-type message; but, really, it could be any message.

In this case, this group has not registered with Elections Manitoba, and so my question is, is what sort of powers do we have, you know, after the fact, after the damage is done, so to speak, to investigate, to prosecute and to stop this from happening?

Ms. Verma: The group which you are referring to, a fund, the Canada Growth Council, recently did register with our office. They—I believe they registered yesterday with our office, so the information is—has been posted or will be posted on the website soon.

You know, in the previous elections, we haven't seen significant third party spending in Manitoba. So, as you are mentioning, this is a relatively new phenomena that we seeing in our province. Post-election, we will be reviewing all the matters and all the information that we receive, and if there are any recommendations needed, we will be bringing them back to the House.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, and again, this is, you know, maybe new to Manitoba, but certainly not new in other places in the world, and it's certainly been not only a talker in, you know, the United States, where I think that's been very overt, but in Ottawa, about the integrity of our elections, as well, within Canada and foreign money influencing our elections.

In this case, this is certainly an out-of-province corporation. We know that they're registered not within the province of Manitoba, and essentially, they—you know, they've already done the advertising; in fact, it continues on as we speak. I don't know if the billboards are up, but I'm getting phone calls from all across the city about, you know, dirty, attack-style, American-style attack pieces coming through in people's mailboxes with, you know, blatant lies, blatant untruths.

I guess what sort of impact—and, again, I mean, you say that the—this corporation has now registered, but they hadn't when all of this information had already been disseminated. So what sorts of, you know—and I appreciate that you're maybe just speculating about future recommendations that you will make, but just as initial thoughts, I'm wondering if the CEO can just give us an indication of ideas on how we can sort of, you know, impact this or stop this from happening immediately in the cases of corporations

who are clearly breaking the rules, but—that are set out by Elections Manitoba

How can we stop it from happening, you know, before it has an impact on our elections? And if it does happen, what sort of tools do we have to stop them from happening again?

Ms. Verma: You know, foreign interference is a matter of grave concern, and all election management bodies across the country do share the concern and we are reviewing this collectively.

But it is a complex issue we all have limited resources to combat, so it is—what we are looking for is a more comprehensive integrated strategy at a national level and having resources at the national level, which provincial-territorial bodies can also make use of, because the kind of information which may come in may be of national intelligence and security, which may not trickle down to each election management body. So, there is the whole concept of foreign interference is a separate matter.

With regard to third parties, again, as I've mentioned, in Manitoba we haven't seen significant third party activities during the election period. Maybe it's the spending limit is so low. The previous election wasn't a set-date election, so only the election period limits were in force, which were \$25,000, which is, given the market trade, may not be that significant.

But the other piece which you are referring to is the Internet, and Internet in its own self has the 'retency' of the—the information is retained forever and ever, so it's not just related to third party; it could be any advertisement, any message which is there. There is the provision or the ability to save it, to forward it, and I don't know if there are any concrete tools which are being used by any other election management body at this time.

When we make recommendations we try to understand what the issue is with regard to Manitoba, what kind of a solution we can provide which is suitable for us. But we also do conduct studies across the country, and internationally too, wherever possible, to gather the best practices which are out there.

So, post-election, depending on the activities of the third party, what kind of more interest and how many more third parties, or just what is their—what is disclosed in their election return, we'll be able to have a better sense of what our research has to be done, and then we'll come to the recommendations.

Also, the legislators have an opportunity to bring in the legislative changes which they consider necessary to strengthen our legislation too.

So, it's a kind of a collective process: what feedback we receive from the legislators, what feedback we receive from the public, to what trends we've seen other election management bodies and provinces and territories, and what comes out of the foreign interference inquiries or commissions and complaints which are under—which are in process currently.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, I do think that there is a role to work together here, and I think that that is something that is certainly going to be—continue to be a hot topic here in Manitoba and something that we can continue to talk about how we can work together.

I guess what I'm trying to get to right now is, you know, in this case where we have a third party who has been breaking the law, has been operating without registering and essentially was ongoing, as the Elections Manitoba indicated that, you know, this was not allowed. I mean, it's very clear within the legislation this is not allowed, but they continue to operate.

* (13:50)

So, first we saw, I guess, billboards—or, sorry, digital advertising, then we saw billboards, then we saw text messages, then we saw mailing, and I think the digital advertising continues on. So, it was like almost like breaking the law over and over and over and over again.

And I appreciate, you know, that there are longer terms where I could—longer term recommendations that I think we would want to contemplate, but in the immediate term, sort of influencing this 43rd general election, how is it that we can—or what steps did the Elections Manitoba take immediately to try to get a handle on this and essentially stop it from happening as it was happening?

An Honourable Member: On a point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: A point of order, Minister Goertzen.

Mr. Goertzen: Yes, I just want to make sure—I mean, we're going down a road of question, which is—questions are questions, but there are two different roles between the commissioner and Elections Manitoba, as I understand—and the electoral officer will clarify or tell me if I'm wrong—but in terms of what, you know, investigation is—can be done, I mean,

I believe that that's through the commissioner, not specifically through Elections Manitoba.

I'm uncertain where the member's going. I'm looking at the website for Elections Manitoba; three different entities registered seemingly on the same day: a group called the Canada Growth Council, of whom I've never heard of—*[interjection]* I'm not sure if that was some sort of strange, odd laugh that seemed odd to everybody else but the member—who I'd never heard of prior to a couple of weeks ago. *[interjection]* He may not want to actually hear any of this, but he could leave the Chamber, then, and come back when he's willing to engage. *[interjection]* Now maybe he's going to take elections seriously.

So, there's three different groups that are registered on the Elections Manitoba website on the same day. One's the Canada Growth Council, one's the Manitoba Nurses Union and one's the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals, all registered on the same day, and he seems to be indicating one of them is doing something illegally.

So, I'm not sure which one he's—what he's alleging, but whatever he is alleging—*[interjection]* Nobody seems to think it's funny except for him. Even his own colleagues seem embarrassed by him. But the—whatever he's alleging, it seems to me this should go to the commissioner.

So, I would just be careful in terms of where the member is going because if he has allegations—and he might, I have registered stuff to the commissioner in the past, I'm sure he's registered stuff to the commissioner in the past—send it to the commissioner and let them investigate.

Mr. Chairperson: The—Mr. Wiebe, on the same point of order?

Mr. Wiebe: No.

Mr. Chairperson: There has been no identifiable breach of the rule, so there is no point of order.

* * *

Mr. Wiebe: Well, the—I don't think I need to repeat the question. I think the CEO understands it quite well. And I do appreciate that she is the CEO of Elections Manitoba and, of course, knows her role, and I think, so far, has been very clear about what she can and can't answer. I don't think she needs others to tell her what is under her purview or not.

I do think it is something that impacts our election—our upcoming election, and so I do think that

there is a—potentially some comments that the CEO would like to make. So, I would hope that the minister would just allow the questions, as asked, to go to our CEO, who, as I said, is very, very capable of knowing what is under her purview and what isn't.

Ms. Verma: I understand the—there are some complaints which have been referred to the commissioner. The matter is still under investigation, so we can't comment right now if the rules have been broken or not. The commissioner is in the process of investigating this matter.

There are four third parties currently registered with us: Canada Growth Council Inc. is one, Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals, Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union and Manitoba Nurses Union. Three registered on June 14th and one registered on June 5th.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I appreciate that the CEO is able to answer the question and do—I do appreciate it.

Obviously, in the four third parties that she references, there is one that stands out as being a lot different than the others, and that's the one that is from out of province, that doesn't disclose its information, who its donors are, has ties to—potentially to foreign influence and is spending money without disclosing even who they are or what their intent is and, if I can be frank, is not actually advocating for any particular issues or concerns that Manitobans have. It's simply choosing to take personal attacks at politicians. And, you know, that's much different than, of course, the work of the nurses, who are advocating on behalf of their members.

I just want to be very clear again, I guess, about the process or about the timelines that the—Elections Manitoba undertook in terms of referring this to the commissioner or the timing of when the commissioner took this complaint and when action was taken. Because as—again, as we understand it, there was a sort of a ramp-up or a escalation in terms of the advertising that was undertaken.

So, first of all, the digital advertising was seen quite early on. So, this would have been, you know, weeks and weeks ago when the initial digital advertising happened. There was a website that was registered or taken over from another party.

And then there were the text messages, which I understand, you know, this—it seems maybe frivolous to normal people texting back and forth amongst their friends, but in terms of a bulk advertising-type text message campaign, that does cost money.

That would also be captured under advertising, is that correct?

Ms. Verma: The three things which you have mentioned, I think: billboard, website and digital ads.

If billboard definitely is a paid advertisement, so are the digital ads, and the website, if it's been created new and some expense may have been incurred.

Was it before June 7th? That's the question which—the commissioner is aware of the complaints, and I believe he is investigating it. There is a due process which is—which goes with any investigation. Unfortunately, given the complexity of the investigation, timelines cannot be that clearly established.

Text messages is something we—I'm not sure about how—will it fall under advertisement or not. It depends, was it a boosted—paid through a company or any other services which was used, or is it a text message which people who know each other can send? And will they—will that fall under an editorial or personal message?

So, that piece we are still reviewing from a compliance perspective, and we are in the process of seeking more legal opinions on it.

But what the commissioner—I'm not able to speak on behalf of the commissioner, but I can assure you the commissioner takes every complaint seriously and they're investigated properly.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, I appreciate that.

And in terms of kind of the escalation of the advertising campaign—as I said, it started off—you know, I'm not, you know, intimately aware of exactly how much the digital advertising costs, but I know that there's, you know, certainly a lower cost to doing some digital advertising. Certainly, billboards cost a lot more money than digital advertising in general does.

And it all culminates in a postcard campaign—like a—actual, physical mail campaign that, presumably, could have cost \$100,000 or more.

So, again, I'm just trying to understand the timeline in terms of, you know, seeing the initial infraction, or the initial advertising that, you know, was against the rules; and then, you know, is there an ability to kind of stop it as it's happening? Say, well, wait a minute, we should nip it in the bud, so to speak, rather than letting it get to the text message campaign, letting it get to the billboard campaign and letting it ultimately get to a mail campaign that is a, you know,

multi-six-figure-type endeavour if you're mailing every, you know, mailbox in Winnipeg.

So, it—I'm just wondering if you—if the CEO can shed any light into that process.

* (14:00)

Mr. Chairperson: Before recognizing the Chief Electoral Officer, I remind the committee to make sure it's focused on the report.

Questions around—general questions around third party advertising are absolutely acknowledged and part of the report. Specific questions, though, are outside of the scope of the report.

Ms. Verma: As a general practice, what I can share with you is if we see any third party advertisement before the pre-election period, or we are made aware of any third party advertisement prior to the pre-election period, we make all efforts to get in contact with the potential third party to alert them of the rules and regulations which will be in effect in that 90-day pre-election period.

So, that is the process that we generally use if we become aware of any third party ads. And then it's up to the third party to do the necessary procedures in case if it's—if they are required to register.

However, if it comes to our attention, once the pre-election period has commenced or during the election period, that a potential third party may have spent \$2,500 more or they are incurring third party election communication expenses, we again contact them to let them know that now they are required to register and here are the forms and necessary resources for them.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I guess I'm just—you know, not to belabour the point too much, but what am I—what I'm concerned about is, for a third party and out-of-province group that wanted to influence our elections, you know, in my calculation, they could sort of say, well, we know what the process is for repercussions.

We know what the fines potentially could be. If we're talking about spending hundred of thousands of dollars in a province, you know, now they're doing the calculation, how much is the fine versus how much are we spending and how much influence are we going to have.

And so, you know—and especially in a case where this wasn't a one-hit type of campaign, right, this is an ongoing campaign. This still continues to happen. And so, the question is how much ability—or, I guess,

what recommendations would the CEO make to have some ability to stop this before it happens or as it's happening, to impact the ability or stop the ability of third parties from out-of-province in having an impact in our elections simply by, you know, writing it up on their spreadsheet and saying, well, we're going to pay the fine and the damage will already be done. We'll already have done what we wanted to do before anybody had the ability to stop us.

I'm just trying to figure out or understand the CEO's thinking on how we can address this going forward or stop it from happening in the future.

Ms. Verma: You know, I will need more information before I can make any recommendation.

There is a provision with the commissioner with-called injunction that the commissioner may be able to use. We have—I don't believe in the recent 20—past 20, 25 years that provision has ever been required to be used, but there is a tool with the commissioner.

There are other—there's real-time reporting with Ontario, and when they receive contributions, they are required to report, I believe, within two weeks of any contributions which they have received publicly. So, there are certain other more real-time reporting functions which are there in some jurisdictions.

But, at this time, to make any recommendation or comment will be very premature.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, not just—not talking about this specific situation, but just in general to understand, when the CEO talks about the injunction power of the commissioner, would that mean that if the commissioner deemed it necessary, they could actually stop advertising from happening, take down billboards, you know, sort of stop digital advertising?

Does the CEO understand the legislation to give the powers to the commissioner to do that kind of work?

Ms. Verma: I believe it will be the commissioner's discretion based on the case-to-case scenario what the commissioner can or cannot do. I'm unable to comment on that.

Mr. Wiebe: And just to go back one step, the CEO mentioned that the text messages were sort of, a new frontier and that they were still looking for a—I believe the CEO said—a legal interpretation or some sort of further information.

Can the CEO give any more context of what that work looks like or what the thinking is at that—this

point about how that will fit into advertising in general?

Ms. Verma: Advertising limits, which are there for the candidates and parties and for third party, are—the definition of advertisement is paid advertisement. Promotional material are not part of advertisement limit.

So, with regard to the text message, we will need to do a bit more investigation as to which category does it fall into: advertisement or promotion. And that's what I meant, that we may need to seek a legal opinion around this, depending on how those text messages were delivered, what was the medium used, will it fall under promotional item or advertisement?

And if it's a promotional item, then they're not part of the spending limit.

Mr. Wiebe: So, certainly, the use of a out-of-province third party of this technology is what's unique here, but campaigns have been using this technology and this form of communication for a while now. So, is this not something that Elections Manitoba has contemplated in that context?

I'm just thinking about my own campaign. I want to communicate with voters, tell them where their nearest voting station is or whatever—or remind them it's election day, to be more simplistic—and I send them out text messages.

Is that something that's captured under—currently, under our legislation in terms of advertising limits?

Ms. Verma: So, promotional material, pamphlets, are—usually fall under the promotional material category.

Text messages—again, it's the personal messaging to a known group that you may or may not have, you know, that is probably considered to be a text promotional message.

At this point, I'm not a hundred per cent sure that text messaging, which you were referring to, used by the third party will fall under promotional or advertisement. That is something we are looking into and will be maybe needing the legal opinion around that definition.

If there is any posting which the candidates or the parties do on the Facebook or social media, they're still required to authorize. So, promotional material and advertisement both require authorization by the official agent of the candidates and the party. Similarly, for the third parties, too, but they do not fall

under the spending limit, which is therefore advertisement.

For parties and candidates, promotional material will fall under the overall spending limit.

Mr. Wiebe: I'm still not sure I'm understanding exactly.

Is the CEO saying, then, that it's not the technology that's at question, it's the—it's what is being communicated? Is it the—not so much the fact that it's coming through as a text message; it's what information is being shared and how it's being—rather than how it's being shared? Am I getting closer to that?

Maybe if you could try one more time, and I might be able to figure this out.

Ms. Verma: Is it an advertisement or is it a promotional item? That is what we are trying to establish here.

So, advertisements are usually paid through a third party medium. So, if you see a billboard, it's rented. If it is a decal on a car, that will be advertisement. But if you are painting your own car to say vote for candidate A, B or C, that's promotion.

So, that's the usual distinction which is used to differentiate between advertisement expense and promotional item.

Mr. Wiebe: So, if I can just, again, bring this back to my own experience in a provincial election campaign, if I'm communicating with my—again, my campaign team or even a wider group of folks, just directly communicating with them through text message, that's obviously not captured.

However, if I was to pay an outside company to distribute a message, that's where you would then incur an expense that would fall under the election limits.

Now, do I have that right?

Ms. Verma: So, any personal messages to your own groups, editorials, they are exempt from advertisement expenses. If you're using a third party medium to, say, canvass the voters, that becomes a polling expense, so it's not an advertisement expense.

* (14:10)

There are all these different categories of expenses. Advertisement expenses are defined in the legislation. They are—using billboards or Internet or

newspapers and radio are considered to be advertisement expenses. Pamphlets and brochures are considered to be promotional expenses.

So, if you see there are three categories of expenses. When you are relaying your message to the public, one is using, through a paid medium, advertisement; one—pamphlets and brochures kind of expenses promotion, and then the exception, editorials, your own personal Facebook page, it may be there—all messages that you are sending to a dedicated group.

Mr. Wiebe: It's only taken three chances here—or, three tries, but I think I'm starting to get it—*[interjection]*—it's not unusual, as some are pointing out in the Chamber—*[interjection]*—oh, better than usual, even. Well, that's really a great way to continue on this afternoon.

So, just to bring it, then, back to the third party example, if a third party was—or, I guess, maybe the question is, is that the clarification that the CEO is trying to get then, in terms of the—with regards to third party spending as well, whether it's promotional or whether it's advertising, and is there a distinction when it comes to the spending on third parties? Does that only matter to the limits that third parties are subject to, or does it also impact disclosure and sort of just how it's, you know, disclosed to the public about where that money is going, or does it impact the limits as well?

I don't know if I asked that question right.

Ms. Verma: Just want to say, as for the definition, advertising means advertising that promotes or opposes a party or candidate or leadership contestant in newspapers, magazines, other periodicals or on the Internet, on radio or television, on billboards, buses, other properties normally used for commercial advertising. It includes direct production costs, does not include publishing a commentary, letter to the editor, similar expression of opinion of a kind normally published without charge in a newspaper or other periodical publication or on the Internet or normally broadcast without charge on television or radio.

On the other hand, promotional material means posters, leaflets, letters, cards, signs, banners, including lumber and other structural supports for signs and banners and any similar printed material, the purpose of which is to support or oppose, directly or indirectly, a registered party or a candidate. It includes direct production costs, mailing and other distribution costs. It does not include material distributed to party members or distributed at a conference, convention or

meeting held by the party or by a candidate, leadership contestant or constituency association of the party.

If we look at the third party, the third party exceptions are transmission to the public of an editorial, debate, speech, interview, column, letter, commentary or news item, distribution of a book or promotion of the sale of a book for not less than its commercial value, transmission by an individual on a non-commercial basis on the Internet of his or her personal views, the transmission of a document or message directly by a person or a group to their members, employees or shareholders.

The election communication expenses or election communication is published—any communication which is published in newspapers, magazines or other periodicals, broadcast on radio or television, posted or distributed on the Internet, posted on billboards, buses or any other property normally used for commercial purposes.

Finally, on the reporting piece, the election communication report must include the following: a list of election communication expenses; the time and place of each communication to which the expenses relate; the value of contributions received by the third party, including received to the end of the campaign period, and for contributors who made contributions of a total amount of \$250 or more to the third party which, in the case of a contribution by a numbered company, its CEO or president; day, name and address and the total amount contributed; the amount that was paid out of third parties' own funds for purposes related to the election, and the amount, if any, by which the election communication expenses exceed contributions.

They also have to report on loans and, in case there is a deficit, then they'll continue to report on the deficit until the time it's paid.

So, if you look at the definition, text messages are not clearly stated as an election communication expense. That is what we are trying to get to the bottom of it. Is it a promotion expense or will it fall under the election communication expense because it's not published in newspaper, magazine or other periodical. It's not broadcast on radio or television. It's not posted or distributed on the Internet or posted on billboards, buses or other property normally used for commercial advertising.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I do think this is important because, obviously, it impacts third parties and, in this case, there's a very specific example. But I think it might

impact, sort of, all campaigns in the upcoming election.

Can the CEO give us any indication about the—an idea for the timing of this ruling? Would there be any kind of communication or indication that's provided to third parties, to political parties about this in advance of the election—leading up to the election? Can you give us any indication of the timeframe?

Ms. Verma: Considering it's important when it comes to the election spending limit, we will try our best to get a clarification around text messages before the start of the election period.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay. I think that's helpful and I think that does—again, I just encourage the CEO if, you know, as much information as can be shared as soon as possible because I think, in terms of the kind of communications we're talking about here, it's very hard to see a scenario where—when, you know, you're sending out a mass text message to potentially hundreds of thousands of phone numbers at a time, that that wouldn't be a paid—you wouldn't be paying for that service, right?

This isn't somebody, you know, texting away and adding phone numbers to a list. It's obviously being done by third party software, third party—sorry, wrong language—the—an outside group that's assisting, that's being paid to provide this service, and so I just—I think it's helpful to understand, in terms of political communication, what the rules are around that.

Likewise, I know that, again, authorized by the official agent, in terms of our language around political parties, third parties—registered third parties—would need to indicate clearly that it's coming from those groups.

Would that—that would be included in text messages? Is that the understanding of the CEO?

Ms. Verma: Again, we have to recognize the distinction between when we're talking about third party election communication expenses and promotional expenses, because election communication expenses have a definition and third party limits are related to the election communication expense.

Those expenses or communication must name the third party; that is required by the legislation. A third party must identify itself in any election communication it places and indicate that it has authorized the communication.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay. And also, I mean, maybe this is outside of the purview of the CEO, so feel free to not

have to comment, but the—you know, I understand unsolicited emails, unsolicited text messages generally have an unsubscribe or a, you know, do not bother me, right, sort of—I think it's federal legislation that was set up.

Would that be also the expectation for political advertising, whether they're from a political party or from a third party, in terms of election communications?

Ms. Verma: I believe the political communication falls under an exception of the do not unsubscribe or the specific legislation—I'm not able to recall right now. So, there is an exception for political communication.

* (14:20)

We do receive a lot of complaints during the election where they do not want to receive—voters don't want to receive calls from political participants, candidates and parties. We refer them to connect directly with the respective party or candidate's campaign, as we don't have any authorization or jurisdiction to get them off the call list or the—or put them under the do not call list.

Mr. Wiebe: We're talking about text messages here, but the other technology, of course—robo-calls. Again, I think that there are specific rules about identification when making those sorts of automated dialer calls.

Would those type of regulations also—would those also be applicable to third parties in the same way? What kind of restrictions would there be to robo-calls? Are those considered election communications?

Ms. Verma: So, CRTC rules are there regarding robo-calls, and they need to identify who they are calling on behalf of. Also, they provide their contact information, I believe.

Third parties—I have to refer back, again, to the election communication, which is defined in the legislation, and robo-calls are not clearly included under the election communication expenses.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, so no rules, or not the same sorts of rules, around either text messages or robo-calls, in that case. That would be the CEO's assessment at this point.

But I understand that this is an ongoing conversation, that there may be a more definitive ruling that's coming forward that would give more clarity. Is that—am I right?

Ms. Verma: With regard to third parties, their reporting is on election communication expense reporting.

They are not reporting on any other expense as of right now.

So, the first determination we have to make is whether text messages and robo-calls fall under election communication expenses. If they fall under election communication expenses, then they are required to report.

With regard to campaigns for parties and candidates and leadership contestants, they are a kind of expense that they are required to report on. They may not necessarily be under the advertisement, but they may fall under promotional expense or polling expense.

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate that, and I appreciate the clarity from the CEO. I think that's an important discussion, so I appreciate that.

Just going back to the situation with the Canada Growth Council, which the minister, you know, appears to not have any knowledge of—he claims to not know anything about that group. It's—you know, I think I've heard that line before, coming from a certain politician down south: Oh, I don't know anything about that.

But certainly we know that, you know, as I said, they're continuing to have influence in our election. We know that they are not a Manitoba corporation, that they're registered out of province.

So, does the—does Elections Manitoba, does the CEO understand the legislation to require any kind of disclosure about, like, Manitoba connections, you know, some sort of connection to the province of Manitoba, be it, like, a board of directors or, you know, somebody who is listed as a CEO of that corporation or that organization?

Is there any kind of disclosure requirements tying an outside, out-of-province group back to Manitoba and indicating why they have an interest or want to have influence in our elections here in Manitoba?

Ms. Verma: Currently the legislation states that, in order to register, the third party must include the name and contact information of the following personnel and the signature of the individuals: if the third party is an individual, the individual; if the third party is a corporation, the corporation and the officer who has signing authority for it; if the third party is a group, the group and an individual who's responsible for the group, the address and telephone number of the third party's office where its records are kept and of the office to which notices and communication under this

act may be sent, the contact information the third party's financial agent, along with the person's signed consent to act, a declaration of the person signing the application that the third party is not acting directly or indirectly on behalf of a registered party, candidate or constituency association.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, no residency requirements, and, in fact, if a third party out-of-province, third party group wanted to be, you know, to comply with the act, could say very clearly, yes, we are headquartered out of Beijing, or headquartered out of Moscow or headquartered out of London or Saskatchewan—or any other place in the world—Texas.

They could very clear about that, and that would comply with the act as it exists now, and as long as they're disclosing that, there's no restrictions or requirements for them to do anything more.

Ms. Verma: My office is responsible for administering the legislation the way it is. As of right now, the legislation is silent on the residency requirement of third parties. In future, if it's the will of the legislators to bring in more restrictions or requirements, then that will be up to the legislators to make that decision.

Mr. Wiebe: Again, I mean, this is a very salient topic in a lot of places in the world because this has been proven to be the case that, you know, foreign influences and out-of-province influences or out-of-state influences in other jurisdictions are, you know, trying to have impact on elections. So, this is not, you know, something new; it's new to Manitoba, but it's certainly not new in the world.

So, I guess I'm just wondering if the—or, if the CEO, sorry, has any thoughts about, again, recommendations of legislation that could come forward, ways that we could strengthen the laws to impact this and to help strengthen the integrity of our elections.

Ms. Verma: As I stated earlier, it's going to be—it's premature for me to make any comments at this point. Post-election we will be conducting our debriefings and surveys and seeking feedback from the stakeholders, doing our best-practice research, looking at other jurisdictions, what is happening and also, by that time, if the foreign interference report and commission or inquiry has been completed, reviewing the recommendations which will be coming out of that process.

Mr. Wiebe: And just in terms of other jurisdictions, can—because one of the things that we always pride ourselves in Manitoba is that we do have very stringent rules, or fairly stringent rules, as compared

to other provinces in the country, right, and I think we, as political parties, respect those and understand the limits and what the rules are and how to operate within those rules. Again, this is kind of new territory for Manitoba, but we've seen it elsewhere.

Can the CEO talk about what other jurisdictions maybe have done? There's been a lot of recent elections. Obviously, Alberta we just had. There's been a number of elections over the past number of years who might have seen, sort of, some of this type of out-of-province influence.

Can the CEO give any context about what other jurisdictions within Canada are doing to clamp down on it and strengthen our legislation?

Ms. Verma: Foreign interference is still an emerging topic.

As I mentioned earlier, it is a matter of concern among—shared with all the EMBs across the country. So, this is still at a stage that we are collecting information, and there's no real evidence which is known, at least in Manitoba, of foreign interference.

Mr. Wiebe: Yes, well, just to be clear, you know, I want to, you know, ensure that we understand that the, again, ability for us to track that is not really known at this point; we don't have the ability to pore through the financial statements or documents with regard to this out-of-province organization that's come in.

So, they would want to say that everything's coming out of Saskatchewan or Alberta; you know, this is money coming from within Canada, coming into influence elections in Manitoba. But that's—we don't know that, first of all, and second of all, with regards to any kind of other political donations or money that's funnelled into Manitoba, we don't allow that; we don't have that ability. We say that, you know, that Manitobans should contribute to Manitoba political parties, and that is how it should be.

* (14:30)

Again, I mean, it's incredibly important for—I think, from the point of view of Elections Manitoba, to deliver free and fair and accessible elections and to make sure that it's Manitobans that are deciding who are—what our political future is.

So, just at kind of like a high level, does this not fly in the face, even just allowing for third parties from out of province to be able to—even if they disclose—to come into Manitoba to spend money in a way that political parties would never be able to, based on who

their donors are, from out of province versus being in province?

Ms. Verma: The financial reporting provisions under The Election Financing Act is quite consistent with—for all political entities here, be it the candidates or the parties, leadership contestants, constituency associations or third party. It is after the fact.

The annual return is filed three months after the end of the calendar year or reporting year. Elections returns are filed four months after the end of the election. There is no real-time reporting for any political entity in Manitoba, so the rules for third party are also similarly designed and in the legislation that they are post-election that they have to report.

What is there is there's proper disclosure. The full disclosure is provided by Elections Manitoba in a timely manner.

The review of the contributions, similarly, because it's an aggregate limit for parties, candidates and constituency associations, we're only able to conduct the review of the contributions once all the returns have been filed with us. So there is a time gap. What I can assure you is that the compliance is done in a timely manner once we have all the information.

So—similarly, for third party too. Once the returns are filed, they will be reported on our website, and we have an internal rule of within two business days the returns are posted on the website, and that practice will be followed with third parties too.

Similarly, compliance review will be conducted for the third party returns consistent to what we do with other political entities.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I think the difference there is that, with regards to any kind of penalties or fines or any kind of rules that would be broken, there is a party—in this case, a political party—that's accountable, that is from Manitoba, that is registered here in the province, that exists and resides in the province, that takes its donations from people within the province and, ultimately, is held accountable to the people—by the people of Manitoba through our elections.

Whereas a third party—an out-of-province third party—can be fined, and they can pay the fine or they can decide not to. It's a—in this case, a corporation, so the corporation can disappear; it can go bankrupt; nobody can hold them accountable.

The damage is done. The message has already been put out there. The influence on our election has already been accomplished. And then, if there's, you

know, no repercussions for them outside of, you know, some sort of fine or being shamed, it doesn't really matter; they've already accomplished their goal.

So, again, not to belabour the point, but I do think that there is a real difference when we're talking about outside of Manitoba groups who have no accountability to anybody and are receiving their contributions, potentially, from people outside of—well, of course outside of Manitoba—and are raising money in places that have different interests than us and are then coming into Manitoba and are influencing our elections.

So, less of a question than a statement at this point, but I do think that this is what's concerning to people at this point. You know, Elections Manitoba has very specific rules. Those rules have already been broken, but even if they were being followed, there is very little accountability for these out-of-province third parties.

And I guess—well, I guess if there was a question here, it would be, again, could the CEO not see a situation where the same sorts of rules that apply to political parties with regards to where those contributions come from could be applied to out-of-province third parties, as well?

I mean, you know, the corporation has to have some accountability, has to have an ability to, you know, disclose, obviously. But then, beyond that, to have some accountability for the message that they're bringing forward, and if that money is dark money, is money from elsewhere that—we don't know where it's coming from or who is influencing things, I think that's—that would give people some concern about our democracy.

So, again, I'll just throw it out there as an open-ended question that maybe the CEO might want to answer or shed some light on, or maybe this is just an ongoing discussion that we can have as we move forward.

Ms. Verma: I hear your concerns, but my hands are tied to the legislation. The—I have to administer the legislation the way it has been in place—enacted.

If there is a will of the legislators to tighten up the third party rules, address the concerns that you are raising, then that is a matter for the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Wiebe: I appreciate that and appreciate the CEO's insight into that.

Moving on to government advertising, I'm just wondering if the CEO can shed some light on the situation around government advertising. The pre-election for-period for third parties, as the CEO has said, is 90 days. The blackout period for government announcement is 60 days.

Can the CEO explain why those are different, and does it make sense for the government to be able to freely make announcements, even though there are rules in place that are meant to limit that third party advertising?

Ms. Verma: Government advertising provisions were amended in 2020, that brought the restrictions on government advertising got reduced from 90 days to 60 days. There were other changes which were brought into the government advertisement rules, too, around—at that same time.

Those were not—that was not our recommendation, so I'm not able to comment on the background or the intent behind this change.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I think the intent is pretty obvious but I understand the CEO's answer there. And I do think that her recommendation is clear, so I appreciate that guidance.

Just to clarify then: Is the government advertising—is government advertising permitted during the writ period?

Ms. Verma: There are certain exceptions which are permitted within the election period or within the 60-day period, too.

The exceptions are: that it is—the advertisement or publication is required by law. It disseminates information about public health or safety matters that, in relation to the usual operations of a government department or Crown agency: is in continuation of earlier advertisements or publications concerning an ongoing or recurring program or activity; or solicits proposals or tenders for a contract; or is a job advertisement; or is information disseminated at or about a job fair or career fair; or that deals with the matter before the Assembly, such as a throne speech, the budget, the introduction or passage of a bill or an order or resolution of the Assembly.

During a by-election, there are certain additional restrictions but not additional exceptions.

There's also a non-application to speaking by members of Executive Council. Nothing in this act applies when a member of the Executive Council speaks on behalf of the government or about a matter

concerning their ministerial responsibilities, as long as government resources are not used to advertise or publish the date or time, venue location the member will speak, to invite a person to attend a location where the member will speak, or to advertise or publish the content of the member's speech after it is made.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I would take it that this would also apply to during the blackout period and I'm just wondering; are there limits to how much the government could spend during election blackout period?

Ms. Verma: In The Election Financing Act, there are no limits around government-advertising exceptions or restrictions.

Mr. Wiebe: Does the CEO think that there should be?

Ms. Verma: Again, my mandate is to administer the legislation as it has been developed by the will of the legislators.

* (14:40)

Mr. Wiebe: Just to understand the CEO's interpretation of that legislation a little bit more, what exactly does she mean by the continuation of existing ads?

Ms. Verma: I believe there are guidelines which have been issued by the government around this definition, and any complaints which come around government advertisement goes directly to the commissioner.

Since the matter is referred to the commissioner, particularly in government advertisement, Elections Manitoba rarely provides an interpretation because we don't want to be in conflict with the guidelines or with the powers of the commissioner.

Mr. Wiebe: [*inaudible*] the CEO just give those guidelines to the committee here today? Lay out those guidelines?

Ms. Verma: The guidelines which the government has provided, they are 11 pages.

Does the member wish me to read out all the pages or anything specific from the guideline?

Mr. Wiebe: If the CEO can synthesize and give us the highlights, that would be appreciated.

Ms. Verma: Okay.

The guidelines identify the purpose and the framework for which this—these guidelines have been prepared. It's for fixed-date general election or a by-election.

There is a committee which has been established to review any communication which is to be prepared. It says communication must be brought before the committee for review if they're planned for a day on which there is reasonable expectation that an order-in-council may be issued for calling an election.

I'm just identifying the highlights. It talks about the roles and responsibilities regarding government advertising and the restrictions. They said they have five key rules involved in compliance with this act and these guidelines. Those roles are for public servants, executive authority, head of communication, communication review committee, assistant deputy minister, Communications and Engagement division.

The general guidelines talk about what is included in advertise or publish, what are the activities that are not likely to be considered advertising or publishing, and these guidelines refer to the use of government resources to promote or advertise information. The act provides for four exceptions, which I listed, which I had identified earlier, required by law, public health and safety matters before the Assembly and the usual operations.

It also has an activity-based guidance regarding announcements and press conferences, media engagements, recurring task forces, technical briefings, meetings, public events, stakeholder relations, federal, provincial, territorial and intergovernmental meetings, ministerial correspondence, social media, web updates, public consultations, email, newsletters, matters before the Assembly, recruitment, procurement, grant notification, presentations and seminars by public servants.

It identifies the process for monitoring, reviewing and approval when an election period begins. It is the obligation of approving authorities and head of communication to establish processes within the department or Crown agency to ensure the thorough and adequate review and approval of all communications and engagement activity.

There is also a section on guideline review and feedback. If feedback on these guidelines can be submitted to the Communications and Engagement division of Manitoba Finance at an email address, ced@gov.mb.ca, or by calling Manitoba Government Inquiry at 1-866-Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: And so, just to be clear, these are guidelines that are outside of the legislation that have been given to the Elections Manitoba?

Ms. Verma: Section 92(5) of The Election Financing Act requires the government must develop and issue publicly available guidelines to assist government departments and Crown agencies in determining if information they intend to advertise or publish about the programs or activities is subject to the restrictions in the section.

Mr. Wiebe: Okay, I appreciate that; I do appreciate the insight that the CEO can give.

If I could just switch gears here, as much as I can, to talk about a few other issues that were identified in the annual report, specifically if we could just ask a little bit about the by-elections, obviously, three by-elections within the last fiscal year, and they are sort of represented wildly different places in the province, if I can put it that way, in terms of challenges. Did the performance of the by-elections meet the expectations of Elections Manitoba?

Ms. Verma: The elections were conducted freely and fairly. All the processes which were supposed to be in place did occur. The three by-elections, the modifications for which we had received approval, were implemented. A report was also submitted around the modifications that we had implemented.

The voter turnout in by-elections is generally low. Thompson was quite low, but as I've always said, voter turnout is a complex issue. There are several factors which lead to a higher or a lower voter turnout, and that be a still a matter of concern.

We are conducting—are engaged in several outreach activities across Manitoba. We're also focusing on our education programs. We recently completed an education tool in Flin Flon. During the by-election in Thompson, we conducted a YPTC, or power to choose education programs.

So, we are in the process of outreach and engaging at the community, at the local ground level, in each electoral division. This year we have a mandate for our returning officers and assistant returning officers to conduct local—within their community—events: the registration events, recruitment events, or we have a program called Vote PopUp, which is a simulation of the voting exercise.

As of right now, 50 out of 57 electoral divisions have planned activities. We are hoping for a full coverage by the time election begins.

Mr. Wiebe: What were the budgets for the three by-elections versus what was actually spent in those elections?

Ms. Verma: By-elections are around \$350,000 each for a by-election plus the reimbursement of expenses for candidates and the parties. The actual spending was within the budget.

So, Fort Whyte cost was \$325,000, including reimbursement; Thompson was \$265,000, and Kirkfield, we are still—the reimbursements have not been calculated—was \$200,000.

Mr. Wiebe: Specifically, with regards to the Thompson by-election, on page 17 of the annual report, Elections Manitoba indicated that it spent less money on, quote, field expenditures, end quote, for the Thompson by-election, as opposed to or in comparison to the Kirkfield Park and Fort Whyte by-elections.

Can the CEO just break down what community outreach expenditures entails?

Ms. Verma: In the Thompson by-election, we did not have vote-by-mail. So, in comparison, the cost is less than the Fort Whyte.

The Thompson and Kirkfield Park election costs are quite similar.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, can the CEO break down exactly what the community and outreach expenditures are?

Ms. Verma: Could you repeat the question, please? Which line item are you referring to?

Mr. Wiebe: So—sorry to Hansard there—as I pull my paper over my microphone.

On page 17 of the annual report, under what's called Total Field Expenditures, the amounts spent in—with regards to the Kirkfield Park—or, sorry, the Thompson by-election with—in comparison to Kirkfield Park.

* (14:50)

So, we are just looking to understand exactly what sort of outreach—community and outreach that's being done. In Fort Whyte, for instance, there was \$25,000—\$25,390 spent; in Kirkfield Park, \$25,694; in Thompson, \$30,644. And I'm just trying to understand the difference—sorry, what exactly the community and outreach entails and what those—the total field expenditures in relation to that—how those two relate.

Ms. Verma: Thank you for explaining that question further.

The community and outreach events in Thompson related to the trade shows that we participated in and community events that we had held. I can get you the

details if—just give me one second for that. In Thompson, we had the CHTM trade show, which was from May 5th to 7th, which were held there, and that's the expenses. We also flew in head office staff from Winnipeg to be in Thompson a couple of times for meetings with different band offices and the travel cost within Thompson.

Mr. Wiebe: So, I'm going to jump around a little bit here. I hope to see you all can keep up. It's almost like I wish I had at least half an hour more of questions. So, when we get a chance to revisit, hopefully the committee will understand that there's a number of areas that we still need to cover.

But, if I could just jump around, can the CEO outline how many First Nations communities will have polling stations directly in their communities for the upcoming election? And, as a follow-up question, can the CEO talk about how many of those stations will have an electronic voting machine or how many will be still counted by hand in the traditional way?

Ms. Verma: There are 63 First Nation communities in Manitoba. As of right now, of—58 communities we have been able to work with to confirm election day voting and advance voting. We are still working with the remaining five communities to establish advance and election day voting opportunities.

We are looking at electronic strike-off in 33, manual strike-off in 19 and manual count in 27; 25 will have vote counting machines.

Mr. Wiebe: So, obviously a ways to go in terms of rolling this out to deploying this across all First Nations.

So, can the CEO talk about what those challenges were about, or are about, getting those into those First Nations? Is it just the total number of machines that will be available for this upcoming election or is there something specific in working with those communities that is a limiting factor to getting them into more communities?

Ms. Verma: There are several factors which we are identifying wherever we are deploying vote counting machines.

Other than the First Nations, too, across Manitoba, it's not 100 per cent coverage. We are looking at 50 per cent coverage on election day and—for vote counting machines and 85 per cent coverage for advanced voting.

The few factors which are considered are, of course, the connectivity that we have for our voters

list strike-off. The other is the volume that a vote counting machine is justified. In many places, in seniors homes, apartment blocks which are 100 or less—or even 150—we are not deploying a vote counting machine. It's also the geography. The transportation of a vote counting machine in some of the remote areas is a challenge.

So, those are the reasons why not all locations will have a vote counting machine. And it's not just north, it's across Manitoba.

Mr. Wiebe: Maybe this is of—publicly available—if it is, I apologize—but I'm just wondering if the CEO can provide the list of those communities that will be having, I guess, there are—is a distinction here, right? There's vote counting or vote tabulation, and that's a separate thing from the voter—and I'm sure I'm forgetting the language that the CEO is using, but the strike-off of those who have voted. So, those are two separate things.

This actually does lead to my next question, if I could just roll two in one here. The machines that are being used, are they connected to the Internet in some way, the vote-tabulation, the vote-counting machines? Is that a limitation for some places that have limited connectivity? Or are they sort of a separate entity, and the strike-off is a—is something that needs the Internet and needs communication?

Ms. Verma: There are three models that we will be using in this next general election.

One is complete technology. So, there will be a real-time strike-off; that means there's a laptop. There will be the scanners. There are also the print ballot on demand for advance voting, and for election date, we don't need a—print a ballot on demand, but a label printer is required under both the models, along with the vote-counting machine.

The second model is we have laptops and associated technology—scanners and printers—but a regular ballot box. There is no vote-counting machine. So, that's a semi-manual.

And the third category will be completely manual. We'll have the paper list and a ballot box, a paper ballot box.

The distinction—the reason why we are using these three options is, of course, one is the geography; the other is the connectivity that we have for the laptops where the voters list is stored and allows for a real-time strike-off. The voter list is not stored physically on the laptop; it is connected to the server, so they

have—they are using Internet to access the voter list for striking off and updating the voter information, which goes further to the portal, information which is available to both the candidates and the parties, that you'll be able to see on an hourly basis the voters who have voted. Plus, you can also see—you can do a voter search by your name or the address to check if the voter has already voted.

With—when it comes to the vote-counting machines, they are not connected to the Internet; they're only connected to a power source. The vote-counting machines' results can be when the polls are open or we are pausing or resuming voting, as it will be needed for advance voting, or we can—we'll be closing the voting. All of these functions, the scrutineers will be able to witness and sign off on the tapes which will be printed from the vote-counting machines.

Before the results are printed, a full reconciliation is also being completed with regard to the number of ballots issued with the voters who have been struck off the voters list at each location. Once the reconciliation and the balance has been done, then the results will be printed through the vote-counting machines, and the results are not going to be directly transferred from the vote-counting machine to our system. So they're—at—even at that point, the vote-counting machines are not connected to the Internet.

At voting places on election day, the results will be manually entered into our system from the tape which has been produced by the vote-counting machine. For advance voting, those advance counts will be occurring at the returning office. We will be printing the tape, but for advance voting, the results are of 57 electoral divisions and the candidates.

We cannot manually enter those results because it will take a long time to enter the 57 electoral division results, plus there is a higher chance of data entry errors. So, for advance voting, the chip will be used from the vote-counting machine to be used in our own laptop through a secure system to upload the results.

When it comes to manual count, the third category or the second, which is a combination, the ballots will be counted manually, and they will be entered either through our system or telephoned in to the returning office, as it used to happen previously.

Mr. Wiebe: We're nearing the end of our allotted time, I'd like to ask if it's the will of the committee to extend our time by half an hour to 3:30 to complete

the questions that I have about the integrity of our upcoming election.

Mr. Goertzen: In the interest of democracy, since no one else has been allowed to ask a question so far, I'd be willing to extend the time by half an hour, but would ask that 15 minutes be allocated to members of the government to ask questions—we also have an interest in elections—and 15 minutes for the opposition member to continue.

* (15:00)

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreed? *[interjection]*

It has been proposed that the committee add 30 additional minutes to the clock with 15 minutes being dedicated to the opposition, 15 minutes dedicated to the government for question purposes.

Is that agreed?

An Honourable Member: Sorry, I'm not sure how—point of order?

Mr. Chairperson: Apologies to Mr. Wiebe.

It has been suggested that the committee continue to sit for an additional 30 minutes. Is that agreed?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, hearing a no, it has also been suggested that the committee sit an additional 30 minutes, with 15 minutes being allocated to the opposition for question purposes and 15 minutes being set aside for the government for question purposes.

Is that agreed to?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing a no, the committee will continue. *[interjection]*

Oh, sorry—Mr. Wiebe.

Mr. Wiebe: It sounds like there are lots of questions that are still needed to be asked this afternoon.

I'd originally proposed to the minister before the committee started that we take the full amount of time that we need to ask questions and had suggested maybe that we could sit until 4 o'clock and that we could revisit at that point. If the minister has 15 minutes worth of questions, I think that would give plenty of time for the government to ask questions and also allow me to finish my questions.

So, my suggestion would be that we just sit until 4 o'clock, or, if the committee is done our questions, we can rise before that and revisit at 4 o'clock.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been suggested that the committee sit 'til 4 p.m. with 45 minutes being allocated to the opposition for question purposes and 15 minutes set aside for the government for question purposes.

Is that agreed to? *[interjection]* Oh.

It's been suggested that the committee sit 'til 4 p.m. unless the questions are done previously. Is that the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: For the committee's information, it is 3:03. The committee is set to rise at—or, at least revisit at 3:05.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, it sounds like the minister may need even more time to ask questions of the CEO, and I'm happy to allow for that. So, I'll suggest that the committee sit until 5 p.m., and that we allow for one hour of questions from the government in addition to the one hour of questions that are—that I still have to ask here of the committee.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been suggested the committee sit 'til 5 p.m. with a one-hour allocation to the opposition and a one-hour allocation to the government.

The—what is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Agree.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Goertzen: I'm happy to extend the offer again to the member opposite, who wasted half an hour on a false allegation that he could have googled before he came here today. We can gladly sit for another half an hour, split the time between the government and the opposition, if the member wishes.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been suggested that the committee add an additional 30 minutes to the clock with a—with that 30 minutes divided equally, 15 minutes to the opposition, 15 minutes to the government for question purposes.

What is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Wiebe: So, again, I'm quite confused because we're asking questions about the integrity of our

upcoming elections. The minister thinks that my questions aren't worthy of this committee. I'm not sure why he would be the arbiter of that.

In fact, the only time that he interjected was at a time when I thought the CEO was answering questions quite well and is obviously very knowledgeable and giving us very good information at the committee. So, I'm quite surprised that he would now feel that he needs more time.

We're happy to give him as much time as he needs. I'll suggest that the committee sit until 6 p.m., and that the government has two hours of questions, and that the opposition—I'm sure I can finish my questions well in advance of one hour. So, two hours for the government, one hour for the opposition.

Any questions that we need to ask, obviously the CEO is doing a very, very fine job, and I think there are some important questions, especially around electronic voting in the upcoming election.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been suggested the committee sit until 6 p.m., with a two-hour allocation being to the government and the one allocation being provided the opposition for question purposes.

What say the committee?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Goertzen.

Mr. Goertzen: Just to be clear for the member, we have not had an opportunity to ask any question in two hours. And so, the member opposite might feign interest in, sort of, democracy, but he's dominated the floor for two hours, half an hour on a scurrilous allegation that he could have googled to find out that the—an organization had registered, which he'd alleged that they had not.

However, because I like to consider myself fair and generous, perhaps we can find the compromise in this, and I'll provide the member an additional half an hour, which is what he initially asked for, and

15 minutes for the opposition. So, 45 minutes from this moment.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been suggested that committee sit for an additional 45 minutes, with a 30-minute allocation to the opposition and a 15-minute allocation to the government.

What is the will of committee?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Goertzen: I move the committee adjourn.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been recommended by—*[interjection]*—oh, sorry. It has been moved by Minister Goertzen that the committee sit—*[interjection]*—oh, sorry—that the committee adjourn.

The motion is in order; it is a non-debatable motion.

What is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

An Honourable Member: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

Some Honourable Members: Aye.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Ayes have it.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 3:08 p.m.

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