

Minutes
Election Advisory Committee
March 6, 2001

1:00 p.m., March 6, 2001

Room 203, Attorney General's Executive Boardroom
815 Hornby Street, Vancouver, British Columbia

Attending:

Committee members (alpha by Party):

British Columbia New Democratic Party: Ed Lavalle, Bruce Ralston, Russ Neely (guest)

Green Party of B.C.: John Richardson (for Alistair Craighead)

Liberal Party of British Columbia: R. Hector MacKay-Dunn, Jim Pipe, Kelly Reichert (guest)

Elections BC:

Robert A. Patterson, Chief Electoral Officer

Linda M. Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

M. Nola Western, CA, Director, Electoral Finances

Derek Cockburn, CGA, Manager, Electoral Finance

Vivian S. Pearcy, Director, Electoral Operations

Peter D. Whelan, Director, Voter Registration

Linda R. Stagg, Secretary to the Chief Electoral Officer

Administration:

Mr. Patterson called the meeting to order. He reviewed the role of the Committee with the representatives.

Redistribution:

Mr. Patterson distributed a listing of the Province's pending electoral districts (EDs) and the number of map sheets for each respective ED. He noted that maps are available in two sizes. He pointed out that at the last general election, there were about 7,500 voting areas. At the next general election, there will be approximately 8,500. About 8,000 of these are regular voting areas, while about 500 are 'point' voting areas which, for example, would serve a high-rise or an extended care facility.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn asked if there was a difference between the number of Special Voting Areas (SVAs) in 1996 and the number set for the upcoming 2001 election. Mr. Patterson said that there were many more than in 1996. Ms. Johnson added that Elections BC has changed its approach and SVAs are now separated into individual addresses. [Although it was speculated that there are about 50% more SVAs in total with about 20% more facilities, subsequent research indicates total SVAs to be 362 vs. 117 in 1996. The increase is largely due to the separation of individual addresses and the conversion of previous 'mobile' absentee voting opportunities to SVAs.]

Mr. MacKay-Dunn further asked if Elections BC would be staffing at higher levels to administer special voting. Ms. Johnson replied that each District Electoral Officer (DEO) is responsible for staff to administer special voting. She added that to minimize disruption, the DEOs will have to work with their respective candidates' campaigns to decide how scrutineers are to be deployed with voting teams.

Mr. Patterson pointed out that the Street Index is now available on disk.

Electoral Information System (EIS):

Ms. Johnson noted that at the last meeting, the representatives were informed that Elections BC was optimistically targeting completion of EIS by the end of the year 2000. The completion date was subsequently moved to the end of February 2001. The system has been developed but not stress-tested, therefore, to minimize risk, most modules will not be put into production until after the upcoming Provincial general election. Some administrative components will be used, for example the EIS candidate listing system will replace a spreadsheet function, and the election officials' payroll will be done using EIS. There will be no electronic means by which to file election financial reports after the upcoming general election. The financial filing component is all but complete, with some fine-tuning still to do. It will not be rolled out until after the general election.

Ms. Johnson added that EIS will also provide Elections BC with an improved capacity to provide statistics and reports.

Mr. Pipe asked when the financial filing component is expected to be rolled out. Ms. Western replied that the earliest possible date would be for the "next financial filings," which would likely be the annual financial filings early next year.

Ms. Western added that providing the software is fully tested, training for financial agents will be scheduled for November and December of this year. She noted that the software has been designed for use also by Leadership Contestants and recall and initiative participants.

Electoral Operations:

Mr. Whelan pointed out that with the redistribution of electoral districts, Elections BC is now working with 79 electoral districts and therefore 79 District Electoral Officers (DEOs). He noted that he is impressed with the calibre of people who have come forward for these positions. The DEOs and their Deputies attended a training conference in Richmond in early February. The first day was for newly appointed DEOs and Deputies, while the following two days were for all DEOs, Deputies and a number of Elections BC staff.

To improve accessibility, six electoral districts, in addition to a District Electoral Office, will have satellite offices during the election period.

Mr. Neely asked for confirmation that the DEO offices will not be open to the public until Writs are issued. Mr. Whelan confirmed that, saying that prior to the election call, access to the DEOs will be through the Victoria office by telephone, as Elections BC does not give out DEOs' residential addresses. Ms. Pearcy, as Director of Electoral Operations, is now the Victoria office contact for DEOs.

Voter Registration:

Ms. Pearcy stated that to facilitate voter registration during the early days of the election period, late last year the Regional Managers, District Registrars of Voters and their Deputies did a great deal of work determining the locations for Registration Centres and Collection Centres. A review process was undertaken about two weeks ago, with the DRVs going through the sites to evaluate them for accessibility and identify

those that need to be changed or any additions.

She added that registration drives were recently undertaken at a number of post-secondary education institutions throughout the Province. Also the Regional Offices have undertaken registration activity in long-term and extended care facilities designated as Special Voting Areas (SVAs).

As of March 2nd, the provincial voters list system had 2,025,109 voters. Additional statistics and other information on voter registration is available on Elections BC's website.

Mr. Patterson stated that in the year 2000, about 600,000 changes were made to the Provincial list of voters. He added that he has confidence in the quality of the list going into the upcoming event.

Ms. Johnson added that the Motor Voter program, which matches address changes from ICBC's driver licences with voter records, has now established links with 85% of voter records. As well, public awareness of the Motor Voter program has increased.

Mr. Neely asked what happens to voter registration activity when Writs are issued. Ms. Pearcy replied that voter registration closes at 9:00 p.m. on Day 7 of the election period. After Day 7, voters are limited to registration in conjunction with voting opportunities.

Ms. Johnson noted that based on registration activity at voting places at the 1996 provincial general election and last fall's federal election, registration activity is shifting to the time and place of voting. DEOs have been instructed to staff at sufficient levels to accommodate heavy registration traffic by voters.

Mr. Neely asked if voters can register and vote in the same queue. Ms. Johnson replied that those registering in conjunction with voting have their own queue for two reasons. The first is to ensure that staff handling registration are sufficiently trained, and the second is to avoid slowing down those voters who are already registered.

Mr. Neely further asked in the absence of a line-up, how long it takes to vote. Ms. Johnson responded that the procedures have been streamlined as much as possible to minimize waiting time. The process of registering a voter takes about one minute, as the voter is required to show two pieces of identification. Once at the voting officials' table, she estimates an additional 30 seconds are required to record the voter's registration information.

Mr. Reichert inquired if voters registering on General Voting Day are assigned a "41" number. Ms. Johnson replied that these numbers are assigned only on General Voting Day for the purpose of announcing voters for scrutineers. ["41" refers to sec. 41 of the Election Act which provides for voter registration in conjunction with voting.]

Election Finances:

Ms. Western reminded the representatives that British Columbia's electoral districts will increase to 79 from 75 when Writs are issued. Constituency Associations registered under existing boundaries will be de-registered when the election is called. At this time, de-registration is voluntary. Should a constituency association be de-registered once the election is called, it cannot transfer funds to its party or candidate.

Funds then held by a constituency association will be required to be submitted to Elections BC and then be transferred back to the party. Currently there are about 203 registered constituency associations, evenly split between the existing and pending boundary configurations.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn asked if automatically de-registered constituency associations will be required to file financial reports. Ms. Western responded that they would, however, the reports need not be audited.

Ms. Western informed the representatives of some estimates of candidates' expense limits for the next general election. She noted that preliminary calculations are done on the day Writs are issued, and soon after Day 15, when the revised voters list is produced, a final calculation is done using the revised numbers of voters per electoral district. She advised that the expense limits will never be less than those calculated on Writ Day. Based on the numbers of registered voters on February 8, 2001, the minimum candidate expense limit would be \$52,744. Mr. Lavalle asked what the maximum could be. Ms. Western replied that the two highest electoral districts would be \$65,930 in Bulkley Valley-Stikine and \$67,546 in Powell River-Sunshine Coast.

Ms. Western further advised that, again based on February 8, 2001 voter registration numbers, a preliminary estimate for the expense limit for registered parties would be \$2.669 million, providing the respective party fielded candidates in all 79 electoral districts.

Ms. Western addressed the outcome of the Pacific Press challenge of the Election Act, which saw the Supreme Court of British Columbia rule that a number of sections of the Election Act [sections 235, 236, 237, 238] are unconstitutional and therefore of no force and effect. Third party advertisers are no longer subject to expenditure limits, however they are still required to register with Elections BC; to have an authorization statement on their ads; and to file financial reports with Elections BC. Ms. Western continued that third party advertisers still need to sign a Solemn Declaration that the ads do not contravene a party's or candidate's expense limits, as required by section 240 (3) (b) (ii) of the Election Act.

Ms. Western continued that publishers of opinion polls are no longer required to publish the methodology of the poll.

Mr. Reichert asked if opinion surveys still required identification of the sponsor. Ms. Western responded that this is no longer a requirement.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn asked if the Pacific Press decision was under appeal. Ms. Western replied that the Province had not appealed the decision.

Ms. Johnson spoke to a recent amendment to Regulations under the Financial Disclosure Act. Candidates are required to file a financial disclosure form with their nomination documents. The Regulation establishes a new form which corrects some errors, however, the form currently in circulation will be accepted until the end of August 2001. Consequently, there will soon be two versions of this form in candidates' hands. The revision addressed how to record holdings of recreational properties and credit card debt. As a result of Elections BC's asking government to provide some information for candidates on how to complete the form, the Ministry of Attorney General is working on a brochure for candidates.

Further addressing the nomination process, Ms. Western pointed out that the Solemn Declarations that need to be taken by candidates will be taken free of charge at Elections BC and Government Agent offices. The Solemn Declarations of Qualification as a Candidate and Statements of Financial Disclosure, however, cannot be taken at these offices before the Writs are issued as the information contained on these forms must be current at the time they are filed. These forms are not available on the Elections BC website.

Mr. Patterson asked for items from Committee Representatives. None were put forward.

No date was set for a subsequent meeting, but an election post-mortem meeting will be planned for the Fall.