

## **Election Advisory Committee (EAC) Minutes**

**25 August 2020**

1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Meeting conducted via conference call originating at the  
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer

### **PRESENT**

#### **Committee Members (alphabetically by political party name)**

- Jordan Reid, BC NDP
- Raj Sihota, BC NDP
- Emile Scheffel, British Columbia Liberal Party
- Paul Barbeau, British Columbia Liberal Party
- Sat Harwood, Green Party Political Association of British Columbia
- Jonina Campbell, Green Party Political Association of British Columbia

#### **Elections BC Staff**

- Anton Boegman, Chief Electoral Officer (Chair)
- Charles Porter, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Finance and Operations
- Yvonne Koehn, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Corporate Services
- Jodi Cooke, Executive Director, Electoral Finance
- Deanna Chapman, Director, Provincial Electoral Finance
- Aidan Brand, Director, Corporate Planning and Strategic Initiatives
- Dan Posey, Analyst, Executive Services
- Arlene Carlson, Executive Coordinator (minutes)

### **GUESTS**

#### **Office of the Provincial Health Officer**

- Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer
- Dr. Brian Emerson, A/Deputy Provincial Health Officer

**Meeting commenced at 3:10 p.m.**

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Anton Boegman, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), welcomed committee members and guests, and asked participants to introduce themselves. He reviewed the agenda, and described the role of the Election Advisory Committee (EAC) as established by sections 14 - 16 of the *Election Act*. Anton noted that while not all agenda items today fall under the requirements of section 16, it is in the spirit of that section that Elections BC makes use of this Committee to engage more broadly on other aspects of political campaigning and election

administration. He noted that the first and third agenda items fall under this broader consultation.

## **2. Public Health Guidelines for Campaigning during a Pandemic**

Anton welcomed Dr. Henry and Dr. Emerson to the meeting, and noted that campaigning pre-COVID-19 typically included a number of activities that involve individuals coming in close contact with others: for example, hosting events such as rallies or fundraising functions, carrying out candidate nomination meetings, door-to-door canvassing or soliciting support from voters. Just as everyone has had to adjust behaviors during day-to-day activities, so too must campaigning activities be adjusted to minimize the risk of COVID-19 being transmitted to others through these activities. These adjustments must be made based on current public health requirements.

The discussion focused on three areas where campaigning would need to be modified to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and keep voters and campaign staff safe during an election:

- at campaign events,
- out in the community, and
- in campaign offices

Dr. Henry and Dr. Emerson commented on these three general areas as follows:

As with all other businesses, political parties should consider having teams put together a COVID-19 safety plan, which considers issues such as minimizing face-to-face interactions by finding alternative ways to accomplish objectives, such as meeting in small physically distanced groups. Be aware that there is heightened anxiety regarding in-person interactions. Some people will not take kindly to strangers knocking on their door. Be considerate and try to find alternative ways of communicating with voters.

The *Election Act* does not require that campaign offices be accessible to the public, so parties can consider finding other virtual ways to interact with voters.

If physical interactions must take place, recognize that all of the public health orders in place must be adhered to. Some examples include providing barriers (plexiglass screens), physical distancing, a maximum of 50 properly distanced people at any event (smaller spaces require a smaller number of participants), assigned seating, maintaining distance between groups, collecting contact information for inside and outside events, and holding events outside or virtually where possible. The plan should also consider how to react if someone in the campaign office is ill. These types of things should all be included in the safety plan.

Step one is to develop and submit a safety plan. The Provincial Health Office (PHO) can provide some guidance and is conducting ongoing discussions with the CEO on how we can have safe elections in BC.

If you do have an individual in one of your offices that contracts COVID-19, think through the response and how you would react to that scenario. It should be part of your safety plan and the PHO can provide guidance.

## Discussion Questions

- Question: This question is for both the doctors and Anton. Keeping in mind that no matter when the election is held, it will be conducted under COVID-19 restrictions, we are provided with addresses for voters that enable us to knock at their doors. Given that we will be seeking alternative methods to contact voters, EBC has collected other information such as email addresses and phone numbers. Has there been any consideration that political parties be provided with additional contact information for individuals on the voters list?
  - Answer: EBC does not collect email or telephone numbers from ICBC. Additional information we have tends to be more event based, for example a voter may provide an email address or phone number and ask us to contact them. There are privacy considerations here as the voter has not consented to sharing this information. We would expect that within your contact databases you have collected contact information where voters have provided consent. This is not a conversation that we have had with the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We understand your challenges with communication during this time and I am willing to have that conversation with the Commissioner. My sense is that without consent we would not be able to provide phone and email contact information that has been given to Elections BC by voters. As well, we do not collect that information on an ongoing basis and there are limits to the accuracy of the information provided by voters.
- Question: Perhaps the Information and Privacy Commissioner could attend a future meeting as campaigning under the pandemic is an ongoing concern.
  - Answer: We will follow up with the Commissioner.
- Comment: There was a new Regulation proposed at a previous meeting which does in fact allow EBC to collect the email addresses and mobile phone numbers of those registering to vote.
  - Answer: Yes, the Voter Registration Regulation was updated to include that information. That collection is done to support the electronic distribution of Where to Vote (WTV) cards so that voters have a choice of how to receive their WTV information. The consent statement for this information indicates that it is collected for the purpose of voting, and will not be shared with political parties. That statement would need to be adjusted were the information to be shared further.

## At campaign events

Anton noted that the *Election Act* does not restrict the various kinds of events that campaigns can hold during the election for the purpose of gaining support or soliciting financial contributions.

For Elections BC, the requirements under the Act are:

- Campaign signs and other advertising promoting an event, such as internet advertising, must have the necessary authorization statements
- All income raised must be from permitted sources and collected in compliance with the Act

- All expenses must be incurred through the bank account by the financial agent and, depending on the nature of the expense, the amount may be subject to the spending limits
- All income and expenses must be reported in compliance with the Act, and,
- If the event is a specified fundraising function (i.e. is attended by the leader of a major political party, a parliamentary secretary or member of the Executive Council), the details of the event must be reported to Elections BC at least seven days prior to the event so that they can be published online

There is nothing in the Act that prevents an event from being held virtually, provided that all other requirements are being met.

Dr. Henry and Dr. Emerson commented on campaign events. They suggested that we will be dealing with COVID-19 into the foreseeable future and even leading in to the next scheduled election. We are seeing transmission in larger groups, as well as at small indoor events such as meals. Things like fundraising dinners need to be thought through. The limit on gatherings of 50 people is really a maximum. If you are thinking of having indoor events where people are going to be in close contact for longer periods of time, then smaller numbers are better. For example, six to twelve people should be the maximum for a fundraising dinner. Assigned seating is also helpful, and of course no one who is ill should attend. Outdoor venues are preferable to inside venues. During the recent national leadership convention for the federal Conservative Party, we noticed that there are innovative ways to do this.

### Discussion Questions

- Question: Reading the recent order issued August 7 by the PHO on gatherings and events, in terms of the description of events, I don't see campaign events as a listed event. Do those on the call view this Order as applying to campaign events?
  - Answer: Yes, the Order applies to political events, and to anything that gathers people together. The other limitation to consider could be the location of the event, for example if it is held in a restaurant or pub, additional requirements (like no dancing) would apply. As a result, election night parties will be subdued as well.
- Question: We have already seen this for parties on this call that Orders cover events fairly well and we will need to plan some events in alternative and virtual ways. The piece of campaigning that is hard to substitute is that face-to-face piece. This is going to be key for maximum safe voter participation. In that spirit, what are the odds that the PHO could issue formal public guidance under which door-to-door canvassing can be done safely? I think it is probably in everyone's interest to address this proactively rather than responding during the campaign period.
  - Answer: That is a very good idea. What we have done with most industries is provide reviews for a plan. If you could come together as this committee and put together your suggestions, as you are the experts, we could help to review and provide guidance to a plan. We don't approve plans, but can weigh in on whether they meet the criteria. It is a good idea to have that for everyone to reference. There are a lot of concerns for people in apartments, condos and communal living facilities around communal spaces such as elevators, hallways etc. If you could agree on parameters, it would help to improve public confidence in the process.

- Comment: I would support this suggestion.
- Question: Can you provide an update on one activity we discussed at a previous meeting, where we have to be face-to-face in order to collect signatures on nomination papers. How might that be done in this context?
  - Answer: EBC noted this question at the last meeting and we have looked into various options. It is acceptable under the legislation to accept nominator signatures electronically, and we are currently producing guidance on how this can be done. We are looking at allowing nomination papers to be signed electronically. This might involve receiving 75 nomination papers for each candidate.
- Question: I know that EBC is communicating with the Saskatchewan CEO. In Saskatchewan what is the relationship between their PHO and CEO working together for the fall election?
  - Answer: Saskatchewan does not have an EAC, so when the premier announced the fall election, the CEO contacted their Chief Medical Health Officer. Together they have formed a committee that includes representatives of the political parties to establish discussions similar to those taking place with this Committee. Their goal is to ensure that the guidance of the public health official is reflected in how the election is administered. With regard to campaigning, the party representatives are speaking with the Chief Medical Health Officer directly, and Elections Saskatchewan does not have a role in that discussion.
- Comment: On the subject of door-to-door canvassing, I believe the Province of Saskatchewan has published some guidelines on door-to-door sales that may be relevant.

### **In the community**

Anton noted that a major component of election campaigning takes place out in the community. Traditionally this includes going door-to-door to speak with voters, standing on street corners, or attending election events in the community, such as town halls or candidate meetings.

The *Election Act* has a number of requirements in relation to community events including:

- Any materials distributed during the campaign period must contain an authorization statement.
- Individuals and organizations are prohibited from campaigning within 100 meters of all election offices and voting places while voting is being conducted.
- Candidates must appoint canvassers in writing for the purpose of distributing candidate information in residential properties.
- If individuals are canvassing in a strata or rental property, the strata or landlord is not permitted to deny access to a canvasser during the campaign period between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. providing the canvasser provides government issued photo ID and a copy of their authorization. This is a recent change to the *Election Act*, and will be new for the next election.

- If other individuals or organizations attempt to canvass voters on a commercial basis, they must be registered as third party sponsors.

Anton invited Dr. Henry and Dr. Emerson to comment on public health guidelines that would impact campaigning in the community.

Dr. Emerson noted that the key thing to know is that different parts of communities have different sensitivities, and that being tuned in to that is a critical issue. Strangers approaching is an overall issue. Landlords and stratas can put in temporary restrictions in common areas around health and safety, and canvassers should be aware of these. This may prevent people from gathering or clustering in a common area. One of the challenges in particular is in First Nations communities. We have heard many times that they may be hesitant about people entering the community from outside. Being tuned in to the local epidemiology can help to raise awareness among workers.

### Discussion Questions

- Question: We brought this question forward at a previous meeting, what is being done by EBC in First Nations communities when they have indicated that strangers are not welcome? It is important to have local election workers. Has EBC done any further work on that?
  - Answer: Yes, we have plans in place. We have always encouraged our District Electoral Officers (DEOs) to recruit from within the community, and this will not change for the next election. At-risk communities such as care homes have options available such as vote-by-mail. We have a meeting scheduled next week with the First Nations Leadership Council. It will afford us the opportunity to provide our initial thinking to council members and ask for their input on what options work for them. Following the meeting we will instruct our DEOs on their outreach efforts. Recruiting election officials from local communities is a major consideration and is part of our normal practice.

### In campaign offices

Anton reminded the group that the *Election Act* does not regulate the structure or layout of campaign offices. The only requirement is that all campaign office expenses must be incurred and reported in compliance with the Act, and that expenses incurred during the campaign period may be subject to the spending limit.

There is also nothing in the Act that requires a candidate or a political party to have a campaign office that is open to the public – although that may seem counterintuitive if an office has been set up to engage with the public. An office could, however, be established as a phone bank to canvass voters.

Anton invited Dr. Henry and Dr. Emerson to comment on public health guidelines that would impact campaign offices.

Dr. Henry and Dr. Emerson noted that the key point to remember is that the workers will be assumed to be employees and therefore WorkSafeBC will require a workplace safety plan which will need to be reviewed by them. The key elements would be similar to a retail environment plan and should include such things as controlling numbers, placing barriers, physical distancing, providing virtual options, preventing those who are ill from attending, and availability of hand sanitizer. Booked appointments are helpful to minimize numbers in

the space. For more information and guidance, committee members are encouraged to visit the WorkSafeBC website and click on COVID-19.

Dr. Emerson said that he looks forward to working with the group on the door-to-door piece. Any questions that committee members have for the PHO regarding campaigning and canvassing should be sent to EBC, who will forward them to the PHO for review and provide answers back to all committee members. He also noted that as other provinces provide them with information, he looks forward to bringing it back into this discussion.

Anton invited committee members to submit any questions they have to [Arlene.Carlson@elections.bc.ca](mailto:Arlene.Carlson@elections.bc.ca).

Anton thanked Dr. Henry and Dr. Emerson for providing their insight.

### **3. Electoral Purposes for Access to and Use of Personal Information Regulation**

Anton presented the proposed amendment to the existing CEO Regulation, the *Electoral Purposes for Access to and Use of Personal Information*. This regulation is now being modified based on Elections BC's experience in how it has been interpreted by political stakeholders at all levels. The change reflected in this new version is intended to minimize any confusion for provincial stakeholders in relation to the requirements of Elections BC and the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The specific change is in section 2(1) and includes the addition of a clause clarifying that the access to, and restrictions established on, the use of personal information for provincial, municipal or federal electoral purposes, only applies to that personal information where the Act requires or authorizes the disclosure, public inspection or other use of those records.

The *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA) applies to all information collected, used and disclosed by political parties, including information provided under the *Election Act*.

There are differences between the application of the *Election Act* for records that are required to be disclosed, and the other provisions of PIPA to information collected by political parties (for example, the collection of information with consent, or the collection of information from a public source).

The extent of this change helps to highlight:

- that only the narrow set of personal information required or authorized to be disclosed by the *Election Act* is subject to the electoral purposes authorization under s. 275 (3) (c), and
- that all other personal information collected, used and disclosed by political parties is subject to the other provisions of PIPA.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- Question: Could we have a practical example as to what will change?
  - Answer: Yes, we can provide some plain language examples on our website.
- Question: Do I understand that this regulatory change would not impact the scope of information that we currently receive from EBC?

- Answer: The scope of information provided to political parties under the *Election Act* would not change.

Anton asked that members provide any feedback on the Regulation via email to [Arlene.Carlson@elections.bc.ca](mailto:Arlene.Carlson@elections.bc.ca) by Tuesday, September 1.

#### **4. Update on Pandemic Election Protocols**

Anton provided the following verbal update on the work that Elections BC has undertaken since the last EAC meeting to plan for an election conducted during a pandemic:

*At the last meeting of the EAC I provided a detailed description of Elections BC's pandemic election contingency planning. This planning had been influenced by our research into approaches successfully used by other jurisdictions internationally, where elections had been held during the pandemic, as well as through our ongoing consultation with the Provincial Health Officer.*

*There were two key issues driving our planning. First, an election is a "high-touch" event in which millions of British Columbians participate. From a public health perspective in a pandemic, it is a high potential risk event. Both Dr. Henry and I believe that an election can be conducted safely in the pandemic, however many preventive measures will need to be put in place, and election processes will need to be adapted to keep voters and election workers safe. These adaptations are also necessary to maintain accessibility to voting processes during the pandemic, as well as to maintain the overall integrity of the electoral process.*

*Second, since the onset of the pandemic in our province some five months ago, it has become clear that it is not going away, and that it will be present in our society until a successful vaccine is developed and distributed province wide. Thus any election or by-election in B.C. within the next 14 months (and perhaps longer) will almost certainly be administered under some form of pandemic public health guidance. This reinforces that the adaptations being proposed are absolutely necessary.*

*Our planning used the framework of physical distancing, engineering controls, administrative controls and personal protective equipment as a means of assessing our electoral processes, and identifying where adaptations were necessary for reducing COVID-19 transmission hazards. This is the same approach that has been used by other B.C. organizations as part of all three phases of re-opening the province.*

*The adaptive protocols presented and discussed at the last EAC meeting have now been formalized in Elections BC's safe voting place plans, which have been reviewed by the Safe Operations Working Group of the Provincial Health Officer.*

*Many of these adaptations have resulted in additional measures being put in place in voting places and electoral offices. Although different from what was done previously, the implementation of these new measures was straightforward as they were in areas not regulated by the Election Act. Rather some processes were re-engineered, training and reference material updated, and new supplies purchased. Examples of these types of adaptations include ensuring that voters are spaced a minimum of 2 metres apart throughout the voting process, adding sanitization stations and extra cleaning in voting places, and procuring portable acrylic barriers to be placed on voting tables between the election officials and voters.*

Some other adaptations, however, will require necessary variances from the Election Act in order to ensure voting place safety. The variances will be accomplished through Orders of the Chief Electoral Officer under s. 280 in response to the public health emergency and the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic. Typically Orders are reactive; they are issued without external consultation in response to emerging circumstances during an election. Because these Orders are intended to be proactive, I believe it is important that political parties are informed of these changes as early as possible, such that in the event of a by-election or early provincial election, there is clear understanding and communication about these specific adaptations.

Adaptations requiring variance from the Act through CEO Order can be categorized as those related to voting in a voting place, those related to alternative absentee voting (vote-by-mail), and those related to campaign finance and candidate representatives. Here is an overview of these adaptations.

### **Voting in a voting place**

These adaptations are necessary for two key reasons, reduced contact intensity and increased physical distancing.

Reducing contact intensity is critical to maintaining low public health risk by minimizing the requirements for election officials and voters to exchange materials and interact in close proximity. Adaptations in this category include:

- Removing the requirement for an advance voting certificate. Given use of the Voter Look-up tool in 2017 and the provision of advance voting turnout data to candidates and political parties through the secure download service, this certificate is now redundant.
- Removing the requirement for voters to sign the voting book. Election officials will now note which voters have voted after they affirm their eligibility.
- Replace other written declarations with oral declarations that voters will affirm.
- Having voters, rather than the election official, remove & discard the counterfoil from their ballot – this means the ballot can go straight into the ballot box after the voter marks it, rather than handing the ballot back to the election official first.
- Broadening the capacity for individuals to vouch for more than one voter in long-term care and acute care facilities (e.g. facility administrator vouching for the identity of care home residents). This will likely be very rarely used, but is necessary to preserve accessibility while also protecting these higher-risk voter populations.

Increased physical distancing in voting places is fundamental to reducing the potential for transmission of COVID-19. Distancing among voters can be accomplished through voting place planning and marking, as well as by spreading more voters out over all voting opportunities. Distancing among election officials, who come together from different households to work, is equally important but requires variance from the Act. Adaptations under physical distancing include:

- Reducing the number of election officials required at each voting station from a team of two seated side by side to a single election official. In all voting places there will remain a minimum of two election officials, including a supervisor. Not only will this enable better physical distancing, but it could also help mitigate the risk of recruiting election officials during the pandemic by reducing the numbers required.
- Adding an additional day of advance voting (seven days total, up from six).

### **Alternative absentee voting with voting package (vote-by-mail)**

*One of the expected changes to voter behavior during a pandemic is a significantly increased demand to vote by mail. This has already been evidenced in pandemic elections in Australia and in this summer's recent primaries in the USA.*

*We conducted surveys in May and August to assess how voters felt about voting during the pandemic. Approximately 35% of voters said they would prefer to vote by mail, even given that voting places would have protective measures in place. In B.C. this could mean that as many as 800,000 voters may vote by mail in the next provincial election, dramatically more than past elections (typically around 6,500 voters vote by mail in a provincial election in B.C.). This in itself has significant consequences as, if this many voters do in fact vote by mail, their votes would not be counted until final count, which itself would need to be delayed to account for the significantly increased volume. Final count normally begins on the 13<sup>th</sup> day following General Voting Day (GVD), and lasts for up to three days. It is possible that final count may not be able to start until four weeks following GVD.*

*A number of alternative absentee voting provisions would need to be adapted to effectively respond to these exceptional circumstances and the potentially massive increase in vote-by-mail. These include:*

- Removing the eligibility requirements for alternative absentee voting. This is a formal recognition of the de facto approach of Elections BC since 2009. It is essentially "no excuse" alternative absentee voting and will provide additional flexibility for voters to request vote-by-mail packages and vote at the office of the District Electoral Officer throughout the voting period, supporting physical distancing.*
- Revising some voting package materials for vote-by-mail. The demand for vote-by-mail packages is anticipated to increase dramatically due to the pandemic. Vote-by-mail packages will use larger write-in ballots, and ordinary ballots following the close of nominations, to permit assembling and distributing high volumes of vote-by-mail packages. To help process received packages, the secrecy envelope will be replaced with a secrecy sleeve (as in the 2018 referendum) and, to encourage physical distancing by voters, the witness signature requirement on certification envelopes for vote-by-mail will be replaced with a space for voters to record their date of birth, which will act as a shared secret to confirm the voter's identity.*
- Replacing vote-by-mail requirements with mail-in voting requirements based on the Election Amendment Act, 2019; The provisions of this Act provide greater flexibility to the administration of vote-by-mail. This includes the capacity for voters to request replacement packages, and the aforementioned use of ordinary ballots for this voting opportunity following the close of nominations.*
- Allowing completed packages to be returned to locations specified by the CEO and permit the receiving steps for completed packages to continue during preparations for final count. These adaptations provide greater flexibility for voters while also encouraging physical distancing. For completed vote-by-mail packages returned prior to the close of voting, permitting the receiving steps required by the Election Act to continue during the preparations for final count will provide greater flexibility to address the expected volumes (these steps are normally done immediately on the receipt of the voting package).*
- Permitting some vote-by-mail certification envelope screening to begin prior to the close of voting. This includes steps like confirming voter eligibility and will enable greater flexibility to respond to the volume of vote-by-mail packages expected to be processed, as well as potentially shortening the time required to prepare for final count.*

*For campaign financing, we will be adapting the provisions to make non-branded personal protective equipment, and other preventative measures necessary during the pandemic, not subject to expense spending limits. In these exceptional times it is important to ensure safe campaigning, and this change will make sure that measures intended to preserve public health and protect campaign staff, volunteers and members of the public do not adversely impact funds available to campaign.*

*For candidate representatives, the adaptation reinforces the physical distancing requirement in voting places, while allowing the maximum number of voters into voting places as space constraints allow. We intend placing limits on the number of candidate representatives in voting places, similar to current provisions under special voting in B.C., as well as changing some typical practices.*

*During voting, each voting place will have a minimum of two candidate representatives allowed to be present (excluding runners who will be picking up copies of bingo sheets on voting days). If space permits, up to one representative per candidate will be allowed, and for very large voting places there will be opportunities for increased candidate representative presence. As with the current rules related to special voting, the selection of candidate representatives will be by agreement between candidates, or by lot. The decision to allow additional representatives will be made by district electoral officers and will allow them to respond to the unique local circumstances.*

*During counting after the close of voting, each candidate will be allowed up to one representative per ballot box being counted.*

*In terms of changes to practices, representatives will not be permitted behind the rigid acrylic sneeze guards, and must adhere to voting place safety requirements including wearing masks and maintaining two metre distancing.*

*This adaptation is based on current requirements for special voting, and mirrors a new variance put in place in Saskatchewan for their upcoming fall election.*

Anton invited questions and comments from committee members, and reminded them that they will receive a draft copy of the meeting minutes by the end of this week.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Comment: In the context of limits on candidate representatives and the increase in vote-by-mail, Elections Saskatchewan will be providing daily updates of mail-in ballots, I would like to request that EBC adopt a similar policy so we know who has voted.
  - Answer: If there is a substantive increase in vote-by-mail ballots, that type of information would be akin to information we currently provide on advance voters. We will follow up with Elections Saskatchewan to see what they are doing and the rationale behind it. We will also review what may be possible in B.C.
- Question: How is EBC preparing for the increase in mail-in ballots, how will you decide how many will be printed? What does it look like from your end and how many are you planning to print in addition to the usual amount?

- Answer: We have researched the experiences in other jurisdictions, and conducted two surveys of voters to understand potential interest in voting by mail. The average of the two surveys shows that 35% of voters are interested in vote by mail. We are planning for up to eight hundred thousand requests. Vote-by-mail packages will have to include write-in ballots prior to the close of nominations. After the close of nominations, we will shift to printing and including ordinary ballots in these packages. Late in the election period, it may become impractical to get vote-by-mail packages out in time for them to be returned to us. In such cases voters will be given direction on where to go to vote in person. We are trying to design the vote-by-mail materials to reduce waste, so that most of them could still be used at a future time. Because vote-by-mail is a request based system, we are working with the Ministry of Citizens' Services to increase our call centre capacity. During a past general election, vote-by-mail packages were put together manually, but here we are looking at reusing and leveraging processes learned from the provincial vote-by-mail referenda.
- Question. Will you be using postage paid envelopes?
  - Answer: Yes, return envelopes within Canada are postage paid. Packages sent to international destinations do not have postage paid return envelopes.
- Question: If my understanding of vote-by-mail is correct, any eligible voter who requests a package will get one? Will this entail a formalization of the process by CEO order? When will the order come forward?
  - Answer: Correct. The Orders are being worked on now, but will only come into effect if/when an election is called.
- Question: Regarding receiving of vote-by-mail packages, a completed package has to be received by the end of the writ period, is that correct?
  - Answer: No, the package must be received prior to the close of voting on General Voting Day. We are looking for expanded opportunities for returning packages via other channels as well as through the mail system. For example, voters could drop off a package at a voting location or DEO office.
- Question: Regarding telephone voting and the potential to expand it, will EBC expand this option to include all voters?
  - Answer: No, this option would be reserved for high-risk voter groups and those with significant accessibility challenges. We are working on eligibility criteria for telephone voting which could include care homes, acute care hospitals, deployed military, First Nations. We simply do not have the infrastructure to support this method for all voters and our systems would be overwhelmed by calls. Australia developed this model for use by sight-impaired voters. During the pandemic elections in New South Wales in April, their telephone call centres were overwhelmed, mostly by voters who were not eligible to use that option. It is not an automated system, and is more complicated than it appears, requiring two election officials to process each voter and maintain the secrecy of the ballot. The universally accessible remote voting option is vote-by-mail.

- Question: If vouching is expanded, will it be expanded to other at risk groups who may not be in medical settings?
  - Answer: We know this is potentially an issue in residential care homes and hospital settings where voters may not have access to their ID, and we are looking at it carefully. The current requirements for voter ID are as flexible as possible, and we conduct extensive outreach to ensure that voters can have the identification they need (for example, a prescription bottle would be accepted). While I believe we already have a flexible model, your point is well taken, and we will explore other areas where the lack of ID may be a barrier.
- Follow up Question: I am thinking specifically of temporary shelters during the pandemic and hoping they will be taken into consideration, as well as enfranchisement within First Nations communities.
  - Answer: We welcome receiving any information around these other aspects and communities, and our team will look into these.
- Question: Regarding the variances proposed for removing the requirement for voters to sign the voting book, would a similar Order work for the nomination paperwork?
  - Answer: That is a good question. When we approached this, we got a legal opinion, but didn't think an Order would be necessary given that we already had an option already permissible under the Act. There may be a more efficient model and we will have another look at that issue.

## 5. Closing Remarks

Anton Boegman thanked members for their comments and asked that they provide any feedback on the Regulation discussed by September 1.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.