

**Election Advisory Committee
September 14, 1999
Vancouver, British Columbia**

Attending:

Committee Representatives (alpha by Party):

British Columbia New Democratic Party: Bruce Ralston, Ron Stipp

Green Party Political Association of B.C.: Julian West

Liberal Party of British Columbia: R. Hector MacKay-Dunn, Jim Pipe

Elections BC:

Robert A. Patterson, Chief Electoral Officer

Linda M. Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

M. Nola Western, CA, Director, Electoral Finances

Kenneth D. Maskell, Director, Voter Registration

Chris K. Roberts, Electoral Geography Manager

Peter Cech, Communications Manager

Linda Stagg, Secretary to the Chief Electoral Officer

Administration:

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

Ms. Johnson presented an overview of Elections BC's new Electoral Information System (EIS). Elections BC has contracted with EDS Systemhouse for a re-work of the organization's computer infrastructure, including the development of financial filing software. The current computerized provincial voters list system (PVLS) dates back to the early 1980s and has had a number of subsystems added. After an extensive process of development of a systems plan, real business needs were identified that could only be addressed by a new system.

EIS will have seven components:

1. provincial voters list
2. boundaries management
3. an address register
4. a support system for District Electoral Officers (DEOs), including a payroll component, as election workers are no longer exempt from federal payroll deductions
5. client communications, for production of public information materials
6. administrative information
7. electronic filing of financial reports

This is a three-stage project. Stage 1, scheduled for completion in April 2000, includes boundaries management, the address register and the DEOs' support system. Stage 2, to be completed by September 2000, will include client communications, voter registration and introduction of electronic filing to registered political parties. Stage 3, completed by December, 2000, will be more internal to Elections BC with the 'handover' of the system from the contractor.

Ms. Western expressed optimism about electronic filing of campaign financing reports, pointing out that sub-contractor SDR is the industry leader for electronic campaign filing software. The software will allow registered political parties, registered constituency associations, candidates, third party advertisers, leadership contestants and auditors to file electronically over the Internet, by modem, or by diskette. Volunteers from registered parties will be sought for *beta* testing, probably next summer.

Mr. Ralston asked if changes to legislation are required to accommodate electronic filing, and if the information will be posted in the public domain as soon as it is filed. Ms. Western replied that no legislative changes are required; however, new forms will have to be regulated. Further, Elections BC will hold the information in a secure database and release all filed information at the same time.

Mr. Ralston questioned the procedure if someone chose to file on paper. Ms. Western replied that filing on paper remains an option. These will be scanned to capture the image electronically, and also key data will be entered to capture the information electronically.

Ms. Johnson added that the system will be able to download political contribution information from a filer's computer system to Elections BC's system. The software will also do the arithmetic calculations for the filer.

Although a training package will be included with the software, Ms. Western asked what kind of training the parties would prefer, whether singularly or together with other parties? Mr. Stipp stated he favoured regionally based training for party representatives. Dr. West agreed.

Ms. Johnson pointed out that regional, multi-party training would not exclude training for financial agents of a specific registered party, and everyone who might be involved with financial aspects of candidates' campaigns.

Dr. West asked in the case of a registered constituency association with relatively few transactions, that the burden of financial filing be minimalized, and perhaps reduced to a single form. Ms. Western replied that a balance sheet and income statement would still be required; however, a registered constituency association need not file other forms if there has been no activity. Dr. West asked if software for electronic filing of campaign financial reports would be relatively platform-independent. Ms. Western indicated that she believed it will run on the current and earlier version of Windows, but not on a Macintosh.

[After further research following the meeting, Ms. Western advised that the software will run on Windows 95, Windows NT, Windows 98 and any newer version of Windows, but not on a '386'.]

Redistribution:

Mr. Roberts stated that Elections BC has made infrastructure changes to facilitate implementation of the 79 new electoral district boundaries established by the *Electoral Districts Act*, which received Royal Assent July 14, 1999. The Surveyor General's office provided legal descriptions for electoral districts. The Electoral Geography Division must now review all legal descriptions and note all references to geographic features such as streets, creeks and rivers, entering them in a database.

The next steps involve placing the 79 new electoral district boundaries into the database and modification of those voting areas affected by redistribution. There are about 250 voting areas split by new boundaries; however, at least 70% of the remainder need to be renumbered. A conversion list and new street index are being developed. Mr. Roberts added that the new EIS does not use postal codes in the same manner as the current provincial voters list system (PVLS), but some system development is needed to convert postal codes into street ranges.

The Ministry of Environment's GeoData BC has been contracted to build a digital road atlas as a base for Electoral Geography's work.

Mr. Roberts mentioned another new product: an address register of all addresses in the Province tied to voting areas. Mr. Maskell noted voter records will have postal codes associated with them; however in the Street Index, postal codes will not be built in as an integral part of the range record. Mr. Patterson added that because Canada Post regularly updates postal codes, it is more

expedient to obtain postal code tapes from Canada Post on an 'as needed' basis, and not duplicate efforts.

Mr. Roberts projected the following timeframes:

- electoral district boundaries entered by the end of September 1999;
- conversion lists of voting areas from current to new electoral districts completed in November 1999. Voting area conversion tables will be available on paper or on disk; and
- re-numbering voting areas, voting area maps designed and proofed, and maps produced by March 2000 (a revised estimate).

Ms. Johnson added that when Elections BC gets the maps, other internal work, such as assignment of voting places, will begin. Mr. Roberts concluded that there is a book of maps of new electoral districts in 8 1/2 x 11-inch format.

Dr. West noted that, because Statements of Votes are on the Internet, the data can be analyzed, but he would prefer additional geographic information, specifically the latitude and longitude coordinates of centre points of voting areas, which would allow him to look at clustering of results by party. He asked if Elections BC could provide this? Mr. Roberts answered that as Elections BC is moving from CAD (Computer Assisted Drafting) to GIS (Geographical Information System), this can be provided for future, but not past elections.

Dr. West further commented that the Statements of Votes are not designed for analysis 20 to 30 years after the event. He asked that electoral district maps contained in the Statements of Votes show voting areas and their numbers. Mr. Roberts replied that, with the new EIS, this too will be easier to provide.

Redistribution and Registered Constituency Associations:

Ms. Western stated that, as a result of electoral district redistribution, all currently registered constituency associations must be deregistered and new constituency associations re-registered. They can be de-registered automatically or voluntarily. There can be one current (or old) and one pending (or new) constituency association for each electoral district, resulting in up to 154 registered constituency associations per registered party. She advised Elections BC is registering new ones; however, none have deregistered. Registration forms will be available on the Internet soon.

She underscored that after Writs of Election are issued for the next general election, a constituency association cannot be registered until after the election period. To be registered in good time for the next general election, constituency associations should start registering as soon as possible, and should consult party headquarters or Elections BC to ensure funds are not tied up as a result of the deregistration/re-registration process.

Possible scenarios which a registered constituency association may follow:

- 1) register the new constituency association
 - 2) transfer funds from the old to the new constituency association
 - 3) deregister the old constituency association
- or
- 1) transfer funds to registered political party
 - 2) deregister old constituency association
 - 3) register new constituency association
 - 4) transfer funds from the political party to the new constituency association

A new bank account is not necessary, as ownership of the existing account can be transferred to the newly registered constituency association before the old constituency association is

deregistered.

New registrations resulting from redistribution will not be subject to restrictions such as a waiting period. They will be able to accept contributions, issue tax receipts, make expenditures and conduct transfers.

Dr. West asked: If a constituency association is deregistered as a result of redistribution, is an audit required? Ms. Western replied that a consequential amendment to the *Election Act* [sec. 170 (3)] contained in the Electoral Districts Act, 1999 [sec. 13] provides that if an entity is deregistered due to electoral district boundary changes, it is not required to file audited financial reports. Financial statements, however, are required. The Chief Electoral Officer retains the authority to require an audit.

Other Legislative Amendments:

Ms. Johnson gave an overview of the *Electoral Districts Act, 1999*, pointing out that the current 75 electoral districts will remain in effect until the House is dissolved and Writs are issued for the next general election. At that time the current 75 will be disestablished and 79 new electoral districts will be established. She also gave an overview of consequential amendments to the *Election Act*, the *Recall and Initiative Act*, and the *Constitution Act*.

The *Election Act* allows appointment of new District Electoral Officers and their Deputies for future electoral districts prior to issuance of Writs, so Elections BC does not have to wait for an election to be called to make these appointments.

The *Election Act* also now allows for refund of nomination deposits accompanying standing nominations for electoral districts which will be disestablished. The respective nomination is also cancelled and the candidate will be required to file new nomination papers for a new electoral district. Additionally, the amendments allow the Chief Electoral Officer to accept a standing nomination for a future electoral district.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn questioned the deregistration and reregistration processes for constituency associations. Ms. Western replied that unregistered constituency associations cannot give funds, goods or services to a political party, candidate or a constituency association. They can incur expenditures only for administration of that particular constituency association, but cannot incur election expenses.

The only consequential amendment to the *Recall and Initiative Act* deals with an initiative petition in process at the time when a general election is called and an electoral district redistribution takes effect. The *Recall and Initiative Act* requires that the petitioning process be suspended until after the election. When it resumes, the initiative petition will continue on the basis of the electoral district boundaries in effect at the time the petition was issued.

Schedule 1 of the *Electoral Boundaries Act* sets out the legal names of the new electoral districts. For clarity only, hyphenated electoral district names are shown with spaces before and after the hyphen. Elections BC has assigned three-character alpha codes for electoral district names. Codes have been assigned to facilitate computerized alphabetic sorting. (A list of the names and codes is attached.) Attendees were advised some codes had changed although the electoral district name remained the same. Ms. Johnson reminded them that all current electoral districts will be disestablished, even those that appear unchanged by redistribution.

Enumeration - Overview of Process:

Mr. Patterson stated that under section 42 of the *Election Act*, a general enumeration must be carried out in the third calendar year after a general election. The Act, however, does not state what form the enumeration is to take. As door-to-door canvassing has proved to be inefficient and creates a security risk for both enumerators and residents in today's world, a province-wide postal enumeration was undertaken.

Mr. Maskell said the enumeration began by purging the provincial voters list of inactive records. Approximately 240,000 packages were sent to voters whose records showed they did not vote at the last two elections, and further showed no update activity since the last election. If voters do not respond to the mailing within 60 days, the *Election Act* allows for those voters to be removed from the voters list. Thirty-nine thousand responded with updating information, and about 201,000 voter records were purged.

The second stage was a confirmation process. Address points in the federal voters list were compared with address points in the provincial voters list. Where a federal address was identified without a corresponding British Columbia address point, a voter registration package was sent to that address. About 200,000 were mailed.

These replies to Elections BC crossed with replies from the previous mailing to inactive voters. Toll-free information line hours were extended to handle the volume of queries, address changes and requests for additional registration forms. Updates were also received by way of electronic mail and the Elections BC website.

A third mailing of 1.7 million enumeration packages was divided regionally into eight phases so voter registration staff could systematically process the returns. Voters whose records were recently confirmed were not targeted. Mr. Maskell noted Elections BC has received about one million replies, with 3,000 to 5,000 returns still being received each week.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn asked what the consequences would be if a package sent to a voter simply got lost? Mr. Maskell noted that Elections BC will soon undertake an analysis to profile those who have not responded. He added that as a result of the confirmation campaign, no one has yet been removed from the voters list. Mr. Maskell said Elections BC will purge records most clearly ascertained to be inactive, and address communities where inactive voters are likely to be.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn further stated that between the inactive voters campaign and "those people who have jumped back in", Elections BC has a very clean list that will dispel criticism. Mr. MacKay-Dunn commented on the cost of postage for the project. Mr. Maskell answered that in addition to the initial outgoing mail, a postage-paid business reply envelope is used to facilitate returns.

Ms. Johnson said there have been few complaints about the decision not to go door-to-door.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn said he figured Elections BC would never get more than about a 25% response. He added that he has gone door-to-door for the census and the party, and found that the Vancouver-Burrard area for one, has a high population turnover. Mr. Patterson said that registration in conjunction with voting is probably the best opportunity for communities like Vancouver-Burrard which are likely to be underrepresented on the voters list.

Mr. Stipp suggested Elections BC issue a news release making a positive statement on the response to the enumeration campaigns. Mr. Patterson replied that this would be considered in conjunction with an upcoming voter registration confirmation card project.

Dr. West expressed concern that individuals who have not responded will be removed from the Voters List, as this is likely to be a surprise to them when they present themselves to vote on General Voting Day. Ms. Johnson stated that Elections BC will continue to pursue addresses where no provincial voters are registered, adding that recall has created additional pressure on the state of the provincial Voters List. Voters also have an obligation to notify Elections BC of changes in their situations.

Mr. Stipp queried data-sharing with municipalities. Mr. Maskell replied that a large number use the provincial list as the starting point for their own voters lists, and share updates with Elections

BC. There is no requirement for a municipality to do this; however, it is in their best interest to do so. Confirmation and change data and additions of new voters are all welcomed.

Mr. Stipp also queried the success of the Motor Voter program. Mr. Patterson replied that the match rate between drivers' and voters' records has increased to about 80% of voter records, and anticipated to increase to 90% of voter records. Elections BC receives between 300,000 and 400,000 address updates annually as a result of Motor Voter.

Voter ID Card Project (Voter Registration Confirmation Card Project):

Mr. Patterson advised that voter identification cards were first issued following the 1989 enumeration and they are very popular. Although they have not been issued for about four years due to a significant increase in production costs, but the voting public continues to ask for them. The cards initially cost about 30 cents, but today would be about a \$1.00 each to produce (\$.75 production costs, plus postage = about \$1.00 per card). Because they showed voter addresses, whenever a voter moved, a new card had to be issued, and cards with previous addresses were seldom returned. Some were used as proof of citizenship, which is an inappropriate use.

Mr. Cech advised that the new card will confirm that the voter is registered, and the package will contain a change of address notification form. It will also contain information on electoral district redistribution. The new card has a dual purpose: to acknowledge that Elections BC has received the voter's information, and to prompt the voter to notify Elections BC of changes. He also noted that if one person in a household receives a card and another does not, they will likely contact Elections BC. The first of four mailings is targeted for October 18, 1999. A regional information campaign will follow in the respective regions about two weeks after the mailings. The message will be that voters who have not received their cards should call Elections BC.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn questioned if there would be another mailing of Where to Vote Cards, adding that today there are too many cards in our life. He pointed out that on General Voting Day, voting officials prefer to see Where to Vote Cards over voter ID cards. He asked if the voter ID cards would be sufficient identification on General Voting Day. He and Mr. Stipp said that, if not, then the designation voter identification card is a misnomer. Mr. Cech agreed. Ms. Johnson asked if "Registration Confirmation Card" would be a better label, to which there was a positive consensus. She emphasized that voters do indeed retain these cards, as Elections BC continues to receive address changes from the original 1989 mailing.

Items from Committee Representatives:

Dr. West stated that late last year he was an election observer for the presidential election in Gambon, describing this as an extremely beneficial experience, and commenting that observers' presence contributed a great deal. He proposed inviting international election observers to British Columbia elections. These observers would not be associated with a party or with Elections BC. They would comprise an impartial international panel, perhaps including Chief Electoral Officers from other Canadian Jurisdictions and retired politicians, and adjudicating issues and incidents and make non-binding statements and recommendations. He cited an incident during the 1996 general election when the NDP took issue with some of the print media, and the Green Party was prepared to intervene on behalf of the NDP and appeal to the BC Press Council.

Ms. Johnson stated that the Government of Canada has an Elections Commissioner, who, rather than the Chief Electoral Officer, handles complaints during an election. The office of Commissioner, however, is bound by statute.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn asked what created the initiative for this international commission to go to Africa, and who invited Dr. West. Dr. West replied that he was invited by a specific non-governmental body. Mr. Patterson added that when he went to Nigeria earlier this year as an election observer, he was invited by the Commonwealth Secretariat. His mission was to observe and report subsequent to the election.

Mr. MacKay-Dunn asked Dr. West what perceived wrong he was endeavouring to address? Dr. West answered that if people know they are being observed, they will conduct themselves differently. He asked how other parties at the table felt about someone else observing and making comments during a campaign?

Mr. Stipp asked if Elections BC could further explore the role of the federal Election Commissioner? Ms. Johnson agreed to research the federal model and share information with committee representatives, adding that Elections BC receives complaints during an election and does its best to deal with them in a timely fashion.

Mr. Patterson stated he could not authorize election monitors. If the Green Party wishes, they may invite individuals for this purpose and appoint them as candidate's agents or scrutineers.

Mr. Pipe asked what happens if a registered political party is running province-wide advertising and a by-election is called? Mr. Patterson replied that the advertising would have to cease in the area of the by-election; however, it can continue in the remainder of the Province.

Ms. Johnson noted how difficult it can be to isolate a single electoral district. During the Parksville-Qualicum by-election late in 1998, the provincial government was running province-wide radio advertising regarding the Nisgàa Treaty.

Mr. Pipe pointed out that advertising bills are paid well in advance. Ms. Johnson acknowledged that this is indeed an issue; however, as the *Election Act* refers to advertising directly or indirectly promoting, ads need not name the candidate to be considered indirect promotion. Ms. Western added that there is no blanket answer and each case needs to be looked at.

Next Meeting:

Mr. Patterson said the next meeting is likely to be called in the spring of 2000 when the redistribution process will be substantially complete. Dr. West commented that, for the record, he would prefer the committee meet more often.

The meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.