

**Minutes
Election Advisory Committee
October 16, 2003**

1:30 p.m.

Office of the Ombudsman

1111 Melville Street, Vancouver, British Columbia

Attending:

Committee Members (alpha by Party):

Green Party: Paul George (attending for Pam Munroe)

Liberal Party of BC: R. Hector MacKay-Dunn, Kelly Reichert

Marijuana Party: Rob Gillespie

New Democratic Party of BC: Russ Neely

Unity Party of BC: Sal Vetro (attending for Tim Bonner)

Elections BC:

Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer (Chair)

Linda Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

Shirley Walker, Electoral Operations Officer

Introductions and Administrative Matters:

Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer, called the meeting to order and welcomed the Committee members.

Administrative matters in relation to the meeting facility and attendees' expenses were reviewed.

Agenda Items:

Harry Neufeld provided an overview of the agenda content and background from the Committee's September 2003 meeting. In preparation for this meeting, documents regarding proposed legislative amendments had been e-mailed to the members a week in advance.

Proposed Legislative Amendments – Fall 2003:

Linda Johnson described Elections BC's specific recommendations for legislative amendments for the Fall 2003 session. The intent of the amendments is to remove the requirement that a general enumeration be conducted in the third calendar year following a general election. The proposal retains the ability of the Chief Electoral Officer to conduct full or targeted enumerations as required. After the September 2003 EAC meeting, full consideration was given to the members' feedback before submitting the legislation request for the Fall session and establishing a "placeholder" request for new legislation at the Spring 2004 session. The legislation request conveyed the Election Advisory Committee members' preference to have an alternative enumeration schedule instead of removing the requirement. However, of the eight Canadian jurisdictions that currently have legislation enabling continuous or synchronized voters lists, BC is the only one that still requires enumeration. Calendared enumerations are inconsistent with continuous lists and fixed election dates.

Government is aware that the Fall submission is 'Part 1' of a two part package that will be finalized for the Spring 2004 session. Elections BC has committed to conducting a targeted enumeration before the next

election to ensure that the list is complete and current. The recent voters list quality audit study recommended combining federal and provincial voters lists to provide the best coverage and currency. It was noted that federal legislation has eliminated the need for further enumerations.

Discussion focused on previous enumerations. The last province-wide door-to-door enumeration was conducted in 1989 and produced poor results: new registrations were low; confirmation of registered voters at their current address was approximately 60%; residents did not want to be disturbed; enumerators encountered safety issues; and, there was a low return rate on packages left at the door. The last mailout enumeration was in 1999 at a cost of more than \$4 million, and once again results were disappointing with approximately 28,000 new registrations and confirmations at 60%. Enumeration alternatives have been analyzed and Elections BC has identified six options, including a targeted enumeration, hinging on legislation, that would enable a multi-channeled approach including mail, telephone and door-to-door. By first updating records with Elections Canada's voter register contents for British Columbia; and then identifying "empty" addresses where there are no voters registered, a focused mail campaign can be undertaken. By using demographic data, registration activities could target youth and other under-covered groups such as aboriginal communities and the homeless, identifying those requiring door-to-door contact closer to the election.

With fixed election dates, moving the targeted enumeration activity closer to Writ day would reduce costs, improve service delivery to voters, and produce a better quality voters list. Members expressed concern that the budget for registration activity will be reduced if the requirement for a general enumeration is removed from the legislation. Linda Johnson advised that the *Election Act* costs are a statutory appropriation and separate from Elections BC's shrinking operational budget. Funding is based on identified costs, excluding administrative overhead and regular staff costs. The legislative package provides scaled cost estimates (eg. no legislative changes, some legislation, etc.), and includes the potential cost of a full door-to-door enumeration at \$15.4 million. Harry Neufeld assured members that, in the future, voters list quality audits will be done as a measurement to ensure that acceptable standards of coverage and currency are maintained. As electoral events arise, Harry Neufeld advises the Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services with details and cost estimates, followed by a presentation to enable the members to make an informed decision.

Kelly Reichert wished that it be stated, for the record, that the BC Liberal Party believes it important that a province-wide door-to-door enumeration be conducted prior to the 2005 general election, as a full door-to-door enumeration of voters has not been conducted since 1989. Members were generally in favour of a multi-channeled targeted enumeration and discussed the need to focus on youth and pre-registration in the schools; they requested details on targeting "empty" addresses, and agreed that some groups would require door-to-door contact. It was suggested that higher registration coverage could drop the voting turnout percentage and the CEO indicated that the objective was to reverse the trend that saw only 55% of eligible voters participate in the 2001 election.

Proposed Legislative Amendments – Spring 2004:

Linda Johnson referenced the handout and commented on specific items in the three sections. It was noted that timing was critical; these amendments must be considered in the Spring 2004 legislative session to ensure adequate time for implementation prior to the 2005 general election. Ms. Johnson indicated she planned to brief the Attorney General following the EAC review of legislative recommendations.

The Voter Registration and Voters List Maintenance section was reviewed regarding requested amendments to resolve issues such as: restricting the voters list usage to enable the CEO to use the federal file as a source of new voters and updates to existing voter registrations; establishing residency rules consistent with other jurisdictions to provide adequate flexibility for the homeless; and, removing the signature requirement at the time of registration to facilitate on-line registration and automatic registrations from Elections Canada. Voters will continue to sign a declaration of qualification at the time of voting and when completing petition sheets. Members questioned citizenship qualifications and the need to maintain a signature file for recalls and initiatives. Linda Johnson advised that Elections Canada verifies the citizenship status of new registrants, and alternatives to petition signature verification will be addressed in the CEO's Recall Report that will be tabled in the Fall session and subsequently released to the public.

The Recommendations from the Report of the CEO on the 37th General Election had been previously reviewed by the EAC. Linda Johnson reviewed some recommended changes and elaboration for the Spring 2004 package which included amendments to other Acts to ensure tenants of rental properties and residents of strata properties are permitted to display campaign signs, and creation of new sections rather than previously recommended amendments to sections 201 and 223. Members expressed concern that a previous recommendation to permit provisional registration of 16 year olds is not going forward. There was discussion regarding low youth participation and ways to encourage pre-registration in the schools. Harry Neufeld advised that to communicate effectively with young voters, past methods cannot be used, and there is not enough time to develop an effective program before the next election. Recommendations for provisional registration will be put forward in the future, however, the current youth registration focus needs to be placed on 18 – 24 year olds where only 21% of eligible voter population register. Linda Johnson informed members that Grade 11 education kits are being developed, registration cards are sent to the schools before each electoral event, and at the last election, District Electoral Officers were encouraged to hire 16 – 17 year olds as voting officials to make them part of the system. Elections BC will be attending Elections Canada's Fall 2003 Youth Participation conference in preparation for a national registration campaign.

The final section of additional amendment recommendations was reviewed as a component of the recommended Spring 2004 legislative package. The focus of these additions is ensuring consistency and providing flexibility in the use of resources. The CEO requires limitations to be removed with regard to appointing District Registrars of Voters, caregivers in extended care facilities and group homes should be able to assist more than one voter to mark their ballots, and sufficient time must be allotted for the courts to establish the date, time, and place for a judicial recount. Minor amendments to the *Recall and Initiative Act* are also recommended to harmonize with the financing provisions in the *Election Act*.

The Committee members did not express any objections to the recommendations for legislative amendments for Spring 2004.

Policy Review on Voters List Data Content:

A handout listing the data fields for electronic and printed versions of the voters list was provided to the members. Harry Neufeld advised that the content and structure of electronic lists is being opened for a policy review. A request from one political party has been received to include a voter's most recent update or confirmation date, and additional requests will be considered. It is recognized that file format changes may affect the parties' existing list processing programs, and some additional data requests could violate privacy

guidelines. The Chief Electoral Officer advised that no changes would be made without a thorough review and communication with the EAC.

Questions were answered concerning the types of confidential information that would not be available for inclusion on the voters list, and there was general interest expressed in having access to province-wide statistics by age group, voting area, etc. Requests from the EAC members for changes to electronic voters list content must be submitted to the CEO in writing prior to December 31, 2003.

Information for Candidates:

Linda Johnson distributed handouts listing items currently in 'Nomination Kits' and 'Candidate Kits'. Neither of these kits contain finance forms, which are sent directly to the financial agents after the close of nominations, nor do they contain voters lists which are only available to certified candidates after the Writ is issued. To ensure the contents of these kits are providing value, a review is being undertaken to determine if the current materials are useful, what items should be added or changed, what information could be made available electronically, what needs to be printed, etc. Members agreed that printed maps are essential. While access to electronic forms and guides was agreed to be useful, any extra printing costs would negatively affect the available budget of candidates who are legally required to contain costs within set expense limits. It was also suggested that more detailed guidelines for the Statement of Disclosure form be provided by the office responsible for this form.

Ms. Johnson asked members to be ready to provide feedback on any required changes to the kit contents at the next EAC meeting.

Other Business:

Harry Neufeld provided the members with a draft version of the federal/provincial Voters List Quality Audit Report and advised that official copies would be distributed when publication formatting and printing is completed. The project was the first scientific study of voters list quality in Canada undertaken at this level of detail and the \$150,000 external cost was shared equally with Elections Canada. Statistical tables printed in the report provided answers to some questions members had raised during the meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, January 15, 2004. Information kit requirements for candidates will be on the agenda at that meeting, and requests for changes to electronic voters list data content will also be discussed at that time.

