

Second Session - Fortieth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Legislative Affairs

Chairperson
Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff
Constituency of Interlake

Vol. LXV No. 5 - 6 p.m., Monday, June 17, 2013

ISSN 1708-668X

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	NDP
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	NDP
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	NDP
BLADY, Sharon	Kirkfield Park	NDP
BRAUN, Erna	Rossmere	NDP
BRIESE, Stuart	Agassiz	PC
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	NDP
CHIEF, Kevin, Hon.	Point Douglas	NDP
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	NDP
CROTHERS, Deanne	St. James	NDP
CULLEN, Cliff	Spruce Woods	PC
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	NDP
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FRIESEN, Cameron	Morden-Winkler	PC
GAUDREAU, Dave	St. Norbert	NDP
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Liberal
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
HOWARD, Jennifer, Hon.	Fort Rouge	NDP
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri, Hon.	Fort Richmond	NDP
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	NDP
KOSTYSHYN, Ron, Hon.	Swan River	NDP
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	Dawson Trail	NDP
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	NDP
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	PC
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor, Hon.	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	NDP
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	PC
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	NDP
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	NDP
PALLISTER, Brian	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PETTERSEN, Clarence	Flin Flon	NDP
REID, Daryl, Hon.	Transcona	NDP
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Kewatinook	NDP
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	NDP
ROWAT, Leanne	Riding Mountain	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	St. Paul	PC
SELBY, Erin, Hon.	Southdale	NDP
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	PC
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin	NDP
SWAN, Andrew, Hon.	Minto	NDP
WHITEHEAD, Frank	The Pas	NDP
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WIGHT, Melanie	Burrows	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Morris	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Monday, June 17, 2013

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

**CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff
(Interlake)**

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Bidhu Jha
(Radisson)**

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Mses. Howard, Irvin-Ross, Hon. Mr. Selinger

Ms. Braun, Messrs. Dewar, Graydon, Helwer, Jha, Nevakshonoff, Pallister, Pedersen

APPEARING:

Hon. Jon Gerrard, MLA for River Heights

Ms. Shipra Verma, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2003, Including conduct of the 38th Provincial General Election, June 3, 2003

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2008

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2009

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2010, Including conduct of the Concordia by-election, March 2, 2010

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2011, Including Conduct of the 40th Provincial General Election October 4, 2011

Permanent Voters List Study, report dated June 2013

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to order.

Our first item of business is the election of a Vice-Chairperson. Are there any nominations?

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): I nominate Mr. Jha.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Jha has been nominated. Are there any other nominations? Seeing none, Mr. Jha, congratulations. You are elected Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to consider the following reports: the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2003, including the conduct of the 38th Provincial General Election, June 3rd, 2003; the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2008; the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2009; the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2010, including the conduct of the Concordia by-election, March 2nd, 2010; the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2011, including the conduct of the 40th Provincial General Election, October the 4th, 2011; the Permanent Voters List Study, report dated June 2013.

Before we get started, are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long we should sit this evening?

Mr. Dewar: Mr. Chair, I suggest we sit until 8 o'clock and then revisit the proceedings at that time, or earlier if the committee concludes their questions.

Mr. Chairperson: The committee has heard. Any further suggestions in this regard?

Seeing none, then it's my understanding we will sit to 8 p.m. or earlier, depending on circumstances, and revisit at 8 p.m. if we're still in committee at that point in time. Agreed? *[Agreed]*

Are there any suggestions as to the order in which we should consider these reports?

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): I would suggest global.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Pedersen suggests a global approach to this. What's the will of the committee? *[Agreed]*

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

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Oh, my goodness. All right, I'll make an opening statement and then I'll get some help from the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Shipra Verma, who's with us tonight. And could you introduce the rest of your staff, please?

Floor Comment: Sure. I'm joined today by—

Mr. Chairperson: Order.

So we'll have the minister's statement after introductions, then. I recognize Ms. Verma.

Ms. Shipra Verma (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer): I'm joined today by Mary Skanderbeg, our chief operating officer, Tracy Nysten, manager of elections finances, and Alison Mitchell, manager of communications.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you.

The honourable First Minister, for his opening statement.

Mr. Selinger: Yes, thanks for the opportunity to speak to the committee tonight. I want to thank by—start by thanking the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer and her officials for all the work they've been doing. And these standing committees of Legislative Affairs do provide officials, elected officials, with a chance to share ideas and perspectives on Elections Manitoba operations and on its recommendations.

Our hope is that this helps strengthen not only this Assembly and its institutions, such as Elections Manitoba, but also our democratic process as a whole.

Over the past decade we have made significant and steady progress with regards to implementing recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer, aimed at making Manitoba's electoral process more accessible.

These changes include moving towards a fixed election date; strengthening the powers of the Commissioner of Elections, to give that office more tools to ensure compliance with the act; expanding the membership of the Manitoba electoral boundaries

commission to include the presidents of Brandon University and University College of the North, and giving the commission the last word on redistribution; improving advanced voting, including by ensuring that nobody in a community of more than 50 voters needs to travel more than 30 kilometers to cast an advanced ballot; and expanding Elections Manitoba's mandate to undertake an aggressive and comprehensive public information and education campaign aimed at encouraging more people to participate in the electoral process; and rewriting the elections finances act in plain language to ensure that it is more accessible and understandable for voters and for volunteers.

Today, we are dealing the contents of Elections Manitoba annual reports, as well as with recently published Permanent Voters List Study released just last week. The 2011 annual report contains a number of recommendations; through this committee, elected officials have an opportunity to discuss and to weigh these recommendations.

I am also looking forward to hearing from Elections Manitoba and from other members of this committee with regard to the Permanent Voters List Study. We know that many other jurisdictions have moved to a permanent voters list and we know that this study raises some of the potential benefits, as well as challenges associated with such a list.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak and I will conclude my remarks at this time.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable First Minister.

Does the Leader of the Official Opposition have an opening statement?

Mr. Brian Pallister (Leader of the Official Opposition): I do not, sir, but I want the record—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Pallister.

Mr. Pallister: Yes, thank you, Sir. I do not but that is because of the brevity of time I have available to ask questions and I don't wish the absence of an opening state to be misinterpreted as any disrespect in any way, shape or form for the folks from Elections Manitoba.

But I would like to just move to questions at the earliest opportunity, if I could.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Mr. Pallister.

I understand that Deputy Chief Electoral Officer wishes to include a PowerPoint presentation as part of the opening statement to the committee.

Is there leave from the committee to allow the PowerPoint presentation? *[Agreed]*

* (18:10)

Ms. Verma, you may proceed. *[interjection]*

Order. Mr. Pallister.

Mr. Pallister: I'm sorry, just because I do have to go to another event, and I would like to ask my questions, if possible, just because of the shortness of time, prior to the presentation, if that's possible. So I don't wish to give leave, I guess.

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Government House Leader): I thought this was canvassed with House leaders in advance and we had agreed that the chief electoral officer would be permitted to give a PowerPoint presentation. If that agreement is now no longer there, that's news to me. But in any case I think that, generally speaking, the way that we proceed is that Elections Manitoba is allowed to give a presentation as the opening part of the committee, after which there are questions asked, and I think that's the way we should continue to proceed. If you want to deny leave that the PowerPoint be part of that until some later part, that's up to you, but that was not the agreement that the House leaders had.

Mr. Pallister: I'm not trying to get in the way of a lovely relationship between House leaders here. I'm just simply trying to have the chance to ask some questions in committee, and certainly there's nothing stopping the presentation from occurring during the committee. It'll simply just occur at a later time.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, the Deputy Clerk, or clerk's assistant has advised me that, Mr. Pallister, if you want to proceed directly to questions then you have to seek leave of the committee to do so.

Mr. Pallister: I'd appreciate leave to ask some questions, if I may, prior to—

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. Mr. Pallister seeks leave to put questions prior to the presentation.

Any further suggestions? Is leave granted?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Leave is denied.

All right, we will go back to Ms. Verma to do her PowerPoint presentation.

Okay, the Clerk—assistant clerk informs me that we do need leave of the committee to go to the PowerPoint presentation, and Mr. Pallister is on record as denying leave to do so.

Mr. Pallister: My understanding was by denying leave to give the presentation, I could then proceed to ask questions. Can you ask your assistant clerk. If that's not possible then I need to know what the course of action is, I guess.

Mr. Chairperson: All right, so leave has been denied to do the PowerPoint presentation.

The—okay, just for the sake of clarity, the assistant clerk suggests that I once again put the request to the committee vis-à-vis the PowerPoint presentation.

Is there leave for the chief—the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer to begin her opening statement with a PowerPoint presentation? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Well, Okay, no dissenting comments in this regard. So on that basis we proceed to the PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Verma.

Ms. Verma: Thank you for inviting me and my staff to discuss a tabled annual report and the permanent voters list report.

I'm Shipra Verma, the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer also acting in the role of the Chief Electoral Officer since the retirement of Richard Balasko in April 2010.

In my comments today, I'll be providing some background in the role and mandate of Elections Manitoba, give an overview of our activities carried out in 2012. We'll address the recommendations in our 2011 annual report and speak to the Permanent Voters List Study tabled on June 10.

As you know, Elections Manitoba is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly. We are a non-partisan office responsible for administering provincial elections, by-elections and referendums. We report to the Legislative Assembly through the Speaker and take our direction from the Assembly. In addition, we report to all the members of the Assembly and our annual operating budget is approved by the Legislative Assembly Management Commission.

Our mandate is to secure democratic rights of all Manitobans. This is achieved through the conduct of free and fair elections ensuring accessibility for all voters, providing information on the electoral

process, enhancing public awareness through education and outreach programs, and ensuring compliance for the electoral law as well as providing compliance assistance.

During 2012, our office focused on five major activities. The first, review of election returns. The filing deadline for election returns for February 6, 2012. Two hundred and sixteen candidate returns were filed and five party returns. Out of the candidates 124 were eligible for reimbursement and paid \$1.2 million while two parties eligible for reimbursement were paid \$1.36 million.

In 2011, general election was evaluated from both an internal and external perspective. All stakeholders were consulted. We conducted surveys of the general population as well as the more highly selected cross-section of voters and non-voters. We consulted with the political parties through the advisory committee. We also carried out a need assessment of candidates, official agents, auditors and political parties. Internally, we conducted performance assessment of each department drawing on debriefing exercises with returning officers and election staff. We also conducted a voting book audit, reviewed our enquiry management process, nomination process and election spending.

I would like to highlight some of the key results from our surveys. The quality of voters list remained high in 2011 with accuracy at 94 per cent, currency at 95 and completeness at 87 per cent. Satisfaction with the voting experience also continued to be high; 95 per cent reported satisfied or very satisfied level of experience.

Reasons for not voting grouped into category of distracted, disassociated and displaced were similar to the previous results. However, the disassociated did show a slight increase. Awareness of advanced voting opportunities increased from 2007 to 2011 and the fieldworker satisfaction willingness to do their job again was high.

Another key area of our activity was strategic planning for the next general election. Using our post-election evaluation as a starting point, we identify a strategic focus areas for 2015 and developed a four-year plan. The focus areas would be amendments to implement the legislative requirements: accessibility, maintaining strong accessibility of the electoral process to all eligible voters; staff development, continuing to develop staff to provide optimum service; awareness, providing election information to all voters; assistance,

providing assistance to political participants and other stakeholders; and service, enhancing our service through effective use of technology and internal capabilities.

We also were given the charge of implementing Bill 33 amendments which led to two areas of activities: the implementation of the new Election Financing Act and the permanent voters list report. I'll address this report at the end of my presentation. Implementing the new Election Financing Act involved updating existing forms and guides as well as preparing new forms and guides for third-party legislation. Updating the corporate website providing information to stakeholders.

Finally, Fort Whyte by-election. A by-election was conducted in Fort Whyte as a result of a vacancy in the Legislative Assembly. Pursuant to section 73(1), of The Elections Act, we were directed to use the final list from the 2011 provincial general election as the preliminary list for this by-election.

Now I would like to speak to recommendations made in the 2000 annual report. In the interest of time, I will not review the recommendations carried forward from 2010 annual report. However, I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have during this meeting.

* (18:20)

There were five new recommendations which were set—which were provided under The Elections Act. The first relates to leave of absence period for returning officers and assistant returning officers. We are recommending a one-week extension of the leave-of-absence period to allow for any application for a judicial recount to be made, as for the completion of final reports and election cleanup.

The second recommendation would expand the use of institutional voting stations to include more types of assisted or supportive-living facilities for seniors. The current use of institution mobile voting stations is limited to correction facilities, hospitals and personal care homes. Further, a regular voting station can only be established in a multiple residence with a hundred or more units. By expanding the use of these stations, we would be able to provide better access to voting for more seniors in Manitoba.

The next recommendation would eliminate the inconsistency within The Elections Act, with respect to the use of the preliminary voters list. Section 95 of the act allows for the preliminary list to be used by

candidates nominated under both The Elections Act and The Election Financing Act, while section 75 allows for the list to be provided only to candidates nominated under The Elections Act.

The next recommendation deals with absentee voting. This would change the timeline for the delivery and return of ballot kits for absentee voters. Currently, absentee applications must be made to the Chief Electoral Officer until the writ is issued, at which time the Chief Electoral Officer forwards any application to the returning officers. With returning officers, open up to 75 days in advance of a said date election, we recommend applications should be accepted by the returning officer as soon as the office is open. Ballot kits could then be issued to voters as soon as the preliminary voters list is complete, rather than waiting for the writ to be issued.

A consequence of this would be that the voter would have an option of writing a political party's name on the ballot, as they would have the option of submitting the ballot before nominations are closed. This extended time for issuing and returning the kits would allow overseas voters better access to voting, as they won't have such a short time to return their ballots. As can be seen from the slide, the time to issue a kit and the time to return the kit substantially increases.

Our final recommendation, under The Elections Act, is to remove the requirement to post a notice of election in each rural voting area. The need for this has effectively been eliminated with technology and a broad-based advertising campaign, which takes place through the stages of the election.

In the final section of my presentation, I'll speak about the Permanent Voters List Study. Section 3 of Bill 33 required us to examine whether a permanent voters list should be adopted for Manitoba, and if so, how it should be created and maintained.

The voters list plays a key role in the democratic process. Currently, all but three jurisdictions in Canada maintain a permanent voters list: Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Yukon. Both enumeration and a permanent voters list can be used as methods of voter registration, and both these methods have their own benefits and challenges.

However, irrespective of the method used to create the voters list, there are certain guiding principles which must be upheld: integrity—the creation and maintenance of the process must be transparent and fair; accessibility—the voter

registration process should be accessible to all; upholding the voter's right—maintaining the ability to opt out by a voter; quality—voters list must meet the standards of quality, accuracy, currency and completeness in an efficient manner; privacy and security—measures that are in place to ensure privacy of voter information; reliability—the sources of voter information should be reliable.

I'd like to say a few words about the methodology for creating a permanent voters list.

We are recommending creation and maintenance of two separate databases: a voter database and an address database. The process should be able to connect a voter in Manitoba with his or her correct address in a timely manner. To achieve this, data collected from the various sources must go through a cleansing and validation process. The output of this process would be a voters list.

If you're asked to move forward with an implementation of a permanent voters list, several foundation elements are required.

We would like to conduct a final enumeration for the 2015 election to serve as the foundation for the voters list and also have the ability to collect date of birth and gender information.

A series of legislative amendments would be required to provide for the change from enumeration to a permanent voters list.

Currently there are inconsistencies in address formats in Manitoba. This creates challenges for the accuracy of a permanent voters list, so standardization of addresses is recommended.

For security of data, a rigorous ID security policy needs to be established and implemented, and partnership with reliable data sources would be required. For both the creation and maintenance of a permanent voters list, we would require adequate sources. Most important, a timely decision on adoption of a permanent voters list is required.

That concludes my remarks. Thank you for your time and attention and I'll be pleased to answer any questions which you may have.

Mr. Chairperson: That concludes your opening statement, Ms. Verma?

Ms. Verma: Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank you for your opening statement. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Pallister: What was the amount of the public allowance paid to the NDP this year? I understand it was retroactive to January 1 of last year.

Ms. Verma: The public allowance paid for the calendar year 2012 paid to NDP was \$278,810.51. We do have a cheque from the NDP for the difference based on the new bill proposed, but that hasn't been even cashed yet as the bill hasn't been passed.

Mr. Pallister: And how much is that cheque for?

Ms. Verma: The cheque is for \$83,643.

Mr. Pallister: It's my understanding that someone can be charged with sexual assault and child pornography and still run as a candidate, is that correct?

Ms. Verma: If the—if they're just charges, yes, they can still run as a candidate.

Mr. Pallister: This was the case in the Fort Whyte by-election, of course, candidates from other political parties, Green, Liberal, NDP and PC ran in a by-election against a gentleman. I believe he tried to register as Mr. Jets TV who was on bail on charges of sexual assault and child pornography. There were four victims identified, young women, in the course of the investigation. This was made public in several media stories.

I just wanted to be clear that there's no restriction allowing someone in that circumstance to run and I just want you to restate, is that correct?

Ms. Verma: Under The Elections Act that is correct.

Mr. Pallister: And a person running for office is given the option of stating where they live or not stating where they live. Is that correct, as a candidate?

Ms. Verma: As a candidate you are required to file the form 400 in which your residential address, mailing and legal address need to be filled in. There is an option for the candidate to—for us to not publish that information, but that information needs to be filed with our office.

Mr. Pallister: Every candidate of any political party has the option to request that their residence not be made available to the general public. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: That's correct.

Mr. Pallister: So a father of two young daughters who wishes not to expose their address to a sexual

predator might be able to avail himself of that option such as I did in that by-election. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: Yes, any candidate has the option of asking Elections Manitoba not to publish their residential address.

Mr. Pallister: In respect of successful candidates for the Legislature, how many legislative members currently do not reside in their stated addresses—do not reside in the constituents in which they contested office?

Ms. Verma: I don't have that information on hand, but I can provide it to you after this meeting.

Mr. Pallister: I'd appreciate that, thank you.

In terms of voter turnout, what was the turnout in the last election and the one prior to that? I'm not referring to the by-elections now, to be clear, I'm just referring to the general elections.

Ms. Verma: The turnout in the 2011 election was 56 per cent and in 2007 election was 57 per cent, however, there were more numbers of voters in the 2011 election as compared to 2007.

Mr. Pallister: Are there are any provinces you're aware of that don't give a rebate on election expenses?

Ms. Verma: There are certain provinces which do not provide for election reimbursement.

Mr. Pallister: Which are those?

Ms. Verma: Can I just check with my colleagues? There is a listing available.

Mr. Pallister: It's not necessary. You can get back to me on that and I appreciate that. Thank you very much.

Are election rebates made generally based on the amount of money spent during the election campaign?

* (18:30)

Ms. Verma: The election rebate is based, firstly, on your entitlement, that you have to receive 10 per cent of the valid votes in the electoral division. The second is based on the 50 per cent of election expenses, which has to be cash election expenses, not—donation-in-kind expenses are not eligible for rebate, and 100 per cent of child care and disability expenses are eligible for reimbursement. These two categories of expenses are not counted towards your election spending limit.

Mr. Pallister: And does that—do those funds, before they're expended, have to be raised, or can a candidate just throw a loan into their campaign and then get a rebate back later?

Ms. Verma: The rebate is based on spending. It's not based on the sources of funds raised. So it's totally based on your election expense spent and expenses used during the election period.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you. What was the number of voters who used the remote capacity in the last election?

Ms. Verma: Are you referring to the absentee votes?

Mr. Pallister: The voting stations not located within the riding but that allowed people who were away from, for example, who knew they were going to be away from their riding all day, to vote at another location.

Ms. Verma: That would be absentee—oh, sorry, advance non-resident voting. I believe it was 22,214.

An Honourable Member: I'm sorry?

Ms. Verma: Twenty-two thousand, two hundred and fourteen that—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Pallister.

Mr. Pallister: I apologize, Mr. Chairman. The other one was, I understand, you're allowed to vote from a remote location on election day itself. You're not allowed to do that? Or you are allowed to do that?

Ms. Verma: There are two kinds of voting. The first one, advance voting, is eight days prior to the election day. You can vote anywhere. So we have the two categories of votes, resident and non-resident. On election day, you can only vote from your voting station.

Mr. Pallister: And was this the first time that this was allowed? Or was this allowed in previous elections, and, if so, how many elections has that been permissible?

Ms. Verma: Advance voting anywhere was first introduced in the 2007 election. There was advance voting prior to that, but not the concept of vote anywhere. So this is the second general election where advance voting was that you could vote at any station.

Mr. Pallister: And then, of course, my next question is: How many people availed themselves of the option in 2007 election?

Ms. Verma: In 2007, 8,780 advance non-resident voters were there, as compared to 22,214 in 2011, non-resident.

Mr. Pallister: A very significant increase, of course, yes.

Now, did have some reports, and these not substantiated, but, that some candidates had experienced members of their family being followed by overzealous campaign workers from other camps. These types of things are not unheard of in election campaigns.

My question is this: If someone is found to be doing this, to—acting in a threatening manner towards a candidate or a candidate's family members, and that is reported to the police and the charges are laid, and the person is subsequently found guilty of this infringement of the law, is there any penalty whatsoever for the campaign of which this person was affiliated?

Ms. Verma: I don't think there is any offence under The Elections Act related to such an offence which you have described.

Mr. Pallister: So this would strictly be in the realm of the public, of course, and this is the business we're in here. If someone did this and behaved in this manner, working with any campaign, it would be up to the public to determine if that behaviour was acceptable or unacceptable and to make an adjudication on it.

Again, there is no penalty for any campaign where—from which, such behaviour may emanate—

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Verma—sorry, Mr. Pallister.

Mr. Pallister: —even if the link was established that the worker was associated with that specific campaign?

Ms. Verma: To my knowledge, there is no such offence. There is an offence for providing false information about a candidate. That is an election offence.

Mr. Pallister: Thank you very much. Is there in terms of maximum amounts to be able to contribute to campaigns, is there any province that has lower limits, lower donation limits than we do besides Québec?

Ms. Verma: I was going to say Québec, but you have mentioned that. Federally, also, the contribution limits are less than \$3,000.

Mr. Pallister: Then, to verify, there are no other provinces that have lower donation limits or greater restrictions on donations than Manitoba does apart from the exceptions you referenced?

Ms. Verma: I have to look into this one. I'm pretty confident about Québec and federal contribution limits, but for the other provinces I'll have to—territories—I'll have to look into it and get back to you.

Mr. Pallister: That's very much appreciated.

I will allow my colleagues to continue if that's appropriate, and I cede the floor.

Mr. Chairperson: All right.

Ms. Verma: I just want to—

An Honourable Member: Sorry, I should say thank you. I do appreciate—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Pallister.

Mr. Pallister: —I do appreciate your responses, and I thank you very much, and I thank the members of your staff who you brought with you tonight and appreciate your work. I believe your reports to be very professionally done and I appreciate the efforts that you put into preparing them.

Ms. Verma: I just want to point out there is one section called force and intimidation in The Elections Act. This is a person who's guilty of an offence who directly or indirectly uses or threatens to use force or violence or threatens to inflict an injury, damage, harm or loss upon another person to induce or compel the other person to vote or refrain from voting because that person voted or refrained from voting or impedes or prevents an eligible voter from exercising their right to vote.

So it doesn't directly address the question or the concern which Mr. Pallister raised, but there is a section about use of force or threatens. That's section 179(1) of The Elections Act.

Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West): Going back to the advanced poll, you talked about non-resident numbers, can you tell us what the resident numbers were for those two years?

Ms. Verma: The resident numbers were 56,307 for 2011 compared to 33,995 for 2007; 56,307 was for 2011. If I said 2007 I'm sorry.

Mr. Helwer: Can you give me an idea of what the criteria is for locations of the advanced polls?

Ms. Verma: There are a couple of criteria that we use. One is we do want to maintain—we have to adhere to the law that no voter has to travel for more than 30 kilometres. The second is we try to go where the voter is. So on that basis we have established advanced voting places at popular spots like the malls. We have it at St. Vital mall, Grant Park, Polo Park, all the major malls within the city, not only in Winnipeg, but we try to cover Brandon, Steinbach.

The other place we are looking to have advanced voting is at universities and colleges because we did want to attract students and encourage their participation. So we had advanced voting stations in more than 10 educational institutions across Manitoba. The other criteria we look at for places which are convenient, accessible to voters and have at least two advanced voting stations in each electoral division.

Mr. Helwer: Well, I guess you met most of those criteria in Brandon West last election except for the accessibility side of it. The university did have a poll, but it's not the most accessible place for nonstudents, and the other advanced poll was in the Shoppers Mall. But the way that the agreements work with stores there is—you're not allowed to have signage outside of the stores or outside of the malls. So that was a difficulty for voters. They—we did get the message from several people that they spent some time walking around the mall, which they do anyway, but could not find the advanced poll because there is no signage and they had to be pointed to that poll and, indeed, it was not easily accessible because the elevator was quite a ways down the hall from it.

But I'm sure you've probably heard those stories, and do you have any suggestions for how that might be rectified next time?

* (18:40)

Ms. Verma: The advanced voting location at the universities we had established in consultation with the student unions and their representatives. So we took the feedback—which would be a common place, attractive place, for the students to view, that advanced voting be accessible, be on the way to the classes, but if that didn't achieve the required purpose, we would again go back to ground zero and review the criteria and work with the students to locate the advanced voting stations at a convenient place.

With regard to the malls, we have certain restrictions when we are using the malls, because we have to adhere to what kind of signage they have allowed us to use. The solution which I can think of right now is to have more signage outside the building and have probably definite location of where the advance voting is going to be placed with— included in within the signage.

And this time, the mall was the returning office itself where the advance voting station was. So going forward, we would review the signage once more to see if it's accessible, viewable by the voters.

Mr. Helwer: So the—I guess the difficulty there is that the mall has said that you can't put any signs outside of the building, so that's their agreement with their current tenants, and unless they can amend that, I'm not sure how you'd be able to fix that. I mean, it is probably the place you need to be unless you look at the north end of the city. But anyway, that's up to your discussion, I guess, how you're going to get there.

The—so moving on to another question with respect to advance ballots versus the election ballots. In Brandon West there was a change from the advance ballot to the election ballot because we had a withdrawal of a candidate, and we were curious as to what are the criteria for allowing two different ballots in election. You know, people did vote in the advance poll for up to four candidates, and that would probably change some of the mix of how people would vote and then in the actual election day, they voted for up to—for one of three candidates. So can you tell me what the elections rules are on that?

Ms. Verma: If a candidate withdraws, we have to issue new ballots. If during the count for advance voting, there were any votes which were for the candidate withdrawn, those votes are not counted. They are set aside.

Mr. Helwer: But I guess for this, the advance ballots—advance poll ballots, had the four candidates, so they were different from the ballots on the actual election day. What are the rules for that? They seem different from what you just said.

Ms. Verma: I have to get back to you if there were two sets of ballots. To my knowledge, there was only one set of ballot because the candidate withdrew just before the start of advance voting. It was after the close of nominations. There is a gap of two or three days between the close of nomination and advance.

As soon as we got the information that the candidate has withdrawn, we did print new ballots.

Mr. Helwer: You talked about community engagement initiatives—or—in the past, and are there particular groups that you target in order to enhance their ability to vote and attract them to the voting process, and what might those groups be?

Ms. Verma: In the last election we did focus on certain groups, which we have understood have faced challenges and difficulties in exercising their democratic rights. One was people with disabilities. We work with the Disabilities Issues Office to understand their need and what, how, in which manner would the message from our office can go which would have the most outreach. So we worked with them to develop a brochure. It was called an access menu, which the Disabilities Issues Office circulated on our behalf to all their members, and we are very thankful for their input.

We also worked with them to develop Braille templates, ballots and templates, which were available at all advance voting and election day voting locations. We also consulted with them on the ramp sizes and what was acceptable criteria for ramps.

The other group that we worked a lot with was homeless shelters because people who do not have homes, they still have the right to vote. And how to facilitate that process with them we developed another brochure specifically for homeless voting—voters. We had enumeration camps at the homeless shelters and also, election day, working opportunities.

The third group which we focused was students. We worked with student representatives from across Manitoba in understanding what kind of promotional activities, communication material would have a good outreach for their group, and also where to establish advance voting locations and election day voting locations.

The other group we focused was children, and children because our survey results showed that families with—of non-voters who have young kids are predominantly the non-voters category. So what we thought was if we engaged the children, it will foster a dialogue at home that would probably lead to an engagement of the adults. And we had the campaign of Bring your Child to Vote under the Citizen Next campaign, which had quite a positive result. I don't know how many translated into votes, but the overall

feedback, which we received from the voting officials, was there was enthusiasm among the young children coming and they got the stickers of future voters and certificates, so that was another area that we focused on.

We also worked with the student information officers. We hired grade 12 students to work as information officers, as potential voters for our province, and we had 299 student information officers. This was a pilot conducted in a by-election. For the first time we did it on a province-wide scale.

Mr. Helwer: I'm interested in the children's side of it—the future voters—but from a different—little different perspective in that, when I'm knocking on doors in Brandon, we have a large immigrant community and I often talk to the children, because the parent is not able to converse in the only main language that I know—the English—so they are not currently voters and hope to be within probably two to four years, depending on their citizenship and how that works. So I think when you're talking to future voters, that maybe something you might want to include is educating the potential voter of the immigrant community.

Ms. Verma: Actually we did target—and I missed out on that one. We did have—for new citizens, we included our material for the citizenship ceremonies, and we have a program called Your Power to Choose, which was for—initially for grade 6, 9 and 11 students. It was expanded for adult literacy and it's also been provided to new immigrant centres, which explains the concept of democracy and how you can participate.

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Yes, Mr. Chair, a question to Ms. Verma is on the voters—permanent voters list report: Are you aware of any studies showing the moving towards a permanent voter list will have an impact on the voter turnout?

Ms. Verma: I'm not aware of any study which has specifically targeted the link between the voter turnout and a permanent voters list.

Mr. Jha: If we had a permanent voters list, what sort of work would be needed between elections to keep the list current and effective? What is seen as the best practices in other jurisdictions with regard to maintaining that list?

Ms. Verma: Creating a permanent voters list, I would say, is 25 per cent of the job; the remaining 75 per cent is the maintenance of the voters list. And as we have witnessed from the other jurisdictions,

identifying reliable data source is the first step in creation and maintenance of a Permanent Voters List Study. Having those partnerships and open communication between the data sources, so whenever there are any changes, we—the electoral body is made aware of those changes and how to adapt those changes into the system.

The second is extensive data cleansing and data validation process, because there's an issue of aliases: aliases in the voter's name, aliases in the voter's address. It could be Jim Smith, it could be Jim K. Smith and it could be Jim Morrison Smith but they all may be the same individuals, but they have recorded their information in different forms in the different data sources. So how do you identify these aliases and associate them in your database so that next time when an update is provided you can identify this as the same individual and no new entries made, so that removes the duplication from the voters list and also ensures and answers the credibility of the voters list. That would be the first thing.

* (18:50)

The second is in the recent times, when there are so many data security issues which have arisen across the province, how do you ensure that the data within your organization is kept secure for authorized access and no unauthorized access of that data is made? So a secure IT data policy is needed.

The third thing for the maintenance is, which I'd identified in my opening statement, was standardization of addresses. Again, that's an issue leading to aliases, because in Manitoba you don't have a standard addressing format in rural and northern communities, you can have section, township, range; we have lot, block, plans; we have the free-flowing addresses. If you get the data from different sources, how do you identify if they are the same, if they belong to the same location? For that you need geocoding X-Y co-ordinates, which we don't have in the province on a complete scale.

So there are—these are some of the best practices which we have observed in the other jurisdictions like British Columbia, they have quite a bit of their data geocoded. Nova Scotia has a standardized address format. They all align one-one addresses—not just standardization, there is a central body which provides the addresses, so not anybody can provide an address. They have to follow a certain guideline through which the address is generated.

AMM in Manitoba has provided 'standardized'—standard addressing guidelines which is there on the website. However, to my understanding, they don't have the mandate to enforce the standardization to all the municipalities. So it's up to them to adopt these standards.

The other issue which, in Manitoba, is there is 911. We have 911 in certain areas, but not complete. And as municipalities are moving towards 911, how do we know which address which was originally in section, township, range, has been assigned a correct 911 address? So, unless there is a geocoding available, we can't relate these two addresses to be the one and identify the aliases.

Mr. Selinger: Could you just elaborate on what you mean by geocoding, so we all make sure we understand what you're saying?

Ms. Verma: Geocoding is—provides an X-Y co-ordinate to a particular location, so if it's 200 Main, we know where 200 Main is exactly on the map. If that boundary's changed, then it's quite simple to move the address to the right boundary because it is associated to a point on the map, rather than us manually assigning it on the map. So it will enhance your accuracy. It will provide us with the flexibility when there are boundary changes, or even when we have to change the voting locations.

Mr. Selinger: I read your report with interest. I noted that we were one of three jurisdictions, I believe, that has not moved to a permanent voters list. But I have to say I was surprised when I realized that, under a permanent voters list, you don't necessarily do an enumeration anymore, and it seemed to me that your report was kind of suggesting that the loss of an enumeration creates some accuracy problems, which you've tried to discuss with geocoding and co-ordinating names and making sure there's not a duplication. But you did seem to suggest there could be targeted revisions done, which I took as code for targeted enumeration.

Is there any reason why we couldn't have a permanent voters list that made active use of enumeration to ensure that we get everybody out there that has the right to vote recorded, and then have a permanent voters list, so that when we get to an election, what I've seen with our enumerations is we go back three times, and if you can't catch a person at home, which is increasingly becoming common, then they may not get on the list unless they take some initiative on their own. So I was wondering why we couldn't do an enumeration along

with all these secondary sources, which is essentially what they are, and try to get them as accurate as possible through geocoding or standardized addresses, but still have that ability to do an enumeration for remote communities, isolated communities, communities that are changing rapidly with subdivision developments, or changes in population. But I sensed from your report that there was a real desire not to lose the capacity to do an enumeration because of its accuracy and the fact that it's right on the ground at the door and you can talk to people and get them interested in the election.

Do you want to comment on that?

Ms. Verma: Sure. The reports what we tried to do was outline the benefits and disadvantages of voter approaches, enumeration and permanent voters list. Many jurisdictions who have permanent voters list do an exercise called confirmation like Prince Edward Island's does it, and Alberta also has that option to do confirmation. That the list is generated through the permanent voters list, it is provided to the field staff, they do go house to house and confirm if the name and address is correct. And we can still do that in Manitoba.

When we were doing this report, we were probably—we were trying to contrast—compare and contrast two separate systems not eliminating the fact that enumeration cannot be done along with the permanent voters list study.

So the confirmation process is still possible. It would—along with the creation and maintenance of a permanent voters list there would be an impact on the cost, because if we have to do a province-wide confirmation, you still would require to have the same amount of people, so the cost would definitely rise. But yes, it would lead to a really good voters list, which is accurate, current and complete.

The—a concern with the permanent voters list is the currency, because when we—when you do a permanent voters list, you are dependent on the data sources to provide you with information. And then when does that data source update their information? So now there is the double reliance on the data source that may impact the currency unless we have a way to ensure that the data sources have a current data right before the election. That might elevate the risk which we have identified with the permanent voters list.

Mr. Selinger: So with an enumeration we tend to get a higher currency value, because it's done so close to

the election we risk not being able to get at some difficult-to-reach communities or individual citizens in communities that may have particular barriers to access. With the permanent voters list we have a—probably a stronger initial data set before we start into the electoral process, but there are some 'riks'—risks of currency if the data is out of date, the secondary sources are not fully up to date.

And, I guess, let me come at it this way, in which jurisdiction do you think they have the best combination of currency and accuracy while retaining a good initial data set, so that you can get up and rolling quickly? Is there one province that seems to be outstanding in this regard having pulled it off? Nova Scotia. Was that one or?

Ms. Verma: Nova Scotia is really good when it comes to completeness, because of the standardization of address. British Columbia is another province that we did look at quite closely because they have the oldest permanent voters list system. The system is matured over time period, and they have their internal data sets of geocoding is very, extremely strong. So those are the two.

When it comes to currency, that's the reason with the permanent voters list we were recommending targeted revision, or there could be a confirmation to address that currency risk and we can identify areas where there has been significant growth or areas of mobility or remote areas.

Mr. Selinger: Another way of question, if you have a mature enumeration system compared to a mature permanent voters list system, which one do you think meets all the tests for getting as much accurate, complete information as possible? Which one do you think, ultimately, would be the most durable system? Do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. Verma: The issue with the enumeration system is it cannot be matured at any time. It can be matured from an internal policy perspective, but we are dependent on more than 3,000 individuals to be recruited and trained in a consistent manner. So there will always be a level of high risk when we do enumeration.

When it comes to a permanent voters list that is more controlled within the organization of developing it and maturing it over time and learning from other jurisdictions their best practices.

* (19:00)

Mr. Selinger: Would it be safe to say, then, that over time a permanent voters list would be able to mature in a more durable way and would presumably, give you more accurate information as long as you had tools to make sure that it was current—targeted revision, confirmation, standardized address system, geocaching or geolocation, I think you could geocoding, if you had those tools, that the permanent voters list might be able to give you the best long-term durable data set for voters? Is that a fair assumption? Or is that maybe asking too much of the system?

Ms. Verma: I think it would be a fair assumption to say, over a time period, if we had the necessary resources and tools, a permanent voters list can provide us with an accurate, complete and current system. For the initial time, there could be some teething problems, as we'll be dealing with the new system, but we can manage that with a targeted revision or a complete confirmation for the first two elections, if that's the case, depending on how the system develops and progresses, meets our quality assurance standards.

Mr. Selinger: When I read your report, I was surprised, actually, to learn that the permanent voters system can be more cost-effective than an enumeration system, because you're using secondary data sources and you don't require as much direct labour to do the enumeration on an ongoing basis. But is it also fair to say that, as you move to that system, it might be more expensive in the short run to get the current complete and accurate list? You might need, sort of, an overlap of resources to be able to do the job properly?

Ms. Verma: I think it would be fair to say that, that initially, if we are setting up, there would be a substantial cost investment to set up a permanent voters list, during the electoral event. If you want to complement it with confirmation or high level of targeted revision, there will be a duplication of cost. But as the system matures, the cost efficiency would be achieved because in enumeration it's a completely labour-intensive process. And the tariff rates do increase over time period. In an electronic system, once the system is set, then it's more the ongoing maintenance cost which is required.

Mr. Selinger: I'll yield the floor to others.

Mr. Helwer: Going back to the permanent voters list and your study that you have, here. It's an interesting process, but I am looking at your calendar, here, and

from it, then, is the assumption that we will still be using an enumeration list in the next election?

Ms. Verma: We are recommending that we need to do a final enumeration for two reasons. One, from a time perspective, we do need one complete election cycle to prepare ourselves for a permanent voters list. And the second is the final enumeration will form the basis, the foundation, for a permanent voters list. We would need to collect the gender and date of birth information, as currently, if you just use the enumeration data, we have the name, your residential address, your mailing address. There is no common link between these data sources and the data sources which we have identified. So, a date of birth and gender information will form the link with the secondary data sources once we create a permanent voters list.

Mr. Helwer: And of course, it says there will be significant changes necessary in legislative acts to accommodate this.

Ms. Verma: That's correct. The way the legislation is written right now, it's quite enumeration-based. All the sections relate to enumeration, so there would be extensive changes within the legislation to provide a provision to maintain a permanent voters list, unless the option of enumeration is retained within the legislation. But we definitely would need the specific authority for the chief electoral officer to create and maintain a permanent voters list, also, for the other data sources to provide us that information.

Mr. Helwer: And I see there's a section for data as an ID that was used, and that's maybe to be used or maybe not to be used, and that's a bit of an issue that I did see in the last election. But I can talk about that a little bit more. So, do you anticipate that you will have a requirement for an ID, or is that just an option?

Ms. Verma: The ID which is mentioned is more for internal purposes that we have within our databases a unique ID for every data entry which we make. So, Shipra Verma has an ID, and my address has an ID. Then you have to match these two data sets. Then we use unique identifiers to match the information. So it wasn't the use of ID at voting places; it was more for the database purposes.

Mr. Helwer: Not a use of an ID to qualify that person to be on the—to be enumerated and then be put into the permanent voters list, that's more of an external or an internal type of ID?

Ms. Verma: That's correct. We have not referred the proof of identity in this report. The ID mentioned is purely for database purposes.

Mr. Helwer: In your opinion, do we need a proof of ID for that voter to be on that list?

Ms. Verma: Well, my opinion doesn't count much because my role is to administer the legislation the way it is. If there has to be a change, then it is up to the legislators to make the change, and we will administer the legislation.

There are still provinces in Canada; some do require ID, some don't require ID, and both the systems work. There's a different level of assurance which each of these systems provide, but there's also a different level of accessibility for the voters and convenience for the voters. So it is a balance between assurance and accessibility, but that's a matter for the legislators to decide.

Mr. Helwer: I know, during the election, I did get questions at the door about, well, I missed the enumeration, and what do I do? And we would tell them that they need to, you know, the process that they need to go through, but then they'd often or sometimes said, you know, I don't have a driver's licence, I don't have a photo ID; what else is acceptable?

So can you tell me what else or what you would accept as identification for someone that wants to be put on the voters list that has missed the enumeration?

Ms. Verma: For sure. If the eligible voter was missed during enumeration, then they can still be put on the voters list through the revision process. The process for that is to contact the returning officer, and they set up an appointment for a revising agent to visit their home, and in the same way as you're enumerated, you are placed on the list during revision process.

If you are missed even on the revision process, you can register at the time of advanced voting or election day. You have to produce one piece of federally or provincially or municipal-issued ID. If you don't have that, you can have two pieces of ID, any two pieces of ID; it could be your hydro bill, your telephone bill, and if either one of these address or identity proofs don't have an address, then you can sign a declaration for your address.

So, within Manitoba, our ID rules are the most liberal ones across the—across Canada. We don't

require identification to show an address, and it's section 2 of The Elections Act which has the identification requirements.

We also had discussed the need for ID for voting on election day in an advisory committee meeting on November 16th, 2009, and at that time, there wasn't a lot take-up on the requirement for ID on election day.

Mr. Helwer: I haven't read much about it in this jurisdiction, but other electoral jurisdictions that have a larger population that has face coverings as part of their culture, it has become an issue, and how does that dealt with in Manitoba, if you're veiled or have a burka or that type of thing?

Ms. Verma: Since an ID's not required on election day, if there is a veil, it doesn't make a difference. If you're on the voters list you can simply show your—identify yourself as your name, and your name is struck off the voters list and a ballot is provided to you.

Mr. Pedersen: I just, first of all, want to go back. Mr. Pallister asked you about the numbers of MLAs not residing in their constituency that they represent, and I just wanted to make sure that when you're providing that, you provide the list of the actual MLAs not just the number. Can you do that?

* (19:10)

Ms. Verma: Sure. So you want us to provide the name of the MLAs, their current address or the address at the time they had file their nomination papers if it wasn't part of their electoral division?

Mr. Pedersen: That would be correct.

Ms. Verma: Correct. So we will be providing you with the list of the members who had a different address other than their electoral division in which they had contested the poll at the time of election.

Mr. Pedersen: Yes, and I think we've got that one surrounded. Thank you very much.

A couple other things that came up, you talked about better accessibility, reaching out to voters. You spoke about homeless shelters and that. Quite often an issue facing homeless people is they don't have any identification, so, when they go to a voter station, they're doing the remote stations, then. How—what's the process for the—for a person that's homeless that doesn't have an address in order to—that they can go and vote?

Ms. Verma: During the recent election, we did enumeration at the homeless shelters, so for that enumeration purposes you don't need an ID. If you're present at the shelter, you get enumerated. During advance voting, if you're a resident of the electoral division, you need an ID and that ID could be in the form of a letter provided by the homeless shelter to state that this individual resides in the shelter. We do take that as a proof of ID. If it doesn't have an address mentioned, they can sign an oath and be eligible to vote. On election day, we had voting station established at the homeless shelter, so that eliminated the need for ID to be presented as they were on the voters list, and they were allowed to vote from that homeless shelter.

Mr. Pedersen: So did you do any tracking, then? You went in and did the enumeration in a homeless shelter, and by the nature of it—well, those people are transient. Did you go—and then, when you had the voting station back in that same shelter, did you track to see what kind of uptake you had in terms of the number of people that you enumerated versus the number of people that voted?

Ms. Verma: I believe we did, but I don't have the exact number here with me. If you want, I can get back to you on that point. It would be part of a statement of vote, but we can look into it and get back to you on that.

Mr. Pedersen: I think that would be interesting, and just to see—obviously, you're looking for success in this program, too, and we would like to see the results of that too.

One of the other questions I had just from the comments, and I got a couple of other questions, then, too, but in November 2009, you said you had a meeting and there was not a large uptake in producing ID at the polling stations. Did I hear you correctly on that? And who was involved in there—where was—who—can you just explain what happened there?

Ms. Verma: I was referring to an advisory committee meeting, which we had on The Elections Act. The advisory committee meeting 'representators' are one representative each from the political party. We had it on our agenda as a possible recommendation—ID for working on election day as part of a process. When we have possible recommendations, we do have an initial discussion with that advisory committee members to understand if that's something of interest to them, if there are any concerns which they have, and this recommendation

did not—the members did not express a high level of interest in pursuing ID on election day. They thought it would be—it would decline the accessibility for voters.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. Thank you.

I understand you also have done some pilot programs in ballot reconciliation. Can you explain what you did there, in terms of ballot reconciliation in a by-election?

Ms. Verma: In the Fort Whyte by-election we piloted the 'by-let'—the ballot reconciliation. We always had a ballot reconciliation for each voting station. At this time it was from electoral division perspective, how many ballots were issued in total, how many provided to the voting stations and how many returned back to Elections Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: And what was your—obviously, you analysed what you did. What was your results of your analysis?

Ms. Verma: There was a complete ballot reconciliation at the end of the day. So it is something I know one of the parties had expressed an interest that we should pursue this on a—at a general election level and when the by-election came, it provided us with an opportunity to pilot it. We think we can continue it at the general election level also.

Mr. Pedersen: So this would come as—it comes as a recommendation from Elections Manitoba that this should be done. Will it be done or what's the process for—is there legislation involved in that, or is this an operations exercise that you would need to do on a province-wide basis come the next general election?

Ms. Verma: It isn't operational policy; it's not something in the legislation which requires us to do, and it would, again, be a measure of internal control and enhancing the credibility of the process.

Mr. Pedersen: So will it be done when the Morris by-election is called?

Ms. Verma: It will be done at the Morris by-election also.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): So we'll talk about this reconciliation a bit. How does it differ, then, from what the standard reconciliation has been?

Ms. Verma: The standard reconciliation is that for every voting station a ballot reconciliation is done at the time of the counting of the ballots. So each voting station is assigned a number of ballots, they

would—when the counting is done, we have the ballots counted, assigned to each candidate, ballots rejected, spoiled—spoiled, rejected, and there's one more, declined, and they all should total to the number of ballots which have been issued. So that statement is prepared for each and every voting station.

The ballot reconciliation which we are now talking about is for the complete electoral divisions, so, when Elections Manitoba provides ballot papers to a returning office, how many ballots in total were printed from the printer using the ballot paper provided? So, if 10,000 ballots were printed, how many were issued to each voting station, and how many were unused? That's the ballot reconciliation we are looking at at an electoral division level.

Mr. Graydon: Would that information not be available anyway under the standard 'reconciliation'?

Ms. Verma: It could be available, but the complete reconciliation was never done because at each voting station level we did have a ballot reconciliation.

It will be putting together each and every voting station reconciliation, and we can calculate an electoral division ballot reconciliation. But this exercise was not done previously as it wasn't considered necessary, but, since there were some concerns raised about it, we would be adopting it as a policy matter and going forward in every election.

Mr. Graydon: Is there going to be an additional cost to do that?

Ms. Verma: I don't think there'll be an additional cost. It's an internal control measure, which we can implement, and we have to train the returning officer and the assistant returning officer in that exercise which we can definitely do.

Mr. Graydon: As we know, the elections are an expensive animal to run, of course. Can you tell me if you have a breakdown for the different areas of expenses and what they might be?

* (19:20)

Ms. Verma: Are you asking for the 2011 general election breakdown?

Mr. Graydon: Sorry about that, Mr. Chair. I don't think that they would change—there's that many different areas that would change from election to election.

Ms. Verma: The 2011 election was more expensive to—than the previous elections. The main reason was from a 33-day calendar, we moved to a 75-day calendar. So when we doubled the number of days a tariff increased, the returning officers', assistant returning officers' pay also increased plus the administrative cost of opening an office location for one month as compared to two and a half months. So all these costs increased in a proportionate manner.

The cost for 2007 election was approximately \$8 million while the cost for 2011 election was \$11.9 million. So you see there's a 50 per cent increase in that cost, mostly related to the tariff and increase in the number of days from a 33 days to a 75-day calendar.

Mr. Graydon: And, so then, the staff, of course, and you're doubling the staff time—would do this, but I'm—I guess I'm looking at the—doing the census, those types of things. Is there a breakdown for census? Is there a breakdown for election day? Is there that type of thing? Is it all general?

Ms. Verma: I'll—I can provide you for the expense amount for enumeration. It was \$2.8 million for enumeration. Our annual report breaks the expenditure down as returning office expenditure. We have election officials' fees, training, travel, and returning office expenditure. But what you're looking, I'm understanding, is by category of revision, enumeration, advance, election day. Just a minute.

We don't have that breakdown right now but that is something which we can send it over to your office.

Mr. Graydon: Well, I'd certainly appreciate that.

If for example, you were to—if we were to hold a referendum, would we be able to use the enumeration from 2011?

Ms. Verma: The issue with enumeration is that it will lose currency because the people who are on the voters list in 2011, as the time progresses, the risk that they may no longer be at the same address increases. So the voters list can be used but the currency would certainly have gone down as compared to 2011 and subsequent time period. And this can be seen when we did our surveys in 2003, we did our surveys six months later than the election date as compared to in 2007 and '11 and the currency rate was definitely lower in 2003 as compared to 2007 and '11, which demonstrate the fact that

currency declines as the time period lapses from the date of enumeration and the usage of data.

Mr. Graydon: Would you have to have a 75-day period or could you do that in a 33-day period in this situation?

Ms. Verma: That is a question for the referendum legislation. At present, the legislation instructs the Chief Electoral Officer to conduct a referendum in as close a manner as a general election is conducted, and, but there is a review of the legislation to make the necessary amendments to the legislation. So that is a question with the legislators, what should be the time period for a referendum, which is not provided in the current legislation?

Mr. Graydon: So in your professional opinion, would a referendum cost the same as an election?

Ms. Verma: If a referendum is in a 33-day period, it may cost less than what it cost us in 2011. It could cost us anywhere between 9 to 10 million dollars. I'm averaging it out from the basis of 2007 election costs which was \$8 million based on the 33-day calendar, and 2011 cost, which was \$11.9 million, based on a 75-day calendar.

So, if we go with an assumption of a 33-day calendar, and take into—factor the CPI increase over this time period, it could cost us around 9 to 10 million dollars.

Mr. Graydon: When we talk about expanding and allowing voting polling stations to alternate types of residence, I think you did make reference to some of the residence. Could you go over that again for me? I have a bit of a hearing problem and a comprehension problem that matches it.

Ms. Verma: What we were referring to, places like 55 plus. They are not personal care homes, but they are partially assistive-living residences. Under the current legislation, we cannot have a voting station for such places if the number of voters is below a hundred. So, in rural areas, you—there are a lot of residences which are associated with the personal care home, but they are partially assisted. So it seems impractical that you have a voting station next door, but you cannot go and vote at that voting station, and you have to travel further down to be eligible to vote.

Mr. Graydon: Would these stations be mobile stations?

Ms. Verma: Yes, they would be institution mobile voting stations.

Mr. Graydon: So is Elections Manitoba looking at facilities or residences—and I'll use the example of a Hutterite colony. There's a possibility of 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 voters in one location. And the reason I ask this is because it's difficult for them to transport people to a voting station. Their transportation is limited to size and, of course, they have different responsibilities also at these types of locations.

Would that be one of the areas that Elections Manitoba are looking at providing, perhaps, a better service that would encourage a better turnout?

Ms. Verma: I'm not sure if they would fall under the institutional voting criteria which we have in our recommendation. But wherever there are such situations where there is a small colony, we do offer the opportunity through advanced voting. We can have mobile voting stations during advance voting, which addresses these needs. Does that answer your question?

Mr. Graydon: Yes, sorry about that.

I don't know that—I guess it would have to be advanced polling, that's for sure. But, at the same time, in many of these locations you're already doing some advanced polling in those locations. So would it be a big inconvenience, then, to address places like that?

Ms. Verma: Our current recommendation is more on the terminology of institution voting stations. So, hence, I'm not sure if the Hutterite colonies will fall under the defined term, institutional voting, in the legislation.

But in the past practice, if we have concern about a certain colony facing any difficulties or challenges in going to a voting station, we try to establish a voting station within that community provided there are a hundred or more voters.

But I have to think about this issue, which you have raised. Our current recommendation is for senior voters, but we can definitely look into expanding it to address your needs.

Mr. Graydon: The question—I won't ask his question.

So you're currently looking at it? And what you have said is that you have been flexible for under a hundred. And so, then, what would be the minimum—because a lot of times, the colonies are isolated. They're not in a downtown community any place, or they could be within 10 miles, 15 miles of a community, but because of the nature of their

existence, they're certainly not going to be that close to a centre of any size. So what is the bottom level, then, that—or the lowest number that you would consider having a mobile station there?

* (19:30)

Ms. Verma: There's a provision in the legislation that says for not more than 50 voters, if they have to travel more than 30 kilometers, an advance voting station has to be established for them. And we are following that requirement. So if there's a 50-voters limit, we do provide an advance voting station for—to accommodate those voters.

But, for your point, what I'm saying is that we can take a look at our existing recommendation. As a process, we have to go back to the advisory committee and discuss our recommendation with them. If we find a consensus with the group, we'll modify our recommendation and bring it forward in the next annual report.

Mr. Graydon: Well, I thank you for that, and I believe I have a—in your presentation, you talked about institutional voting stations, and you said there were seven other jurisdictions in Canada that provide this service. Are you imitating their services? Are you mirroring their services, or are your services that you're presenting and—or intending to present, are they going to be different than the services in the other seven jurisdictions.

Ms. Verma: When we mention about—when we give a reference to—of other jurisdictions, we try to draw upon the best practices which are available in the other jurisdictions. So we found this as a best practice to enhance the service and accessibility levels to all seniors. That's the reason why we've given a reference of the other jurisdictions that it is a common practice and it's something—advantages for Manitobans to have.

Mr. Graydon: Can you tell me what those other jurisdictions are?

Ms. Verma: Yes. I—the other jurisdictions are British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia, as well as Canada.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that. When I review your recommendations that you were carrying—that you had under The Elections Act, establishing a said election period, that was one of things that you brought up. But we have been talking quite a bit about the cost of the elections and the difference in the cost from 2007 to 2011, and that was because of

the extended period of time from 75 days—from 33 days to 75 days, and yet in your recommendations, you're talking about shortening that revision period. What do you expect and what do you foresee shortening it to then?

Ms. Verma: We are recommending shortening the revision period by two or three days, and that is so that the voters list can be completed and distributed to remote locations in a timely fashion for advance voting purposes. Because the revision period is so close to the start of advanced voting, we lose one weekend for remote locations advance voting purposes. That is the rationale for our recommendation to reduce the revision period.

Mr. Graydon: So would it make sense to shorten it further?

Ms. Verma: Two days would give us adequate time to transport the voters list to remote locations, and then we can use the first weekend of advanced voting in the remote areas also. That is what the—assuming would be the benefit. But without implementing it, I cannot provide you with a hundred per cent guarantee that it would be achieved.

Mr. Graydon: Well, when we talk about a permanent voters list, then, is there any point at all of having 75 days' notice?

Ms. Verma: Well, that would depend on what other method would there be to complement the permanent voters list, like if there is a targeted revision or there is a complete confirmation. If there's complete confirmation then, basically, there'll be a replacement of the enumeration period with a complete confirmation. If it's a targeted revision then there could be a possibility of reducing the enumeration period and moving straight into the revision period. But that is something yet to be determined: how the permanent voters list would be implemented.

Mr. Graydon: Shifting gears a little bit—the Morris by-election is certainly of concern. The seat has been empty for some time now. And I just see that there was a pilot version of the by-election website and included a proposed date for the by-election was made public prior to an election call. How did that happen?

Ms. Verma: We do—when we have a by-election or a general election forthcoming, we do test our proposed websites, and it was unfortunate that somebody could, probably it was just by luck, that they typed in the exact test code and it was—this

website was available. It wasn't made public from Elections Manitoba's perspective, but we did have to put it on a server to test it for its usage. And, at that point, it was unfortunate that somebody could type in the same test ID or test website and access the website.

Mr. Graydon: So you're saying it wasn't a mistake by Elections Manitoba. How can you convince me of that?

Ms. Verma: It wasn't published on our official Elections Manitoba website; that's all I can provide you with in assurance. Because if we were making the website live, we would be posting it on our Elections website not on a test site.

Mr. Graydon: Well, are you concerned that if this has happened in this situation that it can happen going forward?

Ms. Verma: We did take this matter very seriously. We have changed our website test prototypes, the way we use it, and changed the system of testing our websites, so we do not put it any longer on a live server. We have had a replication server, which we'll be using going forward, so that such a mistake or error doesn't occur again.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Yes, first of all, in the permanent voters list study, page 21, there's enumeration expenditures listed for 2011; they were \$2.8 million. And yet the summary of enumeration expenditures for the—doing an enumeration on the next page, 22, is listed as \$1.9 million.

How do you explain the big difference?

Ms. Verma: The summary on page 21 for 2011 relates to the actual cost. The summary on page 22 is the projected cost for the next general election, and it also doesn't include the cost for returning officers and assistant returning officers because we are not sure of the calendar it would be. Hence the returning officers' and assistant returning officers' fees has been removed from this comparative analysis of enumeration versus permanent voters list expenditure.

Mr. Gerrard: So you're saying that the cost of—the difference between the two, which is about \$900,000, was related to the hiring of the returning officers and deputy returning officers?

Ms. Verma: Not completely. Two thousand eleven is based on a 33-day calendar period. The—2015 or the next general election projected cost is based on 22 days of enumeration.

But I have to correct myself in the previous response I told you. We haven't included the assistant returning officers' and the returning officers' fee. That was for the comparison of the enumeration and the permanent workers list cost, which is the table below.

*(19:40)

Mr. Gerrard: So the reason for the lower cost in table 5 on page 22 is in part that it didn't include returning officers and deputy returning officers in part because the enumeration period is a little shorter.

Ms. Verma: That's correct.

Mr. Gerrard: Second—next question. You had mentioned that your estimate of the cost of a referendum would be 9 to 10 million dollars. If, in a referendum, you have one ballot for the whole province, whereas in a provincial election you've got different ballots in every constituency, for a whole lot of reasons, it's a lot simpler running a referendum than it is for running a provincial election. And would your—given that you—the cost in 2007 for running a provincial election was \$8 million, even with the increase in cost of living, do you still think it would be 9 to 10 million dollars to run a referendum?

Mr. Verma: The legislation states that the referendum has to be done in a manner similar to a general election. So our assumption is that we would need to set-up the 57 electoral division returning offices and hence the cost would be similar to a general election. If it's the same ballot which is being used, then basically we are reducing the individual ballot printing cost of three or four candidates versus yes or no response. So that would not have a significant impact on the cost because your administrative infrastructure would be similar to a general election.

Mr. Gerrard: At the same time, there's a lot of factors. I mean, if you're dealing with several different candidates for each area, if you're dealing with the filing of election costs for candidates, and there's a lot greater complicating factors for a provincial election than there is for a referendum, is there not? Would that not show up in some areas where there's decreased costs?

Mr. Verma: There are \$8 million for the 2007 general election did not include election finance costs, which is off reimbursement payments. So the 2000—or the referendum costs we have taken it solely

from a 33-day calendar basis and put the CPI index so \$10 million would be a high—a more aggressive estimate. It could be closer to \$9 million, but we don't foresee it going below the 2007 election cost. If the same 33-day calendar is used, 57 returning officers are established, enumeration is conducted, revision is conducted, advanced poll is there and election day voting.

Mr. Gerrard: I wasn't referring specifically to the rebate costs, which I think is what you're referring to for election financing, but rather the fact that from Elections Manitoba perspective, there's a lot of work that goes into checking and double checking the finances that are filed, putting them up on the web page, and so on and so forth. There's a lot of work that would go into a provincial election that would not have to be done in a referendum campaign.

Ms. Verma: Once again, the \$8 million for the general election did not include the expense for review of the campaign finance returns and the reimbursement payments. So the estimation for referendum is based purely on the operational conduct of the general election and not the campaign finance provisions.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes. I mean, there's still—for every candidate, they have to, you know, submit a hundred signatures. Those have to be very carefully checked. There's a lot of procedures that go into a provincial election that you don't have to do in a referendum because, you know, each question of (a) or question (b) on a referendum [*inaudible*] go around and get so many signatures on a ballot.

Ms. Verma: Well, the tariff, which is paid to the returning officers and assistant returning officers is more time based. So if it's 33 days the office is open, the tariff is spent—is established based on the number of hours they would be working in that time period. If the same provision is applicable during a referendum, that the office is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week, complete for 33 days, then the activities which they would be conducting during that time period may not have a significant impact on the tariff which has to be paid to them because they still need to be available in the 33-day calendar for 8 to 8, seven days a week.

So there could be some reduction in administrative cost basis if you hiring administrative staff to be counting those signatures. Definitely, there could be some reduction in that. I would not anticipate it to be of significant value.

Mr. Gerrard: If you were designing a vote on a referendum, right, would—and optimally and cost efficiently, but also making sure that you've got the maximum likelihood of people getting out, would you design it precisely similar to a provincial election, or would you design it somewhat differently?

Ms. Verma: Actually, designing how the referendum would be conducted would be based on the legislators. Right now there is no referendum legislation. The legislation just states that it has to be done in a manner as close as to the general election and regulations need to be developed on how the voters list would be created, what—how—any campaign expenses, spending limits, which need to be established. So for—from our perspective, we are basing these costs completely on a general election basis.

Mr. Gerrard: On page 28 of your annual report, there's a graph showing the voter turnout, and what that graph shows is a rather dramatic drop in voter turnout in the last three elections compared to previous. And I think, in the last election in 2011, there was quite an effort undertaken to get more voters out, but, in fact, the voting numbers didn't change. I just wondered if you have any recommendations moving forward in terms of what would be the best ways to increase voter turnout.

Ms. Verma: I think education plays a significant role in promoting and creating an awareness of value of voting. We would certainly emphasize a lot on engaging the youth and the children to participate in the democratic process. The other stream which can be looked at is new citizens. There are some countries where democracy is not at the same level as Canada, and people coming from those communities, they're encouraged to share their experience with other Canadians to foster an appreciation of what value we have in our country, in our province, which is not available to many people in different countries. That could also be another option of creating voter awareness and engagement. But for us, we will be continuing our efforts in the education stream for grades 6, 9, 11, for young students, through the student information officers, and also through education institutions at the universities and college levels.

Mr. Gerrard: One of the options for voting, which is being used increasingly in other jurisdictions, and, in fact, we use it municipally, is for some form of

electronic voting, and I wondered to what extent that has been explored.

Ms. Verma: Electronic voting is a topic which is—which often comes for discussion in conferences and when we are having our discussions with other electoral jurisdictions. But at this time, there were two jurisdictions, Elections Ontario and Elections Canada who were thinking of doing a pilot project in alternative voting where voting jurisdictions have moved their pilot project dates.

* (19:50)

There is still a continuing risk or concern when it comes to security of electronic voting technology and how to ensure availability of this technology on the event date, because, when it comes to technology, there's always a risk that there could be unforeseen issues which would cause lack of availability of that option to voters.

The other major concern, which is coming to light, is how to ensure it is a unique one voter, one vote. How do you ensure there's no coercion at the place where the voter is exercising their right. How do you ensure that the voter's vote hasn't been changed or taken over by any other individual.

The other concern is transparency of the process, like, in a paper ballot system when there's a recount, you can actually see a ballot, see how it has been voted, and a recount process is transparent and verifiable. The same assurance cannot be provided in an electronic voting system.

So I would say, at this time, what Elections Manitoba is doing is keeping ourselves current with the technology, with the development, with the discussion, which is happening nationally and internationally. But we still think it's a premature system right now.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, I mean, electronic voting can be in the same type of polling station that we've got currently or it can be over the Internet, right? And can you give us an update on what the current view would be on voting over the Internet?

Ms. Verma: Actually, my previous response was more on 'elec'—Internet voting. Electronic voting at the voting station is more like tabulation systems. It's the counting of the vote, which is used municipally. City of Winnipeg uses electronic voting. But when City of Winnipeg uses electronic voting, it's because they have numerous elections at the same time, so there are administrative issues in counting the vote in

a timely manner. You have the mayor, you have school trustees; there's 10 candidates, probably, you're marking your ballot for. In a provincial election, you're marking your ballot for one candidate, so the administrative challenges are not the same at a municipal level as compared to a provincial level.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Gerrard. Ms. Braun.

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): Actually, some of the questions I was going to ask, Dr. Gerrard has asked, but I just wanted to compliment you on the education portion. I came across a fair number of young parents whose children had convinced them that they needed to go and vote, and so that was an interesting aspect of the—at the door, was hearing that they needed to know what the issues were because they were actually going to go vote and take their children, and they'd never voted before. So I have to compliment you on the—how well that was working.

And I guess my question was that—whether those initiatives are going to continue with the next provincial election, and is there anything new that you might want to add to the mix?

Ms. Verma: Thank you. That's really encouraging to hear because what—when we are sitting in our offices, we don't hear at the ground level what's happening, so we really appreciate the feedback. Those initiatives will definitely continue in the next election. We will be expanding our website and Citizen Next program for the upcoming election. We also have a project going on currently with the Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council as an initiative to expand our services to First Nations, and DOTC is working with us which—through a project in which we are going to different First Nations within the DOTC council and providing presentations to students, conducting a mock election, which also includes involving the community seniors to visit and attend these presentations and mock elections.

Mr. Selinger: Just—there's a couple things I wanted to follow up on. In your presentation, you had accuracy, currency and completeness. Is currency really just a subset of accuracy? Is it really just another way of getting at what the accuracy of the voting list is, the number of people registered versus how many can vote?

Ms. Verma: The currency refers—are you at the same address at which you were at the time of election day. That is what currency is: are you currently

resident of the same address. Accuracy would refer having recorded your name and address correctly.

Mr. Selinger: If in comparing enumerated votes versus a permanent voters list, one of the problems you indicated was that an enumeration system has trouble retaining maturity. That you almost have to rebuild it every time depending on the two to three thousand people you have to hire and train. Would it be safe to say this another way, that a permanent voters list might give you a higher level of stability when it comes to accuracy and completeness of your voters lists?

Ms. Verma: With the permanent voters list, that ability to conduct an election at any time period would be increased. Say, when the by-elections were in February in The Pas, we did have significant challenges in hiring staff and for the staff to go out door-to-door enumeration at -30 degree temperature, when the permanent voters list provided what other complement, if it's a targeted division or a complete confirmation that would certainly have an impact on our ability to run an election at any time period without being severely impacted by the weather conditions.

Mr. Selinger: And, in terms of voter participation, the table that was on page 28, the decline in voter turnout, I think this is a phenomena that extends outside of our own jurisdiction. We're seeing it in other provinces as well, if I'm not mistaken. If we had a permanent voters list, do you think that, along with educational initiatives, might encourage more participation? People would know that they're on the list. They would know that they have an obligation and a responsibility and a right to vote and that they could be reminded more frequently of that.

Ms. Verma: There are no conclusive studies which link the permanent voters list with the voter turnout, and the main reason for non-voting, as we have looked into the provincial service, is disassociation. So disassociation is not administratively possible or not distracted, that we were not there at the right place at the right time, we wanted to vote but it slipped our mind, but it is disassociation with the voting process in general. So the challenge is how do we engage that segment of population? How do we convince them to come back into the voting process? And we also found, through our surveys, that these are more perpetual non-voters, this distracted and displaced are phantom non-voters, but disassociated are more permanent non-voters.

Mr. Selinger: We're seeing a growth in what you call a disassociated, it's gone from 45 to 51 per cent. So over half the population now is feeling that they're not motivated to vote. Is that what this survey is telling us?

Ms. Verma: That's correct. If 55 persons—people voted, 45 persons didn't vote, then out of the 45 persons, 50 persons are saying we are disassociated with the process.

Mr. Selinger: And the best way to get at that is to have some strategy of engagement and awareness as to their rights and responsibilities as a citizen.

Ms. Verma: That's correct, and that's why we are saying we focus on education. We find education is a powerful tool to motivate or engage these disassociated voters, and children, again, by fostering a discussion at the family dining table may generate that interest and participation, which can result into voting at election time. But it could be participation, participation is a broad concept. It's not necessarily limited to exercising your right to vote, but it is to participate in day-to-day community activities. So maybe other community initiatives, maybe some other political schools run by the parties could be one of the other initiatives.

Mr. Selinger: You could even have a situation where a person that's very engaged decides deliberately not to vote, but is very associated with the process, but is exercising their franchise in that way by declining.

You've talked earlier about rejected different types of votes that are not counted, including declined. What does that mean? What is a declined vote?

Ms. Verma: A declined vote is when a voter comes in the voting station, accepts a ballot, writes declined on it and places it back in the ballot box. So it is a vote which is counted but placed into the category of declined. It is reported on our website and as part of the voting result.

* (20:00)

Mr. Chairperson: It is now 8 o'clock, and we'd agreed to revisit how long we were going to sit in the committee at this point in time. Any suggestions?

Mr. Helwer: I'd suggest we sit 'til 8:30 and revisit at that time.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Helwer has said. What is the will of the committee?

Ms. Howard: I would say 8:30 or sooner if people have completed their questions by then.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. We will revisit at 8:30 if we're still sitting here. So, Mr. Selinger has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: I only have one more question after which I will get out of the way.

In some of the Commonwealth countries, they have a requirement you have to vote. It's mandatory. It's not a option. Is there any studies on disassociation there and in environments like Australia where you have to vote? Do we have a—is it—for example, is there 51 per cent of people that are dissociated of those that vote or some lesser amount? Is there any research on that?

Ms. Verma: I'm not aware of any research on the disassociated category but I did have an opportunity to interact with some of the Australian election officials, and a comment they had was, yes, it's compulsory voting which does make people vote. However, we are not sure how much of that compulsion results into an engaged and informative voting process. Plus, they also have penalties to collect from voters who do not vote, and it's an administrative nightmare collecting that penalties from the non-voters.

Mr. Helwer: I guess, following along the lines of people voting or not voting, other jurisdictions, other countries have all their votes at the same time, municipal, federal, provincial, school board. What are your thoughts on that type of environment? The ones when I've been—and asked them, I said, don't people get confused, and they said, no, the voter is very well educated in that regard. They know when they're voting for a school board and municipal councillor so they don't get confused in that regard. Any thoughts on that?

Ms. Verma: Is my job on the line? Well, are you eliminating Elections Manitoba?

Mr. Helwer: No. I didn't mean it that way at all. I was just interested in—it's a cost-saving device I would assume. I rather doubt that we could get all the governments together in Canada to do this, but just a thought. So nothing to do with any—no.

Ms. Verma: We need to have the same rules with regard to eligibility to vote if there has to be a standardization of voting at the same time. Currently, federal rules for eligibility are different than the provincial rules, and within Canada also, provinces have different rules. We have a six-months'

residency requirement in Manitoba. Federally, there is no six-months' residency requirement. Other jurisdictions it could be less. It could be more. So that is one of the main administrative issue or legislative issue to address. If the legislators required all the elections to be conducted at the same time, I think there has to be extensive studies and changes which have to be made to different laws regarding election, and also how the government is formed, at the same time provincial and federal and municipal, so it is quite a complex issue which I don't think I will have sufficient time to address at this forum.

Mr. Helwer: Going back a little ways to—Mr. Graydon was talking about the ballot box going out to a community of say a Hutterite colony or something of that nature. What are the criteria for that to occur? Does someone have to request it? A candidate or a returning officer or a community?

Ms. Verma: As part of a pre-writ exercise of the returning officer and the assistant returning officer is to make themselves familiar with the requirements of the electoral division, and that includes requirements of the voters in their electoral division. So they do visit the communities, try to understand the distance requirement, and if there is a need established, or even from comments from the voters and sometimes the political parties, express an interest that they would like to have a voting station established at a certain colony or location which—their voters have challenges in accessing alternate locations, we do set up mobile voting stations at those places. As a process, we circulate the list of voting places to the parties ahead of time, and we welcome their comments and suggestions before we finalize the voting locations.

Mr. Helwer: Well, we do have one community of Old Order Mennonites in Manitoba and most people know it as the Amish, I think, but that's not what they go by here. And I'm not even sure if they do vote. It may not be part of—but that would be certainly one that they would have trouble getting to the polling station in time, I would think, with their current form of transportation, but—and the size of the community is not one, I don't think, that would draw that type of attention, but, nonetheless, down the road, it may be one.

Ms. Verma: We'll certainly make a note of that community. And for a mobile voting station, it's—there's not a minimum requirement for a hundred. We can establish a mobile voting station for that community.

Mr. Helwer: On your annual report for the 2011, on page 28 you have a lovely graph there: provincial voter turnout. And much discussion tonight about distraction, disassociation, et cetera, and it is quite dramatic—the drop in voter turnout there up—on the 2003 election. Any thoughts on where we went from to get there or on how we can get back there—whether—you've gone on some of the issues of how we might possibly get back there, but commentary on that, please.

Ms. Verma: I'm afraid that was before my time, so I can't offer any other rationale or reason why there was such a dramatic decline in the voter turnout in the 2003 general election. But, at present, like, from the past three elections, there—we have tried to maintain that level, but we don't take any ownership on the voter turnout nor we take any credit for maintaining it.

But from Elections Manitoba's perspective, what we have focused and we continue—will be continuing to focus on is to ensure accessibility to voters to meet their needs. We want to take the voting stations to where the voters require them to be, and that has been our goal for advance voting. We increased from 199 locations in 2007 to 299 locations in 2011, so that was more than a 50 per cent increase in the advance voting locations. One, it was based on the legislation, which changed, of not to travel more than 30 kilometres. But the other was also a recognition from our agency that we need more advance voting locations.

Mr. Helwer: Have a couple more things: You—with respect to the Morris by-election website that went somewhat live, you're now doing it on a stand-alone test site that's not attached to the Internet—intranet, I would imagine. Is this a new cost to Elections Manitoba or was it something that already existed?

Ms. Verma: We have different servers within our office which have been assigned for different uses. So we have identified efficiency within our current system to test our websites not on the live server watch but on another server, so there is not a cost increase.

Mr. Helwer: And on your slides, going back to page—well, page 4 on our printed slides, I guess, the review of election returns, you have a list there of 67 candidates that—whose returns were granted an extension. Are those—any of those still outstanding or are they all finished now?

Ms. Verma: All the election returns have been reviewed and completed. There is no outstanding election return, either from a party perspective or a candidate perspective.

Mr. Helwer: And the 124 candidates were eligible for reimbursements. Is it—I assume you have the data available, but is it possible to release to us, per candidate, each—what each candidate received as a reimbursement, and what they spent in the campaign?

Ms. Verma: All the candidates' election returns are posted on our website, so they are available. We are also—we moved to a new website last month, and we are going to post the reimbursement amounts paid to each candidate on the website.

* (20:10)

Mr. Helwer: Yes, it's not critical, but one other thing I did hear from people that were—had plans to travel prior to the last election, and because it was not a fixed election date those plans were, you know, put in place well out in advance in a year or so, so they were travelling sort of week by week and they said they would call me and said, how can I vote? Well, there isn't an easy way to do it because they would be in this location for a week and the next one for a week and they did not have a fixed address for something—a ballot to be mailed to.

Any suggestions on the future of—and we're going to be a fixed election date, presumably they would know when that date is going to be, but any suggestions on how we might deal with that issue in the future?

Ms. Verma: In 2011 there was a set election date. What was not known was when the writ be issued, so our recommendation on absentee voting is that—to accept the absentee ballot applications by the returning officer at the start of the 75-day calendar and not be dependent on when the writ is issued. This would address the issue of voters who don't know when the ballot would be provided, and the second is not to wait for the writ to be issued to issue a ballot, but as soon as the permanent voters list is complete, a ballot can be provided to the absentee voter. So I think that may address that concern.

Mr. Helwer: It's always the question of them—then us making sure that anybody might be aware of that, of course, once the election is called and that's when they start thinking about voting, so there's a bit of an issue there, but it's—I guess we need to make sure that

people know that. I don't—I think I'm pretty much done for questions unless, Mr. Graydon?

Mr. Graydon: I'm still a bit perplexed about the costs of a referendum and I guess what really gets my attention is the leaked information or the information that was accessed for the Morris by-election, which in my estimation should have been called already but at the same time hasn't been. But with the information that was put together by Alison Mitchell, the writ day would have been the 22nd of February. The election would have been on March 26th, which gives us a 32-day period—window. If that's good enough for a by-election, all right, that's the information you put out, you're running a test on all your equipment, that's great but at the same time that's the information that was going to be put out if the election would have been called that day.

Now, in that you have advance polling, you have the open, your closed poll, there's a whole lot of expenses that are associated with that type of an election versus a referendum, and what Dr. Gerrard was speaking of and what we've been asking about is that there's less expenses in a referendum than there is in an election.

We tried to establish the reason from going to 32 or 33 days to 75 days for a referendum. It's not there. This here indicates that you're prepared to do a by-election in 32 days, so what reason would you have for extending that and the costs that you've—that you have put on the record tonight are, in my mind, very much overstated.

So, if you can convince me, I will give you that opportunity now to convince me that they need to be overstated.

Ms. Verma: A by-election calendar is set as per the legislation. It is not a 75-day calendar; it is a 33-day calendar from the time the writ is issued to the election day, and that's because it is defined in the legislation what a by-election calendar would be. We can establish when advance voting would happen, when the election day would happen, when the nomination will open, when the nomination will close, all those activities are defined in the legislation, the timeline.

In case of a referendum, there is no legislation currently which provides us with a calendar, so our estimate for a referendum cost is solely based on if it is a 33-day calendar and we would have the same activities as we do in a general election. The cost

could be less, the cost could be more, depending on how the legislation is put together for the referendum: what regulations will be placed; and how a referendum would be conducted; how the referendum question will be established; what kind of rules would be there for the committees; what is expected from Elections Manitoba when it comes to enumeration, revision, advance voting.

So our estimate currently is based on the 2007 election cost for the general election compared to the 2011 tariff which were increased—putting them together in a 33-day calendar. So there are many assumptions involved in coming to a number of 9 to 10 million dollars. I cannot state that they are absolutely accurate. They are an assumption estimate based on a 33-day calendar and the tariffs used for the 2011 elections.

Mr. Graydon: So what you're suggesting and—to the committee tonight, is that the criteria is out of your hands; you're going to do whatever the government tells you to do. Because they're, ultimately—

Point of Order

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The—Ms. Howard on a point of order.

Ms. Howard: Yes, I under—I accept and understand the member's frustration with the issue of a referendum, but I don't believe that frustration should be directed at Ms. Verma. If he has questions regarding to call or not to call a referendum, those questions can be asked in the House. But they're not questions that pertain to any of the Elections Manitoba reports that are under discussion here tonight.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Graydon on the same point of order?

Mr. Graydon: Yes, and I believe that my questions were directed to the procedure that would arrive at the cost of the referendum, not up to the witness tonight to call a referendum. I'm trying to establish how the costs are arrived at and what they are, and I can only do that by questioning.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. It's not a point of order as long as the member is making a reference to things such as costs, such as time, and so forth.

But I would like to make the point that—and I've been very lenient in this regard—that questions really should be addressed to the Chair and answered

through the Chair. And I haven't really been enforcing that tonight so far, so, you know, if we deviate away from standard questions related strictly to the reports—then I just give that advice to members of the committee.

So the ruling is that it's not a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Graydon: So do you want me to restate the question, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, you have the floor.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you, then.

The question is: You—the—to determine the cost of a referendum, you require the—

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Graydon, address the questions through the Chair, please.

Mr. Graydon: In order to establish a cost of a referendum, Mr. Chairman, then the criteria for that referendum needs to be presented to Elections Manitoba in order for them to ascertain the cost. Is that true or false, and by whom would that be, that gives them that direction?

*(20:20)

Ms. Verma: Lieutenant Governor-in-council can make regulations with regard to referendum and through those regulations the procedure for referendum can be explained, which would include, or which can include the duration for the referendum, the referendum period, the procedures to be involved in the referendum. Once we have the legislation and the regulations in place, we be in a better position to establish the cost with regard to a referendum.

Mr. Graydon: So I just want to go back to the—to elections. And one of, excuse me, one of the recommendations required to post a notice of election in each rural voting area and the recommendation is to remove that and technology and mass media eliminate the need for that posting. Is that been carried forward?

Ms. Verma: That is a recommendation which we have made and—in 2011 annual report which we would like to be implemented. It's because in the rural voting areas the post offices—there are now different procedures for making those kind of postings and not that many people visit post offices. I'm just giving an example.

So the returning officers have recommended to us that we don't find this provision of use in the

modern state of technology there. There are so many alternative ways of informing voters. We use local newspapers, extensive ad campaign, alternative media options to inform and advise the voters of when the election is going to occur, when advance voting is going to occur.

Plus there is a lot of political advertisement also which happens at the same time, which carries the same message. So this provision appears to be redundant and hence our recommendation to remove the requirement for notice in the rural areas.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Chair, the percentage of the voting public has dropped dramatically in the last two elections, and I'm not suggesting that the posting in rural areas and communities would make that much difference. But I'm also of the opinion that if we are doing a census anyway, is that not a form that we can at least try and encourage people to at least let them know that there is an election? Of course you're doing it because there is an election and the amount of money that's being spent on the technology and mass media doesn't seem to be money well spent, and the results aren't there for the money that we're spending. How does Elections Manitoba feel about that?

Ms. Verma: There is a requirement under The Elections Act to provide information on election process. And in line with the mandate which we have of public education and information, we spend our resources to communicate the election information to the voters. We adopt different mediums because what we have seen is not one medium can address the needs for all Manitobans. They have different preferences, choices, options available to them, hence the alternate mediums are used to provide that message with the focus that all Manitobans are reached and we don't exclude any particular group.

Mr. Graydon: Could you tell me what the percentage of voters that are being sworn in are at the polling stations?

Ms. Verma: I'm just looking for the table. The swear-ons for the 2011 election were 26,279 out of 777,000 voters.

Mr. Graydon: I didn't hear the last part of that.

Ms. Verma: The total voters on the voters list were 777,054. The swear-ons were 26,279.

Mr. Graydon: I have one more question. If it is found that a person has voted more than once or multiple times, and apparently this has happened in

the past, what happens to those ballots and what happens to that individual?

Ms. Verma: Voting twice is an offense under The Elections Act. The matter is referred to the Commissioner of Elections who investigates and, if required, prosecutes the offense. In the current system, on election day, it's not possible to vote twice because you have to go to the same voting station and the voters list is—your name is struck off when you vote, so if you go again to vote, it will show that you've already voted and you would not be issued another ballot.

When it comes to advance voting, resident—there is a possibility, a slight possibility that you are hopping from one resident advance voting station to another as the voters list is updated overnight. So within the same day, if you go to two voting stations or three voting stations within the same electoral division, there is a possibility that you can vote twice. But it would be identified when the voters list gets updated overnight and the matter would be reported to the commissioner. There is a chance that your ballot is there in the ballot box and the same—you can't identify in a regular ballot whose ballot it belongs to.

But when it comes to non-resident voting, you are voting through a write-in ballot, that can be identified and put aside and that ballot would not be counted because it is a write-in ballot. Your information is on the top envelope, so when we update the voters list, if we identify an individual has voted twice using non-resident, we pull out their ballots and they're not counted and, again, the matter is referred to the commissioner.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Chair, I understand that there are multiple polling stations in every riding, and if I understood right, the answer was that you could only vote in one of them in a day, and yet I'm looking at 26,000 people that were walk-ups and were signed in.

So is it possible in one day that, if there were 10 or 15 polling stations in a—different polling stations, that a person could do the same thing on election day?

Ms. Verma: On election day it's not possible that you can get sworn-on different voters lists, because every voters list is pertaining to a voting area. So, if you're a resident of a certain voting area, you can only be sworn in for that voters list and not on another one.

Mr. Graydon: I understand that it would be on a voters list, but you were not picked up by the census, and you're a swear-in at a polling station. You walk out of that one and go down to another one. And if you do that 26 times you could vote 26 times in that day and not be caught.

What are the consequences when you are caught?

Ms. Verma: To swear-on, you have to produce ID and also provide a declaration for your address, so unless the voter is providing false declarations for their address, they can only be sworn-on in for their voting area for which they belong.

If it is found out that they have falsified their information, provided false oaths and got themselves registered and exercised their right to vote at multiple voting stations, that matter will be referred to the commissioner, and it is an offense under The Elections Act to vote twice.

Mr. Graydon: Thank you for that, Mr. Chair, and I thank you as well for being as forthright as you've been.

Mr. Chairperson: No further questions?

Okay. We have no more questions. Let's see if we can move some of these reports.

Shall the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2003, including the conduct of the 38th Provincial General Election, June 3, 2003, pass?

* (20:30)

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no. The report is not passed.

Shall the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2008, pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Shall the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2009, pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no.

Okay, just for clarity, I should be saying the reports are not passed. So the three reports referred to are not passed.

Shall the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2010, including the conduct of the Concordia by-election, March 2, 2010, pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no. The report is not passed.

Shall the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2011, including the conduct of the 40th Provincial General Election, October 4, 2011, pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no. The report is not passed.

Shall the Permanent Voters List Study-report dated June 2013, pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: I hear a no. The report is not passed.

Mr. Pedersen: I assume you're getting very close to the end. I just want to thank Ms. Verma for her very forthright, direct answers tonight. I've sat on a lot of committees in this room and particularly Crown Corporations, and we've got less than direct answers from them, and I just want to thank her for her very forthright manner tonight.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for that, Mr. Pedersen. I am sure you speak for all members of the committee.

None of these reports have passed, so I request that members leave their copies of the reports on the table.

The hour being 8:32 p.m., what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Committee rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 8:32 p.m.

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>