

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

Chairperson
Mr. Ted Marcelino
Constituency of Tyndall Park

Vol. LXVIII No. 3 - 2 p.m., Wednesday, December 16, 2015

ISSN 1708-668X

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Fortieth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Wednesday, December 16, 2015

TIME – 2 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Ted Marcelino
(Tyndall Park)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Ms. Amanda Lathlin
(The Pas)

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

*Hon. Messrs. Allum, Chomiak,
 Hon. Ms. Irvin-Ross, Hon. Messrs. Lemieux,
 Selinger*

*Messrs. Cullen, Eichler, Goertzen, Ms. Lathlin,
 Messrs. Marcelino, Pedersen*

APPEARING:

*Hon. Jon Gerrard, MLA for River Heights
 Ms. Shipra Verma, Chief Electoral Officer*

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

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

*Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the
 year ending December 31, 2012 including
 the conduct of the Fort Whyte by-election
 September 4, 2012*

Permanent Voters List Study, dated June 2013

*Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the
 year ending December 31, 2013*

*Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the
 year ending December 31, 2014 including the
 conduct of the 2014 Arthur-Virden and Morris
 by-elections*

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Clerk Assistant (Mr. Andrea Signorelli): Good afternoon. Will the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to order.

Before the committee can proceed with the business before it, it must elect a new Chairperson. Are there any nominations for this position?

Hon. James Allum (Minister of Education and Advanced Learning): I'll nominate Mr. Marcelino.

Clerk Assistant: Mr. Marcelino's been nominated. Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Marcelino, will you please take the Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Our next item of business is the election of a Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

Mr. Allum: I would like to nominate Ms. Lathlin.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any other nominations?

Hearing none, Ms. Amanda Lathlin has been nominated—has been elected as Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to consider the following reports: No. 1, the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2011 including the conduct of the 40th Provincial General Election October 4, 2011; Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2012 including the conduct of the Fort Whyte by-election September 4, 2012; Permanent Voters List Study, report dated June 2013; Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2013; Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2014 including the conduct of the 2014 Arthur-Virden and Morris by-elections.

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

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Until 4 p.m. or sooner if there are no further questions from committee members.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any other suggestions? Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

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

Mr. Goertzen: A global discussion.

Mr. Chairperson: Any other suggestions?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the honourable First Minister wish to make an opening statement? And would he please introduce the officials in attendance, if any.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Okay, I'm going to need a little help with this. First of all, our Chief Electoral Officer is Shipra Verma, and I'll ask her to introduce her staff.

Ms. Shipra Verma (Chief Electoral Officer): Tracy Nysten, Manager of Elections Finances, and Mark Robertson, Manager of Elections Operations.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable First Minister.

Can you please make your opening statement then?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, thank you.

I'm pleased to provide this opportunity to speak to the committee this afternoon. Today we are dealing with the contents of Elections Manitoba 2014, the annual reports, as well as other outstanding reports.

I would like to start by thanking the Chief Electoral Officer and other election officials who join us here today. This committee meeting provides elected officials with an opportunity to share their ideas on Elections Manitoba's operation and their ideas on how to strengthen our electoral process.

Open and fair elections are the foundation of our democratic system, this committee and all-party support here helps strengthen not only this Assembly and its institutions, such as Elections Manitoba, but also our democratic process as a whole.

In particular, I'm also looking forward to hearing from Elections Manitoba and from other members on the preparations for the general election in 2016. I'm pleased to see that work is being done to increase voter participation and to make voting more easy and convenient. It's good to see work is being done to engage young voters and future voters. I'm looking forward to hearing about some of the social-media strategy and other strategies in this regard. I'm also looking forward to hearing from the Chief Electoral Officer about the experience they have seen with

recent elections including the federal election and if we as a province can learn from this.

The federal government has signalled that they will have an all-party task force to review and make recommendations on changes to the way federal elections are conducted. We will be keeping a close eye on the process, and I look forward to seeing what—where they go with that.

Also, I'm pleased to be able to say that—tell the committee today that once Prime Minister Trudeau's plan has been made, we will be—made public, we will be striking our own all-party committee to tour the province and hear from Manitobans on electoral reform here in Manitoba.

Since we last met, we have been working on development of a permanent voters list, as we discussed last year. We were given advice that to prepare for a permanent voters list, voters enumerated for the next general election should be requested to provide their gender and date of birth in addition to their name and address. Having that information would allow each voter to be uniquely identified, which would facilitate the creation of an accurate and up-to-date permanent voters list.

We introduced and passed Bill 45, The Elections Amendment Act, enhanced enumeration. In preparation for the 2016 general election, Bill 45 amends The Elections Act to enable enumerators to ask eligible voters to provide their gender and date of birth. The information will be requested when voters apply to have their name added to the voters list on election day or during advanced voting or when voters apply to vote as an absentee or a homebound voter. The information that is collected will form the basis for a permanent voters list to be used for any election held in 2020 and afterwards.

* (14:10)

Bill 45 made other minor amendments to the act recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer, including allowing separate voting stations in residences for seniors and people with disabilities. It also permits a voting station already established for a health-care facility to be used for voting by seniors and people with disabilities who live in a co-located residence. We appreciate the Opposition House Leader and the member of River Heights for supporting this legislation.

We're also looking—working on the idea of integrating the Manitoba Health card with Manitoba driver's licences and identification cards issued by

the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation. This could assist with voter participation and assist citizens when voting.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. That will conclude my remarks at this time.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the honourable First Minister.

Does the official opposition wish to make an opening statement?

Mr. Goertzen: Not a statement, so much. I just want to thank the Chief Electoral Officer and her staff for being here with us this afternoon to participate in this process, which I think we always find enlightening and thank her for her report and her recommendations, and we look forward to asking some questions but also to hearing her comments as well.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member.

Does the Chief Electoral Officer, Ms. Verma, wish to make an opening statement?

Ms. Verma: Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Please go ahead.

Ms. Verma: Thank you for inviting me and my staff to discuss the tabled reports this afternoon. I'll be providing a brief overview of the 2014 activities as outlined in our annual report; also summarize the outstanding recommendations from the report and detail the activities carried out by my office in 2015.

In our annual report of 2015, we have reported on the operational conduct and financial details of the by-elections in Morris and Arthur-Virden on—which was held on January 28th. There was included several recommendations, and I'll speak to those that are still outstanding. There are five under The Elections Act.

The first one relates to absentee voting. We are recommending to expand the timeline for the delivery and return of ballot kits for absentee voters to allow voters a longer period to return their ballots. We're also recommending to reduce the number of names required for a completed nomination form and require the name of the individual collecting the signatures be identified on the nomination paper; also, to remove the requirement to post the notice of election in each rural voting area, as this can be

better accomplished through alternate methods of communication.

Our next recommendation is to establish a set election period for a set-date election rather than the current variable period of 28 to 35 days. This will allow better management of expenses by campaigns.

Finally, to shorten the revision period from 29 days to 26 days. This will allow more time to deliver the revised voters list to all advanced voting locations in time for the first weekend of advance voting.

We also have two recommendations under The Election Financing Act. The first recommendation will allow for a more effective application of the late filing fee provision, specifically, a 30-day deadline for remitting the fee once notice is received from our office.

Our second recommendation is on government advertising. Before discussing the recommendation, I'd like to make some comments about section 92, the government advertising provision. This is a section that receives considerable amount of attention and poses some interpretive challenges. In the interest of promoting a consistent understanding, I want to take this opportunity to provide some clarification on the provision.

Section 92 is part of an act whose primary purpose is to ensure fairness and accountability in the way money is raised and spent during election campaigns. Among other provisions, the act includes limits on campaign spending. We understand that the primary purpose of section 92 is to ensure fairness by preventing government resources being used to circumvent the campaign spending limits outlined in the act. This section achieves this goal by preventing government departments from advertising or promoting government programs or activities during a specified blackout period. Although every case is different and any complaint must be examined individually, here are a few general points of interpretation I can provide.

First, the words publish and advertise must be construed broadly. They do not only refer to paid advertisements or written publication, but include any dissemination of information to the general public. A publication, for example, includes a speech made at a public event. Of course, not all publications or advertisements are prohibited by section 92; they're only prohibited if they are by a

government department or Crown agency and if they concern its programs or activities.

Secondly, a government department or Crown agency will be involved in a publication or advertisement if it is involved in any intermediate steps taken to achieve the dissemination of information to the public. So, for example, a campaign ad placed by the governing party would nonetheless be in breach of section 92 if the text of the ad has been prepared by a government department.

Thirdly, a department or Crown agency will be involved in a step in the publication or advertisement if any of its resources have been used or expended in connection with the publication or advertisement. In the example just given, a government department that prepared the text of an advertisement would have used staff time for that purpose.

Fourthly, ministers themselves are part of their departments and can therefore be government resources—may I'm sorry, can therefore be government resources involved in a publication. Ministers, however, will only be involved in a government advertisement by their department if they are acting in their capacity as a minister as opposed, for example, to acting as—in the capacity as a candidate in an election. To simplify matters and in keeping with the overall intent of the legislation, we understand ministers to be acting in their capacity as ministers only if some further government resources has been—have been used to support their involvement in a publication. For example, where a department sets up a press conference for a minister, department resources have been used, and so the minister is acting in the press conference in his capacity as a minister. In that case, both the department and minister are involved in the publication. The situation would be different, however, when department sources have not been used to provide the minister with a platform to speak. If a reporter bumps into a minister in a hallway at the Legislature, for example, the minister can answer a question without violating section 92. The meeting has not been arranged using government resources.

We recognize that in some cases, this distinction may appear artificial, but we believe, and it—it is in keeping with the overall purpose of section 92 that government resources not to be used to assist the campaign of the governing party.

The next point is the section is not intended to prevent members of the government, including

ministers, from acting in their capacity as candidates during an election campaign. Members running for office and those assisting them are free to campaign on the government's record. They are free to talk about and disseminate information about government programs and activities as long as they do so in their capacity as candidates or volunteers on behalf of candidates and as long as no government resources are being used.

And, finally, this section is also not intended to halt government business. It limits dissemination of information; it does not prevent the government from acting.

These guidelines do not constitute an advisory opinion under section 96 of The Election Financing Act and are not binding on the Commissioner of Elections when investigating future complaints. They have been prepared, however, in consultation with the commissioner and are based upon Elections Manitoba's and the commissioner's current understanding of section 92. Our recommendation seeks to clarify and strengthen the provision on government advertising by including the words use of government finances or resources in section 92. This would more clearly articulate the intent of the provision and could help address some of the challenges in interpretation.

I hope this has shed some light on section 92 as well as providing some context for our recommendation. That being said, our office respects the 2006 decision of the legislators to separate the investigative and prosecution responsibilities from the assistance and compliance role through the creation of a Commissioner of Elections. Hence, it will not be appropriate for me to comment on any specific or hypothetical cases related to government advertising.

Now moving on to our activities of the current year and election year ahead, on April 21st, a by-election in The Pas was held due to the resignation of Mr. Frank Whitehead. Ms. Amanda Lathlin was declared elected, and the turnout was 21 per cent. Operational conduct and financial details of the by-election will be provided in the next annual report.

As you know, the 41st general election will be held on April 19th. As in 2011, we will follow a 75-day calendar. You have been provided with a summary calendar that indicates the milestone dates. To assist with election planning and request feedback, we have circulated electoral division maps

to all the registered parties earlier this year. We'll also be providing the parties with street keys and community keys in January. We are again planning to make advance voting available at a variety of high-traffic locations, including airports, airport malls and universities.

Now I'd like to highlight some of our communication and outreach activities for the upcoming election. Given the timing of the election, we are anticipating a high proportion of voters may be away during enumeration. In November, we began an absentee voting campaign to target snowbirds with ads at the airport, in print and online. Absentee applications are available on our website. Despite these efforts, we anticipate that the number of snowbirds may have an impact on the completeness of the preliminary voters list, and they may also be challenged with the winter road conditions.

* (14:20)

In January, we'll be launching a new mobile app called Manitoba votes 2016. This app will provide mobile users with quick access to the voting information, including the list of candidates in the division, voting locations, key dates as well as job opportunities.

In an effort to engage young voters in the province, we are collaborating with post-secondary institutions across the province to provide information to students about voting opportunities, eligibility and residency requirements and job opportunities. For the youngest voters and soon-to-be voters, we'll again be offering a student information officer program. The program aims to promote participation, build awareness of the electoral process while providing paid work experience. We will invite all Manitoba high schools to participate.

Another area of focus in our outreach is Manitoba First Nation communities. We are engaging with several community-based organizations to provide information to their constituents. We're planning to have community liaison officers in all the First Nation communities to assist with enumeration, recruitment and voting.

In the fall, we took our education program to several northern communities, providing election workshops to almost 900 students in Norway House, Flin Flon, Pas, Thompson and Churchill. Another item for the upcoming election is the new third-party

legislation. This will be the first general election in which third-party rules will be in place.

Finally, in support of our compliance assistance mandate, we are providing information sessions for all political participants to clarify their roles and responsibilities under The Election Financing Act.

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

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the Chief Electoral Officer, and the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Goertzen: Couple—thank you very much for your introductory comments and also for the points that you made about section 92, which is, I know, always an issue of contention, and some of the different breaches and supposed breaches of that portion.

Can you talk a little bit about—you mentioned speeches being part of a blackout period, and I'm not talking about any particular breach or specific breach in relation to any individual. Just in terms of your comments, you mentioned that speeches by the government could be considered a breach of section 92. Can you just elaborate on that a little bit further? Would that be all speeches, or they have to be in a public forum where people are invited? Would that include party speeches? What specifically were you referring to there?

Ms. Verma: I—the speeches which are being referred to are more media conferences which have been organized using government departments or resources. We are also highlighting that there is a recognition that an individual can be acting in the capacity of a minister or as a candidate, so that distinction also needs to be considered. Plus, what kind of communication is—it is. It's the published and advertised, which is considered to be quite broad.

Mr. Goertzen: How does it break down in terms of—you mentioned, you know, a member can be acting as a minister if they're a minister of the Crown, or as a candidate, but they can also be acting as an MLA, right, separately from a minister of the Crown or a candidate. So how are those responsibilities impacted? If you're a minister but you're also an MLA, what restrictions exist on the MLA portion of it?

Ms. Verma: I won't be able to provide a lot of detail on that distinction. Again, these were very general guidelines or interpretations that we have developed

in consultation with the commissioner to give some clarification to that provision. That provision is a complex provision, and any scenario will have to be considered based on lots of circumstances surrounding that scenario. So it's a little difficult for me to answer your question.

Mr. Goertzen: But supposedly, or—I assume that if a minister is using their special assistant or their executive assistant—which are order-in-council appointments, so they're government appointments—and they're using those resources to do MLA work during the blackout period, that that would be considered a conflict because the—or in—it would be in violation of section 92 because it's the use of government resources. Is that—is it the resources issue that drives it?

Ms. Verma: I believe it is the use of government resources in order to have a government communication. The use of resources in the capacity of an MLA are guided by a different set of rules which are not under The Election Financing Act.

Mr. Goertzen: And there are exceptions within section 92 that would apply to things that happen in the Legislature. Is that correct, that there are legislative functions that can continue on in terms of bills or budgets that provide an exception to section 92?

Ms. Verma: Section 92 has a set of exceptions, but they are different for a general election and there is an additional one for a by-election. For a by-election, there is a specific exception that government business can continue. For the general election, that exception is not there. However, as I'd mentioned, the government advertising restrictions are not meant to stop the government from doing its business, but it's basically to prevent government resources to be used for campaigning purposes.

Mr. Goertzen: Or for the publication of certain things, right? So something could happen in the Legislature, whether it's a bill or a motion or a budget or whatever those things might be, but the restriction is on the publication and the advertisement of those specific things that are happening. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: Section 92 states: A government department or Crown agency must not advertise or publish any information about its programs or activities. So that's the restriction.

It also says that the exception is that advertisement or a publication that is required by law

that is required at that time to solicit proposals or tenders for contracts, matters related to public health or safety, and in case of Crown agencies, in continuation of earlier advertisements or publications are permissible. Also, during a by-election, what is also accepted is matters before the Assembly during the election period of a by-election, such as a Throne Speech, the budget, the introduction or passage of a bill, or an order or resolution of the Assembly. This exception is only applicable for a by-election.

Mr. Goertzen: So, for greater clarity, the issue seems to be less about the activity; it seems to be about the publication and the advertisement of it. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: That's correct.

Mr. Goertzen: Specifically about tenders—government tenders—and I understand there's an exception that deals with—I can't remember the exact terminology of the act in front of you—something in terms of proposals. I know that there's restrictions around proposals, but tenders—are tenders allowed within the blackout period?

Ms. Verma: The exception states that what is—it does not apply to an advertisement or publication that is required at that time to solicit proposals or tenders for contracts or application for employment with a government department or Crown agency.

Mr. Goertzen: And that's true for either a general election or a by-election. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: Yes, that is correct, for both general and by-election.

Mr. Goertzen: Can you give us a bit of an update on, sort of, preparations for the current election in terms of hirings, or have you completed the hirings that you need to do, cost of the election as compared to, perhaps, the last election, those sort of issues?

Ms. Verma: We have—our hiring of returning officers and assistant returning officers is 99 per cent completed. We have still two vacancies in the province. It's like an ongoing business of hiring because circumstances change, and after the federal election we did see a high level of turnover in our staff.

The training of all the returning officers and assistant returning officers has been completed. The last training session was done in November. The ROs and AROs are now in the process of finalizing their office locations, the voting places, voting areas. Mapping work has been completed. We are also in

the process of finalizing the keys and the street keys which will be provided to the parties next month.

Can I ask him to repeat the second question?

* (14:30)

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Goertzen, please do.

Mr. Goertzen: It's like the media. They ask a question about what you're doing, but, of course, they always ask, what are the costs? So the second part of my question was the cost of the election and maybe the comparison to the last election.

Ms. Verma: The cost of the last election was \$11.9 million for the election activities and around \$3 million for the reimbursement of election expenses to the candidates and parties. The election cost which we are budgeting for the next election is \$13.1 million. The increase is primarily due to the change in the tariff, a CPI increase and also some additional media plan that we have implemented for absentee voters and for recruitment purposes.

Considering the timing of the election, our media campaign has begun from November for absentee voters and also for recruitment of election workers. You may have heard or seen ads on hiring of enumerators that we have started. We are anticipating a few more challenges considering it will be February when we'll be enumerating and it is difficult to find people to work with -30° to -40° temperature in Manitoba. We are also looking at the safety of election workers, and in some places, we are doubling up the enumerators, especially in rural areas where there is driving involved, just for the safety of the election workers. Also, in certain downtown locations and areas of higher safety, we are also partnering an enumerator with two people. We have also started with other measures of—there'll be headlights or headlamps for the enumerators.

They will be also, some places, be given leg warmers, hand warmers, foot warmers. Plus, we are working with the City to ensure that—or to work with them that snow clearing may become a priority for them for the sidewalk clearing during the enumeration time period and also, in some places, for additional police force, if it's required, just so that they are aware that enumerators will be out, because there'll be 3,000—minimum 3,000 people out during February and March.

Mr. Goertzen: The advertising that you're doing for absentee voters to make snowbirds aware of their ability to vote when they're not here, I'm assuming,

looking out the window, that a lot of them may have even left by now. Where is that advertising happening? Is it all here or is it in places where the snowbirds might actually be?

Ms. Verma: The absentee campaign started in November. Based on statistics, the major flight happens beginning in November. There are some people who do leave in October too, but if you're looking at the six months' residency, then we are expecting people to be back by April who leave in October. The advertising campaign is happening at several places. It's at the airport, at the Winnipeg airport. It's also—we have targeted websites which are used more for snowbirds. Online ads are there. We have also targeted 55-plus or senior complexes around the province. Posters have gone up in all of those apartments for registration or application for absentee voting. And, in some rural newspapers also, advertisement has been placed.

Mr. Goertzen: So that advertising might take place on—I'm not a snowbird, so I'm sort of guessing on this; I might have to ask others about this, but if you're looking at the Winnipeg Free Press, where a lot of people look at our local paper to keep up with the news, is that where—the kind of places where that advertising would happen?

Ms. Verma: Yes, that's correct. We were able to—we worked with Communications Services to identify which are the websites which are usually seen by absent—or by snowbirds. They have research to support that data. So based on their recommendation and also in consultation with the returning officers, we were able to identify which will be the possible media places where ads might be more effective.

Mr. Goertzen: There's no billboards in Mesa that have been taken out on voting in Manitoba. Now, billboards would be an extreme example. There's no specific advertising happening in places outside of Manitoba?

Ms. Verma: No. The advertisement is in Manitoba. But the online ads can be accessed by people who are outside Manitoba, and that's why we have targeted the online ads quite significantly during—for the absentee campaign.

Mr. Goertzen: The workers that you've hired—and I'm glad to hear that the vast majority of that's done—were a lot of them working in the federal election? Did we pick up people who had worked in the federal election to continue working provincially?

Ms. Verma: Our recruitment campaign had started in 2014. So, at that point, we were not aware of who'll be working in the federal campaign, but over the time period, there were some workers who have worked in—during the federal campaign in different capacities. It could be as a returning officer or an assistant returning officer or even as trainers or election day workers. So—and to some level, I think that experience has been beneficial to them, for the new workforce which has joined our team.

The other—we have been cautious about—we made them aware that the rules for federal campaigns are different for the—as compared to the provincial. A common example is we don't require ID to vote on election day. Federally, ID to vote—ID is required to vote on election day. Plus, there is—the terminology is different; rules are different. So, in our training, we did emphasize to be mindful about the distinction between the federal campaign and the provincial election.

Mr. Goertzen: Watching the federal election, though, from Elections Manitoba perspective, were there lessons that were learned that—from that experience that you'll be putting into place in the provincial election?

Ms. Verma: We did receive some feedback from the election workers on their experience in the federal campaign, and we have taken that feedback, and we have incorporated that in our training.

Mr. Goertzen: What kind of feedback would that be? What were the kinds of experiences that they were having?

Ms. Verma: Some of the feedback was in relation to training. The federal campaign did an—they had made a significant investment in online training. What the—what we heard was it was effective, but they also prefer the in-house, the in-person training. So, given that it's only for—many people work for a day; they'd like the opportunity to ask questions. So—and luckily for us, we have incorporated—we have six new videos which we'll be using for training. These videos will be available on our website. The videos are on enumeration, advance voting and on election day voting. So—and our training session is interactive, so we do have a combination of PowerPoint presentation, the training videos will be available, and it's in person. So that was a major feedback that we received was in the training program.

There was also a concern about long lineups during advance voting. Statistics what we have from federal campaign right now—it's preliminary—but we understand there were around 200 advance voting locations in Manitoba. We have 291 in the last election; we'll be close to 300 again for this election. Our voting rules are different—and federally, you can only vote in your electoral division during advance voting; provincially, you can vote anywhere.

We also have a larger outreach in—for high-traffic voting locations, which were not—which wasn't present federally. So, having places at the airport, which will be going again, at the malls, the universities and colleges. We're also looking at—it's preliminary discussions, but we're looking at working with Health Sciences Centre if we can set up an advance voting location there.

Mr. Goertzen: So those locations for advance polls, and then I'm not even sure about the regular polls on election day. Have they been established and set?

Ms. Verma: Most of the election day voting stations has—have been set. That was part of the mapping exercise that we had done earlier and also the street keys, which we'll be providing to the parties. In January, we'll be providing them with a list of all the advance voting locations—of election day voting locations.

Advance, most of the locations, again, it's a work in progress. We are, for one-day lease or eight days' lease, people need time to have that materialized, but our mobile app, which is also getting launched in January, it will include the search for what is a voting location.

So our goal is right now, by end of December to finalize all the locations. Some may not still be finalized. I'm anticipating ones like in the mall, like Portage Place, Polo Park and St. Vital; that is taking time, and they usually finalize those locations more closer to the event rather than three months ahead of time.

* (14:40)

Mr. Goertzen: So, if I understood correctly, then, candidates or parties will be provided with the polling station list early in January. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: That is the plan. That's correct.

Mr. Goertzen: And—I guess I could probably find it on the list you provided—the electoral lists will be provided to candidates on what date?

Ms. Verma: March 10th is the date when the preliminary list will be produced. So I'm anticipating 10th or 11th the candidates will have their voters list.

Mr. Goertzen: And that's provided in some electronic form, correct? It's on a disk, still, right? It's not provided by email transmission?

Ms. Verma: It is still provided on a CD, which is password protected. We have a security system that once a CD is provided, then somebody from the candidate's campaign office has to call us then to access the security password. We also provide a print copy if that's requested.

Mr. Goertzen: And what format—this is not my area of expertise, you'll find out quickly—but what format is that database provided in?

Ms. Verma: I think it's Access-based.

Mr. Goertzen: Just a couple of questions regarding—I think everybody calls it the vote tax, but I know that's not what it's called. I think it's a per-vote subsidy, or there must be a more formal name for it that you'll advise me of. The date at which it's applied for by political parties and when it's actually distributed to political parties?

Ms. Verma: The political parties can, when they submit their annual return for a calendar year, at that time, unless they decline to accept the allowance, it will be provided to them. The deadline for the annual return is 31st of March, so that is usually the time period, unless they ask for an extension.

Mr. Goertzen: So the political returns are—have to be provided by March 31st, and then is it an automatic that the—full disclosure, everybody knows this, but for the record, I mean, the Conservative—Progressive Conservative Party doesn't accept the per-vote subsidy. But it is filed—but maybe that may have been a surprise to the member for Dawson Trail (Mr. Lemieux) and I'm happy to inform him and his constituents. But the March 31st date, you get—it gets—that's the deadline. Is it an automatic, then, that the—that that cheque gets cut, or is there a auditing process that first has to happen?

Ms. Verma: Unless it has been expressly declined, the annual allowance will be processed if the return is complete.

Mr. Goertzen: So there's some form of a check there, then, just to make sure that it's complete, but it's not an auditing function per se. It's just making sure the lines are filled in properly or there's something on every line?

Ms. Verma: It's an initial review of the return. If it seems to be complete and accurate, then the allowance will be processed. We will also check—the allowance is calculated in relation to the administrative expenses, so that's another form of check which is done.

Mr. Goertzen: Now, the allowance—sorry, I may have been confused. The allowance is based on the number of votes that the political party received in the previous general election. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: So the allowance has two components. Every party is eligible to receive \$100 for every candidate they have nominated in the election. That amount is deducted from \$600,000. The balance amount is proportionately distributed among all the parties based on the average of general election votes received in the preceding two general elections. Once that number has been established, then the allowance is lesser of the party's administrative operating and compliance expenses, as documented on their annual return, and as per Bill 47, it caps the allowance to the greater of \$100,000 or the amount that is 30 per cent less than the calculated amount, the formula which I'd explained earlier, as set out in the regulation.

Mr. Goertzen: That was pretty simple. Going back to the timing of it, though, so if a political party submits their annual return very early in January, they then receive the per vote subsidy, the vote tax, almost at the time that they've submitted the report, presuming that it's complete, and that would be for the previous calendar year that they're receiving it for. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: The payment can depend—it usually takes at least two weeks before we'll disburse the annual allowance amount, and it can vary depending upon how complete the return is or if there are any immediate questions about the return.

And the allowance is in relation the preceding year or the year for which the return has been filed. So, in 2015, the annual allowance was paid for 2014 as the return was for 2014. In 2016, by March 31st, each party has to submit their annual return for the year ending 31st December, 2015. They have three months so that they can complete the return, get it audited and file it with us. If a party can do it by end of January, then we'll process the return accordingly.

Mr. Goertzen: Okay, so I think I got it—well, the timing issue, not the formula, which I'll have to go back on Hansard to figure that out.

But the timing issue, then, it's not a—just for certainty, it's not a—it's a calendar year, not a fiscal year. It's not a March—or April 1st to March 31st; it's every calendar year that the subsidy is provided for. Is that correct?

Ms. Verma: That's correct. Under The Election Financing Act, all the returns other than the election returns, when we speak about the annual returns, they all follow a calendar year. So the parties follow a calendar year; the constituency associations follow a calendar year. The loans and deficit returns for the candidates, for leadership contestant, all follow a calendar year.

Mr. Goertzen: My last question is about—you've had a number of recommendations that you provided in your 2014 annual report, and I thank you for that. I know a lot of them have been outstanding for a while.

The issue of the election date—we have a fixed election day in terms of when the election is held but not a fixed start date. What problems does that cause from an Elections Manitoba perspective?

Ms. Verma: From an administrative perspective, there are no real challenges. This was more—the recommendation is more geared towards campaign spending. If you know—there are election spending limits for an election period. So, if you know that you have, say, \$50,000 to spend in 28 days or \$50,000 to spend in 35 days, it gives more clarity to the campaigns when they're planning for their budgeting purposes.

In relation to third party, it can also be helpful, because third-party spending limits are applicable for an election period. So not knowing when the election period will commence can also pose some challenges. We don't know that yet; this will be the first election where third—first general election where third-party restrictions will be applicable.

Mr. Goertzen: And I guess it causes problems for political parties as well because they're limited, in an election year, how much they're able to spend, and I guess they don't know exactly when that will end, if they don't know when the election date's going to start within a context of seven days. Is that right?

Ms. Verma: Yes, there are spending limits outside the election period for political parties and for candidates. So not knowing when the election period will commence may pose other challenges to them. The other factor for the parties and the candidates

could also be nomination, because nomination papers cannot be accepted 'til the time writ has been issued.

So, for us to process 200 nomination applications for seven days versus 14 days, there's a difference in the timing of it, and it does cause some tension for the parties and candidates when the turnaround has to be quicker but we still have to complete the whole verification process in a more condensed time period. It was done successfully last election. We are prepared to do it in whatever time frame is available for us.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chairperson, am I allowed to ask questions of the Premier (Mr. Selinger) during this committee as well?

Mr. Chairperson: I believe so, for as long as it's limited to the report.

* (14:50)

An Honourable Member: I'm sure you'll keep me in line if I'm not, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed, Mr. Goertzen.

Mr. Goertzen: Would the Premier care to disclose the start date of the election? We know the end date of the election, but would he care to disclose, in the context of fairness, the start date of the election?

Mr. Selinger: Some thought it started yesterday, but it hasn't officially started yet, and that day will be announced in due course.

Mr. Goertzen: Does the Premier agree with the recommendation that it would be more equitable if there was a set start date in addition to a set end date?

Mr. Selinger: I appreciate the rationale put forward by our Chief Electoral Officer in terms of adding certainty to expenditures and budgeting procedures, and that's something that we will take due regard of.

There's also—the original flexibility, I believe, was put in place to allow for unforeseen events which might occur, and planning around that when they do occur and to allow for some flexibility. And, as the member knows, the notion of a fixed-date election is relatively new to the Westminster system of governance and elections in Canada. It's an item that has come here from what appears to be American experience on fixed election dates, and I think there's a wide public discussion whether fixed election dates are to be desired or not desired in our type of democracy. For some people, it gives greater certainty as to when the election will occur. For other

people, it means that the election period and the campaigning period, in many cases, at least at an informal level, can go on for a longer period of time and distracts from the governance functions of government.

So there's lots of debate on that. We have adopted a system of a specific date by legislation with about a seven-day flexibility period as to when it starts, and we're completely open to reviewing that in terms of the pros and cons of that going forward.

Mr. Goertzen: The Premier (Mr. Selinger), though, has committed—I know he has pros and cons about a set election date—he's committed, though, to this particular election date as being firm and the date that the election is going to be held on. Is that correct?

Mr. Selinger: The date's set in legislation, and that is the date that I believe will be the election.

Mr. Goertzen: There may have been some confusion. I know his chief of staff had talked about it in the Winnipeg Free Press about not even having a session, which, I don't think, is actually allowed under our rules, so there may have been some confusion about that.

Did you want to clear up any of that confusion?

Mr. Selinger: I'd be happy to see the article. The date is April 19th, as set by law, and we have a sessional order as to what remaining time we have for a session that we've all agreed on.

Mr. Goertzen: I could show him the article, but he perhaps should just talk to his chief of staff, because his chief of staff talked about whether or not it was even desirable to have a session prior to an election, and I think the only way that could be avoided is to have the election prior to the set date, so he may want to examine that himself.

To the Chief Electoral Officer, the recommendation on the signatures, the 100 signatures—can you expand on that a bit about why, historically, we have those 100 signatures and why other jurisdictions have gone to less signatures?

Ms. Verma: I'm not aware about the rationale for the 100 signatures, how it came about. It has been there for a long time. Our recommendation came about through a discussion in the advisory committee where some members had expressed that, and we took that away and did some research around the 100 names. What we found was only Canada and Quebec require 100 names. All other jurisdictions

require less names. Saskatchewan, four; Alberta, 25; British Columbia, 75. Many jurisdictions range in the—around 25 names. So, considering the research, the concerns raised in the advisory committee, and also looking at the size of the electoral division, we established that 100 names may be more than what is necessary, given in Manitoba context, so that is why our recommendation came about to reduce the number of names.

To also point out the other jurisdictions also require a deposit, like, Canada requires a deposit of \$1,000; Saskatchewan, \$100; Alberta, \$500. We don't have a candidate deposit requirement. So there may be a requirement to have a balance between the number of names and the deposit.

Mr. Goertzen: My experience as a candidate has been that when we're collecting those signatures, people are confused in terms of why we're collecting the signatures, because they already, generally, see us as the candidate at that point because there's been enough awareness that we've been the candidate or that others are candidates in those areas. So they're confused about why it is we're collecting them, and they ask questions about, well, I thought you already were the candidate.

And, increasingly, I think that there are privacy concerns. People are wondering why you're collecting their addresses, and that's just with the overall concerns that people have, I guess, about privacy and some of the things that have happened in a negative way. When people collect data, even though that's not financial data or particularly personal, people still feel a sense of intrusion, I think, sometimes.

Are any of those concerns—do—does Elections Manitoba hear any of those concerns at times?

Ms. Verma: What we have heard from candidates is that 100 names seems to be a bit of a hardship for the candidates to collect.

What my understanding is that collecting the names provides some sort of an assurance or a reality check for the candidates to see what level of public support they have. For candidates who are already visible, who are incumbents, they may not need that level of assurance from the public, but for new candidates, they may be a requirement. So that could be one of the reasons for collecting names.

Privacy concerns, we haven't heard a lot about that from either the voter while providing their names or the signatures. There's also a process of

verification, so once those 100 names come, we do check them, check the addresses, check if they're already part of the voters list, they appear to be residents or not. If there is any concern about it, if the handwriting looks similar, the signatures look similar, we do do other verification of calling the people who have signed on the nomination papers to do verification.

Mr. Goertzen: But if I remember correctly—I don't have forms in front of me, although I've read them at, you know, sort of four-year intervals—the forms don't indicate that the person is supportive of the candidate in terms of they're going to vote for them, it just means that they're okay with them running, right? They don't have a particular grievance with them having their name on the ballot, but it really isn't an indication of support, is it?

Ms. Verma: If I can clarify my previous response, the support is not that you'll vote or don't vote for the candidate, but it's more to see—test their own public awareness of who they are. Sometimes when you're going collecting signatures, you are asked questions about which party will you be representing, what is your mandate. So assessing more about that public support rather than definitive support for voting or not voting for the candidate.

Mr. Goertzen: So, in comparison to other provinces, I know, was reading the report that indicated that Saskatchewan had as few as four signatures, and I'm not even sure what would be the value of that, if there's a legislative reason why there should be any signatures at all at that point.

But compared to other jurisdictions of similar sizes, I mean, what would seem to be maybe a better number? Do you have a suggestion? Is 25? Would that seem to be something where it puts some onus on a candidate but isn't something that's restrictive or seems overly difficult for a candidate?

Ms. Verma: We don't have any recommendation on the exact number of signatures. We can provide you with the research, but I think this matter is best left to the legislators to decide upon the number of names.

Mr. Goertzen: Can you talk a little bit about preparation for the permanent voters list? I know we've passed legislation to allow some of those things to happen in terms of gathering information, but can you just talk a bit about what that process is and what the—we're again going back to those typical reporter questions—what cost implications there may be to that?

* (15:00)

Ms. Verma: So the Bill 45 which was recently passed gave us the authority to collect name, date of birth and gender information. What we are doing with that is our enumeration videos—which will be also on the website and in our communication material, our advertisements—we will be including the new requirement to include—to collect date of birth and gender information. Our—we are including that in our training of the election workers. We are trying to be also mindful of the fact that these are optional information which is being provided. So the enumerator should be requesting this information, but the voter doesn't have an obligation to provide for.

All our manuals and guides have been changed. All our—some are in the process of being changed. Forms have been changed for revision, for homebound, absentee and the enumeration slip, which is called 201, all those have been changed to incorporate the additional requirement for gender and date of birth. For the swear-on, again, the oath books, there might be some changes coming up in that to record that information.

The current cost for implementing date of birth and gender information is not significant. It's part of the process. We were updating the forms; we could include those changes in it, and the printing of the forms had to be done to restock for the next election.

Going forward, when on a permanent voters list report, we had provided an estimate that we will be requiring around five new staffing resources in case a register has to be implemented. There will be additional costs in relation to the security, our IT network, program development, and after that, program maintenance costs. The enumeration, we are projecting, but will be budgeted around \$3.2 million for the 2016 general election. The cost for having those additional staffing resources and for the maintenance and development could be close to \$2 million. We're not—I'm not 100 per cent sure about the number because it will also depend upon what kind of legislative requirements come through a permanent register.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Midland): I was wondering if you could go back about identification required to vote. And I'm thinking in terms of the federal election; they were fairly rigorous, but it was worthwhile, as to my understanding. What identification is required, both in the—on election day and advance polls and these, whatever it is you call

them, airport polls, or whatever it is, where you can vote anywhere?

Ms. Verma: So I'll start with the election day ID requirements. If you're already on the voters list through enumeration or through revision, then you do not require any identification in order to vote on election day. If you are not on the voters list on election day, then ID requirements, as specified in section 2 of The Elections Act, you either need one piece of photo ID or two other pieces of identification, which could be your health card, your credit card bill, your hydro bill. And if any of these pieces of ID do not have a proof of address, then you can sign a declaration for your current address.

For advance voting, the provisions are—in Manitoba are that you can vote at any advance voting location. Advance voting occurs in two forms. You can either be a resident advance voter; that means you belong to that particular electoral division in which you are voting. Or you could be a non-resident advance voter, meaning you're voting in an electoral division which is not your home electoral division. In either case, you require ID to vote, and the ID requirements are the same as for swear-on, specified under section 2 of The Elections Act: one piece of photo ID or two other pieces of ID. If none of those have your address, then you can sign a declaration for your current address.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Appreciate your presentation; it's very helpful.

In regards to the voters and ID'ing the voters, since the flood of 2011, we've had several residents that's been out of their community for, you know, some will be up to four years, some will be maybe not quite that long. Some will return; some will not. How's that being determined for the voters list, and how will that be communicated to the candidates or the party?

Ms. Verma: So to give a bit of a background to that, we understand—and these are numbers which we have received from Red Cross directly, as they are managing the evacuee program right now—from the 2011 Interlake electoral division, the number which we have is 1,933 people are still out of Interlake division. We also have numbers from 2014 evacuees of 332 people who are not—no longer in Interlake, so that gives us around 2,200 people.

If we go by the legislation, the residency legislation states: A person is a resident of the place where he or she has his or her ordinary residence and

to which he or she intends to return when away from it. If you look at a strict interpretation of that legislation, people who have been residing here since 2011 could be Winnipeg residents. Even if they may want to return back, we don't know if the original residence is habitable or not.

The other issue which we are looking at is we don't have information about their addresses. That information is with Red Cross, and due to privacy reasons, they are not willing to share that information with us.

The third factor to consider is that—the way our voters list is created. We go door to door collecting names through enumeration. Unlike the federal, who have a permanent register, we don't even know where these people are, so they could be spread out in Manitoba or in Winnipeg, so it's very difficult for us to identify who is an evacuee right now.

So this is a issue which we are still deliberating about how to deal with it. We are planning to discuss it in the advisory meeting which will occur in January with the advisory committee members. Until that time, we are planning to collect more information, how it was dealt at a federal level and how does our current legislation—can be adapted to make some special circumstances. We do want to give the voters the right to vote where they would like to vote, but what does the legislation say and how can we apply it to the current scenario?

This is a unique circumstance. It has not been considered in the current election—or legislation, but we will be consulting with the advisory committee on this matter.

Mr. Eichler: Are checks and balances in place to ensure they're only voting once and not twice? Even though they may be living in Winnipeg, they may want to vote, say, in Dauphin if that's where their—community they came from or whatever they're came from. How is that going to work?

Ms. Verma: That is a risk which I would say is present in all circumstances. Any voter who has two different pieces of ID with two separate residences, or even if they don't have a residence, can declare whatever residency they have while voting.

The checks and balances which we can have is, in case the voter is a non-resident voter, the vote is in a certificate envelope, and if we can identify they voted twice, the vote can be pulled out and not counted.

However, hypothetically, if an Interlake voter is living in Winnipeg, gets enumerated on the Winnipeg voters list, they can—and they probably have some ID showing that they are a resident of Winnipeg, they can go on election day, they don't need ID, they'll vote on election day. Prior to that, they can go to the Interlake division, too, if they have an ID and vote as a resident voter in Interlake.

The way our voters list is created, it's individually done for every electoral division. There is no collective, integrated provincial voters list. We do put the names list together to provide it to the parties, but that happens post-event.

So there is that—it is an inherent risk in the process that there could be a person who has voted twice. Has it happened? Not to our knowledge. Can it happen? There is a possibility.

* (15:10)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Let me start with the recommendations. There's quite a list of recommendations which are still outstanding and carried forward starting on page 35 of the report, and I wanted to ask in general—I don't remember having had so many outstanding recommendations not being implemented before. There would be—because we are sitting in February and March—there would be a possibility of passing legislation which would implement some of these, but, of course, that would be very difficult because that's immediately before the election and all the plans are in place at this juncture. It—what would be your sense? It would not be advisable to, it would seem to me, to implement these before the election, given that circumstance, but are there some which are so critical which actually should be implemented before?

Ms. Verma: Currently, there's seven recommendations which are outstanding. In the past, we have had a situation where there were lots of recommendations which were outstanding; 2006, when The Elections Act was rewritten, the majority of the recommendations were incorporated in the new act at that point of time.

Right now, for election planning, our inventory of forms in all our—we are close to procurement of most of the material because our first shipping will start in January, second week; our shipping is starting of all the computers and enumeration material. Election offices are scheduled to be opened

on 1st of February with the enumeration beginning on 4th of February. So any changes at this point will be quite challenging to incorporate.

Among the recommendations, the nomination paper one, if it's required, we can make that adjustment. It will still require quite a few changes in the manuals and guides and the forms and our website. It can be done.

The leave of absence has already been implemented with the recent bill. Institution voting station has been included in the recent bill. Providing copies of preliminary voters lists is done. Absentee voting, that one I will not recommend to be changed at this point because absentee provisions are already in place now. New brochures are out and people have already started applying for it. The absentee provision will also require a consecutive change of providing—the way we have made the recommendation is that on an absentee ballot, either the name of the party or the name of the candidate can be written because we are recommending that the acceptance of the packages should begin once the writ has been issued and not once the nomination has been closed.

Notice of election, if that goes, I think we can still implement that change. Set election period, it will require changes. Campaign finance material, a lot of changes will be required there. Revision period—that—the timing of the production of the revised voters list will need to be changed, but it's something which can be implemented even right now. Restrictions on government advertising and recoverability of late-filing fee, they do not impact election planning from our perspective.

Did I answer all the questions? [*interjection*]

Mr. Chairperson: Dr. Gerrard.

Mr. Gerrard: For somebody who's wanting an absentee ballot, right, when is the earliest date that that person can register with you to get an absentee ballot?

Ms. Verma: They can register starting even now. We have started accepting the absentee applications. The legislation states that before the writ has been issued, the absentee applications have to be received by our office so currently we are receiving. If the returning office is open, even if though they'll receive it, they'll forward it back to us because that's the way legislation reads. Once the writ has

been issued, then we provide the applications to the returning offices to be processed. Once the nomination closed, that's the earliest when the applications can be received back from the absentee applicants.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, on the absentee ballots which—if somebody wants to register, what is the process so that if they were to register today, for example?

Ms. Verma: The process to register for an absentee applicant is they have to complete an application form, which is available on our website or we can mail a form to them. They also have to provide us with ID in support of their application, so a photocopy of their driver's licence or any other two pieces of ID. They also have to sign a declaration that they are eligible voters.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, do you do any checks once somebody has registered, because if they register now for several months ahead of time, you know, somebody might move or something might happen? Something—somebody might pass away. What's the?

Ms. Verma: So, if they register right now, we do check with them. If they were doing it in October, they have to be six months resident by April 19th. So we were checking what will be your residency. If you'll be leaving on 1st of October and you're not back 'til April 19th, then you're no longer considered to be resident for election purposes. It will be more than six months' period. Once the applications are sent back to the returning officers, they check if the person was on the voters list or they'll have to add them onto the voters list. For deceased, that is something—it doesn't come directly to our attention unless a relative or another person will bring it to our attention that this person is no longer alive. We don't get that information from Vital Statistics with the—who are the deceased people in the past six to eight months.

Mr. Gerrard: Now, for an individual, say, an individual with a disability who is homebound and wants to have the ability to vote without having to go to a voting station, what is the process there, and when can somebody register for that?

Ms. Verma: Homebound voting is an option which is available under our legislation. So most common cases for homebound voting—our enumerator goes to every residence. They carry a homebound application along with them. If any voter expresses the desire to be—to have the voting option for homebound voting, they can complete the

homebound voting application while the enumerator is there, or the enumerator can leave an application with them and they can deliver it back to the returning officer, mail it back to the returning officer at a later date. The homebound provisions in Manitoba allow not just a person with any disability but also their caregiver to vote as homebound voters. Once the application is received by the returning officer and is processed accordingly, if it's determined that the person is an eligible homebound voter, then the returning officer will arrange with the voter to go at a predetermined time to help them cast their ballot.

The check which has happened is if the person says, sorry, I'm away, I'm shopping right now in the mall, they're—they may not be accepted as a homebound voter because if you're out in the mall, you can probably vote on advance or election day.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, just a little bit more clarification on this: Is that application form also available online, and what is the earliest that somebody could fill it out and submit it?

Ms. Verma: I believe that form is available on our website, but I'd like to confirm it. And I can let you know about that. The earliest they can apply is once enumeration begins.

Mr. Gerrard: At the moment, Elections Manitoba is doing training or learning for people on aspects related to elections finance. The—first of all, just a quick outline of the areas where you're providing training, and (b) where access to the dates would be available.

Ms. Verma: The information sessions that we are providing, those dates are available on our website. You can register through our website. We also advise all the parties about the upcoming sessions. So we have a new schedule starting from January which will be in effect. Usually, we have two to three sessions every month. We try to do one in the evening and one on the weekend.

* (15:20)

The areas which are covered in this information session are the role and responsibility of an official agent, the key campaign finance concepts. We also talk about common issues from the previous elections, which are what errors that we find on the election returns. We also talk about the record-keeping disk and the filing disk which we provide.

We also discuss the different material which is provided to each official agent. When an official agent is appointed, a kit is provided to them. It includes the legislation, manuals and guides, also all the necessary forms they will require as an official agent. And also, it includes a record-keeping tool and a filing disk for preparing the financial return.

The candidates are also provided some information on the key dates and the forms required under Election Financing Act. The candidates are also provided a kit under The Elections Act which includes maps, index, nomination forms and other forms which they may—might require like scrutineer information.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, on the advance polls, is it accurate that wherever the advance poll is a person can vote not just in their own district but in anywhere—at any advanced poll?

Ms. Verma: Yes, all advance voting locations, you can vote either as a resident voter or as a non-resident voter.

And—just got it confirmed, that homebound application is not on the website, but it's a good suggestion and we'll try to put this form on the website.

Mr. Gerrard: And just to come back to this advance poll voting, just to understand the checks that you do to make sure that somebody doesn't advance vote in more than one location. If, as an example, they were living in Winnipeg and then voted in Flin Flon or something like that, all right? I'm sure you must have some sort of internal checks, but maybe you can just talk about that.

Ms. Verma: To give a bit of a background, advance voting is for eight continuous days. It starts on a Saturday, ends on a Saturday; it's from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. When you're a voting resident, then the resident voters list is available at all the resident locations for that electoral division. So the name is struck off when you vote as a resident voter in real time.

That list of voters is provided to the returning officer and through the returning officer to us too. The returning officer will ensure that all the voting books—all the voters lists at the end of the day are updated, or first thing in the morning before the polls open at 8 o'clock.

Now non-resident voters—that follows a different system. Non-resident voters, there is not a

province-wide voters list which is available at the 300 locations. So they have to provide the list of all the non-resident voters to the head office. So, after 8 o'clock, we get the list of all non-resident voters from across the province. We have a system where we will put all the names together, classify them as per their home electoral division, send that information overnight to all the 57 returning officers. Before 8 o'clock, other than updating the list for the resident voters, they will have a list of the non-resident voters of people who have voted outside their division, and the returning officer is required to update all the voters lists.

So, within 24 hours, the names are updated on all the voters lists. It does account for long hours, because depending upon division, some divisions have a high volume of non-resident voters. So a returning officer's day usually starts by 6 or 6:30 and ends by 10 o'clock every night. At the head office, we also start at almost the same time, but we end almost by midnight, at least, in order to ensure all this information is put together, is verified internally, then sent out to all the 57 divisions overnight.

Mr. Gerrard: And thank you for your thoroughness in doing this and making sure we really have a strong democracy here. I think that's really important, and thank you for looking to put the application for homebound voters online.

Mr. Chair, those are my questions. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Dr. Gerrard.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Mineral Resources): It appears to me we're close to winding up. We are—I want to, on behalf of all the committee members, really express gratitude to the Chief Electoral Officer and her officials. It's very, very impressive work. I don't know any jurisdiction that works as hard, probably, to get out as many voters. I recall from the last meeting that 93 per cent of Manitobans are caught in our enumeration list, and we're even going further, with the assistance of all the parties, to go to a permanent voters list.

I genuinely am very, very—I think we all want to thank you for the excellent work that you do and the efficient way that you've brought better democracy to Manitoba and to thank you for the work that you've done internationally, which we've talked about before, and assist in internationally, which many of us, all of us, are interested in as well. So just a big thank-you and well done from—

Mr. Chairperson: Do you wish to respond, Ms. Verma?

Ms. Verma: Very humble—thank you. I think I have a great team which supports me and the office in all this process, and they are really looking forward to the next election. And we are appreciative of the amendments which just went through, giving us the ability to collect gender and date of birth. So thank you very much.

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions, I will now put the questions on each report.

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

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2012 including the conduct of the Fort Whyte by-election September 4, 2012—pass.

Permanent Voters List Study, report dated June 2013—pass.

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2013—pass.

Shall the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2014 including the conduct of the 2014 Arthur-Virden and Morris by-elections pass?

An Honourable Member: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

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

Before we rise, it would be appreciated if members would leave behind any unused copies of the report so it may be collected and reused at the next meeting.

The hour being 3:29 in the afternoon, what is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Committee rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

Thank you very much.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 3:29 p.m.

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