

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

Chairperson
Mr. James Teitsma
Constituency of Radisson

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-Second Legislature

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ADAMS, Danielle	Thompson	NDP
ALTOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Wednesday, November 27, 2019

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

CHAIRPERSON – Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson)

VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere)

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Messrs. Cullen, Pedersen

Mses. Adams, Fontaine, Gordon, Messrs. Johnston, Micklefield, Ms. Morley-Lecomte, Messrs. Moses, Teitsma, Wasyliv

APPEARING:

Mr. Dougal Lamont, MLA for St. Boniface

Ms. Shipra Verma, Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Manitoba

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31, 2018, Including Conduct of the St. Boniface byelection, dated July 17, 2018

* * *

Clerk Assistant (Mr. Tim Abbott): Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs please come to order.

The first item of business is the election of a new chairperson. Are there any nominations for this position?

Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River): I nominate Mr. Teitsma.

Clerk Assistant: Mr. Teitsma has been nominated. Are there any other nominations?

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

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

Are there any nominations?

Mr. Scott Johnston (Assiniboia): I nominate Mr. Micklefield.

Mr. Chairperson: Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Micklefield is elected Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to consider the following report: Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2018, Including Conduct of the St. Boniface byelection, dated July 17th, 2018.

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

Mr. Johnston: I would suggest 7 o'clock or earlier, if the committee is finished—concludes earlier.

Mr. Chairperson: So the suggestion is to sit until 7 o'clock or earlier by agreement. Does that seem reasonable to the committee? *[Agreed]*

Does the minister responsible wish to make an opening statement? And would he also please introduce the officials in attendance.

Hon. Cliff Cullen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I welcome everyone to the committee tonight.

First of all, I will introduce Shipra Verma, who is the Chief Electoral Officer for Elections Manitoba. Certainly, welcome tonight, and thank you and your staff for all your work throughout the year. We know it's a lot of work outside of even the election period and, certainly, we had a busy election period over the last number of months, but we thank you for—and your staff for your work.

So tonight we're going to review the annual report for Elections Manitoba for 2018. Clearly the work of this committee is about enhancing and protecting the electoral process, and we're always looking for ways to make sure that we strengthen the democratic process here in Manitoba.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I know Ms. Verma has some comments she'd like to make, and that's it for me.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister.

Does the official opposition also wish to make an opening statement?

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Well, first and foremost, I want to once again just acknowledge the Chief Electoral Officer. I know that every time we come to committee I'm always singing your praises, but I do think that you are absolutely phenomenal in the job that you do on behalf of all of Manitobans, and I really particularly just want to acknowledge you as a woman working in this field, and I want to acknowledge the work of all of your staff. I—you know, certainly everybody around the table knows and understands that your staff and your department had less a year to get ready for a provincial election, and I just want to acknowledge and say miigwech on behalf of our NDP caucus for all of your hard work.

You know, we know that Manitobans are proud of how diverse and ethnically rich our province is, and with our ever-growing diversity and population we must be increasing access to our political systems. Certainly, a level playing field is fundamental to ensuring all Manitobans can equally and fully participate in the democratic process. True democracy allows individuals from all walks of life to participate to their full extent.

We have been pretty vocal on—in contrast to some of the pieces of legislation that we have understood and see as an attack and a dismantling of democracy on behalf of the Pallister government. We know that since taking office in 2016 there has been a very strategic, methodical and co-ordinated response to unpacking and dismantling democracy in the province, and it begins by several bills that the Pallister government passed.

And we know that the end of a per-vote subsidy for registered political parties, a raise to the political donation allowance and a reduction in the campaign rebates, and now their proposal to end the rebate altogether, disproportionately disadvantages smaller political parties and certainly disadvantages individuals who have not been 'represented' in this Manitoba Legislature. We have been certainly very, very vocal about that in the last three and a half years—the importance of ensuring that people have equitable participation in the democratic process, and we are seeing that that is completely eroded here in Manitoba. It certainly impacts racialized and economically marginalized Manitobans who fear the financial burden that is placed upon them following the campaign.

I do want to note, and I said this repeatedly in the House last session, near the end of last session, when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) did announce that he was going to break the fixed-election law, that there are provinces across the country that, you know, don't seek to dismantle the democratic process but actually ensure that everybody has an opportunity to participate in that. And I did read out several examples across the country, including Quebec, who invests a substantial amount of dollars to ensure that there's equity in our democratic process. I would hope, or I would suggest that, you know, the Pallister government can walk back some of their legislation and look at ensuring that we have a full, comprehensive and equitable democratic processes here in Manitoba.

So, finally, again, I do just want to acknowledge the Chief Electoral Officer and all of her staff, on behalf of all Manitobans, in ensuring that we had an election, and that, despite having limited time than was initially anticipated, we appreciate all of the work. Miigwech.

* (18:10)

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the member.

Does the Chief Electoral Officer wish to make an opening statement?

Ms. Shipra Verma (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Manitoba): Yes.

Mr. Chairperson: Ms. Verma.

Ms. Verma: Good evening, Mr. Chairperson and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me and my staff to discuss the 2018 annual reports, and also for your positive remarks.

The values which this office upholds of fairness and participation are dear to me and all my staff and we try our best to uphold them.

I'm joined today by Debbie MacKenzie, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, and Tracy Nysten, Manager of Election Finances.

Today my remarks will cover the 2018 annual report, provide a brief overview of the 42nd general election, an update on our efforts to modernize the voting process and also a recap of our recommendations.

At this point, I would like to express my appreciation to all those who participated in this general election, including all of you. My headquarters and field staff, registered parties and

candidates, suppliers and partners, volunteers and voters all have shared in fulfilling our province's commitment to the democratic process.

Starting with the 2018 annual report, it includes information on our annual activities, the conduct and financial reporting for the St. Boniface by-election and two major projects that we worked on, which are developing processes and policies for use of the Manitoba Voter Register, which will be called the register, and providing support to the Electoral Divisions Boundaries Commission.

With the creation phase of the register complete, we have moved into the maintenance phase, which involves ongoing updates and validation of data in the register. We also developed processes for staff to update and confirm voter and address information. In 2018, we also conducted the by-election in St. Boniface, where we had an opportunity to test some functionality of the register. We implemented some of the operational changes required under the amendments to the legislation, allowing us to refine our processes for the general election.

Also in 2018, I participated in the Electoral Divisions Boundaries Commission as one of the commissioners. My office provided administrative, mapping and communication support. Fifty-six of the 57 electoral division boundaries were changed. The final report of the commission was submitted on December 14th.

Now, turning to the general election held on September 10th, early in the new year we began work on our maps, the recruitment campaign for returning officers and assistant returning officers, followed by training.

Key election dates were: The writ was issued on August 12th. The same day, we distributed the preliminary voters list to parties and candidates and voter information cards to the public. Nomination closed on the 26th, with 235 candidates nominated from seven registered parties. Advance voting ran for eight days, from August 29th to September 5th. Election day was September 10th. Looking ahead, candidate and party financial returns are due January 10th, 2020.

In this election, 870,000 voters on the final voters list were there. Of that number, 479,000 cast a ballot. Turnout registered was 55 per cent. It did drop by 2 per cent, but it's important to note that while the percentage declined, the overall number of voters increased by 35,000, which is 7.8 per cent over 2016.

Advance voting was held in 326 locations, with voters able to vote at any advance location in this province. On election day, 2,310 regular voting stations were open, along with 136 institutional voting stations in hospitals, care homes and other facilities. The approximate total cost to conduct this election was \$11 million, which is within the projected budget.

As estimated, the use of the register resulted in a more complete voters list for this election. The register was launched in mid-April. We carried out several activities to support registration and updates by voters. These included in-person registration and a province-wide mailing.

This was the first election where a voter information card was mailed to all voters. Based on the experience of other jurisdictions, we expected 10 per cent of our voter information cards to be returned. However, we received fewer than 3 per cent back. So, we considered that to be a reflective—a reflection of an accurate voters list.

Detailed post-election assessment is currently in process and will be reported in the next year's annual report.

Last time, when we came before this meeting, we presented a proposal to modify the voting process for the upcoming general election. There were three specific changes we recommended: using technology during advance voting, which allowed voters to be looked up and struck off the voters list in real time; a revised voting book for advance to support the strike-off method; and a pre-printed voting book for election day which unified all voters lists and struck off all those who had previously voted.

After demonstrating the modifications to the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs, we received informal approval to implement them during the general election. The modifications met the three objectives set out in section 28 of The Elections Act: improving the voting process for voters; achieving administrative efficiencies; and maintaining the integrity of the process.

Of our 326 advance voting locations, 194 used real-time strike-off. Overall, the processes were efficient and effective, and were met with positive responses from both voters and staff. We are now developing a report on the modification, which will include our assessment and any recommendations. The report will appear in our 2019 annual report.

We will also begin exploring options for modernizing the election day voting process. This will

require analysis on logistics, cost, connectivity, voting officials' training and assessment of benefits to stakeholders.

Before I close today, I would like to touch on the three recommendations which have been carried forward. One is to reimburse 100 per cent of reasonable disability and child-care expenses to all candidates to encourage more inclusive participation. The second is to include a time period for recovery of late filing fees, which is also under The Election Financing Act.

A final recommendation carried forward is to establish a single address authority for Manitoba. As I've previously mentioned, Manitoba does not have consistent addressing standards, which poses a significant challenge in achieving the level of accuracy we wish to attain for the register.

Consistent address standards will improve the validation and matching process used to assign a voter to a voting place, enhance the quality of the register, improve the efficiency across various departments and agencies in this province.

While the civic addressing standard for Manitoba documents outlines the rules and conventions for addressing in Manitoba, the standard is simply a guideline, and addressing remains the responsibility of each local jurisdiction.

Currently, no single department or organization in Manitoba is responsible for assigning addresses. We would be pleased to collaborate with any efforts to undertake a centralized addressing initiative.

This concludes my remarks. We have some handouts to share with the committee members, which is a quick overview of the numbers for this general election and a map showing a voter turnout.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, Ms. Verma.

Maybe give a moment for the handouts to be distributed.

The floor is now open for questions.

Ms. Fontaine: Do you think that fixed-date-election laws facilitate public awareness of Manitoba elections and your officers' time to adequately notify the public of an election?

Ms. Verma: What we find with the voters' behaviour—and this is reflective of how they update the voter

information—is for us, election is the prime business. We are in the—we are working for Elections Manitoba. We live and breathe elections. But for voters it is when the election date is near; that is when election awareness arises. We do our best to have more outreach programs and education programs, but the effect is not that widespread.

* (18:20)

So the concept of a fixed-date election, I'm not sure how much of significance it carries with the—with Manitobans. For us, it is the way we plan our work. We work on a four-year election cycle, and all our processes and equipment purchasing, inventory, everything is planned according to a four year. But for the office there's also a mandate to be election ready. So we have to work on a contingency plan as—alongside with our four-year planning.

Ms. Fontaine: So to follow up in respect of your last—the latter part of your answer, there, so when an early election is called—and, obviously, this last 2019 was an early election—how does that impact, then, on your department and the ability to recruit staff and really execute the plan that you're talking about? And does that in any way hinder that you have less a year to be able to execute that work?

Ms. Verma: Well, extra time is always welcome for—I think, for any organization.

This election, for my office, we were implementing quite a few new things. The boundaries were new, which resulted, if you see the handout, 2,800 maps which had to be completed in a shorter time frame. The register implementation was there. We had new IT systems. We had the modifications which were going in. And, of course, the recruitment of around 8,000 staff members. But, from experience, we didn't see—the challenge in recruiting was quite similar in what we would have in a set-date election, also.

So, yes, an extra time is always welcome. But, as I said, the mandate is to be election ready, and we are quite satisfied with the way the election was delivered.

Ms. Fontaine: The advanced—or, the early election, did it impact on the department's ability to train all of the staff, which I think—I believe you said 8,000—coupled with also securing advance polls and election day polls?

Was that in any way impacted, as well?

Ms. Verma: It was challenging to recruit that—those many—that many people and to complete our training.

But we were still able to complete whatever we desired to do. So, if you see the number of advance voting locations, 326, they have increased from the previous election, which was 293.

For voting places and locations, we still—again, having a federal election which was quite close to the provincial, there was some—a higher demand for returning office space as there were lots of candidates also looking at the similar spaces. But, thankfully, we were able to secure all the logistics that we were wanting to, to conduct this election.

Ms. Fontaine: We've discussed, you know, staffing and polling and some of the new measures that were undertaken. Is there anything else that maybe we don't know of, because, obviously, you are the expert in respect of the administration of an election? Is there anything else that you found was impacted? And not necessarily negatively, it's just expeditiously in respect of this last 2019.

Were there other pieces that were—we're not aware of?

Ms. Verma: No, the office is—has been pretty transparent about what we were doing. We were consulting with the advisory committee on a regular basis. We provided them with all the information which was needed for the upcoming election.

Certainly, there were long hours for the headquarter staff, which is present in any election—a little bit more in this election. But, other than that, things went as planned.

Ms. Fontaine: So, as I'm sure you're well aware, a lot of the narrative—or, the discourse that was kind of presented in justifying an early election was Manitoba 150. And I am curious, in your expertise—because, again, I would suggest to everybody around the table, you are the expert in—at this table—do you find that any of—or, do you believe any of the Manitoba 115 celebrations—150 celebrations would have impacted on the fixed-date-election law, which was October of 2020.

Ms. Verma: I believe it would be a bit speculative of my—on my part to respond to this question, as we are not aware of what the celebration involves. But my office is equipped to deliver the election as and when needed.

Ms. Fontaine: So with the new voter registration system coming in to effect for this election, how did you find the new system and processes? How did you find that they functioned during this past election?

Ms. Verma: So the way the register has been compiled is we receive data. It was—the base was the 2016 final voters list, was the base for the register.

Once the legislation was approved, was passed, we started—we got into data-sharing agreements with different data sources, which were Manitoba Health, MPI, Elections Canada. All the—and also procuring through a competitive process a vendor who would help us create the register.

All this was completed in 2018. So 2019, when the maintenance phase was going on, we were in the—we developed rules, too, for data matching and validation.

The rules are—it will take time to mature the register. This was a first general election that we used it. We opened it to the public in April, did a soft launch through our website where online registration and verification of the address and voter information was provided to the voters.

We also did a mail-out sometime in June to encourage the voters to visit our website to confirm the voter information.

The list which was sent out in—when the writ was issued was around 95 per cent complete, so if we go back, look at the processes which have been developed, I won't say they are perfect, but for a first general election they did—it was quite a good job.

It's also reflective on the number of returned voter information cards that we received, which was just 3 per cent—20,000.

Ms. Fontaine: So, with the new voter registration and all of those processes, is it correct that door-to-door enumeration had decreased?

Ms. Verma: Yes. With the new register, the—previously, enumeration was 100 per cent door-to-door registration.

With the register, the door-to-door was specific to target areas, so places of high mobility, places of condominiums or apartments or places where we saw gaps in our register. Target registration was focused in those areas.

Ms. Fontaine: So those would be considered, like, internal enumeration targets, I'm assuming.

So how are we ensured that people are registered if there was less door-to-door enumeration?

Ms. Verma: So our analysis is based on the number which we got from census. That gives us estimation

of what should be the total eligible voter population in Manitoba. And if we compare the number on the register with the estimated citizens with six-months residency, we are 95 per cent complete.

The previous voters list was 87 per cent complete. And we have—in comparison to the previous list, we are 95,000 more voters.

Ms. Fontaine: So one of the things that I'm sure everybody around the table, or most people around the table is—that we find difficulty, is accessing apartments or condos. In fact, there were several apartment buildings that I just could not get into, and I heard that from several candidates.

Are there any plans, because even though we have those little cards that say, you know, sometimes it just does not work. Other apartments are just beautiful and just so great, but there are still difficulties in accessing those different spaces.

Are there any plans to help increase that public education or increase access to those buildings?

* (18:30)

Ms. Verma: As part of a preparation task, each returning officer contacts the apartments and condominiums to touch base and get information to the management company and provide information that the candidates have a right to access this apartment or location for campaigning purposes. We have developed templates to provide to each of these complexes, so—and we work with the advisory committee in providing this information to all of them.

So, if a candidate would have issues in accessing these properties, we would try to work with the management company and advise them of the law, of how it is required for them to give access.

It wasn't perfect in all cases, and sometimes by the—when the returning officers are contacting them to the time when the election actually occurs, there is a change in the personnel or there's a change in the management company side. So we are wanting to work more closely with them, and if you have any suggestions which you can share with us, we'll be happy to follow up on it.

Ms. Fontaine: So what was your office and your employees' experience with implementing the new boundary changes prior to this past election?

Ms. Verma: So with the new boundaries, all—since 56 of the 57 boundaries were changed, we had to—all the maps were developed, 2,800 maps were developed,

and the returning officer—assistant returning officer had to work closely with us to ensure all the voting places, which had to be reassigned, continued to be accessible.

That was one of the main challenges with the new boundaries, is to provide new voting places and accessibility, and also voters are—providing voter education. So providing voter information card, which had the new boundaries, generated some interest, as people may not—were not aware at times that the boundaries have changed. So that's what we were focusing on, to ensure that the voter gets to the right place to vote.

Ms. Fontaine: Were there any, like, missed steps or issues in the implementation of the new boundaries that came from an early election?

Ms. Verma: Not to my knowledge. We are currently conducting our post-assessment and debriefing, so if anything comes, it will be reported in our annual report.

Ms. Fontaine: Did any of the changes in boundaries create increased workloads for any of your staff?

Ms. Verma: I think changing the boundaries, there is an effect in all the other areas which we are working on. The website has to be updated, because the address look-up will change. The maps have changed. The voting areas have changed. The voting locations have changed. The register had to be updated with all the new information, and there was more verification internally, which had to be done to ensure no address is missed.

So, when we transferred all the old address—old boundary information to the new boundary information, we wanted to be sure it's a complete transfer, and we are not missing any voters in this transition process.

Ms. Fontaine: The by-election was your first opportunity to test the new online training for returning officers, assistant returning officers and voting officials. How efficient and effective was this training method?

Ms. Verma: We have done a debriefing with the returning officers and assistant returning officers, post by-election and also the general election. They have positive comments on the training. The online training does not replace the in-person training. It complements it. So—and the good feature about is they can access it from home. They want to refresh a topic, that's available for them online.

Similarly for the voting officials, they have a log-in information. Before the election day, if they want to go and refresh their knowledge, that's available, so it worked in a positive way.

Ms. Fontaine: So to be clear, that was kind of a married strategy that you did online and in person, so everybody also got the in-person training?

Ms. Verma: That's correct. The online training did not eliminate the in-person training.

So to give you an—for the general election, we used to have three training sessions for the returning officers. We were able to combine it to two training sessions and the online version—the same for the voting officers and assistant voting officers. The in-person training used to be between the range of two to three hours. So, if they did the online version, they will—still had an opportunity to come in person and do a shorter training session and get any questions answered.

Ms. Fontaine: Can you give us, like, a just, walk us through how that training would—like, in a week, what does that training look like? If—because if you're thinking that there's 8,000, what does that look like for your department and all of your staff?

Ms. Verma: So we are dealing with two different staff competences. One is the returning officers and assistant returning officers. They are given more intensive training because basically there are 57 independent offices which are established during an election. Each returning officer is responsible for conducting the election in their respective electoral division. So they need to be trained on every phase. Along that—alongside with that, they also have to complete pre-writ work which is work leading to an election. To support them, we have the head office staff, and we also hire support staff which are field support staff and head office support staff. So each returning officer has two contacts alongside with the head office.

Now, coming to the field officials who are around seven to eight thousand, it is a train-the-trainer method that is used. So the online training captured the different aspects was on—for election-day specific or for advance voting day: how the table has to be set, what material do you need, how is the count to be recorded, what you—what precautions do you need to take care of, what are the accessibility features which are available, how to handle the scrutineers, what you should be aware of, what's allowed, what's not allowed, how the count has to be conducted, how the

place has to be closed and how the result has to be reported.

In contrast, to the returning office, it has to be: how the office has to open, how the office has to be set up, the office needs to be accessible, how are you hiring staff, how the payroll has to be completed, what IT equipment you'll be receiving, how will you be using that technology, what are the reporting requirements for head office, when do you need to hire people. The whole election calendar is outlined for them. Everyday activities are provided to them. This—these are the things which you have to do on a day-to-day basis; looking ahead, what you have to do. Staffing within the returning office is explained to them.

So the online version had respective—like, we had two-to-three-minute videos and training modules for each of these sections. But this is still at a high level. We have to drill down to the each and every task which has to be conducted.

Ms. Fontaine: During the past election, many polling stations in Thompson and surrounding areas appeared to have a lack of adequate staffing. Did the early election impact on the ability of your office to recruit staff in the—to run polling stations in the North?

Ms. Verma: There's always a bit of a challenge recruiting up north, and it really depends, we might be able to recruit ahead of time, but when it comes on election day, you still may have some issues. So we know in the North there were three voting stations which were delayed in opening, and that was due to some personal circumstances of the voting officials. They opened around—one around 10, one around noon.

So I don't think it's the early election call which would have resulted this, because there's always been a challenge in recruiting up north and we want to work more closely with the bands and with First Nations to have a more continuous relationship with them, rather than just during an election time.

Ms. Fontaine: So, to that last point, then, is—and I do recall that you have spoken about this in the past when we've sat in this committee, has there been more—the development of more of a strategy to—for that ongoing work in the North?

* (18:40)

Ms. Verma: We are still developing the strategy. I would say the early election call—we couldn't complete all the work that we would have liked to do,

but it didn't impact the conduct of the election. But it did impact other projects that were going on at the same time.

So one of the projects we are looking at is addressing, because in our address database and register, many of the addresses up north are classified as general delivery. So—which is a challenge, putting those locations on the map. We can estimate, okay, there are so many people, so there should be a voting area for this many people, but to actually have addresses and send out material, we have to send it out using general delivery.

So we are planning a project to begin—from next year, where we can target—see the gaps from our address database where we have major gaps in address, and target those First Nation communities first to work with the band offices and having actually field people to go there and document and—the address information. So that would be the first step.

We are also hoping in this process we'll be able to establish connections in those respective communities and plan for more consistent employment opportunities.

Ms. Fontaine: I do just want to throw it out there—it's not a question, just—that if it's cold, please, please just shut the window. I'm very cognizant that you're right there, so miigwech for allowing it to be open for a bit. Miigwech.

Well, I'm really happy to hear about that strategy, because I think that it is important. And—I mean, obviously, you would know better than I that it's important to ensure that every Manitoban has the ability to participate in the democratic process, and we know that in the North—particularly in our communities—at the best of times it's very difficult because—for a myriad of issues. So I'm—I look forward to hearing, in your next report, where that strategy is, moving forward.

I would also say—I will throw it out here—that I do know that our northern colleagues would be more than willing to chat and offer any support or network that our northern MLAs would be if you were interested. So I do throw that out there.

So you did answer that question—because one of the questions we did have was that there were some polling stations that didn't open right at 8 a.m. So I am curious, then, in respect of, you know—and, again, I get as we've shared that those are for personal reasons and not in respect of an early election—how did that

impact on any of the voter turnout at those particular polls?

Ms. Verma: All the three locations which were delayed opening on election day did have advance voting opportunity also. So that was one positive feature. The other was we were communicating in those communities about the delay in opening. We were using Facebook and the local contacts there to send out the message.

At the close, there was no lineup and there were no people who were waiting or expressed that they were not able to vote. So I believe that, even though it was delayed, there was no impact on voting opportunity in those areas.

Ms. Fontaine: I want to go back to—in my opening comments, I did note some of the legislative changes that we've all seen in the last couple of—well, since the new government took order.

One of them, as you know, is that the personal contributions increased from \$3,000 to \$5,000. I am curious whether or not—do you find that that increase from \$3,000 to \$5,000 has an impact on peoples' ability to participate in democracy? Did it—does it have a negative impact?

Ms. Verma: Unfortunately, I don't have any statistics to support or provide any comment on this observation.

Ms. Fontaine: Do you know if there's been any research, like, across the country in respect of increasing personal contributions?

Ms. Verma: Across the country, the jurisdictions have a range when it comes to contributions.

There are—public financing comes in different formats. One is through contribution. Second is through annual allowances or public funding. The third is through reimbursement of expenses, and the fourth is the tax credit.

So, if you look at—across the country, there are no two jurisdictions which are alike. In Manitoba, we have the tax credit, we have the reimbursement, and we have contribution limits. If you take Quebec, they have a very low contribution limit, but they have a high amount of public funding and they have election reimbursement. Alberta has no reimbursement for parties or candidates and no public funding either.

So, if you look from coast to coast, you'll find a different model, and a lot depends on the policy decision of that reigning government.

Ms. Fontaine: You know—and I know that sometimes it's difficult to answer some of these questions, but I am curious if you think that those changes, you know, unfavourably impact on smaller political parties.

Ms. Verma: There are two schools of thought when it comes to funding: some say you need to deserve to desire, and some say you need to have the funding to perform. So it's—it depends from which school of thought you are coming.

Again, being the CEO of Elections Manitoba, I cannot provide a personal opinion on it.

Ms. Fontaine: In 2018, proposals were made to improve voter experience and increase efficiency.

Did your officer implement these approved changes for this past election?

Ms. Verma: Could you tell me which proposal you would be referring to?

Ms. Fontaine: No, you know what, I apologize. That's the wrong question. That's something else. I apologize for that.

I do want to go back to your reimbursement of child care and disabilities. Can you just expand—I know you did mention that in your opening comments. Can you expand a little bit more on that for us please, and where that's at?

Ms. Verma: The current law says that you need to be eligible for reimbursement, which is you must receive 5 per cent of valid votes in order to be eligible for reimbursement. And, if you are, then your expenses are—for child care and disabilities are reimbursed, but they—and they do not go against the spending limit.

What we are recommending is that the threshold should not be there. So, even if you don't receive the 5 per cent of eligible votes, you should still be eligible to receive 100 per cent of disability and child-care expenses which are reasonable.

And, in the previous elections, we haven't seen several claims on this matter, but it's a perceived—it could be a perceived barrier, and hence we are recommending that this should be implemented, that there should not be any threshold to receive to valid votes, and it may encourage participation.

Ms. Fontaine: So you do note that you didn't see many claims, but is that a consequence of maybe not knowing that this is a potential—available to them?

Ms. Verma: It could be. It could be—we are not aware how many candidates who ran had a disability expense or had child-care expense.

Ms. Fontaine: So I do want to go back a little bit, in respect to the fixed-date-election laws that we have here in Manitoba.

In your—would you say that fixed-date-election laws enhance democracy?

Ms. Verma: From my perspective, fixed-date-election law helps in better planning of resources and staffing, but, as I said earlier, my job is to be election ready, be it a fixed date or not.

It does—sometimes voters may plan discussions and debates around it, but, again, this is more speculation at my part right now.

Ms. Fontaine: Just a couple of final questions: I do—sorry, I do want to go back to that reimbursement of child care and disabilities.

*(18:50)

So how do—how are candidates informed of that? And, again, I know that the threshold is 5 per cent. What do candidates need to do to be able to access those reimbursements?

Ms. Verma: Usually, the candidates and their official agents are provided material when they become nominated under the election finance act. There are information sessions which are provided and we also provide information directly to the official agent. When the financial report is being prepared, there are line items which indicate for child-care expense and disability expense. The expenses are defined as reasonable expense, which is over and above what you would normally incur.

So, to give an example, if I'm running as a candidate and I do have child-care expenses for four hours, which are in the evening, that's my normal expense. But, because I'm running as a candidate, I need extended child care. So, it goes to eight hours. So the incremental four hours will be eligible for reimbursement.

Ms. Fontaine: And so—and I'm not sure if you're able to answer this question, but this last election and maybe even the 2016 election, how many people—how many candidates would have applied for these reimbursements?

Ms. Verma: I believe in 2016, there were no disability expenses which were claimed, and I can

confirm this, but I think there were two or three child-care expense claims.

Ms. Fontaine: Can you explain to me what a disability claim might include? What would that look like?

Ms. Verma: Yes. And I just want to confirm there were three child-care expenses which were claimed in 2016.

A disability claim can include a need for a personal companion if you're going door-to-door campaigning. So, you may need a personal companion just during your regular office hours, but if you're going door-to-door campaigning, it would be for extended time period. So, that could be there.

If a candidate is visually impaired, he or she may need some more assistance for campaigning purposes. So, that could be an example of disability expense.

Ms. Fontaine: And would that be—how much would be reimbursed back?

Ms. Verma: I think it's 100 per cent is reimbursed back on child-care and disability expenses.

Ms. Fontaine: So we've spoken about child-care and disability claims.

Is there anything else that you think we are missing, that would be able to encourage more folks to run? Women, indigenous peoples, and we can go down the line. But, do you think—is there anything that we're missing right now in Manitoba to—besides all of the legislation that—and again, that's—you're not going to comment on that, I get that. But besides all of the legislation that we've seen in the last three and a half years, is there anything else that we're missing that could support more folks to run?

Ms. Verma: I think I'll be able to better answer this question once our election assessments and debriefing are completed. But, just to let you know that we have worked towards accessibility. The Election Financing Act was rewritten in plain language, which was considered to be one of the barriers because it was a complex legislation.

We do provide information sessions and provide a lot of support to candidates and official agents because we do recognize that elections come once in four years and the financial knowledge may be limited when it comes to running a campaign.

So we take that—for us, there's a twofold mandate of compliance and assistance, and we take the assistance mandate quite strongly.

Hon. Blaine Pedersen (Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development): Just a couple questions—we—in the 2018 by-election, you used the permanent voters list, I believe, if I read correctly.

How is the voters list—and then now of course it goes into 2019, how is the voters—permanent voters list renewed and how do you—because I know, going in the 2019, and the member opposite was talking about 2019. When I got my voters list, I noticed there was a number of people who have passed away, moved away, whatever. How is the permanent voters list updated?

Ms. Verma: The voters list up—is updated (1) through voter information, which we receive from Manitoba Public Insurance, Elections Canada, Manitoba Health and Vital Statistics.

We also update address information which we receive from the local municipalities, the local government, and City of Winnipeg, City of Brandon, and Steinbach.

The address information is updated twice a year, while every quarter we get information updates from the data sources for voter information.

Citizenship information is only confirmed through Elections Canada, as we don't have access to citizenship records.

So there are data-matching rules which we have to apply. The four main attributes of a voter information is the name—first name, middle name, last name; second is their address information; third is their date of birth, and fourth is gender.

So, when we started the list from 2016, voters—it was optional to provide date of birth. Also, the address information, which comes back to my recommendation for standardizing the address, we find the voter may provide different addresses at different points of time.

So, in the city of Winnipeg or city of Brandon, the addresses are more standardized, but once you start going back, going into the rural Manitoba and northern, we have 137 municipalities altogether in Manitoba. Out of 137 municipalities, they don't have a consistent addressing base, so one municipality may implement 911, or they may have the section-township-range, or they may have their own addressing. In 2016, we do through enumeration; they may have provided us a 911 address. Come 2019, the voter may provide us with a different address. They're

living in the same house, so that's the reason why we have issues about data matching and validation.

The second is the date of birth provides a unique confirmation, too, but since we were started from 2016 with an incomplete list of date-of-birth information, we are gradually completing it.

The third is the name. So it could be S. Verma; it could be Shipra Verma, and I might have a middle name. It could be Shipra middle name Verma. It depends at which—what name has been provided to which agency. So MPI might have S. Verma, or Ship Verma. Elections Canada might have Shipra Verma. I would have in Manitoba register—may have Shipra middle name Verma.

When you put all these attributes together, then there are chances that if the name does not match, the date of birth does not match, we will not identify this as the same record. For us to internally match the record, we have to meet at least two criteria, which is the name and date of birth. Address, we recognize it would—it could change.

So, yes, there were issues from the February list which was provided to the candidates and to all the MLAs. As the list will get matured, we are hoping that these irregularities and these data validation issues will also start going on a decline.

But I do want to make the point again: Getting centralized addressing is a need for Manitoba. It may not appear right now. But, as if you keep going down the road over the years with all different departments and agencies investing their resources on the same matter and not achieving a consistent result, for efficiency purposes, for data validation, and for better service to the voters, we need to look at centralized addressing in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: First of all, I should apologize to the—Ms. Fontaine because I did not explicitly ask if you had completed your questions or yielded the floor. I simply implied it, and if you do have further questions, I can take that under consideration, but the hour is approaching 7 o'clock.

What is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Fifteen minutes?

* (19:00)

Mr. Dougald Lamont (St. Boniface): If I could just have 15 minutes for questions—

An Honourable Member: No—no; I think what he's saying is that we'll finish up everybody in 15 minutes.

Mr. Lamont: Oh, okay.

An Honourable Member: You're not going to take 15 minutes.

Mr. Lamont: Well, I could.

An Honourable Member: Can we finish in 15 minutes?

Mr. Lamont: Okay.

Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere): Mr. Chair, I might propose that we canvass the committee and find out how much time those who have questions would like to take and then find some compromise from there.

Ms. Fontaine: I just have one follow-up question, so from our end, that—we have one follow-up question.

Mr. Lamont: I have but—I have two or three questions, but they can be quite quick.

Mr. Chairperson: So what is the will of the committee?

Mr. Pedersen: I would suggest that we go 'til—to 7:15 unless we finish sooner. And if we're not finished, we can review.

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreed? [*Agreed*]

Ms. Fontaine, I believe you indicated you had a follow-up question, so you have the floor.

Ms. Fontaine: I just wanted to confirm or clarify that the in-person training, in concert with the video training, was also carried out in rural and northern Manitoba, or was it only offered in the city?

Ms. Verma: To my knowledge, it was offered everywhere. But there are certain remote communities where the training is provided either through phone and not in person.

And also, I would like to update my response to the child-care question. There were three claims in 2011. There were seven claims in 2016—seven eligible, one not eligible; total, eight claims. And the amount of reimbursement which was paid was four thousand dollars and ninety-one cents—ninety-one dollars.

Mr. Lamont: Thank you very much for coming here. I'll try to be brief.

I just—when you were talking about the standardization of names and addresses, is that something you think could be solved if there were a

single ID that would be—sort of, as a voter ID or a single Manitoba identification?

Ms. Verma: I believe coming to a single ID would also require, like, who is leading that. And our recommendation for single addressing is that—like, in Nova Scotia, if you take that model, there is one authority which provides the address. That address is then used by any department or agency. So the voter doesn't have a—or, the resident doesn't have a choice as to address. They all are—other addresses will go away, there'll be just one address for that one residence.

So, if you're looking at emergency services, you're looking at Hydro, you're looking at driver's licence, you're looking at health records, you're looking at Elections Manitoba voter information—there will be one address which will be used.

Also, along with the address, geo co-ordinates are also defined. So if you need to locate that address on the map, there's one point. Right now, we have—if you're using section-township-range, we plot a point. If you don't have the—all addresses, we estimate. Okay, this street has eight addresses, so every eighth point is one address.

So there's a lot of estimation which goes in identifying where the address lands on the map. With the central addressing, it will solve both the purposes. It will know this is the address which you are providing and this is where it locates on the map. So, if emergency services have to respond, they know where to go.

Mr. Lamont: I know there have been some—but—there is—in the Throne Speech, there was a proposed—there's a proposed legislative change to remove rebates. I was just wondering, had there been any consultation with Elections Manitoba about that, or had the government discussed that ahead of time before announcing it?

Ms. Verma: Usually, our office does not confirm or deny communication because it is confidential. If it's our recommendation, then we do consult with the advisory committee.

Mr. Lamont: I know the—just as a comment, I—there was a question about—the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) was asking questions about fixed-election dates.

That—under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 21, it says that the will of the people shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections. And one of the things about it being periodic is the the

idea that it's being regular, it's set on specified days or a range of dates within a particular time frame, sometimes fixed-election dates. The other is that it genuinely means that elections are free and fair, in that laws must offer equal conditions and opportunities for its citizens to have access, but you're—the other—which is a huge emphasis, which you've been very good at.

The other challenge is the offering equal conditions and opportunities for all parties and candidates taking part in them, including the ability for political parties and candidates to register for elections without—and balanced access to the media, and that laws governing the financing of campaigns are that—don't give one candidate or party. So I'm just wondering if whether you think that—I mean, is—it seems to me that the principles of human rights are—those are pretty sound with those—are those also—are those something that Elections Manitoba would ever take into consideration when it comes to rules, or comment on—I mean if you are—if you're ever able to comment on whether—what the government is doing sort of conforms to those human—that declaration or not?

Ms. Verma: There are powerful principles which are outlined in that report. Elections Manitoba's role is to administer the legislation. We don't want to comment on the policy matters. We talk more about the accessibility options, the—administratively, how we can enhance the democratic process for the voters. So, when it comes to public financing, again, it's a choice of the legislators. It's the policy decision, and we can administer them, but I can't provide a comment on it.

Mr. Lamont: I just had a question, because—it [*inaudible*] the turnout. Thank you very much for the map.

Do you have demographics for who did vote, who didn't vote? So we have a sense of who is voting, and who we need to reach out to, in order to encourage them to get out to the polls.

Ms. Verma: With the use of technology in this election, and we had the real-time strike-off for advance voting, we know who has voted during advance. But, on election day, the same technology wasn't used, so we don't have that information yet.

The other issue is about the privacy, so the information which we are collecting has a defined use, so we'll have to review and go back to our—with our legal counsel as to how much can we use that information for sharing those demographic information with the parties and candidates.

Mr. Lamont: Yes, I mean, it's very important that we're recognizing that we're—it's a secret ballot, and whether people voted or not is—we don't want to be—that—there's—it's difficult in what—in data-mining that information.

The other was just a—it's just—it's actually more of a comment than a question, but in terms of the connection between finances, between connections—the funding and turnout or—and that there—I understand that there is some research, though it's mostly American, that the ability to spend—that often parties and candidates that outspend their opponents win. So that—I don't know that I have a question, other than to say that that is something that's been—that there are American studies that they've—they do a meta-analysis, to show that there are advantages in terms of fundraising, and—but one of them simply being that when a political party has—or a candidate has money, that they can simply—they can reach more people. It's that you're spending money on communications; they're able to contact more voters, and—so that that's one of the reasons why you can either have an advantage or a disadvantage if fundraising is linked to turnout.

But—and frankly, I don't think I have another question. I just want to say thank you very much.

Mr. Mark Wasyliv (Fort Garry): Yes, I just have a couple questions for you.

Now, my understanding in The Elections Act, there's an expressed provision that allows candidates entries into apartment buildings, and please correct me if I'm wrong. I knew I was going to be in this

committee like, hours ago, so I never looked it up myself. Is that true for condominiums? Do candidates have a private, like, a right of force of entry into a private condominium building? And, if not, is that a change that you would be supportive into The Elections Act?

Ms. Verma: I believe candidates have the right to campaign in any apartment or condominium, so they have to—it could be at a predetermined time, which is convenient for the management company; that can be arranged. Some—and there could be hours during which they can do the campaigning, but they do have a right to campaign.

* (19:10)

Mr. Chairperson: Hearing no further questions—are there any further questions? No.

Then I will now put the question on the report.

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2018, Including Conduct of the St. Boniface byelection, dated July 17th, 2018—pass.

I want to thank everybody for their patience this evening, and I thank Ms. Verma for her testimony and being willing to answer so many questions.

The hour now being 7:10, what is the will of the committee?

Some Honourable Members: Rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 7:10 p.m.

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