

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

*Chairperson*  
*Mr. Dennis Smook*  
*Constituency of La Vérendrye*

**Vol. LXXVII No. 1 - 10 a.m., Monday, December 19, 2022**

ISSN 1708-668X

**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-Second Legislature**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Political Affiliation</b>
AL TOMARE, Nello	Transcona	NDP
ASAGWARA, Uzoma	Union Station	NDP
BRAR, Diljeet	Burrows	NDP
BUSHIE, Ian	Keewatinook	NDP
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy	Kildonan-River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Roblin	PC
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GORDON, Audrey, Hon.	Southdale	PC
GUENTER, Josh	Borderland	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah, Hon.	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg, Hon.	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek, Hon.	Interlake-Gimli	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott, Hon.	Assiniboia	PC
KHAN, Obby	Fort Whyte	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan, Hon.	Selkirk	PC
LAMONT, Dougald	St. Boniface	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Tyndall Park	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas-Kameesak	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Malaya	Notre Dame	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	McPhillips	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
MOSES, Jamie	St. Vital	NDP
NAYLOR, Lisa	Wolseley	NDP
NESBITT, Greg, Hon.	Riding Mountain	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine	Midland	PC
PIWNIUK, Doyle, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	PC
REDHEAD, Eric	Thompson	NDP
REYES, Jon, Hon.	Waverley	PC
SALA, Adrien	St. James	NDP
SANDHU, Mintu	The Maples	NDP
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield-Ritchot	PC
SMITH, Andrew, Hon.	Lagimodière	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Vérendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WASYLIW, Mark	Fort Garry	NDP
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Red River North	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	Kirkfield Park	

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**  
**THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS**

**Monday, December 19, 2022**

**TIME – 10 a.m.**

**LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba**

**CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Dennis Smook**  
*(La Vérendrye)*

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mrs. Cathy Cox**  
*(Kildonan-River East)*

**ATTENDANCE – 6 QUORUM – 4**

*Members of the committee present:*

*Hon. Messrs. Goertzen, Johnston*

*Mrs. Cox, MLA Marcelino,*  
*Messrs. Moses, Smook*

**APPEARING:**

*Ms. Shipra Verma, Chief Electoral Officer,*  
*Elections Manitoba*

**MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:**

*Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year*  
*ending December 31, 2021*

\* \* \*

**Clerk Assistant (Ms. Katerina Tefft):** Good morning. 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 Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

**Hon. Kelvin Goertzen (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I would nominate MLA Smook, given his vast experience and knowledge in this area.

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

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

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

Are there any nominations?

**Mr. Goertzen:** It is my honour to nominate MLA Cox.

**Mr. Chairperson:** MLA Cox has been nominated. Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, Ms. Cox is elected Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to consider the Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2021.

Are there any suggestions from the committee as to how long we should sit this morning?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I've not had the opportunity to confer with opposition members. Typically, we sit for no more than two hours for this committee. We can offer two hours, but if there are—if questions end sooner, then I'm sure members would be happy to disperse sooner, as well.

**Mr. Chairperson:** It has been brought forward by Honourable Mr. Goertzen that we sit for a maximum of two hours. Should the questions be done before that, then we can adjourn at that time.

Are we all in agreement of that?

**Some Honourable Members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Ms. Marcelino?

**MLA Malaya Marcelino (Notre Dame):** Yes, Mr. Chair, I'm agreed to that.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you. We shall sit for a maximum of two hours or sooner if the—if questions are done with.

Does the honourable minister wish to make an opening statement? And would he introduce any elected officials in attendance—but I see we have none.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, we do have some elected officials in attendance. I won't introduce them, they'll introduce themselves. And I'm sure that our Chief Electoral Officer, Shipra Verma, will introduce her staff when she has the opportunity.

So, just very quickly, I want to thank Ms. Verma and Elections Manitoba for the work that they continue to do on all of our behalf and on behalf of Manitobans in ensuring that our democratic system functions well and functions fairly.

I know that they have been busy just completing a by-election from the Elections Manitoba perspective. And, of course, next year there's a general election, so they're busy getting ready for that as well.

There are so many different parts of our system that are important to make sure that democracy functions well and functions fairly. It's incumbent upon us as elected officials, it's incumbent upon us as candidates when we're running as candidates, and the different political parties that operate. Then, of course, together with Elections Manitoba, we all play a part and a role in this, in both ensuring that democracies function well, but that there's confidence in democracies. And that's as important as anything.

These days, we see it around the world, there's questions about the confidence of democratic institutions—not just the electoral system, but institutions generally—and we all play an important role of ensuring that we instill, to the best we can, confidence in the systems that govern us and those that are governed by them.

So, with all that in mind, I want to thank Ms. Verma for her work and the work of Elections Manitoba. And I'm sure that she'll take the time to provide an introduction statement and also introduce her staff as well, and then we'll look through the report and the recommendations, which the committee—I'll just conclude by saying I think that all members of this committee and of the Assembly, regardless of political party, have always taken the recommendations of Elections Manitoba seriously, and I think we have a pretty good track record of implementing them—maybe not in the most timely fashion that the people might want, but sometimes they're complex and require technological changes that have happened, as well.

So, thank you for the recommendations in the reports and for your service.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you, Minister Goertzen.

Does the critic for the official opposition have an opening statement?

**MLA Marcelino:** Yes, I'd just like to add to the minister's comments by just saying to—my thanks to Ms. Verma and to Elections Manitoba staff for, you know, this report—this Elections Manitoba 2021 report—and all the activities that they described in it. I can see was a lot of work in 2021, as well as what they've been doing this year.

So, deep gratitude to all the important work that you guys continue to do. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairperson:** We thank Ms. Marcelino for her statement.

Does Ms. Verma from Elections Manitoba wish to make an opening statement?

**Ms. Shipra Verma (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Manitoba):** Thank you for inviting me and my staff to discuss our annual report here today.

With me is Debbie MacKenzie, deputy chief electoral officer, and Tracy Nysten, director of finance.

As I mentioned, we are here to talk about the annual report—specifically, the work we have been doing to implement recent modifications and legislative changes, preparation for the next general election, as well as the recommendations we have made in the annual report. I would also like to speak about the report on the modification to the voting process for the Fort Whyte by-election, where the option to vote by mail was expanded, and is included in this report.

But first, I would like to take a moment to thank and commend this committee and all sitting members for their attention and support in the matter of these modifications and legislative amendments. Their recommendations to modernize voting have been made with the aim of better connecting voters with voting opportunities and participants with the electoral process. The goal has been to increase service level; keep elections free, fair and accessible; to protect the integrity of the electoral process at every step. The support and engagement of this committee, and the speed at which the legislation was passed, reaffirms a shared commitment to democracy.

Much of our work in 2021 was based on the concept of building connections. Our focus was on the areas of retention, recruitment and moving forward with the proposed modification for vote anywhere in your electoral division.

Our retention and recruitment efforts were quite successful. Through direct outreach, advertisement, reappointments, we have filled all available returning officer, assistant returning officer and support positions, and training is well under way.

Moving to the modifications, I would just like to recap the progress made and provide a brief timeline on all the modifications implemented to date.

In the 2019 general election, we successfully implemented modifications for real-time strike-off for advance voting, introduced a new format for advance voting book, and a combined voters list for use on election day.

\* (10:10)

For the Fort Whyte by-election in March, all these modifications were repeated, and also, a vote-by-mail criteria was expanded due to COVID. This allowed any eligible voter to apply to vote by mail. This modification achieved the objectives of section 28.1 of The Elections Act, and the report is included in the annual report.

In Fort Whyte, we also tested real-time electronic strike-off as a parallel process. Data from the strike-off was accessible via a secure online portal, connecting candidates and parties with real-time information. This portal was also used to share files, such as maps, phones and guides with all the participants.

In October 20, 2021, proposal to allow vote anywhere in your electoral division was passed. One aspect of vote anywhere in your electoral division and modernization is introduction of vote-counting machines or tabulators. The use of these machines were added to the legislation when bill 11 received royal assent in March.

We are moving forward with this process. We have secured a contract with the vote-counting machines and ballot printing and continue to refine processes and training for voting and counting.

Finally, I would like to speak on the recommendations in the annual report. There are a few new recommendations: first, to allow the unique ID attached to the voters to be shared with all political participants, including candidates. This will allow for a consistent voter list to be provided to both the parties and the candidates.

Second, to extend the time frame for division and allow division to begin as soon as the writ is issued, or as directed by the CEO. The rationale for this is that the voter information cards are mailed out almost on the writ date, or within a day, so the voters should get the maximum opportunity to do revision.

Third, to make the nomination deadline consistent for a fixed-date general election or a non-fixed general election or by-election, which would be day 22, giving 11 days between the close of nominations and the start of advance voting. This will allow suitable time for

programming and preparing the vote-counting machines.

Finally, to use the Manitoba Voter Register as a source for assessing eligible voters when evaluating applications to register a new party. This is a departure from what is currently in the legislation is the voter list from the previous general election. I believe this provision is a legacy provision when we used to do enumeration and we didn't have a permanent voters list.

This concludes my opening statement, and I'm happy to answer any questions which you may have.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Thank you, Ms. Verma.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I want to thank Ms. Verma for the statement and the update of the recommendations contained in the report.

I wonder if she could provide—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Sorry. I've just been informed that the first question has to go to the critic.

So, Ms. Marcelino.

**MLA Marcelino:** Yes, I have a question.

Ms. Verma, excluding 2022, has there ever been three by-elections in one calendar year?

And, I know that you aren't going to be able to speak to specific finances, because it's 2022, but I'm just wondering, how much do by-elections generally cost nowadays?

**Mr. Chairperson:** I'd just like to remind everybody that the questions should come through the Chair, not directly to our guest here.

**Ms. Verma:** To my knowledge, there have—I've been with Elections Manitoba since 2004, and so this is a departure from what we see between election cycles. So, three by-elections in one calendar year is unusual. Usually, we do have two to three by-elections in an election cycle, which is four years between the two elections.

The cost of a by-election is approximately \$300,000 for each by-election, plus any reimbursement cost for candidates or parties.

**MLA Marcelino:** Do I get to ask another question, Mr. Chair?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Yes.

**MLA Marcelino:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to ask Ms. Verma if she could please explain the importance of leadership contest rules.

**Ms. Verma:** The leadership contest rules are under The Election Financing Act. Elections Manitoba has a limited role in a party's leadership contest.

The Election Financing Act, called as EFA, outlines the contribution limits and the reporting deadlines of—for a leadership contest. It also defines the responsibility of the financial officer of a party regarding disclosure and information as to when the leadership contest has—is begun and who are the leadership contestants.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you, Ms. Verma.

I was just wondering, Mr. Chair, if Ms. Verma could please explain if it's a breach of Elections Manitoba law to spend money on a leadership campaign before leadership contest rules have been announced.

**Ms. Verma:** So, EFA defines a leadership contest period. It is from the time when the financial officer advises us when the leadership contest period has begun and ends two months after the leadership contest date.

No leadership contestant is—should spend any money before the start of the leadership contest period.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you, Ms. Verma.

I would just like to ask, Mr. Chair, if Ms. Verma knows—if she could please explain the advantage a candidate could get by spending money on a leadership campaign before leadership contest rules are announced.

**Ms. Verma:** It is difficult for me to explain any advantage which a leadership contestant might have. It depends on the circumstances and it would be speculative on me to reply to this question.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you, Ms. Verma.

I'd just like to ask Ms. Verma, Mr. Chair, because earlier this year, Bill Bowles, the Manitoba Commissioner of Elections, found that the Premier (Mrs. Stefanson) was in breach of election finance rules by incurring \$1,800 in expenses prior to the leadership period—campaign period start date.

He issued a formal caution to the Premier, saying that the early start to one leadership hopeful's campaign may have resulted in a benefit to that candidate, and I don't believe it would be appropriate

for me to entirely ignore this breach of legislation. End quote.

So, what does Elections Manitoba think about the commissioner's ruling? I noticed in page 27 of your report that, you know, it says that the Commissioner of Elections report no breaches of this section in 2021. His ruling came in 2022 but it was about 2021.

Could you just discuss that a little bit, please?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I'm not sure that it's particularly fair or helpful to ask Elections Manitoba what they think of the commissioner's ruling.

The commissioner is set up there to provide, where there are complaints that—brought forward either by—you know, political parties or the public—to provide an opinion on things. And the member's brought complaints before, I've brought complaints before and the commissioner makes a ruling.

I don't recall ever then going to Elections Manitoba. They're not the Court of Appeal when it comes to these sort of things. I'm not sure why the member is asking for an opinion of Elections Manitoba from a ruling that has already been provided by the right body to provide that ruling.

**MLA Marcelino:** The question was for Ms. Verma. Specifically, about page 27 in the annual report.

It does not include any reports of breaches in this section of 2021—that's the quote here in the report—and I was just asking Ms. Verma why that wasn't included in 2021, even though this ruling was about 2021—even though it was only issued in 2022.

\* (10:20)

**Ms. Verma:** The reporting on page 27 of the Commissioner of Elections is specifically for government advertisements, so, for any government advertising complaints, if there is any ruling which the commissioner makes, that we have to make public in our annual report. Any other report or decision which the commissioner makes becomes public on their website, and we do not include it in our annual report.

The commissioner has a separate annual report, which comes usually once every two years or following a general election, and those rulings are included in the commissioner's annual report.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you so much for clarifying that for me, Ms. Verma.

My next question is for Ms. Verma, Mr. Chair. It's—can you please speak about the financial barriers that candidates face when trying to run for office?

**Ms. Verma:** Can you be a bit more specific about the financial barriers that you are wanting me to answer about?

**MLA Marcelino:** So, I meant, would you say that candidates often lose money or forgo additional income when they run for office?

**Ms. Verma:** I'm not familiar with this aspect of what they are—if they have any loss of income.

What The Election Financing Act allows is that, if they receive 5 per cent of eligible votes, then 25 per cent of their eligible election expenses are reimbursed. Fifty per cent of the reimbursement is provided within 15 days of filing of their—for their financial return. The remaining is provided when the review is completed.

**MLA Marcelino:** Just like to ask Ms. Verma, Mr. Chair, if she thinks it's easier for Manitobans who are more well off and have more work flexibility to run for office.

**Ms. Verma:** I don't have any statistics to answer this question, as we don't collect this information.

In addition to the reimbursement, I just want to add to the previous question is that 100 per cent of child-care expenses and any disability expenses are also reimbursed to candidates.

**Mr. Chairperson:** I would just like to remind the members that questions should be—they should pertain to the annual report itself. It's difficult for people to speculate on things—like, the questions should be from the annual report.

**MLA Marcelino:** I'd just like to ask Ms. Verma if she thinks that having high entry fees to enter a leadership race is a financial barrier?

**Ms. Verma:** As I mentioned earlier, the leadership contest rules are internal to the parties. Elections Manitoba has no role in assessing or determining those rules.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you for that answer.

I'd just like to know, Mr. Chair, from Ms. Verma, if she knows that—if the PC Party of Manitoba held a leadership campaign in 2021 and it required candidates to receive nomination signatures from 50 party members, sell 1,000 memberships and pay a \$25,000 entry fee, would you agree that this \$25,000

entry fee would be a barrier to entry for many people trying to seek leadership?

**Mr. Goertzen:** You know, I've been on this committee—not today, but in the past—for several years.

This seems to be taking a very strange turn that I'd want to caution my friend who is asking the questions about. She seems to be asking speculative questions for the Chief Electoral Officer to weigh in on about the internal operations of a political party and whether or not the decisions of a political party are good decisions or bad decisions.

I can assure the member I'm not, nor have I, asked questions about the leadership contest by which the now-Official Opposition Leader was elected several years ago and whether that process was a good process or a bad process, because it's a process that the party themselves have to make a decision about within the rules and limits of the election laws.

So, if the member is raising some particular breach, she can raise that with the elections commissioner, as she's outlined previously—I don't think she has found a valid one—but I don't think it's fair or right or proper or somewhat ethical to be asking the Chief Electoral Officer to be speculating on what her view is of how a political party operates on a leadership race that has nothing to do with the rules that she is required to govern.

**MLA Marcelino:** I would just like to ask another question, then, for Ms. Verma.

How does Elections Manitoba plan for an election with a fixed election date?

**Ms. Verma:** For a fixed election date, the planning process is we identify when we need to start updating our policies and procedures. And, given that there was substantive modifications and legislative amendments that have been brought through, that process started actually right after the last election with a planning and debriefing.

The—2021 was spent in evaluating the modification proposals and presenting them to the committee. Internally, we were updating our infrastructure and also our communication strategy for the next election.

We also look at the outreach with different groups, especially the First Nation Indigenous community, the Métis nations. Then we also have to look at updating all the material—the training material and manuals—which have been impacted because of the changes in the legislation or the modification or any

best practices that we have identified through our debrief and jurisdictional search.

We start with recruitment. So, as I mentioned, in 2021 the recruitment campaign had started to hire the returning officers and assistant returning officers, which continued in 2022. Subsequent to that, the training has to be scheduled. So, one training session to all the returning officers and assistant returning officers have been completed. The remaining two training sessions are planned for January and March.

Along with training, pre-writ work also commences. We provide maps—updated maps—based on our address updates and the voter list updates to the returning officers for their review. They start looking at the maps, the voting places, potential returning office locations, accessibility checklist. In parallel, our outreach work also starts picking up speed.

We are also looking at significant technological changes for the next election, so procurement of all the material, the request for quotes, invitation for tenders, ballot printers, that progresses. With the—when you know there's a fixed-date election, the timeline to the returning officers and assistant returning officers for their work is outlined to them—when the offices will open, when target registration will commence, when the election calendar will be how it will be. Information is shared with the parties and the candidates.

At the political front, we do see candidates start getting nominated, but the legislation also allows for an other-than-a-fixed-date general election. So, we do have a contingency plan which we develop simultaneously to see in case a general election happens earlier, then how we need to proceed with it.

So, you can say that there are two planning processes which are happening at the same time: one for the best case scenario of a fixed-date election, and one considering the political environment if it—early election has to be called, then how we can proceed with that.

\* (10:30)

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you, Ms. Verma.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd just like to ask, how does—ask Ms. Verma: How does Elections Manitoba find out about early elections? Is this communicated in advance of the general public? And, if yes, how far in advance?

**Ms. Verma:** For an early election call, I believe the government can have government advertising

restrictions that gives us an estimate as to an early election is coming.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you, Ms. Verma.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. My next question, again for Ms. Verma: On page 29 of the annual report, it states that the 43rd general election outreach EM staff will be developing communications and outreach campaigns for the 43rd general election in 2023, including a general advertising campaign to reach Manitobans and targeted initiatives designed to reach voters that faced barriers to participation, end quote.

When will these initiatives launch?

**Ms. Verma:** These initiatives have already been launched. We have seen it in the Thompson by-election through the outreach activities that we undertook.

But for Indigenous outreach, we have a three-fold strategy. The first one is to support Indigenous voters. We have specific voter registration drives that we conduct. We plan additional events with the returning officer for voter registration, outreach. There is a program called Vote PopUp that we are having every returning officer have at least one initiative in their electoral division. We are also looking at translation into Cree language.

The second aspect is building internal capacity and structure to provide better service to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. That includes targeted hiring. We try to hire from the community groups for those returning officers in the northern electoral divisions. For the 43rd election, we are looking at 12 per cent Indigenous staffing. For the Thompson by-election, we had 25 per cent. We're also working on First Nations addressing and voter cleanup.

The third priority that we are looking at is relationship-based engagement. That could be with Indigenous leaders, organizations, communities—for newcomers, also, for immigration groups.

These are the ways that we have started our work, and we want to proceed leading up to the next general election.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you, Ms. Verma, and thank you, Elections Manitoba, for all those initiatives.

My next question is for Ms. Sherma [*phonetic*]—Ms. Verma, sorry.

Will Elections Manitoba be ready if there's an early election, since an early election would shorten



the amount of time that EM would have to advertise on the general election?

**Ms. Verma:** It's our mandate to be ready for an early election call.

If—depending how early the election will be, the new initiatives which are being rolled out will have to be assessed at that particular time period.

**MLA Marcelino:** My next question is for Ms. Verma.

How many staff does Elections Manitoba plan on hiring for the 43rd general election, and will this be less due to the introduction of the electronic vote ready—reading machines?

**Ms. Verma:** We are planning to hire seven to eight thousand field staff for the next election. I don't see a significant reduction in the hiring.

We maybe have different duties at the voting place. So, we know we are going with a single voting officer for every poll, but we may need additional information officers to direct the voters. We will need a tabulator operator.

So, there may be a reduction of 5 per cent, but not more than that.

**MLA Marcelino:** How does Elections Manitoba plan—or, do you plan—for when people are sick or who have no-shows for their shifts?

And, historically, how many people on average don't come for their shifts if they can't work due to being sick?

**Ms. Verma:** So, there is a pre-COVID and there's a post-COVID scenario.

In pre-COVID scenario, we used to have 10-person spares for training. And there would be no-shows, but we always could find people.

Post-COVID, we have increased the number of spares to 20 persons. So, that's 20 person additional hiring and training, and we are finding more people—that we have to use more spares. In the by-election, both the Kirkfield Park, Thompson, and actually even Fort Whyte, most of our spares were used, and in Thompson there was one location where we had a head office staffperson in Thompson for assistance who had to go and be the voting officer.

**MLA Marcelino:** This next question's for Ms. Verma.

Will the Elections Manitoba site be ready for the general election? What happens if the website crashes? What kind of precautions are being taken?

**Ms. Verma:** The website will be ready for the next general election.

We did have an issue in the Kirkfield Park by-election. There was a programming error and, also, our hosting site wasn't functioning well. So, that was an error that we regret, and we will be going in for additional testing and a backup plan for the general election.

**MLA Marcelino:** I'd just like to ask Ms. Verma: Will the voter database be updated in time for the election?

**Ms. Verma:** The voter database is a permanent database.

We get quarterly updates from our data sources. We update the database three times to four times in a year. All the parties will be getting an annual voters list update in February, so we are on track to get that updated.

**MLA Marcelino:** Just like to ask—thank you, Mr. Chair. Just like to ask some questions regarding voter turnout.

Can Ms. Verma please explain the barriers some people face regarding voting? Can you talk a little bit about the particular challenges that Manitobans from different demographics and regions face?

**Ms. Verma:** So, we conduct voter surveys after every general election. The surveys of the past four general elections provide a more—very consistent result.

There are three categories of non-voters. (1) there are—there could be administrative issues, which ranges between 9 to 11 per cent among non-voters. It's like, the voting place was not convenient, or it was changed, or they did not receive the voter information in time.

The second reason is they planned to vote, but they did not vote. We consider them more as irregular voters. So, that category is around 30 per cent—30 to 35 per cent.

But the largest category of non-voters are disassociated voters is they don't think their vote counts. They don't understand the process of voting at times, and they don't have the information to evaluate how to make a decision as to who to vote for. Or, there is apathy towards voting.

So, that category has been increasing. It's almost close to 50 per cent of non-voters are falling in that category, which is alarming.

So, in my area, it's more the administrative issue that we see, and we try to—the voter information card is a process that we have been evaluating how to provide most current information and provide the voter information cards in a timely manner that we are continuously working on and trying to improve our address database quality.

One of the recommendations that we have had since 2016 is to have an integrated address system for Manitoba, because civic addresses have a postal code and they are more consistent, like if you see City of Winnipeg or Brandon, but rural addressing and First Nation addressing have several challenges. One of the most common challenges is aliases; you may have a lot-block-plan; you may have a section-township-range; or you may have a 911 or a civic address.

\* (10:40)

Municipalities don't have a requirement to have a consistent addressing, so if—that recommendation we still believe is something that would help Manitobans, not just for election purposes but for other realms, too.

**MLA Marcelino:** Also, thanks for that information, Ms. Verma. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I guess I'd like to ask Ms. Verma to maybe touch a little bit more about what Elections Manitoba is doing to address the barriers—the non-administrative ones that you were saying that you mostly focus on to help, you know, capture the irregular voters and the very apathetic voters that you said were the 50 per cent of the non-voters.

So, on page 20, you guys discuss registration drives that you have, and you talk a little bit about the education programming.

Do you think that Elections Manitoba needs to take a bigger role in this, or is this something that needs to be legislated and mandated?

**Ms. Verma:** So, our message to the returning officers and assistant returning officers is to build connections in the community. What we would like is to build awareness around the voting process and the different ways that voters can access their voting opportunity.

The other target area that we look at is youth and young voters. We believe developing a participate—a habit of participating in the democratic process really

helps in the long run. The surveys also say that people who are coming from families of voters tend to vote, and we have the concept of bring your child to vote. So, we want the parents to bring their children to the voting places to show them the voting process, make them familiar with the process and start the engagement at an early age.

So, we are looking at education. We are looking at the community outreach. We're also looking at partnering with different community organizations to spread the message of voting.

Vote PopUp, another initiative that we started in the last election that we are promoting again for this election, is actually a simulation of the voting process. So, the whole—the area will be set up and people can come and do the act of voting, because many newcomers and are—may be coming from areas where voting is not secure or safe. We want to let the message be that voting in Manitoba, in Canada is safe, it's free and fair. And Vote PopUp is a way of showcasing the voting process and removing the barriers which they may have as to how to vote. So, one of the reasons which I had mentioned earlier was people are not familiar as to how the voting process unfolds. So, the Vote PopUp will address that.

Engaging the youth is another aspect. We're also looking at—we have the ability to have 17 and—16- and 17-year-olds in our voter database. We are building that, and we are hoping for the next election we can engage with them or connect with them to say that you will be the first-time voter. Also, sending a voter information card to the young voters will be a priority.

**MLA Marcelino:** Thank you, Ms. Verma.

Actually, Ms. Verma, when I was in university, I did study a little bit about, you know, voter participation. And there was some evidence showing that a lot of this kind of civic studies didn't actually help too much—like, in education—and the only thing that was proven in—across jurisdictions to really increase voter participation was mandating it, like how you have to pay your taxes.

Have you guys, in Elections Manitoba, done any research on this?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Before I ask Ms. Verma to reply, just would like to remind the member that—try to keep your questions directed to the Chair. The use of the word you when you're talking to Ms.—it should come through the Chair, please.

**Ms. Verma:** So, I believe the civics has been reinstated in the social studies curriculum in Manitoba, and that started probably in 2006 or '7. If you're referring to compulsory voting, then we have not done any specific research study on this.

I know Australia has mandatory voting. That's the most I have for this question right now.

**MLA Marcelino:** My next question is for Ms. Verma.

Does the location of polling stations have an effect on voter turnout? What about the nature of the polling station? For example, in the side-by-side apartment, one with a voting location in it, does that usually have a higher turnout compared to the other one where people have to vote at a community centre blocks away?

**Ms. Verma:** So, we try to make our voting places accessible and convenient to the voters. The first target is to use the same voting place which the voter is used to going to, be it a provincial or federal election. We don't have any study in particular as to if a side-by-side versus going to a community centre.

In Manitoba, if you have a housing complex of 100 units, then we are required to have a voting station within that complex. Even for the number could be less if it's a seniors' home or assisted living. We can still have a voting place in that building, and that's what our target is.

When we were looking at vote-counting machines or having larger poll size, in rural areas we are not making any changes in the voting places. They will continue to be there where they were before, so the voters will not have to travel more distance.

For advanced voting, the law says that no more than 50 voters have to travel more than 30 kilometres, so we do comply with that legislation, too. We have over 300 locations for advance voting.

So, I believe that if there are any additional voting places which you think we need to consider, please let us know. We do circulate the maps to all the parties ahead of the election. The maps will be going out in the new year to all the political parties for review, which do identify the voting areas and the locations, too.

So, if there's any additional recommendation that you would have for any area we would be very pleased to receive that feedback from all of you.

**MLA Marcelino:** I'd like to ask Ms. Verma about advisory committees.

I notice on page 26, you're describing—Ms. Verma was describing the EFA advisory committee—the from the report, and I was wondering if there was any thought to having advisory committees to help expand voter registration, considering the very distressing levels of voter turnout we've been experiencing recently.

**Ms. Verma:** So, the advisory committee consists of one representative for—from each registered party. We do meet with the advisory committee under both Elections Act and Election Financing Act at least once every year. And if they have any feedback on the registration or the voter turnout, we do take that into consideration.

The voter registration is to get the voters on the voters list, and the swear-ons that we have, if—is a very small percentage of the actual voters on the voters list. So, the—we don't see a strong connection between the voter turnout and the registration database, which is there.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask Ms. Verma, does Elections Manitoba set a target goal for voter turnout, and what is considered a successful turnout?

**Ms. Verma:** Voter turnout is a complex issue, as I'd mentioned earlier. The reason for not voting is administrative, but there is a—more ideological reasons for not voting.

So we do not set up a target for voter turnout. What we set as a target is that all voting locations should be accessible, our information to the voters must be accurate and complete, the voters should get that information in a timely manner, the information on the voters list should be current, accurate and complete.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask Ms. Verma, does she think that elections—does Elections Manitoba think that voter turnout is on a downward trend, and why or why not?

**Ms. Verma:** The voter turnout in a general election and the voter turnout in a by-election historically is not the same.

The voter turnout in the general election has been quite consistent; it's around—between 55 to 56 per cent.

\* (10:50)

The number of actual voters were more in the 2019 election as compared to the 2016 election, but the voter turnout was less because the number of voters in our voters list was more in 2019 versus 2016.

The voter turnout in a by-election ranges usually around from 20 to 35 per cent to 40 per cent. The by-election turnout was—in Thompson was quite low; it was 19.5 per cent.

**MLA Marcelino:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask Ms. Verma, when was the last time a by-election was held in December, and does she think that the date of an election month impacts voter turnout—or the weather?

**Ms. Verma:** I cannot answer if the date of the by-election will impact the turnout. There are several reasons—it's a complex concept of a voter turnout.

The last by-election was called in December, and that was Arthur-Virden, I believe.

**MLA Marcelino:** I think those are all my questions, Mr. Chair. I just have a couple more loose ones.

Do we still have time?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Yes, we have time. *[interjection]*

MLA Marcelino.

**MLA Marcelino:** My next question is about—here on page 31 in the report—about the consistent election calendar nomination deadline.

I was just wondering what spurred that on. Like, if—why we need to—why you felt that we need to have this six days after the writ is up for folks that have been nominated.

Has there been problems with having this type of information out for the voters?

**Ms. Verma:** So, the reason why we are making that recommendation is that the—in a fixed-date election, nomination closes on day 22. In an—other fixed date—a non-fixed-date election or a by-election, it closes on day 15.

If we have vote-counting machines, then it does take time to program the machines and do adequate testing. Four days between close of nomination and advance will be extremely challenging in completing the full testing and delivering these vote-counting machines all across Manitoba. In a fixed-date election, we do have 11 days, which seems to be a more realistic time period to do the testing and delivering of the vote-counting machines all across Manitoba.

We also understand that a by-election—there is a new—under the legislation, six months—within six months, the by-election has to be called. So, there is a general awareness among the parties and the candidates as to the estimated timeline of a by-election, and 50 voters are required for the nomination process.

So, by making the dead-date line consistent, we believe it will not cause additional hardship to the political parties or candidates, but also it will ensure that the testing is done properly of these vote-counting machines. And that provides an additional assurance that the public confidence and the integrity of the process is maintained.

**MLA Marcelino:** I'd also like to ask Ms. Verma about the telephone voting recommendation.

And I was just wondering if Elections Manitoba was considering any pilots for any other types of groups, other than CAF members, because it just seems like a very timely recommendation and something that would really encourage a lot of people to vote and reduce barriers to voting.

**Ms. Verma:** The telephone voting recommendation came about in the previous annual report, too. We had suggested a larger audience; it could be for home-bound or absentee voting, and especially the military.

In this recommendation—the revised one—we are downsizing it just for the armed forces as a pilot. If that is accepted by the legislators, and we get the approval to proceed with it, then it would be a pilot with the armed forces, and then we can come back with a report to further provide information as to if it can be expanded.

**MLA Marcelino:** Those are all my questions, and I really appreciate all the responses from Ms. Verma and the participation of your staff and all the input that you gave us through this 2021 report.

And I was just wondering, when do we see the 2022 report? Since there was so much activity this year, I can't wait to be able to discuss some of the issues that I personally ran into and that I got to see from the other voters.

**Ms. Verma:** Our annual report is usually tabled around October. Next year is the general election. If it's a set date as October, then we will be advising the members as to when the annual report will be coming out.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Just a few questions. I know a lot of the questions were covered off already by the official opposition critic.

When it comes to preparing for the next election, I know that financial officers play a really, really important role for candidates—often unappreciated or maybe unrecognized, not by Elections Manitoba, but by the public as a whole. But candidates recognize how important their role is.

There are normally training seminars that happen with those financial officers. Are those planned again for early in the new year?

**Ms. Verma:** Yes, we are offering training sessions again to the parties and to the candidates.

We also offer training sessions—there are general ones, but we also offer training sessions which are specific to the parties, because we find sometimes, in that environment, the candidates and the official agents are more comfortable in asking questions.

Currently, we have around 50 candidates who are already nominated under The Election Financing Act. We have provided an offer to train, if anybody's interested, and we are providing sessions upon request.

For the next election, we are looking at promoting the record-keeping tool, which is an online, web-based record-keeping tool for all the candidates and also for the parties' election return and annual return, that will assist them in recording their expenses in a timely manner and the contributions.

The online tool also has the feature of providing tax receipts, which is electronic tax receipts. Some of the questions we get, you know, we want to provide a duplicate tax receipt. That online tool has the capacity to provide duplicate tax receipts, also, if needed. It has a banking statement, provides features of scanning the tax receipts and invoices and supporting documentation.

It can be accessed by the auditor, too, so it's all in one that the official agents or the financial officer do their bookkeeping in one place. They can share it with the auditor and then electronically transfer the statement to us.

**Mr. Goertzen:** And thank you for that, and I know my financial agent, Doug Hamm—not a secret; it's published all the time, in terms of the person who is your financial agent—really, really appreciative of that online tool. He's now done this for a number of different elections and says it sort of improves every time.

And—but with that, I mean, there's a lot of work that happens with financial agents. I might argue maybe more work, sometimes, than with the auditor—not that the auditor function isn't important, but I think the actual work is maybe more significant with those financial agents.

\* (11:00)

Currently, I think Elections Manitoba, through our legislation, pays a certain amount directly to the financial agent. Is that—is my memory correct? Is there a certain amount that's paid to financial officers, or is it just to the auditors?

**Ms. Verma:** Under the EFA, there is an audit subsidy which is paid directly to the auditors. The audit subsidy is \$1,500 plus PST to candidates and leadership contestants; \$16,000 for party's annual return and \$30,000 for party's election return.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Yes, thanks for that reminder. So, it's just paid to the auditor.

Has there ever been any consideration for recommendation for the financial agents, perhaps, to receive some subsidy? I know that the campaigns themselves, if they choose, could provide remuneration—that's often done—but it might, I don't want to say increase the quality of those who do that work, but it might make it a bit easier.

**Ms. Verma:** It's not a recommendation that we have considered, given that the campaigns can provide remuneration to the official agents and then the campaigns are eligible for reimbursement, too, if they receive 5 per cent of the eligible vote.

Around Canada, too, I'm not aware of any other jurisdiction pays to the financial officers. But you are right; the financial officer's work is actually extremely important. In case of any investigation or non-compliance, it is the financial officer who is held accountable, also, for any violations under The Election Financing Act.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Very true, and I'll just leave that with you. I don't know if I have a particular recommendation around it. My financial agent always reminds me that if there's any problems, there are two people

who potentially get in trouble: it's me and him. So, he's very adamant of—that we are careful on those sort of things, and I appreciate his work and all those around the province who do it.

There was a change a few years ago—not that many years ago—that associations have to file unaudited statements as referred to in your report. How is that function going? I think that the expenses get parallel—get filed parallel to the same way that we file our elections expenses. Is that, sort of, the right category is, and is that function working all right?

**Ms. Verma:** The constituency associations also have to file a more complete statement than what they were filing previously. And we had made that recommendation especially because there are financial transactions between the constituency association and the candidates and the parties. And then we were trying to reconcile. It would—like, sometimes there used to be—the numbers would not match. So, having the banking information and the actual transaction information assists us in doing the reconciliation.

Our recommendation to move the filing deadline for constituency associations to the annual party one is to have a more seamless reconciliation of these transfer payments because we find we are unable to close the review of the constituency association returns until the time we receive the party returns.

So, there is a delay of two to three months because, 'til the time we get the party information, we cannot verify the constituency association information. So, if the deadlines are made consistent, then I think it would be helpful for the constituency association officers also, because once they are filing the return, they are waiting for us to close it and we are also waiting for the other information to be received.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I will just close with a couple of questions regarding voter turnout.

So, the opposition critic, you know, talked about different models that happen in other countries, and I think you might have referenced Australia and their, you know, quote, unquote, mandatory voting system. I'm not sure if it's mandatory, but you just simply get—you pay a fine or you lose a tax credit or something on your income tax if you don't vote. But, you know, in terms of the system of voting, it's never been more easy for Manitobans and Canadians, more generally, to vote through advance voting; you know, there's advance polls in malls.

And so I think that, you know, more work to do, I'm sure, but there's never been more of an effort by elections officials and political agents and those who work in the political system to try to make it more easy and to remind people about voting, and yes—and yet, voter turnout is going down.

So, you sort of made it an allusion to the fact that it's more than just—it's more philosophical reasons, maybe, that voter turnout isn't so high. And I don't expect you to, sort of, maybe expand on those, unless you feel comfortable doing so, but would you agree that it's never been easier for people to be able to vote?

**Ms. Verma:** There are definitely more voting opportunities. And over the years, if—we see that Manitoba has been leading the new services, which we provide to the voters, in the country.

You know, advance voting—vote anywhere and advance voting, Manitoba was the first jurisdiction to have that in Canada, with eight days of advance voting. We have home-bound voting, where any disability, people are eligible for home-bound voting, and their caregiver, too. There is absentee voting. Now with election day, vote anywhere in your electoral division is again a step up for the voting opportunities.

So, I would agree that in Manitoba we have been progressing steadily in providing more accessible voting opportunities to Manitobans.

**Mr. Goertzen:** And—then, I'll just sort of conclude, maybe, on more of a statement than a question, I suppose. Respond if you wish, but you might not want to.

Just in terms of voter turnout: my friend, you know, made some comments about mandatory turnout or voting, a lot about the system of voting, and I know that Kevin Lamoureux, when he used to be an MLA, he spent a great deal of time in these committees talking about lowering the voting age to 16 or mandatory voting. He became federal MP and hasn't, sort of, worked to implement those sort of things; although, I know this is an issue that he cares about still very much, but it's complex. And the reasons why people don't vote are complex.

But I think that it's, you know, not just an onus that falls on Elections Manitoba, and it felt that way from the questions, maybe, that were being asked.

You know, we as political operators, we as political participants, need to take responsibility there, as well. So, we have a system where we try to ensure

that people will vote, but we need to, you know, conduct ourselves in a way that is encouraging for people to vote and that motivates people to vote, because a lot of times people will say they're not voting because—and we hear this at the doors, all of us, all political parties—well, my vote doesn't make a difference. It doesn't make a difference who I vote for.

Or, sometimes we hear political parties, like in the last by-election, and you won't want to comment on this—I'm not asking you to say that, you know, you shouldn't vote for a particular political party you might want to vote for because that's a wasted vote; you should only vote for our political party.

All of those things, you know, have an impact, I think, on voter turnout.

So, it's a collective responsibility that doesn't have a silver bullet answer. It's not about forcing people to vote. It's not about, you know, just looking at issues of voter accessibility. Some of that voter accessibility is a part of that. We have a responsibility, as those who participate in the electoral system, as well, to give people a positive reason to vote in addition to the other reasons why people might vote.

So, I just want to say that I don't want Elections Manitoba or others to feel, based on the questions, that this is simply your responsibility to increase voter turnout. All of us who participate in the electoral system have reason to try to get voter turnout up. We all have reason to take responsibility for reasons that it might be down. And we all have a collective responsibility to look at what are the things that can encourage voter turnout, recognizing that the right not to vote says something, too.

Those who don't come out and vote are also making a statement. Might not be as clear a statement as those who are voting, but they are also saying something, and it's incumbent upon us to figure out what it is that they're saying by not exercising their right to vote. It's not all about dissatisfaction. Some people might not vote because they are satisfied.

But, whatever those reasons are, I know that we have a collective responsibility to try to increase that and to try to make the voting system not just easier, but more attractive, and give people reasons to vote.

So, not asking you to respond unless you want to, because some of that was pretty political, but, again, thank you for being at the committee and the work of Elections Manitoba. And we wish you well in what I know is going to be a real busy year for you, and a year that's going to be filled with lots of excitement

and challenges, as well, for Elections Manitoba. So, thank you for being at the committee tonight.

And if there are other questions from other members, I'm happy to cede the floor.

\* (11:10)

**Ms. Verma:** I just want to add a couple of points: that in the legislation, which—you know, the participation in the democratic process of the public is not just through the voting process. It's also by being part of the election process, which is participating as election workers and giving out—like, being—teaching and educating people about how the voting process unfolds.

And, again, I commend and thank all the legislators for giving us two points in the law, which was—our recommendation was allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to work in any position in the—in elections. Earlier, they were restricted to just information officers, but 16- and 17-year-olds can work in any election position, election day or advance voting or even in the returning office.

And the second one is, you no longer have to be a citizen to work as an election official. Which was, again, a change which was brought in Manitoba, and we were, again, the first one in the country to have that, that landed immigrants, people on study or work visas can also work as an election official. Because that's also their exposure to the elections process, and they are future voters for us, be it 16-, 17-year-olds or the new immigrants or students who may be coming to settle in Canada.

So, introducing and making these future voters as part of the elections process also helps us getting the—more public engaged.

So, thank you for that.

**Mrs. Cathy Cox (Kildonan-River East):** I also would like to thank you and your team for all of the important work that you do.

And next year is going to be a very busy year for you. You know, public needs to know and needs to feel comfortable when they go to that ballot box that everything is safe and that their ballot will make a difference. So, thank you.

And, I just want to—with regard to encouraging, you know, individuals to vote, my 10-year-old granddaughter just—during the last municipal election, they also did a mock election in their classroom. And it was—I think it was, you know, remarkable that, you

know, they decided who they wanted to vote for, you know, based on all of the pamphlets and information that they received.

And I'm wondering if there's anything that we can, as Elections Manitoba, provide or develop. Some type of a—you know—handbook for teachers that kind of tells them what they can do if they want to host a mock election and, you know, what the different processes are.

Just a question, and, again, thank you.

**Ms. Verma:** Actually, we do have a program. It's called Your Power to Choose. It is for grades 6, 9 and 11, but any grades can access that program.

We have our own facilitators. We go to the classrooms. It is—there's no charge to the school or the teachers for it. We conduct mock elections, we conduct workshops. And in the mock election, the classroom is divided into people—the children can become either candidates, they can become scrutineers, they can become voting officials, they can

do a campaign as to how to spread the message. So, what you were saying exactly, that's part of the Your Power to Choose program.

We do around 300 workshops in a year. We also promote this through the social studies teachers, the SAGE program, and we have our own outreach which we do in January and the beginning of the calendar school year.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Seeing no further questions, I will now put the question on the report.

Annual Report of Elections Manitoba for the year ending December 31st, 2021—pass.

The hour being 11:14, what is the will of the committee?

**An Honourable Member:** Committee rise.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Committee rise.

**COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 11:14 a.m.**



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

**<http://www.manitoba.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>**