

Meeting Summary

Advisory Committee of Political Parties

June 10-11, 2021

Table of Contents

<u>Advisory Committee of Political Parties’ Meeting Summary</u>	3
<u>Meeting Summary</u>	3
<u>Introductory remarks by the Chief Electoral Officer</u>	3
<u>Voting by Mail</u>	4
<u>Adapted Voting Services on Reserves, in Long-Term Care Facilities and in Quarantine Centres</u>	5
<u>Presenter: Dawn Borutskie (Acting Director, Voting Operations)</u>	5
<u>Responding to Emergency Situations</u>	6
<u>Political Finance Updates</u>	6
<u>Forward Calendar</u>	8
<u>Appendix</u>	9
<u>Appendix A: Meeting Agenda</u>	9
<u>Appendix B: List of Participants</u>	9
<u>ACPP representatives</u>	9
<u>Elections Canada staff present for the duration or part of the meeting</u>	11
<u>Meeting facilitator</u>	11

Advisory Committee of Political Parties' Meeting Summary

Meeting Summary

The Advisory Committee of Political Parties (ACPP) convened for a virtual annual general meeting on June 10-11, 2021. The goal of the meeting was to give updates to ACPP members on key operational details for the 44th general election. Topics of discussion included updates to vote-by-mail services and adapted voting services on reserves, in long-term care (LTC) facilities and in quarantine centres. Updates were also provided on how Elections Canada (EC) would respond to an emergency situation (e.g. a pandemic). Updates were also provided with respect to closing out the 43rd general election, as it relates to the financial returns and audits of political entities.

This ACPP meeting was the first time that the committee met under the revised ACPP terms of reference. The revised terms include a protocol for conducting virtual meetings, which parties were consulted on before the ACPP meeting.

Introductory remarks by the Chief Electoral Officer

Presenter: Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer

The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) opened by assuring ACPP members that EC is ready to conduct an election during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also provided a brief overview of service adaptations that EC will be implementing to better serve electors when an election is called. For instance, he noted that a drop-box service for special ballots will be made available at polling stations for people who are unable to mail their special ballot in time for it to be returned to EC by the deadline. He also explained that, while EC is exploring the feasibility of re-introducing the Vote on Campus program, there are major logistical implications that prevent EC from reaching agreements with universities and operationalizing the program within the prescribed election timeframe. Nevertheless, the CEO explained that students will likely have several voting options to choose from (e.g. voting at polling stations in residences or voting by special ballot). We are developing an information campaign to let students know what voting options are available to them. On electoral security, the CEO stated that EC is working with electoral security partners, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Cyber Security Education Consortium and the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, to ensure enhanced monitoring, detection and response to security incidents that may arise. The CEO explained that EC has developed measures that will help to pre-empt, correct and publish accurate information as required, particularly on social media. Similarly, the CEO explained that

EC will be looking to collaborate with parties to prevent misinformation about the election.

The CEO stated that we recently updated the National Register of Electors and issued mail-outs as part of our efforts to maintain the accuracy of the Register. The CEO introduced Maxime Messier, who has taken on the role of Senior Director of Electoral Data Services and Development.

Members inquired about how Bill C-19: An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (COVID-19 response), which is currently being considered in Parliament, could change how elections are conducted. The CEO explained that the bill would provide additional powers to help conduct elections during a pandemic (e.g. how services are administered in LTC facilities). He clarified that he would have the discretion to not use some of the items in the bill if the measures implemented in response to the pandemic are deemed to no longer be necessary, upon consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Canada. The CEO closed the session by answering questions about the total number of voting days, voter information cards and the availability of new and different polling stations.

Voting by Mail

Presenter: Danielle Duquette (Acting Director, Alternative Voting Methods)

Ms. Duquette gave a summary of the vote-by-mail services that will be available in the next federal election. She also provided key timelines to issue, process and count special ballots, and to engage scrutineers. Ms. Duquette also gave an overview of the verification process, from pre-verification at the local office to checking the ballots before they are included in the count. She explained who can be present during the verification process (e.g. scrutineer, candidate, etc.).

Ms. Duquette also outlined the process of counting special and ordinary ballots, highlighting how this process will be adapted given the expected increase in applications for special ballots. She further explained that this process will be adjusted based on the number of ballots that are received. The returning officer will inform local campaigns of the decision on the timing of counting. Ms. Duquette also noted that drop boxes may impact the timing of the counting of ballots (i.e. in large geographic areas). Returning officers may plan up to three ballot counts per day. They will communicate regularly with EC headquarters about when counting begins and when it ends. They will also keep local campaigns informed of the decisions made regarding the counting of ballots. Ms. Duquette also noted that EC would have drop boxes on election day for people who are not able to mail their special ballot in time for it to be returned to EC by the deadline. She further noted that staff will be assigned to monitor the drop boxes. Finally, she informed the committee that parties will be invited to submit the names of observers that will witness the counting of special ballots at EC's Coventry Road office in Ottawa. Safety measures will be implemented and mandatory training will be

provided. Parties will find information about the administration of the count (counting schedule) at the Political Entities Services Centre.

Committee members asked EC to provide more detailed information about the changes to processes (including the verification process) as well as services. In particular, parties requested information specific to political entities. EC noted that procedural manuals are available on the website and that parties will be able to comment on the process in the Opinions, Guidelines and Interpretation Notes. EC advised members that it will produce information materials to explain the process—including changes to services—to the public. A question was raised about how electors will know that they are dropping off their ballot in the right electoral district. EC responded that an information officer or a central poll supervisor will be present to answer questions from the public and may consider adding an identifier for the polling division. The communication campaign will also inform electors about the service (i.e. how to drop off ballots). A question was raised about people dropping off multiple ballots. EC clarified that these situations will be logged by poll officials in an incident report. Ballots will not be verified when they are deposited in the drop box and electors are responsible for their ballots and ensuring that they are delivered to EC.

Adapted Voting Services on Reserves, in Long-Term Care Facilities and in Quarantine Centres

Presenter: Dawn Borutskie (Acting Director, Voting Operations)

Ms. Borutskie gave an overview of adaptations that will be made to services in LTC facilities and senior residences, reserves, quarantine centres and other places due to the pandemic. Ms. Borutskie noted that services may change depending on the local situation (e.g. increased safety measures if there is an outbreak of COVID-19). She briefed committee members that four options will be available for electors in LTC facilities: voting on election day, voting at advance polls, voting by mail independently and voting by mail with the support of a helper). On-site polling stations will be offered. Electors in LTC facilities will still be able to vote at their local office or their assigned polling station. If there is no on-site polling station at the LTC facility, electors will be able to vote at their assigned polling station. Ms. Borutskie also listed factors that LTC facilities would need to consider if they opt for on-site polling stations (staffing, volunteers, etc.).

On First Nations reserves, services will include ordinary polling stations and voting by mail with the support of a community relations officer. CanTalk Canada will provide interpretation services. EC will continue to reach out to band councils and leaders throughout the summer to facilitate the service offering so that electors may benefit from polling stations that are located within close proximity. EC is aware that services in quarantine centres may change depending on circumstances related to the pandemic. The main service offered will be voting by mail and deadlines will apply. Electors who are unable to leave their home (e.g. who are in quarantine or isolation) will be

encouraged to vote by mail. Home visits will be offered, subject to criteria outlined in the Canada Elections Act (CEA), while upholding safety precautions and pre-screening. Youth and students will be encouraged to vote at their local office, by mail or at ordinary or advanced polls.

Parties were asked to comment on how EC will be communicating about polling locations in LTC facilities and on reserves (i.e. through the Political Entities Services Centre, on the EC website as a notice of grant of a poll, electronic list of polling sites). EC enquired about whether other communication mechanisms are necessary and whether parties will require information that is different than that provided to local campaigns. Parties asked about the appointment of community relations officers. EC clarified that returning officers hire and recruit such officers, in collaboration with the communities they serve.

Responding to Emergency Situations

Presenters: Robert Sampson (Legal Counsel, Legal Services)

Mr. Sampson explained that some of the legislative instruments that are available to the CEO for the effective administration of the election. This includes administrative discretion, adaptations to the CEA, as well as the cancellation and postponing of elections. Mr. Sampson clarified that these instruments have been used by the CEO in the past. In particular, he noted that adaptations were used in 2019 to allow a “super-poll” in Winnipeg, due to storms. Similarly, in response to ballot shortages, the CEO allowed ballots to be photocopied. The Governor in Council has the authority to postpone or cancel an election in one or several electoral districts if the CEO certifies that it is impracticable to administer the election (see section 59 of the CEA).

ACPP members asked for clarification about elections that have been postponed or canceled in the past and the prime minister’s role in the matter. On the previous use of the powers set out in section 59 of the CEA, the CEO responded that it has never been used at the federal level. On the CEO’s recommendation to the Governor in Council, he noted that there would be transparency in the decision. Clarification was also asked about photocopying ballots and whether this is something that the CEO can always resort to in the event of shortages. EC stated that there would have to be an unusual or unforeseen event causing a shortage for the adaptation to allow this measure. There was also a question on the communication channels that are used to provide information to parties when exceptional circumstances arise. EC replied that it has effective public communication mechanisms in place, including via the ACPP inbox. There was further clarification that parties are not consulted when emergency measures are put in place.

Political Finance Updates

Presenters: Josée Villeneuve (Senior Director, Political Financing), Tamara Kluge (Director, Political Financing and Audit) and Jeff Merrett (Director, Regulatory Instruments & Systems)

Ms. Villeneuve gave updates on the post-43rd general election financial reporting cycle to ACPP members. On campaign and candidate results, she noted that EC plans to finalize reporting at the end of June 2021. Ms. Villeneuve also noted some of the changes that were made to the third-party regime ahead of the 43rd general election. A total number of 150 third parties registered; an increase of 30 percent. The verification of expenses is ongoing. Third parties were also surveyed and there appeared to be confusion about the rules surrounding third parties given the complexity of the regime. Party verifications are ongoing as well. Ms. Villeneuve also provided operational updates to members. Namely, she noted that a new operations centre was opened in April to streamline the services that are provided to political entities.

Ms. Kluge provided updates on the reporting obligation of electoral district associations (EDAs) for 2019 and 2020. Following the 2019 reporting process, over 100 EDAs were deregistered due to non-compliance with the registration and reporting requirements. Ms. Kluge reminded participants that May 31 was the deadline to produce the 2020 reports and also reminded them of other upcoming deadlines for EDA reporting requirements, as per the CEA.

Ms. Kluge provided updates on the upcoming triennial review. EC expects the process to remain unchanged from the 2015 verification. Since the last general election, three parties have been deregistered and three parties will be eligible for the next election. Finally, she noted that nomination contest and reporting are ongoing and EC is providing contest kits.

Mr. Merrett outlined some of the readiness activities happening within the Political Finance unit. He noted that the portal for the Political Entities Service Centre is being improved for the next election. Specifically, the overall party dashboard is being improved to better serve parties. One observation from the last election is that official agents were completing financial reports on the portal but not submitting them. EC is planning to update the submission process so that users know when returns have been submitted, among other things. The Political Entities Service Centre now allows “designates” so parties can get updates on EDA activities.

Mr. Merrett also updated committee members on EC’s training program for political entities, which is being shifted to a fully online model. The online program allows EC’s training sessions to have a greater reach. Mr. Merrett noted that the format has been well received and over 600 people have signed up for EDA training sessions. Candidate sessions are also being transferred online and include a live virtual Q&A component. Mr. Merrett invited parties to contact EC if they need training for their candidates.

Parties asked for clarification on the triennial review process. On the triennial review timeline, EC reminded participants that parties can start collecting signatures one year before submission submitting them to EC. Scanned copies of declarations will be

accepted. Parties also asked for clarification regarding the verification process for parties without representation in the House of Commons. EC noted that the process is designed to reduce the administrative burden while maintaining the integrity on the process. EC was asked to reconsider the timing of the review process, particularly as it concerns young people who may change residence or travel during the summer months. EC reminded participants and encouraged parties to engage their membership as early as January. On political finance annual returns, physical signatures will also be required, though parties can submit their returns via the Political Entities Service Centre.

Forward Calendar

Presenter: Susan Torosian, Executive Director, Public Affairs and Civic Education

Ms. Torosian presented an outline of upcoming engagements involving political parties, which will include web renewal consultation in order to help EC understand how parties use the website and to provide EC with critical information on what works and what doesn't.

She noted that, when the writ is dropped, there will be an ACPP videoconference on the general election to give key operational updates (vote by mail, adapted voting services, etc.) to political parties. The next ACPP meeting is scheduled for January/February 2022 and will include such topics as assistive voting technology and EC's accessibility plan. This is a legislative requirement under the Accessible Canada Act (ACA) and must be published by December 31, 2022.

Following the presentation of the Forward Calendar, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:30 p.m. on June 11, 2021.

Appendix

Appendix A: Meeting Agenda

Day 1: June 10, 2021

1:00–1:15 p.m.	Welcome and Logistics
1:15–1:45 p.m.	CEO Introductory Remarks
1:45–2:45 p.m.	Voting by Mail
2:45–3:15 p.m.	Adapted Voting Services on Reserves, in LTC Facilities and in Quarantine Centres
3:15–3:30 p.m.	Break
3:30–4:15 p.m.	Responding to Emergency Situations
4:15–4:20 p.m.	Wrap-Up

Day 2: June 11, 2021

1:00–1:05 p.m.	Welcome and Logistics
1:05–1:50 p.m.	Political Finance Updates
1:50–2:05 p.m.	Forward Calendar

Appendix B: List of Participants

ACPP representatives

Name	Political Party
Stephen Best	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Liz White	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Sylvain Gauthier	Bloc Québécois
Josée Beaudin	Bloc Québécois
Christian Gaudreault (observer)	Bloc Québécois

Rod Taylor	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Peter Vogel	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
George Zekveld (observer)	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Ken Stouffer (observer)	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Jay Watts	Communist Party of Canada
Elizabeth Rowley	Communist Party of Canada
Trevor Bailey	Conservative Party of Canada
Janet Fryday Dorey	Conservative Party of Canada
Matthew Clarke (observer)	Green Party of Canada
Melanie Snow	Green Party of Canada
John Arnold	Liberal Party of Canada
Azam Ishmael	Liberal Party of Canada
Jamie Kippen (observer)	Liberal Party of Canada
Jessica Cardill (observer)	Liberal Party of Canada
Luc Vaudry	Liberal Party of Canada
Coreen Corcoran	Libertarian Party of Canada
Jean-Serge Brisson	Libertarian Party of Canada
Anna Di Carlo	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
Christian Legeais	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
Anne McGrath	New Democratic Party
Jesse Calvert	New Democratic Party
Michel Blondin	Parti pour l'indépendance du Québec
Jacinthe Lafrenaye	Parti pour l'indépendance du Québec
Daniel Tyrie	People's Party of Canada
Danny Légaré	Marijuana Party
Sébastien CoRhino	Parti Rhinoceros Party

Liz White	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Stephen Best	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Josée Beaudin	Bloc Québécois
Sylvain Gauthier	Bloc Québécois
Mitesh Joshi	CFF – Direct Democracy Party
Partap Dua	CFF – Direct Democracy Party
Ken Stouffer	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Rod Taylor	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Elizabeth Rowley	Communist Party of Canada
Jay Watts	Communist Party of Canada
Keith Sheppard	Conservative Party of Canada
Trevor Bailey	Conservative Party of Canada
Jeannôt Guillemette	Free Party Canada
Richard Magnan	Free Party Canada
Deepasha Gupta	Green Party of Canada
Robin Marty	Green Party of Canada
Azam Ishmael	Liberal Party of Canada
John Arnold	Liberal Party of Canada
Coreen Corcoran	Libertarian Party of Canada
Jacques Y Boudreau	Libertarian Party of Canada
Danny Légaré	Marijuana Party
Lori Montmarquette	Marijuana Party
Anna Di Carlo	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
Christian Legeais	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
Alvin Knibbs	Maverick Party

Elections Canada staff present for the duration or part of the meeting

Aboubacar Dakuyo, Anne Lawson, Annie Laflèche, Bradley Darch, Brenda Sandelin, Chih Chang, Christopher Morris, Daniel Fischer, Danielle Duquette, Dawn Borutskie, Denis Bazinet, Jane Dunlop, Jannine Atkinson, Jeff Merrett, Jérémie Martineau, Josée Villeneuve, Juan Melara-Pineda, Mario Lavoie, Martin Génier, Maxime Messier, Melanie Wise, Michel Roussel, Miriam Lapp, Natasha Gauthier, Nicholas Levert, Olivier Girouard, Paul Legault, Robert Sampson, Serge Caron, Sophie Martineau, Stéphane Perrault, Steven Tyrie, Susan Torosian, Sylvie Jacmain, Tamara Kluge and Trevor Knight.

Meeting facilitator

Alain Rabeau, Principal, Senior Consultant, Facilitator and Trainer, Intersol Group.