



Advisory Committee of Political Parties

Meeting Summary
February 4-5, 2021



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1. Meeting summary

The Advisory Committee of Political Parties (ACPP) was convened for a virtual meeting on February 4 and 5, 2021. The objective of the meeting was to update ACPP members on how Elections Canada (EC) is preparing to deliver a federal election in a pandemic context with a focus on services to electors opting to vote by mail, those residing in long-term care facilities, First Nation reserves, and those needing to quarantine. EC also discussed adaptations to the counting of ballots and reporting of election results. Parties were also informed of the potential impact that *Bill C-19: An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (COVID-19 response)* would have on the conduct of the election should it receive Royal Assent ahead of the election.

EC also updated parties about changes to candidate services. A session was held to inform party representatives about Elections Canada's engagement efforts with local and national public health authorities to ensure the safe administration of the election. Dr. Barbara Raymond, from the Public Health Agency of Canada, was invited to this session to answer party representatives' question about candidate safety during an election.

2. Introductory remarks by the Chief Electoral Officer

Presenter: Stéphane Perrault (Chief Electoral Officer [CEO])

Mr. Perrault welcomed participants to the meeting, including newly appointed committee members. Mr. Perrault's objective was to update ACPP members on Elections Canada's (EC) state of electoral readiness, noting that while the agency is always ready to deliver an election, the types of services offered would change depending on the context. Given the pandemic context, Mr. Perrault reassured party members that Elections Canada's priority is the delivery of services for electors, candidates and workers in a safe, secure and healthy manner. He noted that as part of Elections Canada's readiness efforts, the agency is working towards developing an effective strategy to recruit sufficient election officers, securing an adequate number of polling locations, implementing appropriate health and safety guidelines for voting in person for both electors and poll workers, adapting voting services in Long Term Care facilities, and adapting operations for the administration of voting by mail. Mr. Perrault indicated that the administration of the vote-by-mail service is expected to take significant effort given that EC is planning to process more than 5 million ballots received through the mail. The existing online registration platform would be used as the tool to allow voters to request a vote by mail kit online. This will significantly reduce the time required to receive vote by mail kits and will also allow Elections Canada to follow up with electors electronically if there is any issue with their application.

On Bill C-19, Mr. Perrault noted that he was expecting to appear before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs (PROC) to offer his comments on the contents of

the Bill. As such, he invited ACPP members to provide feedback on the bill during the course of the meeting which the CEO would consider ahead of his appearance before Parliament.

Mr. Perrault then welcomed questions from participants. During the question period, the CEO was asked about the decision to not allow electors who apply to vote by mail to change their minds about their preferred voting method. The CEO responded that measures will be in place that aim at preventing double voting. He further clarified that in some cases where an elector does not receive their voting kit, they will be able to take an oath and vote at their assigned polling station. With respect to the nomination process and the contents of Bill C-19, parties expressed disappointment that the CEO had not recommended changes to the legislation to allow for the collection of electronic signatures during the pandemic. The CEO stated that Elections Canada has been looking into options for signatures and that this is a point that he will raise at his next appearance with PROC on C-19.

3. Legislative changes under Bill C-19

Presenter: Anne Lawson (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Regulatory Affairs)

Ms. Lawson presented ACPP members with an update on the proposed legislative changes under Bill C-19. The bill would ensure the health and safety of electors and electoral workers. Attendees were informed that the CEO expected to be asked to appear in Parliament once the bill is referred to Committee. Upon receipt of royal assent, some elements of Bill C-19 would come into force immediately including an enhanced adaptation power and new flexibility for Long Term Care (LTC) voting. Most of the provisions of the bill come into force 90 days following royal assent such as an extended polling period (Saturday, Sunday and Monday), Special Voting Rule changes, and any other necessary changes.

Regarding the fact that the bill includes the power for the CEO to repeal it, parties inquired on whether this is a power that the CEO had requested or whether it was something that Parliament opted to include. EC confirmed that this was not a power that was requested. On the CEO's adaptive powers to the Canada Elections Act in the event of a spring election, parties asked how changes would be communicated to political parties and the public. The CEO clarified that voting by mail services are being adapted based on current legislative provisions; only services in LTCs would be impacted. On the bill coming into force, parties asked whether the CEO could delay implementation of the bill in the event of an election. It was clarified that the CEO can recommend that implementation does not occur during an election period. Parliament could then repeal legislation by recommendation of the CEO. However, the decision would rest with Parliament. Parties also expressed concern over the collection of physical nomination signatures during a pandemic, and recommended that electronic signatures should be allowed. EC clarified that Bill C-19 does not include changes to candidate services and that currently, physical signatures are still required. There were also questions of clarification asked regarding the process that EC is following for the administration of voting by mail.

4. Election Readiness

Presenters: Michel Roussel (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation) and Olivier Girouard (Director, Planning and Administration of Operations)

The purpose of this presentation was to update committee members on Elections Canada's (EC) overall election readiness strategy, while providing timelines for pre-election activities in the field and at headquarters and outlining some of the adjustments to electoral operations due to the pandemic. Mr. Roussel explained that while EC is ready to conduct an election, the agency has set working dates of March 1st and October 1st for the implementation of certain service enhancements. He also stated that EC is building on lessons learned during the fall 2020 by-elections.

Related to operations in the field and at ECHQ, Mr. Roussel stated that priorities for the agency include the implementation of effective health and safety protocols. Specifically, he noted that procedures at the polls are currently being adjusted to promote the health of poll workers and voters. EC is also adapting its procedures to enhance our capacity to issue and count special ballots. He further mentioned that Elections Canada is focusing its readiness efforts on election material preparation and assembly, staging of field hardware, production of geography material, and adaptation of polling day worker training. EC is also preparing a public education campaign to effectively inform electors about what they can expect when voting during a pandemic.

Mr. Roussel also outlined field activities that are underway, including the appointment of returning officers and assistant returning officers. Returning officers are also in the process of identifying of potential local offices and polling locations and planning their local recruitment and outreach.

There were no questions from ACPP members following the presentation.

5. Vote By Mail

Presenters: Brenda Sandelin (Manager, National Voter Registration Projects and Electoral Readiness) and Steven Tyrie (Assistant Director, Alternative Voting Systems)

Ms. Sandelin and Mr. Tyrie provided a summary of the current status for voting by mail for electors. Due to the anticipated increase in requests to vote by mail (potentially between 4-5 million), Elections Canada has modified the current Online Voter Registration Service to allow local electors to use the system to apply to vote by mail. This new functionality will allow electors to upload their proof of identity and address, reducing the time required to process the application and provide the voting kit.

A video presentation illustrating how to apply to vote by mail was shown to committee members, and was followed by questions. There was a request for clarity regarding voting by mail and the access that

political parties will have to electors. Committee members questioned as to when would a person be denied a mail-in ballot. A request was also made to clarify whether there was any available data on rejected special ballots.

6. Vote Counting & Results

Presenters: Sophie Martineau (Assistant Director, Operations & Field Governance) and Dawn Borutskie (Electoral Operations Planning and Administration)

The purpose of this presentation was to update members on how Elections Canada is preparing to deliver special ballot voting services, and how it is planning to report on results. To this end, Ms. Martineau remarked that due to the higher expected numbers of mail-in ballots and added safety measures, EC is planning changes as to how ballots are processed and counted and how results are reported. Specifically, Ms. Martineau explained that if vote counting cannot be completed on Election night, it would continue on Day -1. The counting of special ballots would start no earlier than Day -2 and to respect physical distancing and may occur at alternate locations. Furthermore, while Elections Canada will allow political parties to send candidates, representatives, and observers to witness the counting process, physical distancing and safety would be practiced first and numbers may be limited due to space.

On the tabulation of results, Ms. Borutskie explained that preliminary results from the general election will be published on the Elections Canada website. The vote count on election night would not include local special ballot counts which would take place after election night (on Days -1, -2, -3). The validation of results would start later than normal (closer to Day -4 or -5) to account for the completion of counting of local special ballots.

Members were informed that EC is currently formalizing its approach to counting and reporting of results in a regulatory policy, which will be aligned with the Canada Elections Act.

7. Commissioner of Canada Elections

Presenter: Yves Côté (Commissioner of Canada Elections [CCE])

The Commissioner of Canada Elections (CCE), Mr. Yves Côté, was invited to participate in the meeting of the ACPP. Mr. Côté informed ACPP members that the new Administrative Monetary Penalties (AMPs) regime was operational which the CCE can now impose for various violations related to illegal voting, communications, third parties, and political financing.

Mr. Côté noted that the Office of the CCE has already begun to issue AMPs and that his office intends to make full use of the flexibility that this compliance tool affords. He further noted that it is imperative

that all parties ensure that prospective financial and official agents, as well as candidates, understand their obligations under the Canada Elections Act. Lastly, in the event a general election occurs before 2023, Mr. Côté advised members that CCE Legal Services will reach out to all political parties to establish a point of contact should legal issues arise. The Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections has conducted a preliminary review of complaints received in the context of the 43rd general election. In some cases, administrative reviews and investigations related to these complaints remain ongoing. The Office is also continuing to receive referrals from Elections Canada. In both cases, decisions made by the Commissioner that lead to [administrative monetary penalties](#), [compliance agreements](#), [undertakings](#) or the laying of [charges](#) are published on the Commissioner's [website](#).

During the question period, ACP members asked if political parties would have access to the list of AMPs to which the Commissioner confirmed that a plain-language document is available, and would be shared with parties.

8. Candidate Services and Engagement with Public Health Authorities, and PHAC Guidance for Parties

Presenters: Sylvie Jacmain (Director, Alternative Voting Methods and Operational Outreach), Christopher Morris (Acting Assistant Director, Candidate Services), Martin Génier (Chair, General Election Pandemic Intelligence Task Force), and Dr. Barbara Raymond, (Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC])

The objectives of this session were to give an overview to parties on the measures that Elections Canada (EC) is taking to conduct the election in a safe manner. Presenters explained how EC will adapt its services to candidates and political entities (support for candidates, submission of candidate nominations, etc.), as well as how EC is engaging with public health authorities to account for local safety measures in place resulting from the pandemic. On candidate nominations, EC will be encouraging all candidates to submit their nominations through the Political Entities Service Centre portal (PESC). Returning officers will make themselves available to support candidates through the process; either by phone, video conference, or in-person consistent with local health guidance. Candidates' representatives are expected to follow COVID-19 guidelines implemented at polling places and the returning office and are urged to work with their returning officers to ensure reasonable numbers of candidate representatives per poll. Elections Canada also informed parties that the agency has partnered with local public health authorities to develop and validate pandemic instructions that will be used by all stakeholders in the political process, including political entities. The Pandemic Election Steering Committee has mandated the creation of the General Election Pandemic Intelligence Task Force (GEPI) to plan and coordinate EC's operational response to public health-related incidents, situations, constraints, guidelines, and directives.

Elections Canada facilitated a session with the Public Health Agency of Canada, to answer questions about how to campaign safely during the pandemic. EC officials also answered operation questions

about adaptations to services. ACP members asked for questions of clarification regarding EC's process for keeping up with guidance issued by local public health authorities. Members were also interested in protocols in place for workers or voters who are unable to wear a mask. Parties also urged EC to allow for the collection of electronic signatures, given the high volume of candidates that will be out canvassing and in contact with the public.

9. Voting for Vulnerable Communities

Presenters: Sophie Martineau (Assistant Director, Operations & Field Governance) & Dawn Borutskie (Electoral Operations Planning and Administration)

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Election Canada is adapting the service offered at long-term care facilities and seniors' residences and for electors on First Nations Reserves. In regards to long term care facilities and retirement centres, Ms. Martineau stated that there will be a focus on providing a suite of options to adapt to local realities which may vary from one location to another and may change during an event (depending on the evolution of pandemic). Four service options will be offered in response to the risks of the pandemic: traditional ordinary single building polling station; adapted advance on-site polling station; vote by mail (supported by facility staff if polling station is not able to be set up); and vote by mail (if polling station cannot be set up and facility staff members are not available to provide administrative support). For those electors unable to leave their homes (e.g. quarantining, isolating), voting by mail will remain the main option.

Ms. Borutskie provided an overview of services that will be made available at First Nations Reserves. Four service options will be offered, in response to the risks of the pandemic: traditional ordinary polling station; traditional advance polling station; vote by mail (supported by Community Relations Officer); and vote by mail. As previously stated, vote by mail (supported by CRO) will be an option if a polling station cannot be set up and administrative/logistical support for residents is available. Vote by mail will take place only if a polling station cannot be set up, and administrative support cannot be provided.

There was a question as to whether those persons employed by Elections Canada to work during an election would be potentially be able to be vaccinated sooner. There was also a request if EC would be able to elaborate on why landlords would not want to accommodate for polling places onsite at their properties.

10. Electoral Calendar Overview

Presenter: Danielle Duquette (Assistant Director, Operations Oversight and Financial Administration)

Ms. Duquette presented the following discussion topics and dates in the planning and delivery of an election were shared with ACPP members which included:

- Service for the 44th General Election
- Election readiness in the context of a minority government, given lack of a fixed election date
- Election readiness in light of the changing pandemic circumstances

She also spoke to key activities for political entities during an electoral period which were outlined in an election calendar that will be made available through the Political Entities Service Centre.

11. Forward Calendar

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

Following the presentation of the Forward Calendar by Ms. Torosian, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:00 p.m. on February 5, 2021.

12. Appendix A: Agenda

Day 1: February 4, 2021

1:00 – 1:15	Welcome and Logistics
1:15 – 1:45	CEO Introductory Remarks
1:45 – 2:45	Legislative changes under Bill C-19
2:45 – 3:00	Break
3:00 – 3:45	Election Readiness
3:45 – 4:15	Voting by mail
4:15 – 5:00	Vote counting and results
5:00 – 5:15	Wrap-up

Day 2: February 5, 2021

1:00 – 1:05	Welcome and Logistics
1:05 – 1:20	Commissioner of Canada Elections
1:20 – 2:30	Candidate Services and Engagement with Public Health Authorities, and PHAC Guidance for Parties
2:30 – 3:30	Voting for Vulnerable Communities
3:30 – 3:45	Break
3:45 – 4:15	Electoral Calendar Overview
4:15 – 4:45	Closing Remarks and Forward Calendar

13. Appendix B: Meeting participants

ACPP representatives:

Name	Political Party
Stephen Best	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Liz White	Animal Protection Party of Canada
Sylvain Gauthier	Bloc Québécois
Mathieu Desquilbet (observer)	Bloc Québécois
Rod Taylor	Christian Heritage Party of Canada
Peter Vogel	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
Nick Carter	Green Party of Canada
Melanie Snow	Green Party of Canada
John Arnold	Liberal Party of Canada
Azam Ishmael	Liberal Party of Canada
Derek Lipman (observer)	Liberal Party of Canada
Jessica Cardill (observer)	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

Rock Larochelle	Parti Libre Canada
Richard Magnan	Parti Libre Canada
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
Graeme Marrs	Stop Climate Change

Other invited guests and presenters:

Name	Organization
Jacinthe Dumont	Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections
Yves Côté	Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections
Dr. Barbara Raymond	Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

EC staff present for the duration or part of meeting:

Aboubacar Dakuyo, Anne Lawson, Bradley Darch, Brenda Sandelin, Christopher Morris, Danielle Duquette, Dawn Borutskie, Denis Bazinet, Duncan Toswell, Jane Dunlop, Janine Atkinson, Jérémie Martineau, Josée Villeneuve, Juan Melara-Pineda, Lisa Drouillard, Mario Lavoie, Martin Génier, Melanie Wise, Michel Roussel, Miriam Lapp, Natasha Gauthier, Olivier Girouard, Paul Legault, Robert Sampson, Serge Caron, Sophie Martineau, Stéphane Perrault, Steven Tyrie, Susan Torosian, Sylvie Jacmain, and Trevor Knight.

Meeting facilitators:

Alain Rabeau
Patrick Valois (facilitation assistant)