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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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**Tuesday, May 26, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Joe Preston**

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Tuesday, May 26, 2009

• (1205)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)):** Order, please.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, February 26, 2009, main estimates 2009-10, today we'll be reviewing vote 15, the Chief Electoral Officer, under Privy Council.

We are in public today.

Monsieur Mayrand, I'd like to welcome you here today.

We'll let you start with your opening comments, and you'll introduce the people you brought with you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Mayrand (Chief Electoral Officer, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am please to appear before the committee today to discuss the 2009-2010 Main Estimates for my Office. I am accompanied today by Gisèle Côté, Chief Financial Officer, and Hughes St-Pierre, Senior Director, Corporate Services.

As I am sure the committee is aware, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer is funded by two separate budget authorities.

The first, an annual Parliamentary appropriation, provides for the salaries of permanent, full-time staff. It is this component that the committee is considering today.

The second is the statutory authority that draws directly from the Consolidated Revenue Fund. This authority funds all other Elections Canada expenditures. These include the cost of electoral events; maintenance of the National Register of Electors; political party allowances; and public information and education programs.

For the Main Estimates I am presenting today, our appropriation is \$27.4 million—representing the salaries of some 394 full-time employees. To provide some context to these figures, I will briefly describe some of the challenges Elections Canada is facing, and summarize our priorities for this fiscal year and beyond.

The current operating reality presents our agency with three significant challenges.

The first and perhaps most obvious relates to the fact that we have had three general elections in roughly four years, each returning a minority government.

Our mandate requires that we be ready at all times to deploy the substantial resources and carry out the broad range of activities associated with an electoral event—all of which must happen within a period as brief as 36 days.

In the last Parliament, there were no fewer than 25 confidence votes—requiring Elections Canada to maintain a high state of readiness for an extended period.

A second, less visible challenge is the impact of electoral reform, and the uncertain volume of new legislation in this area. The 39th Parliament, for example, included passage of legislation related to fixed date elections; the Federal Accountability Act; and new voter identification requirements. The process of electoral reform continues, as we saw with the tabling last month of Bills-6 dealing with the issue of loans to political entities.

In this same context, I would note recent public discussion regarding a potential referendum on the topic of Senate reform. To ensure we are prepared for such an event, we are in the process of updating the regulation that adapts the provisions of the Canada Elections Act for a referendum. We expect to share those with the committee before the summer recess.

Finally, as I have mentioned to this committee before, Elections Canada has initiated a full review of its existing IT environment, which has reached the limits of its capacity and cannot be augmented further to meet new requirements. This is a major undertaking that we anticipate will take another two years. It impacts all sectors of the organization and most of our business lines.

This change is required so that we are in a better position to respond to the current and future expectations of stakeholders and deliver on the next generation of electoral services.

[English]

These significant challenges—successive minority governments, ongoing legislative reform, and a largely exhausted IT environment—along with other emerging and ongoing responsibilities, have placed increasing demands on our personnel and our capacity. We continue to supplement our organizational capacity with term and temporary and contractual resources. While all departments rely on these stopgap measures from time to time, our increased dependence on these vehicles is neither desirable nor sustainable.

Our plan is to conduct a comprehensive A-base review of our programs, as well as a review of the internal allocation of resources. The aim is to establish appropriate and sustainable funding and staffing levels to effectively deliver on our legislative mandate and strategic priorities.

I intend to share the results of this exercise with the committee, as it is likely that additional long-term funding may be required so that the agency can continue to fulfill its responsibilities.

Turning to priorities for the current fiscal year, we will continue to focus on completing all activities related to the 40th general election, as well as preparing for the next one.

With regard to the most recent general election, we expect to complete and share with the committee an integrated evaluation report later this month, in fact in June.

I also intend to provide a recommendation report to Parliament before the end of this calendar year. These, along with the statutory report I discussed with this committee in February, will complete the reporting cycle prescribed by the Canada Elections Act and will point out the specific areas for both administrative and legislative improvements.

In addition, we continue to process parties', candidates', and third parties' financial returns for the 40th general election. Election expenses, returns of all parties, and receipt of quarterly allowances have now been received, audited, and reimbursed.

Regarding candidates' returns, we plan to honour the service standard commitment made by my predecessor. We expect to have final reimbursement by August 13 for all completed returns that were submitted by the February 13 deadline. This would be for returns that present no significant errors or omissions or compliance issues, and provided, of course, that official agents answer inquiries in a timely manner.

As you know, there were 1,602 candidates in the 40th general election. At this time we have identified 680 candidates who will be entitled to a final reimbursement. In fact, 931 received a preliminary reimbursement. As of yesterday, we had completed 101 audits of returns entitling the candidate to a final reimbursement. This compares to 95 such audits completed for the same time span following the 39th general election. Generally, a total of 255 audits have now been completed.

In parallel, we will have to re-establish full readiness for the next general election by September 1, 2009. As we do so, we will be ready to implement some improvements to the electoral process. For example, we will increase the number of advance polling stations in rural areas, with the objective of improving accessibility for electors. Other improvements will include making incremental changes to the list of acceptable pieces of identification; proposing amendments to the tariff of fees to increase the pay of election workers; and improving training and manuals for our field staff.

We will also continue to make progress on long-term priorities, including our strategic plan, namely renewing our information technology infrastructure to offer enhanced electronic services to electors, such as provision of online registration; conducting an A-base review to identify efficiencies and establish appropriate

resource levels; and implementing our long-term human resources strategy. As we pursue these, we will seek to advance our strategic objective of trust, accessibility, and engagement.

To conclude, Mr. Chair, I would like to assure the committee that while our capacity is being tested by the current operating reality and successive minority governments, my office will continue to ensure the highest service standards as expected by Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I will be happy to answer your questions.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Okay. Fantastic.

We'll start off with Monsieur Proulx. He was here long before everybody today, so we're going to give him first shot.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Absolutely; "long" means two minutes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good day and welcome, Mr. Mayrand, Mr. St-Pierre and Ms. Côté.

Mr. Mayrand, according to your notes, your Office's budget has increased by \$9.1 million compared to 2008-2009, with \$6.1 million allocated to build organizational capacity to deliver programs in light of recent legislative amendments and to support IT requirements.

What have the remaining \$3 million been earmarked for?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** The funds will be used to complete all activities related to the last general election. The first figure that you mentioned, which is more in the order of \$5.3 million for the coming year, is further to an increase in appropriations approved by Treasury Board in June of last year.

The Office's budget was increased primarily to allow for additional resources further to different legislative amendments over the course of previous years. The second figure mentioned represents an expense associated with statutory appropriations arising from the cost of holding general elections, including evaluation costs, follow-up costs and post-event costs.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Must you contend with this kind of expense after each general election?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** There will always be costs associated with post-event activities that may not necessarily have been budgeted for.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** This is likely to be the case each time we have an election.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, this will likely happen regularly.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** When you appeared before us on February 24, we discussed a range of topics as well as factors that could result in additional expenses. I listened to and read your presentation.

You intend to consider further the recommendation to adjust the salaries of election workers. We also discussed on February 24 the possibility of improving training. Currently, election workers receive three hours of training and some maintain that this is not enough. There was also some discussion of election manuals.

Other subjects were also broached. You said you planned to submit a more-detailed post-event report to us shortly. As you may recall, that aroused my curiosity. You informed us that you wanted to do some evaluations of new telecommunications technologies. I assume your findings will be included in the report that you plan to present.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It is possible that we could eventually recommend some legislative changes.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** I made a suggestion at the time and you say you would give it some thought. Have you had time to think about it?

Mention was made at the time that all of the documents used in the 308 ridings during the campaign were returned to your head office. I had suggested that it might be considerably more cost-effective to shred them.

Have you had time to consider my suggestion or would you prefer to discuss it at a later date?

• (1215)

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We will continue to give this matter some thought in the coming months.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Might this suggestion be included in a future report?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, but there are a few things that I need to point out to you. By law, the documents must be returned to head office. Sometimes, we need to distinguish between statutory documents and purely administrative ones. Often, it is easier for us to have them returned to our office. However, if there are ways to cut costs, we will certainly consider them.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Fine then. Thank you, Mr. Mayrand.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Block.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I really appreciated the opportunity to come and tour Elections Canada not that long ago, and I recall that we had an opportunity to ask a number of questions.

Looking at your estimates, I guess I might imagine that an annual budget looks a little different in the year of an election, but perhaps not, given our current reality and the need for Elections Canada to be election ready. I know you highlighted that for us when we toured Elections Canada. What impact does needing to be election ready have on your budget? What is the cost to Canadians for us to have Elections Canada election ready for who knows how long?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Again, there are various phases. We have to be ready to run an election at any time, and there are some costs described in the main estimates regarding that.

What's happening is that as the temperature gets a bit higher and there is more discussion about a possible election, we have to go beyond simply being ready and start deploying resources. That can be pretty expensive. I'll give you a very simple example.

If after analysis we believe there's a good chance of an election being called, we need to identify offices for returning officers. We will not rent them until the writ is dropped, but what we do is in the area of telephony, because we need about 25 lines for each of those offices and we need the offices to be operational within 48 hours. In order to do that, we have arrangements with telecom operators to put lines to the point of demarcation of possible offices. It's really to get ready to further deploy if the writ is dropped.

There are, therefore, incremental steps in the readiness process that involve at some point moving toward deployment of resources, mostly in the technology area, that need to be deployed from a central location to the 308 ridings. These costs can be quite substantive. That's why I referred to the 25 motions of confidence. I haven't done the exercise, but you can assume that during the last Parliament each of these involved some deployment costs.

These may vary from time to time. For example, for inquiry support we need about 200 staff. Again, these staff are basically hired for a period of eight weeks or so. We need to get them on board to be trained a little bit before the writ is dropped, two to three weeks before the writ is dropped. So again, depending on the environment, depending on the likelihood of a possible election—which is a judgment call—we may start recruiting those staff to train them. But again, if the writ is not dropped, the costs are incurred, but the people will not be used. Unfortunately, we are not sure the same 200 people will be available when the next call is made.

These are some of the factors that are at play when we talk about readiness. There is a significant impact on costs.

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Guimond.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I apologize, Mr. Mayrand, for missing the last part of your presentation.

You stated the following at the top of page 3 of your speaking notes: “The 39th Parliament, for example, included passage of legislation related to fixed date elections [...] I congratulate you for showing some restraint and for speaking these words without laughing. This legislation which provides for fixed date elections is a joke. Prime Minister Harper disregarded it at the first opportunity when he called general elections last fall.

If the minority government is not defeated, when will the next general elections be held, according to the fixed date elections legislation?

• (1220)

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** The scheduled date would be October 2012.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** When exactly in October 2012?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Either on the 15th or 16th, but I'm not 100% certain.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** So then, the elections would be in October 2012.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** That is correct.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Fine then.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It would be the third Monday of October.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Thank you.

I'd like to come back to the Supplementary Estimates, more specifically to line 1. Listed under "Expenses of Elections" is an amount totalling \$87,315,500.

Does that represent the cost of the last election?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** No.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I don't understand. I've always heard that it cost \$250 million or more to hold an election.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** The cost of last October's general election is pegged at \$280 million.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** So then, the figure of \$87 million...

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I don't have the same...

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Just a moment. I'd like to have everyone's attention. It seems I have to chair the meeting!

What does this figure of \$87 million refer to?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I do not have the same document as you.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I have a copy of The Supplementary Estimates (A).

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I'm working from the Main Estimates for 2009-2010.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I'm looking at the Supplementary Estimates (A). It is possible that you will ask Treasury Board for an additional \$87 million to finance the cost of an election. What exactly will these \$87 million be used for?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** This amount of \$87,316,000 is included in the Main Estimates for the Year 2009-2010.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I see, it's for next year.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** When the budget is drawn up, we don't speculate on possible elections, whether general elections or by-elections. We prepare our budget regardless of whether an election is scheduled or not. If an election is called during the year, for example, if the call comes in September for an October election, an election budget is drawn up and included in the supplementary estimates or in final government accounts. That is where you will find the \$280 million figure.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Fine then. Without getting into the details, can you tell me what the \$87 million earmarked for election expenses will be used for?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** The money will be used to prepare for the elections, for political financing, for compliance activities, and so forth.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I have another question. According to the next line, the salary of the Chief Electoral Officer is \$265,300.

Is that just your salary? The salaries of Members of Parliament are public and cannot be negotiated on the side. Is this your actual salary or does this figure include something else?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** No, it is the salary for the position as determined by the Canada Elections Act.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Are you entitled to other benefits in addition to your salary of \$265,300? You were hired by the House and I do not know with whom you negotiated your working conditions. However, did you negotiate other benefits in addition to your salary?

● (1225)

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** No. The salary for the position is fixed in the legislation. In fact, if memory serves me well, it corresponds to the salary paid to a Federal Court judge. There are no other financial conditions associated with the position.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I see. So you do not receive any additional benefits.

Mr. Chair, I would like to conclude by thanking or rather congratulating the witness.

When you appeared before the committee, you stated—and you repeated it when we visited your offices—that we would be receiving phone calls from our returning officers to update us on the location of polling stations.

I don't know if the meeting has already taken place, but in March, as I recall, our returning office contacted all of the parties in my riding. Our meeting at least has been scheduled.

I would like to thank you. That proves that preparations are being made for the election. It also shows you appreciate that the polling stations used for the last election were clearly adequate and that you are always mindful of ensuring that it is convenient for people to vote. Naturally, every effort should be made to make it easier for people to vote, but in reality, it is not always that simple. I want to thank you, because efforts are indeed being made in that regard.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** You are welcome.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I have nothing further, Mr. Chair.  
[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Davies, welcome to our committee today.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the witnesses and their CEO for coming today.

I want to follow up on an issue I've raised many times before, and that has to do with voter identification. I know you received a number of submissions from MPs. We certainly sent one from Vancouver East. This goes back to Bill C-31. I don't want to lay it at your feet because you didn't suggest it, but you have to live with it.

I want to reiterate that the system as it is now, which was supposedly brought in to deal with all of this voter fraud that doesn't really exist, has created so many difficulties. We gave you one example of a man who had lived in our riding for more than 80 years and had voted there all of his life. He didn't have the right ID and was turned away, even though a scrutineer who had known him for 30 years through a community centre was there. She couldn't vouch for him because she lived in the next poll to him. He waited an hour and a half for someone to show up who was in the same poll—and this was someone very elderly. That's just one example of many. It was very frustrating and a very difficult day.

I know that you will report back to the committee on the general election with your recommendations, both legislative and administrative. Do you contemplate making changes to improve it now that we've had this first experience with the new rules? Secondly, even if you don't make legislative recommendations, what will you do about the capacity?

I'm sure this was true for many ridings, but certainly in the urban and inner-city areas, because of the new rules on ID, there were huge problems—lineups, lack of staff and resources, lack of translation, and bottlenecks of people coming through the door who didn't have ID. There weren't enough resources to send them to another electoral voting place. So even from a capacity point of view, a resourcing point of view, if nothing changes in the law and we have to deal with this again, we have to change the way it works at the local poll. Otherwise we'll be building in a level of frustration and even anger among voters for no good reason. They really are eligible to vote but just don't have the proper ID.

There's sort of the macro level of legislation, if you're going to do anything there, but even if you're not, what are we going to do at a capacity level in resourcing?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** That's a very complex question, which I will bring back to the committee in the evaluation report later this summer. You will find in there that generally the system worked well, but some groups of electors were affected differently. My focus will be on how we can better serve those electors.

On capacity, one of the points I made in February was that it is less a capacity issue and more a matter of being captive to very prescriptive legislation. It sets out very specifically who does what on the poll side and does not allow much flexibility in how you organize tasks. It sets out how many electors should be in a poll. It sets out certain minimums and maximums for a poll.

My short answer is that without reconsideration of some of the prescriptions in the statute, it's going to be very difficult to significantly improve service at the polling stations.

•(1230)

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Do you contemplate recommending changes to deal with how prescriptive it is?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, I do, both with respect to the management of the voting process itself at poll sites as well as with respect to voter ID.

Interestingly—and I mentioned this in February—B.C. just had a provincial election, and one of the things that B.C. had was rules for identification that are similar to what we have at the federal level, but

there they accepted the voter information card as one piece of ID that established at least the address and name of the elector. That is something that, in my view, should be considered at the federal level.

The other interesting thing is that the rules on vouching at the provincial level, in B.C., at least, are somewhat more flexible. There are still some restrictions. I think that would meet the concerns of the committee and Parliament when they set out Bill C-31, but it is a little bit more flexible, so that a family member can vouch for all the members of the same family, which is not the case at the federal level.

Some of these issues and findings will feed into the recommendations that I will be bringing forward over the next year.

**Ms. Libby Davies:** When will that report come before the committee?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We'll first see an evaluation report about what electors have told us about the election, who's been affected, and how they have been affected. There will be the same thing for candidates and parties and also the staff. That will be followed by a third report in the late fall providing recommendations for legislative changes.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Madam Jennings.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

*Merci beaucoup, monsieur Mayrand.*

I have several questions.

First, on page 6, in the bottom part of the last paragraph, you talk about "amendments to the tariff of fees to increase the pay for election workers". That may be available in some other document that I have not seen or have not seen in a while. What is the pay of election workers right now, and what are you proposing or will you be proposing in terms of an increase in the pay for election workers? That's one.

Secondly, you talked about some of the costs that are required when you're doing your election preparedness, for instance, the telephony services. What type of telephony services does Elections Canada usually get? Is it land lines, or are you taking advantage of some of the more cost-effective options such as wireless, etc.?

I know that for my election campaign—I think I mentioned it to you—we did not go with land lines, and we saved something like 75% of the cost. We purchased the phones and we used wireless. It was amazing.

The other one is that in your report, on page 4, you talk about planning to conduct a comprehensive A-base review. What is an A-base review?

Finally, when you talk about the auditing and the managing once an election happens, and about the expenses that are submitted by the candidates, the parties, etc., I'd like to know whether you have definitive costs to date for the work that has been required of Elections Canada as a result of the Conservative in-and-out scheme. Have those been separated out or not? And if so, what are they?

Thank you.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Okay. Let me deal first with the telephone.

Right now, we're basically using land lines, copper lines, but remember, we need to maintain an IT infrastructure in those 308 locations across the country. In fact, it's close to 440, with sub-offices. We're looking right now at whether that is an area in which we can reduce our dependency on land lines.

There are issues, in terms of coverage, across the country. That's an analysis we're doing right now, but it looks like most of the offices that were used for the last election would be able to use wireless communication to communicate both within the riding and across the country. So certainly one of our objectives, as they say at the office, is to reduce the footprint of telephony across the country. Over time that should produce substantial savings.

You asked me also about the A-base review, which basically is taking a look at the structure of the organization, all its programs and activities, and whether they still meet the purposes for which they were set up and whether they are still aligned with the statutory mandate, of course, but also with the future direction of the organization. We also look at opportunities for either reallocating resources to higher priorities or building or finding some efficiencies in various processes we run, and, finally, we try to identify potential gaps that will need to be filled.

• (1235)

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** So that's what the term "A-base review" means.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Okay. I had never heard the term. Thank you.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** That's a common term among bureaucrats. It's really looking at how we're spending money and whether there are efficiencies and opportunities to reallocate.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** The last piece is the cost to Elections Canada for managing, auditing, and so on, depending on the issue of the Conservative in-and-out scheme.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** As I think everybody knows, there are two processes in place. One is a civil dispute that is taking place before the Federal Court. The last I looked, we had spent about \$280,000 in legal fees on that dispute.

As we also know, there is an investigation by the Commissioner of Canada Elections. I believe his costs are approaching \$1.2 million at this point in time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Mayrand, for being here today.

I want to refer to page 6 of your notes in English, the first full paragraph. Just prior to that, I think I heard you indicate that there were 1,602 candidates, and 680 were entitled to final reimbursement.

I'm confused as to the final reimbursement entitlement. Only 101 audits have been completed entitling the candidate to that final reimbursement. Is that implying that not all candidates who receive the final reimbursement are audited?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** No. It implies that these audits have not been completed yet. They are in progress.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** So it's possible, then, if I understand correctly, that if they're entitled to a final reimbursement, that could happen prior to the audit.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Not prior to the audit. The audit has to be completed for final reimbursement.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Do you understand my confusion? Only 101 audits have been done, yet 680 candidates are entitled to a final reimbursement. That's confusing to me. I'm sorry. I'm not an accountant.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** These candidates have shown that they incurred expenses that will require additional reimbursement. All candidates who reach the threshold of 10% receive 15% of the spending limit in their ridings.

Of all those candidates, 931 receive that first 15%.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** That's preliminary.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** That's the preliminary payment. Then there has to be a final payment. We estimate that 680 of the 931 candidates will receive an additional payment.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** So you're estimating that prior to the audit.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Okay, that helps.

Secondly, of the 1,602 candidates, you said that, as of this time, 255 audits have already been completed. Will they all be audited?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** So that's a little more than one-eighth of the total number of candidates. There's a lot of work still to be done.

• (1240)

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes. There goes the summer.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** No vacation this year.

In the last paragraph you talk about increasing the number of advance polling stations in rural areas. I represent a fairly large rural area. Do you have criteria as to how you would increase that number? Will it be  $x$  number of polling stations per square kilometre,  $x$  number per thousand voters? What kind of criteria do you expect to use to give some kind of balance across the country?



**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** First of all, we're asking returning officers to engage riding associations, candidates, and parliamentarians in the various ridings to identify the needs there. Then we will get to the financial aspect of it. We will certainly consider the geography, the population, and already existing usage of advance polls in certain areas. There's quite a variance among ridings. We will also have to factor in the availability of sites, because that's another significant factor. All these factors combined will govern the decision to add a number of voting sites.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Thank you.

It's probably too early to project or speculate as to what percentage increase you would see in the number of advance polling stations in rural areas, whether it would be a 3%, 5%, 15%, or 20% increase. Do you have a ballpark figure?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It's too early, and I did not set an objective. I wanted to have the exercise locally through each riding. From that we will determine, and a cost-benefit analysis will have to be made.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** In terms of speculation, it's probably also too early to speculate on what type of ID will be acceptable. Have you mentioned that and I missed it this morning? What other kinds of ID are you considering? In your last paragraph you talk about improvements to include incremental changes to the list of acceptable ID.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I did receive a number of suggestions from various groups in the last several months. One that comes to mind is the Métis card, that maybe it should be added to the list. The CNIB card could be added to the list. There are a number of pieces that have been suggested for consideration, and we are considering them right now.

In addition, as I mentioned earlier, to my mind the most significant issue, the most systemic issue, is around the proof of address. My suggestion to the committee is that we look at the VIC as being an acceptable piece of ID to establish name and address, the VIC in combination with another document. That's the voter identification card.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Some rural areas simply have rural route numbers and others have the fire code. That's a real problem in some areas as well. Is that another area...?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** That's been resolved by Bill C-18. So even though it shows a rural road or a mailing address as opposed to a residential address, if the elector is on the list and registered, we have both addresses. So we can correlate the mailing and the residential address.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Madame DeBellefeuille.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Mr. St-Pierre, Ms. Côté.

Three weeks ago, or thereabouts, the returning officer in my riding paid me a visit to discuss advance polls. We shared with him a series of recommendations and we had a nice discussion. Let me just say that the returning officer was well briefed for this meeting.

Will our returning officer's report be made public? Will we be able to consult it to see if he took our recommendations into consideration?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** All of the reports will be sent to our office, and since they are public documents, they will be subject to the Access to Information Act. There will be no secrets.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** They are not on your web site. Therefore, we will need to make an access to information request. Have all of the reports been turned in?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** The process will be completed by the end of the summer and decisions will have to be made then. I would guess that the process will be completed by September 1.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** So then, as of September 1, we should know the final outcome of the recommendations by riding.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, along with the number of polls that will be added. The exact location of these polling stations will vary somewhat, because there is a great deal of movement. As of September 1, you should know how many new advance polls are being set up.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Fine.

My official agent asked me a question and I want to take this opportunity to put it to you. Is it possible for MPs who have received their final reimbursement and whose file has been closed and audited to find out if they are in fifth or sixth position, for example? Is there some kind of document on your web site that they can consult?

• (1245)

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Are you referring to the order in which their returns were processed?

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Yes.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** No, not really.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Can we find out if we were among the first ten?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Results are posted as the returns are processed. As soon as final reimbursements have been issued, the results are posted within 24 or 48 hours. This is not done in any particular order, because a number of variables can come into play.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I was just curious about this. Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Davies, did you have another...? No.

Mr. Cuzner.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Thank you very much. Thank you to the witnesses. I'll certainly look forward to the full evaluation when it is presented at the end of the month.

Some of the questions that have been asked, and certainly Libby's, were concerns I share as well, and some of the recommendations you are putting forward, as Harold mentioned...the advance polls are something we've had in our constituency as well. I'm from a primarily rural area. We don't have the numbers, but we do have the windshield time to justify additional advance polls, and some people in rural communities really don't have access to public transportation. So that really should be a factor in attempts to better accommodate voters.

I've got two questions here. The first concerns the posting of expenses and contributors. The website is fairly friendly, and I've been on the website a couple of times. It's not too hard to navigate, but I'm wondering what the protocol is with regard to the posting of expenses and claims. I don't even know if mine have been posted yet, and I know they have been submitted for some time. Can you give me some rationale as to when those things are posted?

And could you give me a general overview? I remember the voters list in 2004 was a nightmare. It was a little bit better in 2006. So could you give me some general comments on where you think you're going with the voters list? Is it getting better each time? Is there some way you can measure the accuracy of the voters list? Is there something you guys do with that?

Those are my questions: the posting of expenses and revenues, and the voters list.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** In terms of posting financial returns—I presume we're talking about candidates' returns—these are posted as received, first. So before any review, as we receive them, they are posted as submitted. That should take place...again, there's a bit of a delay there, but we aim to have them posted within 72 hours. So within three days of receiving returns, they are posted as submitted.

What may be somewhat confusing at times is that eventually the returns will be reposted as reviewed. Our service standard is six months, and in many cases it may take six months for the returns to be posted as final. In other cases it may take much longer if there are issues around the return itself.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** You post them on the website when they're final?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** They're not final. The first posting is as submitted by the candidate, the official agent.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Okay, yes.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Later on, there will be a new version that will say "as reviewed". That means it has been audited, approved, and certified.

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:** Okay.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Again, there are easily six months between the two versions.

In terms of voters lists, again, right now we have various methodologies to assess the quality of the lists. We basically have two measures. One is the coverage: how many electors are registered? The other one is the accuracy of the information on the electors.

For the last general election we ended up with 94% coverage, meaning that 94% of all eligible electors were registered. That

compares rather well with other systems that have mandatory registration. I believe in Australia, for example, their coverage rate is at 95%, even though it's mandatory. So there is, for most electoral bodies, a population out there that's extremely difficult to reach.

In terms of the quality, we are at 84% accuracy of information on electors. The challenge we face there is that we have a churn in the system of about 1.8 million electors, which changes constantly. Mostly these are address changes, but there are also new electors coming on board, new citizens coming on board, and deceased electors. This is a constant churn of about 13% to 18%. That's what is difficult to manage right now.

In terms of moving forward, I think the list is getting better. I hope most of you will recognize that. It's not perfect, but it's getting much better, much more stable. We're continuing to expand our arrangements with provincial bodies. For example, B.C. benefited from the federal list that came out after the October election. That was useful in terms of B.C. Right now, we're benefiting from recent B.C. events in updating our own lists. We have arrangements with electoral bodies across the country.

Over the long term, we believe that e-registration, electronic registration of electors, would help improve accuracy of the list. The idea here is that over time electors will be able to update their information, first, and eventually even register electronically on the Internet. So those who are not captured by different sources we have right now would have this additional option of registering electronically. We're looking at introducing these services in 2010, provided we can renew our IT technology that I mentioned earlier.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lauzon.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for being here, folks.

Here on the bottom of page 5 you say that we expect to have made final reimbursements by August 13 for the candidates' returns that were submitted by February 13. So there's a period of six months there.

How many people would you have reviewing these submissions?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I believe there are over 40 auditors right now who are working on reviewing returns. Remember, we have returns from candidates. This is also the time of year when we're getting returns from political parties, and there are 19 of them. We're getting returns also from riding associations, and there are 1,100 of them. So we are in the bulk of the season in terms of—

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** What would be the priority? Do you prioritize them in the order of candidates, the EDAs or—

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We have separate things assigned to riding returns, party returns, and candidate returns. But it's often the same people who are moved around.

Right now we're focusing on candidates' returns. We've dealt with party returns and reimbursements. Right now, our focus and our priority is on candidates' reimbursements.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** The reason I'm asking is because if you have an election in October, it seems to me to be a rather lengthy period of time, especially if you've presented a pretty comprehensive report, and you have to wait eight or nine or ten months to get a reimbursement.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** First of all, the service standard is six months. It will be six months by August 13.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** It will be six months from February.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, which is when we receive most of the returns. In fact, this time around, we had an increase in the number of late filers. I think over 20% of the returns were filed late. But we still maintain our service standard, six months from February 13, which is the latest date, the statutory date, for filing the returns.

Six months may be long, but, again, unless we move to a system where we have electronic filing for returns, it's going to be difficult to significantly improve that turnaround time. It's not necessarily just an issue...again, we could always have more auditors.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** I'm sure you have a number of files completed now.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, they are mentioned in the report; there are 255.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Okay. Maybe I misunderstood that.

One of the questions I have is about what you said:

As of yesterday, we had completed 101 audits... This compares to 95 such audits completed in the same time span following the 39th general election. Generally, a total of 255 audits have been completed at this time.

That doesn't mean that in previous elections you had 255?

•(1255)

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** No. The 95 compares to the 101.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** So of the 680, there are 255 that have been finalized.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** No. I'm sorry; I realize that it may not have been presented in the best way.

We had 1,600 returns in total. All have to be audited. At this point in time, 255 have been fully audited. Out of the 255, there are 101 candidates who have received a final reimbursement.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** So out of 1,600, there are only 101 people who have gotten their reimbursement?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, but they're not all entitled to a final reimbursement.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** I realize that, but you only have—

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It's 101 out of 680.

There are 1,600 candidates; 900 are entitled to an initial reimbursement, but only 680 will have a final payment. Out of those 680, 101 have already received their final reimbursement.

This means we have more than 500 still to go, and we're working on them.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** I take a little exception. I think you made a comment to the effect that, generally speaking, most people were satisfied with the process. I'm talking about electors going to the polls. Did you make that comment?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** That's what the survey shows.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Do you do exit surveys?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We do a survey of electors in the week following the election.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** It might be a suggestion to do an exit survey after the person votes, especially at the advance polls, because I can assure you that—certainly in my riding, and I'm not sure about other ridings—the air was blue in some of those advance polls as people were leaving them. As you know, we reported people who left in anger. That's when you need to do your surveys. A week later the tempers have cooled down.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes. That may or may not be good.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** But you're not getting the right information. Most businesses do exit interviews—

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Right after the service is provided?

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** —on the way out the door.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, that's certainly one thing we could consider. I don't want to suggest that we should have our initiative rely entirely or solely on surveys. There's other information that needs to be factored in. When you service 14 million electors on a given date, a survey may tell you something, but it doesn't mean there are no pockets here and there of dissatisfaction. We need to look at those.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Do you have an opinion or a thought as to why the participation rate is dropping off? You may not have science on it, but do you have a sort of feel for it, or do your people have a feel for it?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We commission a fair bit of research. We are commissioning research for the last election to see why. We all know “what” happened to the turnout, but not the “why”. Time after time, those surveys suggest that maybe 8% of non-voters would attribute the fact that they did not vote to some administrative reasons: they're too busy, they have conflicting schedules—such things as that. Beyond that, there's a wide range of factors that involve engagement in political life. Sometimes there's some cynicism, but that's not... Basically, it's lack of information. More and more electors are not relying on the mainstream media; they get their information from various alternative sources.

Anyway, it's a challenge, and as part of the evaluation, there will be some discussion about voter turnout phenomena. You can expect further research in the coming year.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your answers to our questions today. We look forward to the evaluation, and we look forward to further reports so that this committee can also look at those.

We have the duty of asking, shall vote 15 for the Chief Electoral Officer under the Privy Council, less the amount granted in interim supply, carry?

PRIVY COUNCIL  
Chief Electoral Officer  
Vote 15—Program expenditures.....\$27,397,000

(Vote 15 agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the same to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I would say to our guests that they may go, if they like.

Mr. Guimond, do you have one more item?

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Thank you very much.

First of all, I have an announcement for committee members, for you, Mr. Chair, and especially for our colleague Mr. Albrecht, who chairs the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs: there will be a change of membership for the Bloc Québécois on the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business. Mrs. Gagnon, the Member for Québec, will be replacing Mrs. DeBellefeuille. It seems that there is no need to move a motion and that procedure simply dictates that we inform the committee. We sought the advice of the clerk on this.

Second—and this is for your information, Mr. Chair—on Thursday, May 14, before the break week, we approved a report calling for amendments to the Standing Orders. As I recall, the report called for minor changes to Standing Orders 153 and 156. You tabled this report in the House of Commons on Friday, May 15, but you did not move concurrence in it, either yesterday or this morning. There is nothing contentious about this report and no one has expressed any opposition to it. Therefore, I would like to know what you are waiting for to move concurrence in it?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'll take that under advisement and let you know what we're going to do.

Under the membership reports on private members' business, you've reported to us, and that's perfect. I think that, by tradition, this is all that needs to happen on this, to let the chair know about it.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I realize that. This is the reason why I made the first point. It's just advice.

But on my second question, what is your answer to that?

**The Chair:** I don't have an answer for it. I'll have to get back to the committee at the next meeting.

Mr. Proulx, do you have a point of order?

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** I'm wondering whether there may have been a problem with the translation between you and Mr. Guimond, in the sense that we decided at a sitting of this committee that we were accepting these changes that had been suggested by the Speaker.

**The Chair:** Right.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** What have we done with that? Have we adopted them? Do we intend to adopt them? Are we going to table them?

**The Chair:** We did. We made the report to the House, as it was recommended.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** No, you tabled the report, but did not move concurrence in it. Has that already been taken care of? According to my sources, it has not. You tabled the report on May 15, but have not yet moved concurrence in it.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Oh, we didn't move concurrence in it?

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Yes.

**The Chair:** So we'll need to seek concurrence in it?

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Yes. Why do we have a report? Is it to take home for the summer?

**The Chair:** I apologize to Mr. Guimond for not understanding what he was originally asking.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right.

Is there a motion to adjourn?

**An hon. member:** I so move.

**The Chair:** It has been so moved. The meeting is adjourned.







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