



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
*of* BRITISH COLUMBIA

Second Session, 42nd Parliament

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS  
(HANSARD)

SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW

# PROVISIONS OF THE ELECTION ACT

**Virtual Meeting**  
**Wednesday, May 26, 2021**  
**Issue No. 6**

JAGRUP BRAR, MLA, CHAIR

ISSN 2563-8491



## **MEMBERSHIP**

### Provisions of the Election Act Review

- Chair:* Jagrup Brar (Surrey-Fleetwood, BC NDP)
- Deputy Chair:* Peter Milobar (Kamloops–North Thompson, BC Liberal Party)
- Members:* Brittny Anderson (Nelson-Creston, BC NDP)  
Greg Kylo (Shuswap, BC Liberal Party)  
Ronna-Rae Leonard (Courtenay-Comox, BC NDP)  
Andrew Mercier (Langley, BC NDP)  
Adam Olsen (Saanich North and the Islands, BC Green Party)
- Clerk:* Susan Sourial



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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

MINUTES

Special Committee to Review  
Provisions of the Election Act

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

1:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

**Present:** Jagrup Brar, MLA (Chair); Peter Milobar, MLA (Deputy Chair); Brittney Anderson, MLA; Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA; Andrew Mercier, MLA; Adam Olsen, MLA

**Unavoidably Absent:** Greg Kylo, MLA

1. The Chair called the Committee to order at 1:06 p.m.
2. **Resolved**, that the Committee meet *in camera* to consider its review on the administration of annual allowance payments to eligible political parties. (Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA)
3. The Committee met *in camera* from 1:06 p.m. to 1:35 p.m.
4. The Committee continued in public session at 1:35 p.m.
5. The Committee recessed from 1:36 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.
6. Pursuant to its terms of reference, the Committee continued its review on the administration of annual allowance payments to eligible political parties.
7. The following witness appeared before the Committee and answered questions:  
BC Libertarian Party
  - Keith MacIntyre, Leader
8. The Committee recessed from 2:17 p.m. to 2:26 p.m.
9. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions:  
BC Federation of Labour
  - Denise Moffatt, Director, Political Action and Government Relations
  - Sussanne Skidmore, Secretary Treasurer
10. The Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair at 2:42 p.m.

Jagrup Brar, MLA  
Chair

Susan Sourial  
Clerk Assistant, Committees and  
Interparliamentary Relations





WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2021

The committee met at 1:06 p.m.

[J. Brar in the chair.]

### Deliberations

**J. Brar (Chair):** Good afternoon, Members. I would like to call the meeting to order.

This part of the meeting is in camera. So could I have a motion to go in camera, please?

**R. Leonard:** So moved.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Any seconder? Peter.

Motion approved.

The committee continued in camera from 1:06 p.m. to 1:35 p.m.

[J. Brar in the chair.]

**J. Brar (Chair):** We are out of camera now. Basically, we adjourn the meeting here. Is that what happens?

**S. Sourial (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Inter-parliamentary Relations):** Recess.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Members, this committee will be in recess, at this point, until 1:55. We will come back at 1:55 to hear a couple presentations.

Thank you. You can have a little recess. See you soon.

The committee recessed from 1:36 p.m. to 2 p.m.

[J. Brar in the chair.]

**J. Brar (Chair):** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jagrup Brar. I am the MLA for Surrey-Fleetwood and the Chair of the Special Committee to Review Provisions of the Election Act.

I would like to acknowledge that I am joining today's meeting from the traditional territories of the Kwantlen, Katzie, Semiahmoo and Tsawwassen First Nations. I will ask everyone to reflect upon the traditional territory that you are on today.

Our committee's mandate is to review whether the annual allowance made to political parties should continue up to 2022 and, if so, the amount of the annual allowance and how many years it should be paid. We must report to the Legislative Assembly with our recommendation by September 1.

British Columbians can share their views by providing a written, audio or video submission. The consultation will

close at 5 p.m. on Friday, May 28, 2021. More information on how to participate is available on the committee's website at [www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/rpea](http://www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/rpea).

I would like to call the meeting to order. I will ask the members of the committee to introduce themselves. I'll start with Peter Milobar.

**P. Milobar (Deputy Chair):** Good afternoon. I'm Peter Milobar. I'm the Deputy Chair and the member for Kamloops-North Thompson.

**A. Olsen:** I'm Adam Olsen. I'm the MLA for Saanich North and the Islands.

I am happy to be working from my home village here, W̱JOĒĒĒP in the W̱SÁNEĆ territory.

**R. Leonard:** Good afternoon. I'm Ronna-Rae Leonard. I'm the MLA for Courtenay-Comox.

I'm coming from the territory of the K'ómoks First Nation.

**B. Anderson:** Hi. I'm Brittney Anderson. I'm the MLA for Nelson-Creston.

I'm on the traditional, unceded territory of the Ktunaxa, the Sinixt and the Syilx peoples.

**A. Mercier:** Andrew Mercier, the MLA for Langley.

I'm on the traditional territory of the Kwantlen, Katzie, Matsqui and Semiahmoo-speaking peoples.

**J. Brar (Chair):** We also have staff members helping us in this process. We have Susan Sourial. We have Ron Wall and Jesse Gordon. We have, of course, Hansard staff, as well, working with us.

The first presenter today, Members, is Keith MacIntyre from the B.C. Libertarian Party.

Welcome, Mr. MacIntyre. You have up to 15 minutes for your presentation. Hansard Services has provided a timer, which will be visible on your screen.

Mr. MacIntyre, please begin whenever you are ready.

### Presentations on Provisions of the Election Act

B.C. LIBERTARIAN PARTY

**K. MacIntyre:** Thank you. Appreciate it. Glad to be here.

As you mentioned, my name is Keith MacIntyre, and I'm the current leader of the B.C. Libertarian Party. We are a political party in B.C. since 1986. We ran the fourth most candidates in the province last election.

We are vehemently against per-vote subsidies and believe they should be cancelled immediately. In my opinion, that they even exist shows a bit of immorality of the large political parties. It's our belief that if a political party can-

not function on the donations from their party members, they shouldn't be relying on taxpayers to fund their party, in particular between elections.

According to reports filed for the last election, the B.C. NDP Party received approximately \$5½ million in donations, in addition to approximately \$800,000 to \$1 million per year in vote subsidies since 2018. It looks like their campaign reimbursements for the election were in the order of \$2.15 million, as well, for the last election. The largest expense was advertising at almost \$3 million, followed by travel at over \$400,000. So \$1.8 million was for television ads and \$266,000 for social media.

[2:05 p.m.]

The B.C. Liberal Party received \$3.2 million in donations and \$1½ million in election expense reimbursements, as well as \$800,000 to \$1 million in voter subsidies since 2018, with an obvious reduction to \$557,000 after the last election.

The largest expense was advertising, at almost \$2.26 million, followed by tour expenses, at \$300,000. Over half of that advertising, \$1.1 million, was spent on social media, with another \$573,000 on television ads. Half of those campaign expenses for both parties were then subsequently reimbursed. That's a lot of dollars.

I think one of the biggest issues with the divisive politics that we have in our country today is an overuse of marketing and the manipulation of the electorate through social media. Do you think, if the taxpayers knew how much of their money was being given to Mark Zuckerberg, they'd be happy? I know I'm not.

By eliminating the per-vote subsidies — and the campaign expense reimbursements, I'm hopeful for — the parties will be held accountable to their donors for how the money is spent, rather than freely spending taxpayer money for their own agendas.

As a party, we would have refused the subsidy. That said, we also believe that the annual allowances are discriminatory. Who is to say what votes are actually important and what votes aren't? The 8,360 people that cast ballots for our party likely think that their votes matter. However, according to the act, we are not worthy of receiving the \$14,630 that would have been provided to us if there were no percentage vote limits.

Either give the vote subsidy to every party or give it to none. As I said, we would have refused it or donated it. I think if taxpayers knew that they, the taxpayers, are funding attack ads, they would oppose a per-vote subsidy.

I'd also like to ask the committee why it was decided initially that the per-vote subsidy would be extended into 2022. Five years seems like an excessive amount of time. I think the subsidy was a complete misuse of taxpayer money from the start, and the government should not have the ability to legislate funding to their political parties with taxpayer money.

In conclusion, political parties have had more than enough time to adjust their fundraising from the rules

put in place several years ago, and this subsidy should be immediately cancelled. As evidenced by how much money they were able to raise, they don't need this money.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Thanks, Mr. MacIntyre. Thanks for coming and for making your presentation to us. I really appreciate that.

Now I will open the floor for questions. Members, does anybody have any questions?

**B. Anderson:** Yeah. I just wanted to thank you very much, Mr. MacIntyre, for your presentation. We are at, I think, our fifth presentation, and this is the most divergent view that we've heard. So I really appreciate that we're getting a good spectrum of different opinions on this. Thank you very much for providing us with that.

I know you probably haven't seen some of the other submissions, but they were demonstrating how these particular people felt it was actually more democratic to be providing that return, because it's not just funded by people that are wealthy, but rather, it's funded by the tax base. So it's actually more of a democratic system. I was just wondering what your thoughts would be on something like that — on that type of thought.

**K. MacIntyre:** Yeah, for sure. I'm sorry to hear that I'm the most divergent opinion.

I've heard the argument many times that it is more democratic to have the per-vote subsidy, but I am fundamentally against using taxpayer money to fund political parties. And to say that it's only the wealthy that are able to donate.... You know, it's a 75 percent tax credit on donations under \$100, so essentially, for most people, a \$100 donation costs them \$25. And the caps are at \$1,100.

I think this very much biases towards the larger parties. I think it ends up being undemocratic toward some of the smaller parties. I am not just speaking for ourselves. As I said, we're not interested in government handouts. I just can't justify \$14 million of taxpayer money essentially, in most cases, going to advertising, which I think is the fundamental issue with how the major political parties are operating, anyways.

[2:10 p.m.]

It's a bunch of divisive politics. In my opinion, less media, less advertising is better for democracy. And with the amount of money that's going to social media, that's taxpayer money that's going directly out of the country and, for the most part, going into Mark Zuckerberg's pocket, which I also don't agree with.

**R. Leonard:** Thank you very much, Mr. MacIntyre. I agree with the MLA for Nelson-Creston about the need to hear from all sides. I appreciate your very reasoned approach.

As you were speaking about the use of funds, whether earned through donation or through a per-vote allowance,

for advertising and marketing, regardless of what the content is.... One of the things we did hear from yesterday's academics was the notion of needing to have an engaged electorate. I'm wondering. If they don't use advertising, what do you see as the way to make sure people are able to make informed choices outside of advertising?

**K. MacIntyre:** I'm not saying: "Don't use any advertising." I think advertising ends up getting grossly misused. Especially during elections, it ends up being these talking points intended to divide the electorate. If it's being used to educate and inform, rather than to put down other parties' policies and those sorts of things, I think that's a better use of money.

I think the media needs to be more engaged. I think the media has been decimated, as well, by social media. I think there are ways to build this up.

I look at how I built up my reputation in my community. It's through community involvement. People know me. I'm running in a city council by-election right now. I don't need an election sign up.

We have got to this place in politics where it feels like it's the right thing to spend a bunch of money on advertising. We're actually ending up diminishing the message that we're trying to spread, in my opinion. I think there are different ways to do it.

Social media has turned into a very divisive area. I've seen the ads from all the different parties, and it's honestly disheartening to see the devolving of politics in Canada over the last decade.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Thank you. Any other questions, Members? Any other questions?

I just wanted to ask you a couple of questions. The first one is kind of in line with what the other member asked you.

The elections are about a platform. Political parties have platforms. A platform is not a simple document. It has, of course, a long list of things which the provincial government does. In 28 days or 30 days, to educate people about that huge document is not an easy job. So advertisements or social media.... Different tools are used.

If we don't use advertisements, how do we educate people about our platform?

**K. MacIntyre:** For example, for us, we educate on our platform consistently throughout the years. It's not just about an election for us.

On your comment about 28 days, I thought it was unconscionable that the Lieutenant-Governor actually granted an election. I used to work in the U.S. election industry. I was actually quite shocked that the election period was 28 days during a pandemic.

I went through the detailed election results today, and I saw a very distinct difference from the mail-in ballots and absentee voting lists — about 1 to 2 percent of the vote.

On election day, it was 4 percent of the vote. It shows that, to me, the election period was a little bit too short. If it ends up being whoever spends the most media and gets the biggest headline, which the *Sun* or the *Province* picks up, I think that's a real disservice to politics.

[2:15 p.m.]

We also had the last election, where it was: "No PST for a year, and we're going to give everybody \$1,000." That's not your platform, and that's what the money is being spent on. It's a manipulation of the electorate, trying to get these big headlines and trying to get votes from them. If it were truly for education purposes, absolutely, let's do that. I think all of the major parties need to take a look in the mirror and just do a little bit better.

The media has kind of turned into this clickbait robot of just copying and pasting press releases. I think we do need a more engaged electorate, but headlines and social media advertising are not the way, in my opinion.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Any further questions, Members? One more time, any further questions? For the last time, any further questions from anyone?

Mr. MacIntyre, thank you very much for coming here today and sharing this information with us. I really appreciate that.

Susan, the next team is going to come at 2:30. Is that when it was?

**S. Sourial (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Inter-parliamentary Relations):** Right, yes. We can recess until 2:25, perhaps.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Members, you have a....

**K. MacIntyre:** Can I stay on and listen, or do I jump off now?

**S. Sourial (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Inter-parliamentary Relations):** It's entirely up to the committee members.

**J. Brar (Chair):** I will take the liberty to say, unless committee members object, that we are okay if you want to listen.

**P. Milobar (Deputy Chair):** It's live-streamed, anyway, is it not, Mr. Chair? It's live-streamed to the public either way, is it not?

**J. Brar (Chair):** Yeah.

Members, we can have a little recess until 2:25. We'll come back at 2:25.

The committee recessed from 2:17 p.m. to 2:26 p.m.

[J. Brar in the chair.]

**J. Brar (Chair):** Welcome back, Members. Our next presenters come from the B.C. Federation of Labour. Joining us are Sussanne Skidmore, secretary-treasurer, and Denise Moffatt, director of political action and government relations.

Both of you, first of all, welcome to the special committee. I really appreciate, on behalf of members, both of you for coming today to make a presentation. You have up to 15 minutes for your presentation. Hansard Services has provided a timer which will be visible on your screen.

Please begin whenever you're ready.

#### B.C. FEDERATION OF LABOUR

**S. Skidmore:** I'm Sussanne Skidmore. I'm the secretary-treasurer of the B.C. Federation of Labour.

I want to acknowledge that I am joining you today from the unceded traditional territories of the Secwépemc people, up in the Shuswap.

I wanted to acknowledge that I'm joined here by Denise Moffatt, our director of government relations and political action. As most of you probably know, the B.C. Federation of Labour represents over 500,000 union members from across the province, of affiliated unions, working in literally every aspect of the B.C. economy. We have a long and proud history of fighting for the rights of all working people to a safe workplace and fair wages.

Just a bit of background. We know the B.C. government brought in legislation to eliminate contributions from corporations and unions in 2017. This legislation meant a substantive change in the way that political parties are funded in our province. It was an important step forward for the province and for our democracy, and the B.C. Federation of Labour supported this legislation. We believe it makes our political system stronger and more democratic.

During the transition period away from corporate and union donations, parties were allocated a per-vote allowance, funded by the government. We join you today to support the continuation of an allowance for political parties in British Columbia. We suggest that an annual allowance be continued in the amount of \$2.50 per vote on a permanent basis. We also suggest that this amount be indexed to CPI, similarly to the way that expenses limits are increased under the Election Act. Political parties play an important role in our democracy, by bringing together individual views to put forward a vision for our province.

When voters go to the polls, it is critical for them to be informed of the differences of those visions and the impact their vote may have on individuals, communities and our province as a whole. Political parties need to have base funding so that they can effectively communicate with voters throughout the election cycle.

Political parties play an important role in building public engagement and public policy and decision-making. Communication can be a challenge, as there is competition for voters' attention, given the fast pace of family and

working life. We must ensure that all eligible voters have access to the information that they need to help parties shape their policies and, come election time, to cast their ballots. An allowance would ensure that political parties can effectively engage with British Columbians.

[2:30 p.m.]

We support a relatively low threshold for parties to be eligible for the per-vote allowance. We believe B.C. should continue with the current thresholds. This means parties must meet one of the following minimum thresholds: at least 2 percent of the total number of valid votes cast in all electoral districts, or at least 5 percent of the total number of valid votes cast in electoral districts in which it has endorsed candidates.

Having a low threshold makes it easier for new political parties to qualify. It will help ensure that the diverse voices are represented in our political discourse and that parties have the means to communicate their vision with the public. The allowance should be available regardless of whether the party is successful in electing a representative. This will again make sure that new parties receive support and give voice to parties that are developing their support but have yet to meet a high enough threshold in one region to get elected.

With regard to some of the other jurisdictions where we see this, there are political party allowances that are the norm in many of the provinces here in Canada. We know that Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick offer allowances to political parties. Manitoba previously offered an allowance between 2009 and 2016. Other democracies are also offering an allowance, around the globe, including Australia, Finland and New Zealand.

With regards to equity and inclusion, although we don't have a specific policy suggestion for you, we do believe that the committee should explore how allowances can be used to ensure that political parties put forward candidates that are more representative of the diversity of our province. Equity groups, including women, Indigenous People, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities and people of colour, have been underrepresented in our political parties and governance. It's incumbent on us to examine our structures and to remove barriers to participation.

Political parties play a central role in ensuring representation. This idea has been explored in New Brunswick, which provides an additional subsidy for votes received by women candidates. The New Brunswick legislation benefits parties that not only run women. It also encourages parties to ensure that women who are running are running in winnable ridings.

Just to finish up and say the B.C. Federation of Labour recommends the following: that an annual financial allowance for political parties be offered in the amount of \$2.50 per vote on a permanent basis; that this amount be indexed to the CPI similarly to the increases to expenses under the Elections Act; that the current eligibility

thresholds for the allowance are continued; and that the committee explore how the political party allowances could be used to reduce systemic inequities in our political system and improve the representation of equity groups in B.C. politics and elected roles.

That concludes my presentation.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Thank you, Sussanne. Denise, do you want to add anything?

**D. Moffatt:** Not at this time. I think Sussanne has covered everything. I may jump in based on some of the questions that come forward. Thank you.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Well, thanks to both of you, once again. I will open the floor for questions. I have Andrew. Andrew, proceed.

**A. Mercier:** Thanks, Sussanne, for the presentation and for your submission.

I just have a question about one of your recommendations. You recommend instituting a \$2.50 allowance. When the change was first instituted — taking big money out of politics — the per-vote allowance was \$2.50. It's subsequently gone down over the years and is \$1.75 now. I'm just wondering if you could maybe just talk about how you came to the number \$2.50 and what you view as the benefits of that.

**S. Skidmore:** Sure. I will say that we looked across the country and compared ourselves to other like provinces. We looked at what Ontario does and the dollar value that Ontario has, and it's about the same. That is part of our decision-making when we were looking at what number to put forward. But it's sort of a bigger-picture piece around investing in democracy, right? It's two ways that we....

[2:35 p.m.]

With taking the big money and the big, giant donations, whether they're corporate or union, out of politics, there still needs to be sort of a levelling of the playing field for candidates and parties to be able to participate, and participate in a meaningful way and be able to actually have access to voters. We just felt that this was the threshold that would give people that avenue.

Denise, do you want to add anything?

**D. Moffatt:** Not too much, just that we looked at the range. I think that the \$2.50 also gives you room to explore the last part we talked about, which is the equity and inclusion piece. If you look at the New Brunswick model, they actually give a bonus per vote for women candidates. It's possible that if you were building in some kind of equity incentives, the additional room that that amount would give could be used to benefit parties who were meeting some of those equity objectives.

I think it just gives a bit more of a cushion there to ex-

plore other options than if you continued with the current threshold of, I think, \$1.75, right?

**J. Brar (Chair):** Thank you.

Any further questions, Members? Anybody else?

Adam, are you raising your hand, or are you just...? Go ahead.

**A. Olsen:** I don't have any questions. I just want to comment on how succinct.... Four minutes and 47 seconds — that's a pretty phenomenal amount of time to provide a very succinct.... I really appreciate you sharing the perspectives of yourself and your organization and doing it in such an efficient manner. Thank you for that.

**S. Skidmore:** Thanks, Adam. Some would say I'm a fast talker. I'll give credit to the staff who helped put this together as well.

**R. Leonard:** I, too, wanted to add my gratitude for your presentation. I think it's telling when you, as an organization representing 500,000 voters in British Columbia, take the time to make comment about how we can make sure that we are doing the right thing for democracy here in British Columbia.

I'm not sure that I have a question. We have heard a few comments from some of the academic experts yesterday around some of the issues that are before us. I guess I have a question on how you envision a rollout of an equity mandate. Politically, I know that my party has taken that on and has faced criticism for it in how it's rolled out. I'm just curious how you envision trying to roll out a diversity vision within a non-partisan, structural setting.

**S. Skidmore:** Thanks for that question. It's a great question. We've sort of turned our minds to it.

Most everything we do has an equity lens on it and has an intersectional lens on it as well, sort of contemplating. We know that the positions in government at every single level right up to the federal government are not representative of the people who live in our country, who live in our province here.

I'm not 100 percent sure I have all the answers for you. There are some interesting models, I think — different models. The New Brunswick model, particularly with sort of gendered, particularly women, candidates is probably a good start that could be worked on.

I think, as frustrating as government consultations can be sometimes, that, actually, this is one of those things you would need to consult with people with disabilities, with the BIPOC community, with Indigenous people and all of those things to kind of see if there's a bit of a hybrid model that could work and support.... It's complicated, but it's necessary, right?

I'd love to see us explore some sort of avenue into having that conversation so that we can actually work towards

true representation here in B.C. And, of course, we'd love to be part of those conversations.

**D. Moffatt:** Can I add one thing to that too?

[2:40 p.m.]

I'm just curious, as well, that if it was something that was part of the Elections B.C. mandate, if that actually kind of takes some of the pressure off political parties, that they're figuring out what the best policy is, that it becomes more of a universal standard in that sense.

I wonder. I mean, again, like Sussanne said, this is new territory. There weren't a lot of examples of how this worked. New Brunswick was the only model that we had to look at in Canada, and I didn't find any data on how it's going. It seems to me that having more of a universal... The more that we can build things into our structures, that they become systemic norms, the more that we're actually tackling the problems of systemic racism and discrimination, rather than it becoming a choice of a party or a choice of a party not to, if that makes some sense.

I don't know. That's just my only other thought around that question, around how these issues can become thorny for folks politically, and therefore sometimes discourage parties from doing the right thing — right? — which is to really fight those battles out for equity and justice within their own party and decision-making models.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Thank you.

Any other questions, comments, Members?

Thank you very much to both of you for coming today to make this presentation. I really appreciate that.

**D. Moffatt:** Thanks very much for having us.

**S. Skidmore:** Thanks for having us.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Thanks. Bye.

Susan, is there anything you want to say before I conclude the meeting?

**S. Sourial (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Inter-parliamentary Relations):** Just a reminder that tomorrow morning's meeting will start at 9:10 a.m.

**J. Brar (Chair):** Members, we will meet again tomorrow at 9:10 a.m. You can have a good rest, and I will talk to you tomorrow morning again. Thank you very much, once again, for your cooperation and patience going through this process.

I need a motion to adjourn the meeting. So moved by Ronna-Rae. Seconded, Adam.

Motion approved.

The committee adjourned at 2:42 p.m.

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