



**Remarks of the Acting Chief Electoral Officer
on the Main Estimates 2017–18
before the
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**

May 16, 2017

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Part 1: Budget Authorities

Budget
authorities

Today, the Committee is studying and voting on Elections Canada's annual appropriation, which is \$29.3 million. This represents the salaries of approximately 350 indeterminate positions. Combined with the statutory authority, which funds all other expenditures under the *Canada Elections Act*, our 2017–18 Main Estimates total \$112.2 million.

Part 2: Electoral Services Modernization

During this fiscal year, Elections Canada is working on specific administrative changes to modernize the electoral process to address problems raised by Canadians during recent elections and meet their evolving expectations. I would like to highlight three aspects: voting services, voter registration services and online services for candidates and political entities.

New voting
services model

On voting services, the agency is hoping to see legislation that allows for our proposed new voting services model, which can be adapted to meet the specific needs of each electoral district. I was pleased that this Committee agreed to the CEO's recommendations that would allow for its implementation. We look forward to the government's response.

Benefits

In large urban centres, wait time is often an issue for voters, especially at advance polls. In those places, a new voting services model would allow voters to vote at any available table within their polling location, thereby reducing wait times. The new process will also improve working conditions

for poll workers by simplifying their tasks and allowing them to take breaks as required, without interrupting the vote.

E-poll devices

To implement this new model, election workers will be equipped with electronic poll books. These are applications that will run on tablets or laptops to help election workers manage voters lists, forms and “bingo sheets.” This will replace the cumbersome stacks of paper forms that they currently use and the need to cross voter names off of a paper list with pencil and ruler. It should also significantly reduce record-keeping errors, improve compliance with procedures and increase auditability. I wish to stress that we will retain paper ballots, which will continue to be marked and counted by hand.

Deployment

We are currently mapping out scenarios for deploying this new voting services model for the 2019 general election, focusing on electoral districts where deployment would bring the most benefit. Deployment decisions will also be informed by a procurement process currently in progress and input from the Advisory Committee of Political Parties.

Other voting service initiatives

In more sparsely populated areas, travel time to voting locations, rather than wait time, was one of the main problems reported by Canadians in recent elections. In those areas, instead of introducing technology, we will increase the number of advance polling locations to improve proximity. As well, we will provide returning officers with routing data to support the selection of voting locations. This will help ensure that voters are directed to the polling location that is nearest in terms of travel time.

Since the preparation of our Departmental Plan, we have decided to set aside

one aspect of our transformation agenda—the electronic delivery of special ballots. While we continue to believe that legislation should be amended to provide flexibility in the delivery of special ballots, this is not something we will be pursuing for 2019.

However, based on the success of the pilot project conducted at some 40 post-secondary institutions in 2015, we will increase the number of satellite local offices. These offices will provide information, registration and opportunities for voters away from their electoral district to vote by special ballot.

Registration
services

Our priority for registration services is to increase the coverage and currency of the National Register of Electors, especially with respect to young voters. For instance, only one quarter of 18-year-olds are registered, compared to just over 70 percent of 20-year-olds.

I would note that our recommendations to pre-register 16- and 17-year-olds, as well as to gain access to data from Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada on non-citizens, would also improve the coverage and currency of the National Register of Electors. These measures are also included in Bill C-33.

In addition, we are working to make the online voter registration service more universally accessible, particularly for voters in rural areas who do not have standardized residential addresses.

Services to
candidates and
political
entities

We will also offer an online portal providing a number of services to candidates and political entities. This will include the ability to download

various documents such as maps and voters lists, or to file electronically documents, such as nomination papers. I would note that this Committee supported the recommendations that will facilitate the electronic filing of nomination papers.

Consultation

In moving forward with improvements to our services offering, we will continue to consult with parliamentarians, including this Committee, as well as with key stakeholders.

Part 3: Asset Renewal

Asset
renewal

Elections Canada is also in the process of replacing and improving a number of existing systems and services that enable the delivery of modern elections.

For the next general election, these include new telecommunications services for local offices and our central contact centres. This also includes upgrades and maintenance to our IT network and the progressive implementation of a new solution for hosting our data centres. Upgrades and additional basic functionalities are also required for the system that supports returning officers in recruiting, training and paying some 300,000 election workers during a general election.

These investments will allow Elections Canada to ensure that our IT services remain reliable and secure in the evolving environment. We are working with lead security agencies, including the Communications Security Establishment, to ensure that our infrastructure continues to meet all appropriate security standards and requirements.

Part 4: Support to Parliament

Lastly, I would like to touch briefly on the timing of new legislation.

Future
legislation

I understand that the Minister intends to introduce legislation related to fundraising this spring. She also indicated before this Committee that she intends to introduce other legislative changes in the fall of 2017, building on the CEO's recommendations report.

Timeline for
implementation

The Minister recognized the last time she appeared before this Committee that Elections Canada needs sufficient time to implement the changes well ahead of the 2019 general election. In this regard, assuming enabling legislation is enacted by spring 2018, this should allow us to implement our proposed new voting services model and other legislative changes for the next general election.

Conclusion

To conclude, we look forward to the final report from this Committee on its review of the CEO's recommendations for improved administration of the *Canada Elections Act*. Elections Canada staff remain available to assist.

Thank you. My colleagues and I are happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.