



# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES**

## **Hansard Verbatim Report**

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**Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES**

Hon. Corey Tochor, Chair  
Saskatoon Eastview

Mr. Warren McCall, Deputy Chair  
Regina Elphinstone-Centre

Hon. Greg Brkich  
Arm River

Ms. Lori Carr  
Estevan

Mr. David Forbes  
Saskatoon Centre

Mr. Jeremy Harrison  
Meadow Lake

Mr. Greg Lawrence  
Moose Jaw Wakamow

Mr. Doyle Vermette  
Cumberland

[The committee met at 17:28.]

**The Deputy Chair:** — Live from the basement of the legislature, well good evening, colleagues. Welcome to House Services Committee. You may be wondering what I am doing in the Chair. Just here as Deputy Chair, and we'll turn things over to the Speaker shortly, who is of course the Chair of the House Services Committee.

Before we get too far down the line, I just want to note for the record that we're joined tonight by Mr. Forbes, Ms. Wilson, Mr. Steele, Mr. Buckingham, Mr. Brkich, and Mr. Buckingham is chitting in for Mr. Harrison. Mr. Steele is chitting in for Ms. Carr, and Ms. Wilson chitting in for Mr. Lawrence.

**General Revenue Fund  
Supplementary Estimates — November  
Chief Electoral Officer  
Vote 34**

**Subvote (CE01)**

**The Deputy Chair:** — We're here tonight for, I'm sure, not too lengthy a consideration, but certainly in the supplementary estimates there was vote 34 for the Chief Electoral Officer in the amount of \$400,000.

So we are joined tonight again by the Speaker, with witnesses from Elections Saskatchewan. So at this moment I'll turn things over to the Speaker and Mr. Kress, deputy electoral officer, to make appropriate introductions of officials, and we'll get into the consideration of the vote here tonight.

**Mr. Kress:** — All right. Thank you, Deputy Chair. Certainly. My name is Jeff Kress. I'm the deputy CEO [Chief Electoral Officer]. I'm responsible for operations at Elections Saskatchewan. Dr. Boda is currently at a COGEL [Council on Governmental Ethics Laws] conference, where he's speaking and making a presentation, as is Jennifer Colin who is the deputy CEO responsible for finance.

Today with me here I have Richard Hall, and he is the director of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer for operations and corporate policy. Also with me to the back is our new director of finance, Aaron Thompson.

So I just have some very brief comments. I know the purpose today is with regards to the supplementary budget estimates. By-elections are very important electoral events, and delivering these events in a professional, impartial, independent, and cost-effective manner is really a key part of our role. And we take great pride in the delivery of these electoral events.

And I know, while the focus of this meeting is on the supplementary estimates, I do know that Dr. Boda, I know that he'd want me to highlight that Elections Saskatchewan is also currently focused on ways to modernize Saskatchewan's electoral service.

So it continues to be a busy time at Elections Saskatchewan as we prepare not only for the upcoming by-elections but we also work towards the next general election. And with that, I

promised to keep my comments brief, so I will pass it over to Mr. Speaker.

**The Speaker:** — Just briefly, I just want to thank the members for being able to make it to the committee and do the good work that Elections Saskatchewan does, and look forward to a thoughtful exchange of questions and answers.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Kress, any further introductions you'd like to make of other officials not with us at the table?

**Mr. Kress:** — I think the only other individual was Aaron Thompson who is our director of finance.

**The Deputy Chair:** — I guess I just wanted to make sure he wasn't left out, or something like that. I'm not sure what that was necessarily about, but thank you very much for that. Colleagues, I'd open the floor to questions, comments for the delegation. Mr. Forbes.

**Mr. Forbes:** — Okay, thank you very much. And thank you to the officials, Mr. Kress and Mr. Hall, to be here, and the Speaker for bringing the officials here.

Just a couple of quick questions, one in terms of . . . So it looks like what we have before us is a statutory request for 416,000. So is that the cost of the by-election in Fairview, Saskatoon Fairview, and how does that relate? Are by-elections getting more expensive? Is this sort of in the norm of the past few by-elections?

We're going to be coming into three by-elections actually I think, if I'm correct that there's three that are on the horizon. And is this the kind of thing that we can be expecting? Are there going to be some . . . Or is this a bit of an outlier or what has been the range of expenses?

So can you tell us a little bit about this particular by-election, one. And then overall is this within the realm of reasonable or, you know, what might be expected for the cost of a by-election?

**Mr. Kress:** — Absolutely. So in terms of the cost of the by-election, the 416,000 is our anticipated cost right now for the by-election in terms of supplementary funding.

Where we're at with the last couple of by-elections, we do have some information. The last by-election that we would have had, in Saskatoon Meewasin before that, was anticipated to be about \$380,000. Now that amount, the amount that was actually spent for candidate reimbursement, was actually a little bit lower than had been anticipated, by about 25 grand. So that makes the amount a little over \$400,000 in total.

Now we never know what amount will be paid out in terms of candidate reimbursement. It depends on whether or not the thresholds are met and how much the candidates actually spent. So until the final accounting is done, those things are still outstanding. But certainly the costs will be consistent with the past by-elections.

**Mr. Forbes:** — All right. And so can you tell us, so are the

refunds probably might be about a quarter, or are they a third of the costs? What are the other costs that are involved?

**Mr. Kress:** — Absolutely. It's a great question. So the single biggest cost in terms of a by-election is staffing. You know, it takes us about 200 people to work a by-election. That includes everything from the returning officer and election clerk that run the returning office, all the way down to the workers out in the field who maybe help people with accessibility issues or to help administer the vote. So staffing is the single biggest cost of a by-election. It's about a third of the cost in total, so it's a fairly significant number.

The second-biggest cost is most definitely the reimbursements. So it works out to be a little bit over 25 per cent of the costs. Certainly out of that 416,000 we're anticipating that, between staffing and reimbursements, we're already over 250,000 between those two numbers. So they are by far and away the biggest amount. I would say as a rough estimate, 25 to 30 per cent is what was the case in this particular by-election.

**Mr. Forbes:** — And I don't know if the numbers have come out. They may have. I haven't been paying attention in terms of participation and that type of thing. One of the things that was interesting is that you had advanced polling in the Confederation Mall, which I think probably added a lot to the voter turnout. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**Mr. Kress:** — I don't have the voter information numbers in front of me, but I'll get Richard to look them up while we're here. Certainly part of the role of Elections Saskatchewan is to try to make sure that there are accessible places to vote, and so trying to have places that might be on a major bus route or be along major thoroughfares back and forth. It certainly is something that we're trying to do to try to find ways to reduce barriers.

Now with respect to by-elections in the past, in some cases turnout for by-elections has tended to be lower than for a general election. That's just the normal trend. So it was down from the GE [general election], Richard tells me, and he's just looking up the specific number.

**Mr. Forbes:** — I don't really have any others questions, so I don't want to . . .

**The Deputy Chair:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Forbes. I note Mr. Harrison has now joined us. Again, thanks to Mr. Buckingham but welcome, Mr. Harrison. And he's got a question.

**Mr. Harrison:** — Sure. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, appreciate it. Apologies for my late arrival.

One question I would have, which is pretty specific: looking through the recent by-elections in our neighbouring province of Alberta with a larger, you know, population base per constituency, those by-elections have cost between 200 and \$260,000 per by-election. That's kind of the average of a whole bunch of them in the last two or three years. Why are by-elections in this province costing so much more with a smaller population base per riding?

**Mr. Kress:** — So I can't say that I have specifically looked in terms of Alberta, but I can tell you that the processes that we have to put in place have to follow *The Election Act, 1996*, and so the number of polls and the number of polling locations and the number of people that come to polls, those are some of the cost factors. And certainly the number of polls and staffing is probably our single biggest cost.

**Mr. Harrison:** — You know, I appreciate that answer but I'm quite convinced that the elections Act in Alberta would have similar provisions as far the provision of the number of polling locations and all of those sort of things which, you know, obviously drive costs.

You know, I just wonder how in Alberta they're running these things for half the cost. That's a pretty substantial difference. I haven't heard any complaints from candidates or others involved in Alberta by-elections and I think we probably know folks directly involved in different capacities that would indicate, you know, significant issues.

So having, you know, larger electoral districts per population, some of which I think as well by geography, to have that significant a difference . . . I could see if it was in a few percentage points or even, you know, 10 or 15 per cent. But when we're talking 50 per cent or more difference in the cost I think we need to take a pretty hard look at how we're doing things. And maybe, you know, we're doing things a bit better. I don't know. Or maybe Alberta can do things better, but to have that big of a differential . . . I really think we need to take a pretty significant look at how we're doing things.

**Mr. Kress:** — So I'll have to take that back and take a look at the numbers. It is quite possible that part of it has to do with what's actually determined to be included as cost.

So for example . . . I can't speak for Alberta, but we'll go back and check. In some provinces the cost for reimbursement, which works out to be the 25 to 30 per cent, that's not actually included in the cost of the election, the by-election.

For us it is something with the reporting, with the way we go ahead and we do those numbers. Certainly I don't have the background on Alberta here in front of us but it is something we can go back . . . I can tell you in terms of our costing for this one, as I said, staffing is about a third. The reimbursements are the 25 to 30 per cent. Our advertising for this one — that includes statutory, non-statutory, and all the things that we do to try to make sure that voters are aware of the by-election and where and when to vote — that works out to be about 75,000. Our contractual services are 45,000.

Certainly a big part of that or a significant part of that, from our perspective, is related to our old information system, which is ESPREE [Elections Saskatchewan permanent register of eligible electors]. And we've put that in the past budget, that that is one of the systems that we are looking at trying to replace. Certainly when you're in a system that any time you need to run a by-election you need to use your vendor to make the changes and configure the system, it's less than optimal. So those are some of the things that we're looking at trying to change.

Another big factor that relies into our costs — it's about the remaining 30,000 — is related to supplies, services, rents, things of that nature. So I can certainly take that back. We can come back, provide the committee with some information. I can't answer though the differences between us and Alberta at this point in time because I certainly haven't dug into that information.

**Mr. Harrison:** — Okay. No, I appreciate that. And I guess what we would ask then is if at the next appearance before the standing committee or even during the Board of Internal Economy budget process, if we could have a detailed breakdown, a comparative analysis with, you know, perhaps Alberta and other . . . if there are other jurisdictions you think would be equally valid as far as comparisons, we would appreciate that.

**Mr. Kress:** — Yes, absolutely.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Harrison. Colleagues, any further questions, comments at this time? Seeing none, thank you very much for that. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Kress, Mr. Hall, thank you very much.

And we will now move to the following statement ably supplied by Kathy Burianyk: vote 34, chief electoral officer, page 14, chief electoral officer subvote (CE01) in the amount of \$416,000. There is no vote as this is statutory.

I'd like to ask a member of the committee to move the following motion . . . There's a draft in front of committee members — very good — of the eighth report of the Standing Committee on House Services. We require a member to move the following motion:

That the eighth report of the Standing Committee on House Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

Mr. Brkich.

**Hon. Mr. Brkich:** — I so move:

That the eighth report of the Standing Committee on House Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Is that agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** — It's agreed. Motion is carried. I think just before I entertain a motion to adjourn I'd just like to again thank committee colleagues, legislative staff, and certainly Mr. Speaker, Mr. Kress, and the good folks coming here tonight for the consideration of this matter.

**Mr. Kress:** — Thank you.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Thank you. I'd now entertain a motion to adjourn. Ms. Wilson.

**Hon. Ms. Wilson:** — I so move.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Got to be pretty fast to get ahead of an

adjournment motion from Ms. Wilson.

So moved. And it's agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** — Agreed.

**The Deputy Chair:** — Thanks, colleagues.

[The committee adjourned at 17:44.]