

## **March 24, 2018 Speaker Series-Legislation**

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Understanding the election process is an important part of 'Election Readiness'; we look for fairness, transparency, efficiency and access for all who qualify as electors.

To learn more, Greg Essensa, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), and head of Elections Ontario, was invited to inform us about provincial elections in Ontario: laws, policies, and current initiatives. Greg has been in this position since 2008 and his dedication and enthusiasm is apparent. Elections Ontario is a non partisan agency of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It is directed by the CEO who reports to the Legislature as an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly, responsible to all members of Parliament through the Speaker. The CEO cannot vote in a provincial election.

Greg covered Elections Ontario's Vision, Mission, Strategic Priorities and Values. Key to driving change yet maintaining the integrity of the election process is modernization, ensuring sustainability, and putting the needs of voters first. He highlighted recent legislative changes and actions that address the challenges faced by Elections Ontario:

- A growing population
- Ensuring accessibility & representation for all eligible voters
- Modernizing the electoral process through the use of secure technology
- Creating a sustainable and effective staffing model at polling locations
- Fewer volunteer scrutinizers
- Engaging young voters (in particular 18 - 25)

### **Electoral Districts**

In 2015, to accommodate a growing population and changing population distribution legislation was passed to increase the number of electoral districts from 107 to 122. This was further increased in 2017 with the addition of 2 new districts to improve representation in the far north.

### **Harnessing Technology at the Polls**

Bill 45, passed in December 2016, has lead the way to better use of technology in the polls, notably electronic Vote Tabulators and e-Poll books. Elections Ontario piloted the SuperPoll model in selected multi poll voting locations in the recent Whitby—Oshawa by-election. Existing polls at selected voting locations were merged into one poll. Checking in was facilitated using ePoll books enabling electors to be looked up and checked in efficiently. With this new model, fewer staff is required. Results of the pilot were successful reporting high satisfaction by staff and voters. This will be the way of the future. For more details, see the report, ***Proposal for a Technology-enabled Staffing Model for Ontario Provincial Elections: Post-Event Report: Whitby-Oshawa By-election*** on the Elections Ontario website.

### **Voter Engagement, including Youth**

Elections Ontario has made it easier to maintain an up-to-date voters list through offering e-registration and has been promoting this across the province. This improves efficiency at the polls for everyone, staff and voters included, but also empowers the public. Young adults have the lowest voter turnout record so it is essential to capture their interest. To engage young people to vote when they become eligible at 18, Elections Ontario now offers pre-registration for those who are 16 and 17 on the Ontario Register of Future Voters. The schools are involved in the promotion. Greg and his colleagues who

attended were impressed with the CFUW Southport's **Grandma Asked Me to Vote** campaign.

### **Financial Rules**

**The Election Finances Amendment Act**, 2016, offered the first significant review and update in 40 years. Now an individual cannot contribute more than \$1200 annually to a party or a candidate during the campaign period, and cannot contribute more than \$5000 to their own campaign. Parties, candidates, etc. may no longer knowingly accept contributions from sources outside Ontario, registered charities, corporations or trade unions, to name a few. Restrictions have been placed on attendance at fundraisers. Financing limitations have been placed on third party advertising. For CFUW, such limits are welcome as it levels the playing field and opens up opportunities for public service for those of more limited means and outside of the power structures that create barriers for women and minorities. We continue to be concerned about third party advertising through social media. Also, Elections Ontario does not have control over the content of election ads. If we see offensive ads an option is to make a complaint to the party involved.

### **For canvassers**

Although CFUW is non-partisan, many of our members pound the pavement for candidates of our choice at election time. Greg outlined the current rules for canvassers, under the **Election Act**, which are available on the Elections Ontario website. An important update involves access to multiple residence buildings. Under the law, a candidate or his/her representative must be provided with access, per stipulated rules. If access is denied, building owners and condominium corporations will face fines.

### **Accessing Elections Ontario**

The Elections Ontario website, <https://www.elections.on.ca/>, is very well designed and easy to follow; it definitely caters to the average citizen, with essential information right up front. See e-Registration (link from the main page) to check if you are registered to vote and to update your information if necessary. Encourage friends and family aged 16-17 to pre-register so they will already be in the system when they become eligible to vote. Follow Elections Ontario through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for news and updates.