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**MANITOBA FEDERATION OF LABOUR BRIEF ON  
BILL 37**

**The Lobbyists Registration Act and Amendments to The  
Elections Act, The Elections Finances Act, The Legislative  
Assembly Act and The Legislative Assembly Management  
Commission Act**

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The Manitoba Federation of Labour, generally speaking, supports the provisions outlined in Bill 37. Because of the time limitations for presentations to this committee, we will only address a few items it contains.

### **Schedule C – The Elections Finances Amendment Act**

When the Government of Manitoba enacted the **Elections Finances Act** in 2000, the Manitoba Federation of Labour and most of its affiliated unions supported its provisions. We understood the need to address the growing concern among Manitoba residents that political parties required the financial backing of entities with deep pockets – big business in the case of the Conservative and Liberal parties and labour in the case of the New Democrats. Accurately or not, people had the deepening belief that the mainstream parties formed governments already beholden to their non-government sponsors even before being sworn into office and that this relationship did much to shape the legislative agenda that followed.

The reasonable remedy was to take a course of action already taken in other jurisdictions:

- Limit political contributions to individuals resident in Manitoba only,
- Establish a ceiling on the amount individuals can contribute,
- Limit third party spending, and
- Regulating expenditures between and during election campaigns.

While these provisions did much to correct the appearance of parties being beholden to interests other than the people of Manitoba, they have created significant challenges for political parties when it comes to financing their activities – challenges that don't, for the most part, exist in other jurisdictions that have similar contribution laws. Of the six jurisdictions in Canada to ban corporate and union donations and limit individual donations, only Manitoba has not enacted reasonable public financing provisions.

In 2000 when we shared our views on the enactment of the Elections Finances Act, we made it clear that our support for it was conditional on it including an effective public financing component to support political parties' fund raising efforts with a modest annual budget "floor". The level of financial support from general revenue should not be so high as to cover all of the costs of a modern political party and each will still have to promote political policies and election

platforms that reflect the values and aspirations of our citizens in order to attract contributions from individuals.

We are glad to see the provisions of Bill 37 that are contained in Section 70, **Annual Allowance for Registered Political Parties**. Our only reservation is that we believe the government has set the level too low at \$1.25 per vote. At this level, the annual allowance will cover only about a third of the typical mainstream party's budgetary needs. In contrast, federal parties receive more than \$1.90 per vote, in New Brunswick the allowance is set at \$1.76 and in Nova Scotia at \$1.50.

We recommend that the government amend Bill 37 to increase the annual allowance to \$1.50 per vote received in the last election.

With the introduction of public financing for political parties, the other half of the equation finally exists. We can now say that Manitoba has made the electoral financing process far more transparent than it was prior to 2000. We are closer to attaining the ideal that our electoral system based on citizen participation in the process and not on how much money the supporters of political parties have. It is closer to being a system based on ideas and policies and not on the well-documented impact of large-scale, expensive multi-media advertising. If we as a society have decided it's a good idea to be careful about who we allow to make political contributions – and we have – then we as a society have a responsibility to partially underwrite the costs faced by political parties, which Bill 37 does.

Democracy should be more than a contest of wallets.

### **Schedule B - The Elections Amendment Act**

We are open to the idea of a fixed election date. We have never felt hard done by with the call of an election being controlled by the government of the day. And, having a fixed date is just as acceptable to us.

If the idea of a fixed date for elections to occur on the second Tuesday in June every four years gives some a greater sense of faith in the electoral process, then so be it. Greater transparency in elections is good and if it reduces voter cynicism and increases participation, even better.

Other provisions in this Act deserve the support of Manitobans. For example, opening the polls an hour earlier at 7 am will create greater convenience for working people and may well be an important factor in the effort to increase voter participation in the electoral process. Similarly, limiting the distance that rural residents must travel to cast their vote is also a positive amendment.

### **Schedule A - The Lobbyists Registration Act**

We support the provisions of the Lobbyists Registration Act if they lead to greater transparency in the political process. In a political community as small as the one that exists in Manitoba, lobbyists of all political stripes are usually well known to one and other. We know who is lobbying who, and most often for what.

Having said that, we recognize that this may not be readily apparent to the average citizen. Registering lobbyists and making their relevant information easily accessible to Manitoba residents, particularly through the internet. This will increase the ability of the average person to understand the significance of statements made by political pundits and by politicians themselves. It will help flesh out the importance of what members of government and the opposition parties say.

However, we urge the government to ensure that the bureaucratic support structure for the **Lobbyists Registration Act** doesn't become excessively cumbersome and an unnecessary burden for practitioners. For example, is re-filing unchanged information every six months necessary? Can it not be limited to filing new information as needed? We recognize that this is important information that needs to be filed correctly if it is to be of use to the residents of Manitoba, but other than the initial filing – perhaps resubmissions of registry information can be limited to those occasions when new information is available.

Thank you for listening to our views on this important Bill.