

Legislative  
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of Ontario



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## **Official Report of Debates (Hansard)**

P-22

## **Journal des débats (Hansard)**

P-22

### **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

2023 Annual Report,  
Auditor General:

Cabinet Office

Treasury Board Secretariat

### **Comité permanent des comptes publics**

Rapport annuel 2023,  
vérificatrice générale :

Bureau du Conseil des ministres

Secrétariat du Conseil du Trésor

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43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Monday 27 May 2024

1<sup>re</sup> session  
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Lundi 27 mai 2024

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Chair: Tom Rakocevic  
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Président : Tom Rakocevic  
Greffière : Tanzima Khan

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES  
COMPTES PUBLICS**

Monday 27 May 2024

Lundi 27 mai 2024

*The committee met at 1345 in room 151, following a closed session.*

2023 ANNUAL REPORT,  
AUDITOR GENERAL

CABINET OFFICE

TREASURY BOARD SECRETARIAT

Consideration of review of government advertising.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** I would like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. We are here to begin consideration of the 2023 Auditor General's Review of Government Advertising.

Joining us today are officials from the Cabinet Office and the Treasury Board Secretariat. You will have 20 minutes collectively for an opening presentation to the committee. We will then move into the question-and-answer portion of the meeting, where we will rotate back and forth between the government and official opposition caucuses in 20-minute intervals, with some time for questioning allocated for the independent member.

Before you begin, the Clerk will administer the oath of witness or affirmation.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan):** Good afternoon, everyone. I will begin with both deputy ministers, who are both doing oaths on Bibles. The Bible is placed in front of you today.

I will begin with Deputy Minister Alexandra Sutton. Do you solemnly swear that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** I do so swear.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan):** Thank you so much.

Now, Deputy Minister Carlene Alexander, do you solemnly swear that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** I do so swear.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan):** Thank you so much.

I will now move on to the two affirmations that we have this afternoon. The first one will be for Kirsten Evans. Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** I do so affirm.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan):** Thank you so much.

Now, I have Len Hatzis. Do you solemnly affirm that the evidence you shall give to this committee touching the subject of the present inquiry shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** I do so affirm.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan):** Thank you so much.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** I would invite each of you to introduce yourselves for Hansard one time when you begin speaking. Please begin when ready. Thank you very much for being here today.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you very much, and good afternoon. My name is Carlene Alexander. I'm the deputy minister of the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Secretary of the Treasury Board and Management Board of Cabinet. I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear today.

I'm joined by Deputy Minister Alexandra Sutton and a number of ministry colleagues to provide any information that is needed to fully answer the committee's questions today.

From Treasury Board Secretariat, I'm joined by Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Administrative Officer Sandy Yee and legal services director Len Hatzis.

I will now turn it over to Deputy Minister Sutton to introduce those joining from the Cabinet Office.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you, Deputy Alexander.

Good afternoon. My name is Alexandra Sutton. I'm the deputy minister of communications in Cabinet Office.

Bonjour, je m'appelle Alexandra Sutton, sous-ministre des communications au sein du Bureau du Conseil des ministres.

I'd also like to introduce Kirsten Evans, assistant deputy minister, marketing, enterprise services and insights, who is joining me today.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you, Deputy Sutton.

Before we get started, I'd like to speak to the fundamental role non-partisan public servants play in serving Ontarians, their communities and the public interest under the direction of the elected government, all in accordance with the Public Service of Ontario Act. As part of this role, we serve the government of the day with utmost professionalism and in a manner that upholds public trust. We support decision-makers by providing objective, non-partisan advice, options and recommendations.

Treasury Board Secretariat, or TBS, is not only a line ministry responsible for its own divisions and branches but is also a central agency responsible for working with other ministries. In the context of all that TBS does as a central agency, our role in government advertising is a small one, and I can speak to that today.

As a central agency, our ministry's role includes holding the overall policy responsibility for the Government Advertising Act and its supporting regulation. For the benefit of this committee, the Government Advertising Act, 2004, provides the primary legal framework for government advertising in Ontario.

This legislation, passed in 2004 and amended in 2015 and 2016, lays out the responsibilities and rights of government when advertising to the public. Specifically, the Government Advertising Act applies to a government office, which the act defines as a "ministry, Cabinet Office" or "the Office of the Premier." So each ministry must meet the requirements of this legislation.

As members will be aware, governments of Ontario and across Canada routinely pay to publish, display or broadcast advertisements or distribute printed material. In the case of the Ontario government, the act states a variety of reasons the province may choose to use paid advertisements, and that includes informing the public about new or existing programs, plans, services or policies, and it is well understood that government should be able to inform the public about their rights and responsibilities under the law.

In addition to that, advertising can be used to encourage behaviour that is in the public interest and to promote our province with the objective of bolstering economic activity within Ontario.

Another important aspect of the act is that it requires the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario to review certain advertising to ensure it is consistent with the requirements of the act. This includes ensuring advertising does not include any partisan content as defined by the act.

As the committee will know, Treasury Board Secretariat has a lead role in the relationship with the Auditor General. However, in the case of advertising, compliance with the act is broadly overseen by Cabinet Office and direct accountability of the ministry deputy ministers to submit campaigns. My colleague Deputy Sutton will speak about this shortly.

Of course, each campaign is the result of co-operation across different ministries. Cabinet Office leads and individual ministries are accountable for their advertising campaigns, from content to funding. As well, Cabinet Office determines how much funding is allocated to each individual campaign, and my colleague Deputy Sutton and her team will be able to speak to that.

TBS also does have policy responsibility for the advertising procurement directive, which ministries must adhere to from a procurement perspective. Additionally, Supply Ontario, an agency of TBS, has the advertising and communication services procurement branch, which provides procurement and vendor management services for third-party communications and advertising agencies.

I will now turn it over to Deputy Sutton to discuss the role Cabinet Office plays in this process. Following her remarks, I will speak about the government's response to the Auditor General's recommendations in chapter 4. Over to you, Deputy Sutton.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you, Deputy Alexander. I'd like to thank the committee today for the opportunity to be here.

In the context of the committee's review of the Auditor General's chapter on government advertising from 2022-23, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to outline the role of Cabinet Office and the public service communications function played in government advertising.

Similarly to Deputy Alexander, I would like to begin with a note about the important role of the Ontario public service in serving people of Ontario and the government. In the communications space, that includes providing non-partisan communications advice and direct services to the elected government and its staff.

From media relations to advertising, we take our responsibilities seriously, in accordance with the Public Service of Ontario Act. In that context, Cabinet Office communications is responsible for public service oversight of cross-government communications, including paid advertising.

Cabinet Office responsibility for advertising extends to all government ministries but does not include government agency advertising such as Metrolinx or the LCBO. For the benefit of the committee and in the context of chapter 4, this is consistent with the application of the Government Advertising Act.

#### 1350

Cabinet Office's role in advertising has evolved over the past few years, and it now has a centralized role in directly delivering the planning, strategic development, creative production, media buying and execution of all ministry advertising initiatives. We do this in partnership with the Premier's office, deputy ministers and communications directors across government.

In that centralized role, Cabinet Office's marketing and creative services strategy branch is able to directly deliver a number of services and functions, including advertising campaign strategy, creative concept and production, and planning and purchasing from media of government campaigns. We do continue to use third-party agencies in some cases, but by bringing more campaigns in-house, we save agency fees, delivering significant cost avoidance for the government and the people of Ontario.

To outline the marketing campaign process, I will start with the annual marketing planning exercise. Cabinet Office works closely with ministries across government to secure their proposals for policies, programs and public services that may benefit from paid marketing support. The annual marketing plan allows Cabinet Office to plan the year, resource accordingly, and avoid or reduce overlap of messages and campaigns in market. The annual campaign process takes into account the needs of the public, the responsibilities of government and the priorities of the government for the year ahead.

Deputy Alexander already touched on this in her remarks, but it is worth reiterating that advertising campaigns in the annual plan may focus on a number of topics, as listed in the Government Advertising Act:

- informing the public about government programs, plans, services and policies;
- new, existing, proposed or changing items, such as Health811, in the Building a Better Health Care System campaign;
- raising awareness and encouraging or discouraging specific social behaviour, such as driving awareness of cancer screening in the 2023 advertising report;
- promoting Ontario as a great place to live, work, invest, study or visit, or any one of its economic sectors, such as Foodland’s Make It Local economic recovery campaign.

Once an annual plan has been determined, Cabinet Office communications confirms timing, budget and delivery strategy to the ministry.

While we always begin a fiscal year with an annual marketing plan, new or urgent marketing campaigns do arise and are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. They would be subject to similar rigour and a requirement for ministry, Cabinet Office and the Office of the Premier’s alignment on the campaign.

Now that I have highlighted the planning and funding for campaigns, I’d also like to briefly outline the process to develop a marketing campaign. As I mentioned earlier, over the past few years, the OPS has centralized marketing functions within Cabinet Office communications. The marketing campaign process begins with strategic development. The marketing strategy unit develops a strategic brief and gains ministry input on messaging, target audiences, and facts and data being presented. Cabinet Office uses the strategic brief to gain Premier’s office alignment and then briefs in either the in-house creative and media teams or third-party vendors.

To spend a moment on third-party vendors: Cabinet Office works closely with the advertising and communications services procurement branch within Supply Ontario to competitively procure third-party vendors.

Once creative and media partners—either internal or external—have been briefed, the creative development process begins. The assigned creative team develops concepts. Cabinet Office gains Premier’s office alignment on those concepts and the ministry ensures all materials are factually accurate and aligned with policy, program and communication’s goals and obligations.

When I speak of “creative” or “creative assets,” I am referring to the individual ads that you may see on television, social media, newspapers, out-of-home billboards, digital banner ads, online videos or here on the radio. As creative is developed, media recommendations are developed based on budget, target audiences, message tracks, preferred or desired channels, media availability, inventory and timing.

Media recommendations also take into account the bilingual nature of all campaigns and also consider multi-

lingual channels to ensure we reach people across Ontario and in the language that they need.

Once creative products and media plans are approved, Cabinet Office works with the lead ministry to prepare submissions for the office of the Auditor General’s review. Consistent with the Government Advertising Act, all campaign assets and media plans outside of search and social media require approval from the Auditor General before they go live. The lead ministry submits the package and the ministry’s deputy minister is the recipient of the approval letter. Cabinet Office in its enterprise role oversees and tracks office of the Auditor General approvals. We also ensure all reviewable ads are approved before they go into market. All reviewable ads must be approved by the office of the Auditor General within the prescribed timelines, including pre-review where necessary. Once approved, Cabinet Office works with creative and media partners to traffic assets to market.

Now, I will talk about campaign measurement. Once a campaign is in market, Cabinet Office monitors performance of different media, optimizing as needed. Once the campaign is out of market, Cabinet Office works to develop performance reporting. That reporting largely focuses on media buying and includes reporting on metrics such as impressions and reach, link clicks and cost per click. Additionally, the ministries and Cabinet Office may track program and business results associated with the original brief to help make clear the campaigns reach the original business goals, as well as communications aims. These advertising metrics along with business metrics are taken into account on a year-over-year basis to inform campaign planning and help to ensure people are connected to the programs and information they need.

I will turn to a brief overview of the 2022-23 advertising year, which was of course the subject of the chapter we are reviewing today. It’s important to note that 2022 was an election year, so all government advertising was out of market from April 1, 2022, until the post-election period, with the exception of allowable exceptions. The 60-day pre-writ blackout period as prescribed by the Government Advertising Act is amended in 2015. Having said that, as the chapter outlines, in 2022-23, the government spent \$33.72 million on advertising in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2023. Ministries and Cabinet Office delivered 24 campaigns in total that year across a spectrum of topics. All reviewable advertising assets were approved by the Auditor General in that year.

In closing, I hope I have provided you with useful information regarding the subject of government advertising in Ontario and some of the processes Cabinet Office uses to deliver on our enterprise role.

I will now turn it back to Deputy Alexander to address the recommendations in the Auditor General’s 2023 annual report and the government response.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you, Deputy Sutton.

As the deputy minister for Treasury Board Secretariat, the lead respondent to the recommendations of this chapter, I am pleased to outline the response to the specific recommendations in the 2023 annual report related to government advertising.

The first recommendation from the Auditor General is that the previous version of the Government Advertising Act, 2004, that was in force from January 30, 2006, to June 3, 2015, be reinstated. In that recommendation, the Auditor General also requests an amendment that maintains digital advertising as a reviewable medium.

As we have described, government ministries, supported by Cabinet Office, ensure that all reviewable advertisements are given to the Auditor General for review and approval as required by the act. As well, the government reviews all advertising paid for by the province to ensure it is delivered in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. That includes expansion of in-house services as outlined by Deputy Sutton to reduce overhead agency costs. As noted in the summary status table sent to the committee on May 13, 2024, the government is maintaining the status quo at this time.

**1400**

The second recommendation is in regard to revoking O. Reg. 143/15 under the Government Advertising Act, 2004, in order to enable the Auditor General to review all digital advertising paid for by the government without exception. The government appreciates the work that the Auditor General does and values the review process.

Under the Government Advertising Act, 2004, the Office of the Auditor General continues to review and approve advertising as set out in the act, and that includes digital advertising, such as online video and digital banners. In the context of social media and search engine advertising not in the scope of the act, the government is maintaining the status quo at this time with regard to the regulation in question. But I will briefly state, to provide additional context, that the government follows the spirit of the act for those non-reviewable assets, whether part of a larger campaign or stand-alone. Both responses were also noted in the summary status table submitted to the committee.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Two minutes remaining.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** I would like to thank the Office of the Auditor General for the recommendations and the committee for the opportunity to respond specifically to both recommendations.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the members of the committee for your time today. I hope we have provided some clarity on the government advertising process and how TBS and Cabinet Office fit within that process.

In summary, TBS's central agency role includes holding the overall policy responsibility for the Government Advertising Act and its supporting regulation. As my colleague noted, Cabinet Office is responsible for broad, centralized oversight across government communications, which includes paid advertising. This responsibility extends to all ministries and includes the strategic planning, development, production, media planning and execution of all marketing campaigns. So, when speaking of roles, Cabinet Office manages the day-to-day process and oversight of advertising campaigns we're discussing today, and as part of this oversight, Cabinet Office, in sup-

port of ministries, also facilitates Auditor General review of all applicable material. TBS, as the central agency, puts the guidelines in place, and each line ministry is responsible for keeping their programs compliant with these guidelines and directives.

In terms of the two recommendations that we are discussing today, I want to reiterate appreciation for the Auditor General's ongoing review of the act and recognize the important role that the Auditor General plays in presenting reports to the Legislature. On these particular recommendations with regard to the Government Advertising Act that we are discussing today, the government will maintain the status quo.

We are happy to answer any questions that you have. Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Thank you very much for the presentation. We now begin the first of two rounds of questions, beginning this week with the official opposition.

MPP Fife, you have the floor.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you to all of the delegations who are before us, from the Cabinet Office and the Treasury Board Secretariat.

I must tell you, though, the key recommendations, recommendations 1 and 2 that were in the report, this is the bulk of the work that we are doing, and you have already now negated our work by saying that the government will maintain status quo.

As the official opposition finance critic, I want to let you know that the status quo is not good enough for the people of this province. In fact, when the Liberals changed the rules, which I know you must follow, in 2015, it was for clearly partisan reasons, and the government of that time, under Premier Wynne, was very specific about where the regulations would fall as well, especially with regard to the digital media strategy.

So for the government already—and I think it is actually worth noting that Premier Ford, ahead of the 2018 election, promised to reverse these changes. So in your opening comments—and I'm going to address my comments right now to Ms. Alexander—you mentioned that under the public services act, you give non-partisan advice. And I want to know: Does this include pointing out to the Premier that these ads are partisan, under any other measure, except now, under this act that was changed under the Liberal government? Do you have these frank conversations with the Premier and with cabinet about the partisan nature of the advertisements that we're seeing in Ontario right now?

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you very much for the question. I will start. I will pass it over to Len Hatzis to supplement any information as necessary, and potentially over to Cabinet Office as well.

I do want to reiterate what TBS's role is in this process, which is that we have policy responsibility for the Government Advertising Act, and what means is that we are responsible for following the act as written. Changes to the act, as you know, can only be made by the Ontario Legislature—



**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That's the key piece, though. You said in your opening comments that you give non-partisan advice. It is non-partisan to tell the Premier that these advertisements are partisan, because they are. Do you ever have that opportunity?

Perhaps I should just go over now to Alexandra Sutton. You're the deputy minister of communications. These advertisements do not provide any public good, any information, including this last advertisement: a commercial that came out during the Super Bowl. Do you, under the oath of office that you have to take, I assume—because you're a public service professional and you have a duty to advise and to ensure that the public good is being served here.

Clearly, the act is not meeting the threshold for partisanship. Are you in a position to challenge and to ensure that information shared and paid for by the taxpayers of Ontario is fair information to be shared?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you for your question. I'd just like to highlight that I do take the non-partisan component of my role very seriously and the advice that I do provide to the government is non-partisan in nature.

I can't speak to changes to the act. As referenced by my colleague Deputy Minister Alexander, that's a decision of the Legislature. However, I can speak to the role that we play in terms of ensuring adherence to the act, and I can talk about what is stated in the Government Advertising Act around why a government may choose to advertise.

If you look at the subsections in the act on some of the examples of why a government would choose to advertise—I'll just read out a few of them: informing the public about existing, new or proposed government programs, plans, services or policies; about changes to existing government programs, plans, services or policies; informing the public of their rights and responsibilities; encouraging or discouraging specific social behaviour, in the public interest; promoting Ontario or any part of Ontario as a good place to live, work, invest, study or visit; and promoting any economic activity or sector of Ontario's economy.

So the work that we do is grounded in the act, and a big part of the work that we do is ensuring that campaigns that are reviewable are submitted to the Office of the Auditor General for review, and that all campaigns in 2022-23 did, in fact, receive approval from the Auditor General and were in compliance with the act.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That is the key piece, is that the Government Advertising Act is insufficient to protect the people of this province from any government, of any stripe, of misusing and abusing their power and wasting tax dollars on advertisement that doesn't serve the public good.

Former Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk asked this question and has reviewed the advertisements once they were changed in 2015. She says that this is “not a good use of taxpayer money” because they don't serve the purpose of informing the public about how to access government programs or services.

“It's basically an ad that would pat the government on its back... Partisan advertising is fine. But the issue is, should the taxpayer pay for it? It should be paid for by the governing party or opposition parties.” Even the interim Auditor General said that the latest advertisements just create “a positive impression of the government.”

I think that this is the crux of the problem, is that already through the cabinet and the Treasury Board, you've already said that the government is content with status quo. Our work here at public accounts is to follow the money and to ensure that those tax dollars are spent responsibly and in the interest of the people who we're elected to serve.

**1410**

This last campaign that happened, the new Ontario “It's Happening Here” ads, totalled, I think, \$13.5 million that we were aware of, but we actually had to FOI to find out what were the agency costs and what were the production costs. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation's Jay Goldberg says this is not the sort of advertising that should be funded by public money. We agree. We shouldn't be seeing these kinds of ads that don't really inform the public and are just really political puff pieces.

This is where I'm trying to get to: I understand that as the deputy minister, you have a responsibility to serve the public in the public interest. You are bound by a piece of legislation which contravenes the intent of the original Government Advertising Act which came back in 2004, which was put in place to protect the public from the government wasting their money on misguided or non-factual advertising. So how do you reconcile your responsibilities when this is actively happening? Because you're bound by legislation, and you've already told us that our work here as a committee will not be changed; that the government is not even going to consider adapting to the recommendations of the auditor.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you for your comments on “It's Happening Here.” I don't think that was contained in chapter 4. However, I'm happy to speak a little bit about the work we do.

We take our role of providing non-partisan public service advice very seriously—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I believe you. I do believe you.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** What we need to do is to ensure compliance with the act. So although I appreciate your opinion, our role is to ensure the best value for money for the taxpayers and that we are meeting compliance with the act.

Maybe I'd ask my colleague, Deputy Alexander, to talk a little bit more about the act.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Sure. I think that it's important to talk a little bit—and I will pass it to Len—about the definition of “partisan” as per the act and how we ensure that advertisements meet that definition of non-partisan as per the act.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Just to be clear, the Treasury Board Secretariat has oversight for this act, right?

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Correct.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I put two questions on the order paper back on March 26, shortly after the big football game, the Super Bowl. It said, “Would the President of the Treasury Board please provide the total cost of the ‘It’s Happening Here’ ad campaign, including production and total ad buys.” And then I also had another question for the Treasury Board: “Would the President of the Treasury Board please provide the number of advertisements the government ran during the 2024 Super Bowl and the cost associated with booking said advertisements.”

This is one of the tools we have as opposition members, is to put questions on the order paper. In response, I received that the Treasury Board Secretariat is not responsible for the individual ministry advertising campaigns.

But who is tracking the money? That’s the key piece. You’re the Treasury Board. This is the most powerful ministry here in the Ontario Legislature, I would argue, because that’s where the money is. As the deputy minister, do you not have any concerns about following where the money is going, who is getting the contracts, why some ministries are overspending or underspending? This is totally not within your purview, even though the Treasury Board has responsibility and oversight for the advertising act?

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you for the question. I can clarify: Cabinet Office has day-to-day responsibilities for managing advertising campaigns, along with ministries. So Cabinet Office would be the ones tracking that.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay. Well, then, I’ll go over to the Cabinet Office.

As these advertisements become more and more popular, especially with the digital—because the Auditor General does not have true oversight over digital advertising, because that threshold is not there—are you not concerned in your role as the deputy minister of communications around how this money is getting spent and how much money is being spent? I mean, it’s one thing that—when we were in COVID, public health? Absolutely, no doubt about it; that’s exactly what government advertising should be about: accessing health care.

But in this instance, with this “It’s Happening Here” advertisement, this is just a pure fluff piece, in our estimation. Yes, the act permits it, but within the context of your responsibilities, can you convey some concerns to the government as to how this undermines trust, actually, in the system?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** If I had concerns, I could absolutely convey them. Our role is to ensure that the campaigns for which we seek approval meet with the requirements of the act.

I can talk to you a little bit about—you talked a little bit about campaign dollars. In fact, ministries fund campaigns through their expenditure estimates allocation. That is done on a ministry basis.

You talked a little bit about value for money. Part of Cabinet Office consolidation of the marketing function within Cabinet Office was ensuring value for money. It allowed us to reduce duplication. It allowed us to reduce agency fees by bringing more of that work in-house. We

have met with some very ambitious targets in terms of cost savings by centralizing that within Cabinet Office.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay, but then the other part of it—I understand where you’re going with this, but you also talked about the business goals. So, who is evaluating the business goals and the benchmarks that are supposed to be met through this advertising expenditure?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Sure. As part of the campaign process, we develop those business goals and those metrics and how to track them. There is a robust tracking process that actually takes place, both while the campaign is in-market in terms of calibrating to ensure that we are meeting the intended audience, in addition to post-campaign to track and verify how that campaign actually tracked in-market.

I’d like to ask my colleague Kirsten Evans to talk a little bit more about that process.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Kirsten, before you start—I’m going to give you a chance—but is this publicly available around the business goals?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Kirsten, do you want to talk a little bit more about it?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure. For the benefit of Hansard, I’m Kirsten Evans. I’m the assistant deputy minister responsible for marketing enterprise services and insights within Cabinet Office.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan):** Can you just move your mike closer?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Move it closer? Can you hear me now?

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Yes. Good.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** You’re very soft-spoken.

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Thank you. There’s a first time for everything.

To speak to the campaign development process, as the deputy has asked, I think I’ll speak a bit broadly and then be happy to answer any further questions.

In the context of an annual plan or in an ad hoc campaign space, Cabinet Office would be responsible, with the ministry, for articulating the business objectives associated with that campaign, as well as marketing objectives associated with the campaign. In the context of business objectives, we would ensure that those line up for both the ministry as well as Cabinet Office, and the marketing objectives would be the work of Cabinet Office.

The way that campaigns are made public, which I think gets to this centre, is through opportunities like today, as well as through the ministry’s public accounts on a spending basis.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay, that’s a really good segue. Thanks for that, Kirsten.

I’m going to look at one campaign, and this is a campaign that was the health care campaign. It was the Building a Better Health Care System campaign. It was run between 2022 and 2023. The government spent about \$21 million on this one campaign that lasted three months, January to March, and it accounted for 62% of the government’s total spending on advertising that year.

In the report from the Auditor General, there was a conclusion “that the primary objective of these ads and/or information” included “was to foster a positive impression of the government.” The Auditor General stated that, “The ads we took issue with included statements such as ‘we’re reducing wait-times for surgeries,’ ‘we’re building 3,000 more hospital beds’ and ‘we’re adding and upgrading nearly 60,000 long-term-care beds,’” but there was no context or evidence given to back up these claims.

That’s the heart of the question. You must know that these claims are not accurate. Where is your role in the public service to question or to at least put a lens of accountability on some of those claims?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** I appreciate that question because we do play an important role in terms of ensuring factual accuracy of the campaigns. The campaign in question you referenced, Building a Better Health Care System, was indeed fact-checked by the ministry for all content, as all campaigns are fact-checked by the ministry for content.

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**Ms. Catherine Fife:** That’s really interesting, because the report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information found that the wait-lists for hips, for knee replacements, for other priority procedures are longer than before, and Ontario actually falls below that. Where do you get your information from when you’re fact-checking the government’s partisan commercials?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** The ministry is responsible for fact-checking, as they are—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** The ministry is fact-checking themselves?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Well, they are fact-checking, just as they are in all government communications, and that campaign was indeed signed off.

I would also highlight some of the important elements that were contained in that, including information in terms of the role of pharmacists and their ability to now prescribe and renew medications, an important piece of information for people in Ontario to understand those changes.

I would also highlight that the Health811 engagement during the period of that campaign actually rose up to 1.5 million in terms of the engagement, so some significant pieces of information—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** It’s good for me to hear that you are tracking and targeting some of those benchmarks, but I would also point out, though, in that same year that this advertisement ran, Ontario broke an all-time record for emergency room closures: 1,199 instances where health care services were closed in 2023, including 868 emergency room closures, which was an all-time high. These closures have led to decreases in access to emergency care, particularly for rural populations.

What you’ve just told me is that the ministry fact-checks the ministry on their numbers, and then you rely on the ministry’s information to confirm that this data is correct in the advertisement. Is that correct?

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Under a minute and a half remaining.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you for the question. Yes, in all government communications, ministries are

responsible for their own fact-check and the accuracy of information—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Well, I think we just hit on the major issue here. That’s the problem. No ministry is going to say, “Do you know what? We’re missing our targets on mammograms, on hips and knees, on vaccinations.” That’s a fundamental flaw of this process. You’re essentially only dealing with the information that you get from the ministry. Would you say that’s correct, Kirsten?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** I think what I would recognize is what the deputy called attention to within the act, in terms of ensuring that people are able to connect with new information about government programs and policies. That campaign is specifically raising awareness and providing additional information about items such as pharmacists, as well as Health811, as opposed to the metrics that you are addressing.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay. That’s totally fine. What I’m hearing now is that there is some accurate information, just enough in there to make it justifiable, but the rest of the stats that were contained within that particular ad campaign—which cost a huge amount of money; remember that these dollars could be going into addressing the wait-lists and the mammogram wait-list and ensuring that health care is actually reflected properly in the advertising.

I think I’m pretty much done my time and I look forward to my next 20 minutes. But I’ve already learned so much, actually, during this session. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Yes, we’re at time for the official opposition’s first round of questions.

We’re now moving on to the government members’ 20 minutes. MPP Crawford, please begin.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Thank you to all the witnesses here today. I just wanted to take a step back and ask perhaps both deputies how your offices play a role in ensuring that the advertising that the government of Ontario is doing is actually non-partisan and communicating a message to the people of Ontario.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Perhaps we can start. I will give Len Hatzis an opportunity to talk about what the act says in terms of partisan advertising.

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** I’m Len Hatzis, legal director at TBS legal services. The act defines what partisan is, and according to the legislation an advertisement is defined as partisan:

—if it includes the name, voice or image of a member of the executive council or the Legislative Assembly, unless the primary audience is outside Ontario;

—if it includes the name or logo of a recognized party;

—if it directly identifies and criticizes a recognized party or a member of the assembly; and

—if it includes to a significant degree a colour associated with the governing party.

This is a clear, objective test of what is considered partisan under the act. This replaces the previous, more subjective test that allowed the Auditor General to consider any other factor appropriate in deciding whether an item’s primary objective was to promote the partisan political interests of the governing party. That is set out in section 6, subsection (2), of the Government Advertising Act.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Is it fair to say, then, that the advertising programs that the Auditor General highlighted all meet those requirements?

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** That is correct.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay. Thank you.

Next question: I'd like to get a bit more of a sense—we do, obviously, advertise to the people of Ontario about various changes in regulations or public announcements. Obviously, through COVID, I think it was particularly important that we advertise. We do some advertising as well in foreign jurisdictions. Does that fall under your purview and does that fall under the same rules as well?

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** Yes, that does fall. The key is that if we're paying for advertising through taxpayer dollars, it would fall within the purview of the Government Advertising Act. Sometimes the primary audience is outside of Ontario, as you're referring to, so that would fall within the purview of the act.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Hopefully you can answer this question, but in terms of the breakdown in terms of what was spent on advertising by the government in the last year that the Auditor General looked at, do you have any idea of what percentage would be within Ontario and what per cent would be foreign, ballpark?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** For the chapter in review, that was a purely domestic year of advertising. Moving into this year, there is a component that is an international campaign that is to drive largely investment attraction into the province. It's an economic campaign.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** That seems to be working, because we have \$43 billion in auto investments in Ontario to date, which is literally a world record. We've surpassed China in terms of EV and EV manufacturing investments, so we are the number one jurisdiction—Ontario—right here in the world.

I think attracting foreign capital to Ontario is critically important. From what the Premier has mentioned, when he's travelling, or even here in Ontario, he's getting calls from governors, foreign leaders, consul generals, ambassadors: "What's going on in Ontario? What's going on?" People are hearing about it.

This success is paying off, which leads me to my next question: How do you actually quantify and follow up to see if a government advertising program has been successful or not?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you for your question. With each campaign, there is work that is done while the campaign is in market to get a good sense of how that campaign is performing. Sometimes tweaks will be necessary to ensure maximum performance, and then, in a post-campaign world, the team reviews that and, based on a number of key performance indicators, is able to take a look and adjust as necessary for the future and note what performed well.

I'd like to invite Kirsten Evans to talk a little bit more about that work that happens.

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure. I'm happy to.

Speaking to the space of media buying, in particular, there are a number of key performance indicators that the

team would look at in terms of online as well as off-line tactics, focusing on the KPIs that are highly measurable in the digital space. That could include cost of impression delivery, ad click-through rates—which I think the deputy had referred to earlier—as well as video completion rates in the case of an online video.

TV and radio are really more straightforward in terms of you purchase the spot and manage for impressions through those audiences and compare to the estimate audience and actual audience, and all of those things can provide insights as to how well the ads are performing based on the campaign objectives and allows the teams to adjust and optimize through the campaign delivery as well.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Is it fair to say that in the last eight or 10 years, the government advertising has shifted a little bit more digital from traditional media?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Yes, I think that's generally what is happening the world over in terms of eyes-on on digital. It's been an important component of the campaigns that we are currently delivering.

Do you want to talk a little bit more about digital, Kirsten?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure, absolutely. I think digital advertising does really fall into that space of delivering efficient and timely advertising and information to the public. We make sure in that context that we follow the spirit of the act, because I think the deputies have acknowledged, in the context of today's chapter, that the Auditor General does acknowledge that search engine marketing and social media marketing are not subject to review. However, those are increasingly important spaces for government advertising to be in, for two different reasons. In the search-engine-marketing space, we recognize that that is somebody who's looking for information online, and we want to present them with information that is reliable from the perspective of accuracy and drive directly to an ontario.ca page. Then, in the social media space, as you've acknowledged, the landscape has changed in making sure that we meet people in all languages where they are every day.

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**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** So the government of Ontario advertises in multiple languages?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Crawford:** Okay, great. Thanks.

I'd like to pass my time now to MPP Wai.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** MPP Wai, you have 13 minutes.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** I just want to focus my question on Deputy Minister Sutton. Actually, following up on what the MPP has just asked, I know that you've done 24 campaigns over last year. Out of those, can you tell me two that are most successful and their outcomes and two that are not successful and their outcomes?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you for your question. In terms of last year, there were indeed 24 campaigns. We've talked a little bit about Building a Better Health Care System and some of the important work that that shared in terms of connecting people to pharmacists under

the new rules that allow pharmacists to prescribe and renew medications. A Plan to Catch Up also was able to connect parents of students returning in a post-COVID world in terms of possibilities for parental support, ensuring that kids would have access to sports and after-curriculars and to mental health programs in a return-to-school context.

Kirsten, do you want to talk about some of the other campaigns that you might want to highlight in terms of 2022-23?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure, absolutely. I think I'll give you a brief overview of the full scope of advertising, if that is helpful. I'll give you a sense of the broad buckets that we advertised in with some feature campaigns.

There were a few different topics, including health care; the deputy has acknowledged that big campaign. I'll talk a bit about some cancer screening campaigns and some other pieces as well. In the context of education, there are additional campaigns. Then there are also some things in the work of government around ServiceOntario and consumer protection.

To speak a bit about the cancer screening campaign, there are three things to identify. First of all, we launched a campaign as time-sensitive during that pre-election period on cervical cancers as well as breast cancers, and additionally a full-blown campaign later in the fall to run the scope of those two types of cancer screenings as well as colon cancer. In that space, the business goal is to move into a screening rather than treatment space, ensure that people are aware of how to connect with screening associated with those three types of cancers and also meet the type of candidates that are required, either from a risk perspective on a health basis or on a screening eligibility basis.

In the health care space, additional to the Building a Better Health Care System, there was also a winter vaccines campaign that was endeavouring to be complementary to messaging and market from other organizations and drive awareness of the importance of being up to date on a vaccination basis during the winter season.

In the education space, additional to the Plan to Catch Up, there was also a dedicated multicultural campaign to drive awareness of the catch-up payments that parents were eligible for at that time, specifically to connect with funding associated with filling learning gaps in a post-pandemic period.

Skilled trades have been a key focus in the 2022-23 time period. That was focused on raising awareness of career options and growth opportunities within the skilled trades, including high-earning, learning and employment options for youth.

Then, finally, the Learn and Stay Grant started in mid-December and ran until the end of the year to create awareness and drive applications to priority programs as well as to the grant itself.

ServiceOntario, just to take a minute on that: There are some key responsibilities of government in the ServiceOntario space as well as with respect to consumer protection. ServiceOntario has an always-on campaign that

drives two things: first of all, connecting people to online services and making sure that they are aware of all of the transactions they can do with government online and also driving people to sign up for digital reminders. Additionally, an always-on campaign in the consumer protection space was focused on raising awareness of phishing scams, and how to recognize and protect yourself.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** That's great. Can you also highlight which are the two that are not as successful in terms of the responses or the outcomes?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** I think I'll take a minute. So, you're thinking in the context of the media impressions—is that right? The lower impact? I'll take a minute to review, if that's possible, because I'm not sure I have that information right at hand.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Okay, maybe I'll ask another question in the meantime. You also mentioned about the multi—because Ontario has so many different diversities. How do you plan on getting—which campaigns will you address to multiple cultures or which campaigns do you not, and how do you decide on that? How do you spread the amount over these?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Yes. It's a great question. We talked a little bit about the Building a Better Health Care System. That campaign was actually in 17 languages, so that was communicated with all of those assets translated into languages.

Work is done in terms of—I'd probably ask Kirsten to talk a little bit more about the work of your team in terms of the language identification and the campaigns.

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Absolutely. Would you like me to carry on with the multilingual or answer your question around lower-performing?

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Carrying on will be just fine.

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Okay. Excellent.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Do I have the time for that?

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** You have seven minutes.

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Great.

So, in a media-buying context, we've talked about how the team prepares and what are the things that they look at to define the media objectives. I think, upfront, it's important to acknowledge that we are doing some of that media-buying internally, with internal teams—that helps in terms of cost avoidance, to sort of optimize our media spend—or we could use a third-party agency.

Media planning starts with the marketing strategy brief. That brief would include information about key audiences, and at that point, could identify that either a targeted, multilingual application would be helpful to increase the reach of the campaign, or it could identify a specific population where a multilingual application would be helpful.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** Okay. Thank you. Do you have the answer for the one earlier?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** I do, in fact. So, I think there were two small campaigns from the perspective of impact and reach that would've been lower than what we would hope. The first one was connecting with antiviral treatments

during the 2022-23 period. And secondly, in the context of Lyme disease and prevention, those were lower-performing as well.

**Mrs. Daisy Wai:** I'll pass my time to MPP Skelly.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** MPP Skelly.

**Ms. Donna Skelly:** Can you just repeat—you said there were two that were unsuccessful—the first one you claimed was unsuccessful?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** I think, looking at the examples that I have here, I would say there was a small antiviral campaign during that period and then Lyme disease.

**Ms. Donna Skelly:** Okay. Where do we start? I have to challenge my colleague across the way, because I spent a lot of time in communications and effective campaigns aren't always full, jam-packed with lots of detailed information. They have to capture your attention. We all know that the consumer's attention span has shrunk. When I was in the media a hundred years ago, a news clip was 30 seconds long. Now, you have to get your message in under seven seconds. We have to get a message across.

I think that the campaign—the Buy Ontario, the “locate in Ontario,” the “Ontario is the place to be”—is an extremely effective campaign. I think my colleague from Oakville MPP Crawford was right when he suggested when you're attracting \$43 billion in new investment, the campaign is working. Something is working.

My cousin was in Korea. She got off a plane and in the airport was an Ontario ad. She took a picture of it and sent it to me and said, “This is crazy.” I said, “This is amazing.” It's everywhere and people are seeing it and they're wanting to do business in Ontario. It's not unlike ads from Alberta that are running in Ontario or ads from Michigan. I see an ad from Michigan and I want to go vacation there because it's a well-done ad, and that's what we're trying to do.

In terms of the accuracy of the information—and I know MPP Martin has spent a lot of time in the health ministry and would probably suggest that the information in that health campaign was accurate and that a lot of the—well, I would suggest that we can all challenge it from whatever information we're bringing to the table.

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But clearly, when we're talking about hospitals being built and beds being opened and nurses being hired and doctors being hired etc., there are some factual details that go behind the messaging. Again, I just wanted to bring up the point that campaigns have to be effective or we would be sitting here talking about the money that this government wasted on lousy ads, millions of dollars on lousy ads that aren't resonating with people and aren't doing the job. Clearly, they are doing the job.

Let's talk a bit about one of these successful campaigns, and that is the pharmacies. That is a huge difference in how we are delivering services. It's taking the pressure off of a lot of our family physicians. It's allowing Ontarians to have access—greater access, quicker access, more convenient access—for what is a list of 13 or 15 ailments. That was a successful campaign. People were actually talking to me—I know there was just recently a whole thing about

pink eye, and people were actually going to the pharmacist to have the pharmacist show them what to purchase, what to buy to treat pink eye. That took a huge amount of pressure off of our family physicians. So can you just expand on that particular campaign and why it was so successful?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Yes, I would be happy to. Thank you for the question. In terms of the Building a Better Health Care System, we mentioned earlier that that campaign was delivered in 17 languages. It did reach more than 90% of Ontarians aged 18-plus. In terms of paid social, Meta reached over nine million Ontarians; TikTok, 2.6 million. I could go on in terms of those details. Digital served nearly 375 million impressions, and it delivered information to people in Ontario in terms of how they can connect with a pharmacist, in terms of renewal of prescriptions.

You'll note that there is a link to a landing page in terms of that advertisement, where when you click through on that first click-through, where we have a responsibility as well in terms of sharing with the Auditor General information that is provided that is relevant to inform people in Ontario.

**Ms. Donna Skelly:** The other area of concern was the fact that the digital component is not under the jurisdiction of the Auditor General, but most of these campaigns are really just a reflection of the audio, the radio, television campaigns. They're not separate campaigns for digital use, are they?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** No, there are two areas in digital, search and social, that are out of scope in terms of the Auditor General's review, but they are generally an extension of other campaign creative that has been developed.

Kirsten, do you want to talk a little bit more about that?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure. I think just to make sure that we've given you a comprehensive answer, there are a few campaigns that I would identify were in only those mediums. However, it's important to reiterate that all those campaigns would follow the spirit of the act.

So in the 2022-23 context, in the search and/or social space, there was a search campaign from the Ministry of Labour that aimed to connect refugees from Ukraine to resources within Ontario. There were two health-led social media campaigns, the first driving to online addiction resources and the second reminding Ontarians to regularly get screened for cancers—

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Sorry, we're out of time. Okay. Thank you.

Okay. We now move to our independent member. You have—

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** How long do I have?

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Three minutes.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Twenty minutes?

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** You have three minutes.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Two minutes? Three. Okay. I'd better not waste any more time, then, in joking around.

Thank you for the presentation. I do have some basic questions. As MPP Fife mentioned, we're learning a lot today about your operations. I guess my first question would be really to understand where you get your directives from to create campaigns. Like, I'm not—I have no expertise in advertising, but I would like you to walk us through the process. Like, where does a request come from? What factors are being considered and how do you decide on the direction you're going to take?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you for your question. I'd be happy to elaborate. In terms of planning for advertising campaigns, there is an annual process whereby we work with ministries as part of their communications planning, what topics would be worthy of a marketing campaign, and so that is an annual process to look at what we might want to consider. I would say that although there is an annual plan, sometimes things happen where a campaign may be required. So it does shift and change a little bit over the year ahead.

Kirsten, do you want to talk a little bit more about the role of ministries, how we work with them and the Premier's office in terms of the campaign planning for the year?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure. Is that the main interest in the question, around rules and responsibilities?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Yes, how you do it. Does the request come to you? How do you treat it? What are you considering when you're creating the campaign? How much should be invested and whatnot?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Absolutely. As the deputy articulated, ideally, we are working in an annual planning process. What that allows us to do is take in all of the ministry interest from a paid advertising perspective, look for opportunities to unify those, reconcile media plans, make sure that we're in the right place at the right time to deliver efficient annual plans.

In the case of a campaign, the things that we would take into account were certainly the business objectives associated with the campaign, the specific marketing objectives, as well as a clear call to action. We would also be looking to understand the audience for the campaign, including desire for reach and impact, as well as any specific groups we would be looking to reach through the campaign, and we would put the budgeting on the whole, both at the campaign level as well as across the annual plan, to make sure we are making good use of the resources.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Okay. My other question is maybe a little bit more difficult. It calls on your appreciation. According to the Attorney General, there is a really good portion of money that was invested in campaign ads last year that would have been illegal under the previous act, which was a lot more restricted, for reasons of lack of evidence, lack of context for claims, incomplete plans and promises. I just want to know how you feel and if you consider it okay to make ads that are not supported by sufficient evidence or data to support the claims that are being made in the ads.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Sorry; we're at time. We're over time, actually.

We'll now go back to the official opposition. MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay, listen, I just need us to reset here, because this committee is not supposed to be looking whether or not an advertisement is sexy, if it's working; we're here because the Auditor General found that 75% of the advertising budget that the government has used would have been in contravention of the original advertising act, right? That was prior to the Liberals changing it.

Just for context—and I think my colleague will remember this, that this change that happened under the Liberals happened when the government was under a lot of pressure and they needed to sell this idea of the Ontario pension plan. Do you remember the Ontario pension plan? And there were these ridiculous advertisements, commercials running almost constantly, of this woman running and trying to jump over a valley to get to that elusive pension plan that would miraculously arrive if they voted for the Liberals. The government wanted to use those advertising dollars for their partisan purposes, and they changed the law.

At the time—and I just want to say, I remember knocking on doors during that time. People would say to me, "Oh, no, I'm going to vote for the Liberals, because I want to get a pension," not knowing any details, any context, any costing out. It was a huge misuse of tax dollars to promise Ontarians a pension plan when they had never worked or there was no costing of it.

So the fact that the Auditor General has reported to us as a committee, the public accounts committee, which is responsible for following the money in this province, that to date 75% of those commercials that under the Ford government have aired on television in high-priced advertising time slots would have been in contravention of the goal of ensuring that those tax dollars are spent responsibly—okay? That is what we're trying to get to here, and the fact that in the last session you were able to sort of clarify where you get your information from and how you fact-check, and the fact that a lot of this information comes from the ministry.

**1450**

But it is very damaging to our democracy for a government to use their own dollars to sell them a story about health care or about education or about emissions when it is not factually accurate. I've been told now that there were parts of that advertising campaign that were factually accurate and so, therefore, somehow, this is okay.

I can tell you something: When those advertisements were running and people in rural Ontario were being told there was no crisis in our health care system—and yet, in Chesley, their emergency room had closed. Clinton's emergency department had been closed. Durham, in western Ontario, their emergency room was closed 51 times. Seaforth had 17 temporary emergency department closures. Walkerton has had 20; Wingham, 31. Fort Erie and Port Colborne urgent care centres? Permanently closed overnight. The Minden hospital's emergency room was permanently closed.

When people in Ontario are witnessing the truth of what's happening on the health care file and then they see

their tax dollars are being spent in such an irresponsible way, it undermines our democracy, and it undermines confidence in our government—the same government who, I will remind my fellow colleagues, promised to reverse the Liberal changes. Not only have you followed in the Liberals' footsteps; you've doubled down and accelerated the spending that the Auditor General quite rightly has identified would have been in contravention of the original goals of the advertising act.

I will also say the fact that the Cabinet Office and the Treasury Board have already indicated that, regardless of the recommendations of the Auditor General where she says, "We recommend that the previous version of the Government Advertising Act, 2004 that was in force from January 30, 2006, to June 3, 2015, be reinstated"—this is the independent officer of the Legislature asking for the power to actually do her job in Ontario. Also, she wanted us to "include an amendment that adds digital advertising as a reviewable medium," because even though digital advertising is included in the legislation, in the regs it's exempt. This is a messy situation. It's a political problem, but I think, fundamentally, it's a fiscally irresponsible way to move forward in Ontario.

The second recommendation where the government has already indicated they are quite happy to maintain the status quo is the auditor recommended "that the government revoke O. Reg. 143/15 under the Government Advertising Act, 2004 to enable the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario to review all digital advertising paid for by the government, without exception." So the Auditor General should be able to evaluate all digital advertising, because we've just seen from the graph in the report that digital advertising is the way of the future. I would think that, as dedicated public service professionals, you also would want to ensure that these dollars are being spent appropriately and with the appropriate due diligence.

This kind of leads to the nature of the partisanship because the definition of partisanship has been seriously watered down—first by the Liberals and now by the Conservatives. In 2018, the Auditor General released a report that the Liberals at that time had spent 17.4 million taxpayer dollars on ads that would be considered partisan before they changed the definition of "partisan" to one that is effectively useless.

In response, the now health minister introduced a bill to change the definition back, describing the ads—and this is now the current health minister. She said those ads were "partisan and self-congratulatory government advertising which would not have been approved by the previous rules."

We completely agreed with her. We voted in favour of this back in 2018. And in the report before us, the government spent over \$20 million on a campaign regarding the health care system described as "self-congratulatory" and "would not have been approved by the previous rules."

We totally agree with that. But close to three quarters—75%—of the total dollars spent on government advertising are partisan under the original version of the act.

I guess my general question for you—because you can see this is frustrating, right? This is supposed to be a

serious committee doing serious work. Is there any plan to adjust the use of government advertising to ensure that taxpayer money isn't spent on ads of this nature? Is there any willingness to go down this road, given the detrimental impact of using tax dollars to misinform the people of Ontario?

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you very much for the question. I do want to reiterate that, as civil servants, it is our responsibility to follow the act as written. At this point, the government is not intending to make changes and will be maintaining the status quo.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Can you let us know who made that final decision? Somebody had to make the final decision, right? Someone read this report and said, "Do you know what? This isn't going to be a political problem for us." Can you tell us who made that decision?

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** This was a collective decision of the government.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Okay.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** If I can just jump in for a minute—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Please.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** You mentioned effective use of taxpayer dollars. I would just like to reiterate our commitment to effective use of taxpayer dollars and good stewardship of that money. Part of that has been the centralization of the marketing function within Cabinet Office to achieve some significant cost savings across the system.

We do take very seriously our role in terms of non-partisan advice that we're providing, and it is our requirement to live within the rules of the current act. All of those campaigns were approved by the Auditor General in 2022-23.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** I totally understand that. I understand that the current iteration of the advertisement act for the province of Ontario is insufficient, and I also understand that your hands are tied. But we still need to be challenging this information.

I do want to say, the other campaign that the Auditor General found problematic was in education: A Plan to Catch Up. In this campaign, almost \$4.1 million was spent, ironically, on talking about resources that essentially were not there for kids to catch up after the pandemic. The campaign was the second-highest cost of all campaigns in 2022-23, and like the other campaign, the health care campaign, the government put statistics in the advertisements "without context or evidence to back up" the claim. One line included the claim of "hiring 3,000 more staff in schools." Yet we're seeing school boards forced to make cuts due to chronic underfunding by the government and schools reporting extreme—that is their language—"extreme" teaching staff shortages.

We just learned, last week, school boards from across the province are actually reporting the use of non-certified staff in their boards. Locally, in Waterloo, 900 non-certified staff were in our classrooms in the Waterloo Catholic District School Board just last month, and in the public, there were 300 non-certified. It's not a huge stretch to say that the promise of hiring 3,000 new trained education staff, one would think, is part of that campaign.



When you were looking at the education campaign, specifically A Plan to Catch Up, the auditor also noted that the statements in the campaign “might have been intended to influence public perceptions of teachers and/or their bargaining agents during contract negotiations.”

This is a different lens to look at these issues on, because it’s more of a political intention. Within your roles, would you ever caution or warn or put up a red flag on some of these, especially around the timing of this particular campaign? Is that something that you consider when these campaigns come before you? This is a question for everybody.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** I can start. In terms of A Plan to Catch Up, yes, if there were concerns with content, that is a live and ongoing conversation as we look at the creative, as we work with the ministry on fact-check, as we have discussions with the Premier’s office. If there are concerns around the actual fact-check, the ministry does go through that process to ensure that it’s accurate.

1500

In terms of A Plan to Catch Up, it is in the context of a post-COVID world, after parents and students had had a challenging time in terms of whether or not they were in the classroom and having the supports needed in terms of being able to deliver on academic success. That campaign did highlight a number of things, including access to sports and extracurriculars, tutoring supports available as well as mental health supports for students. It contained information for parents and for students in a post-COVID world where students were returning to a classroom.

Kirsten, is there anything more you’d like to add to that?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** I think you’ve done a good job of providing the overview. I would just, given the member asked, affirm that should I have any concerns about a campaign, I would have an open dialogue around that.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Anyone else? No?

So this is where we are as a committee. Clearly, we don’t have the numbers because it’s a majority government. This is the same majority government that promised to repeal this egregious piece of legislation; that was actually the language used by the now-economic development minister when the Liberals first introduced it. The government has already indicated that on the two recommendations, Chair, that they are not willing to change. So we will go through an exercise basically of frustration at this committee, writing a report that will not be listened to or adhered to.

I have to tell you that this is a dangerous road for our government to go down. It’s the height of hypocrisy, one would say, when the government promised to repeal it and now has doubled down on it. The most important thing that I learned here today is that the Ministry of Education is fact-checking their own stats. There is a saying in communications that when you start believing your own press release that you wrote, we’re in big trouble here. It comes down to a confidence issue, I think.

I wish that you, in your roles, had greater power and influence to ensure that the money that is being spent on these advertisements is actually going toward public good

and is not contravening the recommendations and the advice of the Auditor General.

When the Auditor General sends back these campaigns to you, after the Office of the Auditor General has reviewed the campaigns and said that there are concerns, what happens then within your current responsibilities?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** I’m happy to start with that. First of all, I would just like to reiterate that all campaigns in 2022-23 did meet with compliance with the act and did receive approval from the Auditor General. If the Auditor General highlights an opinion in terms of her response to the deputy minister of the line ministry that is receiving that confirmation of approval of the campaign, there could be a discussion in terms of those comments. What is really important for me to highlight is that our requirements are to ensure compliance with the current Government Advertising Act.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** And if I could maybe just add that when there are significant spends, the Auditor General actually reviews it twice. There’s a preliminary review that the Auditor General does and then there is a final review. No ads are run without the approval of the Auditor General. So I think that that’s really important, that ministries always get Auditor General approval before running any ads.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Anybody else?

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** Just to pick up on the deputy’s point, section 8 of the legislation prohibits publication of an item that has not been reviewed by the Auditor General or that the Auditor General has provided notice does not meet the legislated standards. To the point raised, if it doesn’t meet the legislative standards, the act very clearly says that it can’t be published. That’s an oversight function that the Auditor General exercises.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** But let’s be clear, the Office of the Auditor General’s hands are tied because the watered-down version of the Government Advertising Act limits that office’s ability to define partisanship. Did you want to comment on that?

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** No. I just am saying to you that the standards that are set out in legislation have been met. The Auditor General has confirmed that with respect to all the campaigns that have been discussed, and that is the law as it is written.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Yes, but that’s because the bar is so low. That is why those campaigns are being approved. That’s the point of this committee. That’s the point of this work, that, in 2015, the Liberals should never have watered down the Government Advertising Act. That is why the office has found that 75% of the government advertising that this government has purchased and put out there into the province would not have passed that benchmark, right? That is why the Auditor General came forward with these two recommendations, to revoke O. Reg. 143/15 and to review all digital advertising paid for by the government, and also to reinstate the previous advertising act from 2015, which, at that point, had the support of my PC colleagues.

I think that this is going to be an exercise in frustration, Chair, because this committee has already been told that the government will not listen to or review or pay attention

to the work of the public accounts committee. They are determined to continue to use tax dollars for their own partisan purposes.

I'm going to conclude my comments on this because, quite honestly, this is a misuse of tax dollars under the previous act, and it is a violation of ethics, in my view.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** We now move to the second and final round for the government. MPP MacLeod.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** On a much more chipper and positive note, I want to thank everyone for being here. I also want to—before I begin my remarks, I think it's really important I recognize one person in the room who works for the Treasury Board Secretariat. Deputy, I had the privilege of working with William Snowball for three years. I know I'm embarrassing him, but my former staff told me I should do it, and that's why I'm doing it. He and Deputy Matthews took me through the pandemic, and I have to say, you're very fortunate. My former staff all said you probably have no errors because William probably looked at everything first. I want to thank him for the great work, and all of you I know work very, very hard.

I want to address two things, and I have a couple of small questions. You know what? I'll give it to the member from Waterloo: She does care about the tax dollars. She cares about transparency, accountability and openness in government, as we all do. We all care about that. But I took issue with two things. One was the "misuse of taxpayer dollars" and the other was "misinformation."

Have you ever been accused of misinformation in one of your ads by the auditor or of misuse of taxpayer dollars?

Don't speak at the same time. I won't be able to hear you.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** In terms of the Auditor General, as previously mentioned, we did receive approval from the Auditor General for all of those campaigns. In some of those campaigns, the Auditor General did note her opinion, but nothing was factually related to misinformation in those comments.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** Okay, because that's troubling to me. Any of us who have travelled abroad, and I've had the fortune of doing that—I've been to India, for example, where an ad there, a billboard there would never, ever in a million years be approved here. I just left Fort Lauderdale. At the airport, the local mayor was giving political ads every three seconds. I think that we have a very good standards system, so I don't think we're at the bottom.

I think it's a problem when the auditor's office thinks that we can't move ads forward—and I'm even defending the former Liberals—because they had an apple that was too red and it looked like—come on, okay? No one's sitting there looking at a red apple thinking, "Oh, my God, I'm going to vote Liberal."

There were other challenges, as my colleague noted, with respect to the pension plan, but I think those have been addressed, and they certainly have been addressed federally, so that's a model that we should all follow.

I want to talk a little bit about what MPP Crawford talked about, which was, how do you quantify success? I want to talk to you a little bit more about that. I had the opportunity of working at heritage, sport, tourism and cul-

ture industries, and before that, at MCCSS. I want to go to MEDJCAT and the new MTCU, and I want to talk a little bit about Destination Ontario.

**1510**

There's a method to my madness, and it's this: The member opposite would have us believe that spending taxpayer dollars outside of the country during the Super Bowl or a hockey game, particularly during the NHL playoffs, perhaps even during the Oscars, would be a waste of money. So here I'm going to go with this, because I think to have that view is knee-jerk. It's probably appropriate when you're talking to the public, but when you're sitting there making billion-dollar decisions, you're trying to make sure that the sectors like those in tourism, culture and—what the heck did I used to have?

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Sport.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** Sport. It's been so long. In those industries and MEDJCAT, you're trying to attract people to come here, whether that's to visit and stay or to locate their business here and recruit and retain employees.

To me, those types of ads aren't about telling people where to get their vaccine or the curriculum changes; they're actually aspirational and they're trying to talk about Ontario as a place of pride for the people and a place of pride for where we live. So the two best ads Ontario ever ran, in my opinion, were in 2016—I don't know if Dalton McGuinty was still there; no, it was probably Kathleen. They ran an ad, "Where Am I?," and it was about Ontario, to bring people here. The second best ad we've ever run is running right now and that is "It's Happening Here." Now, we've had some doozies that weren't very good in all levels of government, but we did spend on them.

But I go back to my question about quantified success. For vaccines, I think you could probably look at your digital metrics and then you could look at the number of people who got their vaccine. For these two ads that I'm talking about—and one that you may not even remember, because you weren't here—the quantifying of success would be looking at the new job creators that we brought in; more people working, for example, who are now taxpayers, who can contribute to health care and education; more visitors, particularly after the pandemic, who think Ontario is a safe, clean environment where they will bring their family.

So I guess that's my second question, and then I have a final one for you, just about integrity of the process. But in this particular case I hope I'm explaining myself well: When we're looking at touchy-feely ads that people think they should throw out during the Oscars, there's actually a point to them, and they're a very important point when you're trying to attract success.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** I appreciate the question. In terms of "It's Happening Here" and some of the international campaigns, although not contained in chapter 4, I would highlight that the space for investment attraction around the world is a very competitive space, so ensuring that there are messages out in international markets that drive investment attraction into the province is an important one.

I would also say it ties us directly back to the Government Advertising Act. If we look under some of the subheaders of reasons why the government may choose to advertise, you'll find promoting Ontario or any part of Ontario as a good place to live, work, invest, study or visit. That goes to your comments around post-pandemic tourism and promoting any economic activity or sector of Ontario's economy. So the international campaign is very much focused in that area and focused on investment attractions, of which there have been some notable successes communicated recently.

Kirsten, do you want to talk a little bit more about performance metrics and evaluation?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure. Absolutely. I think to avoid repeating what I said originally, I'll pick up on the point with respect to getting eyes on creative and also sticking with creative. We would see that as a key responsibility for all campaigns; regardless of the topic, it's seeking to get people to engage and stick with the creative.

I'll point out one metric from the international campaign, which is that it increased calls to Invest Ontario by more than 600% year over year. So there is a business outcome associated with that for Invest Ontario.

I would also point out, just for the benefit of the committee, that, as you would know, in the Destination Ontario space, Cabinet Office does not have responsibility for that advertising, but they would certainly be tracking things like local visits, engagements with local municipalities and making sure that those calls to come and visit Ontario are backed up by business outcomes.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** I'll just follow up very quickly, just sort of as perhaps a follow-up to the committee: Because MEDJCAT has those regional offices—and then, of course, Destination Ontario, whatever your relationship is with how that works—provide us with a little bit more detail there. That would be very helpful, and perhaps even the film office that's down in Los Angeles, just to figure out how that all sort of comes together, so that people would understand that when you put out a type of ad like that, it actually does increase volume and support for the province.

A final question; I know my colleagues all have one: The member from Waterloo did talk about—and I think rightfully so—being worried that everything is just going to be status quo. Perhaps the way we want to look at it, as government, as a committee, as public servants or as a collective, is that media is always changing. There's always a new app that people are flocking to. There's massive changes happening on television going over to streaming, so we can't always be status quo. I think we'd all recognize that. I think there's always room for improvement. I think everyone here recognizes that. That's why we show up every day.

Can you tell us a little bit about what the process is and, when you can do it without having to go to Treasury Board, for example, to the political actors, some of the things you can refine to improve the system so that it is more effective for the taxpayers of Ontario? I'm sure you're already doing it, and I think that the broad language is actually stifling some of the progress you're making in terms of greater accountability.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** I'd probably start with that on a high level and then maybe ask Kirsten to fill in a little bit more detail.

One of the initiatives we undertook, commencing in 2021-22, was the centralization of marketing within Cabinet Office. This was a significant effort to avoid duplication, to minimize agency fees, to bring a lot of that work in-house to Cabinet Office, providing value for taxpayer dollars.

There was, at the time, a request that was approved to TB/MBC in terms of a fiscally neutral exercise to move a number of full-time equivalent employees from ministries into Cabinet Office to work on marketing, planning and execution.

Kirsten, do you want to talk a little bit about that in terms of cost avoidance and what that looks like?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure. I'll talk a little bit about the process to change the machinery, as well as how that actually reduces reliance on third-party vendors, which, in turn, reduces agency fees, both in the creative and media space.

As the deputy pointed out, we had a small team within Cabinet Office and went through a fiscally neutral transfer of FTEs into Cabinet Office. That allowed us to expand the services that we offer, as well as bring some direct services in-house.

At the time, the cost avoidance was targeted to be between \$1 million and \$2 million, which we did achieve in the subject year and have subsequently continued to increase by overall reducing our reliance on third-party agencies. I would say that the most significant way that that's done is in the media space, where, for instance, if you were to purchase \$1 million worth of media through a third-party agency, you would get \$900,000 worth of actual media. In our case, we are able, through that fiscally neutral transfer of FTEs, to purchase \$1 million worth of pure media. As the deputy pointed out, that's one of the ways that we're continuing to deliver value and also make the process more efficient.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** Yes, you can do it. You don't have to put your hand up. You're the deputy.

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Thank you. I'd also like to add, from a procurement perspective, we also drive value from that perspective in that we do use vendor of records who go through a competitive, fair, transparent and open process to ensure that we're getting the best prices when it comes to the vendors that are used to run the advertising campaigns. There are multiple ways in which we are ensuring efficient and effective use of taxpayer dollars.

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** Good work. Okay. So just to make sure that we have that process and that you provide us—and I'm pointing at you, or all of you—with the details in terms of how we quantify things; I think that would be very helpful. Good work.

You have a question?

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Lisa MacLeod:** Oh, Robin Martin does. I'm Batman; she's Robin.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** MPP Martin, please.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** How many minutes do I have?

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** You have seven minutes in all.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Seven? That's excellent. Okay, great. Thank you very much.

Thank you all for some of this input. Really, I was affronted, shall I say, by the characterization of the Building a Better Health Care System campaign from my colleague here from Waterloo. I wanted to just ask about that campaign, and I know the Auditor General commented on that campaign. But the Auditor General did not say the campaign was inaccurate or had misinformation. That wasn't the issue that she raised.

I've been looking at the Government Advertising Act in front of me, and I notice, just like my colleague pointed out with respect to promoting Ontario and that campaign, the one in the market now, that one of the opportunities in the government advertising campaign is informing the public about existing, new or proposed government programs, plans or services and informing the public about goals, objectives, expected outcomes or results of these programs.

1520

I think the Building a Better Health System campaign came out post-COVID, just like the other economic campaign that you mentioned, Deputy Sutton, and that campaign was about, I believe, the Your Health plan, which was issued around the same time, saying all the things that Ontario was going to be doing to improve the health care system, including some things it had put in place already and some things that were going forward, like, for example, 3,000 more hospital beds to be built in addition to the 3,500 that already existed. The plan actually outlines the details of those numbers.

Is that an accurate reflection of that campaign? I just noticed the timing is the same, so I assume that's what it was about.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thanks for your question and comment. I would highlight the chapter, chapter 4. If you look at the front cover page it actually has an extract of some of that creative, saying that pharmacists can now write and renew. You'll also see there's a link to [ontario.ca/YourHealth](http://ontario.ca/YourHealth). That highlights what you've just mentioned in terms of some of the information that was put out there.

I would also just highlight in terms of Building a Better Health System, some of the results on that one would show that engagement on Health811 went up to 1.5 million during the campaign. That engagement on Health811 was lowest just prior to the campaign and was highest, obviously, during the period of time where the campaign was in market.

Kirsten, is there anything else about the content of the campaign you'd like to highlight?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** I think you've covered it from a content perspective, for sure.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** Okay. Well, thank you. I appreciate that, because I think it's a legitimate use of government advertising to inform people about what the government's plans are to improve something like our health care system, which is something like 40% of the budget of Ontario and obviously very important to every-

body. I think that's what these advertisements were intended to do, is to say, "This is our plan." I think that kind of an advertising campaign also gives people the opportunity to say, "I don't like this part of your plan" or, "What about this other thing that isn't in your plan that I think is important?"

I would think it's a legitimate use of advertising and it certainly allowed for—in the sections that I looked at in the act, under section 1.1(2), where it talks about the kinds of things you can advertise for, which include promoting Ontario or any part of it as a good place to live, work, invest or study, or informing the public about the goals, objectives or expected outcomes of programs that the government is putting in place or plans that the government is putting in place. To me, that is an important subject area.

We had four health care items in the list that the Auditor General provided to us—campaigns. There was the Building a Better Health System, there was cancer screening, there was Breaking Free, there was the cervical cancer screening, and that takes a lot of the total of \$30 million of advertising. But is the amount of money spent by a ministry in any way reflective of how much money the ministry spends as a part of government resources? Because I know the Ministry of Health is the largest; the Ministry of Education, here the second-highest campaign, is also a very—I think it's the second-largest part of government spending.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Thank you for your question. I think campaigns will often reflect the current priorities of the government. As you highlight, the Building a Better Health System campaign was in market in a tail-end-of-COVID world and did promote information for awareness—

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Two minutes remaining.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** I beg your pardon?

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Two minutes.

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Oh, thank you—of living in Ontario.

Kirsten, anything further you want to add on that?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** I think to answer the question that precisely, it's not a direct relationship, but the annual plan would be grounded in current needs of the people of Ontario, the priorities of the government, as the deputy articulates, but I think it would not be uncommon to see that health care and education would be priorities of an annual marketing plan.

**Mrs. Robin Martin:** I imagine during COVID, obviously—and we saw the budget went way up during COVID. A lot of that advertising was probably health-related advertising, and that kind of makes sense; as you point out, Kirsten, it depends on what is the priority at the time. But health care is a common priority across the board for the government, and that's why the government spends so much of its resources, such a high percentage of its resources, on health care and improving the health care system. I think that's very important to note.

I also think that these ads are actually helping people to understand where the government is going. As I said before, improving our health care system is important to everybody. Every single person in the province wants to

make sure that our health care system is delivering for them. So, like I said, this gives people an opportunity to see what's coming and what improvements can be made.

The only other thing I wanted to ask about was the better value for money that your work has been driving on our advertising. You talked about the centralizing function and working with Supply Ontario and the vendors of record. Can you just elaborate a little bit on how that is saving money and how that may be improving the value for money for taxpayers?

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Sorry; we're at time right now. We'll be moving on to the final round for our independent member.

MPP Collard, please begin.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** All right. A little bit more of a direct question and a shorter question: Would a more restrictive act make your job more or less difficult? If we were to go back to the previous version of the act, what would that mean for you in terms of the work you need to do?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** I'm not sure I could comment on that. I think our role is to ensure, whatever the act that is in force, that we follow the act.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Got it. So how did you come to the formulation of your responses to the recommendations of the AG today about not moving forward, or were you excluded from that decision? Difficult question.

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** You're saying, were we involved in the content of the responses to the recommendations?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Yes. How did you come to the conclusion that it was going to be the status quo, that—

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** So, from my perspective, we don't have any specific information that changes to legislation were being contemplated at this juncture, and that's how I understand some of the content of that response was generated. I'm not sure if the other deputies were—

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** You were not involved in the discussion about the recommendations of the AG?

**Mr. Len Hatzis:** I was not involved in that discussion.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** No? None of you were?

**Ms. Carlene Alexander:** Personally, I was not there at the time.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Okay. All right. Have there been any deliberate choices or strategies to go with digital advertising because it's excluded from the act?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** There are only two components of digital that are excluded: search engine and social.

I think, around the world, digital is certainly an effective focus for a good campaign. So it is not a deliberate decision in terms of how the act applies to the work that we do because much of the work that is in the digital space is in fact reviewed by the Auditor General, with those two exceptions.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Okay, that's fine. Do you measure, monitor or otherwise evaluate public perceptions or reaction to specific ads? I'm not talking about performance metrics here, but just collecting the reaction of people or their perception of what the ad is trying to convey in terms of message?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Do you want to talk about that, Kirsten?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Sure. In some cases, what we might engage in is what's called pre- and post-market research. So that would be sort of understanding what was understood prior to a campaign being in market and what was understood after the fact.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** So you do that, what, through a survey or—

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** It would be through a survey.

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Through a survey. Okay. And my last question is a simple one: Are all the campaigns that you do broadcast in French and in English, 100%, or depending on what it is?

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Would you like me to take that?

**Ms. Alexandra Sutton:** Go ahead, sure.

**Ms. Kirsten Evans:** Yes. All campaigns are in both official languages. We also ensure that they're in both French and English at the same time. What that might not mean—there could be an application in French only or in English only, but all campaigns are bilingual in nature, and then to add colour, we also ensure that a minimum of 5% of all media buying is in the French language.

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic):** Thank you. We're at time.

That concludes the time for questions this afternoon. I would like to thank you all who have appeared here before the committee and answered questions. You are now dismissed. We thank you again for your time.

We will now pause briefly as we go into closed session, so that the committee may commence report-writing. Thank you very much. Have a great afternoon.

*The committee recessed at 1534 and later continued in closed session.*





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