



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Budget Bill Guts *Government Advertising Act*, Auditor General warns

(TORONTO) Legislative amendments proposed in the 2015 provincial budget would gut the province's landmark law prohibiting partisan government advertising, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk warned in a news conference today.

"These proposed changes would allow the government to spend public dollars on partisan advertising with little of the current independent oversight," Lysyk said. "The government could flood the province with self-congratulatory and self-promotional advertising that would be of little practical use to the citizens paying for it."

At issue is the *Government Advertising Act, 2004*, enacted a decade ago in response to complaints that previous governments had made excessive use of public funds to run ads that promoted their partisan interests or criticized their political opponents.

The Act gave the Auditor General the responsibility to review most of the government's advertising prior to their use to ensure the advertising is not partisan and that it meets other standards in the Act (see [backgrounder](#)).

Since the Act became law, the Auditor General has reviewed more than 7,200 advertisements, worth more than \$400 million. It rejected less than 1% of those messages, either because they were partisan or failed to meet a standard in the Act.

"My Office has always been very careful to balance its anti-partisan mission with the legitimate need of the government to inform citizens about its programs," Lysyk said.

Under the Act, the Auditor General has the final say on what is, and is not, partisan. The amendments proposed last Thursday would replace that discretionary authority with a narrow definition of what is partisan. Lysyk said this definition would give the government considerably more leeway to spend public dollars on advertising that would meet the standards of the amended Act but that a reasonable person could see as partisan.

"Equally significant, these amendments would transform the role of the Auditor General into that of a rubber stamp because they would oblige us to approve an ad submitted to us as being in compliance with the amended requirements even though, in our opinion, it was clearly partisan," Lysyk said.

"This would have a serious impact on the credibility and reputation of my Office, with citizens rightly asking how we could have approved controversial ads as being non-partisan."

Lysyk added that if the changes remain, she will ask the government to make a further amendment to the Act removing the Auditor General's responsibility for the review of government advertising and assigning it to a government ministry or agency to do this work on the government's behalf. She also said that her Office would issue a special report on this shortly.

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