



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Government Spending More on Advertising: Auditor General

(TORONTO) Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk said today that the provincial government spent \$37.59 million on advertising in the 2019/2020 fiscal year. The report presents the Auditor General's review of government advertising, mandated under the *Government Advertising Act, 2004*, to ensure that, among other things, ads are not partisan or self-congratulatory.

"During the past fiscal year, the government ran ads that would not have passed our review under the previous version of the *Government Advertising Act*," Lysyk said after her *2020 Annual Report* was tabled in the Legislature.

The government spent \$27.3 million on 645 ads reviewed by the Auditor General in 2019/20, and another \$8.2 million on search services and digital ads on social media that are exempt from review. Another \$2.0 million was spent in March 2020 on urgent COVID-19 advertising, for a total of \$37.59 million.

That compares with 2018/19 spending of \$12.55 million for 614 reviewable ads plus another \$3.84 million on non-reviewable digital ads, for a total of \$16.39 million.

The report noted concerns with 125 ads in four campaigns the government submitted for our Office's review. This represents 19.7% of the ads submitted in the last fiscal year, with a value of \$9.47 million (or about 35% of the government's spending on reviewable advertising).

"Amendments in 2015 did away with our Office's discretionary authority to determine what constitutes partisan advertising," Lysyk added. "Our Office's approval may give the impression that an ad is not partisan or self-congratulatory, but that may not always be the case. That's why we continue to report on those ads that would have not passed our review under the former version of the Act."

Ads that would not have passed review under the former version of the Act include a campaign about the government's environment plan, government debt and how it will be addressed, and infrastructure improvements.

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Read the report at www.auditor.on.ca

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