



Political materials left over from the 2021 territorial elections campaign trail, seen on May 3, 2022. (Dana Hatherly/Yukon News)

# Official Opposition calls on premier to close “loophole” in political party revenues

Debate resurfaces following premier’s letter to chief electoral officer about foreign interference

DANA HATHERLY / Mar. 23, 2023 9:00 a.m. / LOCAL NEWS

The Yukon Party took to the floor of the House to demand Premier Ranj Pillai close what the opposition parties call a “loophole” in the Yukon’s political financing rules.

Amid conversations of foreign interference on the national stage, a letter from Pillai to chief electoral officer Maxwell Harvey prompted the latest exchange in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

On March 9, Premier Ranj Pillai wrote to Harvey to ask how foreign interference can stay out of Yukon elections.

In a March 13 response to the premier's letter, Harvey noted there is no evidence of foreign interference in territorial elections. Harvey wrote that strengthening campaign finance regulations to prevent the influence of foreign influencers is one of three strategies at the core of preventing foreign interference.

During question period on March 20, Brad Cathers, the Yukon Party MLA for Lake Laberge, referred to the portion of Harvey's letter on financing. Cathers spoke about the "unprecedented secrecy" around the Yukon Liberal Party receiving money from undisclosed sources.

"This is a familiar subject for this Liberal government, as they have faced questions about their use of a loophole in the current rules that allowed them to hide the source of the large amount of political donations," Cathers said.

He cited debates leading up to the last territorial election and an editorial in the *Whitehorse Star*.

"If I was hiding anything, I wouldn't be tabling a letter in the House," Pillai responded to Cathers.

Annual reports on political party financing filed with Elections Yukon show the Yukon Liberal Party taking in more than \$100,000 in other revenue in 2019 and 2021.

But the Liberals aren't the only ones reporting this category of revenue in recent years.

In 2019, the Yukon Party reported close to \$13,000 while the NDP reported about \$1,800 in other revenue. In 2020, the Yukon Liberal Party reported more than \$22,000 while the Yukon Party reported about \$66,000 in other revenue

and the NDP had nothing to report. In 2021, The Yukon Party reported more than \$13,000 in other revenue while the NDP again had nothing to report.

Tim Kucharuk, the Yukon Party's press secretary, said the party's other revenues can be broken down.

In 2019, there was \$4,480 in Yukon Party membership sales, \$4,725 for an event at \$100 a ticket with a portion of each ticket covering the cost of the venue and \$3,760 in revenues from smaller events such as the annual Christmas party which included silent auctions. In 2020, thousands of new members signed up during the Yukon Party leadership race, which dramatically bumped up the other revenue.

Pillai fielded questions on the topic from reporters in the cabinet office.

Pillai said reporting under other revenue can include "everything from hosting events to a number of different things."

"We've always followed rules, and we've always ensured that we have integrity in the process that we do," he said.

"The Yukon Party had 14 years in office, and over that period of time, they didn't do anything on fundraising, they didn't touch it."

Pillai nodded to the report Harvey is going to produce later this spring. Pillai mentioned he tabled a motion earlier that afternoon supporting a process to review electoral boundaries in the Yukon.

“I want to make sure we have the proper boundaries in place, I want to make sure that we have the proper rules in place, and I want to make sure that there’s no interference,” he said.

“I think if Maxwell Harvey feels that there’s portions of the reporting structure that he’s uncomfortable with that he’ll identify that in the report.”

On Oct. 19, 2020, former premier Sandy Silver, who remains in cabinet and MLA for the Klondike, said the party was abiding by the rules when pressed on the so-called “loophole” by the NDP. Silver did not disclose where the other revenue comes from.

“We will continue to do the work that we need to do to make sure that we as a political party have the wherewithal to run and showcase the candidates in all of the ridings. We will continue to do so inside of the rules,” he said.

“We are in favour of capping donations. We are also in favour of capping those donations from corporations and from unions. We don’t support a ban on donations from anyone outside of the Yukon.”

Yukon NDP Leader Kate White told reporters on March 20 that she wants an end to corporate donations, union donations and donations from outside the territory.

“Campaign financing has been problematic in the Yukon for a very long time,” she said.

“There’s been an outside influence on Yukon elections as long as we allow people from outside the Yukon to donate.”

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