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2007 federal election mysteries resurface

In the Saanich-Gulf Islands federal riding, questions about a last-minute telephone campaign for a candidate who had withdrawn, and the origin of four organizations who advertised for winning Conservative candidate Gary Lunn, still remain unanswered.

In the last few days before voting day, many voters were telephoned with a recorded message urging them to vote for NDP candidate Julian West, who had withdrawn from the race, but whose name remained on the ballot, due to a printing deadline. The telephone calls apparently came from the telephone number of NDP riding association president Bill Graham, but he denied having originated them. NDP non-candidate West finished fourth, receiving 3,667 votes.

The race was close; Lunn won with 27,988 votes over Liberal Briony Penn, who polled 25,367 votes. Green Party candidate Andrew Lewis was third, with 6,732 votes.


Penn described the telephone calls as 'fraudulent in the extreme,' but an Elections Canada investigation failed to establish their origin, and has apparently been abandoned on the grounds that they couldn't find anyone who was influenced, anyway. The RCMP said no laws were broken.

Meanwhile, five previously unknown organizations, named as Common Sense Advocacy of Victoria, Citizens Against

Higher Taxes, the Dean Park Advocacy Association, the Economic Advisory Council of Saanich, and the Saanich Peninsula Citizens Council, bought signs and ran *Victoria Times-Colonist* advertisements supporting Lunn in a last-minute blitz. All five organizations gave their address as the office of the vice-president of the Conservative riding association, Victoria lawyer Bruce Hallsor.

Questions were raised about the ads when it appeared that Lunn's campaign had spent close to the legal limit of \$92,000 for the riding. Together, the five groups spent \$15,671; according to the law, each group separately would have been limited to \$3,666. The limit on individual donations to candidates or parties is \$1,100, but there is no limit to donations to such groups.

Elections Canada will not reveal whether they are conducting an investigation of third party spending, saying only that financial returns are being 'reviewed and assessed'.

Meanwhile, Burnaby-Douglas Liberal MP Bill Siksay, who had earlier called for an investigation into third party election spending in Saanich-Gulf Islands, has called for Lunn to step down temporarily from his current position of Minister of State for Amateur Sport. Lunn was previously Minister of Natural Resources. 

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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada. Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.
Email: islandtides@islandtides.com. Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>