

Several returning officers linked to Tories

Edmonton-Meadowlark returning officer says she is 'huge Ed Stelmach fan'

Last Updated: Tuesday, February 12, 2008 | 11:37 PM MT

CBC News

Ed Stelmach insists there's no problem with a returning officer, who is supposed to be an impartial election referee, posting photos of herself wearing an Alberta Tory T-shirt and attending party events.



One of Allie Wojtaszek's Flickr pages features herself and husband Duncan wearing Dave Hancock Tory leadership T-shirts.

Allie Wojtaszek, the returning officer in Edmonton-Meadowlark, has a page on Flickr, a popular photo-sharing website, featuring dozens of photos of her and her husband at Alberta Progressive Conservative events.

Duncan Wojtaszek is also the president of the PC constituency association in Edmonton-Meadowlark.

In one photo, under the caption "Campaigning," both Wojtaszeks are

seen wearing T-shirts supporting Dave Hancock's PC leadership run in 2006.

Several photos feature Allie Wojtaszek posing with Stelmach, as well as this comment posted by her: "I am also a huge Ed Stelmach fan."

One image shows the couple on their wedding day with former Conservative energy minister Murray Smith, in his office.

Returning officers are appointed by government and are supposed to act as neutral voting administrators, hiring poll workers and ensuring election rules are followed. In the rare event of a tie vote, they can actually cast a ballot to break a deadlock.

Alberta's Election Act states that returning officers may not "engage in political activity on behalf of any political party or candidate" while holding those positions — but does not say anything about before or after elections.



"When you are praising on a website the premier of Alberta, Ed Stelmach ... I think it raises a lot of questions," said Duane Bratt, a political scientist at Mount Royal College, about Wojtaszek's Flickr set, which has been taken

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On her Flickr page, Allie Wojtaszek, wearing a blue Conservative party T-shirt, and her husband Duncan, left, pose with former Alberta trade representative Murray Smith, in Washington, DC.

down.

But Stelmach said as long as returning officers, such as Wojtaszek, do their jobs, there's no problem with optics.

"There are many people that I know that are in Alberta, met over the years," said the Tory leader Tuesday. "So are you saying that anybody that I shook a hand with, the optics are that they can't ever serve as a deputy returning officer? I think that is brutally unfair."

Several returning officers have close ties with the Conservative party:

- Lynn Warkentin in Calgary-Montrose is married to Frank Warkentin, the nomination chair for that riding's local Tory association.
- **Andrea Grubbe in Calgary-North Hill is listed as the secretary of the riding's PC constituency association.**
- Robin Darsi in Calgary-Currie ran unsuccessfully against Arthur Kent for the riding's PC nomination.

Both the Liberal and NDP leaders have called for Warkentin to step aside, and for Alberta's chief electoral officer to appoint returning officers, not the provincial government.

But Stelmach said he doesn't see any reason to change the way returning officers are appointed.

Bratt said under federal rules, returning officers must be seen to be politically impartial. He said if the same rules were in place in Alberta, several returning officers would be fired.

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