

# THE VANCOUVER SUN

## Complaint spurs review of poll cited in union disclosure fight

### Polling standards group investigates results widely referenced by Tory MP

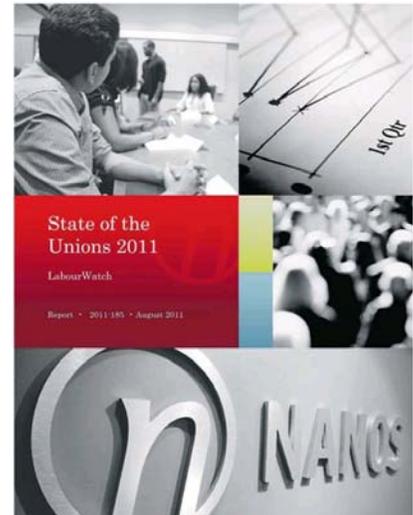
Peter O'Neil July 5, 2013

The MRIA's Code of Conduct requires members to do research in a way that boosts public confidence.

A poll used by B. C. Conservative MP Russ Hiebert to argue there is wide public support for his controversial union disclosure bill is the subject of a disciplinary review by the organization that sets polling standards, The Vancouver Sun has learned.

The Canadian Labour Congress filed a complaint on a Nanos poll report for LabourWatch.

The 2011 poll was paid for by the Canadian LabourWatch Association, a Vancouver based organization that is partly funded by non-unionized construction firms and provides, among other things, information on how to decertify unions.



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Two Saskatchewan academics have argued since late 2011 that the poll by Nanos Research doesn't give an accurate picture about public attitudes on disclosure of union spending practices.

The Canadian Labour Congress, using information compiled by the academics, filed a formal complaint with Canada's Marketing Research and Intelligence Association.

"We're in the process of looking into it," said MRIA interim executive director John Ball.

He said the association expects to make the MRIA panel's findings public this month.

Veteran Canadian pollster Allan Gregg, asked by The Sun to review the Nanos poll, said he's glad the association is taking the complaints seriously.

He said that, in his opinion, the two key questions were crafted in a "horrendously biased" way to get the results LabourWatch wanted to promote tougher disclosure laws for unions.

Gregg, chairman of the Harris/Decima polling firm, told The Sun that, in his view, "this is not the kind of polling that people in our discipline should be doing. Clearly it's being done by an advocacy group that's got a particular perspective on the world and an axe to grind, and they're using the poll not to illuminate their understanding of public opinion but as a PR (public relations) tool."

Hiebert's disclosure bill was blocked by the Senate last week.

But the Harper government has indicated it will make a new bid to pass a law forcing unions to publicly disclose an array of financial details.

Hiebert has repeatedly cited, as recently as this week, the Nanos poll in defending his call for unions to make public all transactions over \$ 5,000 and all remuneration to employees totaling more than \$ 100,000.

Hiebert has refused requests from The Vancouver Sun for an interview but issued a statement saying he stands by his comments.

The MRIA's Code of Conduct requires members to do research in a way that boosts public confidence by not producing polls that are "inaccurate or misleading." An association member that violates standards could face sanctions ranging from a warning to revocation of their membership in the organization, said Ball.

The MRIA doesn't disclose details of its panel investigations or the identity of complainants, said Ball.

But CLC president Ken Georgetti confirmed, when asked, that the CLC filed the complaint. The CLC used information assembled by two professors in the University of Regina's business administration faculty, Sean Tucker and Andrew Stevens, who began sending emails in October 2011, to pollster Nik Nanos, LabourWatch President John Mortimer, and eventually the MRIA, raising questions about the poll.

"New results from a Nanos Research survey ... shows the majority of working Canadians ( whether unionized or not) say they want union financial transparency," a Sept. 5, 2011 LabourWatch news release began, adding that 83 per cent of "working Canadians believe that Canadian law should require both public and private sector unions to be financially transparent with the public."

The CLC and the two academics say there are two key flaws with the random telephone poll of 1,001 Canadians, conducted in the summer of 2011. A poll of that size is accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, according to Nanos.

- They argue that respondents, when asked the broad question about whether unions should publicly disclose spending, were "primed" by a preamble designed to sway them.