



Qs and As

Government Advertising Act

Many questions and misconceptions have arisen about the *Government Advertising Act, 2004* (GAA) since the government announced plans on April 23, 2015, to significantly change it. We address some of those here in order to clear up the confusion.

Q. What is the *Government Advertising Act, 2004*?

A. The GAA requires the Auditor General of Ontario to review most government ads before they are used to ensure they are not partisan, and gives the Auditor General the discretion on what is partisan. Criteria were established many years ago and have been consistently applied by the Office when reviewing ads to ensure that they are not partisan. The Act has been in effect for the past 10 years.

Q. Has our Office rejected an ad because it contained a red apple?

A. No. Colour becomes an issue in government advertising review only when there is a significant use in an ad of the governing party's political colours.

Q. Have you ever told the government to remove red fruits and vegetables from an ad?

A. No. We cautioned the government that the story board they submitted to us for a preliminary review for a Foodland Ontario TV commercial included “many red items.” We reminded them that colour is one of the factors we look at in assessing partisanship. It was up to them to decide what red items they would remove, if any, before sending us the produced TV commercial for our final review.

Q. Did you reject a commercial on manufacturing in Ontario in 2014?

A. Yes. The ad strongly implied that manufacturing in Ontario was booming as a result of government assistance to manufacturing. When reviewing ad, one of the key criteria considered is factual accuracy. We found this ad to be misleading, and concluded that the primary objective of the ad was to foster a positive impression of the government, contrary to what the Act requires.

Q. Isn't it waste when the government spends money to make a TV commercial and you reject it?

A. Yes. That's why we offer a pre-review service that allows the government to submit a preliminary version of a commercial, before actually spending to produce it. We review this version and advise whether the proposed ad would meet the standards of the Act. Waste can happen when the government spends to produce a commercial without first availing itself of this service (such as with the manufacturing ad described above) or doesn't wait for the results of our review.