

Investigating the Rulings on 'Misinformation' in Canada's
Legislative Assemblies

REPORT 4

**Findings and Implications of
Responses from Speakers to the
Survey on 'Misinformation' Rulings
in Canada's Legislative Assemblies**

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Ottawa, Canada

October 21, 2021

A. Introduction to Results and Implications of Responses from Speakers to the Survey on 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies

Report 1, [Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) was posted January 25, 2021, [REPORT 2: Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) was posted February 14, 2021, and [REPORT 3: Responses from Speakers to the Survey on 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#) was posted April 2, 2021.

Report 3 presents the replies received from Speakers and/or their delegated agents, and this report summarizes the results of pursuing the advisories, suggestions, instructions, directions, etc., provided by Speakers and/or their agents. I am grateful to federal, provincial, and territorial Speakers and officials for the instructions, directions, advice, etc., about references to Hansard and other documentation.

This report first presents the findings from analysis of communications, Hansard, and other documentation about rulings by Speakers regarding the term 'misinformation'. The overriding finding is that to this point in time, Speakers of federal, provincial, and territorial legislative assemblies have not ruled that the term 'misinformation' is considered unparliamentary language. (1)

The report then draws on a parallel body of research to briefly explore the implications of a "What-if" scenario that appears to bring a different dimension to rulings by Speakers about the term 'misinformation'.

That is,

- What if 'misinformation' is used as a euphemism or cover word for terms which are generally recognized by Speakers as unparliamentary language?

Examination of materials received from Speakers did not encounter explicit discussion of this what-if scenario. I hasten to add that such a discussion may have occurred, but I did not locate it in my reviews.

However, parallel research projects suggest that the what-if scenario dimension warrants consideration by Speakers who are tasked with ensuring the absence of duplicity, disparagement, disingenuousness, deprecation, or other forms of unacceptable debasement of parliamentary language, which includes ensuring that the language used in legislative assemblies shows respectful regard for members.

Since this what-if scenario appears to break new ground regarding rulings by Speakers

in Canada's legislative assemblies, it is not appropriate to engage in formal what-if scenario analysis.

Rather, it is appropriate that this report serve as a vehicle to 'road test' the scenario in working hypothesis style. Then, if informal feedback is encouraging, grounds may be in place to contact Speakers and their officials for inputs to a what-if scenario analysis.

Or, even better, one or more Speakers, or a consortium of Speakers, might undertake such a study, because of the expertise in Speakers' offices, with emphasis on their knowledge of library science and how to digitally access Hansard files and other documentation, including broadcast media productions.

B. Letter of Inquiry to Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings

For the convenience of readers, the communication to The Hon. Scott Reid, Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly, is presented to recall the letter seeking responses from Speakers.

From: Barry Wellar [mailto:wellar.barry@gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, February 1, 2021 5:07 PM

To: scottreid@gov.nl.ca

Subject: Misinformation Project, Report 1 Speaker Reid

Honourable Scott Reid, MHA, Speaker
Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly

Dear Speaker Reid,

I write to seek your assistance regarding the project, **Investigating the Rulings on 'Misinformation' in Canada's Legislative Assemblies**.

It is my impression that The Speaker of a legislative assembly is a powerful force for improved communications throughout Canada, hence this request.

My research on the topic of 'misinformation' is reaching out to The Speaker of Canada's provincial and territorial legislative assemblies, as well as to The Speaker of the federal House of Commons and the federal Senate.

I am asking Speakers to contribute their expertise and experience to what may be the first study of its kind in Canada, and perhaps anywhere in the world.

By way of brief background, several months ago I published the report, [The Inescapable Truth about Disinformation and Misinformation? They have NOTHING at all to do with Information](#). The Information Research Board (IRB) document is available via this link.

That production is consistent with the research that have I done over the past 50+ years, and for which I was named Member, Order of Canada, in 2018. Although I am “near-retired”, I still enjoy doing research, serving the public interest, and engaging in social and broadcast discourse on matters of the day.

Based on my research and that of research colleagues, I am very uneasy about the frequency with which the term ‘misinformation’ appears in both social media and broadcast media (about 58 million ‘results’ in a recent Google search), and all the more so because research findings reveal that at best ‘misinformation’ and ‘disinformation’ are concocted nonsense terms which are falsely portrayed as having a connection to information.

In truth, upon deconstruction of statements the finding is that they are not derived from empirical or archival data.

Rather, the statements and motivations are accurately described by terms such as con, deceit, deceive, deception, dissemble, distort, fabricate, fakery, falsehood, fantasy, fiction, fraud, hoax, lie, misrepresentation, propaganda, rant, rave, scam, and sham, none of which involve information derived from data through methodologically designed analysis or synthesis.

As noted, this is my first venture into the domain of legislative assemblies in Canada and, in particular, into making inquiries of Speakers who rule on matters involving the acceptability of language used in each Assembly.

The reasons for undertaking this pilot study and the details of its design are presented in the document, [REPORT 1: Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#).

I hasten to add that full credit for prompting this inquiry is given to a meeting of the Ontario Legislative Assembly, during which I first witnessed a Speaker ruling on the term ‘misinformation’.

It is my perception that if a Speaker rules that ‘misinformation’ is not a term to be used in an assembly, then there is a reason to believe that there could be less usage of the term by politicians outside the legislature. And, should that occur then there could be fewer such mentions in social and broadcast media and, perhaps, a transition to an increase in straightforward communications in society.

Speaker, this communication was preceded by inquiries of your legislature’s Hansard record, but I was unable to locate any references to ‘misinformation’ or ‘disinformation’.

I would be most grateful, therefore, if you could kindly direct me to any rulings in Hansard regarding the term ‘misinformation’, or the term ‘disinformation’.

A citation of any provided material will be included in the report.

And, if you are not aware of any related ruling(s), I would be most grateful if you could direct me to the person responsible for your Assembly's Hansard keyword searches, as he or she no doubt knows better than I how to conduct digital searches of your Hansard records.

Speaker Reid, thank you kindly for your consideration of my inquiry.

Sincerely,

Barry Wellar

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One major change from February, 2021 that warrants noting is that the letter refers to 58 million Google results as of September 2020 for the terms "misinformation" and "disinformation". At the time of this writing in October 2021, the combination of "misinformation" and "disinformation" yields 100,200,000 results, which is an increase of more than 42 million webpages in little more than a year.

C. General Finding about 'Misinformation' Rulings by Speakers

The long story short is that as a rule Speakers are inclined to avoid or limit language interventions, and when they do become engaged the focus of attention of Speakers is on what is referred to as unparliamentary language.

(https://www.ourcommons.ca/About/ProcedureAndPractice3rdEdition/ch_13_3-e.html#footnote-195-backlink)

As noted in a parallel report, [CRITIQUING SPREADERS of the MISINFORMATION PANDEMIC: BROADCAST NEWS MEDIA – NEWSPAPERS](#), there are informal lists of terms associated with unparliamentary language (e.g., <https://ipolitics.ca/2011/12/14/the-106-things-you-cant-say-in-parliament/>), but as of this writing 'misinformation' has not been located in any list.

And, in a related vein, 'misinformation' *per se* was not identified as unparliamentary language in responses from Speakers, although the provided materials indicate that it likely would be the case if use of the term 'misinformation' is deemed to be intentionally

malevolent, such as by deliberately misleading an assembly, or by deliberately impugning or disparaging the character of a member.

Positions stated or deduced from communications, Hansard, and other documentation as bases for Speakers' rulings on 'misinformation' include the following:

- Language evolves, and context is very important in making decisions about whether a term or phrase is unparliamentary. As of this writing there are insufficient grounds for flagging 'misinformation' as unparliamentary language in any assembly except possibly Ontario. (2)
- Speakers are not language coaches, speech writers, copy writers, editorialists, or other kinds of 'wordsmiths' with an obligation to be language monitors, terminology correctors, or oration overseers for politicians asking questions or making comments in legislative assemblies. As a result, regardless of any shortcomings, unknowns, misconceptions, fuzziness, ambiguities, uncertainties, or other questionable features that might be associated with 'misinformation', if the term 'misinformation' is not deemed to be unparliamentary language in a federal, provincial, or territorial legislature, then the Speaker does not intervene when it is used in assembly discourse.

In sum, 'misinformation' passes the parliamentary language test in Canada's legislative assemblies, and Speakers' rulings or lack thereof reflect that situation.

However, examination of communications, Hansard, and other documentation provided by Speakers' responses, suggests that there is at least one more layer to peel off the 'misinformation' onion regarding the role of Canada's legislative assembly Speakers in addressing the 'misinformation' pandemic.

In conjunction with this research project, Investigating the Rulings on 'Misinformation' in Canada's Legislative Assemblies, the Information Research Board conducted several other 'misinformation' projects which investigated concerns about the 'misinformation' pandemic and related concerns.

Those projects explored a number of 'misinformation' topics, including the issue of 'misinformation' serving as a euphemism and/or cover word for a number of terms which have nothing whatsoever to do with information. (3)

As discussed in the following section, some of these euphemisms or cover terms are already on lists of unparliamentary language, and others could be added if their context indicates that referring to 'misinformation' is intended to deceive the assembly and/or disparage a member and/or a political party by use of unparliamentary language

D. A Comment on the Implications for Rulings by Speakers if 'Misinformation' Is Used as a Euphemism or Cover Word for Terms Generally Ruled to be Unparliamentary Language

The parallel productions pertinent to the 'misinformation' project involving Speakers' are as follows:

- [The Inescapable Truth about *Disinformation* and *Misinformation*? They have NOTHING at all to do with Information](#)
- [Initial Thoughts about 'Fauxinfo' as an Antidote to the 'Misinformation' Pandemic](#)
- [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(POWERPOINT SLIDES\)](#)
- [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(PDF\)](#)
- [Using the Powers of Geographic Information and GIS to Expose the Myth of 'Misinformation'](#)
- [CRITIQUING SPREADERS of the MISINFORMATION PANDEMIC: BROADCAST NEWS MEDIA – NEWSPAPERS](#)

As noted in the Introduction, since the what-if scenario approach appears to break new ground in Canada, it is appropriate that the report proceed in working hypothesis style to examine that proposition that:

'Misinformation' is a term which could serve as a euphemism or cover word for terms which are already ruled to be unparliamentary language, and for other terms which could be so ruled depending upon context of use.

For this initial exploration of the working hypothesis, consideration is limited to three findings which are consistent with 'misinformation' potentially serving as a euphemism or cover word for unparliamentary language.

1. 'Misinformation' is a Meaningless Term

At the most basic level, there is no apparent parliamentary language issue because, as has been argued in previous productions, there is no such entity as 'misinformation'. (4)

Further, and as also previously argued, 'misinformation' is a meaningless term, a nonsense term, a term which despite multiple usages has not been defined substantively by any user or anyone else.

In sum, no production has been located after many searches which demonstrates how and from what 'misinformation' is derived, nor have there been any known responses to requests published in numerous list serves and posted on numerous sites in the search for substantive arguments and counter-arguments regarding the validity, evaluability, etc., of 'misinformation'. (5)

The term 'myth' appears to be a very apt descriptor of 'misinformation' because, while the term is highly popular, there do not appear to be any substantive, verifiable, evaluable examples, illustrations, or demonstrations, whether textual, numeric, or graphic, which substantively describe 'misinformation' conceptually or operationally. (6)

Those findings have not been challenged, so from a working hypothesis perspective it is appropriate to ask, "What if all those statements are valid?"

One what-if outcome pertinent to this report is that if 'misinformation' does not mean anything in particular, then it can be construed to mean whatever the user wishes it to mean, in whatever ways the user wishes, including as euphemisms and cover words for terms designated unparliamentary language.

2. 'Misinformation' has Nothing to do with Information

Information is derived from data through analysis and synthesis, and may be transformed into knowledge. However, no methodologically-based evidence has been located which demonstrates how 'misinformation' (or 'disinformation') is derived from data, or even how information is transformed into 'misinformation' or 'disinformation'.

Or, to re-phrase, during hundreds of searches of learned, popular, public sector, professional, technical and other literature, no empirical evidence was found that made any substantive connection between real information and purported 'misinformation' or 'disinformation'. (7)

A second what-if outcome pertinent to this report is that if 'misinformation' has nothing to do with information, then it has no researchable footprint or trail of footprints. Consequently, no definitive arguments can logically be made about what 'misinformation' is or is not, where it came from and where it is going, how it got here and how it moves on, etc.

As a result, and again, because it has nothing to do with information, and more or less just popped in from the ether so to speak, 'misinformation' can be construed to mean

whatever the user wishes it to mean, in whatever ways the user wishes, including as euphemisms and cover words for terms designated unparliamentary language.

3. 'Misinformation' as a "Do Not Ask. Do Not Tell" Word in Assemblies

Given points 1 and 2 above, questions arise about the absence of elaborations, examples, illustrations, or explanations of what members mean when using the term 'misinformation' in presentations, questions, or comments in response to questions.

Moreover, the absence of elaborations, examples, illustrations, or explanations of what members mean when using the term 'misinformation' in questions or comments is a common thread running through many hundreds of government-related productions originating in Canada.

And, on the other side of this "Do not Ask, Do not Tell" coin, are members who do not ask for specifics as to what is meant when the term 'misinformation' is used.

Further, it is commonplace for the term 'misinformation' to be used by politicians outside legislative assemblies in media releases, in media briefings, and during election campaign events, with nary a word of clarification given nor asked.

Indeed, even members of the media seem to be 'asleep' when what is arguably a meaningless, nonsense term is used with misplaced authority and conviction, but no challenges are issued. (8)

Connecting the dots, the seemingly total absence of specification of what members mean by 'misinformation' in comments, or in questions, appears to point to a potential problem for Speakers who, to this point in time, appear to have given or tended to give 'misinformation' a pass or a free ride if you will.

That is, what if 'misinformation' is a euphemism or cover for words which are or could be ruled unparliamentary language? The following section briefly considers this possibility.

4. 'Misinformation' as a Euphemism or Cover Word for Unparliamentary Language

Examination of broadcast media reports from Canada and other countries revealed that many politicians seemingly had very little knowledge of the reality-data-information-knowledge transform process and, it appears fair to say, did not much care when it came to using the term 'misinformation'. (9)

That is, regardless of whether it is a meaningless, nonsense term, it appears that 'misinformation' has cachet and connotation because of the perceived connection to

'information' and that is good enough for politicians who want a soundbite term, and/or are speaking to their bases about some failing or flaw by members or parties or organizations on the other side.

As for what politicians actually mean when using the term 'misinformation', or commenting on its use by someone on the other side, questions put to politicians in that regard were not answered. The "Do not tell" part of "Do not ask, Do not tell" came into play without exception.

Given the lack of responses, we were obliged to infer intentions and ascribe meanings, many of which were actually suggested by politicians and their acolytes, as well as by journalists, late show television hosts, blog hosts, and talk radio hosts.

Their suggestions were filtered in several ways, one of which was context, and another was based on the character of those using or commenting on the use or the user of the term 'misinformation' which, as noted above, is a meaningless, nonsense term that has nothing to do with information.

Tying that research to this project is the working hypothesis that the term 'misinformation' is used by politicians as a euphemism or cover word for terms which have been ruled as unparliamentary, or could be ruled unparliamentary by some, many, and perhaps all Speakers if used in a legislative assembly session.

In that regard, and giving credit where credit is due, it is highly likely that some and perhaps many politicians have ascertained the boundaries of acceptable terminology, and the associated limitations on uttering 'zingers'.

It therefore follows that they would have their own lists of terms that would be cause for grief if expressed in an assembly session and, hence, could readily cause them to gravitate to the term 'misinformation' as a handy and highly suggestive euphemism to put before the media and citizens because of the connotation of some kind of wrongdoing, flawed work, deception, etc., but without getting down and dirty regarding any specifics.

Table 1 contains a partial list of terms that previous research found to be what users of the term 'misinformation' possibly, probably, or likely meant when referring to statements which they characterize as 'misinformation'. ([Using the Powers of Geographic Information and GIS to Expose the Myth of 'Misinformation'](#)). (10)

It is again recalled that no substantive definitions, examples, illustrations, arguments, statements, or other expositions are found in any body of literature, so it is presumed that one or more of the kinds of terms listed in Table 1 are candidates for what politicians mean or have in mind when using the term 'misinformation'.

**Table 1. Preliminary Inventory of Nouns Referred to as,
Construed as, Invoked as, or Presented as Proxies,
Surrogates, Stand-ins or Interpretations of Statements
that Include the Term 'Misinformation'**

Babble	Exaggeration	Hoax	Perjury
Bafflegab	Fabrication	Hogwash	Perversion
Baloney	Fake	Invention	Phony
Blather	Fakery	Jargon	Prevarication
Bullshit	Falsehood	Lie	Propaganda
Claptrap	Falsification	Malarkey	Rot
Crapola	Falsity	Misconception	Rubbish
Deceit	Fib	Misnomer	Scam
Deception	Fiction	Misreport	Sham
Delusion	Fraud	Misrepresentation	Smoke and mirrors
Distortion	Fraudulent	Misstatement	Snow job
Doubletalk	Garbage	Mistake	Swindle
Drivel	Gaslighting	Noise	Trick
Duplicity	Gibberish	Nonsense	Untruth
Error	Gobbledygook	Perfidy	Whopper

Analysis of comments and reference materials provided by Speakers and their offices indicate that many of the terms if used in legislative assemblies would be cause for objections by members 'across the aisle', as well as by Speakers if it was perceived that the term was used, for example, to mislead the assembly, or to refer to members in a pejorative or otherwise unacceptable personal way.

In this latter regard, I examined many of the provided links to Hansard in a search for examples of members of a legislative assembly in Canada requesting as a Point of Order or other procedural move, that the member opposite "Explain exactly what is meant by 'misinformation'".

I did not find any request or comment along those lines, but it occurs that in due course the user of the term 'misinformation' in an assembly in Canada will be asked to "Explain exactly what he or she means by 'misinformation'".

The reason for this expectation is out-of-country in its origins. Namely, in several offshore parliamentary democracies for which recordings of assembly sessions are available, it is my observation that exchanges between members of those assemblies are frequently more intense, pointed, and incisive than those of Canadian assemblies that I have witnessed or reviewed via Hansard.

Which brings me to the specification comment made above.

Use of the term 'misinformation' led to questions and comments in those offshore assemblies about what the users meant, and when no responses were forthcoming, or the responses were deemed to be superficial, flippant, fake, insincere, invented on the spot, etc., then terms such as those in Table 1 were thrown back-and-forth between the aisles.

In addition, however, when users of the term 'misinformation' refused to retract or declined to clarify, members opposite frequently used terms such as those in Table 1 as the basis for other figures of speech which can take on a personal attack characteristic.

Examples of language shifts include transforming bullshit to bullshitter; deceit to deceiver; doubletalk and duplicity to cheater; and terms such as baloney, fabrication, lie, misrepresentation, and whopper become liar, idiot, and scumbag, and a number of profanities which caused Speakers considerable grief.

This is not to say, of course, that members of Canada's legislative assemblies are likely to create protracted 'misinformation' scenes, thereby causing our Speakers to restore decorum order by calling out "Order" numerous times. (11)

However, when members use the term 'misinformation' as a euphemism or cover for something else, such as one or more terms in Table 1, then I submit that no matter how polite they may seem to be in appearance or tone, they are deliberately misleading the assembly and/or impugning or denigrating the character of a member.

Furthermore, and more importantly in my opinion, they are deliberately misleading citizens, an action which I believe should be considered by Speakers to be more offensive than misleading a legislative assembly and/or impugning or denigrating the character of a member.

The main body of this report is closed by a brief comment about the downside of relying on popular usage as a measure of much of anything substantive, much less treating popularity as a basis for accepting a term as parliamentary language when many of the uses of the term are best described by entries in Table 1.

E. A Comment about the Term 'Statistics' to Demonstrate Why Popular Usage is a Weak Reason for Not Holding Legislative Members to a Higher Language Standard

A Google search of the term "statistics" yields 1,790, 000,000 results, that is, the word "statistics" appears in one billion, seven hundred and ninety million web pages.

Answers to two questions illustrate what happens when prudence is not applied to ensure that popular usage is not taken to necessarily mean informed usage or, possibly in the case of parliamentary language, honest usage.

Question 1. Relatively speaking, how popular is the word “statistics”?

While it may be a non-scientific way to measure the popularity of the term “statistics”, the results from Google searches for a selection of everyday words may be pragmatically instructive in approximating the relative popularity of a term which has an academic, business, and government background going back more than a century, and is used many millions of times per day around Planet Earth by people in all walks of life in conversations, communications, social media postings, etc.

The following words and results are indicative of the relative web page popularity of the term “statistics”:

wine	1,940,000,000
ice cream	1,860,000,000
statistics	1,790,000,000
soccer	1,510,000,000
dancing	1,470,000,000
milk	1,230,000,000
beer	1,110,000,000
lunch	1,030,000,000
bicycle	1,020,000,000
bread	909,000,000
icebergs	345,000,000
ice hockey	297,000,000
moose	220,000,000
oatmeal	189,000,000
diet	88,600,000

While not as popular as wine or ice cream, “statistics” appears in more web pages than ‘the beautiful game’, or everyday staples such as milk, bread, and oatmeal, or bicycles which are an international form of transport, and about six times more frequently than ice hockey.

All in all, the term “statistics” appears to be a relatively popular web page entry.

Question 2. Relatively speaking, how many Canadians who use the selected terms have a substantive understanding of what they mean, stand for, represent, do, etc.?

Running the terms past a small focus group confirms that all the terms except statistics are likely to be readily defined, described, depicted, etc., by an overwhelmingly large proportion of Canadians who use the terms. (12)

And therein lies the core point of this concern.

That is, a large proportion of statements about “statistics” in broadcast media reports, social media postings and comments, political party statements, and public statements by politicians actually have nothing whatsoever to do with “statistics” (13).

In brief, examination of many thousands of these kinds of productions containing “statistic” or “statistics” reveals that while the terms are expressed in the content, that’s it, that’s all, there is nothing more beyond the term itself in more than 95% of broadcast media reports, perhaps 99 % of social media comments, and more than 95% of statements by politicians and/or political parties.

In this latter regard, I believe that anyone who listened intently to remarks by politicians over the past two years on COVID-19 and variant infections and deaths will recall frequent mention of the term “statistics” in a know-it-all fashion, but without substantive details. (14)

Or, to re-phrase, an overwhelming proportion of these productions do not reveal any knowledge of the fundamentals of statistics including, for example, that an analytically-derived statistic describes a sample, that there are descriptive and inferential statistics, that sampling has many dimensions and conditions, that parameters describe populations, and that with careful, rigorous work it may be possible to generalize with confidence from statistics describing samples to parameters describing populations.

A common thread between productions referring to ‘misinformation’ and ‘statistics’, therefore, is that of substantive credibility.

‘Misinformation’ has no substantive credibility under any circumstance, but that lack of substantive credibility fate befalls ‘statistics’ in overwhelming proportions when the users and uses of these terms involve productions by lay people in broadcast media, social media, or the political sphere who demonstrate little or no understanding of what statistics are or what they do. (15)

And that finding takes us back to Table 1.

That is, many of the terms in Table 1 for which ‘misinformation’ can serve as a euphemism. or a cover word, can also be used to represent or stand for whatever lay

users want 'statistics' to mean, imply, suggest, connote, convey, impart, etc., which, for example, includes providing leeway for a member to attempt to mislead an assembly or impugn another member.

And, on the flip side, the entries in Table 1 can also be used by someone who wishes to critically and/or negatively comment on the usage or user of the term 'statistics'. (16)

Finally, combining "misinformation" and "statistics" in a Google search produced what I regard as a significant result from the perspectives of Speakers, and thoughts about unparliamentary language.

That is, this combination yields 34,700,000 results, which means that the terms appear together in 34,700,000 web pages.

Examination of several hundred randomly selected entries reveals a number of relationships between 'misinformation' and 'statistics', but for the purposes of this report emphasis is on 'misinformation' as a nonsense term that has nothing to do with information, and 'statistics' being used without substantive justification.

The relationship of interest and concern is that the nonsense term 'misinformation' is frequently used to characterize the term 'statistics' when the latter is used without substantive justification, and the term 'statistics' is frequently used without substantive justification to invoke the term 'misinformation'.

This is not a healthy communications relationship under any circumstance and, I believe, is all the less so when either term, or both terms in combination, are used in legislative assemblies as euphemisms or cover words for members to engage in the use of unparliamentary language.

F. Conclusion

The overriding finding from examination of communications, Hansard, and related documentation is that to this point in time Speakers of federal, provincial, and territorial legislative assemblies have not ruled that the term 'misinformation' is considered unparliamentary language.

However, because parallel research revealed that a rigorous definition of the term 'misinformation' has not been found in any body of literature, including Hansard, and generally appears to serve whatever purpose assigned to it by users, including members of legislative assemblies, a what-if scenario is proposed for consideration by Speakers.

That is,

- What if 'misinformation' is used as a euphemism or cover word for terms which are generally recognized by Speakers as unparliamentary language?

Since this what-if scenario approach appears to break new ground, it is premature to engage in formal what-if scenario analysis. Instead, this report serves to 'road test' the scenario in working hypothesis style, and I believe that sufficient grounds have been put in place for Speakers and their officials to conduct what-if scenario analyses.

To assist in that regard, the terms in Table 1 are presented to illustrate what prior research reveals about euphemisms and cover words for 'misinformation'.

Many of these terms have already been ruled as unparliamentary language, so the term 'misinformation' which lacks substantive definitions and means whatever users have in mind, appears to warrant a critical review by Speakers.

Finally, this report discusses the term 'statistics' as an example to illustrate that the popularity of a term can mask the fact that the term itself is poorly understood, and can serve as a euphemism or a cover word for numerous other terms, including those rated as unparliamentary language.

Moreover, when two poorly understood terms such as 'misinformation' and 'statistics' are used in combination, the opportunities to engage in unparliamentary language through euphemisms and cover words increase significantly.

Similarly, on the flip side, it is likely that only a small percentage of those seeing or hearing the word 'statistics' in a legislative assembly can critically assess the amount of information contained in the statement; or can ascertain whether the term statistics is being used as a euphemism or cover word for another term which is or could be ruled unparliamentary language.

As a closing note, Google searches for the first report in this series, [The Inescapable Truth about Disinformation and Misinformation? They have NOTHING at all to do with Information](#), yielded a total of about 58 million combined results for "misinformation" and "disinformation". That report was published on September 8, 2020.

Slightly more than a year later, Google search results for "misinformation" and "disinformation" combined are 100,200,000, or an increase of more than 42 million web pages for two terms that have no demonstrated substantive credibility.

And yet, despite having no substantive credibility here they are, expanding their web page presence in pandemic fashion.

Based on our experience to date, it is not too soon for Speakers of Canada's legislative assemblies to anticipate that they may be facing a very formidable and persistent language foe in the very near future.

G. Endnotes

1. The only potential exception encountered to date is a ruling by Ontario Legislative Assembly Acting Speaker Percy Hatfield that the term 'misinformation' be withdrawn. ([REPORT 1: Terms of Reference for a Survey of Speakers about 'Misinformation' Rulings in Canada's Legislative Assemblies](#)). While it is likely that deemed unparliamentary language is the reason for the ruling, inquiries made to the Ontario Speaker and Acting Speaker have not resulted in an explanation.
2. An excess of caution is exercised to ensure that the positions of Speakers are accurately represented. Corrections are invited. As noted above, only a ruling in Ontario appears to be in the unparliamentary language domain as of this writing.
3. Examination of broadcast media, social media, and political statements reveals that the term 'misinformation' (and the term 'disinformation') is used by people and organizations as a 'dog whistle'. However, 'dog whistle' is not included in the main body of this report because 'misinformation' does not appear to be used in Canada's legislative assemblies as a code word among a particular group of politicians or for particular constituencies.
4. The comment about 'misinformation' applies to 'disinformation', which is merely a variation on a theme in that they are both non-entities, neither has anything to do with information, and neither is supported by substantive arguments which enable making evidence-based distinctions between the two terms. Further in that regard, examination of uses of 'disinformation' in broadcast media, social media, and political statements suggests that many of the terms in Table 1 are equally applicable to 'misinformation' and 'disinformation'.
5. After numerous literature searches, and posing numerous requests and challenges, I have not found a substantive definition of 'misinformation' or its running mate 'disinformation' which informs about matters such as their structural and functional characteristics, and the derivation of purported bits, pieces, or bodies of 'misinformation' and 'disinformation'.
6. Even as the number of Google results for 'misinformation' (and 'disinformation') continued to increase in recent years, there was no change in the absence of evidence to substantively support uses of or claims about the terms. That is, there was widespread belief based on what I argued to be one or more false ideas about 'misinformation' and 'disinformation', which took us into the realm of myth. Several

reports were produced on that theme, and to date no substantive counter-arguments have been encountered. For details see: [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(POWERPOINT SLIDES\)](#); [HOW GEOGRAPHY and GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS EXPOSE the MYTH of 'MISINFORMATION' \(PDF\)](#); and, [Using the Powers of Geographic Information and GIS to Expose the Myth of 'Misinformation'](#).

7. Academics are among those who use the terms 'misinformation' and 'disinformation' in broadcast media reports, and in reports published as website and blog productions. A preliminary review reveals that academics frequently make comments using these terms without defining what either term means or does not mean, and how a piece or body of 'misinformation' or 'disinformation' is derived. The seeming absence of regard for the scientific method strikes me as cause for concern.

8. The saying 'Clear as mud but covers the ground' applies to many statements by politicians and their agents. However, the frequent lack of challenge by other politicians and members of the broadcast media to utterings of this nature does not bode well for citizens when it comes to politicians in any venue using the term 'misinformation' free from challenge as to precisely what they mean.

9. As demonstrated in the report, [Using the Powers of Geographic Information and GIS to Expose the Myth of 'Misinformation'](#), the geographic data-geographic information-geographic knowledge transform test is a very effective means of demonstrating that 'misinformation' is a nonsense term or, more politely, a myth.

10. Table 1 is a partial list because of the decision to preclude profanities from the preliminary inventory of nouns referred to as, construed as, invoked as, or presented under the cover of 'misinformation'.

11. Those used to witnessing polite legislative assembly sessions may be surprised to learn that such is not always the case everywhere. A recent European assembly session featured a series of verbal melees that took many nasty turns. A very patient Speaker called for "Order" eight or nine times for one incident before members did as asked, only to start all over again when the government member resumed his comments.

12. I do not know the number of entries of each term contributed by Canadians in how many web pages. However, since Canadians are rated as being among the high-end users of Internet services, and in the upper rank of national literacy, it appears reasonable to suggest that they make their fair share of contributions to web pages for all items, with perhaps a little extra for icebergs, ice hockey, and moose.

13. Literature reviews of government reports, academic papers, professional papers, association technical papers, and corporate reports also found statements using the term “statistics” without any reference to samples or sampling procedures, and no details about the kind of “statistics” that were being derived, and nothing about parameters and populations. One message that seems to follow from these findings is that as the popular usage of the term “statistics” increases, its integrity decreases.

14. Over the past 20 months or so, Canadian politicians at all levels of government have used the term “statistics” in many of their statements about the incidence, spread, and effects of COVID-19 and its variants. As the broadcast media reveal, there is a long and substantive record of problems with politicians’ statements, and both broadcast media and social media productions contain numerous comments about politicians using and misusing ‘statistics’ to spread ‘misinformation’ and ‘disinformation’. Moreover, many of the comments feed off criticisms of politicians and their remarks about statistics to criticize science, the scientific method, and methodologically designed research.

15. It is important and necessary for the purposes of this report to establish that there are evaluable, verifiable distinctions between politicians who have demonstrated competence in understanding and applying descriptive and inferential statistics, and those who do not. For example, politicians who are trained formally through college or university courses, or through apprenticeship, mentorship or other kinds of supervised training by an accredited instructor, can legitimately claim demonstrated competence in statistics by such measures as success in tests, exams, published papers, employment, and professional standing. Politicians without such training are referred to as ‘lay people’, and although they could achieve demonstrated competence in statistics by other means, I have not ascertained any evidence in that regard in their legislative assembly comments.

16. The phrase “Lies, damned lies; and statistics” which seems to have originated more than 200 years ago is frequently associated with politicians, and is frequently expressed in offshore legislative assemblies where it is not unusual for debates to turn into brouhahas, best efforts of Speakers notwithstanding. However, in many dozens of statements that I reviewed, including reports about the phrase, there are no statistics in the comments, just claims about statistics. A more accurate phrase, it appears, is more along the lines of “Lies, damned lies, and other fabrications”, although many terms in Table 1 could be substituted for ‘fabrications’ with little if any loss of generality.