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May's campaign spending questioned by Green party leadership rival

By DENNIS BUECKERT The Canadian Press

OTTAWA — The Green party leadership race is heating up, and a longstanding friendship between the two leading candidates appears in danger of melting.

Elizabeth May, who has been seen as the front-runner, was furious Tuesday after learning that rival David Chernushenko had requested a party audit of her campaign spending.

"That's so dirty," she said. "I'm just so stunned by this. This is not exactly positive campaigning four days before the ballots have to be mailed in."

A mail-in vote on the leadership is under way prior to the party's convention in Ottawa later this month. The deadline for mailing in ballots is Friday.

Chernushenko said he is concerned about two speaking tours conducted by May during the campaign — one to promote a book and another to raise public awareness about the environmental impact of oilsands development.

"We have seen an enormous amount of activities and speaking tours and have been reading about them in the media," said Chernushenko.

"We have been led to believe there have been quite a few speaking events that should be counted as part of elections spending and yet there's been a denial that they count."

May said she has sought advice from Elections Canada on how to account for her speaking engagements, and will comply with that advice.

"Under Elections Canada rules, our first financial report has to be submitted this week. There's been nothing submitted yet so there's no paperwork with which anyone could complain," she said.

"This is entirely a last-minute smear campaign because if they were really concerned about my finances they might want to wait until they saw the first report."

May said the rules permit multipurpose events provided there's a clear distinction between spending for party purposes and non-party purposes.

She said her speeches about the tar sands did not mention the Green party, but she added that volunteers — acting without her knowledge — recruited Green party members at an event in Victoria. That will be treated as a party event, she said.

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