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Amendments strengthen election legislation

Improvements will reflect Alberta's changing population

Edmonton... Proposed amendments to Alberta's election legislation will set in motion a review of current provincial electoral boundaries.

Bill 45: Electoral Boundaries Commission Act proposes an Electoral Boundaries Commission be established no later than July 31. The Bill requires that the five-member Commission prepare recommendations to divide Alberta into 87 proposed provincial electoral divisions, an increase of four divisions. Alberta's population has increased by more than one million since the last time the number of electoral divisions was changed prior to the 1986 election.

An Electoral Boundaries Commission is appointed to review existing electoral boundaries and when appropriate, make proposals for change. Under the current legislation, a Commission could not be appointed before March 25, 2010. Amending the legislation to allow a Commission to be appointed earlier will ensure that a review of the electoral boundaries can be debated and adjusted well in advance of the next provincial election.

The Commission must conduct public hearings during the year it is reviewing the boundaries. The Commission has one year from the time it is established to submit a report to the Speaker of the Legislature. The Commission must create a preliminary report within seven months of being established, and that report is made public. It then must conduct further public hearings, and is required to deliver a final report to the Speaker within another five months.

The proposed amendments will allow the Commission to make recommendations to change Alberta's electoral boundaries so that they more accurately reflect the current population of each electoral division. Changes to the legislation will also allow the Commission to incorporate more recent population information into its population calculations if the Commission feels the information is reliable and helpful. This information would be used with Statistics Canada census information.

After the Electoral Boundaries Commission submits its report, the recommendations are reviewed by the Legislative Assembly. Following that, amendments may be made to the *Electoral Divisions Act*, which sets out each electoral boundary in the province.

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