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## Area resident will have impact on electoral system

Belleville Intelligencer

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Ontario's electoral system could be undergoing a change and at least one local resident will be voicing his or her view on which direction - if any - the system should be heading. Across Canada, residents have been picked randomly from the voters list to possibly sit on the Citizens Assembly of Electoral Reform.

The assembly will be made up of 103 randomly-selected citizens. To ensure diversity and equal representation, 52 of the members of the assembly will be female and 51 will be male. At least one member will be aboriginal. Once the assembly has all members named, they will examine Ontario's electoral system - the system that structures how votes are combined to elect representatives to the provincial legislature.

The representative for the riding of Prince Edward-Hastings will be named this Sunday in Kingston. Beginning at 1 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Kingston Waterfront Hotel, members of the assembly for three local ridings (Prince Edward-Hastings, Hastings-Frontenac Lennox and Addington and Kingston and The Islands) will be selected. Barry Koen-Butt, director of communications for the Ontario Citizens Assembly Secretariat, said those individuals who attend the selection meeting have already been short-listed from the entire population of Ontario.

"Elections Ontario ran the selection process. Their job was to take the 8.5 million people on the electors roll and... short- list it down to 10 to 13 people per riding," Koen-Butt said. Earlier this year, Elections Ontario sent out 124,000 letters to randomly selected people. Twelve-thousand people responded though approximately 2,000 said they were interested but could not be involved leaving 10,000 people on the list.

This list was then pared down to roughly 1,250 people. This number leaves the 10 to 13 individuals per riding which - as meetings have and will continue to be held across the province - goes through the final process at the selection committee meetings. "It's not unlike jury duty except they select you and then they give you the option," he said. "With jury duty, of course, you've got no option."

Like jury duty, assembly members will receive a \$150 per day honorarium when they must attend a meeting. Koen-Butt said people have one more chance to bow out from the race at the beginning of the selection committee meetings when it is fully explained what the assembly will be doing and the tasks that lie ahead. Anyone who, after hearing this, does not want to be involved can leave.

If no one leaves and 13 people remain, the names are then placed in a box and randomly drawn. "This is random right from the very beginning to the end, so maybe when people are selected they'll jump right out of their seat. We've had people say they feel like they've won the lottery because we've gone from 8.5 million people down to 103," Koen-Butt said.

Once all members are named, the assembly will meet twice a month for eight months beginning in September. Together, they'll examine Ontario's current electoral system and learn about other systems. They'll meet with people at public meetings to be held across the province. Depending on what they learn and hear, they'll recommend either keeping the current electoral system or adopting a new one.

That recommendation will be outlined in a report due on or before May 15, 2007. If the assembly recommends making a change to Ontario's current electoral system, the government will put the question to voters in a province-wide referendum.

Sunday's session is open to the public.

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