

Proposed Election Act limits voting to citizens

Ontario residents will find it easier to vote as a result of changes proposed in the province's Election Act.

Government House Leader Thomas L. Wells told the Legislature that all polls in the province will open and close at the same time; more advanced polls will be held and polls will be located in premises which are convenient for the aged and handicapped.

As well, he said, the term British subject will not be used to describe eligible voters after July 1, 1986 when the right will be limited to Canadian citizens who have lived in Ontario for the previous six months.

The minister said the new act will be dealt with at the spring session of the Legislature and he invited interested persons to write to him at Queen's Park with any suggestions they believe will make elections more convenient.

"This will be the first substantial amendment to our election act since the present legislation was passed in 1969 and draws upon the experience of the past 15 years in attempting to adjust to the contemporary environment," Mr. Wells said.

"Election day in Ontario continues to be

Thursday," he continued. The bill provides for a common time for polling between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. local time, year round, except in the districts of Kenora and Rainy River which are in the Central Time Zone. Polls there will be open from 8 a.m. until 7 p.m. Central Time. The effect is that no poll will open sooner or close later than any other poll in Ontario.

"The minimum period between the issue of the writs and polling day is reduced from 37 days to 30 days, but nomination day will remain 14 days before polling day.

"There are three significant changes in the nomination process—a reduction from 100 to 25 in the number of signatures required for nomination; the requirement for the first time of a deposit of \$200 and the requirement of a statement of having filed—or an undertaking to file—for registration with the Commission on Election Contributions and Expenses from each candidate.

"Enumerators will be required to make three visits before leaving a notice envelope at the residence and provision is made to add names to the voters list up until the day before polling. In rural ridings the historic

right of election day vouching will be continued.

"We are, as well, proposing to add Thursday to the Saturday and Monday prior to election day for broadly-situated advance polls. As a further convenience, six additional days of polling before election will be held in the premises of the returning officer on the 12th, 10th, ninth, eighth, sixth and second day before election day.

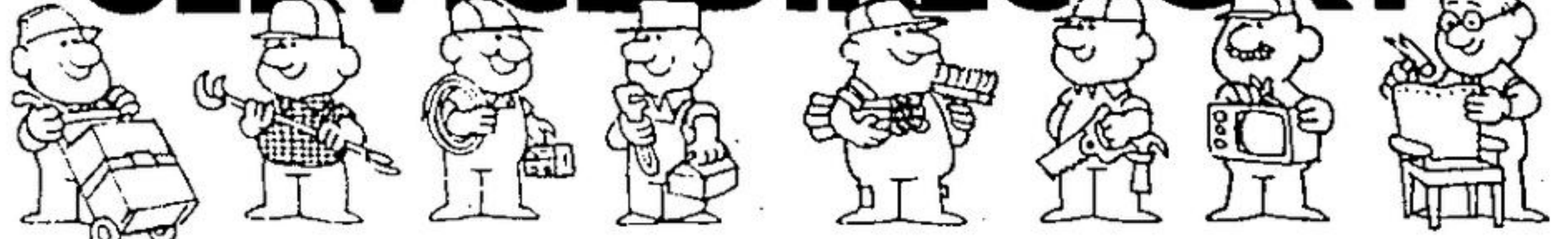
"In addition, the bill broadens the category of those who may act for the voter at the revision of the rolls—for example a teenage child asking to have a parent's name added. The bill also extends to an elector who is away from the riding during the polling period on business the right of designating a proxy.

"Returning officers will be required to seek out polling locations with access for the

disabled. Poll officials will be authorized to move the ballot box to help the elderly or disabled—for example, carrying the box to the door if the voter cannot come inside.

"Municipalities and school boards, along with landlords of premises of more than 100 dwelling units, will be required to make polling space available at the request of the returning officer.

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