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Student out to alter law
on voting for handicapped

Ontario's handicapped who cannot visit polling places are being denied a secret ballot and a Wilfrid Laurier University student is out to change all that.

Andy Seal, a second-year economics student, said that as the law now stands a proxy voter must vote for a handicapped person and the proxy voter knows how the handicapped person votes.

Seal's interest in the issue has led to an introduction in the Ontario legislature of a bill designed to allow the handicapped to vote by mail. The bill was sponsored by the Liberal Party's community and social service critic, Don Boudria (Prescott and Russell).

The bill was given first reading before Christmas and Boudria gives it a better chance for success than many of the private member's bills that usually die on the order paper after first reading.

Seal got the idea originally after a discussion with Kitchener Liberal MP Peter Lang who helped in the publication of a federal report, called Obstacles.

Upon reading the report Seal thought that correcting the voting problem would make an excellent project for his Canadian government and politics course, taught by Dr. John McMenemy.

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"It only makes sense to have this situation changed," Seal said. "I want to see it implemented in Ontario." And that fitted in with the class project to draft legislation on some issue and try to get it introduced in the legislature or House of Commons.

Seal wrote to the chief electoral officer in Manitoba, where the handicapped vote by mail, and got back a great deal of information. The next step was to find someone to introduce it and that led to Boudria.

"The work was top notch," Boudria said. "We were very satisfied that this was the kind of bill we can support."

Under the proposed bill a handicapped person, unable to visit the polling place, would receive three envelopes. The first is addressed to his particular poll, the second contains an identification of the voter to be signed by a witness and the third contains the ballot that is put into the ballot box.

It will take time for the bill to become law, if it ever does. But the Laurier student will be satisfied even it fails this time. It may be introduced later and ultimately pass.

In the meantime he has a more personal satisfaction--the project garnered him an A from his professor.