



# Issue in Focus

---

April 2012

## Adding Members to Saskatchewan's Legislative Assembly

**Core Issue:** The Saskatchewan Party government has now introduced legislation to add three more Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). This will bring the total number of MLAs in the province to 61. Saskatchewan's residents are already well represented on a per capita basis by politicians and the money used to fund these new roles could be put to better use elsewhere.

### Background

After announcing plans last December, the Saskatchewan Party government has now introduced legislation, *The Constituency Boundaries Amendment Act, 2011*, to change constituency boundaries for the next election and add three more Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) to the province. This will bring the total number of MLAs in Saskatchewan to 61.

On January 1, 2012, Saskatchewan's population was estimated to be 1,067,612.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, currently in Saskatchewan every MLA represents about 18,407 people. Comparatively, British Columbia has 53,804 people to each politician, Alberta has one for every 43,437 people, Manitoba has one for every 21,930 people, Quebec's ratio is 63,838 people to each politician, Nova Scotia has 18,181 people to each politician, and in Ontario, which has the highest ratio in Canada, there is one politician for every 124,981 people.<sup>2</sup>

Under Saskatchewan's new system of 61 MLAs, each politician in the province would only be responsible for representing 17,501 people. The only provinces with lower people-to-politician ratios are New Brunswick (13,736:1), Newfoundland and Labrador (10,638:1), and Prince Edward Island (5,404:1).<sup>3</sup>

Under existing legislation, the redrawing of electoral maps in the province of Saskatchewan happens every 10 years because of the changing geographic distribution of the province's population. Regardless of the decision about whether or not to increase the number of MLAs in the province, this redrawing of the constituency boundaries will occur next year following the final report of the 2011 Census.<sup>4</sup> However, the government's *Constituency Boundaries*

---

<sup>1</sup> Government of Saskatchewan. Bureau of Statistics. 21 03 2012. 11 04 2012 <<http://www.stats.gov.sk.ca/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Craig, Colin. "Saskatchewan Doesn't Need More Politicians." 20 12 2011. Canadian Taxpayers Federation. 11 04 2012 <<http://taxpayer.com/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-doesnt-need-more-politicians>>.

<sup>3</sup> Mandryk, Murray. "NDP right to oppose more MLAs." 07 04 2012. Leader-Post. 11 04 2012 <<http://www.leaderpost.com/news/right+oppose+more+MLAs/6423554/story.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Saskatchewan. "Three More Constituencies will be Added in Time for Next Provincial Election." 15 12 2011. New Releases. 11 04 2012 <<http://www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=dbb97243-a36f-4591-aadc-54f28f7b574f>>.

*Amendment Act, 2011* will not consider children under the age of 18 when determining the population redistribution.

The government has indicated that based on the pattern of population growth in the province, the additional three constituencies will likely mean one more constituency in Regina, one more in Saskatoon, and one more rural constituency.<sup>5</sup>

### **Current Situation**

According to the Sask Party, the additional cost for each new MLA is \$225,000 per year, which means the total additional cost for the new MLAs will be \$675,000 per year.<sup>6</sup> The government has said that these new MLA costs, which will not be incurred until after 2015, will not cause the legislative assembly budget to increase because they will be absorbed elsewhere in executive government through increased efficiencies.<sup>7</sup>

The Sask Party government has stated that the new MLAs are needed to ensure that the residents of the province, particularly those in rural Saskatchewan, are able to access their MLAs in a fair and reasonable manner, without having to travel excessive distances.<sup>8</sup> Without the addition of the new MLAs it is likely that the redrawing of the electoral map would increase the size of loosely populated rural ridings (while reducing the number of MLAs representing that area) and increase the number of urban ridings where the majority of the population has shifted toward.

Critics argue that the government is actually trying to prevent the reduction of the rural seats, not on the basis of riding size, but for political considerations. Assuming a reduction in the number of rural ridings, the next election would force two currently sitting Sask Party MLAs to compete against each other for the party's nomination.<sup>9</sup>

Another source of criticism has been the government's decision to exclude young people from the population redistribution formula. This change will likely lead to an over-representation in rural regions where the population is older, while urban centres with more immigrant and aboriginal families with young children will be under-represented.<sup>10</sup> In an effort to postpone the passing of the legislation, on April 4, 2012 the Official NDP Opposition introduced an amendment to the bill asking to remove the provision that would exclude people under 18 from being counted in the drawing of electoral boundaries and eliminate the addition of three new MLAs.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>6</sup> Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. "Debates and Proceedings." 05 04 2012. [Hansard](http://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Legislative%20Assembly/Hansard/27L1S/120405Debates.pdf). 11 04 2012 <<http://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Legislative%20Assembly/Hansard/27L1S/120405Debates.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>9</sup> Swenson, Rick. "Archived Weekly Comments." 02 01 2012. [Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan](http://www.pcsask.ca/archives.html). 11 04 2012 <<http://www.pcsask.ca/archives.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> Laskowski, Chelsea. "NDP urges government to re-think Bill 36." 04 04 2012. [Ink online](http://jschool.ca/index.php/news/provincial/674-chelsea-laskowski). 11 04 2012 <<http://jschool.ca/index.php/news/provincial/674-chelsea-laskowski>>.

<sup>11</sup> Hall, Angela. "Sask. NDP opposes bill to add MLAs." 05 04 2012. [Leader-Post](http://www.leaderpost.com/news/Sask+opposes+bill+MLAs/6416704/story.html#ixzz1rlhZLVqt). 11 04 2012 <<http://www.leaderpost.com/news/Sask+opposes+bill+MLAs/6416704/story.html#ixzz1rlhZLVqt>>.

*The Constituency Boundaries Amendment Act, 2011* has been marked as a Specified Bill, which means that it will need to be passed before Completion Day of the legislative session, which is May 17<sup>th</sup>.

### **Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce Position**

The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce believes that residents across Saskatchewan are adequately represented by the current number of MLAs and that Saskatchewan's population would have to increase significantly before the ratio of people to politicians becomes an issue. The Saskatchewan Chamber also rejects the government's argument that prevention of the creation of larger rural ridings is justification for the additional MLAs. The increased use of communication technologies means a continual reduction in the travel requirements of MLAs, allowing them to more easily serve larger regions.

The Chamber is concerned with the expense associated with the addition of three new MLAs. Each additional politician will require a salary, expense account, offices, staff, and pension contributions. These extra costs will be carried on for decades, easily reaching tens of millions of dollars over the long term. Any savings or efficiencies that the government can find to offset these costs in the short term should be enacted immediately, and those cost savings should be returned to the people of Saskatchewan through tax reductions.



## Works Cited

Craig, Colin. "Saskatchewan Doesn't Need More Politicians." 20 12 2011. Canadian Taxpayers Federation. 11 04 2012 <<http://taxpayer.com/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-doesnt-need-more-politicians>>.

Government of Saskatchewan. Bureau of Statistics. 21 03 2012. 11 04 2012 <<http://www.stats.gov.sk.ca/>>.

Government of Saskatchewan. "Three More Constituencies will be Added in Time for Next Provincial Election." 15 12 2011. New Releases. 11 04 2012 <<http://www.gov.sk.ca/news?newsId=dbb97243-a36f-4591-aadc-54f28f7b574f>>.

Hall, Angela. "Sask. NDP opposes bill to add MLAs." 05 04 2012. Leader-Post. 11 04 2012 <<http://www.leaderpost.com/news/Sask+opposes+bill+MLAs/6416704/story.html#ixzz1rlhZLVqt>>.

Laskowski, Chelsea. "NDP urges government to re-think Bill 36." 04 04 2012. Ink online. 11 04 2012 <<http://jschool.ca/index.php/news/provincial/674-chelsea-laskowski>>.

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. "Debates and Proceedings." 05 04 2012. Hansard. 11 04 2012 <<http://docs.legassembly.sk.ca/legdocs/Legislative%20Assembly/Hansard/27L1S/120405Debates.pdf>>.

Mandryk, Murray. "NDP right to oppose more MLAs." 07 04 2012. Leader-Post. 11 04 2012 <<http://www.leaderpost.com/news/right+oppose+more+MLAs/6423554/story.html>>.

Swenson, Rick. "Archived Weekly Comments." 02 01 2012. Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan. 11 04 2012 <<http://www.pcsask.ca/archives.html>>.