

Rights board has little clout: lawyer

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By MARK LOWEY
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Political interference has turned the Alberta Human Rights Commission into an ineffectual shell, says a prominent Calgary lawyer.

"I think that human rights are currently in jeopardy in Alberta," Brian Edy said in an interview.

The Alberta government at the highest level has interfered with the commission's ability to do its job, Edy charged Saturday night.

His comments come a day after Sen. Ron Ghitter criticized the provincial government's lack of commitment to human rights issues.

On Friday night, Edy, former president of the Alberta Civil Liberties Association, won the Suzanne Mah Award from the commission for his work in human rights and civil liberties.

Edy said Saturday that former community development minister Diane Mirosh "clearly interfered with the working of the commission" when she spoke against protection for homosexuals experiencing discrimination.

Under current Community Development Minister Gary Mar, Edy noted, the commission still is not protecting the rights of gays and lesbians. "I believe that cabinet does not have the commitment to do the right thing."

Gays and lesbians in Alberta are routinely being denied jobs and housing because of their sexual orientation, Edy said.

By doing nothing, he said, the commission is violating Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms which guarantees individual rights to every citizen regardless of sexual orientation.