

Human rights commission lacks visible minorities

Calgary Herald

Calgary

The Tory government's "new open policy" to invite ordinary Albertans to fill vacancies on the province's human rights commission came under attack Thursday.

And critics renewed calls for an independent commission after Community Development Minister Gary Mar announced the government would not renew contracts for two of the four remaining commissioners.

The decision leaves the commission without female members or visible minorities and has cast a cloud of controversy over a review into the province's Individual's Rights Protection Act.

Commissioner Ron Scrimshaw was reappointed for four months, while a four-year reappointment went to Calgary commissioner Del Iannucci. Iannucci, a longtime Tory, was first appointed amid cries of patronage in 1989. The planning consultant is a longtime member of the Calgary Buffalo Conservative constituency association board.

Mar was criticized for not reappointing Edmonton lawyer Shirish Chotalia and Dr. Raffath Sayeed of Lloydminster. Critics said he should have extended their contracts until the review, started in March, is completed in the spring. Their four-year terms were up for renewal this month.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out we need women and visible minorities represented on a human rights commission," said Brian Edy, past president of the Alberta Civil Liberties Association.

Mar was discussing the fate of the commission on a Calgary phone-in radio show Thursday when Chotalia called to demand an explanation. "Why were we not reappointed?" he asked.

The minister responded by telling her to send in a new application, adding he is confident a number of qualified female candidates will apply.

In an interview later, Chotalia called the invitation an "insult."

Former community development minister Dianne Mirosh has speculated the commission might be dismantled to save money.