

THE SPEAKER AS ADMINISTRATOR

The Speaker is also responsible for representing the House on all ceremonial or formal occasions, and for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Parliament Buildings, including the Legislative Precinct, Legislative Library, Security and Hansard (Hansard is the official written record of every word said in the House; since 1991, debates are also broadcast by Hansard Television).

The Speaker also acts as Chair of the Legislative Assembly Management Committee. Made up of members from both government and opposition, the management committee is responsible for determining services and funding provided to MLAs.

DID YOU KNOW...

The Speaker's impressive, carved oak chair (also called the Speaker's throne) is located on a platform at the south end of the Legislative Chamber.

Designed to accommodate Speakers of all sizes and shapes, the chair is equipped with a small electric motor to move the seat closer to or farther from the lectern in front.

THE SPEAKER AS MLA

The Speaker, when elected, does not stop being an MLA.

That means – while the Speaker is neutral and must avoid taking public positions on politically controversial matters – the Speaker must still continue to listen to the people of his or her riding and to effectively represent their interests in the House. The Speaker does this by making private recommendations to government and organizations on issues affecting his or her constituents.

VISITING THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

WE WELCOME VISITORS. Free tours of the B.C. Parliament Buildings are available Monday through Friday throughout the year, and on Saturdays and Sundays in the summer months.

To see MLAs in action, visitors are welcome in the public galleries of the Legislative Chamber whenever the House is sitting. The galleries are often full during Question Period – the 30-minute period every Monday to Thursday afternoon when MLAs ask questions about government activities.

For more information on the work of the Legislative Assembly, please contact:

**Public Education and Outreach
Room 144, Parliament Buildings
Victoria B.C. V8V 1X4
250-387-8669 phone
250-356-5981 fax
PEO@leg.bc.ca**

For information on visiting the Parliament Buildings, please contact:

**Tour Office
Parliament Buildings
Victoria B.C. V8V 1X4
250-387-1400**

Or visit the Legislative Assembly website at: www.leg.bc.ca

THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

SHAPING BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FUTURE

In the grand and historic British Columbia Parliament Buildings, our elected representatives – called Members of the Legislative Assembly or MLAs – come to meet, debate and pass the laws that govern the people of British Columbia, and help shape the future of our province.

GOVERNMENT IN B.C.

In British Columbia, one MLA is elected from each of the 79 constituencies or ridings across the province to speak on behalf of the people of that riding.

Candidates are usually members of an organized political party, but may also run for election as independents.

The political party that wins the largest number of seats in a general election forms the governing party, and its leader becomes the head of the provincial government, known as the Premier. The opposition consists of elected members who do not belong to the governing party.

THE NEED FOR A SPEAKER

The primary role of the opposition is to question government actions and present alternatives to government positions.

While this kind of adversarial system is a cornerstone of democracy, debates can – like a hockey game – sometimes get heated.

The Speaker serves as a very necessary “referee”, ensuring fair play by all MLAs.

THE SPEAKER

The Speaker is the key figure in the Legislative Assembly (also known as the House).

The Speaker is an MLA elected in a secret ballot by all other members of the Legislative Assembly to oversee debates and make sure the House follows established rules of behaviour and procedure.

The election – which is open to all MLAs except cabinet ministers (MLAs selected by the Premier to work as ministers of the Crown, in charge of the day-to-day operations of individual government ministries) – takes place immediately after each general election, or when a Speaker dies or retires.

The Speaker is neutral, responsible for making sure that all MLAs, no matter what party they belong to, are treated fairly and impartially, and votes only to break a tie.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

The Speaker has been part of the British parliamentary system since 1377.

In the beginning, the Speaker was responsible for carrying messages, often complaints or grievances, from the people's representatives to the King or Queen. Sometimes the monarch was not entirely pleased with the messages from parliament, and as many as nine Speakers literally lost their heads.

This rather bloody and dangerous past explains why a Speaker elected today will pretend to be reluctant to take the Speaker's Chair and must be dragged to the front of the Legislative Chamber.

THE SPEAKER AS PRESIDING OFFICER

Balancing the right of the majority to conduct business with the right of the minority to be heard is one of the Speaker's most difficult tasks.

It is the Speaker's job to enforce the Standing Orders – the House rules of parliamentary procedures – that are essentially designed to make sure debates in the House are properly carried out and that all MLAs have the opportunity to participate.

These rules require all MLAs to show respect for the Speaker, and for each other. For example, members must not speak unless “recognized” by the Speaker, or interrupt when the Speaker is speaking.

In addition, to discourage personal attacks, MLAs must direct their speeches to the Speaker, not to each other. They must use the name of another MLA's riding – “the Honourable Member from Victoria”, for example – rather than the MLA's actual name.

If an MLA does not obey the rules and makes rude remarks, the Speaker will ask the member to withdraw those remarks. If the member ignores the Speaker's instructions, the Speaker will ask the MLA to withdraw from the House for the day.

For more serious offences, the Speaker can “name” the MLA, that means the MLA will be suspended from the House (without pay) for 1 to 15 days at the Speaker's discretion.

OPENING CEREMONIES

At the start of each day of the Legislative Assembly, the Speaker, dressed in ceremonial costume (including tricorne hat and black silk robe), will enter the Legislative Chamber escorted by the Sergeant-at-Arms who carries the Mace, the symbol of the Speaker's authority in the House, and the Clerks of the House.