

FAQs about The Senate of Canada

What does
the Senate
do?

Who are
senators?

Why is
the Senate
called the Red
Chamber?

And other questions about
Parliament's Upper House

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Q: What is the Senate?

A: The Senate is an essential part of Parliament.

Over 135 years ago, the Fathers of Confederation agreed that Canada should have a Parliament to make Canada's laws. They wanted to be sure that everything decided in Parliament would be carefully thought through by not one, but two houses, so they created an Upper House, the Senate, and a Lower House, the House of Commons.



Photo: Library of Parliament
Tom Littlemore

The Queen, represented by the Governor General, the Senate and the House of Commons make up Canada's Parliament.

Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, called the Senate a place of

"sober second thought."



Q: What does the Senate do?

A: One of the most important jobs of the Senate is to help make the laws that we live by.



The Senate carefully examines bills, which are proposed laws, to make certain that they are the best they can be. The bills are studied to find out how they might affect the daily lives of Canadians. Changes are suggested to improve

No bill can become law in Canada without Senate approval.

them; some bills may even be rejected. The Senate may also introduce bills of its own, even though most bills are introduced in the House of Commons.

The Senate is responsible for protecting the rights and interests of Canadians in all regions, especially minority groups or people who do not often get a chance to present their opinions to Parliament.

Before a bill can become law, it goes through three stages, called "readings," in both Houses. The bill is debated, fine-tuned and then voted on by each House. Once approved, the bill is presented to the Governor General for royal assent and is made law.



Q: Who are senators?

A: The Senate is made up of women and men from all over Canada with many different backgrounds.

Business people, lawyers, teachers, journalists, artists, doctors, hockey players, police officers, scientists, writers, nurses, Aboriginal leaders and politicians have all become senators.



The Prime Minister recommends the names of senators to be appointed by the Governor General.



There are usually 105 members of the Senate.

Q: What happens in a day in the life of a senator?

A: Senators are busy people. On any given day they may

- discuss and debate important issues in the Senate Chamber;
- meet with the people they represent;
- work with office staff who help do research;
- go to committee meetings;
- submit bills to make laws;
- present petitions from groups who want to be heard;
- answer reporters' questions;
- help people solve problems in dealing with government;
- read books, reports and studies;
- give speeches;
- attend conferences;
- travel between their home region and Ottawa; and
- represent Canada around the world.



Each year, Senate committees hear from more than 1000 people (also called "witnesses"), hold an average of 400 meetings and produce more than 100 reports.

Senators work on committees to investigate important issues, including children's rights, literacy, poverty and terrorism. They speak on behalf of those whose rights are often overlooked, such as children, veterans, the elderly and the poor. These investigations allow people from all walks of life a chance to give their views on issues that affect them.



Photo: Library of Parliament
McElligott Photography Ltd.

Q: What happens in the Senate Chamber?

A: The Senate Chamber is where senators meet when Parliament is in session.



They gather here to discuss committee reports, to debate important issues and to pass laws. During Question Period, senators can ask the Leader of the Government in the Senate about how the country is being run.

The Opening of Parliament, the Speech from the Throne and other important ceremonies take place in the Senate.

When the Senate is in session, the Speaker sits in a chair on a raised platform at one end of the Chamber, in front of the two thrones. The Speaker keeps order and makes sure that the rules of Parliament are followed.

The mace is a symbol of the Senate's authority. Whenever the Senate is sitting, it must be set on the Clerk's table with the crown pointing toward the thrones.



Photo: Library of Parliament
Hone's Photography

Q: Why is the Senate called the Red Chamber?

A: The Senate is where the Queen comes when she visits Parliament, so it is decorated in red, a traditional colour of royalty.



To see more photos of the Senate Chamber, go to www.parl.gc.ca

Look for

- the ceiling covered in gold leaf;
- carvings of plants and animals native to Canada;
- stained glass windows set high in the walls;
- two bronze chandeliers weighing almost two tonnes each;
- murals depicting scenes from the First World War; and
- two thrones reserved for the Queen or the Governor General and their spouses.

1-800-267-7362

sencom@sen.parl.gc.ca

Want to know more?

To learn more about the Senate, including information on how to visit Parliament Hill, go to www.parl.gc.ca