



FAQs about
The Canadian
House of Commons

What happens in the House of Commons?

Why is the Commons Chamber green?

Who are MPs?



And other questions about the major law-making branch of Parliament.

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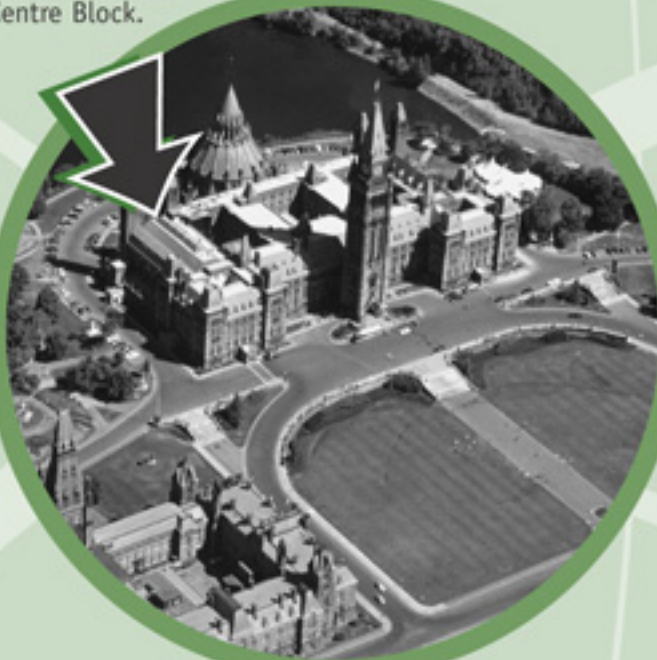
Q: What is the House of Commons?

A: It is one of three branches of Parliament.

In 1867, the Fathers of Confederation created Parliament to make Canada's laws and to govern the country. The Parliament of Canada includes the Queen, represented by the Governor General, the Senate and the House of Commons.

People in each part of the country vote for the person they want to have represent them in the House of Commons.

The House of Commons Chamber is located at the west end of the Centre Block.



Canada is divided into 308 geographic sections, or ridings, based on population. One representative is elected in each riding.



Members of the House of Commons are elected. Senators are appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister.

The House of Commons approves the money needed to run the country.



Q: Who are MPs?

A: They are Members of Parliament.

Members of Parliament are men and women from different regions, cultures and walks of life. They include farmers, lawyers, teachers, doctors, business people and others elected to come to the House of Commons, where they discuss, debate and vote on matters important to the whole country.

MPs also

- attend committee meetings;
- do research;
- help solve people's problems;
- make speeches;
- answer questions from reporters;
- take part in conferences, ceremonies and other events;
- help constituents in their ridings; and
- represent Canada in other parts of the world.

The Speaker sits in the largest chair in the Chamber.



Q: What happens in the House of Commons Chamber?

A: MPs meet in the Chamber when Parliament is sitting.

MPs usually belong to political parties, which are groups of people with the same beliefs about how the country should be governed. The party with the most MPs forms the Government and the leader of that party is the Prime Minister. All other Members form the Opposition.

The Government presents bills, which are proposed laws, and asks everyone in the House of Commons to support the way they are running the country. Opposition Members ask questions about what the Government does and make suggestions for different or better ways to handle the country's business. Sometimes the debate gets noisy!

Q: Who's who in the House?

A: Certain people have special jobs to make the whole system run well.

The Prime Minister is leader of the party in power and head of the Government.

The Leader of the Opposition is leader of the political party with the second largest number of MPs in the House.

The Speaker acts as a referee to make sure everyone follows the rules and traditions of the House.

Cabinet Ministers are chosen by the Prime Minister. Each Minister is in charge of a certain area, or ministry, from fishing to farming to finances.

Question Period lasts for 45 minutes each day that Parliament is sitting.



Individual Members from either the Government or Opposition can also present bills.

The Mace is a heavy, richly decorated club that is the symbol of authority in the House. No one may speak in the Chamber until the Mace is placed on the table pointing towards the Government.



Q: What does the House of Commons do?

A: Making laws is the main job of Parliament.

Most bills, or proposed laws, are introduced in the House of Commons. Members of Parliament must carefully consider each and every bill before it becomes law. They research, debate, fine tune and finally vote on the bill. Once it is approved both by the House of Commons and by the Senate, the bill is presented to the Governor General for Royal Assent and is made law.

All discussion and debate in the House is simultaneously translated into English and French.

Hello!

Bonjour!

Q: Why is the House of Commons green?

A: Green is the colour used in the British Parliament.

Our Parliament is based on the British system, from which we have borrowed many traditions. The green colour of Canada's House of Commons is the same as that used in the House of Commons in England for over 300 years.

At the start of each working day in the Commons, bells ring to call MPs to the House. The Sergeant-at-Arms carries the Mace and leads the Speaker and clerks through the Hall of Honour to the Commons Chamber. After a prayer, the Speaker calls the House to order and work begins.



To see the magnificent House of Commons Chamber, go to www.parl.gc.ca. Look for beautiful stained glass windows, a hand-painted cloth ceiling, fossils 450 million years old and much more.

