

Yukon Legislative Assembly

Information Sheet No. 8 Assembly Time Periods

The business of the Legislative Assembly is divided into different time periods. This information sheet explains the difference between a sitting day, a Sitting, a session and a Legislative Assembly.

Sitting day

Each day that MLAs gather in the Assembly Chamber to transact their business is referred to as a sitting day. The days and hours of sitting are outlined in Standing Order 2(1) which says, "The time for the meeting of the Assembly shall be 1:00 p.m. on each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday unless otherwise ordered. The normal hour of adjournment shall be 5:30 p.m." Though 5:30 p.m. is the normal hour of adjournment a member may move a motion to adjourn anytime during the sitting day. This often happens just before 5:30 p.m.

It is also possible to extend these sitting hours. Standing Order 2(5) says, "A motion to sit beyond the normal hour of adjournment must be moved by the Government House Leader or designate at least one-half hour before the normal hour of adjournment. Such motion shall specify the business to be dealt with and may be moved either with the Speaker in the Chair or while the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole." Motions to extend sitting hours are rare.

Notwithstanding Standing Order 2(1), the Assembly does not sit on statutory holidays (Easter Monday, Thanksgiving Monday, Remembrance Day, etc.) The number of sitting days is not fixed. There were 211 sitting days during the 31st Legislative Assembly (2002-2006).

Sitting

A Sitting is a group of consecutive sitting days. Section 13 of the *Yukon Act* says, "The Legislative Assembly shall sit at least once every 12 months." The Standing Orders refer to the Assembly sitting twice a year - in the Spring and Fall - for a maximum of 60 days total.

It is up to the Premier to decide when a Spring or Fall Sitting will begin. Standing Order 73(2) says that once the Premier has decided when the Assembly will begin sitting, he or she "shall advise the Speaker...in sufficient time to allow the Speaker opportunity to give a minimum of two weeks notice of the date on which the House shall meet." This rule does not apply to a Sitting that takes place immediately after a general election).

Once the Assembly reconvenes the government has five sitting days to introduce all the bills it wants dealt with during that Sitting. Once all the bills are introduced the three party House leaders will negotiate how many sitting days there will be in that Sitting. Standing Order 75(2) allows for a minimum of 20 sitting days and a maximum of 40 sitting days for any one Sitting. If the House leaders cannot reach an agreement

Standing Order 75(3) says the Spring and Fall Sittings shall be a maximum of 30 days each. At the end of the final sitting day of a Sitting the House will be adjourned until the Premier calls it together again.

Session

A session begins with a Speech from the Throne. It ends when the session is prorogued or the Assembly is dissolved for a new election. Ending a session by prorogation effectively wipes out the Order Paper - any bills or motions still there are removed and the agenda commences anew – new throne speech, new bills, new motions, etc. There is no rule that determines how long a session will be. That is up to the Premier. The 31st Legislative Assembly was one continuous session. There were two sessions during the 30th Legislative Assembly (2000-2002) and one session during the 29th Assembly (1996-2000). Since the 1990s the tendency has been toward fewer sessions. During the 1980s it was not uncommon for there to be a new session each year. That is no longer the case.

Legislative Assembly

A Legislative Assembly begins the first time the Assembly meets in the chamber after a general election. The first pieces of business are the election of the Speaker and the Speech from the Throne. An Assembly ends when it is dissolved, either by law or by request of the Premier.

According to section 11(1) of the *Yukon Act* an Assembly can last a maximum of five years from the return to the writs (the official confirmation of results) of a general election. The most recent general election took place on October 10, 2006. The return to the writs took place on October 16, 2006. Accordingly, the current Legislative Assembly - the 32nd - will, by law, dissolve on October 16, 2011 unless the Premier asks the Commissioner to dissolve it before that date. The latter is what almost always happens. The Premier seeks a dissolution because he or she wants to have a general election. The Premier has the right to ask the Commissioner for a dissolution at any time he or she wants. A Legislative Assembly, therefore, has no fixed time period, though there is - by law - a maximum length of time for it.

As mentioned the current Assembly is the 32nd. Yukon's Legislative Assemblies are numbered consecutively beginning with the first wholly-elected territorial council elected on June 28, 1909. At some time in the future - not later than October 16, 2011 - the 32nd Assembly will be dissolved, a general election will be held and the 33rd Assembly will meet at some point after that.

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