

Model Parliament Unit

Glossary

Act of Parliament. A bill that has been passed by both the House of Commons and the Senate, has received Royal Assent and has been proclaimed.

adjournment. The ending of a sitting of the Senate or House of Commons. An adjournment may be set to last from a few minutes, to several months.

agenda. A list of the items of business to be dealt with during the sitting of the Senate, the House of Commons or a committee.

amendment. A change proposed to a motion, a bill or a committee report.

backbencher. A parliamentarian who is neither a minister, nor a Parliamentary Secretary nor an Opposition critic.

bicameralism. Parliament is "bicameral," which means it has two separate legislative chambers: the House of Commons, sometimes referred to as the "Lower House" and the Senate, or "Upper House." Generally, the two Houses have equal privileges and powers, but each is far from being a duplicate of the other. This bicameral system has a significant impact on the way Parliament works.

bill. A proposed law submitted to Parliament for its approval. It can originate with the Government, a private Senator or MP, or a committee. A bill can relate to public or private interests.

Cabinet. The executive of the Government, consisting of those Senators and MPs appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister.

caucus. A group composed of all Senators and MPs of a given party.

Chair. The officer in charge of a meeting. In the Senate or the House of Commons, the Chair is the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker or the Acting Speaker; in a committee, it is the Committee Chair, Vice-Chair or Acting Chair.

Chamber. The hall in which the Senate or the House of Commons meets to conduct its business.

committee. A body of Senators, MPs, or Senators and MPs selected to consider such matters (including bills) that Parliament may empower it to examine.



Model Parliament Unit

constituency. Any voting district entitled to have one MP represent it in the House of Commons. During debate, an MP is identified by the name of his or her constituency, not by his or her own name. (Synonyms: electoral district, riding.)

constituent. A member of a constituency.

Crown. (1) Her Majesty the Queen (represented in Canada by the Governor General), in her role as the head of state. (2) The executive branch of government, in its role of representing the Queen by acting through Her agents (the members of Cabinet).

dissenting opinion. A brief item, added to a standing committee report, that contains opinions or recommendations (proposed by one or more members of the committee) that are contrary to, or in addition to, the contents of the report.

federal system. A country where powers are shared between two levels of government. In the case of Canada, the two levels are federal and provincial.

general election. An election during which MPs are selected for every riding in Canada. Votes are cast by secret ballot, and the candidate receiving the greatest number of votes in a riding becomes that riding's MP in the House of Commons.

Government. In Canada, the Cabinet (headed by the Prime Minister), which has the authority from the Crown to make decisions.

government bill. Any bill introduced by a Minister.

government business. Any bill or motion introduced in the Senate or the House of Commons by the Government.

Government Orders. (1) Items of business introduced by the Government, and placed on the agenda of the Senate or House of Commons. (2) A period set aside each day for dealing with Government orders.

Hansard. The printed, word-for-word record of the proceedings in the Senate and House of Commons, published after each sitting. It is named after the British family originally responsible for the writing of the proceedings of the House of Commons in the United Kingdom. Also called *The Debates*.

House. Refers to either the Senate or the House of Commons.

House of Commons. The elected part of the Parliament of Canada (currently made up of 308 MPs).

in camera meeting. A meeting from which the public is excluded.



Model Parliament Unit

inquiry. A procedure in the Senate whereby Senators, after giving two days' notice, call the attention of the Senate to a matter of particular interest or importance.

Journals. The minutes of the meetings of the Senate and the House of Commons. (Also called "Votes and Proceedings" in unbound format.)

legislation. The laws established by, or on the authority of, Parliament.

legislature. A governing body empowered to make laws.

Mace. A large, heavy and richly-ornamented staff that is the symbol of the authority of the House. When the Speaker takes the chair, the Mace is placed on the table by the Mace Bearer (in the Senate), or the Sergeant-at-Arms (in the House of Commons), to signify that the House is in session.

motion. Motions are the mechanisms by which decisions are made in Parliament. In either the Senate or the House of Commons, a motion is a proposal made by one parliamentarian that the House do something, or order something done, or express an opinion about some matter.

MP. One of 308 parliamentarians elected by popular vote at least once every five years to sit in the House of Commons. The country is divided into electoral districts, also known as ridings or constituencies, and each is entitled to one seat in the House of Commons. MPs' duties include representing constituents' concerns, serving on committees, proposing legislation, participating in Commons debates, and discussing and amending bills. (Note: MP is an abbreviation for Member of Parliament. While the term Member of Parliament officially refers to both Senators and MPs, it is commonly used in reference to the parliamentarians in the House of Commons.)

Official Opposition. The party (or coalition of parties) that holds the second-largest number of seats in the House of Commons. The Official Opposition has certain advantages over other parties in opposition. (Synonym: When the term "Opposition" appears with the first letter capitalized, it refers to the Official Opposition.)

Opposition. See Official Opposition.

opposition party. A political party that is neither the Government party, nor part of a coalition of parties that forms the Government.

opposition critic. An MP, belonging to a party in opposition, responsible for presenting his or her party's policies in a given area, and commenting on the Government's policies in that area. (See Shadow cabinet.)



Model Parliament Unit

oral question period. A daily, 45-minute period in the House of Commons, 30 minutes in the Senate, during which oral questions may be addressed to Ministers and committee chairs. (Synonyms: oral questions, question period.)

Order Paper. An agenda (list of items of business) for the day.

other business. A bill or motion sponsored by a private Senator. A period is devoted to this business each sitting day. In the House of Commons it is referred to as "private Member's business."

Parliament. (1) The law-making branch of Government, composed of the Governor General, the Senate and the House of Commons. (2) The period during which the Parliament of Canada exercises its powers-extending from the time when Senators and MPs are first summoned after an election, to dissolution (the ending of Parliament).

parliamentarian. A member of the Senate or the House of Commons. (See Senator or MP.) Senators and MPs.

parliamentary procedure. The rules by which the Senate and the House of Commons conduct their business. Decisions by the Speaker are based on these rules.

Parliamentary Secretary. A Member of the Government party named for a period of one year to assist a Minister as the Minister directs. A Parliamentary Secretary may table documents or answer questions on the Minister's behalf, but may not present Government bills.

parliamentary system of government. A system of government in which the Cabinet is appointed from among parliamentarians of the ruling party. The Cabinet holds power, but in order to keep it, its major decisions must be supported by the majority of the House of Commons.

petition. A request made by Canadian residents to Parliament for some action. Such a request can only be presented by a Senator or an MP. Petitions may be presented during Routine Proceedings at any sitting, or in the House of Commons they may be filed with the Clerk.

political party. A group of people sharing a set of goals and a particular ideology or way of thinking. The party puts forward candidates for election to Parliament.

portfolio. The federal department for which a Minister is responsible.

Prime Minister. The Leader of the Government, who is ordinarily the leader of the party having the greatest number of seats in the House of Commons. Appointed by the



Model Parliament Unit

Governor General, the Prime Minister selects the other members of the Cabinet and, along with them, is responsible to the House for the administration of public affairs.

principle (of a bill). The objective or related objectives that a bill seeks to achieve. The principle of a bill is adopted at its second reading.

private Member. Strictly speaking, any parliamentarian who is not a Minister. Sometimes, Deputy Leaders (Senate), House Leaders (House of Commons), party Whips, Opposition critics, and Parliamentary Secretaries are not considered private Members.

private Member's bill. A bill sponsored by a parliamentarian who is not part of the Cabinet.

private Member's business. A bill or motion sponsored by a Private Member. A period is devoted to this business each sitting day. In the Senate it is referred to as "other business."

proceedings. The actions taken by the Senate, House of Commons or a committee. The most important parts of the proceedings are the decisions that are taken.

proclamation. An official notice or order given by the Crown. For example, a session of Parliament is begun by a Throne Speech following a proclamation summoning Parliament to meet.

prorogation. The formal termination of a session of Parliament by the Governor General, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister. Prorogation brings all parliamentary business to an end, abolishes all pending legislation, and halts all committee work until the opening of the next session.

put the question. To put a motion to a vote. At this stage, no further debate or amendment is possible. The question is put to the House by the Speaker.

question period. See oral question period.

reading of a bill. One of the stages in the passage of a bill. Each reading stage (introduction, second and third) has its own individual function.

resolution. A motion adopted by the House in order to make a declaration of opinion or purpose. A resolution does not require that any action be taken.

riding. See constituency.



Model Parliament Unit

routine proceedings. Business of a basic nature, for which a daily period is set aside in the House. It includes such items as tabling documents, presenting petitions, and the introduction of bills and, in the House of Commons, statements by ministers.

Royal Assent. The approval, given by a representative of the Crown, of a bill passed by the House of Commons and Senate. Royal Assent makes the bill into an Act of Parliament. Royal Assent is given in the Senate Chamber, usually by a deputy of the Governor General in the presence of MPs and Senators. Since 2002, Royal Assent may now be done in writing without ceremony.

rules of the Senate. The collection of the permanent written rules adopted by the Senate for its proceedings.

Senate. The "Upper House" of the Canadian Parliament. It usually consists of 105 Senators appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Senate possesses almost all of the same powers as the House of Commons.

Senator. One of 105 parliamentarians appointed to the Senate by the Governor General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Senators must be at least 30 years of age, reside in the province for which they have been summoned, and have real and personal property worth \$4,000, in excess of any debts and liabilities. Unless they die, resign, are disqualified, or their seat is declared vacant, Senators hold office until they retire at age 75. Senators examine and revise legislation, investigate national issues and represent regional, provincial and minority interests. Senators also introduce their own bills and sit on committees in order to examine specific social and economic issues in detail.

session of Parliament. One of the basic periods into which a Parliament is divided. It begins with a Throne Speech, and is ended by prorogation. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet decide when a session should end. Each Parliament includes one or more sessions, which may be of any length.

shadow cabinet. The group of parliamentarians in each opposition party, especially the Official Opposition, chosen to act as party critics for each of the ministerial portfolios.

shadow minister. The MP of an opposition party assigned the task of acting as the party's critic for a specific government ministry.

sitting of Parliament. Sitting (1) meeting of the Senate or House of Commons within a session. A sitting may last for only a matter of minutes or may extend over several calendar days. A sitting ends with adjournment for the day. (2) a reference to the sittings of the Senate or House of Commons during a particular period. For example, the Autumn sitting, from September to the Christmas adjournment.



Model Parliament Unit

special committee. A group of Senators, MPs, or Senators and MPs, appointed to study a particular matter. Once it has made its final report, the committee is dissolved.

Speech from the Throne. A speech normally delivered by the Governor General (although it may be read by the Queen) at the opening of a session of Parliament. The speech outlines the Government's plans for the session, and is delivered in the Senate Chamber in the presence of parliamentarians from both Houses.

standing committee. A permanent committee that studies matters referred to it, or other matters within its area of responsibility.

Standing Orders. The collection of permanent written rules adopted by the House for its proceedings.

tabling of documents. The first item called by the Speaker under routine proceedings. At this time, Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries have the opportunity to table reports, responses to petitions or to committee reports, and other documents.

Throne Speech. See Speech from the Throne.

vote. The formal expression of opinion necessary to reach a decision. In both Houses, votes are given either orally, or by the Senators or MPs standing in their places.

whip. A parliamentarian responsible for keeping other MPs of the same party informed about House business. The whip ensures their attendance in the House, especially when a vote is expected. Each party normally has a chief whip and one or more deputy whips.

For further parliamentary terms, refer to the [Glossary of Terms](#) on the parliamentary Web site.

