

THE ROLE OF THE SPEAKER



The Speaker is a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) elected in a secret ballot by all MLAs to preside over debates and ensure that the Legislative Assembly follows established rules of behaviour and parliamentary procedure.

THE SPEAKER AS PRESIDING OFFICER

The election of a Speaker is the first item of business for a new Parliament and takes place on the first sitting day after each provincial general election or when a Speaker resigns, retires, or dies. Once elected, the Speaker must remain neutral at all times and can only vote to break a tie.

The Speaker is responsible for ensuring that all MLAs are treated fairly and impartially. One of the Speaker's most difficult tasks is balancing the right of the majority to conduct business with the right of the minority to be heard.

It is the Speaker's job to interpret and enforce the Standing Orders - the Legislative Assembly's rules for parliamentary procedures - to ensure that debates are carried out properly and that all MLAs have the opportunity to participate.

To assist the Speaker in maintaining order, MLAs cannot participate in a debate until they are formally recognized by the Speaker. Once recognized, MLAs must direct their speeches or questions to the Speaker, not to each other. Any MLA who disobeys the rules or makes unparliamentary remarks can be disciplined by the Speaker.



The Speaker's Chair in the Legislative Chamber



The Mace of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

OTHER DUTIES OF THE SPEAKER

Although the Speaker is neutral and avoids taking public positions on political matters, the Speaker continues to serve as an MLA. The Speaker represents their constituents and can make recommendations to government outside of the Legislative Assembly. The Speaker also represents the Assembly in all relations with external organizations and individuals. In addition to procedural and representative duties, the Speaker is the head of the Legislative Assembly administration and chairs the Legislative Assembly Management Committee, an internal all-party committee that oversees financial and administrative policies for the Legislative Assembly.

HISTORICAL ROLE OF THE SPEAKER

The role of the Speaker has been part of the British parliamentary system since 1377. In the beginning, the Speaker was responsible for carrying the monarch's messages to Parliament. Over time the role of the Speaker evolved into making representations on behalf of Parliament to the king or queen. This was a potentially hazardous profession, with several Speakers being executed for their involvement in the political affairs of the realm. This rather bloody and dangerous past explains why a Speaker, upon election, will pretend to be reluctant to take the Speaker's Chair and must be dragged to the front of the Legislative Chamber.

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