

# GLOSSARY



## Discover Your Legislature Series



**Legislative Assembly of  
British Columbia  
Victoria  
British Columbia  
V8V 1X4**



## **ACT**

A bill that has passed third reading by the Legislative Assembly and has received Royal Assent.

## **AMENDMENT**

A proposal to alter the text of a bill or other measure by inserting new text, by deleting text, or both. Amendments must be introduced by motion and must be approved by the House before the proposed change takes effect.

## **BACKBENCHER**

A Member of the Legislative Assembly who is not a cabinet minister. Also known as a private member.

## **BAR OF THE HOUSE**

A brass bar across the entrance to the Chamber that cannot be crossed by anyone who is not a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

## **BILL**

Proposed legislation introduced to the Legislative Assembly. It becomes an act when passed by the Legislative Assembly and given Royal Assent.

## **BIRDCAGES**

Nickname of the colonial-era government buildings built on the site of the present Parliament Buildings between 1859 and 1864 and so named for their eclectic and exotic architectural style.

## **BUDGET**

The government's annual plan outlining revenue and expenditure measures and the provincial economic condition, introduced to the Legislative Assembly by the Minister of Finance.

## **CABINET**

Consists of the Premier and Members of the Legislative Assembly from the governing party who serve as ministers of the Crown. Also known formally and legally as the Executive Council of the government.

## **CAUCUS**

A group composed of Members of the Legislative Assembly of a given party.

## **CLERKS ASSISTANT**

Legislative Assembly staff who assist the Clerk of the House with administrative responsibilities and procedural duties in the Chamber.

## **CLERK OF THE HOUSE**

The senior permanent officer of the Legislative Assembly. The Clerk is responsible for providing advice on parliamentary procedure to the Speaker and other Members of the Legislative Assembly as required and for maintaining all official House documents.

## **CLERK'S TABLE**

Where the Clerk of the House and Clerks Assistant sit in the Chamber. The Clerk's Table is immediately in front of the Speaker's chair. This serves as the business centre of the parliamentary process. The mace must be present on top of the Clerk's Table for the House to meet.

## **COAT OF ARMS**

A symbol of our colonial origins and our geographic location. The stag and ram represent the former colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia. King Edward VII originally granted the shield in 1906, and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II granted the remaining elements of the Coat of Arms on October 15, 1987.

## **COMMITTEES**

A group composed of Members of the Legislative Assembly who are appointed and authorized by the Legislative Assembly to investigate and report on specific issues of importance to British Columbians.

### **COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**

A committee consisting of all the Members of the Legislative Assembly, presided over by the Deputy Speaker as the Speaker leaves the Chamber. The Committee of Supply is responsible for reviewing and approving the government's spending plans as presented in the estimates.

### **COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE**

A committee consisting of all the Members of the Legislative Assembly, presided over by the Deputy Speaker as the Speaker leaves the Chamber. The Committee of the Whole House is responsible for examining in detail each section of a bill.

## **COMMONWEALTH**

An international association made up of countries with historic ties to the former British Empire.

## **CONFIDENCE MOTION**

A motion in which the Legislative Assembly expresses its support for the performance of a government or a minister. Votes on the Speech from the Throne and the budget speech are deemed to be confidence motions. If the government loses a vote on a confidence motion, they are said to have lost the confidence of the Legislative Assembly and are expected to resign.

## **CONSOLIDATED REVENUE FUND**

The account into which the government deposits taxes and other revenues collected. It is also the account from which government withdraws the money it requires to cover its expenditures.

## **CONSTITUENCY**

A geographical boundary whose voters elect a representative to be a Member of the Legislative Assembly. Currently, there are 87 electoral districts in B.C. and consequently 87 Members of the Legislative Assembly.

## **CROSSING THE FLOOR**

When a member changes political party affiliation during a sitting of the Legislative Assembly. A Member of the Legislative Assembly crossing the floor may choose to sit as an independent or as a member of a different party.

## **CROWN**

Term expressing the legal authority of the monarch, who, under Canada's constitution, is the supreme authority. The government in British Columbia acts in the name of the Crown by, for example, administering public lands legally owned by the Crown.

## **CROWN CORPORATION**

Corporate entity established or acquired by the provincial government to provide services to the public. B.C. Hydro and B.C. Ferries are examples.

## **DISSOLUTION**

The bringing to an end of a parliament. This is done by the Lieutenant Governor and is followed by a general election.

## **DIVISION**

A vote taken in the Legislative Assembly when the names of members are recorded individually according to how they vote. The result of the vote, dividing the members into two groups (the yeas and the nays), determines the decision of the House on a particular matter.

## **ELECTORAL DISTRICT**

See Constituency.

## **ESTIMATES**

The expenditure plans (budget) of all government departments, consisting of Main Estimates tabled annually and Supplementary Estimates tabled as required. Review of estimates is the work of the Committee of Supply. The print version of the estimates is commonly referred to as the "blue book".

## **EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

The Premier and cabinet ministers who have been appointed by the Lieutenant Governor on the advice of the Premier to act in a formal and legal capacity to carry out their executive powers. The Executive Council is the highest formal instrument of government, and is created by section 9 of the provincial Constitution Act (RSBC 1996, c. 66). It is the institution through which the government as a whole formally gives advice to the Lieutenant Governor.

## **FEDERALISM**

A system of government in which a constitution specifies and divides powers between central federal government and regional, provincial and territorial ones.

## **FIRST READING**

The stage of a bill where the Member of the Legislative Assembly sponsoring the bill introduces the proposed law and explains its purpose. The bill is not debated, but Members of the Legislative Assembly vote on whether to accept it for further debate. If approved, it is assigned a number and scheduled for second reading.

## **GALLERIES**

Areas in the House overlooking the Chamber. They are set aside for the public, the press and distinguished visitors who wish to attend a sitting.

## **GOVERNING PARTY**

The political party that wins the largest number of seats in an election. Its leader becomes the head of the provincial government and is known as the Premier.

## **HANSARD**

The full and verbatim transcript of what is said in the Legislative Assembly and in committees. Hansard prepares a transcript that is available in print form as well as on the Internet. It also oversees the live telecast of proceedings throughout the province by satellite.

## **HOUSE LEADER**

A Member of the Legislative Assembly designated by a caucus to be responsible for coordinating the business of the House.

## **INDEPENDENT MEMBER**

A Member of the Legislative Assembly who does not belong to a recognized political party. For a party to have recognized political party status in the Legislative Assembly, they must have a minimum of four Members of the Legislative Assembly.

## **JOURNALS**

The official summary record of House proceedings and decisions. They are published by the Office of the Clerk at the conclusion of each session.

## **LAW**

A bill that has passed all stages in the House, has received Royal Assent and has been proclaimed.

## **LEGISLATION**

Laws enacted by or on the authority of the Legislature.

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

The legislative body of British Columbia, consisting of all the elected members, as constituted under the Constitution Act.

## **LEGISLATIVE PRECINCT**

The buildings and grounds occupied by the Members of the Legislative Assembly and staff of the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of their parliamentary duties, excluding constituency offices.

## **LEGISLATURE**

- (1) Formally, the Lieutenant Governor acting by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly.
- (2) Term commonly used to refer to the Parliament Buildings.

## **LIBERAL PARTY OF B.C.**

Along with the Conservatives, one of the two main political parties in B.C. during the first half of the twentieth century. The party was introduced in a 1902 convention. The first Liberal leader was James A. MacDonald, a lawyer from Rossland. The first Liberal Premier was Harlan Brewster, who governed for 12 years.

## **LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR**

The Queen's representative in each province. The Lieutenant Governor's approval (Royal Assent) is needed for a bill to become law. (See also Crown.)

## **LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR-IN-COUNCIL**

The Lieutenant Governor acting by and with the advice and consent of the Executive Council.

## **MACE**

An ornamented club symbolizing the authority of the Speaker and, through the Speaker, the House. When it is in place, the House is duly authorized to function, and proceedings can begin.

## **MLA**

Member of the Legislative Assembly.

## **MOTION**

A proposal put to the Legislative Assembly framed in such a way as to seek the House's opinion or decision. A motion initiates all business undertaken by the House.

## **NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF B.C.**

The provincial wing of the federal party formed in 1961 when the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) joined forces with organized labour. First elected as government in 1972 under David Barrett.

## **OPPOSITION**

Members of the Legislative Assembly not belonging to the government party whose role is to question government actions, present alternatives to government positions and provide the option of an alternative government.

## **ORAL QUESTIONS**

See Question Period.

## **ORDERS OF THE DAY**

The published daily agenda of House business.

## **PARLIAMENT**

- (1) The period between general elections, composed of a number of sessions that are made up of individual sittings.
- (2) Term commonly used to refer to the Legislative Assembly.

## **PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

The buildings housing the Chamber, offices of the staff and Members of the Legislative Assembly, and the Legislative Library. The current buildings were designed by Francis M. Rattenbury and built between 1893 and 1915.

## **POLITICAL PARTY**

A group of people sharing a particular ideology and set of goals that puts forward candidates for election to the Legislative Assembly.

## **PETITION**

A historic means for the public to have direct access to the Legislative Assembly. A petition is a request, opinion or position from an individual or a group that is put forward to the Legislative Assembly for some action. A petition may only be presented to the House by a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

## **PREMIER**

The leader of the governing party and the head of the provincial government.

## **PRIVATE BILL**

A bill introduced by a Member of the Legislative Assembly on behalf of a person or group outside the Legislative Assembly. Private bills generally deal with a specific problem affecting that person or group.

## **PRIVATE MEMBER**

A Member of the Legislative Assembly who is not a cabinet minister. (See also Backbencher.)

## **PROCLAMATION**

An official notice or order issued by the Lieutenant Governor. A parliament is begun and ended by a proclamation from the Lieutenant Governor upon the advice of the Executive Council.

## **PROROGATION**

The ending of a parliamentary session that abolishes all pending business and halts all committee work.

## **PUBLIC BILL**

A bill that applies to the entire province, usually introduced by a cabinet minister. (The law that sets the legal driving age, for example, started as a public bill.) A public bill introduced by a Member of the Legislative Assembly who is not a cabinet minister is known as a public bill in the hands of a private member.

## **QUESTION PERIOD**

An intense 30-minute period held every Monday to Thursday afternoon while the House is in session. Members of the Legislative Assembly are allowed to ask the Cabinet direct questions about government priorities and policies.

## **REGULATION**

A law made under the authority of an act. Regulations may also be known by other names such as orders, rules or bylaws.

## **RESOLUTION**

A motion to make a declaration of opinion or purpose without ordering or requiring a particular course of action. Resolutions are typically phrased to suggest that the government initiate a certain measure, such as “That, in the opinion of the Legislative Assembly, the government should consider....”



## **RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT**

A Cabinet generally, and cabinet ministers individually, that are accountable and answerable to the Legislative Assembly.

## **RIDING**

See Constituency.

## **ROYAL ASSENT**

The Queen's official approval as given in the province by the Lieutenant Governor. The Lieutenant Governor comes into the Chamber to give a new act Royal Assent. An act will become a law following Royal Assent unless otherwise provided for in the bill.

## **SECOND READING**

The stage of a bill during when Members of the Legislative Assembly debate only the bill's general principles and goals. Specific sections are debated in committee stage by the Committee of the Whole.

## **SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**

A permanent officer of the Legislative Assembly. The Sergeant-At-Arms is responsible for security of the legislative precinct as well as the administration and support of functions relating to the Legislature.

## **SESSION**

A series of sittings of the Legislative Assembly during a parliament. It begins with the Speech from the Throne and ends with prorogation or dissolution.

## **SHADOW CABINET**

Members of the opposition assigned to watch specific ministries very closely and to represent the opposition party's position in debates about that ministry's plans and activities.

## **SITTING**

A meeting of the Legislative Assembly.

## **SOCIAL CREDIT PARTY**

A party formed in 1952 after a surprise provincial election in which the Social Credit League of B.C. unexpectedly won 19 seats, enough to form a minority government. William Andrew Cecil Bennett was chosen as party leader.

## **SPEAKER**

A Member of the Legislative Assembly elected by secret ballot at the opening of a new parliament by all Members of the Legislative Assembly to oversee debates and ensure the House follows established rules of procedure and behaviour. Upon election as Speaker, he or she adopts a non-partisan position to House duties and political issues of the day.

## **SPEAKER'S PROCESSION**

The entrance of the Speaker into the Chamber at the start of each sitting. The Speaker is in ceremonial dress, including a tricorne hat and black silk robe. He follows the Sergeant-at-Arms, who carries the mace (the symbol of the Speaker's authority in the House). The Clerk of the House and Clerks Assistant follow the Speaker.

## **SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**

A speech read by the Lieutenant Governor at the start of each new session. It outlines the reasons for summoning the Legislative Assembly and provides a broad outline of the government's proposed legislation.

## **STANDING ORDERS**

Rules adopted by the Legislative Assembly to govern its proceedings.

## **STATUTE**

An act of the Legislative Assembly.

## **STATUTORY OFFICER**

A person serving the Legislative Assembly in a position for a term fixed by statute. The officer helps the Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public monitor and assess government programs, procedures and performance, and they each play an important role in the process of holding the government accountable to the Legislative Assembly.

## **STRANGERS**

Term used to refer to all persons who are not Members of the Legislative Assembly, officers or staff of the House.

## **THIRD READING**

The last opportunity that Members of the Legislative Assembly may choose to debate the bill before a final vote.

## **VOTE OF CONFIDENCE**

See Confidence Motion.

## **VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS**

A published summary of the day's business in the House prepared by the Office of the Clerk — similar to minutes. It includes a listing of all bills introduced, documents tabled, motions introduced, decisions of the House and the results of any votes.

## **WHIP**

A Member of the Legislative Assembly whose role is to keep other members of his or her party informed about House business and to ensure their attendance in the House, especially when a vote is to be held.