

THE ROLE OF THE SPEAKER

The Speaker is an MLA elected in a secret ballot by all Members of the Legislative Assembly to preside over debates and ensure that the House 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 House rules of parliamentary procedures that are established to ensure that debates in the House are carried out properly and that all MLAs have the opportunity to participate.

To assist the Speaker in maintaining order in the House, MLAs cannot participate in the debate until 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.

OTHER DUTIES Although the Speaker is neutral and avoids taking public positions on political matters, the Speaker continues to serve as an MLA. The Speaker represents his or her constituents and can make recommendations to government outside of the House. The Speaker also represents the Legislative Assembly in all relations with external organizations and individuals.



The Speaker's Chair in the
Legislative Chamber



The Mace of the
Legislative Assembly
of British Columbia

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 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. Sometimes these demands displeased the monarch, and as many as nine British Speakers met a violent death. In a nod to this dangerous period, Speakers elected today pretend to be reluctant to take the Speaker's Chair and must be dragged by their colleagues to the front of the Legislative Chamber.