

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA



Journalists have been called the watchdogs of democracy. Reporters are expected to monitor the actions of influential people and provide unbiased reports to the public. Freedom of the press to report without interference has been called a fundamental cornerstone of democracy by the United Nations. The Canadian Association of Journalists states: “Journalists have the duty and privilege to seek and report the truth, encourage civic debate to build our communities, and serve the public interest.”¹ In Canada, freedom of the press is protected under section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

THE PRESS GALLERY

Many reporters cover government issues, but some are specifically assigned by news outlets to cover legislative activities from the capital city of Victoria. These journalists are often called the “Press Gallery.” By tradition, the press are seated behind the Speaker in most Commonwealth parliaments where they are out of sight and may take notes without being seen by the Speaker.

The term “Press Gallery” refers both to the seating gallery in the Legislative Chamber where reporters traditionally observe Legislative Assembly business and to the offices where they work.

In British Columbia, a gallery for reporters was built in the Legislative Assembly around the year 1900 located behind and above the Speaker’s Chair. On the day it opened, a Times reporter wrote: “The reporters are comfortable now, can hear well, see everything that takes place and are free from the annoyance subjected last year when they were given scant accommodation on the floor of the House.”² Since that time and with the expansion of the number of Members in the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), the Press Gallery was moved to now occupy the first row of seats in the Speaker’s section of the Public Gallery.

Office space is also provided to Press Gallery members with print reporters on third floor and broadcast reporters in the basement of the Buildings. They can also often be seen huddled with microphones around a Member of the Legislative Assembly in a “scrum” following Question Period.

¹ Canadian Association of Journalists, “Principles for Ethical Journalism” 2020

² “Around the House” Times (Victoria), 5 January 1900, p.2

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

PEO@leg.bc.ca @BCLegislature @BCLegislature LegislativeAssemblyBC

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