

November 6-10, 2016
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

British Columbia

The third largest and most westerly of Canada's ten provinces, British Columbia (B.C.) has a population of just over 4.5 million people. At 944,735 square kilometers, B.C. is almost the size of France, Germany and the Netherlands combined.

B.C. joined the Canadian Confederation in 1871, the sixth province to do so. Victoria, on Vancouver Island, is the province's capital city and is named for Queen Victoria. It is also home of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, the provincial parliament.

The largest city is Vancouver, with a regional population of 2.3 million people.

Legislative Assembly of British Columbia

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia is comprised of 85 elected Members, known as Members of the Legislative Assembly, or MLAs. One Member is elected in each of the 85 constituencies across B.C. There are currently two main political parties in the Legislative Assembly: the B.C. Liberal Party which holds 48 seats and the New Democratic Party which holds 35 seats. The other two seats are held by Independent Members. The provincial *Constitution Act* provides that a party must have a minimum of four Members to receive official party status in the Legislative Assembly.

B.C. was the first jurisdiction in Canada to establish set general election dates, in 2001. As a result, provincial general elections in British Columbia take place every four years on the second Tuesday in May. The next general election, on Tuesday, May 9, 2017, will see the number of electoral districts increased by two, from 85 to 87, to reflect the rapidly growing population around the Greater Vancouver area.

The Role of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

The Speaker is a Member who serves as the presiding officer of the Legislative Assembly, and is elected in a secret ballot by all fellow Members on the first sitting day after each general election. The Speaker's most visible and important responsibility is to ensure the orderly flow of business in the Legislative Assembly by administering the standing orders and rules of procedure, maintaining order and decorum, and defending the rights and privileges of all Members. To preserve the trust of the Members, the Speaker's actions are impartial. The Speaker does not participate in debate, only votes in the case of a tie, and works to balance the right of the government to transact business in an orderly manner with the right of all Members to be heard in debate.



The Speaker is also responsible for the overall direction and management of the Legislative Assembly. All matters of administrative and financial policy affecting the Legislative Assembly are overseen by the Legislative Assembly Management Committee, an all-party committee composed of Members and chaired by the Speaker.

As the official representative of the Legislative Assembly, the Speaker has ceremonial and diplomatic roles. These include: maintaining relations with other legislative assemblies and foreign parliaments; hosting visiting parliamentarians; and participating in parliamentary associations and interparliamentary groups both within Canada and abroad.

The current Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia is the Honourable Linda Reid. Speaker Reid is also the longest serving Member of the Legislative Assembly, having first been elected in 1991.

The Role of a Member of the Legislative Assembly

The citizens in each of the 85 constituencies elect one Member to serve as their provincial representative in the Legislative Assembly. All Members, including Members of the governing party, opposition, and independent Members make up the Legislative Assembly. Some of the key responsibilities of the Members of the Legislative Assembly include the following:

Representing constituents: raising constituents' perspectives and concerns during debates, presenting petitions, and asking government to take action on particular issues affecting their constituencies or the province.

Proposing and considering laws: when the Legislative Assembly is sitting, considering, debating and voting on bills (proposed laws). Bills may be introduced either by a Cabinet Minister or a Private Member (a Member who is not in Cabinet).

Scrutinizing government spending: scrutinizing and approving government spending and tax changes. Debate and voting on spending estimates follows the presentation of the budget.

Exercising oversight: asking questions about government plans and policy, and participating in debates.

In the constituency: attending community meetings and events, and providing assistance to people who have questions or concerns about provincial government programs, policies, and benefits.

In committees: In addition to their responsibilities in the Chamber and in their constituency, Members may be involved in the work of parliamentary committees. All-party parliamentary committees engage in detailed examination of policy, exercising oversight of the executive branch, and may review other matters. Committees may also meet with expert witnesses; travel to communities across the province; and seek input directly from the public through public consultation processes.

The Role of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Members are supported in their parliamentary functions by the Clerk of the House, the chief permanent officer of the Legislative Assembly who reports to the Speaker. In addition to providing non-partisan procedural advice to the Speaker and all Members, the Clerk is also responsible for the operational direction, management and day to day administration of the Legislative Assembly.

The Office of the Clerk maintains the official records of all parliamentary proceedings, and oversees the preparation of the *Orders of the Day* and *Votes and Proceedings* as well as the Journals of the House.