



THE SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

ROLE AND APPOINTMENT

In any legislative chamber, a presiding officer is required to facilitate the conduct of business and maintain order. This is done through the administration of the chamber's rules and practices. In the Senate, the Speaker is responsible for guiding proceedings and preserving order and decorum during sittings.¹

The Speaker of the Senate is appointed by the Governor General, on the advice of the Prime Minister.²

The Speaker's position has evolved over time to resemble increasingly the non-partisan role of speakers in other parliaments modeled after Westminster. The Speaker rules on points of order and the prima facie merits of questions of privilege, which can be raised by any senator, and may also act on their own initiative to preserve order and decorum and to enforce the *Rules of the Senate*. The Speaker also has the authority to suspend a sitting for a maximum of three hours in cases of grave disorder.³

Each sitting day begins when the Speaker enters the Senate and reads the Prayers. After Senators' Statements, the Speaker calls out the headings during Routine Proceedings and, after Orders of the Day, calls any items on the Notice Paper. Throughout the sitting, the Speaker recognizes senators wishing to speak, puts questions to a vote, and announces the results of voice votes and standing votes. The Speaker also reads messages from the Governor General and the House of Commons, and introduces visitors who are in the Senate galleries.⁴ The sitting concludes when the Speaker announces that the Senate has adjourned.

SPEAKER'S AUTHORITY AND POWERS

The *Rules of the Senate* give the Speaker a number of specific powers in relation to the proceedings of the Senate.

DEBATE AND VOTES

One of the Speaker's key responsibilities is presiding over debate in the Senate. A senator wishing to speak must be recognized by the Speaker. In a case where two or more senators rise at the same time to speak, the Speaker will recognize the senator who, in their opinion, rose first.⁵

The Speaker also has the duty to ensure that every senator who wishes to speak in a debate or adjourn the debate has the opportunity to do so before the right of final reply is exercised or the question put.⁶ The Speaker informs senators when the time for their intervention has expired and puts a question to a vote once debate has concluded.⁷ The Speaker may participate in debate, but must leave the chair to do so.⁸

The Speaker has a deliberative vote and may vote on all questions before the Senate.⁹ When the Speaker chooses to vote, they do so before the names of the other senators voting the same way are called out. In no case can the Speaker break a tie vote.

POINTS OF ORDER

When a point of order is raised, the Speaker hears debate on the issue and determines when sufficient argument has been made to take a decision on the matter.¹⁰ The Speaker can then rule immediately or take the matter under advisement and deliver a ruling at a subsequent sitting. All decisions of the Speaker may be appealed, with the exception of those relating to the expiry of speaking times and the results of voice votes if no request for a standing vote is made.¹¹

QUESTIONS OF PRIVILEGE

When a senator has raised a question of privilege under the processes established under Chapter 13 of the Rules, the Speaker determines whether or not a prima facie question of privilege has been established. If so, the Senate can then debate and decide on a motion to take action or to refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament for investigation and report.

As with points of order, the Speaker can either deliver a decision immediately or take the matter under advisement.¹²

EMERGENCY DEBATE

If an emergency debate is requested, the Speaker's role is to decide whether the matter raised by the senator is of urgent public interest as defined by the Rules. When a senator has asked to hold an emergency debate, the Speaker allows a maximum of 15 minutes of debate prior to deciding whether the matter raised is of urgent public importance.¹³

OBJECTIONABLE NOTICE

The Speaker may disallow a notice if it contains unparliamentary expressions or contravenes a rule or an order of the Senate.¹⁴

WITHDRAWAL OF STRANGERS

The Speaker may, when considered necessary, order strangers to leave the Senate, including persons in the public galleries.¹⁵ A stranger is defined as anyone who is not a senator or official of the Senate.

RECALL OR EXTENDED ADJOURNMENT OF THE SENATE¹⁶

During an adjournment of the Senate, the Speaker may, if they are satisfied that it is in the public interest, recall the Senate before the date and/or time set for the next sitting in the adjournment order. Conversely, if the Speaker is satisfied that the public interest does not require the Senate to meet on the date specified in the adjournment order, the Speaker may, after consulting the Leader of the Government, the Leader of the Opposition and the leader or facilitator of any other recognized party or recognized parliamentary group in the Senate, determine a later date for the return of the Senate.

SPEAKER'S PRECEDENCE AND ADDITIONAL DUTIES

The Speaker of the Senate ranks fourth in the Table of Precedence for Canada, after the Governor General, the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Therefore, in addition to their duties as presiding officer of the Senate, the Speaker is often called upon to represent the Senate, and sometimes the country, at national and international events.

SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE AND ABSENCE OF SPEAKER

The Speaker pro tempore is, in essence, a deputy speaker who presides over sittings whenever the Speaker is absent from the chamber or is unable to perform the duties of the chair. The Speaker pro tempore is elected by secret ballot at the start of the first session of each Parliament and at any subsequent time a vacancy arises during the course of a Parliament.¹⁷ If both the Speaker and the Speaker pro tempore are absent at the beginning of a sitting, a senator chosen by the Senate will preside over sittings. Any senator replacing the Speaker is invested of all the powers of the Speaker.¹⁸

In cases where the Speaker has to leave the chair during any part of a sitting, they may ask another senator to preside as Speaker until they return or for the remainder of the sitting.¹⁹

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

[Senate Procedure in Practice](#) (Chapters 2 and 4)

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON OTHER POINTS COVERED IN THIS NOTE

[Senate Procedural Note No. 1, Opening of Parliament](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 2, Order of Business of Sittings](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 3, Debate](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 4, Voting](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 5, Legislative Process](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 6, Royal Assent](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 7, Time Allocation](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 8, Committee of the Whole](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 10, Decorum](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 11, Points of Order](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 12, Parliamentary Privilege](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 13, Chamber Documents](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 14, Leave of the Senate](#)

[Senate Procedural Note No. 15, Supply Process](#)

References

¹ Rule 2-1(1).

² *Constitution Act, 1867*, section 34.

³ Rules 2-1(1) and 2-6.

⁴ Rules 2-11, 4-1, 4-5, 6-1, 16-1(3) and 16-2(2).

⁵ Rules 6-1 and 6-4(1).

⁶ Rule 6-12(3).

⁷ Rules 6-3(2) and 9-2(1).

⁸ Rules 2-3 and 2-4(5).

⁹ Rule 9-1. See also *Constitution Act, 1867*, section 36.

¹⁰ Rules 2-1(1), 2-3 and 2-5.

¹¹ Rules 2-5(3) and 9-2(2).

¹² Rule 2-5(1).

¹³ Rules 2-1(1) and 8-3.

¹⁴ Rule 5-4.

¹⁵ Rules 2-13(2) and 2-13(3).

¹⁶ Rule 3-6.

¹⁷ Rule 2-4.

¹⁸ Rule 2-4(7). See also *Parliament of Canada Act*, sections 17 to 19.

¹⁹ Rule 2-4(5).