SENATE
SÉNAT
CANADA

The SPEAKER *of the Senate*

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THE SPEAKER

The Speaker of the Senate is one of Parliament's most important officials. The Speaker presides over the Red Chamber, enforces the rules and ensures proceedings run smoothly.

In addition to serving as the public face of the Senate, the Speaker is part administrator and part diplomat, all the while retaining the ability to participate in debates like every other senator.

The position of Speaker was formalized in the *British North America Act* (later renamed the *Constitution Act, 1867*), which created the Dominion of Canada. It gives the governor general the power to appoint the Speaker, but — as with many parliamentary appointments — the governor general acts on the advice of the prime minister.

I am deeply honoured to serve as the 46th Speaker of the Senate. To live up to the trust that has been placed in me, I will do my utmost to ensure all voices are heard in the exercise of my procedural, ceremonial and diplomatic responsibilities. I vow to always act in the interest of our democracy and on behalf of all Canadians.

Raymonde Gagné, C.M., O.M.
Speaker of the Senate

THE HONOURABLE

RAYMONDE GAGNÉ

C.M., O.M.

Born in Manitoba, Speaker Raymonde Gagné has worked in the field of education for over 35 years. Notably, she was President of the Université de Saint-Boniface (USB) from 2003 to 2014. During this time, she directed the efforts to change the institution's status from college to university. She also spearheaded a fundraising campaign — the largest in the institution's history — to construct a new health sciences building, to expand research capacity, and to increase the scholarship and bursary program.

Prior to her tenure as president, she served as Director of New Programs, Director of the Community College and of the Continuing Education Division of USB, and as a professor of business administration.

Prior to her arrival at USB, she worked as a high school teacher, a principal and as a consultant in regional and industrial expansion in New Brunswick.

She is a member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba, and a recipient of the Prix Riel.

Throughout her career, she contributed to numerous organizations and boards within Manitoba and across the country. She served as President of the Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne from 2005 until 2009, she was a member of the Advisory Committee on Official Languages for the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada from 2007 until 2009, and she was a member of the Board of Directors of the Consortium national de formation en santé, which she co-chaired from 2009 until 2014.

As President of USB, Senator Gagné was a member of the Council of Presidents of Universities of Manitoba and was elected chair in 2012. She was also a member of the Senate of the University of Manitoba.

She was appointed to the Senate of Canada on April 1, 2016. She has sat on a number of Senate committees, including Official Languages, Agriculture and Forestry, and the Special Senate Committee on Senate Modernization. In January 2020 she was named Legislative Deputy to the Government Representative in the Senate (Deputy Leader), a position she held until she was appointed as the 46th Speaker of the Senate on May 12, 2023.

HISTORY

Credit: Malak, Library and Archives Canada, C-007749

The office of the Speaker of the Senate is as old as Canada.

Since Canada's legislature was modelled after the British Parliament, so were the roles of its presiding officers.

In the Senate, the Speaker took on the more limited role of the United Kingdom's Lord Chancellor, who presided over the House of Lords — the British Parliament's upper house — until members of the Lords elected their first Lord Speaker in 2006.

Initially, the Speaker shepherded the Senate through the daily order of business and ensured that all senators had their chance to be heard, but in 1906 senators amended their own rules, giving the Speaker the power to maintain order and decorum in the Chamber.

Those changes gave the Speaker the ability to halt proceedings, to enforce the Rules of the Senate and to rule on points of order (in which a senator argues that a rule or customary procedure was not followed).

In 1991, the Speaker was granted the authority to suspend debate to restore order. Though the Speaker still possesses these powers, it has seldom been necessary to use them in debate.

The Speaker's term in office is not fixed, but it tends to be relatively short. With 46 Speakers of the Senate since Confederation, the average length of service is three years.

A solemn figure and a guardian of the institution, the Speaker represents tradition in the Senate. The Speaker is the only senator who still wears the traditional court garb of black robes and a tab collar.

Senators still nod or bow to the Speaker's chair when they enter or leave the room as a sign of respect. In addition, a sitting of the Senate may only begin after the Speaker enters the Chamber in the Speaker's Parade and reads the opening prayers.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II during the opening of the 23rd Parliament in 1957 in the Senate Chamber. Each new session begins with a Speech from the Throne. It starts only after the Speaker of the Senate asks the Usher of the Black Rod to invite representatives from the House of Commons to the Senate Chamber. The speech is most often read by the monarch's representative in Canada, the governor general.

FIRST SPEAKER

HON. Joseph-Édouard Cauchon, P.C.

1867

Joseph-Édouard Cauchon, a prominent Quebec journalist and politician, served in the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada before his appointment to the Senate on November 2, 1867. Three days later he was named Speaker, a role he filled until June 1872.

SPEAKER

RECEIVES POWER TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND DECORUM

1906

FIRST WOMAN SPEAKER

HON. Muriel McQueen Fergusson, P.C.

1972

Muriel McQueen Fergusson, the first woman Speaker of the Senate, shattered conventions early in her life. She was a law student in the 1910s and among the few women called to the New Brunswick bar in the 1920s. She became the first female probate court judge for Victoria County and in 1950, she was the first woman elected to Fredericton city council, later becoming deputy mayor.

Prime Minister Louis St-Laurent named her to the Senate in 1953, where she continued to break barriers. In 1971, she finally convinced the Senate to allow girls to become Senate pages. Then, in 1972, she was appointed Speaker of the Senate. It was another five years before the House of Commons would have its first woman in the Speaker's chair — Jeanne Sauvé, who would become Canada's 23rd governor general and the first woman to hold that position.

SPEAKER

GRANTED AUTHORITY TO SUSPEND DEBATE

1991

THE ROLES OF THE

SPEAKER

PRESIDING

OFFICER

The Speaker is the presiding officer of the Senate — essentially the chair of its "sittings," or meetings of all senators in the Red Chamber.

During the sitting, the Speaker directs the flow of legislative business by guiding senators through the daily agenda while maintaining order and decorum. The Speaker is also responsible for recognizing senators who wish to speak, reminding senators of their time limits during speeches and calling out the next item for consideration.

As a procedural authority in the Chamber, the Speaker must be neutral and fair in ensuring that rules and practices are respected during proceedings.

The Speaker often rules on procedural matters, including points of order — questions raised by senators as to whether the Senate's correct procedure has been followed or a rule has been violated. The Speaker also determines after debate whether a prima facie question of privilege has been established— any claim that a senator's rights, powers or immunities have been violated.

If the matter is complex, the Speaker may take several days to deliberate before rendering a decision. The senators involved can appeal a ruling, and it can ultimately be put to a vote to be ratified or rejected. Given the Speaker's duty to remain impartial, such appeals are rare.

The Speaker also presides over important parliamentary ceremonies that take place in the Senate Chamber. Some of these events include the Speech from the Throne, which opens every session of Parliament, and Royal Assent, during which the monarch or designate — usually the governor general — formally consents to the enactment of bills passed by both the Senate and the House of Commons.

DIPLOMAT

The Speaker plays an integral role on the world stage in strengthening relations between Canada and other countries.

A ROLE THAT EXTENDS BEYOND THE WALLS OF PARLIAMENT

The Speaker of the Senate ranks fourth in Canada's Table of Precedence, after the Governor General, the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. This position reflects the importance of the role within the Canadian state and the place she holds in representing Parliament, in Canada and abroad.

Beyond presiding over the proceedings of the Senate, the Speaker plays an active role in international relations through parliamentary diplomacy. She welcomes foreign leaders and delegations to Parliament, meets heads of state, ambassadors and diplomats, and maintains relationships with parliamentary representatives from countries around the world.

In collaboration with Global Affairs Canada, she also leads parliamentary delegations abroad. These delegations are composed of senators from different recognized groups and caucuses in the Senate, allowing for diverse representation of the institution.

These missions help build relationships of trust with Canada's international partners, allow for the exchange of experiences and best practices, and lead to a better understanding of the challenges facing other parliaments. By maintaining regular dialogue with international partners, Parliament also contributes to strengthening Canada's relationships and supporting its presence and influence on the international stage.

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN PARLIAMENTS AND COUNTRIES

Parliamentary diplomacy complements the diplomacy carried out by governments. It creates direct and lasting relationships between parliaments that can continue despite political changes.

These exchanges foster dialogue, the sharing of expertise and mutual understanding. They also help promote Canada's democratic values and increase awareness of how its institutions function.

The Speaker therefore acts as an ambassador for the Parliament of Canada, at home and abroad.

She helps explain the role of the Senate and its contribution to Canada's legislative process, while representing Canada in its engagement with parliamentary counterparts around the world.

SENATOR

Just like every other senator, the Speaker represents the people of his or her home province or territory and their interests.

It is relatively rare for the Speaker to participate in debates; it is customary to do so only if he or she feels strongly about the subject. In these cases, the Speaker will step down from the chair and take a regular Senate seat while the Speaker *pro tempore* presides.

The Speaker also has the right to take part in recorded divisions, or formal votes in the Senate; the Speaker's vote has the same weight as that of any senator.

Unlike the Speaker of the House of Commons, who only votes to break a tie, the Speaker of the Senate may vote on any issue. His or her vote is counted first when a vote is held.

SPEAKER

PRO TEMPORE

At the start of each parliamentary session, senators vote by secret ballot to elect a senator to assume the role of Speaker *pro tempore*, or acting Speaker. The Speaker *pro tempore* presides over a sitting in the absence of the Speaker or when the Speaker of the Senate wishes to participate in a debate.

THE UNIFORM

The distinctive black uniform of the Speaker of the Senate is one of the most visible examples of the Canadian Parliament's deep roots in British tradition.

Dating back to the 18th century, this uniform evolved from the standard outfit worn by officers of the law courts of England.

It was adopted by senior officers of the British House of Lords and House of Commons due to their affiliation with the "High Court of Parliament." The essence of this traditional uniform is largely unchanged and is now part of the time-honoured custom of most parliaments in the nations that emerged from the British Empire.

1. ROBE

The most distinctive element of the Speaker's uniform is the black silk robe with a flat hood and "wings" that hang from the open elbow sleeves.

2. WHITE SHIRT

The white shirt has a winged collar around which are tied tabs, and two white, starched bands.

3. TAILCOAT

Underneath the robe is a black tailcoat with large cuffs and seven decorative buttons. Made of wool, the tailcoat is worn over a black vest and trousers trimmed with a narrow silk band.

4. COTTON GLOVES

For ceremonial occasions, like the parade, the Speaker wears short, white cotton gloves.

TRICORN HAT

The Speaker wears or carries a tricorn hat, a style popular among European men in the 18th century. In the Senate, only the Speaker can wear one; however, wearing the hat is not required.

WIG BAG

A symbolic "wig bag" hangs in the middle of the back over the robe. This ribboned square of black silk was originally used to hold the ends of a powdered wig, which was the style in Europe during the 18th century.

THE PARADE

As the bells ring, officials solemnly escort the Speaker and the ceremonial mace into the Senate Chamber.

The Senate Speaker's parade is a vibrant tradition linking the present to centuries of parliamentary democracy.

Every Senate sitting is heralded by the sound of a bell. The bell summons all senators to their seats and rings for 15 minutes to mark the beginning of the Speaker's parade.

The ceremonial procession assembles at the Speaker's chambers. It moves through the main foyer at the heart of the Senate of Canada Building, then turns into the antechamber before entering the Upper House and halting in front of the Thrones of Canada.

The parade consists of many officials escorting the Speaker and the ceremonial mace. At its head are constables, followed by the Usher of the Black Rod, the Mace Bearer, the Speaker, the Speaker *pro tempore*, two pages, the Clerk of the Senate and other table officers. Senators and observers remain standing as the Speaker ascends the dais and opens the sitting with prayers. The mace — the symbol of the Senate's authority under the Crown — is then placed on the Clerk's table.

The precise origins of the Speaker's parade are lost to history. Some historians believe it evolved from a religious procession in the early Westminster parliamentary system in England, the model upon which Canada's Parliament is based.

The parade may instead have its roots in a military escort, an interpretation suggested by the presence of the mace — a ceremonial version of an ancient weapon.

Whatever its origins, this solemn ritual connects the modern Senate with a proud and dignified past.

THE

SENATE MACE

The Mace is a symbol of the legislative authority granted by the Crown to the Senate of Canada. The story of this 1.6-metre gold-plated brass staff goes back to the beginning of British rule in Canada. The Mace remains at the heart of parliamentary ceremony today, preceding the Speaker into the Chamber before each sitting and remaining in the Chamber for as long as the Senate remains in session.

A PLACE AT THE TABLE

The Mace Bearer carries the Mace into the Red Chamber and places it on crimson cushions on the Clerk's Table, crown facing the Speaker. The Mace must remain here while the Senate is in session. When the governor general is in the Chamber, the Mace is held upright by the Mace Bearer near the thrones. When the monarch is present, the Mace is covered with a cloth, since it is unnecessary to represent the monarch symbolically.

THE CHAIR

The Speaker's chair sits on a dais at the head of the Senate Chamber, near the thrones reserved for Canada's monarch or the governor general.

The dais, chair and thrones are upholstered in deep red, the colour of royalty. This decor is why the Senate Chamber is often called the Red Chamber.

In the 19th century, it was the custom in the Senate to give the chair to the outgoing Speaker as a gift.

While the Centre Block building on Parliament Hill undergoes a major rehabilitation that will last for years, the Speaker's chair and the thrones will also be restored. To mark the 150th anniversary of Confederation, as well as the Senate's move to the Senate of Canada Building, Dominion Sculptor of Canada Phil White designed a new chair and set of thrones.

Symbols of the country's founding nations that adorned the permanent Speaker's chair are reflected in the new chair. The chair is also embroidered with the Senate emblem on its seatback. Like the permanent chair in Centre Block, its height can be adjusted to accommodate a Speaker of any stature.

THE SPEAKER'S

CHAMBERS

When the Speaker is not presiding over sittings of the Senate or representing Parliament at home and abroad, the Speaker's chambers are the centre of professional activity. This is where the Speaker reviews legislation, prepares speeches and meets with fellow parliamentarians, diplomats and other distinguished visitors to the Senate.

Furnished with art, artefacts and furniture from the Senate's heritage collection, the Speaker's chambers are a stately setting for conducting parliamentary business. The new suite in the Senate of Canada Building includes a formal dining room, salon and office. It was designed in keeping with the Beaux-Arts character of the building — a former train station built in 1912 — and includes restored windows and an original marble fireplace.

The space was designed to serve both as a formal reception area for the monarch, the governor general and other dignitaries while on Parliament Hill, and as a working office for the Speaker.

FOLLOW THE SPEAKER'S

ACTIVITIES

ON THE WEB

sencanada.ca/en/speakers/raymonde-gagne

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