

# Canadian Parliamentary Review



## *Please Save the Beaver for Canada Legislating a National Symbol, 1975*



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***In this issue...***

***Work–family balance in  
l'Assemblée nationale du  
Québec p. 2***



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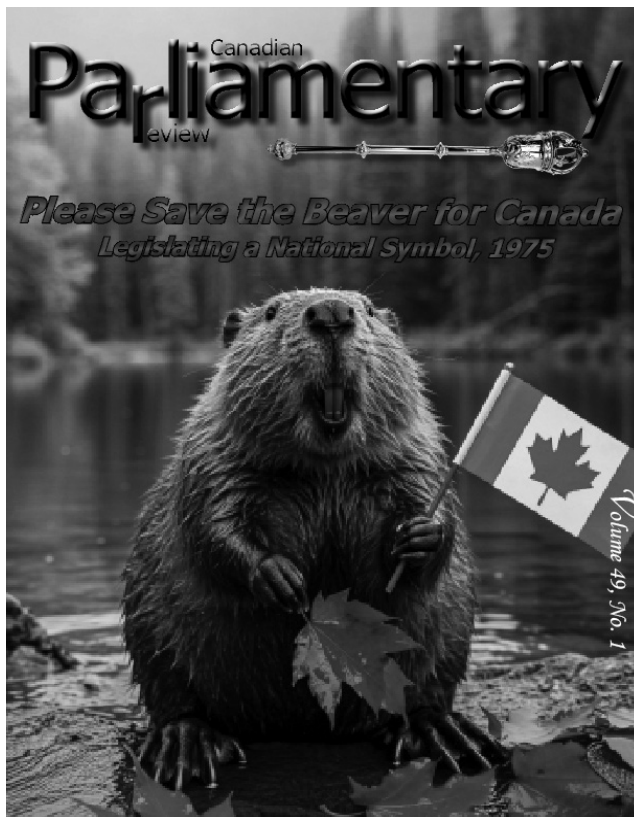
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**Roundtable: Work–family balance in l’Assemblée nationale du Québec**

*Participants: Madwa Nika Cadet, MNA, Pascal Paradis, MNA and Marilyne Picard, MNA; Moderator: Xavier Mercier Méthé.....2*

**Roundtable: In Conversation with Women Speakers**

*Participants: Hon. Danielle Barkhouse, Hon. Raymonde Gagné, Nathalie Roy, Hon. Donna Skelly; Moderator: Geneva Fuina.....11*

**Casting the Deciding Vote in British Columbia’s 43rd Parliament**

*Hon. Raj Chouhan.....21*

**“Please Save the Beaver for Canada”: Legislating a National Symbol, 1975**

*Colin M. Coates.....24*

**Privilege in Practice: Queen’s Park Perspectives on Parliamentary Privilege**

*Megan Ryan-Lloyd.....36*

**New and Notable Titles.....46**

**CPA Activities .....47**

**Legislative Reports .....50**

**So Many Faces, So Many Stories: The History of Queen’s Park’s Premier Portraits and the Legacy They Reveal**

*Geneva Fuina.....73*

# Work–family balance in *l'Assemblée nationale du Québec*

Work–family balance is a major challenge for parliamentarians. The demands of long hours, a constant heavy workload and frequent travel create real difficulties for elected officials seeking to reconcile political responsibilities with family life. These issues were the focus of a roundtable moderated by Xavier Mercier Méthé, Team Leader at the Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec's Service de la recherche. On that occasion, three Members of the Assemblée nationale—Madwa Nika Cadet, Pascal Paradis and Marilyne Picard—shared their experiences and the strategies they have adopted to combine public service with parenthood. Their testimonies provide insight into the challenges of work–family balance and a chance to reflect on institutional measures that could facilitate the exercise of parliamentary duties.

**Participants:** Madwa Nika Cadet, MNA, Pascal Paradis, MNA and Marilyne Picard, MNA

**Moderator:** Xavier Mercier Méthé

**Xavier Mercier Méthé:** *Before entering politics, did you already have children or plan on raising a family? When you were deciding to run for office, did your family situation significantly influence that decision?*

**Madwa Nika Cadet:** The issue of work–family balance was absolutely central to me when I decided to run. My son was born in 2022, an election year. The election took place on October 3, so at that time I had a baby who was only a few months old, and the issue of balance came up immediately in my mind. What allowed me to take the leap anyway, without thinking “this is impossible; I will never be able to reconcile these two new realities—becoming a mother and an MNA in the same year,” was the support of my immediate circle, both at home and within my extended family. That allowed me to grow in both roles. Children, especially young children, need support at every stage of their lives, and the younger they are, the more quickly those stages evolve. I weighed the issue with my loved ones, and they stepped forward and said: “We’re going to do this as a team.” That support laid the foundation that allowed me to enter politics while taking into account the fact that I had a very young child.

**Pascal Paradis:** I already had two children when I entered politics. In my case, I had just separated from the mother of my children after 20 years together. My entry into politics happened quickly—it was a byelection—and I was experiencing a lot of turbulence in my personal life. Despite the separation, we’ve maintained a very good relationship. When I was given the chance to board the train of politics, I immediately contacted her to say, “We need to talk, because I have this opportunity. I want to do it, but it’s a family decision.” The two of us got together with our two children for family meetings. We explained the advantages and the disadvantages. We said that we would only go forward if everyone agreed. Otherwise, I wouldn’t do it. Obviously, we explained things in simplified terms, but we trusted the children. They made the decision with me. Even today, I check in with them regularly: I ask them if I am getting good grades on my “Papa” report card. It really is a family endeavor, and it’s very important that it be that way.

**Marilyne Picard:** We were a large, blended family. We had five children before I entered politics. I had been at home for about six years as a stay-at-home mother, taking care of the children. So, I had thought about this issue before submitting my candidacy to my party.

Like my two colleagues, it involved family discussions. For us, it was very clear that if I were elected, their father would stay at home for an indefinite period. Since I have a young daughter who

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*Madwa Nika Cadet is MNA for Bourassa-Sauvé. Pascal Paradis is MNA for Jean-Talon, and Marilyne Picard is MNA for Soulanges. Xavier Mercier Méthé is Team Leader at the Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec's Service de la recherche.*

is very ill and severely disabled, Dad had to be willing to take on that role. We also had a great team at home with the brothers and sisters, who helped their father a lot. So, my entry into politics was carefully thought out. I didn't fully know what I was getting into, but I took the leap.

**XMM:** *Do you feel you have a role to play, at the Assemblée nationale, in addressing the work-life balance issues experienced by the Québec population? Does your personal experience influence your work as an elected Member?*

**MP:** What happens at home certainly impacts our work as parliamentarians. This year, I created a program for bereaved parents. Having experienced the loss of two children, I was able to push that issue forward in Parliament. I have also promoted the issue of home care, since I live that reality with my daughter.

**MNC:** For me, the reality of having young children—I just gave birth to my daughter, who is now six months old—and the challenges of work-family balance are at the heart of the various positions I have taken.

I think the public wants to see that parliamentarians have lived these experiences, and talking about them can encourage others to believe they can get involved in politics. It also helps avoid a disconnect from the reality of many Québec families. The sense that elected officials share these realities and understand what it means to have young children is important. I find that it allows me to approach issues differently. Before, family and education issues were, for me, more theoretical or based on past experiences. Now, as I deal with these challenges daily, these feelings aren't a distant memory. They're a very present reality.

I'm also thinking of my work as a member of the Select Committee on the Impacts of Screens and Social Media on Young People's Health and Development. I was pregnant during that mandate, and it made me reflect on what it would mean for my child who was already born and for the one on the way. That allowed me to intervene credibly, with very concrete examples from daily life, and to say: "This recommendation may look great on paper, but in real life it doesn't align with the modern family's reality." I feel that the challenges of work-family balance are an integral part of my political discourse and my political action.

**XMM:** *Some of you have held parliamentary responsibilities related to family issues. Do your experiences as parents make you more eager to take on mandates related to youth or family?*

**MNC:** We often volunteer for mandates that speak to us. That's why I volunteered to be a member of the Select Committee. I was thinking about how my family reality could influence my work. It's not entirely coincidental, but parliamentary constraints also come into play.

**PP:** Even though our lives are often out of the ordinary in terms of intensity, obligations, pressure and workhours, we remain citizens like everyone else. I have to manage my life as a single parent every other week. I have to cook, clean, do the laundry and maintain my home.

I also find it very useful to discuss my work with my children. Recently, I made public statements about the digital age of majority—that is, the idea that companies should verify children's age so that they don't have access to platforms until they are 14.

So, as you can imagine, I've made an effort to experience video games and social media with my children. That's allowed me to have discussions with them about their experiences and what affects them. That helped me balance my position with their reality. I read the report by the Select Committee on screens and I was able to discuss it with my children.

Other issues like confidentiality and privacy arise when you're involved in this type of mandate. I did an interview once where a journalist wanted to know what my children did on social media. I said: "No, I'm not going there. I've discussed it with them and with their mother, and they don't want me to talk about their specific situation in public, except to say that I also experience these issues with my children."

**XMM:** *Parliamentary life is out of the ordinary, particularly because of scheduling demands and travel. How do you reconcile these constraints with your family life? Do you have any strategies?*

**MP:** My husband and I decided that when I have to attend events—for example, dinners with seniors' groups or occasions of that kind—he would often accompany me in the evenings and on weekends, because otherwise we wouldn't see each other. He doesn't mind accompanying me. At least we spend time together. It's true that I see the children less, but I try to take more frequent vacations where we really have quality time together. That's how we juggle a very busy schedule.



Collection Assemblée nationale, Claude Mathieu photographe

## Madwa Nika Cadet

**MNC:** It requires an enormous amount of organization and discipline, because with our schedules, we work seven days a week. So occasionally, you have to carve out time for yourself and find a balance. Having a family life is also a responsibility that you can't neglect. Even with the support of those around us, the responsibility ultimately rests on our shoulders.

I often like to say that at our place, we have weekly family meetings, complete with an agenda. We figure out the logistics of the week and how we'll manage to see each other. My husband and I block time in our calendars—moments just for us—because otherwise we wouldn't see each other. The same goes for important events. My son is getting old enough to have his own schedule. We need to be present—for karate class, soccer practice, and so on—and integrate all of that into our schedule.

It's not easy. Of course, there is our parliamentary work, which is more visible, but on weekends, when we return to our ridings, there are spaghetti dinners,



Collection Assemblée nationale, Claude Mathieu photographe

## Pascal Paradis

seniors' clubs, and so on. Our evenings are often taken up. Sometimes you also have to know how to say "No". It's never perfect; you have to live with imperfection.

This year, I gave birth to a baby girl, which added a certain level of complexity. She accompanied me throughout the fall session. The two of us travelled by car between Montréal and the city of Québec. We had to make changes to my travel routine for it to work. The Assemblée's drop-in daycare<sup>1</sup>, and it can't be said often enough, is essential. I am a strong advocate for it, because it's what allowed me to continue my work. I didn't miss a single day of the parliamentary session this fall because the daycare was there to take care of my daughter. Several times a day, I would go see her for feedings. We managed to juggle everything thanks to the flexibility of other parliamentarians, who took my situation into account, and thanks to the daycare, which ensured that my child did not become a burden on staff or a reason for absences.

**MP:** Ms. Cadet makes me think of respite care. We have a young daughter who is ill, so we have access



Collection Assemblée nationale, Claude Mathieu photographe

## Marilyne Picard

to family support services for her. On weekends, she sometimes goes to respite care. These services are very helpful for us, just like the daycare. I try to take my daughter to the Assemblée at least one week per session. I say “I try,” because as soon as there’s snow, I don’t want to be in the city of Québec with a wheelchair on the slopes of Parliament Hill. But it gives my husband a break when I bring her to Québec for the whole week.

**PP:** Workplace daycares are extraordinary. I would say there is no equivalent once children are older. I’m fortunate to have very independent children, but our lives are absolutely crazy! That makes achieving a work-family balance complicated. I already worked a lot before. When I considered politics, I knew it would require a lot of sacrifice, but I said to myself, “I already work so much now, I don’t see how I could work more.” But, yeah, I work even more now! Despite all their goodwill, the people around us have difficulty grasping this reality, how hard it is to balance everything.

It’s doable but it’s hard. It takes a lot of discipline. Politics doesn’t wait because the news doesn’t wait. Debate in the Chamber doesn’t wait. Nothing waits in politics. It’s a challenge.

There’s a paradox to work-family balance because while it’s my private life, my entire team has to be aware of my custody schedule and my children’s activities. Both of them play basketball, and for me it’s extremely important to be present at their games. I have to be present, because that’s where my heart is too. But you have to integrate it into your schedule. Otherwise, you risk pushing it aside because so many political emergencies and priorities come up. You can’t be afraid to tell your colleagues: “Remember that I’m a single father and that I have my children.” They’re independent, but you want to enjoy those moments. The older they get, the more their needs change. Right now, that means sports activities, social activities, and so on.

I want to take the time here to acknowledge and thank my colleagues, particularly the women who, in a nonpartisan way, pushed the Assemblée nationale to rework its schedules, especially regarding parliamentary committee work. I can’t even imagine what my life would be like today if we still had intensive sittings like those in the past, which didn’t end before midnight on weeknights. Thank you to the pioneers. And thank you to the men who joined them at the time to say, “We need to rethink this to make our lives more manageable as fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and children. We have to find a balance between our responsibilities to our families and our obligations to the public and to our colleagues.”

**MP:** I think one of the first things we learn when we take on this role is the advice given by those who were Members before us, who say: “Take care of your family, because your loved ones will stay, and politics won’t.” I think our generation understands that this is an issue. We always have to keep in mind that with our children, the time that passes will never come back. We have to make the most of it, one hundred percent.

**MNC:** First of all, we need to acknowledge the work that has been done to make our parliamentary schedules a bit more manageable. In the past, sitting very late or even overnight was much more common than it is today. That was an obstacle to work-family balance, and it discouraged many women from entering politics.



### The Family Room in l'Assemblée nationale du Québec.

But despite that progress, the pace remains relentless. It's easy to start neglecting our loved ones because there is a constant sense of urgency, the impression that everything that comes up in politics is crucial, and that we can always do more. When we're not giving 150%, we think, "Oh my God, I'm not doing enough!"

It takes discipline. You have to put certain moments in your calendar and tell yourself, "It's okay. Today we're decorating the Christmas tree, and that's important." You can't always postpone family activities. You have to remind your team and the people around you, and speak your truth.

That is crucial, because when colleagues have lived through similar experiences, they understand. It's different for people who have never had to deal with work-family balance challenges because they entered politics later in life or never had children. People will

say: "Well, you're available! You have a gap here in your schedule." As Pascal said, you have to schedule and block off time. We need to keep talking about this reality in order to normalize it. When we do that, it invites others to do the same. It normalizes the fact that some things can wait and be imperfect. Sometimes it's a bit uncomfortable, but if we want to meet the challenge of work-family balance, we don't really have a choice.

**XMM:** *What advice would you give to a future Member who is embarking on the challenge of work-family balance?*

**PP:** I think it's doable. I encourage people who have a family life to go for it, because people like us can bring a special perspective to public action. It's important to have parents at the Assemblée nationale who live these realities. It's a challenge, and that does need to be said. It takes discipline and commitment,



L'Assemblée nationale du Québec's daycare.

but it can be done. I think all the members who are parents would agree that it takes teamwork with the people around you. The more things are made clear in advance, the more the downsides and the joys will be experienced together. Because political life has its joys. There are so many wonderful moments. We meet fantastic people. We learn so much about everything that's happening in our society. I think it's wonderful for my children to have the opportunity to experience that the way few people can, like Members of the Assemblée. But there are downsides, and the more we act as a team, the better it works. My children feel that they're part of the team, and I think they appreciate that.

We can't forget that there are also many difficulties. We can't look at the situation through rose-tinted glasses. But it's important to mention everything that's beautiful about it too, because often we tend not to.

**MP:** I would just like to say that everything is possible. You just have to be well organized and have good people around you. I really think that's the key. As Pascal said, it's amazing how much beauty there is in politics. That's the difficulty, because when it's hard, it's really hard. But when it's good, it's really, really fun. We're on a roller coaster all the time. I think our children are along for the ride with us, through the lows and the highs. But it's extremely rewarding. If I can do it, if my family can do it, everyone can. You just have to be well organized.

**MNC:** Like my colleagues, I think it's important to be honest with potential parliamentarians and to give them a clear picture of the fact that this role comes with difficulties, regardless of the resources provided by the Assemblée. As I said, I'm a strong advocate for the drop-in daycare. I believe we need these institutional tools to overcome obstacles and encourage young women and



Opened in fall 2023, the drop-in daycare aims to facilitate work–family balance by offering occasional childcare tailored to the specific realities of the Assemblée nationale. The service is available in particular to Members, political staff and administrative staff of the Assemblée nationale.

men to run, and also to stay. Encouraging people at the outset is one thing, but we also need resources so that people want to continue the adventure, because it can be exhausting.

I would tell that person that if they have the level of commitment required to take this step and decide to serve their community, it will be a wonderful adventure, and that it is a privilege to be elected and to experience all the exhilarating moments of politics. Ultimately, each person makes the decision that reflects their own reality. All choices are valid. Some people say: “No, at this point in my life, it doesn’t work, but maybe at another time.” Others say, “I don’t want this to be an obstacle; I don’t want fear to stop me from going for it, because we can organize ourselves and put everything in place to make it work.” It’s up to that person not to let fear eat away at them, and to make an informed choice.

**XMM:** *In 2019, a survey of parliamentarians and political staff identified several work–family balance measures. Some have been implemented, such as a simplified access procedure, takeout meals, a nursing room located near the Chamber, a family room and the drop-in daycare. As parliamentarians, are you familiar with these measures? Which ones do you consider the most useful?*

**MP:** I’ll share a quick anecdote about the first day I brought my daughter to the Assemblée’s drop-in daycare. I had her wheelchair, her feeding equipment, her medication... This big bag on the back of the chair. I had to go through security because even though I had an access card, she didn’t.

The security guard asked me to open the bag and take everything out because there was metal inside. It was awful. But I saw the Assemblée’s willingness to listen, because we managed to get an access card for my daughter. She has her own little card to enter

Parliament, as if she were an employee. That's been incredibly helpful for us, because now, when I come to Parliament with her, I get through security very quickly. That measure helped me a great deal. And of course, the daycare, as we've mentioned.

**MNC:** What's truly extraordinary is that the drop-in daycare adapts to our parliamentary schedule. When there's a closure motion and we have to be at the Assemblée at 7 a.m., we call them and explain the situation. They open at 6:45 so my daughter can arrive a bit earlier. When we sit late, say until 10:30 p.m. on some evenings, there's an educator there, smiling, to take care of our child. I find that attentiveness and flexibility very important.

At first, you don't want to bother people with your situation. But you can rely on this resource. The fact that they are professionals and that they listen, adapt, and say: "Here's how we're going to make sure everything works. I'll write to you, send you photos. If something changes, we can be flexible." It's extraordinary. You really feel heard and you don't feel like a burden because of your situation. It makes a huge difference.

I also used the nursing room. We're fortunate to have that kind of space close to the Chamber. When you have a workplace that takes into account our needs as young parents, you realize just how much our role as parents can be intrinsically integrated into the Assemblée.

**XMM:** *Mr. Paradis, your children are older. Do they often accompany you to your parliamentary workplace? Are there any facilitating measures?*

**PP:** They rarely accompany me to the Assemblée nationale. Parliamentary work generally takes place during the school year. And at their age, it's not easy to get them interested in constituency activities, even when they might get something out of it.

For children their age, there really aren't any accompanying or facilitating measures. What would be helpful is easier access to support services or help at home. I'm also aware that the costs involved with these services are significant, so I'm not suggesting there should necessarily be financial support. But realistically, if you want the time to do this very demanding job, to give citizens what they need, and do parliamentary work, it's hard to juggle everything. And if you also want to be present, at least a little, for your children, then something else has to give, and managing a household is difficult. There's no other

way than to rely on third parties when you realize you can't do everything yourself anymore."

In my case, as a matter of principle, I like to cook for my children. I could order in or hire someone to cook, but for me, that's an important part of my role as a father. So how do you reconcile that? I do it at night. I cook late in the evening. But it's important to me.

So it's difficult. I myself don't know how the Assemblée nationale could help me more. This is something that ultimately gets managed in each household.

**MP:** What really changed our lives was having someone come in to help with housecleaning. Honestly, that was just too much in my life. But for teenagers, I think it would be interesting to create a day when our teens come to Parliament, so they can experience what we do every day. A bit like Student Parliament, so that parliamentarians' children can better understand our work.

When I text my son in the evening and say, "I can't talk, I'm in parliamentary committee," does he really know what that means? And then he replies, "Can you send me some money?" Well, yes—but I'm in the Chamber, give me a minute! For them, it remains abstract.

**XMM:** *Do you think the measures implemented by the Assemblée nationale could inspire other parliaments or public institutions?*

**MNC:** One hundred percent. Honestly, I don't know which other Canadian parliaments have a drop-in daycare, a family room or a nursing room. But we're seeing more and more young parents deciding to run for office. And sometimes both parents are elected officials. We see it in our Parliament and in the federal Parliament. And I see how our services could become examples of what could be done elsewhere in the country.

**MP:** We see it during interparliamentary missions. We're fortunate to have all of this in Québec. We always talk about it to the other parliamentarians we meet.

**XMM:** *Conversely, when talking to your counterparts during interparliamentary missions, do you hear about other initiatives that could serve as a source of inspiration here?*

**MNC:** I would say having standardized leave periods, as we see at the federal level and in some other

legislatures around the world. For example, when we decided to have a second child, the issue came up. We built our family plan around the parliamentary schedule to take advantage of the summer period and so I wouldn't miss too many sitting days. But that's not realistic for everyone.

Having a defined, reliable leave period would put us all on the same footing. I think it would remove some of the arbitrariness that currently weighs us down and adds to our stress. We want to give 110%, and we don't want our family plans to be seen as a constraint. To balance all that, instead of handling pregnancies informally among ourselves and bearing the burden individually, I think it would be worthwhile to establish a standard.

We would have to think about how long that type of leave could last and what our responsibilities would be. Could we step back only from parliamentary duties while continuing to do our work in the riding? Defining these elements would be the next step that could truly make Québec a model for legislatures everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

**MP:** I agree with Madwa. It would be such a good idea, especially for when you are going to have a baby. I'm also thinking about family caregivers or people who need to be away because of bereavement. Right now, it

largely rests in the hands of our party. As Madwa said, there's still pressure to return to Parliament, because it's part of our role.

Especially for births, I think it would lift a burden from young parents, but also from the party. At the same time, we're very aware that we don't have parental leave as such. We remain involved in our riding and continue to work remotely, even when a birth or another major event occurs. It's not that we would stop working, but it would be less uncomfortable to have to be away.

## Endnotes

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- 1 Opened in fall 2023, the drop-in daycare aims to facilitate work–family balance by offering occasional childcare tailored to the specific realities of the Assemblée nationale. The service is available in particular to Members, political staff and administrative staff of the Assemblée nationale.
- 2 In Québec, in 2022, section 35 of the *Code of ethics and conduct of the Members of the National Assembly* was amended to provide that absences related to pregnancy, to the birth or adoption of a child, to maternity, paternity or parental leave, or to a caregiving situation do not constitute a breach of the attendance obligation set out in that section. Since the duration of the absence is not defined, it is determined on a case-by-case basis.

# In Conversation with Women Speakers

Although relatively few women have held the position of Speaker in Canada's parliamentary assemblies, six women currently preside over 15 chambers across the country. In this roundtable, the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* editorial intern Geneva Fuina spoke with four women Speakers about why they sought out this position, what has surprised them about their role, and what changes they've implemented.

**Participants:** Hon. Danielle Barkhouse, Hon. Raymonde Gagné, Nathalie Roy, Hon. Donna Skelly

**CPR:** Speakers, thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. I have a few questions that can guide us in our discussion, but of course, if other topics come up naturally, organically, that's what we aim for.

The role of the speaker, historically, has been dominated by men. All of you are either the first, second, or third woman to hold your role in your respective legislature. What does being a woman speaker mean to you?

**Donna Skelly:** Natalie, you have been Speaker longest, correct. You should go first.

**Nathalie Roy:** I've been in this position for several years. It is our colleagues, the members of the Legislature, who elect us, and it is a great privilege. It is an honour.

We must earn and keep the trust of all the elected officials of all parties. I am only the second woman President in 230 years of the Quebec Legislature, so I take this role extremely seriously.

Being in this position means becoming a role model for women. It tells women it's possible. If you want to go into politics, yes, it's possible. And, you can reach

the highest offices; you can preside over an assembly. In Quebec and Canada, with my other colleagues, we have this opportunity to become an example for those women who want to take the plunge into politics.

**DS:** I'm the first woman Speaker in Ontario. As proud as I am of that, and I really genuinely am, I want to be remembered as not just the first female, but probably the best Speaker. I think that's one of the things that women forget. We want to be at the table, but I think it's time that we also be recognized for our level of professionalism and our abilities, not just our gender.

I've been there for eight months now, and I'm hoping the changes that I've already brought forward will help define me as one of the best speakers in Ontario history. Because, as I said, women not only deserve a seat at the table, we should also be leading the discussion because many of us are the best in the room.

**Danielle Barkhouse:** I agree with my colleagues 100 per cent.

I usually don't take on this type of role, but I have to give shout-outs because, as the second woman Speaker of Nova Scotia's Assembly, and as a single mother, I think for me, it is very important to show my daughter and other young ladies out there that you can do this. You can be anything that you want to be.

To go from a backbench or MLA to a Speaker is, to me, quite amazing. I feel fortunate. Like Donna, I want to be the best Speaker they've ever had in 255 years. Male, female, I don't care. I'm not looking at what sex they are; I'm looking at what they've done as a Speaker.

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*Danielle Barkhouse is Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Nova Scotia, Raymonde Gagné is Speaker of the Senate, Nathalie Roy is President of the Assemblée nationale du Québec and Donna Skelly is Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.*



**Danielle Barkhouse**

**Raymonde Gagné:** I believe it's a sign of progress. When I look back on my career, I realize that many of the leadership roles I have held, whether as a school principal, director, or president of a university, were positions I occupied as the first woman. As Speaker of the Senate, I am only the third woman to occupy the Speaker's Chair of the Senate, the previous one having done so nearly 50 years ago.

To me, this reflects the evolution of our society. I think it serves as an inspiration to other women and girls, which is extremely important. It also highlights a different leadership style, which is essential to see in action, and helps break stereotypes. Diversity has real value: it fosters innovation, enriches knowledge, and sparks new ideas. For me, this is a sign of hope and meaningful change.

**CPR:** What drew you to the Speaker's role? What influenced your decision to pursue it? Also, I'm wondering if you experienced any barriers to attaining the role as it relates to your gender, and if you felt welcomed once you were formally installed as the Speaker.



**Raymonde Gagné**

**DB:** I'll go first. I've always been the motherly type. It comes from being in the healthcare profession. I mean, I'm never one to run from fires; I run toward them. So, for me, becoming Speaker fulfilled that inner part of me that wants to help. But, also, it appeals to the part of me that wants to be in control and to make sure that the House doesn't go sideways... that decorum is kept. It really fulfilled a lot of my personality traits.

I was named Deputy Speaker in 2021 and studied that book. Every time I saw that Chair empty, I did whatever I could to get in there and sit as Speaker to show that I know what I'm doing, and that I can do this. There was already a Speaker. So, I suppose that was a barrier, but besides that, I didn't find any barriers, and I felt welcome.

I take my job very seriously. If someone's out of order, I'm calling them out of order. That's part of the neutrality of this job. I don't know what my colleagues will say, but when you spend all this time in caucus and running campaigns and being with people in your party, of course, you're going to build this bond. But, when you're in that Chair as Speaker, that bond has to be put to the side in order to be good at your job.



**Nathalie Roy**

**NR:** I would say two things attracted me to the role of Speaker: my political experience over the last 10 years, and also my training. I'm a lawyer by training, and I would say I'm both a lawyer and a journalist by profession. The fact that I'm no longer in a confrontational role, but rather an arbitrator, a judge, complements my training as a lawyer—defending everyone's rights and privileges.

Did I encounter any obstacles related to my gender in accessing this position? No, the vote was unanimous among my 124 fellow Members. I did feel welcomed in the position, but there was a challenge. I was told: Prove yourself and show us that you're not a partisan.

I told you from the outset that my experience helped me prepare for these roles. I was fortunate enough to spend six years in the opposition. In the opposition, I was very, very, very partisan. That was my role. Then I had the great privilege of becoming a minister and serving for four years. As a minister, you don't take a step back anymore; you take the heat. In the opposition, you attack. In the government, you get attacked, and you defend yourself. In the Presidency, you step out



**Donna Skelly**

of the confrontation to become neutral, to become the arbiter. I strive, every day, to defend everyone's rights and privileges. I think that my education and my experience have given me the skills to do the job well.

**DS:** I was privileged to serve as Deputy Speaker and, because of that opportunity, I recognized just how incredible this role was. So, I knew that I would want to run when the next session began.

In terms of any sort of barriers with being a woman, no, not at all. And I did feel welcomed, absolutely.

I always perceived the role of Speaker as being one that's a very lonely role. But I think the Speaker can determine how social you want to be, and how accessible you want that position to be. As Speaker, I have a responsibility to bring people together, so it isn't at all a lonely position. In fact, it's very inviting, very welcoming. I make a concerted effort to reach out to people on all sides of the aisle to ensure that people get together and get along. When they do get to know each other, they're far more productive at the Assembly.

**RG:** In the context of the Senate, the Speaker is appointed, not elected. In my case, the appointment followed a more or less formal consultation process. I was aware that my name had been mentioned among others, but I was nonetheless surprised that it was put forward for the Speakership.

It is often said that “in politics, timing is everything.” It’s important to understand that the vision of former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was to make the Senate more representative of the diversity and needs of contemporary Canadian society.

As a result, during Mr. Trudeau’s tenure, the Senate surpassed gender parity, at one point reaching a representation of more than 55% women. In my case, I was in the right place at the right time.

What factor influenced my decision to accept the position? I must admit that I was a little hesitant, especially when it came to work-life balance. I knew it would mean having less freedom, more time away from my family, and so on. However, I also knew that accepting the role would allow me to promote women’s leadership, as well as the Francophonie, and that weighed heavily in my decision. If I had had to campaign to be elected, I probably wouldn’t have done it.

**CPR:** Many of the traditions and physical spaces associated with the Speaker’s role were designed long before any women held the role. Have you made any changes, either formally or informally, to any aspect of the Speaker’s role that reflects your lived experience as a woman? For example, have you made changes to the ceremonial dress, or the office or workspace that you’re provided?

**RG:** I made a few changes. On my first day, I made two decisions that I think can be attributed to the fact that I am a woman. The first was choosing not to wear the tricorne hat. Just like we no longer wear white wigs in Canada, I decided to move away from this inherited tradition.

The second decision concerned the tradition whereby the new Speaker pretends to resist being escorted to the Chair by the Leader of the Government and Leader of the Opposition. What this symbolizes, namely the risk of being imprisoned or even executed for displeasing the monarch, struck me as an archaic tradition.

On a less formal note, I also decided not to offer Scotch or whisky, or even a “Speaker’s spirits,” as is the tradition in the House of Commons. Finally, a senator kindly gifted me lace gloves, which I like very much, and which feel more delicate than the traditional pair. I am grateful to my honourable colleagues, who find different ways to show me their support.

**DS:** I started with the robe. It’s a very male garment. So, I’ve been working with the tailor. But he is not used to working with women – believe me – because we’ve gone back and forth just trying to fit a feminine body. Redesigning the robe and the pants, and creating a skirt. There’s a whole new mindset just coming up with that.

Like Raymonde, I did not want the tricorne hat as part of the ceremonial robe that they wear in Queen’s Park. I don’t like hats. I don’t wear one. The origin is very masculine, so instead, I’ve gone back to the gloves, and I have monogrammed white satin gloves.

And there have even been some changes to my office. When I arrived, my desk was the size of a small boat. It was just massive. I felt like I was just swallowed up in it. We’ve looked for more feminine pieces of furniture and brought that whole aspect to my office and to my attire.

I have also intentionally gone into our vault and started pulling pieces of artwork out and putting them back on the walls, reclaiming art that we had lost over the years. Our Group of Seven is back on the wall, and it’s beautifying the space, because I think a beautiful space is a must. People just really appreciate it, and it improves the whole work experience.

**NR:** I’m going to pick up on what Donna said. I completely agree. In Quebec, we don’t have a uniform to perform the duties of Speaker. We wear business attire, like a suit, but we don’t have a British-style uniform. We have a parliament more like the French one, but it’s a British-style arrangement, so it’s really a hybrid parliament. We don’t have suits. However, I agree with Donna.

Regarding the office, I insisted that we bring out all the antique pieces, the heritage furniture we had hidden here and there. I wanted to show it, because we are, after all, a young nation. Quebec, like Canada in general. The pieces of furniture now in my office belonged to the representatives of the Queen of England; these were the offices of the Lieutenant Governor before the 1970s.

But I said: “Let’s show these antiques; let’s show these pieces of furniture that are our shared heritage. These are our treasures.”

Furthermore, naturally, I added a feminine touch to the decor, to the choice of artworks that are on loan to us by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. I had the privilege of serving as Minister for the Musée in another era.

That said, more specifically, what I did as President during ceremonies was to ensure that medals were awarded. We all have the power to present the President’s Medal. I wanted to ensure fair, and perhaps even slightly better, representation of women, because for too long women have been forgotten at award ceremonies for their community involvement.

So, I strive to highlight the presence of women, and women politicians. Furthermore, I have created a new medal for women who are making a difference in our daily lives in the community and who are often overlooked. I created a new award, named “Femmes engagées”, to recognize the women who are so important in our social fabric – who are truly making a difference in the community.

This is extremely important to me, especially raising their profile within Parliament, and that’s what I’m doing with a new award coming this spring as well.

**DB:** I love your award idea. I wrote that down. I love the glove idea as well. Similar to what my colleagues described, furniture was a big thing for me. My desk was taking up more than half the room.

Also, before we officially started this roundtable, we were talking about Christmas parties. I’ve been told by people who have been at the Assembly longer than I’ve been alive that this year we had the most exciting and elaborate Christmas decorations that they’ve ever seen at the Province House.

And, I probably shouldn’t say it, but it’s me, so I will say it because it’s a notable change. For the first time in 255 years, we have feminine hygiene dispensers in the Speaker’s washroom.

As gifts, Speaker’s Choice alcohol had almost always been a Scotch whiskey. I switched it up and went for blueberry vodka. I modernized that tradition.

I also have been focusing a lot on education during my time as Speaker, with mace tours and bringing in schools. We get students to do mock debates to learn about the work we do in the Assembly. They have an election for government and opposition, and premier and leader of the opposition, and they pick a topic to introduce as legislation. I give them a script, and then they get to run through the first, second, and third reading of the bill.

I’m also working with the tailor. I did change my gown up a little bit, but it still does not fit the curves of a woman. Therefore, I had to go back to the drawing board. You can probably see clips on YouTube where I’m constantly pulling it back up or readjusting it. It’s just not made for my body type.

**DS:** I wanted to mention, after my visit to Quebec, I borrowed a lot from what Nathalie has been doing in Quebec’s National Assembly, including a family room. For the first time ever, the Ontario Legislative Assembly has a family room. I remember the day she gave us a tour of their family room. I was standing there in awe, and bringing it to Queen’s Park has been an incredible success.

Danielle, you mentioned feminine hygiene products. We have now just introduced feminine hygiene products in all the washrooms for members, including in the lounges. And we’ve added mouthwash, combs, and hairspray... things that wouldn’t have been there before. It’s such a minor little addition, but it means a lot to people who are sitting in the Chamber.

**CPR:** In your opinion, does having more women in positions like the Speaker change the tone or priorities of the legislative debate?

**DS:** I’d say no. My background in journalism has had more of an influence on me in the Chair than my being a woman. I’m a strong woman. We all are strong women, and I think it’s our personality that has controlled the room, as opposed to our gender. My background in broadcast journalism means I’m a stickler for time and for clocks. Most people don’t know what it means to keep to time. If you’ve got a minute, you stick to a minute when you’re in broadcasting, not a minute and a half, not three minutes. The Members realized quickly that I was going to enforce the rules within our Standing Orders that dictate time.

I cut them off right to the second. I’ll stand up in the middle of an emotional debate, and they get cut right

off. Now, they love it because they know exactly how long something's going to last, and they just shave time off their speech. So, to me, my background in journalism was far more impactful than being a female.

**NR:** Donna, I was going to say exactly the same thing as you. The journalism background helps us; we have the same professional history in part, and you're absolutely right.

It's surprising that when we're able to modulate our voice, which was part of our job, we're also able, to a certain extent, control the intensity of the debates, to control the tone of the colleagues. That's very, very subtle, depending on the context. I think I see Danielle nodding.

**DB:** I'm with both of my colleagues on this. I mean, you're talking to three very strong women, but it's not just about our gender. I believe more life experiences bring a better debate, better policies, and better legislation, better government for people.

I tell my children all the time that when you go to a museum and look at abstract art, you don't want to be there with somebody who sees the same thing you see. If I see a boat, I want you to see a guitar, or, you know, flowers. We all have different life experiences, and have learned different life lessons, and have different perceptions. That's good to have that at the table. So, for me, it's not only gender; it's all our life experiences.

**RG:** I would say the very composition of the Senate already makes a big difference, and adding a female voice to the Speakership has double the effect. In my interventions, especially when tempers rise in the Chamber, I strive to remain neutral and respectful, without reacting impulsively. Having that control helps prevent escalation and maintain a calm atmosphere.

One of my first decisions clearly illustrates my approach. When a senator raised a question of privilege regarding personal attacks and accusations circulated on social media, I ruled that this type of behaviour was unacceptable. My decision had an immediate effect. Since then, debates have become more cordial, illustrating the effectiveness of a collaborative leadership style aimed at changing the way things are done.

**CPR:** We're now going to take a step back to when you ran for Speaker. Did you deliver a speech? If so, did you highlight your identity as a woman, and if not, why?

**DB:** No, I did not give a speech. And if I did, I would not have brought my sex into the speech. Nor would I ever want this position because I am a woman. I want this position because I am strong, because I know what I'm doing, because I can handle it, because I'm educated in how to do it. That's why I want this position. I think the best qualified person for the job should always get the job, and in this case, I thought it was me.

**CPR:** I love that, thank you!

**DS:** Nathalie?

**NR:** I agree with you, Danielle. It's not a question of gender; it's a question of experience and competence.

However, during my speech, I specified that I was referring to my gender to remind all the elected officials and nine million Quebecers that I was only the second woman elected in 230 years. It's important to remember this, especially since people in all the parties were calling for a female President. I wanted to remind them, but above all, to tell them that it was the people who were demanding it. Quebecers were demanding more women in positions of power.

Now, it is our duty as women in positions of power to ensure that the glass ceilings that have been broken stay shattered. The door that was opened, the door through which we passed, must remain open for other women. It's our duty to remember that.

**RG:** Since I was appointed, not elected, I did not deliver a speech as part of my nomination. However, my identity as a woman and as a Francophone is reflected in most of my speeches, communications, and correspondence.

For example, when addressing my colleagues in French, I deliberately feminize titles, using the term « sénatrice » in the salutation « Honorables sénatrices et sénateurs », instead of grouping them all in the masculine « Honorables sénateurs ». My identity is central to my values, and I am committed to ensuring that it is fully and authentically expressed.

**DS:** I didn't run on the fact that I was a woman. I was running against another woman, so regardless, one of us would be the first woman Speaker.

I came from Northern Ontario, grew up in small town Ontario, and was intimidated by big urban centres. If I felt that way, I'm sure I was not alone. I wanted part of my message to be bringing the Legislature to the

people and bringing the people to the Legislature. That's part of my vision of making it an inviting, welcoming destination for people from across the province.

But I want to expand on what Nathalie was saying. Now that we are there, there is a responsibility.

I've never believed in quotas. But, if you look at my office makeup, it's all women. It's not intentional; it's who I feel comfortable with. And if I'm traveling, I'd much prefer traveling with a woman than a man, only because we'd probably have a lot more in common in where we want to go for dinner or such things.

Naturally, your circle becomes people you're comfortable with. And I think it wasn't always intentional that men excluded women. I think they probably had the same experience. They had more male friends. Therefore, they would surround themselves with people that they knew they could work with.

Now, we have to make sure that we go out of our way to really recognize and support women. We need to learn from what our male counterparts have done and start supporting each other, or continue supporting each other.

**CPR:** Some of you here today are also Francophone, and you hold a very unique position at the intersection of gender and linguistic identities. Moreover, both of these identities are underrepresented in the Canadian political landscape. How do you see your identity as a Francophone woman influencing the way you lead and navigate the Speaker's role?

**NR:** Three of us come from Francophone backgrounds: Raymonde, in the Senate, comes from Manitoba, a province with a historically significant Francophone population. Francine, in New Brunswick, comes from an officially bilingual province. And me, in Quebec, which is a province where French is the official language.

Speaking French is extremely important to me; it's part of my identity. When French people left France, came here and, with the First Nations who were already here, created New France, their French heritage helped to shape who we are.

I carry this heritage within me, and as President, it is my duty to make it shine. This is what makes us different, but it's also what made us complementary when, with the British settlers, these three peoples founded Canada.

My heritage is very important to me. So, as a Francophone, it's extremely important for me, in the only officially Francophone province in Canada, to express myself in French during my interviews with international officials. And naturally, if we can speak other languages, all the better.

It's important to remember that Canada is different in this way.. Canada is a country with its own unique characteristics, and the federal government must take each of those characteristics into account. This applies to the Maritime provinces, Ontario, Quebec, the Prairies, and the Western provinces alike.

Each province is important. It has its own specific characteristics that we must respect.

**RG:** I have chosen to begin and end all of my correspondence and speeches, when bilingual, in French, which is not a traditional part of parliamentary culture. Both signage and how I preside over sittings also reflect this desire for fairness.

For example, I alternate languages when reciting the prayer at the start of each sitting, to ensure equitable representation. The objective is to give both official languages a meaningful place and to maintain a proper balance between them.

Whether in my role as a senator or as the Speaker, this commitment remains central. In 2023, I chose to vote at third reading in favour of Bill C-13, which sought to modernize the *Official Languages Act*. I was sponsoring this Bill in the Senate up until I was appointed Speaker. In the Senate, the Speaker has the option to vote, and, when choosing to exercise this right, they vote first. Contrarily, in the House of Commons, the Speaker is only called on to vote in the event of a tie. In the case of Bill C-13, I decided to do so because this was a very important issue to me.

In my role, Francophonie is a priority. I make a point of meeting with members of French-speaking minority communities and dedicating time to understand their concerns and perspectives. It is also at the forefront of my meetings with heads of missions and during international visits, in order to continue to grow the French language and its communities.

**CPR:** What has surprised you most about the Speaker's role?

**DB:** There is a certain population that thinks that as soon as you become Speaker, you know everything;

they think your brain has turned into Google. And I was quite surprised when I first won, on how many MLAs depend on the Speaker for that base knowledge of how things work. That surprised me immensely because it was not even first-termers coming to me for information.

What also surprised me was how you take on almost a motherly role to some MLAs. Not all of them, but certainly to some of them. Those two things surprised me the most, I would say.

**DS:** As I said earlier, I was expecting it to be much more solitary. But I have flipped it upside down, and it's really become a welcoming role.

**RG:** The diplomatic responsibilities have been the most unexpected part of my role.

The complexity of geopolitics represents a constant challenge. You have to remain up to date in an ever-changing international context, understand issues that are often highly complex, and be able to exercise effective diplomacy on the international stage. I had caught a glimpse of the importance of such work even before starting my mandate, particularly during a diplomatic mission with my predecessor, Speaker George J. Furey.

Since then, I now understand the full scope of my responsibilities. I am enjoying it, and I feel more and more at ease with this part of my role.

Finally, security issues are now an integral part of my daily life. The changes to my routines can at times be surprising, even unsettling, and require a heightened level of caution, especially on the Hill. That has become an inherent reality of the position.

**NR:** What surprised me most is the creativity of my colleagues in the opposition and even in the government during Question Periods. How do they manage to maintain decorum? We have a list of forbidden words, and they have to respect the rules, all while debating.

So, they have to demonstrate great creativity and originality. That's what surprises me most. Seeing them, day after day, clash over ideas, but with such originality, is impressive. I am here to ensure everything runs smoothly, but I marvel at their abilities.

**CPR:** Women political leaders in Canada typically face a heightened media scrutiny. What has your experience with the media been like, and how has it

shaped the way that you approach your role or connect with the people?

**DS:** I have a really good relationship with the media. I think that just comes from the fact I've known many of them for years, and I've worked with many of them. They've been pretty good. Nothing overly critical; generally, very supportive. Of course, that doesn't mean it's going to remain that way. *(Laughs)*

But when I was on television as a reporter and news anchor, being a woman on television would get you ripped to shreds. This is a walk in the park compared to being on television. The comments I would get then: "I can't stand your hair, your earrings are the wrong size, what are you wearing? You're fat, you're skinnier..." Now, with social media, I think everybody is pretty much a victim.

**NR:** I'm going to respond to what Donna just said. Your question concerns sexist media discourse about political leaders in Canada.

Well, in Quebec, I've worked with most of the journalists, and in some cases, I was the boss of some of them. There's no sexist discourse towards female politicians.

Political life is tough. For women and for men, it's not a bed of roses. However, I think—and I'm knocking on wood as I speak—I have the same relationship with the media as Donna. It's a good relationship. Where you have to be careful, and everyone is a victim, is with social media, misinformation, artificial intelligence, the infamous fake news. There, everyone loses. Men and women.

**DB:** I agree with everything that Nathalie said. You have to be careful, whether you're Speaker, minister, or an MLA on the opposition or government side. I don't want to blame it on COVID-19 or anything like that. It just seems that each year, it gets a little worse. I don't know if my colleagues feel the same way, but it's almost vitriolic at times.

I have a great relationship with the reporters that I do know, but again, I'm very careful of everything that I do.

**RG:** The vast majority of the messages I receive on social media are positive. These platforms allow me to showcase the work that is carried out on a regular basis, particularly on the diplomatic front. They are also an important means of maintaining strong ties with

community groups and to stay connected to Manitoba, the province I represent.

That being said, I remain very mindful of the need to preserve and uphold the values of the Senate. Neutrality must also be reflected in the media space. In that regard, I consider myself a guardian of the institution, committed to preserving its integrity and credibility.

Journalism plays a vital role in our democratic system, and I maintain a good relationship with the members of the Press Gallery. That said, restraint remains at the heart of my media approach. Since the start of my mandate, I have given about one interview per year. However, when my office receives media requests, it is important that my team respond with candour, transparency, and diligence. Overall, my experience with the media has been quite positive.

**CPR:** One of the fundamental values of the Speaker, in most jurisdictions, is non-partisanship. How do you go about maintaining a non-partisan stance, specifically when you've previously been involved in partisan activities? Have you experienced any challenges with maintaining a neutral stance?

**RG:** I was appointed as an independent senator in 2016, as part of the first cohort of senators appointed through a new, more transparent and independent process.

Throughout my professional career, I was never active in politics, having served as a teacher, school principal, and President of the Université de Saint-Boniface. As a result, partisanship has never been part of my life.

I have always exercised my right to vote, and my preferences have changed over time, but I have never actively contributed to a political party with the goal of gaining or maintaining power. My independence is central to my role as both a senator for Manitoba and as Speaker of the Senate.

**NR:** In Quebec, in the role of President, our laws and regulations prevent us from participating in any partisan activity. So, the President, who is part of a caucus—in this case, the government—is no longer part of it.

I no longer attend the caucus. I'm no longer a member of the Cabinet. I don't participate in any party congresses or assemblies. There is a duty of neutrality.

**DB:** In Nova Scotia, that hasn't been the case. The Speaker does attend caucus but not leading up to or during the sitting.

I compartmentalize. I ran under the Progressive Conservative banner. I am a Progressive Conservative MLA. But when I have my Speaker's hat on I am the Speaker and I put those bonds and friendships and party politics to the side. We have strict rules as Speakers to follow. We have to make sure that the members follow those rules. If you're following those rules, you are non-partisan.

**DS:** I would say that inside the Chamber, if you apply your rules fairly, you're fine. And, regardless of the ruling, somebody will say it's not fair. But, I think if you look back objectively at how I've ruled, I would say it's very, very consistent.

Like Nathalie, I do not attend caucus; I do not attend any sort of partisan event. I am very careful with events, even in my own riding. If a minister shows up, I have to be very careful. There are exceptions. If it's a Chamber of Commerce event, I will attend. If it's pre-budget deliberations, I still want to attend as the representative of the people. That becomes the very tricky area for me - the balance of being a Speaker and still representing your constituents. My argument is always: "I have always had the ear of all ministers and the Premier as a colleague, and they respect me as the Speaker."

**CPR:** What advice would you give to young women interested in pursuing a career in politics?

**DS:** I don't mind starting. I would say if you're weak, don't go into it; at least not on the front lines. There are many jobs behind the scenes that women can consider if they don't have an extremely thick skin. But politics is a blood sport, and you have to be ready to sacrifice a lot.

For example, if you're wanting to start a young family, I personally couldn't have run for election when my children were really young. But I do see a lot of amazing young moms, too.

You have to go in with your eyes wide open because it's not easy to have just given birth and then be in the Chamber. We had a mom that just three weeks after giving birth, was back in the Chamber. I was shocked. She is such an amazing mom. It's her third child, and she's just incredible. So, some women can do it, but just make sure you're going in with your eyes wide open.

I also want to say one last thing, if I may. I really like these women, and Francine Landry, who could not be here, and I'm sure this will be true for Yvonne Clark, who was just elected Speaker in Yukon. I have tremendous respect for them. I have learned so much when we have had opportunities to get together. That has been one of the best parts of the short time I've been Speaker, and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. You have become my mentors.

**NR:** Oh, that's so nice.

**DS:** Truthfully. Truthfully.

**RG:** I believe it is important for young women to get involved early, whether through volunteering, joining associations, or even engaging in politics – if that interests them. Participating in activities such as youth parliaments, supporting causes that are important to them... acting with authenticity. These are all ways to learn and get involved.

It is also essential to remember that men are not our adversaries: equality is a societal issue, and we build it by working together, men and women alike, on all issues, including those related to gender inequality. Equality will not be achieved through opposition, but rather through collaboration.

In traditionally male-dominated environments, women's leadership often involves choosing your battles wisely. It is important to be thoughtful about how you express yourself. Acknowledge your own limits. Knowing how to adjust is a sign of strength and maturity.

Women sometimes underestimate their abilities or doubt themselves. We should never underestimate our value and the impact we can have.

**NR:** So, what advice would I give to young women who want a career in politics? The advice is: if you're really passionate, if you want to go for it, trust yourself and go for it. Go for it, don't hesitate. And then, ask for advice from those around you, and from other women. Call your MNA, if you have a female MNA, call your President, call them, ask for their advice: they'll give you some, I'm convinced.

Oh yes – also ask male politicians to give you tips because, as I said, it takes two. With male colleagues who understand that we'll succeed together, men and women will have better governments, that we'll truly achieve something good, and with the generous women have just made such good points.

And Donna, you're right. It's not for everyone. It's not for all women, and, I would say, it's not for all men either. It's a job that requires commitment. It's an essential role in a community. But if you have the passion... Trust yourself, go for it.

And to add to Donna's point. The women presiding officers in Canada, who are experiencing the same things, can help each other, even from a distance.

We can inspire other women to take the plunge, help other women to move forward. And ladies, you are an inspiration to me, and I can't wait to see you in person again.

**DB:** It's so true. I fell in love with these women. I adore them to no end, and I sometimes sneak on YouTube and Facebook and watch what they're up to. There is a geographical difference, so they're not down the road. But they are inspirational.

To add my advice for young women interested in politics, I would say don't be afraid. The only thing to fear is fear itself. Always be honest. And, while you've got to have thick skin, don't take things personally. People aren't angry at you; they're angry at the issue, and they take it out on you.

Finally, go into politics for the right reasons – to help people, to make a better province, a better country, and keep a true heart to that.

And if you find that slipping, take a second and look deep inside yourself, and ask: "Why am I getting cynical? Have I been in it too long?" And try to change that cynicism. If you can't, get out of politics, because this job is about helping people.

**CPR:** Thank you so much. Honestly, this has been such an enriching, candid, and truthful discussion, and I'm so blessed to have had the opportunity to speak with you.

# *Casting the Deciding Vote in British Columbia's 43rd Parliament*

Although it is relatively rare for Speakers in Canada to find themselves in a position where they must cast a deciding vote on a matter, this has not been the case in British Columbia since early 2025. In this article, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia explains the unique circumstances that have led to an exceptional number of tie-votes and outline his process for casting the deciding vote. *\*This article is adapted from a presentation delivered at the CPA Canadian Regional Conference on July 23, 2025.*

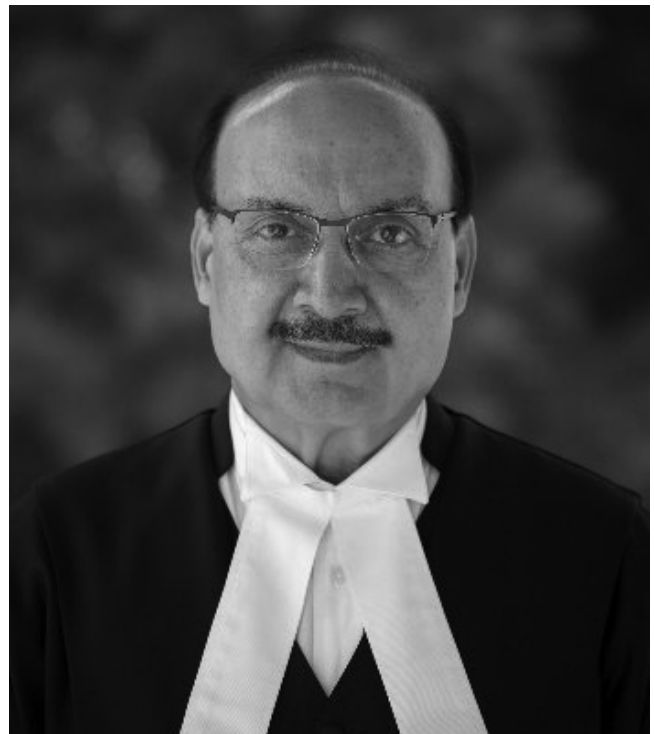
**Hon. Raj Chouhan**

## **Introduction**

When questions are put to a vote in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, they must be decided by a majority vote from the Members present, apart from the Speaker. The Speaker, though present, abstains from voting because “confidence in the impartiality of the Speaker is an indispensable condition of the successful working of procedure, and many conventions exist which have as their object not only to ensure the impartiality of the Speaker but also to ensure that that impartiality is generally recognised.”<sup>1</sup> Abstention from votes is in keeping with this objective, as is the conventional practice of Speakers to forgo participation in caucus meetings and partisan activities.

However, when it comes to the Speaker’s abstention from votes, there is one exception. Both the federal *Constitution Act, 1867* (30 & 31 Victoria, c. 3 ([U.K.]) and the British Columbia provincial *Constitution Act* (R.S.B.C. 1996 c. 66) provide that when a vote is tied, the Speaker will enter the deciding vote. In British Columbia, Standing Order 10 reinforces that in the event of a tie, the onus of the “casting vote” falls to the Speaker. It also notes that if the Speaker chooses, they can record the reason for their vote via the *Journals of the House*.<sup>2</sup>

It is not only the Speaker who may be required to provide a casting vote. Any Member serving as a Presiding Officer—such as a Deputy Speaker or as a Committee Chair—must exercise a casting vote in the case of a tie in order to ensure that the House,



**Hon. Raj Chouhan**

or a committee, is able to come to a decision on a specific question. Impartiality is a guiding principle for all Presiding Officers serving in these roles and is essential to earning and maintaining the respect and trust of all Members.

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*Hon. Raj Chouhan has been Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia since 2020.*

## **The Casting Vote in British Columbia’s 43rd Parliament**

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Before I was elected to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia in 2005, I worked in labour relations. I cut my teeth as an arbitrator and mediator—experience that continues to serve me well in the role of Speaker, especially in our current parliament because the number of government and opposition Members is tied, excluding my seat.

Most Speakers will never find themselves having to break a tie in the House. Casting votes in our federal Parliament and provincial and territorial legislatures are rare. For example, in over 158 years since Confederation, a casting vote by a Speaker has been required just 11 times in Canada’s House of Commons.<sup>3</sup> Comparatively, 11 casting votes, by the Speaker and other Presiding Officers, were required in the final week of B.C.’s 2025 spring sitting period alone. Another two were required in the 2025 fall sitting period, for a total of 13 casting votes in the first session of British Columbia’s 43rd Parliament. The 2026 sitting year appears to be on track for continuing this trend.

Even one casting vote could shake Members’ trust in a Presiding Officer’s impartiality, particularly in a case where a vote could be perceived to benefit the political party they were affiliated with upon election. However, this need not be the case. Through my work as an adjudicator, I came to value transparency as a mechanism for accountability. It is important to be able to demonstrate that one’s professional decisions were and are anchored by principle and policy—not personal favour. I have learned that if I am consistently relying on the same principles to guide my decisions, then I can readily and confidently point to a familiar rationale for every decision. Outlined below are the principles that have guided me and our team of Presiding Officers through a historic number of casting votes in the 43rd Parliament.

### **Principles of the Casting Vote**

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Fortunately, Presiding Officers have well-established Westminster traditions and principles upon which to draw when they are required to break a tie. These date back to the late 18th and early 19th centuries and have been refined over time, always in the interest of preserving a Presiding Officer’s commitment to impartiality.

In 1844, Erskine May determined that “...to avoid any imputation upon the Speaker’s impartiality, it is usual for the Speaker, when practicable, to vote in such a manner as not to make the decision of the House final.”<sup>4</sup>

In the context of legislation, I interpret this to mean voting *for* a bill to proceed to the next stage of debate. For example, when applied to a bill at second reading, this approach would allow it to move forward for further examination at committee stage. Conversely, a negative vote at this stage would defeat the bill, ending any further opportunities for consideration. Succinctly put:

- Presiding Officers should cast their vote in a manner that allows for further discussion whenever possible. (Or, don’t kill the bill!)

Sometimes, however, voting in a manner that enables further discussion is not possible. In such cases, the Presiding Officer should consider casting their vote in the direction that maintains the status quo, one that allows the matter to be maintained in its original form and revisited at a later time. For example, in the case of a hoist or reasoned amendment at the second reading of a bill, the Presiding Officer should vote *against* the amendment. This is because if such an amendment were to pass, it would defeat the bill and amount to a final decision. This is the basis for the second principle, which is in keeping with the traditions that inform the first principle:

- When no further discussion is possible, decisions should not be made except by a majority. (Or, don’t kill the bill part II.)

Extending from the provision that decisions should be made by a majority that excludes the Speaker, the third principle is that the Presiding Officer should:

- Vote in a way that leaves a bill in its existing form. In this case, when voting on an amendment to a bill, a Presiding Officer should vote against the amendment in order to leave the bill in its existing form, thereby preserving the status quo.

Taken together, these three principles form a reliable template for Presiding Officers to vote predictably, consistently, and impartially, guided by rationale that is grounded in convention.

## Applying the Principles

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During B.C.'s 2025 spring sitting, two bills—Bill 14, the *Renewable Energy Projects Act*, and Bill 15, the *Infrastructure Projects Act*—were subject to extensive debate at Committee of the Whole consideration.<sup>5</sup> Numerous amendments during committee stage debate were proposed to the two bills, including one from a Minister. In keeping with the second and third principles above, the Committee Chair's casting votes defeated all proposed amendments on both bills. By voting against the proposed amendments, the Chair ensured that the bills remained in their original forms, thereby preserving the status quo.

Tied votes on the motions for third reading of both abovementioned bills required me to exercise casting votes. Most importantly, both Bills 14 and 15 had been declared confidence matters when they were introduced by the government. As such, voting against third reading of either of them would have resulted in an expression of non-confidence in the government. In these unique scenarios, in addition to the principles above, I also considered that the casting vote should not be exercised in a way that would express non-confidence in the government, thereby setting the expectation that the government would resign or seek dissolution of the Legislative Assembly for a general election. In each instance, I further considered how the bill, declared as a confidence matter, had passed second reading with majority support and how the bill had not been amended during committee stage. As such, I cast my vote in favour of the motion for third reading of each bill and provided the reasoning that these confidence matters had passed earlier stages of consideration with majority support.

In the subsequent 2025 fall sitting period, these experiences further guided me as I found myself in a very similar circumstance making a casting vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 31, *Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025*. In casting my vote, I first and foremost considered that this Bill had been declared a confidence matter and, as with Bills 14 and 15, I voted in favour of third reading, noting that the Bill had passed earlier stages of consideration with majority support.

There are other recent precedents in Canada for casting votes on confidence matters, too, and both the Speakers' decisions and their rationales are consistent with mine. One is from 2004 by then-Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, Myron Kowalsky, who voted in favour of the motion to adopt the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, stating that only a majority should determine its defeat on a question of confidence. In 2005, then-Speaker of the House of Commons, Peter Milliken, was required to cast a vote on second reading of the budget bill. The Speaker voted in favour of the second reading question to ensure that the government was not defeated and explained that the decision was guided by established principles, not politics.

## Conclusion

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The responsibility of casting a tie-breaking vote is weighty, but Speakers and Presiding Officers need not fear it. A strong commitment to constitutional and procedural provisions is essential—but every Presiding Officer ought to have that already. Thus, a Presiding Officer can be assured that by following a principled approach, they will strengthen not only their own confidence, but the confidence of all Members of the House in their ability to act impartially in moments of greatest contention.

## Notes

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- 1 Natzler, D. et al. eds. (2019). *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th ed. UK Parliament.
- 2 Ryan-Lloyd, K. et al. eds. (2020). *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*, 5th ed. Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. <https://ppbc.leg.bc.ca/index.html>
- 3 House of Commons. (2026, Feb 1). *Casting Vote of the Speaker – 1867 to Present*. <https://www.noscommunes.ca/speaker/en/role/casting-votes>.
- 4 Natzler, D. et al. eds. (2019). *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, 25th ed. UK Parliament.
- 5 In British Columbia, the practice is for all government bills to be considered by a Committee of the Whole at committee stage. This means that another Presiding Officer chairs those proceedings and is required to exercise a casting vote in the case of a tie.

# “Please Save the Beaver for Canada”: Legislating a National Symbol, 1975

In 1975, after a concerted public campaign, the beaver became a national symbol of Canadian sovereignty. In the space of a few weeks, following reports that New York might claim the semiaquatic rodent as its state symbol, over 13,000 letters, postcards and signatures on petitions poured in to support a young Progressive Conservative MP’s bid to save the beaver for Canada. Passing the House of Commons through all-party support, it became law on March 24, 1975. Official recognition has been accorded to a limited number of symbols in Canada; among others, the national flag and anthem (by definition) and the country’s summer and winter sports (lacrosse and hockey). While the party in power proposed some of these laws, such as the national flag, others resulted from private members’ bills – rarely a source of successful legislation in the Canadian parliamentary system. In this article, the author explores how this legislative campaign reveals features of Canadian nationalism in the volatile 1970s, as well as some of the vernacular understandings of the potential scope of government action.

Colin M. Coates



## 1. The American attack on the beaver

The event that precipitated the adoption of the beaver<sup>1</sup> as an official Canadian symbol occurred in New York state. In 1974, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation recommended that the legislature adopt the beaver as the official state mammal, alongside the brook trout as the state fish. In promoting this course of action, H. Wayne Trimm, the art director of *The Conservationist*, the official publication of the department, referred to the animal’s historical role in encouraging European settlement. It had been recognized in its depiction on the first seal of the State

of New York and in the Dutch name for state capital Albany: Beverwyck. Moreover, it embodied attractive human traits as “an industrious animal, which is not too bad a symbol these days,” Trimm stated. The publication also referred to the monogamous nature of the animal. If adopted, the beaver and the brook trout would join other state symbols: the sugar maple, the wild rose, the bluebird, and the garnet. Reported on page 41 of the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*, this was not front page news.<sup>2</sup>

Canadians did not react to this initial proposal, but when news spread that state senator Bernard Smith, the Chairman of the New York Senate Committee on Conservation and Recreation, planned to introduce the appropriate legislation, fulfilling the department’s recommendation, Canadians began to notice and engage with the issue.<sup>3</sup> Hope Ryden, an ethologist (animal behaviour scientist), published a detailed

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natural history of the beaver, lending her support to the state bill designating it as the official state mammal. Recognizing that the beaver had almost been extirpated from the state, she explored the history of the fur trade in the region and conveyed the animal's habits and abilities. She profiled the Grey Owl-like character, Dorothy Richards, who raised beavers on her property in upstate New York. She concluded her piece by detailing the laudable characteristics of the animal: "Besides being clean, good-natured, intelligent, sociable, cooperative, adaptable and hard-working, the beaver is a jack-of-all-trades. It is a lumberjack, hydraulic engineer, carpenter, canal builder, mason, hair dresser and, no doubt, a dozen other things I haven't thought of. What other animal is so qualified to personify such a diverse people as we are?"<sup>4</sup> Canadians would later point to some of these same features to justify their choice of the animal as a national symbol. Within days of the publication of Ryden's article, and spurred on by journalists, Canadian politicians began to stake their own claims on the beaver.

## 2. The Canadian response

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*Toronto Sun* journalist Mark Bonokoski, one of the first members of the media to notice the American effort, contacted the office of former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker for comment. Diefenbaker's executive assistant, Keith Martin, turned over the story to his friend, 22-year-old Progressive Conservative MP Sean O'Sullivan (Hamilton-Wentworth). Martin encouraged O'Sullivan to raise it in Question Period in the House of Commons. "It will go everywhere!!", Martin assured the young MP.<sup>5</sup> He was correct.

On the second last sitting day before the 1974 Christmas break, Question Period was dominated by issues related to crime, transportation policy, and racist slurs against Progressive Conservative MP Lincoln Alexander (Hamilton West).<sup>6</sup> With Secretary of State Hugh Faulkner absent from the House, O'Sullivan opted to write immediately to the minister, urging him to operate through diplomatic channels and dissuade the New York state legislators from proceeding. He also recommended that Faulkner consider according "some official status" for the beaver "as one of the symbols of Canada's rich heritage."<sup>7</sup> O'Sullivan also spoke to Faulkner's parliamentary secretary, Gustave Blouin (Manicouagan), who expressed surprise that Parliament had not already recognized the beaver as a "national emblem."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the files of the Secretary of State contain a series of letters dating back to the 1930s that posed questions about the official status of the beaver as a Canadian symbol.<sup>9</sup>

Faulkner did not respond formally to O'Sullivan's letter until February 5, 1975. His reply was cautious, but logical: "Even if the beaver were to be registered officially as a national symbol of Canada under section 9 of the *Trade Marks Act*, there is no legal action that could be taken against the State of New York to prevent that State from using it as its emblem."<sup>10</sup> The wording was taken directly from an earlier memorandum submitted by Jean Boucher in his office. That memorandum accompanied a draft letter to the Secretary of State for External Affairs providing terms that could be used to present a mild protest to the United States and government of New York. Faulkner never sent this letter to his colleague.<sup>11</sup> The Secretary of State clearly had little interest in this issue. Writing to elementary school students some weeks later, Faulkner claimed, "Some Canadians are flattered that the State of New York is planning to honour the Beaver as Canadians have done in the past and are continuing to do today."<sup>12</sup> This response was not reflective of any of the correspondence that his office had received.

The issue began to gather momentum and O'Sullivan realized he had an opportunity to enhance his political profile. As his memoir later recalled, in terms reminiscent of the general rhetoric, O'Sullivan saw the potential in this issue: "the beaver was about to be kidnapped by Americans."<sup>13</sup>

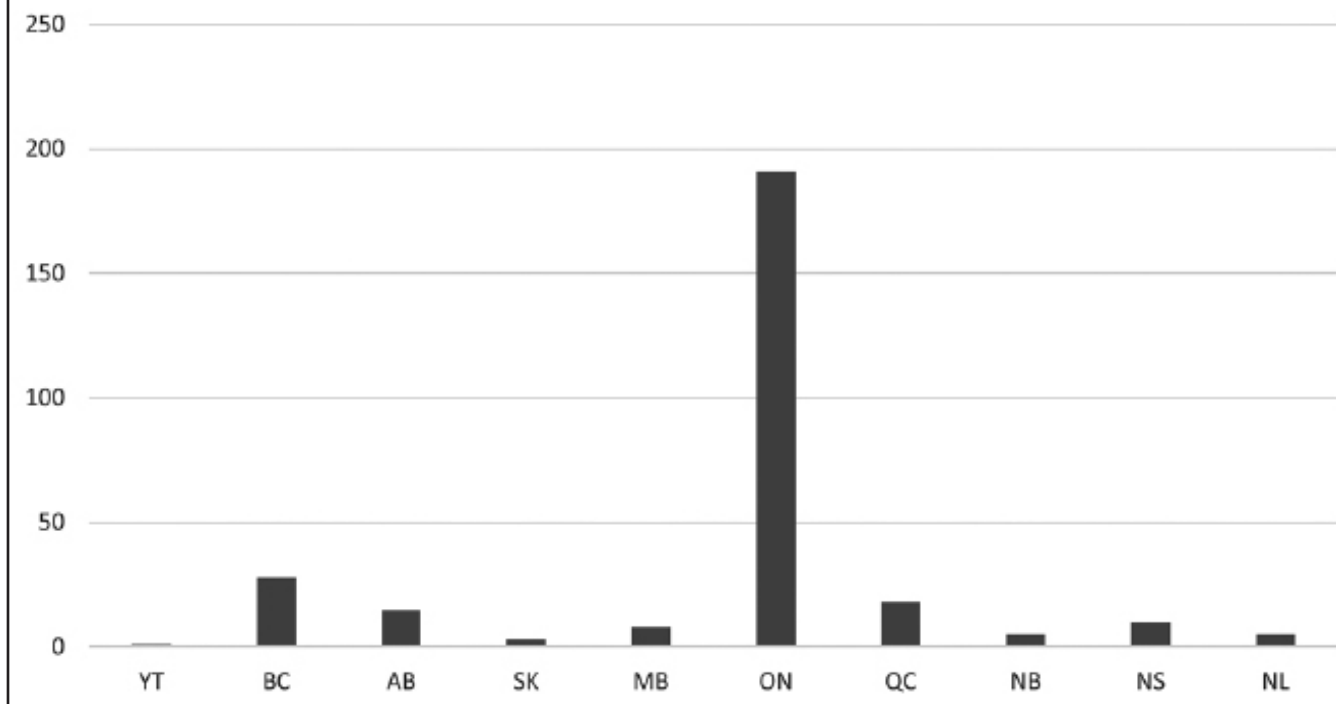
Having sowed the seeds for his own story, Bonokoski published an article on December 20, 1974 warning of the upcoming New York legislation. In one of the many wordplays that typified press coverage, Bonokoski wrote that "New York is busy as a beaver stealing our dam emblem." Within a few days, CBC Radio was on the case. *As it Happens* launched a public petition, commissioned a French horn quartet to play an ode to the beaver, and brought a live beaver into the studio, which proceeded to pee on host Alan Maitland.<sup>14</sup>

## 3. Public involvement

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Despite the dire warnings about American cultural imperialism, the tone of the debate was often jocular. Public reaction was swift and voluminous. Thousands of letters and signatures on petitions poured in. Many came to the CBC, but O'Sullivan and other MPs received their share, and a few hundred ended up in the files of the Secretary of State. Keeping in mind the fact that Faulkner had little personal interest in the issue, his staff responded carefully, if formulaically, to the interventions that had provided postal addresses.

**Figure 1:**  
Correspondence in the Secretary of States files,  
by province and territory (n = 284)



With the absence of postage fees for correspondence with Members of Parliament, it's understandable that many Canadians choose to share political opinions with elected representatives via mail. However, it is difficult to compare the scale of public engagement in this case with others.<sup>15</sup> CBC producer Mark Starowicz recalled "big canvas mailbags of petitions,"<sup>16</sup> suggesting the public support to make the beaver a national symbol was notable, strong, and perhaps overwhelming.

Support came in many shapes: signatures on hastily designed petitions, a few words on postcards, longer letters with reasoned arguments, sketches of beavers, and poems. Individuals drew up, mimeographed, and circulated petitions. "Keep the Beaver Canadian" petitions came from, among other places, 100 Mile House, BC; Edmonton; Acton, ON; Saint John, NB; Ottawa; and the first floor of North Eaton House, Acadia University.<sup>17</sup> One petition deferentially admitted that not all the signatories were of voting age, but the sender still hoped that the submission would be considered, given the urgency of the matter: "it can't wait till we can vote. And we feel it concerns us since we feel the loss..."<sup>18</sup> The majority of the letters were hand written, and the petitions were fairly amateurish,

demonstrating the groundswell of grassroots support for the proposal among people who may not have otherwise routinely engaged in political debate.

Of the 284 letters and petitions to which it is possible to ascribe a geographical location, a strong majority came from Ontario (Figure 1). But interventions arrived from all provinces, except for Prince Edward Island, with one from Yukon. The national scope across Anglophone Canada of *As It Happens* likely accounts for the coast-to-coast interest. Numerous writers referred specifically to the CBC program.

Some teachers also clearly saw an opportunity to involve their students in civic debate and the political process. Whole classes at Centre Dufferin District High School in Shelburne, ON; Fisher Park High School in Ottawa; W.D. Lowe Secondary in Windsor, ON; and Curling Elementary School in Curling, NL sent in their petitions and representations, likely the first time the young citizens had ever written to the Canadian Parliament. One group from the St. John's School in Kitchener, conveyed their views, undoubtedly informed by a teaching unit on the beaver. One young student justified her support by noting that the beaver



Ste Marie thought the five-cent piece was at risk: "We have invested probably millions of dollars in the minting of nickels with the beaver on it. Please save our beaver! Keep it Canadian."<sup>26</sup> In fact, some Canadians expressed concerns about copyright issues after the bill was passed. The city clerk for Saint John, NB, wrote to a Progressive Conservative MP representing a nearby riding to confirm "the City of Saint John's right to continue to use the Beaver as part of its crest."<sup>27</sup>

Some writers emphasized the intrinsic qualities of the beaver, at least as they are often expressed in an anthropomorphized way. Steve Rodney of Ottawa wrote that the beaver "represents industriousness, skill and hard work. If we should loose (sic) the beaver we shall loose our oldest and most valued symbol of our Canadian culture."<sup>28</sup> Chuck Meagher of Medicine Hat, AB, appealed to the historical importance of the beaver: "It represents the competitive ethic of the fur trade that opened up this nation."<sup>29</sup> But, surprisingly, relatively few writers referred to the animal's characteristics or linked it to a specific historical role, though undoubtedly many of them took these attributes for granted.

Rather the key argument was simply that the beaver was already a Canadian symbol, and therefore it should remain that into the future. Although this is essentially a circular argument, it was the most compelling reason for supporting the bill. Mary Edith Garniss of Wingham, ON, confirmed this view: "The beaver has always been unofficially the Canadian emblem, since it is a part of our natural wildlife. Therefore, it should be adopted formally by the Canadian federal government before it is overtaken by our hungry neighbour. There is enough American domination in Canada without allowing our symbols to be stolen as well."<sup>30</sup> For Ken Valline of North Vancouver, "The beaver to Canada is like the Crown Jewels to England."<sup>31</sup>

For some correspondents, expressing views on the beaver question allowed them to add their own statements on the state of the country and their concerns about historical change and contemporary issues. For example, Phyllis Crampton of Hamilton complained about the lack of nationalism among Canadian youth, presumably aware that she was writing to a very young MP: "Why aren't the young people in schools to-day taught to respect & be proud of Canada as a whole, They look down on it, & take all they can get for nothing..."<sup>32</sup> In addition to pledging her "full support" for the bill, Nora Gleeson of Chalk River, ON, added that, "I am also in favour of bringing back the Death Penalty for Murderers."<sup>33</sup>

But the key arguments related to attitudes to the United States, and to the extent that the letters reveal the writers' ideological stances, people from both the left and right agreed on their attitudes to Canada's southern neighbour. Falling shortly after the end of the Vietnam War and the resignation of Richard Nixon, and reflecting concerns about American involvement in Canada, many writers – as O'Sullivan expressed it – thought that the Americans were stealing the Canadian beaver. It is unlikely that if Sweden, for instance, had expressed the desire to designate the beaver its national animal, the result would have been the same. But New York State occupied a much different place in the Canadian consciousness, and many writers wrote in negative terms about the United States. In that sense, the beaver issue became a metaphor for US imperialism in Canada, and the correspondents drew on imagery of crime and economic domination. Sharon Metcalfe of Almonte, ON, wrote that "The Yankees are trying to steal our symbole (sic)..."<sup>34</sup> M. Nadeau thought that if the Canadian government acted quickly, the Americans would not be able to adopt the same symbol: "The Americans can always find a substitute. (We suggest a rat.)" The letter was signed, "some patriotic Canadians."<sup>35</sup> Charles Hackland complained about American rapacity: "The Americans have taken a great deal out of Canada, more perhaps than they are entitled to. They will continue to do this as long as our government does nothing."<sup>36</sup> From Mississauga came a similar complaint: "Don't let them Yanks steal everything from us. They already have our land, businesses, oil, water etc etc PLEASE don't let them take our BEAVER."<sup>37</sup> The fact that an American state was attempting to adopt the symbol was a key element in provoking a deeply felt Canadian reaction.

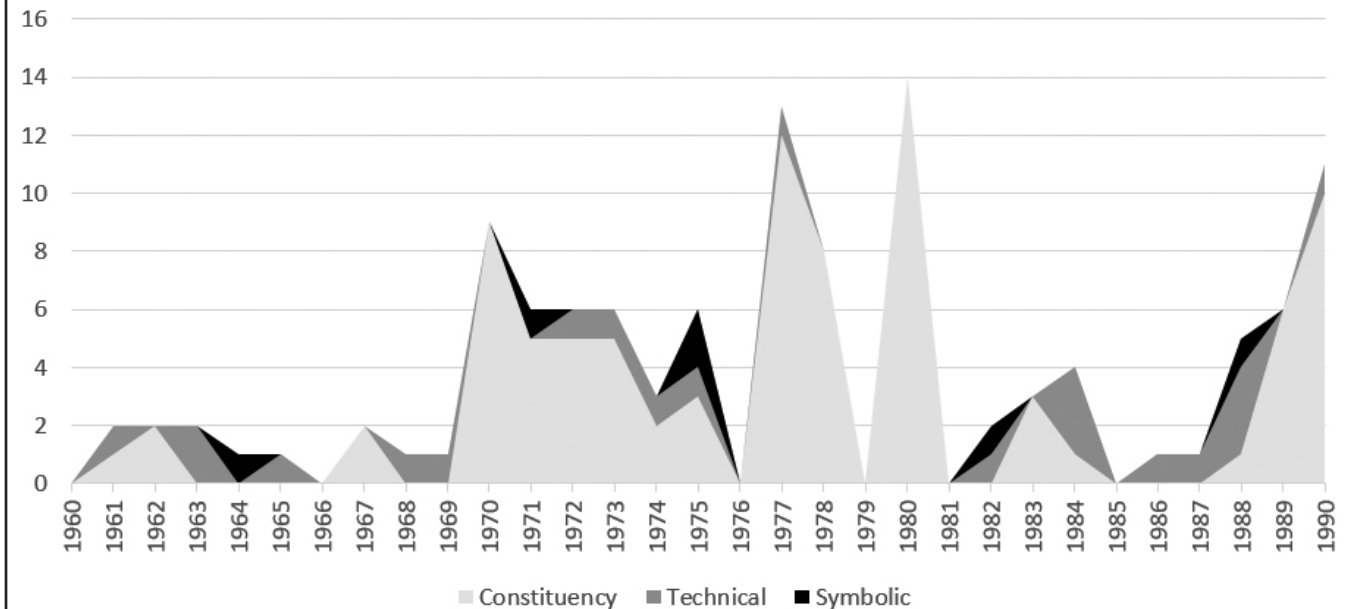
#### 4. Private members' bills

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In theory, the government could have taken on the task of introducing legislation to confirm the beaver as an official symbol of the country. But Faulkner realized that legislation would not stop New York from declaring its own intentions, and his staff did not initially think that the issue was garnering much attention.<sup>38</sup> O'Sullivan effectively made the beaver issue his own.

In late January 1975, O'Sullivan had his chance to introduce his private member's bill. But the Hamilton MP was not the first to think of presenting a private member's bill to recognize the beaver. His fellow Progressive Conservative MP Stan Darling (Parry Sound – Muskoka) had presented Bill C-331 on October 15, 1974, "to provide for a National Emblem for

Figure 2:  
Number of successful Private Members' Bills  
(both HofC and Senate),  
per year by nature of bill, 1960-1990

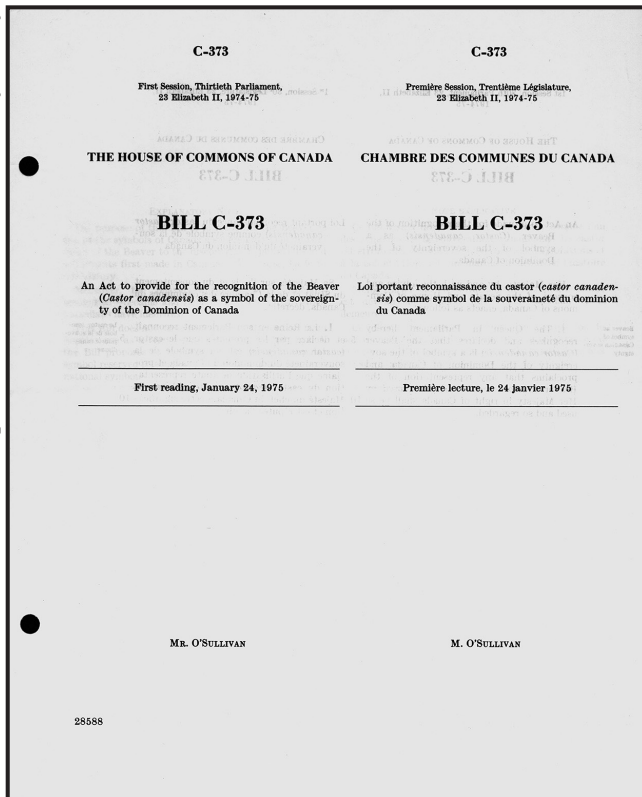


Canada.”<sup>39</sup> The bill declared that “the official emblem for the Dominion of Canada shall be the beaver.”<sup>40</sup> As was often the case with private members’ bills at that time, C-331 passed first reading, but then died on the order paper. Darling recalled that he withdrew his bill to allow O’Sullivan to present his version, but O’Sullivan does not mention him in his memoirs, nor did Darling second O’Sullivan’s bill when it was presented in parliament. Rather, that task fell to another backbencher, Joe Clark (Rocky Mountain).

During the 1970s, the type of private members’ bills that passed into legislation usually involved changing the name of a constituency (for instance, from “Bruce” to “Bruce-Grey”), a clearly local issue, but one that needed the consent of parliament. Occasional bills of a technical nature also acquired the support to ensure passage. For instance, in 1975, John Reid (Kenora-Rainy River) shepherded through the House a bill amending the *Fort-Falls Bridge Authority Act* by altering the date of the bridge’s construction.<sup>41</sup> Acts with a symbolic intent, such as the beaver bill, were rare during the 1970s. Later examples include the analogous

bill which proclaimed Canada’s official winter and summer sports, hockey and lacrosse in 1994. Previous attempts to make hockey Canada’s official sport had failed when fans of different sports objected. But a somewhat unlikely compromise was reached in 1994 between the NDP sponsor Nelson Riis (Kamloops), the Liberal government, and opposition Bloc Québécois and Reform MPs. A more recent example of such a bill is the passage in 2021 of an *Act* establishing “Kindness Week.”<sup>42</sup>

O’Sullivan was well aware that private members’ bills had little chance of passing. If their sponsor is successful in getting a bill onto the order paper, he or she still had to navigate the opinions of all other members of the house. One contrary voice, or one lengthy speech that used up the limited time allotted for debate, scuttled the chances of passage. O’Sullivan had prepared the ground carefully, informing the house leaders of the NDP and Progressive Conservatives of the intentions of his bill. The Cr ditistes also agreed with the bill. The matter was urgent, he informed his colleagues: “Should this Bill be enacted in Parliament I am then



The cover page for what was colloquially referred to as the “Beaver Bill.”

hopeful that the New York State Legislature will find a more suitable state symbol than the Beaver...” He also ensured that he would have the support of the sole independent MP.<sup>43</sup>

In legislatures that follow the Westminster tradition, backbench MPs tend to have little influence on legislative priorities, and private members’ bills normally die on the order paper. Nonetheless, the 1960s were considered the “golden age” for such initiatives in Westminster itself; private members’ bills were responsible for the *Abortion Act, 1967* and the decriminalization of male homosexual acts. Since that time, party discipline and government control of legislative agendas, and some MPs who philosophically favoured reducing state intervention, have rendered passage of private members’ bills very unlikely.<sup>44</sup> Some rules concerning private members’ bills differ in Canada, but the context is broadly similar. Private members’ bills in Canada cannot raise or spend money; but such bills may still have an “expressive” function, allowing individual MPs to present their views and attempt to influence public opinion. Still, few private

members’ bills that succeed have any “saliency.”<sup>45</sup> The strong public support for O’Sullivan’s bill confirmed the performative, but not the legislative, import of the legislation.

## 5. Debate and passage of the bill

On January 24, 1975, O’Sullivan presented the bill in first reading “to protect the beaver as a popular symbol reserved to Canadians by declaring the beaver a national symbol.”<sup>46</sup> By the time the bill reached the debate stage at second reading, O’Sullivan had acquired cross-party support for the measure. His justifications were slightly different by this point. He proposed Bill C-373 “to provide for the recognition of the Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) as a symbol of the sovereignty of the Dominion of Canada.” This designation technically limited its impact as a national symbol, providing merely that “when the beaver is used by the Queen in Parliament, it can be used as a symbol of the country.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, it was the government’s use of the symbol that would be protected, not the vernacular recognition of the beaver as representing the country.

Nonetheless, this was an attempt to “correct an oversight of history...” because it was easy to “find that the strong, tireless and industrious beaver has always been symbolic of our northern homeland.”<sup>48</sup> O’Sullivan cited the many ways the beaver had been used as a symbolic figure: an Indigenous clan sign, a figure carved on totem poles, a symbol on the arms of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and on the heraldry for Sir William Alexander’s short-lived Scottish colony of Nova Scotia in 1692. When O’Sullivan stated that the beaver appeared on the first Canadian stamp, another MP interjected, “Before the Queen?” Yes, the young MP replied, “Before the Queen.” Switching to French, O’Sullivan added that coins, the arms of the City of Montréal, and 14 Canadian regiments all boasted the animal. Trying to head off any opposition, and maybe not wishing to stir up bad feelings from the previous decade’s flag debates, he commented that the beaver and the maple leaf went together. It was true that Oregon, “The Beaver State,” had already adopted the animal (though it uses the Latin name, *castor americanus*), and its flag dating back to 1925 has the beaver on its reverse (the only two-sided state flag) and of course New York was debating the same issue. But the Canadian claim was stronger, and of broader appeal: it was “a symbol of national significance, well-founded in history and honoured by generations.” Finally, O’Sullivan argued that despite the economic difficulties facing the country, it was still possible to discuss an issue of national identity such as this.



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**A beaver sculpture over the entrance to Centre Block on Parliament Hill.**

Undoubtedly mindful of the limited time allotted to debate a private member's bill, only two others spoke on the issue, both of them from the government side. Ian Watson (Laprairie) referred to the use of the beaver by commercial houses in Montréal, and he raised concerns about how the adoption of the bill could raise implications for Canadian heraldry. For his part, Gustave Blouin supported the Beaver Bill with a few illogical references to the ultraconservative Castor

political faction of the late nineteenth century. These anecdotes illustrated, rather weakly it may be pointed out, that "the beaver as an emblem has always been and still is related to our history." Blouin concluded by recounting that some of his Indigenous constituents had pointed out a carving of a beaver on the top of the door to Parliament. With the two lacklustre speeches in support, the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. Here the

discussion largely focused on semantic issues. Watson, though not a member of the committee, repeated his concerns about potential heraldry problems, but the members brushed those points aside. In fact, his Liberal colleague, Simma Holt (Vancouver Kingsway), congratulated O'Sullivan for avoiding the language of heraldry and writing the bill in clear prose. The main amendment replaced "Dominion of Canada with "Canada." Mark MacGuigan (Windsor-Walkerville) emphasized the fact that this was "really quite a modest bill."<sup>49</sup> The bill was returned to the House, and on March 18, it had its third reading, passing without a formal vote.<sup>50</sup>

The bill received a bit more attention in the Senate. Senator Muriel McQueen Fergusson spoke from the same notes that O'Sullivan had used in the House of Commons; but he had supplied her with more ammunition. Fergusson quoted from the groundswell of letters written in support. For example, Mrs. Constance McDermid of St. Catharines wrote, "Please add my name to your list of supporters in regard to our beaver as an emblem. Why don't we use the emblem more? It stands for industry and faith. The little creatures build well. Somehow to me beavers mean Canada."<sup>51</sup>

Two senators raised questions about the bill that required some research. Senator Jacques Flynn expressed concern that the bill might make it more difficult to use the beaver as a commercial symbol. Senator Josie Quart, also a fan of *As It Happens*, referred to a problem raised in another segment of that programme which suggested that a National Film Board documentary filmmaker working on a story about Grey Owl had to go to Utah to find beavers for the shoot. The next day, using replies drafted by O'Sullivan, Senator Fergusson closed the debate, reassuring Flynn that no infringement of commercial use was intended. She confirmed Quart's understanding of the recourse to beaver in Utah but explained that was because there was a beaver farm in that state, and it was able to supply animals less expensively than a trapper could. The bill passed in the Senate without division, and it received Royal Assent, alongside *An Act to amend the Prairie Grain Advance Payment Act* on March 24, 1975.<sup>52</sup> From that moment, the beaver became an official, state-sanctioned symbol of Canada.

## 6. New York's symbol

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Despite the concerted efforts of Canadians, the beaver also went on to become an official symbol of New York State. Senator Smith had spoken with O'Sullivan on

the telephone on January 30, 1975, and he repeated in a letter on February 18, 1975 that he could "see no reason why Canada and the State of New York can not share the same animal, who happily lives in our respective geographical areas."<sup>53</sup> The New York Assembly and Senate considered their own legislation at the same time that O'Sullivan's bill worked its way through the Canadian parliament. They even maintained the official scientific designation of the beaver as "castor canadensis," although sometimes the phrasing "castor americanus" was used.<sup>54</sup> New York State legislators likewise ignored the light-hearted protest from Jason Boe, president of the Oregon State Senate in early May. Writing to the *New York Times*, Boe claimed to having been "pelted with letters from the citizens of Oregon who are raising their tails in protest. This damning reaction should cause you gnawing doubts as to the sagacity of such fur-fetched legislation." He concluded by asking "that you keep your hands off our beaver."<sup>55</sup>

In July, the Senate bill was returned to the governor of New York for his signature.<sup>56</sup> A range of other state symbols have since joined the beaver, including an official fossil (1984), shell (1988), insect (1989), saltwater fish and reptile (2006), as well as an official state fruit (the apple), muffin (the apple muffin), beverage (milk), and bush (the lilac).<sup>57</sup> The Canadian government has not proliferated its symbols to the same extent.

For O'Sullivan, another *Toronto Sun* article published just two days before the third reading of his bill was likely more disturbing than having to share the beaver with two states. Under the headline: "It was only a joke!" Bonokoski admitted his role in the whole affair, and complained that "now we're stuck with a rodent as a symbol of Canadian nationalism." He pointed out that Canadians had turned their attention from much more important matters like inflation, taxes, strikes, violence, famine, wars and the price of alcohol to focus on this issue of national identity.<sup>58</sup> Still, he had the audacity to ask O'Sullivan for a letter of acknowledgement of his role in the process, planning to submit the file for a newspaper journalism award.<sup>59</sup> O'Sullivan took some weeks to send the letter, confirming he had learned about the New York senator's plan from Bonokoski. But, wounded, O'Sullivan wrote separately to the journalist, assuring him that "I would not take up the time of Parliament on any matter lacking any serious importance."<sup>60</sup> Similarly, he took umbrage to *Globe and Mail* journalist Geoffrey Stevens' assessment of the beaver campaign as "a phony issue." "I can assure you," O'Sullivan wrote Stevens, "that I do view such an issue as being a serious and legitimate one for consideration by the House."<sup>61</sup> This legislation was

one of O'Sullivan's major parliamentary achievements. Questioning his own future and unhappy with the election of his erstwhile ally, Joe Clark, as party leader in 1976, O'Sullivan resigned from the House the following year and joined the priesthood.

## Conclusion

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The beaver bill of 1975 reveals some of the limitations of the official recognition of national symbols, and it raises some important questions: Does it matter if a government recognizes a popular symbol? Does that act provide more legitimacy to the symbol? Lacrosse may have become the official summer sport of Canadians in 1994, but it remains a relatively minor sport, not figuring among the top 25 sports by participation in a Statistics Canada survey from 2010.<sup>62</sup>

Does state recognition lend weight to an icon? The key argument that most members of the public could muster was that the beaver was already a symbol of Canada, and therefore it should be legislated as a symbol of Canada. It was not the "beaver-ness" of the beaver that counted, but rather its "symbol-ness." This is the banality of nationalism, to borrow an expression from Michael Billig. For the sociologist, the everyday experience of national identity is key to understanding the ideology: "Banal nationalism operates with prosaic, routine words, which take nations for granted, and which, in so doing, inhabit them."<sup>63</sup> In the case of the beaver, it is the five-cent piece, the Roots Canada and Parks Canada logos, among other illustrations, that underline the place of the beaver in the pantheon of Canadian national symbols. We cannot know how Canadians would have reacted if an American state had chosen the caribou, featured on the 25-cent piece since 1937, to be its symbol, or the moose, or for that matter the Canada goose. But perhaps the beaver holds more gravitas for Canadians than the other animals. During the contentious debate over the maple leaf flag in the 1960s, some western Canadian MPs admitted preferring the beaver, because at least the rodent appeared naturally in their part of the country, unlike the maple.<sup>64</sup> But by the same token, the natural range of the beaver extends well into the United States.

The debate over the beaver bill allowed Canadians to express some general anti-American attitudes in a playful manner, not likely to offend – or really, for that matter, even to be noticed. These debates make it clear that, in the 1970s, anti-American sentiment, often fairly visceral, was more than an elite-driven rhetorical stance, despite the arguments of historians like J.L. Granatstein.<sup>65</sup> A strict reading of the bill does

not protect the public use of the beaver as a national symbol, which was the goal of many of the letter-writers, but rather the government's use. To be fair, the government could not legitimately do much more, even though the rhetoric in the debate hoped that it could.

Although the over 13,000 people<sup>66</sup> who took the time to sign petitions or send postcards or letters to their politicians clearly felt otherwise, the beaver's role as a symbol of Canada did not depend on the government's authorization. It stemmed from history, from anthropomorphizing a non-human species, and the reassurance stemming from a tradition that the beaver had always been a symbol of the country. The timelessness of the beaver made it an appropriate choice for many Canadian citizens and their legislators to agree on in 1975. They entrusted the exclusivity of an expression of national identity to the legislative process that could not do anything effectively to guarantee it. On some level, Canadian citizens believed that the state could deliver.

## Notes

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- 1 I discuss the broader history of the beaver as a Canadian symbol in "The Beaver" in Michael Dawson, Catherine Gidney and Donald Wright, eds., *Symbols of Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2018), pp. 8-17. I would like to thank the editors of that book for encouraging me to write on this topic. Philippe Thompson and Sydney Manton provided research assistance.
- 2 Harold Faber, "Beaver and Brook Trout Urged as State Symbols." *New York Times*, 25 August 1974.
- 3 The timing of the Canadian reaction suggests that it was a December 15, 1974 article in the *New York Times* that occasioned the concern, although refracted through *Newsday* (another New York area newspaper). Brock University Archives, Sean O'Sullivan fonds, RG431-1 [hereafter SO fonds], 12.26, Secretary of State – Beaver Bill, 1974-75, Keith Martin to Sean O'Sullivan, 19 December 1971.
- 4 Hope Ryden, "Let's hear it for the eager beaver." *New York Times*, 15 December 1974, pp. 38-41, 44-45, quotation from p. 44.
- 5 SO fonds, 12.26, Secretary of State – Beaver Bill, 1974-75, Keith Martin to Sean O'Sullivan, 19 December 1974; Sean O'Sullivan with Rod McQueen, *Both My Houses: From Politics to Priesthood* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1986), pp. 96-99.
- 6 *House of Commons Debates*, 30th Parliament, 1st Session, vol. 1, 19 December 1974, pp. 2389-97.
- 7 SO fonds, 12.26, O'Sullivan to J. Hugh Faulkner, Secretary of State of Canada, 19 December 1974.
- 8 SO fonds, 12.26, Handwritten notes about O'Sullivan's conversation with Blouin, 19 December 1974.

- 9 The staff responses to the queries were fairly standard. This wording from 1935 is typical: "I do not know of any official recognition of the beaver as an emblem of Canada although, I am aware, it is very popularly used." LAC, Secretary of State, BAN #2002-01398-X, Box 150, File #7974-5 [hereafter Sec. State], Vol. 1, E. H. Coleman, Under Secretary of State, to John W. Regan, Halifax, 28 March 1935.
- 10 SO fonds, 12.16, Faulker to O'Sullivan, 5 February 1975.
- 11 Sec. State, Vol. 4, Memorandum to the Minister, 10 January 1975; draft letter to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, no date; notes, dated 30 January 1975, AC (Andrew Cohen) to JB (Jean Boucher).
- 12 Sec. State, Vol. 6, J. Hugh Faulkner to Grade 5 Class, Curling Elementary School, Curling, NL, 26 February 1975.
- 13 O'Sullivan, *Both My Houses*, p. 97.
- 14 "Ten years of As It Happens," 17 November 1978, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/audio/1.3333223>; Mary Lou Finlay, *The As It Happens Files* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), p. 26; Kevin van Paasen, "Mark Starowicz, the last of CBC's great documentarians, rolls the credits" *Globe and Mail*, 31 July 2015.
- 15 Here are two contrasting examples. In the United States on April 11, 1968, days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, Republican governor of Maryland Spiro Agnew confronted African-American leaders. He claimed they had not denounced clearly enough the wave of violence that had followed. By the end of the month, his office reported having received 7,588 letters and telegrams of support, against only 1,042 which criticized his position. See: Clay Risen, "How the Party of Lincoln Became the Party of Racial Backlash." *New York Times*, 31 March 2018; More recently, in a context in which letter-writing has become less common, members of the public sent "hundreds" of letters and emails to federal Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould in reaction to the decision in the Gerald Stanley murder trial. A CBC journalist described these communications as a "flood of correspondence." See: Kathleen Harris, "'Do something': Liberals faced angry backlash over Colten Bushie case", 11 May 2018, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/justice-minister-letters-boushie-1.4655794>; Tom Perry, "Justice minister's tweet on Boushie verdict inspired wave of angry emails, letters," 26 May 2018, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/boushie-trial-minister-tweet-1.4679089>.
- 16 van Paasen, "Mark Starowicz."
- 17 SO fonds, 12.16, "Keep the Beaver Canadian" petition, no date.
- 18 Sec. State, Vol. 2, David Hayashida, 21 January 1975.
- 19 SO fonds, 21.26, student from St. Johns School, Kitchener, to Joseph Flynn, MP, 31 January 1975. (I am not including the student's name in this or the next note, given their young ages when they wrote the letter. The names of adult authors of letters are indicated.)
- 20 SO fonds, 21.26, student from St Johns School, Kitchener, to Joseph Flynn, MP, 31 January 1975.
- 21 SO fonds, 21.26, Dave Bayus, Oshawa to Ed Broadbent, 26 January 1975. Likewise, HJ Jolly, Grassie, ON to O'Sullivan, no date (received 21 February 1975.)
- 22 Sec. State, Vol. 5, Kenneth A. Benson to James H. Faulkner, 26 January 1975.
- 23 Sec. State, Vol. 2, Petition, 24 January 1975.
- 24 "The beaver is one of our last remaining natural resources that are still Canadian-owned...", Sec. State, Vol. 2, Marc Morin, 21 janvier 1975.
- 25 On the history of brands, see Liz Moor, *The Rise of Brands* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).
- 26 Sec. State, Vol. 1, Paulette Rousseau, 7 January 1975.
- 27 SO fonds, 12.21, Secretary of State, Beaver Bill, 1975, Correspondence. A-22-4, D. H. Garey, Common Clerk, to R. Gordon Fairweather, 21 April 1975.
- 28 Sec. State, Vol. 1, Steve Rodney, 8 January 1975.
- 29 SO fonds, 12.26, Chuck Meagher to Sean O'Sullivan, 20 January 1975.
- 30 Sec. State, Vol. 5, Mary Edith Garniss, Wingham, ON, 6 February 1975.
- 31 SO fonds, 12.27, Ken Valline, 16 February 1975.
- 32 SO fonds, 12.26, Phyllis Crampton, Hamilton to O'Sullivan, 22 January 1975.
- 33 Sec. State, Vol. 2, Nora Gleeson, Chalk River, ON, 20 January 1975.
- 34 Sec. State, Vol. 1, Sharon Metcalfe, Almonte, ON, 28 December 1974.
- 35 Sec. State, Vol. 1, M. Nadeau, Iroquois, ON, 27 December 1974.
- 36 Sec. State, Vol. 1, Charles and Susan Hackland, Ottawa, ON, 27 December 1974.
- 37 Sec. State, Vol. 2, B. Montgomery, Mississauga, 21 January 1974.
- 38 Sec. State, Vol. 4, ? to WL, notes, 14 January 1975: "So far we have received 35 letters on the subject."
- 39 *House of Commons Debates*, 30<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1974, vol. 1, p. 378. Darling mistook the chronology in his memoirs, dating the debate over the beaver issue to 1977, and interestingly not remembering what New York State had decided. Darling with Beth Slaney, *Darling Diaries: Memoirs of a Political Career* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995), p. 50.
- 40 Jim Cameron, *The Canadian Beaver Book: Fact, Fiction, and Fantasy* (Burnstown, ON: General Store Publishing House, 1991), p. 11.
- 41 Kelly Blidook argues that Private Members' Bills, even unsuccessful ones, may be more significant than often thought in that they propose items that influence government policy. This article acknowledges the importance of rule changes introduced in 1985 and later modifications. "Exploring the Role of 'Legislators' in Canada: Do Members of Parliament Influence Policy?" *Journal of Legislative Studies* 16, 1 (March 2010): 32-56.

- However, a study based on extensive interviews with former MPs suggests that party discipline constrains the Private Members' Bills that individual MPs present and vote upon. Alison Loat and Michael MacMillan, *Tragedy in the Commons: Former Members of Parliament Speak Out About Canada's Failing Democracy* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2014), p. 215, 231.
- 42 "Private Members' Public Bills Passed by Parliament: 1910-Present," URL: [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/legislation/privateMembersBills](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/legislation/privateMembersBills)
  - 43 SO fonds, 12.21, Secretary of State, Beaver Bill, 1975. A-22-4, Letters to Stanley Knowles, Walter Baker, Jerry Yanover, John M. Reid, 10 February 1975; Leonard C. Jones to O'Sullivan, 14 February 1975.
  - 44 Alex Brazier and Ruth Fox, "Enhancing the Backbench MP's Role as a Legislator: The Case for Urgent Reform of Private Members Bills" *Parliamentary Affairs* 63, 1 (2010): 201-11; Holly Marsh and David Marsh, "Tories in the Killing Fields? The Fate of Private Members' Bills in the 1997-2001 Parliament" *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 8, 1 (Spring 2002): 92-112.
  - 45 R.V. Stewart Hyson, "The Role of the backbencher – An analysis of private members' bills in the Canadian House of Commons" *Parliamentary Affairs* 27 (March 1974): 262-72.
  - 46 *House of Commons Debates*, 30th Parliament, 1st Session, 1975, p. 2573,
  - 47 MP Mark MacGuigan, *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs*, 12 March 1975, pp. 15-34. Copy in SO fonds, 12.27, Secretary of State – Beaver Bill, Part II. Mar.-April 1975.
  - 48 *House of Commons Debates*, 30th Parliament, 1st Session, 21 Feb. 1975, p. 3463.
  - 49 Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, pp. 15-33 to 15-42, quotation at p. 15-34, Copy in SO fonds, 12.27, Secretary of State – Beaver Bill, Part II. Mar.-April 1975.
  - 50 *House of Commons Debates*, 30th Parliament, 1st Session,, 18 March 1975, p. 4215.
  - 51 *Senate Debates*, 30th Parliament, 1st Session 20 March 1975, p. 686.
  - 52 *House of Commons Debates*, 30th Parliament, 1st Session,, 24 March 1975, p. 4447.
  - 53 SO fonds, 12.26, Bernard C. Smith to Sean O'Sullivan, 18 February 1975.
  - 54 *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York*, 198<sup>th</sup> session, vol. 2, 2 June 1975, p. 2494.
  - 55 Jason Boe, to the Editor, *New York Times*, 12 May 1975, p. 26.
  - 56 *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York*, 198<sup>th</sup> session, vol. 3, 9 July 1975, p. 4050.
  - 57 New York State, Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Symbols, n.d., available at <https://dec.ny.gov/get-involved/education/kids-go/new-york-state-symbols>
  - 58 Mark Bonokoski, "It was only a joke!" *Toronto Sun*, 16 March 1975.
  - 59 SO fonds, 12.26, Bonokoski to O'Sullivan, 25 March 1975.
  - 60 SO fonds, 12.26, O'Sullivan to "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN", 16 April 1975; O'Sullivan to Bonokoski, 16 April 1975.
  - 61 SO fonds, 12.26, O'Sullivan to Geoffrey Stevens, 21 February 1975.
  - 62 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, Research Paper (2012), p. 34.
  - 63 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), p. 93
  - 64 *House of Commons Debates*, Hugh Horner (Jasper-Edson), 18 August 1964, p. 6930; F.J.W. Fane (Vegreville), 18 August 1964, p. 6990; A.C. Cadieu (Meadow Lake), 20 August 1964, p. 7067; D.R. Gundlock (Lethbridge), 24 August 1964, p. 7192.
  - 65 J. L. Granatstein, *Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1996). Ryan Edwardson captures the general tenor of anti-American sentiment in Canada in his analysis of The Guess Who's iconic song from 1970, "'Of War Machines and Ghetto Scenes: English-Canadian Nationalism and The Guess Who's 'American Woman'" *American Review of Canadian Studies* 33, 3 (autumn 2003): 339-56.
  - 66 Sean O'Sullivan provided this number in the House of Commons. *House of Commons Debates*, 21 February 1975, p. 3463. In his autobiography, he recalled that more than 10,000 letters had been received by the Minister of State's office, in addition to which CBC petitions had garnered 13,000 signatures. In fact, the Minister of State's files contain a more modest number of letters and petitions. O'Sullivan with Rod McQueen, *Both My Houses*, p. 97.

# *Privilege in Practice: Queen's Park Perspectives on Parliamentary Privilege*

Parliamentary privilege refers to immunities and rights necessary for Parliament and legislative assemblies, as institutions, and their Members, as representatives of the electorate, to fulfill their functions without interference. As a set of fixed legal powers, parliamentary privilege is necessary to protect legislative institutions, elected Members, committees, and all those involved in parliamentary proceedings. Without these protections, Members may face limitations or be obstructed in performing their parliamentary duties of legislating and debating. Additionally, without privilege, the role of legislative institutions as a forum for representing citizens' concerns would be severely undermined. The rights and immunities exercised by a legislative institution depend on the constitutional context. Jurisdictions across the Commonwealth outline the protection of this ancient parliamentary right in different ways. Ontario, for example, has partially codified its understanding of parliamentary privilege, partly due to historical doubts regarding the constitutionality of provincial legislatures' right to legislate their own privileges. In this article, the author explores whether there is interest within the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in further asserting, clarifying, or modernizing how it outlines privilege. This research further considers how legislative assemblies can ensure that the protections of privilege meet the needs and expectations of their Members and support of parliamentary democracy in the 21st century.

**Megan Ryan-Lloyd**

Parliamentary privilege refers to the collective and individual rights and immunities which are deemed necessary for Parliament and its Members to satisfy their primary functions. Among these rights are the freedom of Members to perform their parliamentary duties without undue obstruction, interference or intimidation, and the power of the House to discipline members, staff or "strangers" for conduct deemed a breach of privilege or contempt of parliament.<sup>1</sup> Without parliamentary privilege, parliaments and legislative assemblies, as institutions, or Members, as representatives of the electorate, could be barred from performing their parliamentary duties. As a result, the authority and effectiveness

of a legislative institution to hold the government to account and its role as a forum for expressing citizens' concerns would be correspondingly diminished.<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary privilege is widely recognized as essential for the effective functioning of the legislative branch. Indeed, it is intuitive that, at the heart of democracy, there lies a recognition that parliamentarians must be free to represent their constituents' views and express themselves in debates without fear, regardless of the power or wealth of those they criticize. Jurisdictions across Canada and the Commonwealth assert and protect parliamentary privilege in different ways. This article explores how parliamentary privilege functions within the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and considers whether there are ways the Legislative Assembly can adapt its understanding of parliamentary privilege to meet the needs and expectations of its Members.

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## **Research Questions and Methodology**

Historically, legislatures have acted to more clearly define and articulate parliamentary privileges in times when there has been significant concern

about parliaments' ability to effectively operate. For example, court decisions that appear to unduly restrict or limit the application and scope of privilege<sup>3</sup> have prompted parliamentarians to consider methods of asserting, protecting or further defining their privileges. Recognizing this pattern, this research examines whether the Legislative Assembly of Ontario is currently able to effectively operate relying on its parliamentary privilege. It also examines whether additional steps, ranging from a committee study to complete codification, would be beneficial to fully allay any contemporary concerns about maintaining and exercising privilege.

My research question asks whether changes should be made to assert further, clarify, or modernize how the Legislative Assembly of Ontario outlines these privileges. More specifically, are there substantial concerns about the exercise of privilege? If so, what are some options to address these concerns? Or, perhaps more generally, is there a need for legislatures to comprehensively assert or re-examine the nature and scope of parliamentary privilege? These questions highlight the importance of understanding parliamentary privilege and its broader role in protecting our representative institutions, especially in a time of tense and divisive politics. This article emphasizes that a commitment to protecting and strengthening our parliamentary and legislative institutions is essential, and such a commitment includes preserving the unique privileges that serve as an essential foundation for their constitutional and democratic roles.

In undertaking this research, I reviewed both primary and secondary sources to understand how parliamentary privilege has been applied and developed over time as a constitutional principle. To supplement this literature review, I conducted three interviews with procedural experts from the Legislative Assembly of Ontario who provide procedural support to Members in various capacities. A second set of interviews focused on attitudes, feelings, and general understandings of privilege for those it impacts the most: Members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Ten Members of the Assembly were selected based on criteria indicating a greater likelihood of familiarity with parliamentary procedure and privilege at the Legislative Assembly.<sup>4</sup> Participating Members each met at least one of the two following requirements: they occupied a formal position whose duties are primarily procedural in nature, or had been a Member for a minimum of 10 years.<sup>5</sup> The balance achieved across party lines was

as follows: five Members from the Government, three from the Official Opposition, and two independent Members based on the party standings of the 43rd Parliament.

### **Understanding Parliamentary Privilege: History, Definition, Application in Ontario**

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This article employs the definition of parliamentary privilege set out by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario's Standing Orders: "Privileges are the rights enjoyed by the House collectively and by the Members of the House individually conferred by the *Legislative Assembly Act* and other statutes, or by practice, precedent, usage and custom."<sup>6</sup> For this study, codification of parliamentary privilege refers to the practice of incorporating the often-unwritten applications and customs of privilege into statutory form, as opposed to relying on common law protections.<sup>7</sup>

Legislative bodies primarily decide how their privileges are exercised internally.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, among the privileges held by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario is the right to independently regulate its internal affairs. Ontario has partially codified its parliamentary privileges in the *Legislative Assembly Act* ("the *Act*"). The *Act's* parliamentary privilege provisions include the following:

- The power of the Assembly to command and compel the attendance of witnesses before it and its committees, as well as the production of "papers and things," as deemed necessary for its proceedings and deliberations;
- The power of the Speaker to issue warrants to direct the attendance of persons before the Assembly and its committees, and the production of papers and things, as ordered by the Assembly;
- The protection of persons from liability for damages or otherwise, for any act done under the authority of the Assembly;
- Members' freedom of speech;
- Members' freedom from arrest in civil actions; Prohibition on the service of civil process in the legislative building, committee rooms, and designated Members' offices;
- The exemption of Members, officers, and employees of the Assembly, and of witnesses summoned to appear before the Assembly or its committees, from serving as jurors; and
- The right to inquire into and punish contempt's and breaches of privilege (*Legislative Assembly Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. L.10).

This statutory expression reflects the Legislative Assembly's preferred approach in assertion of its privileges, which can be relied upon within court proceedings and in clarifying the elements of its privileges on an as-needed basis. Ontario's approach—a pragmatic use of statute law—is one of the two primary approaches to legislating parliamentary privileges, the other being comprehensive codification.<sup>9</sup> Comprehensive codification can further clarify the full parameters of privilege, offering a way for a parliamentary or legislative institution to proactively assert its privileges, and provide direction for its consideration by the courts. An example of a more fulsome codification of privilege can be found in the *Australian Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987*.<sup>10</sup>

Parliamentary privilege was first claimed within the historical struggles of the English House of Commons as it battled to assert legal protections from the dominant role of the Monarch. Taking offence at the conduct of some Members of Parliament, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the King imprisoned several parliamentarians despite protests from the House of Commons that these arrests contravened its liberties. While the primary concern of parliamentary privilege historically was the then-evolving relationship between the British House of Commons and the Monarch's gradual decline of constitutional power and influence, today, a more significant concern tends to be the threat of encroachment by the judiciary and the impact of narrow recognitions and interpretations of privilege.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in recent decades, parliamentary privilege discourse has centered on how privilege should function within a rights-based legal system, exemplified in the Canadian context by the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.<sup>12</sup>

Compared to the Parliament of Canada, some legislative assemblies in Canada's provinces and territories had a longer and more fraught process to assert their parliamentary privileges. The *British North America Act, 1867*, conferred the privileges of the British House of Commons and its Members as in effect in March 1867 to the new Canadian Parliament, but did not explicitly extend the same privileges to provincial legislatures. Provinces, therefore, later sought to establish recognition of their parliamentary privileges through legislation.<sup>13</sup>

### Literature Review & Key Debates

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Many jurisdictions throughout the Commonwealth rely on authoritative procedural guides to inform their respective approaches to parliamentary business. In

Canada, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* is a respected authority on parliamentary procedure. It explains how business is conducted in the House of Commons and how Members' work is governed.<sup>14</sup> This guide and similar procedural authorities collect and organize Parliament's traditions, precedents, and procedures. Joseph Maingot's oft-cited *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* focuses on the history and workings of privilege within a Canadian context and is frequently referred to during in-depth discussions of this topic. Additionally, Erskine May's *Treatise upon the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* is a cornerstone source which has become a preeminent authority on parliamentary practice owing to its enduring and pervasive use in maintaining a uniform understanding of privilege. Although written explicitly for the Parliament at Westminster, it has continued to be used as a procedural authority by numerous legislatures, national, state, and provincial, for many years.<sup>15</sup>

Robert and Lithwick's "Renewal and Restoration: Contemporary Trends in the Evolution of Parliamentary Privilege" provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of parliamentary privilege in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The authors highlight that as individual parliamentary institutions and democracies have matured over the last century, they have developed their own approaches to privilege. In surveying these democracies, Robert and Lithwick distinguish two trends: renewal, a more explicit approach to accommodate individual rights with parliamentary privilege by applying a "necessity test," and restoration, a more implicit approach that emphasizes protecting privilege in order to sustain the work of parliament.<sup>16</sup>

Significant academic debate concerns who should be able to define the scope and exercise of parliamentary privilege. Some sources highlight the critical role the judiciary plays in relation to parliamentary privilege, specifically when the existence, scope, or necessity of the asserted privilege is at issue and competing constitutional principles, rights, and interests are in balance.<sup>17</sup> Others, however, argue that in scrutinizing the necessity and scope of privilege, Canadian courts have chipped away at the separation of powers, unjustifiably prioritizing the judicial recognition of individual rights over the needs of parliamentary institutions.<sup>18</sup> This body of literature highlights the practical challenges of ensuring that the functioning of parliamentary privilege complements our constitutional framework rather than operating above it.<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned above, Australia and New Zealand offer specific examples of the codification of privilege. The UK has also strongly considered this avenue. A report by the Constitution Society, an independent foundation, argues that support for further codification of privilege extends beyond syntactic considerations, and there are potential practical consequences of relying solely on an evolutionary approach.<sup>20</sup> This report outlines that the benefit of codification is that the process of creating specific provisions may make it less likely that the judiciary will cut down the scope of parliamentary privilege intended by Parliament.<sup>21</sup>

The question of whether codification is a preferred mechanism remains contested. Some typical concerns about the codification of privilege note the risk of freezing privilege in a particular era, potentially leading to increased judicial encroachment, public misunderstanding, and a lack of flexibility for privilege to adapt to the changing needs of legislative institutions. Colette Mireille Langlois, for example, argues for a “relational approach” to parliamentary privilege. Such an approach frames issues in terms of context and underlying values, rather than the traditional contest approach, which involves competition between individual rights and privileges.<sup>22</sup>

Upon reflection, there is a lack of discussion in the literature surrounding the codification of privilege within the specific context of Canadian provinces. Additionally, literature in this area highlights that Members rarely participate in these discussions about privilege. Apart from a contribution by former MP Derek Lee,<sup>23</sup> most commentary on this subject is produced by clerks, procedural researchers, or other senior officials of legislative institutions. This appears to suggest that the practice in many parliaments and legislative assemblies is that a robust understanding of privilege is almost exclusively limited to clerks or other proceduralists, rather than Members. This study aims to examine this dynamic, especially considering how much parliamentary privilege impacts Members.

### Key Informant Findings

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This research included three semi-structured key informant interviews to assess a range of topics, including Members’ levels of understanding about procedure and technical clarifying questions, such as what codification would look like in practice and what resources are available to Members to support their understanding and navigation of privilege issues. As these staff serve in a strictly non-partisan

capacity, they did not recommend a particular course of action concerning codification or other modification methods. However, their specialized knowledge of the topic provided some initial insight into Members’ relationship with procedural topics.

These interviews revealed that there have not been significant discussions about further codifying parliamentary privilege in Ontario. As one interviewee explained: “We’ve modernized our approach to parliamentary privilege quite a bit internally, but nothing in statute.” The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, established in 2014, was cited as a primary reason codification has not been strongly considered. This Office provides comprehensive legal advice and support services for questions on parliamentary law, procedure, and privilege, from the Speaker, the Clerk, the House, committees, and individual MPPs. Having a specialized office with a comprehensive understanding of parliamentary privilege alleviates some uncertainty that may otherwise be present with privilege-related matters. As a result, discussions about possible further reform may be seen as less pressing.

Another reason Ontario may not have considered further codifying parliamentary privilege is due to its unique post-Confederation history. Although the *Constitution Act, 1867* was silent about whether the provincial legislatures had parliamentary privilege and the right to legislate their privileges,<sup>24</sup> later court decisions confirmed this power, allowing legislatures to enact laws defining their privileges.<sup>25</sup> Provisions in the modern-day *Legislative Assembly Act* are the same as those early provisions from the Assembly’s first successful attempt to legislate. Therefore, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario’s struggle to recognize its privileges, which remain partially codified today, must be understood in relation to its historical context and why Ontario opted to codify strategically and not comprehensively. The strategic codification of certain aspects of privilege in Ontario reflects this historical conflict and should not necessarily be seen as a broad preference for codification.

The interviews also highlighted some future considerations that could prompt the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to consider additional codification of privilege. For example, if a senior court were to seriously restrict parliamentary privilege or add more barriers to establishing privilege, legislative assemblies may determine that relying on the common law development of privilege is no longer sufficient for their needs. As one interviewee highlighted:

In a world where the non-codification of parliamentary privilege has led to a significant retraction of privilege by the courts, I suspect that will sharpen my mind at the very least, but I think a lot of my colleagues' minds as well across the country, whether or not codification, a significant and complete codification, is something that we ought to do.

One of the primary concerns regarding codification is that while it may increase certainty surrounding interpretation and future use, it also may limit flexibility. The parliaments of Australia and New Zealand, frequently cited as examples of parliaments that have adopted comprehensive privilege codes, have both signaled that their respective legislation is not intended to be a comprehensive code and will not limit the further interpretation and exercise of privilege. With this in mind, key informants were asked about the degree to which codification can be rigid or limiting, especially when the intent, as seen in Australia and New Zealand, is to provide clarity while maintaining flexibility. The following quote comes from a conversation about the role of "saving clauses" found within the Australian and New Zealand codes, which are the textual evidence suggesting the acts are not intended to be comprehensive:

Saving clauses are great, but if you put a big list [of codified parliamentary privileges] in front of a judge, they're going to use that big list. They're going to use that big list for no other reason than the fact that you clearly put some thought into it. And so, if you're trying to create new laws, new parliamentary privileges, or make an ideology, it's got to be restricted to that particular list, or the theories and threats behind that list.

This reflection is an example of how the codification process could lead to reduced flexibility in privileges and how a saving clause would not necessarily alter this reality. Ultimately, if a legislative body wishes to fight for a new articulation of privilege, a saving clause may do very little to support this exercise. The absence of a concrete "list" of privileges may make it more straightforward to fight for such an expansion.

These interviews also revealed insight into the distinction between a procedural authority and a codified set of laws on parliamentary privilege, specifically in their capacity to serve as tools for parliaments.<sup>26</sup> Interviews highlighted that the

primary purpose of codification is to protect privilege from legal challenges. In contrast, a procedural authority would primarily serve as an educational tool and resource, with little to no legal standing. One interviewee highlighted a difference that makes codification significantly more rigid and inflexible than a procedural authority: "You don't get to provide context in a bill. You are able to provide context in a book." A procedural authority can include historical background, examples, and interpretive notes, whereas bills prioritize precision, which leads to differing impacts of both methods on clarifying parliamentary privilege.

When asked about Members' levels of familiarity with privilege, respondents highlighted its complex nature. And, while all interviewees recognized that Members are not expected to be experts in privileges or parliamentary procedures, there is a broadly shared sentiment that many Members lack a full understanding of such topics. For example, when asked about what Members believed parliamentary privilege was, individual freedom of speech was emphasized as one of the rights of privilege that Members intuitively recognized and understood. One interviewee pointed out that this pattern points to a lack of understanding of privilege among Members: "I think as scholars and practitioners of parliamentary privilege, sometimes we don't make it clear enough that there's no such thing as an individual privilege." This reflection underscores that privilege is best understood as collective rights, as individual privileges are often subordinate to the collective privileges of the House. As such, interviewees highlighted the importance of viewing privilege through an institutional lens, emphasizing the role of a parliamentarian within their broader institution. The following quote from an interview explains why it is crucial to use an institutional lens to see privilege and how misapprehension of privilege may impact the consideration of codification:

Part of parliament being able to function properly is its privileges. So, to the extent that we say that some privileges are not necessary anymore in the current day, or we read down the scope of privileges because parliament doesn't seem to need them, it doesn't mean the parliament doesn't need them tomorrow. I don't think right now, parliaments are making that point clearly enough to the public, to the courts, to everyone else about the role it can play in the future and the goal that it should play in the future.

These reflections helped inform my approach to Members' interviews, particularly in assessing whether Members do, in fact, primarily view parliamentary privilege as tantamount to individual rights or if there is an equal focus on the institution of the Legislative Assembly.

## **MPP Interviews Findings**

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Building on the technical insights gained from the initial interviews with key informants, Members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly were asked how often the subject of parliamentary privilege came up in their work, to what degree they believed they understood the topic, and what issues they associated with it. Through a thematic analysis process of the interview transcripts, I identified four key themes underlying Members' reflections on parliamentary privilege: "Recognition of the Significance of Privilege," "Individual Rights," "Lack of Understanding," and "Perceptions vs. Reality."

### ***Theme #1: Recognition of the Significance of Privilege***

Participating Members recognized parliamentary privilege and the rights it affords them as being fundamental to the legislative process 15 times over the course of the interviews. Some Members noted that their experience in senior caucus roles or as a presiding officer gave them procedural experience that granted them a deeper understanding of how crucial parliamentary privilege is to the Legislative Assembly as an institution. Some Members also highlighted how specific situations arising in the House involving privilege illustrated this point.<sup>27</sup> However, appreciating the importance of parliamentary privilege does not necessarily mean that Members have a comprehensive understanding of the topic. As one interviewee noted:

While most Members might not be familiar with the finer points of privilege in its actual defined legislative sense, I think all of us have a very clear concept of privilege. And so even without some of the specific details and rules, I think most of us recognize the weight of what it is that we do, however we would define it.

Perhaps then, Members can intuitively understand the importance of parliamentary privilege without fully understanding its intricacies. Interestingly, one interviewee, based on their academic experience, provided specific insight into the codification of privilege. In this conversation, the Member provided reflections with a strong response against the idea:

Our system of law, or common law, is set to evolve over time, almost like historical storytelling. You know, context changes, application then can evolve. If you come at it from looking at something like the Napoleonic code, where everything is codified, it gives you a sense of certainty, but it also makes it more difficult to evolve. You have to consciously change it. So, I prefer not to have [parliamentary privilege] codified because then you're captured in the four corners of the paper.

Another insight by the same Member highlighted the tension between the judiciary and parliamentary institutions as to who should broadly define the application and scope of privilege:

The greatest tension is that the judges are making decisions on what the boundaries [of privilege] are, when really the legislature was meant to be its own master of its own space. So, as long as that balance doesn't shift, we're okay. But there's a tendency for laws and conventions to evolve, and they do just because the context changes. Parliamentary privilege is pretty sacrosanct, and we don't want to see an incursion by other decision-makers.

### ***Theme #2: Individual Rights***

There were 13 instances during interviews in which participants associated parliamentary privilege as a concept that affords them individual rights and protections, rather than recognizing it as a set of collective rights. At the beginning of each interview, Members were asked what parliamentary privilege meant to them. On this point, many Members expressed that their understanding of the concept amounted to the idea that "if Members say things, they can't be sued for it." In contrast, collective privileges, such as parliament's ability to regulate its internal affairs or to discipline Members, were rarely highlighted in interviews. The distinctly individualistic understanding of the rights of privilege is apparent in many of these interviews:

No matter what side of the political spectrum, you're given the right to speak, you're given the right to represent, and you're given the right to participate. But at the same time, you don't have the right to abuse your privilege, or more importantly, abuse another Member's privilege. That's what some people forget: that when you talk about points of privilege, it's not just "my privilege," it's what I intend to do to someone else. They deserve the same rights as me.

In a parliamentary setting, the concepts of individual and collective privileges are marked differently from individual and collective rights in law. While it is common to hear the rights of privilege referred to as individual and collective privileges, it is more accurate to say that privilege belongs to the House as a whole. Individual Members have claims to privilege only insofar as any denial of their rights or threat made to them would impede the functioning of the House. This theme illustrates a concern raised by key informants, in that when Members focus on the individual component of privilege, the effect can be to chip away at the power of privilege to protect not only individual Members but, in a broader sense, the Legislative Assembly as an institution.

### *Theme #3: Lack of Understanding of Parliamentary Privilege*

Members were asked if understanding the procedures of the House was something they viewed as integral to their role as a parliamentarian or if it was a more specialized area of knowledge that was only required on an as-needed basis. There were 13 instances of responses highlighting that it is not something seen as integral, nor understood very well. Some interviewees with backgrounds in municipal politics or union movements highlighted how the term “point of privilege” is used in a different, less technical sense in these spaces, contributing to further confusion about this concept.<sup>28</sup> The vast majority of interviewees emphasized that they wish they had a better understanding of what parliamentary privilege entails. They also noted that their fellow Members do not have a comprehensive understanding of the concept. As one Member noted:

Most people don't necessarily have a common understanding of what it means, or don't really have a clear idea about what it is, and how it can be used or when you can claim a question of privilege.

Despite indicating they would like to know more about this topic, it was repeated by Members that their gap in understanding of procedural concepts is easily filled by “procedurally knowledgeable staff,” such as Clerks or the House Leaders. As one interviewee explained:

Most Members don't really have time, or they don't have a sense of why they would care, because they have a house team that manages these tasks. And even when there is an issue

that they feel aggrieved somehow, they know that they can talk to the table, and they do.

Overall, comments within this theme indicate that having a comprehensive understanding of parliamentary privilege and procedures of the House is not strictly necessary to perform the role of an MPP. Furthermore, the extent of procedural support provided to members may, in some cases, diminish motivation to learn more about privilege and procedures.

### *Theme 4: Perceptions vs. Reality of Privilege*

This theme is defined by Members distinguishing a “valid” point of privilege compared to what is “fair.” There were five instances where Members expressed dissatisfaction over how privilege functions, particularly when there is an assumption that fairness is a guiding principle for the House rules. Fewer instances of this theme are present because this theme was primarily highlighted by non-government Members. This theme highlights an apparent tension between the ideals of what privilege should be and the actual powers available to legislative institutions, particularly with respect to their authority over internal affairs. One Member emphasized a disconnect between what is considered “fair” and what is procedurally permitted:

I have found that some of the things that have happened constitute what I perceive to be a real limitation on a member's ability to function in terms of their parliamentary role. But some of these things are actually not breaches of privilege because they are permitted by the Standing Orders.

Another interviewee mentioned the specific examples of Standing Order 77a<sup>29</sup> and the House's ability to censure a member as powers that seem “unparliamentary.” In expressing these concerns, this member emphasized that these instances “*feel like a denial of privilege*” [emphasis added]. This speaks to a tension between values of legitimacy and fairness: The former is a question of how to ensure permissible decisions are made (for example, referring to the standing orders or convention), while the latter involves the question of what “ought to be done” on a substantive level by the Legislative Assembly as a political institution. In the context of a majority government, where the outcome of motions reflects the democratic will of the majority, opposition Members could likely experience this

conflict most acutely. Members tended to express that feelings of unfairness stem from how other Members approach or vote on issues related to privilege, such as the exercise of disciplinary powers. There seems to be recognition that procedures designed to protect privilege are in place to support the work of parliament and its Members in principle, however imperfectly they might be perceived to function in practice.

## Reflections

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Surveying the attitudes and understandings of privilege at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, there does not appear to be a pressing desire to drastically reform practices related to parliamentary privilege or to engage in a high-level review of the concept. Nevertheless, there does appear to be interest among Members for some additional proactive training and education on the operational and necessary components of privilege. While the Assembly is not currently facing a situation that requires immediate action to safeguard the operation of parliamentary privilege, this study has revealed varied levels of understanding of parliamentary privilege and its operation. Working to ensure parliamentarians have a better understanding of the nature of parliamentary privilege would be beneficial should the need for reform be thrust upon the Assembly by future circumstances; for instance, if a particular court ruling is judged to unreasonably restrict parliamentary privilege.

While much of the responsibility of recognizing and understanding parliamentary privilege has been tasked to knowledgeable and trusted non-partisan officials, such as staff in the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, it is perhaps concerning that a concept so integral to parliament as an institution is something that many Members see as “beyond them.” How this concept is understood and applied in practice is vital to its long-term utilization and renewal. Indeed, Members who lack an understanding of privilege may be less likely to be concerned about any incremental erosion of its associated rights, as they may not fully comprehend its significance.

With established democracies confronting high levels of political disengagement, decreased trust in elected representatives, and dissatisfaction with the perceived relevance and competence of parliaments,<sup>30</sup> it is essential for everyone engaged in parliamentary life to undertake initiatives to strengthen our representative institutions. In these

circumstances, it is especially important to view parliamentary institutions as promoters of the values of parliamentary democracy. This includes an ongoing commitment to understanding and protecting the unique parliamentary privileges that are critical to the collective and individual roles of parliamentarians. A thorough understanding of these privileges is crucial because when complex or contentious issues arise, parliamentarians must be able to navigate them effectively, ensuring that debates and decisions operate within proper legal and institutional frameworks.

To bring this study to a close, I reflect on a historic moment in parliamentary history. In 1642, King Charles I arrived unannounced at the doors of the English House of Commons, accompanied by 400 soldiers, and attempted to arrest five Members of Parliament for treason. The five Members had sponsored a petition that was critical of the King, who therefore had concluded that their actions were treasonous. The King’s ultimately unsuccessful attempt to arrest these Members undermined the privileges of the House, including the collective rights of the Members to deliberate amongst themselves without the threat of interference by the Crown. This event is regarded as one of the factors that contributed to the outbreak of the English Civil War.

This story underscores the significance of parliamentary privilege as something that withstood a direct threat from the Crown. This historical moment has left a lasting impression on English parliamentarians’ collective memories, and some observers could conclude that such a dramatic history contributed to a parliamentary culture which has included fulsome contemporary discussions on privilege. In contrast, the Canadian House of Commons inherited parliamentary privilege as an extension of our constitutional heritage without needing to overcome dramatic physical intrusions or other immediate threats. Some Canadian provinces, which were not explicitly granted this privilege, asserted privilege over time through legal disputes adjudicated by courts. The absence of physical threats to the legitimacy of parliament may have shaped the evolution of Canadian parliamentary culture. But our own parliamentary history should not prevent us from doing our utmost to ensure that parliamentarians, as our democratic representatives, have a thorough understanding of these important legal rights so that they are fully vigilant in utilizing and renewing these rights, which are so essential to a vital parliamentary democracy.

## Notes

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- 1 House of Commons of Canada. (n.d.). *Parliamentary Privilege*. Our Procedure - ProceduralInfo. [https://www.ourcommons.ca/procedure/our-procedure/parliamentaryprivilege/c\\_g\\_parliamentaryprivilege-e.html](https://www.ourcommons.ca/procedure/our-procedure/parliamentaryprivilege/c_g_parliamentaryprivilege-e.html)
- 2 Gay, O. "Parliamentary Privilege: Current Issues. Parliament and Constitution Centre: House of Commons," UK Parliament Research Briefing, 2013, p. 4. <https://doi.org/https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06390/SN06390.pdf>, p. 4).
- 3 For example, the Australian Parliament, finding that the courts were severely restricting its freedom of speech, enacted statutory remedies through the *Australian Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987* to protect its proceedings.
- 4 Although the sample does not represent all Members of the Legislative Assembly, these guidelines were considered necessary for this study to facilitate informed discussions during interviews.
- 5 E.g., Government or Official Opposition House Leader, Government or Official Opposition whip, Speaker, Deputy Speaker or Assistant Deputy Speaker.
- 6 Legislative Assembly of Ontario. (2024). *Standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario*. <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/standing-orders>, page 9.
- 7 The *Criminal Code of Canada* is a prime example of codification, as it consolidates most of Canada's criminal law in a single, unified document. Codification in this example aims to provide a clear, accessible, and comprehensive overview of criminal law in Canada.
- 8 Questions of privilege raised about some action taken by another Member, Minister, Ministry, or individual related to a proceeding in parliament are dealt with by the respective House and the Speaker. See: Reynolds, R. "Parliament and Democracy in the 21st Century: Parliamentary Privilege." *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, 25(4), 2002, p. 2. <http://www.revparl.ca/english/issue.asp?param=85&art=270>
- 9 The distinction between pragmatic use of statute and comprehensive codification was made in the 2013 report of the UK Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege. Comprehensive codification would entail legislating all aspects of privilege, whereas pragmatic use of statute entails the use of statute to clarify or confirm specific elements of privilege as required.
- 10 The Australian Parliament, finding that the courts were severely restricting its freedom of speech, enacted statutory remedies (i.e., codification) to protect its proceedings in 1987. The *Australian Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987* provides definitions for a number of concepts including contempt.
- 11 Encroachment by the judiciary in this context refers to courts exerting, arguably, an increased influence over the meaning and operation of parliamentary privilege. The concern associated with judicializing parliamentary privilege is that such a process weakens the autonomy of legislative institutions.
- 12 Senate of Canada. *A Matter of Privilege: A Discussion Paper on Canadian Parliamentary Privilege in the 21st Century*. Ottawa, Ontario, 2015, p. 77. URL: <https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/412/rprd/rep/rep07jun15-e.pdf> The incorporation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms into the patriated Canadian constitution in 1982 was a turning point in Canadian law, shifting it to a constitutionally entrenched rights-based legal system. Following the adoption of the Charter, questions as to whether and how the constitutional rights of individuals might affect the exercise of constitutional powers by various institutions (i.e., privilege) has been raised more often before the courts.
- 13 In 1868, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario passed *An Act to define the Privileges, Immunities and Powers of the Legislative Assembly, and to give Summary Protection to Persons Employed in the Publication of Sessional Papers* in an attempt to grant itself the same privileges enjoyed by the Canadian Parliament.
- 14 Bosc, M., & Gagnon, A. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* (3rd ed.). House of Commons of Canada, 2017.
- 15 Robert, C., & Lithwick, D. (2014). "Renewal and Restoration: Contemporary Trends in the Evolution of Parliamentary Privilege." *The Table: The Journal of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table in Commonwealth Parliaments*, 82, 2014, p. 29. URL: [https://doi.org/https://www.societyofclerks.org/Documents/TheTable\\_2014.pdf](https://doi.org/https://www.societyofclerks.org/Documents/TheTable_2014.pdf)
- 16 Robert & Lithwick, p. 25.
- 17 Newman, W. J. "Parliamentary Privilege, the Canadian Constitution and the Courts." *Ottawa Law Review*, 39(3), 2008, p. 573. <https://doi.org/https://www.canlii.org/w/canlii/2008CanLIIDocs118.pdf>
- 18 Neudorf, L. The Judicialization of Parliamentary Privilege in Canada: A Cautionary Tale. *Laws*, 13(26), 2024, pp. 1–28. URL: [https://doi.org/https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4746964](https://doi.org/https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4746964)
- 19 Newman, p. 609. Another notable debate on parliamentary privilege in a Canadian case concerns the question of constitutional limitations on privilege. Since parliamentary privilege provides an exemption from specific ordinary laws, this aspect of immunity can conflict with the expectations and norms of rights-based law, (Robert & Lithwick, p. 24). In Canada, a delicate balance exists between privilege and the rights of individual citizens, primarily outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Robert and Lithwick discuss how the Charter impacts discussions about parliamentary privilege, and how this change has prompted some rethinking of the extent of the privileges possessed by provincial legislative assemblies.
- 20 Gordon, R., & Jack, M. *Parliamentary Privilege: Evolution or Codification?* The Constitution Society, 2013, p. 53. For example, the report discusses the importance of understanding the relationship between committee work and the corresponding scope of parliamentary privilege.
- 21 Gordon & Jack, p. 43.

- 22 Langlois, Mireille, C. "Parliamentary Privilege: A Relational Approach." *Faculty of Law, University of Toronto*, 2009, p. 53. <https://doi.org/https://utoronto.scholaris.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/9de43908-9938-434d-870e-b3e4460becf3/content>
- 23 Lee, the MP Scarborough-Rouge River from 1997 to 2011, argues in favour of codification by taking issue with the general lack of knowledge about parliamentary privilege among the public, lawyers, and even legislators themselves (Lee, D. "The Need for Codification of Parliamentary Privilege." *Commonwealth Parliamentary Association - Canadian Region*, 2005, p. 2.: <https://doi.org/https://www.canlii.org/en/commentary/doc/2005CanLIIDocs286#!fragment/zoupio->). He recommends clarifying the rights of privilege, such as those outlined in the First Report of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege in 1999 in the UK.
- 24 As a result, in 1868, the Ontario Legislative Assembly passed *An Act to define the Privileges, Immunities and Powers of the Legislative Assembly, and to give Summary Protection to Persons Employed in the Publication of Sessional Papers* in an attempt to grant itself the same privileges enjoyed by the Canadian Parliament. This *Act* was disallowed by the Governor General on the advice of the Privy Council. Later, in the 1896 case *Fielding v. Thomas*, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council confirmed the right of the provincial legislatures to grant themselves the same privileges as the House of Commons of Canada. (Maingot, J. *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* (2nd ed.). House of Commons and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, p. 205).
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 205-06.
- 26 As referenced in the primary source literature, a procedural book refers to some jurisdictions' sources that serve as a guide to how the institution operates and conducts its business. This may include an elaboration of the Standing Orders, practice recommendations, and precedents that govern proceedings. An example includes the House of Commons Procedure and Practice (Bosc, & Gagnon).
- 27 Some examples highlighted by Members included privilege issues related to Members being exempt from jury duty, protected from obstruction in the performance of their duties, and other cases that have come up during their time at the legislative assembly.
- 28 Similar to other parliamentary bodies, a "point of privilege" is often used as a mechanism for a council member to raise an issue that affects their ability to fulfill their duties as a councilor, or that impacts the privileges of the council as a whole.
- 29 Standing Order 77(a) allows for the Second Reading of Bill to be discharged and the Bill to be referred to a committee. Meaning that second reading is postponed until after the committee's consideration.
- 30 Dalton, R. *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford University Press, 2004.

# New and Notable Titles

A selection of articles relating to parliamentary studies (January 2026 – March 2026)

“OECD review of the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Office”. *OECD Papers on Budgeting*. 1-44, February 2026

- The Review presented here is part of a series of IFI external evaluations and was commissioned at the request of the Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer in September 2025. It represents the first external review of the PBO.

Bache, Ian. “How (and when) does party matter? Explaining MPs’ positions on assisted dying/assisted suicide”. *Parliamentary Affairs* 79 (1): 1-21, January 2026.

- While the legalisation of assisted dying/assisted suicide (AD/AS) has enjoyed sustained public support for several decades, Parliament has repeatedly voted decisively against legalisation. This article explores this parliamentary deviation from citizens’ preferences by explaining what shapes MPs’ positions on this free vote issue and, in particular, how (and when) party matters in shaping these positions.

Barbieri, Michele, Macarie, Laura. “Faces at Stakes: Comparative Insights on Facial Recognition Technologies Policy Implementation Arrangements across the EU, the US, and the PRC”. *International Review of Public Policy* 8 (1): 1-27, 2026

- Facial recognition technologies (FRTs) crystallize tensions between security, innovation, and fundamental rights, as their implementation follows markedly different policy arrangements across states and geopolitical blocs. This article explores how policy implementation arrangements for FRTs shape models of digital sovereignty in the European Union (EU), the United States (US), and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Through a comparative, most-different systems design, and structured content analysis of secondary sources (laws; guidance; enforcement; grey literature), this investigation operationalizes four dimensions: regulatory

frameworks; actor networks; implementation and enforcement mechanisms; and sovereignty implications. Three distinctive pathways emerge, namely, the EU’s rule-and-regulator, the US’s liability-and-localism, and the PRC’s command-and-integration, which shape digital sovereignty attributes by reflecting broader security-related strategies. The article advances a mechanism-based account linking policy implementation to sovereignty claims and offers policy recommendations for aligning policy instruments with regulatory oversight capacity.

Bengio, Yoshua. “International AI Safety Report: Extended Summary for Policymakers”. *International AI Safety Report*: 1-28, February 2026.

- This Extended Summary for Policymakers presents key findings from the International AI Safety Report 2026.

Dell, Brendan, Gardner, Paul J., Sigalet, Geoffrey Thomas. “Parliamentary Constraints on Constitutional Review in the Supreme Court of Canada”. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*: 1-24, February 2026

- Since the adoption of the Charter, scholars have argued that Parliament defers to the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) on questions of constitutional law. This is surprising given Canada’s previous history of parliamentary supremacy, Parliament’s enforcement of Court decisions and cognate findings internationally that show how elected officials can constrain high courts.

“Undertaking a Gender-Sensitive Parliament Assessment”. *The Parliamentarian - Journal of the Parliaments of the Commonwealth* 106 (4): 28-29, December 2025.

- The Jersey States Assembly undertook a Gender-Sensitive Parliament assessment with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and they share their experience of the process.

# The Canadian Scene

## New Prince Edward Island Speaker

On March 26, 2026, Rustico-Emerald MLA **Brad Trivers** was elected Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island over O’Leary-Inverness MLA **Robert Henderson**. Speaker Trivers assumed the position which had been vacated when **Sidney MacEwen** stepped down to join cabinet.

Born in Perth, Ontario, Speaker Trivers lived in Vegreville, Alberta, Fort St. John and British Columbia, before his family settled on the north shore of Lake Huron, Ontario. He grew up on farm between the villages of Iron Bridge and Thessalon, that produced beef and sweet corn. In addition to excelling in school, he enjoyed participating in 4-H activities, playing sports and music, and acting, later touring with the group Up With People.

Graduating from the University of Waterloo’s co-op program, he completed an honours degree in Science and Business. After pursuing a career in information systems, including running a New Glasgow-based consulting business, Speaker Trivers pursued elected office.

Unsuccessful in his first election campaign in 2011, Speaker Trivers was elected in 2015 and re-elected in 2019 and 2023. Since entering the Assembly, he has held several cabinet portfolios, including Minister of Environment, Water and Climate Change, Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, and Minister of Social Development and Housing, and served as Government Whip. Prior to his election as Speaker, he served as Deputy Speaker for a year.



**Hon. Brad Trivers**

Active in his community, Speaker Trivers has coached minor sports, plays Oldtimers hockey, and sings and plays guitar at local ceilidhs, kitchen parties and benefits. He is married with two children.

Due to a production error, the print edition of our Winter 2025 issue (Vol. 48, No. 4), contains a version of “Racial Diversity and the 2025 Federal Election: Visible Minority Candidates and MPs,” by Jerome H. Black and Andrew Griffith that did not incorporate corrections made to the final proof by the authors. These minor edits, solely related to grammar and formatting, have been made to the article on our website. The *CPR* sincerely regrets this error.

## Regional Executive Committee, CPA\*

### **PRESIDENT**

Nathalie Roy, Québec

### **FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT**

Raj Chouhan, British Columbia

### **SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT**

Francine Landry, New Brunswick

### **PAST PRESIDENT**

Donna Skelly, Ontario

### **REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES**

Brad Trivers, Prince Edward Island

Rosemary Moodie, Federal Branch

Raj Chouhan, British Columbia

### **CHAIR OF THE CWP, CANADIAN REGION**

(Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians)

Susan Leblanc, Nova Scotia

### **EXECUTIVE SECRETARY-TREASURER**

Jeremy LeBlanc, House of Commons

## Members of the Regional Council\*

### **HOUSE OF COMMONS**

Francis Scarpaleggia, Speaker

Eric Janse, Clerk

### **SENATE**

Raymonde Gagné, Speaker

Shaila Anwar, Clerk

### **ALBERTA**

Ric McIver, Speaker

Shannon Dean, Secretary

### **NOVA SCOTIA**

Danielle Barkhouse, Speaker

James Charlton, Secretary

### **BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Raj Chouhan, Speaker

Kate Ryan-Lloyd, Secretary

### **ONTARIO**

Donna Skelly, Speaker

Trevor Day, Secretary

### **CANADIAN FEDERAL BRANCH**

Alexandra Mendès, Chair

Andrew Lauzon, Secretary

### **PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

Brad Trivers, Speaker

Joey Jeffrey, Secretary

### **MANITOBA**

Tom Lindsey, Speaker

Rick Yarish, Secretary

### **QUÉBEC**

Nathalie Roy, President

Mélissa Morin, Secretary

### **NEW BRUNSWICK**

Francine Landry, Speaker

Shayne Davies, Secretary

### **SASKATCHEWAN**

Todd Goudy, Speaker

Iris Lang, Secretary

### **NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

Paul Lane, Speaker

Kim Hawley George, Secretary

### **NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

Shane Thompson, Speaker

Glen Rutland, Secretary

### **NUNAVUT**


David Joanasie, Speaker

Stephen Innuksuk, Secretary

### **YUKON**

Yvonne Clarke, Speaker

Dan Cable, Secretary



\*As of April 30, 2026

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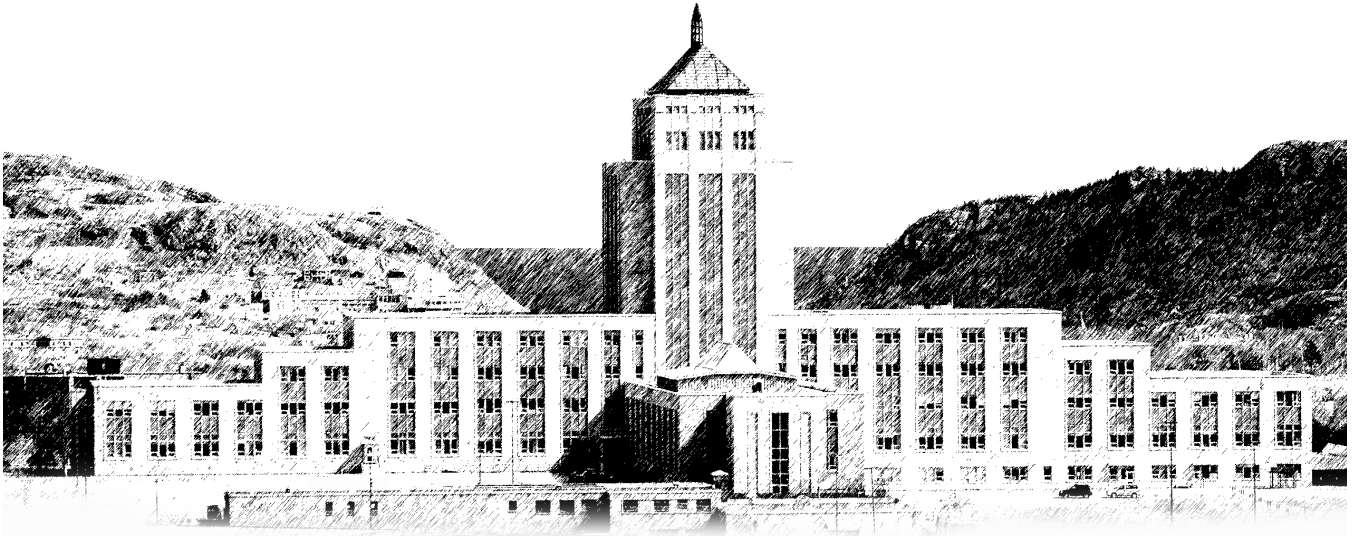
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## Newfoundland and Labrador

### Fall 2025 General Election

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On September 15, 2025, former Premier **John Hogan** visited the Lieutenant Governor to request the dissolution of the 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. Later that day, Elections Newfoundland and Labrador issued writs to returning officers in all 40 provincial electoral districts for a general election to be held on October 14. This was the province's 52<sup>nd</sup> general election and the 23<sup>rd</sup> since Confederation.

With returns published on October 20, the election resulted in 21 seats for the Progressive Conservative Party and 15 for the Liberal Party. The New Democratic Party maintained its count of two seats, and two independent Members were re-elected. This result marked the province's first change in government since 2015, with the Progressive Conservatives forming Government.

No recounts were automatically triggered; however, the Liberal Party petitioned for judicial recounts in three districts: Topsail - Paradise, Placentia West - Bellevue and Lewisporte - Twillingate. On November 14, a ruling from the Supreme Court granted a recount for the district of Topsail - Paradise. Official results followed on November 21 and saw no change in the outcome of the October 14 election.

### Swearing-in of Members and Election of Speaker

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Following initial election results, 37 Members-elect of the 51<sup>st</sup> General Assembly were sworn in on November 3.

Unaffiliated MHA **Paul Lane** was the only Member to submit a notice of intent for election to the Office of Speaker by the close of nominations on October 31. In accordance with Chapter 2 of the Standing Orders, he was acclaimed to the position on November 3. Following brief remarks, the Speaker adjourned the House of the call of the Chair.

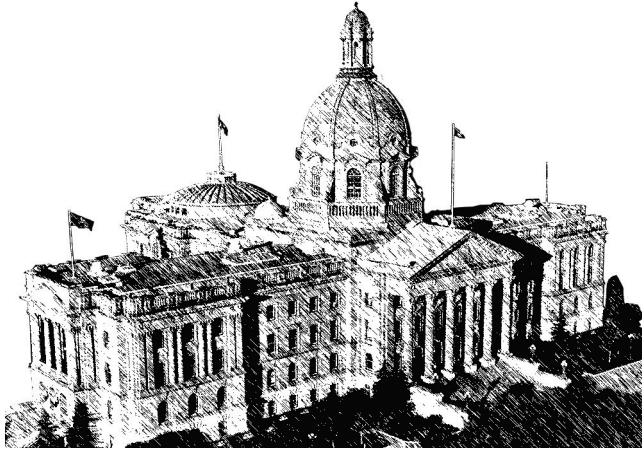
On November 18, after requests for judicial recounts in Placentia West - Bellevue and Lewisporte - Twillingate were dismissed, the Members-elect for those two districts were sworn in. Finally, the Member-elect for Topsail - Paradise was sworn in on November 25, following the results of that judicial recount.

### Spring Sitting of the House of Assembly

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In accordance with the 2026 parliamentary calendar, the House is scheduled to reconvene on March 2 for its spring sitting, which will commence with a Speech from the Throne.

**Evan Beazley**  
Committee Analyst



# Alberta

## Second Session of the 31st Legislature

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Originally scheduled to commence on October 27, the first day of the Second Session of the 31st Alberta Legislature opened on October 23, 2025, with a Speech from the Throne delivered by Lieutenant Governor Salma Lakhani. The session adjourned, almost two weeks later than scheduled, on December 10.

## Speech from the Throne

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The Speech from the Throne reaffirmed the Government's commitment to promoting provincial prosperity by opposing federal policies considered detrimental to the provincial or national economy. Key strategic economic priorities include expanding energy exports, partnering with First Nations on pipeline ownership, and diversifying the economy with a focus on artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging sectors. Infrastructure initiatives will focus on enhancing highways, passenger rail, light rail transit, and municipal improvements. Investments in education aim to increase school capacity, augment staffing, and expand the number of spaces in high-demand post-secondary programs. The Speech from the Throne also touched on planned healthcare enhancements, including the expansion of chartered surgical services, improved access to private diagnostic and AI-based screening services, and the implementation of the Alberta Recovery Model and Compassionate Intervention Program.

## Government Bills

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During the fall sitting the Government introduced 14 Bills, including:

- Bill 1, *International Agreements Act*, which establishes that Alberta is not automatically bound by international agreements signed by the federal government if those agreements involve matters under provincial jurisdiction such as health, education, or resource management. Instead, any such provisions only take effect in Alberta if they are implemented through legislation passed by the Alberta Legislature.
- Bill 2, *Back to School Act*, which was considered at all stages of the legislative process in one day and received Royal Assent the following day. A Government Motion, passed on division, allowed for the Bill to "be advanced two or more stages in one day," and the Bill received a total of five hours and 18 minutes of debate through time allocation. The *Act* legislated striking teachers to return to work, imposed a collective agreement until 2028, and declared, in accordance with section 33 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, that the *Act* operates notwithstanding certain provisions of the *Charter*.
- Bill 9, *Protecting Alberta's Children Statutes Amendment Act, 2025*, amended three different *Acts* which have provisions restricting gender-affirming health care for minors by banning gender reassignment surgeries for those under 18 years old and prohibiting puberty blockers or hormone treatments for children under 16 years old; requiring parental notification and consent for students under 16 to change names or pronouns at school or receive instruction on gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality; and enabling restrictions that limit participation in women's and girls' amateur sports to individuals assigned female at birth. The three *Acts* were amended to add declarations that those provisions operate notwithstanding certain provisions of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Alberta Bill of Rights*, and the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.
- Bill 11, *Health Statutes Amendment Act, 2025 (No. 2)*, permits certain medical professionals such as surgeons to work in both public and private sectors under a dual-practice model. General practitioners are not included in the model. The Bill requires surgeons to perform a minimum number of public surgeries and maintain separate records to prevent misuse of public funds. Bill 11 also updates drug coverage rules, health card renewal processes, food safety regulations, and penalties for improper billing.
- Bill 13, *Regulated Professions Neutrality Act*, limits professional regulators' authority over off-duty conduct and training mandates. It ensures that regulators cannot discipline professionals for

speech or actions outside their professional duties, such as social media posts, except in narrow circumstances. It prohibits regulatory bodies from requiring cultural-competency, unconscious-bias, or diversity/equity/inclusion training unless directly necessary for professional competence and prohibits them from considering characteristics such as race, gender identity, religion, or political beliefs in regulatory decisions or in pursuit of diversity outcomes. The legislation applies to all regulated professions and establishes a consistent standard of review for legal challenges.

- Bill 14, *Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 2025*, raises MLA nomination signature requirements from 25 to 100 signatures and prohibits electors from signing or inducing another elector to sign more than one nomination paper, bars party names that could be confused with existing parties, limits candidate endorsements exclusively to registered party leaders, transfers certain authority over citizen-initiative referenda from the Chief Electoral Officer to the Minister of Justice, eliminates the requirement that referenda not exceed constitutional jurisdiction, allows MLAs and their families to accept nonmonetary gifts from candidate associations, clarifies the statutory mandate for the Law Society of Alberta, grants the Attorney General immunity from official actions, and restricts the Law Society's power to mandate professional training to core admission or specialized roles or in relation to disciplinary matters.

### **Government Motion 17**

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On December 3, **Mickey Amery** moved Government Motion 17. Under the authority of the *Alberta Sovereignty Within a United Canada Act*, the motion authorizes the Lieutenant Governor in Council to take certain actions directing provincial agencies, including law enforcement, to refuse to participate in the federal government's firearm buyback program. The motion asserts Alberta's constitutional jurisdiction over property and civil rights, expressing that Ottawa's initiative to confiscate assault-style firearms and compensate owners of banned assault-style firearms is not in the public interest and diverts resources from law enforcement and public safety. The motion was agreed to, on division, the same day.

### **Question of Privilege**

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On October 30, **Peter Guthrie** raised a purported question of privilege against the Government House

Leader, **Joseph Schow**, for allegedly intimidating and obstructing the Member in the performance of his duties. Mr. Guthrie's question of privilege related to a Government Motion proposing to appoint him to the Standing Committee on Private Bills without his consent. On November 4, Speaker **Ric McIver** ruled that he did not find there to be a *prima facie* case of breach of privilege. The Speaker noted that committee membership is determined by way of passage of a Government Motion, and therefore the decision is a decision made by the Assembly and not the Government or the Government House Leader. The Speaker also noted that Mr. Guthrie had submitted a letter resigning from the Committee, which had been tabled by the Speaker.

### **Cabinet Changes**

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**Rebecca Schulz** resigned as Minister of Environment and Protected Areas effective January 2, 2026. She will continue to represent Calgary-Shaw until May 2026. **Grant Hunter**, recently the Associate Minister for Water, has been sworn in as the new Minister of Environment and Protected Areas.

### **Committee Business**

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On November 24 the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship met to continue its review of the *Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act*. The Committee reviewed the written submissions received from stakeholders and the public and chose to invite four organizations to make oral presentations to the Committee. To determine who will be invited to make presentations, the Government and Official Opposition caucuses have each identified two stakeholders from those who made written submissions to the Committee.

Pursuant to Government Motion 13, agreed to on November 25, 2025, the Assembly has appointed the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices for the purpose of inviting applications for the position of Auditor General and to recommend to the Assembly the applicant that it considers most suitable for that position. The Committee appointed the Auditor General Search Subcommittee to complete this task. The Subcommittee will be accepting applications until January 29, 2026.

**Jody Rempel**  
Committee Clerk



## British Columbia

### Fall Sitting Period

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The First Session of the 43rd Parliament resumed on October 6, 2025. On October 8, 2025, the House adopted a motion to amend the parliamentary calendar to remove the sitting week of November 3, 2025, and add a sitting week the week of December 1, 2025, falling outside of the Standing Order provisions that prescribe the typical sitting weeks. This change was made to enable Members to participate in the annual B.C. Cabinet and First Nations Leaders' Gathering.

The Legislative Assembly concluded its fall sitting period on December 3, 2025, a day earlier than anticipated. A long adjournment motion was adopted authorizing the Speaker to recall the House should the need arise. Consistent with practice in recent years, the motion also allows for the alteration of the location and means of conducting the sittings of the House by agreement of the Speaker and the House Leaders of each recognized caucus, if required due to an emergency or public health measures.

### Party Standings

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On September 22, 2025, **Elenore Sturko**, MLA for Surrey-Cloverdale, was removed from the Official Opposition Caucus and now sits as an Independent Member. On October 20, 2025, **Amelia Boulton**, MLA for Penticton-Summerland, left the Official Opposition Caucus and now sits as an Independent Member. As of December 4, 2025, party standings are 47 BC NDP, 39 Conservative Party of British Columbia, two BC Green Party, two OneBC, and three Independents.

### Party Leadership

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On September 24, 2025, the BC Green Party elected **Emily Lowan** as its new leader. As she does not

currently hold a seat in the Legislative Assembly, **Jeremy Valeriote**, MLA for West Vancouver-Sea to Sky, continues to serve as Leader of the Third Party in the Legislative Assembly.

On December 3, 2025, a majority of the Members affiliated with the Official Opposition Caucus advised the Conservative Party of British Columbia's legal counsel that they no longer had confidence in the Leader of the Conservative Party of British Columbia and Leader of the Official Opposition, **John Rustad**, MLA for Nechako Lakes. The next day, MLA Rustad resigned as Leader of the Conservative Party of British Columbia and the Caucus selected **Trevor Halford**, MLA for Surrey-White Rock, as the new Leader of the Official Opposition. The Board of Directors of the Conservative Party of British Columbia subsequently appointed MLA Halford as Interim Party Leader. A party leadership contest is expected to be launched in the coming weeks.

### Legislation

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During the fall sitting period, a total of 19 bills, including one Private Member's bill, received Royal Assent. This included several bills focused on health care, safety, and the economy. The government designated Bill 31, *Energy Statutes Amendment Act, 2025*, and Bill 32, *Mental Health Amendment Act (No. 2), 2025* as matters of confidence.

Bill 31 fast-tracks construction of the North Coast Transmission Line, a project intended to increase electricity in the province's north, to power critical mineral projects and liquefied natural gas terminals. As there was a tie on the motion for third reading of the bill, the Speaker was required to exercise a casting vote. As the bill had been declared a confidence matter, he cast his vote in favour of the motion, further noting that the bill had passed earlier stages of consideration by the House with a majority of votes.

Bill 32 harmonizes liability protections and modernizes the language in provisions of the *Mental Health Act* relating to involuntary care and informed consent to ensure that health care workers and facility staff are afforded adequate legal protections. As there was a tie on the motion for second reading of the bill, the Speaker was required to exercise a casting vote. He cast his vote in favour of the motion in accordance with established practice to allow further debate. The bill subsequently passed third reading with a majority of votes.

## Ministerial Statement

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On October 20, 2025, Premier **David Eby**, delivered a ministerial statement in support of BC's forestry industry and communities impacted by U.S. duties and tariffs. The Premier emphasized that the province's forestry industry was facing an existential crisis and launched a call to action to all British Columbians. The Leader of the Official Opposition, MLA Rustad, discussed the need to reduce red tape and enable more British Columbian businesses to source the raw materials they need and get their products to market. MLA Valeriotte, Leader of the Third Party, emphasized that the long-term and holistic management of BC's forests depends on prioritizing ecosystem health, local ownership and employment, as well as partnerships with First Nations. The Leader of the Fourth Party, **Dallas Brodie**, highlighted that reducing taxes and stumpage fees and eliminating band council vetoes would revive the province's forest industry.

## Speaker's Statements and Decisions

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On October 29, 2025, the Leader of the Official Opposition made an application under Standing Order 35 for the adjournment of the House to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, being the protection of fee simple property rights. As background, the August 2025 *Cowichan Tribes v. Canada* Supreme Court of British Columbia decision found that the Cowichan Tribes hold Aboriginal title to a parcel of land in the city of Richmond including lands which are held in fee simple by private parties. In his decision on the Standing Order 35 application, the Speaker, **Raj Chouhan**, noted the two criteria required for a successful application under Standing Order 35: first whether other opportunities to debate the matter are available to the House, and second whether new, sudden or unexpected events require the House to suspend all other business for an emergency debate on the matter. Based on the submission from the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Speaker concluded that neither of these criteria were met and ruled that the application had failed.

Over the course of the fall sitting period, the Speaker addressed the use of unparliamentary language on several occasions. On October 28, 2025, the Speaker made a statement on unparliamentary language and provided guidance on language used in debate. The Speaker stated that the use of strong language in terms that relate solely to policy or positions taken by Members or parties may be permitted in debate at the discretion of the Chair. The Speaker reiterated that Members

should focus their comments on policies and issues rather than using personal insults and emphasized that allegations of racism against individual Members were out of order as they constitute an offensive personal characterization. On November 25, 2025, the Minister of Finance, **Brenda Bailey**, raised a point of order regarding remarks made by the Fourth Party House Leader, **Tara Armstrong**, that she viewed to be unparliamentary. In his ruling the following day, the Speaker noted that the Member's submissions on the point of order amounted to debate, as they introduced various opinions unrelated to a breach of decorum, and stated it is inappropriate for the Chair to intervene in disputes between Members.

Following Oral Question Period on November 26, 2025, the Official Opposition House Leader, **Á'a'liya Warbus**, raised a point of order in relation to Standing Order 47A (b), which provides, in part: "questions and answers shall be brief and precise." In raising the point of order, she highlighted that Ministers' answers are often lengthy and unrelated to the question posed. In rendering his decision, the Speaker noted that while the Standing Orders do not prescribe a time limit for questions or answers, Oral Question Period should ideally attain an even balance of time spent on questions and answers. The Speaker added that his examination of the use of time during Oral Question Period during the fall sitting period revealed an incommensurate amount of time taken up by answers provided by some Ministers. He stated that he expects Ministers to note the length of questions they are responding to and strive to provide proportional answers wherever possible.

## Parliamentary Committee Activities

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The Special Committee on Democratic and Electoral Reform presented its first report, *Toward a Stronger Democracy in BC*, on November 26, 2025. This report relates to the first part of the Committee's mandate on democratic engagement, voter participation, and electoral reform. The Committee made 36 recommendations designed to strengthen BC's democracy by supporting British Columbians' participation and engagement, examining the efficacy of legislation and policy, and enhancing the responsibilities of and resources for Elections BC, political parties, and Members. The Committee heard from 987 participants through written submissions and a series of public meetings held both virtually and in communities across the province. The Committee is also empowered to review the administration of the 2024 provincial general election for which work is underway.

On October 9, 2025, the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Bills presented its fifth report, reporting Bill M 210, *Korean Heritage Month Act*, complete without amendment. The bill, sponsored by **Paul Choi**, MLA for Burnaby South-Metrotown, subsequently received Royal Assent on October 30, 2025, establishing the month of October as Korean Heritage Month in BC.

### Statutory Officers

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Over the course of the fall sitting period, the Special Committee to Appoint Statutory Officers presented four reports containing the Committee's unanimous recommendations to the Legislative Assembly regarding the appointment of a Chief Electoral Officer, a Conflict of Interest Commissioner, an Ombudsperson, and an Auditor General. The Legislative Assembly adopted each of the reports and subsequent motions appointing or recommending for appointment, as applicable, the individuals recommended by the Committee.

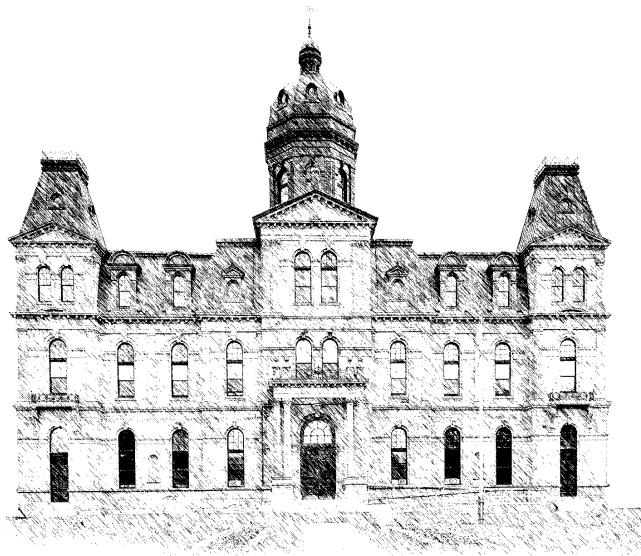
The Legislative Assembly recommended that the Lieutenant Governor appoint **Shipra Verma** as Chief Electoral Officer for a term of two provincial general elections plus one year commencing on November 12, 2025. She comes to British Columbia after decades of experience at Elections Manitoba, having most recently served as the province's Chief Electoral Officer.

The Legislative Assembly also adopted a motion recommending that the Lieutenant Governor in Council appoint **Jeffrey Schnoor** as Conflict of Interest Commissioner for a five-year term commencing January 5, 2026. He most recently held office as Ethics Commissioner for the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

**Bridget Parrish** was appointed by the Legislative Assembly as Auditor General for an eight-year term effective December 1, 2025. She most recently served in the role of Acting Deputy Auditor General within the Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia.

Additionally, the Legislative Assembly recommended that the Lieutenant Governor appoint **Sandra Hermiston** as Ombudsperson for a six-year term commencing January 31, 2026. She previously served as the first Ombudsperson for both the Cayman Islands and Prince Edward Island.

**Danielle Migeon**  
Committee Researcher



## New Brunswick

This report covers events from October 21 through December 12, 2025.

### Swearing-in Ceremony and Prorogation

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On the morning of October 21, Lieutenant-Governor **Louise Imbeault** presided over a swearing-in ceremony in the Legislative Assembly Chamber for **Kevin Russell**, newly elected Progressive Conservative Member for Miramichi West.

During a sitting of the House later that morning, Mr. Russell was introduced by Official Opposition Leader **Glen Savoie** and took his seat, following which the First Session of the 61<sup>st</sup> Legislature was prorogued.

### Second Session of the 61<sup>st</sup> Legislature and Throne Speech

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The Second Session opened on the afternoon of October 21 with Lieutenant-Governor Imbeault delivering the Speech from the Throne. Titled "Change in Motion," the speech – the second of Premier **Susan Holt**'s Liberal government – outlined the government's plans in six priority areas: health care, affordability and housing, education, economic development, environment, and trusted leadership. The speech noted that measurable progress had been made during the first year of the government's mandate and indicated the government's intention to continue working in collaboration with New Brunswickers to realize the province's full potential.

## Reply to Throne Speech

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On October 23, Official Opposition Leader Savoie gave his reply to the Speech from the Throne. He outlined the Official Opposition's intention to defend all New Brunswickers and articulated complaints from rural residents that their needs have been neglected by the government. He criticized the government for breaking promises, including with respect to balancing the budget. Mr. Savoie challenged the government's approach to several issues, including mental health and drug addiction, and signaled the Official Opposition's intention to bring forward motions proposing improvements in these areas.

## Capital Budget

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Finance and Treasury Board Minister **René Legacy** tabled the 2026-27 Capital Budget on December 2. The budget totals \$1.47 billion, an increase of \$210 million over the previous year's budget. Highlights include \$205 million for healthcare infrastructure; \$242 million for schools in response to aging buildings and growing enrolment; \$78.1 million to continue development of new public and non-profit housing units; and \$540 million for roads, bridges and other transportation assets.

## Legislation

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Twenty-three bills were introduced during the fall sitting, of which 21 received Royal Assent. Bills introduced included:

- Bill 2 – *An Act to Amend the Public Health Act*, introduced by Health Minister **John Dornan**, changes the appointment process for the Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), provides for removal for cause, and provides that certain government directions to the CMOH must be in writing and may be made public.
- Bill 14 – *Free Trade Within Canada Act*, introduced by Intergovernmental Affairs Minister **Jean-Claude D'Amours**, has as its stated purpose to remove barriers to the trade in goods and services between New Brunswick and other Canadian jurisdictions.
- Bill 23 – *An Act Respecting the Right to a Healthy Environment*, introduced by Green Party Leader **David Coon**, is a modified version of a Bill introduced during the previous session and studied by the Standing Committee on Law Amendments. The Bill provides for New Brunswick residents' rights to a healthy environment, to be informed of and participate in environmental decision-making

and to seek remedies in court. It also proposes establishing the position of Environmental Rights Commissioner.

## Motions

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Motions debated during Opposition Members' Business included:

- Motion 4, moved by Official Opposition House Leader **Margaret Johnson**, urging the government to provide persons recovering from substance use disorders with integrated care plans. The House adopted the motion in amended form on November 20.
- Motion 11, moved by **Sherry Wilson**, urging the government to strengthen oversight and standards for methadone treatment and to develop a plan to transition patients from private methadone clinics to other community-based or public clinics.

## Committee Activity

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The Standing Committee on Economic Policy, chaired by **Natacha Vautour**, was active during the fall sitting, considering 18 Bills referred to it following second reading.

On November 7, the House directed the Standing Committee on Official Languages to review the *Official Languages Act* and present its report by December 31, 2026. The Committee, chaired by **Benoît Bourque**, met on December 10 with the two commissioners who carried out the previous review of that *Act* in 2021.

The Standing Committee on Private Bills, chaired by **Alexandre Cédric Doucet**, met on November 26 to consider Bills promoted by the New Brunswick Association of Occupational Therapists and the City of Fredericton.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts, chaired by **Tammy Scott-Wallace**, met on December 9 and 11 to discuss the Report of the Auditor General of New Brunswick, 2025, Volume II – Performance Audit and Volume III – Financial Audit. In the performance audit, Auditor General **Paul Martin** addressed issues including hospital emergency department visits; the implementation of the provincial plan to reduce violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people; and highway safety. The financial audit reported that the province's financial condition has remained stable since 2024 while highlighting areas of concern.

## Appointment of Consumer Advocate for Insurance

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On November 19, the House adopted a resolution recommending the appointment of **Marc Roy** as the province's next Consumer Advocate for Insurance, an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. The resolution also thanked **Michèle Pelletier**, who had served in the role since 2017. Mr. Roy was subsequently appointed by Order-in-Council effective December 11.

## Adjournment

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The House adjourned on December 12 and is scheduled to resume sitting on March 17, 2026, when it is expected that Minister Legacy will present the 2026-27 Budget.

The standings in the House are 31 Liberals, 16 Progressive Conservatives and two Greens.

**Patrick Dunn**

Law Clerk and Committee Clerk



# Manitoba

## Third Session of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Legislature

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The Third Session of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Legislature commenced on November 18, 2025, with the Speech from the Throne delivered by Lieutenant Governor **Anita Neville**. **David Grenon**, a singer-songwriter known as SoulBear, sang the national anthem "O Canada" and the royal anthem "God Save the King" from the Gallery at the conclusion of the event.

In order to provide a more natural sound in the Chamber, the audio technicians ran a live ambient microphone in the moments leading up to the Speech so that there was low-level room noise for the viewing audience. Historically on opening day there was no

audio on the broadcast until the Lieutenant Governor took the Throne and started speaking. This effect has always seemed a bit odd when watching the broadcast, as there was no room noise, just silence. Once the Lieutenant Governor left and the Speaker took the Throne, the normal practice was resumed of only having the Speaker's mic on, or the mic of a recognized Member.

The address outlined a series of initiatives intending to build on the Government's progress over the past two years, with new commitments to improve health care, lower costs, create good jobs to grow the economy and keep communities safe.

The Speech specifically identified the following priorities and commitments:

- Introducing three pieces of legislation to improve patient safety by creating a patient safety charter, ending mandatory overtime starting with nurses on the front lines and legislating staff-to-patient ratios in priority areas of the health-care system;
- Launching digital health cards and a new patient portal in 2026;
- Expanding pharmacists' scope of practice so they can provide birth control and treatment for urinary tract infections (UTIs) and other common ailments;
- Building on Manitoba's protective care legislation by providing new detox beds for people leaving the Protective Care Centre who are taking methamphetamines (meth), and investing in housing and wraparound supports for those struggling with addiction;
- Conducting a targeted meth sweep focusing on those producing and distributing meth and setting up a task force on drug enforcement;
- Advancing a potential Churchill trade corridor project in partnership with Indigenous nations, with new legislation to enshrine the Manitoba Crown-Indigenous Corporation into law;
- Building four new schools and adding more than 400 child-care spaces in River East, Pembina Trails, Seven Oaks, and Brandon;
- Conducting the most comprehensive after-action wildfire review ever undertaken in Manitoba; and
- Updating the *Accessibility for Manitobans Act* and expanding French legal services.

During his contribution to the Throne Speech debate on November 21, the Leader of the Official Opposition **Obby Khan** moved a non-confidence amendment which stated that the Government, among other things:

- Failed to present a credible or transparent fiscal plan while making yet another false promise to balance the budget despite record deficits, deteriorating credit outlooks, and no path to sustainability;
- Misstated progress in the healthcare system while Manitobans continue to face unacceptable emergency room wait times, closed rural services, long surgical backlogs, and a worsening shortage of front-line staff in many regions;
- Failed to address the growing cost-of-living crisis, offering short-term rhetoric instead of long-term affordability measures, leaving families, seniors, farmers, and small businesses without meaningful relief;
- Failed to offer a serious plan to rebuild the economy despite job losses, a weakening investment climate, and stalled major infrastructure projects that are vital to Manitoba's competitiveness;
- Misrepresented the provincial government's record on public safety as crime rates, drug trafficking, and violent incidents continue to rise in many communities across the province, with no comprehensive strategy to tackle the root causes or support law enforcement;
- Failed to support municipalities, which continue to face downloading, infrastructure deficits, and cost pressures without stable long-term funding;
- Failed to address the severe impacts of drought, wildfire, and climate-driven disasters, providing no concrete commitments to build provincial resilience, protect agriculture, or support affected communities beyond vague reviews and slogans; and
- Continued to overpromise on northern development and the Port of Churchill, offering speculative, uncostered announcements without supporting evidence, timelines, or guarantees of feasibility, transparency, or value for Manitobans.

On November 27, the amendment was defeated on a recorded vote of 20 ayes, 33 nays, while the main motion carried on a recorded vote of ayes 32, nays 20. The Fall Sittings period concluded on December 4, 2025, with the House scheduled to resume sitting on March 4, 2026.

### **American Sign Language (ASL) Live Broadcast**

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On December 3, 2025, thanks to the great work of the Assembly's Digital Media Branch, live American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation was provided in the Manitoba legislature for the first time. As Minister of Families **Nahanni Fontaine** introduced Bill 6, *The*

*Sign Languages Recognition Act*, members of the deaf community were present in the gallery to observe the proceedings, and ASL interpretation was provided live in the public gallery as well as on our broadcast. The Bill formally recognizes American Sign Language, Quebec Sign Language and Indigenous Sign Languages as distinct languages, and acknowledges the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of sign languages as the primary languages of many deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf-blind Manitobans. This step served as a successful test case, and the Assembly is working towards providing ASL interpretation as a regular feature of our broadcasts starting in 2026.

### **Legislative Building Exterior Restoration & Preservation Project**

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A multi-year capital project is underway to preserve and restore the exterior of the Manitoba Legislative Building. In addition to cleaning, repainting, and repairing the historic stonework, the project includes renewal of key heritage features such as the lampstands, statues, and balustrades. The project implementation has been divided into four parts with the East Side due to be concluded in 2027, the South Side in 2028, the West side in 2031 and the North side by 2033.

### **Independent Officer changes**

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In November 2025 **Leigh Anne Caron** was appointed as Manitoba's first **Senior's Advocate**. Manitoba's independent Seniors' Advocate office was officially established with the proclamation of *The Seniors' Advocate Act* on November 1, 2025. The role was established to act as an independent voice for seniors, identifying systemic issues and making recommendations to the legislature on health care, housing, and programs.

An all-party committee has been established to select and appoint a new **Ethics Commissioner** after **Jeffrey Schnoor** announced he was leaving the position to serve as Conflict of Interest Commissioner for British Columbia. The Speaker expressed his gratitude to Mr. Schnoor in the Fall Session noting Mr. Schnoor oversaw the implementation of many changes to Manitoba's Conflict of Interest legislation. In addition to providing confidential advice to MLAs and assisting Members with their disclosure obligations, he developed a new online disclosure process and website. He also took on the challenging task of creating a process for responding to requests from MLAs to give an opinion respecting the compliance of other Members with *The Conflict of Interest Act*.

Finally, an all-party Committee has also been launched to hire a new **Chief Electoral Officer**, filling a vacancy created when **Shipra Verma** left her role in November 2025 after serving 21 years with Elections Manitoba. The Assembly thanks Ms. Verma for her many years of dedicated leadership and for her commitment to the democratic values of participation and electoral integrity. Her work has strengthened electoral processes and has served Manitoba voters with professionalism and care.

**Greg Recksiedler**

Research Clerk / Clerk Assistant



## Ontario

### 1<sup>st</sup> Session 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament (Fall Meeting Period)

The House returned from the summer adjournment on October 20, 2025, for the fall meeting period. During this busy time, the House passed several bills, while committees considered the Estimates and continued various studies. The House adjourned on December 11, 2025.

### Tributes

On December 3, 2025, the House agreed unanimously to pay tribute to several former Members who had passed away. Members made statements in remembrance of the following individuals:

- **Allan Kenneth McLean**, Member for the Electoral District of Simcoe East (March 19, 1981, to June 2, 1999)
- **Mike Liam Farnan**, Member for the Electoral District of Cambridge (September 10, 1987, to June 7, 1995)
- **Michael A. Brown**, Member for the Electoral District of Algoma–Manitoulin (September 10, 1987, to October 5, 2011)

- **Jan Duksza**, Member for the Electoral District of Parkdale (October 21, 1971, to March 18, 1981)
- **Rev. William C. Davis**, Member for the Electoral District of Scarborough Centre (May 2, 1985, to September 9, 1987)
- **James Joseph Bradley**, Member for the Electoral District of St. Catharines (June 9, 1977, to June 6, 2018)
- **Allan Furlong**, Member for the Electoral District of Durham Centre (September 10, 1987, to September 5, 1990)
- **Bernard Grandmaître**, Member for the Electoral District of Ottawa East (December 13, 1984, to June 2, 1999)
- **Timothy Escott Reid**, Member for the Electoral District of Scarborough East (October 17, 1967, to October 20, 1971)
- **John Hastings**, Member for the Electoral Districts of Etobicoke—Rexdale and Etobicoke North (June 8, 1995, to October 1, 2003)
- **Sharon Murdock**, Member for the Electoral District of Sudbury (September 6, 1990, to June 7, 1995)

### Speaker's Ruling

On December 11, 2025, the Speaker delivered a ruling respecting the same question rule. This rule is captured in Standing Order 55, which provides that “no motion, or amendment, the subject-matter of which has been decided upon, can again be proposed during the same session.” She informed the House that as a result of the passage at third reading of Bill 46, *An Act to amend various Acts, Bill 74, An Act to Amend the Christopher's Law (Sex Offender Registry), 2000 with respect to the disclosure of information obtained from the sex offender registry*, was rendered out of order. This was because Bill 74 was identical to the provisions of Schedule 3 of Bill 46. Bill 74 was subsequently removed from the *Orders and Notices Paper*. The Speaker explained that the intent of the same question rule is to protect the House's time and to prevent the House from making contradictory or incompatible decisions in the same session.

In her ruling, the Speaker also noted that while the principle of the same question rule is widely observed in Westminster-style parliaments, its application by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario has differed from that of other jurisdictions. Many other parliaments consider the passage of a bill at second reading to be a point at which a substantially similar bill is no longer able to proceed. The Speaker advised that in Ontario, the practice has evolved such that the same question

rule only takes effect once a final decision on a bill has been made, i.e. defeat at second reading or passage at third reading. She explained that this interpretation gives the House the greatest opportunity to decide on a matter without the risk of premature intervention by the Speaker.

### **Temporary Changes to the Parliamentary Calendar**

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On December 11, 2025, the House adopted a motion that when it adjourned that day, it would stand adjourned until March 23, 2026, instead of February 17, 2026, the start date of the spring meeting period provided for in the Standing Orders. The motion also revised the 2026 parliamentary calendar by adding a constituency week to the spring meeting period during the last week of April.

### **Committees**

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During the fall meeting period, committees met for ongoing studies and reviewed bills. The policy field committees also considered the 2025-2026 Estimates of the ministries assigned to them. They reported the Estimates back to the House on November 20, 2025, pursuant to the tabling deadline of the third Thursday in November set by Standing Order 66(a).

The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs began the 2026 Pre-Budget Consultations with hearings in Toronto and Peterborough on December 4 and 5, 2025. Having been authorized by the House to meet during the winter adjournment, the Committee plans to hold public hearings in nine other locations across the province this January.

The Standing Committee on Justice Policy resumed its study on intimate partner violence, which was initiated in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament and revived in the 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament. On November 17, 2025, the House ordered that the Committee consider a draft report authored by MPP **Jess Dixon** (Kitchener South—Hespeler) and meet for report writing later that month. The Committee presented its final report to the House on December 9, 2025.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts received a briefing from the Auditor General's 2025 Annual Report on December 8, 2025. The Committee also presented the following reports to the House:

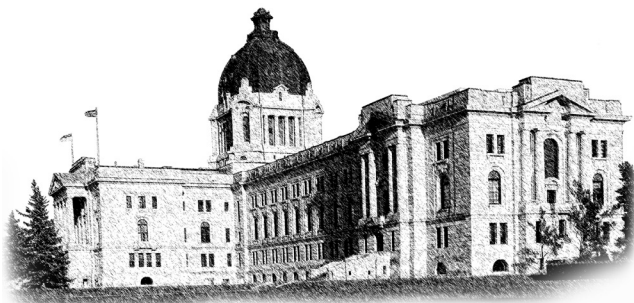
- Value-for-Money Audit: Financial Services Regulatory Authority: Regulation of Private Passenger Automobile Insurance, Credit Unions

and Pension Plans (2022 Annual Report of the Auditor General of Ontario);

- Value-for-Money Audit: Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation: Casinos, Lotteries and Internet Gaming (2022 Annual Report of the Auditor General of Ontario);
- Value-for-Money Audit: Tourism Support Programs (2023 Annual Report of the Auditor General of Ontario); and
- Review of Government Advertising (2023 Annual Report of the Auditor General of Ontario).

Members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs attended the Fall Harvest Festival of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation on October 18, 2025. The Committee's participation in this event was related to its ongoing work on including Indigenous representation at the Legislature as part of its study of the rehabilitation and restoration of the Legislative precinct. On December 4, 2025, **Todd J. McCarthy**, acting Minister of Infrastructure, provided a briefing to the Committee on behalf of the Queen's Park Restoration Secretariat regarding the status of the Queen's Park Restoration Project.

**Stefan Uguen-Csenge**  
Committee Clerk



## **Saskatchewan**

### **Prorogation and the opening of a new session**

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On the afternoon of October 22, 2025, the second session of the thirtieth legislature was opened by Lieutenant Governor **Bernadette McIntyre**, following prorogation of the first session earlier that day. The Lieutenant Governor delivered the Speech from the Throne, followed by blessings from Chaplain **Fred Hill**, Reverend Dr. **T.V. Thomas**, and Chief **George Cote**.

On October 23, 2025, a motion for Address in Reply was moved, followed by an amendment from the opposition expressing a lack of support for the agenda outlined in the speech and a loss of confidence in the government. The Assembly debated both the motion and the amendment for five days. On October 30, 2025, the amendment was negatived on a recorded division of 25-32 and the main motion was agreed to on a recorded division of 32-25.

### **Sessional order and amendments to the rules and procedures**

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The *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan* specify that when Remembrance Day falls on a Tuesday, the Assembly shall not sit on the preceding Monday. As a result, the 25<sup>th</sup> and final day of the fall sitting period would have fallen on a Monday. On October 23, 2025, the Assembly adopted a sessional order modifying the parliamentary calendar for the fall session, allowing the Assembly to sit on December 5, as the final day of the fall period so that members would not need to return to the Assembly the following week for one sitting day. Related provisions of the sessional order modified the sitting times and order of business for December 4, and December 5, 2025.

Government House Leader **Tim McLeod** then moved four subsequent motions seeking permanent amendments to the rules to alter the parliamentary calendar to ensure the final day for the fall sitting period does not fall on a Monday in the future. All four motions were adopted by the Assembly.

### **Summary of legislation of the fall sitting**

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The Assembly sat for 25 days, during which time 25 public bills and seven Private Members' public bills were introduced. Six of the public bills received Royal Assent, including an appropriation bill containing supplementary estimates for various ministries and agencies tabled by the government on November 27, 2025. The other bills that received Royal Assent included *The Income Tax (Miscellaneous) Amendment Act, 2025*; *The Statute Law Amendment Act, 2025*; *The Public Libraries Amendment Act, 2025*; *The Cyberstalking and Coercive Control Act*; and *The Miscellaneous Statutes Repeal Act, 2025*, which repealed 2 outdated public Acts and almost 200 obsolete private Acts.

On November 27, 2025, directly following question period, the Government House Leader asked for leave to move directly to Government Orders, item no. 7, *The Cyberstalking and Coercive Control Act*, skipping over

multiple other items of business to consider the bill. The bill then immediately received second reading, was considered in Committee of the Whole on Bills, and received third reading. Afterwards, the Assembly granted leave to return to routine proceedings.

### **Urgent and pressing necessity motion**

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On October 23, 2025, Opposition Leader **Carla Beck** was granted leave to move a motion of urgent and pressing necessity calling on the Premier to urge the Government of Canada to remove the federal tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles to restore market access for producers of canola, peas, and pork in Saskatchewan. Members on both sides of the House spoke in favour of supporting Saskatchewan producers and urging the Government of Canada to take immediate action. A government amendment was moved to include that the Assembly commend the Premier for his leadership and early calls for the removal of the tariffs. Both the amendment and the subsequent amended motion were agreed to on recorded divisions of 33-24.

### **Point of order and Speaker's ruling**

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On October 29, 2025, the Government House Leader raised a point of order immediately following the first reading of a bill, before it could be set down for second reading. He argued that Private Members' Bill No. 605, *The Free Trade within Canada (Mutual Recognition) Act*, was a substantial duplication of government Bill No. 24, *The Saskatchewan Internal Trade Promotion Act*, and asked the Speaker to find the bill out of order pursuant to the "same question rule," rule 59(e).

The Speaker ruled on November 3, 2025, that the point of order was too soon in the parliamentary process as the process of first reading and setting a bill down for second reading on the order paper is procedural in nature. The first decision to be made by the Assembly on a bill is its second reading motion and, so far, there had been no debate or decision made on either bill. As such, the opportunity to apply rule 59(e) would only occur once the Assembly voted on the second reading motion. Accordingly, the Speaker found the point of order not well taken and ordered Bill No. 605 to be set down for second reading on the order paper.

### **Assembly response to Conflict of Interest Commissioner report**

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As required by *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act*, when the Conflict of Interest Commissioner finds that

a member has contravened the Act, the Assembly shall consider and respond to the findings of the report within 40 sitting days of the day the report is laid before the Assembly. The Act provides penalties that the Assembly may impose. Two of the Commissioner's reports from the previous session contained opinions that members had breached section 15 of *The Members' Conflict of Interest Act*. On November 4, 2025, the Government House Leader moved a motion to receive the findings of four Conflict of Interest Commissioner reports, published October 21, 2024, December 16, 2024, and March 17, 2025. One opposition member spoke briefly on the motion before it was passed.

### **Absence of minister during committee and resulting privilege case**

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On December 2, 2025, Minister of Crown Investments Corporation **Jeremy Harrison** was not present for consideration of statutory supplementary estimates at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies. Motions were moved during the committee meeting to compel the minister's attendance and to report a breach of privilege to the Assembly, but they were negatived. On December 3, 2025, Opposition Whip **Aleana Young** submitted a privilege case to the Speaker of the Assembly.

Prior to the Speaker delivering his ruling, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies moved a motion for the committee's third report to be concurred in by the Assembly. The report recommended that the Assembly concur with the supplementary estimates as reported and include them in the appropriation bill for consideration by the Assembly. The Opposition Whip entered debate on the concurrence motion, speaking to her concerns about the minister's absence at the meeting. The Minister of Crown Investments Corporation joined the debate and argued that there is no obligation to consider statutory budget items in committee. The opposition voted against the concurrence motion, but it was ultimately passed on a recorded division of 32-22.

Immediately following the concurrence motion, the Speaker delivered his ruling on the privilege case to the Assembly. The Speaker determined that there was not a *prima facie* case of privilege, as breaches of privilege in committee must be dealt with by the committee and the House has no authority to deal with the matter unless there is a report from the committee. The Speaker found the question of privilege not well taken.

### **Roughriders Grey Cup parade**

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On November 18, 2025, the Assembly adjourned immediately following question period to allow members to participate in the Saskatchewan Roughriders Grey Cup parade and celebration, which ended at the Legislative Building. Members were permitted to wear Roughrider jerseys during proceedings on that day and joined the celebration outdoors following adjournment. During the celebration, members of the Saskatchewan Roughriders football team came inside the building to celebrate in the rotunda and on the Premier's balcony with the Grey Cup.

### **Adjournment of the fall sitting**

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The fall sitting of the Assembly adjourned on December 5, 2025. It will reconvene on March 2, 2026, in accordance with the parliamentary calendar.

### **Cabinet shuffle**

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On December 11, 2025, Premier **Scott Moe** announced a shuffle to his cabinet, adding two new members and bringing the number of cabinet ministers back to 18. As part of the shuffle, the ministry previously called Corrections, Policing and Public Safety was renamed Community Safety.

Five ministers entered cabinet for the first time:

- **Chris Beaudry** became the Minister of Energy and Resources;
- **Kim Gartner** became the Minister of Highways;
- **Darlene Rowden** became the Minister of Environment;
- **Michael Weger** became the Minister of Community Safety and the Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency; and
- **Sean Wilson** became the Minister of SaskBuilds and Procurement and Minister Responsible for the Global Transportation Hub Authority.

Eight cabinet ministers retained some, or all, of their current portfolios:

- **Lori Carr** remains the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Seniors and Rural and Remote Health;
- **Jeremy Cockrill** remains the Minister of Health;
- **Jeremy Harrison** remains the Minister of Crown Investments Corporation, Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission, Minister Responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated, Minister

Responsible for Saskatchewan Government Insurance, Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Power Corporation, Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Telecommunications, Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Water Corporation, and Minister Responsible for Lotteries and Gaming Saskatchewan Corporation;

- **Everett Hindley** remains the Minister of Education;
- **Terry Jenson** remains the Minister of Social Services;
- **Tim McLeod** remains the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Minister Responsible for the Firearms Secretariat, and Government House Leader;
- **Jim Reiter** remains the Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance; and
- **Alana Ross** remains the Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, and Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan.

Four cabinet ministers took on new portfolios:

- **Ken Cheveldayoff** remains the Minister of Advanced Education but also became the Minister of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety and Minister Responsible for the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board;
- **Warren Kaeding** remains the Minister of Trade and Export Development and the Minister Responsible for Innovation but also became the Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority;
- **David Marit** returns as the Minister of Agriculture, Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation, and Minister Responsible for Saskatchewan Water Security Agency; and
- **Eric Schmalz** remains the Minister of Government Relations, Minister Responsible for First Nations, Métis and Northern Affairs, and Minister Responsible for the Provincial Capital Commission but also became the Minister of Immigration and Career Training.

Three ministers left cabinet: **Daryl Harrison**, **Travis Keisig**, and **Colleen Young**. Alongside the cabinet changes, Premier Moe also announced that **Brad Crassweller** will replace **Sean Wilson** as Government Whip.

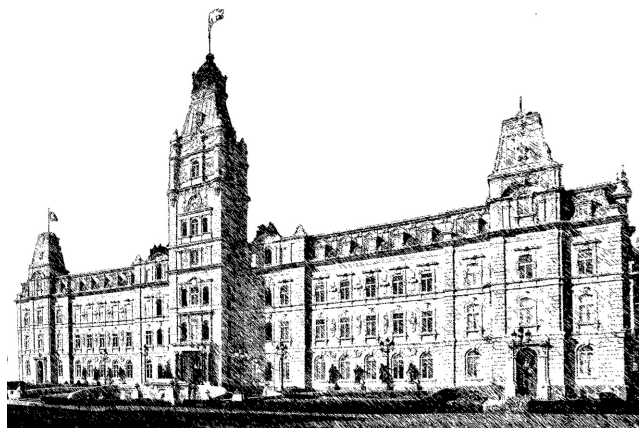
### **Retirement of Deputy Clerk**

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After 18 years of service with the Legislative Assembly Service (LAS), **Kathy Burianyk** retired from

her position as Deputy Clerk at the end of December 2025. Ms. Burianyk began her career with the LAS in 2007 as a Committee Researcher and subsequently held the titles of Committee Clerk, Senior Committee Clerk, and Clerk Assistant. She became a Table Officer in 2015 and was appointed Deputy Clerk in February 2023.

**Jessica Start**  
Procedural Clerk



## **Québec**

### **Proceedings of the Assemblée nationale du Québec**

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#### *Extraordinary sitting*

The Assemblée met for an extraordinary sitting on October 24, 2025, to introduce an exceptional legislative procedure for the consideration of Bill 2, *An Act mainly to establish collective responsibility with respect to improvement of access to medical services and to ensure continuity of provision of those services*. The sitting began at 8:00 a.m. and ended during the night, shortly before 4:00 a.m.

Bill 2 was passed on the following vote: Yeas 63, Nays 27, Abstentions 0.

#### *Composition*

On October 30, 2025, **Lionel Carmant**, Member for Taillon and, at the time, Minister Responsible for Social Services, announced his withdrawal from the caucus of the parliamentary group forming the Government. He now sits as an independent Member.

The same day, **Sonia Bélanger**, Member for Prévost, was appointed as Minister Responsible for Seniors and Informal Caregivers, Minister Responsible for Social

Services and Minister for Health. The Member for Berthier, **Caroline Proulx**, was appointed as Minister Responsible for Housing. She remains the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

On November 4, 2025, **Isabelle Poulet**, Member for Laporte, was excluded from the caucus of the parliamentary group forming the Government and now sits as an independent Member.

On November 18, **André Fortin**, Member for Pontiac, was designated as Leader of the Official Opposition, to replace **Marwah Rizqy**, Member for Saint-Laurent, who was suspended from the caucus for an indefinite period. She was excluded from the caucus on December 2. Mr. Fortin, who had been Official Opposition Whip, was replaced by **Marc Tanguay**, Member for LaFontaine. A few weeks later, the parliamentary group forming the Official Opposition made more changes to its parliamentary officials following the resignation of **Pablo Rodriguez** (who was not a Member of the Assemblée) as Leader of the party. As a result, between December 19 and 22, 2025, Mr. Tanguay, Member for LaFontaine, was designated again as Leader of the Official Opposition, **Monsef Derraji**, Member for Nelligan, as House Leader and **Filomena Rotiroti**, Member for Jeanne-Mance-Viger, as Whip.

On November 22, the caucus of the parliamentary group forming the Second Opposition Group excluded **Vincent Marissal**, Member for Rosemont, who now sits as an independent Member.

On December 4, **Sona Lakhoyan Olivier**, Member for Chomedey, was excluded from the caucus of the parliamentary group forming the Official Opposition. She now sits as an independent Member.

On December 18, **Christian Dubé**, Member for La Prairie, announced his resignation as Minister of Health and withdrew from the caucus of the parliamentary group forming the Government. He became the ninth independent Member of the Assemblée. On December 19, **Sonia Bélanger**, Member for Prévost, was appointed as Minister of Health, in addition to her responsibilities as Minister Responsible for Seniors and Informal Caregivers and Minister Responsible for Social Services.

Consequently, the Assemblée nationale is now composed of 124 Members: 80 from the Coalition avenir Québec, 18 from the Québec Liberal Party, 11 from Québec solidaire, six from the Parti Québécois and nine independent Members. The seat for the electoral division of Chicoutimi is vacant.

### *Resumption of the debate on the opening speech*

On October 1, 2025, the Assemblée resumed the debate on the opening speech of the Second Session of the 43rd Legislature. The debate ended on October 21, after just over 23 hours of proceedings. In total, 77 parliamentarians spoke. The motion moved by the Premier to approve the Government's general policy was carried on division.

### *Legislative agenda*

On October 1, 2025, **Mathieu Lévesque**, Deputy Government House Leader and Member for Chapleau, moved a motion to continue the consideration, at the stage at which it was interrupted, of the bills in progress before the prorogation of the first session of the 43rd Legislature, pursuant to Standing Order 48 of the *Standing Orders of the National Assembly*. Once the motion was carried, 54 bills were again placed on the *Order Paper and Notices*.

Between October 1 and December 31, 2025, 29 bills were introduced in the Assemblée, of which 16 were government bills, nine private Members' bills and four private bills. The introduction of Bill 1, *Québec Constitution Act, 2025*, was preceded by a ministerial statement by Premier **François Legault**, on October 21.

During the same period, 14 government bills, one private Members' bill and two private bills were passed, including

- Bill 82, *An Act respecting the national digital identity and amending other provisions*;
- Bill 94, *An Act to, in particular, reinforce laicity in the education network and to amend various legislative provisions*;
- Bill 101, *An Act to improve certain labour laws*;
- Bill 103, *An Act to regulate supervised consumption sites in order to promote their harmonious cohabitation with the community* (modified title);
- Bill 104, *An Act to amend various provisions in particular to follow up on certain requests from the municipal sector*;
- Bill 108, *An Act to amend the Act respecting the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles to modernize the Société's financial service offer and to recognize the digital creativity industry*;
- Bill 109, *An Act to affirm the cultural sovereignty of Québec and to enact the Act respecting the discoverability of French-language cultural content in the digital environment*;

- Bill 112, *An Act to facilitate the trade of goods and the mobility of labour from the other provinces and the territories of Canada*;
- Bill 14, *An Act to strengthen the integrity of voting in political parties' leadership campaigns and nomination contests*; and
- Bill 16, *An Act to postpone the coming into force of certain provisions of the Act mainly to establish collective responsibility with respect to improvement of access to medical services and to ensure continuity of provision of those services*.

A fast-track procedure was used for the passage of Bills 14 and 16.

#### *Other events*

*Debate on the report from the Commission de la représentation électorale*

Pursuant to section 28 of the *Election Act*, the Assemblée held the debate on the report from the Commission de la représentation électorale, which was tabled on December 2, 2025. It should be noted that the electoral division delimitation process is usually undertaken every two general elections. The Assemblée passed Bill 59, *An Act to interrupt the electoral division delimitation process* on May 2, 2024, to postpone the process to the 44th Legislature. In a judgment rendered on December 1, 2025, the Court of Appeal of Québec declared the *Act* unconstitutional, resulting in the resumption of the process. The limited debate, lasting a maximum of five hours, that must take place within five days after the report is tabled was held over two sittings, on December 5 and 9, 2025.

### **Committee Proceedings**

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#### *Changes to the composition of committees*

Changes were made to the composition of parliamentary committees in November and December 2025, following modifications to the composition of the Assemblée.

Ms. Rotiroti, Member of the Official Opposition and Member for Jeanne-Mance–Viger, was appointed as Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education.

Also from the Official Opposition, **Brigitte B. Garceau**, Member for Robert-Baldwin, was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Institutions, and **Jennifer Maccarone**, Member for Westmount–Saint-Louis, was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Labour and the Economy.

From the Second Opposition Group, **Alexandre Leduc**, Member for Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Public Administration, and **Andrés Fontecilla**, Member for Laurier-Dorion, was appointed as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Citizen Relations.

#### *Parliamentary committee mandates*

Between October and December 2025, the committees held special consultations on seven government bills and within the framework of an order on examining Québec's target for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. A general consultation on the planning of immigration to Québec for the 2026–2029 period was also held in the fall, and a general consultation on Bill 1, *Québec Constitution Act, 2025*, was initiated at the beginning of December. Lastly, the committees carried out clause-by-clause consideration of 12 government bills and two private bills.

#### *General consultation on the planning of immigration*

A general consultation on the consultation document on the planning of immigration to Québec for the 2026–2029 period, entitled “La planification de l’immigration au Québec pour la période 2026-2029,” was carried out between October 1 and 30, 2025. The Committee on Citizen Relations held 11 meetings and heard 88 witnesses. It received 979 answers within the framework of the online consultation that was carried out between June 6 and October 30, 2025. At the end of the mandate, the Committee published a report containing 25 observations and 15 recommendations.

#### *General consultation on Bill 1, Québec Constitution Act, 2025*

Bill 1, *Québec Constitution Act, 2025*, was introduced in the Assemblée nationale on October 9, 2025, by **Simon Jolin-Barrette**, Minister of Justice and Minister Responsible for Canadian Relations.

The bill enacts three new *Acts*: the *Constitution of Québec*, the *Act respecting the constitutional autonomy of Québec* and the *Act respecting the Conseil constitutionnel*. It also amends 21 *Acts*, including the *Constitution Act, 1867*, and the *Act respecting the National Assembly*. It should be noted that the current Coalition Avenir Québec government already amended the *Constitution Act, 1867*, via the *Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec*, which was passed in June 2022.

Following this, the Assemblée nationale gave the Committee on Institutions a mandate to hold a general consultation. Public hearings started on December 4, 2025, and will continue until February 18, 2026.

*Special consultations and public hearings on Québec's target for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions*

On November 6, 2025, **Bernard Drainville**, Minister of the Environment, the Fight Against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks, tabled in the Assemblée a consultation document on Québec's target for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Under the *Environment Quality Act*, a parliamentary committee of the Assemblée nationale must hold a special consultation and the Advisory Committee on Climate Change must publish a notice on the target before the target is determined. The Committee on Transportation and the Environment also carried out special consultations and public hearings on the document entitled "Consultation sur la cible de réduction des émissions de gaz à effet de serre du Québec".

The hearings were held from November 25 to December 3, 2025. In total, the parliamentarians heard 26 individuals and organizations. At the end of the mandate, the Committee held a deliberative meeting and produced a report containing 12 observations and eight recommendations.

#### *Culture at the forefront*

During the fall 2025 parliamentary proceedings, the Committee on Culture and Education considered two bills introduced by **Mathieu Lacombe**, Minister of Culture and Communications and Member for Papineau. Bill 108, *An Act to amend the Act respecting the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles to modernize the Société's financial service offer and to recognize the digital creativity industry* broadens the Société's mission so that it includes digital media creation and establishes the Commission de la créativité numérique. Bill 109, *An Act to affirm the cultural sovereignty of Québec and to enact the Act respecting the discoverability of French-language cultural content in the digital environment* enshrines the right to discoverability of and access to French-language cultural content in the *Charter of human rights and freedoms* and enacts the *Act respecting the discoverability of French-language cultural content in the digital environment*. The Act provides for various obligations for digital platforms that offer a service for viewing audiovisual content online or for listening to music or other audio content online and regulates manufacturers of television sets and connected

devices. The interfaces of platforms and devices must be easily configured in French, provide access to viewing platforms offering French-language cultural content and meet the presence and discoverability criteria for French-language content. The *Act* does not apply to digital platforms whose main purpose is to offer Indigenous content.

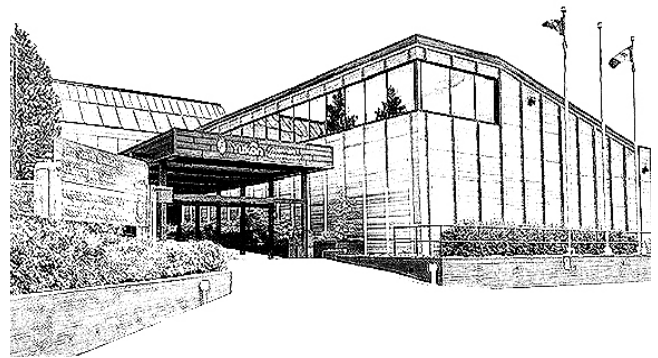
Bills 108 and 109 were passed in the Assemblée on December 10 and 11.

**Simon Quer**

Direction de la séance et de la procédure parlementaire

**Marie-Claude Paquette**

Direction des commissions parlementaires



## Yukon

### 36<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly Elected

The fixed election date provision in section 50.01 of Yukon's *Elections Act* was employed for the first time with a general election held on November 3, 2025.

The 21 members of the 36<sup>th</sup> wholly elected Yukon Legislative Assembly were sworn in on November 19 and 20, 2025.

The Yukon Party won a majority government with 14 members elected, forming the largest government caucus in Yukon history. The New Democratic Party, lead by **Kate White**, moved into the position of Official Opposition with six members elected. The previously governing Yukon Liberal Party won a single seat and is now helmed by **Debra-Leigh Reti**.

A majority of the successful candidates were new to the Assembly, with only eight incumbents re-elected.

This general election saw the largest number of women ever elected to the Assembly: 11. For the first time, women and gender diverse Members of the Legislative Assembly form the majority at 57 per cent of members (12 of 21).

Premier **Currie Dixon**'s cabinet was sworn in on November 21, 2025. Premier Dixon is Yukon's first premier to have been born in the territory.

## 2025 Fall Sitting

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The opening of the First Session of the 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature occurred on December 8, 2025.

**Yvonne Clarke** was elected Speaker. Speaker Clarke is the first Filipino Speaker of a Canadian Legislative Assembly. First elected to the Legislative Assembly on April 12, 2021, she is Yukon's 27<sup>th</sup> Speaker and the second woman to hold the position.

Following the election of the Speaker, Commissioner **Adeline Webber** delivered the Speech from the Throne.

Over the course of the shortened eight-day Fall Sitting, one government bill was introduced and passed: Bill No. 200, *Second Appropriation Act 2025-26*. During debate on the bill, the Premier noted that his government felt that it was important to bring this spending to the floor of the Legislative Assembly as it was primarily money that had already been spent by the previous government.

## 2026 Spring Sitting

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The 2026 Spring Sitting will commence on March 19, 2026. The Assembly adopted a Sessional Order on December 15, 2025, to delay the start of the Spring Sitting as Yukon will be hosting the Arctic Winter Games from March 8 to 15, 2026.

## Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel

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**Bhreagh Dabbs** joined the Yukon Legislative Assembly's Table Officers in the new position of Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. As Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, she provides legal advice to the Speaker, other presiding officers, members, legislative committees and the Clerk, as well as legislative drafting services for the preparation of private members' bills and amendments

**Allison Lloyd**  
Deputy Clerk



# The Senate

## Bills

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After being read a third time and passed, a message was sent to inform the House of Commons and to seek its concurrence with regard to each of the following Senate public bills:

- S-210, *An Act respecting Ukrainian Heritage Month*, on October 1;
- S-228, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sterilization procedures)*, on October 2;
- S-227, *An Act respecting Arab Heritage Month*, on October 8;
- S-211, *An Act respecting a national framework on sports betting advertising*, on October 21;
- S-233, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (assault against persons who provide health services and first responders)*, on October 22; and
- S-201, *An Act respecting a national framework on sickle cell disease*, on November 18.

On October 2, Bill S-1001, *An Act to authorize Gore Mutual Insurance Company to apply to be continued as a body corporate under the laws of the Province of Quebec*, a Senate private bill, was read a third time and passed. Accordingly, a message was sent to the House of Commons, which passed the bill without amendment on October 22.

On November 19, Bill C-3, *An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2025)*, was read a third time and passed by the Senate without amendment. The latter and Bill S-1001 received Royal Assent by written declaration on November 20.

Bill S-2, *An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements)*, as amended by the first report of the

Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, was read a third time and passed on December 4. A message was sent to inform the House of Commons accordingly and to seek its concurrence.

On December 10, following its adoption at second reading, with leave of the Senate, Bill C-17, *An Act for granting to His Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2026*, was read a third time and passed without amendment. It received Royal Assent by written declaration later that day.

### **Chamber, Procedure and Speaker's Rulings**

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Senator **Pamela Wallin** raised a point of order relating to personal, sharp and taxing speeches on October 7. The Speaker pro tempore **René Cormier** delivered a ruling and asked all senators to consider and take into account, during debate, the provisions of rule 6-13 that “[a]ll personal, sharp, or taxing speeches are unparliamentary and are out of order.”

On November 6, the Senate adopted a motion governing all stages of proceedings on Bill C-3, *An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2025)*, which were set to conclude by November 19.

A motion was adopted on November 18 to amend the *Rules of the Senate* to include provisions for observing a minute of silence, adjourning a sitting of the Senate and cancelling or adjourning Senate committee meetings on the day of the death of a senator. It had been the usual practice for some time.

### **Committees**

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The Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications presented its first report, on Bill S-211, *National Framework on Sports Betting Advertising Act*, without amendment, on October 8. The bill was placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting.

On October 23, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology presented its first report, on Bill S-201, *National Framework on Sickle Cell Disease Act*, without amendment, and the bill was placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting.

On November 6, upon receipt of a message from the House of Commons with Bill C-3, *An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2025)*, pursuant to an order adopted

earlier that day, the bill was adopted at second reading and referred to the Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee. On November 18, the committee presented its second report on the bill, without amendment but with observations, and the bill was placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting.

The Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee presented its third report, on Bill S-202, *An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (warning label on alcoholic beverages)*, without amendment but with certain observations, on November 20. The bill was placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting.

On November 25, the Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament presented its first report recommending amendments to the *Rules of the Senate* to include provisions for Question Period with a minister. If adopted, a practice initiated in December 2015 by way of a sessional order would be formalized in the Rules. However, the procedural and logistical details, such as the frequency of Question Period with a minister and the time permitted for questions and answers, would continue to be determined by a sessional order supported by the leaders and facilitators of all recognized parties and parliamentary groups.

The Committee on Indigenous Peoples presented its first report, on Bill S-2, *An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements)*, with four amendments and certain observations, on November 25. The report was adopted on December 2 and the bill, as amended, was placed on the Orders of the Day for third reading at the next sitting.

### **Senators**

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Senator **David Richards** retired from the Senate on October 17. He was appointed to the Senate on August 30, 2017, on the recommendation of Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**, to represent New Brunswick. Senator Richards is an acclaimed Canadian novelist, essayist, screenwriter and poet, whose commitment to the Miramichi River valley, his province, and the country is reflected in his body of work. He has been a writer-in-residence at several universities and colleges across Canada and has received honorary doctorates from three New Brunswick universities and the Atlantic School of Theology and is a member of the Order of New Brunswick and the Order of Canada. Senator Richards was a member of several standing Senate committees, including National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs, Agriculture and Forestry, Legal and Constitutional Affairs, and National Finance.

Senator **Gwen Boniface** resigned from the Senate on November 15. She was appointed to the Senate on November 10, 2016, on the recommendation of Prime Minister Trudeau, to represent Ontario. Prior to her appointment to the Upper Chamber, Senator Boniface was the first woman to serve as the Commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police and is a past President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. She served internationally for 10 years, including as Deputy Chief Inspector of Ireland’s Garda Síochána Inspectorate tasked with reforming Ireland’s national police service, and as a Transnational Organized Crime Expert with the United Nations Police Division. Her work in the Senate included membership on the Senate Standing Committees on Indigenous Peoples, Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Foreign Affairs and International Trade, and Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament. In addition, she chaired the National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs Committee for several years and was the Joint Chair of the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency during the 44th Parliament.

**Max Hollins**  
Procedural Clerk



## House of Commons

### Introduction

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This account covers key procedural highlights from late October 2025 to mid-December 2025. The House adjourned on December 11, 2025, and is scheduled to resume sitting on January 26, 2026.

### Committees

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*Creation of the Special Joint Committee on the Exercise of Powers Under the Building Canada Act*

On November 20, 2025, by unanimous consent, the House adopted a motion to create the Special Joint Committee on the Exercise of Powers Under the *Building Canada Act*.

The order set out the committee’s composition. It also provided that the committee would have joint chairs, with the Senate joint chair to be determined by the Senate and the House of Commons’ joint chair being a member representing the official opposition. The motion further detailed the procedures for electing vice-chairs; the rules governing the designation and replacement of committee members; the quorum required for votes and meetings; and the committee’s powers, including the power to summon witnesses, require the production of documents, create subcommittees, and make its proceedings public. All documents previously tabled pursuant to the *Act* were deemed referred to the committee.

On November 27, 2025, the list of the committee’s House of Commons members was tabled with the Clerk of the House, and on December 2, 2025, the House received a message from the Senate that it had adopted a similar motion, formally designating its members to the committee.

### Legislation

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Admissibility of amendments to Bill C-4, *An Act respecting certain affordability measures for Canadians and another measure* adopted in committee

On October 29, 2025, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, **Kevin Lamoureux** (Winnipeg North), raised a point of order concerning the admissibility of amendments adopted by the Standing Committee on Finance during its clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-4, *An Act respecting certain affordability measures for Canadians and another measure*. He noted that the committee chair had initially ruled the amendments out of order, but that the committee had overturned this decision before reporting the bill back to the House with the amendments. Mr. Lamoureux submitted that the 11 amendments were inadmissible because they required a royal recommendation, as they would impose a charge on the public treasury and therefore engage the Crown’s financial prerogative. Accordingly, he argued that the amendments should be ruled out of order and removed from the bill as reported.

On October 30, 2025, **Yves Perron** (Berthier—Maskinongé) noted that amendments lowering or

eliminating a tax are admissible in committee. He stated that the amendments to Bill C-4 would reduce revenue associated with the Goods and Services Tax but would not authorize a charge on the Consolidated Revenue Fund. On this basis, he argued that the amendments did not require a royal recommendation and were admissible.

On November 3, 2025, the Speaker ruled that the 11 amendments adopted by the committee did not require a royal recommendation, as the rebating of a tax already collected does not constitute a government expenditure. He concluded that the committee's report and the reprinted bill were therefore properly before the House.

Admissibility of amendments to Bill C-12, *An Act respecting certain measures relating to the security of Canada's borders and the integrity of the Canadian immigration system and respecting other related security measures*, adopted in committee

On November 28, 2025, **Arielle Kayabaga** (London West) raised a point of order concerning the admissibility of amendments adopted by the *Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security* during its clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-12, *An Act respecting certain measures relating to the security of Canada's borders and the integrity of the Canadian immigration system and respecting other related security measures*. Ms. Kayabaga noted that the committee chair had initially ruled the amendments out of order, but that the committee had subsequently overturned this decision before reporting the bill back to the House with the amendments. She submitted that the amendments were inadmissible because they violated the parent act rule, which requires that an amendment relate to the subject matter of the bill or clause under consideration.

On December 2, 2025, the Speaker delivered his ruling, explaining that eight of the amendments contravened the parent act rule and were not relevant to the bill's legislative objectives. He affirmed that the committee chair had correctly ruled these amendments inadmissible since they were beyond the scope of the bill. In contrast, the amendment adding new clause 24.1 was found to fall within the scope of the bill as adopted at second reading. The Speaker therefore ordered that clause 24.1 be maintained, while the eight amendments adding clauses 39.1 to 39.4, 75.1 and 75.2 be declared null and void and removed from the bill. He also directed that Bill C-12 be reprinted without the inadmissible amendments.

## Questions of privilege

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*Approval process for forms relating to the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons*

On October 24, 2025, **Michael Barrett** (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes) raised a question of privilege alleging that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner had exceeded his authority by publishing and using forms that had not been approved by the House, contrary to section 30 of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons. He submitted that this constituted a contempt of Parliament.

On October 28, 2025, **Christine Normandin** (Saint-Jean) noted that section 30 requires all proposed forms and guidelines to be submitted to the *Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs* and approved by the House before taking effect. Although she indicated that she had been unable to locate the forms in question online, she emphasized the importance of maintaining parliamentary oversight of officers of Parliament.

The following day, Ms. Kayabaga argued that the matter was not a question of privilege. She noted that the committee had already decided to study the matter. She submitted that it would be premature for the Speaker to intervene while the committee's study was ongoing and confirmed that the committee had invited the commissioner to appear as part of its review of the forms and related procedural and interpretative guidelines.

On November 6, 2025, the Speaker delivered his ruling. He noted that the commissioner had acknowledged the error in a letter dated October 28, 2025, explaining that he had falsely assumed committee approval was not required for what he considered minor changes. The forms had since been removed from the website and resubmitted to the committee for review. In light of these corrective steps and the committee's ongoing study, the Speaker concluded he considered the matter closed.

*Budget documents distributed to Members*

On November 5, 2025, **Gabriel Ste-Marie** (Joliette—Manawan) raised a question of privilege concerning the versions of the budget documents provided during the budget lock-up. He noted that Members were given access only to a paper version that was 111 pages shorter than the electronic version. On November 7,

2025, **Alex Ruff** (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound) and **Claude DeBellefeuille** (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon) noted that certain annexes had been available only in the electronic version of the documents. On November 17, 2025, Ms. Kayabaga explained that the version of the budget tabled in the House on November 4, 2025, was complete. She added that providing budget documents to members during the lock-up is a courtesy and does not alter the status of the tabled version.

On November 20, 2025, the Speaker ruled that the matter did not constitute a *prima facie* question of privilege. The Speaker noted that the version of the budget tabled in the House is the authoritative version, not the version published on the department's website.

*Information requested by the Parliamentary Budget Officer*

On November 17, 2025, **Kelly McCauley** (Edmonton West) raised a question of privilege following a notice issued by the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO). The notice stated that the PBO had been unable to obtain information from certain federal departments and parent Crown corporations that the PBO considered necessary to fulfill its mandate under subsection 79.4(1) of the Parliament of Canada Act. Mr. McCauley requested that the Chair examine the matter.

On November 18, 2025, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Mr. Lamoureux, responded that the government had complied in good faith with the PBO's request and that the documents in question would be provided in early December.

On November 20, 2025, Ms. Normandin expressed concern about the reported lack of access to documents required for the PBO's work. She asked the Chair to take the matter under consideration and stated her view that a *prima facie* case of privilege existed.

On November 25, 2025, the Speaker delivered his ruling. He confirmed that the PBO had followed the appropriate procedure by informing the Speaker of the government's refusal but emphasized that the authority to order the production of documents rests with the House of Commons, not with the PBO or the Chair. Since the House had not yet considered the matter or exercised its powers, the Speaker concluded that it was premature to find a *prima facie* case of privilege.

## Financial procedure

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### *Budgetary Policy*

On November 4, 2025, at 4:00 p.m., the House proceeded to the consideration of ways and means motion No. 2 for the budget presentation. The timing of this presentation is unusual, as the budgetary policy is typically tabled in the spring. The Minister of Finance and National Revenue, **François-Philippe Champagne** (Saint-Maurice—Champlain) has previously announced that the government intends to table the budget in the fall from now on.

On that day, the minister tabled the Budget 2025 and delivered the budget speech. The following day marked the first appointed day for the budget debate. The Leader of the Opposition, **Pierre Poilievre** (Battle River—Crowfoot), did not move an amendment during his remarks. As a result, an amendment to reject the government's budget was instead moved by **Yves-François Blanchet** (Beloeil—Chambly), an uncommon occurrence, since the amendment is typically moved by the official opposition.

On November 6, 2025, the second appointed day, **Jasraj Singh Hallan** (Calgary East) moved a subamendment to replace the list of reasons for rejecting the budget. The question was put on the subamendment and it was negatived.

On November 7, 2025, the third appointed day, debate continued on the amendment, which was also negatived. On November 17, 2025, the fourth and final appointed day, the main motion approving the budgetary policy of the government was agreed to.

## Parliamentary Publications

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### *Launch of the new written questions website*

In October 2025, the House of Commons launched a new website for written questions, consolidating members' questions and the government's responses on a single public platform. As of October 29, 2025, government responses made into orders for return have been linked from the electronic version of the Journals to the corresponding questions' webpage on the new website.

*Tabling of the fourth edition of House of Commons Procedure and Practice*

On December 2, 2025, the Speaker tabled, in both official languages, the fourth edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. He noted that previous editions published in 2000, 2009 and 2017 had become essential references for those on and off Parliament Hill. He expressed confidence that this new edition would likewise serve as the most authoritative procedural guide. The Speaker stated that the volume, edited by the Clerk of the House, **Eric Janse**, and the Deputy Clerk, Procedure, **Jeffrey LeBlanc**, reflects practices as recent as spring 2025. He highlighted its scope, with more than 1,300 pages and 5,500 footnotes. The fourth edition is also available in electronic format on the House of Commons website (OurCommons.ca).

### **Take-note debates**

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#### *Softwood lumber industry*

On November 21, 2025, by unanimous consent, the House agreed to hold a take-note debate on the softwood lumber industry on November 25, 2025, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1. The motion also specified the terms of the debate. This take-note debate, held in committee of the whole, was the first of the 45th Parliament.

#### *Canada's auto industry*

On December 2, 2025, by unanimous consent, the House agreed to hold a take-note debate on the auto industry on December 3, 2025, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1. The motion also set out the terms of the debate. The debate proceeded on December 3, as scheduled, in committee of the whole.

### **Moments of silence, tributes and ministerial statements**

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#### *Veterans' Week*

On November 3, 2025, the House observed a moment of silence to commemorate war veterans. It was followed by a ministerial statement by the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, **Jill McKnight** (Delta) for Veterans' Week.

#### *Tribute for Louis Plamondon, the member with the longest uninterrupted service in the House of Commons*

On November 26, 2025, members made statements to mark **Louis Plamondon** (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel—Alnôbak) becoming the member with the longest uninterrupted service in the House of Commons. Mr. Plamondon has been elected consecutively in his riding since 1984 and had recently surpassed the previous record of 15,059 days, held by **Wilfrid Laurier**.

#### *École Polytechnique de Montréal*

On December 4, 2025, the Minister of Women and Gender Equality, and Secretary of State of Small Business and Tourism, **Rechie Valdez** (Mississauga—Streetsville) made a ministerial statement about the gender-based shooting at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989, and to mark the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

**Vicky Sedhya Maurice-Sevigny**

Table Research Branch, House of Commons

# *So Many Faces, So Many Stories: The History of Queen's Park's Premier Portraits and the Legacy They Reveal*

From incorporating significant items to an artist's choice of how to depict their subject, Ontario's Premier portraits are a unique window into the province's political history and culture. In this article, the author provides a brief history of these works of art and speaks to two artists who painted some of the more recent portraits to explain a trend in which premiers have sought to highlight the "personal" while honouring the "political."

**Geneva Fuina**

The long-standing convention holds that a picture is worth 1,000 words. Well, if this is true, then one must wonder what a life-sized custom portrait says about Ontario's Premiers? In many ways, Queen's Park functions as a living museum, a time capsule preserving the political history of the province. The second floor, where the hallways are lined with portraits of past Premiers, is a gallery of stories to be told. One way of revealing the legacy they leave behind is through the personal objects Premiers include in their portraits, and this is where our story unfolds.

After Confederation, the government set out to build a new Legislative Building: the Pink Palace we know and admire today. However, when its doors first opened, the interior was quite different; despite the gleam of new furniture, the halls were bare, awaiting the life and legacy that would soon fill them. The first portrait to enter Queen's Park on April 4, 1893, its official opening day, was that of Oliver Mowat, painted by Robert Harris.<sup>1</sup> The portrait, commissioned and donated by the "friends of the Premier," was brought from the former location on Front Street West, and marked the beginning of a tradition honouring Ontario's leaders within Queen's Park.<sup>2</sup>

The tradition of commissioning portraits of prominent political figures spans governments worldwide and serves many purposes. Indeed, it serves as a means of decorating the building, and it is for this



**George Brown**

reason that earlier portraits are considerably bigger as an attempt to occupy the empty walls. Further, they are a gesture of gratitude, serving as gifts for service when a Premier reaches the end of their tenure. All encompassing, portraiture embodies the history of the

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*Geneva Fuina is a 2025-2026 participant in the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme. She served as an editorial intern for the Canadian Parliamentary Review as a part of her internship.*

Courtesy of Government of Ontario Art Collection, Archives of Ontario



**Edward Blake**

province and, by extension, serves a key educational function. As historical and biographical artifacts, they reveal changing leadership and invite insights into the personality of their subject, depicted through the objects that symbolize their legacy and values.

The practice of including personal items is not unique to the most recent portraits but rather is evidenced in portraiture that pre-dates Confederation. Notably, George Brown (1851-1865) is seen holding papers from *The Globe*, the newspaper he founded, known today as *The Globe and Mail*. The portrait of Edward Blake (1871-1872), the second to be hung on the walls of Queen's Park, is the only one to depict a Premier in the Chamber. In a similar sentiment, Oliver Mowat's (1872-1896) portrait features his home library as the backdrop. A phone can be seen on the desk in the portrait of Ernest Drury (1919-1923). The portrait of George Henry (1930-1934) features a window framing the Whitney Block,

a building beside Queen's Park, for which Henry was involved in its creation.

The portraits are not rigid, standardized reproductions; indeed, they evolve over time and reflect personal choices about how the subject is depicted. While some remain formal, presenting the Premier alone against a unified plain background, others incorporate elements of personal significance. Prior to the 1980s, such inclusions were subtle and relatively rare. A notable shift emerged, however, with the work of portrait artists Linda Dobbs and Phil Richards, whose contributions transformed portraiture at Queen's Park; not only did the number of personal objects increase, but the emotional depth and sentiment behind them became more pronounced.

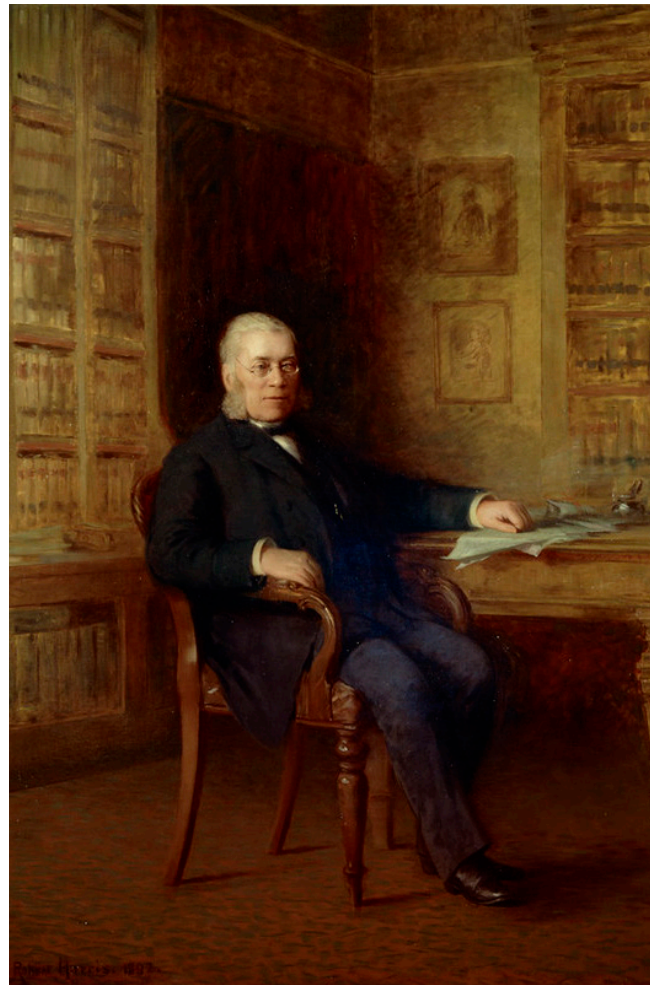
I had the privilege of interviewing both Linda and Phil, whose reflections offered insights on their artistic choices and processes that inform their nuanced approach to portraiture at Queen's Park. In understanding the motivation underscoring this shift, Phil expressed "it was a very different attitude that I brought to the collection at Queen's Park and really any other collections I have been in." The use of symbolism is an integral component of Linda's artistic vision, especially in portraiture, as she expressed, "my whole purpose is that three hundred years from now if somebody looked at the portrait, they would know the time the person was living in and the human being they were looking at." The use of symbolism allows the artists to encapsulate the subject's "inner soul and personality," as Linda describes, allowing the viewer to generate a sense of resonance with the subject and an understanding of their humanity.

The portrait of David Peterson (1985-1990) ushered in a distinctive style of portraiture. I had the pleasure of speaking with Mr. Peterson, who enthusiastically shared that he wanted his portrait to be "different and more personal." This artistic liberty is reflected in his portrait, painted by Linda Dobbs, who explained that before beginning her work, "I need to know a lot about the person, a lot about how they feel they should be remembered in history, what objects represent them."<sup>3</sup> The portrait reflects this sentiment as Mr. Peterson shared with me the stories behind the objects he chose to stand beside. First and foremost, a framed photograph of his family and dog sits atop the fireplace mantel. The fireplace and mantel serve more than a decorative function, as Linda described; they represent Mr. Peterson's astrological signs: the stone symbolizes Capricorn, an earth sign, while the fire represents Sagittarius. In the background, a stack of books can

be seen, and as Mr. Peterson shared with me, if you look closely, the spines are labelled with the initials of his parents. The former Premier is depicted not in a formal dress suit but wearing a loose tie adorned with horses, and in the mirror, the head of a horse peeks through the window. The horses appear as a nod to his wife, Shelly Peterson, who enjoys riding, breeding, and training horses and has authored nine books on the subject. Indeed, Shelly was out riding her horse when Linda arrived at their home, which inspired her to include these elements in the portrait. The portrait, set at the family's farmhouse in Caledon, captures the Ontario fall colours that shine through the window, which, as Mr. Peterson shared with me, he was eager to include.

To capture the personal and political life of Mr. Peterson, Linda begins her process with several conversations to understand her subject's personality, explaining, "I need to draw out the information onto the canvas." The element of symbolism is key to Linda's work, which can be traced back to her earlier days as an illustrator, as she shared, "I used to put my friends in my illustrations, and they were pleasantly surprised."

The portrait of Bob Rae (1990-1995), painted by Phil Richards, features framed family photographs atop the desk, alongside a laptop, which was included to signify that he was the first Premier to computerize his office. The subtle rays of sunlight streaming on Mr. Rae serve as a homage to his father's time spent on the vaudeville stage alongside his sister and brother in an act named "The Three Little Raes of Sunshine." On the back ledge sits a lamp with a base shaped like a baseball bat, which is seen touching the baseball that sits to its right. In the distance hangs a landscape of Mr. Rae's cottage in the autumn season, and Phil revealed that the surrounding gold frame originated in the portrait itself, only later being created in real life. The orange lilies serve as a tribute to the first NDP Premier, referencing the party's signature colour, and the loon sculpture to its right was a request made by Mr. Rae's wife, Arlene Rae. Remarkably, the cabinet never existed in real life and was imagined by Phil as an English antique to symbolically reference Mr. Rae's time studying at Oxford. Through the window, both the CN Tower and the University of Toronto Campus are visible; however, these sights cannot be seen together from Queen's Park and were included to represent his time at the university. An interesting fact often shared on art tours is that the shoes Mr. Rae wears in the portrait belong to the artist. While technically true, Phil clarified the full story: the shoes



Courtesy of Government of Ontario Art Collection, Archives of Ontario

## Oliver Mowat

belonged to his father, who purchased them in London, England, in the early 1940s when he was stationed there during the war. They came to be in the portrait as Mr. Rae's shoes were too worn, so Phil suggested that he paint on his father's wing-tip shoes, which, fun fact, are actually brown but painted black. Little did Phil's father imagine that one day his shoes would be featured in a Premier's portrait.

The range of personal and political items of significance "speaks not just to his time as a Premier but his whole life in a way," Phil shared. The process of creating a symbolically rich portrait relies on collaboration: "I always tell my sitter that you and I can make a better painting than I can make on my own." The inclusion of personal objects of importance evokes a deeper understanding of the subject, just as Phil intended, as he received "immediate feedback in terms of the humanization of the sitter in this portrait."



## George Henry

This portrait, Phil described, “was a pivotal painting for me and for the art of portraiture. I think it marked a change in the attitude towards portraiture. One of the reasons I did that and worked so hard to change the look of the portraits was because I wanted to revive the art of portraiture, which had really fallen on hard times by the middle of the 20th Century.”

The portrait of Ernie Eves (2002-2003) features the Speaker’s dais in the background, along with a stack of books representing his political achievements, including the budgets he introduced. In Dalton McGuinty’s (2003-2013) portrait, the legislative building can be seen through the window, along with the daily news clippings atop his desk.

The most recent Premier portrait is that of Kathleen Wynne (2013-2018), painted by Linda Dobbs, and is rich with personal symbolism. “I talked to her about

objects that mattered to her,” says Linda, who included framed photographs that showcase Ms. Wynne’s three children, grandchildren, and life partner, Jane Rounthwaite. On the desk sits an eagle feather, a gift from a group of Indigenous women, alongside a canoe, representing her dedication to fostering positive relationships with Indigenous communities. Further, there sits a stack of books, including a lesbian parenting book in which Ms. Wynne and Jane co-authored a chapter and a book on the history of Richmond Hill, her hometown. A vase of tulips is a homage to the years she lived in the Netherlands, where two of her children were born, while a scarf draped over a chair hints at her fondness for scarves. Moreover, as the first woman Premier, Linda expressed “I felt it was important for her to be feminine” as she is seen “wearing heels and a beautiful pink suit.” A running shoe can be found beneath her desk, as Ms. Wynne was a “great athlete and I wanted that to be represented in some way,” shared Linda. Indeed, the former Premier can be remembered for having run laps around Queen’s Park.

These portraits reflect not only the political accomplishments of each Premier but also facets of their personal lives. In a conversation with David Bogart, Communications Officer, he shared that visitors are drawn to the portraits that contain personal items. He described the fascination as “curiosity mixed with commentary,” noting that many make personal connections to the objects and spend a considerable amount of time admiring the portraits. This phenomenon reflects the sentiment held by Phil, who explained, “that is what this kind of portrait can do: let people see that the person who was the Premier and took on that role and made a great effort to do the best in it, is also a human being. Before and after their leadership role, they have a life, family, interests, [and] problems as they move through life. It humanizes these leaders we have depended on and so often been critical of or praised what they have done. But at the end of the day, once they leave that leadership role, they become human again.” Through the inclusion of personal items, the subject’s essence fully occupies the canvas. As Linda expresses, “subtly translating an emotion is my motivation...it is very rewarding when the subject appreciates your vision of them, and depth is important to me. It’s not just a likeness, there is something else, a more interior view that you need to bring out, and I find it very important to know and feel who this person is to be able to execute the portrait.” The artists of the portraits are deeply tied to the creation of these historic pieces and as Linda reflects, “to make a contribution to history and to be part of it is a great honour and I don’t take it lightly.” The Premier portraits that line the halls of Queen’s Park are more than dried paint on a canvas; they are living legacies tied to Ontario’s history.



If you are hurrying through the hallway, these details can easily go unnoticed. Next time you find yourself on the second floor of Queen's Park, take a moment to study the portraits and discover the personal objects that speak volumes about the legacy each Premier wished to leave behind. And maybe, just maybe, you might find a few objects that escaped my eye!

### Endnotes

- 1 Fern Bayer, "Faces of History: The Portrait Collection," in *The Ontario Collection*. (Toronto, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1984), 240.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 3 David Warner, "Interview with Linda Kooluris Dobbs," in *The Artists Who Created the Art at Queen's Park*, ed. David Warner. (Toronto, ON: The InFormer, 2018), 55.

**Clockwise from top right: Kathleen Wynne, Dalton McGuinty, Ernie Eves, Ernest Drury, David Peterson, and Bob Rae. Images Courtesy of Government of Ontario Art Collection, Archives of Ontario**



