



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Information Sheet No. 5

The Role of a Member of the Legislative Assembly

A Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) is elected by the voters in his or her electoral district (a geographic area also called a 'constituency' or 'riding') to represent the people of that electoral district in the Yukon Legislative Assembly. There are 19 MLAs in the Yukon Legislative Assembly, each representing a different electoral district whose boundaries are defined in the *Electoral District Boundaries Act*.

MLAs divide their time between work in their electoral districts and in the Assembly and its committees. The role of an MLA can be viewed as having three distinct components: the MLA as representative of his or constituents, the MLA as a member of their party caucus, and the MLA as parliamentarian. Each of these different components requires the MLA to assume different tasks.

The MLA as Representative

The MLA's duty to constituents is to represent them individually and collectively, inside and outside of the Legislative Assembly. Representation may involve raising issues, in the Assembly Chamber or with individual cabinet ministers, that concern the MLA's constituents. It may involve presenting a petition on their behalf, or assisting in solving a problem a constituent has with the Government of Yukon. MLAs keep in touch with their constituents by personal contact, by phone, by writing letters and emails, through meetings, and by a limited number of mass mailings that are paid for out of the Legislative Assembly's budget. Each MLA has an office in the Government of Yukon's Main Administration Building in Whitehorse where they may meet with constituents, and others. A complete list of Yukon MLAs with contact information can be found at: <https://yukonassembly.ca/mlas>

The MLA as Caucus Member

Unless an MLA is an independent Member, he or she will be a member of a party caucus, a group of MLAs from the same political party. As a caucus member the MLA takes on certain roles, helps plan and carry out caucus strategy, supports the caucus and its decisions, and develops expertise in certain subject areas.

The Premier could call upon an MLA in the government caucus to be a cabinet minister. Cabinet ministers are publicly responsible for the work of specific government departments, corporations or other entities. Ministers respond to oral and written questions from opposition MLAs, put forward government bills, present and defend budgetary estimates and table annual reports of their department(s) or corporation(s). Cabinet operates as a collective body, so, for

example, during Question Period one cabinet minister may respond to a question asked of another cabinet minister. It is up to cabinet, as a collective body, to decide which minister is in the best position to respond to the question.

A member of the government caucus who is not in cabinet is called a government private member or 'backbencher'. Government private members have a lower profile than cabinet ministers, but may present petitions, introduce a private member's bill and propose motions for debate. The government private member may also speak to bills and motions presented by other MLAs.

Opposition MLAs assume critic responsibilities for specific government departments, corporations or other entities. They ask questions of cabinet ministers in Oral Question Period and may submit written questions, as well. Like government private members, opposition members also present petitions, propose motions for debate, introduce private members' bills and speak to bills and motions presented by other MLAs.

The MLA as Parliamentarian

The MLA's duty as a parliamentarian can also involve assuming different roles. Fulfilling these duties does not necessarily benefit the MLA or his or her caucus, but are undertaken to benefit the Legislative Assembly as an institution.

For example, the Legislative Assembly has three presiding officers: the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker (who is also Chair of Committee of the Whole) and the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole. An MLA elected as a presiding officer chairs the meetings of the Assembly or Committee of the Whole and ensures that the proceedings follow the established rules and practices.

An MLA's duty as a parliamentarian can also include serving as the Chair, or as a member, of one or more standing, select or special committees. Standing, or permanent, committees deal mostly with matters which are internal to the Legislative Assembly and its House Officers (the Chief Electoral Officer, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, and the Ombudsman), or government finance and operations. Select or special committees are sometimes appointed to deal with matters of public concern, such as hydraulic fracturing, off-road vehicle use, anti-smoking legislation, whistle-blower protection, etc.

An MLA may also be called upon to represent the Legislative Assembly by participating in inter-parliamentary activities, such as those arranged by the Yukon Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

For more information please see the Legislative Assembly's website:

<https://yukonassembly.ca/>