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# *Canadian Political Terms*

*(updated Jan. 10, 2020)*

This Glossary of Terms is derived from several sources.  
(See \*Sources at the bottom.)

It is intended for use as a coaching tool for Members and Elected Officials whose primary language is one other than English. It is by no means an exhaustive list and will be updated occasionally.)

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**Act** - A bill that has received Royal Assent and has become a law.

**Allophone:** A resident whose mother tongue or home language is neither French nor English. The term parallels anglophone (native language is English) and francophone (native language is French). **Note:** Native speakers of aboriginal languages are generally not treated as allophones.

**Attorney General:** The Minister of Justice (French: Ministre de la Justice) is the Minister of the Crown in the **Canadian** Cabinet who is responsible for the Department of Justice, chief federal legal adviser and is also **Attorney General of Canada** (French: Procureur **général du Canada**). **Term length:** At Her Majesty's pleasure

**Backbencher:** A Member of Parliament who is not a minister and does not sit on the front benches reserved for Cabinet Ministers or for opposition party officials.

**Ballot** - A sheet of paper that lists the names of all candidates standing for election.

**Barbeque Circuit:** (or Bar-B-Q Circuit) The "summer barbecue and kissing babies circuit" or, the **barbecue circuit** refers to the summer activities of Canadian legislators and politicians during breaks from parliament and the provincial legislatures. This involves attending community events in order to meet constituents. The term refers to the ubiquity of grilled meat (barbecue) at these gatherings.

**Bicameral** - A legislature that has two law-making Houses or Chambers. For example, the Parliament of Canada in Ottawa is bicameral – it has both the House of Commons and the Senate.

**Biculturalism:** This describes the co-existence, to varying degrees, of two originally distinct cultures.

**Big Government:** A negative term, used mainly by conservatives to describe government programs in areas where they believe government shouldn't be involved, especially those that spend money on social problems

**Bill:** A suggestion for a law (a proposed law) that Parliament is asked to consider.

**Bipartisan:** A cooperative effort by two political parties

**Bleeding Heart:** A term describing people whose hearts "bleed" with sympathy for the downtrodden; used to criticize liberals who favor government spending for social programs.

**Bourinot's Rules of Order:** A **Canadian** parliamentary authority originally published in 1894 by ... The document is widely **used in Canada** to set procedures for formal meetings in **government**, companies and other organizations. ... of Order, most probably in response to the American publication **Robert's Rules** of Order. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourinot%27s\\_Rules\\_of\\_Order](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourinot%27s_Rules_of_Order)

**Budget:** The yearly plan for where the Government is going to get money and how it will spend money.

**Bully Pulpit:** The Presidency, when used by the President to inspire or moralize. Whenever the President seeks to rouse the American people, he is said to be speaking from the bully pulpit. When the term first came into use, "bully" was slang for "first rate" or "admirable."

**Cabinet** - A group of MPPs that is made up of the Premier and the Cabinet Ministers. The Cabinet decides the government's priorities and policies and decides which bills will be presented to parliament. The Cabinet is sometimes referred to as the Executive Council.

**Cabinet Minister:** A Member of Parliament who is usually head of a government department. The Leader of the Government in the Senate is usually a member of Cabinet. (See "MINISTER")

Cameral: Of, or relating to a legislative or judicial chamber. See Bicameral or Unicameral.

**Campaign:** (noun) An organized effort to win an election (verb) To strive for elected office

**Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:** A section of the Canadian constitution that ensures that all people in Canada are guaranteed certain basic rights and freedoms.

**Candidate** - A person who is running in an election.

**Capital:** The city where Parliament is located and the government carries out its business. The capital city of Canada is Ottawa. Each province and territory also has a capital city.

**Court of Last Resort:** See "**Supreme Court of Canada**"

**Caucus (1):** In Canada, refers to all elected members of the same political party in Parliament, including Senators, or a provincial legislature. These members elect among themselves a **caucus chair** who presides over their meetings. In some parties, the caucus also has the power to elect MPs to Cabinet when the party is in government.

**Caucus (2):** An informal meeting of local party members to discuss candidates and choose delegates to the party's convention

**Ceremony:** A formal act that follows special rules or traditions.

**Chamber:** The meeting room in the legislative building where Senators or Members of Parliament meet to discuss, debate and to vote. There is one meeting room for Senators, and one for Members of Parliament. (Senate, House of Commons)

**Checks and Balances:** The system of dividing power among the three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial) to prevent anyone from having too much power. Each branch has some authority to check the power of the others, thereby maintaining a balance among the three.

**Citizen: Citizen** - A resident of a province or country who has certain freedoms, rights and responsibilities. A **Canadian** citizen is a person who was born in Canada or who moved here and met the rules for becoming a Canadian.

**Clerk of the House of Commons:** The principal person in the Chamber who advises the Speaker, Members of Parliament and the other clerks about rules in the House of Commons.

**Clerk** - The person who advises the Speaker and the MPPs on the rules and procedures of parliament. The Clerk also counts the votes in the Chamber, monitors time during debates, and swears in newly-elected MPPs.

**Clerk of the Senate:** The principal person in the Chamber who advises the Speaker, the Senators and the other clerks about rules in the Senate.

**Coalition:** The joining together of two or more political parties to form a Government or an opposition.

**Coattails:** The power of a popular candidate to gather support for other candidates in his or her party. Winning candidates are said to have coattails when they drag candidates for lower office along with them to victory.

**Committee** A group of Senators, Members of Parliament or both selected to study a specific subject or bill and write a report about it.

**Collusion:** secret or illegal cooperation or conspiracy, especially in order to cheat or deceive others. "the armed forces were working in collusion with drug traffickers"

LAW: Illegal cooperation or conspiracy, especially between ostensible opponents in a lawsuit.

Synonyms: conspiracy, connivance, complicity, intrigue, plotting, secret understanding, collaboration, scheming. Eg: "There has been collusion between the security forces and paramilitary groups."

**Committee** - A small group of MPPs from all political parties that meet to discuss bills. Members of the public can share their thoughts and ideas about a bill during most committee meetings.

**Confederation:** The agreement made in 1867 by four provinces (Ontario, Québec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) to join together, forming the nation of Canada, and create a federal Parliament. Other provinces and territories joined at later dates.

**Constituency:** The geographic area in Canada that a Member of Parliament represents in the House of Commons (also known as a riding or electoral district).

**Constituent:** A person living in an area represented by a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons.

**Constitution:** The set of rules that a country like Canada follows to work well as a nation.

**Convention:** A national meeting of a political party, where delegates formally elect a party's nominee.

**Corroborate:** To confirm or give support to (a statement, theory, or finding). *Synonyms:* Confirm, verify, ratify, endorse, authenticate, validate, certify.

**Cronyism:** (derogatory noun) the appointment of friends and associates to positions of authority, without proper regard to their qualifications. Eg: "it looked like an end to the cronyism with which many of the government's appointments had been tainted."

**Crossing the Floor:** When a politician changes their allegiance or votes against their party in a Westminster system (used by Canada) parliament. Crossing the floor may be voting against the approved party lines, or changing to another party after being elected while a member of a first party. While these practices are legally permissible, crossing the floor can lead to controversy and media attention. As well, voting against party lines may lead to consequences such as losing a position (e.g., as minister or a portfolio critic) or being ejected from the party caucus. Maldives and Bangladesh have laws which remove the member from parliament due to floor-crossing.

**Dark Horse:** A long-shot candidate. In **horse** racing, a "dark horse" is a horse that wins a race when no one expects it to.

**Dean of the House:** The Member of the House of Commons with the longest unbroken record of service. The Dean is responsible for presiding over the election of the Speaker of the House of Commons at the beginning of each Parliament. Equivalent of the Father of the House in the British House of Commons.

**Debate:** An organized discussion of any subject by Senators or Members of Parliament.

**Debt to income ratio** (in Canada): The amount **Canadians** owe relative to their **income** ticked higher in third quarter. Statistics **Canada** says household credit market **debt** as a proportion of disposable **income** was 177.5% in the third quarter on a seasonally-adjusted basis. That compared with 177.4% in the second quarter. (Dec, 2018)

**Delegate:** A representative to a party's national convention chosen by local voters to vote for a particular candidate. Each state is assigned a certain number of delegates based on its population.

**Demagogue:** A leader whose impassioned rhetoric appeals to greed, fear, and hatred, and who often spreads lies. Former U.S. Sen. Joseph McCarthy (see McCarthyism) is often cited as a classic demagogue.

**Democracy:** A country that is governed by people who are elected by its citizens to make decisions on their behalf. (Adjective: democratic) A form of government where citizens elect representatives to govern and make decisions on their behalf.

**Deputy Speaker** - An MPP who fulfills the Speaker's duties when the Speaker is unavailable to preside over the debates in the Chamber.

**Domestic policy:** Administrative decisions that are directly related to all issues and activity within a nation's borders. It differs from foreign policy, which refers to the ways a government advances its interests in world politics. Domestic policy covers a wide range of areas, including business, education, energy, healthcare, law enforcement, money and taxes, natural resources, social welfare, and personal rights and freedoms.

**Due Diligence:** Similar to "doing your homework" Reasonable steps taken in order to satisfy a legal requirement, especially in buying or selling something. Or, a comprehensive appraisal of a business done by a prospective buyer, especially to establish its assets and liabilities and evaluate its commercial potential.

**Election:** The selection of a person or government by voting. In Canada, elections for Members of Parliament must be held at least every five years. A process where citizens vote for a candidate to represent their constituency in the parliament. In Ontario, an election is usually held every four years.

**Elections Canada:** Headed by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Elections Canada is an independent, non-partisan agency of Parliament. Its primary task is to be prepared at all times to administer an electoral event. Elections Canada – [Statements and Speeches](#)

**Electoral District:** Another word used for constituency or riding.

**Environmental Registry of Ontario:** <https://ero.ontario.ca/page/welcome> A new registry for people to submit suggestions to help the environment

**Federal Government:** The Government of Canada that acts and speaks for the whole country. The level of government that is responsible for issues that affect Canada as a whole country. Our federal government is located in Ottawa, Canada's capital.

**Fence Mending:** What politicians do when they visit their electoral districts to explain an unpopular action. The term originated in 1879, when Ohio Senator John Sherman made a trip home that most people considered a political visit. Sherman insisted, however, that he was home "only to repair my fences."

**Filibuster:** An attempt by a Senator or group of Senators to obstruct the passage of a bill, favored by the majority, by talking continuously. Because there is no rule in the Senate over how long a member can speak, a Senator can prevent a bill from coming up for a vote by talking endlessly. Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina set the record in 1957 by speaking for more than 24 hours without stopping.

**First Ministers' Conference:** A meeting of the provincial and territorial premiers and the Prime Minister. These events are held at the call of the prime minister and since 1950, have typically been held annually in Ottawa.

**Fishing Expedition:** An investigation with no defined purpose, often by one party seeking damaging information about another. Such inquiries are likened to fishing because they pull up whatever they happen to catch.

**Front Burner:** Where an issue is placed when it must be dealt with immediately

**Gerrymander:** The reorganization of voting districts by the party in power to insure more votes for their candidates. The term originated in 1811, when Governor Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts signed a bill that changed districts to favor the Democrats. The shape of one new district supposedly resembled a salamander, provoking a Boston newspaper editor to say, "Salamander? Call it a Gerrymander!"

**G.O.P.:** "Grand Old Party", nickname of the Republican Party (USA).

**Gold standard, the:** The system by which the value of a currency was defined in terms of gold, for which the currency could be exchanged. The gold standard was generally abandoned in the Depression of the 1930s. Today: the best, most reliable, or most prestigious thing of its type. Eg.: "You can't rely on lab tests as being the **gold standard**."

**Goldilocks Approach or Goldilocks Economy:** In economics, a Goldilocks economy sustains moderate economic growth & low inflation, which allows a market-friendly monetary policy. A Goldilocks market occurs when the price of commodities sits between a bear market and a bull market. Goldilocks pricing is a marketing strategy that, although not directly related to the Goldilocks principle, uses product differentiation to offer three versions of a product to corner different parts of the market: a high-end version, a middle version, and a low-end version.

**Governing party:** The political party that forms the government because it had more of its members elected to the Chamber by the people than any other political party.

**Government:** The ruling authority running the business of the country. The political party with the greatest number of elected members.

**Government House Leader:** The Senator or Member of Parliament responsible for managing the Government's business in the Senate or the House of Commons. This person is usually a member of the Cabinet.

**Governor General:** (Federal) The representative in Canada of the monarch (Queen or King), who acts on the monarch's behalf with the advice of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The role of the **Governor General** (Canada/Federal) and **Lieutenant Governor** (Provinces) is largely the **same**. They are the Queen's representatives in government. They sign bills into law. It is highly ceremonial title, but they have almost no power.

**Grass Roots:** Political activity that originates locally, or arises from ground level.

**Hansard:** The printed record of what Members of Parliament said in the House of Commons. The word-for-word printed record of the daily proceedings in the Chamber and committees. Hansard is named after the family that began the tradition of recording the proceedings in the British House of Commons. It has been the official transcript of Ontario's parliamentary proceedings since 1944.

**Hansard reporters** - Hansard Reporters use a computer to record the first few words that a recognized MPP says, and all interjections said during meetings of parliament and committees.

**Head of Government:** The Prime Minister is the Head of Government and looks after the business of the country.

**Head of State - The Monarch:** (Queen or King) is the Head of State of Canada. The Governor General represents the monarch in Canada.

**House** - Another term for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It can also refer to the Chamber, where the Legislative Assembly meets.

**House Leader** - One member from each political party who is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the party in the Legislature. The House Leader for the governing party is always a member of Cabinet and is responsible for announcing the daily order of House business. The House Leaders from each party meet weekly to plan the business of the Legislature.

**House of Commons:** (\*See "Lower House") The elected Members of Parliament together form the House of Commons. This term also refers to the Chamber where they meet regularly.

**Ideology:** An integrated system of ideas about politics, values, and culture. Those who espouse an ideology are sometimes criticized as rigid and narrow-minded.

**Incumbent:** A current officeholder. For example, in an election for office, the **incumbent** is the person holding or acting in the office of that position before the election, whether seeking re-election or not.

**Independent (Senator or Member of Parliament):** A member of the Senate or House of Commons who does not belong to a political party.

**Indigenous:** originating or occurring **naturally** in a particular place; native. Eg: "The indigenous peoples of Siberia". (Synonyms: native, aboriginal, local.)

**Indigenous Peoples:** Also known as **first peoples**, **aboriginal peoples** or **native peoples**, are ethnic groups who are the original settlers of a given region, in contrast to groups that have settled, occupied or colonized the area more recently.

**Inside the Beltway:** The area inside the Capital Beltway, a highway that encircles Washington, D.C. An issue described as "inside the Beltway" is believed to be of concern only to the people who work in and with the federal government and of little interest to the nation at large.

**Interim Leader:** [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interim\\_leader\\_\(Canada\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interim_leader_(Canada)) In Canadian politics, a party leader appointed by the party's legislative caucus, or the party's executive, to temporarily act as leader when a gap occurs between the resignation or death of a party leader and the election of their successor.

**Issue:** A subject for debate or discussion.

**Justice Committee, The:** This is the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. This name was put in place by the House of Commons effective in Sept. 1997 as

it combines its mandate with the "former Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Persons with Disabilities."

**Kangaroo Court:** An unofficial court held by a group of people in order to try someone regarded, especially without good evidence, as guilty of a crime or misdemeanor. A court that ignores recognized standards of law or justice, and often carries little or no official standing in the territory within which it resides. The term may also apply to a court held by a legitimate judicial authority who intentionally disregards the court's legal or ethical obligations.  
Eg.: "They conducted a kangaroo court there and then".

**Laissez faire:** A policy or attitude of letting things take their own course, without interfering.

**Lame Duck:** An officeholder whose term has expired or cannot be continued, who thus has lessened power.

**Law:** A rule for all Canadians made by the Senators and Members of Parliament through discussion and voting.

**Leader of the Official Opposition - House of Commons:** The leader of the political party that had the second most MPs elected in the election. The members of this party do not always agree with the ideas of the governing party and often question their decisions.

**Leader of the Opposition – Senate:** The leader of the party which holds the largest number of seats in the opposition.

**Left-wing:** Liberal. The labeling system originated from the seating pattern of the French National Assembly, which put liberals on the left, moderates in the middle, and conservatives on the right.

**Legislative Pages** - Students in grades 7 and 8 from all over Ontario who act as messengers in the Chamber. Pages usually serve a term that lasts between two and four weeks and are granted a leave of absence from school to work at the Legislature.

**Legislative process** - The process by which bills are approved by parliament and become laws.

**Lieutenant Governor** - Provincial. <https://www.lgontario.ca/en/> The person who represents The Queen in **Ontario**. He or she is appointed by the Governor General of Canada on the advice of the Prime Minister for a five-year term. See **Governor General** for clarification.

**Lobby:** A group seeking to influence an elected official, or the act of doing so. The term originated in the seventeenth century, when people waiting to speak with legislators at the English House of Commons waited in a large atrium outside the legislators' hall, called the lobby.

**Local Government:** The council that manages the business of a municipality (village, town or city). The council members are elected by the people living in that area.

**Lower House:** Another name for the **House of Commons**.

**Mace - House of Commons:** When the Speaker enters the Chamber on a working day, the Sergeant-at-Arms places the mace on the Table in front of the Members of Parliament in the House of Commons.



**Mace – in Senate:** A large, heavy and richly ornamented ceremonial staff. It is a symbol of the Speaker's authority to oversee the Legislature. The Mace is carried into the Chamber by the **Sergeant-at-Arms**, and must be present during all legislative meetings. The mace represents the power and authority of Parliament. When the Speaker takes the Chair, **the Mace Bearer** places the Mace on the **Table** to signify that the Senate is in session.

**Machine Politics:** Politics controlled by a tightly-run organization that stresses discipline and rewards its supporters. Machines are usually found in large cities and are frequently accused of corruption.

**Majority Government:** When the governing party has more than half of the total number of Members of Parliament elected to the House of Commons. The Majority Government holds more than half the seats in the House. It is the opposite of the **Minority Government**.

**Mayor:** The head of a municipality (village, town or city).

**McCarthyism:** The practice of smearing people with baseless accusations. Origin: Refers to the tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy, who in the 1950s destroyed the careers of many prominent Americans by branding them as being Communists.

**Mea culpa:** (*Latin: "By my fault"*) An acknowledgment of one's own fault or error.

**Media:** The radio, television, Internet, magazines and newspapers and the journalists who work for them.

**Member of Parliament (MP):** A person elected to the House of Commons. There are 338 Members of Parliament representing all of the areas of Canada in the House of Commons.

**Minister:** See Cabinet Minister

**Minister of Justice:** See "*Attorney General*" (French: Ministre de la **Justice**) The **Minister** of the Crown in the **Canadian** Cabinet who is responsible for the **Department of Justice**, chief federal legal adviser and is **also Attorney General of Canada** (French: Procureur général du **Canada**).

**Style:** The Honourable

**Ministry** - A government department that is in charge of one or several of the provincial government's responsibilities. For example, the Ministry of Education.

**Ministry critic** - Members from the opposition who are appointed to scrutinize the activities and policies of the ministries. They may question Cabinet Ministers during the daily question period in the House.

**Minority Government:** When the governing party has less than half of the total number of Members of Parliament elected to the House of Commons. It has less than half of the seats in the House, as opposed to the **Majority Government**. In order to remain the government, it has to cooperate with the opposition Members.

**Monarch:** A Queen or King. The British monarch is also the monarch of Canada.

**Muckraker:** A journalist who seeks out the scandalous activities of public officials. Derived from the Man with the Muck Rake, a character in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, who could never look up, only down.

**Municipal Government:** Local government. The level of government that is responsible for issues that affect a city, town, village, or township. The municipal government receives its power from the provincial government.

**Mysogyny:** (not a political term, but a term that may possibly be encountered in politics) A dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women. (adjective: misogynistic)

**Nomination:** When a political party chooses its official candidate for a particular office

**Nominee:** The candidate chosen by a political party to run for a particular office.

**Non-partisan** - A person that is not affiliated with a political party. (Opposite of **Partisan**)

**Official languages:** By law, English and French are the official languages of Canada. Parliament does all its work in both English and French.

**Official Opposition:** The political party that had the second most Members of Parliament elected in the election.

**Opposition** - All political parties and independent MPPs who do not belong to the governing party.

**Page:** University students working part-time in either the Senate or House of Commons to assist parliamentarians during sittings by distributing documents and relaying messages.

**Parliament Hill:** The site of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa.

**Parliament:** The organization that makes the laws that apply across Canada. It is made up of the Governor General as the Queen's representative, the Senate and the House of Commons.

**Parliamentarian:** A Senator or a Member of Parliament (MP).

**Partisan** - A person who is affiliated with a political party and supports that party's policies. (opposite of **Non-Partisan**)

**Party System:** Political parties are organizations that seek to control government and participate in public affairs by nominating candidates for elections. Since there are typically multiple groups that wish to do this, political parties are best thought of as part of a party system, which is the way political parties conduct themselves in order to structure political competition.

**Peace Tower:** A tall bell tower located in the centre of the Parliament Buildings, named to honour the service and sacrifice of Canadians in World War I. The tower is 92 meters high.

**Petition:** A letter: often signed by many people, making a specific request for change, submitted to Parliament.

**Photo-Op:** Short for "photo opportunity," an event staged specifically for news cameras to help a politician appear in magazines and newspapers, on television, or online  
**Platform:** The positions that a party adopts, and stands on, at the beginning of an election campaign

**Political party:** A group of people who have the same beliefs about how the country should be run and with the same political beliefs. An organization that seeks to achieve political power by electing its members to public office. A group of people who share the same political beliefs. They join together in organizations and nominate candidates to run in elections.

**Political Suicide:** A vote or action that is likely to be so unpopular with voters as to cause a politician's probable loss in the next election

**Poll:** A survey that asks questions to find out what people think on a certain topic; A survey used to gauge public opinion concerning issues or to forecast an election

**Pork Barrel:** Wasteful and unnecessary projects that politicians secure for their local districts, usually to gain favor with local voters. This term dates from the days when salted pork was occasionally handed out to slaves from large barrels. An observer once wrote that the mad rush of politicians to get their district's share of treasury funds looked like slaves rushing to the pork barrel.

**Portfolio** (noun): A portfolio usually represents a portable showcase of your talents, achievements and successes. Today actual portfolios can be in the form of a website dedicated to showcasing their professional accolades. There can be political portfolios, investment portfolios, artistic portfolios, etc.

**Premier** - The leader of the political party with the highest number of elected MPPs. The Premier is the head of the provincial government, and is responsible for working with the Cabinet Ministers to develop policies and set priorities for the government.

**Primary:** A state election in which party members vote for a candidate from within their party. The vote determines how many of that state's delegates each candidate gets.

**Prime Minister:** The Head of Government and leader of the governing party. The Prime Minister is also a Member of Parliament and represents a constituency. The leader of the political party with the highest number of elected Members of Parliament (MPs) in Canada. The Prime Minister is the head of the federal government.

**Procession** - Every day that the Legislative Assembly meets, the Sergeant-at-Arms carries the Mace and leads a procession through the hallways of the Legislative Building to the Chamber. The Speaker, Clerk, Table Clerks and two Legislative Pages follow the Sergeant-at-Arms. Once in the Chamber, the Mace is placed on the Clerk's table with the crown pointing towards the government party.

**Prorogue** (verb): Discontinue a session of (a parliament or other legislative assembly) without dissolving it. Eg: "James prorogued Parliament in 1685 and ruled without it." Or "The House was all set to prorogue." (Prorogation)

**Provincial or Territorial government:** Every province and territory in Canada has a legislature that makes laws for the people living in that province or territory. This legislature is located in the capital city of the province or territory. The level of government that is responsible for issues that affect the

whole province. For example, Ontario's provincial government is located in Toronto, which is Ontario's capital.

**Pundit:** A political analyst, commentator, or columnist who usually works for a newspaper or magazine, or in broadcasting. Derived from a Hindi phrase meaning "learned one."

**Queen:** Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is Queen of Canada. (see **Monarch**)

**Question Period - House of Commons:** A time set aside every day in the House of Commons when Members of Parliament can ask Cabinet Ministers questions about their projects.

**Question Period – Senate:** A daily 30-minute period during which oral questions may be addressed to the Leader of the Government, other ministers and committee chairs. Members of the opposition and government backbenchers have the opportunity to ask the Cabinet Ministers about the activities and policies of their ministries.

**Reactionary:** A militant conservative; opposite of "radical," which means ultraliberal

**Reading (of a bill):** A word used for the stages where a bill is debated in Parliament before it is passed to become law. **Readings** are the steps a bill must pass through in order to become a law. Readings give MPPs the opportunity to study a bill and suggest how to improve it before it becomes a law. In Ontario, a bill goes through three readings.

**Red Chamber:** Another name for the **Senate**. Also **Upper House of Parliament**.

**Red Tape:** Government paperwork and procedures that are slow and difficult. Stems from an 18<sup>th</sup> Century British practice of binding official papers with a reddish twine.

**Representative:** A Senator or Member of Parliament who makes decisions on behalf of Canadians.

**Recession – proof:** That which is not prone to the challenges of an economic recession. For example, a recession-proof job is a job that one is likely to be able to find even during hard economic times. Though these jobs are not truly "recession-proof," they have a continual demand for workers, thereby increasing the chances that one who has the skills will be likely to find employment.

**Riding:** Another word for a geographic constituency or electoral district. An area that is represented by an MPP in the Legislative Assembly. For example, Ontario is divided into 107 ridings, also called constituencies or electoral districts.

**Royal Assent:** This last step of the legislative process makes the bill a law. The Governor General approves a bill passed by Parliament to make it law. Sometimes a Royal Assent ceremony takes place in the Senate Chamber. Other times, the bill is signed at Rideau Hall, where the Governor General lives. If the majority of MPPs vote to make a bill a law, it is presented to the Lieutenant Governor for Royal Assent, named so because the Lieutenant Governor is agreeing to the bill on behalf of The Queen.

**Rubber Chicken Circuit:** A humorous reference to the many public dinners and luncheons politicians must attend in order to raise funds and make speeches. The menu often includes chicken, which is cooked hours earlier and then reheated, giving it a rubbery texture.

**Scrum:** A media scrum is an impromptu press conference, often held immediately outside an event such as a legislative session or meeting. Scrums play a central role in Canadian politics and also occur in the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand.

**Senate:** (see **Red Chamber**) Also known as the **Upper House of Parliament**. One of the two law-making Houses of Canada's federal parliament in Ottawa. This term also refers to the room where Senators meet regularly.

**Senator:** A member of the Senate in Canada. The Senate has 105 Senators to represent regions of Canada. Senators are appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister.

**Sergeant-at-Arms:** The person who carries the mace during the Speaker's Parade into the House of Commons Chamber and also ensures that the Members of Parliament are safe. The person who is responsible for maintaining law and order in the House on behalf of the Speaker, and oversees security services and property management at the Legislative Building. He or she is also the **guardian of the Mace**.

**Silent Majority:** An unspecified large group of people in a country or group who do not express their opinions publicly. The mass of citizens whose opinions are not loud and public, but who together have enormous power. Originally popularized by President Richard Nixon, who claimed that Vietnam War protesters comprised a minority, while a "silent majority" supported the war.

**Silver Tsunami:** A metaphor used to describe the aging population in great numbers.

**Slate:** Candidates for various offices running as a team; or a group of delegates running on behalf of one candidate

**Smoke-Filled Room:** The sort of place where behind-the-scenes political wheeling and dealing, often devious, occurs. Refers to the penchant of many political operatives for smoking cigars.

**Speaker of the House of Commons:** The Member of Parliament who is elected by the other Members of Parliament to run their meetings and to keep order in the House of Commons. The MPP who presides over the debates in the Chamber. The Speaker's job is to uphold the rules of parliament and ensure that all business of the Chamber is carried out in an orderly manner. The Speaker is elected from among the MPPs, but does not participate in debates and only votes in the event of a tie.

**Speaker of the Senate:** The Senator who is appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister to run their meetings and to keep order in the Senate.

**Speaker's Parade - House of Commons:** When the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Sergeant-at-Arms with the Mace, the Clerk of the House and other officials walk formally from the Speaker's Office to the House of Commons before the opening of a sitting.

**Speaker's Parade - Senate:** When the Speaker of the Senate, the Clerk of the Senate, the Usher of the Black Rod, the Mace Bearer and other officials walk formally from the Speaker's Chambers to the Senate before the opening of a sitting.

**Speech from the Throne:** The speech given by the **Governor General** at the start of a new session of Parliament, describing what the government plans to do. A speech delivered by the **Lieutenant**

**Governor** at the beginning of each new session of parliament. This speech outlines the government's initiatives and plans for the new session of parliament.

**Spin:** A politician's attempt to shape the way the public looks at an issue or event, much the way a tennis player uses spin to direct the ball. Political advisers who spin are known as "spin doctors."

**Standing Orders** - The rules and procedures for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The Clerk advises the Speaker and MPPs on these rules so that order is maintained in the Chamber.

**Status quo:** The existing state of affairs, especially regarding social or political issues.  
Eg. : "They have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo."

**Stranger to the House:** In the House of Commons of Canada and its provinces' Legislative Assemblies, this is anyone permitted on the floor of the House who is not either a Member of Parliament, an Officer of the House (such as the clerks or the Sergeant-at-Arms) or a parliamentary page. The position was created at the federal level after the 2004 federal election when a Winnipeg district elected a quadriplegic candidate, Conservative Steven Fletcher, who requires the presence of an aide for personal care and to assist in his duties. Fletcher's assistant is the first (and so far only) adult Stranger to the House to be permitted on the Commons floor while the House is in session. MPs have brought their infant children into the Chamber on several occasions. A ruling by the Speaker in Feb. 2012, clarified that members may bring their infants into the Chamber, provided it does not cause a disruption.

**Stump:** To campaign in person on a local level. A political **stump** speech is a standard speech used by a politician running for office. Typically a candidate who schedules many appearances prepares a short standardized **stump** speech that is repeated verbatim to each audience, before opening to questions.

**Supreme Court of Canada:** Also known as the "**court of last resort**," the Supreme Court of Canada sits at the very top of Canada's judicial hierarchy and holds the power to overrule all lower-ranking courts — and even **Parliament** itself.

**Swing Vote:** The undecided, usually independent, portion of the electorate that can "swing" the outcome of an election one way or the other.

**Tariff:** A tariff is a tax on imports or exports between sovereign states. It is a form of regulation of foreign trade and a policy that taxes foreign products to encourage or safeguard domestic industry.

**Third Party** - The political party with the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest number of elected members after the government party and the official opposition.

**Throne:** A special chair in the Senate Chamber reserved for the use of the monarch or the Governor General.

**Trade Agreement:** Also known as **trade pact**. A wide-ranging taxes, tariff and **trade treaty** that often includes investment guarantees. It exists when two or more countries agree on terms that helps them **trade** with each other.

**Transitional skills:** (Also known as **Transferable Skills**): **Skills** that you develop as you progress through employment, education or training. Communication, problem solving and teamwork are all examples of **transferable skills** because they can be used in any employed role, your education or vocational training.

**Trial Balloon:** An idea a politician suggests in order to observe the reaction. If public reaction is favorable, the politician takes credit for it; if not, the idea dies quickly.

**Unicameral** - A legislature that only has one law-making House or Chamber. For example, Ontario's provincial parliament is unicameral – it has only the Legislative Chamber.

**Upper House:** Another name for the **Senate**, or **Red Chamber**.

**Usher of the Black Rod:** An officer of the Senate who is sent to summon members of the House of Commons to the Senate Chamber for ceremonies such as the Throne Speech and Royal Assent. The Usher uses the black rod to knock on the door of the House of Commons Chamber.

**Veteran's Affairs:** The department within the Government of Canada with responsibility for pensions, benefits and services for war veterans, retired and still-serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces and Royal Canadian Mounted Police, their families, as well as some civilians. Founded 1944.

**Vote:** A formal indication of a choice between two or more candidates or courses of action, expressed typically through a ballot, a show of hands or by voice. A way or process for a person or group of people to make a decision. For example, a vote is a way for citizens to choose who represents them in parliament. It is also a way for MPPs to decide whether a bill should become a law.

**Welfare:** One of the Social programs in Canada. Social programs include government programs designed to give assistance to citizens outside what the market provides. The Canadian social safety net covers a broad spectrum of programs, and because Canada is a federation, many are run by the provinces. Only social programs that direct funds to individuals are included in that cost; programs such as medicare and public education are additional costs.

**Westminster System:** Canada's form of government is based on the British parliamentary system, also known as the Westminster System, a style of democracy adapted from centuries of English tradition. Canada's founders believed the British had the best form of government in the world, and the opening lines of the Canadian constitution promises Canada will have a "Constitution similar in Principle to that of the United Kingdom." <http://www.thecanadaguide.com/government/parliament/>

**Whip:** The party member who makes sure that all other members are present for crucial votes and that they vote in accordance with the party line. The one Member from each political party who is chosen to keep the other Members of their political party informed about House business. The Whip also ensures that Members are present in the Chamber, especially when a vote is being held. Legislative Chamber, Legislative Assembly of Ontario. The term originated in British fox hunting, where the "whipper-in" was responsible for keeping the hounds from straying.

**Whistle-Stopping:** The practice of making speeches in many towns in a short time, often during a single day. When politicians traveled by train, small towns were called whistle-stops. Politicians would use the stop to deliver a quick campaign speech, often from the back of the train, before heading to the next stop.

**Witch Hunt:** A vindictive, often irrational, investigation that preys on public fears. Refers to witch hunts in 17th-century Salem, Massachusetts, where many innocent women accused of witchcraft were burned at the stake or drowned.

Katherine Thompson has compiled this Glossary of Political Terms for coaching purposes.

\* **Sources:**

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