

Senators

Selection Process and Qualifications

Senators are not elected.

They are appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister.

There are usually 105 Senators in the Senate of Canada, the upper chamber of Canada's Parliament.

Senators must be at least 30 years old and retire by the age of 75.

Senators also must live and own property in the Canadian province or territory that they represent.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Examine and revise legislation

The main role of Senators is to provide "sober, second thought" on the work done by the House of Commons.

All federal legislation must be passed by the Senate as well as the House of Commons.

While the Senate rarely vetoes bills, though it does have the power to do so, Senators do review federal legislation clause by clause in Senate committees and may send a bill back to the House of Commons.

The Senate can also introduce its own bills, except for bills that impose taxes or spend public money ("money bills"). Senate bills must also be passed in the House of Commons.

2. Investigate national Canadian issues

Senators also contribute to in-depth studies by Senate committees on public issues, such as health care, illegal drugs, regulation of the Canadian airline industry and urban Aboriginal youth.

The reports from these investigations can lead to changes in federal public policy and legislation.

The wide range of experience of Senators provides substantial expertise for these investigations. Backgrounds of Senators include former provincial premiers, cabinet ministers and business people from many economic sectors.

Also, since Senators are not subject to the uncertainties of elections, they can track issues over a longer period of time than MPs.

3. Represent regional, provincial and minority interests

Senate seats are distributed regionally: 24 Senate seats each for the Maritimes, Ontario, Québec and Western regions; and 8 Senate seats for Newfoundland and the territories.

Senators meet in regional party caucuses and consider the regional impact of legislation.

Senators often adopt informal constituencies to represent the rights of groups and individuals who may otherwise be overlooked, such as young people, people with low incomes, seniors and veterans.

4. Watchdog on government

Senators provide a detailed review of all federal legislation.

During the Senate Question Period, Senators also routinely question and challenge the Leader of the Government in the Senate on federal government policies and activities.

Senators can also draw important issues to the attention of Cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister.

5. Party supporters

A Senator usually supports a political party and may play a role in the operation of the party.