



House of Assembly

Glossary of Terms

Agenda: A list of the items of business to be dealt with during a sitting of the House or of one of its committees.

Amendment: An alteration proposed to a motion, an Act, a stage or clause of a bill, or to a committee report. It may attempt to present an improved formulation of the proposition under consideration or to provide an alternative to it.

Appropriation: A sum of money allocated by parliament for a specific purpose outlined in the government's spending estimates.

Appropriation Bill: A bill to authorise government expenditures, introduced in the House following concurrence with the main government expenditures and/ or supplementary estimates. An appropriation can only be introduced by a Minister; normally introduced by the Minister of Finance.

Assent: When the Governor formally approves an Act, making it law.

Backbencher: A member who is not a Minister, House Leader, Whip or a party spokesperson.

Ballot: A piece of paper on which a voter indicates his or her choice (e.g. of a candidate in an election, an option in a referendum or can be used for voting on a motion in the House).

Bar (of the House): A rope inside the Chamber, which divides the Members of Parliament and members of the public, sitting in the public gallery. Members of the public are not allowed to cross the rope unless officially summonsed by the Speaker.

Bicameral: A legislative body comprised of two chambers or Houses. The House of Assembly and the Senate are the two Houses of the Bermuda Parliament.

Bill: A proposed draft statute submitted to Parliament for its consideration and approval. It may originate either with the government, with a member or from a committee, and may relate either to public or private interests. Bills may be first introduced in either the House or the Senate, but bills are traditionally tabled and passed first in the House of Assembly.

Blues: The unedited transcript of the proceedings in the House; so called because they were formerly printed on blue paper.

Budget Debate: A debate on a motion approving the government's budgetary policy. The motion is moved by the Minister of Finance following the presentation of the budget speech.

Budget Speech: A presentation made in the House by the Minister of Finance introducing the Government's plans concerning fiscal, economic and social policy. Often referred to as "bringing down the budget".

Business of the House: Any Parliamentary Questions, Motions or Bills that are placed before the House, whether introduced by a Minister or by a member.

By-election: An election held to fill a vacancy arising during the course of parliament. The date of the by-election is fixed by the incumbent Government Leader.

Cabinet: The executive of the Government, consisting of Members of Parliament and Senators appointed by the Premier.

Cabinet Minister: A member of the executive appointed by the Premier. Ministers are selected from existing Members of Parliament and Senators. Ministers are responsible to Parliament for their official actions and their departments. Cabinet Ministers are given the title "The Honourable".

Caucus: A group composed of all members and senators of a given party.

Chair: The Presiding Officer who rules over a meeting of the House, whether the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker or the Acting Speaker.

Chair of Committee of the Whole: The member elected (Deputy Speaker) by the House charged with presiding over Committee of the Whole and acting in the Speaker's stead.

Clause (of a Bill): A division of a bill consisting of an individual sentence or statement. Once a bill becomes law, its clauses are referred to as "sections".

Clerk to the Legislature: The chief procedural and administrator adviser to the Speaker and Members of Parliament. The Clerk is the senior permanent official of the House, responsible for a wide range of administrative and procedural duties, relating to the work of the House and its committees.

Committee: A body of Members of Parliament and Senators, selected to consider such matters as the House may refer to it or empower it to examine, including bills.

Committee Clerk: The procedural Clerk acting as administrative officer and adviser on parliamentary procedure to a committee and its chair. The committee clerk takes the minutes of the proceedings at all committee meetings and may draft rulings on procedural questions for the committee chair.

Committee of the Whole (House): All of the Members of Parliament sitting in the Chamber, while a bill is at the Second Reading/ Committee Stage; presided over by a Chair rather than by the Speaker. All bills are debated at this stage including appropriation bills and any other matters referred to it by the House.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA): Is an Association of Commonwealth Parliamentarian united by community of interest, individual rights and freedom and by the pursuit of positive ideals of parliamentary democracy. The CPA furthermore promotes the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance.

Conflict of Interest: A conflict arising from any interest, financial or other, interfering with a member's ability to perform his or her functions. Such a conflict may prevent a member from voting on a given issue.

Constituency: A section of a Parish represented by an elected Member of Parliament in the House of Assembly. During debates, members are identified by their names and the name of their constituency. There are thirty six constituencies in total.

Constituency Boundaries Commission: According to the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968, a Boundaries Commission is appointed every three – seven years by the Governor on the recommendation of the Premier and Opposition Leader, to oversee the constituencies in each parish.

Cross the floor: To change political allegiance, signified in the House of Assembly by taking a seat as an independent or among the members of a different party, usually located across the Chamber from one's former party.

Debatable Motion: A motion that is debated because of its substantive nature or procedural importance is subject to debate before being put to a vote. The Standing Orders give a complete enumeration of the various motions which are debatable.

Decision: (of the Speaker) A ruling on the procedural acceptability of some matter before the House which, unless otherwise specified, serves as a precedent to govern future proceedings. All rulings are final and may not be debated or appealed.

Decision (of a Chair): A ruling of a matter before a committee, which may serve as precedent in future committee proceedings.

Deputy Speaker: Title given to the member elected as Chair of Committees of the Whole at the beginning of every parliament. The Deputy Speaker replaces the Speaker when he is unavoidably absent.

Die on the Order Paper: Items that remained on the Order Paper at the end of a session without a final decision having been taken. Government motions and Bills which "die" are lost and are not proceeded with further, unless they are reintroduced in the next session.

Dissolution: The bringing to an end of Parliament, either at the conclusion of its five-year term or by proclamation by the Governor. It is followed by a general election.

Division: A vote by all members, which is divided into two groups (the Ayes and Noes) in order to reach a decision.

Division List: A list giving the results of a recorded division, printed in the Journals and the debates. Members are identified by name, are listed under 'AYES' or 'NOES'.

Filibuster: An obstructive tactic consisting of the use of either numerous or excessively long speeches to delay the business of the House or of a committee. The use of this latter tactic is now severely limited by the rules of the House relating to the length of speeches.

First Reading: The first reading or tabling of Public Bills is done by the Minister in charge of the proposed drafted statute. The bill is read by its title only and is normally considered and debated two sittings later. The first reading of Private Bills is done by a Backbencher.

First-Past-The-Post System: An electoral system in which the candidate receiving more votes than any other candidate is declared elected, whether or not the winner has received an absolute majority of the votes. The first-past-the-post system is used to elect members to the House of Assembly.

Fiscal Year: The 12 month period, from April to March 31, used by the Government for budgetary and accounting purposes.

Floor of the House: The part of the Chamber of the House of Assembly reserved for the members and the officials of the House.

Free Standing Bill: A bill introducing a policy or initiative for the first time, which stands on its own without any direct connection with other statutes.

General Election: An election following the dissolution of Parliament, where all members are selected for every constituency. Members are elected by a simple plurality of the votes (first-past-the-post), which are cast by secret ballot.

Government: The sovereign political authority of a state, which are vested the executive, legislative and judicial powers.

Government Bill: Any bill introduced by a Minister. They are concerned with public policy and may contain financial provisions.

Government Member: A member belonging to the government party.

Government Orders: Any bill or motion initiated by a Minister or Junior Minister.

Governor: The representative of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, who exercises the Crown's powers. The Governor is responsible for the external affairs, defence and police of Bermuda.

Grandfather Clause: A clause protecting a prerogative of an individual or a group from being affected by new legislation.

Green Paper: A document containing government policy proposals, issued for discussion purposes. Such a document does not represent a government commitment to introduce legislation or to adopt a particular position.

House Leader: The member of a party, responsible for its management in the House. The Government House Leader determines the schedule of House business.

House of Assembly: The elected Members of Parliament consisting of 36 members. The House alone is constitutionally authorised to introduce legislation concerned with the raising or spending of funds.

Impute Motives: Ascribe objectionable motives or motives to a member different from those acknowledged by the member.

Independent Member: A member who is not affiliated with a recognised political party. A member may be elected as an independent or may leave or be expelled from a party during a Parliament and sit as an independent.

Joint Select Committee: A committee made up of a proportionate number of members from both the House of Assembly and the Senate. It may be either a standing or a special committee.

Leader (of a party): The person chosen by a political party to provide leadership in Parliament and during election campaigns. Those so chosen are either already Members of Parliament or are expected to seek a seat in the House of Assembly.

Legislation: The laws enacted by or on the authority of Parliament. These include orders, regulations and other statutory instruments adopted as a result of power delegated by Parliament to a variety of government departments, boards and commissions.

Legislative Clerk: A procedural clerk who provides advice in committee and during the report stage concerning the admissibility of proposed amendments to bills and the proper order in which they should be considered and voted on.

Mace: A large, heavy and richly-ornamented staff which is the symbol of authority of the House of Assembly. When the Speaker takes the Chair, the Sergeant-at-Arms places the Mace on the table to signify the House is in session.

Maiden Speech: The first speech made in the House by a new member. By tradition the Speaker recognises a member rising to make such a speech in preference to others; the member may read from notes on this occasion.

Ministerial Responsibility: The principle that Ministers are responsible to the House of Assembly for their actions and those of their departmental officials.

Motion: A proposal moved by a member for the House to do something, to order something to be done or to express an opinion with regard to some matter.

Motion to Adjourn: A motion that is put forward by a Minister that the day's business is finished. During the motion to adjourn members are allowed to speak for a maximum of twenty minutes; after all members have spoken the House will adjourn until its next sitting.

Notice of Motion: An announcement, either oral or written, of an intention to bring a substantive proposal before the House. The notice period varies depending on the type of motion and who will move it.

Oath of Allegiance: An oath of loyalty to the Her Majesty the Queen.

Oath of an Assemblyman: An oath sworn by Members of Parliament to carry out faithfully the duties entrusted to them.

Order of Business: The recurring sequence of business for each sitting day in the House of Assembly. The daily business of the House is taken up accordingly to a predetermined sequence outlined in the Standing Orders of the House.

Orders of the Day: Items to be debated, such as Government Bills and Motions. Private Bills and Petitions are not to be displayed on the Order of the Day.

Parliament Act: Is the law that protects Members of the Legislature as well as outlines the Legislatures precincts.

Panel of Chairman: Members of Parliament appointed by the Speaker to proceed over the Committee of the Whole House or Committee of Supply.

Papers and Communications: Statutory Instruments, Reports and other important documents tabled in both Houses of the Legislature. These items appear on the Order Paper and tabled by the member-in-charge.

Preamble: It is an introduction to a draft statute. It will state the reasons for the statute and what it seeks to attain.

Private Bill: A Bill presented on behalf of a corporation, association or group. A private bill can only be introduced by a backbencher.

Privilege: The rights and immunities for Members of the Legislature. They include freedom of speech while speaking in either House; protection from civil or criminal prosecution for defamation or published documents. This is necessary for the carrying out of parliamentary duties.

Prorogation: To end a session of Parliament without dissolving it. Report to the House: A written or oral statement by a committee of the House, giving the results of an inquiry. For a committee studying a bill and any amendments made constitutes the report.

Right to Reply: The right of the mover of a substantive motion or a motion for the second reading of a bill, to speak a second time in the debate.

Second reading: Is the first opportunity for Members to debate the main principles of the Bill.

Statutory Instruments: Can change laws without making a new Act. The Parent Act would have provisions for future delegated legislations to alter the law. Delegated legislation may be reviewed by the Regulations Committee.

Sub judice: A convention whereby members refrain from speaking on matters before the courts.

Third Reading: Final debate on a Bill before being officially passed.

Unparliamentary Language: Words or expressions contrary to the properties of the House. A member, who refuses to withdraw such language, will be named by the Speaker and asked to withdraw immediately.

Voice Vote: An oral vote that does not record a members' vote or the number of Ayes or Noes.

Whip: Member charged with keeping other members of the same party informed concerning House business; ensuring members are present in the House or in committee, especially when a vote is anticipated. There are two whips in Bermuda, the Government Whip and the Opposition's Whip.

Writ of Election: When Parliament is dissolved a written order (writ) is issued by the Governor under the Public Seal of Bermuda, to hold a general election. This is the only way a general election can be held.