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# QUESTION PERIOD IN THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA AND OTHER LEGISLATURES

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*Question Period in the Parliament of Canada and in Other Legislatures*
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# CONTENTS


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 INTRODUCTION....1

2 CANADA....1

2.1 Senate of Canada....1

2.2 House of Commons....2

2.3 Provincial Legislatures....4
2.3.1 Newfoundland and Labrador....4
2.3.2 Nova Scotia....4
2.3.3 New Brunswick....4
2.3.4 Prince Edward Island....5
2.3.5 Quebec....5
2.3.6 Ontario....6
2.3.7 Manitoba....6
2.3.8 Saskatchewan....7
2.3.9 Alberta....7
2.3.10 British Columbia....7

2.4 Territorial Legislatures....8
2.4.1 Nunavut....8
2.4.2 Northwest Territories....8
2.4.3 Yukon....9

3 UNITED KINGDOM....9

3.1 House of Lords....9

3.2 House of Commons....10

4 AUSTRALIA....11

4.1 Senate....11

4.2 House of Representatives....12

5 NEW ZEALAND....13

6 CONCLUSION....13

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Question Period is the parliamentary proceeding that tends to attract the most attention. On each day that the Senate and House of Commons are in session, Question Period gives parliamentarians an opportunity to seek information from the government and to hold it accountable on its policies and administration of public affairs.

Historically, the rules, conventions and practices surrounding Question Period in the Parliament of Canada were unwritten. However, in the 1960s, both houses adopted written rules governing the conduct of Question Period. Although the general format of Question Period has remained relatively stable since then, some changes to Question Period have been made since the adoption of these written rules, and over the years, its proceedings have been shaped by Speakers' rulings and the initiative of parliamentarians.

In the Canadian provinces and territories, the basic structure of Question Period is generally the same, but with some differences to details like the amount of time allocated to Question Period, the number of supplementary questions that are permitted and the time allotted for individual questions and replies. Like their federal counterpart, all provinces and territories have rules in place governing both oral and written questions.

In other Commonwealth countries – namely, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand – the parliamentary proceeding during which parliamentarians are afforded the opportunity to pose questions to the government is called "Question Time." Like in Canada, Question Time is an important opportunity for legislators to hold the government accountable. The rules respecting Question Time in these international jurisdictions vary more, with important differences to the notice requirements for questions and how questions are allocated, for example.

# QUESTION PERIOD IN THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA AND OTHER LEGISLATURES

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Question Period (known officially as "Oral Questions" in the Parliament of Canada) is a time set aside in Westminster-style parliamentary systems during which parliamentarians, principally from the opposition, can pose questions regarding government policies and decisions. It is a public forum in which legislators can hold the government of the day to account.

This publication examines the rules, conventions and practices surrounding Question Period in the Parliament of Canada, in Canadian provinces and territories and in several other Commonwealth countries – namely, the United Kingdom (U.K.), Australia and New Zealand. As these jurisdictions share similar parliamentary and governance systems, their legislatures' procedures are often alike. This paper focuses on the general framework that governs Question Period, not the specifics of individual rules. Since Question Period and written questions are interconnected in some jurisdictions, this paper also briefly reviews the rules governing the submission of written questions.

## 2 CANADA

### 2.1 SENATE OF CANADA[1]

For much of the Senate's history, Question Period took place without the guidance of any written rules until it amended its rules in 1968 to formally recognize the practice.[2]

Each sitting day during its 30-minute Question Period, senators may ask oral questions of the leader or representative of the government in the Senate, ministers who are senators, and committee chairs. In 2015, the Senate agreed to invite ministers who are not senators to respond to oral questions.[3] Since 2016, such ministers have regularly answered questions during Question Period, although this practice was suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.[4]

The leader or representative of the government in the Senate may be asked oral questions relating to public affairs. Questions directed to ministers must relate to their ministerial responsibilities. In 2006, the Speaker of the Senate ruled that this included departmental responsibilities and excluded functions that are regional, political or unrelated to ministerial functions.[5] Questions asked of committee chairs must relate to their committee activities, which include "the specific things that are done by the committee, such as the holding of meetings, the election of a chairman, the calling of witnesses, the hiring of staff, advertising, and any other matter relating to the manner

in which the committee conducts its proceedings."[6] General issues about planning and upcoming work are also considered as part of committee activities.[7]

Oral questions are asked without notice and may be followed by supplementary questions. Debate is out of order during Question Period, but the senators asking or answering a question may make brief explanatory remarks. *Senate Procedure in Practice* states that "[a]lthough the Opposition leadership may provide the Speaker with a list of senators who wish to ask questions, the Speaker is not bound to follow this list."[8]

The recipient of an oral question may defer answering if the question cannot be answered immediately. While there is no obligation to provide a response, any reply that is provided later can be provided in writing under "Delayed Answers" or deposited with the Clerk and subsequently published in the *Debates of the Senate*. Delayed answers appear immediately following the record of proceedings for Question Period on the day the response is provided. The answers, however, are not read aloud during the Senate's proceedings.

A senator whose question seeks statistical or other information that is not readily available, or who desires an answer in writing, may submit a written question to the Clerk of the Senate. The question is then placed on the *Order Paper* until a reply is tabled or until the end of the session. A copy of the answer is also provided to the senator who asked the question. Written questions may be asked of the leader or representative of the government in the Senate and ministers, but not of committee chairs.

## 2.2 HOUSE OF COMMONS[9]

Early in its history, the House of Commons Question Period, like its Senate counterpart, was based on convention and custom. In 1964, the first-ever written rules governing Question Period were included in the *Standing Orders of the House of Commons* (the rules of procedure governing the House of Commons), and the proceeding has continued to be shaped by precedent and Speakers' rulings and statements.

The Speaker of the House of Commons is empowered to rule questions out of order if they contravene the rules and practices of the House of Commons. The Speaker can also suggest that a question be rephrased to render it acceptable or recognize a different member to pose another question. Although the Speaker may order that a non-urgent question be placed on the *Order Paper* instead, this power is rarely used.

The recognition pattern – the order in which members are permitted to ask questions – and the distribution of questions among political parties and independent members are usually negotiated by the parties based on each party's level of representation in the House of Commons. It is an established practice for political

parties to provide the Speaker with a list of members who will be asking questions ahead of that day's Question Period, although the Speaker is not bound by this list.

*House of Commons Procedure and Practice* provides a complete description of the rules, practices and precedents governing the questions that may be asked during Question Period. Members are expected to "ask a question, be brief, seek information and ask a question that is within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the individual minister addressed."[10] Questions need not be preceded by any notice. Based on past practice, members have approximately 35 seconds each to ask and answer a question.

Oral questions may be asked of ministers and members who are designated members of the Board of Internal Economy (the administrative body of the House of Commons). Questions to the Speaker are out of order, however. House of Commons practice allows members to pose questions to committee chairs regarding their committees' schedules and agendas.

While oral questions tend to be addressed to a specific minister, they are considered to be directed to the government as a whole and may be answered by any minister, reflecting Canada's "collegial system of Cabinet responsibility."[11] In 2017, then prime minister Justin Trudeau adopted the practice of answering all questions on Wednesdays when he was in attendance, but this practice appears to have ended after he left office in 2025.

According to parliamentary practice, ministers to whom a question is addressed may answer the question, defer it (referred to as "taking it on notice"), explain why an answer cannot be provided at the time or decline to respond. Parliamentary secretaries may also answer questions addressed to their ministers.

A member who is dissatisfied with the response to a question may give notice of their intention to raise the subject matter of the question upon the House of Commons' adjournment. The "adjournment proceedings" (or "late show," as it is often called) take place every sitting day at 6:30 p.m. except Friday and last for 30 minutes. The Speaker selects up to three topics that are to be debated each day on the basis of several criteria: the order of the notice, the urgency of the matter and the apportioning of opportunities to members of various parties. Each question is debated for up to 10 minutes. The member who raised the matter may speak for up to four minutes, and the minister (or parliamentary secretary) responding is also given four minutes to reply. A second round of two minutes may follow (one minute for the member and one minute for the minister or parliamentary secretary).

In addition to oral questions, members seeking information from ministers relating to public affairs may place up to four written questions at a time on the *Order Paper*. No more than three of the four questions (distinguished in the *Order Paper* by an asterisk) may be designated for an oral reply. A member may request that their question be answered within 45 calendar days. If no answer is provided within this timeframe,

the government's failure to respond to the question is deemed referred to a standing committee chosen by the member. The member may choose to accept this referral or choose instead to have the question transferred to adjournment proceedings for debate.

## 2.3 PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES

### 2.3.1 Newfoundland and Labrador[12]

In the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly, oral questions on matters of urgency or public importance may be posed to ministers during the daily 30-minute Question Period. Ministers may respond or decline to answer a question. If a minister believes that the question would require a lengthy reply, the question may be placed on the *Order Paper* or the minister may take the question on notice and respond orally during a subsequent sitting. When such responses are lengthy, ministers are asked to provide them during "Statements by Ministers" rather than during Question Period; these statements are published in the Assembly's daily proceedings. At the Speaker's discretion, a member may pose a "reasonable" number of supplementary questions following a response by a minister to a question.

As well, members may seek information about public affairs from ministers by placing written questions on the *Order Paper*. Through the same process, information may be sought of any other member relating to bills, motions or any public matter connected to the member. Written answers to such questions are reproduced verbatim in *Hansard*, the official record of the House of Assembly's daily proceedings. Although questions to the Speaker are out of order, members can write to the Speaker regarding matters within the Speaker's jurisdiction, and a response must be provided.

### 2.3.2 Nova Scotia[13]

The time allotted to oral questions varies in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, with Question Period lasting up to 50 minutes on any day of the week except Monday. As described in *The Nova Scotia Legislature: An Overview of Its Procedures and Practices*, members may pose questions to the premier "about the manner in which the government is conducting the affairs of the province,"[14] and to ministers on matters for which they are officially responsible. Members may also ask written questions of ministers, which are filed with the Clerk. Any written responses are also filed with the Clerk.

### 2.3.3 New Brunswick[15]

Question Period in the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick takes place each day the Assembly is sitting and lasts 30 minutes. Oral questions must pertain to urgent matters and must reasonably be assumed to relate to information within the minister's present knowledge. The member's question and the minister's reply must not exceed 60 seconds each. A minister may answer a question, take it on notice, state that it

should be submitted in writing or decline to answer it. A member may ask up to two supplementary questions on the same subject as the initial question. Oral questions taken on notice and answered orally on a subsequent day may be followed by one supplementary question from the member who originally asked the question.

Members may direct written questions to ministers by placing them on the *Order Paper*. Answers to written questions are printed in the *Journal of Debates* (Hansard), the Legislative Assembly's official daily transcript of proceedings.

### 2.3.4 Prince Edward Island[16]

Question Period in the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island takes place every day the Assembly is in session and lasts 40 minutes. Question Period allows members of the Legislative Assembly to pose oral questions to ministers about public affairs, bills, motions or any other public matter related to the Assembly's business. Questions must be clear and concise and refer to matters that are reasonably within the present knowledge of the minister. A minister may answer the question, take it on notice or state that the question should be put in writing. Upon such a request, the Speaker may direct that the question be put in writing or stand as notice on the *Order Paper*. At the Speaker's discretion, an oral question may be followed by no more than two supplementary questions on the same subject.

Responses to questions taken on notice are given orally on a subsequent day at the beginning of Question Period. The time taken by ministers to answer questions taken as notice has no impact on the duration of Question Period.

Written questions may be placed on the *Order Paper*, and the minister to whom a question is directed must provide an answer to the Clerk within 45 calendar days. The Clerk then transmits a copy of the answer to the member who asked the question.

### 2.3.5 Quebec[17]

Members of the National Assembly of Quebec may ask ministers questions on any matter "of urgent or topical public importance for which a minister or the Government is officially responsible" during the 45-minute daily Question Period. An oral question may be followed by one or more supplementary questions.

A minister may take a question on notice and answer at the end of Question Period or during a subsequent sitting (after Question Period). A minister may also decline to answer a question, particularly when the information sought could only be collected through considerable effort that the usefulness does not warrant, or the information sought would be injurious to the public interest.

Written questions may be placed on the *Order Paper and Notices*, and the written replies are tabled in the National Assembly.

### 2.3.6 Ontario[18]

In the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Question Period takes place every morning when the legislature is in session and provides members with an opportunity to ask questions of ministers. Question Period lasts 60 minutes, including supplementary questions. Members may give notice of a question to a minister.

A minister may decline to answer a question or take a question on notice and answer it at a subsequent sitting. A minister may direct a question to another minister who is responsible for the subject matter. The Speaker may order that a question requiring a lengthy answer be placed on the *Orders and Notices Paper*. At the Speaker's discretion, a question may be followed by "a reasonable number" of supplementary questions. Parliamentary assistants may also ask questions, but not of their own ministers; they may, however, answer questions on behalf of their ministers. One independent member is allowed to ask a question and a supplementary question at each sitting.

A member who is dissatisfied with an answer or whose question was ruled as not being of public importance or urgent may give notice to the Clerk that they intend to raise the question's topic during the adjournment proceedings. Before 4:00 p.m., the Speaker indicates up to three topics that have been selected for debate at the adjournment of the Assembly on that day. Each question is discussed for up to 10 minutes: five minutes for the member raising the matter and five minutes for the minister or parliamentary assistant responding.

Written questions may be placed on the *Orders and Notices Paper*. They must be answered by ministers within 24 sessional days unless the minister declines to answer the question or indicates that more time is needed to prepare a response. Written answers are provided to the member who asked the question and to the Clerk. A member can have up to 10 questions on the *Orders and Notices Paper* at any one time.

### 2.3.7 Manitoba[19]

Forty minutes are allocated for Question Period each sitting day in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. Question Period "is an opportunity for Members to seek information about important matters which fall within the administrative responsibility of the government or of the specific Ministers to whom questions are addressed."[20] An oral question may be followed by up to two supplementary questions, at the discretion of the Speaker.[21]

As well, written questions may be submitted to ministers relating to public affairs, and to other members when they are related to bills, motions or other public matters connected to House business. Each member may place up to five questions on the *Order Paper*, which must be replied to within 30 days. Answers to written questions are tabled in the Legislative Assembly.

### 2.3.8 Saskatchewan[22]

Question Period in the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan is limited to 25 minutes, and questions must relate to matters within the competence of the government or a minister's responsibility. Members may not ask ministers questions of a private nature, or questions that relate to Saskatchewan's Board of Internal Economy, a caucus, a party or political responsibilities. Ministers' responses must be relevant to the question. A minister may also decline to answer a question or take it on notice, in which case it may be answered at a subsequent Question Period.

Members may also seek information from ministers through written questions. These must be preceded by a notice of five sitting days before being answered. On the fifth day, the government may table the response, seek an Order for Return when more time is necessary or convert the question into a Notice of Motion for Return if it intends to amend the wording of the question or bring the matter forward for debate. Notices of questions and their responses are printed in the Assembly's daily published record, *Votes and Proceedings*.

### 2.3.9 Alberta[23]

The *Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta* contain few rules governing Question Period, other than providing for a 50-minute Question Period each sitting day beginning no later than 1:50 p.m. Most rules governing Question Period are based on guidelines, precedents and practices inspired, in part, by the House of Commons.

At the outset each legislature, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly typically outlines the relevant rules before the first Question Period takes place.[24] Questions and answers are limited to 35 seconds, and supplementary questions are permitted. In the current legislature, there are 16 questions per day, based on a recognition pattern agreed upon by the House leaders.[25]

In addition to posing oral questions during Question Period, members of the Legislative Assembly may also submit written questions to ministers relating to public affairs by placing them on the *Order Paper*. Such questions must be answered within 30 sitting days of being accepted.

### 2.3.10 British Columbia[26]

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia has its daily 30-minute Question Period at the opening of the afternoon sitting on Mondays and Wednesdays and at the opening of the morning sitting on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Oral questions followed by supplementary questions are allowed, at the discretion of the Speaker, except for those taken on notice.

Members may also place written questions on the *Order Paper* to ministers and to members in relation to bills, motions or other public matters connected with the member and the business of the Assembly. Answers to such questions are provided by written replies to the Clerk, who enters them in the Legislative Assembly's official record of daily proceedings, the *Journals*.

## 2.4 TERRITORIAL LEGISLATURES

### 2.4.1 Nunavut[27]

Question Period in the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut lasts up to 75 minutes but can be extended by unanimous consent for an additional 30 minutes.

Questions "relating to public affairs" must be directed towards ministers, and up to two supplementary questions on the same subject are allowed. According to the *Oral Question Period Guidelines* appended to the Assembly's written rules, its proceedings "are generally conducted in accordance with a combination of Nunavut practices [and] precedents," as well as citations from sources about House of Commons parliamentary procedure.

Written questions may also be asked to ministers for questions "which would likely to require a detailed or complex answer, or which would not reasonably be assumed to be within the present knowledge of the Minister."

### 2.4.2 Northwest Territories[28]

The Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories allocates up to 60 minutes for its daily Question Period. According to the Assembly's *Guidelines for Oral Questions*, which are appended to its rules, the four objectives of Question Period are to provide a forum to raise constituency concerns, probe the actions of the Executive, bring attention to "the differences of opinion on the policies of the Executive on major issues and judging the parliamentary skills of individual Members," and obtain information from the government.

Questions must be addressed to a minister, and up to two supplementary questions are permitted. Where a situation arises that is not covered by the Assembly's guidelines, the Assembly will address it by drawing from "a combination of practices and precedents of the Northwest Territories, the House of Commons of Canada, provincial and territorial legislatures, and parliaments in the Commonwealth."

Written questions are also permitted for questions "which would be likely to require a detailed or complex answer, or which would not reasonably be assumed to be within the present knowledge of the Minister." There is a limit of up to five written questions on the *Order Paper* per member at any one time.

### 2.4.3 Yukon[29]

The Yukon Legislative Assembly's Question Period lasts up to 30 minutes and provides members with the opportunity to pose questions "seeking information about a matter which falls under the administrative responsibility of the Government of Yukon."

In general, questions of up to one minute in length and responses of up to one minute and 30 seconds are permitted. Questions may be followed by up to two supplementary questions and replies "should be as brief as possible."

Questions cannot be posed to the Speaker, but the Standing Orders provide that a cabinet commissioner may answer questions during Question Period. A cabinet commissioner is a "government private member appointed to lead a cabinet commission."[30]

The Guidelines for Oral Question Period provide that "[i]n all cases not provided for within these guidelines, the usages and customs of the House of Commons of Canada, as in force at the time, shall be followed."

Written questions may be placed on the *Order Paper* seeking information of the Executive Council "relating to public affairs" or from "private members, including Committee Chairs, relating to any bill, motion or other public matter connected with the business of the Assembly in which such members may be concerned."[31] There is a limit of up to five written questions on the *Order Paper* at a time, and replies are tabled in the Assembly.[32]

## 3 UNITED KINGDOM

### 3.1 HOUSE OF LORDS[33]

Oral questions take place from Monday to Thursday at the beginning of parliamentary business and last up to 40 minutes. Questions in the House of Lords must relate to matters of government responsibility and are usually addressed to "His Majesty's Government" as a whole – not to a particular minister. They must be preceded by 24 hours' notice, and each member may only give notice of up to seven oral questions per year.

Four oral questions are answered each day. Questions should be concise enough so that an answer can be given in 75 words or fewer. Supplementary questions are allowed and should be limited to one or two points. The proceedings on each question, including supplementary questions and answers, are limited to 10 minutes. With some

exceptions, no member can have more than one oral question in the *House of Lords Business* at any one time.

On Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, the fourth space during the oral questions period is reserved for a "topical question" chosen by ballot, which is more timely in nature. Balloted questions are randomly chosen, similar to a "shuffle" (which is described in the next section of this paper). Any member may submit one topical question for the ballot even if they already have an oral question on the *Order Paper*. A ballot is also used to designate three questions asked of secretaries of state sitting in the House of Lords once per sitting month. These questions are addressed to a particular secretary of state and not to the government as a whole.

In addition to ordinary oral questions, members may ask "private notice questions" on urgent matters, provided they have given written notice to the Lord Speaker. Such notice must be given before noon when the sitting of the House of Lords begins after 1:00 p.m., and by 9:30 a.m. should the sitting begin before 1:00 p.m. The decision as to whether the question is sufficiently urgent rests with the Lord Speaker.

Members are also permitted to table six written questions on any one day and up to 12 per sitting week. These are expected to be answered within 10 working days, and their answers are sent electronically to the member asking the question and then published online.

Questions for short debate may also be submitted by members, and they are selected on the basis of a ballot conducted every five sitting weeks. Questions for short debate are taken during the lunch or dinner break, or as the last item of business. They last between one and one-and-a-half hours. The questioner is permitted between 8 and 10 minutes and the responding minister between 10 and 12 minutes. The remaining time is divided equally between speakers on the list.

### 3.2 HOUSE OF COMMONS[34]

There are various types of oral and written parliamentary questions that members may ask of the government in the U.K. House of Commons. Oral questions include Prime Minister's Questions, Ministerial Question Time (which includes substantive and topical questions) and urgent questions. Written questions include "ordinary" questions, "named day" questions and oral questions that did not get asked during Question Time.

Prime Minister's Questions takes place every sitting Wednesday and lasts for around 30 minutes. Members who wish to ask a substantive question of the prime minister must submit it in writing by the preceding sitting Thursday. A random digital draw, known as the "shuffle," selects the names of 15 members who have tabled a question and the order in which the questions will be asked. The questions are then placed on the *Order Paper*. The selected members or any other member may pose a

supplementary question, which need not pertain to the same subject as the original question. At the end of the half hour, questions on the *Order Paper* that have not yet been asked will stand for a written answer.

Ministers are allocated a specific day to answer oral questions. From Monday to Thursday, 40 minutes are devoted to substantive questions, which require notice of three to five sitting days, followed by 15 to 20 minutes of topical questions, which may be asked without notice on any aspect of that minister's responsibilities. The questions are selected through the "shuffle."

Urgent questions, which, as the name suggests, are urgent and of public importance, may also be asked of ministers after Question Time or at 11:00 a.m. on Fridays, when there is no scheduled Question Time. Urgent questions must be submitted to the Speaker by the morning deadline (which varies depending on the day of the week) if they are to be answered that day.

Members may also table written questions to ministers. Ordinary written questions do not need to be answered within a fixed timeline after being tabled, but they are usually answered within seven days. "Named day" questions are questions whose answers are tabled on the day specified by the members asking them, provided that they are preceded by a minimum of two days' notice. Oral questions that could not be answered during Question Time due to time constraints are treated as named day questions.

## 4 AUSTRALIA

### 4.1 SENATE[35]

Each sitting day, at 2:00 p.m., Question Time begins in the Senate of Australia. This period allows senators to put questions to ministers on any matter relating to public affairs. Oral questions may also be asked of the President (the Australian Senate's term for its Speaker) in relation to any matter under that office's responsibility. While questions are supposed to be posed without notice, ministers often receive informal notice of the subject of an upcoming question.

The Standing Orders establish strict time limits on questions and answers. A question should be asked within one minute, while its answer must not exceed two minutes. Up to two supplementary questions and answers may be asked within 30 seconds and answered within one minute each. A supplementary question must be put to the same minister who answered the initial question and must arise from the original answer or question. In recognizing senators, the President seeks to allocate questions proportionally among political parties and independent senators. In practice, however, the President follows a list in allocating questions agreed to by senators.

Question Time usually lasts one hour and ends when the leader of the government in the Senate asks senators to put any other questions on the *Notice Paper*. This practice reflects the fact that ministers are not obliged to answer questions without notice. At the end of Question Time, a senator who is not satisfied with an answer may move a motion to take notice of answers given to questions that day. While more than one such motion may be moved on the same day, the time devoted to debate a motion is limited to 30 minutes, and a senator may not speak for more than five minutes on each motion.

A senator may also seek information from the government by putting a question on notice, which involves giving a written copy of the question to the Clerk, who then reproduces it in the *Notice Paper*. The answer is also provided to the Clerk in writing. Upon being answered, the question and answer are reproduced in the Senate's online database for questions on notice. A senator whose question remains unanswered after 30 days may ask for an explanation at the end of Question Time.

## 4.2 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES[36]

Question Time takes place at 2:00 p.m. on most sitting days, when ministers answer questions from members of the House of Representatives for a duration of time not specified in the rules. The government determines when Question Time ends, and this is typically signalled about 45 minutes in, when the prime minister or a senior minister – who has no obligation to answer questions – asks that further questions be put on notice. This brings Question Time to an end, and the next item of business is called. If the government does not want Question Time to take place on a given day, it uses the same method, asking that questions be placed on notice as soon as the Speaker calls for questions.

The Speaker has discretion over the allocation of questions. In practice, the leader of the opposition is given priority to ask the first question, and questioners thereafter alternate between government and non-government members. The Speaker seeks to allocate questions fairly between all members.

Thirty-second-long questions are asked of ministers but not of parliamentary secretaries, who cannot be asked questions. Questions may also be put to private members and to the Speaker on any parliamentary business connected to them. Ministers may refuse to answer a question or reply to a question in writing. Ministers have three minutes to answer a question. At the conclusion of Question Time, members may ask questions of the Speaker about any matter under that office's jurisdiction.

Oral questions asked during Question Time are put to ministers without notice. Members may also ask a question of ministers in writing for written reply. The question is placed on the *Notice Paper* by the Clerk, and once it is answered,

the question and its reply are reproduced in the House's official daily transcript, *Hansard*.

## 5 NEW ZEALAND[37]

Members of the House of Representatives, the sole chamber of the Parliament of New Zealand, may use Question Time to pose oral questions (ordinary or urgent) to ministers. Question Time takes place at 2:00 p.m. on each sitting day.

Ordinary oral questions can be asked of a minister regarding any public affairs, House proceeding or administrative matter for which the minister is responsible or with which the minister is connected. Questions can also be posed to private members in relation to any parliamentary business connected with the member.

Notice of oral questions must be given by 10:30 a.m. on the day the question is to be asked either electronically or by hand to the Clerk. After their vetting by the Clerk for compliance with the Standing Orders, all questions are published on the parliamentary website at about 11:30 a.m. There are 12 such questions each day. Shortly after 2:00 p.m., each sitting day, all questions will be asked and answered. One supplementary question per answer, directly related to the answer given, may be allowed by the Speaker. Following ordinary oral questions, members may ask urgent questions if they have given a copy of the question to the Clerk and the responsible minister. Urgent questions are limited to matters that have arisen since 10:30 a.m., that is, after the deadline for notice of ordinary questions.

Ordinary oral questions are allocated to parties proportionally. Excluded from the calculation, however, are members from the government caucus who are ministers and parliamentary undersecretaries. The Business Committee, a standing committee of the House of Representatives, makes the appropriate calculation to ensure proportionality among parties and decides on the rotation to be fair to all political parties and independent members.

Written questions may be put to ministers and other members, as well as to the Speaker, concerning any administrative matter for which they are responsible. Written questions must be submitted and answered electronically. After they are accepted, questions are sent electronically and published on the parliamentary website. Answers to written questions must also be provided electronically no later than six working days after the publication of the question.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The basic structure of Question Period is broadly the same across the jurisdictions examined in this publication: a half-hour to one-hour period devoted to oral questions posed to the government by parliamentarians, who may also submit written questions.

In general, rules, conventions and practices relating to Question Period in Canadian provincial legislatures are often inspired by those of the House of Commons. There are differences in Question Period practices among the jurisdictions reviewed, however. For example, while oral questions are asked without notice in Canada, they are preceded by notice in the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

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NOTES

1. Senate, "Chapter 4: The Senate Chamber, Its Sittings and Publications," *Senate Procedure in Practice*, June 2015, p. 72.
2. Senate, Standing Committee on Rules, Procedures and the Rights of Parliament, *First Report*, 25 November 2025.
3. Senate, *Journals*, 10 December 2015.
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