

## INDEPENDENT MEMBERS AND SENATORS

'Independents' are members and senators who do not belong to a party.

Independent members and senators usually sit by themselves on the cross benches which are the seats that curve around at the end of the chamber and are furthest from the Speaker or the President.

Independents sometimes vote with the government and sometimes with the opposition. On some occasions they abstain and do not vote at all.

If the government does not have a majority in the Senate, it may need the votes of some or all of the Independents to pass the bill, particularly when non-government senators oppose the bill. Therefore, the government sometimes spends time and effort persuading Independents to support government bills.

Independents can introduce their own bills into Parliament. These are called private members' bills. Independents introduce their own bills so that they can suggest new laws about issues that they think are important and which the government is not addressing. Private members' bills cannot pass without government support and therefore are usually defeated. However, an Independent parliamentarian at least has the satisfaction of raising the issue for public debate.

Independent members and senators are usually elected because they are well known and respected in a community and have a strong personal following.