

THE PARTY WHIP

The Whip is a member of parliament or a senator who is also a party official and works for the members of the same political party. The Whip is like a team manager and coach who organises the minute by minute activities of party members in the Parliament.

The word comes from the sport of fox hunting in England. The Whip was the person who whipped all the hounds into a pack and pointed them in the right direction to chase the fox!

The Whip has so many tasks that the major parties have a Chief Whip and two other Whips.

On days when the Parliament sits, Whips from the major parties meet and plan the day's agenda and sort out procedural and other details. The Whips also negotiate 'pairs' from opposite parties so that the numbers between the Government and Opposition are kept in balance if individual members and senators are absent.

The Whip also organises lists of party members who wish to speak on specific bills and motions and passes the list to the Speaker or President before the debate begins. When there is a Division vote in the chamber, the Whip makes sure that all party members turn up to vote. The Whips from the major parties count the votes in a division.

When individual members and senators have personal problems such as serious illness, they seek the advice and support of the party Whip.

Whips supervise the minute by minute operations of the Parliament to make sure that party decisions are implemented through correct voting, orderly speech-making and by using the Standing Orders or rules of the chamber.

Whips are selected from the members and senators. They are usually experienced members of the party who enjoy the respect and confidence of colleagues. Different parties have different methods of appointing Whips.

Whips are quite visible as they move around the chamber speaking to colleagues, organising the business of the party and making last minute decisions with the Clerks, the Speaker or the President.

Usually, the Whips sit where they can be easily accessible to other party members. In the House of Representatives, the Whips sit in the back row behind the party where they can see who is present and what is happening among party members. In the Senate, the Whips sit at the President's end of the rows of seats where they can confer with party advisors, the Clerks and each other.