

A DAY IN PARLIAMENT

Parliament usually meets for two consecutive weeks each month except January and July. In a sitting week, both the House of Representatives and the Senate usually sit from Monday to Thursday. The outline below is based on the House of Representatives timetable for Wednesdays and Thursdays. The daily routine of business in the Senate is very similar.

9 am

Prayers followed by government business. This includes ministers introducing new bills, and members debating and voting on bills. Members sit in the House if they are about to deliver a speech, if they are interested in the bill or if requested by the Whip to make up a quorum of numbers. Speeches usually last 20 minutes.

2 pm

Question Time. Members ask questions of ministers. All members must attend.

3 pm (approx)

The opposition may ask for a special debate on a current issue. This debate is called a Matter of Public Importance.

4 pm

Government business. The debate on new bills from the morning continues.

7.30 pm

Adjournment debate. During the last 30 minutes, members make five minute speeches about any matter, especially about issues in their electorate.

On Mondays and Tuesdays, the debates on government business continue until 10.30pm and are then followed by the adjournment debate. On Wednesday and Thursday mornings, the House of Representatives runs a second chamber where members debate bills and motions that are not controversial. There are more opportunities for members to take part when there are two houses debating.

On Mondays in the House of Representatives there is a time when any member can introduce their own bill, called a private member's bill. At various times during the week, the Parliament is required to vote on many things such as government decisions about starting inquiries, changing the agenda for the day and reports from government departments.

The details of the daily program are set out in 'Standing Orders' or the rule books for both chambers. It is the responsibility of the presiding officers (the Speaker and the President) working with the Clerks in both houses to make sure that standing orders are followed so that Parliament deals with all its business legally and accurately. The Whips of each party work closely with the Clerks, senior members and senators, and the presiding officers to keep the business of the Parliament running smoothly.