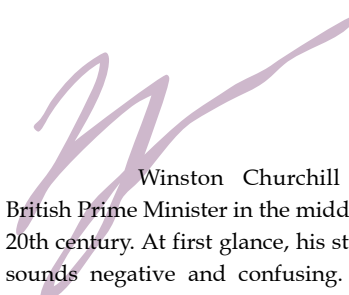


*"Democracy is the
worst form of
Government,
except all those
others that have
been tried."*

WINSTON CHURCHILL



Winston Churchill was a British Prime Minister in the middle of the 20th century. At first glance, his statement sounds negative and confusing. On the positive side, he was saying that no matter how many faults it has, our system is the best we have found for governing society.

This publication will explain how we Manitobans govern ourselves.



Our style of government is called a *parliamentary democracy*. This means that the people approve all laws and all taxes. How is this achieved? It begins by dividing the province into 57 areas called constituencies. Each constituency has about the same number of people. They then choose one person to represent them in the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. These 57 elected members, along with the Queen's representative (who is called the Lieutenant Governor) form the *Legislature*.

The *government* is formed by a group of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). Usually they all belong to one political party. This group must be able to have policies and taxation measures approved by the Legislative Assembly.

The *Chamber* is the room in the center of the Legislative Building where the Assembly sits. It is sometimes referred to as "the House".

Laws passed by the Assembly affect the life of every citizen of Manitoba. Manitoba's citizens play a key role in our province's development by electing a new Legislative Assembly every five years. Understanding the Legislative Assembly and how it works will help make the Assembly more relevant to you.



The Chamber is the room in the center of the legislative building where the Assembly meets.



Government House

There are three bodies that govern our province: the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary.

1. The Legislature

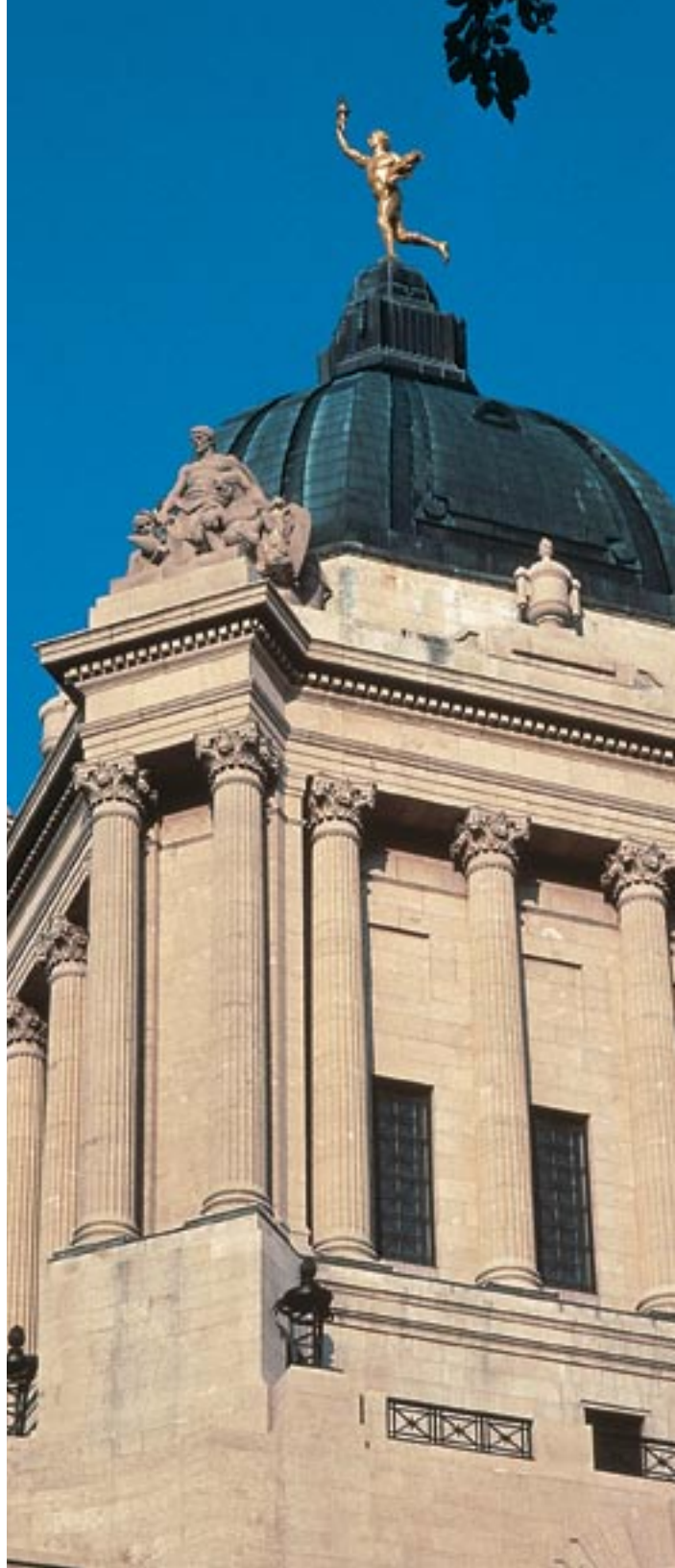
The Legislature is also known as the Legislative Assembly, the direct representatives of the people. The Legislature passes provincial laws, approves spending and examines how the government conducts public business.

2. The Executive

The Executive is made up of the Premier, Cabinet Ministers and their supporters. They put forward policies and are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the province. We usually use the term “the Government” when we are speaking about this group.

3. The Judiciary

The Judiciary consists of the court system, which rules on any disputes arising from the laws passed by the Legislature.





The Golden Boy

Sometimes we get the impression the Legislature is just a place for drama and clashes of ideas in endless debates. But legislators have very serious jobs and talk about things that are very important to Manitobans.

The Legislative Assembly is a provincial parliament. The word “parliament” comes from the French verb “parler” meaning “to speak.” That freedom of speech is the way our provincial parliament (the Legislative Assembly) makes government accountable. The Legislative Assembly plays several important roles in overseeing government.

Legislative Role - Passing Laws

Passing laws is the best known function of the Legislative Assembly. Since our province is governed by laws, every piece of legislation introduced in the Assembly must be treated seriously. (See pamphlet titled “The Making and Passing of Laws”.)

Financial Role - Checking the Books

Every year, usually in the spring, the Minister of Finance proposes a budget to the Legislative Assembly. A budget is a series of documents and books showing how the government plans to spend money over the following year. Members of the Assembly then examine this budget in detail. Ministers listen to the opinions of MLAs and answer questions before the Assembly grants the money required. The Assembly has the right to deny the money or reduce the amounts requested.

At the end of the year, there is a review of finances called an audit. The government

What is the Role of the Legislature?



The Legislative Building

must present this audit which is contained in a series of books called *Public Accounts*. Members of the Assembly review these books with the help of the Provincial Auditor, an officer of the Assembly.

Inquiry Role - Asking Questions

Question Period is one of the best ways for the Assembly to get information about government actions. Every day for forty minutes, Members can ask questions about important matters concerning the responsibilities of the provincial government or specific Ministers.

How does Question Period work? An MLA is allowed an initial question and up to two follow-up questions. The Minister responsible for answering the question responds. Sometimes he or she will ask for more time to answer because more information is needed. Often the Leader of the Official Opposition asks the first question. He or she is the person leading the party with the second highest number of Members elected to the Assembly.

Question Period is one of the most distinctive features of parliamentary democracy. The Speaker maintains order and decorum during Question Period.

Another way the Assembly fulfills its role of inquiring or looking into government activities occurs in *legislative committees*. Often the whole Assembly does not have time to deal with important matters, such as how government entities (like Manitoba Hydro) are operating. A Committee (made up of 11 of the 57 MLAs) can take the time for a longer look. Legislative committees also make detailed reviews of each clause of proposed laws. They also examine each proposed expense of every government department.



Speaker's Chair

Members

A *Member of the Legislative Assembly* (MLA) is elected by the public in his or her constituency (electoral district) to represent the people in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. An MLA has many roles.

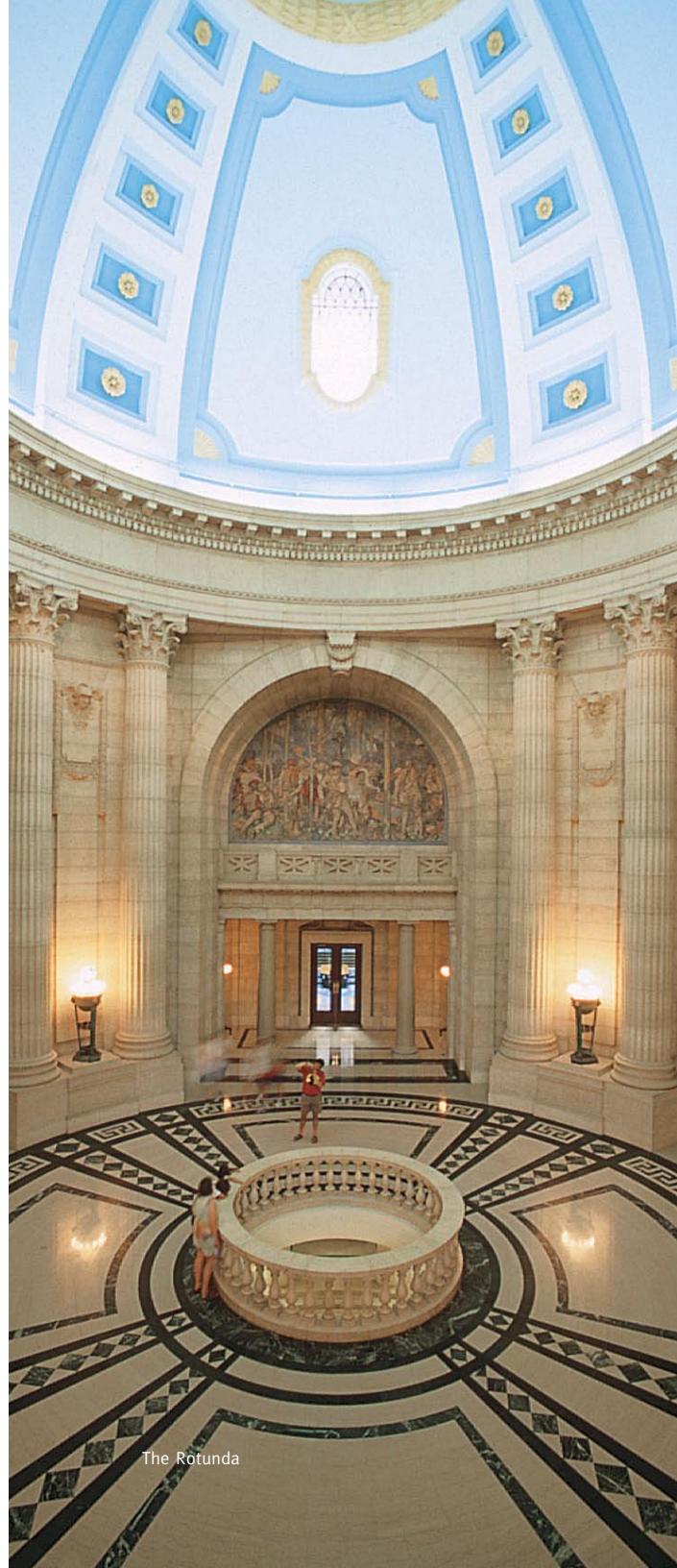
- As a **Legislator**, an MLA must understand the spirit of existing laws, plan new ones, and then study, discuss and support or oppose new laws.
- As a **Representative** of his or her constituency, an MLA may voice his constituents' concerns, represent viewpoints and help solve constituents' problems.
- As a **member of an elected party caucus**, she or he may be involved in planning strategy in the Chamber, supporting the caucus in its decisions, and becoming expert in given subject areas.
- As a **Cabinet Minister** or an **Opposition Critic**, depending on whether his or her party forms the government or the opposition, the member serves only if chosen for these roles.

Speaker

The *Speaker* is elected by all Members and is to be above partisan politics. The Speaker's job in the Chamber is to



The Mace



The Rotunda



The Grand Staircase

make sure that legislative business is done according to the rules. Outside the Chamber, the Speaker represents the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. This may include attending ceremonies, hosting visitors and being an ambassador to other parliaments and governments. The Speaker is the equivalent of a Minister and is responsible for all Legislative Assembly offices and staff.

The Speaker wears a black robe when the Assembly is in session. When entering or leaving the Chamber, the Speaker is preceded by the *Mace*. The Mace is a symbol of the Legislature's authority. You will see it on the table in the Chamber when the Assembly is in session.

Premier

The leader of the political party that elects the largest number of Members to the Legislative Assembly is the *Premier*. The Premier is the province's Prime Minister. The Premier chooses a Cabinet, which is made up of Ministers. Each Minister is responsible for one or more government departments or agencies. Together, they define government policy.

Leader of the Opposition

The leader of the political party that forms the Official Opposition is called the *Leader of the Opposition*. The Opposition is an alternative to the government. Its leader is an alternative to the Premier. The Opposition's criticism of government helps form public opinion. Public opinion is critical in a democratic society.

Officers of the House and of the Legislative Assembly

The *Clerk* is the senior employee of the Legislature. She or he is responsible to the Assembly through the Speaker for managing the services provided to the Assembly and its Committees. The Clerk also provides advice on parliamentary procedure and answers questions about the Rules of the House. The Clerk sits with the *Deputy Clerk* and the *Clerk Assistant* at the Table in the Chamber in front of the Speaker. Branches of the Clerk's Office include *Hansard* (producing a written record of everything that is said in the House), *Journals* (preparing the permanent official record of proceedings of the Assembly and the daily agenda) and *Committees* (providing parliamentary advice and administrative support to the Assembly's committees).

Sergeant-at-Arms

The *Sergeant-at-Arms* is responsible for security within the Chamber and manages security staff and messaging services to the Assembly. The Sergeant-at-Arms carries the Mace at the opening of each day's meeting of the Assembly.

Legislative Pages are students from grades 11 and 12. They serve under the direction of the Sergeant-at-Arms and provide



Speaker's Gallery



The Manitoba Room

essential services to the Members and Officers of the Legislature. Duties include distributing documents in the Legislative Chamber, receiving and delivering items to the Members in the Chamber, and announcing Members' names for recorded votes. The Pages provide similar services for legislative committee meetings. Each spring, school divisions nominate students for these positions. After interviews, eight are chosen to serve as Legislative Pages.

Other

There are a number of Officers that report directly to the Assembly, including; the *Chief Electoral Officer, the Provincial Auditor, the Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate*. These officers report to the Assembly each year. They may appear before Assembly committees to answer questions from Members of the Assembly.



The Legislative Building Exterior

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