

## Governor General: Roles & Responsibilities

Canada is a constitutional monarchy. This means that the duties of the Head of State (currently Queen Elizabeth II) and the head of Government are distinct (meaning each has different responsibilities). In 1947, authorization was granted in Canada for the Governor General to carry out the duties on behalf of the monarch (king or queen). The main power in Canada rests with the prime minister and his ministers; however, the Governor General does have the right to advise, encourage and warn the government regarding future decisions. The Governor General must therefore be non-partisan and apolitical (they favour no particular ideology nor any political party). The main roles and responsibilities of Canada's Governor General are listed below:

- Ensures that Canada always has a Prime Minister and a Government
- Ensures that the Prime Minister and Government have the confidence of Parliament
- Ensures that our Prime Minister & government abide by the Constitution
- Swears in the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Ministers at the beginning of their term in office
- Formally appoints Senators who are chosen for this role by the Prime Minister
- Formally dissolves Parliament prior to the calling of an election (at the request of the Prime Minister)
- Gives formal approval (called Royal Assent) to proposed laws that are passed by the House of Commons and the Senate.
- Possesses the following “Reserve Powers”, that may be exercised without the approval of the government, to be used if required by extreme circumstances\*:
  - To dismiss a Prime Minister from his / her position
  - To refuse to grant “Royal Assent” of a bill (proposed new law). This seldom occurs.
  - To refuse to dissolve parliament.

*\* These powers are seldom used, as the constitution, as well as tradition, provides clarity regarding situations where it would be necessary or appropriate to use such powers. To employ such powers without reasonable cause would upset the people of Canada, and result in a constitutional crisis. In other words, the Governor General serves as a neutral referee who ensures that the government is abiding by the Constitution of Canada, and would only use reserve powers if it were absolutely necessary.*

