

PAGES IN PARLIAMENT AND THE LEGISLATURES

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FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

For many years after Confederation it was customary for the House of Commons to choose boys, often as young as eleven years old, from the Ottawa-Hull region to perform the traditional page services of carrying messages and running errands for Members of Parliament. The boys were often school drop-outs whose families needed the money and their job as pages prevented them from continuing their education. Once they reached sixteen or seventeen years old they were no longer suitable as page boys and many had difficulty finding other work although a large number were hired in some other capacity by the House of Commons.

From time to time this system was criticized by members who felt Parliament had some obligation to assist these boys with their education. In 1968 a minimum age of 16 was established for pages but they were still drawn from the local area and they still were all male. In 1971 some members inquired about the possibility of hiring female pages but no change

in the recruitment system was made at that time.

After the Hon. James Jerome became Speaker in 1974 he asked the Clerk of the House to prepare a report on the page system used in the United States Congress. The report was referred to the Standing Committee on Members Services which concluded that the Canadian system was unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. It said an adequate page system should achieve the following objectives:

- (1) symbolize the national character of parliament;
- (2) increase the public's knowledge of parliamentary proceedings;
- (3) ensure a high quality of service in the chamber to members;

- (4) provide opportunities to young people with no discrimination on the basis of sex.

The Committee considered the United States model, the essence of which is the provision by Congress of a school in the Library of Congress through which the pages continue their regular education during their months of page service, but decided not to recommend a similar system. With the smaller number of pages needed in Canada and the necessity that would arise of providing schooling in both official languages and probably in at least two provincial school systems (Quebec and Ontario), the idea seemed impracticable.

The Committee then considered holding an annual national competition open to students in their final year of high school. Such a competition would have been very costly and as a compromise it was decided to limit the applicants to undergraduate university students who attend or were planning to attend one of the post secondary institutions in the national capital region. In this way it was hoped to achieve as broad a representation as possible, assist students with their education costs and attain the other objectives outlined by the committee.

The first group of pages consisted of 22 girls and 14 boys chosen from the ten provinces and two territories. They began work in October 1978. Each page works a 2½ hour shift with a total of 11-13 hours a week. Their duties are basically the same as the former pages, delivering messages and running errands within the confines of the Centre Block. Pages receive \$6,000 a year and they work under the jurisdiction of the Sergeant-at-Arms. The Chief Page, Mr. Robertson, is himself a former page.

On the matter of hiring female pages the Senate preceded the Commons by nearly seven years. On June 2, 1971 Senator Muriel Fergusson noted that the United States Senate had broken with tradition by appointing female pages and the Ontario Legislature also had four girl pages. She asked if consideration could be given to hiring female pages in the Upper House and on September 14 of that year Speaker Deschâtelets announced the appointment of two female pages in the Senate. Both girls were university students; one was studying geography at Carleton University, the other was enrolled in psychology at Ottawa University.

At present the Senate employs eight pages, four male and four female. Each page is assigned to approximately thirteen Senators and is responsible for making sure that Senators receive all the documents of the Senate relating to each day's debate. One Senate page operates the electronic console which opens the microphone of the Senator who has the floor.

The basic requirement in selecting Senate pages is that they must be at university and require financial assistance to continue their studies. The salary of Senate pages ranges from \$5,402-\$6,156. They sign yearly contracts which are renewable and may be terminated by either party.

Provincial Legislatures

In 1972 a survey on the use of pages in provincial legislatures was published in The Parliamentarian which summarized the information as follows:

"Manitoba's Legislative Assembly now hires two boys and two girls, chosen from among the most successful students in metropolitan

Winnipeg. They serve for one session only, receiving a lump sum of \$300 and \$2.06 an hour for evening sittings. ...

Saskatchewan similarly employs two boys and two girls as pages in the Legislative Assembly. They are in their late teens, having finished school, and are paid an hourly wage with overtime. The pages work from eight to twelve hours daily during the sessions which usually last eight weeks.

The Alberta Legislative Assembly has six page boys, aged between 15 and 19, who arrange their school curriculum so as to leave them free to work in the Assembly between 2 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. They receive \$1.75 hourly and a uniform.

Ontario employs four girls and eighteen boys, of 12 and 13 years of age, as pages in the Legislative Assembly. When not working in the Chamber they attend special classes in order to keep up with their education. ...

Both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia employ youths in their late teens or early 20s as legislature pages. Some have completed high school and are attending or expecting to enter university. ...

The Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island appoints four high-school boys as pages. They serve in pairs on alternate days so that their schooling does not suffer during the short legislature sessions.

The pages of the National Assembly in Quebec attend school within the legislative building, the curriculum being the same as that followed by other students aged 15 to 18. They make up for time lost by going to extra classes during holiday periods."
(1)

In March 1979 the Clerks of each provincial legislature were asked to update this information and their replies are shown in the following chart. It will be seen that the only major change is in Quebec where pages have been fully integrated into the regular messenger service.

PAGES IN THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES...

(1) Anthony Wright, "Pages in the Canadian Parliament and Legislatures", The Parliamentarian, Vol. 53 (January 1972).

PAGES IN THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURESAS OF MARCH 1979

<u>Province</u>	<u>Number of Pages*</u>	<u>Age Requirement</u>	<u>Salary</u>	<u>Education Provisions or Other Comments</u>
BRITISH COLUMBIA	14	13 - 15 years	\$3.00 per hour	-Pages selected by their teachers based on scholastic standing and general deportment. The schools which provide pages are selected by the local school board and different schools are chosen each year. -Pages work on alternate days so as not to be absent from school on a regular basis.
SASKATCHEWAN	5	18 - 22 years	\$5.10 per hour plus 4% holiday pay with overtime paid on anything over 8 hours per day or 40 hours per week.	Full-time positions from November to May. No special arrangements for education.
MANITOBA	4	Senior high school students	\$485 per year but with overtime for evening and Saturday session they can earn about \$1,000.	Pages are selected by school principals from top students in their schools. The schools are chosen each year by the Speaker.
ALBERTA	6	Senior high school students	\$4.35 - \$4.55 per hour	Chosen from students with high scholastic performance and upon recommendation of school principal and consent of parents.
QUEBEC	10	No special minimum or maximum age. 18 to 65 as for Public Service	\$7,590 - \$8,300	The page service is fully integrated with the messenger service. During a session certain messengers carry out the traditional role of pages in the Assembly.

ONTARIO	Five groups of pages are selected - three groups during the spring session and two groups for the fall session - 22 pages in each group.	Selected from all of Ontario's 125 ridings; minimum average of 80%; Grade VII or Grade VIII student (11-14 years of age); residence in Toronto during term of duty; Principal's consent to be absent from school for approximately 6 weeks.	A honorarium of \$10.00 per day plus \$3.75 for each evening worked; \$1.00 per day transportation allowance; \$3.00 dinner allowance for evenings worked; for pages living more than 100 miles from Toronto, a return rail or bus travel allowance is provided to come in for a uniform fitting; for pages living more than 300 miles from Toronto, 80% of a return air flight home is provided during term of duty.	Pages are tutored in English, History and Mathematics for a total of 5 hours per week and are also provided with French instruction 3 mornings per week. This is an educational programme which provides a unique opportunity for Ontario's bright Grade VII and Grade VIII students to watch first-hand, the workings of the Provincial Government.
NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR	4	University students	\$631.52 per month	-
NOVA SCOTIA	6	High school or College students	\$16.50 per day	-
NEW BRUNSWICK	6	17 - 21 years	\$99-\$104 per week for four-day week. Overtime for additional days.	The people hired are usually looking for a permanent job.
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND	6	No age stipulation but chosen from grades XI and XII (usually 17-18 years)	\$61-\$67 per week	No special educational arrangements. Given the short session (normally 8 weeks) with pages working an average of one full day per week, various principals have indicated that the time lost does not impair their studies. All pages must be first class honours students.

* All provinces listed permit girls to work as pages although the ratio may change from time to time depending on the applications.