

Question Time



The rules of the House allow Speaker Neil Andrew to exercise his judgment in relation to supplementary questions.

The following question was submitted by an *About the House* reader.

Question

After a Minister responds to a Member's question during Question Time in the House of Representatives, can the Member immediately ask a follow-up or supplementary question of the Minister?

Answer

At the discretion of the Speaker, supplementary questions without notice may be asked to elucidate an answer. This is provided for by the rules of the House of Representatives (standing order 151).

Prior to 1950, Members were not permitted to ask supplementary questions during Question Time. This restriction applied to immediate follow-up questions and to questions that were based on an answer given by a Minister during the same Question Time. The reason for this restriction was to avoid a series of questions on the same subject, which would develop into a debate.

When the rule allowing for supplementary questions was introduced in 1950, the term 'supplementary question' was not intended to mean an immediate follow-up question. Instead the rule was intended to allow Members, at some other point in Question Time, to ask a Minister a question based on an answer he or she had given during that Question Time. There was also a restriction that limited supplementary questions to one for each answer.

The standing orders were amended in 1962 to permit more than one supplementary question. But Speakers continued to follow the practice of alternating between Opposition Members and Government Members in relation to the asking of questions, so immediate supplementary questions were not asked.

In 1993 the Procedure Committee, which reviews the practices and procedures of the House, recommended that supplementary questions immediately following an answer be allowed. It stated

that "immediate supplementary questions would place added pressure on Ministers to remain relevant and enhance the effectiveness of Question Time in calling Ministers to account for their administrative responsibilities". The Government indicated in its response to the Procedure Committee that it preferred the traditional arrangement.

In 1996 the Speaker, Bob Halverson, commenced a practice of allowing immediate supplementary questions. He required that the supplementary question arise from the Minister's response, be regarded as part of the one question, be restricted to the person who asked the original question, and be put in precise and direct terms without preamble. Speaker Halverson also told the House that he expected the Minister's response to be brief and that he did not expect to permit a supplementary question on all occasions.

The next Speaker, Ian Sinclair, discontinued the practice of allowing immediate supplementary questions. The current Speaker, Neil Andrew, also has indicated that he does not intend to allow immediate supplementary questions as a matter of habit. This accords with standing order 151, which gives the Speaker the right to exercise his/her judgment on this matter.

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