

In word and deed

From IT support to preparing and following up on daylong committee meetings – the Parliamentary Services assist Council members in all that they do. In order to ensure a separation of powers they answer directly to parliament and are independent of the Federal Council and the Federal Administration.

General Secretariat



Secretary-General:
Philippe Schwab

Parliament Building, 3003 Bern
058 322 99 10

information@parl.admin.ch
www.parlament.ch

When a new member of parliament takes up office in the Federal Assembly it is similar to starting a new job: new Council members have many questions, are inundated with information, and are expected to hit the ground running, but first have to become acquainted with how parliament works. At the start of a new legislature period the Parliamentary Services therefore have their work cut out. But even at other times, the 300 or so staff who share 212 full-time positions, support the work done by lawmakers year in, year out, whether in the spotlight or quietly in the background.

The work of the Federal Assembly is most visible when parliament is in session. Debates are recorded in the Official Bulletin, which is produced while the sitting is in progress; individual speeches are available to read around an hour later at www.parlament.ch. But before an item of business even makes it to the chamber for debate, it is first examined by the relevant committee. The meetings of the various committees are prepared in terms of content and organisation by the respective committee secretariats, and in practical terms by the team of ushers. To allow committee members to familiarise themselves with the wide range of topics and fields, they are provided with documentation, such as reports produced by federal offices, newspaper or journal articles and minutes from earlier meetings. Council members can also request personalised documentation packs and advice for more in-depth information, or to help prepare for visits at home and abroad.

Information online and in all official languages

Council members can find most of the documentation they need on the intranet. Each member of parliament receives a laptop, if requested, or at least the relevant codes to be able to log in to parliament's system. A team of IT staff and web specialists is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the entire IT infrastructure at the Parliamentary Services and the secretariats of the parliamentary groups. The parliament website also has to be kept up to date so that the public can find out about items of business, members of parliament or events. During the sessions, debates are streamed live via internet.

Council members speak before parliament and in committee meetings in their own language. During sessions in the National

Council, interpreters provide simultaneous translation of statements in the three official languages of German, French and Italian. Translations of most documents are also available.

Contacts outside and within the Federal Palace

The work performed by parliament does not only take place within the Federal Palace: there are numerous contacts with journalists and the public, as well as with foreign parliaments. Here too, the Parliamentary Services provide Council members with the support they need. Press releases are drafted, media conferences are organised, and arrangements are made for trips by Swiss delegations abroad and for visits by foreign delegations to Switzerland.

The public can follow the work of their representatives in parliament through the media or online, but also in person from the viewing gallery. Council members receive individual visitors or groups in the Federal Palace, and visitors can find out about parliament by taking a guided tour.

A large number of people from quite different walks of life pass through the doors of the Federal Palace: Council members, representatives of different interest groups and the media, civil servants and visitors. An open house like this requires certain security measures and the presence of security staff. The building also has to be looked after. The activities that take centre stage would not be possible without all the work done behind the scenes. Work would soon grind to a halt if the wastepaper baskets were overflowing, if there was no heating in winter or if Council members weren't able to get a coffee...