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# A Note on the Average Age of Senators Since Confederation

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by Rob Cunningham and Deborah Wehrle

*There has been much public discussion over the years about the age of the parliamentarians sitting in Canada's Senate. The Constitution Act, 1867, provided that Senators retained their appointment for life. Moreover, a person needed to be at least 30 years of age before he or she could be summoned. In 1965 a constitutional amendment came into force requiring Senators to retire at age 75. The amendment only applied to Senators appointed after June 1, 1965; Senators appointed prior to that date could still hold their seats for life. This study examines the average age of Canadian Senators since Confederation.*

The data required to complete the study was obtained from listings prepared by the Senate Communication Office, the Library of Parliament, and the Canadian Parliamentary Guide. The necessary data for each Senator included the date of birth, date of summons, and date the Senator ceased to be a member (because of retirement, resignation, death, or disqualification).

## Method

A series of Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets was used to calculate relevant statistics from this data. The average age of Senators in a given year is based on the Upper Chamber's membership as of December 31.

New Senators were added in the year of their appointment at the age they had attained at December 31 of that year. In 1867, each Senator's age was recorded as of December 31, 1867. When a Senator resigned or died, he or she was not included in the average for that year (which was calculated as at December 31).

If a Senator turned 69 on June 30, his or her age is set at 69 (not 69.5) for the purpose of calculations as of December 31. The same principle applies for all birth

dates regardless of where they fall between January 1 and December 31.

## Results

The average age of Senators for each year is found in Table 1. A total of 770 persons have sat in the Senate including four who were reappointed after resignation and one who was reappointed twice.

In 1867, the year that Senators were first appointed, the average age was 55.3. At the end of 1993, a total of 770 persons had been appointed to the Senate. This number includes four Senators who were reappointed after resignation and one who was reappointed twice. In 1917, it dropped suddenly to 64.0 because a total of 26 Senators were appointed, including many of a relatively young age.

After 1917, the average age of a Senator climbed steadily to a peak of 71.2 in 1961. Following mandatory retirement in 1965, the average fell significantly and stood at 65.9 in 1966. Over the next two decades, the overall trend was a further decrease in the average age. In 1993, the average stood at 62.6. For the years 1984 to 1993, the average was fairly stable ranging between 62.1 and 63.6. The average has not been below 62 since 1885.

The youngest Senator was William Miller from Nova Scotia who was 32 when summoned in 1867. The oldest Senator was Georges-Casimir Dessaulles of Quebec who died at age 103 in 1930. The only other centenarian was

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David Wark of New Brunswick who was 101 when he died in 1905. A total of 22 Senators have sat in the Chamber after their 90th birthdays. A further 138 Senators sat past their 80th birthdays. A total of 162 Senators were at least 80 years old when they ceased to be members. This represents 21.0% of all Senators ever appointed and 27.6% of Senators appointed prior to 1965.

Only two "lifers" were sitting at the end of 1994. These Senators were appointed before 1965 and hold their seats for life: Orville Phillips (70), and John MacDonald (88).

*While editorial cartoonists are likely to continue targeting the age of Senators, the fact is that the average age has decreased considerably in the last 30 years. Senators have not been younger since the 1880s.*

The increase in age following 1867 is principally explained by the fact that Senators held their seats for life. The average age increased yearly, while only a few new

and younger members replaced those who resigned or died.

As new provinces and territories became part of Canada, the number of Senators rose from its original 78 to the current 104. The addition of new members slowed the increase in average age. But as the new members grew older, the average age of Senators increased.

Part of the increase in average age might be explained by the increase in life expectancy. In 1921, when Statistics Canada first calculated estimates, life expectancy stood at 59.7 (58.8 for men and 60.6 for women). These figures had increased to 73.0 for men and 79.7 for women by 1986.

Given the relative stability of the average age of Senators over the last ten years, it is unlikely that there will be much of a decrease in average age in future years. However, there might be a change if the criteria for Senate membership is modified. A lower retirement age, an elected Senate, or even a 10 year term appointment for Senators would likely lower the average age. ♦

**Table 1**  
**Average Age of Senators 1867-1993**

1867	55.3	1892	63.3	1917	64.0	1942	67.6	1967	65.4	1992	62.8
1868	55.7	1893	63.6	1918	63.8	1943	68.1	1968	64.5	1993	62.6
1869	56.5	1894	63.7	1919	63.8	1944	67.7	1969	64.8		
1870	56.9	1895	64.5	1920	64.8	1945	66.7	1970	64.3		
1871	57.2	1896	64.4	1921	64.0	1946	67.0	1971	63.3		
1872	58.0	1897	65.1	1922	64.1	1947	67.9	1972	63.3		
1873	57.4	1898	65.1	1923	64.7	1948	68.2	1973	63.4		
1874	57.4	1899	65.8	1924	65.2	1949	67.9	1974	64.1		
1875	58.0	1900	65.6	1925	64.8	1950	68.1	1975	64.3		
1876	57.7	1901	65.4	1926	64.6	1951	68.7	1976	63.6		
1877	58.2	1902	66.0	1927	65.5	1952	69.5	1977	63.1		
1878	58.3	1903	64.5	1928	65.3	1953	69.2	1978	63.8		
1879	59.1	1904	64.3	1929	65.7	1954	70.1	1979	63.1		
1880	60.0	1905	65.0	1930	65.1	1955	69.0	1980	63.6		
1881	60.5	1906	65.1	1931	65.7	1956	69.6	1981	63.7		
1882	60.7	1907	64.8	1932	65.9	1957	69.1	1982	63.9		
1883	61.7	1908	65.6	1933	65.3	1958	69.4	1983	64.0		
1884	61.5	1909	66.1	1934	65.8	1959	70.1	1984	62.3		
1885	61.4	1910	66.6	1935	65.6	1960	70.3	1985	62.7		
1886	62.2	1911	67.5	1936	66.1	1961	71.2	1986	62.3		
1887	62.7	1912	66.3	1937	66.5	1962	70.1	1987	62.7		
1888	62.6	1913	66.6	1938	67.1	1963	70.0	1988	62.8		
1889	62.9	1914	67.1	1939	67.7	1964	69.8	1989	63.6		
1890	63.5	1915	67.3	1940	66.9	1965	69.6	1990	62.1		
1891	63.9	1916	67.4	1941	67.3	1966	65.9	1991	62.2		