

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

This introduction, which includes several of the more commonly used motions and portions of parliamentary law, is derived from the 700-page Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised – 11th Edition (Copyright 2011 by Henry M. Robert III. Da Capo Press of the Perseus Books Group). Quotations from this book are cited by page and line. A full presentation of the order of precedence (ranking) of motions is too complex and lengthy for this brief introduction. In addition to this Introduction, please refer to the "Standing Rules" offered to the Annual Meeting for further guidance.

### I. Obtaining the Floor

To obtain the floor, members of the assembly must be recognized by the chair. Use the term "Madam (or Mr.) Moderator." (See RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], pp. 22, l. 33 - 24, l. 11). When recognized, members identify themselves, and then offer their motions, participate in the debate, etc.

### II. Making a Motion – Seconding

After members are recognized, they may offer a motion usually in the form "I move that..." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 33, l. 5). (Unless noted otherwise, motions may not interrupt a speaker.)

Almost all motions require a second from another member. That member does not need to be recognized by the chair before saying "Second." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 35, ll. 3-8).

### III. Main Motions – Including Resolutions (Bring business before the assembly)

Main motions may be made only when no other motion is pending in the assembly. (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 62, ll. 18-21).

Second. Debatable. Amendable. Majority – in most cases.

### IV. Subsidiary Motions (assist the assembly in handling main motions)

A. "*Postpone Indefinitely* is a motion that the assembly decline to take a position on the main question. Its adoption kills the main motion (for the duration of the session) and avoids a direct vote on the question." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 126, ll. 4-7).

Second. Debatable. Not amendable. Majority.

B. "The subsidiary motion to *Amend* is a motion to modify the wording – and within certain limits the meaning – of a pending motion before the pending motion itself is acted upon." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 130, ll. 7-10).

Second. Debatable--if motion to be amended is debatable. Amendable. Majority.

(See "Standing Rules" adopted by the 2012 Annual Meeting for several modifications.)

C. "The subsidiary motion to *Commit* or *Refer* is generally used to send a pending question to a relatively small group of selected persons--a committee--so that the question may be carefully investigated..." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 168, ll. 3-6).

Second. Debatable. Amendable. Majority.

D. "The subsidiary motion to *Postpone to a Certain Time*...is the motion by which action on a pending question can be put off, within limits, to a definite day, meeting, or hour..." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 179, ll. 31-34). "In a case where more than a quarterly time interval...will elapse between meetings (for example, in an annual convention of delegates or in a local society that holds only an annual meeting), a question cannot be postponed beyond the end of the present session." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 183, ll. 7-11).

Second. Debatable. Amendable. Majority.

E. "The *Previous Question* is the motion used to bring the assembly to an immediate vote on one or more pending questions..." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 197, ll. 26-28). "Calls of 'Question!' by members from their seats are not motions for the *Previous Question* and are disorderly if another member is speaking or seeking recognition." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 207, ll. 18-20). "When a member has risen to claim the floor or has been assigned the floor...if calls of 'Question!' are made, it is the duty of the chair to obtain order and protect the rights of the member who is entitled to the floor." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 385, ll. 9-14)

Second. Not debatable. Not amendable. Two-thirds.

**Note:** "When debate appears to have concluded, the chair may...ask, 'Are you ready for the question?' or if, after a reasonable pause, no one rises to claim the floor, the chair may assume that no member wishes to speak and ...may proceed to put the question." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 386, ll. 30-35).

F. "The motion to *Lay on the Table* enables the assembly to lay the pending question aside temporarily when something else of immediate urgency has arisen... This motion is commonly misused in ordinary assemblies--in place of the motion to *Postpone Indefinitely*, to *Postpone to a Certain Time*, or other motions. Particularly in such misuses, it also is known as a motion 'to table.'...the motion to *Lay on the Table* is out of order if the evident intent is to kill or avoid dealing with a measure." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], pp. 209, l. 25 - 210, l. 11).

Second. Not debatable. Not amendable. Majority.

**Note:** If the above motion has been adopted, then for that item to be returned to the floor a motion to *Take from the Table* must be adopted. "The object of the motion to *Take from the Table* is to make pending again before the assembly a motion or series of adhering motions that previously has been laid on the table." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 300, ll. 3-5).

Second. Not debatable. Not amendable. Majority.

## V. Privileged Motions (special matters of immediate and overriding importance)

- A. A *Call for Orders of the Day* is a privileged motion by which a member can require the assembly to conform to its agenda, program, or order of business...unless two thirds of those voting wish to do otherwise." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 219, ll. 4-8).

Takes precedence over all motions listed above.

May interrupt. Does not need a second. Not debatable. Not amendable. If Chair chooses not to do it, then Chair must put it to a vote – requires two thirds vote against the Call in order to continue debate.

- B. "A *recess* is a short intermission in the assembly's proceedings, commonly of only a few minutes..." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 230, ll. 20-21).

Second. Not debatable. Amendable as to length of recess. Majority.

## VI. Incidental Motions

- A. "When a member thinks that the rules of the assembly are being violated, he can make a *Point of Order* (or "raise a question of order"...), thereby calling upon the chair for a ruling and an enforcement of the regular rules." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 247, ll. 3-7).

May interrupt. No second. Not debatable--but issue can be explained. Not amendable.

Ruled on by chair. Or chair may choose to submit to assembly. Majority.

- B. "By electing a presiding officer, the assembly delegates to him the authority and duty to make necessary rulings on questions of parliamentary law. But any two members have the right to *Appeal* from his decision on such a question. By one member making...the appeal and another seconding it, the question is taken from the chair and vested in the assembly for final decision." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], pp. 285, l. 26 - 286, l.3).

Interrupt speaker at time of ruling being appealed. Second. Debatable. Not amendable.

Requires majority in negative to reverse chair's decision. Chair may vote.

- C. "When a motion relating to a single subject contains several parts, each of which is capable of standing as a complete proposition if the others are removed, the parts can be separated to be considered and voted on as if they were distinct questions--by adoption of the motion for *Division of a Question* (or 'to divide the question')." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 270, ll.30-35)

Second. Not debatable. Amendable. Majority.

- D. "A member who believes that a secret vote will give a truer expression of the assembly's will on a pending motion can move that the vote on the motion be taken by ballot." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], p. 285, ll.3-5).

Second. Not debatable. Amendable. Majority.

## VII. Decorum in Debate

"Members address only the chair, or address each other through the chair....a member does not speak...without first having *obtained the floor*...(RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], pp. 23, l. 31 - 24, l. 12).

"In debate a member's remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly...he must avoid personalities and under no circumstances can he attack or question the motives of another member....as much as possible, the use of names of members should be avoided in debate....During debate, during remarks by the presiding officer to the assembly, and during voting, no member should be permitted to disturb the assembly by whispering, walking across the floor, or in any other way. The key words here are *disturb the assembly*. The rule does not mean therefore, that members can never whisper, or walk from one place to another..." (RONR [11<sup>th</sup> ed.], pp. 392, l. 6 - 394, l. 19).