

AMVETS

Department of Illinois



Parliamentary Procedures

Meetings shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order. It is the duty of the post commander to maintain an orderly meeting, and to conduct the meeting in such a manner that all business transacted or discussed shall follow in proper sequence.

The post commander, when presiding, always accedes to the will of the majority of the members present, and is not for him to insist on points against the decision of the members. He should not allow discussions between members across the floor. No member may speak unless first recognized by the Commander. Each post should have a Robert's Rules of Order at each meeting, so there should never be a doubt as to procedures or decisions.

The rules of parliamentary law did not develop out of thin air, nor are they devices to complicate the business of post meetings, as the new member sometimes thinks, when a barrage of "points of order," or "previous questions" confronts him.

Like the other rules, which govern modern society, those of parliamentary law are based upon actual experience. If each one of us made up our own traffic regulations, no one would be able to drive a car. In the same way there are rules for football games, for the payment of taxes or the drawing of unemployment compensation, the building of houses, and almost every other activity in which we take part.

Rules for meetings enable the business of the post to get done with speed and efficiency, while at the same time protecting the rights of all of the members. To the newcomer they may seem confusing, until he learns them. Just as you can't play baseball unless you know that three strikes are out, so you can't play your proper role in the functioning of the rules, which control its actions.

These might be stated briefly as follows:

1. Only one subject can come before the meeting at one time.
2. Each proposal coming before the post shall be freely

debated.

3. Each member has rights equal to those of every other member.

4. The will of the majority shall be carried out, yet the minority shall have the right to present its case.

5. The desires of the membership should be brought together in such a way that the welfare of the organization as a whole is served.

HOW BUSINESS GETS DONE

Unanimous Consent

The Chairman should remember that a great deal of the business of the meeting can be accomplished by unanimous consent. For example, when the adjutant has finished reading the minutes, the chairman will ask, "Are there any corrections?" and then if none are made, "If there is no objection the minutes will stand as read," or "as corrected," if corrections have been made.

This same procedure may operate with regard to communications and reports. In those instances, in which communications do not require action, the chairman may say, "If there is no objection, the letter will be received and filed," or in the case of a report, which contains no recommendations, "If there is no objection, the report will be accepted."

Many a meeting has been killed by a large pile of long-winded communications, read in a monotonous voice by an adjutant who isn't at all interested in what they have to say. This can be avoided by having communications go to the executive committee, which decides which of them shall be read to the membership, or by having the adjutant summarize the less important ones.

Motions

Whenever a body desires to take action on any problem it does so through the passage of some motion dealing with that question. Almost all of the activity of a meeting, therefore, revolves around motions and what happens to them, whether they are adopted, amended, defeated or postponed for future action.

Getting the Floor

No one has a right to talk at a post meeting unless he has first been recognized by the chairman, that is, has been "given the floor." A

member desiring to present a motion, or to speak on any question, arises and addresses the chair as “Mr. Chairman.”

Ordinarily the chairman recognizes the first member to arise, but when two or more arise at the same time he may use his own judgment. When a member has the floor the remainder of the group should sit quietly until he has finished. The chairman recognizes a member by nodding or pointing to him, or by calling out his name or position. Thus: “AMVET Brown,” or “The member in the third row.”

Making the Motion

Every motion should begin with the words “I move that,” not “I make a motion that,” or “I move you that.” Motions should be stated positively, that is in such a manner as to require some action. Thus it is not necessary to pass a motion “not to hold a picnic.” A motion cannot be made while there is another motion on the floor, with the exception of certain types of motions, which will be noted later.

Every motion must be “seconded” before it can be discussed. This is to ensure that at least two people in the meeting are interested in the motion. In some instances, a member desiring to make a motion will ask the privilege of explaining the subject matter and intent of his motion before making it. If there is no objection from the body the chairman may allow him to do this. Otherwise no motion may be discussed before being seconded. In most post meetings all that is required for a motion to be seconded. In most post meetings all that is required for a motion to second is for a member to call out “Seconded” in a loud voice, while remaining seated.

Stating the Question

When a motion has been made and seconded the chairman should repeat it clearly, so that all members will know what is before

the body. If the motion is awkwardly worded or confusing, the chairman, with the permission of the maker, should reword it so that its meaning will be clear. If the chairman believes the motion is “out of order” he should say so as soon as it is made. In repeating the motion the chairman may ask the adjutant to read it.

Discussion

When a chairman has finished stating a motion he should ask for discussion, thus: “A motion has been made and seconded,” or “It has been regularly moved and seconded that this post should put into effect the AMVETS juvenile opportunity program. Is there any discussion?”

The maker of the motion is usually given the first opportunity to speak since he is the one who can be expected to give the best arguments for it. A member who has not yet spoken on the motion is given preference to one who has; in fact, except for the maker of the motion further explaining its meaning, no should speak twice on a motion so long as there are some desiring to speak who have not done so.

It is a good practice for the chairman to alternate speakers for an against a motion. If he does not know on which side members wishes to speak, he can ask, “For or against?” and should be guided accordingly. A member who seldom talks should be given preference over one who speaks frequently. Discussion should be strictly limited to the matter before the meeting.

The chairman has the right to speak on a motion, but should not make a practice of long speeches from the chair, or otherwise dominate the meeting so that the members fear to express their own opinions. It is best that the chairman speak only when he feels that there are certain implications in the motion, which have not been brought out by others, or feels that the matter is so important that he wants his position known before the vote is taken.

Amendments

Suppose the post is considering a motion, which the members would like to see, changed a little. That's the time when the amendment is used. The amendment may be offered at any time after the motion has been seconded and before the vote is taken. The mover of the amendment must get the floor in the same fashion as one wishing to speak on the motion, and the amendment must be seconded before it can be considered.

The maker of the amendment should state clearly what his amendment is, and to which section of the motion it applies. For Example, the body is acting on a motion that "a picnic be held on August 15, with tickets at \$1 a couple." The maker of an amendment wishing to change the date would say, "I make an amendment that the date of the picnic be August 22 instead of August 15."

No Amendment can be made which is directly contrary to the motion. For instance, an amendment not to hold a picnic would be out of order.

Amend the Amendment

Just as it is possible to amend a motion, so it is also possible to change an amendment. Suppose the motion is that "the executive committee investigate the possibility of organizing a new post in Smithville." An amendment might be made that "a special committee be appointed to investigate, etc." Some members might feel that the committee should be elected, and so would move "an amendment to the amendment, providing that the committee be elected."

That is far as the situation can go, for there can no amendment to an amendment to amendment. When during the discussion it would appear that neither the original motion, nor the motion as amended will be satisfactory, the best plan is to offer a "substitute for the

whole, “that is one motion to replace the original motion and the amendments.

It is important to note that while there can be an amendment to an amendment; there cannot be two amendments to a motion before the meeting at the same time. In the instance cited above, after the amendment had been made to appoint a special committee to make the investigation, it would be out of order to make another amendment asking, that the committee also investigate the possibilities of organizing another post. Once an amendment is before the body the discussion is limited to the amendment until it is disposed of. A chairman can sometimes save time by calling upon the maker of the motion and the second and asking whether they would be willing to accept the amendment as part of the original motion. If they agree, and no other members objects, this can be done, saving time and energy.

Voting

When it appears that there has been sufficient discussion, the chairman may say, “Are you ready for the question?” And if no one desires to speak the vote is taken. So long as anyone desires to debate the chairman himself cannot close the debate. This can only be done by a majority vote of the body (see “Previous Question”).

Before putting the matter to a vote, the chairman should make it clear just what the members are acting on—the motion, the amendment, the amendment to the amendment, or the motion as amended, as the case may be.

Amendment First

When a motion with an amendment is before the body, the vote on the amendment comes first. If the amendment is passed the body then acts upon the motion as amended. If the amendment is defeated, the vote then is on the original motion. Another amendment may be offered when the first has been disposed of.

When a “substitute for the whole” is offered voted upon first. “If adopted, the substitute then takes the place of the original motion, and be- comes subject to debate.

In certain cases it is not advisable to use the normal order for voting on amendments. There may be a motion to set up a committee of five, an amendment to make it seven, and an amendment of the amendment to fix the size three. The best procedure is to vote on the largest figure first,with next largest, and so on.

In most instances the members will first vote vocally by saying “Aye” or “No” in chorus with position seeming to have the most voices winning. The form is this: The Chair- man: “All those in favor of the motion say aye...those who opposed, no...the aye’s have it and it is so ordered.”

Show of Hands

When there is any doubt in the mind of the chairman or the membership as to which side has the majority, a vote should be taken by a show of hands. The phrase the chair- man uses are: “The chair is in doubt. We will vote by show of hands.” Any member may call for a vote by show of hands by calling “division” from his seat. The chair should grant this request.

In voting by show of hands the members raise their right hand as the chairman calls for the ayes and nos. If the group is a large one the chairman may appoint tellers who will count hands on each side. Otherwise the secretary and the chairman can do the counting. The hands should be counted unless the results are so obvious as to be without question. In large meetings voters are often asked to stand rather than to show hands.

Vote by Ballot

On very important question, such as elections, voting may be

by ballot, so that each member may keep his vote secret. Unless otherwise specified in the by-laws, a vote by secret ballot may be called by a majority of the members of the meeting; such a motion is not debatable. Tellers are chosen; who are responsible for distributing the ballots, seeing that the vote is correctly counted. They report the total to the chairman, who announces the results to the meeting.

The chairman has the right to vote when the vote is by ballot, or when his vote will affect the decision. Thus he may vote with minority to make a tie, and prevent the approval of a matter, or he may vote with the majority to break the tie, and provide the passage of a measure. Under no circumstances may he vote twice.

ACTING ON A MOTION

Let's try to fill in the outlines we have given of motions, amendments, discussion and voting, by taking an actual instance of a local post taking action on a problem that has been brought before it.

The Chairman: "Is there any new business?" AMVET Grady is given the floor.

"Mr. Chairman, we have a very nice post home here, but we don't make enough to use of it. What's the use of paying for a---"

Making the Motion First

The chairman interrupts, "AMVETS Grady, if you have any suggestion to make regarding the use of our home, please put them in the form of a motion. Unless there is a motion before the body you cannot speak."

"Then Mr. Chairman," says AMVET Grady, "I move that the commander appoint an educational committee to organize activities for our members in the home. The reasons why we need such a committee ---"

Getting the Second

Again the chairman interrupts. "Is there a second to the motion that I appoint an educational committee?" Several cries of "Second" are heard. "All right, AMVET Grady, now you may speak on your motion."

"I only wanted to say," Grady finally asserts, "that it's a shame to have a home as nice ours and not use it more regularly. At the same time, it's obvious that an educational committee could plan classes, and other affairs, which would be helpful to the post. It looks like I could use a class in parliamentary law myself."

An Amendment

AMVET Lucia gets the floor. “I agree with AMVET Grady that we ought to have an educational committee but I don’t see much point in renaming one unless we give it some money to spend. If we are going to have worth -while program we will have to be willing to pay for it. I, therefore, move to amend the motion that we appropriate \$200 for the use of the committee.”

“Is there a second to the amendment?” There is a cry of Second!”
“We will now discuss the amendment that we appropriate \$200 for the use of the educational committee. AMVET Ceneo.”

One thing at a time

“There are a lot of activities that we ought to start. For example, this post has never sponsored a dance which would benefit the members greatly ”

“Just a minute, AMVET Cuneo, you are out of order a dance is a fine idea, but this isn’t the time to discuss it. We are now deciding whether or not we should appropriate \$200 from the educational committee. AMVET Horn, did you want to speak?”

“Yes. I noticed that the motion doesn’t provide any size for the committee, so I would like to offer another amendment that the committee be composed of five members.”

“Only one amendment at a time, AMVET Horn, your amendment is out of order and cannot be accepted now. It is now proper only to offer an amendment to the amendment, such as that the amount to be voted be \$100 rather than \$200. Your amendment will be in order after we have acted on the present amendment.”

A confused murmuring arises in the hall. “Quiet please,” the chairmen calls out. AMVET Robinson is recognized. “I don’t think we should appropriate any money for the committee until we see

what plans they have. Let's wait until they report back to us the next meeting."

AMVET Schwartz arises.

"I don't want see why we want to bother with this educational business at all, after all it's ---"

Vote on the Amendment

The chairman: "AMVET Schwartz, you are out of order; you are talking on the main motion while we are discussing the amendment. Is there any further discussion on the amendment? There being none we shall vote on the amendment? There being none we shall vote on the committee. All in favor say aye...those opposed...no...the chair is in doubt. We will vote by a show of hands. We the adjutant please act as teller? All in favor of the amendment will please raise their hands...those opposed..."

The adjutant counts and turns the results over to the chair- man.

"The amendment is lost 76 to 60. The original motion is now before the house. AMVET horn, you may now make your motion as to the size of the committee."

AMVET Grady rises. "I'll accept the motion as part of my original motion."

"If there is no objection, the amendment will become part of the original motion. Is there any further discussion? We will now vote on the motion that the Commander appoint- ed an educational committee of five to organize activities for the post home. All those in favor say aye...opposed, no. The ayes have it and the motion is carried. I will name Grady, Horn, Stupek, Conrad, and O'Brien as members of the committee. (In some cases, the chairman may desire to name the committee at a later time after giving the matter some thought.) Is there any further new business?"

Keeping the Order

When a football player violates the rules the game he is penalized. In the same fashion a post member who does not abide by the parliamentary rules of the meeting finds himself unable to function.

You have seen how he may be restrained and prevented from making motions or amendments. If he persists in being out of order the chairman may have him removed from the hall.

However, the rules of parliamentary procedure are not all simple, and it is not likely that every member will know all of the fine points. Therefore, it is the duty of the presiding officer, the chairman, to see that the rules are lived up to by calling them to the attention of the members as they are violated or are needed.

Thus we have seen that he has forbidden a member to speak on a motion until it had been seconded, he has forced members to speak on the question before the house, has seen to it that only one motion was before the body at a time, and otherwise seen to it that the rules of procedure were lived up to.

The Point of Order

However, there are times when someone violates the rules without the chairman noticing it. Or else the chairman may make a ruling which is felt to be wrong. In such a case a member of the body may call it to the attention of the chair by raising a "point of order"

A member wishing to call the attention of the chair to some violation of the rules of order does so by standing up in his place and saying, "Mr. Chairman, a point of order." Or simply, "Point of order." He may do this even though he interrupts someone else who has the floor. The chairman must recognize him, and ask him what his point of order is. The form is this:

"Point of order, Mr. Chairman."

“What is your point of order?”

“AMVETS Smith is not speaking on the question before the body.”

“Your point is well taken. AMVET Smith, will you please confine your remark to the question before the house?”

Or if the chairman disagrees:

“Your point of order is not well taken. AMVET Smith’s remark have a direct bearing on the question before the body. You may proceed, AMVET Smith.”

It should be remembered that one of the worst enemies of a well-conducted meeting is the “point of order pest,” that is, the member who regards himself as the expert on the parliamentary procedure and looks for opportunities to prove it. It is much better to keep quiet when the chairman has missed a minor infraction of the rules than to disrupt the meeting.

A point of order is not:

An excuse to slow down a meeting.

A convenient way to interrupt a speaker.

An excuse to make a speech.

An excuse to criticize the chairman.

Appeal from the Decision of the Chair

In most instances the best thing a member can do when ruled out of order, or when his point of order is not recognized by the chair, is to keep quiet about it, and abide by the decision of the chairman. When, however, he feels that a grave injustice has been done him, or that the decision of the chairman was a definite violation of the rules of procedure, or that the best interests of the post will be served, the member has a right to “appeal from the decision of the chair,” and have the whole membership decide he or the chairman

was right.

The appeal can be taken only immediately after the ruling has been made. It may be made by the member called to order, or any other member. The member announces: "I appeal from the decision of the chair."

After discussion, if any, the question is put to a vote by the chair in this fashion:

"All those in favor of upholding the ruling of the chair, say aye...
Opposed, no...the chair is sustained."

Or if the vote is the other way: "The chair is overruled."

Immediately upon the decision of the appeal the business of the meeting is continued.

Point of Information

A member who feels that he needs certain information, either about the meaning of a motion, or its effect, or other facts to enable him to vote intelligently, has the right to ask for it at any time. He simply gets up and says, "Point of Information."

The chairman should recognize the questioner but he cannot interrupt another speaker. The questioner states his problem, and the chairman should answer it as well as he can. Sometimes the questioner desires information from another member. In such a case, the chairman should ask the one who had been speaking whether he will yield for the purpose of the question. He cannot be forced to do so. The questioner must address his question to the chair even though he want information from another member, thus:

"Mr. Chairman, I wonder if AMVET Jones can tell us how many World War II veterans work with him."

Parliamentary Inquiry

When the information that the member seeks has reference to the rules of parliamentary procedure this is known as a “parliamentary inquiry,” – for example: “Is it in order now to make a motion with reference to the problem of unemployed World War II veterans?”

The chairman’s answers to such questions do not constitute decisions which can be appealed. Only a decision he would make after such a motion had been brought up would be subject to appeal.

HOW TO DO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO

We have seen how a post acts in the normal course of events in dealing with motions and amendments. However, there are times when some unusual action is desired. This is accomplished by what is known in parliamentary law as “subsidiary” motions. They are intended primarily to help the handling of the business rather than to deal with it directly. Many of them differ from the motions for action which we have discussed in that they can interrupt a speaker, require no second, cannot be debated, or require more than a majority of the votes cast to be carried.

Prevent Something from Coming Before the Body “To Subject to the Consideration of a Question”

On occasion a motion is made which deals with a matter the very discussion of which, it is felt, will cause ill feeling or friction, or be otherwise harmful to the body. A member who feels this way will arise immediately after the motion has been made, but before discussion has started, and say, “Mr. Chairman, I object to the consideration of the question.”

The chairman must reply:

“There has been an objection to the consideration of this question. Will the assembly consider it?”

The matter is then immediately put to a vote. There can be no discussion. If two-thirds of the members vote against considering the question, then it cannot be brought up again during that meeting.

A member desiring to “object to the consideration of the question” may interrupt another speaker. No second is required for the objection. It should be remembered, however, that this motion should be used only in exceptional cases:

Take Back Something You Have Started

“Withdrawing a Motion”

After a motion has been made and seconded it becomes the property of the body, and cannot be withdrawn without its consent. The maker of the motion asks the chairman for permission to withdraw his motion, and the chairman puts the question before the members thus: “If there is no objection the motion will be withdrawn.” When an objection is raised the question of withdrawal must be put to a vote. It requires no second, cannot be debated, and requires a majority vote to pass.

Drop the Matter for the Present

“To Table” “To Lay on the Table” vs. Defer a Motion

This question confuses the motion to Lay on the Table with the motion to Postpone to a Certain Time. The purpose of the motion to Lay on the Table is to enable an assembly by majority vote and without debate, to lay the pending question aside temporarily when something else of immediate urgency has arisen or when something else needs to be addressed before consideration of the pending question as resumed. In ordinary societies it is rarely needed and hence seldom in the order. [RONR (12th ed.) 17. 1-24; see also p. 127 of RONR In Brief.]

A motion to table should only be made to take up a matter of more importance that needs to be handled immediately or to consider another matter that needs to be settled prior to the existing motion.

The proper procedure is to move to defer a motion. This can be a motion to defer to a particular time or date or to defer indefinitely. If it is deferred indefinitely the motion is effectively quashed.

The maker of the motion to table or defer, is recognized in the usual manner; upon being recognized he says: “I move to table

(defer) the motion.” The chairman then asks for a second, and if the motion is seconded, puts the question of tabling to a vote.

A motion which has been tabled can be “removed from the table” as soon as some other business has been transacted. A member making the motion “to remove from the table” is recognized in the usual manner, and again the question is decided without debate, and by a majority vote.

“To Limit Debate” “To Extend Debate”

Only by action of the members themselves can debate on a motion be stopped so long as some of the members desire to speak. The body, however, can limit the amount of debate which shall be allowed, or stop it altogether. Motions to do this are made in the usual fashion, require a second and are not debatable. They may be amended and are debatable only when they come before the body as a general rule for all questions.

Debate may be limited by setting a time when the motion before the house shall come to a vote, by limiting the number of speeches and the time for each speech, or by allotting a certain amount of time for each side of the question.

In the latter case, members on the same side may get together to divide the time. In some posts it is the practice to have a standing rule in the by-laws fixing the maximum amount of time that a member may speak on any motion. When there is a standing rule fixing the time for debate, or when the body has acted to limit debate, and it is found advisable that the time for debate be extended, this may be done by a motion similar to that limiting discussion. In both cases, the maker of the motion to limit or extend debate must get the floor in the usual manner, and cannot interrupt someone who has the floor.

Stop Discussion and Take a Vote

“The Previous Question”

When it is desired to cut off debate entirely, and come to a vote at once, the motion is the “previous question.”

For the “previous question” to be moved it is necessary for the mover to be recognized by the chairman in the usual manner. The motion requires a second, and like the motion to limit debate it is not debatable and requires a two-thirds vote. The form is “I move the previous question,” or “I move that we close debate and vote on the question.”

Immediately after the motion is made and seconded the chairman must put it to a vote thus: The previous question has been called for. Will those in favor say aye...opposed, no....”

In some organizations it is the practice to close debate when several members call out “Question” from their seats, showing that they are tired of the debate, and want to vote. This practice is proper in most cases, but should not be used when there are members who desire to speak.

Then the motion for the “previous question” is the proper one.

Change A Previous Decision of the Organization

A. “To Reconsider”

When it is felt that a body has acted hastily on some matter, or later events or new information indicate that the decision was unwise, the organization may decide to “reconsider” or “rescind” the action.

The motion to “reconsider” is used when it is desired to bring the whole matter up anew for discussion and action. It must be made on the same day that the vote to be reconsidered was taken. It must be made by someone who voted with the majority in the original

instance, but any member may second it. When the vote has been by secret ballot, any member may move to reconsider.

Updated August 2024