

Appendix C

Extracts from Robert's Rules of Order

ARTICLE XIX, Section 2 of the BYLAWS of The Military Order of the Purple Heart, states: *All Chapter, Department, National and Committee meetings of the Military Order of the Purple Heart of the USA, Inc., shall be conducted in accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, as revised ...*"

Following are some abbreviated notes from Robert's Rules of Order. These notes may be useful in conducting Chapter, Department or Committee business. When in doubt, always refer to a written copy of *Robert's Rules*, provided in your start-up kit.

Order of Precedence of Motions. These twelve motions have a fixed rank, the Order of Precedence, among themselves. When one of them is pending, any motion higher on the list is permitted, with a few rare specified exceptions. Any motion lower on the list is prohibited, except that to amend or to order the previous question on *an amendable higher-ranking motion* is permitted when the higher-ranking motion is pending. They are proposed in any upward sequence and put to vote in the opposite downward sequence.

- Adjourn
- Recess
- Raise a question of privilege
- Call for the order of the day
 - Lay on the table
 - Order the previous question (close debate)
 - Limit or extend limits of debate
 - Postpone indefinitely
 - Commit or refer
 - Amend
- Main motion

Introduction of Business. All business should be brought before a meeting by a motion of a member or by the presentation of a communication to the assembly. In many cases in the ordinary routine of business, however, it is not usual to make a motion. Instead, the chair specifies an action and announces that, if there is no objection, the action will be considered adopted.

Obtaining the Floor. Because business requires a motion, it is usually necessary for a member to make a motion, and before a member can make a motion or address the assembly on any motion, it is necessary that he obtain the floor. That is, he must obtain the right to speak.

When two or more members rise and address the chair at the same time, the chair must make a decision about which member to recognize, and he should serve the interests of the assembly by allowing the floor to alternate between the friends and enemies of a motion, if he knows them. Furthermore, the member upon whose motion the subject under consideration was brought before the assembly is entitled to be recognized as having the floor if he has not already had it during that consideration, and a member who has not spoken on the motion is entitled to be recognized in preference to one who has.

Motions. Before any subject is open to debate, three steps are necessary. First, a motion must be made. (A motion is a formal proposal by a member in a meeting that the assembly take certain action.) Second, the motion must be seconded by another member. Third, the motion must be stated by the chair.

Opening Debate. The chair opens debate on a debatable motion by saying, after his statement of the motion, “Are you ready for the question?” This language is simply an invitation to debate the motion and should not be taken as implying that the chair wants to vote on the motion immediately.

Main Motions. A motion that brings before an assembly, for its consideration, any particular subject independent of any other pending motion or parliamentary situation is a main motion.

Subsidiary Motions. Subsidiary motions are motions applied to other motions for the purpose of disposing of them. Any of these motions can be applied to the main motion, and some of them may be applied to other motions. The following are the subsidiary motions as they appear in the Order of Precedence:

- Lay on the table
- Order the previous question
- Limit or extend limits of debate
- Postpone indefinitely
- Commit or refer
- Amend

Incidental Motions. Incidental motions are motions that arise out of other motions and consequently must be decided before the motions that gave rise to them. The most common incidental motions are:

- Point of order
- Appeal
- Object to the consideration of a question
- Divide the question
- Divide the assembly
- Read papers
- Withdraw or modify a motion
- Suspend the rules

Privileged Motions. Privileged motions are given high rank because of their importance, taking precedence over most other motions (including all other motions in the order of precedence). They are not debatable, for otherwise their high rank would make them useful for unjustifiably consuming a large amount of time. They are only four in number and appear below in their order of precedence:

- Adjourn
- Recess
- Raise a question of privilege
- Call for the orders of the day

Raise a Question of Privilege. Questions relating to the rights and benefits of the assembly, or one or more of its members, are *questions of privilege*, and they take precedence over all other motions of fixed rank except to recess and to adjourn. They typically involve the comfort of members; ability to

hear speakers; conduct of officers, members, employees, and guests; or the accuracy of published reports or proceedings. A motion to close the meeting to all but members (that is, to go into executive session) is common example.

Point of Order or Appeal. A *Point of Order* is an assertion that a rule is being violated and a request that the rule be enforced by the chair. It takes precedence over any pending motion out of which it rises. It is in order when another has the floor, even if it is necessary to interrupt a speaker.

It does not require a second and is not debatable or amendable. It is decided by the chair, subject to appeal, and is not subject to reconsideration.

If a member objects to the chair's decision, he states, "I appeal from the decision of the chair." If the appeal is seconded, the chair defines the issue involved, explains the reasons for his decision, and asks, "Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?" An appeal is debatable unless it relates to a lack of decorum or a violation of the rules of speaking, relates to the priority of business, or is made while the immediately pending question is not debatable. If it is debatable, no member may speak more than once in debate, but the chair may defend his ruling once again at the end of the debate. An appeal is not amendable. A majority vote or a tie vote sustains the chair's decision, even if the chair votes to make a tie.

Suspend the Rules. This motion is to render *temporarily* ineffective one or more rules of order or standing rules. It cannot have an effect beyond adjournment of the meeting. It requires a second, is not debatable or amendable, cannot have any subsidiary motion applied to it, and requires a two-thirds vote if applied to a rule of order and a majority vote if applied to a standing rule. It cannot be reconsidered. Rules contained in the Bylaws cannot be suspended unless they provide for their own suspension.

Lay on the Table. The motion to *lay on the table* (or to *table a motion*) is to remove the main motion from consideration and entrust it to the care of the secretary until its consideration is resumed by the assembly at an unspecified future time. It takes precedence over all other subsidiary motions and yields to privileged and other motions. It is not in order when another member has the floor, it requires a second, is not debatable, requires a majority vote for adoption, and cannot be reconsidered.

The object of the motion is to postpone the main motion in such a way that at a future time it can be taken up when the assembly wishes rather than at a specific time set in advance. If adopted, it delays consideration not only of the main motion, but of any amendments and other motions that must be decided before the main question can be decided.

Amend. The motion to *amend*, that is, to change the words of a pending motion, is one of the most important in all parliamentary law, but takes precedence of nothing but the motion that it proposes to amend. It is not in order when another member has the floor, it requires a second, and is debatable. An amendment is amendable, but an amendment to an amendment is not amendable.