

ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

A Quick Overview for the Mountain Sky Area

Guiding Principles

- Only one thing may be discussed at a time.
- Each topic may be discussed only once.
- Some things may interrupt other things for the good of the whole.
- Everyone has the right to participate in discussion.
- Everyone has the right to know what is going on.
- Everyone has the right to expect things will be done in an orderly fashion.
- Both the right of the majority to get things done and the right of the minority to be heard are respected and protected.

Motions

All "motions" propose some form of action for an assembly to consider. The basic form of the motion – the only one whose introduction brings business before the assembly – is called a "main motion." Other motions may come in dialogue with the main motion or because of special circumstances and help the assembly do its work. "Petitions" are proposed main motions that will be considered during the course of the meeting.

Precedence

Sometimes for the good of the whole, in order for everyone's rights to be protected, some motions may be considered before other motions. These motions can "precede" or "go before" something else and so are said to have "precedence" (*/pree-SEED-ence/*). When a motion with precedence is adopted, the main motion and all other pending motions are included in that action.

Amendments

Revisions to a motion may be made in many forms. The most common form is to delete something and replace it with something else. Special rules apply to some forms of amendments, and not all motions are amendable. No more than two levels of amendments – an amendment to an amendment – can be pending at any one time. Amendments that create the equivalent of a "no vote" on the main motion or would cause the main motion to be out of order are improper. After the assembly has voted that certain words shall, or shall not, form part of the pending resolution, it is not in order to make another motion to amend that raises the same question of content and effect.

Germane

An amendment must always be "germane" – that is, closely related to or having bearing on the subject to be amended. No new subject can be introduced under the pretext of being

an amendment. An amendment may be germane to the topic at hand even if it is contrary to the original intent of the motion.

Previous Question

A member recognized by the Chair may ask to end debate on a certain topic by moving the "Previous Question." If adopted, all further debate on the pending question is concluded and the assembly proceeds directly to a vote by the rules of precedence. This motion may include just the pending motion ("previous question") or everything pending including the main motion ("previous question on all that is before us").

2/3 Vote

Most motions require a simple majority of those present and voting ("half plus one") for adoption. However, motions that deny or restrict the rights of all members to full discussion and may restrict the minority's right to present its case such as "suspend the rules," "limit or extend debate," or "previous question" must pass with 2/3 of those present and voting.

Special Annual Conference Rule: Consensus

"Consensus" does not necessarily mean that everybody agrees. Rather, it is that state where those who disagree choose not to impede the intent of those who do agree. Our conference defines "consensus" as 80% of those present and voting. The threshold of consensus applies to Consent Calendars and to those petitions speaking on behalf of the conference to a regional or national body or organization.

Lay on the Table

The motion to "Lay on the Table" has high precedence because it allows the assembly to temporarily set aside one conversation in order to attend to another matter. Laying something on the table does not end conversation on a pending question. It is merely suspended until a more opportune moment. Members desiring to end conversation on a pending question without a vote may move to "Postpone Indefinitely."

Point of Personal Privilege

A "Point of Personal Privilege" gives a member the opportunity to say something to the assembly that ordinarily would not be in order. Typically used to address urgent or intolerable circumstances hindering a member's participation in the assembly, a "point of personal privilege" can also be heart-felt speeches expressing the distress or joy of the member. A "Point of Personal Privilege" is not a free speech in the legislative process or an opportunity to gather support for a particular point of view.

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February 2018