

# GAVEL POWER

## **“THE CHAIR”**

*Chair* refers to the *person* presiding in a meeting or to the *station* from which the presiding officer presides

Presiding officer - called *chairman* when no special title (e.g. *president*) has been assigned

Address chair as Mr/Madam President (Title) or Mr/Madam Chairman

Term *chair* is not an abbreviation for word *chairman*

## **PRESIDING PROTOCOL**

### **Use of the gavel**

One rap when calling meeting to order, to signal recess or adjournment, for slight breaches of order

No such thing as “gaveling through” a measure

### **When to stand**

While calling meeting to order or declaring it adjourned

While putting a question to a vote

When explaining reasons for the chair’s ruling on a point of order

When speaking during debate on an appeal or a point of order that chair has submitted to the judgment of the assembly

### **When to be seated**

While a member is speaking in debate (if view between presiding officer and members would be obstructed, step back during member’s speech)

### **May stand or be seated**

At other times as presiding officer finds convenient; for commanding assembly’s attention and preserving order provided that when seated he can see all present.

### **When to turn chair over to Vice-President**

When a motion commends or censures him

To participate in debate; may not return until pending motion has been disposed of

## **DUTIES OF THE PRESIDING OFFICER**

- To call meeting to order (at appointed time) after determining a quorum is present
- To announce the business in proper sequence
- To recognize members who are entitled to the floor
- To state and put to a vote all questions that legitimately come before assembly as motions and to announce the result of each vote
- To protect the assembly from frivolous or dilatory motions
- To enforce rules of debate and those relating to order
- To expedite business in every way compatible with rights of members
- To decide all questions of order, subject to appeal
- To respond to inquiries relating to parliamentary procedure or factual information bearing on business of assembly
- To authenticate by signature when necessary all acts, orders, proceedings of the assembly
- To declare the meeting adjourned when assembly so votes, at time prescribed in the program, or in event of a sudden emergency

## **PLAN AN EFFICIENT MEETING**

### **Choose best agenda for your particular meeting**

Can be traditional or priority. (May include "consent" items)

No need to call on people who are not reporting

Traditional agenda – MRS SUN (Minutes, Reports of Officers and Standing Committees, Special Committees, Special Orders, Unfinished Business, New Business )

Priority agenda – placing items on agenda in order of priority

### **Control the agenda**

Adopt meeting rules

Approved agenda can be changed by 2/3 vote (Suspend the Rules)

### **Bring Bylaws/Standing Rules, Parliamentary Authority, list of standing/ special committees**

### **Script the meeting if inexperienced or insecure.**

### **Knowledge is strength – Strive to know more than other members**

Before debate

Make sure motion is seconded

Make sure chair has stated motion

Before vote

Make sure assembly understands both motion and effect

Announce the result

Announce next pending question or business

## **ATTITUDE OF THE CHAIR**

Overbearing chair affects behavior of assembly

Be pleasant, firm, calm

Be impartial

Chair should speak in third person and not allow members to speak directly to each other.

Maintain decorum. Interrupt unruly behavior.

Tools: Make sure audio system works and is adequate

Make sure room is comfortable

Do not share presiding podium

Do not take things personally

Keep sense of humor

Know when to call a recess

## **ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENTARIAN**

Parliamentarian advises. Chair rules.

Sits next to presiding officer

Directs legal questions to an attorney

A member of assembly who acts as parliamentarian has same duty to maintain a position of impartiality as presiding officer

No power, no vote except by ballot

If member parliamentarian in small organization, possible Standing Rule: "A member appointed as parliamentarian may have full participation in the meeting, including but not exclusive to, debate and votes by voice or roll call."

## **PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING A MAIN MOTION**

1. Obtaining and assigning the floor
  - A member rises when no one else has the floor and addresses the chair: “Mr/Madam President,” “Mr/Madam Chairman,”
  - The chair recognizes the member by announcing his name or title, or in small assembly by nodding to member
2. How the motion is brought before the assembly
  - The member makes the motion: “I move that (or to)...” and resumes his/her seat.
  - Another member, without rising, seconds the motion: “Second.”
  - The chair states the question on the motion (TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP OF THE MOTION): “It is moved and seconded that ... Is there debate?”
3. Consideration of the motion
  - Members can debate the motion
    - i. Before speaking in debate, members obtain the floor as above
    - ii. The maker of the motion has first right to the floor if claimed promptly
    - iii. All remarks must be addressed through the chair
    - iv. Debate must be confined to the merits of the motion
    - v. Debate can be closed only by order of the assembly (2/3 vote) or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate
  - The chair puts the question to a vote
    - i. “Are you ready for the question?” If no one rises to claim the floor.....
    - ii. The chair says: “The question is on the adoption of the motion that ... Those in favor of the motion, say Aye. (Pause) Those opposed, say No. (Pause)
  - The chair announces the result of the vote.
    - i. “The ayes have it, the motion is adopted, and ... (indicating effect)” or
    - ii. “The noes have it and the motion is lost.”

## **MAINTAINING ORDER**

### **Additional basic rules of order**

No member may speak twice until all members who have not spoken have the opportunity  
No member may speak more than twice to the same question on the same day (also 10 minute rule in RONR)  
Chair alternates pro and con in debate  
Decorum shall prevail (no cross talk)

### **Decorum in debate**

Refrain from attacking member’s motives or using offensive language  
Refrain from speaking against one’s own motion  
Avoid use of member’s names  
Refrain from speaking adversely on a prior action, not pending  
Reading from reports, quotation, etc. only without objection or with permission  
Be seated during interruption by the chair  
Refrain from disturbing the assembly – walking, talking, whispering  
Out of order to call out motion to adjourn or lay pending question on table when a member has been assigned the floor  
If someone calls “Question”, it is duty of chair to protect rights of member who has floor  
Chair’s authority and duty is to maintain order. Adjourn if disorder prevails.

### **Response of chair to slight breaches:**

“Debate must be germane to pending question.”

“The member’s time has expired. Thank you.”

“The member will be in order. Please refrain from referring to a member’s motives.”

To dilatory motions of all kinds: “The motion is not in order at this time.”

### **INTERRUPTIONS**

**Point of Order** – calls attention to a breach of a rule at the time

- Response: “Point is (not) well taken.” Chair’s response becomes a ruling.

**Appeal from a Decision of the Chair** – member challenges ruling. (requires second)

- Response: “Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?”

**Point of Information** – must be a question, not a speech. Chair’s response is not a ruling.

- Response: “The member will state the question.”

**Point of Inquiry** – must be a question on procedures, not a speech. Chair’s response is not a ruling.

- Response: “The member will state the inquiry.”

**Raise a Question of Privilege** – urgency due to safety, health, integrity, protection

- Response: “A question of privilege (of the assembly or personal) has been raised.”

**Division of Assembly** – demand a standing vote to verify voice vote (no second required)

- Response: “A division is called for. (e.g. All those in favor, please rise; etc.)”

**Call for Orders of the Day** – stick to agenda (no second required)

- Response: “The Orders of the Day are called for. (e.g. It is now 11:30 a.m. and the agenda has scheduled a recess for that time. We are in recess.)”

**Requests – Withdraw a Motion, Read papers, Excused from Duty, etc.**

- Response: “If there is no objection, the member may ...”

**RULINGS AND APPEALS** – Wise presiding officers welcome challenge on ruling because when appealed, the ruling is decided by vote and may not be further appealed. It becomes the assembly’s ruling, not the chair’s.

Members have no right to criticize the chair’s ruling. Appeal it.

Appeal must be made at time of breach, unless it is a continuing breach.

Rulings of assembly are final and cannot be appealed.

### **THE ASSEMBLY HAS RIGHTS**

Order

Equality

Majority rule

Minority heard

Debate

Information

Individuals protected – quorum and notice

Fairness and good faith

Taken together.....

***Members are not controlled by, but have a choice over,  
the rules by which they will be bound. Jon Ericson***