

Parliamentary Procedure 101

When I read that a hired gun ran a meeting until 3:00 am because he didn't know that a tie vote does have finality, I thought it might be helpful and interesting to have a guy in town who is not only schooled in parliamentary procedure but actually has access to a descendent of the original General Henry Martyn Robert of Robert's Rules of Order renown write some material on how poorly run city council meetings are and what the consequences could be. Each issue for awhile, I'll offer up some of his comments:

A mayor and city attorney without a clue about basic parliamentary procedure

STATING THE QUESTION

How is a motion formally placed before an assembly/council?

Not by the reading of the title, not by the making of the motion, not by the motion being seconded, and not by just anybody.

Only the presiding officer can place a motion before the assembly.

Until he does so, the maker of the motion has the right to modify his motion as he pleases or withdraw it entirely.

The motion becomes the property of the assembly when the presiding officer *states the question*; that is, he states the exact motion and indicates that it is open to debate.

Failing to state the question can be considered misconduct and can result in the presiding officer being deposed (removed from office suddenly and forcefully).

I SO MOVE

How many times have you heard "I so move" at a meeting?

Nothing fills the chest of a politician with pride like uttering "I so move!"

"Hey, they say it in the movies and TV and that's where I learned parliamentary procedure."

Mmm, mmm, mmm, "I so move."

Problem is, "I so move" is rarely used in the concise, unambiguous, and complete form required for a motion.

It is typically based on something said in informal consultation. It is to be avoided.

"I so move!"

You so move what?

"What she said!"

And what, pray tell, was that?

"Oh you know ..."

Actually, I don't.

"Well, I will leave it to the Clerk to figure it out."

Great ...

Motions have to be made or presented in a wording intended to become the assembly's official statement of the action taken. No presiding officer can accept less.

How cool would it be to hear a mayor say, "we have before you a motion to *I so move*." One can only imagine the quality of what would follow.

Can the public reading of the title of a proposed ordinance count as a motion?

The public reading of the title is no more a motion than the title of a book is the content of the book.

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