

call to order

The Most Commonly Misused Motion

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Very often a member of a body will move to *Table* an item when they want to kill or delay indefinitely. The motion is out of order. The correct terminology is to *Lay on the Table*. It is the most misused of all motions.

The motion to *Lay on the Table* temporarily sets the matter aside with the intent to take the matter up later in the meeting.

When you are in the middle of debate on a motion and a question is asked of a department head that needs time to get the information, rather than wait, move to *Lay on the Table*. Or, if you are in the middle of debate and reach the hour where you have a public hearing scheduled, move to *Lay on the Table*. In both situations the intent is to take the matter up later in the meeting.

Before the chair accepts a motion to *Lay on the Table*, the chair must fully understand the intent. If it is to kill or delay indefinitely then the chair must rule the motion out of order.

The motion to *Lay on the Table* is out of order when someone else has the floor, must be seconded, is not debatable, is not amendable and requires a majority vote.

When the body is ready to resume discussion on the matter, the proper motion is to *Take from the Table* with the same rules applying as *Lay on the Table*.

If the intent is to kill or delay indefinitely then the proper motion is to *Postpone Indefinitely*. The motion to *Postpone Indefinitely* kills the motion and avoids the members taking a direct vote on the matter. It can be used to dispose of poorly drafted, ill-advised, or embarrassing motions where members would rather not be recorded as voting aye or nay on the matter.

The *Postpone Indefinitely* motion can also be used to test the strength of a proposal. Say you are debating a motion that is divisive, you do not know where the votes are, you have amendments to make it more acceptable but you do not want to make the amendments because you are opposed, move to *Postpone Indefinitely*. If the motion passes, the matter is dead and you have won. If it does not pass, you now know where the votes are and can decide if you want to make your amendments.

The motion to *Postpone Indefinitely* is out of order when someone else has the floor, must be seconded, is debatable, is not amendable and requires a majority vote.

If the intent is to delay action on a main motion then the proper motion is to *Postpone to a Certain Time*. The motion just to *Postpone* is out of order. The motion must be to a time specific, such as a definite day, meeting, hour or until after a certain event. For example, a proper motion would be to *Postpone until the next meeting*, *Postpone until after the finance committee has acted*, or *Postpone after June 1*.

The motion to *Postpone to a Certain Time* is out of order when someone else has the floor, must be seconded, is debatable, is amendable and requires a majority vote.

Adopting a motion to *Lay on the Table* when the intent is to kill or delay deprives the body of its most basic right to debate the matter, which is allowed with the motions to *Postpone Indefinitely* and *Postpone to a Certain Time*. It also deprives the body of the ability to *Amend*, which is allowed with the motion to *Postpone to a Certain Time*.

I now move to *Postpone discussion on parliamentary procedure until the March 2015 edition of Wisconsin Counties magazine*; do I hear a second?