

call to order

Suspend the Rules

—J. Michael Blaska, Parliamentarian & Chief of Staff,
Wisconsin Counties Association



It is unwise for an assembly or society to function without formally adopted rules of order. Every government body or societal organization should adopt rules of procedure or agree to follow *Robert's Rules of Order*. Rules are important to the smooth functioning of the assembly and to provide a firm basis for resolving questions of conflict. However, there are occasions where it may be prudent to suspend the rules. Whenever a body wants to do something that is prohibited by its rules it may adopt a motion to *Suspend the Rules*.

The motion to *Suspend the Rules* can be made at any time when no question is pending. It can also be

made when business is pending if it directly affects the business at hand.

The motion is out of order when another member has the floor, must be seconded, is not debatable and is not amendable. The motion requires a two-thirds vote and may not be reconsidered.

Reasons for suspending the rules might include taking up agenda items out of their proper order, allowing members to speak again if they have exceeded their allotted time and allowing members of the public to address the board that otherwise might be prohibited from doing so.

JAN 25
2016



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DATE



Educational SEMINAR

THE COUNTY BOARD ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

10:00 a.m. • Holiday Inn Convention Center, Stevens Point

After the county board elections in April 2016, Wisconsin's county boards are required by statute to meet on the third Tuesday of April to "organize and transact business." In preparation for this pivotal post-election meeting, the Wisconsin Counties Association will conduct an educational seminar *The County Board Organizational Meeting* on January 25, 2016 in Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

This seminar will cover in detail the election of officers, adoption of the county board's procedural rules, and

county board organization. Topics also include the number of committees, how they are appointed and how the officers are selected; resolutions and how they are introduced and processed; and, agendas and who is responsible for them and how items get on the agenda. Ample time will be dedicated to county officials' questions.

Save the date to attend this not-to-be-missed educational seminar. Register today online at www.wicounties.org/events. Watch for a more detailed agenda to be available soon.

A member wishing to suspend the rules simply obtains the floor, moves to suspend the rules and states the purpose. There is no need to state the rule that is being suspended. If the chair feels that everyone is in support, the chair can state, “If there is no objection?” and if there is none then the action is allowed.

All procedural rules can be suspended with unanimous consent with some exceptions. Under no circumstances can rules contained in bylaws or a constitution be suspended. No applicable procedural rule prescribed by federal, state or local law can be suspended unless the prescribed law provides for it. Additionally, fundamental principles of parliamentary law, such as the rule that permits only one question (the main motion) to be considered at one time, cannot be suspended.

It is a good idea to incorporate all procedural rules into county ordinance and then include a provision for all other rules the body will follow

Robert’s Rules of Order. The county ordinance should also include, among other things, how the board is organized, naming the officers and committees and their duties and responsibilities.

Can procedural rules of order, incorporated into county ordinance be suspended? Yes, if clearly stated that the motion to *Suspend the Rules* is incorporated as one of the rules or if there is a provision that states for all other procedural rules the body will follow *Robert’s Rules of Order.*

There are times when the rules are suspended without going through the formal process. Sometimes a body will adopt a motion then realize after the fact that the motion was never seconded. Does not seconding the motion invalidate the action? No, because no one raised the issue at the time, not the chair nor the members, so it must be assumed that it was okay.

Another rule that cannot be suspended? Reading *Call to Order.*

Source: Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised, 11th Edition

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