

# call to order

## *Point of Order*

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



The duties of the chair are numerous. They include announcing issues, recognizing members, restating the motion, calling for and announcing the vote, just to name a few. Paramount in those responsibilities is enforcing the rules relating to debate, order and decorum. It is the chair's job to make sure the meeting runs smoothly and fairly.

However, keeping the peace is not limited to the chair, everyone in the meeting shares in that responsibility. When a member feels the rules of the assembly are being violated, he or she can make a *Point of Order*. Making a *Point of Order* is calling upon the chair for a ruling and enforcement of the rules.

A member makes the *Point of Order* by simply rising and addressing the chair by stating, "I rise to a *Point of Order*" or "*Point of Order* Mr. or Madame chair." A member need not be recognized by the chair and may interrupt a speaking member. It does not require a second and cannot be amended.

The motion takes precedence over any pending issue. No other subsidiary motion can be made, except the motion to *Lay on the Table*, until the *Point of Order* is disposed of. It can be applied to any violation of the body's rules. It is not debatable, however the member making the *Point of Order* must be allowed to explain his point.

Once the member has provided an explanation, the chair must rule on the matter. The chair can agree with the member and state, "The *Point of Order* is well taken" or "is not well taken," briefly stating the reasons. The chair may consult a parliamentarian

or more experienced members of the board. If the chair is in doubt, the matter can be referred to the body where the matter is decided by a majority vote. If referred to the body the matter becomes debatable. No one has the right to express their opinion unless requested by the chair.

Every member who feels a rule has been violated has the right to insist on its enforcement. If a member is unsure if there is a violation, he or she may make a *Parliamentary Inquiry* of the chair. A *Parliamentary Inquiry* may be requesting information from the chair on the body's rules. Members should be careful not to raise *Points of Order* on minor infractions when no one's rights are being violated and no real harm is being done to the transaction of business.

A *Point of Order* should be raised at the time the violation occurs. As an example, if debate has begun on a motion where there was no second, it is too late to raise a *Point of Order*. Once debate has begun it is assumed that a second was not necessary because no one raised the issue at the time. By consensus, the body allowed the motion to move forward without a second.

However, it is never too late to raise a *Point of Order* if the infraction violates federal state and/or local laws, constitution or bylaws, previously adopted motions or a fundamental principle of parliamentary law.

Stay tuned for next month's *Call to Order*, which will address the process for appealing the decision of the chair.

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