

**Extension to
Communities**



**Simplified
Parliamentary
Procedure**

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

Effective Meetings — Simplified Parliamentary Procedure

“We must learn to run a meeting without victimizing the audience; but more importantly, without being victimized by individuals who are armed with parliamentary procedure and a personal agenda.” — www.calweb.com/~laredo/parlproc.htm

Parliamentary procedure. Sound complicated? Controlling? Boring? Intimidating? Why do we need to know all those rules for conducting a meeting? Why can't we just run the meetings however we want to? Who cares if we follow parliamentary procedure?

How many times have you attended a meeting that ran on and on and didn't accomplish anything? The meeting jumps from one topic to another without deciding on anything. Group members disrupt the meeting with their own personal agendas. Arguments erupt. A few people make all the decisions and ignore everyone else's opinions. Everyone leaves the meeting feeling frustrated. Sound familiar? Then a little parliamentary procedure may just be the thing to turn your unproductive, frustrating meetings into a thing of beauty — or at least make them more enjoyable and productive.

What is Parliamentary Procedure?

Parliamentary procedure is a set of well proven rules designed to move business along in a meeting while maintaining order and controlling the communications process. Its purpose is to help groups accomplish their tasks through an orderly, democratic process. Parliamentary procedure is not intended to inhibit a meeting with unnecessary rules or to prevent people from expressing their opinions. It is intended to facilitate the smooth functioning of the meeting and promote cooperation and harmony among members.

The rules of parliamentary procedure are guidelines, not hard and fast laws. Robert's Rules of Order, the most commonly used system of parliamentary procedure, is more than 300 pages. There are many aspects of parliamentary procedure which you will never use. Pick and choose what best fits the task at hand.

This booklet takes a “practical” approach to parliamentary procedure. We relax the rules a little in order to make meetings a little more spontaneous and social. For a stricter interpretation of parliamentary procedure, you may want to refer to one of the reference books or Web sites listed at the end of this booklet.

When is Parliamentary Procedure Necessary?

Formal rules of procedure usually become more important as groups become larger or more diverse, issues become more controversial or complex, or the stakes involved become more significant. Procedural rules should always be seen as a means to an end, not an end in themselves. The important thing is for the group to remain focused on its objectives and reach decisions while allowing everyone to participate and be heard. A small group may be able to work effectively without any formal rules if no one tries to dominate the meeting and members treat each other's viewpoints with respect.

Principals of Parliamentary Procedure

Parliamentary procedure is based upon a few simple principles:

- Only one issue can be discussed at a time.
- All members have equal and basic rights — the right to vote, the right to be heard, and the right to oppose.
- The rights of the minority must be protected.
- No member can speak until recognized by the chairperson.
- Every member can speak to the issue on the floor; however, no one can speak a second time as long as another wants to speak a first time.
- A majority vote decides an issue.
- The chairperson is strictly impartial.

The Chairperson

The chairperson has the success or failure of the meeting riding on his or her shoulders. He or she should be thoroughly familiar with all the business to be dealt with at the meeting, including committee reports and business held over from previous meetings. The chairperson must be sensitive to the physical, informational, and social needs of the members.

Under the rules of parliamentary procedure, the chairperson has absolute control over the meeting. No one can speak without being recognized by the chairperson. This power comes with a great deal of responsibility. The chair must at all times conduct the meeting impartially and stay on top of the agenda. She or he must be familiar with parliamentary procedure in order to keep the discussion moving and know when to take a vote without someone having to “call for the question.”

Order of Business — The Agenda

The chair is usually responsible for preparing the agenda (the items of business to be discussed) and distributing it to the members well in advance of the meeting. The members have the responsibility to propose agenda items to the chair before the meeting. The exact details and order of the agenda should be decided by the group. The following is a typical format.

- Call to Order
- Roll Call (if appropriate)
- Adoption of the Agenda
- Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting
- Reports of Officers (listed)
- Reports of Committees (listed)
- Unfinished Business (listed)
- New Business (listed)
- Announcements (listed)
- Adjournment

Agenda

Call to Order: The chairperson begins the meeting at the published time by saying something such as “The meeting will now come to order.”

Roll Call: Roll call is a legal requirement for some local government boards and commissions. The minutes must list the names of those present and absent. Some boards and commissions have taken the additional step of indicating in the minutes the time late members arrive (it helps get people there on time!). The meeting secretary usually conducts the roll call. Civic organizations and community groups may not need to record members present by taking roll call.

Adoption of the Agenda: It is a good practice to send members a copy of the tentative agenda in advance of the meeting so they can prepare for the meeting. If this is not possible, the tentative agenda should be given to the members when they arrive at the meeting. A meeting without an agenda usually ends up as no meeting at all!

Many official government bodies are required to publicize their agendas by informing the news media and posting agendas in a public place prior to the meeting. Government bodies should never add potentially controversial items to the agenda after it is published.

When the meeting starts, the chairperson should ask if anyone has items to place on the agenda. After these have been added, the chair should call for a motion to adopt the agenda. A member should, “Move that the agenda be adopted.” A second is required. A simple majority vote restricts the business of the meeting to the items listed on the agenda. After the agenda has been adopted, it takes a two-thirds majority vote to change it.

Less formal community groups don’t need to formally adopt the agenda. If an agenda is approved by majority vote, however, it can only be changed by a formal motion to do so. This prevents members from introducing new business without prior warning.

Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting: Reading meeting minutes during the meeting is a time waster. Minutes should be sent out (with the agenda) for members to read prior to the meeting. Unless there is a disagreement regarding the minutes, it is not necessary for a motion or a vote to accept the minutes. The chairperson can simply declare them approved. “Are there any additions or corrections to the minutes?” If there are no corrections, the chairperson can say, “There being no corrections to the minutes of (date) meeting, the minutes are approved as printed (or “ . . . approved as amended”).

Reports of Officers: Typically the officers will make brief reports on the group's business that has transpired since the last meeting. These may include the treasurer, secretary, chairperson, vice chairperson, publicity chairperson, etc. If the officers do not have any information to report, they should not be listed on the agenda. The chairperson should not have to ask each officer if he or she has anything to report.

The annual treasurer's report should have a motion to adopt, a second, and a vote. Monthly treasurer's reports do not necessarily need to be officially adopted but should be part of the official minutes of the meeting. If a treasurer's report has not been audited or reviewed, it may be wise for the organization to simply record the report in the minutes rather than officially approve it.

Reports of Committees: Prior to the meeting, the chairperson should check with any committees to see what progress they are making and to find out if they want time on the agenda to make a report. When possible, committee reports should be written. To make the secretary's job easier, written reports may be attached later to the meeting's minutes.

After the committee chairperson has made a few comments and answered questions about the report, motions may be received from the floor dealing with the substance of the report. A second is required for any action. Note, however, that a committee's report need not be adopted. An affirmative vote on a motion to adopt the whole report has the effect of endorsing every word of the report. More frequently, a motion will pertain to some specific action recommended by the report and not deal with the whole report itself.

The chair may want to wait until all committee reports have been given before allowing any motions to be made on any of the recommendations. One committee's recommendations may affect the recommendations of another committee.

Unfinished Business (list of items): Items pending from previous meetings are called "old" or "unfinished" business. The chairperson may want to provide a brief history of the item or call upon someone else to do it.

New Business (list of items): "New business is now in order." Items listed under "new business" will be discussed in the order they appear on the agenda. Items not on the agenda cannot be discussed unless the agenda is amended. Amending the agenda requires a motion, a second, and a two-thirds vote.

Announcements (list of items): Frequently members and committee chairs will want to make special announcements. The chairperson should call on people to make announcements in the order listed on the agenda. Strictly speaking, if the item is not on the agenda, the person should not be allowed to make an announcement.

Adjournment: When the last agenda item is reached, the chairperson should entertain a motion to adjourn the meeting. Someone will "move to adjourn." A second is required. The motion cannot be amended or discussed. A simple majority vote is required for passage. If passed, the chairperson announces that the meeting is officially adjourned. Bang the gavel, if you have one.

Quorum of Members

The by-laws of a board or organization should specify the number of members that must be present at a meeting in order to officially conduct business. This minimum number of members is called a quorum. A quorum should be small enough to allow the organization to conduct its business, but not so small that a minority of members can pass motions that do not represent the opinions of the majority. Typically, a quorum is one person more than half the total membership. Without a quorum, no official business can be transacted.

Motions

Nearly all business conducted during a meeting begins with a motion. A motion requires two people — a “mover” and a “second.”

“I move that we accept the treasurer’s report of June 3, 1999, as amended.”

“I second that motion.”

Strictly speaking, a motion must be made and seconded before any discussion on the topic can begin. In practical terms, a preliminary discussion frequently occurs prior to the actual motion being made. This gives people time to formulate some opinions and ideas before making the formal motion. This can result in a more precisely worded motion. A lot of time is wasted at meetings trying to get the proper wording for a motion. Motions should be short, precise, and in writing. Departing from strict parliamentary procedure is the chairperson’s decision. Care must be taken not to let the meeting get out of control with a wandering discussion prior to a motion being made.

The Steps of A Motion

1. A member is recognized by the chairperson to speak.
2. The member makes a motion: “I move that”
3. The chairperson asks if there is a second to the motion.
4. The chairperson recognizes a member who wants to second the motion.
5. The member “seconds the motion.”
6. The chairperson repeats the motion exactly as stated. (In practical terms, the chairperson often rewords the motion for clarity with the consent of the person who made the motion and the person who seconded it.)
7. The chairperson opens the floor for discussion. It is customary to allow the person making the motion to speak first and to make closing remarks after everyone else has had a chance to speak. Members may speak on the issue after being recognized by the chair. A member may not speak a second time on the issue until all other members have had an opportunity to speak a first time.
8. When everyone has had an opportunity to speak, the chairperson should restate the motion and conduct a vote (voice vote, show of hands, ballot, stand up, roll call), counting those in favor and against. “All in favor of the motion say ‘aye.’” “All opposed, say ‘no.’” Most motions are decided by the majority of the votes cast. The results of the vote should be announced to the group.

Seconding The Motion: Is It Always Necessary?

The underlying reason for requiring motions to be seconded is to make sure the group doesn’t waste time discussing something favored by only one person. Therefore, the chair may ignore this step when dealing with routine non-controversial motions or motions that clearly have significant support among the members (unless the organization is required by rule to identify the person who seconds a motion.) Small groups or committees may decide to completely eliminate any requirement for a second.

Debating (Discussing) A Motion

“No one is to disturb another in his speech by hissing, coughing, spitting, speaking or whispering to another.” —Thomas Jefferson

The chairperson must insure that the ensuing discussion pertains only to the motion on the table. She or he needs to keep the meeting focused on the business at hand and keep everyone clear on exactly what is (and isn't) being discussed.

Before anyone can speak, they must be recognized by the chairperson. Everyone should have a chance to speak before anyone is given the opportunity to speak a second time. A big part of the chairperson's job will be clarifying thoughts and ideas and helping people restate what they mean.

Often an item will come up in the discussion that is important but not strictly related to the motion on the floor. The chairperson has the right to call it “out of order” and not discuss it. Remember, though, that you're meeting to conduct the business of the organization. The chairperson may take a straw poll to determine if the members would rather move to discussing the new point. Sometimes it is best to discuss several alternatives at one time in order to come up with the best solution. Be flexible in order to accomplish the task at hand.

The chairperson should make sure everyone has had an opportunity to speak before ending the discussion and taking the vote. Frequently a member will “call for the question” if he or she thinks the discussion should end and a vote be taken. It is up to the chairperson to decide when to take a vote on the motion. Generally, a vote should not be taken if any member still seeks the floor. Calling for the question does not automatically stop the discussion because one member does not have the power to keep other members from expressing their views. In fact, a motion to stop the discussion would require a two-thirds vote to be adopted. (“I move to close debate,” or “I move the previous question.”)

Discussion can easily get bogged down and drag on. The chairperson can move the discussion along by following the “speak once” rule. When necessary, the group may put time limits on speakers.

Amending A Motion

An amendment is a change to the original motion. Here are two of the more common ways to amend a motion:

1. **Many motions are informally amended while being made.** Before the chairperson formally states the motion, a member may informally offer modifying suggestions to the maker of the motion. The maker may accept or reject the member's recommendations.
2. **After the chairperson has stated the motion, any member may propose changes to the motion before the motion is voted upon.** The amendment requires a second. The amendment is then debated, and a vote is taken on the amendment to the original motion. It takes a simple majority vote to pass an amendment. After an amendment has been voted on, the discussion of the motion, as amended, continues.

When an amendment is offered, the group must first vote on the amendment before voting on the main motion. By voting on an amendment, members are only deciding whether or not to change the main motion. Once all amendments are considered, the group still has to take a final vote on the main motion itself.

Sample Motion to Amend

Motion: "I move that we buy a new table for the conference room."

Second to Motion: "I second the motion."

Chairperson: "There has been a motion and a second to buy a new table for the conference room."

Move to Amend: "I move to amend by inserting 'not to exceed \$500' at the end of the motion."

Second to the Amendment: "I second the amendment to the motion."

Does the Chairperson Enter Into Debate or Vote?

The chairperson typically does not participate in the debate of a motion nor vote on its passage. The job of the chairperson is to remain impartial while controlling the process of the meeting. However, there are some instances when it is proper, and even desirable, for the chairperson to participate in debate and vote:

1. The chairperson should vote if his or her vote will decide the outcome by either breaking or creating a tie vote.
2. The chairperson can vote if the vote is by ballot.
3. If the committee or board is small and operates more informally, it is proper for the chairperson to debate issues and vote.
4. If the members of a committee or board have each been chosen to represent a specific district, group, or interest area, the chairperson may participate in debate and vote so his or her constituency is fully represented.
5. When an organization has a board of directors, an executive committee, standing committees, or special committees, the chair of those committees may have the same privileges as any other member to make motions, discuss issues, and vote.

If the chairperson participates in the debate, she or he must not abuse the privilege. It is important for the chairperson to avoid dominating the discussion. Once the chairperson has taken sides in a issue, it is even more important that the powers of the chair be exercised impartially. If necessary, the chairperson can avoid the appearance of bias by turning the chair over to the vice chairperson or some other member before making motions or discussing the merits of a question before the group.

Rank of Motions

Rank	Motion	May interrupt speaker	Second required	Can amend	Can debate	Adoption
Privileged Motions						
1.	Adjourn to a fixed time		X	X		majority vote
2.	Adjourn meeting		X			majority vote
3.	Recess meeting		X	X		majority vote
4.	Point of Privilege	X				decision of chair
5.	Order of business (agenda)	X				enforced by chair
Subsidiary Motions						
6.	Table a motion		X			majority vote
7.	Previous question		X			two-thirds vote
8.	Limit or extend debate		X	X		two-thirds vote
9.	Postpone to a certain time		X	X	X	majority vote
10.	Refer to a committee		X	X	X	majority vote
11.	Amend a motion		X	X	X	majority vote
12.	Main motion		X	X	X	majority rule
Motions that Bring A Question Back						
a.	Reconsider (the vote)	X	X		X	majority vote
Incidental Motions – no order of precedence						
a.	Appeal decision to chair	X	X		X	majority vote
b.	Object to consideration of a question	X				two-thirds vote
c.	Point of order	X				enforced by chair
d.	Withdraw a motion					majority vote
e.	Point of information	X				no action required
f.	Division of the meeting	X				requires standing vote

Order of Motions

Because a meeting can consider only one topic at a time, parliamentary procedure ranks motions in order of precedence. When a motion is made and seconded, no other business can be considered until that motion has been disposed of, or until a motion of a higher precedence has been proposed, seconded, and accepted by the chairperson.

There are three types of motions: Privileged Motions, Subsidiary Motions, and Incidental Motions.

Privileged Motions

Privileged motions deal with the meeting environment itself: the meeting time, agenda, meeting room comfort, and the rights and behaviors of individuals. These motions have overriding importance and can interrupt the meeting at any time. The privileged motions are listed below in order of rank. Higher ranked motions must be considered before lower ranked motions.

1. Adjourn To A Fixed Time

This type of motion is the highest order and takes precedence over all other motions. It is used to set the next meeting date, time, and location.

“I move that the meeting adjourn to Wednesday, June 18, at 7 p.m. in the city conference room.” The motion must be seconded. It is not debatable but can be amended. It requires a majority vote to pass.

2. Adjourn Meeting

A member can “move to adjourn” to end the meeting even though not all of the business has been finished. A motion to adjourn must be seconded and requires a majority vote. The chairperson should declare the meeting adjourned after an affirmative vote.

3. Recess Meeting

A member can ask for an intermission or recess even when another motion is on the floor. A motion to recess must have a second and requires a majority vote. “I move that this meeting recess until 8:30 p.m.”

The chair may also declare a recess without a vote of the group.

4. Point of Privilege

A member can raise a “point of privilege” concerning the welfare of the membership. “Chairperson, I rise to a point of privilege.” Points of privilege usually deal with comfort in the meeting room (noise, inadequate ventilation, heat, cold) or the conduct of others. No second or vote is required. The chairperson rules as to the admissibility of the point of privilege.

5. Order of Business (agenda)

A member may call for “the orders of the day” if that member feels that the meeting agenda is not being followed. An “order of business” motion does not require a second or a vote. If the chairperson admits that the agenda has not been followed, she or he must return to the agenda. If the chair doesn’t return to the agenda, a two-thirds vote can force the chairperson to do so.

Subsidiary Motions

Subsidiary motions deal directly with the business at hand. They provide a structured way to introduce, discuss, alter, and make democratic decisions on specific business items. The subsidiary motions listed below are in order of precedence. For example, action on a “motion to table” must be completed before a “motion to amend” can be considered. The concept is that the membership can consider only one motion at a time.

6. Table a Motion

A motion is said to be “on the floor” when it is being considered by the group. When a motion is “tabled,” it is temporarily set aside while other business is considered. A tabled motion can be taken up again during that meeting or the next meeting whenever the majority so decides. A motion to table requires a

second and a majority vote. When there is general agreement to defer a motion until later in the meeting, it is a common informal practice to simply ask unanimous consent to postpone further discussion until a specified point in the agenda.

7. Previous Question

“I move to close debate.” Note: It is not proper for members to simply call for “the question.” Members who do so should be ruled out of order by the chairperson. A “previous question” motion attempts to end the discussion on an issue and immediately force a vote on it. A “previous question” motion must have a second. It is not debatable and requires a two-thirds vote to pass. If the motion to put the question passes, the chairperson must immediately call a vote on the main motion.

If the chairperson is doing his or her job properly, she or he will sense when the discussion on a motion has ended or has become repetitious and will attempt to initiate a vote without the members having to introduce a motion to close debate (or “move the previous question”). Some members attempt to use the previous question motion to curtail unwanted discussion on an issue.

8. Limit or Extend Debate

“I move that debate on this motion be limited to five minutes per member.”

Or, “I move that debate on this motion be extended another 15 minutes.”

A motion to limit or extend the time of debate must be seconded, can be amended, and requires a two-thirds vote.

9. Postpone to a Certain Time

A motion to “postpone” halts debate on a motion to some future specified time. A motion may be postponed to follow another agenda item, or until a certain specified time — for example, 8:05 p.m. It can be postponed until a specified subsequent meeting. A motion to postpone requires a second, can be amended, and requires a majority vote. The chairperson needs to keep on top of postponed motions and take them up at the agreed upon time.

10. Refer to a Committee

“I move that the question be referred to the Facilities Committee for further study and a recommendation at our next meeting.”

Sometimes a group doesn't have enough information to make an informed decision or the group is too large to work out the details in a timely manner. Referring the issue to a smaller committee for a report at a future meeting can be an effective way to move toward a decision on the issue. A motion to “refer” requires a second and a majority vote. It can be debated.

11. Amend a Motion

As discussed previously, many motions being considered by the group can be changed. A motion to amend requires a second. The membership can debate the motion to amend. The amendment itself can be further amended. Most amendments require a majority vote. An amendment to an already-passed meeting agenda requires a two-thirds vote.

The following motions cannot be amended: adjourn meeting, order of business, call for division of the assembly, table a motion, take from the table, dispense with reading of the minutes, objection to the consideration of the question, postpone indefinitely, previous question, point of information, point of order, point of privilege, suspend the rules, appeal from the decision of the chair, and reconsider a motion.

12. Main Motion

A main motion is what brings an issue before the group. A main motion ranks the lowest in the order of precedence; therefore, it can be made only when no other motion is pending. When a motion has been made and seconded, the chairperson will repeat it and debate can begin.

Motions that Bring a Question Back

A motion to reconsider allows the group to re-discuss a motion that has already been voted on. A motion to reconsider requires a second and a majority vote. If the motion to reconsider is passed, the original vote is thrown out and the matter is up for debate again. Only a member who voted on the winning side of the original motion may make the motion to reconsider. The motion to reconsider must be made during the same meeting as the original motion. Once the meeting adjourns, a motion to reconsider is out of order.

Incidental Motions

There are some motions that can be made at any time. They have no order of precedence. They include:

- **Appeal decision to chair**

A member may appeal a decision to the chairperson at anytime. A second and a majority vote is required.

- **Object to consideration of a question**

A member may have so much objection to a motion that he or she doesn't even want it discussed by the membership. A motion objecting to the main motion may only be made before debate on the objectionable motion has begun. A member may simply stand up, without being recognized by the chairperson, and say, "Chairperson, I object to the consideration of the question." No second is required. It is not debatable. The chairperson says, "An objection has been made to the motion. Shall we consider the motion?" A two-thirds vote is required to uphold the objection and dismiss the main motion.

- **Point of order**

A member who thinks the group is not following proper parliamentary procedures may ask for a "point of order." A point of order does not require a second. The chairperson decides whether or not to accept the point of order.

Member: "Chairperson, I rise to a point of order."

Chairperson: "State your point of order."

- **Withdraw a motion**

The person who makes a motion can withdraw it (before any amendment is made) with the consent of the person who seconded it. No vote of the membership is required to withdraw a motion, unless someone objects; then it takes a majority vote to withdraw the motion.

Any member may move to withdraw a motion. If the maker of the motion and the seconder agree, the motion can be withdrawn from consideration. If the maker doesn't agree to the withdrawal, a majority vote is required.

- **Point of Information**

A member may ask the chairperson for some information or fact relevant to the current discussion. The chairperson may request an answer from any appropriate member. This is a request for information, not an opportunity to state an opinion or debate a point. The chairperson can rule the request out of order.

- **Division of the Meeting**

If a member doubts the accuracy of the chairperson's ruling on the outcome of the vote, the member can demand a "division of the meeting." This requires the chairperson to immediately conduct a vote by a more precise method. Alternatives include a show of hands, a standing vote (members stand to indicate a vote for or against a motion), ballot, or roll call. Division of the meeting is usually the prerogative of any member and does not usually require a motion or a vote.

Conclusion

This booklet covers some of the key points to using parliamentary procedure for effective meetings. Don't try to memorize all the aspects of parliamentary procedure. This booklet is best used as a reference. By using the index tabs on this booklet, you can quickly look up details of parliamentary procedure when you need them.

Chairpersons have a lot of responsibility when conducting meetings. By taking a practical approach to parliamentary procedure, the chair can help a group accomplish its tasks through an orderly, democratic process. Parliamentary procedure does give the chairperson a great deal of power over a meeting and its members. Don't abuse that power. The chair must conduct the meeting impartially and stay on top of the agenda. Don't let strict adherence to parliamentary procedure get in the way of the group accomplishing its goals.

Members also have responsibilities under rules of parliamentary procedure. They have the responsibility to participate in discussions, to listen to and respect the opinions of others, and to stick to the topic at hand.

A well conducted meeting can be fun and productive for everyone. By using a few simple principles of parliamentary procedure, everyone comes out a winner.

References for Further Study

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Parliamentary Procedure Summary Sheet

Steps in a Motion

1. State the motion — “I move that . . .”
2. Second the motion
3. Chairperson restates the motion
4. Discuss (debate) the motion
5. Vote on the motion
6. Announce result of vote

Rules for Debate

1. A member cannot speak until recognized by the chairperson
2. Remarks must pertain to the question before the group
3. Remarks should be addressed to the chairperson
4. Personal attacks are not allowed
5. Speakers should stand

Methods of Voting

- Voice vote
- Vote by standing
- Show of hands
- Ballot
- Roll Call

Ways to Amend a Motion

1. Inserting Words — I move to amend by inserting the words “by October 31st” at the end of the motion.
2. Striking Words — I move to amend by striking the words “from Elm Street.”
3. Striking Out and Inserting — I move to amend by striking out the words “from Elm Street” and inserting the words “by October 31.”

Incorrect Phrases

“So Moved”

All members have a right to know exactly what is being moved. The chairperson must state the exact motion to avoid confusion. “So moved” doesn’t mean anything.

“Question” or “I call for the question.”

This is not a motion as stated. It is the chairperson’s responsibility to know when debate is over and conduct a vote. Generally, a vote should not be taken if any member still seeks the floor. Members should not normally make a motion to stop the debate, but if they do, they should seek the floor and say, “I move to close debate.”

Shortcuts

1. If the membership is clearly in support of a motion, don’t waste time getting a second. Just move on to debate.
2. “If there is no objection . . .” If there is no opposition, the chairperson can save time conducting routine business by obtaining “unanimous consent.” This eliminates the need for a motion, second, debate, and/or a vote. If there is objection to the unanimous consent, then the formal steps of making and debating a motion must be followed.
3. “Straw Poll” — Sometimes it is useful to get a feel of the membership regarding several alternatives before making a formal motion. A straw poll can informally poll members for opinions.

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. . . and justice for all

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