

ITEM 3 | OBTAINING THE FLOOR

Before a member call make a motion, or address the assembly in debate, it is necessary that he should obtain the floor -- that is, he must rise after the floor has been yielded, and address the presiding officer by his official title, thus, "Mr. Chairman," or "Mr. President," or "Mr. Moderator;"¹ or, if a woman (married or single), "Madam Chairman," or "Madam President." If the assembly is large so that the member's name may be unknown to the chairman, the member should give his name as soon as he catches the eye of the chairman after addressing him. If the member is entitled to the floor, as shown hereafter, the chairman "recognizes" him, or assigns him the floor, by announcing his name. If the assembly is small and the members are known to each other, it is not necessary for the member to give his name after addressing the chair, as the presiding officer is termed, nor is it necessary for the chair to do more than bow in recognition of his having the floor. If a member rises before the floor has been yielded, or is standing at the time, he cannot obtain the floor provided any one else rises afterwards and addresses the chair. It is out of order to be standing when another has the floor, and the one guilty of this violation of the rules cannot claim he rose first, as he did not rise after the floor had been yielded.

Where two or more rise about the same time to claim the floor, all other things being equal, the member who rose first after the floor had been yielded, and addressed the chair is entitled to the floor. It frequently occurs, however, that where more than one person claims the floor about the same time, the interests of the assembly require the floor to be assigned to a claimant that was not the first to rise and address the chair. There are three classes of such cases that may arise:

- (1) When a debatable question is immediately pending;
- (2) when an undebatable question is immediately pending;
- (3) when no question is pending.

In such cases the chair in assigning the floor should be guided by the following principles:

- (1) When a Debatable Question is immediately Pending.
 - (a) The member upon whose motion the immediately pending debatable question was brought before the assembly is entitled to be recognized as having the floor (if he has



not already spoken on that question) even though another has risen first and addressed the chair. The member thus entitled to preference in recognition in case of a committee's report is the reporting member (the one who presents or submits the report); in case of a question taken from the table, it is the one who moved to take the question from the table; in case of the motion to reconsider, it is the one who moved to reconsider, and who is not necessarily the one who calls up the motion.

(b) No member who has already had the floor in debate on the immediately pending question is again entitled to it for debate on the same question. As the interests of the assembly are best subserved by allowing the floor to alternate between the friends and enemies of a measure, the chairman, when he knows which side of a question is taken by each claimant of the floor, and these claims are not determined by the above principles, should give the preference to the one opposed to the last speaker.

(2) When an Undebatable Question Is Immediately Pending. When the immediately pending question is undebatable, its mover has no preference to the floor, which should be assigned in accordance with the principles laid down under (b) in paragraph below.

(3) When No Question Is Pending.

(a) When one of a series of motions has been disposed of, and there is no question actually pending, the next of the series has the right of way, and the chair should recognize the member who introduced the series to make the next motion, even though another has risen first and addressed the chair. In fact no other main motion is in order until the assembly has disposed of the series. Thus, the motion to lay on the table, properly used, is designed to lay aside a question temporarily, in order to attend to some more urgent business, and, therefore, if a question is laid on the table, the one who moved to lay it on the table, if he immediately claims the floor, is entitled to it to introduce the urgent business even though another has risen first. So, when the rules are suspended to enable a motion to be made, the mover of the motion to suspend the rules is entitled to the floor to make the motion for which the rules were suspended, even though another rose first. When a member moves to



reconsider a vote for the announced purpose of amending the motion, if the vote is reconsidered he must be recognized in preference to others in order to move his amendment.

(b) If, when no question is pending and no series of motions has been started that has not been disposed of, a member rises to move to reconsider a vote, or to call up the motion to reconsider that had been previously made, or to take a question from the table when it is in order, he is entitled to the floor in preference to another that may have risen slightly before him to introduce a main motion, provided that when some one rises before him he, on rising, states the purpose for which he rises. If members, rising to make the above mentioned motions, come into competition they have the preference in the order in which these motions have just been given; first, to reconsider; and last to take from the table. When a motion to appoint a committee for a certain purpose, or to refer a subject to a committee, has been adopted no new subject (except a privileged one) can be introduced until the assembly has decided all of the related questions as to the number of the committee, and as to how it shall be appointed, and as to any instructions to be given it. In this case the one who made the motion to appoint the committee or refer the subject to a committee has no preference in recognition. If he had wished to make the other motions he should have included them all in his first motion.

From the decision of the chair in assigning the floor any two members may appeal,² one making the appeal and the other seconding it. Where the chair is in doubt as to who is entitled to the floor, he may allow the assembly to decide the question by a vote, the one having the largest vote being entitled to the floor.

If a member has risen to claim the floor, or has been assigned the floor, and calls for the question to be made, or it is moved to adjourn, or to lay the question on the table, it is the duty of the chair to suppress the disorder and protect the member who is entitled to the floor. Except by general consent, a motion cannot be made by one who has not been recognized by the chair as having the floor. If it is made it should not be recognized by the chair if any one afterwards rises and claims the floor, thus showing that general consent has not been given.



In Order When Another Has the Floor. After a member has been assigned the floor he cannot be interrupted by a member or the chairman, except by

- (a) a motion to reconsider;
- (b) a point of order; an objection to the consideration of the question;
- (d) a call for the orders of the day when they are not being conformed to;
- (e) a question of privilege;
- (f) a request or demand that the question be divided when it consists of more than one independent resolution on different subjects; or
- (g) a parliamentary inquiry or a request for information that requires immediate answer; and these cannot interrupt him after he has actually commenced speaking unless the urgency is so great as to justify it.

The speaker (that is, the member entitled to the floor) does not lose his right to the floor by these interruptions, and the interrupting member does not obtain the floor thereby, and after they have been attended to, the chair assigns him the floor again. So when a member submitting a report from a committee or offering a resolution, hands it to the secretary to be read, he does not thereby yield his right to the floor. When the reading is finished and the chair states the question, neither the secretary nor any one else can make a motion until the member submitting the report, or offering the resolution, has had a reasonable opportunity to claim the floor to which he is entitled, and has not availed himself of his privilege. If, when he submitted the report, he made no motion to accept or adopt the recommendations or resolutions, he should resume the floor as soon as the report is read, and make the proper motion to carry out the recommendations, after which he is entitled to the floor for debate as soon as the question is stated.



Footnotes

¹"Brother Moderator," or "Brother Chairman," implies that the speaker is also a moderator or chairman, and should not be used.

² In the U. S. House of Representatives there is no appeal from the decision of the chair as to who is entitled to the floor, nor should there be any appeal in large mass meetings, as the best interests of the assembly require the chair to be given more power in such large bodies.

