

ITEM 42 | DEBATE

In 1-6 are explained the necessary steps preliminary to debate namely, that when no business is pending a member shall rise and address the chair by his title, and be recognized by the chair as having obtained the floor; and that the member shall then make a motion which, after being seconded, shall be stated by the chair, who shall then ask, "Are you ready for the question?" The question is then open to debate, as is partially explained in 7, which should be read in connection with this section. No member shall speak more than twice during the same day to the same question (only once on an appeal), nor longer than ten minutes at one time, without leave of the assembly; and the question upon granting the leave shall be decided by a two-thirds vote without debate.¹ No member can speak a second time to a question as long as any member desires to speak who has not spoken to the question. If greater freedom is desired, the proper course is to go into committee of the whole, or to consider it informally, either of which requires only a majority vote; or to extend the limits of debate [30], which requires a two-thirds vote. So the debate, by a two-thirds vote, may be limited to any extent desired, as shown in 30. The member upon whose motion the subject was brought before the assembly, is entitled to close the debate with a speech, if he has not previously exhausted his twenty minutes, but not until every one else wishing to speak has spoken. He cannot, however, avail himself of this privilege after debate has been closed.² An amendment, or any other motion, being offered, makes the real question before the assembly a different one, and, in regard to the right to debate, is treated as a new question. When an amendment is pending the debate must be confined to the merits of the amendment, unless it is of such a nature that its decision practically decides the main question. Merely asking a question, or making a suggestion, is not considered as speaking. The maker of a motion, though he can vote against it, cannot speak against his own motion. [To close the debate see 44.]

The right of members to debate and, make motions cannot be cut off by the chair's putting a question to vote with such rapidity as to prevent the members getting the floor after the chair has inquired if the assembly is ready for the question. Even after the chair has announced the vote, if it is found that a member arose and addressed the chair with reasonable promptness after the chair asked, "Are you ready for the question?" he is then entitled to the floor, and the question is in exactly the same condition it was before it was put to vote. But if the chair gives ample



opportunity for members to claim the floor before putting the question and they do not avail themselves of it, they cannot claim the right of debate after the voting has commenced.

Footnotes

¹ The limit of time should vary to suit circumstances, but the limit of two speeches of ten minutes each will usually answer in ordinary assemblies and, when desirable, by a two-thirds vote it can be increased or diminished as shown in 30. In the U. S. House of Representatives no member can speak more than once to the same question, nor longer than one hour. In the Senate there is no limit to the length of a speech and no senator can speak more than twice on the same day to the same question without leave of the Senate, which question is undebatable.

² Formerly the member who reported a proposition from a committee was permitted to close the debate in the House after the previous question was ordered, provided he had not used all of his hour previously.

