

ITEM 44 | CLOSING AND PREVENTING DEBATE

When the debate appears to the chairman to be finished, he should inquire, "Are you ready for the question?" If, after a reasonable pause, no one rises to claim the floor, the chair assumes that no member wishes to speak and, standing, proceeds to put the question. Debate is not closed by the chairman's rising and putting the question, as until both the affirmative and the negative are put, a member can rise and claim the floor, and reopen the debate or make a motion, provided he rises with reasonable promptness after the chair asks, "Are you ready for the question?" If the debate is resumed the question must be put again, both the affirmative and the negative. Should this privilege be abused by members not responding to the inquiry, "Are you ready for the question?" and intentionally waiting until the affirmative vote has been taken and then rising and reopening the debate, the chair should act as in case of dilatory motions [40], or any other attempt to obstruct business, and protect the assembly from annoyance. When a vote is taken a second time, as when a division is called for, debate cannot be resumed except by general consent.

If two-thirds of the assembly wish to close the debate without allowing all the time desired by others, they can do so by ordering either the previous question or the closing of the debate at a certain time; or they can limit the length of the speeches and allow each member to speak only once on each question, as fully explained in 29 and 30. These motions require a two-thirds¹ vote, as they suspend the fundamental right of every member of a deliberative assembly to have every question fully discussed before it is finally disposed of. A majority vote may lay the question on the table and thus temporarily suspend the debate, but it can be resumed by taking the question from the table by a majority vote when no question is before the assembly [35], at a time when business of this class, or unfinished business, or new business, is in order. If it is desired to prevent any discussion of a subject, even by its introducer, the only way to do it is to object to the consideration of the question [23] before it is debated, or any subsidiary motion is stated. If the objection is sustained by a two-thirds vote, the question is thrown out for that session.

Footnotes

¹ In the Senate not even two-thirds of the members can force a measure to its passage without allowing debate, the Senate rules not recognizing the above motions. In the House, where each speaker can occupy the floor one hour, any of these motions to cut off debate can be adopted by a



mere majority, but practically they are not used until after some debate. Rule 27, §3, H.R., expressly provides that forty minutes twenty on each side, shall be allowed for debate whenever the previous question is ordered on a proposition on which there has been no debate, or when the rules are suspended. [See note to 22.] In ordinary societies harmony is so essential that a two-thirds vote should be required to force the assembly to a final vote without allowing free debate.

