

ITEM 45 | PRINCIPLES OF DEBATE AND UNDEBATABLE MOTIONS

All main motions are debatable, and debate is allowed or prohibited on other motions in accordance with the following principles:

(a) High privilege is, as a rule, incompatible with the right of debate of the privileged motion: and, therefore, all highly privileged motions are undebatable, except those relating to the privileges of the assembly or a member. Questions of privilege [19] rarely arise, but when they do, they are likely to be so important that they must be allowed to interrupt business, and yet they cannot generally be acted upon intelligently without debate. and, therefore, they are debatable. The same is true of appeals from the decision of the chair which are debatable, unless they relate to indecorum, or to transgression of the rules of speaking, or to priority of business, or are made while an undebatable question is pending; in which cases there is not sufficient need of debate to justify making them an exception to the rule, and therefore an appeal under any of these circumstances is undebatable.

(b) Motions that have the effect of suspending a rule are not debatable. Consequently motions to suppress, or to limit, or to extend the limits of, debate are undebatable, as they suspend the ordinary rules of debate.

(c) Appeals made after the previous question has been ordered are undebatable, as it would be manifestly improper to permit debate on them when the assembly by a two-thirds vote has closed debate on the pending question. So any order limiting debate on the pending question applies to questions arising while the order is in force.

(d) To Amend, or to Reconsider, an undebatable question is undebatable, whereas to amend, or to reconsider, a debatable question is debatable.

(e) A Subsidiary Motion [12] is debatable to just the extent that it interferes with the right of the assembly to take up the original question at its pleasure. Illustrations: To "Postpone Indefinitely" a question places it out of the power of the assembly to again take it up during that session, except by reconsideration, and consequently this motion allows of free debate, even involving the whole merits of the original question. To "Commit" a question only delays the



discussion until the committee reports, when it is open to free debate, so it is only debatable as to the propriety of the commitment and as to the instructions, etc. To "Postpone to a Certain Time" prevents the consideration of the question till the specified time, except by a reconsideration or suspension of the rules, and therefore allows of limited debate upon the propriety of the postponement. To "Lay on the Table" leaves the question so that the assembly can consider it at any time that that question or that class of business is in order, and therefore to lay on the table should not be, and is not, debatable.

Because a motion is undebatable it does not follow that while it is pending the chair may not permit a question or an explanation. The distinction between debate and asking questions or making brief suggestions, should be kept clearly in mind, and when the latter will aid the assembly in transacting business, the chair should permit it before taking the vote on an undebatable question. He should, however, remain standing during the colloquy to show that he has the floor, and he should not allow any more delay in putting the question than he feels is helpful to the business.

The following lists of motions that open the main question to debate, and of those that are undebatable, are made in accordance with the above principles:

Motions That Open the Main Question to Debate.

Postpone Indefinitely	34
Reconsider a Debatable Question	36
Rescind	37
Ratify	39

Undebatable Motions.

Fix the Time to which to Adjourn (when a privileged question)	16
Adjourn (when unqualified in an assembly that has provided for future meetings)	17
Take a Recess (when privileged)	18



Call for the Orders of the Day, and questions relating to priority of business	20
Appeal when made while an undebatable question is pending, or when simply relating to indecorum, or transgression of the rules of speaking, or to priority of business	22
Suspension of the Rules	22
Objection to the Consideration of a Question	23
Incidental Motions, except an Appeal as shown above in this list under Appeal	13
Lay on the Table	28
Previous Question [29] and Motions to Close, Limit, or Extend the Limits of Debate	30
Amend an Undebatable Motion	33
Reconsider an Undebatable Motion	36

