

How the GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE OPERATES



**The purpose of
Conference debate
is to reach a group conscience—
there are no winners or losers**

Summary of Conference Procedures

Generally speaking, the General Service Conference follows *Robert's Rules of Order*, and proceeds on as informal a basis as possible consistent with the rights of all concerned. It is important to remember that the purpose of rules of order is to make it easier for the Conference to conduct its business; rules exist to allow the Conference to do what it needs to do to carry out the will of the Fellowship by reaching an informed group conscience. Over the years the Conference has adopted some exceptions to *Robert's Rules*, which help it to proceed more closely in accord with the spirit of A.A. Tradition.

Conference Quorum

A Conference quorum — two-thirds of all registered members — is required to conduct Conference business.

Committee System

To the extent possible, important matters to come before the Conference will be handled via the "Committee system." This assures that a large number of questions can be dealt with during Conference week. Each Committee considers carefully the items before it and presents its recommendations to the Conference as a whole for acceptance or rejection. Recommendations of Conference committees are automatically motions that have been made and seconded. Members are urged to resist the temptation to edit recommendations on the floor.

Substantial Unanimity

All matters of policy (Conference Advisory Actions) require substantial unanimity, that is, a *two-thirds majority*. Any actions, including amendments, that affect an Advisory Action, or motions that might result in such an action, also require a *two-thirds majority*. Because the number of members present in the hall during the week of Conference varies from time to time, the phrase "two-thirds majority" is taken to mean two-thirds vote of the Conference members voting, as long as the total vote constitutes a Conference quorum.

Minority Opinion

After each vote on a matter of policy, the side which did not prevail will always be given an opportunity to speak to their position. If the motion passes with two-thirds vote, the minority may speak. If the motion receives a majority vote, but fails to pass for lack of a two-thirds vote, the majority may speak.

Remember that saving "minority opinions" for after the vote, when there is no rebuttal, is a time-waster, for it can force the Conference body to reconsider a question that might well have been decided the first time around if it had been thoroughly examined from all sides.

General Rules of Debate and Voting

(Agreed to at the beginning of each Conference)

- People who wish to speak line up at the microphones and are called on in order.
- Each person may speak for two (2) minutes.
- No one may speak for a second time on a topic until all who wish to have spoken for the first time.
- Full discussion of a recommendation should take place before each vote.
- Everyone is entitled to, and should, express his or her opinion. However, if your perspective has already been stated by someone else, it is not necessary to go to the mike and say it again.

- Premature actions (e.g., amending motions early in the discussion or hastily calling the question) can divert attention from the subject at hand, thus confusing and/or delaying Conference business.
- Voting is by show of hands.

Tabling a Motion

Tabling a motion (postponing discussion to a later time during the same Conference):

- Must be made without comment.
- Requires a second.
- Is not debatable.
- Needs only a *simple majority* to pass.

Calling the Question

Calling the question brings debate to a halt while Conference members decide whether to proceed directly to a vote (the question) or go on with the debate. A motion to call the question:

- Must be made in order at the microphone.
- Must be made without comment.
- Requires a second.
- Is not debatable.
- Requires a *two-thirds vote*.

Reconsideration

A motion to reconsider a vote may be made only by a member who voted with the prevailing side, but it can be seconded by anyone.

- Only a *simple majority* is required.
- If the majority votes to reconsider, *full debate*, pro and con, is resumed. (Conference members are urged to limit discussion to *new* considerations of the question under debate.)
- No action may be reconsidered twice.

Floor Actions

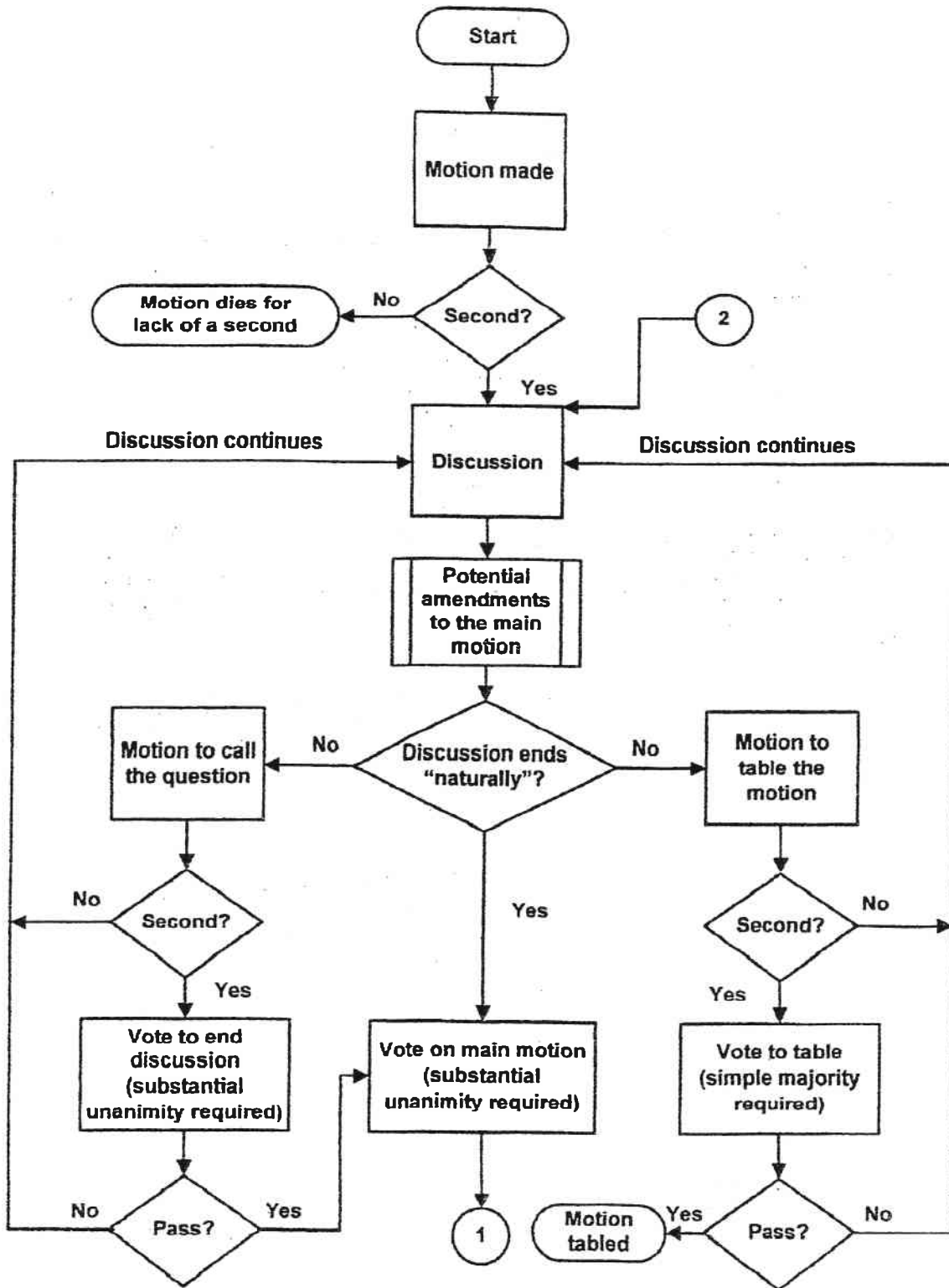
Floor actions may be introduced at any time during the Conference except at the Sharing Sessions, and:

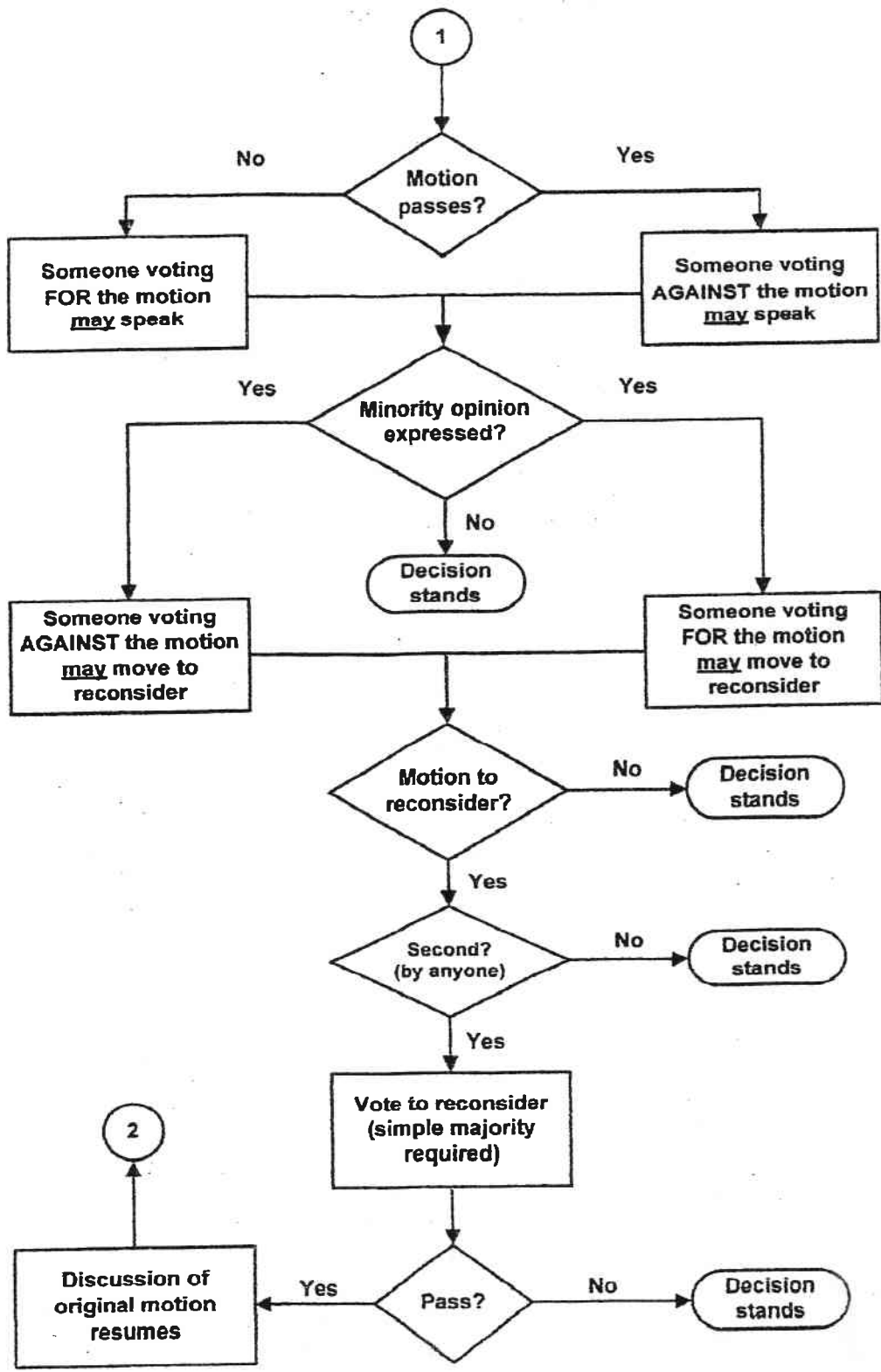
- Must be made without comment.
- Must be submitted in writing by the maker to the Conference secretary.
- Will come up for deliberation after all Committee reports have been heard.
- Require a *two-thirds majority*.

When a floor action is to be heard, its maker will be given two (2) minutes to state the rationale behind the action, after which the chair shall ask if there is a motion that the Conference decline to consider the floor action. A motion to decline to hear a floor action:

- Must be made without comment.
- Requires a second
- Is not debatable.
- Requires a *two-thirds majority*.

Our Voting Procedure





Summary of Robert's Rules¹

| MOTION | REMARKS | PHRASING | SECO ND REQ' D? | DEBAT- ABLE? | AME ND- ABLE ? | VOTE |
|---|---|--|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Lay on the Table (Table) | When used to "kill" a Motion, Chair can rule it out of order. As part of Motion, maker may state time he/she intends to take item from the table during remainder of the meeting or the next meeting. | I move to table the Motion | Yes | No | No | Majority |
| Take from the Table | At current or next meeting only | I move to take from the table the Motion relating to... | Yes | No | No | Majority |
| Call the Question or Previous Question | Used to stop debate | I call the question or I move to previous question | Yes | No | No | Two-thirds |
| Parliamentary Inquiry | Response from Chair or Parliamentarian | I rise for Parliamentary inquiry...[note reason] | No | No | No | |
| Point of Order | Used to remind or question Chair on Bylaws, rules of order, etc. Chair may seek advice. | I rise to a point of order [await recognition from Chair, state reasoning] | Yes | No | No | Chair rules |
| Appeal | Chair should state reason for decision. Vote is to uphold Chair's decision. | I appeal from the decision of the Chair | Yes | Yes | No | Majority ⁶ |
| Reconsider | At same meeting only | Having voted on the prevailing side, I move to reconsider... | Yes | Yes ⁷ | No | Majority |
| Rescind | Used at subsequent meeting | [Note reason]... Therefore, I move to rescind the Motion | Yes | Yes | Yes | Two-thirds |
| Adjourn | | [Note reason]...I move to adjourn | Yes | No | No | Majority |

Adapted from *Summary of Robert's Rules* (http://iee-ies.org/history/roberts_rules.pdf), dated 20 Oct 2004

⁶ Majority of negative votes needed to overturn Chair's decision.

⁷ If Motion is amendable

Summary of Robert's Rules¹

| MOTION | REMARKS | PHRASING | SECO ND REQ' D ² | DEBAT- ABLE? | AME ND- ABLE ² | VOTE |
|------------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Main | | I move that ... [note specific action] | Yes ² | Yes | Yes | Two-thirds ³ |
| Amendment | | I move to amend the pending Motion by striking out or inserting the following words | Yes | Yes | Yes ⁴ | Majority ⁵ |
| Amendment to an Amendment | | I move to amend the pending Amendment by striking out or inserting the following words | Yes | Yes | No ² | Majority ⁵ |
| Substitute | | I move to substitute the following for the Motion pending | Yes | Yes | Yes | Majority |
| Postpone to a Definite Time | Should be used to readdress Motion at a specific time | I move that the pending Motion be postponed until [note time] | Yes | Yes | Yes | Majority |
| Postpone Indefinitely | Can be used to "kill" a Motion | I move to postpone indefinitely | Yes | Yes | No | Majority |
| Refer to a Committee | Standing or Ad Hoc (can be appointed at any time) | I move to refer the issue to... | Yes | Yes | Yes | Majority |
| Leave to Withdraw | Only used by maker of Motion | I ask permission to withdraw the Motion | Yes | No | No | Majority |
| Division of Question | Used to consider multiple aspects of a Motion one at a time | I call for a division of the question | Yes | No | Yes | Majority |
| Division of Assembly Secret Ballot | Request for verification of a voting result | I call for a Division I move we take this vote by secret ballot | No Yes | No No | No Yes | Majority |

- 1 As modified for use by Eastern Pennsylvania General Service Assembly
- 2 Unless moved by a committee
- 3 Majority only if a matter of little importance or the body so decides
- 4 If Motion is amendable
- 5 Two-thirds if a matter is of importance or the body so decides