

## SUSPEND THE RULES

### (Skit narrator #1)

The President of this organization has been a member for several years and has always been very opinionated; but after being elected President has performed the duties of the office in a satisfactory manner; however recently the President has started showing bias and partiality and has started entering into debate on some very controversial issues. At the previous month's meeting, the President was very verbal in support of a "hot" issue that is scheduled to come before today's meeting. Diplomacy has been unsuccessful, and attendance has suffered, as well as declining membership renewals. It is clear that the members must do something, or the organization will fail. The Secretary conferred with the President before this meeting and suggested that perhaps the President might want to let someone else chair the meeting today, but the Secretary felt that the discussion fell on deaf ears. The members have decided to rein in the president in a show of solidarity. We join them at the beginning of the regular monthly meeting.

- **President: (at the lectern)**  
The meeting will come to order!
- **Mr. Hickory:**  
[standing] Madam President, I rise to a Question of Privilege affecting the assembly.
- **President:**  
State your question.
- **Mr. Hickory:**  
I move to Suspend the Rules and appoint our Parliamentarian to serve as Chairman Pro Tem for the duration of this meeting.
- **Ms. Magnolia:**  
Second
- **President:**  
Sorry, but the President chairs all the meetings around here, so sit down! Now for the minutes.
- **Mr. Hickory:**  
I appeal from the decision of the chair.
- **President:**  
There is nothing to appeal. Will the Secretary please read the minutes?
- **Mr. Hickory:**  
[standing] Madam President... Point of Order!
- **President:**  
Sit down! I told you that we're not going to elect a Chairman Pro Tem. Let's get back to business, SHALL WE... now where were we? ...Reading and approval of the minutes!

----- A Parliamentary Skit prepared by Rod G Davidson, PRP -----

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- **Mr. Hickory:**  
I move to Suspend the Rules and appoint our Parliamentarian to serve as Chairman Pro Tem for the duration of this meeting.
- **Ms. Magnolia:**  
Second.
- **President:**  
Sit down! We're going to approve the minutes now.
- **[Mr. Hickory standing in his place]**  
The Question of Privilege is to Suspend the Rules and appoint our Parliamentarian to serve as Chairman Pro Tem for the duration of this meeting. RONR permits rules of order, even when placed in the bylaws, to be suspended with a two-thirds vote, and further specifies that the duties of officers in connection with a meeting are rules of order.  
Are you ready for the question? [pause] ...As many as are in favor of the motion to Suspend the Rules and appoint our Parliamentarian to serve as Chairman Pro Tem for the duration of this meeting, please stand...be seated... those opposed please stand...be seated. There are two thirds in the affirmative and the rules have been suspended, and our Parliamentarian has been appointed to serve as Chairman Pro Tem for the duration of this meeting.  
**[Mr. Hickory ducks flying paper wads thrown by President.]**

**[Parliamentarian, now the Chairman Pro Tem, moves to the lectern.]  
(President also remains at the lectern)**

**Chairman Pro Tem:**

Thank you. If there is no objection, a special committee of three, made up of Dr. Rosewood, Dr. Sequoia, and Dr. Spruce, will be appointed for the duration of this meeting to perform the duties of a Sergeant at Arms...[pause to see if there is an objection]. These three members are appointed. For their information, should the need arise, a Security Guard is on duty and his cell phone number is 555-8953. The next business in order is Reading and Approval of the Minutes.

- **President:**  
Well, we may need a REAL doctor before this is all over! I Object!! I strenuously object! This is all out of order, and you have NO BUSINESS...
- **Chairman Pro Tem:**  
The member is out of order and will be seated. Need I remind the member of the proper rules of decorum in debate?
- **President:**  
This is ridiculous! I strenuously object! I have a greater responsibility than you can possibly fathom! I have never heard of such a thing. It says in our bylaws that the President is to chair all meetings. Bylaws cannot be suspended, and I am the President, and I still have the gavel -- so take your seat Missy [or Mister]!

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- **Chairman Pro Tem:**  
No. Please take YOUR seat. We are following the rules in our parliamentary authority, Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised. For your information, they are:  
pp. 252-258 - Suspend the rules;  
p. 15 - Definition of Rules of Order "duties of officers in connection with meeting";  
p. 12 - Definition of bylaws;  
p. 17 - Suspension of bylaws in the nature of rules of order.

It takes a 2/3 vote to suspend the rules. The members have voted unanimously in favor of suspending the rules and appointing the Parliamentarian to serve as Chairman Pro Tem of this meeting. We have a lot of business to cover at this meeting. Please take your seat, so we can get on with business.

- **Ms. Evergreen:**  
Madam Chairman, a point of information, please.
- **Chairman Pro Tem:**  
The member will state the point.
- **Ms. Evergreen:**  
Madam Chairman, my question is: Does the Presiding Officer need a Gavel? -- I have an extra gavel in my purse if you would like to use it. (handing the gavel to the Chairman pro tem)
- **Chairman Pro Tem:**  
Yes, I believe I will need the gavel. Thank you. We will now have the reading of the minutes ... [meeting progresses].

**[Skit members can sit down]**

- **(Skit narrator #2)**  
At this point, the President would be treated as any other member who fails to follow the rules of decorum and, if necessary, the assembly could impose a penalty, such as ordering his/her removal from the hall for the duration of the meeting.

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*"In dealing with any case of disorder in a meeting, the presiding officer should always maintain a calm, deliberate tone."* **(For practice, find the exact page in RONR this quote is on.)**

## **Review:**

- Suspend the rules pp. 252-258
- Definition of Rules of Order p. 15 "duties of officers in connection with meeting"
- Administrative duties of president outside scope of parliamentary law p. 440
- Definition of bylaws p. 12
- Suspension of rules in bylaws clearly in the nature of rules of order p. 17
- Definition of standing rules (application outside a meeting) p. 18
- Chapter XX pp. 642-643
- Temporary presiding officer if President and VP are agreeable p. 432
- Question of privilege "relate to conduct of its officers" p. 219
- p. 254-255 - Rules that cannot be suspended
- p. 244 - Timeliness requirement for point of order (implicit suspension of rules), and continuing breach
- "The member is out of order and will be seated." p. 626

## **Note:**

I was asked by an organization (a high school band booster club) to help them with relieving their president of his duties for a meeting. As it turned out, the mere threat of this maneuver was an effective deterrent to a de facto dictator, and he resigned a couple of days before the showdown. This was a happy day for all the members!

With script in hand, I believe they could have pulled it off but, of course, it would never have gone as smoothly as the skit indicates. I think it would have been a very contentious and unpleasant meeting. Before actually doing this for real, I would strongly recommend that the members try to reason with the president. Let him/her know ahead of time that this option is available to the members (which will come as a great surprise in most cases), and ask that in the best interests of the organization that the chair be voluntarily relinquished with as little fanfare as possible.

---Rod G Davidson, Professional Registered Parliamentarian

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