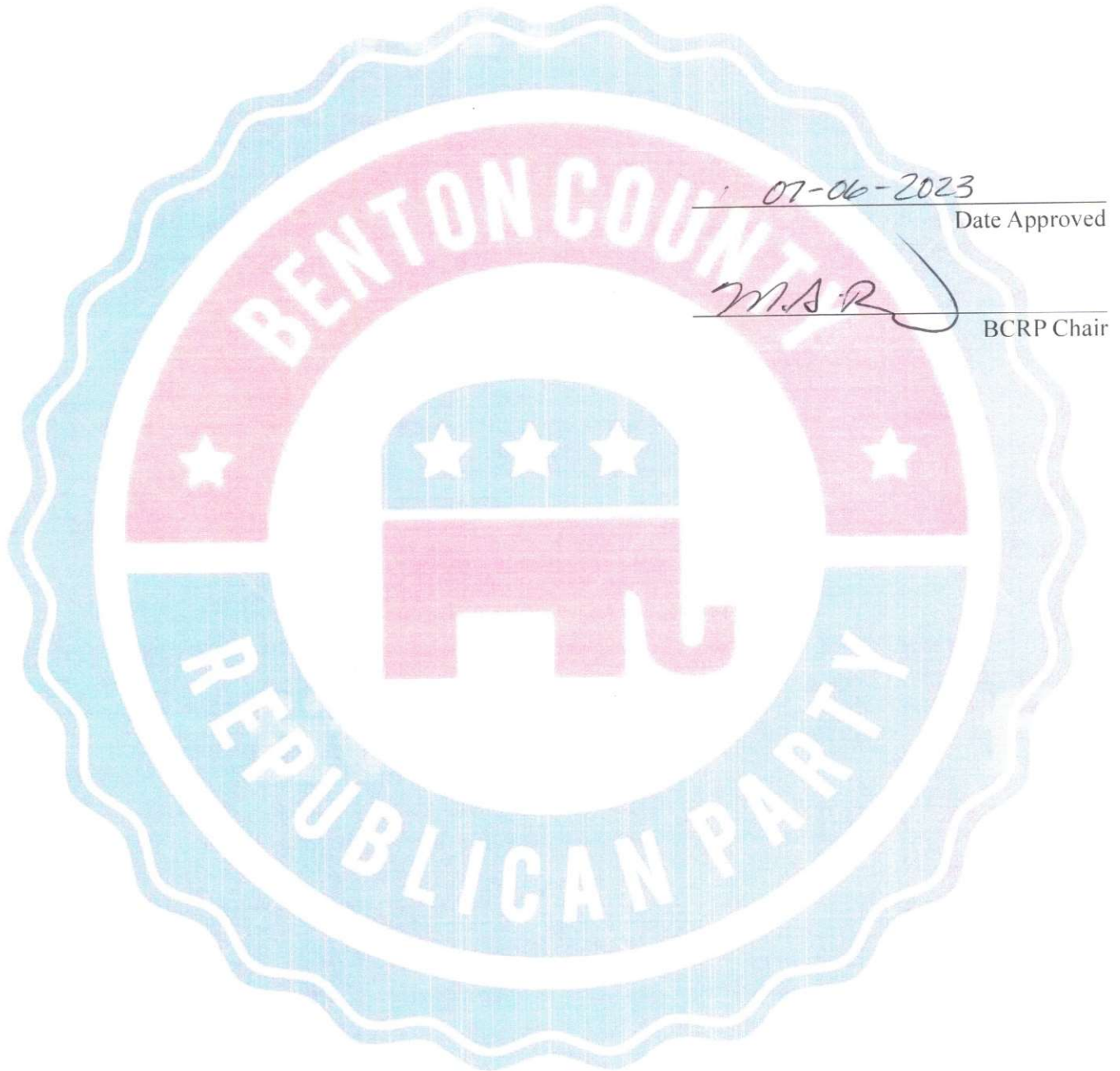


## Policy 9.1 - Conduct

1. **Purpose** – Every political organization has the right to enforce and expect ethical and honorable conduct from its members as prescribed in Robert’s Rules of Order so that a meeting will progress smoothly and benefit the whole organization. See the attachment of Robert’s Rules of Order on Conduct.



in the center of the platform or stage, if there is one) is called "the chair." During meetings, whoever is presiding is said to be "in the chair" (whether standing or seated at the time), and he is also referred to as "the chair." The phrase "the chair" thus applies both to the person presiding and to his station in the hall from which he presides. The secretary's desk should be placed so that papers can easily be passed to him from the chair during the meeting.

- 3:8 The duties of the presiding officer, the secretary, and other officers that an assembly or society may have are described in 47.

### Pattern of Formality

- 3:9 Customs of formality that are followed by the presiding officer and members under parliamentary procedure serve to maintain the chair's necessary position of impartiality and help to preserve an objective and impersonal approach, especially when serious divisions of opinion arise.
- 3:10 **Customs Observed by Members.** The president or chief officer of an organized society, who normally presides at its meetings, is then addressed as "Mr. President" or "Madam President" (whether a married or unmarried woman), "Mr. [or Madam] Moderator," or by whatever may be his or her official title. In the lower house of a legislative body, this officer is most commonly "Mr. [or Madam] Speaker." A vice-president is addressed as "Mr. President" or "Madam President" while actually presiding. (A possible exception may arise where the usual form would make the meaning unclear—for example, when the vice-president is in the chair while the president is also on the platform. In such an instance, the vice-president is addressed as "Mr. [or Madam] Vice-President.") A person presiding at a meeting who has no regular title or whose position is only temporary is addressed as "Mr. [or Madam] Chairman" by long-established usage. Several variations of this form—such as "chairperson" or "chair"—are now frequently encountered, however, and may be in use as the general practice in particular assemblies.

3:11 Even in a small meeting, the presiding officer of an assembly is not addressed or referred to by name. (The only exceptions that might arise in an *assembly*<sup>1</sup> would be in cases of a testimonial nature, such as in the presentation of a gift to a president who is about to go out of office.) With nearly the same strictness of observance, he is not addressed by the personal pronoun “you”—although occasional exceptions may occur in ordinary societies if brief administrative consultation takes place during a meeting. As a general rule, when additional reference to the presiding officer is necessary in connection with addressing him by his official title, members speak of him as “the chair”—as in, “Mr. President, do I understand the chair to state ... ?”

3:12 Members address only the chair, or address each other through the chair. In the parliamentary transaction of business—within a latitude appropriate to the conditions of the particular body—members generally should try to avoid mentioning another member’s name whenever the person involved can be described in some other way, as in, “Mr. President, may I ask the member to explain ... ,” or, “Mr. Chairman, I hope that the gentleman who last spoke will think of the probable consequences ...” With a very limited number of particular exceptions, and except in committees and small boards, a member never speaks while seated;<sup>2</sup> and with a slightly larger number of exceptions, a member does not speak without first having *obtained the floor* as described in 3:30–35.

3:13 **Customs Observed by the Presiding Officer.** The presiding officer speaks of himself only in the third person—that is, he never uses the personal pronoun “I.” In actual parliamentary proceedings he always refers to himself as “the chair”—as in, “The chair rules that ...” At other times during meetings—such as when he makes a report to the members in the capacity of an

---

1. As distinguished from a small committee, where some relaxation of this rule may be appropriate, depending on the conditions.

2. A member who is unable to stand is permitted to speak while seated.

administrative officer of the organization rather than as presiding officer of the assembly—he may, if he wishes, describe himself by his official title, as in, “Your President is pleased to report ...” Strictly speaking, the chair does not mention a member’s name and does not address an individual member as “you,” except in connection with certain disciplinary procedures (see 61:12). Instead he may say, for example, “The chair must ask the member to confine his remarks to the merits of the pending question.” In practice in an ordinary lay assembly, however, there are a number of occasions where the chair often refers to members by name, such as when assigning the *floor* (that is, the exclusive right to be heard at that time, as explained in 3:30–35), or when announcing the members of a committee.

3:14 (For more complete explanations of the general forms observed by the presiding officer and members in an assembly, see 42 and 43.)

### Call to Order; Order of Business

3:15 When the time of a meeting has arrived, the presiding officer opens it, after he has determined that a quorum is present, by *calling the meeting to order*. He takes the chair (that is, occupies the presiding officer’s station in the hall), waits or signals for quiet, and, while standing, announces in a clear voice, “The meeting will come to order,” or, “The meeting will be in order.” (For the procedure to be followed when a quorum of members do not appear, see 40:6–10.) The call to order may be immediately followed by religious or patriotic exercises or other opening ceremonies.

3:16 The initial procedures in a mass meeting or in one called to form a society are described in 53 and 54. Meetings of permanently organized bodies usually follow an established *order of business* that specifies the sequence in which certain general types or classes of business are to be brought up or permitted to be introduced. If the assembly has no binding order of business, any member who obtains the floor (see 3:30–35) can introduce

43:18 On the other hand, if, in considering a particular question, it is desired to retain the usual limit on the length of speeches but remove restrictions on the total number of times members can speak, the assembly by a majority vote can resolve itself into a committee of the whole or into quasi committee of the whole, or it can consider the question informally (see 52:1). Speeches made under these procedures do not count against a member's right to debate the same question if it is further considered by the assembly on the same day under the regular rules. If the question under consideration is composed of a number of sections or paragraphs—as in the case of bylaws, for example—the total number of speeches allowed each member can be greatly increased, but not made unlimited, by considering the document seriatim (28), in which case each member can speak twice on each paragraph, section, or unit that is taken up as a separate part.

### Decorum in Debate

43:19 The following practices and customs observed by speakers and other members in an assembly assist the carrying on of debate in a smooth and orderly manner. Paragraphs 3:9–13 under the head *Pattern of Formality* should be read in connection with this subject.

43:20 **Confining Remarks to the Merits of the Pending Question.** In debate a member's remarks must be germane to the question before the assembly—that is, his statements must have bearing on whether the immediately pending motion should be adopted (see also *Principles Governing the Debatability of Motions*, 43:35–40).

43:21 **Refraining from Attacking a Member's Motives.** When a question is pending, a member can condemn the nature or likely consequences of the proposed measure in strong terms, but he must avoid personalities, and under no circumstances can he attack or question the motives of another member. The measure, not

the member, is the subject of debate. If a member disagrees with a statement by another in regard to an event that both witnessed, he cannot state in debate that the other's statement "is false." But he might say, "I believe there is strong evidence that the member is mistaken." The moment the chair hears such words as "fraud," "liar," or "lie" used about a member in debate, he must act immediately and decisively to correct the matter and prevent its repetition (see 61).

- 43:22 **Addressing All Remarks Through the Chair.** Members of an assembly cannot address one another directly, but must address all remarks through the chair. If, while a member is speaking in debate, another member wishes to address a question to him—which the person speaking can permit or not as he chooses, but which is taken out of his time if he does—the member desiring to ask the question rises and addresses the chair, proceeding as explained under *Request for Information* (33:6–10).
- 43:23 **Avoiding the Use of Members' Names.** As much as possible, the use of names of members should be avoided in debate. It is better to describe a member in some other way, as by saying, "the member who spoke last," or, "the delegate from Mason County." The officers of the society should always be referred to by their official titles. There is no need, however, to refer to oneself in debate in the third person as by the use of such expressions as "this member." A member's debate is expected and intended to be partial, and the first person is quite acceptable.
- 43:24 **Refraining from Speaking Adversely on a Prior Action Not Pending.** In debate, a member cannot reflect adversely on any prior act of the society that is not then pending, unless a motion to reconsider, rescind, or amend it is pending, or unless he intends to conclude his remarks by making or giving notice of one of these motions.
- 43:25 **Refraining from Speaking Against One's Own Motion.** In debate, the maker of a motion, while he can vote against it, is not al-

lowed to speak against his own motion. He need not speak at all, but if he does he is obliged to take a favorable position. If he changes his mind while the motion he made is pending, he can, in effect, advise the assembly of this by asking permission to withdraw the motion (33:11–18).

- 43:26 **Reading from Reports, Quotations, etc., Only Without Objection or With Permission.** If any member objects, a member has no right to read from—or to have the secretary read from—any paper or book as part of his speech, without permission of the assembly. Members are usually permitted to read short, pertinent, printed extracts in debate, however, so long as they do not abuse the privilege (see also 33:20–21).
- 43:27 **Being Seated During an Interruption by the Chair.** If at any time the presiding officer rises to make a ruling, give information, or otherwise speak within his privilege, any member who is speaking should be seated (or should step back slightly if he is standing at a microphone some distance from a seat) until the presiding officer has finished. At that time the member can resume his speech, unless he is denied the right as a disciplinary measure. (Questions of discipline arising from disorderly debate by members are treated in 61.)
- 43:28 **Refraining from Disturbing the Assembly.** During debate, during remarks by the presiding officer to the assembly, and during voting, no member should be permitted to disturb the assembly by whispering, walking across the floor, or in any other way. The key words here are *disturb the assembly*. This rule does not mean, therefore, that members can never whisper, or walk from one place to another in the hall during the deliberations of the assembly. At large meetings it would be impossible to enforce such a rule. However, the presiding officer should watch that such activity does not disturb the meeting or hamper the transaction of business.