

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE QUESTIONS RELATED TO SECRET BALLOT & NON-MEMBERS

1. SECRET BALLOT

Generally, voting on any measure, even elections, is by voice (*viva voce*) or by show of hands. When a secret ballot is requested, the assembly must agree to it, either by simple majority vote or by "general consent" (the chair asks if there is any objection to secret ballot and if there is none, orders it). Secret ballot can be used at any time, on any motion, as long as the body agrees to it.

Here is the relevant section from *Robert's*:

"Voting by Ballot. The main object of this form of voting is secrecy, and it is resorted to when the question is of such a nature that some members might hesitate to vote publicly their true sentiments. Its special use is in the reception of members, elections, and trials of members and officers, as well as in the preliminary steps in both cases, and the by-laws should require the vote to be by ballot in such cases. Where the by-laws do not require the vote to be by ballot, it can be so ordered by a majority vote, or by general consent. Such motions are undebatable. Voting by ballot is rarely, if ever, used in legislative bodies, but in ordinary societies, especially secret ones, it is habitually used in connection with elections and trials, and sometimes for the selection of the next place for the meeting of a convention. As the usual object of the ballot is secrecy, where the by-laws require the vote to be taken by ballot any motion is out of order which members cannot oppose without exposing their views on the question to be decided by ballot. Thus, it is out of order to move that one person cast the ballot of the assembly for a certain person when the by-laws require the vote to be by ballot. So, when the ballot is not unanimous it is out of order to move to make the vote unanimous, unless the motion is voted on by ballot so as to allow members to vote against it in secrecy."
(*Robert's Rules of Order*, Art VIII, Sec 46)

2. NON-MEMBERS

Robert's is silent on the rights of nonmembers for the simple reason that an organization consists of its members. Nonmembers do not "exist in" the organization. Thus, they can have no rights or privileges in it.

Even though parishes often consider their meetings to be "public" (i.e., non-secret), a meeting of the parish council or general assembly is not a public meeting open to all citizens or communicants.

Nonmembers may attend a meeting only if the body consents to their presence. Consent may be expressed by majority vote or by order of the chair "without objection." If the parish council or assembly has a customary practice of allowing nonmembers to attend, this is a courtesy of the local organization; it does not mean that the nonmember "has a right" to be there.

If nonmembers are present at a meeting, they have no right to speak or address the assembly in any way, except as invited by the chair. The chair may invite a nonmember to give a report or make a general address, but the nonmember may not speak during debate (i.e., discussion of motions), unless the body formally votes to "suspend the rules," which requires a 2/3 majority vote.

If a nonmember speaks without permission, or makes "interjections," the chair may ask that person to leave, or may have the person removed from the meeting. The nonmember has no right of appeal, and their comments are not recorded in the minutes.

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