# Parliamentary Procedure

TRAINING FOR VIRTUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY

# STANDING RULES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly is governed by the *Book of Order* and the *Manual of the General Assembly,* which includes the Standing Rules of the General Assembly.

Find the Manual under the Resources tab in PC-Biz.

o   pages 3-4 of the Manual for an introduction to the Values Present at General Assembly;
o   pages 88-90 for Standards of Ethics for Commissioners and Advisory Delegates.

Although you as a GA commissioner or advisory delegate should be open to your presbytery colleagues and to all sides of an issue, you do not come with instructions from those who elected you. "Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ." (F-3.0204)

# SPECIAL RULES for 224th GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- The unique circumstances of this electronic General Assembly will necessitate the adoption of special rules to govern how the Assembly will be conducted.

- The first set of recommendations by the Assembly Committee on Business Referral is Item 01-02 in PC-Biz; you will vote on these as the first item of business when the Assembly convenes on June 19.

- That Committee is meeting again on June 18 and may propose other special rules, which you would also consider in your first meeting.

# ADVISORY DELEGATES

- Advisory delegates have voice but not vote, and are not eligible to make motions.

- Advisory delegates are polled before commissioners vote so that commissioners have the benefit of their advice in their own decision-making.

# ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

Meetings of councils, as required by the **Book of Order**, are "conducted in accordance with the most recent [currently, the 11th] edition of **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised** [RONR] … Councils may also make use of processes of discernment in their deliberations prior to a vote as agreed upon by the body." (G-3.0105)

> The principles of RONR are intended to protect the rights of all parties: while the majority rules, the rights of the minority to be heard are safeguarded. Presbyterians believe that we make better decisions together, listening to the voice of the Spirit through one another's voices. It's not just fairness that leads us to guard the rights of those who might be in the minority – they may be speaking for God.

"Decisions shall be reached in councils by vote, following opportunity for discussion and discernment, and a majority shall govern." (F-3.0205)

# BASIC RULES OF DECORUM

Here are some basic rules of decorum for members of assemblies:

- Address the Moderator.

- Confine your remarks to the pending question [be germane]. The Moderator may remind speakers who lose track of which motion is on the floor.

- Do not impugn other members or their motives [generally, do not use names].

- You cannot speak against your own motion.

- You may not speak a second time until everyone who wishes has spoken.

- Honor time limits.

# NAVIGATING PC-BIZ

**IOB = Item of Business**

- Commissioners have access to a variety of tools in PC-Biz to enable you to request to speak, and to move and second motions. Advisory delegates will see fewer active options, because they may speak to business but are not empowered to make motions. Corresponding members may also seek recognition, but will not see a screen allowing them to vote.
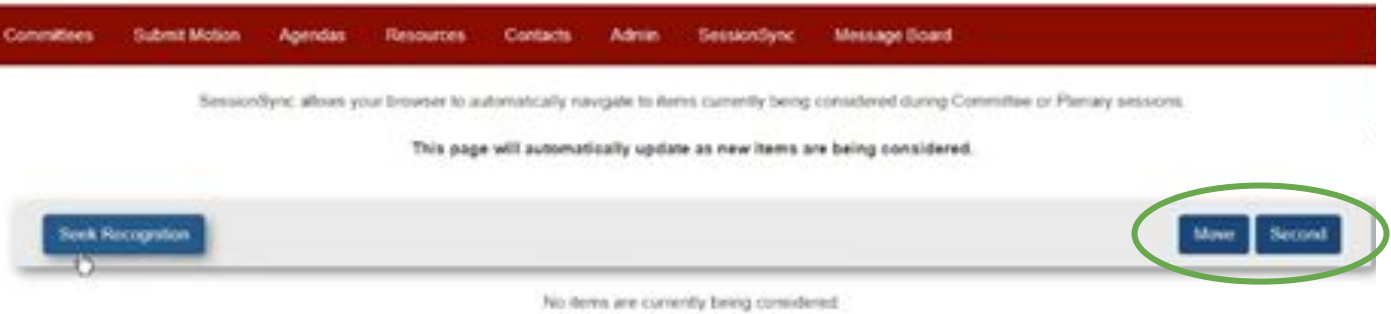


- Found in the blue bar at the top of the PC-Biz screen, **SessionSync** displays the item that's currently being considered during plenary or a meeting of Committee 01.

- If you need help sorting out the options, or with any other issue, find the live *Help* section by clicking your name in the upper right hand corner of the blue bar. *Please use the phone number, chat feature, or email for immediate assistance, whether for parliamentary procedure advice or technical support.*

# MOVE & SECOND FUNCTIONALITY

The **Move** and **Second** buttons you will see in SessionSync will be of use only when the Moderator asks for a motion.

*"I will entertain a motion to approve Item #" or "Is there a motion to approve Item #?"*



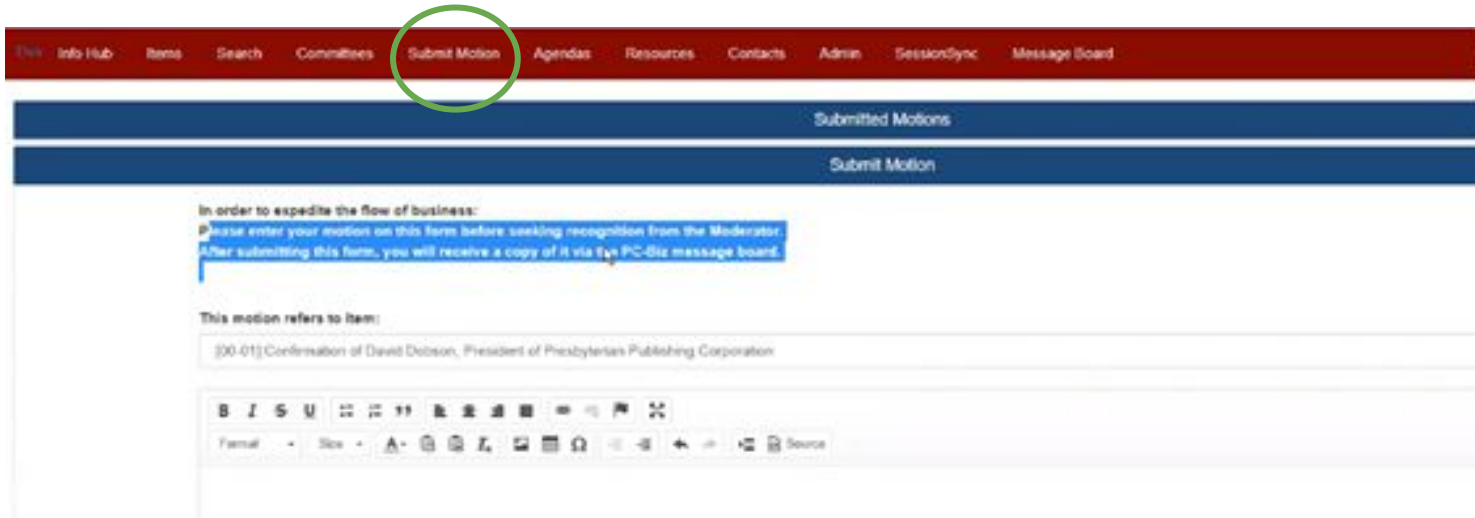**NOTE:** *the bar in these examples will be RED, the bar you use in PC-Biz will be BLUE*

Clicking Move or Second without an invitation from the Moderator will have no effect.

# SUBMIT MOTION & AMENDMENT OPTIONS

In the blue bar at the top of the PC-Biz screen, commissioners will find the **Submit Motion** tab.



You may click on an **IOB** from the dropdown menu and type an **amendment** relating to that item there, at any time; however, the motion will not be considered until the IOB is pending (a motion has been made to bring that business to the floor), and you are recognized to make it.

# SEEK RECOGNITION OPTIONS

When an IOB about which you wish to speak is pending, you will click **Seek Recognition** and choose one of the options that appear.
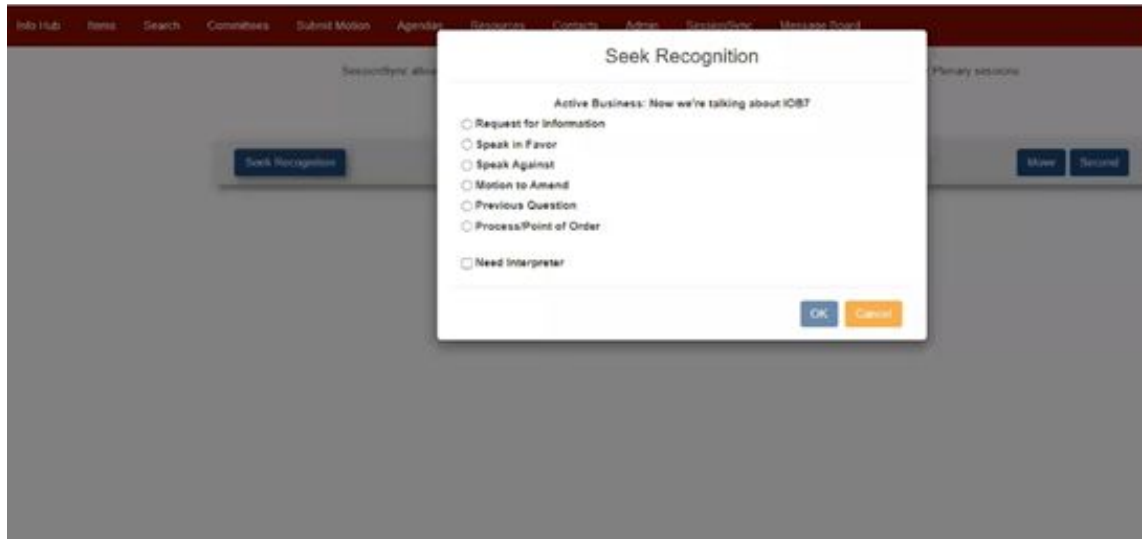


**Request for Information** Ask a question about the IOB currently being considered (background, explanation, etc.)

**Speak in Favor** of the motion on the floor

**Speak Against** the motion on the floor

**Motion to Amend** Modify the wording of the motion on the floor

**Previous Question** End debate, sometimes known as "call the question"

**Process** All other motions/reasons for speaking

# PROCESS OPTIONS

Click the **Process** option to make any of the following motions, indicating which motion and any details in the text box:

- **Commit/Refer** Send the IOB to a named entity for further consideration rather than voting directly on the recommendation at this time

- **Postpone to a Certain Time/Definitely** Consider later in the docket of this GA

- **Limit or Extend Limits of Debate** Change the time allowed for individual speeches, the number of speeches, the hour the debate must end, or the total time allocated for the IOB

- **Lay on the Table** Interrupt consideration of the current IOB because something urgent comes up that must be attended to immediately (not usually needed)

- **Point of Order/Appeal** Bring up a breach of the rules/challenge the ruling of the Moderator

- **Division of a Question** Vote separately on parts of an IOB, each of which could stand on its own

- **Consideration by Paragraph (Seriatim)** Consider a long recommendation one paragraph or section at a time, before voting on the whole at the end

- **Parliamentary Inquiry** Ask a question about process related to this IOB

# MOTION TO AMEND

If what you want to do is to offer an amendment to the main motion, then click **Motion to Amend** and select a motion you wrote in advance from the dropdown. Or use the same procedure for amendments that occur to you in the midst of debate on an IOB–enter the wording of the motion in **Submit Motion**, then choose **Motion to Amend** and select it.

# OTHER MOTIONS TO SUBMIT

You may wish to make a motion that is not related to a particular IOB.
If so, click **Other** in the **Submit Motion** dropdown list. Examples when you might wish to do that:

**Raise a Question of Privilege** Interrupt the current business for an urgent matter – for example, to request that the assembly pause for prayer before taking a vote ("question of privilege affecting the assembly")

**Parliamentary Inquiry** To ask how to accomplish something unrelated to current business – *though you may be able to accomplish this more efficiently by speaking to a parliamentarian through the* Helpdesk *feature*

**Suspend the Rules** In order to do something not allowed by the rules

**Call for the Orders of the Day** Require the assembly to conform to its agenda

There is a PDF of the list above, **How to Seek Recognition,** in the Resources tab on the PC-Biz banner; you might want to print it for handy reference.

# MOTION BASICS

When the Moderator recognizes you, you will be unmuted.

When you speak, you will always be expected to **identify yourself** – *name, role, and presbytery.*

Pages 8-9 of *A Guide to Parliamentary Procedure in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* – found in the Resources tab – chart the most common motions and shorthand rules for their use; you might want to print those pages for quick reference.

Most motions are adopted by a majority (more than half) of those voting; when the requirement is for a 2/3 vote, it is generally a motion to restrict the rights of a member of the body (such as cutting off debate), or to alter a previous action (such as suspending the rules).

Chart #1, the 13 ranking motions, shows the hierarchy of motions that are in order when other motions are pending (on the floor). The main motion is at the bottom of the chart, and thus lowest ranking; a main motion (which brings business before the body) is not in order while any other motion is on the floor. Lower-ranking motions are not in order whenever a higher-ranking motion is pending – for example, if a motion to limit debate is on the floor, it is in order to move to take a recess, but not vice versa. If a motion to postpone to a definite time is on the floor, it is not in order to move to amend the main motion; but it would be in order to move to amend the motion to postpone (for example, to a different time).

When several motions are pending, the last one made must be disposed of first, until the body works its way back in reverse order to the main motion.

# AMENDING A MOTION / SUBSTITUTE MOTION

Perhaps the most common subsidiary motion is to **amend**. A motion to amend must be germane – it cannot introduce a new subject – and may take several forms: to insert or add; to strike out; and to do both (strike out some words and insert/add others).

A motion to amend by replacing a whole paragraph, or a whole motion, with different wording, or involving words that are not consecutive, is a **substitute**.

Here's the process used to consider substitute motions. After the substitute is made:

- ☐ Perfection of the main motion – any amendments are made until the motion is in final form
- ☐ Perfection of the substitute motion
- ☐ "Shall the substitute become the main motion?"
- ☐ Debate on the merits of both motions
- ☐ No amendments in order

# ORDER OF AMENDMENTS

It is in order to move to **amend a proposed primary amendment to a main motion**, but a further level of amendment is not in order until the secondary amendment ("amendment to the amendment") has been disposed of.

There is no such thing as a "friendly amendment," however welcome it may be to the maker of the main motion. **Once a motion has been made, seconded, and stated by the moderator,** it belongs to the body and any amendments must be moved, seconded, and voted upon.

# COMMIT/REFER AND MODIFY DEBATE MOTIONS

The motion to **commit (refer)** is used when the mover believes that the issue warrants further study or refinement that's not possible right away. Motions to refer should be clear about what committee (already existing, or special) will consider the matter, its task or charge, and when it shall report. Unless other stipulations are made in the action adopted, special committees (K.1) are appointed by the GA co-moderators. When matters are referred to committees by the GA, the action often comes by way of a main motion, sometimes with special instructions to the committee.

The Standing Rules (F.5.a) limit speeches in plenary to two minutes, but the body by a 2/3 vote can **modify debate** by setting further time limits on individual speeches, the number of speeches, the total time for further debate, or the hour by which a vote will be taken. Time limits on speeches beyond two minutes can also be *extended* by **suspending the rules** – but with the press of business, that's usually not the desire.

# CALLING THE QUESTION

Many love the motion to call or move the **previous question** – to close debate immediately and proceed to a vote. *A 2/3 vote is required to end debate.* The previous question can be applied to the immediately pending motion alone, or to any number of pending motions – for example, both a secondary and a primary amendment – or to all pending questions (sometimes "all that is before us"), such as a secondary amendment, a primary amendment, and the main motion. (But it could not be applied to a secondary amendment and the main motion, skipping the primary amendment.)

Be aware that much time can be spent on debate of amendments, and it may not be helpful to move the previous question on all pending questions when the body hasn't yet had an opportunity to debate the main motion. Because the *Book of Order* (F-3.0205) stipulates decisions "following opportunity for discussion and discernment," *this motion should not be used to cut off debate prematurely.*

Sometimes someone is recognized to move the previous question when it's evident that no one wishes to continue debate; in those instances, the motion actually takes up *more* time because the moderator has the discretion to move directly to a vote without it.

# POSTPONING MOTIONS

It's common for people to move to **table** a motion when they *really intend* the effect of the motion to **postpone to a particular time**. The undebatable motion to **lay on the table** is properly used only when something of immediate urgency has arisen, and the motion does not specify a time when the matter will be taken up again.

The debatable and amendable motion to **postpone definitely** is *usually more appropriate* – for example, to postpone until after something else has happened in the session, more information can be gathered, or to a specific hour.

# MODERATING DEBATE

The **maker of a motion** has the *privilege of first debate*, but *not the last word*.
The moderator will try to alternate speakers pro and con.

It is the **responsibility of the moderator** to ensure that all members are clear about what's being voted on – generally by stating the question (repeating the motion) when it is first made and seconded, or indicating the proper words in PC-Biz. Sometimes it's also necessary to go into more detail to explain the effects of a proposal.

*If you are confused about parliamentary procedure, or it seems that others are, or if things are moving too quickly, do not be afraid to make a parliamentary inquiry, raise a point of order, ask for clarification, or request information. "Moderator, please explain the effect of that motion…"*

# BUSINESS CONSIDERED  /  CONSENT AGENDA

Due to the limitations of the electronic format, at the recommendation of the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, the Assembly Committee on Business Referral is recommending that the Assembly refer to the 225th General Assembly (2022) much of the business submitted to this GA; **that recommendation is IOB 01-04**. Items recommended for *referral* to the next GA are in PC-Biz numbered **02-##**.

IOBs recommended for *consideration* by the 224th General Assembly (2020) are numbered **00-##** in PC-Biz. The Committee on Business Referral may choose to propose items presumed to be non-controversial on a Consent Agenda, to be approved in one action at the business meeting on June 26 – thus saving time for items that require more discussion. Any commissioner can remove any consent agenda item simply by requesting to do so, if you oppose the action or otherwise wish to discuss it; but be prepared to speak to it later when it comes up later in the docket.

*(F.5.b) When the Consent Agenda comes up in the docket, time will be allowed for you to remove items; use the* **Process** *button to note the IOB name and number and it will be removed, to be placed on the docket in a later plenary business meeting.*

# CLARIFICATIONS / PROTESTS

Business can move rapidly, but you have the right to **ask the moderator** to explain the effect of the proposal so that everyone is clear before the vote is taken. *The moderator will make every effort to ensure that no one gets lost or overlooked.*

If you vote against a motion which prevails, you may file a **written protest or a dissent** with the Committee on Business Referral (G-3.0105); it will be included in the Minutes if the Committee decides it is decorous and respectful. The protest and dissent forms are available in PC-Biz under the *Resources* tab.

A **protest** expresses disagreement, supported by reasons, alleging an irregularity or delinquency.
A **dissent** puts you on record as disagreeing with the action.

# CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations on your election as an **advisory delegate or commissioner** to the 224th General Assembly!

This electronic GA was not what anyone expected when you were elected, but you are participating in an historic first – and you continue to be called to discern the will of Christ for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as we move into God's future.

## *The PC(USA) is praying for YOU!*