

## UIL Contest: Congress

***“Where there are no laws, or individuals have their own rules and laws, there is the least of real democracy.” -- Gen. Henry Martyn Robert (author, *Robert’s Rules of Order*)***

Congress is an individual contest in a large group setting. It models the legislative process of democracy, specifically, the United States Congress.

Within this mock legislative assembly competition, contestants draft legislation (proposed laws and position statements) submitted to the tournament, and they research the docket of bills and resolutions dealing with real-world social and political policies prior to the contest to prepare their speeches. At the tournament, students caucus in committees, deliver formal discourse on the merits and disadvantages of each piece of legislation, and vote to pass or defeat the measures they have examined. Parliamentary procedure forms structure for the discourse, and students extemporaneously respond to others’ arguments over the course of a session.

Judges evaluate contestants for their research and analysis of issues, argumentation, skill in asking and answering questions, use of parliamentary procedure and clarity and fluency of speaking.

Each Congress session is approximately 3 hours. A student Presiding Officer (PO) runs the session. The PO’s job includes 4 things:

- Recognizing speakers
- Giving time signals
- Conducting votes
- Keeping order

A congress tournament begins with the establishment of an agenda, or order of legislation selected to be debated from the complete docket.

The speech introducing legislation is called an authorship speech if the student who wrote the legislation delivers it before the assembly, or if delivered by a teammate of the student. It is called a sponsorship speech if given by another student in the chamber. The author or sponsor may speak for up to 3 minutes, followed by 2 minutes of continuous questioning by other delegates in the chamber.

The first opposing speech is also 3 minutes, followed by 2 minutes of questioning.

Each speech afterwards on the same legislation is 3 minutes followed by 1 minute of questioning.

Each judge (also called a “scorer”) evaluates each speech every student in the chamber delivers. Judges also take answers to questions into account. Students are awarded 1 (low) to 6 (high) points per speech. The official parliamentarian also scores. Top scorers advance to a “super” final congress.

For additional information, explore additional resources produced by the University Interscholastic League at [www.uiltxas.org/speech](http://www.uiltxas.org/speech). The National Federation of High School Associations publishes a booklet that may be obtained at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org) and the National Forensic League provides a Congressional Debate Guide at [www.nationalforensicleague.org/](http://www.nationalforensicleague.org/).

# Congressional Debate

# Guide



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***(Author, Robert’s Rules of Order)***



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[www.congressionaldebate.com](http://www.congressionaldebate.com)  
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Congressional Debate is a mock legislative assembly competition where **students draft bills** (proposed laws) and **resolutions** (position statements), which they and their peers later **debate** and **vote** to pass into law. While coaches aren’t always required to submit legislation to meets, it gives their students the right to an **authorship** speech, introducing the bill or resolution to the chamber. In advance of the meet, a **docket** of submitted titles or full legislative text are distributed to participating schools, so students may research and prepare themselves for the debate. Many meets allow students to caucus in committee(s) to determine the **agenda**, wherein they strive to select topics that will yield even and engaging debate, as well as balancing authorship privileges among the schools participating in the chamber.

The National Forensic League is committed to educational development of the individual through the vehicle of Congressional Debate, which promotes leadership and communication skills through rigorous interaction and debate on issues confronting our democracy. These skills will prepare them for learning and leadership throughout our lives.



# Congressional Debate Terminology

- **Legislation** - a specific, written proposal (in the form of a “bill” or “resolution”) made by a member or committee for assembly to debate.
- **Bill** - type of legislation that describes the details of how a policy would be enacted, if voted into law by the assembly.
- **Resolution** - an expression of conviction, or value belief of an assembly, which may urge, request or suggest further action by another decision-making authority.
- **Docket** - the complete packet of legislation distributed by a tournament.
- **Agenda** - the order of legislation as suggested by a committee or member, and voted on by the assembly (sometimes called the *calendar*).
- **Presiding Officer (PO)** - leader who runs meetings by *recognizing* members to speak or *move*. Also called the **chair**. Modeled after the *Speaker* of the House of Representatives, or the Vice President or President pro tempore of the Senate.
- **Floor** - when a member has the full attention of the assembly to speak (also refers to the area where the assembly meets, where its members speak, and where it conducts its business).
- **Committee** - a small group of members who meet and bring recommendations to the full assembly.
- **Amendment** - a specific change to an item of legislation, explaining exactly which words it modifies, and not changing the **intent** of the legislation itself (*germane*). An amendment not pertinent is ruled **dilatory**.
- **Authorship Speech** - a *constructive* speech of up to three (3) minutes given by a member, which introduces an item of legislation for debate by the chamber. It is called a sponsorship speech if given by a student who is not affiliated with the school the legislation originated from. All author/sponsorship speeches are followed by a two-minute questioning period. The first negative speech also may have two minutes of questioning.
- **Questioning** - period where the members of the assembly ask individual questions of the speaker. *Multiple-part* (or two-part) questions are not allowed (unless the rules are suspended for that instance, or specific *open/direct questioning* rules are used), because they take time from other members who may wish to question the speaker. For all speeches that follow an authorship – except the first negative speech under NFL rules – the speaker may speak for a maximum of three (3) minutes, followed by one minute of questions. All affirmative and negative speeches that follow an authorship speech should introduce new ideas (arguments) and respond to previous arguments (refute or rebut).
- **Precedence** - standard rule in most leagues (including NFL and NCFL), which requires the presiding officer to choose speakers who have spoken least (or not at all). The only exception to precedence is when a speaker has *authorship* privileges to legislation when it is introduced for debate. In those cases, the presiding officer must recognize the author first. If no author is present, selecting a sponsor is based on precedence.
- **Recency** – standard rule in NFL, where the presiding officer not only employs precedence, but also selects speakers based on who has spoken *least recently* (or *earliest*).

Before precedence is established (applies to students who have not spoken), the following method is often used:

- **Geography** - this method is employed to balance recognition of speakers among various spatial zones in the chamber, so students seated in any given area aren’t disadvantaged. The chair should ensure that an equal number of affirmative and negative speeches are called from the same zone. Geography is just one approach to recognizing speakers.

The following methods of speaker recognition priority are flawed and **not recommended**:

- **Activity** - PO selects speakers based whom they have already recognized for questions and motions. The *problem* with this is that the PO could still be biased in recognizing legislators for questions and motions in the first place, and it encourages impertinent questions, just for the sake of being recognized.
- **Longest Standing** - PO tracks how many times speakers stand to be recognized. The *problem* with this is that speakers may or may not actually have substantive speeches prepared, but simply stand earlier to *play the game*.

## Oath of Office

“I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter, so help me God.”

# Competition Chronological Order

**Legislation** - Participating schools may submit legislation when they register entries for competition. If the purpose of legislation is to effect change in the status quo, then ideas should stem from a desire to solve problems or meet needs. The best legislation is *debatable*, meaning there is some degree of controversy in either the topic or how the legislation intends to address the issue(s). Before students draft legislation, they should research the scope of jurisdictional power Congress has for lawmaking on the given topic, and what agency (or agencies) of the federal government would be responsible for enforcement and implementation of that legislation. See the **Writing Legislation** section of this guide.

**Researching the Docket** - Tournaments send to participating schools or post online a docket of legislation. Each squad then brainstorm affirmative and negative arguments and finds supporting evidence through research. Students should have a firm working knowledge of issues in the docket, but should not write word-for-word speeches ahead of time; rather, they should be prepared to dynamically respond to arguments given by peers at the tournament.



**Role Playing** - Contestants act in the manner of a senator or representative, weighing needs of theoretical constituents whom they represent, and in a larger sense, all American citizens. This includes speaking as a legislator would talk, and acting genuinely nice to other delegates. If students think of the purpose of Congress as serving a higher need of solving problems in our society (rather than as a debate competition), they will take it more seriously. Humor is acceptable in the right context, but shouldn't be the emphasis of speaking or conduct. Contestants should dress the part: professional legislators wear business attire. Dress shoes are highly recommended with restraint toward tasteful accessories that would not distract an audience.



**Chamber Opening Business** - Upon arrival at a Congress, students are assigned to chambers, sometimes labeled as a "Senate" or "House (of Representatives)," where they would be assigned the appropriate courtesy title (Senator or Representative). When tournaments prepare placards (name cards) with students' names (or make cardstock paper and markers available) or have name tags, it enhances the dignity of the event, and makes identification of speakers by judges more efficient. The first task a chamber assumes is to determine seating arrangement. Either the tournament will provide a seating chart with assigned placements, or students will fill in a blank seating chart. This facilitates easier identification by student presiding officers and judges.

**Setting the Agenda** - With the legislative docket provided to schools, students in each chamber will:

- Offer proposed agendas, which are presented in the order they wish to debate it. The chamber will conduct a single-ballot election until one agenda receives a majority vote; or
- Convene an "Agenda," "Calendar" or "Rules" Committee, comprised of one representative from each school, who will collaboratively determine an agenda for the duration of the session. By virtue of procedure, whatever order this committee settles upon becomes binding unless rules are suspended; or
- Convene several committees based on issues (whereby all members of a chamber serve on a committee).

Once the agenda is set, it is considered part of the standing rules of the chamber; changing it (beyond laying an individual bill or resolution on the table) requires a motion to suspend the rules. This is considered ill-advised, because it has the potential to be manipulative and consumes time better spent facilitating speeches.

**Presiding Officer Election** - Using a single ballot election, presiding officers are elected for each session (or fragment thereof as established by each individual tournament's procedural rules).

**Instructions (with visual aids) for conducting elections may be downloaded from [www.congressionaldebate.org](http://www.congressionaldebate.org).**

**Competition Structure** - There are many methods of determining who earns a trophy or gavel as the "Best Legislator/Speaker," or "Best Presiding Officer." These methods vary in their degree by tournament. The recommended method by the NFL is for judges to rank the top students in the chamber, and for a cumulative rank total to determine who advances and placement. At some competitions, the top-rated students by judges may be considered a slate of nominees for the chamber to cast a preferential ballot ranking their peers, in order of favor.

# Writing Legislation



## A Bill to Establish a Specific Policy

BE IT ENACTED BY THIS CONGRESS THAT:

1. **SECTION 1.** State the new policy in a brief
2. declarative sentence, or in as few
3. sentences as possible.
4. **SECTION 2.** Define any ambiguous terms inherent
5. in the first section.
6. **SECTION 3.** Name the government agency that will
7. oversee the enforcement of the bill
8. along with the specific enforcement
9. mechanism.
10. **SECTION 4.** Indicate the implementation
11. date/timeframe.
12. **SECTION 5.** State that all other laws that are in
13. conflict with this new policy shall
14. hereby be declared null and void.

*Introduced by Name of School*

Most legislation should have a national/domestic focus that the U.S. Congress would have *jurisdiction* over, taking the form of a **bill**. A bill establishes details behind how a particular law must work, including when it takes effect, how much tax levy would be appropriated (if applicable), how infractions/violations will be dealt with, etc. A bill may answer the who, what, when, where – and most specifically how – but it will never answer “why.” Legislators explain rationale behind bills in their speeches, and how a bill implements its solution can spark deeper, more meaningful debate.

Since bills attempt to solve problems faced by our country, brainstorming those areas is a great place to start. Students should be mindful of how controversial an issue is; for example, is it likely that students would argue against a bill to assist starving infants? Frequently, arguments over bills stem from the amount of funding. Since there are countless problems needing solutions, funding projects often comes down to whether one item should be prioritized over another.

Next, students should think about exactly what the U.S. Congress has jurisdiction over. Since the Executive Branch runs most of the agencies that enforce federal laws, understanding those helps; for more information, visit [www.usa.gov/Agencies/Federal/Executive.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/Federal/Executive.shtml). While foreign affairs often fall under the jurisdiction of the Executive Branch, funding efforts such as USAID can have an impact on the success or failure of United States involvement in other countries, and therefore, can be framed as a bill. Inspiration for legislative ideas can be found at: [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov).

Writing an effective bill involves more time and research than researching one written by someone else. A student must ask her/himself what the legislation does, who is involved (government agencies), where it happens, when it is feasible to take place and how much time is needed for implementation, and how it should be carried out (a plan of action). All of these questions must be answered in writing the sections of the bill, with thoughtful consideration as to how thoroughly each section explains its plank of implementing the overall bill’s plan of action.

**Resolutions** are simply position statements on issues Congress does not have jurisdiction over (such as a foreign issue, although a bill can suggest foreign aid), or further action (such as amending the Constitution). Resolutions lack the force of law, and never establish enforcement.

## Topics & Format

Appropriate topics exhibit seriousness of purpose. The action proposed should be feasible, and such that the actual United States Congress might debate it. Topics should be debatable, meaning substantive argumentation exists on both sides. Legislation should be typed and double-spaced with line numbers, **not exceeding one page**. Capitalizing the words “WHEREAS” and “RESOLVED” in resolutions, and “SECTION” in bills, as well as inverse-indenting each clause or section helps to distinguish between ideas and concepts.

## A Resolution to Urge Further Action on a Specific Issue

1. **WHEREAS,** State the current problem (this needs to
2. be accomplished in one brief
3. sentence); and
4. **WHEREAS,** Describe the scope of the problem
5. cited in the first whereas clause (this
6. clause needs to flow logically from the
7. first); and
8. **WHEREAS,** Explain the impact and harms allowed
9. by the current problem (once again, the
10. clause needs to flow in a logical
11. sequence); now, therefore, be it
12. **RESOLVED,** By this Congress that: state your
13. recommendation for dealing with the
14. problem (the resolution should be a
15. clear call for action); and, be it
16. **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That (an *optional* additional
17. recommendation; if not used, end the
18. previous clause with a period).

*Introduced by Name of School*

The samples above show proper formatting. In the resolution, note the semicolon, and how it precedes the word “and” at the end of each “whereas” clause, and the phrase “now, therefore, be it” at the end of the last “whereas” clause. Templates for drafting legislation, and sample legislation may be downloaded from [www.congressionaldebate.org](http://www.congressionaldebate.org).

# Speaking



Debate on each legislation starts with a speech *introducing* it to the chamber, called an **authorship** if it's delivered by the student or school who wrote it, or **sponsorship** if delivered by a student from a different school (students present from the authoring school *may* decline the privilege of authorship). This first speech on each legislation is always followed by a two-minute questioning period. Questions and answers are timed continuously (the clock does not stop) once the first questioner is recognized. Also, the NFL requires a two-minute questioning period for the **first negative** speaker on each legislation.

After the introductory speech for each legislation, students deliver **alternating negative and affirmative speeches**. Each of these speeches allows a maximum of three minutes, with a one-minute questioning period (NFL rules) or balance of unused speaking time (NCFL rules and some states). If a speech is particularly controversial, a member may move to suspend the rules to extend questioning *for an individual speaker*, but this should be done with restraint.

While a speaker technically has the option to not yield to questions, this is extremely inadvisable, since under NFL rules, scorers are instructed to take answering questions into account when evaluating speeches.

Speeches should be delivered **extemporaneously**, which means spoken spontaneously based on an outline of notes, rather than recited word-for-word from a manuscript. To do this, a speaker must be well-researched and prepared with ideas before arriving at the contest. S/he will develop specific arguments that **refute** (argue against) the opposition and introduce new ideas and perspectives rebuilding his/her own side of debate, rather than simply repeating ideas shared by speakers on the same side, or ignoring points raised by the opposing side. The only exception to this expectation is the speaker who introduces legislation (authorship or sponsorship) who may have a manuscript, since s/he begins debate on legislation.

In refuting, speakers should refer to specific arguments made by peers and **never** attack the individual (*ad hominem* fallacy). Be kind, generous and gracious with remarks, for example: "While Sen. Smith's argument to close the military base is well-intentioned..." It is also effective to refer to general themes/threads made in arguments on a particular side, synthesizing and weighing the overall "big picture" impact. After debate gets one-sided, a speech of summation is a welcome relief.

Effective speeches that respond to other arguments made on legislation come as a result of critical **listening** and **taking notes** – called *flowing*. Keeping track of arguments made on both the affirmative and negative sides – and any proof or evidence that may be questionable is the only way to keep debate dynamic or interactive.

Speakers should use effective word choice, correct sentence structure, and clear transitions to **signpost** ideas (outline that the audience can follow). Connect with the audience through sustained eye contact, and avoid standing behind a podium, if possible, because that creates a barrier with the audience.

Asking **questions** helps clarify confusing points in debate and shows a genuine interest in what other speakers are saying. *Questions* usually are not scored by judges, but how well **speakers answer** is scored. Answering questions well shows a judge the speaker can defend his/her arguments and has sound knowledge of the topic. When answering, it's best to succinctly answer just the question – no more, no less. Do not avoid answering questions; give your best effort, but if you don't understand the question paraphrase by saying "what I think you're asking is..." and then answer. If you don't know the answer to a question, redirect your answer to what you do know about the topic. It's courteous for speakers to thank the presiding officer when s/he recognizes them to ask a question.

## Speech Organization

- I. **Introduction** (15 to 30 seconds)
  - A. Relate the speech to ideas that are, or might be, brought to the floor for debate.
    1. Use a quotation; and/or
    2. Use an analogy; and/or
    3. Use statistics to raise awareness of a problem
  - B. State purpose/thesis (about 10 seconds)
- II. **Body** (approximately 2 minutes)

Each claim you make (whether constructive or refuting the opposition) should be *supported* with analytical reasoning and/or evidence with a good combination of quantitative statistics or facts, and qualitative case studies and quotations from experts. Be sure to state the importance, or *impact* that claim has for the overall topic of debate and why it supports or opposes those views. Example structure:

  1. **Claim:** issue of debate; point or points that are in conflict.
  2. **Proof:** evidence and reasoning to support the argument; *explain* how the proof relates to the claim (link).
  3. **Impact:** why the argument is important/significant, especially to the particular side debated. Challenge the opposition to respond to an issue. Give two to three meaningful arguments.
- III. **Conclusion** (about 30 seconds)
  - A. State primary points and issues
  - B. Summarize key arguments



# Procedure for Debate



- **Time** is of the essence, and the ultimate goal of the congress is to share time equally among legislators for speaking. The more time spent on parliamentary motions, amending, etc.; the less time is available for speeches.
- Setting the agenda at the beginning of the session is important. Try to avoid changing this valuable work by **laying items on the table** once the session has begun. This may slightly anger your judges/scorers and parliamentarian. Also, do not “Lay on the Table” when calling the question fails. Remember, calling the question protects the voice of the minority prior to when the vote will rest on the majority.
- Do not yield remaining speaking time to another legislator. The elected presiding officer may not give a speech while presiding, unless a tournament’s rules specifically allows for it. NFL/NCFL tournaments do not.
- **Only the presiding officer recognizes legislators who wish to question the speaker.** Suspending rules to allow for direct questioning is not recommended. Legislators may only ask one question at a time; two-part questions are not allowed, and suspending rules to allow for them is also frowned upon.
- **Legislators stand if they wish to be recognized to move, to speak, or to vote on the main motion** (legislation). Votes on most other motions are usually taken by *voice vote*, with a “Division” called by a member when the vote is not clear *and* that member believes someone’s right to speak is being abridged.
- Be respectful of the presiding officer and adults in the room. If the presiding officer makes a minor mistake, give him/her the benefit of the doubt unless someone has been wronged. The PO is elected by the chamber to run the meeting and should be allowed to fulfill this duty efficiently and effectively.
- Voting results for a simple majority decision (except on the main motion, i.e., legislation) are based upon the number voting (ayes plus noes); not the number seated in the chamber at the beginning of the session. When debate has exhausted and no one wishes to speak (or the chamber moves to end debate), the chamber will vote on the legislation. This vote is based on the number seated in the chamber, since Congress members’ voting records are ostensibly tracked by their constituents.
- **Amendments** must be submitted to the parliamentarian in writing, who assesses its relevance (whether it’s germane) and render that decision to the PO. After the current speech and questioning period, the amending legislator should rise and “move to amend.” Once the motion to amend is recognized, the PO will take a vote to second the amendment. Upon approval by one-third of the chamber, a delegate may move the question, or the PO may call for speeches in affirmation of the amendment. The amending legislator is not guaranteed this privilege; it is based on precedence and recency, if established.

## Gavel Signals:

- **1 strong tap** = call meeting to order
- Speech time signals: **1 tap** = 1 minute remaining • **2 taps** = 30 seconds remaining • **3 taps** = time has lapsed
- **Multiple taps** (until speaker stops talking) = grace period has ended (should not exceed 10 seconds)
- **1 strong tap** = end questioning time (*the presiding officer may also gesture a cue to questioners to be seated as the speaker finishes answering the final question*)

## Helpful Phrases:

You want to:	You say:
Move a motion	“I move that ( <i>or to</i> )...”
Leave the room (restroom, etc.)	Legislator says: “I move a personal privilege.” Chair says: “State that privilege” Legislator says: “To leave the room.”
Make an amendment	See “ <b>Amendments</b> ” above. “Move to amend.”
Close debate on the current issue	“I move the previous question.”
Ask about an error	Stand and say “Motion... I rise to a point of parliamentary inquiry.”
Second a motion	“Second!”
Table	“I move to lay the question on the table.”
Take from the table	“I move to take from the table...”

## Tracking Speaking Order

Keeping record of who has spoken ensures fairness in speaker recognition, and can be done with a simple table as demonstrated below. When students track recency, documenting the order of speeches also helps with this process. Speaker side is also noted – S (sponsor), N (negative), A (affirmative) – the examples below show where more than one speech on the same side was given.

In the example to the left, speakers' names are snaked from top to bottom, left to right, and crossed out when a speaker is subsequently recognized (the speech numbers are noted in parentheses). This makes it easier to determine who has spoken least and least recently.

In the example to the right, an alphabetized list is kept. In both examples, the presiding officer serves for two hours, which counts as two speeches.

	1	2	3
1	Smith (PO)	Smith (PO)	Wilson (20N)
2	<del>Lincoln</del> (1S)	Jones (7A)	Clinton (22A)
3	<del>Jones</del> (2N)	<del>Clinton</del> (12A)	
4	Washington (3A)	<del>Wilson</del> (14A)	
5	Roosevelt (4N)	Nixon (17N)	
6	Jackson (5A)	Carter (18A)	
7	Reagan (6N)	Lincoln (19N)	
8	<del>Clinton</del> (8N)		
9	Bush (9N)		
10	<del>Wilson</del> (10S)		
11	Harding (11N)		
12	Kennedy (13N)		
13	<del>Carter</del> (15N)		
14	<del>Nixon</del> (16A)		
15	Ford (21N)		

		1	2	3
1	Bush	8 N		
2	Carter	12 A	19 A	
3	Clinton	7 A	16 A	22 N
4	Ford	14 A		
5	Harding	10 S		
6	Jackson	5 A		
7	Jones	2 N	15 N	
8	Kennedy	11 N		
9	Lincoln	1 S	20 N	
10	Nixon	13 N	18 A	
11	Reagan	6 N		
12	Roosevelt	4 N		
13	Smith	PO	PO	
14	Washington	3 A		
15	Wilson	9 N	17 N	21 A

Student  
Presiding  
Officer



Debater or  
"Speaker"

Judge or  
"Scorer"

*Congressional Debate  
at Milwaukee City Hall, Wisconsin*

### CORE VALUES

As members of the National Forensic League community, we share a commitment to:

- Promote ethics in research and competition.
- Promote respect for diversity of ideas and of community.
- Promote seriousness of purpose and demeanor.
- Promote empowerment gained through knowledge.
- Promote tools of effective and ethical leadership.
- Promote active participation in democratic processes.
- Provide an opportunity for developing higher level thinking skills and critical analysis of issues.
- Develop interaction skills and cooperative decision making skills used in an assembly or in a committee.
- Learn the basic principles of parliamentary procedure and its use in a democratic society.

# Presiding

## Supplies

Table of Parliamentary Motions, legislative docket packet, stopwatch, paper (notebook or otherwise), gavel.

## Order of Procedure

1. If you give a candidacy speech for election, state that you will be fair and work to make sure time is best spent giving speeches.
2. After you are elected, say “this chamber will come to order.” State that you will use your best effort to recognize speakers around the chamber in a fair and balanced manner. Describe gavel time signals. Explain procedures clearly: i.e., how you will recognize speakers, etc., that you **will not call for motions at any time** (speakers should seek your attention when they wish to rise to move something), and that when it is clear that debate has exhausted on a bill/resolution, you will ask the chamber if they are ready for the question, rather than waiting for the *previous question* (which should be reserved for forcing end to debate that has become one-sided or repetitive in arguments). Always stand when addressing the chamber (to project authority). Use a calm, controlled and caring voice to show a genuine interest in the chamber’s business.
3. When you are ready to begin, say “Who would like to sponsor the first legislation?” When you recognize speakers, use the third person: “The chair recognizes...”
4. When a speaker concludes, say “That speech was \_\_\_minutes and \_\_\_seconds; questioners, please rise.” *Call on one legislator at a time, until the questioning period is over. You should keep track of questions to allow a fair distribution.*
5. *You may gesture for questioners to sit down when it is apparent time is running out. Afterwards, say “The questioning period has concluded, and the speaker may be seated.”*
6. “Those wishing to speak in opposition, please rise.” *Call on a speaker, using **recency** and balancing areas of the room as much as possible.*
7. “That speech was 2 minutes and 15 seconds; questioners, please rise.”
8. When you have called on the last person who wishes to speak on a bill/resolution, say “since this is the last senator/representative who wishes to speak on this issue, if no one objects following his/her speech, we will immediately move the question following his/her speech.” (That way, a separate vote to call *previous question* is unnecessary).
9. When it is time to debate the next legislation, say “The next item of business is —” (say the legislation’s title).



## General Notes

Legislators should refer to you as: Mr./Madam chair, *Speaker*, or *President*. Legislators may not approach the front table without rising to a point of personal privilege.

## Handling Motions

- **Recognizing Members:** “The chair recognizes...” or “State your point/question.” Say their title (Representative or Senator) and last name.
- **Second:** (if the chamber is silent) “Is there a second?”
- **Stating Motions:** “It is moved and seconded that...”

## Taking Votes

- **Negative votes and abstentions** are **only** counted for *recorded* votes (such as the main motion, i.e., legislation); votes taken where a fraction of members are needed are based on those casting a vote each time.
- **Voice Vote** - “On the motion to [read the motion title] those in favor, say aye. (Pause) Those opposed, say no.” *If the result is not clear, especially evidenced by particularly loud members, **or** if a member moves for a **Division** of the vote, then a standing vote is taken. Do not call for abstentions, since a voice vote is not recorded.*
- **Rising Vote** (*You may substitute “raise hands”*) “Those in favor of the motion to [read the motion title] will rise [or, “stand”].” [Count vote.] “Be seated. Those opposed will rise.” [Count vote.] “Be seated.” Calling for abstentions is unnecessary, except for the main motion (legislation).
- Voting for individuals (presiding officer, awards) is done by **secret ballot**.

## Announcing the Result: “On the motion to...”

- **Voice Vote** - “The ayes have it and the motion is adopted [or “carried”].” Or, “The noes have it and the motion is lost.” *If you are unsure of the prevailing side, announce that you will take a rising vote (before someone asks for a division... to save time).*
- **Counted Rising Vote or Show of Hands Vote** - “With a vote of 51 in the affirmative and 23 in the negative, the affirmative has it [or, “there are two-thirds in the affirmative] and the motion is adopted.” Or, “There are 29 in the affirmative and 33 in the negative. The negative has it and the motion is lost.”

## Discipline

- **Motion Out of Order or Motion Not in Order** “The chair rules that the motion is out of order [or “not in order”] because . . .”
- **Member Out of Order** (serious offense) “The member is out of order and will be seated.”

# Table of Parliamentary Motions

Following is the National Forensic League's motion chart, annotated (non-shaded) to show motions used most often.

Table of Most Frequently Used Parliamentary Motions Adapted for use in NFL Congressional Debate			Second Required?	Debatable?	Amendable?	Required Vote	May Interrupt?
Type	Motion	Purpose					
Privileged	24. <b>Fix time for reassembling</b>	To arrange time of next meeting	Yes	Yes-T	Yes-T	Majority	Yes
	23. <b>Adjourn</b>	To dismiss the meeting	Yes	No	Yes-T	Majority	No
	22. <b>Recess</b>	To dismiss the meeting for a specific length of time	Yes	Yes	Yes-T	Majority	No
	21. <b>Rise to a question of privilege</b>	To make a personal request during debate	No	No	No	Decision of the Chair	Yes
	20. <b>Call for orders of the day</b>	To force consideration of a postponed motion	No	No	No	Decision of the Chair	Yes
Incidental	19. <b>Appeal a decision of the chair</b>	To reverse a decision	Yes	No	No	Majority	Yes
	18. <b>Rise to a point of order or parliamentary procedure</b>	To correct a parliamentary error or ask a question	No	No	No	Decision of the Chair	Yes
	17. <b>Division of the chamber</b>	To verify a voice vote	No	No	No	Decision of the Chair	Yes
	16. <b>Object to the consideration of a question</b>	To suppress action	No	No	No	2/3	Yes
	15. <b>Divide a motion</b>	To consider its parts separately	Yes	No	Yes	Majority	No
	14. <b>Leave to modify or withdraw a motion</b>	To modify or withdraw a motion	No	No	No	Majority	No
	13. <b>Suspend the rules</b>	To take action contrary to standing rules	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
Subsidiary	12. <b>Rescind</b>	To repeal previous action	Yes	Yes	Yes	2/3	No
	11. <b>Reconsider</b>	To consider a defeated motion again	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	No
	10. <b>Take from the table</b>	To consider tabled motion	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
	9. <b>Lay on the table</b>	To defer action	Yes	No	No	Majority	No
	8. <b>Previous question</b>	To force an immediate vote	Yes	No	No	2/3	No
	7. <b>Limit or extend debate</b>	To modify freedom of debate	Yes	Yes	Yes-T	2/3	No
	6. <b>Postpone to a certain time</b>	To defer action	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
	5. <b>Refer to a committee *</b>	For further study	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	Yes
	4. <b>Amend an amendment °</b>	To modify an amendment	1/3	Yes	No	Majority	No
	3. <b>Amend °</b>	To modify a motion	1/3	Yes	Yes	Majority	No
2. <b>Postpone indefinitely</b>	To suppress action	Yes	Yes	No	Majority	No	
Main	1. <b>Main motion</b>	To introduce a business	Yes	Yes	Yes	Majority	No

\* No. 5 should include:

1. How appointed?
2. The number
3. Report when or to what standing committee

T = Time

° Nos. 3 and 4 by:

1. Adding (inserting)
2. Striking (deleting)
3. Substituting

# Congressional Debate Rubric: Speaking

This table of evaluation standards may be used by any judge who would like assistance in determining scores for speeches. Each scorer independently (without collaborating) awards 1 to 6 points for each speech. Each speaker has up to three minutes to present arguments followed by a questioning period (the time length for which will vary, depending on specific league rules).

Points	3	4	5	6
	<b>Mediocre</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Superior</b>
<b>Content: Organization, Evidence &amp; Language</b>	The speech lacked a clear thesis and organizational structure. Claims are only asserted with generalizations and no real evidence. Language use is unclear or ineffective.	While the speaker's purpose is present, the speech lacks logical organization and/or developed ideas. Analysis of evidence, if present, fails to connect its relevance to the speaker's claims. Use of language is weak.	While a clear purpose is apparent, organization may be somewhat loose (weak introduction/conclusion; no transitions between points). Diction represents a grasp of language. Much evidence is presented, but not in a persuasive or effective manner; or the speaker relies on <i>one</i> piece of evidence, but does so effectively.	Content is clearly and logically organized, and characterized by depth of thought and development of ideas, supported by a variety of credible quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (testimony) evidence analyzed effectively to draw conclusions. Compelling language, a poignant introduction and conclusion and lucid transitions clearly establish the speaker's purpose and frame the perspective of the issue's significance.
<b>Argument &amp; Refutation</b>	The speaker offers mostly unwarranted assertions, which often simply repeat/rehash previous arguments.	The speaker fails to <i>either</i> introduce new arguments (simply repeating previous arguments) <i>or</i> the speaker fails to refute previous opposing arguments; in other words, no real <i>clash</i> is present.	New ideas and response to previous arguments are offered, but in an unbalanced manner (too much refutation or too many new arguments). Questions are answered adequately.	The speaker contributes to the spontaneity of debate, effectively synthesizing response and refutation of previous ideas with new arguments. If the speaker fields questions, he/she responds with confidence and clarity.
<b>Delivery</b>	Little eye contact, gestures and/or movement are present. Vocal presentation is inarticulate due to soft volume or lack of enunciation.	Presentation is satisfactory, yet unimpressively read (perhaps monotonously) from prepared notes, with errors in pronunciation and/or minimal eye contact. Awkward gestures/movement may be distracting.	The presentation is strong, but contains a few mistakes, including problems with pronunciation and enunciation. The speech may be partially read with satisfactory fluency. Physical presence may be awkward at times.	The speaker's vocal control and physical poise are polished, deliberate, crisp and confident. Delivery should be extemporaneous, with few errors in pronunciation. Eye contact is effective and consistent.

Scores of less than three (3) are rarely encouraged, and should be reserved for such circumstances as abusive language, a degrading personal attack on another legislator, or for a speech that is extremely brief (less than 45 seconds) or delivered without purpose or dignity for the cause exhorted by the legislation. Substantial written comments and description of specific incidents should accompany such scores.

# Congressional Debate Rubric: Presiding

This table of evaluation standards may be used by any judge who would like assistance in determining scores for a presiding officer (PO). Each scorer independently (without collaborating) awards 1 to 6 points for each hour of presiding.

Points	1-2	3-4	5-6
	<b>Weak – Mediocre</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent – Superior</b>
<b>Speaker Recognition</b>	The P.O. needs to improve his/her communication with fellow delegates to gain their trust and respect relating to the rationale for rulings made. Frequent errors are made in speaker recognition, which lacks consistent method or impartiality.	While the P.O. does not adequately explain his/her preferences for running the chamber in advance, he/she does clearly explain rulings, when necessary. Speaker recognition may be somewhat inconsistent or biased.	Presiding preferences are clearly explained at the beginning of the session and executed consistently. The P.O. is universally respected and trusted by his/her peers, and is consistent in recognition ( <i>very few</i> errors) and rulings, distributing speeches throughout the room geographically, equally between schools of the same size, and among individuals.
<b>Parliamentary Procedure</b>	The P.O.'s knowledge of parliamentary procedure is lacking, and he/she shows negligible effort to correct errors and/or consult written rules.	The P.O. demonstrates competency in procedure, but makes mistakes in determining the results of motions and votes, etc.	The P.O. has command of parliamentary procedure (motions) and uses this almost transparently to run a fair and efficient chamber, seldom consulting written rules and ruling immediately on whether motions pass or fail.
<b>Delivery/ Presence</b>	The P.O. needs to improve his/her vocal and physical presence and professional demeanor.	The P.O. displays a satisfactory command of the chamber in his/her vocal and physical presence. Word choice is usually concise.	The P.O. dynamically displays a command and relates well to the chamber through his/her vocal and physical presence. Word choice is economical and eloquent.

# Faulty Speaker Recognition Systems: “Longest Standing” and “Activity” Waste Time



by Adam J. Jacobi

While I have coached Dramatic Interp., Policy Debate and everything in between, my passion seems to have become Student Congress Debate. Perhaps it's because I discovered early in life that communication is the crux of how our democratic society works, and the dynamism of lawmaking is a true test of problem solving at work. To that end, I introduce you to the monthly “Congress Connection” column, where I will ponder issues central to this event, and endeavor to bring it to the masses!

In the last Rostrum article I penned about Congress (November 2006), I discussed what I dubbed “urban legends” of Congress: the use of procedures that are not actual procedures! I also pondered ethics and the efficiency of chambers: upholding the ultimate aim that Congress is really more about speaking and debating than it is about the procedure. To that end, I present some new parliamentary customs that have arisen, and my observations and recommendations, accordingly.

Foremost is the much-maligned conundrum of speaker recognition. The prevailing parliamentary rule in most leagues is precedence, that is, those speakers who have not spoken, or who have spoken least. However, before precedence is established, recognition is still random, and subject to the bias of the elected student presiding officer. So, to combat this, recency was devised, adding one priority layer to precedence by recognizing the legislator who spoke least recently (earliest). When employed,

recency actually continues for the duration of a session, in companionship to precedence. In my observation of Congress chambers across the country and in different leagues, students have chosen to adopt this norm on their own, lending credence to its effectiveness.

In their quest to appear impartial, students who preside have devised less effective and efficient measures to recognize speakers before precedence is established. The first of these is longest standing, which recognizes speakers who stood first (and conceivably, continued to stand) on each side of debate for a particular legislation. The problem with this is twofold: the presiding officer has to take the time to write down everyone who stood, taking care to note shorter persons in the back of the room, plus, the order in which s/he writes the names is still random, but subject to bias. So, this approach fails to mitigate bias, and actually adds more time to figuring recognition, taking time away from legislators to speak.

Next, there's the notion of activity, which is even less effective than Longest Standing. Here, presiding officers track questions, and in some cases, motions by students on the floor. Those who advocate this system assert that it encourages more interaction in a chamber. The reality is that students make gratuitous motions and ask meaningless questions just to get recognized. And, guess what? The presiding officer has

control over who to call on for motions and questions, so this little magic trick of illusion only shifts the perception of bias away from recognizing speeches. Again, extra time is wasted in figuring these fallacious factors of mitigating bias. What's more, the NFL added one minute of questioning after each speech following the sponsorship, which encourages more interactivity. However, that period should not be used gratuitously, either. It should be reserved for meaningful, substantive questions that truly extend or clarify debate.

The bottom line is that longest standing and activity are a waste of time, because they do not truly aid a presiding officer in adding objective priority layers to the recognition system.

Beyond the effective recency method, there aren't any prevailing norms I've observed that mitigate the need to randomly recognize speakers before precedence is established. Beware those that claim to eliminate that bias, because they're usually a smoke and mirrors approach that can actually waste more time.

Next month, I'll discuss abuse use of voting blocs and other manipulative measures that discourage smaller and starting Congress programs. If you have any comments, concerns, questions or ideas you'd like to pose in this column, please let me know! E-mail [jacobi@nflonline.org](mailto:jacobi@nflonline.org).

# Politics in Student Congress Taking a Stand for Competitive Ethics



by Adam J. Jacobi

A wise man once remarked that competition can inspire the worst conduct in some people, and that in Student Congress, it can corrupt the objective of the event to simulate the problem-solving process through a democratic framework. That man is none other than Mr. Harold C. Keller, “Mr. Congress” himself, who dedicated his career to enhancing the stature of this event, through service as a coach, as a member of the NFL Board of Directors, and as director of the Sen. John C. Stennis National Congress.

It took the mind of a civil engineer, Henry Martyn Robert, to devise *Robert’s Rules of Order*, the parliamentary framework used as basis for legislative discussion. Mr. Keller himself engineered the NFL’s *Base System*, a tabulation method of balancing quantity of participation with the quality of input to legislative discussion. Together, Mr. Robert’s and Mr. Keller’s contributions allow students to collaboratively communicate, addressing problems in our country, and earn recognition for the value of their efforts.

I have had the pleasure of introducing several elected officials, attorneys and other influential people to Student Congress. After observing a legislative session,

they are inspired to see the intense argumentation, vision for the future, and professionalism these young people have. They are amazed that a teenager can bring a higher degree of leadership to the legislative process than many of our adult elected officials. The joke, “if the opposite of pro is con, then isn’t the opposite of progress Congress” is a sad commentary on how political and financial forces often get in the way of achieving legislative goals in Washington, D.C. Student Congress remains a beacon for the romantic notion of how democracy belongs to everyday people, as Jimmy Stewart’s character reminds us in the film *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

Yet, more and more, negative forces driven by the greed for competitive success are encroaching on this unique event. I present a challenge to students, judges and coaches to take a stand for ethics, before those negative forces drive away newer participants, who become disillusioned and disgusted by petty tactics and game-playing.

Student Congress often starts with administering an oath of office. This process, which reminds an elected official of their obligations, could be trivialized as a matter of routine pomp and circumstance. Students

who enter this event should have a sense of those obligations foremost in their minds. Consider another oath students should be expected to uphold in competition, the NFL Oath: “As a member of the National Forensic League, I pledge to uphold the highest standards of integrity, humility, respect, leadership and service in the pursuit of excellence.”

Let’s apply the five principles of the NFL Code of Honor to elected officials. They are “public servants,” because they conceivably serve a larger purpose than their own interests, and they are leaders through charting a course of action for our country. The most successful politicians show respect toward one another, because debate can’t happen without listening, and they are humble enough to avoid being consumed with their power. Their actions speak louder than words, because they have done what’s right through their personal integrity.

Yet, these values are sometimes absent from competition. The darkest hour I have observed in this activity came this past summer at the National Tournament, where a majority of students in the final session of the Senate elected a presiding officer who did not even wish to be considered for that office.

This was apparently done to remove this student from the floor, denying his ability to give speeches, because the trend holds that it's rare for a student who presides to win the tournament. The most discouraging aspect of this action was that it denied another student whose passion genuinely was to preside, from having that opportunity. What's more, the laughing that followed the presiding officer election results was not senatorial by any standard.

## Be the Change

I often get asked for advice from coaches whose students are frustrated with voting blocs and manipulative presiding officers. To that, I offer a few suggestions:

1). Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Students should take a stand and not become embroiled in questionable political plots. Such actions sacrifice integrity, and often the ringleaders of these schemes make empty promises, because their intentions are not noble to begin with. To employ a companion quotation: "What a wicked web we weave when at first we practice to deceive."

2). Coaches should make sure they supply a judge who is versed enough in parliamentary procedure to know when negative manipulation is happening, to ask questions of more knowledgeable people, and willing to intervene when necessary to moderate students' questionable behaviors. Take, for instance, when a student moves to lay legislation on the table immediately after a motion for the previous question has failed, and the presiding officer fails to rule this out of order. That is an improper use of the motion to lay on the table,

and should not be tolerated. While Congress is student-driven, judicious adult intervention is necessary to uphold a just playing field in the framework of competition. For coaches and judges less versed in parliamentary procedure, the NFL has some great resources available.

3). When a student is elected presiding officer, concerns over perceptions of favoritism often make recognizing speakers a difficult task. Subjectivity can enter into recognition even under the best of intentions for randomization. My suggestion to presiding officers has been to "inoculate" themselves from those worries by making sure the first several speakers they recognize are unlikely candidates: newer students, a student from a rival school, or a shorter student in the back who might otherwise be overlooked. It's inclusion, sensitivity and having a genuine interest in others. In short, effective presiding officers project the five pillars of the NFL honor code.

4). A student who is truly likeable can transcend voting blocs. Some basic tenets of interpersonal communication go a long way toward building respect. Be a good listener. Stick up for underdogs and include outcasts. Address issues in debate, not the debaters. Be aware of what's happening and who's involved. Be patient and be professional.

5). When all else fails, it's important for coaches to advocate for integrity in competition. While Congress is student-centered, it's also an interscholastic event, and just as coaches would be upset if a structure were skewed in any other forensic event, why should they not fight

for fairness if other schools are manipulating procedures? Some rule changes may be necessary to prevent manipulation. Whether coaches or students take up this charge, it might mean some sacrifice initially, due to the "resistance to change" mentality. To quote sports columnist Howard Cosell, "What's right isn't always popular. What's popular isn't always right." However, it's people like Mahatma Gandhi whose tenacity for change made the decisive difference in the long run.

Congress is indeed a democratic event, and to quote an inscription often found on government buildings, "*vox populi*," Latin for "voice of the people." We are a country founded on the premise of "*E Pluribus Unum*," "Out of many, one." Sometimes, it takes many drops of water to fill the bucket, for one person at a time to effect change, and for many people over time to be heard. Competition sparks motivation in students to perform at their best, but it can also tempt a greedy desire to win at all costs. The ethical student who takes the high road and advocates for fairness will ultimately gain the most success in life, because she or he will be remembered as – to quote Roman orator Quintilian – a "good person who spoke well."

If you have any comments, concerns, questions or ideas you'd like to pose in this column, please let me know! E-mail [jacobi@nflonline.org](mailto:jacobi@nflonline.org).



# Recency Table & Fractions of Voting

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# Votes Cast	Majority	Two-Thirds	One-Third
6	4	4	2
7	4	5	3
8	5	6	3
9	5	6	3
10	6	7	4
11	6	8	4
12	7	8	4
13	7	9	5
14	8	10	5
15	8	10	5

# Votes Cast	Majority	Two-Thirds	One-Third
16	9	11	6
17	9	12	6
18	10	12	6
19	10	13	7
20	11	14	7
21	11	14	7
22	12	15	8
23	12	16	8
24	13	16	8
25	13	17	9