Becoming a Polished PO

Being in Congress must be fun!

Responsibilities

The Presiding Officer (PO), aka "the chair", is the representative elected by the body to oversee the chamber, select speakers and questioners, handle all motions, and generally be the student in charge. They must also:

1. time all of the speeches and ensure that all time limits are followed.
2. keep up with precedence (order of the speakers/questioners) to ensure that the round runs in a fair and efficient manner
3. work with the parliamentarian if any questions arise that the PO does not know the answer to, or needs guidance on.
4. Conduct the voting and recording the votes of the chamber
5. Have a working knowledge of basic parliamentary procedure
6. Handle any disciplinary things that may come up in the round

Why the PO is important

- Sets tone for the round.
  - If the PO is joking and informal the round will be seen that way.
  - Remember judges make impressions of you and the tone you set!
- Should be a fair and impartial moderator
  - Have a consistent and fair method of calling on speakers & questionnaires.
  - Until Precedence and Recency is established try to use geography.
- Is the time keeper for the round.
  - Pro tip: have two stopwatches. One for timing speeches and one for timing the length of debate on each item.

IT'S VERY IMPORTANT!

The Auditioning Process

1. Declare you want to run for PO, typically before the tournament.
2. 1 hour is divided between all PO candidates
3. Practice starting congress rounds
4. Keep your own precedence and questioning charts
5. Be active asking questions and speaking when you aren't auditioning
6. Don't be rude!

Jobs of the PO

1. Set the **rules** of the **day** and set the agenda from the docket
2. **Time** the debates (give signals)
3. **Open** and **start** debate
4. **Recognize** speakers--follow the aff/neg block
5. Recognize **questioners**
6. Count votes
7. Handle questions and other motions

Common Gaveling Procedures

1 tap= 1 Minute remaining

2 taps= 30 seconds remaining

3 taps= speech time has elapsed & provide a verbal stop saying time.

Strong Tap= Motion passes or questioning ends

PRESIDING OFFICER: STEPS FOR OPENING A SESSION

1. If you give a candidacy speech for election, state that you will be fair and work to make time is best spent giving speeches.

2. After you are elected, say "this session will come to order." State that you will use your best effort to recognize speakers around the chamber in a fair and balanced manner. If "gaveling" time signals have not been explained previously, demonstrate how you will conduct them. Explain procedures clearly ahead of time to save time later. 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 item of legislation?" When you recognize speakers, use the third person: "The chair recognizes…"

4. When a speaker concludes, say "Time of 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 precedence and equity for all legislators. It is appropriate to first recognize speakers who have consecutively sought to speak earliest.

7. When you call on the last person seeking recognition 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 move to the immediate previous question following his/her speech." (That way, a separate vote to call "previous question" is unnecessary).

8. When it is time to debate the next legislation, say "The next item of business is —" (say the legislation's title). Legislation should be considered in the order established on the agenda, unless it is laid on the table. Laying on the table should only be done to allow a legislator time to construct a speech to continue two-sided debate, or introduce new information. It should not be abused to allow another legislator an earlier opportunity to get to a later agenda item. Time and prudence is spent by the entire chamber to set a fair and balanced agenda to give everyone an equal opportunity to debate their own legislation, and attempts to circumvent this should not be allowed.

9. Use of the motion for previous question should be discouraged, particularly when legislators have something new to contribute to discussion. When debate or discussion becomes repetitive, allow the previous question without reservation. When debate becomes one-sided, the previous question may be considered immediately, and should be encouraged.

PRESIDING OFFICER: DEALING WITH MOTIONS AND VOTING

- *Recognizing Members*: (for speeches) "The chair recognizes [Sen./Rep. last name]" or (for motions) "State your point/question."

- *Second:* (if the chamber is silent) "Is there a second?"

- *Stating Motions:* "It is moved and seconded that…"

- *Taking Votes* (use recorded votes for any votes requiring other than a majority for passage (a specific fraction of members), and for the *main motion* (legislation itself), since legislators' voting records are ostensibly tracked by their constituents). All voting is done only be members present at the time the vote is taken.
    - *Negative* votes and *abstentions* are counted for *majority* votes; votes taken where a fraction of members are needed are based on those seated in the chamber at the beginning of the session, so counting nay votes and abstentions is unnecessary; however, never should an absentee or abstention be counted as a nay vote.

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

What makes a good PO

Everyone remembers bad POs.

Good PO are seemless. They handle issues swifly and make sure debate stays at a natural pace and flow. Good PO may make few errors but handle them swiftly and don't make them into larger issues.

An excellent PO does the above things, but does it free of any errors in precedence or in the handling of motions. If the parliamentarian doesn't have to step in and correct anything for the entire round, you have an excellent PO.

How to be an Effective PO

Effective POs should do the following:

- Prioritize being correct over being fast.
- Call on questionnaires quickly, fairly, and accurately
- Know how to keep a CLEAR and accurate precedence sheet
- Make an attempt to pronounce the last names of the competitors correctly
- Be known for positive reasons not calling attention to yourself.
- Know the basic fractions for the votes and what % of chamber is needed -OR- have your chart with it on there!
- Have a working knowledge of the Amendment Process
- Know which set of rules will be followed (UIL/TFA/NSDA) and know the rules
- Enforce time on recesses- Give everyone a warning before it ends
- Be accurate in timing
- Be active when you are not auditioning
- Remind the judges for each hour of their service
- If POing in the afternoon or all day be willing to relinquish the gavel to debate a bill- be wise about this choice. **For more information, refer to RONR 10th ed. pp. 470-471, 382-383.**

Things the PO needs to be Aware of

- Situational Awareness
  - Perception is everything
  - Playing Favorites
  - Confidence

I'm Beyonce always.

How to help yourself get ranked by a judge

1. Remind the judge your POing time counts as a speech every hour!
2. Audition well- even if you don't "win" the audition in the chamber a judge will remember that you have this skill.
3. Relinquish the Gavel AKA- Be willing to give the gavel to another person in the room to debate a bill then return back to POing.

These are things that can be important for judges of all experience levels.

When to PO

1. At school @ practice
   a. Don't have a class-- ask your history or english teacher if you can do a quick parli procedure lesson the run the room for a week or so to practice your POing
   b. Create agendas that have to be used and parliamentary procedure to move through it.
2. At invitational tournaments - Don't let your first time POing be at regional or state!
3. Don't let yourself be forced into POing
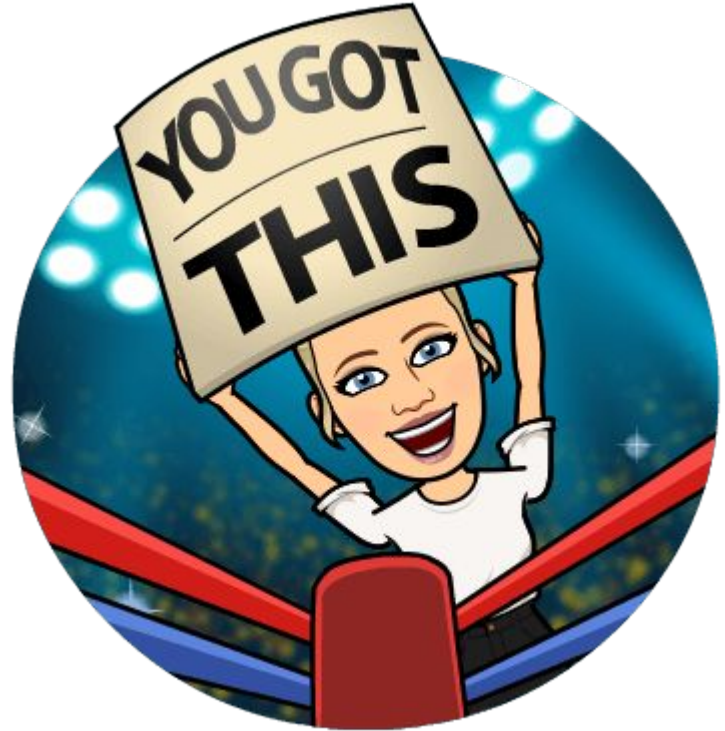
Helpful PO resources

Contact Information

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Works Cited

National Forensic League 2008-2009 Student Congress Manual

National Speech and Debate Association Congressional Guide 2017

UIL CONGRESS RULES & PROCEDURES

Bryan Alford Presiding Officers presentation UIL Capital Conference 2019.