



Jurassic Parliament Newsletter
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When the chair is a bully or out of line...

Last month we described the [basic principles that forbid bullying](#) or rude behavior at a board or council meeting. These principles apply to the chair as well as the members. Sometimes the chair lets his position go to his head. If you are burdened with a chair who bullies or intimidates others, we suggest this approach:



1. **First, find your allies.** Going head-to-head with the chair is risky, since the chair has all the authority of her position, and other members usually are reluctant to challenge her. Talk with people outside of the meeting if feasible, and estimate whether there is a majority in favor of civility. Of course if you belong to a public body, you will honor the public meeting laws by meeting with fewer than a quorum of your fellow members.
2. **Talk with your attorney** and see if he is familiar with the rules of decorum as laid out in Robert's Rules of Order. An attorney who understands these principles can help educate the chair.
3. **Schedule a private meeting with the chair**, perhaps including one other member and the attorney, and describe your concerns. Give specific examples of behavior that is not acceptable under Robert's Rules. For instance, Robert says that the chair may not interrupt a member, even if she knows more about a matter than the member does. Personal comments, insults, profanity and inflammatory language are also forbidden.
4. If the chair is responsive, well and good. If she continues to offend, however, **you may have to raise the matter at a meeting.** When the chair offends, loudly say "Point of Order!" The chair should ask you to state your point, and you respond by explaining the offense. The chair has the duty of ruling on

whether the point is correct or not. (The verbiage is, “The point is well taken” or “The point is not well taken.”)

5. If the chair says you’re wrong (“The point is not well taken”), any two members can **appeal the chair’s decision**. Once this has happened, it is the body itself that decides whether the behavior is acceptable or not.
6. What if the chair doesn’t recognize you when you say “point of order,” or just moves right on without giving a ruling? **You may stand up in your place and ask the body to vote** on whether your point is valid or not. It takes guts to do this, and you may have to explain what’s going on, but under Robert’s Rules the group is the final authority. The chair must obey the group’s decision.

We hope that education will do the trick, and drastic public measures won’t be necessary. In the long run, though, it’s better to belong to a body that follows the rules of decorum and discusses things in a civil way than to allow a tinpot dictator to insult or bully the members. **Rally your colleagues, consult your attorney, and then take action** according to these principles. It’s the democratic thing to do.

Ann G. Macfarlane

Professional Registered Parliamentarian

Quick tip: No right to speak last



The person who makes a motion has the right to speak FIRST in discussing it. After that, members have the right to speak as they are recognized by the chair. A member who has not yet spoken has the right to the floor ahead of someone who has already spoken to the matter. In meetings run according to Robert's Rules, there is no general right to speak LAST in debate to sum up or rebut what has been said.