

Speaking at Napo AGM Conference

A. PROPOSING A MOTION

1. Preparing a speech

Unless you are an experienced and gifted speaker, the most effective way to propose a motion is to read out a prepared speech. You have six minutes to propose a motion, which is quite a long time to speak for, but it can be squandered by, for example:

- laboriously reading out the wording of the motion;
- speaking in jargon and unexplained acronyms;
- mumbling, speaking in a monotone and/or speaking too fast;
- running out of time.

If possible, prepare your speech well in advance of Conference. After you have written your first draft, find a private space and read it aloud; alter or cut anything that sounds unnecessarily verbose or that obscures or dilutes your argument. Now read it aloud again with expression, at a public speaking pace without being ponderous, and time it. Remember to include your name and branch at the beginning – an acceptable formula is: “Chair, Conference, Rosa Luxemburg, East Berlin Branch” and when you have finished your speech, it’s usual to punctuate it with “Conference, I move” or “Please support this motion”. If your speech takes longer to deliver than six minutes, **cut it until it no longer does!**

2. Time’s Up!

Don’t worry about losing speaking-time for applause, heckling or laughter. On the day, the Steering Committee members, who staff the Timing Table, will stop the clock for any interruptions until you can restart your speech. What the Timing Table will **not** do, is allow you to speak longer than your allocated time! There are traffic lights on the two speaker podiums. The Timing Table will turn on the green light and ring a bell when you have 30 seconds left; the red light and a longer ring on the bell signifies that your time is up. If you continue speaking, the chair of the session will intervene and may even have your microphone switched off.

If, when the green light shows, you still have more than 30 seconds of your speech left, do not speed up in a vain attempt to cram the rest of your speech into the remaining time! Acknowledge that you will not be able to say everything you wanted to and ask Conference to support the motion anyway. Your seconder has yet to speak and can fill in the gaps.

3. The Microphone

If you get a chance, try out the microphone on the “For” podium during a break in conference business (you may need to approach a National Officer or member of Steering Committee to get it switched on). Bear in mind that you need to be heard throughout the hall while you are looking down to read your notes. If you don't manage to have a rehearsal beforehand and, while you are speaking, you realise that you are not being heard, inform the chair of the session of the problem and don't re-start your speech until it's sorted. The Timing Table will also stop the clock until you are ready to continue.

4. The Right of Reply

If your motion is debated i.e. members speak against it or “request information” (see Steering Committee paper ST03/2019(?)), then, as the proposer of the motion, you have a three minute “right of reply” at the end of the debate. You can use this to summarise your and your seconder's arguments and refute those of your opponents. You may not, however, introduce any new material i.e. material that has not already been raised by any speaker in the debate, in your right of reply.

B. SECONDING A MOTION

1. “Formally” or Properly?!

If you are seconding a motion, there is an expectation that you will speak to it and you are allowed three minutes to do so. In recent years, however, growing confusion seems to be arising about when seconders should “formally second” the motion and “reserve” their “right to speak”, which I shall attempt to clarify. There are three situations where it is acceptable to second a motion formally:

- When Conference is running out of time and the motion seems uncontroversial, then seconding it formally will allow more time for dealing with outstanding business and earn you a deserved round of applause.
- If the motion you are seconding is going to be opposed (i.e. you can see people lining up to speak against it), it can be tactically useful to delay your seconding speech so that you can specifically address the issues that your opponents are going to raise. In this case, you introduce yourself and your branch to the session chair and to Conference at the “For” podium and say: “I am seconding this motion formally and I reserve my right to speak” (**NOT** “my right of reply”, which only belongs to the proposer). The chair of the session is then obliged to let you speak later in the debate whenever you indicate that you wish to do so.
- If the seconder of the motion is unexpectedly absent and you are intervening (with Conference's permission) to second the motion so that it gets debated and does not automatically fall for lack of a seconder.

2. Preparing a Secunder's Speech

Having established that, as a seconder, you should always prepare a speech even if you don't use it, the advice is the same as for a proposer (see section A. above) except that as you only have three minutes to speak, you need to adjust your timings accordingly. The most useful seconding speeches are prepared in the knowledge of what the proposer is going to say and should therefore complement rather than reproduce the proposer's speech.

C. MOVING AN AMENDMENT

1. What is an Amendment

Shortly after Napo has published the motions and constitutional amendments that have been submitted for that year's AGM Conference, there is a deadline in the Napo calendar for amendments to those motions and constitutional amendments. Amendments, like motions, can come from a Branch or Section, a National Committee or two full members. An Amendment can seek to delete, add to or change the wording of parts of a motion, though not in a way that would completely negate or contradict the intention of the original motion – such an attempt would be deemed a “wrecking amendment” and would not be allowed.

Unfortunately, in recent years very few members appear to be submitting amendments to Conference motions by the deadline. This can lead to the unedifying spectacle of a member climbing onto the “Against” podium at Conference and saying something like “I actually support most of this motion, but there is one bit I can't accept, I therefore reluctantly urge Conference to reject it...”. It would have been much more constructive if that member had proposed an amendment instead!

2. How Amendments are dealt with in the Debate

- 1) When an amendment to a motion has been proposed, the chair of the session will call the proposer of the original motion to move the motion in the normal way from the “For” podium. Before beginning the proposal speech, however, the proposer of the motion can indicate that they accept the amendment. If this happens, then the wording of the motion will be changed to accommodate the amendment without any further debate and will now be called “the substantive motion”, which will, however, remain the ‘property’ of the original proposer, who will retain the right of reply at the end of the debate.
- 2) If, however, the proposer of the original motion does not accept the amendment, then the amendment is debated and voted on. The proposer and seconder of the original motion continue to move their motion from the “For” podium, but then the proposer and seconder of the amendment are each allowed to speak for three minutes in support of the amendment from the “Against” podium. The chair then opens up the debate and takes speakers from the floor, those supporting the original motion speak from the “For” podium and those supporting the amendment from the “Against” podium. At the end of this debate, the proposer of the original motion is allowed a three-minute right of a reply and then the matter is put to a vote.

- 3) If the amendment is lost, then the debate on the original motion continues and the proposer of the original motion retains the three-minute right of reply at the end of the debate, as long as there are no other amendments to consider. If there are further amendments to consider, however, the above process needs to be repeated for each individual amendment.
- 4) If Conference votes to accept the amendment, then the original motion is amended accordingly and becomes the “substantive motion”, which is now the ‘property’ of the proposer of the amendment, who now has the right of reply. If there are still further amendments to be considered, however, this same process has to be repeated for each individual amendment with the place of the proposer of the “original” motion now being taken by the proposer of the “substantive” motion and with the possibility that this would change again if a subsequent amendment is not accepted, but is carried by Conference.
- 5) After all the proposed amendments have been dealt with and the final wording of the substantive motion has been established, the chair of the session invites Conference to debate the substantive motion. Because this is, in effect, new business, everyone who has spoken in the previous debate(s) about the amendment(s), including the proposers and seconders of the original motion and the amendment(s) are allowed to speak again for three minutes and, as already stated, the proposer of the substantive motion is allowed a three minute right of reply at the end of the debate.

3. Constitutional Amendments (CAs)

Although it may initially seem a bit confusing, a Constitutional Amendment (CA), which is a proposal to change a part of Napo’s constitution, is treated exactly like a motion. The proposer and seconder are allowed to speak for six and three minutes respectively; the proposer is allowed a three-minute right of reply, and, while it is not allowable to amend an amendment to a motion, it is legitimate to amend a constitutional amendment and the process is the same as that set out for a motion above. The only big difference between a motion and a CA is that branches, National Committees or two full members can only directly propose CAs at AGM once every three years. In the intervening two years, any proposed CAs must be approved by the NEC.

D. SPEAKING FROM THE FLOOR

1. Waiting to speak

Once a motion has been proposed and seconded and any amendments have been dealt with, it is open to the members attending Conference to debate it. During motions, the front row of the conference hall is reserved for members who wish to speak; those who wish to support a motion should sit opposite the “For” podium, and those who wish to oppose that motion should sit opposite the “Against” podium. It is very important that you sit in these seats if you want to speak, as it lets the chair of the session know how many members wish to speak on either side so that the debate can be fairly arranged. It also establishes an orderly queue from which the chair can call you to speak.

2. Speaking

All the speakers in a debate are allowed three minutes. You must give your name and branch at the beginning of your speech. The green light and bell indicate that there are 30 seconds left and the red light and longer bell signal that time's up. If you come to Conference intending to speak in a particular debate, it is advisable to prepare a speech in advance and all the suggestions about preparing a speech that have been made for proposers and seconders above, apply. If you only decide to speak on the day, it is still advisable to make a note of the points you want to make as it's very easy to go off the subject, particularly if you are not used to speaking 'off-the-cuff'.

3. Points of Order and Requests for Information

These are dealt with fully in a separate Steering Committee paper ST03/2019(?). You can raise a point of order with or make a request for information to the chair of the session using any of the microphones positioned around the conference hall, but you still need to identify yourself by name and branch before you make a point of order or request information. It should also be stressed that a "request for information" is just that – it's a question! If you try to give information rather than seek it, you are abusing Conference by speaking in the debate without waiting for your turn in the queue for the "For" or "Against" podia and will be reprimanded by the chair of the session.

INFORMATION & HELP

If you have any questions, problems or issues about speaking at Napo AGM Conference, please come and talk to us in the Steering Committee Room (but please don't approach our members on the Timing Table – they must not be distracted!). The Steering Committee room is well-signposted and there is always a member on duty throughout Conference business hours.

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