



What's a Snippet? Glad you asked! A Snippet is short article about meetings or parliamentary procedure. New snippets are released on the first day of every month at www.agreatmeeting.com.



Snippet #144 Tabling

One thing at a time. This is the mantra of the parliamentarian, although it definitely can get nitpicky. But what do you do when something comes up – right in the middle of something else – and you need to deal with it? Ah, there's a motion for that!

Unfortunately, parliamentary authorities disagree on how to handle this situation and the gold standard, *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (RONR), even added an extra definition to the book in 2000: "To interrupt the pending business so as to permit doing something else immediately." In the 15 years since this statement was added to "explain" this motion, we haven't seen much difference in the public perception of tabling. But the motion does have a purpose; it's the rules surrounding the motion that might need a little tweaking.

Let's start with Robert's Rules, the gold standard of parliamentary procedure. Basically, this motion is only in order when something urgent has come up and the pending business must be set aside temporarily. The twist here is that, under RONR, it's the assembly that decides when (or if) the pending business will come back. While most people think that setting something aside means it's gone forever – that's the motion to Postpone Indefinitely. (*See Snippet #143.*)

Under the rules in RONR, a motion can be laid on the table and, when the immediate, urgent business is finished – *it doesn't come back automatically*. The members must bring that motion back to the floor by the motion to Take from the Table. This can be done at the same meeting, or at the next meeting, provided the next meeting happens within a quarterly time frame (which, in RONR-speak, means within the next three calendar months). That's a lot to learn and remember!

The American Institute of Parliamentarians *Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure* (AIPSC), treats tabling much differently. Under AIPSC a motion to table removes a matter from consideration the same as the motion to Postpone Indefinitely under RONR – it stops consideration of a motion entirely and without debate. AIPSC justifies this by requiring a two-thirds vote, but again, there are nuances that will not be understood by most members. Like under RONR, the result is that the assembly will be confused and annoyed because things have gotten too complicated. AIPSC also allows the motion to be renewed at any future meeting – but then, any motion can be renewed at any future meeting, so what's the point?

Neither parliamentary authority allows debate on the motion to table – which RONR's Postpone Indefinitely does. Both give the motion a high rank, which means that it is taken up in preference to several other motions.

What's the bottom line? Parliamentary rules are interesting to those who like that kind of stuff. To anyone else, they're unnecessarily complicated. Here's a practical approach: during a meeting, if something comes up, set aside what you are doing and then *automatically return to it when you are finished*. It's not in either of the books. But it does make sense, so when someone wants to table something, why not bring it back automatically by general consent after you have disposed of the intervening urgent business?