

The rules and rights of voting



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A fundamental concept in any democracy is the right to have your voice heard. This ensures that governing is based on the will of the people. As such, the importance of one's right to vote cannot be overstated. There are many slogans used to highlight and bring awareness to the importance of voting. Your vote, your voice; if you don't vote, you can't complain; elections have consequences.... The list goes on and on.

Incorporated within the NALC Constitution are several provisions that require the will of the members to direct specific activities or changes.

Article 15 of the *Constitution* directs the means and method by which branch or state association bylaws may be amended by vote of the membership:

Each Branch or State Association may make, alter, or rescind such by-laws, rules, and regulations from time to time as may be deemed most expedient, providing they do not in any way conflict with this Constitution. By-laws of branches may be amended at any regular meeting of the branch, provided the amendment has been submitted in writing at the last previous regular branch meeting, and suitable notification to members shall be made at least ten (10) days before the regular meeting at which the vote is to be taken. By-laws and amendments thereto, fixing the amount of initiation fees, dues, and reinstatement fees, or the time and place of meetings, shall become effective at the time determined by the Branch or State Association. All other by-laws must be submitted in duplicate to the Chairperson of the Committee of Laws and shall not become effective until approved by the Committee of Laws as provided in Article 11, Sec. 3, of this Constitution.

Article 5, Section 3 of the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches (CGSFB)* addresses branch elections in part:

All regular members shall be entitled to one vote for each office or position to be filled.

However, station delegates, representatives, or shop stewards may be elected only by the regular members within the station or area they represent. Branch stewards and any other persons who are members of the Branch Executive Board or similar body must be elected by the entire branch, not just by the station or area they represent.

Article 7, Section 2 of the *CGSFB* addresses fees, dues, fines and assessments in part:

The rates of dues and initiation fees may be increased only by majority vote by secret ballot of the regular members in good standing at a special or regular meeting after reasonable notice has been given that this question will be before the meeting, except that a Branch may provide in its by-laws that such majority vote may be had by secret ballot referendum. The same rules of procedure shall apply to the levy of a special or general assessment and to the imposition of fines upon members found guilty of charges preferred against them, except that such assessment or fines must be approved by a two-thirds vote. Branch by-law provisions requiring a vote greater than a majority of the regular members in good standing at the special or regular meeting to amend the Branch by-laws do not apply to proposals to increase the rates of dues or initiation fees.

Article 10, Section 1 of the *CGSFB* addresses charges in part:

Any member of the Branch who shall violate the Constitution or By-laws of the Association or Branch may have charges preferred against him/her, and if such charges are proved shall be fined, reprimanded, suspended or expelled as the laws may direct or the Branch determine. Any officer of the Branch who shall fail or neglect to discharge the duties of his/her office, or who may be guilty of gross misconduct, may be removed from office. These determinations shall be made by the members present and voting at the next regular Branch meeting after which said charges were read to the Branch. The vote regarding any of the above matters may be continued once, by motion, to the following regular Branch meeting.

Article 12, Section 3 of the *CGSFB* addresses funds in part:

All funds shall be devoted to such uses as the Branch may determine; provided, that no appropriation shall be made except when ordered by a majority vote of the members present and voting at a regular meeting; provided further, that Branches may make provision in their by-laws allowing officers to spend a certain sum of money between Branch meetings in cases of emergency.

The above is meant to illustrate the importance of the vote in establishing the will of the membership, and is not inclusive of every circumstance in which a branch vote is required or necessary.

Of similar importance to voting on NALC matters is the importance of exercising one's right to voice his or her opinions and vote in the election of those who will be making decisions at our local, state and federal levels of government. Your vote is your voice on those issues affecting you and your family. It goes without saying that careful consideration is of paramount importance when deciding among candidates, but one must exercise the right to vote to be heard at all.