

Branch bylaws: Meetings



Nicole
Rhine

Each year, the Committee of Laws rules on hundreds of submissions from branches for proposed changes to their bylaws. As chairman of the Committee of Laws, it is my job to review the proposed bylaws and then make a recommendation to the full committee. When reviewing hundreds of submissions each year, common problems with proposed language become apparent. So, in an effort to help branches get that required stamp of “approval,” here are some of the common issues the committee sees that pertain to branch meetings:

Regular branch meetings—Article 3, Section 1 of the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches (CGSFB)* states that regular meetings of the branch shall be at “such time and place as may be designated in the branch by-laws.” Long-standing presidential rulings have held that this language requires that both the date and the hour of the meeting be specifically designated in the branch bylaws (i.e., the third Monday of each month at 7 p.m. or the 10th of each month at 6 p.m.). Often the committee receives branch bylaws where the date and the hour of the meeting are not designated, which is in conflict with the *Constitution*.

Who presides at meetings—Article 3, Section 5 of the *CGSFB* contains the provisions for who can preside at a branch meeting. This section was amended by the delegates at the 2012 national convention. Previously, Article 3, Section 5 of the *CGSFB* provided only that in the absence of the president and vice president, any member in good standing could be elected to preside at a branch meeting by a majority of those present. This language still remains, but another option for branches was adopted: a provision that the branch may designate in its bylaws one or more officer(s) to preside in the absence of the president and vice president. Either provision is acceptable for a branch to have in its bylaws; however, if the branch wishes for another officer to preside in the absence of the president and vice president, those officers must be specifically listed in the branch bylaws.

Special meetings—Article 3, Section 2 of the *CGSFB* states: “Special meetings shall be called by the President upon the written request of ___ members (number to be determined by the Branch) in good standing or by vote of the Branch.” A common problem is proposed language

that gives the branch president independent authority to call a special meeting. The *Constitution* does not permit the president to call special meetings on his/her own authority. The same applies to the branch’s executive board or other officers.

Notice of special meetings—Often the committee sees language that notification of special meetings by the branch will be by posting on a bulletin board. Long-standing presidential rulings have held that posting a notice on a station bulletin board is insufficient by itself because there is no guarantee that every member of the branch, particularly retirees, will see the bulletin board. When the committee sees language like this, we will point out that the language may be in conflict because it appears that this is the only notification the branch is providing. Again, the *Constitution* requires notification to all members of the branch. (See Article 3, Section 2 of the *CGSFB*.)

Quorum—Article 3, Section 4 of the *CGSFB* states: “The Branch shall be called to order at the time prescribed in the bylaws if a quorum be present.” On occasion, the committee receives language that eliminates the requirement of a quorum. This is a conflict. Unless a quorum is present, a branch meeting may not come to order and conduct business. Another problem the committee encounters is proposed language that requires a branch quorum to consist of a certain number of officers before a meeting can be called to order. However, the *Constitution* does not authorize a branch to invalidate a branch meeting because no officer bothered to attend. When this occurs, any member in good standing may be elected by a majority of those present to preside at a meeting. (See Article 3, Section 5 of the *CGSFB*.)

Again, these are just a few of the common errors the Committee of Laws encounters regarding proposed language about branch meetings. To assist branches that may be considering revising their bylaws, the Committee of Laws recommends that branches refer to the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches* as a guide. The *CGSFB* begins on page 66 of the *NALC Constitution*.

While we’re on the subject of branch meetings, I would be remiss not to encourage every member to attend the meetings of your branch. Branch meetings are not only where all decisions of your branch are discussed and voted on, but a great place to become educated about the contract and keep up on current events that could affect the Postal Service and, therefore, could affect you.

This is a crucial moment in history for the Postal Service and it’s going to be up to us—the NALC—to save it. We’re all in this together. Get involved. What better place to start than to attend your branch meetings and ask how you can help?