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2002-484                      Remarks to be “Published” in Minutes

One of the members of our association, a somewhat officious gentleman, insists from time to time that his remarks (usually made in debate on some issue) be included in the minutes “for the record” and that the minutes be “published”, presumably so that his thoughts and views will get a wider distribution than otherwise.

What should we do about this? We don’t want our minutes to serve as a platform for one man’s opinions “published” for all to read, nor are we sure just what “published” means in this context.

The parliamentary authority is *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (RONR).

Opinion:

This inquiry involves two distinct questions: the first deals with the proper content of minutes and the second raises the question of whether it is permissible to include additional information if the minutes are to be published. Related to the latter is the question of what “published” actually means in the modern world.

Responding to the first question: It is not necessary, nor appropriate, to include in the minutes any statements by a member, even though the member may assert he is “speaking for the record”. The proper basic content of minutes is neatly summarized by the familiar statement (from RONR, p. 451, lines 25-28) that minutes “should contain mainly a record of what was *done* at the meeting, not what was *said* by the members”. Of course, some additional information should be included in minutes beyond just what was “done”; the appropriate content is described at pages 451-456 of RONR. Taken as a whole, these specifications comprise the basic information content that any proper minutes should contain. Including additional material, e.g., speeches in whole or in part, individual voting or attendance records, etc. is up to the association to decide upon, either by established customs or by specific motions.

This last observation suggests how a “statement for the record” could, properly, be included in minutes. A speaker could, by making a motion, *ask* that his words be incorporated in the minutes, or the chair could respond to a member’s insistence that his remarks become a “statement for the record” by assuming a motion to include the remarks. It then becomes the association’s decision whether to include them in the minutes. If the association defeats the motion to “include remarks” often enough, the officious member might just get the message and temper his requests.

A word of advice to the Secretary: If the motion to “include remarks” is proposed, be *sure* to have the member write out the text of his remarks, or supply his previously

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prepared text, *signed and dated* by the member, to be included as a portion of the text of the actual motion to go in the minutes, if adopted. This will completely avoid the all-too-common “That’s not what I said” – “Oh, yes it is” arguments that can ensue if the secretary tries to summarize or transcribe remarks on his own.

Turning now to the somewhat thorny question of “published” minutes: RONR has some suggestions for additional content on page 458, but these may not be suitable for all organizations that wish to publish their minutes. As was suggested above, placing anything in the minutes beyond the basic collection of information set out on pages 451 ff. is basically up to the organization to determine. An organization is free to include as much additional material as desired, congruent to the purposes of publishing. (We, the committee, would like to suggest that descriptions of any additional content of “published minutes” be dropped from future editions of RONR – the basic content of minutes is specified by the book, anything beyond that is essentially an organizational, not a parliamentary, question.)

And just what does “published” mean? Beyond the dictionary definition of “to prepare and issue for public distribution” things get a little murky. They were probably not so murky when Henry M. Robert first wrote of published minutes in the very first 1876 edition of his book. Back then “published” could mean little more than set in type, printed, and distributed. (The first commercial typewriter wasn’t available until 1874.) But these days, “publication” can include photocopies of hand or typescripts, faxes, web pages on the Internet, e-mail, word-processor files on disks, CDs, as well as “old fashioned” printing. All of this further argues that the whole question of the content of “published minutes” is something that the individual association will have to deal with in whatever way best fits its needs. A parliamentary authority need not attempt to offer specifications beyond the basics.