

# National Catholic Forensic League



## STUDENT CONGRESS

### MANUAL

*September 2017  
Edition*

#### *Oath of Office*

*I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter, so help me God.*

## FOREWORD

Of all the areas of forensics, student congress is one of the most fascinating. It combines aspects from both debate and speech competition in a unique blend. At the NCFL Grand National Student Congress, you will be placed in a legislative chamber with students who hail from across the nation. To be successful, it is important that you work well with your peers to serve as an advocate for your “constituents” and pass legislation. Immersing yourself in the full experience of this event requires that you familiarize yourself with the procedures outlined in this manual.

### I. PREPARING FOR THE GRAND NATIONAL TOURNAMENT

The bills and resolutions that will be debated by the chambers are placed in a packet by the NCFL Clerk of Congress. The Clerk of Congress attempts to select legislation that encourages educational debate on a wide range of subjects. Each diocese entering students is encouraged to submit legislation, and may submit up to two items. Submission of legislation for the tournament must be done using the templates found on the NCFL website; **legislation that does not utilize the templates will not be accepted.**

It is possible for a chamber at the Grand National Tournament to suspend its rules to permit introduction of a bill or resolution not included in the NCFL Congress packet. Such a suspension of rules requires a 2/3 vote OF THE ENTIRE CHAMBER, NOT JUST THOSE VOTING AYE/NAY. A student cannot count on the success of such a motion because the other members of the chamber have prepared to speak on legislation that is included in the NCFL packet.

Bills and resolutions are different types of legislation; each type has a different purpose and a different format.

- A **bill** is an enumeration of specific provisions which, if enacted, will have the force of law. If the Congress of the United States has the authority to enact a particular policy or initiative, legislation must be drafted as a bill (as opposed to a resolution). Debate on a bill will often include discussion on the merits of specific processes contained therein. A bill contains either sections or articles, but not “Whereas” clauses.
- A **resolution** is simply a generalized statement expressing a conviction or idea. Resolutions are used when Congress does not have sole authority over a particular policy or initiative. Debate on a resolution generally centers on broad principles about the concept presented. “Whereas” clauses (as opposed to articles/sections) are used to set forth the ideas presented in a resolution. *Since Constitutional Amendments are actually suggestions that the states ratify a provision, these should be written as resolutions.*

Whether your legislation was selected or not, be sure to spend some time prior to the NCFL Grand National Tournament reviewing the legislation packet. Use a variety of resources to conduct your research and formulate your arguments. Documentation is frequently more impressive than sheer personal opinion.

## II. CHRONOLOGY OF STUDENT CONGRESS AT THE GRAND NATIONAL TOURNAMENT

*This is a summary of the ordinary rules and procedures at the NCFL Grand National Tournament. For more detail and information on how to handle situations not addressed below, please consult Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised. A Table of Frequently Used Parliamentary Motions is an appendix to this manual.*

### Preliminary Business

Before debate begins during the first session, there are some preliminary items that require attention. Each of the chambers during Saturday's preliminary competition will need to complete two important steps.

**Agenda-Setting:** the NCFL Grand National Congress will utilize a brief caucus within each chamber at the beginning of Preliminary Session I in order to set the debate order of legislation (also called the agenda). Once the order is set by the chamber, a suspension of the rules is required to change it.

**Election of the Presiding Officer:** the Parliamentarian or a member of the Tab Staff will conduct the election for each session's presiding officer. During Preliminary Business, only the first session's Presiding Officer will be elected. The following are rules for Presiding Officer elections during EACH session (except for the Grand Final Session):

- At the start of each session, the Parliamentarian shall take nominations from the floor for Presiding Officer. Students should NOT assist with this process.
- No student may nominate himself/herself.
- Short (30-45 seconds) speeches of introduction and qualifications may be given by each candidate prior to the first round of voting in a given election, but are not required.
- Elections for presiding officer shall be conducted by secret ballot. On a small piece of paper, each student will vote for only one of the nominees.
- A majority vote will elect the presiding officer for a given session. Balloting shall continue until a majority (50% + 1) is reached.
- In each round of balloting, the candidate receiving the lowest total of votes is eliminated; if the bottom two students' vote total is less than the total of the student who is third from the bottom, the bottom two students are both eliminated from the next round of voting.

### Sponsorship and Authorship

Each item of legislation in the preliminary sessions will be listed as being sponsored by a diocesan league. A diocesan representative shall be recognized to open debate on an item, but thereafter s/he shall take his/her chance with other members for further speaking opportunity. S/he does not have any other special powers or rights, and does not have the right to summarize the debate.

## Decorum – General

There is a right way and a wrong way to speak in legislative session. By studying the Table of Frequently Used Parliamentary Motions and Robert's Rules – and learning to use these motions with the appropriate language – you will be taking a step forward in your effort to be an effective congressperson and contribute to a fine NCFL Grand National Congress.

When referring to another participant, use the following form:

- *If in a House: "Representative..." or "The Representative from..."*
- *If in a Senate: "Senator..." or "The Senator from..."*

When referring to a Presiding Officer, use the following form:

- *If in a House: "Mr. Speaker" or "Madame Speaker"*
- *If in a Senate: "Mr. President" or "Madame President"*

The correct way to obtain the floor to offer a motion is to wait until a speaker's remarks conclude, stand and say "motion," and wait for the Presiding Officer to recognize you. When the Presiding Officer recognizes you, make your motion.

The correct way to obtain the floor prior to presenting a speech or asking a question during cross-examination is to stand and wait to be recognized when the Presiding Officer calls for speakers or questioners. When the questioning period elapses or a speaker has been selected, those waiting should take their seats.

Congresspersons are reminded that the speeches they give are of primary importance in influencing the nomination process. Use of motions in a proper and timely manner helps further debate and influences the nominating process.

## Decorum – Floor Speeches and Cross-Examination

Members shall claim the floor in debate only if they wish to oppose the views of the preceding speaker; debate will thus alternate between pro and con speakers. If no one wishes to oppose the preceding speaker, the presiding officer may recognize a speaker upholding the same side. The time limit for each speech is three minutes.

Members may not yield any portion of their speaking time to another member except to answer a question during a cross-examination period. A mandatory two-minute questioning period follows all authorship and sponsorship on amendment speeches. A two-minute questioning period shall also follow the first negative speech on any item of legislation. The Presiding Officer shall recognize legislators who wish to ask a question of the speaker; the speaker MAY NOT perform this function him/herself. All other speeches will have a mandatory one-minute questioning period that may not be suspended. Questioners may only ask one question at a time. Thus, the Presiding Officer has an obligation to rule "two-part," misleading, or irrelevant questions out of order. If time remains once all questioners have been exhausted, the chair will absorb the remainder of the time. The rules may NOT be suspended to add additional questioning.

When many members wish to speak, the Presiding Officer will choose those who have spoken least. Presiding Officers should maintain careful records of the number of times each student has spoken and use this as a guide in the selection of speakers. At the start of each preliminary session, all students start with zero speeches (recency is reset).

It is not necessary – and is in fact discouraged – for a questioner to ask, “Will the speaker yield to a question?” If the speaker has signaled his/her intention to answer questions or is the sponsor of an item of legislation, it is sufficient that the Chair recognize the questioner.

### **Amendment Process**

For many students, the amendment process is confusing, time-consuming, unnecessary...or some combination of the three. Use the information below to eliminate the confusion as to both the process as well as the rationale for why an amendment is sometimes necessary.

Some general information: amendments must be in writing and state exactly the words to be added or stricken and may be considered only upon a second of 1/3 of the members PRESENT. Negative 1/3 seconds are never ordered. Amendments can be used to correct unintentional errors in legislation, adapt legislation to reflect events that have unfolded since it was originally drafted and released, better reflect the course of debate on the legislation, or another reason entirely. The procedure to be used is as follows:

1. The amendment is written out on an NCFL Amendment form and passed to the Parliamentarian.
2. The Presiding Officer will read the amendment and determine if it is germane.
3. The Presiding Officer will pause for motions after each speech.
4. When an Amendment is proposed, the Presiding Officer will read the amendment.
5. The Presiding Officer will ask for a 1/3 second of the MEMBERS PRESENT. If the amendment does not receive the 1/3 second, debate continues with the next appropriate speech. If the amendment receives the 1/3 second, the Presiding Officer shall ask for a sponsorship speech on the amendment. Preference for the sponsorship speech on the amendment shall be based upon the number of speeches given (regular speaking precedence); the author of the amendment DOES NOT have the right of sponsorship. Once a chamber provides the 1/3 second, the amendment becomes the property of the chamber.
6. Debate on an amendment to legislation DOES NOT INCLUDE mandatory cross-examination; after the sponsorship speech, a con speech ON THE AMENDMENT will be in order.
7. Debate will alternate pro and con ON THE AMENDMENT until the amendment is disposed of properly. Proper disposal of an amendment involves a successful calling of the question and a vote on the amendment’s acceptance.
8. Any speech on the main motion is OUT OF ORDER if it does not pertain to the amendment while the amendment is on the floor.

## Voting Procedures

Votes on legislation shall be taken by standing vote unless a roll call is demanded by 1/5 of the members.

A division of the Chamber may be demanded by any two members (***motion and second***) on any question on which a voice vote has been taken. The call for a division of the Chamber must be made before the Chamber has moved on to other business.

## Time Limits and Ending Debate

There is no limit on the length of debate required on any piece of legislation, nor is there a minimum cycle rule. When no one wishes to speak, the vote should be taken.

The motion of Previous Question requires a 2/3 vote OF THE MEMBERS PRESENT IN THE CHAMBER. For example, if there are 21 people present, 14 is the minimum needed to invoke the Previous Question. This rule differs from that which is specified in Robert's Rules. This is an NCFL Grand National Student Congress rule.

It is important to note and stress that the motion of Previous Question should NOT be used repetitively in an attempt to force voting on a bill or resolution. If the motion fails once, calling it after both of the next two speeches burns valuable debating time (especially if it is seconded and a vote is therefore required). Students are urged to maintain a sense of the momentum within their chamber and use this motion primarily when it may have a reasonable chance of passage.

## Rules and Rulings

A motion to suspend the rules of the Chamber must be passed by a 2/3 vote OF THE MEMBERS PRESENT. This procedure is needed when one wishes to consider legislation that is not on the official agenda or when altering the agenda in any way. **A motion to suspend the rules may not be used to alter any NCFL National Student Congress Rule or Regulation.**

On Student Congress rules, the Parliamentarian is the final authority within each chamber and s/he should correct any serious deviations from the rules. Decisions of a Parliamentarian on procedure will not be altered by the Tab Room.

Under no circumstances is a member permitted to argue with the Presiding Officer or the Parliamentarian. A member's only recourse if s/he feels the Presiding Officer has made a serious error is to stand and say: "I rise to a point of parliamentary procedure." The Presiding Officer will say: "State your point." The member should state what s/he believes to be the error and sit down. The Presiding Officer may confer with the Parliamentarian before answering. If the member still feels the Presiding Officer is wrong, s/he can rise and say: "I appeal the decision of the Chair." This motion requires a second. There is no debate, but the person making the motion may, in a few sentences, state why s/he feels the decision should be overruled. The Presiding Officer may also state, in a few sentences, why s/he feels the decision should stand. The Presiding Officer then takes the vote as follows: "Those voting to sustain the Presiding Officer...those voting to overrule the Presiding Officer." Once the vote has been taken and the

results announced, the decision is irrevocable and no further discussion is permitted on the matter. ***Please note: the purpose of Student Congress is to debate legislation, not show off one's knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Take this into consideration when contemplating the above action.***

### **III. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRESIDING OFFICERS**

#### **General Guidelines**

A Presiding Officer may only serve in one of the three preliminary sessions; service as a Presiding Officer during preliminary competition does not obligate or bar a candidate from seeking election as a Presiding Officer during the semifinals.

Once elected, the Presiding Officer MAY NOT relinquish the Chair during the session to enter into debate.

#### **Recognition of Speakers**

It is your job as Presiding Officer to keep careful records of speaker order. One suggested method: as each speaker gives a speech, mark an "X" next to his/her name on the seating chart and note the time s/he spoke. Check with the Parliamentarian at the end of each hour of debate or another convenient time to ensure that your recency charts agree.

When many members wish to speak, choose those who have spoken the least. Check your recency or seating chart. When you must choose between two members with the same number of speeches, select the speaker who has spoken least recently.

#### **Procedural Matters – During a Session**

Time each speech. When 2 minutes have elapsed, tap the gavel once. When 2 ½ minutes have elapsed, tap the gavel twice. At 3 minutes, gavel down the speaker, allowing the speaker to complete his or her sentence and ask the speaker to relinquish the floor.

The Presiding Officer is strictly charged with the responsibility to keep debate moving. You will be held responsible for seeing that no one monopolizes speaking time; you will also be held responsible for failing to rule dilatory motions out of order.

The Presiding Officer will be expected to rule all interruptions of speakers – even for questions – out of order. Members may rise for questions only after the speaker has finished his/her speech. Speakers that gave authorship or sponsorship speeches on legislation must remain standing for two minutes of questions. Only authorship speeches on main motions carry this two-minute questioning period. All other speakers may answer questions if time permits in their speech time. Suspensions of the rules to add on questioning periods are allowed, but should be considered carefully by the Chamber. Each suspension of the rules for questions detracts from debate time. Only authors are required to answer questions. All other speakers may decline.

A member may not yield any portion of his/her speaking time to another speaker except for a question. In this case, only a question may be asked. No statement or other non-interrogatory comment is allowed. The Presiding Officer should suppress such out-of-order statements immediately, but politely.



Questions of procedure not covered by these rules shall be governed by Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised.

### **Procedural Matters – Concluding Debate on an Item and Concluding a Session**

When taking votes, do so quickly and with precision: "The Question is...(state the motion). Those in favor please raise your hands...those opposed by the same sign." You may use this format or a similar method. Then announce the votes and which side won. Voice votes may be taken EXCEPT on final votes on legislation and amendments and on all motions that require a vote other than a majority. Such votes as these must be taken by STANDING VOTE.

Use of the motion for the Previous Question should be discouraged as long as members have something new to contribute to the discussion. When the motion is made and seconded, take a standing vote. Remember – a 2/3 vote OF MEMBERS PRESENT is required for passage. When no one wishes to speak, the vote on the legislation may be taken directly without moving and passing the Previous Question.

Although a perfect session might end with a vote on the legislation at hand, it is not mandatory. Do not force a vote if there has been insufficient debate. There is no limit on the length of debate required on any piece of legislation.

### **Role of the Parliamentarian**

Each session the Presiding Officer is scored BY THE PARLIAMENTARIAN on an eighteen-point ballot; this score is similar to a speech score. The Presiding Officer may be nominated for Outstanding Member for their service.

#### **IV. SEMI-FINALS AND GRAND FINAL SESSION**

1. The goal for size of preliminary chambers will be 22 members. If there are 220 entries or less, as of 2 weeks prior to the Grand National Tournament, there will be 10 preliminary chambers. If there are more than 220 entries prior to the Grand National Tournament, then there will be an additional chamber added for every 22 entries above 220, or fraction thereof. The below rules shall apply if there are 10 preliminary chambers; adjustments will be made if necessary.
2. The Chambers will hold three preliminary sessions on Saturday, meeting for a total of 9.5 hours. Exact times for the sessions will be determined by the Grand National Tournament Director.
3. Six members will advance from each Chamber to the Semi-Finals. The Clerk of the Congress will distribute the qualifiers into three approximately equally sized Chambers. Qualifiers for the Semi-Final Session will be posted at the same time as other events on Saturday night.
4. There will be 3 Semi-Final Chambers (I, II, III). The Semi-Finals will consist of one 3 and ½ hour session. Advancement procedures are listed in Section V.
5. Eight students will advance to the Grand Final Session from each Semi-Final Chamber. These students will compete for the honor of being elected the NCFL Grand National Congress Champion.
6. The Grand Final session shall be divided into two two-hour parts. Each part shall be presided over by a student elected from those advancing to the Grand Final Session. A student may not preside for both parts unless no other student has volunteered to preside. There will be four Scorers and one Parliamentarian for the entire Grand Final Session. The Grand Final Session will last 4 hours. Exact times for the Session will be determined by the Grand National Tournament Director.

An election will be held at the beginning of the Final Session for presiding officers. Any student wishing to serve as presiding officer must be a candidate in this election. Voting will proceed as it does for all other PO elections, with the exception that the winner of the first election in the Final Session will choose whether to serve in the first or second half of the Final Session. Upon the election winner's selection of her/his service, all those who were candidates in the first election may decline participation in the next round of voting. A second election will then follow, the winner of which will serve as presiding officer for the remaining half of the session. Only if no candidates wish to run in this second election will nominations of those who were not candidates in the first election be considered.

7. Nominations for advancement shall occur as outlined in Section V. Final selection of the rank order of the winners (the top eight in the Grand Final Session) will be done by rank order preferential ballot.
8. All rules of procedure outlined in this NCFL Manual will be followed.

9. A different set of legislation will be debated during the Semi-Finals and the Grand Finals. The items will be selected by the NCFL Clerk of Congress, and the agenda order will be established by the members of each Chamber.

## V. INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCORERS

1. Scoring in Student Congress is similar to judging other events in the sense that you take notes. Speakers will usually alternate from pro to con, and questions may be asked. In scoring speeches, however, you need not decide the “winner” as you would in a debate round. While you may see speakers who refute the positions of the opposition point by point, it is not necessary that they do so. Each speech should be rated on its own merit, using the categories on the ballot (a sample ballot is included in the Appendix).
2. You are ***STRONGLY ENCOURAGED*** to make thorough and extensive comments on the ballots.
3. Since the purpose of Student Congress is to advance debate on the policies presented through legislation, speeches from the floor should do so rather than rehash previously-delivered arguments. A quality speech may be presented even if it does not run three minutes.
4. DO NOT evaluate speakers on their use of Parliamentary Procedure in scoring their speeches. If a student is out of order, the Presiding Officer and/or the Parliamentarian will correct the problem. THE SCORER SHOULD NOT TAKE A ROLE IN PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES.
5. Do not give speakers low points solely because they raise controversial issues or points you believe to be false. Each speaker is entitled to his/her position and should be scored based on how well s/he communicates and supports his/her position.
6. There will be two Scorers and one Parliamentarian in each Chamber during the preliminary sessions. The Scorers will rotate among the Chambers, while the same Parliamentarian will remain with a Chamber throughout all three preliminary sessions.
7. Nomination of Outstanding Members:  
Preliminary Sessions: at the end of each session, each Scorer will rank the top 6 persons who, in the Scorer’s opinion, did a truly outstanding job during the session. The Parliamentarian or a member of the Tab Staff will collect the nomination forms. All ranks for each student from a Chamber will be added; each student not ranked will receive a “7” from that Scorer. At the conclusion of the third session, the eight students in each Chamber with the lowest ranks will comprise a nomination ballot presented to the students; the three students with the lowest ranks will be Semifinalists. Students will then place the names on this ballot in the order that they prefer the nominees. The top two vote-getters of the preferential election who have not advanced on the basis of total ranks shall also be Semifinalists. The Parliamentarian will also separately rank the students in the chamber; his/her top-ranked student who has not advanced by either total judge ranks or preferential voting shall also be a Semifinalist. See Section VII for voting procedures.  
  
Semi-Final Sessions: the four Scorers and the Parliamentarian in each Chamber will each rank the top eight members of the Chamber; each student unranked by an official will receive a rank of 9. The ranks will be totaled and the students with the lowest 5 totals will advance to the Grand Final Session. Two (2) members to advance are voted on by the Chamber by preferential balloting, selecting from those students not already advancing from Semi-Finals who have either given a speech or served as Presiding

Officer during the semi-final session. Finally, the top-ranked student on the Parliamentarian's rank form who has not advanced by either total judge ranks or preferential voting shall also be a Finalist.

Grand Final Sessions: each Scorer will rank the top 8 persons at the end of the Grand Final Session; the Parliamentarian will also rank the top 8 persons. This procedure will mirror that of the end of Preliminary Sessions, with the 8 students with the lowest ranks comprising a nomination ballot. Preferential balloting will be done by the rank ordering of the 8 nominees; each Scorer and the Parliamentarian will also complete a preferential ballot, each of which shall be worth 4 student ballots.

8. The ballot cast by the Parliamentarian in Preliminary, Semi-Final, and Grand Final Sessions will be used to break any ties that may occur.

## VI. INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS

1. The primary duty of the Parliamentarian is to be available to settle problems that might arise relating to procedure within a Chamber. As long as things run smoothly, you should stay in the background. Even on minor parliamentary errors, you should sit back and let the Chamber have an opportunity to recognize the error and resolve it. You may wish to point out the error briefly at the start of the next session. The general philosophy: let the members of the Chamber solve their own difficulties. Only when a major problem or error has been made should you step in and correct matters. In particular, if debate or progress in the Chamber bogs down, you should step in and point out ways out of the parliamentary quagmire. You MAY quietly counsel the Presiding Officer on his/her discretionary power to rule dilatory motions out of order and to watch out for speakers that might try to monopolize time.
2. At the start of the Congress, you should preside initially and take roll call (reporting ANY ABSENT OR TARDY members to the Tab Room). You should be available as a resource for students during the agenda caucusing. You will also utilize the seating charts provided by the Tab Room to seat students before the opening of debate.
3. You are asked to evaluate each Presiding Officer on the basis of his/her work for each session s/he presides over. The ballot is in the Appendix.
4. Although you do not score sessions or the students' use or abuse of procedure, you can and should take their overall performance in these areas as a factor when making nominations. REMEMBER: at the end of the third Preliminary Session, one student you nominate will automatically advance to the Semi-Final Session.
5. During the Congress, please assist the Presiding Officer by keeping a very careful record of all speeches given during each session and verifying speaker order and recency with the Presiding Officer occasionally.
6. You also function as a resource for the Scorers in your Chamber. Their questions will likely go to you first, and please do not hesitate to give your best guidance in accordance with the rules. Please direct all questions concerning tournament procedures, scoring guidelines, and scoring ranges to the Tab Room. The Tab Room and the Clerk of the Congress are available as a resource for you.

## VII. CLERK OF CONGRESS

1. The Clerk of the Congress shall be appointed annually to manage and direct the operation of the Student Congress by the NCFL Executive Council. The Council may designate additional assistants for the Clerk.
2. A Diocese may submit one or two items of legislation for consideration. Bills and resolutions must be submitted electronically to the designated official of Congress, and must utilize the templates posted to the NCFL website to be considered for debate. **Due date for legislation is April 1<sup>st</sup>.**
3. The “designated official” (if not the Clerk) will confer with the Clerk and other assigned assistants to the Congress on final determinations as to which items to use for the preliminary sessions, the Semi-Finals, and the Grand Final Session. In order to promote diversity of debate, the committee may choose amongst legislation addressing the same topic. Thus, not all dioceses may be represented in the legislation packet.
4. The accepted legislation will be numbered. One set will be used in the Preliminary Sessions. Sponsorship in each Chamber is guaranteed for a member of the authoring Diocese.
5. There will not be guaranteed sponsorship speeches in the Semi-Finals and the Grand Final.
6. Legislation packets will be posted to the NCFL website on or around April 25<sup>th</sup>.
7. Bills and resolutions that are not in the proper form, duplicate other topics, or arrive after the deadline, may be rejected.
8. Entries will be assigned to Chambers according to the following guidelines:
  - a. Congresspersons from a Diocese shall be equally distributed to the Preliminary chambers by the Grand National Tournament Director or his/her designee.
  - b. If a Diocese makes a substitution, the new congressperson will replace the original entry in the appropriate Chamber.
  - c. Parliamentarians will be assigned to Chambers that do not have an entry from their Diocese. The Scorers will also be assigned to Chambers that do not have an entry from their Diocese; if it is unavoidable to place a Scorer in a Chamber with students from their Diocese, s/he will be assigned so that s/he is not in a Chamber with congresspersons from his/her school.
  - d. All preliminary chambers will utilize the same legislation packet.

# ***APPENDIX***

***Tentative Tournament Timetable***

***Glossary of Useful Terms***

***Sample P.O. Critique Form***

***Sample Scorer's Critique Form***

***Sample Format for Bill***

***Sample Bill***

***Sample Format for Resolution***

***Sample Resolution***

***Sample Constitutional Amendment***

***Sample NCFL Amendment Form***



## **TIMETABLE**

The below information is a set of guidelines for Congress competition at the Grand National Tournament. It is by no means exhaustive, and the specifics may change from year to year. But whether you are a competitor, coach, scorer, tournament official, or visitor, you may find the information below useful.

### **Session One**

- The Parliamentarian establishes seating and takes attendance
- Agenda nominations are caucused and proposed
- A presiding officer is elected for the first session
- Debate begins on the first item of legislation
- Debate continues for approximately three hours, with recesses taken at the discretion of the chamber

### **Lunch**

### **Session Two**

- A presiding officer is elected for the second session (if not already done at the conclusion of the first session)
- Debate resumes per the agenda approved at the beginning of the first session, unless otherwise amended
- Approximately three hours of debate follow, with recesses taken at the discretion of the chamber

### **Session Three**

- A presiding officer is elected for the third session (if not already done at the conclusion of the second session)
- Debate resumes per the agenda approved at the beginning of the first session, unless otherwise amended
- Approximately two and one-half hours of debate follow, with recesses taken at the discretion of the chamber
- Preferential balloting conducted (determines 1/3 of the qualifiers for the Semi-final Sessions)

## GLOSSARY OF USEFUL TERMS

**Agenda:** also called a “docket,” this is the sequence in which the legislation will be debated in a given chamber.

**Authorship:** generally refers to speechmaking privilege accorded to the writer of a bill or resolution, and can also refer to the introductory speech on legislation itself. At the Grand National Tournament, this privilege extends to all students from a given diocesan league that is listed as the “author” of a bill or resolution. Authors must stand for two minutes of cross-examination.

**Bill:** a type of legislation that lays out specific provisions and carries with it the full force of the law upon passage. Only a policy area that is within the purview of the United States Congress should be the subject of bills.

**Constitutional amendment:** a type of legislation, written as a resolution, that sets forth one or more specific changes to the Constitution of the United States.

**Cross-examination:** period of time after a speech concludes when members may ask questions of the speaker holding the floor upon recognition by the presiding officer. Simple, single questions are the only type allowed; multi-part and follow-up questions are out of order.

**Parliamentarian:** the adult in the room who serves as the check on all rules and procedures. Generally seated at the front with the presiding officer, s/he is available for consultation by the presiding officer, other students, and the scorers.

**Personal privilege:** motion that is required for a member to enter or exit chambers when the chamber is not in recess.

**Preferential balloting:** the process by which students rank those peers determined to be the best in the chamber by the scorers. The Tab Room then uses the process of redistribution to determine certain students who advance to the Semi-Final session or Final session; the process is also used, with a slight variation, to determine final placement.

**Presiding officer:** the student who is elected (prelims and Semi-Final) to chair debate in a given chamber. Referred to as “the Speaker” (if a House) or “the President” (if a Senate), s/he has responsibilities that are extensively outlined in Section III of the Congress Manual.

**Previous question:** a motion that ends debate and begins voting on an item of legislation. Passage of this motion requires a 2/3 vote (see elsewhere in the Congress Manual for specifics).

**Recency:** a method of recognizing speakers that takes into account both how many times each member has spoken as well as how recently s/he has spoken. Once established, it is the method presiding officers must utilize to recognize speakers at the Grand National Tournament. It resets at the end of each session.

**Recess:** a period of time during which debate is temporarily suspended in a given chamber. It may be used after the conclusion of one item, prior to the introduction of an item, or for any

reason at all. It is advised that these be few in number at the Grand National Tournament to maximize debating time.

**Resolution:** a type of legislation that lays out reasons why Congress should support a particular measure and contains one or more specific “be it resolved” clauses. Ultimately, such items do not have the full force of law behind them even upon passage. This should be used if Congress does not have the power to take action on a given policy.

**Sponsorship:** refers to the privilege and responsibility accorded a student who does not have authorship privileges to begin debate by introducing an item of legislation. A student who sponsors legislation will have to stand for two minutes of cross-examination.

**Table:** to place an item of legislation “on the table” refers to the process by which an item is set aside so that the chamber may move on to a new item even though debate may not be finished with the “tabled” item.



# National Catholic Forensic League Presiding Officer Ballot

# PO

P.O. Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student Code \_\_\_\_\_

Chamber \_\_\_\_\_ Session \_\_\_\_\_ Judge \_\_\_\_\_

*DIRECTIONS: Rate the Presiding Officer 1-6 in each category (6 is the best). Please provide comments on the front of this ballot, and the back if necessary. In scoring, use whole numbers only – no decimals.*

KNOWLEDGE OF USUAL PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE.....\_\_\_\_\_

CLARITY IN EXPLAINING RULES AND PROCEDURES.....\_\_\_\_\_

CONTROL OF CHAMBER.....\_\_\_\_\_

FAIRNESS IN ORDER OF RECOGNITION AND RULINGS.....\_\_\_\_\_

OVERALL IMPACT AND IMPRESSION/CHAMBER LEADERSHIP.....\_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL POINTS (1-6 POINTS PER HOUR OF P.O. SERVICE) .....\_\_\_\_\_



# National Catholic Forensic League Student Congress Ballot

Use this sheet for all speeches given by one student in a single session

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student Code \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Rate each speech 1-6, with one being the worst and six being the best. Student congress speeches are rated on a speech by speech basis, so it is possible to give several sixes, fives, fours, etc. ***In other words, you are not ranking the students, just rating each speech individually.***

Criteria: When rating each student, consider the following elements and provide comments in the spaces provided.

- ***Delivery:*** Is the speech clear? Is it persuasive? Does the speaker demonstrate poise?
- ***Originality of Thought:*** Does the speaker demonstrate that s/he has listened to others in the debate? Does the speech advance debate? Does the speaker respond to issues raised in the debate?
- ***Organization and Coherence:*** Does the speech ramble, or does it develop? Is the speech easy to follow? Are the speaker's purpose and/or focus clear?
- ***Evidence and Logical Basis:*** How many sources are referenced? Are the sources credible? Does the speaker use logic in the development of arguments?

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Speech One Topic \_\_\_\_\_ Side: Sponsor AFF NEG

Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rating: 1-6

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Speech Two Topic \_\_\_\_\_ Side: Sponsor AFF NEG

Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rating: 1-6

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Speech Three Topic \_\_\_\_\_ Side: Sponsor AFF NEG

Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rating: 1-6

Judge's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Judge's Diocesan League \_\_\_\_\_

**Standard Format for a Bill**

- 1 Article I: State the new policy to be adopted in a brief declarative sentence, or in
- 2 as few sentences as possible.
- 3 Article II: Define any ambiguous terms inherent in Article I.
- 4 Article III: Indicate the implementation date.
- 5 Article IV: Name the government agency that will oversee the enforcement of the
- 6 bill along with the specific enforcement mechanism.
- 7 Article V: State that all other laws that are in conflict with this new policy shall
- 8 hereby be declared null and void.

Respectfully Submitted,

Diocesan League

## **A Bill to Eliminate the Social Security Wage Cap**

- 1 Article I: The wage cap on the Social Security component of FICA imposed on payments  
2 made by employers and employees is hereby eliminated.
- 3 Article II: “Wage cap” refers to the maximum amount of income subject to the full 6.2%  
4 Social Security portion of FICA.
- 5 Article III: The above provisions will take effect on January 1, 2014.
- 6 Article IV: The Social Security Administration and the Internal Revenue Service will jointly  
7 assume responsibility for the implementation of the above provisions.
- 8 Article V: All laws or portions of laws in conflict with the above provisions are hereby  
9 declared null and void.

Respectfully Submitted,

Diocese of Albany

### **Standard Format for a Resolution**

- 1       Whereas:       State the current problem (this needs to be accomplished in one brief
- 2                               sentence); and
- 3       Whereas:       Describe the scope of the problem cited in the first whereas clause (this
- 4                               clause needs to flow logically from the first); and
- 5       Whereas:       Explain the impact of or the harms perpetuated by the current problem
- 6                               (once again, the clause needs to flow in a logical sequence).
- 7       Therefore,     be it resolved by this NCFL Student Congress here assembled that: state
- 8                               your recommendation for dealing with the problem (the resolution
- 9                               should be a clear call for action).

Respectfully Submitted,

Diocesan Name

\* NOTE: the number of "whereas" clauses will vary depending on the number of concerns that need to be addressed to bring about a resolution of the problem.



### **A Resolution to Urge Intervention in Syria**

- 1       Whereas:       The security situation in Syria has been ignored by the United States  
2                       government for far too long; and
- 3       Whereas:       Civilians and other non-combatants have suffered the brunt of the instability  
4                       with insufficient aid from the global community; and
- 5       Whereas:       Protection of human rights and a restoration of global order demand a more  
6                       direct American response.
- 7       Therefore,      be it resolved by this NCFL Student Congress here assembled that: the  
8                       President is urged to deploy peacekeeping troops to Syria.

Respectfully Submitted,

Diocese of Albany

**A Resolution to Amend the Constitution**

1       Whereas:       Members of the United States Congress have continued to demonstrate an  
2                               inability to achieve progress in Washington, DC; and  
3       Whereas:       The repeated delays in achieving meaningful reform of the budget processes  
4                               and resolution of the debt crisis stress the economy of the United States and  
5                               the world; and  
6       Whereas:       Implementing term limits may encourage members to seek compromise as a  
7                               lasting legacy.  
8       Therefore,     be it resolved by two-thirds of this NCFL Student Congress here assembled, that  
9                               the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the  
10                              United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the  
11                              Constitution when ratified by three-quarters of the several states within seven  
12                              years from the date of its submission by the Congress:

ARTICLE XXVIII

14       SECTION 1:     No member of the House of Representatives shall serve more  
15                               than five consecutive terms, nor shall any member of the  
16                               Senate be elected to more than two consecutive six-year terms.  
17       SECTION 2:     The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by  
18                               appropriate legislation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Diocese of Albany

# NCFL Amendment Form

Author: \_\_\_\_\_ Bill/Resolution Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Diocesan Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Lines Affected: \_\_\_\_\_ Seconded? \_\_\_\_\_

Amendment Wording: \_\_\_\_\_

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# NCFL Amendment Form

Author: \_\_\_\_\_ Bill/Resolution Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Diocesan Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Lines Affected: \_\_\_\_\_ Seconded? \_\_\_\_\_

Amendment Wording: \_\_\_\_\_

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