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July 6th, 2020

Tracie Hall, Executive Director
American Library Association
225 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Tracie,

RE: Report on the Annual Conference

Thank you very much for the opportunity of providing parliamentary services at ALA's 2020 Conference. This report includes my observations about this first ever set of virtual meetings.

Overall Comments

Due to the corona virus pandemic, the ALA Executive Board canceled the in-person Annual Conference and directed that all governance gatherings be held virtually. The online platform that was chosen for these gatherings was Zoom Webinars. Substantial preparation work and numerous rehearsals were organized and orchestrated by ALA's Governance Office. This was a concerted team effort and was ultimately very successful, despite the odd imperfections.

Here are some of the highlights:

- President Wanda Brown provided warm and supportive leadership throughout the three days of meetings. Her human touch and her respectful and accommodating disposition made it easier for Council to address some tough issues within a limited time.
- Given the magnitude of the task at hand, it is absolutely remarkable that there were so very few technical glitches, the chief one being the odd occasions when a participant's internet connection was weak. But these glitches were definitely the exception and not the norm.
- As parliamentarian, I learned to be nimble and work 'outside the box'. This meant replacing direct advice to the presiding officer by texting to her. It also meant that, unlike in-person meetings, I spoke more often directly to Council, especially when this was the most practical manner to provide parliamentary advice.
- Council Members adjusted quickly to the Zoom platform and the debates were of equivalent caliber to that at in-person Council meetings. Council's attention to detail and its due diligence and care were sustained throughout the session. The fact that meetings were held electronically had no discernible negative impacts. On another point: By my count, Council was very well represented at the meeting, with almost 90% of its members in attendance. There was never a question about a quorum being present.

Eli Mina, M.Sc., P.R.P.

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Here are a few suggestions for future virtual meetings:

- Councilors were using both the Chat and the Q&A functions to debate the issues. It is recommended that Councilors use only the Q&A or raise hand features to debate issues, so all Councilors, including people with disabilities, can see and hear the debates.
- To help optimize the audio and video quality of the meeting experience and bring it as close as possible to that of an in-person gathering, all participants should be encouraged to obtain high speed internet access on a laptop or desktop computer, if possible.
- In response to concerns that were raised about the two week deadline for submitting resolutions for Virtual Council Meetings, a change was made to revert to a 24 hour deadline this time. This issue should be reviewed when planning future Virtual Meetings.
- I repeat a suggestion that I made in previous reports: Although Councilors are entitled to propose amendments to resolutions or action item, I recommend that they save the formal amending process for substantive and/or potentially contentious changes. Housekeeping amendments, although not out of order, consume precious time, and may cause others to become impatient. I have two suggestions: **First**, leave it to the Executive Director (ED) to make minor changes without changing the intent of a motion. **Second**: Possibly abandon the quest for absolute perfection, as long as a proposal is reasonably clear. An example was a time consuming amendment to include the Midwinter Meeting explicitly in the Forward Together motion, when the proposal might not have needed to be that specific.
- There were questions about amendments by substitution. This procedure was used to propose a replacement of the motion that was imbedded in the "*Forward Together*" report. To clarify, the motion to amend by substitution is debatable and amendable, and requires a majority vote to adopt. After the vote on the amendment, debate focuses either on the original main motion or on the substitute (depending on the outcome of the vote). Another vote is required on the main motion after the debate on it ends. It should be noted that the mover of the amendment by substitution was entitled to debate it ahead of others.

Clarification of a Procedural Issue

A Council Member requested that I explain what led me to change my `ruling' that a 2/3 vote was necessary to extend Council II, when I later stated that only a majority vote was required.

Article XII in the ALA Bylaws states: "*Robert's Rules of Order, in the latest edition, shall govern the Association in all cases to which it can be applied and in which it is not inconsistent with the Constitution, the Bylaws, or **special rules of the order** of the Association.*"

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (abbreviated as RONR, the latest being the 11th edition) stipulates that, once an agenda is adopted, it can be changed by a two thirds vote or a majority of the entire membership or unanimous consent. The motion to extend the meeting received a majority of the votes cast. However, it did not receive two thirds of the votes cast, did not receive a majority of the full Council Membership, and was very far from receiving unanimous consent. This led me to conclude at the time that the motion to extend the meeting had not exceeded the required threshold and therefore had not been adopted.

After the meeting I was asked by two individuals about my advice. The reason they questioned it was that Section 18 of the **Rules for ALA Virtual Meetings**, which had been adopted by Council that morning, explicitly indicated that the virtual meeting or a segment thereof could be extended by a majority vote, which means a majority of the votes cast, and, under this rule, the extension was approved.

The question is: Which rule has a higher ranking: the one from RONR or the one from the Virtual Meeting Rules? The answer lies in ALA Bylaw Article XII (see above). After a careful review, I concluded that, although the Virtual Meeting Rules were not explicitly stated to be special rules of order, they still were, in essence, special rules of order for that meeting, and were adopted by unanimous consent. As per Bylaw Article XII, special rules of order override RONR. Had I done this analysis there and then, I would have concluded that a majority of the votes cast was sufficient to extend the meeting, and Council II would have been extended.

In Closing

This concludes my procedural observations about the first ever ALA Virtual meetings, held in June 2020. I hope ALA Council's leaders and participants find my comments helpful. Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide parliamentary services to ALA.

Eli Mina

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