

**Senate procedure, a saga**  
**Adam Swenson<sup>1</sup>**

**Narrator:** A Standing Committee has introduced the following motion

Main motion: That tacos be declared the official food of the CSUN Faculty.

**Narrator:** Since it comes from a Standing Committee, no second is needed. Several members have raised their hands to indicate that they would like to speak in favor or opposition, ask a question, or make a motion.

**Chair:** First on our speakers list is **Speaker 1**

**Speaker 1:** I'd like to propose an amendment.

**Narrator:** Every member has a chance to suggest changes to the proposal. That includes those who want to honor a different food or who oppose declaring an official food. Everyone has a chance to make whatever passes as, ahem, palatable as possible.

**Chair:** Go ahead

**Speaker 1:** I propose we strike the word 'tacos' and replace it with the word 'burritos'

Amendment: That ~~tacos~~ burritos be declared the official food of the CSUN Faculty.

**Chair:** Is your amendment correctly represented on the screen?

**Speaker 1:** Yep.

**Chair:** Is there a second?

**Narrator:** No one on their own can cause the senate to do anything—especially not the chair. But if any 2 members believe that a matter is worth discussing, we must consider the matter.

**Speaker 2:** Second!

---

<sup>1</sup> Comments and suggestions very much appreciated: adam.swenson@csun.edu

**Narrator:** **Speaker 2** might have any number of reasons for seconding the motion. She might support the proposal. She might think it's worth hearing her colleagues' views on it. She might even want it to be discussed so that it can be rejected.

**Chair:** The amendment to replace tacos with burritos has been moved and seconded.  
**Speaker 1** would you like to speak to your amendment?

**Narrator:** The person proposing something normally gets the first chance to speak. While she speaks other members raise their hands to indicate that they would like a turn to speak in favor or opposition, ask a question, or propose a motion.

**Speaker 1:** Yes. I know it is unfashionable, but I believe burritos are far superior to tacos in terms of flavor, versatility, and neatness of consumption.

**Chair:** Next on our speakers list is **Speaker 3**

**Speaker 3:** I'd like to propose an amendment to the amendment.

**Narrator:** So far, a change has been proposed. The question is what that change should be. Think of it this way: **Speaker 2** proposed replacing the word 'tacos' with something. Other members may have different views about what the replacement should be—they can add other foods or even propose a different food.

However, they can't at this point suggest other changes to the motion, for example, by adding 'and staff' after 'faculty', because the question right now is what goes in the slot currently occupied by 'tacos'.

**Chair:** Go ahead

**Speaker 3:** I'd like to add the words 'and hamburgers' after the word 'burritos'.

Amendment (2<sup>nd</sup> order): That ~~tacos~~ burritos and hamburgers be declared the official food of the CSUN Faculty.

**Chair:** Is your amendment correctly represented on the screen?

**Speaker 3:** Yep.

**Chair:** Is there a second?

**Speaker 2:** Second!

**Narrator:** We now have 3 questions stacked on top of each other. Right now we are deciding what alternative to ‘tacos’ as the official food to consider. Once we decide that, we will decide whether to replace ‘tacos’ with the alternative. Finally, we’ll be back to the main motion —whether to declare an official food. The proposal might still be that tacos be the official food. Or it might be something else, depending how the votes on these amendments go. But, at that point, the question of what food is the official food will be settled. We won’t be able to make any further changes to what food appears in the proposal.

**Chair:** The amendment to add ‘and hamburgers’ to the amendment replacing tacos with burritos has been moved and seconded. **Speaker 3** would you like to speak to your amendment?

**Speaker 3:** Yes. I believe the considerations my colleague raises concerning burritos apply equally to delicious hamburgers.

**Chair:** Next on our speakers list is **Speaker 4**

**Speaker 4:** I oppose this amendment for two reasons. First, tacos are singularly delicious. Second, and more importantly, many of our colleagues are vegetarian or otherwise avoid meat. Even with the advent of Impossible burgers, I fear adding hamburgers would unduly exclude, irritate, and otherwise harm our meat-avoiding colleagues.

**Chair:** Thank you. Next is **Speaker 5**.

**Narrator:** Our chair is about to make a mistake in order to illustrate how every member has the right and obligation to ensure that procedure is followed.

**Speaker 5:** I’d like to propose an amendment

**Chair:** Go ahead

**Speaker 5:** I’d like to add ‘and French fries’ after the word ‘hamburgers’.

[X] Amendment: That ~~tacos~~ burritos, and hamburgers, and French fries be declared the official food of the CSUN Faculty.

**Chair:** Very well, is there a second?

**Speaker 6:** Point of Order!

**Narrator:** There are very few times when you are allowed to interrupt someone who has the floor. The chair making a mistake that will undermine the process is one such time.

**Speaker 6** correctly gets the chair's attention and then waits to be recognized.

**Chair:** Go ahead **Speaker 6**.

**Speaker 6:** We are already on an amendment to the amendment. Third order amendments are not allowed.

**Narrator:** If this is confusing, remember where we are. The first amendment to replace 'tacos' with 'burritos' essentially opened the question of replacing 'tacos' with something. The second amendment to add 'and hamburgers' essentially opened the question of what the proposed replacement should be. **Speaker 5's** attempted amendment wouldn't create a new question since it's an alternative to the proposal we are currently discussing.

**Chair:** Thank you **Speaker 6**. You are correct. The proposed amendment is not in order. **Speaker 5**, if you would like to make this change, you can oppose the current amendment which only adds 'and hamburgers'. If the current amendment fails, you will have the opportunity to propose adding 'hamburgers and French fries' to the word 'burritos'.

We are on the amendment adding 'and hamburgers' to the amendment replacing the word 'tacos' with 'burritos'. The Chair recognizes **Speaker 7**.

**Speaker 7:** I have a Point of Information.

**Narrator:** This is a fancy way of saying "I have a question". It's also fine to just say "I have a question." By the way, a 'Point of Information' is often misunderstood and misused to offer information.<sup>2</sup>

**Chair:** Go ahead.

---

<sup>2</sup> This is very problematic in bodies which, e.g., restrict the number of speakers for and against a motion since a real point of information does not count as speaking in debate.

**Speaker 7:** Will declaring an official food of the faculty lead to any form of discount at campus dining?

**Chair:** Good question. Perhaps **Speaker 8**, the chair of the sponsoring committee, has some information. **Speaker 8?**

**Speaker 8:** That's not something the committee looked into in creating this proposal. However, my committee has heard reports showing that the pandemic has been extremely hard on the University Corporation who runs campus food services. So I doubt they're going to offer too many discounts.

**Chair:** **Speaker 7** does that answer your question?

**Speaker 7:** It does. Thank you, **Speaker 8**.

**Chair:** I have 5 senators on the speakers list. Next is **Speaker 9**.

**Speaker 9:** I'd like to call the question.

**Chair:** It has been moved that we stop debate on the amendment adding 'and hamburgers' after the word 'burritos' in the amendment replacing the word 'tacos' and move immediately to a vote. Is there a second?

**[Many voices]** Second!

**Chair:** Very well. We will now vote on whether to close debate and vote on the amendment. This is undebatable and requires 2/3.

**Narrator:** A majority—more than half the votes cast—is enough for the body to make a decision. Thus amendments and the main motion require a majority. But since calling the question takes away the right of other members to voice their opinions or suggest further changes, it requires the much higher threshold of 2/3.

**[Vote takes place]**

**Chair:** The motion calling the question has passed. We will now vote on the amendment adding 'and hamburgers' to the amendment replacing 'tacos' with 'burritos'.

[Vote takes place]

**Chair:** The amendment to the amendment passes. We are now on the motion to replace the word 'tacos' with the words 'burritos and hamburgers'.

**Narrator:** We've now decided that if tacos are replaced with anything, it will be burritos and hamburgers. The question is now whether to make this replacement. Members can speak for or against this replacement, but it's not in order to make changes to what the proposed replacement is.

If the amendment had failed, it would still be okay to propose other replacements for tacos. **Speaker 5** could even propose replacing 'tacos' with 'burritos, hamburgers, and French fries' since that is a different list from the one we just decided we didn't want.

**Chair:** I have no one on my speakers list. [pauses] Seeing no one else seeking to be recognized we will now vote on whether to replace the word 'tacos' with the words 'burritos and hamburgers'.

[Vote takes place]

**Chair:** The amendment passes.

**Narrator:** We have decided that if an official food is declared, it will be burritos and hamburgers. At this point members can speak for or against declaring these items the official food(s) or suggest other changes. For example, someone might suggest changing whom burritos and hamburgers are the official food(s) of by suggesting that 'faculty' be replaced with the word 'community'. Or someone might be uncomfortable with the idea of an official food and want to change it to the 'recommended consumable'. The only thing that's been decided so far is that the things we're talking about are burritos and hamburgers. Taco partisans could even suggest replacing 'official food' with 'most reviled food'. But let's move things along.

**Chair:** We are back to the main motion as amended. Seeing no one seeking recognition, let's vote.

[Vote takes place]

**Chair:** The motion fails.

**Narrator:** One way of looking at what just happened was that there was a whole bunch of pointless discussion which went nowhere. The burrito partisans and hamburger partisans surely feel differently. They may be disappointed, but they had the opportunity to try convince their colleagues to go a different way. As a group, we considered multiple perspectives along the way to making a decision. Assuming our group represented a wide array of perspectives, we can be confident in the wisdom of rejecting the proposal that would have made burritos and hamburgers the official foods of CSUN's faculty.