

Political Party Organizational Meeting

As we have stated, a major political party in Ohio consists of a State Central Committee, County Central Committees in all 88 counties, and such other committees as party rules may provide for, such as district or municipal committees. Currently, in Ohio, the third category are not relevant. The State and County Central Committees are elected every 2 or 4 years, as provided by party rules. The State Central Committee has its own bylaws, and each County Central Committee has its own bylaws.

Elections for Committee Members, be they state or county, are held at the Primary Elections in even-numbered years at the expiration of the terms for the particular committees as set by the rules of the respective party organizations. That is, an individual county party or the state party may set the length of term for its members at 2 or 4 years, and the election may be set to occur at the primary election in the presidential or gubernatorial election year.

All the members of the new committees are elected in the Primary Election. These new members are called the Members Elect of the Central Committee. The old committee is about to expire or pass out of existence; and a whole new committee is about to take over. This **New Committee** must now be **Organized**. So, a political party completely reorganizes or remakes itself every 2 or 4 years, as it prefers, according to state law.

The party organizes itself at the **Organizational Meeting** held shortly after the election of the new committee members. This Meeting is required by state law.

Section 3517.04 | Organization of state central committees

The members-elect of each major political party state central committee shall, except as otherwise provided in this section, meet following the declaration of the results by the boards of elections of the election of members of the state central committees, at a suitable place and time to be designated by the retiring chairman of the committee in accordance with party rules. In the case of a county central committee, the meeting shall be held not earlier than six nor later than fifteen days following the declaration of the results by the board of elections of the election of members of county central committees in that county. Notice of any meeting held pursuant to this section, giving the place and time, shall be sent to each member-elect by the retiring secretary of the committee by mail and a copy of the notice shall be posted in the office of the secretary of state or board of elections, as the case may be, at least five days prior to any such meeting. The meeting shall be called to order by the retiring chairman or secretary or if there is no such officer, or if such officer is absent, then by a member of such committee

designated by the secretary of state in the case of the state committees, and by a member of the board of elections of the same political party, designated by the board, in the case of county committees. A temporary chairman and secretary shall be chosen and the committee shall proceed to organize by the election of a chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, secretary, and such other officers as the rules provide.

Notice of Meeting

For the state central committee, the meeting will be held after the declaration of the results of the primary election by the boards of elections in every county, at a suitable place and time designated by the retiring chairman of the state central committee in accordance with party rules.

A notice of the meeting shall be sent by the retiring secretary to the members elect, and a copy of the notice shall be posted in the office of the secretary of state at least 5 days prior to the meeting.

For the county central committee, the members elect shall meet at a **Meeting** to be held not earlier than six (6) days nor later than fifteen (15) days following the certification of the election results by the county board of elections.

The notice of the meeting, giving the time and place, shall be sent to each member elect of the County Central Committee by the Retiring Secretary of the Central Committee, and a Copy of the Notice shall be posted at the office of the County Board of Elections at least 5 days prior to the Meeting.

The **Meeting** shall be called to order by the Retiring Chairman or Secretary of the Central Committee.

(We will focus on the County Central Committee henceforth.)

Interval from the Sixth Day to the Day of Meeting

It is important to understand that ***on the sixth (6th) day*** following the declaration of the election results, the OLD county central committee passes out of existence, the terms of the members having expired at the end of the 5th day. As such, the Chairman and Secretary of such Committee are hereafter referred to as the Retiring Chairman and Retiring Secretary by state law, and have no other authority than that given by state law.

As it is stated in ORC 3517.05, “A county central committee shall serve until the sixth [6th] day after the date of the declaration of the results by the board of elections of the primary elections in that county.”

Thus, by the end of the 5th day the Retiring Secretary shall have sent and posted a notice for the Organizational Meeting of the New Central Committee, and the official terms of all officers and existing committee members ends, and no other official business can be conducted. All officers of the party are no longer officers, and the executive committee passes out of existence.

Only state law is in operation from the 6th day following the certification of the election results until the New Committee is properly organized.

Call to Order

ORC 3517.04 states, “The meeting shall be called to order by the retiring chairman or secretary or if there is no such officer, or if such officer is absent, then by a member of such committee designated by the secretary of state in the case of the state committees, and by a member of the board of elections of the same political party, designated by the board, in the case of county committees.”

Calling the meeting to order means merely to announce to the assembled Committee Members the commencement of the Organizational Meeting and to call the roll. This is to be done by the Retiring Chairman of the County Central Committee or the Retiring Secretary of the same. Once the roll has been called the Retiring Chairman or Secretary presides only until a Temporary Chairman and Secretary is chosen by the New Committee. The Temporary Chairman and Secretary shall be selected by the assent of a majority of Committee Members present.

In the case that the retiring chairman or secretary of the central committee is not present to call the meeting to order, the county board of elections shall designate a member of the board from the same political party to act in this role of calling the meeting to order. So that means that the 4-member board of elections in advance of organizational meeting, shall by a majority vote designate one member of the board from each respective political party to act in this role if necessary.

Choosing the Temporary Chairman and Secretary

Once the Meeting has been called to order and the roll has been called, the Committee itself is now charged with appointing a Temporary Chairman and Secretary.

ORC 3517.04 states, “A temporary chairman and secretary shall be chosen and the committee shall proceed to organize by the election of a chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, secretary, and such other officers as the rules provide.”

The Central Committee is the **controlling committee** of the county party. The assembled members of this New Committee are a plenipotentiary body with complete power to self-organize according to its own will in accordance with state law. There is a complete discontinuation of the authority of the old committee with respect to the business of the new, even in the conduct of the Organizational Meeting. That is why the new committee is authorized to choose a Temporary Chairman and Secretary.

The official party duties and the authority of the Retiring Chairman and Secretary have at this point ended. They have no other authority to preside over any additional business of the Committee; they are merely performing their perfunctory duties prescribed by state law. They are no longer **officers** of the Committee. Their terms have already expired, and they are authorized by state law only to call the Meeting to order and preside until the Temporary Chairman and Secretary are chosen. Then they must hand over the gavel and depart. They have no authority to exercise any further control over the meeting or the business of the Committee.

It is important to note that even though a political party may have traditions, customs, and protocols, used by previous committees or even outlined in party rules, for the selection of the temporary chairman and secretary, state law gives plenary and novel power to the new committee to select them. The **New Committee** is not bound by prior conventions. So even if the party has customarily chosen the chairman of the central committee, or the chairman of the executive committee, or the secretary of the same to preside over the Organizational Meeting, the **New Committee** may choose to select different persons. Even if they choose to go by tradition or accepted convention, they must have a vote on the floor to choose the Temporary Chairman and Secretary.

It is entirely the prerogative of the incoming committee to select the people they want to conduct the Organizational Meeting. It is entirely the prerogative of the **New Committee** to change everything they wish to change at this time, whether it be their officers, their executive committee, or their constitution as well.

The Organization of the Party

During this period, the **New Committee** is operating only under state law to fulfill those things prescribed in the code.

1. Elect officers of the central committee: chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, secretary.
2. Adopt party bylaws.
3. Elect executive committee and other officers as provided in party rules.

The **New Committee** has, at this point, no officers, no executive committee, and has not adopted bylaws. Even though a previous committee operated under a set of party rules, this is a **New Committee** and is not bound by a previous committee's rules. The **New Committee** has plenary power to elect its officers, executive committee, and to frame and adopt its bylaws.

ORC 3517.03 The controlling committee[s] of each major political party or organization shall be...a county central committee consisting of one member from each election precinct in the county, or of one member from each ward in each city and from each township in the county, as the outgoing committee determines.

Each major party controlling committee shall elect an executive committee that shall have the powers granted to it by the party controlling committee, and provided to it by law.

ORC 3517.02 Each political party shall file with the office of the secretary of state a copy of its constitution and bylaws, if any, within thirty days of adoption or amendment

Once the Temporary Chairman has the gavel, the order of business prescribed by law is to elect a Chairman, Vice-chairman, Treasurer, and Secretary and such other officers as the rules provide. The **Central Committee**, or **Controlling Committee**, is a free parliamentary body and may carry out these assigned tasks as it sees fit.

It would be useful at this time to move to introduce rules for conducting the election of the officers with respect to nominations, candidates' opportunity to address the Committee, methods of voting, and counting of votes. It may elect its officers as a slate, or one by one. If one at a time, the order should be as prescribed. Once elected, the new Chairman and Secretary may preside as the Committee desires. At some point, a motion to adopt the party bylaws should be made, and the election of the executive committee and other party officials should be done as the rules provide.

The party is now legally organized and may proceed to conduct any business with its new officers presiding. The role and duties of the Temporary Chairman and Secretary immediately cease, and any further business of the party as prescribed by party rules should be conducted with the new leadership in control.

Let us summarize in chronological order the Organization of the County Controlling Committee of a Major Political Party:

1. The members of the County Board of Elections must designate a member of the Board from each major party to perform the duty of calling to order the Organizational Meeting of their respective political party if the retiring Chairman or Secretary of the County Central Committee is absent.
2. The retiring Secretary of the Central Committee shall send a notice of the Organizational Meeting to each Member Elect, designating the time and place, at least 5 days prior to the meeting. A copy of the notice shall be posted at the Board of Elections office at this time.
3. The Members Elect of the Central Committee shall assemble at the designated time and place. The Meeting shall be called to order by the Retiring Chairman or Secretary of the Central Committee, or if neither is present, by a designated Member of the Board of Elections of the same party. The roll shall be called and a Temporary Chairman and Secretary shall be chosen by the Members present.
4. The Temporary Chairman shall preside over the election by the Members of the Committee of a new Chairman. The Committee shall continue to organize by the election of a Vice-chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer, the

adoption of party rules and the election of an Executive Committee, and such other officers as the rules of the party provide.

The importance of the Organizational Meeting is paramount. A party controlling committee is a parliamentary (or representative) body elected by the people of their respective jurisdictions who are members of the same political party, who have vested the members with power to represent them through their political party according to state law.

The proper understanding of the laws of the State of Ohio related to Party Organization is needful for every citizen to properly exercise their right to participate in the government of this Republic.

Thus, with political parties, or any and all public offices, the People have a right and a duty to participate in selecting those who will represent their authority in public office. To quote the Ohio Constitution, "All political power is inherent in the people."

The Organization of political parties is no exception. Political party controlling committees are popularly elected bodies that represent the people that align with their party from their respective jurisdictions. Thus, if the people desire to be adequately represented in their local jurisdictions to all public offices, they do it through their local political party.

The controlling committee of the county party, the County Central Committee, is an autonomous, self-organizing parliamentary body. The body itself has full authority to determine its policies, its leadership structure and officers, and its operating rules, as long as they are in accordance with state law.

It is a tendency in all institutions for those who wield authority in positions of leadership to exceed their commission by over-managing the operations of the group, club, society, institution, or in this case, party. They do it by using procedural mechanisms during meetings to restrict participation and quash debate. They do it by incorporating into party rules elaborate mechanisms and legalistic protocols geared to perpetuate the leadership and management structure in place. (Many of such protocols and traditions may actually violate state law by trespassing on the plenary authority, liberty, and agency of the

controlling committee.) They do it by dogmatically imposing preset meeting agendas on the committee and prohibiting new business. They do it by refusing to call regular meetings.

It is imperative that such practices be discountenanced and resisted by the members of the Committee. As an organic, self-organizing body of free citizens, the Committee itself must assert its authority. Party officers and executive committee members must be constantly reminded that they serve entirely at the pleasure of the Central Committee. There should be open and robust debate and dialogue. Party leaders should be transparent and accountable to the Committee in all matters related to the business of the party. They should welcome active participation of Committee Members at regular meetings and in party operations. They should abide by agreed upon party rules and invite discussion and recommendations on adjustments and improvements to those rules. These are the hallmarks of healthy republican institutions.