

OVERTURE 3 from Southwest Florida Presbytery “Amend <i>RAO</i> 15-6 regarding Recommendations of the Overtures Committee”	(to CCB, OC)
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Be it resolved, that the 54th General Assembly amend section *RAO* 15-6 as follows (~~striketrough~~ for deletion, and underlining for additions):

15-6. Special Rules of Procedure for the Overtures Committee.

...

c. Only business referred to the committee by the Stated Clerk may be considered. All overtures or other items of business must be considered individually by the committee, and no complex motions to simultaneously consider multiple overtures will be allowed. Any overture or item not addressed individually by the committee by the conclusion of the General Assembly will be referred to the Overtures Committee of the subsequent General Assembly automatically by default.

...

q. Each recommendation by the committee to the General Assembly must be approved by a majority of members of the committee present and voting. The committee may not recommend actions which are not allowable for the General Assembly for overtures, according to the Rules of Assembly Operations (cf. *RAO* sections 12-1, 14-9.e, 15-8.c).

So that the amended passages shall read:

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RATIONALE

The Overtures Committee has long utilized special rules in order to ensure sufficient debate on matters of importance to the church. The process of submitting an overture is lengthy and time-consuming, as it must pass through scrutiny and debate, typically at multiple levels of the church courts, in order to be considered. Consequently, to respect the work and effort undertaken by local churches and presbyteries in submitting overtures to the General Assembly, the *RAO* specifies a number of deviations from ordinary *Roberts Rules* for the Overtures Committee in order to limit the types of parliamentary techniques that can end debate prematurely. Limitations on the right to call the question and provisions for others to have the right of address, for instance, are designed to ensure that every overture gets a fair hearing and that a supermajority must be in agreement in order to arrest deliberation on a particular matter.

Unfortunately, at the 53rd General Assembly, a relatively new parliamentary technique was utilized to circumvent debate which, although contested, was held to be allowable. If this technique is not directly addressed, then it may result in the weaponization of the agenda and make obtaining the privilege of the floor an adversarial contest, which is not consistent with the intent of the operation of the Overtures Committee.

The new technique, in short, allowed multiple overtures to be bundled together by a single motion (although those overtures were quite distinct and in fact mutually exclusive) and then answered in reference to another overture. It was held by the Chair that this was not an omnibus motion in the traditional sense, which would have allowed individual overtures to be removed for independent discussion based only on the request of a single committee member. Instead, it was ruled that this was a “complex motion” and once it had been made, the only way to remove any included overture for discussion was to obtain the floor to propose an amendment to remove any overture(s) from the complex motion, which would then need the typical majority threshold in order to pass.

This approach represents the complete inversion of the protections already present in *RAO* 15-6.g, which stipulates that motions to limit debate are not allowed, and that to call the question, fully $\frac{3}{4}$ of the voting members must agree. But under this new parliamentary technique, it essentially might require an overture to gain 51% of the voting members to even be considered in the first place! In principle, a single member could obtain the floor at the beginning of the day and propose a “complex motion” to take every overture and refer it back to its originating body, and once made, nothing could be done to stop it without 51% of the voting members supporting it. It seems obvious that this is not consistent with the intent of the operation of the Overtures Committee, so this proposed overture simply adds a clarification to *RAO* 15-6.c to ensure that each overture sent to the Overtures Committee must be dealt with individually and

1 that it will enjoy all the other protections for consideration presently established in *RAO* 15-
2 6.

3
4 A second clarification is also added via this overture to *RAO* 15-6.q, to clarify that the
5 Overtures Committee cannot recommend to the General Assembly to do anything to an
6 overture that the committee or the Assembly is explicitly prohibited from doing with overtures
7 elsewhere in the *RAO*. For example, this past year, there was a motion that the Overtures
8 Committee recommend to Postpone Indefinitely a particular overture, although this motion is
9 explicitly disallowed for the Overtures Committee in *RAO* 15-8.c and for the Assembly in
10 *RAO* 14-9.e. It may seem as though such a clarification would not be needed, but somehow
11 this motion was not ruled out of order by the Chairman or the parliamentary advisors, so
12 perhaps the additional clarity will be helpful for the operation of future Overtures Committee
13 sessions.

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16 *Adopted by the Southwest Florida Presbytery at its stated meeting, September 12, 2026*

17 *Attested by TE Freddy Fritz, Stated Clerk*
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