OVERTURE 6 from the Southwest Florida Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
"Amend *RAO* 19-4 to Limit Moving the Previous Question at GA"

Whereas, the General Assembly is a deliberative body; and

Whereas, the General Assembly benefits from both the orderly dispatch of business and the careful deliberation of matters brought before it; and

Whereas, the commissioners of the General Assembly have been sent by their churches and Presbyteries for the work of the Church; and

Whereas, commissioners should have a reasonable opportunity to hear and respond to arguments concerning a pending motion; and

Whereas, preserving the initial period of floor debate maximizes commissioner participation; and

Whereas, parliamentary procedures are "courtesy codified" and best utilized for enabling robust debate and deliberation;

Therefore, be it resolved that *RAO* 19-4 is amended by adding a new paragraph f as follows (underlining for additions):

> f. A motion to order the Previous Question shall not be in order until ten (10) minutes of commissioners' floor debate under 19-4.d have elapsed. When debate is governed by *RAO* 14-9.h.3 or *RAO* 15-8.g.3, this protected period shall be twenty (20) minutes.

Rationale

The motion to call the question is a tool best utilized to aid constructive deliberation by moving a topic forward. This reflects the longstanding understanding of parliamentary procedure as "courtesy codified." However, some have noticed a trend in recent Assemblies of using this procedural motion in a way that has the effect of stifling deliberation.

The goal of General Assembly is not to move through business as quickly as possible in the name of efficiency. Efficiency is good, but moving quickly is not necessarily the most efficient way to do the business of the church. From committees and commissions to the floor of General Assembly, deliberation is the primary means by which we do this. Although a motion to call the question must be approved by the Assembly, that approval can sometimes amount to little more than a rubber stamp. Commissioners may vote to end debate for the sake of speed before meaningful debate has taken place, missing an opportunity to hear arguments and be persuaded.

Because our procedural tools for debate are meant to fuel earnest debate marked by love, they help ensure a fair hearing, protect the minority voice, and allow us to reason together.

This overture protects the initial period of floor debate already allotted to commissioners. That protected period covers all debate on the question, including debate on any amendments or substitutes; it is not a new period for each motion, and it does not restart when an amendment or substitute is offered. Under *RAO* 19-4.d, ordinary business receives ten minutes, with each commissioner limited to three minutes on the same question unless additional time is granted. An Overtures Committee minority report receives sixty minutes of debate under *RAO* 15-8.g.3, with each commissioner limited to five minutes, in addition to the presentations specified in *RAO* 15-8.g.1. These existing limits remain unchanged.

Finally, this overture recognizes the wisdom of ending debate when no commissioner wishes to speak. It preserves the Moderator's authority to put a pending question to a vote in that circumstance, even before the protected period has expired. Once that period has expired, the ordinary rules for ordering the Previous Question and extending debate continue to apply.

Rules cited: RAO 19-4.d, 14-9.h.3, and 15-8.g.1, 3 (2026).

Adopted by the Southwest Florida Presbytery at its stated meeting, November 10, 2026
Attested by TE Freddy Fritz, Stated Clerk