

Explanation of Robert's Rules Regarding Speaking on the Floor

One of the rights outlined in the parliamentary procedure is the right to speak.

According to Robert's Rules, a person can only speak once they have been recognized by the Moderator and no one can speak longer than permitted by the rules of the body." [RONR 4:29]

The Highlands Presbytery has traditionally given a speaker two minutes, in keeping with the Manual of the General Assembly.

Should a person wish to exceed that amount of time, the chair or any member can ask to do so either by unanimous consent or by a motion to Extend the Limits of Debate, which requires a two-thirds vote without debate.

When a member's time is exhausted, it is the moderator's duty to call the speaker's attention to that fact, by signal or interruption.

Debate must be confined to the merits of the pending question. Speakers must address their remarks to the chair, maintain a courteous tone, and—especially in reference to any divergence of opinion—avoid injecting a personal note into debate. To this end, they must never attack or make any allusion to the motives of members. [RONR 4:30]

Members bring business before the assembly in the form of a motion. A motion is a member's formal proposal that the assembly take a certain action.

There are numerous categories of motion, which can be found summarized or in detail in Robert's Rules of Order.

After a report is made by a standing committee, by a member of the Presbytery staff or by a member of the assembly, it is appropriate for members to ask questions.

The committee report is, at that time, the pending business, so a request for information is appropriate.

Unless the person presenting the report makes a motion for action or presents a resolution, or a member of the assembly makes a motion related to the report, the presentation of the report means that it is received by the assembly and no further action is appropriate.

In short, the only permissible response to a report is to ask for information or make a motion.