

DISCLAIMER

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Wednesday 17th June 2020

DAY 2

PART A

9:09am

I. GOVERNMENT ORDERS OF THE DAY – Reading of Bills

1. SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL No.3 2020; and APPROPRIATION BILL 2020/2021 – debate on second reading cont.

I. ALAIASA Moefaauouo Sepulona Moananu – Member for Anoamaa East

The Member acknowledged Mr Speaker and fellow Parliamentarians and offered praise to the Almighty for his guidance and blessings upon Samoa. He then delved into the Budget and asserted that emphasis should be placed on the development of agriculture and fisheries to encourage subsistence farming especially during such unprecedented times. The Member believes that cultivating the land can alleviate potential impacts of lack of food from the COVID19 induced financial crunch. In regards to Education, the Member called to prioritise distance learning and suggested to utilise effective technology cables available to government for schools/universities to ensure there are no issues with the internet connection.

The Member made comments on the pandemic which originated from China (Wuhan); which caused the Member for Gagaifomauga No.3 Laauli Leuatea Polataivao Fosi to interject and caution the Member to refrain from making offensive comments as China is one of Samoa's major donors.

INTERJECTION - PRIME MINISTER

The Hon PM interjected to clarify that remarks made by the Member cannot be proven as there are currently two super powers passing the blame as to who caused this outbreak (reference to America and China). The PM stated that there are numerous uncertainties going around with the underlying causes of COVID19 (the world is unsure about what is factual and what is fiction pertaining to the origins of the virus). The PM recalled times of the Spanish Flu,

which had massive casualties (100 million to be exact). Hon PM asserted that collective efforts from scientists globally in formulating a vaccine has united the world in these trying times.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Mr Speaker ruled to have the statements from the Member for Anoamaa East retracted from official parliamentary records.

ALAIASA Moefaauouo Sepulona Moananu – Member for Anoamaa East (cont.)

The Member acknowledged efforts made by the Minister and Ministry of Health in keeping Samoa COVID free. He then queried the possibility of re-opening Samoa's borders, as there has been no case of corona in Samoa.

INTERJECTION - PRIME MINISTER

On a point of clarification, the Hon PM interjected to inform the House that Government continues to assess the situation globally before a decision is made to open its borders. The Hon PM also elaborated on the issue of seasonal workers and stated that Government is discussing with New Zealand on the safest route to implement the repatriation of RSE workers. Furthermore, the Prime Minister assured the public to remain calm and stated that discussions with the World Health Organisation (WHO) continues to be updated as to the status of the pandemic.

The Hon PM delved into the specifics of the Budget prepared by the Ministry of Finance to clarify and explain the financial stability of the nation, as certain members have incorrectly interpreted the term 'deficit'. Hon Prime Minister clarified that deficit does not imply 'loss' rather that Samoa's expenditure exceeds revenue as aid from donors which amounts to 107million is included in expenditure. Hon PM then continued to refute claims that one-man runs the affairs of the nation – Cabinet has a collective responsibility in pursuing the interests/affairs of the nation.

ALAIASA Moefaauouo Sepulona Moananu – Member for Anoamaa East (cont.)

The Member expressed sincere thanks to the Minister of Finance for the preparation of the budget. He acknowledged the increase of pension for the elderly and noted his disagreement on Government's initiative of a pay-out of \$50 for those who register for a National ID (this is unnecessary expenditure). Furthermore, the Member stated that he is also free to express the opinions of his constituency as that is his right, and therefore refuting claims that Members are withheld from speaking freely in the House.

The Hon Prime Minister acknowledged the Member on his comments, and iterated that Members are entitled to openly express views, with the exception that the information expressed are factual and genuine as Cabinet is blamed for any misleading information. (The PM stated that Cabinet only interjects when facts are inaccurate).

II. OLO Fiti Afoa Vaai, Member for Salega East

The Member acknowledged his constituency in all her honorific salutations. He then spoke on the Budget and stated that he had examined the intentions of the forefathers of the nation when deliberating the Budget. The Member noted that the common theme in the mannerisms conveyed by the Members was "Bravery". He continued to comment on the main economic drivers in the early phases of Samoa's government, which was basically agricultural crops and produce; such as cocoa, banana, taro, etc.

The Member mentioned the optimal state that the Samoa Airways was operating in and shed light on the increase of the budget when HRPP took the reins (budget soared from 75million to more than 800million today). Then raised concern on the sale of Government assets such as SamoaTel and other major companies.

The Member for Faleata West interjected to point out to the Member for Salega East that the new Chambers the Members are currently sitting in is owed to the developments which occurred in times of HRPP.

INTERJECTION – HON PRIME MINISTER

The Hon Prime Minister asserted that Cabinet has yet to interject because they are appalled at the ungrateful nature displayed by the Member as all developments are not for the praise or good of one man or party, but that of God. Further asserted that God is paramount, hence the amendment of the Constitution to incorporate the God which Samoa is founded upon.

OLO Fiti Afoa Vaai, Member for Salega East (cont.)

The Member commented on the Gateway under the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and stated that there are 2 cables but only a minimal percentage of profits received from these two gateways. On the issue of internet bills, the Member voiced that Fiji is reaping the benefits from the two internet providers. The Member then queried the continuation of the Intranet (SNBH) as he believes there are only 2 schools and 2 district hospitals utilizing this service (he noted that this was an unnecessary expenditure). The Member then spoke on the issue of the Skyline Company producing wine yet the content is spirit – and stated that people have different habits of avoiding costs incurred onto the business; and implied that the company has used this means as a way to evade tax as taxes imposed on wine are lower than that imposed on spirits.

Hon TIALAVEA Seigafolava Tioniso Hunt, Minister for Customs and Revenue

The Hon Minister clarified that assessments were undertaken by the Ministry and found that the labelled contents is indeed what is contained inside the bottle. The Minister affirmed that the findings from the investigations undertaken by his Ministry is what he will take as opposed to the personal opinions of the Member as these are unsubstantiated.

**Proceedings were set aside at 10:49am;
and reconvened at 11:40am**

III. FUIMAONO Teo Samuelu Teo – Member for Falealili West

The Member acknowledged the 3 arms of Government and proceeded to acknowledge his constituency in her honorific salutations. Fuimaono echoed sentiments that Samoa's sovereignty is protected by her customs and traditions (Faa-Samoa). He commended the Minister for Finance and his Ministry for ensuring priority areas are included in the budget. He noted an appropriation of 2million for the Samoa Water Authority and requested for an extra 2million for the Electric Power Corporation, as these are the essential services.

The Member acknowledged the Minister of MWTI and pledged support for developments in his constituency upon the approval of the Budget. Acknowledged the increase of the pension and called whether this be increased to \$200 and waive free ferry travels and medicine dispense services afforded to pensioners.

On the 2% appropriated to Commercial Banks, the Member called to examine Small Financial Institutions who have high interest rates on loans as these small institutions are frequently used by the public; therefore the member suggested to establish a regulation to control interest rates of Small Loan institutions. Fuimaono then queried how the percentage afforded to contributors in July will be calculated and distributed by the SNPF. In regards to the private sector, the Member queried the taxation system in place and queried the process for a grace period on taxation. The Member also requested a centralized system to ensure consistency in the subsidizing process. Fuimaono noted there being a minimal price of 10,000 to pay for the system utilised.

Hon. TIALAVEA Tioniosio Seigafolava Hunt - Minister for Customs and Revenue

The Hon Minister stood to clarify on the new taxation system utilised by the Ministry for Revenue as questioned by the Member and stated that the sole purpose of purchasing the said system was to ensure consistency in the collection of GST as there were certain businesses

who avoided the payment of tax. The Minister noted pros of the system as it ensures the exact amount of GST is collected from businesses. The Hon Minister explained that there are 2 phases of implementation; the first phase will cover a total of 210 businesses. The 210 businesses included in the first phase of implementation as the Ministry noted compatibility of current systems utilised by these private businesses with the new software. The Hon Minister urged businesses to come in and discuss payment methods with the Ministry to make an arrangement suitable for the business and the Ministry and to avoid being penalised come July 2020 when the trial period concludes.

INTERJECTION – Hon. Prime Minister

The Hon PM mentioned that there is a Japanese wine produced from fermentation of rice and this was a popular export of Japan; thus noting the potential to export local Samoan wine.

FUIMAONO Teo Samuelu Teo – Member for Falealili West (Cont.)

The Member acknowledged the Minister for his clarification and iterated that the issue is not so much the system of taxation but the price of the system/software for taxation as there have been issues noted by certain business owners that the price for purchasing the software has increased. The Member then went on to raising the issue of hefty fees charged by lawyers for processing adoption papers. The Member recalled this service being executed by the Registrar of the Courts and suggested that the service be transferred back to the Courts to alleviate costs and ensure consistent fees are charged on the processing of adoption. (Fuimaono noted that some Firms charge legal fees up to \$3000 tala for this service). If the service cannot be carried out solely by the Registrar of Courts, Fuimaono suggests a regulation be formulated to establish a price ceiling for such services.

Hon FAAOLESA Katopau Ainuu, Minister of Justice and Courts Administration

The Minister pointed out that Government cannot regulate legal fees, as these are determined by the law firm and such fees vary for the processing of adoption paperwork.

HON PRIME MINISTER - CLARIFICATION

Hon Prime Minister noted that the issue of legal fees is not new and has been raised several times, specifically on the matter of processing adoptions. The PM recalled seeking assistance from three former Attorney General's to draft a regulation of the fees. He then cautioned the House on the issue of adoption, and stated that there have been such negative outcomes of adoption such as the local family seeking to adopt their child to family members overseas for better opportunities, yet families overseas have (hidden agendas) such as claiming benefits and social welfare for the adopted child yet neglecting to provide basic care for the child in their protection. The PM cautioned on adoption and stated that there is always the possibility

of child trafficking. Furthermore, the process now requires a full background check on the adopted parents. Hon PM further urged families to rethink before the adoption of children regardless of close family ties.

FUIMAONO Teo Samuelu Teo – Member for Falealili West (Cont.)

The Member commented on the 13 million appropriated for SAFFRON; FUIMAONO raised the need to have simple processes in place when applying for these grants, such as SAFRON. The Member stated that there have been concerns raised by members of the public regarding the lengthy application process before being eligible to receive the grant – and recommended that the forms be translated in Samoan language for better understanding of our people.

Hon LOPAOO Natanielu Mua - Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries

The Hon Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, LOPAOO Natanielu Mua, asserted that the forms have been translated and that the process has been simplified.

IV. NAMULAUULU Sami Leota, Member for Faasaleleaga No.2

The Member acknowledged Parliament and Samoa in all her honorific salutations. He then addressed the budget and stated that he was initially concerned with the financials due to certain issues, such as the measles outbreak and the COVID19 . NAMULAUULU acknowledged the Minister of Finance for sound financial planning and management as evidenced in the figures; specifically the percentage of 11% for debt while 89% utilised for the operation of the nation’s developments in the coming FY 2020/2021 – this is sufficient for our constituency to note our support for the budget.

The Member specifically addressed the following Ministries:

- Ministry of Communication and Information Technology:

In regards to the connection of the digital TV, the Member expressed concerns for certain members in his constituency that there needs to be an upgrade in connection for the digital TV.

- Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration:

The Member acknowledged the newly appointed Chief Justice and conveyed best wishes on the execution of his role. The Member noted the new office for the Electoral Commission currently under way and requested for an office in Samoa if finance and time permits.

- Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture:

The Member acknowledged efforts made by the Minister and the Ministry in development of school facilities; acknowledged the support provided by the Government of Japan through in building a new school in his constituency

- Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries:

The Member urged the Minister/Ministry to encourage collective responsibility from Sui o Nuu in promoting taro and cocoa farming in villages. Namulauulu raised the issue of market price for taro which has caused farmers to deter from growing this crop.

Hon LOPAOO Natanielu Mua - Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries

The Hon Minister clarified that the SACEP programme aims at the development of cocoa and coconut plantations; he then for villages to assist in the extermination of the rhinoceros beetle to assist with the effective implementation of the SACEP programme. In reference to the price of taro, the Hon Minister elaborated that before the price of taro was \$38 per 2 kilos; currently it is \$75 per 2kilos. Hon Minister clarified that the price of taro fluctuates depending on different variable , such as climate change.

HON PRIME MINISTER – MOTION

The Hon PM moved to amend sitting hours as follows:

9am – 1pm

6pm – 11pm

The following hours will remain until the Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No.3) 2019/2020; and the Appropriation Bill 2020/2021; motion seconded and approved.

NAMULAUULU Sami Leota, Member for Faasaleleaga No.2 (Cont.)

The Member commented on the need to upgrade the Fiaaga road; acknowledged efforts made by the Minister for Revenue on the new taxing system proposed to achieve consistency for all businesses and to curb tax evasion. Namulauulu acknowledged the Ministry of Police, specifically the determination of the Commissioner and the police force in stamping out Narcotics i.e Marijuana, Methamphetamine. Minister commended the Village Council on the stability and assisting police during raids. He commended the Samoa Shipping Corporation for their operations during the lockdown and requested that the MNRE install solar lights for his constituency. In conclusion the Member acknowledged the Prime Minister in his resilience in leading the affairs of Samoa and concluded acknowledging his constituency.

V. TOOMATA Aki Tuipea – Member for Salega West

The Member greeted the House and acknowledged Samoa in all her honorific salutations. He commended the Minister and the Ministry for compiling the tabled budget; stated his support on the fully detailed budget which reflects the Ministry's to be transparent with all funds Government Grant and aid from foreign donors. The Member noted that the Auditor's have stated that Samoa's finances have been utilized effectively and efficiently. Toomata, acknowledged the Executive Branch of Government for their financial management skills as depicted in the Budget. The Member stated that despite

misconceptions about the Budget in his opinion Samoa continues to be at a financial strongpoint irrespective of contradicting views by critics.

**Proceedings adjourned at 1pm;
and will reconvene at 6pm.**