

DISCLAIMER

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DAY 5 9:31am

Mr Speaker took his Chair and commenced proceedings with a prayer; he then greeted all Members present in the House and to Samoa listening in; he again acknowledged the support from Members of Parliament who were tending to Ministerial duties.

Announcement by Mr. Speaker – Point of Order

Mr. Speaker then raised concern with an interview streamed the past week between a media outlet and the Opposition Leader, whereby the reporter queried the Opposition Leader whether Parliament is wasting its time considering/deliberating on Committee Reports and Government Responses. Mr. Speaker expressed his disappointment with such statements which undermine the work of Parliament, emphasizing the importance of considering committee reports as it is one of Parliament's inherent functions – the oversight function of Parliament. Mr. Speaker urged Members to refrain from making statements that imply Parliament is wasting its time and ruled that the matter will not be discussed further in Parliament.

) Tofa Hon LAUOFO Fonotoe Nuafesili Pierre Laufo – Opposition Leader

The Opposition Leader in response clarified to Mr. Speaker that as he clearly stated, the Opposition leader did not make such statements, and explained that he responded to the reporter very positively that the work conducted in Parliament is of great importance.

I. ORDERS OF THE DAY

) Consideration of Parliamentary Committee Reports and Government Responses (cont.) – DAY 5

- 1. P.P. 2022/2023 No. 23, Report of the Finance & Expenditure Committee on P.P. 2020/2021 No. 104 & P.P. 2021/2022 No. 37, Annual Reports of the Development Bank of Samoa for Financial Years 2019/2020 & 2020/2021.**

- P.P. 2022/2023 No.62, Government Responses on P.P. 2022/2023 No. 23

Afioga FALEOMAVAEGA Titimaea Tafua, Chairperson for Finance and Expenditure Committee, moved a motion for the Assembly to consider its Report which consists of its findings, recommendations and resolutions on the Annual Reports of the Development Bank of Samoa for the FYs 2019/2020 and 2020/2021; motion seconded and approved.

The Chairperson then delivered a summary of its findings and read out the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

The Committee recommends the Development Bank of Samoa to monitor individuals and businesses outstanding loans and to pursue repayments as soon as economic conditions restore, the Committee continues to make note that this can be taken as an excuse to delay payments.

Recommendation 2:

The Committee recommends the Development Bank of Samoa to consider a way to measure, to withhold financial benefit derived from the government (stimulus package) paid to businesses and hotels in order to cover the outstanding balance of loans in the Bank.

Recommendation 3:

The Committee recommends the DBS, to work in collaboration with MOF on stimulus packages paid to businesses to set a rate of 50% to repay the arrears but release another 50% to continue with the development.

Recommendation 4:

The Committee recommends the DBS to continue to provide lower interest, which will also attract more customers to make a loan with DBS.

) Susuga Hon MULIPOLA Anarosa Ale-Moloo, Minister for Finance

The Hon Minister greeted Mr Speaker and all Members, then presented the following responses on the Committee's Recommendations:

Response to Recommendation 1:

The recommendation is well noted. The DBS is monitoring the implementation of relief assistance to support clients/businesses during Covid19. The DBS is prioritizing follow up of loan repayments and arrears to ensure loan obligations are honoured to improve loan collection and quality of loan portfolio.

Response to Recommendation 2:

The recommendation is well noted. The DBS has submitted request to Government for consideration to allocate a percentage of the financial benefits to settle arrears and to reduce loan balances of businesses and hotels that have loan accounts with the DBS.

Response to Recommendation 3:

The DBS has taken the recommendation of the Committee to request the MOF to allocate 50% of the financial benefits received from Government to settle arrears and to reduce loan balance of businesses and hotels that have loan accounts with the DBS.

Response to Recommendation 4:

The DBS interest rates offered for loan assistance are much lower compared to other financial institutions. The concessional interest is also available through Government financing assistance facilitated through the DBS to increase access to finance for development to our people.

**Mr. Speaker announced that the floor is open for Members who wish to raise issues or make queries on the recommendations and responses put forth.*

i. Tofa Hon LAUOFO Fonotoe Nuafesili Pierre Laufo – Leader of Opposition and Member for Anoamaa 2

The Hon. Member greeted Mr. Speaker, fellow Parliamentarians, Government officials present and all Samoans listening in. The Member stated that he continues to stand and comment on all reports as he values the work carried out by Parliamentary Committees and appreciates Government's responses. Hon LAUOFO asserted that he only has one matter to raise on the Development Bank of Samoa (DBS) Annual Report and mentioned the amount of loan portfolio of the DBS amounting to more than \$141million loaned to businesses and hotels. He noted that 67% of loans is given to Hotels, yet Hotels only comprise of 2%; the Hotel industry was the most affected during the Covid19 which has evidently impacted the earnings of the DBS.

The Opposition Leader then suggested to move the Hoteliers to other Financial institutions, such as UTOS or another Commercial Bank whilst the DBS can focus on providing financial assistance to the Agricultural sector.

ii. Afioga Hon. LAUTAFI Fio Selafi Purcell - Member for Satupaitea

The Hon. Member greeted Mr. Speaker and Members present, also paid acknowledgement to Government Heads present in the Chamber to witness and support the work of Parliament. The Member then acknowledged the operations of the Development Bank and noted that the reporting period was the most challenging period as the nation encountered the unfortunate

measles outbreak and the Covid19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, Hon LAUTAFI was hopeful that Samoa managed to get through these challenging times with the right management.

The Member then advised the DBS to thoroughly reconsider their policies and priorities so they are able to cater for people and small businesses in need during unforeseen challenges. He then expressed his disapproval for the provision of the stimulus package by the DBS to pay-off loans.

The Hon Member asserted that the purpose of the stimulus package was to help small businesses stay afloat and assist with their development plans instead of paying off debt. He then noted his approval of the recommendation to allocate 50% of financial benefits.

iii. Afioga NIUAVA Eti L Malolo – Member for Vaisigano 1

The Member greeted Mr. Speaker, Cabinet Members, Opposition leader and all Members of Parliament present. He then raised concern regarding the amount of loans approved for hotels and queried whether there was a maximum amount for these loans to hotels. Afioga NIUAVA reiterated the suggestion made by the Opposition Leader to advise the DBS to reconsider their loans to hotels as this can affect their revenues, and also focus on developing other sectors of the country such as; agriculture and small businesses.

) Afioga FALEOMAVAEGA Titimaea Tafua, Chairperson for Finance and Expenditure Committee

On a point of clarification regarding a matter raised by a media outlet (2AP) which recorded that the Government cannot proceed with the \$300tala pay-off to pension as requested by the Leader of the Opposition during last week's sitting. The Chairperson stressed that these are false accusations and wanted to clarify that he never said the Government cannot continue this \$300 one-off as an annual pay-off but the request is given at a wrong time considering the Government's status with their budget and the rapid rise in cost of living situation.

He then acknowledge the Member for Satupaitea for his advice and the fact that he does not agree with the 50%, he clarified that these businesses were only given 50% because they did not see them trying to develop their own business even at these uncertain times when we were affected with the pandemic. In regards to the questioned raised by the Member for Vaisigano 1 about the maximum of loan for Hotels, he responded that any loan issued depends on the value of the asset or hotel. He then outlined the percentages given by the DBS to respective sectors such as 65% of income for tourism, 35% for agricultural sector. He further emphasized that 85% is for the major developments and 35% for the minor developments.

Afioga Hon. LAUTAFI Fio Selafi Purcell - Member for Satupaitea

The Member for Satupaitea interjected to clarify that he supports recommendation 3 where it offers to a rate of 50% to repay the arrears instead of the full amount but does not support recommendation2 where a stimulus package is offered to pay off the loans in the Bank.

) **Susuga Hon MULIPOLA Anarosa Ale Molioo, Minister of Finance**

The Hon Minister commended all Members for their suggestions and input to improve the services of the Development Bank of Samoa. She then responded that Government's assistance to businesses through the DBS should not exceed 20%. In regards to the request made by the Leader of the Opposition about shifting hotels under another commercial bank to loan from, the Minister noted that this is an important matter, and will be taken into consideration as a way-forward for the Bank, so that the DBS can focus on assisting other sectors, such as the Agriculture and Fisheries and small businesses.

) **Afioga FALEOMAVAEGA Titimaea Tafua, Chairperson for Finance and Expenditure Committee**

The Chairperson moved a motion for the Assembly to approve its Report on P.P. 2022/2023 No. 23, Report of the Finance & Expenditure Committee on P.P. 2020/2021 No. 104 & P.P. 2021/2022 No. 37, Annual Reports of the Development Bank of Samoa for Financial Years 2019/2020 & 2020/2021; seconded and approved

) **Susuga Hon MULIPOLA Anarosa Ale Molioo, Minister of Finance**

The Hon Minister moved a motion for the Assembly to approve the Governments Responses on P.P. 2022/2023 No. 23 as presented earlier; motion seconded and approved

ii. P.P. 2022/2023 No. 35, Report of the Social Sector Committee on P.P. 2020/2021 No. 63, Annual Report of the National Kidney Foundation for Financial Year 2019/2020; - P.P. 2022/2023 No.83, Government Responses on P.P. 2022/2023 No. 35

Afioga LAUMATIAMANU Ringo M Purcell, Chairperson of the Social Sector Committee, moved a motion for the Assembly to consider its Report which provides a synopsis of its findings, recommendations and resolutions on the P.P. 2020/2021 No. 63, Annual Report of the National Kidney Foundation for Financial Year 2019/2020; motion seconded and approved.

The Chairperson then delivered its encapsulation on the Committee's findings and read out the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

The Committee recommends the Government to consider purchasing other new dialysis machines for the new NKF Building given the increase of dialysis patients from year to year.

Recommendation 2:

The Committee recommends the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education to collaborate with the Foundation to formulate policies and rules in order to promote healthy lifestyles in Primary and Secondary Schools through the foods that are available for the students to buy.

Recommendation 3:

The Committee recommends the Government to enforce Village and Church leaders, especially parents to lead by example by encouraging children to consume healthy diet and the importance of doing exercise.

) Afioga Hon VALASI Luapitofanua Toogamaga Tafito Selesele, Minister of Health

The Hon Minister greeted the House and paid special acknowledgement of the previous Minister of Health whose service to the Foundation's operations is during the reporting period FY 2019/2020. He also acknowledged the Chairman and Board of Directors as well as the CEO, management and staff of the National Kidney Foundation for their hard work and services provided. He then clarified that there were 30 new dialysis machines available upon the opening of the NKF at its new headquarters, instead of the number presented in the Report.

**Proceedings were set aside at 10:46am; and
Resumed at 11:30am**

**) Afioga Hon VALASI Luapitofanua Toogamaga Tafito Selesele, Minister of Health
conts**

The Hon Minister presented the following Government's Responses on the Committee's Recommendations:

Response to Recommendation 1:

A request is now with Cabinet to purchase 30 new dialysis machines

Response to Recommendation 2:

Policies to this effect are already in place, perhaps there is a need for stricter enforcement.

Response to Recommendation 3:

This is included in the Ministry of Health's PEN Fa'a Samoa initiative which is being rolled out to villages; however, the recommendation is greatly supported.

He further added to the Governments Response to clarify the objectives of the Ministry's PEN Faa Samoa initiative and other plans in place that aims to address NCDs which are contributing factors to Kidney failure. The Hon Minister then urged the House to be mindful of what they consume/eat, and encouraged the Office of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly (OCLA) to provide light refreshments such as fruits and water instead of preparing heavy food; this will not only cut down and save the Office budget but also encourage healthy eating habits for our Members.

**Mr. Speaker announced that the floor is open for Members who wish to raise issues or make queries on the recommendations and responses put forth.*

i. Tofa Hon TUUU Anasii Leota, Member for Siumu

The Member greeted the Speaker, Deputy PM, Cabinet, Leader of the Opposition and all Members present in the House. He also acknowledged the presence of a Church Ministry and his wife (from Australia) in the Chamber. He then expressed his concern with the increasing number of people diagnosed with kidney disease especially among the youth. He acknowledged the Minister's effort in ensuring preventative measures are taken to avoid further kidney failure within the country especially with what we should consume and what not. The Hon Member further emphasized on the importance of conducting blood tests to confirm whether there are any medical conditions or not which is also a preventative measure encouraged by the Ministry of Health.

) Afioga Hon SEUULA Ioane - Minister of Education

The Hon Minister stated that during the XV Parliamentary Term, a Special Committee was established to enforce healthy eating habits and hygienic lifestyles in schools. The Committee managed to conduct site visits around schools in the country to ensure that healthy food products were sold in schools and healthy-living was encouraged by consuming fruits and vegetables. This was an initiative essential for our people. The Hon Minister further explained that education was not the main priority of any nation, rather the health, and therefore urged the Hon Minister of Health and all Members to value the importance of healthy eating habits and healthy lifestyles.

ii. Afioga PESETA Vaifou Tevagaena – Member for Faasaleleaga 5

The Member for Faasaleleaga 5 greeted the Speaker of the House and his fellow Parliamentarians; and acknowledged the work of the Committee in preparing the report and recommendations. He then noted that restaurants and fast food outlets plays a part in our unhealthy lifestyles and further emphasized that home-cooked meal is the healthy choice.

He then urged the responsible Minister to identify quality markets abroad for our imported products. Furthermore, the Member commended the Minister of Health for the new dialysis machines received and further requested to consider a new place for the Foundation to shift to as the current place is easily crowded. In this regard, Afioga PESETA Vaifou Tevagaena encouraged the Minister to have another facility for the treatment of dialysis patients, such as the central business district in Vaitele, as it is more accessible and convenient for people living near the area. He then asserted that the cost for dialysis treatment in American Samoa is quite high and there have been American Samoa citizens who travel to Samoa for treatments.

) **Susuga Hon. LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao Fosi – Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries**

The Hon Minister responded to the point raised by the Minister of Education regarding a Special Parliamentary Committee assigned to investigate and promote healthy lifestyles and eating habits in Schools. The Hon Minister clarified that the Committee was called Samoa Parliamentary Advocacy Group for Healthy Living (SPAGHL) and continued to enlighten the House on the terms of reference for this Committee and its findings and investigations.

The Hon Minister further noted some of the issues he noticed during their Committee visit during the XV Parliamentary term for the school at Moataa, noting on the poor conditions of school buildings, bathrooms and the numerous junk and unhealthy food at schools' canteens. He perceives that this is one of the reasons why our youth are experiencing kidney issues today, due to the poor health choices when they were young. The Hon Minister continued to explain the outcome of the Committee visits and inspections, then stated that there were schools that were forced to lockdown due to the poor conditions of school buildings, bathrooms, canteens and food choices at the school canteen. The Minister further stated that the youth nowadays are now at high risk of Non-communicable diseases.

The Hon Minister also highlighted that although the NKF has received 30 new dialysis machines, it is not the solution to the problem of kidney failure instead Parliament as a whole should tackle this issue collectively with the Government promoting healthy living. As a result of the foreclosure of the mentioned school, five new school buildings worth \$5 million each were built through China aid. This was made possible as donors saw the urgent need and the active involvement of Parliament in taking lead is an important matter.

Hon LAAULI then accentuated that the reason why the Special Advocacy Committees were discontinued, was due to the fact that such Committees were seen to be over-riding the power and authority of Parliament. He then advised Members of Parliament to encourage healthy living within the country as this issue of kidney failure should be taken seriously. In addition, he requested the Speaker whether it is appropriate to re-establish the Advocacy Groups for the betterment of our people and emphasized that if we desire new changes, it must start within Parliament.

SPEAKER:

Mr. Speaker noted that he has taken all advises and requests into account and stated that he will consider the re-establishment of these Special Advocacy Groups and Committees given the significance of its roles for our people.

iii. Afioga ALAIASA Moefaauouo Malagatutogiai Sepulona Moananu- Anoamaa 1

The Member for Anoamaa 1 commended the members for their important requests and advises shared in the House. The member further commended the respective management of the Foundation, the responsible Committee and Chairperson for preparing the report under consideration. He then raised the issue regarding the differences in numbers of new dialysis machines for treatment mentioned in the report, and sought clarification from the Minister. Furthermore, he commented on the overall budget of the Kidney Foundation and asserted that the allocation for personnel costs was too high, yet there are less than 20 staff members; he then queried whether this amount includes the overtime, allowances, etc.

He further commented on the number of patients treated at the Foundation and stated that he supports the request for another building for the Foundation to operate at; however, he suggests the Minister of Health to consider distributing dialysis machines at District Hospitals first before establishing a new building for the Foundation. He then concluded by expressing his support on the revival of the Parliamentary Advocacy Group for Healthy Living.

iv. Afioga SULAMANAIA Fetaiai Tauiliili Tuivasa - Vaimauga 1

The Member greeted Mr. Speaker and everyone present in the Chamber. He then commended the preceding Director General of the Ministry of Health for his contribution and further noted from the report the number of programs conducted as it paved a way for the Ministry to conduct tests, check-ups for locals and babies in various districts in order to reduce the risk of NCDs. The Member then urged the Minister to establish policies to enforce tests/treatments for patients and those who do not wish to be treated as he understands several people especially elders tend to refuse treatments.

v. Afioga FAAGASEALII Sapoa Feagiai- Aleipata Itupa i Lalo

The member greeted the Hon Speaker and fellow Parliamentarians, the Government officials present in the House then commended the Minister of Health for his efforts and service to ensuring the promotion of healthier lifestyle. The Member then acknowledged the Minister of Agriculture for encouraging healthy living through the promotion of vegetables and fruits for consumption. She further outlined the appropriate food combinations people should have for breakfast, lunch and dinner to ensure a balanced diet. The Member as a former nurse, elaborated on the main causes of kidney disease and other NCDs and how these disease not only affects your body physically but can also affect your mental health.

Afioga ALAIASA Moefaauouo Malagatutogiai Sepulaona Moananu: Anoamaa 1

The Member queried whether those who are already diagnosed with kidney failure and going through dialysis can become better (will no longer need to use the machine) if they start to consume healthy food mentioned by the female Member for Aleipata Itupa i Lalo.

Afioga FAAGASEALII Sapoa Feagiai- Aleipata Itupa i Lalo

The member raised a recommendation to the Minister of Health for training programs for nurses on the process and procedure of conducting dialysis as there is only basic training available for nurses specialized in dialysis every 6 months on how to operate the dialysis machine. She then touched on the questioned raised by the member for Anoamaa 1 and elaborated that she is talking about preventative measures that people can take to avoid illness which can develop into a serious state such as kidney failure hence the importance of educating ourselves on the effectiveness of a balanced diet.

vi. Afioga FUAAVA Suluimalo Amataga- Aleipata Itupa i Luga

The Member commended the Minister of Health and the Foundation for their service as well as the new 30 machines acquired by the Foundation. The member requested the feasibility of having 2 dialysis machines for the Health Clinic in his constituency; 1 for immediate operation and the other as a spare. He then mentioned the challenges of accessibility, and transportation of locals from remote districts to the main hospital for treatments. He further expressed his support for preventative measures outlined by the Member for Aleipata itupa i lalo, and further stressed the importance of the collaboration between MOH and MESC to ensure that education and healthy-living go hand in hand.

The Member also stressed on the imported foods from overseas companies, as noted from the overseas conventions, they inject chemicals in products such as chicken/poultry to fasten growth. The Member expressed his concern with these chemicals as these might be another cause of NCDs. Furthermore, he noted his concern with the Minister of SROS regarding chemicals being injected into the soil or used for agricultural purposes highlighting that these can pose a long-term negative impacts for our locally grown products which may eventually affect our health. The member also highlighted that even though there is FDA (US Food and Drug Administration), he recommends to have our own food standards as the quality of meat from overseas is questionable.

Susuga Hon LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao Fosi - Minister for Agriculture

The Hon Minister stated during their travel to Fiji regarding agricultural matters such as poultry, 95% are produced and supplied locally in Fiji. He then emphasized on the need to address the issue with imported food as a total number of 50 (40ft) containers full of chicken/poultry is consumed by the country daily.

He further stated that Samoa is too dependent on import goods especially chicken and therefore, encourages the local production of poultry farming so that we are not worried about what we consume. The Minister also urged the country to produce and supply its food locally and to refrain from relying on these expensive and unhealthy imported foods.

Afioga Fuaava Suluimalo Amataga- Aleipata Itupa i Luga

The Member expressed his gratitude to the Minister of Agriculture and highlighted that the issue regarding chickens is a result of GMO (Genetically Modified Organisms) utilized by overseas companies for mass production of chickens. Therefore, he encourages companies to refrain from using chemicals and other means to speed up the process of poultry farming as this will have immense impact on our health. He further explains that there are organisations in the country trying to implement ORGANIC methods of growth for agriculture and livestock, which is healthier than the chemical injected in livestock and soil.

The Member also noted the increase of newly admitted patients throughout the financial year 2019/2020 where the number of patients increased from 36 to 48 and therefore encourage the Government and Ministry to focus on prevention to halt this increase. He also encouraged proactive measures by Parliament to address the issue instead of trying to upgrade machines and facilities at the Foundation. He then emphasized that the Foundation and Parliament as a whole should work collectively to promote preventative measures.

Afioga FUAAVA further noted that in 2004, he was on the task team for the inception of the Dialysis Foundation in 2005 which was during Hon Mulitalo's time as the Minister of Health and recalled one of their trips to Singapore, where they noticed the positive and friendly environment in the dialysis facilities. Through this, he encouraged the dialysis patients to exercise and eat a balanced diet and also to enjoy watching TV and reading during their treatment time.

Announcement from the Chair:

Mr. Speaker announced that on 23 March 2023, the OCLA will receive a visit from the National Kidney Foundation for medical screenings and tests to ensure the staff are healthy, in this regard, the Speaker invited all Members who are keen to get tested to join the Office on this day.

**Proceedings adjourned at 1:10pm and will reconvene on Tuesday, 14 March
2023 at 9:30am**