

DISCLAIMER

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PART A

9:28am

I. PRESENTATION OF PAPERS

There were 2 Papers presented in Parliament:

- (i) 1 Annual Report
- (ii) 1 Government Response

II. PRESENTATION OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS

A total of 5 Committee Reports were tabled in Parliament

- 2 Reports from the Finance and Expenditure Committee:
 - Supplementary Estimates No.1 2022/2023
 - Public Accounts for the FY 2019/2020
- 1 Report from the Standing Orders, Electoral, Petitions and Constitutional Offices Committee
 - Covid19 and Human Rights – A Samoan Case (Ombudsman Office)
- 2 Reports from the Economic Sector Committee
 - Labour and Employment Relations Amendment Bill 2023
 - Fisheries Management Regulations 2022

III. MOTION FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION

Afioga AUUAPAAU Mulipola Aloitafua, Deputy Chairman moved, That the Assembly approves the Assembly Sitting Programme for 2023/2024 given hereunder as approved by the Parliamentary Commission

Tuesday 7th March	Tuesday 30th May	Tuesday 20th June
Tuesday 22nd August	Tuesday 24th October	Tuesday 19th December
Tuesday January 23rd 2024		

IV. GOVERNMENT ORDERS OF THE DAY - Reading of Bills

1. Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No.1) 2022/2023 – debate on second reading commence

i. Afioga FUAAVA Suluimalo Amataga, Member for Aleipata Itupa i Luga

The member began by acknowledging his fellow parliamentarians and Samoa listening in to the proceedings of Parliament. The Member then spoke generally on the following issues:

- Minister of Health

The Member commended the Minister and the Ministry for their services in the previous year and acknowledged efforts taken by the Ministry for renovations and establishment of doctors' residences in each constituency where district hospitals are located. Furthermore, the Member acknowledged the services provided by the doctors and nurses servicing the hospital at Aleipata and other villages close to Aleipata. He then requested on behalf of his constituency for a dialysis facility to be constructed at the hospital in Lalomanu. The member requested to set up an extension to cater specifically for maternal ward and dialysis ward as this will be more accessible and convenient for the patients residing in the rural areas.

Afioga Hon. Valasi Luapitofanua Toogamaga Tafito Selesele (Minister Health)

The Hon. Minister acknowledged the Member for raising such important points, however there is no budget in the supplementary to cater for such requests (specifically for a dialysis treatment facility in Lalomanu). The Hon Minister asserted that the possibility of this happening in the future, would require the necessary people to be trained appropriately so that they may be able to fully provide this service in the villages in the rural areas, especially with the handling of equipment for dialysis treatment and these are very expensive equipment. The Hon Minister urged other contractors to bid for the maintenance of district hospitals as he noted there continues to be only one company bidding for the maintenance and upkeep of district hospitals.

Afioga FUAAVA Suluimalo Amataga, Member for Aleipata Itupa i Luga (cont.)

- Minister of Health

The Member continued by further stating the benefits of having a dialysis facility in the rural area, as this can assist people and families with transportation costs. He then suggested to have a technician team to operate the machines for dialysis and reiterated to set up a training unit as done before during the time when Hon Mulitalo was the responsible Minister.

- Public Service Commission

The Member noted from advertisements on the PSC circular there are various roles/vacancies that have yet to be filled and queried this; the Member was concerned that this was also a contributing factor to the increase of people choosing to go to seasonal employment schemes

abroad. The Member noted that there was a legislation recently passed by the House regarding the transferral of duties from the Ports Authority to the Shipping Services, The member asserted that several queries were raised in the House when the Bill was deliberated whether there will be any employees affected by this transferral, which the responsible Minister asserted that there is no impact on the workers; yet the Member for Aleipata Itupa i Lalo noted that there are certain people from his constituency who were affected by this transfer; thus the Member urged the responsible Authority to revisit the issue to solve this unfortunate situation.

The member then raised the matter whereby an individual has made accusations on the misuse of government grant, specifically referring to carbon credit. The Member asserted that such statements must be cleared as it implies negatively on his name and tenure when he was working with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, in which time, the current Hon Prime Minister was the responsible Minister for the Ministry at the time.

Hon Mr. SPEAKER

Mr Speaker advised the Member to refrain from mentioning matters that are irrelevant and suggested to focus on the merits of the bill as the public are listening in and may be misled by such statements made by the member.

Afioga FUAAVA Suluimalo Amataga, Member for Aleipata Itupa i Luga (cont.)

- Minister of Health

The Member continued by explaining that the reason he raised this issue was because he feels that he is affected in the matters regarding rumors spreading on social media and so he wanted to explain the situation.

Afioga Hon TUALA Iosefo Ponifasio – Deputy Prime Minister

The Hon Deputy Prime Minister advised the member to refrain from discussing matters from social media and matters of no substance. Furthermore, he advised the Member to avoid mentioning the Hon Prime Minister's name as she is not present to respond to his statements. He then urged the Member to set aside this issue and to focus on the supplementary appropriation.

Hon Mr. SPEAKER

Mr Speaker further iterated that the Members concerns are noted but advised the Member to take heed of the Chairs interruption and advise to refrain from continuing with this matter as there are no solid evidence for this matter presented on social media.

Afioga FUAAVA Suluimalo Amataga, Member for Aleipata Itupa i Luga (cont.)

The Member conveyed apologies for mentioning the Prime Ministers' name and that he meant no disrepute but to clear his name as well as the Minister at the time. He then raised concerns on the safety provided for dignitaries. He mentioned an incident which occurred outside the Court House which involved the Opposition leader who was harassed by an elderly citizen, which then raises

concern for the overall safety of our people, especially those in high positions as Samoa is scheduled to host several international leadership forums thus the importance of having our security personnel highly equipped with necessary skillset and knowledge. The Member stated this is significant to consider as Samoa would be hosting Leadership conventions, which a number of World Leaders would be present thus heightening the need safety and security in Samoa must be enforced, strengthened and improved in preparation for this as our police officers would be needed as guards for these leaders.

Afioga Fepuleai Faasavalu Faimata Sua - Member for Salega 1

In the absence of the Minister for Police, the Associate Minister stood to explain to the Member that the incident which occurred outside the Court house, was unexpected, however commended the Ministry for their efforts thus far in keeping Samoa safe.

Afioga FUAAVA Suluimalo Amataga, Member for Aleipata Itupa i Luga (cont.)

The Member commended the increase of pension and financial assistance for disabled people by \$50tala for 3 consecutive months as shown in the bill. However, the member requested to continue this financial assistance for a longer period considering the rise in the cost of living. The Member elaborated that although his concerns are not in the budget, he emphasised that it is important to raise these issues as can be applied to our foreign guest that may need police to guard them for their own safety. He then concluded by wishing all a good day.

ii. Afioga PESETA Vaifou Tevagaena, Member for Faasaleleaga 5

The Member firstly conveyed his well wishes to the Hon PM and few members of the Cabinet who were not present due to seeking medical treatments abroad; he then addressed all those present in the House. He acknowledged Government Ministries and Offices and all who were listening in. He asserted that a new year has begun; therefore, whatever plans set out to achieve this year should be left to God and His guidance.

The Member then spoke on the Budget:

- Commended the Minister of Finance for preparing the Supplementary Bill
- He queried the \$500,000 given to Samoa Victim Support as this group is not under a Ministry and queried how the organization can be held accountable with the grant of \$500k given to them.
- Commended the increase of pension by \$50tala for three consecutive months however, requested to extend this period.
- The member queried the status of a national Airline. Advising that it is important to have our own airline to avoid all the complexities our people go through when traveling overseas.

Susuga Hon Laauli Polataivao Fosi – Minister of MAF (interjection)

The Hon Minister clarified that they did not declare during their campaign that pensions would be \$300 and paid out twice a month rather than if they come in as Government they will increase pension monthly payout to \$200.

Afioga PESETA Vaifou Tevagaena, Member for Faasaleleaga 5 (cont.)

The Member continued by commending the Hon Minister of Finance for the Supplementary and queried the Minister for Works on the feasibility of bringing in an aircraft for Samoa as there are numerous Samoans travelling to and from for family faalavelaves. He then raised an incident whereby Samoans were stranded at an airport. The Member expressed concerns towards the Deputy Prime Minister as there was an announcement on TV that business renewal license for 2023 has been ceased. Also concerned and questioned if there would be any new or additional requirements for renewal of business license.

Tofa Hon Olo Fiti Vaai – Minister for Works, Transport and Infrastructure

The Hon Minister responded to the issue of stranded passengers at international airports, and clarified that this happened in overseas airports, and Samoa has no control over those nations' policies and operations, however such incidents happen when the layover period for flights are longer than usual.

Mr Speaker – Point of Clarification

Mr. Speaker clarified that the Government has already addressed this matter and urged Members to support the Government and their initiatives for the betterment of the nation.

Afioga Hon TUALA Ponifasio – Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Customs and Revenue

The Minister clarified that the renewal of Business Licenses is not on hold and emphasized that business licenses were changed due to a recently passed regulation which provided changes to processes involved for business renewals and new business proposals. The Hon Minister noted that Samoa was blacklisted by OECD, an organization which oversees the economy of Samoa, thus amendments were made to relevant legislation in 2022 to align with the regulations of OECD with the aim to remove Samoa from the blacklist. The Hon Deputy Prime Minister asserted that the legislation should have been amended because OECD has been urging Samoa for the past 12 years to make necessary amendments.

Afioga PESETA Vaifou Tevagaena, Member for Faasaleleaga 5 (cont.)

The Member acknowledged the Hon Deputy Prime Minister for his clarification.

Hon Mr. SPEAKER

Mr Speaker advised the Member that his query has been addressed by the Hon Deputy Prime Minister in his clarification.

**Proceedings set aside at 10:48am; and
Resumed at 11:38am**

MOTION – Deputy Prime Minister

The Hon Deputy Prime Minister moved the amendment of sitting hours as follows:

- Commence from 9:30am – 1pm;
- 3pm – 7pm

Motion seconded and approved.

Afioga PESETA Vaifou Tevagaena, Member for Faasaleleaga 5 (cont.)

- The Member then queried the reasoning for a letter his constituency received noting that his constituency will not receive any more funds aside from the first 200k as an establishment fund for constituency offices.

Susuga Hon LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao – Minister for MAF (clarification)

The Hon Minister clarified on the intention of the Government when rolling out the 1 million project, with the overarching aim to instigate development within constituencies. He noted that the project follows the Public Finance Management Act to ensure funds are accounted for and that the utilization of public funds is made transparent. Furthermore, the Hon Minister elaborated that applications for 10 constituencies did not meet certain conditions and requirements, thus funds have been ceased for these constituencies.

Afioga PESETA Vaifou Tevagaena, Member for Faasaleleaga 5 (cont.)

The Member then stated that his constituency have already made purchases for their constitutional office, yet they received news that 1 million distribution for their constituency have been ceased and this wasted government income/money used for purchases.

Susuga Hon LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao – Minister for MAF (clarification)

The Minister asserted that the Member is using a tactic to delay this project. He also stated that any reason there is a halt in receiving funds is when the village committees do not utilize the fund the right way. The Minister also stated that a Member that wants benefit for his constituency will take the 1 million. Hon Minister urged the Members to ensure that the Committees meet the requirements and to have well qualified and reliable members.

Afioga PESETA Vaifou Tevagaena, Member for Faasaleleaga 5 (cont.)

The Member informed the Minister that the requirements for Committee composition includes membership from both Political Parties; then explained that his constituency only members of HRPP were interested to be Committee members.

iii. Afioga LUPEMATASILA Galumalemana Tologata: Falelatai ma Samatau

The Member greeted the House and commended the budget tabled in the House and made specific mention on the following Ministries:

- Ministry of Health

Commend the Minister, CEO and ministry as a whole for their continuous efforts in ensuring the public is safe and healthy; He further queried the Ministry and the Government's response to the new Covid variant spreading globally. He then reminded the Minister about his constituency's district hospital, and asserted that it would be very rewarding for his constituency to have a hospital constructed before another pandemic hits our nation.

- Climate Change

In regards to the adverse impacts of changing weather patterns and climatic conditions, his constituency requests the construction of seawalls

- Minister for Works, Transport and Infrastructure

The Member requested the Minister for more access roads to be developed for his constituency.

In regards to the \$50 added on the pension and support for chronic disease patients, the Member requested to consider another financial assistance to counter the increasing cost of living. The member noted that the pension is from public servants money/contributions however, there is no sign of increasing their salaries considering the rapid increase in cost of living. He further urged the government of the day to consider looking at employment opportunities given the fluctuation of inflation rates and the constant increase in cost of living.

The Member queried the status of returning customary/traditional land under the Government to villages for their developments. He further raised concern with the processing of business license, he asserted that issuing business license (for renewals) have been told that the full process is required (whereby the payment of a full business license is required).

The Member raised the 1 million initiative highlighting that his constituency has complied with all necessary requirements for acquiring more funds upon the completion of their committee house and offices; unfortunately, they are one of the constituencies with a halt for any further payment.

- Minister for Education, Sports and Culture

The member raised the salaries of teachers who are employed by the Church. Advising that the government should consider including these teachers' salaries in their budget.

Afioga Hon TUALA Ponifasio – Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Customs and Revenue

The Minister clarified that there is no process whereby full payment of business license is required for renewal of license. Furthermore, the issuing of business license is still in progress, the applicant is only required to answer certain questions before the license is issued. The Hon Deputy Prime Minister elaborated that there are questions for applicants to answer before the license is issued, for security purposes, such as proof of identification (ID) bank statements to confirm the bank details and that applicant is the genuine owner.

Furthermore, Hon TUALA clarified that business owners travelling from to Samoa to register for a license renewal, registration is within 2 months. For those investors or those who wish to register a business in Samoa, they must have a permit/visa that would allow them to register their business. The Minister also clarified that the Ministry would make extensions for registrations and reassured that there are no penalties. The Minister also asserted the need for better investors as there have been quite a few investor who only invest SAT\$50 in some businesses.

Susuga Hon LAAULI Leuatea Polataivao – Minister for MAF (clarification)

The Minister clarified that the lands they promised to return to respective constituencies are the unused customary lands and emphasised that only Samatau has given their proposal for land and that others are in progress, he also begged for the forbearance of his fellow Parliamentarians.

Afioga LUPEMATASILA Galumalemana Tologata: Falelatai ma Samatau (cont.)

The Member commended the Minister Agriculture and the Deputy Prime Minister for responding to his requests and providing clarification. The Member further noted the importance of Chinese shops as they have provided our people with affordable goods and products and this is also good to encourage competition for our locals to up their game, and the ability to try and provide a better pricing for our own people. He also mentioned that it is vital to revive the Price Control Board to monitor product pricings. Furthermore, the member further touched on the 1million initiative highlighting that his constituency have complied with all necessary requirements however, he is saddened by the fact that there are rumors on social media claiming his constituency did not comply with the conditions. Therefore, the member advised the minister that his constituency is waiting for the full fund from the initiative for future developments. Furthermore, the Member also requested an increase in salaries for teachers (of Church Schools), as they are doing an important job in educating our young ones for the future Samoa. He then concluded his speech by acknowledging efforts and support of different ministries for his constituency.

iv. Afioga LEAANA Ronnie Posini, Member for Safata 1

The Member greeted the House then spoke directly on the following Ministries:

- Minister of Health

The Member commended the Ministry of Health for their continuous effort in ensuring the health and safety of the country. He also raised his concern with the delay in the construction process of their district hospital.

- Minister for Works, Transport and Infrastructure
The Member reminded the construction of seawalls for his constituency; he then commended the Minister for road-tar in Salamumu.
- The Member highlighted the benefits of the Seasonal Work Scheme, which has helped numerous people however, he has concerns with the Government's action to temporarily pause the scheme. The member advised that this can affect our people's opportunities to get work overseas.

The Member raised concern regarding the hold placed on filling government employment vacancies. Taking into account the increasing number of students who have returned with degrees but no employment available. The member touched on Business Licenses advising the Minister to refrain from specifically mentioning names of countries who operate in Samoa. The member highlighted that mentioning China can be offensive or reflect discrimination towards these people who have provided assistance for the development of our economy.

Afioga Hon TUALA Iosefa Ponifasio – Deputy Prime Minister

The Hon Minister clarified in regards to RSE, that the decision has been finalized by Cabinet to cease taking people overseas for a temporary period. This is due to the fact that our people are being taken advantage of, and to the extent of being exploited but the government of the day does not intend to stop this scheme but it is only for a temporary period; 1 month and the cabinet will review this matter. The rationale behind ceasing the scheme is for the cabinet to review the conditions on the safety of our people whilst working overseas and the concern was also the limited number of people to help the Village councils, Matai and Chiefs during the Village Fono. The Minister asserted that Cabinet is also concerned with their relations with Australia and New Zealand.

Hon Minister elaborated further that everyone should not only think about the pros of RSE but should also consider the cons whereby he touched on the impacts of constantly sending too much of our people through this scheme. If they continue to send people to work overseas there would be less or no one to serve their matai/chiefs of their families, village and constituencies.

Afioga LEAANA Ronnie Posini, Member for Safata 1 (cont.)

The Member expressed his concern in regards to Samoa losing out of employment opportunity from the overseas scheme as there are other Pacific nations involved in the scheme.

Afioga Hon TUALA Iosefa Ponifasio – Deputy Prime Minister

The Hon Minister clarified that countries like Australia and NZ prefer our people to work in this profession in their hence why a good number of people have opted for these career.

Afioga VALASI Luapitofanua Toogamaga Tafito – Minister of Health

The Hon Minister added on to the clarification by the Deputy Prime Minister regarding the RSE scheme. The Minister highlighted that the temporary halt on the scheme is to conduct an overall review of the processes involved in sending our people overseas. In addition, the minister noted that some people are taking advantage of our people trying to apply for the scheme noting that they are ripping people's money therefore the government must conduct a review of the whole process.

Tofa Hon OLO Fiti Vaai – Minister for Works, Transport and Infrastructure

The Hon Minister noted that the other concern was the high turnover, especially the professional engineers who have left their jobs to join the RSE scheme. This is due to poor policies and requirements set by the previous government. Another concern highlighted is the living conditions of our people going overseas. He also emphasized on the importance of population as this indicates the economy of a country

v. Hon LAUTAFI Fio Selafi Purcell – Member for Satupaitea

The Member emphasized that there were policies in place during their time when in Government and objects statements made by the Hon Ministers that there were no policies.

Afioga Hon TUALA Iosefa Ponifasio – Interjection

The Deputy PM clarified that the policies mentioned are not in use and invalid therefore they have had to formulate new policies to resolve the issue towards the RSE scheme.

vi. Tofa Hon LAUOFO Fonotoe Nuafesili Piere Lauofo

The Hon Member explained that we cannot be compared to other countries bigger than us and there is a difference between the process of visa's (work visa and travel visa) we cannot be expected to go on trips and work on one visa and we should know that there are specific visa's when you want to travel.

Mr SPEAKER – Ruling

The Hon Speaker rules that the Member speaking to refrain from speaking on the RSE Scheme.

• Afioga LEAANA Ronnie Posini, Member for Safata 1 cont.

In regards to business license, he praised the Chinese business owners for their contribution for the overall development of Samoa.

• Afioga Hon TUALA Iosefa Ponifasio – Interjection

The Hon Minister clarified that the mention of Chinese does not mean the Chinese doing businesses in Samoa are only from China. There are Chinese business owners/investors who are New Zealand citizens for example.

Mr Speaker – Point of Order

The Hon Speaker advised the Deputy Opposition Leader to seek the Chairs' approval before speaking as due process.

Proceedings set aside at 1:04pm and will reconvene at 3pm