

TUESDAY 12TH APRIL 2011

The Speaker, Sir Allan Kemakeza took the Chair at 9:30 a.m.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

At prayers, all were present with the exception of the Ministers for Education & Training; Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification; Communications & Civil Aviation; Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology; Culture and Tourism; Rural Development and Indigenous Affairs; Lands, Housing & Survey; Planning & Aid Coordination; Agriculture & Livestock; Provincial Government & Institutional Strengthening and the Members for West Guadalcanal; Small Malaita, West Kwara'ae, Temotu Pele, North West Guadalcanal, Temotu Vattu, West Kwaio and the Member for Malaita Outer Islands.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

- Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the 2010 Supplementary appropriation Bill 2011

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Prime Minister's Office: intel report

1. **Dr Sikua** to the Prime Minister: Can the Prime Minister inform Parliament whether any action has been taken against the author/s of the so-called Intel Report alleging that Australia and RAMSI were backing the Opposition in its bid to oust his NCRA regime?

Hon Philip: The NCRA Government is not a regime, it is a government. But yes, no action has been taken.

Mr WALE: Why not?

Hon Philip: Question please.

Mr Wale: The Prime Minister's answer was that there has not been any actions taken as yet, and so the further supplementary question is why is there no action taken as yet?

Hon Philip: Because the Government did not sanction it.

Mr. Wale: The report came formally from the Prime Minister's Press Office, and if the Government did not sanction it, then it is all the more reason why some disciplinary actions ought to be taken on either the authors or those who perpetrated the lying because the information is really a lie. But if no action is taken then it seems the government is complicit in the whole situation, and so perhaps the Prime Minister could care to explain that.

Hon. Philip: That is an inference that the Government sanctioned it. The report was sent to us anonymously, and we are at the receiving end just like the Opposition. The fact that the Press Secretary said something about that report does not mean it is sanctioned by the government.

Mr. SOGAVARE: I am going to put to you again the supplementary question asked by the MP for Aoke/Langalanga. With the fact that the Government did not sanction this report, it is irresponsible on the part of the Press Secretary to put it out, and because of that, as stated by the MP for Aoke/Langalanga, warrants disciplinary action. Can the Prime Minister confirm that position?

Hon. Philip: I do not want to take too much of our time on this issue because it is a subject of the court at the moment. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has put this to the court, and so what is the point of asking it in Parliament.

Secondly, the people whom the report is targeting, as far as I am concerned and the Australian Government is concerned, is now water under the bridge because of the basic reason that we disagreed to agree, so what is the concern of the Opposition?

Mr. Wale: I filed a defamation suit as rightly pointed out by the Prime Minister against the Prime Minister and his Press Secretary or perhaps now former press secretary. That in a way stands in the way of appropriate discipline being taken and so it does not mean that just because the matter is before the courts and therefore no discipline can be taken. That is to answer the first point raised by the Prime Minister, and that is of concern to us. I think it is of concern to the people of the country that if the Government whether knowingly or unknowingly has been used for something that itself did not conjure up, there ought to be some discipline taken.

Hon. Maelanga: Point of order. If the matter is before the courts why should we discuss it here? Psychedelic

Mr. Speaker: The Chair has just known that the matter is before the courts. In fact, I was supposed to have given a ruling, but my Office did not know that this matter is before the court and therefore, I do not allow any debate on it because the matter is now before the courts.

You are right, Deputy Prime Minister. Let us allow the Member for Aoke/Langalanga to finish his statement and the Leader of the Opposition may thank the Prime Minister. Member for Aoke/Langalanga, would you finish your statement?

Mr Wale: It is all right.

Mr Speaker: That is very kind of you, MP for Aoke/Langalanga.

Hon. Sikua: I would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for answering the question.

Political appointments in the Prime Minister's Office

2. **Dr. SIKUA** to the Prime Minister: In line with the announcement by NCRA upon assuming office to reduce expenses for political appointments, can the Honourable Prime Minister inform Parliament of the following:-

- (a) The number of political appointees currently employed in the Prime Minister's private/political office and the Bureau for Social and Economic Reform;
- (b) The nature of the appointment of the Prime Minister's new Press Secretary as the Chief Executive Officer of the Government Communications Unit.

Hon. Philip: The number is 15 political appointees and the Bureau 10.

Dr Sikua: The honourable Prime Minister did not answer the second part, part (b) of my question and so if he would respond to that as well.

Hon Philip: The second part of the question relates to the Chief Executive of the Government Communications Department. He is still there as the CEO of the Communications Department. He is however, filling in as the Press Secretary to the Prime Minister. The former Press Secretary has now moved to the Bureau.

Dr Sikua: Supplementary question. This change in the Press Secretary position, is it related to any disciplinary action you have taken from my first question on the first Press Secretary of the Prime Minister?

Hon. Philip: No, definitely not.

Dr Sikua: I would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for answering my question.

Questions No. 9, 10, 13, 14, 15 & 16 deferred.

BILLS

Bills – Second Reading

The 2010 Supplementary Appropriation No. 2 Bill 2011

Hon LILO: I rise again to move that the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation (No.2) Bill of 2011 be now put to the second reading.

This Bill is in keeping with Section 103(2) of the Constitution and Section 15 of the Public Finance and Audit Act, which stipulates that the Minister of Finance may, at his discretion, authorize expenditure arising from an un-urgent and unforeseen need under a contingency warrants where the amount required exceeds that is available under an existing appropriation and subject to financial limits set by Parliament not being exceeded.

As you would realize, last year in August when the NCRA Government came into office, we had asked in the Supplementary Appropriation at that time that we will not seek for any supplementary appropriation but to stick within the provisions of the contingency warrant. That is exactly what NCRA Government has done, and therefore, the need for this particular Supplementary Appropriation Bill. And in keeping to the requirement of the Constitution that Bill has to be presented to the next available meeting of Parliament to present a supplementary which should also include the provisions of contingency warrants that have been executed for the particular period.

The 2010 Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2) Bill of 2011 seeks an appropriation to cover expenditure that has already been authorized by contingency warrant by the Minister of Finance in the last part of 2010, which will in turn conclude the funding of the 2010 Budget.

The House will recall that under the Supplementary Appropriation Act of 2010 passed by parliament, the total amount that has been prescribed to be issued by the Minister in exercise of the powers under Section 103 of the Constitution for the financial year 2010, in respect of heads of recurrent expenditure was \$30million and in respect of heads of development expenditure was also \$30million.

The total supplementary expenditure sought by this particular Bill is \$22,845,173. It seeks to legalize \$11,345,173 in respect of the Recurrent Expenditure and \$11,500,000 in respect of the Development Expenditure. I believe that upon assuming this office by the NCRA Government, it has been able to exercise responsibility. It has kept to its discipline and that it has been able to maintain tight control over the total amount that has been prescribed in the remaining months of the year 2010. The increases in recurrent and development expenditure, as you would understand, are inevitable. But nonetheless, these have been to ensure that the government must continue to deliver on its commitment to our people.

The Bill seeks appropriation to cover expenditures of, as I have stated earlier on, \$11,345,173 which had already been authorized against the recurrent for four ministries, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Communication and Aviation. In addition, the Bill seeks appropriation to cover expenditures of \$11,500,000 in respect of the heads of development expenditure for three ministries, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Culture and Tourism and Rural Development.

Against the heads of recurrent expenditure, the Bill allocated half a million dollars to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to facilitate the Melanesian Spearhead Group Chairmanship reconciliation and peace ceremony here in Honiara late last year. This as you will, appreciate Sir, has enabled the reconvening of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG)

meetings hosted by Fiji last week reflecting our regional and international reputation as 'friends to all and enemy to none'.

Also, the Government has made an additional \$2million to the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to enable the Prime Minister to further strengthen international relations and diplomatic ties, as well as to establish the Bureau of Social and Economic Reform. Also, an initial \$1million has been given to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for the establishment of a secretariat to coordinate and manage the preparations of the 11th Pacific Arts Festival. This is to ensure that preparation towards the festival are all on course. And I am sure you will all agree that it is now on course. Also, an additional \$7,845,173, has been issued to the Ministry of Communication and Aviation to enable the smooth operation of the Henderson Airport and the maintenance of all provincial airports, as well as installation and upgrading of equipment to meet the international civil aviation organization (ICAO) safety standards.

In respect of heads of development expenses, the bill has allocated \$3million as a gesture of goodwill to the government and people of Papua New Guinea towards the construction of the Papua New Guinea Chancery Building here in Honiara. In June 2010, the Government of PNG had asked the Solomon Islands High Commissioner to PNG to address amongst other things assistance towards completion of the chancery here in Solomon Islands. Included also in discussions by the PNG Government with our High Commission in PNG was the issue of our scholarship in Papua New Guinea, which unfortunately we had not been able to address until today. As a result of that and given the fact that Papua New Guinea has given us a gift too in the sovereign state of PNG by way of building the Solomon Islands Chancery, we believe that we need to respond to that particular request by the government of Papua New Guinea to also show our goodwill relations with them to further strengthen our relations with them with what they have offered to us. They have given us a building, told us to buy our tickets to go over and receive the building and have our chancery in Port Moresby. So that is exactly what the Solomon Islands Government is doing now.

Also, an additional \$3.5million was given for the construction of the School of Tourism and Hospitality at SICHE towards the end of last year, and a further \$5million was to the Ministry of Rural Development as SIG contribution towards the ROC support to constituency development fund.

With all those, let me just conclude by saying that this Bill demonstrates that the government has continued to keep to its commitment to our people in the rural areas, we have continued to deliver to them during that very short difficult time when the government went through transition in the formation of the government.

We have also delivered on steps on overall reform goals and that is for us to stick to the discipline of maintaining a reasonable provision of the contingency warrant to stick within what has been approved by Parliament. Parliament has approved \$60million, but this bill or this particular contingency warrant is only for \$22million.

With those remarks I commend this Bill to the House and I beg to move.

Mr Speaker: Normally under Standing Order 61(2), debate of the appropriation bill should adjourn to a day later. Today, however I understand that the Government would like the

House to go ahead with this Bill and because of this I now call upon the Minister of Finance and Treasury to take the necessary steps.

Hon Lilo: Thank you for granting me leave to enable that. I move that Standing Order 61(2) be suspended in accordance with Standing Order 81 to permit the debate on the second reading of the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2) Bill 2011 to resume today.

As you know, under the statement of government business Parliament will stand adjourned sine die as of tomorrow. As it is a requirement of the constitution that any expenditures incurred by way of contingency through the contingency provision has to be presented to Parliament in the next meeting of Parliament, I move and I submit that it is appropriate that I seek the consent of Parliament to suspend the standing order to allow debate on this motion to continue now and have it concluded also today.

Also, as you know that over the last four or five days we have already exhausted ourselves on issues pertinent to public finance and financial management of the country during the debate of the budget. Therefore, I am sure everyone will concur that given the size of the particular expenditure that we are talking about, it is well within the provision that is provided for under the constitution, and under the previous bill that came through this Parliament, therefore I seek that we suspend Standing Order 61(2) in accordance with Standing Order 81 so that we can permit the debate on the second reading of the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation No. 2 Bill 2011 to resume today.

With those remarks I beg to move.

(The motion is open for debate)

Dr. SIKUA: I quite understand the arguments that have been put forward by the Minister of Finance for suspension of Standing Order 61(2). Traditionally, we all know that supplementary appropriations are already water under the bridge. Discussing it here is just for Parliament to acknowledge what the Government had already spent within the warrants it has. But I have just seen the report of the Public Accounts Committee on this Bill, and there are some very serious recommendations made by the Committee that when dealing with supplementary appropriations, Members of Parliament need to be given the opportunity to comment on the recommendations made by the Committee, and I think we would need more than just today for that. Therefore, I think we should keep to the Standing Orders and leave the debate on this Bill for tomorrow.

The Government has proposed the House to stand adjourned sine die tomorrow, but I think we need to consider Standing Order 62(1) and change that date later on when we come to it. Because of those reasons I suggest we stick to our standing order without suspending standing order 62(1)

Hon Lilo: I would like to thank the Leader of Opposition for contributing to this motion on behalf of that side of the Bench.

As he has alluded to, the expenditures that were committed are expenditures that in some ways directly relate to the action of past governments as well. In that sense, I would have

thought that the Leader of Opposition should have come up responsibly and say “yes, these expenditures are in relation to some of the expenditures that were directed to policies of previous governments”. When this government came into power, it has to assume those responsibilities coming in transition. The Leader of the Opposition has somehow fell short in appreciating that particular point.

We do understand the report by the Public Accounts Committee. I have seen the report and the issues that are raised in the Public Accounts Committee report are managerial in nature. They are matters that would normally have been addressed by management. There are mechanisms within our laws that allow for those issues and concerns to be addressed and therefore, I do not think it will affect any issues that addressed to the debate or the continuation of the debate of this motion, given that it is constitutionally binding on this particular parliament or any parliament to approve matters raised out of contingency warrants. And these are expenditures authorized by a legitimate government and not by any other government, but a government that is elected by the people of this country; this very parliament. Because of that, I believe it is only responsible that Parliament must continue and at the time set by the government.

I still submit, this side of the House still submits that today is an opportune day for us, just like yesterday when we successfully concluded the 2011 Budget, today is a good time for us to continue to bless what have been spent in terms of contingency warrant. With those remarks, I beg to move.

The motion agreed to and Standing Order 61(2) is suspended.

(Debate on the Bill is opened)

Mr. SOGAVARE: Thank you for giving me this time to contribute to this 2010 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2011 moved by the Minister for us to debate and eventually to approve. The way this bill is structured is already a foregone conclusion that Parliament just has to pass because the nature of this kind of bill, as the Minister rightly pointed out, are expenditures already incurred and so it is for us to regularize within the laws. So I guess it is a foregone conclusion that we can debate like what, but eventually we would need to give our blessings to it. But that does not mean it stops this side of the House or anyone to express their thoughts on how government finance is managed.

The Minister is right that as far as the law is concerned it is right within the provisions of section 103(2) of the Constitution and also section 15 of the Public Finance and Audit Act. Therefore, what the Minister is doing is in compliance with the requirement of the laws as far as the law is concerned; it is right within the law and is legal.

I think the issue in retrospect, looking back on the expenditures, comment on them and maybe learn any lessons from the views that will be expressed by MPs so that it is not repeated again on the nature of the expenditures that have been incurred which we are now asking Parliament to pass.

I, of course, shared the views expressed by the Leader of Opposition that the standing select committee of Parliament that is required to look at finance bills that come before the

House has come up with its report, and has also made some recommendations, and I am sure Members of Parliament would have read the views expressed about the various items that appear in the supplementary appropriation bill.

With your indulgence and for the benefit of many people listening out there, the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee in the report that is in our hands are as follows:

1. Upon completion of the hearing of the bill, the Committee recommends that as much as possible supplementary budget estimates of expenditures are restricted to new and urgent needed services and programs. Usual budget items should be adequately provided for in the original budget estimates.
2. That proper documentation of the program and activities of the Reform Unit is provided to justify the huge budget allocation that is appropriated for the Unit.
3. That bids for projects like the construction of the building for the School of Tourism and Hospitality are carefully assessed to avoid unreasonable pricing and the continuous requests for additional funding.
4. That accounting officers of ministries and public agencies are required to appear before the Committee for hearing must attend the Committee's hearing and provide explanations on their programs of activities to justify their allocated budget estimates.
5. That members of parliament continue to provide up to date reports on the various funds provided under their discretion.

As rightly pointed out by the Leader of the Opposition, these recommendations are quite serious and not new to Parliament from the number of supplementary appropriations that have already come before Parliament, which we have lost count of, nonetheless, the fact that recommendations like these keep coming up shows the seriousness of the business of supplementary appropriations.

The Minister, of course, on Recommendation 1 explained that this bill is just to regularize spending that government has incurred, and he also submitted to Parliament that they are urgent and unforeseen in nature. Well, that is a matter of fact that the Minister himself, maybe in his round up after the debate, will further consolidate that position because this seems to be an issue that keeps coming up again and again. Maybe when we go through the various heads and comment on them, we will see expenditures that are urgent and unforeseen in nature and which ones are not.

The issue of documentation is important, and this is something that keeps popping up from the Public Accounts Committee that any huge expenditures have to be fully and properly documented so that the House is satisfied with the justification of figures that appear before the Public Accounts Committee. If the Committee sees it important to come up with that point because it is not provided with the kind of document that will satisfy it to deliberate properly

on that particular item that comes before it, then it is probably an issue that needs to be looked at. Maybe in the future because there is nothing that can be done now when this bill is passed and gone, we may have to support bids with proper documentations so that the Committee does not come up again with that view.

The third point on proper assessment of bids is quite serious because sometimes projects that are supposed to be implemented will sit down because of lack of funds. And that simply boils down to when the bids were assessed that it should necessarily be the lowest bids that should be accepted. The bids should be assessed based on professional advice on what level of funds is needed to actually complete the structures. If not, then we are going to have the sort of experience where buildings funded by government are only built halfway and then need additional funds. I think the particular structure referred to in the report is quite important to the tourism sector and so it must be completed, and so government has to come up with additional funds.

The Committee also rightly expressed a serious concern that some officers of some ministries did not attend committee hearings. That is quite serious. Parliamentary standing committees are the arms of this Parliament and have the same power as Parliament itself. If officers are summoned to appear before parliamentary standing committees, they must appear.

I do not know what sort of action the Government should take against the officers that do not appear before the Public Accounts Committee, but they should be subject to disciplinary action. If officers wilfully and deliberately not attend the Public Accounts Committee hearing, I think some kind of disciplinary actions need to be taken on them so that it is a lesson in future to any public officers who may not want to adhere to the call to come before the committees of the House.

The fifth point is, I think, something we will continue to talk about. I think we have exhausted it during the debate in the Committee of the whole House, and that is report on the various funds provided under the discretion of members of Parliament. We were assured by this Government that it is looking into some accountability processes that will guide us on our usage of funds channelled through us. And as I have said yesterday at the deliberations of the Committee of the whole House, about \$107million is channelled through Members of Parliament. Maybe this year it has increased by another \$3million on top of it - \$7.5million from here in Parliament and the other balance comes from the Ministry of Rural Development. There is a huge amount of money being channelled through members of Parliament for funding of projects in their respective constituencies.

In this context, I am glad to hear the Minister of Rural Development telling us yesterday that reporting from members of Parliament is starting to improve. I just want to encourage every one of us that we are actually responsible for what people are saying about us as members of Parliament when it comes to the use of public funds, and so we are collectively responsible of protecting the image of Parliament as members of this honorable House.

I just want to comment on a few items appearing here before I sit down and allow others to talk, may be within the context of what is urgent and unforeseen that the Government needs to come up with additional requests for funds. The first one in the recurrent expenditure is the Ministry for Foreign Affairs asking for \$500,000 and the narration there is that the amount is to cover the cost of the Melanesian Spearhead Group Meeting held in December 2010.

I want to stand here and register my appreciation on the way leaders of the Melanesian Spearhead Group are now addressing the issue of Fiji. I think it was the first time that Melanesian leaders got together as a group, consolidated their position and tell the region that they are Melanesian leaders and this is how they want to run the affairs of Melanesia. That is important. And I am a strong believer in the continual dialogue and involvement of Fiji; we should not let them out of the loop. The direction that Melanesian leaders have taken is something that needs to be applauded, and the Melanesian leaders should be congratulated for taking that unprecedented step.

I am a very strong critique of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, and it looks like it is losing its impetus; it has become weak as a collective body to talk on the issue of Melanesia. Our leaders need get together again to rethink this whole thing and stand up as a group now to talk on the issue of Melanesia. I am very glad to see them actively engaging Fiji in the Group.

On the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the trips that will be taken by the Prime Minister, as a new government and, of course, this is what is expected of a prime minister when a new government comes in, he will need to travel to meet other leaders in the region, I think that is normal. The other expenditures there that make up the balance of \$1.6million is for the Bureau, and this side of the House does not have a quarrel over the number of people that were engaged, although we asked questions to find out how many people were engaged in places like that, but it is all within good spirit. The only issue is that those people must deliver. That is the position that we from this side are taking. If people have to be paid very high salaries then they must deliver because if they do not deliver then those huge expenditures are not justified.

We understand that this Government came in on one very important pillar, and that is reform. We can understand when looking at the Appropriation Act that it is quite very thin and silent on the funding of reform activities as such. But it is noted that it lumps money here and there, especially in this particular Unit, as to how we read it, it is this Unit that will probably drive the reform agenda of the Government. This is quite a serious agenda of the Government and the responsibility that lies on these people is quite heavy.

Reform is a very important pillar of this Government; remove the letter 'r', and NCRA collapses. Without reform this Government has no reason to exist because it came out and said it is a reform government. And that is why when we expressed our concern during the debate on the supplementary appropriation that the allocations are thin and silent on reform, we had that in mind. Therefore, if this Government does not deliver on the reform it has been preaching about, then it exists for no reason at all. This Unit, the Bureau has very, very heavy responsibilities on its shoulders to ensure the reform agenda of the Government is delivered.

The other question that should be asked is how often would the performance of this Unit be reviewed? It could be yearly or quarterly so that if there is need to remove and replace people during the course of the implementation of the government's programs, let us do it because this is the flag carrier policy of the government – 'reform' and it needs to deliver on reform. I believe when the Prime Minister participates in the debate, he will probably enlighten the House on how often the work of those people will be reviewed.

I will leave the other areas to the other colleagues to comment on, and so the last thing I want to make an observation on is the additional \$5million for the rural community

development fund. I think this fund has already changed its name to rural development support.

I am of the view that no matter how much this money is coloured; whether it be support or RCDF or whatever, it does not change the nature of this fund and how members of Parliament relate to it. The issue is not in changing names; it is to come up with proper accountability processes. That is the real issue of this fund. The change of name came about, as I understand, because of some concerns by the Republic of China over the use of this fund and it does not really address the real concern of the Republic of China. It is not the changing of name that matters, it is to come up with an accountability process that is clear, the reporting system must be clear, so that the Republic of China is happy with how its money is used in the constituencies.

As I have said we can debate till kingdom come about this bill, but we will achieve very little in terms of directing these spending because they have already been spent. But what probably can be picked up, if the Government can pick it up at all, is the concerns that we have in the areas we are raising. With those brief comments, I support the Bill.

Mr GUKUNA: First of all, I want to thank the Minister of Finance and Treasury for this Bill. As has been stated by the colleague Member for East Choiseul, and as we all know, these funds have already been used and so bringing this Bill to this house is just a formality. But that said, we are talking about \$23million, and that is a huge amount of resources and that kind of resources deserve comments from this House.

Members should take this opportunity to speak on this amount of money, especially when it comes in a supplementary that does not fall in line with the mainstream budgeting of 2010. For that reason, I think it is not right for us to bring this Bill to this House and then expect not to debate it. There must be expectation for this Bill to be debated, and for that reason it does not seem right in my view to come in here with the intention of suspending Standing Orders.

I say this more-so, because as you know the motion to end this meeting, the sine die motion has already been tabled. And because it has already been tabled, I am surprised that after dragging its feet for the last three to four months, the Government is so hurried to conclude this meeting tomorrow. What is the hurry for? There are still businesses to be done. This Bill deserves some considerations and deserves to follow the procedures of this Parliament, and so there is no need to suspend Standing Orders just because the Sine Die has been moved to conclude this meeting tomorrow.

I also have a motion that I would like to move as well, a very important motion which relates directly to the motion by the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister's motion is debated after this Bill, and it is not concluded with today, it will continue tomorrow then I need some time to move the motion to carry the Prime Minister's motion through. Because should the Prime Minister's motion is passed and I do not have the time to move that motion then this means we will not be able to implement it until next year because we may next meet sometime in December.

This is my concern that I feel we are squeezing ourselves. We have finished the main business, which is the Budget, and that is excellent, but we should be given some more time to deal with some outstanding issues of this House.

Having said that, allow me to touch briefly on some of my observations on costing. The \$2million allocated to the Prime Minister's Office is needed it, but the reason given by the Minister of Finance does not match the breakdown of that money. The Minister of Finance in his introduction stated that the \$2million was used to establish the Bureau. If you look at the costing and breakdown of the \$2million, it does not reflect the Bureau. I therefore do not know whether the Minister is giving us the right information or not. But I noticed that there is \$300,000 for tour and travel and I suspect that that must be for the trip to Russell at the end of last year, which people claimed a lot of rice and tinned fish were taken with them during that trip.

Sir, that trip happened at the time when my constituency was hit by a cyclone, and it would have been really nice if the Prime Minister had sent that \$300,000 to buy rice for people in my constituency because they really needed it. I do not know why the Prime Minister has to take so many goods like rice and tinned fish to be distributed to people in Russell at the end of last year.

But that is my observation of that \$300,000. I might be exaggerating here, but to have a huge allocation just for travel would be for that purpose. But the point I raised is that the costing is not related to the Bureau, but it relates to costs that are outside of the Bureau.

There is another point I wish to comment on, but first I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for appropriating \$3.5million to the School of Tourism at SICHE. That is a school that must be completed as soon as possible. The contractor of that building, which I also assisted in identifying last year is the Minister himself, and so I do not know whether I should feel good about him that whether through him that building will be quickly completed or I am feeling a little bit uneasy about it because, as you know the conflict of interest issue often comes in on situations like this.

The other point that I want to comment on is the \$ 3million paid to the PNG Chancery.

Hon Lilo: Point of order. I think the implication raised by the honourable Member against the Minister of Infrastructure on 'conflict of interest' is totally unnecessary. Mr Speaker, I think you better remind him to improve the quality of his debate because that matter really inferred very badly on the Minister.

The MP made the award when he was the minister. The contract was awarded to a particular minister now who at that time was not a member of Parliament. So why should you turn around now and try to make some implications contrary to the good faith that all of you made at that time? I think you ought to remind him, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Thank you, Minister of Finance. You will have the opportunity to reply. The MP for Rennell/Bellona is talking on an issue related to this Bill now in debate. Go on, MP for Rennell/Bellona.

Mr. Gukuna: I want to thank the Minister for that. But he cannot deny the fact that there is a fine line there. Depending on where you are, you fall on which side of that fine line. But I have made the point, and I think I am entitled to make that point, and that point should be taken by the Minister as none related at all to the award of the contract.

The other amount of \$3million is an amount of money that is causing a lot of talks and raising a lot of eyebrows in the last few months. It is believed this money was paid under some questionable circumstances. The Minister has given reasons for this payment by painting it very nicely, making us feel very obliged in making the payment. But still he has to dispel criticisms that were raised, particularly when the payment was made when work on this building is not moving. We all know that it is almost nine months that work on the PNG High Commission building there stopped, and the payment was made when construction work came to a halt.

The public wants to know why payment was made when work stopped, but there was no answer given for this concern. One of our MPs in here has also raised concern about the payment. Even though we are here to help legalize the payment, the Government and the Minister in particular will have to dispel public concerns because after all it is about the Government's image. Therefore it would be good for the Minister to clarify the payment so that the public thinks positively about this Government, and that is what we called good governance.

Apart from what I have said, I have no other points to make except to thank the Minister and to assure him that despite of the opposing views I have expressed, I support these expenses and I support the Bill.

Hon. AGOVAKA: First of all, I would like to thank the Minister for Finance and Treasury for tabling this Bill. It is important that we legalize what we have spent through contingency warrants.

As you all know, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently hosted the Melanesian Spearhead Group reconciliation ceremony between Vanuatu and Fiji. Hence, we have asked the Ministry of Finance for a supplementary budget of \$0.5million. This fund was put into good use and, of course, as you all know the reconciliation took place, hence the meeting of the MSG leaders in Suva recently.

I would like to thank the Member for East Choiseul for his kind words on the MSG as well as on leaders of governments of Melanesia. The meeting in Suva resulted in a communiqué by the leaders in which they were all happy to embrace Fiji in its reforms in the communiqué in ensuring Fiji accomplishes its roadmap to democratic election in 2014.

Secondly, I would like to comment on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade's development supplementary estimates of \$3million, which was also put into good use. The Minister of Finance has already explained this; it is a bilateral arrangement between the Solomon Islands Government and the Papua New Guinea Government. Through this arrangement, as the Minister of Finance alluded to earlier, the Papua New Guinea Government has assisted us in our scholarships, our chancery building and therefore it is only fitting that we reciprocate, hence \$3million is a very small token to Papua New Guinea.

I would also like to comment on the tour by the honourable Prime Minister to the Russell Islands. I believe if we can resolve the RIPEL issue we would also be able to resolve the Lungga land issue. With those few remarks I support the Bill.

Hon. MANETOALI: I just want to contribute briefly to this debate because earlier on I heard the Honourable Member of Parliament for Renbell talked about the Tourism school.

The supplementary budget has a provision of \$3.5million for the Tourism School. The honourable member for Renbell briefly mentioned the contract work on the School. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has a 12-months contract with J.F Construction to build and complete the school by July 2011. However, due to delay on the 2011 Budget, the contingency warrant was necessary to continue with the work from January to April this year.

The honourable member for Renbell alluded to earlier on today that my good friend here, the Minister of Infrastructure has taken the contract and there may be a conflict of interest. That is what the MP said. Contract work on the School of Tourism building was awarded when my good friend, the Member for Renbell was the Minister for Culture and Tourism. That was during his time, and now he is pointing figure at my friend here that there is conflict of interest. Before we MPs enter Parliament after the elections we have to declare ourselves.

Mr Gukuna: Point of order. I would just like to remind my successor, the Minister of Culture and Tourism that the action we took in awarding that contract was not related at all to the period I talked about.

Hon. Manetoali: Since the contractor is now a member of parliament does not mean the contract will be terminated because if that happens the Government will have to pay a big amount of money for breaching the contract or for terminating the contract.

I just want to say here that the contract was awarded when my good friend the MP for Renbell was the Minister for Culture and Tourism. He therefore cannot turn around and say there is conflict of interest because before we enter Parliament we have to declare ourselves, we have to fill in some forms to declare that we have this contract and that contract, and so you cannot turn around and say 'conflict of interest. 'No way, Mr Speaker! This contract must continue until the building is completed, and that will be in July this year.

But I thank my colleague MP for Renbell for doing a great job by starting off that School; he has done well, and the building is almost complete and so I am happy with him. And I will invite him at the opening of this School sometimes this year. Those are my few comments and with that I support the bill.

Hon Dr Sikua: I rise to briefly contribute to the Supplementary Appropriation Bill of 2011. The first thing I would like to say is to thank my good friend the Minister of Finance for bringing this Bill to the House for us to approve and legalize the spending that Government is doing from proceeds coming out of our warrants.

What is in the recurrent expenditure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade of \$500,000, as reported by the Minister I would like to sincerely thank the Government for this allocation of \$500,000 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade to carry out

reconciliation amongst the Melanesian Spearhead group between the Republic of the Fiji Islands and Vanuatu. Like the Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade has said, the reconciliation is paving the way for the MSG Leaders Summit that has just happened recently. And as we have heard from the Minister himself the meeting has been very successful with a communiqué coming out. One good result of that meeting as well is that currently the Minister of Foreign Affairs has a new sulu, which you can see him wearing today. He really looks nice in it; now he looks like a 'ratu' in his sulu. But make sure you do not go hanging around with it at the seaside, my wantok, otherwise the wind blows your sulu and you will be in trouble.

The step taken by the Government is very important. Before I left the office, we had not succeeded in getting our two MSG founders to come to an agreement, and I think this expenditure in the recurrent budget for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is really a good one. I only hope that with the communiqué coming out and the patience that we need to have with Fiji for it to proceed with the reforms it needs to do and the roadmap to eventually have democratic elections in 2014 must happen. And so I would like to urge the Government that even though it is still a long way to go, but you need to be patient and work with Fiji in its search for a democratic elected government in 2014. So congratulations to the Government, especially the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister for that.

The allocation in the Development Budget for \$3million is causing a bit of suspicion to me in regards to where the request was coming from. I know there was a payment of \$3million deposited into the PNG High Commission bank account with the Bank South Pacific on the 6th December 2010. It is now April and the \$3million has gone into the account on the 6th of December and so one would have expected work on the High Commission building to continue. However, I have gone around that area many times but I cannot see anything happening, it still remains the same. This makes me to wonder where the \$3million has gone to. May be work is going on, but because it is fenced in I cannot see inside – I do not climb fences, I can only look down from the building on the other side of the road. The amount of work after December 6th when the money was put into the account until now does not seem to match if there is any work being done at all.

But coming back to my point earlier on the request, what I know is that the construction company that was contracted to build the PNG Chancery at Town Ground has been trying to get a sovereign guarantee for \$2million from the government during the time of the CNURA Government. The contractor ran out of money and so he wants the government to provide a sovereign guarantee for \$2million that he wants to borrow from the Bank South Pacific.

At that time when he came to see me as Prime Minister then, I told him that that is not possible because at that time the government was not in a position to incur any additional debts. And also to maintain a level playing field for all businesses, it would be difficult to do it for just one company and not for the other private businesses, and so we declined that request. Somehow I have seen requests coming from the PNG side, which really were not from anyone in the government of Papua New Guinea, but it was our High Commissioner in Port Moresby that asked if we could consider giving money. No requests ever came from any official level in PNG. That is what I know. And so I am a bit suspicious of this \$3million allocation as to whether it is really a request from the PNG Government. Because as you know, Mr Speaker, PNG does not need any help from us. Okay, it is goodwill, I know, but PNG has so much

money that it does not know what to spend it on; PNG has a lot of money and therefore, the \$3million goodwill is questionable.

I am still trying to put forward the argument that I think what is being done here is the Government trying to help a construction company that suffers from a self-inflicted business mess, and just because he is a wantok, a friend or a brother we wanted to help him, but we are trying to cover it up in a way. I believe that is what is happening here. And so I am concerned about the quality of this amount of money given to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under development in the supplementary appropriation to continue building the PNG chancery at Town Ground.

The other observation I want to make on the supplementary appropriation is just a general comment on contracts. I think the Public Accounts Committee has made a very good observation and recommendation towards the end in trying to point us to the fact that when contracts are awarded to contractors, we must ensure contractors complete the work within the amount specified in the costing of whatever work that is to be done. And this not only concerns the School of Hospitality and Tourism, but it happens in almost all contracts that Government is awarding.

This is just a general comment on that concern because the office of the Leader Opposition is yet to be completed; there is still a lot of work yet to be done. A small garage has been built but it is taking the contractors almost the full year to build the small house. What I heard was that the contractor has already run out of money. This means somebody must be paying people for work not done and that is why money runs out whilst work is still incomplete.

I think the Ministry of Infrastructure Development or whoever is supervising contracting work of the government must try and be more careful in the way these kinds of work are supervised because otherwise we will keep blowing out the original estimates of any contract that Government is giving. I just want to ask the Ministry of Infrastructure Development in line with recommendations by the Public Accounts Committee to make sure the costing of whatever work that government is paying for are carefully assessed and to avoid unreasonable pricing and continuing requests for additional funding for any contract that the Government entered into. Those are just very brief observations and comments on this 2010 Supplementary Appropriation (No 2 Bill) 2011.

I would once again like to thank the Minister of Finance for bringing this Bill to the House. With these few comments I support the Bill.

Mr MANENIARU: I too would like to contribute very briefly to this Bill, the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2011 brought here by the honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury.

I also join other colleagues in saying that I have nothing against the bill, as it is a traditional bill brought here for us to bless because Parliament has the power to look at these figures and give its blessings to them. I therefore want to again thank the Minister for Finance and Treasury for bringing this very important bill to this House.

I just want to comment briefly on the help we termed as goodwill that was given to PNG. I fully support it, and I do not want to speak on how the payment was made, but if we

become mature as a nation, we too must also assist others instead of being a recipient all the time. I think it is high time that the ninth Parliament needs to take the lead in the initiative of trying to develop our country so that we are in a position to also give hands to our neighbouring countries.

I think it is high time we take serious consideration of how we carry out our responsibilities as members of Parliament so that we grow this country and the economy so that we are in a good position to be able to also assist our neighbouring nations. This assistance of \$3million is very small and increasing it would be good so that we give our goodwill to Papua New Guinea since PNG has been very helpful to us. That is my comment on this matter.

I also wish to support the supplementary allocations allotted to the Ministry of Tourism. I personally believe this is a future industry for our country, and so if millions of dollars is pledged into developing this potential, I will fully support it. I just hope this supplementary caters for the additional amount required by the project in order for the School to be completed. Otherwise like the Leader of Opposition has stated, we would be expecting some more requests coming in later for additional funding.

Lastly on the Ministry of Rural Development and Indigenous Affairs, which also has supplementary provisions, I would also want to join the Member for East Choiseul in saying that regardless of how often we change the name, what difference does it make? In the last house, the eighth Parliament, it has a different name and it was changed at this ninth Parliament. What name is this ninth Parliament going to have so that come the next Parliament, it will be changed?

It is all about accountability and so this 9th Parliament must ensure that the name does not change. It is accountability that really matters here, as emphasized by the Member for East Choiseul. Therefore, I wish to challenge and encourage the ninth Parliament to take the challenge to refrain from altering the name. Let us not create a problem with the name so that the next Parliament has to look for another name. Let us get into the needfulness of this funding by being accountable and prove that the 9th Parliament can make the change and is accountable to our people and our donor partners who are helping us with the funds.

With these brief remarks, I want to once again thank the Minister of Finance and Treasury for bringing this important Bill and I also support the Bill.

Mr HOUNIPWELA: I would also like to comment on this bill and I would like to thank the honourable Minister for bringing this bill to Parliament to discuss.

As other colleagues have already expressed, especially the honourable Member for East Choiseul who said that it is legal requirement that this bill is brought before Parliament in terms of the Constitution and in terms of the Public Finance and Audit Act and so the Minister is doing the right thing by laying these expenditures before Parliament. As others have already said, these expenditures are capital and recurrent which were already spent and so in a way we are only here to stamp them.

However, Parliament's oversight responsibility is not done away with, and in this respect I want to thank your office, Mr Speaker, for allowing debate to take place on this bill. And therefore I will only make general observations. In relation to the oversight responsibility of Parliament, it is important that all things that come before Parliament, especially government

expenditures are looked at in a way there is quality expenditure. That is something very important.

My colleagues when we look at these numbers and figures we stand on behalf of the people of Solomon Islands. These resources that we are talking about totalling \$23million are the resources of the people of Solomon Islands, the population, and so it is important that we look at it in that regard and respect, so that we are satisfied that these expenditures are spent for the benefit of our people.

In that context, allow me to talk in relation to the report that the PAC made to Parliament on this supplementary appropriation. I think the honourable colleague Member for East Choiseul has already talked on that, and so I will just mention a few things. And the first one is on the subject of contingency warrants. I am a bit concerned, and I think the Ministry of Finance and Treasury needs to re-emphasize to accounting officers of line ministries that contingency warrants are not for things that we know will happen or things that are foreseen. This has to be re-emphasized again. If there is an expenditure that we know will happen, do not call it a contingency warrant. I just want to express this and some have already commented that if it is not in the budget, the CW will take care of it. I want the Ministry of Finance to re-emphasize this to line ministries because some have relied very much on contingency warrants.

On the issue of accountability, which was also raised by the Committee, is very important. I think others have already commented on it, but I want to repeat that it is not only the reasonableness of price, but we also want quality work and quality work only comes with quality of workmanship. And therefore I am sure the process of giving out contracts goes through the right way in that contracts are not given to those we know, but rather it is recognized for its quality. And of course, many of our Solomon Islands contractors be they plumbers or carpenters or electricians or suppliers of goods and services can supply good quality work.

I think the Leader of Opposition informed us of a project that is going ahead on the hillside of the office of the Opposition, which I have also seen, in that the garage is not yet finished, although work started last year. Those are the kind of things that we must be careful of. I want to appeal to those people that are giving out contracts to be careful because we are dealing with the money of the people of Solomon Islands.

I have nothing more to say, but I just want to say thank you honourable Minister that I too am in support of this motion and I hope this time next year, we do not use too many contingency warrants. I now take my seat and support this bill.

Hon. PHILIP: I too would like to contribute briefly to the Bill in trying to put some minds at rest on some of the questions and comments made by previous speakers.

I totally agree with the member of East Choiseul for his comments on the manpower requirements of the Bureau and the quality outcomes that everyone is expecting from the Bureau. Like I have already said on one or two occasions, either to the media or in this House and various other occasions, I have tried to make a compromise between the two governments that currently exist in this country. Some people, for the first time, know that there are actually two governments. One is the established government comprised of the Public Service, the ministries, the departments, the permanent secretaries, technical officers and also the political

governments, which its tenure of office is only four years but the established government does not have any particular term in office; it remains there all the time. Therefore, for the more than 30 years we have become an independent country with a constitution, it gives power and mandates to the two governments, which does not seem to be operating to everybody else's expectations and therefore being human as we are and in a diverse situation demographically in this country, sometimes the established government does not quickly respond to the incoming political government to start the cogs moving in getting its policies in place and starting to implement them.

The other thing that I also want to mention about the Bureau is that the Bureau being the compromise is the middle lane mechanism that will push the work and aspirations of the political government. So in theory, if you like, it is a justified mechanism. In practice, this is for the first time that any government has ever come up with this idea, and I take heed of the admonition rendered by the MP for East Choiseul.

Yes, the way the Bureau will operate is important for all of us to understand, and that particular function will be given through a legislative mechanism hopefully sometimes this year. At the moment because of the necessity of time it will be operating as an administrative arm of the Prime Minister's Office. In due course too, it will be a link to the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning and the Prime Minister's office to deliver and enhance the implementation process of the government.

There are one or two comments about the trip to Russells. Personally, to me the trip to Russells was fully justified. I might put on board the Patrol Boat a few bags of rice. I think the people of Russells need a much better treatment than what we have been giving them; denying them of their livelihoods for the last seven years. I brought with me 20 bags of rice each for Yandina, Louna and Maralaoun and I am embarrassed when this is voiced in Parliament because according to custom this is "taboo". I think we have to do certain things in governance with custom and with respect. When a chief plans to visit his people he cannot go empty handed. And there is provision in the appropriation for me to take some more trips. I am expecting to take a trip around Malaita, and this is fully justified. The people of Malaita need something from the Prime Minister or the chief when he goes to visit them, he must have something to give them. I think this is very much within our value system that when the Prime Minister travels, he carries with him something, not to feed the rest of the people, everyone of them, but at least it is a token that gives dimension to that particular event when he goes around.

In other places that I am going to visit, I will do the same as well. And so the trip to Russell is fully justified, and any other trips the Prime Minister will take in the future will be fully justified when visiting our people in various places in this country.

I fall short of trying to see the rationale and the aspect that relates to the PNG Chancery, obviously because the whole thing went through a legal tender system in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and not here, not even during the time of my government too. Unfortunately, I am inheriting it. Whether the request comes from Papua New Guinea or from our office in Port Moresby to here, I will try and establish that particular confusion when I get to Port Moresby in the near future – in the not-too-distant future from now, and sit down with the Government of Waigani to see what is the best way forward and not to blame and finger pointing at any

particular person. But when the request came to us as a government at that time, we said it is a good idea since PNG handed us the key after it completed our big office in Port Moresby and so we think we should also do something for PNG. Even the fees of our students that go for studies in PNG are also met by PNG and there are many things that PNG is doing here in our country and so I think it is very good within the spirit of Melanesia that we reciprocate.

Last week when the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I went to Suva, the Prime Minister of Fiji gave 1.7 hectares of land for us to build our High Commission office in Fiji. How do we transact our appreciation to other governments in this region for that kind gesture? Are we just going to sit down like this and keep receiving all the time? There are times when this country, its people and its government must be grateful. Fiji not only gave Solomon Islands 1.7 hectares of land, but the government of Vanuatu was also given another 1.7 hectares, and the government of Papua New Guinea another 1.7 hectares; all in one area. In diplomacy you must reciprocate; you cannot be seen to be receiving one-sided all the time. Like some people used to say 'cutting a tree only from one side will make the tree fall on you'. Our gesture of \$3million is only a token, and it is with the High Commission at this time. There is some confusion in this whole deal, and I think it will be addressed at the highest level possible.

On the RCDF, I want members of Parliament to know, and I can call out the names of only five members that have still not acquitted their accounts. I want you to quickly do it now so that Taiwan gives us the money that we are still waiting for right now. But I am not going to call out your names, I will leave it for now, I will easily talk with you. But all of us are just waiting for the five of you. It does not look good, and what is wrong? The CDOs have just finished their meeting, their seminar and training last week, and it is very easy. I want you to hand in your acquittals so that everybody else receives theirs because the pressure is upon all of us. I feel very sorry too for all of us because back in our houses, people are hanging everywhere on our walls and fences, and so I would like us to help each other in that way.

As I said I do not want to prolong my small contribution, but I want to thank the Minister for bringing this supplementary and thank everybody else who have already spoken. With those few words, I would like to support the bill.

Hon HA'AMORI: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this 2010 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2011. I only have a few comments to make. I find it a bit interesting the note or the request from PNG just came through the High Commissioner. I thought that is one of the natural paths that requests are normally passed through in terms of diplomacy. Therefore, for us to question the request coming through the PNG High Commissioner, and to think that is an important point, then we might be wrong because that is the expected pathway for requests to come through, unless our leaders sit down together on one table and requests like that are passed through.

The second point on this same matter is that I think we are creating our own conclusions. We have been making too many assumptions that make us look good on the assumptions we create ourselves, especially when we are talking in here with the whole nation listening to us, but we only operate on assumptions. May be that is what is called parliamentary privilege but parliamentary privilege should be exercised with responsibility and therefore to just assume so many things is not quite right.

PNG or for that matter any other country requesting assistance from us, as long as we approve it, I think is enough and we should not go looking deep inside as to what should be bought with it whether it is to buy biscuits or rice or taiyo or whatever. They requested it and if we cannot afford to give it, we should just tell them that we cannot afford it so that we do not have to ask about it anymore if we are very concerned about the money.

The \$3million given to PNG, in my view, is reasonable to be given to them. We have squandered much more than that kind of money, and so why should we not make right our name and reputation, looks like we are appreciating things by giving this miserable \$3million. I cannot see why we should make so much of an issue on this.

Another thing about that particular issue is that the PNG High Commission received the payment and so for us to keep on saying that it is improper is implying that PNG is participating in doing something wrong here in Solomon Islands; that it had colluded in a corruptive act. Does it ever come to our minds that we are making PNG to look bad on this issue? PNG has received this payment and if truly PNG does not have anything to do with this, it has not requested anything then PNG should have refused it in the first place; it should not be sitting in its account right now. That is one point of concern as to how we go about raising this issue.

The other matter we have touched on is our contractors. All of us by now should appreciate that there are more than one way that a contract can go sour. Take, for example, and I am not implying that that is the case, but if the money is sent for the chancery or whatever we might want to call it, if the money is given and it remains in the common account and the person issuing the money to the contractor to run the office and also use the money for other things so much so that in the end the person controlling the money told the contractor that he runs out of money, are we going to blame the contractor for this? The way we keep on blaming the contractor and implying the contractor is really tarnishing the image of the contractor without any solid facts. I believe if those allegations were raised outside of this building, those people should have the right to take us to court. Why, because we are jeopardizing the contractor's opportunity to obtain any more contracts in the future. We must be very sure about what we are doing and what we are saying before we disrepute the names of these poor people. We are not protecting them but we are tarnishing them. Next time it might be a legitimate bid, but because what we are saying right here now under parliamentary privilege would have an impact on them because when we finish talking in here, it is all said and done. But what we have painted on the contractor will be there for the rest of its life because it will not win anymore contract. So we have to be careful with some of these things in our talking.

Finally, on the matter of supplementary appropriations, the honourable Prime Minister said there are two governments; well I reluctantly accept that there are two governments. One government is responsible of putting together the budgets. We who are sitting down here do not write the numbers, but it is those people who are writing the numbers using a framework that has been there for a long time, which we all know by just filling in numbers sometimes, and that is why the figures that appear in the budgets are misquoted.

It is very difficult to be precise and this is because of our nature that we cannot be very precise about certain things many times and so we cannot hope to depart from the current nature of how we create our budgets and budgeting, and that is why time and time again we

will come back to this House with supplementary appropriation requests for approval. To throw opinions easily and hard at the same time at each other when it comes to supplementary appropriations, I think we should not spend too much time on such things unless it really begs us to do so. Even the figures that are laid before us now under this bill for \$3million, \$3.5million and \$1million and all these, I think these are adequate for us to spend it in doing our work. Surely none of us in here will get these money and buy bananas with because they are going to be spent in the right place. So for those reasons I support the Bill.

Hon. TORA: I would like to thank the honourable Minister of Finance and Treasury for bringing this very important bill as well as officers in his ministry for compiling this very important bill. I also wish to thank colleague members of Parliament who also contributed to this very important bill by raising points that we need to take note of. I see this bill as straightforward, proper and according to law. And I am pleased that both sides of House are in support of this supplementary appropriation bill.

The point I would like to raise here is service to our people and our nation, which is very important! Regardless of what appears in the supplementary, it is just normal for any government of the day that as long as things are consistent with the law, I see it as proper. The bottom line is that service to our people must continue, and that is why we are seeing these expenditures under the recurrent and development estimates of last year under contingency warrants.

To me, even if we go on discussing this bill, the bottom line is that we must deliver services to our people. And I want to thank the Minister of Finance and Treasury who is authorized by law for bringing this supplementary bill to this House. Therefore, on behalf of my people of Ulawa/Ugi, I want to thank all of us who are in here who are going to support and approve this very important bill because services will go to 50 constituencies, including my constituency, the 47th constituency in Solomon Islands.

Without prolonging the debate, we must pass this bill so that we can move on. With those few remarks I would like to support this very important supplementary bill and I resume my seat.

Hon Lilo: I would like to thank colleagues who have contributed to the debate of the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2011. Obviously, all the contributions that have been made do really fit the exact nature of this Bill that is now before the House. Some of the hot contributions that have been made and the cold ones, and also the nice ones have really put us to rest at this time. And I am sure we all agree that whether it be this Minister of Finance or any other ministers of finance, this supplementary is inevitable that it has to come to this House. That said we must not lose sight of the very good comments made by members who have contributed. But let me just comment in particular to the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee, and on this note let me extend also on behalf of the Ministry of Finance and the NCRA Government our thanks for the effort taken by the Public Accounts Committee, not only on this Bill but also the 2011 Appropriation Bill. I thank the Committee for the time taken for the Committee to examine this Bill and the issues pointed out in its report, which are

very much relevant and therefore have incited some very good contributions and debates by members.

I think one of the issues that have been raised by the Committee is the need for us to stick within the meaning and definition of urgent and unforeseen circumstances in the application of contingency warrants, which is a matter that we need to really take heed of. And this cannot be done without us really committed to do reform. We must exercise good reform in the way we manage our public finances.

You will note the comment I made about the commitment by this Government to move towards public expenditure reform or the public expenditure review, which is an exercise that gears towards building up the capacity of all the ministries to skill up people within the ministries to have appropriate techniques and the ability to be able to make good projections of what budgetary provisions are essential for the delivery of services in all the ministries. We have the support of donor partners in doing this, this year. I believe this exercise must be carried out because that is the only way for us to come up with a good process of coming up with estimations of our annual budgets and at the same time ensuring there is capacity within the ministries to be able to deliver the expenditures in the most quality way. And so I will leave it at that.

I believe if the public expenditure review is pursued, I am sure all the concerns raised, for instance, the way we are getting the prices on contracts. The policy of outsourcing is a policy that we are yet to perfect the system as to how it is done in this country. We still have not been able to get what the true costs of the delivery of services are. One option that others have recommended to us in carrying out reform is to do outsourcing; putting it out to the market and allowing contractors to tender the price so that we can see which one is the highest or the lowest and what we think would be the appropriate price that would reflect that particular contract or services. But we still did not get it right too, as the member for East Choiseul has said that sometimes we only run for the lowest rate and when we run for the lowest rate only a few months after the contract is effected, we found out that the contractor has ran out of money and so it could not deliver. So our process to perfect the outsourcing of contracts to the private sector needs to be perfected.

I believe that in our effort of improving the capacity of ministries to properly estimate their budgets and also see how best they can effectively implement their provisions through this public expenditure review process, I am sure would be one way of contributing towards improving this process so as to ensure the budget provision estimates are right and appropriate and at the same time measured according to the ministries' capacity in ensuring how they will deliver appropriately to our people.

Just a note on some issues raised by some people on the Bureau of Economics and Social Reform, which the Prime Minister and others have already clarified on the issue of the PNG chancery. I think the Minister of Education has really pointed us right on that point for us to understand. I mean, I myself too, but let me just deliver it here because I also do not feel confident when people say there was a letter that came from the PNG High Commissioner last year. Yes, I have a copy of that letter given to me and it is here. The letter was addressed to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Solomon Islands from the Solomon Islands High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea also copied to the office of the Prime Minister on the 19th of July 2010.

There were a lot of issues raised in that letter, and not only the issue of the chancery. There was also the finalization of the SIG project to the PNG Government for funding, final submissions for claims from the contractor and project manager of our High Commissioner in PNG, discussions on Be-mobile, telecommunication issues, and funding for the 2011 scholarships for our students. Those are some of the issues the High Commissioner has written to us and the last one is assistance required from the Papua New Guinea Government for its chancery project in Honiara.

Now this comes from our High Commissioner in PNG and as you know as a government, he is our man who is sitting on our behalf in Papua New Guinea. The person we have given the credential for him to sit down there on our behalf is the High Commissioner. And so if he channels the request from there to us, are we going to question it? I will just leave it like that. I say that regarding some of the points we raised about questionable circumstances. I do not know what is questionable in that regard when we have something like that in here. I will leave it there.

Overall, this Budget is well below the one third of the contingency provision, which is about \$22million of a total of \$60million and so it is within that one third. I believe one third of that contingency provision is a reasonable level for contingency and for committals in such provisions. For anyone who thinks it is excessive, a little bit below or is too much, I want to say that the \$22million that has been committed is one third of the total; it represents one third of the total contingency provision. It is not even half of the contingency provision but only one third.

Whether or not the nature of those expenditures flow beyond the mainstream of the 2010 Budget, when we come to the Committee of Supply you will be convinced yourself, Mr Speaker, as well as this Chamber will be convinced that they are not at all outside of the mainstream of the 2010 budget, they are not. If you look at every one of them you will find it there. That is what the MP for Renbel has said; he said it is outside the mainstream of the 2010 budget.

Half a million dollars for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for instance, is not outside. There was intention last year for Solomon Islands to convene reconciliation at the MSG meeting last year. If the previous CNURA Government would have still been in government towards the end of last year, it would have incurred this sort of expenditure to convene the reconciliation. The Pacific Arts Festival, for instance, was the intention of the previous government to host the Pacific Arts Festival. We in the last government made the bid to host the Pacific Arts Festival, and so that again cannot be said that the provision incurred by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is outside of the mainstream of the 2010 Budget.

The same also applies to the School of Tourism; it was part of the mainstream 2010 Appropriation Bill and so I cannot agree with the comment that it is out of the mainstream 2010 Appropriation. But I think in the main, the points and concerns that have been raised, I am sure were all taken by us and we will continue to work towards making improvement on the areas of concern that were raised.

With those remarks, I beg to move that the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No. 2) of 2011 be now read the second time and I beg to move. Thank you.

The 2010 Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2) Bill 2011 is passed.

Sitting suspended from 11.55am for lunch break

Parliament resumed at 2.11 pm

Bills - Committee Stage

The 2010 Supplementary Appropriation No.2 Bill 2011

Mr Chairman: Honourable Members, the House will now resolve into the committee of supply to consider the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation No.2 Bill 2011.

Honourable Members, we are now in the Committee of Supply to consider the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation Bill No. 2 Bill 2011, and may I remind all members that when we consider each head Standing Order 64(3) requires that any debate on the head must be confined to the policy of the service for which the money is to be provided.

Head 274: Ministry of Foreign Affairs & External Trade - \$500,000

Mr Sogavare: This \$500,000 cost of the Melanesian Spearhead Group meeting, as I have already expressed is a move the Government should be congratulated for. For the benefit of the House and the nation maybe, can the government brief us on what are steps or arrangements the Melanesian Spearhead Group has reached to help Fiji return to parliamentary democracy?

Hon Agovaka: I would like to thank the honourable member of Parliament for East Choiseul for his question. As you know, when we start the negotiations to have reconciliation between Vanuatu and Fiji, it was a difficult task. And the first task I did as a foreign minister was to liaise between the Prime Minister of Fiji, Bainimarama, the Prime Minister of PNG Sir Michael Somare and the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Hon Natapei. We managed to do that in New York hence the reconciliation in late 2010.

Solomon Islands values Fiji's friendship and would like to help Fiji embrace its roadmap and its framework of change. That is our support towards them. We have also supported them in their various negotiations with the EPA; we have asked the European Union if they can allow Fiji to be part of that. We have also asked the Pacific Islands Forum, Australia and New Zealand to allow Fiji to be part of the Pacific Islands negotiations in PACER PLUS.

Fiji's roadmap is simple in that in September 2014 is its targeted year for the democratic election. There are a number of reforms it is doing now; social reforms, economic reforms and constitutional reforms and it is working to achieving some of its MDGs and we are assisting them through international and regional meetings to encompass and engage Fiji in all these meetings. Those are some of the things we have been doing to help bring Fiji back to democratic elections in September 2014.

Head 274 agreed to.

Head 281: Office of the Prime Minister & Cabinet - \$2,000,000

Mr Sogavare: This \$1.6million of that additional request is, I think related directly to the establishment of the Bureau of Social and Economic Reform Unit. In making his second reading debate, the Prime Minister made reference to coming up with some kind of legislation to legalize the establishment of that Bureau. Can the Prime Minister further elaborate on the policy intention there?

Hon Philip: Yes, it is our intention to bring in a prescriptive legislative mechanism that will afford the Bureau more assertive mandates, functions, and perhaps powers to exercise its implementing process of the programs and mechanisms of the government.

We have, not difficulties, but timing constraints on that particular draft legislation, and I can assure the House that it will come between now and the end of the year to make the work of the Bureau become more articulate and more assertive in its deliberations in implementing the Government's reform programs.

Head 281 agreed to.

Head 287 -Ministry of Culture and Tourism - \$1,000,000

Mr Sogavare: Maybe for the benefit of the House, the Minister can update us on the progress of the preparations for the Festival of Arts, which I understand will take place next year?

Hon Manetoali: In terms of the progress of the cultural festival, I would say that work on it has begun. The festival committee has already been set up. I believe this budgetary provision would allow the work to progress further.

Mr Gukuna: Just to move this question a bit further. I have been informed or have information that we are eight months late in our preparations. Can the Minister enlighten us as to whether we can still move ahead and get things done in time, considering the information that we are eight months late?

Hon Manetoali: Yes, it is said that we are eight months late, however awaiting this budget, I believe work will be in progress and by next year, preparations will be completed.

Head 28 agreed to.

Head 289: Ministry of Communication and Aviation - \$7,845,173

Mr. Sogavare: Can the Minister brief Parliament on item 6121 [Henderson operating costs] and item 6133 [minor works installation], which are additional requests of \$3million and \$2.5million respectively? What actual works are happening there?

Hon. Lonamei: Yes, the Henderson operating cost involves work to do with cleaning, clearing and maintaining of the Henderson airport. The minor installation work is to do with upgrading work at the domestic terminal.

Mr. Gukuna: The subhead 6121 seems to point to a problem we have in budgeting. The original estimate was \$383,499 and a supplementary for \$3million has been requested. Those two amounts are very far apart.

I would have expected the budget to be credible and so the original amount should be bigger than the supplementary because it is only to supplement and so to ask for \$3million as supplementary on top of an original estimate of \$383,000 points to a problem of estimation in budgeting. Can the Minister explain to us why the supplementary really exceeds the original estimates?

Hon. Lonamei: The costs under this head is usually catered for under the special fund, but when the special fund was transferred to CASI we have to resort to the Ministry and that is why the CW is used here.

Dr. Sikua: Still on the same item. When the special fund was transferred to CASI, would not those funds meet the same costs when the special fund was still with the Ministry? When it is transferred to CASI, what did CASI spent that money on leaving the Ministry to deal with operating costs of the Henderson airport?

Hon. Lonamei: CASI is an authority of its own and so its priorities are different from the priorities of the Ministry, and that is why this comes about.

Mr Sogavare: Can the Minister also brief us on which provincial airfield is maintained under item 2159?

Hon. Lonamei: Yes, this is to meet provincial airfields around our country that are still being maintained.

Dr Sikua: Item 6130, the last item is minor works installation. The original estimate is only \$500,000 and we ended up having a supplementation of \$2.5million to make it \$3million. This is a huge undertaking, so what is this?

Hon. Lonamei: As I said earlier on, this is for improvement to our domestic terminal. When contract work was done, the special fund was still under our authority and so they went ahead to award the contract for work to be done with the use of special funds, but when the special fund was transferred to CASI, we have to resort back to CW for funds to meet the contract work that was done on the domestic terminal.

Head 289 agreed to.

Total Recurrent expenditure of \$11,345,173 agreed to.

Development Expenditure

Head 474: Ministry of Foreign Affairs & External Trade - \$3,000,000 agreed to.

Head 487: Ministry of Culture & Tourism - \$3,500,000

Mr Gukuna: I just want some clarifications. This one has a CW of \$3.5million which should, according to the way it is presented, pertain to spending last year. If you look at the development estimates for the school last year, it is \$5million. The actual spending on this school last year was \$5,370,000, which is \$300,000 more than the original estimate; that is the actual.

The resolution we passed at the end of last year should have allowed the Ministry to spend \$1,250,000. It appears that given the actual spending last year, the amount that is permitted under the resolution we passed in December last year, I am just wondering whether this \$3.5million Contingency Warrant was drawn last year or this year?

Hon Manetoali: The \$3.5million was applied for by the Ministry but I think the Ministry did not get it until the budget session. The \$3.5million is for the period from January to April. Due to the delay of the 2011 Budget, this amount was to complete the work from the period of January to April.

Dr Sikua: In the light of what the Minister has just said, the estimates that we talked about here, the \$3.5million is for the year ending 31st December 2010. The \$3.5million went to this head before the 31st December 2010 and so I am a bit confused as to which of these is the true story.

Hon Lilo: Both of you are correct. Yes, it would be to the 31st of December 2010. The Minister of Culture and Tourism and the Minister of Finance signed this Contingency Warrant towards the end of last year.

Head 487 agreed to.

Head 498: Ministry of Rural Development & Indigenous Affairs - \$5million agreed to.

The total development expenditures of \$11,500,000 agreed to.

The total recurrent and development expenditures by contingencies warrants of \$22,845,173 agreed to.

The First schedule agreed to.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Mr Chairman: Honourable Members this brings our proceedings on the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation Bill No. 2 Bill 2011 to a conclusion. This committee of supply therefore stands dissolved, and the honourable Minister in charge of the bill will report to the House when Parliament resumes.

Parliament resumes

Hon. Lilo: I wish to report that the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation No.2. 2011 Bill has gone through the Committee of Supply without amendment.

Bills – Third Reading

Hon. Lilo: I move that the 2010 Supplementary Appropriation No.2 Bill of 2011 be now read a third time and do pass.

The 2010 Supplementary Appropriation No.2 Bill 2011 agreed to.

MOTIONS

Motion No.5

That Parliament approves the amendment to the Standing Orders of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands to establish three Standing Select Committees and their respective functions as set out in the annexure to this motion.

Hon PHILIP: Mr Speaker, I wish to thank you for the opportunity of moving this motion today. But before doing so, I would like to attribute my homage and appreciation to the leadership of the Chairman of the House Committee and his very able members for deliberating on the proposed amendment which we have received in our hands being distributed to each Member of Parliament.

This is very important because it will afford the opportunity for members of Parliament to be able to consume and understand the rationale behind the motion, and the fact it was taken under the limitations of time that the Chairman and his Committee was able to produce a very comprehensive report on the intentions of the motion itself. Soon after this, whatever the destiny of the motion, we will then be able to implement the recommendations that will be delivered through this motion this afternoon.

I would like to provide some background information and the reasons as to why the Coalition for Reform and Advancement Government is of the opinion that additional standing select Committees are necessary for the advancement of our parliamentary democracy.

Currently, there are five standing select committees of Parliament responsible for only five main areas. These are the Public Accounts Committee, the Parliamentary House

Committee, the Bills and Legislations Committee, the Constitutional Review Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee. It is obvious that these five standing select committees work is grossly limited in this ever expanding parliamentary duties expected of our parliament these days. Therefore, the need for additional standing select committees becomes necessary if we want to have a proactive parliamentary system in our country. I should also add that the need for additional select committees is not only necessary but timely as the people's expectations on our Parliament grows as well as the issues our people expect Parliament to address are increasing.

Please let me now turn to the reasons for these three additional standing select committees. There are two important facts that give rise to these additional three standing select committees, hence this motion. First, the need for vigilance on the part of Parliament over the actions for possible omissions of the executive or the government of the day cannot be under estimated.

Members of this House know every well that the executive or government is responsible and answerable to Parliament and in turn Parliament is collectively responsible to the voters and citizens of our country. Therefore, in order for proper parliamentary scrutiny and oversight over the Executive or the Government, additional standing select committees have become necessary and must if Parliament is to keep a tap over the executive branch in our country.

Secondly, the volume of work expected of our Parliament as I have alluded to earlier on is on the increase. While the time Parliament takes to consider issues at its disposal is very limited, I am sure members of this House will agree with me that it is becoming quite impossible that every matter that comes before this House can be or should be thoroughly and systematically examined, tested and considered on the floor of Parliament. Therefore, it is only prudent and reasonable for some parliamentary responsibilities to be assigned to standing select committees of Parliament while Parliament itself still retains that overall oversight responsibility over the Executive. However, I should stress also that this does not mean Parliament is not adhering to its constitutional mandate, but rather it is only delegating its constitutional responsibility to additional and trusted agencies, in this case the three additional standing select committees.

The practice of setting up standing select committees has over the years become a normal parliamentary practice for reasons already stated earlier. Other parliamentary jurisdictions have a well developed parliamentary committee system and these committees have done a tremendous job in keeping the executive or the government in check as well as expose action, omissions or failures which otherwise would be kept out of parliamentary and public scrutiny. The best part of committee hearings or deliberations as opposed to a usual parliamentary debate is that at the committee level issues are deliberated at length, views expressed freely and issues considered in depth. If need be, expert opinion and evidence can be undertaken.

I now turn to the individual proposed standing select committees. The Government that I am humbled to lead sees education as top priority. Therefore, it wants to ensure that Parliament is well equipped to examine, make observations and recommendations on matters relating to education and the like.

This is no small task by any imagination, for instance, our education budget is one of the biggest in our country. I was informed that at the USP alone, this year SIG has over 600 Solomon Islands sponsored students at the Laucala Campus. This does not include Solomon Islands student sponsored by our donor partners. The significance of this is the question whether there is need for an additional USP campus here or whether there is need for a national university of our own. This is just one example of the need to equip our Parliament with the right resources to handle present and future issues in relation to this very important sector. I could go on and on, but I am sure other members will further speak on this aspect later on.

The second committee that I am proposing is the Health and Medical Services standing select committee. Again, this is an important sector in our nation and our country's development, and the National Coalition for Reform and Advancement Government strongly feels that a specific standing select committee to provide parliamentary oversight in this area is extremely important.

On the 3rd April, 2009, two years ago, this House passed a motion moved by the then MP for West New Georgia and Vona Vona, the honourable Peter James Boyers for a special select committee to look into the quality of medical services provided at the National Referral Hospital and generally about medical services throughout the country. That special select committee had done its work as required and had been disbanded. While the executive or the government will consider this report, Parliament itself needs to take charge of its own report, its recommendations and responsibilities. Part of this responsibility is to ensure the executive implements the committee's recommendations if any. In other words, Parliament must continue to provide parliamentary scrutiny on an ongoing rather than on an ad hoc basis. It is hoped that this proposed committee will carry on from where the previous special committee had left off, but on a more regular and permanent basis. There are other timely, pressing and important health and medical issues that this proposed committee will deliberate on, and I am sure other members of this House will highlight them as part of their contribution to this motion.

Lastly but not the least, the third proposed select committee is on police and national security. As outlined in the annexure to this motion, the functions of this select committee shall be to examine and make its observations and recommendations on matter relating to police and national security including correctional services referred to it by Parliament or the Government.

Police and national security will continue to be vital priority for any government or any country for that matter, especially in view of emerging threats to peace, security and stability. These threats are both internal and external including transnational crimes and cybercrimes. Even climate change is a serious threat to our security and the very survival of our coastal communities, hence the importance of the proposed standing select committee on police and national security to make observations and recommendations on critical police and security matters.

I have been advised that resources both human and financial will be made available to ensure these three standing select committee become operational as soon as Parliament approves their establishment. As I have alluded to earlier, the work of these committees will contribute to further development and vibrancy of our parliamentary democracy. With these remarks, I beg to move.

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members, the honourable Prime Minister has moved that Parliament approves the amendment to the Standing Orders of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands to establish three standing select committees and their respective functions as set out in the annexure to this motion. The motion is now open for debate.

Mr GUKUNA: Let me first of all thank the Prime Minister for this motion as it is a very important one. I would also like to thank him for the kind words he said about my Committee.

I stand mainly to direct my colleague members in this House who may wish to contribute to this motion that my Committee has produced a report on this motion, which has been distributed as you are sitting here. First of all, I would like to apologize for distributing the report very late. As you know, this kind of report is meant to give us some further insight in addition to do our own thinking as to how we can contribute meaningfully to discussions on this kind of motion. Unfortunately, we could not do that; we could not give you enough time despite of the fact we have tried our best to give you at least some hours so that you are able to look through it before making your contribution. Nevertheless despite the late delivery to your desks, let me assure you that the Committee has done its best.

All parties that hold stakes in this motion appeared before the inquiry last Friday where representatives of the PM's office were called in. We also received financial opinion on this motion, we also have opinion from the Public Service and, of course, we also have the legal advice of the Attorney General. All is well and I can assure you that that report is basically a summary of the inquiry. I must say that my Committee is fully supportive of this motion.

I had hoped that I would be able to table the amendments to the Standing Orders at this particular meeting so that we can implement these changes to the Standing Orders sooner rather than later. Unfortunately, timing does not allow me, especially the Parliament staff to get the drafting ready in time, and so we just have to accept it and put it off to some other time. But I can assure this House that in the next meeting I will definitely bring the amendments to include these three committees in the Standing Orders of this House.

As you are aware, the Prime Minister has clearly stated the objectives of the three committees. In the report we made the recommendation that the Government would have to spell out clearly the responsibilities or the job descriptions, if you like, of these three committees so that they can carry out their tasks in the three important areas that have been identified.

These committees, as we heard from the motion are going to address three important areas of our lives as people of this country on health, education and security. These are areas that have been traditionally left to the ministries and their ministers to guide them, and most times maybe we as the Parliament have neglected these important areas. At least these three committees will bring these areas to this Parliament so that as often as we go along hear from these three areas, and that is one beauty about these three committees. Let me say again that my Committee is fully supportive of this and again please accept my apologies for not being able to deliver those reports that are now in front of you in time. With those comments I support this motion.

Hon SOFU: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this motion moved by the Prime Minister, purposely to amend the standing Orders of Parliament. First of all, I would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for recognizing these three additional standing select committees. I would like to thank him for the vision he had which enabled him to see what is going to come and so is setting in place mechanisms to deal with it. That is what a leader should do and is expected to do, and that is to give support where and when the need arises.

Before I briefly contribute to this motion, I also wish to thank the Chairman of the Parliamentary House Committee and members of the Committee for their hard work in scrutinizing this motion before bringing it to Parliament for us to deliberate. I wish to also acknowledge the witnesses that also contribute towards this motion.

Over the past years we have seen our population growing, which means we need additional manpower and we need more people to serve. Secondly, donor funding programs to sectors that the honourable Prime Minister is trying to establish through these select committees is very important because sometimes aid donors do not trust us with funds they have given to us for the intended purpose. And so I think the Prime Minister has wisdom in moving this motion.

The establishment of the Health and Medical Services Select Committee, the Police and National Security Select Committee and the Education Select Committee are very important to ensure that the services the Government delivers to our people through Parliament are professional and equitable so as to strengthen Parliament's role to be accountable to our people that we represent in here. To build the trust of aid donors that are funding those services in the three sectors that we are now trying to establish through these committees, and to build the trust on our people who are using the services of health, police and education.

Mr Speaker, you might be concerned about the manpower capacity of supporting these additional committees. But I can tell you, Mr Speaker, fear not! This is a priority of the Government and through the resources made available in the budget that we just passed last night, it can be made possible. May be you were thinking there is no money for things like this, but as I have already said 'fear not' because the budget has already passed last night.

I will be very brief just to render my support to this very important motion moved by the Prime Minister. The Government has seen as very important and that is why it intervened to give support to these sectors, and it is a normal thing. In other countries they have an ombudsman for education, for police and for health. And their role is purposely to oversee these sectors to ensure issues are dealt with before they go out of control. And so I see this as a very good idea.

I really appreciate the good intentions of the Government as it is a healthy thing to set these committees because it is based on a bipartisan approach and therefore it is good for the education sector, the security sector and the health sector.

The additional three standing select committees will bring more meaning to Parliament and the Government now and in the future. With this brief contribution I support the motion and I resume my seat.

Mr SOGAVARE: I too would like to join other colleagues who have already spoken on the motion. In fact I will be speaking in support of it, and so the Minister of Public Service, we can assure him, not to worry because we fully support this idea of the Government establishing three additional standing select committees for Parliament.

In terms of the law that mandates Parliament to do that, the House Committee has already outlined it fully for us. Unfortunately, this report only reached us very late and so we will probably refer to it as we go on with this debate. But on page 2, the constitutional mandate to Parliament is outlined which can establish additional standing committees as read with Standing Order 70(1). Therefore, the Government is thinking now to establish three standing select committees on education and human resources training, as related to us by the Prime Minister, another one on health and one on police and national security.

As I have said earlier on I will speak in support of this motion before the House. I think this is something that is left very, very late, really late on something that should have been addressed a long time ago. And so it is just appropriate that the Government brings it now for Parliament to look into.

I will speak generally on the importance of standing select committees and their roles on improving parliamentary democracy and the role of Parliament to be properly accountable to our people on issues placed before Parliament. Standing select committees facilitate the engagement of elected Members of Parliament to perform their roles as members of Parliament. We are supposed to be members of the highest decision making body of the land; that is primarily our responsibility. The standing select committees have helped Parliament; fully engage members of Parliament. It is different from special select committees where its membership can be people from outside. But when it comes to standing select committees of the House, it fully utilizes members of Parliament, and that is where MPs are fully engaged in; to advise Parliament.

Very little is supposed to be deliberated here in Parliament. In very highly developed democracies most of the work is done by select committees and their work given to Parliament for its blessings, so there is not much debate on issues. And this is because the committees are normally made up of members from both sides of the House so that is where they trash out every argument and whatever there is and when those issues come to Parliament it is a joint advice to Parliament. Thus the five standing committees that we have on public accounts, house committee and others comprise members from both sides of the House. And that brings up a very important issue that as we develop, our parliamentary democracy develops, members of Parliament should come to realize what our true responsibility is. As I have said we are members of Parliament and members of Parliament are supposed to be fulltime employees of the National Parliament.

We can understand that because our parliamentary committee system is not well fully developed so members of Parliament engage in something else; we become service delivery agencies in our constituencies. Because of this hangover we now have \$107million coming through members of Parliament and members of Parliament become service delivery agencies in the constituencies. That is not the job of members of Parliament. We are supposed to be fulltime employees of National Parliament, our role is to make laws, to amend laws and to

deliberate on issues that are placed before us by standing select committees, and most of these works are done by those committees.

Maybe we can, as I have said, justify why members of Parliament take on additional responsibilities. Maybe it is understandable in our parliamentary democracy and the way we are structured as a least developing country and a country where 85 percent of its population lives in the rural area and so members of Parliament take on more roles than what is expected like of a member of parliament of Australia and New Zealand.

I remember the former Speaker and Prime Minister said that members of Parliament are bankers and are everything to our people. That is something new developing because maybe right from the beginning members of Parliament are seen that way, to take on those roles. Maybe we can excuse that and say members of Parliament can still perform that role, but I believe we can properly organize it so that while members still hold the role of service delivery agents in our constituencies, at the same time we perform our role as members of standing committees. I believe the added responsibility can still be accommodated in the service delivery framework that we need to seriously consider through proper establishment of constituency setups so that when we are busy that active delivery service responsibility is removed from members of Parliament to government paid officers placed in the constituencies. If we do not move in that direction, we will be hard up here. We will all be busy if there is the need to establish more standing committees and it becomes necessary that members of Parliament are fully engaged throughout the year, members of Parliament may neglect their constituencies.

On the idea of establishing offices, in fact, in other well developed democracies, their members of Parliament have well established offices in their constituencies where they have people working for them and members of parliament only go to those offices, visit the offices when there is need to address certain constituency issues. There are provisions here to do that; we are required to go down three to four times a year to our constituencies through allowances paid by Parliament to assist us to go down. Maybe there is need to increase that allowance so that we can perform our role in visiting our constituencies.

On this note, surveys have stated that we have not been visiting our constituencies, and maybe it is because of that reason – are we going to use the RCDF to go down? It is better to increase those funds so that it assists us to visit our constituencies.

The importance of standing committees, well, the proceedings in Parliament on issues that are placed before it are just as good as the advice tendered to Parliament by standing committees. When the Parliament support services engaged qualified graduates to work here in Parliament, there is sudden improvement in the work of standing committees, and that is one of the best things that probably has ever happened to this Parliament. And we would like to encourage you, Sir, to continue to look into that area to improve the level and quality of people that work in Parliament to support the work of Parliament.

I am saying this because the proceedings in Parliament are just as good as the advice tendered to Parliament by standing committees so that is how very important the roles of standing committees are. I remember back in those days when we have to write the reports ourselves, the standing committees. After we meet we have to write the report ourselves and submit it to Parliament and the reports are not of quality and not well researched; background information to those reports are not that good and so Parliament is not properly advised.

I agree that we have to move ahead. We have moved ahead in many areas of our parliamentary democracy but we have made little progress in our standing select committees, thus the importance and need of establishing additional standing select committees. And interestingly it should coincide with the increased number of seats in Parliament. Maybe we must start changing our views on the positions we take on the need to increase the number of seats, and I probably will comment later on that during the course of this debate.

The Public Service Minister has expressed some views today in his contribution. The idea of establishing additional standing committee is something we have contemplated under the Grand Coalition for Change Government in 2006. In fact, we recommend the establishment of five additional standing committees to broadly correspond with the main functions of government on the areas of development irrespective of who is in government. And so a submission was made to the House Committee where the health and education sector and other essential social services were lumped under a committee that we proposed as service delivery and infrastructure development committee. It takes on infrastructure development as one of its functions. We separated law and order, national security is one committee, and the other one is development of the private sector committee. The other committee that we also recommended was development of the productive sector in rural development, and the fifth committee was going to be peace, national unity and reconciliation because it is a current issue in this country.

The idea that was put to Parliament is a bit more broader than what is now suggested under this motion. In addition to just advising Parliament on issues placed before it to deliberate and tender advice on, we believe the standing committees should also be actively involved in two areas. The first is monitoring and implementation of Parliament approved policies, and the second role is reporting and accountability process. Those are the two main areas of functions that we think should be taken up in the standing committees. We believe that Parliament has the duty not only to approve policies but to monitor implementation of those policies by line ministries.

This role should be structured in a monitoring framework which should involve the following sectors and entities. The first is the private sector which should include the churches, NGOs and private commercial entities. I think those entities should also involve in monitoring framework. The next entities are the public good governance institutions like the Ombudsman, the Leadership Code Commission, the Auditor General and other institutions like that, which should also be structured into the monitoring responsibility.

The other important group that we suggested that needs to be considered is the donor partners, and the other group is, of course, the National Parliament standing select committees. Those are the four sectors and entities that should be actively involved in the monitoring and performance of implementation of government policies.

In regards to reporting and accountability processes, I believe it should also be structured to involve the following sectors and entities, the four key monitoring agencies namely, the aid donors, private sectors, good governance institutions and our people. I have already made this submission to Parliament and so I do not want to go through it again. What is before us now is to approve the establishment of these three committees.

What we were saying through our submissions to Parliament then was that instead of standing select committees acting as standalone advisers to Parliament on matters before it for

consideration, it must be structured into the national monitoring and reporting accountability process. Basically improving the content and coverage of Parliament's reporting process to the people who are the ultimate reason for the existence of government. Those are the reasons why we are now talking about all these committees.

This only goes to mean that the functions of standing committees must be reviewed, as I see it and as we develop. Okay we may think about first establishing all standing committees, and as we go on there is need to really improve on the functions of select committees and they must be reviewed to feature the followings: First it must broaden the roles and functions of standing committees, and second it requires the attendance of ministers of the crown. I do not see any reason why ministers should not be attending standing committees or budget committees. When it comes to very important decisions, for example, and I feel sorry for public officers when they come before committees trying to defend they budget, and most of the time they are afraid because the proceedings are televised on the television, and so they are very careful on how they talk and they do not come out very clear.

If it is politicians that make the decisions then they should come before standing committees and defend the decisions they make. Maybe that can be looked into so that instead of only public officers appearing before standing select committees, politicians come before it so that ministers making the decision comes before standing select committees and answer questions put to you by the PA Committee.

It may also require regular meeting of the committees to perform monitoring and their accountability roles. That means as the committee has been saying, this will need additional manpower and it needs additional financial resources. We really need to booster the budget of Parliament if we want those committees to function efficiently and to improve the quality of issues that are placed before Parliament for consideration.

Parliament is the highest accountability institution on the land. That being the case, there needs to be, in my thinking, a reorganization of accountability institutions. I believe that all accountability institutions should be part of the National Parliament for organization and funding purposes but, of course, maintaining their independence in the execution of responsibilities. They report, of course, directly to Parliament on all matters instead of ministers as is currently the case, for example, the Auditor General. It is not really clear at this point in time whether the Auditor General reports directly to the Speaker of Parliament. Since we have the Attorney General here with us, maybe later on we need to clear that because there is currently a dispute over whether the Auditor General can report directly to Parliament and place his report to Parliament for deliberation by Parliament. There are some ministers who think, maybe through the interpretation of laws that his reports should go through minister responsible for that statutory organization and come through Cabinet and Cabinet will then report to Parliament. Those grey areas need to be cleared if the role of the Auditor General and other accountability institutions are going to be effective so that government is accountable. The bottom line is that is what it is. If we bring up things like this and yet we are still not clear about areas like that then it goes to show we really do not believe on it.

The other view is probably the expansion of the committees and the proposed establishment of things like, and I do not know whether these bills will eventually come; the Constitutional Amendment initiated by the last CNURA Government that failed to go through

in the last sitting of Parliament, the establishment of shadow ministers, the establishment of parliamentary secretariats and issues like that. Establishing offices like that will make MPs fully engaged. If one is a parliamentary secretariat he will have a very big job because he is basically an assistant minister and is assigned on specific tasks, and is assisting the minister and so when the minister goes away, he becomes the person keeping the office in the absence of the minister. That in itself is a big responsibility. There are only 50 of us, and normally the difference is 26, 28 or 29, 21 and if all are 24 ministers there are only five that will be parliamentary secretaries and so members of Parliament are fully engaged.

On the Opposition side you have the Leader and the Deputy Leader. Under the proposed amendment that was to come is the establishment of the post of deputy leader of the Opposition, and not only that but establishment of the posts of shadow ministers who will also be very actively involved as shadow ministers looking at specific portfolios, comment on it and work with line ministers on issues of national interest. So the MPs will also be fully engaged. Now that fully occupies the 50 members of Parliament. So maybe some of us who stood here on the floor of this Parliament and really talked against the idea of the increase in the number of seats in Parliament, maybe we need to rethink our position. There is probably now a justification to increase the number of seats in this House if we want Parliament to be effective. And I am talking about now the effectiveness of standing committees. Unless we have enough people because standing committees is not picking people from outside, Mr Speaker, but you only use members of Parliament. Here we also have responsibilities in our constituency to visit and so forth so whilst MPs are fully engaged they might lose their seats in 2014 if they do not visit their constituencies. And so I think there is justification now to look into these areas like that.

But the motion before us for establishment of three standing committees receives the full support of this side of the House and I know the Leader will speak later on. But we should establish more committees, these are only three so maybe let us look at two or more and give them specific assignments for them to deal with on behalf of Parliament. With those comments I fully support the motion.

Dr SIKUA: Before I make my brief contribution to this motion, I would like to thank the honourable Prime Minister for introducing this motion to the House, which specifically seeks Parliament's approval for establishment of three standing select committees as well as establish the respective functions of those three select committees.

I am not making any lengthy contribution to this motion as it receives the full support of this side of the House. The report by the House Committee, I think, has drawn our attention to a number of issues that arise from its hearings, and I am happy to hear the assurance made by the Minister of Public Service that the concern of the House Committee on the human resource capacity of the National Parliament Office is supported. The three additional standing select committees will require additional staff, maybe another three officers with quite a very high level in the public service, may be level 10 /11 or 9/10. I hope the Ministry of Public Service will support the National Parliament Office to find these officers quickly as well as any other staff to support the committee. Because as has been mentioned in the report, the current staffing levels of the National Parliament Office is often being overstretched, and that there is need to have

additional staff. And additional staff always means additional equipment, furniture like chairs, tables, and computers and things like that. And so I hope the Ministry of Public Service, the Ministry of Finance and the office of the Prime Minister will lend a very sympathetic ear to any requests coming from your office, Mr Speaker, to properly staff and provide funding support for these three standing select committees, as you will need to recruit three or more levels 10 /11 officers to oversee the work of the select committees.

Apart from human resource capacity and funding support levels to these committees, one area that I see when looking at this motion comparing it with the existing standing select committees of Parliament is the functions of the proposed committees. It is very obvious under Standing Order 69 to 71(a) and 71(b) on the functions of the five existing committees, their functions are quite clearly well defined. However, for these new committees are very broad in nature. The Committee's report argued on both sides of it that sometimes it is good to leave the functions of committees to be broad like this so that they can be in a position to look at anything they want to look at in a particular sector. But sometimes when you have people that are not well experienced or are not long time members of parliament become chairpersons of committees like these they will be sort of confused. For me as is a second term, in the past when I was chairman of the constitutional review committee, most of the work of my committee was taken up by the people who are working on our federal constitutional review and so I was pretty happy with that. But anyone coming in as chairs of these committees, if functions are not specified very clearly, he/she will have a lot of trouble trying to work out what the work of his/her committee is when things are lumped up together this way.

I think it is a good idea as was expressed by the Committee for the Prime Minister's Office after this motion is passed to look at what the specific functions of the proposed committees would be. For someone like me, if I am put in the education committee, I will fly everywhere because I know what is expected, you do not need to tell me, and therefore I quite like the idea of the broad functions of the education and human resource training committee, as it will suit someone like me in education. But for someone who just comes in and if the chairperson is not very good, he will struggle a bit. I therefore think it would be good to spell out the proposed functions of these committees just to guide members and the chair.

At the same time in thinking about the education sector, and for the education and human resource training committee, there is the National Education Board that exists under an act of Parliament in the Ministry of Education. I think there is capacity and room for these two parliamentary committees probably with the National Education Board, like the Minister has said have been holding meetings, so as not to step on each other's toes, and therefore the need for us to be a bit more careful. I think the Ministry of Health has a health council and so as the national education board. Therefore, care must be taken once these committees are operational to make sure whatever issues we are looking at, although Parliament takes precedence, I understand that but, of course, there is a body like the national education board that is made up of every education ministers of provincial assemblies too. This is just something to think about in relation to that.

On the proposed functions, there are points raised by the Committee which I would also like to express. It is good to see there are no legal impediments in having three more committees, but as the member for East Choseul has expressed, there is room for two or more

committees. What I would find very useful is a committee that looks at the budget throughout the year on how it is implemented because some of us are not finance people.

The Public Accounts Committee is one of the main committees we have here and the work of the Committee is to look at the draft estimates up to the time when Parliament approves it and then it leaves the budget there. But I was looking at a committee that in the course of the government implementing its budget, this committee monitors how the government implements the budget. It is going to be a parliamentary standing select committee that monitors the monthly reports on warrants, which the Minister of Finance has said that he is going to give so that it monitors and scrutinises the ongoing implementation of the budget after it is passed in Parliament. I think that is one of the committees I really want us to set up, and its work will be throughout the financial year.

The Public Accounts Committee stops working when the draft is passed in Parliament so that when we come back to look at the next budget for the following year, we have the report of this committee on how the previous year's budget was spent and the performance of government and ministries will be measured against the spending made on the budget in the previous year. That would be another good committee or probably to combine this same committee with the Audit Office because all audit reports that reach us are only understandable by people with financial minds. Probably that committee can do the auditing functions as well, so that it advises Parliament and not leaving it up to members to read the reports and try to make a head or tail out of them. Some of us do not understand these things and so it would be very helpful that there is ongoing monitoring of the budget as well as auditing made simpler for us. Those would be my suggestions on further committees.

I support the work of these three committees and I appreciate them, but I think it is essential to have some more committees, at least two more is very, very important.

I endorse all the comments made by the honourable Member for East Choiseul on the need for members of Parliament to be fully occupied on the work that we are entrusted to do. But I would like to say that it is good that ministers are busy in their ministries, the backbenchers and those of us on the opposition side are occupied with committee tasks. Therefore, I would like to suggest to you, Mr Speaker, that when it comes to the selection of the chair and members of these three committees, the Government not only appoints its backbenchers just to maintain the number in those committees. I hope that freedom will be given to you, Mr Speaker, to select who you think would perform well in those committees that are going to be set up. I know sometimes you are under a lot of pressure, Mr Speaker, and the government also has the right to choose, but let us be fair to each other. I hope the Government takes heed of this and gives some of the chairmanships to those of us in the opposition side and not only the government side, my good Prime Minister. With these few comments I support this motion.

Mr HOUNIPWELA: I want to thank the honourable Prime Minister for bringing this motion for the establishment of three additional committees for the Parliament to approve. I want to thank himself and his staff and of course the NCRA Government. I would also like to acknowledge the good work done by the parliamentary House Committee in producing this

report for us. This shows the hard working Chairman of the parliamentary House Committee. I wish to acknowledge their effort and the report provided for us to look at.

I just want to say that all the things stated by the honourable member for East Choiseul earlier on today, I personally endorsed all of them, especially on the roles and the reasons why there is need for standing select committees in Parliament. This is like a mechanism that scrutinizes and enhances effectively the work of Parliament and properly articulated, and this is why we need standing committees to be established in Parliament. If these committees do not exist, our work will be insufficient. It is important therefore that we have standing select committees within Parliament.

This is important for reasons outlined in the Prime Minister's opening speech that MPs comprise those committees. This is important for all the reasons already mentioned. I also look at it this way that being a member in one of those committees will enhance your knowledge as to what our roles are in Parliament, why we are representatives of the people of Solomon Islands and why are we here in this chamber as parliamentarians. Therefore, you must not shy away from being a member of those select committees. In fact, real work is there in the standing committees.

I want to encourage all of us to try as much as possible to be a member of those committees. That is our real work as parliamentarians. Our coming here to debate is just to top that up, it is just a top up, but the real work is in the committees. So that we do not spend time loading ships, buying iron roofing and all those sorts of things because those are not our work.

I am very pleased indeed, Mr Speaker, that your office has endorsed my request for the Civic Group of Parliament to go and do civic education in my constituency for at least two or three weeks. This group will go to talk about the roles of a parliamentarian. I understand none of you has requested that and so I am very happy that I did. This group will go next month to my constituency and so I am looking forward to that visit. It is very important that people know what it is that they elect us here to do. I just want to emphasize the point made by honourable member for East Choiseul very splendidly today in his remarks. The work of Parliament will be enhanced, better articulated, more reinforced and will be better and more effective with parliamentary standing committees. That is my first point in support of this motion.

It is also important for us to know that the committees should be bipartisan. As the Leader of Opposition stated today, those in the government, those in the opposition, those in the independent and those who do not know where they belong must be included in the committees. Do not think that your responsibility is only to come here to debate, and that is the end of your work. No, our work is in the committees so that our work of debating laws and all sorts of things we are talking about will be good for our people. And speaking about our people is the purpose why Parliament has the role of scrutiny and oversight. That is the role of the committees. Firstly, it is to strengthen our work, but more so, so that the scrutiny work and the oversight role in Parliament is strengthened because we are doing this on behalf of our people. This is why the parliamentary standing committees are important.

The only concern as other speakers have already mentioned is in regards to resources. I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee, as you have graciously appointed some of us to be members of, Mr Speaker, and it is very true that the officers that work for the committees

work late into the night. Why? Because they have to write up everything we talked about, and when we meet again and change some of the things, they go on changing those things, and in the meantime Parliament is going on, and so we need staffing in these committees, we need staffing resources, we really need it.

The place for committees to meet is also an issue. Because there is only one room that the committees are fighting over we sometimes have to meet in the kitchen or meet at the dining room, sometimes because it is a standing committee we just stand up and meet. This is not very good. We need rooms and equipments, proper rooms and proper equipment to have our meetings so that the committees do their work properly. This is something we need to think about; the Office of the Prime Minister, of course, and your office Mr Speaker, must think about this, and if you ask money for it I will support it. Not only that, but as I have said earlier on today, I want to urge all of us since this is a bipartisan issue for all of us, lend yourselves to be a member of all the committees because it will enhance our work and the work of the committees. The resources that we need are not only financial but they are equipments, rooms but also for ourselves, it needs our time to do the work.

In terms of the functions of the committees, I want to support the points that have been made about the functions of the three select committees that they need to be more articulated. I believe that work is going ahead on this to make it more to the point. But it is important for us to see the roles and functions of the committees as more specified and detailed so that members are not confused of their work.

On the issue about functions of the committees, we, in the PAC are looking at the functions and roles of the Public Accounts Committee so that work is done properly. I think there is need to look at the functions of the different committees that are already in existence so that they work properly for Parliament.

I will not talk any further, but just to say again, thank you Mr Prime Minister for bringing this motion. We want to say thank you to you because of your foresightedness of this motion in bringing it here for us to look at the three committees, and I want to put my support on this motion.

Mr TOZAKA: I want to join my colleagues who have already spoken in favour of this motion. I have already made my contribution in the House Committee on this motion, and we are very happy for your support on this motion. Our discussions are in this report that is in front of you.

I am very glad that your family is growing and so as the Clerk because she will have increased number of staffs in this Chamber. The environment presented the reform program on capacity building in this Parliament is what makes us feel very comfortable about it so that we come up with this idea. I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, for a very successful implementation of the capacity building program of your committee secretariat in here.

I also recognize the hard and very good work that our small secretariat is doing. They have been doing a good and high level work they produce for us in Parliament, and it is very important that this is maintained. I am also happy to hear my friend, the Minister for Public Service said that the supply of manpower, qualified and skilled manpower to support this proposal is there. But that said, practically as we know what happens in the Public Service is that when advertisements are put up for positions like these asking people who are available in

the market to apply for the positions, they normally do not apply, they do not respond to take up a very important responsibility like this in government. And so the temptation again is we go back to the system of taking whoever is available in the Public Service to be employed in very important organizations like Parliament. I just want to make a point in my contribution to this motion on the importance of not derailing the high level capacity building program in our committees and the secretariat of this House in that it must be maintained.

The last thing I want to say is that we must not resort to getting political appointees to these committees. That is what I want to stress here. It must go through the recruitment system in the Public Service to recruit the right, qualified and skilled manpower. We must respect our Solomon Islanders. The responsibility of the Minister of Education is not employment. His work is only to train and to produce qualified manpower. It is the work of the Public Service to employ. The Minister of Education has no business whatsoever to produce people for employment as that is under the Public Service's purview. I would like to stress that very important point.

The balance as well of those committees must be there. The executive has committees and Parliament must also have its committees. Increasing the number of committees must depend upon considerations such as manpower, finance and also our logistic support. Those must be taken very seriously in your consideration.

I am happy, and I think the Prime Minister is also aware that through the normal program of Parliament we are coming up with the draft Standing Orders. And in the draft standing order I gather there is recommendation for an increase in the number of committees. I am happy that that is happening. Those are the points I would like to make.

The final point I would like to make, and probably if it is important to the Prime Minister he would take note of is a scheme of service for our committee secretaries. They are part of the normal public service scheme of service. You are aware that there is already movement of very qualified committee secretaries specifically trained for the job elsewhere; they had moved out from this group. It is important therefore that you look at perhaps a special scheme of service in recognition of their skills and the work they are doing which is quite different from the normal public service work.

I think those are the points I would like to make. Once again I thank the honourable Prime Minister for moving this motion and I join other colleagues in supporting it.

Mr ETE: I take this opportunity as a solemn duty like everyone sitting in this honourable Chamber to make my contribution towards this motion. First of all, I want to thank the Prime Minister for seeing it fit in moving this motion this morning. Thank you as well to your government and I also extend this word of thanks to the House Committee. I see this as a commitment from the government as its support to improve the services sector and that is why we are now looking at making amendments to sections of the Standing Orders to include three new parliamentary select committees. I say this in the light of the many debates that have been going back and forth on the service sectors, which a lot of successive governments have been looking at and trying to do, but the current NCRA has now put forward this amendment for Parliament's approval for three additional committees. I believe the government is going down the right road and is timely and appropriate in doing this.

I am saying this not because I want to please the government, but it is because these sectors are very, very important sectors that directly touch the lives of the people in the rural sectors. These are cutting issues; health, education and security. These are cutting issues because if there are no medicines in clinics at the area health centres down in the rural areas, it directly reflects government policy. If there are no medicines in our clinics in the rural areas, then it would be of no use supporting the health sector. We will only support a dead elephant. And so I really salute the Prime Minister for bringing this motion to Parliament and the initiative of the NCRA.

The aim of the government, as we know, is to feed me, shelter me, clothe me and ensure that the economy is sustainable. When government is doing those: shelter me, feed me, clothe me and so forth, in between the cracks, the government also ensures that its population is literate, healthy and safe for the purpose of national economic development. On that note I really thank the Prime Minister for seeing it fit in establishing these committees.

Today I am not going to talk about the committees in here, but I will only talk on the importance as to why these committees are formed. Depending on the reports and the terms of reference that the Speaker will be in charge of, I now believe that the 2012 appropriation bill will reflect the recommendations that the three committees are going to put up to be included in the budget. I see that as very important. It is very important that the 2012 appropriation bill 2012 must reflect the recommendations. I am really sad because the last parliamentary select committee of the Ministry of Health of which I am a core writer of the report that was sent here, many of the recommendations have not been taken into account, but I believe that the new appropriation bill of 2012 will include recommendations if the government is now serious in supporting the lives, education, security, law and order of the people of this country so that this country can grow in terms of its political, socio and economic aspects of it. I will stop here, and with those few remarks I do not hesitate to support the motion.

Mr. MANENIARU: I too would like to join my colleague MPs who have spoken already to thank the honourable Prime Minister for moving this motion, a very important motion on the three new standing select committees. I would also like to thank the NCRA Government for its vision in seeing it fit for us to continue have important committees to support us in this chamber. On that note, I would also like to acknowledge the good work of the parliamentary House Committee, the Chairman and members of the Committee and also the secretariat whom we have now seen the output of their work in the reports that come to support this motion.

I do not want to repeat what my colleagues have already said. But I just stand up in person to support this motion. The point that I would like to briefly touch on is the quality of chairmanships of our committees. I have a feeling that the committees seem to be there only for the Opposition and the Backbenchers. And when we consider the composition of our Parliament Members, it seems to me that the first choice is ministers and the left over are the ones being pushed to the committees. I feel that that is quite unfair to the committees if that is how we view this.

The committees are very important, as the Member for Small Malaita has hammered in his statement in that they are doing a big work. The committees deliberate on issues, go over the issues before we come here to debate them. We need to carefully consider the qualification

and experience when selecting the chairmanship of the committees. That is a very important point worth noting.

Further, the turnover of the chairmanship of the committees is also an issue that I see. Because if the government changes, normally the chairmanship post will also change. That to me creates the problem of inconsistency in the important task, function and role of the committees. I want to submit that we must consider how we can maintain the chairmanship of those committees because they are doing a big work. To me, this is an issue and I want the government to consider how we can allow those committees to be consistent in their work, especially when they are under the capable leadership of a particular chairman.

In terms of budgetary resources, there were assurances already given to these standing committees in the report. But I am looking at its long term prospects. We know that it is because of the Parliamentary Strengthening Project that we have the committee secretariat. Once this project is returned to the Public Service, my fear is that it would not be attractive to the qualified and experienced staff to remain to carry out these important tasks. I think it is quite important that this must be considered for its long term by making the committees, especially the secretariats to be attractive. They have to have attractive packages to attract not only qualified people but also those with the experience as well. Because the chance of turnover of chairmanship is quite high in our political environment, the secretariat as much as possible should be considered to be maintained so that the secretariat to each of the committees can have long term contracts. How we are going to keep them in those positions is also important to be considered. Otherwise the committee work would only be seen as a training ground to attract new graduates who are not experienced and might be looking for job opportunities to end up in those committees. Or it will be just another place where no one is attracted to and so anyone who is looking for employment finds himself there. I feel it is an important consideration that we look at how we can continue to maintain the interest and also what is attractive to employees to continually be secretariats to our committees.

Those are my brief remarks that I have on this important motion, and I fully support the motion.

Hon Philip: It is now 4:30pm and because a number of Members still want to speak to the motion and so to give them the opportunity to debate, I seek your consent to move suspension of Standing Order 10 in accordance with Standing Order 81.

Standing Order 10 suspended in accordance with Standing Order to permit the continuation of the business of the House after 4.30pm until adjourned by the Speaker

Mr. WALE: I want to thank the Prime Minister for taking the necessary procedural steps and also for this very important motion.

The oversight function of Parliament, the scrutiny function of Parliament as was pointed out by the Prime Minister when moving this motion could not be overemphasised. The independence of Parliament to the Judiciary and the Executive will only work if the scrutiny and oversight function is effective. And, of course, the effectiveness of the scrutiny and of the

oversight functions depends very much on the kind of processes that standing committees assist Parliament with.

When questions are brought to Parliament or when reports are tabled in the House in the ordinary business of Parliament, it would take a committee to conduct more detailed hearings where members of the public and stakeholders will have interest to present their views and Parliament would therefore have a benefit of the views of public and stakeholders on issues that come before it.

Further, as we know although there are 50 of us, we do not have a monopoly over knowledge and wisdom and everything there is that this House needs so that it can make good wholesome, balanced, wise decisions. Therefore, it is important that Parliament that belongs to the people must remain open to the people, that the people are accessible to Parliament and Parliament is accessible to people. And the way this access is maintained and sustained is through a committee system. This is very important and could never be overemphasised. It is in light of that that this motion is very important.

When the House Committee considered this motion by the Prime Minister, it suggested a small amendment to it, which unfortunately the Prime Minister does not feel at this time appropriate or right for him to take it on. But we made a recommendation that perhaps two more committees so that it is five in total of standing committees to be created. First as a national audit committee so that audit reports do not come through the Minister of Finance because if audit reports come through the Minister of Finance and there are management issues there and we want the Auditor General to be as independent as possible, reporting directly to Parliament at some time, perhaps on various issues, the Minister of Finance may not be so happy to table such reports to Parliament.

We have had over the recent past, audit reports coming directly through the Speaker. I think some of us are not sure that that is the right procedures, so we made the recommendation that there should be a national audit committee where the Auditor General provides secretariat to it, but also reports of the Auditor General come through that standing committee to Parliament, and that committee would take on the responsibility which is currently half-heartedly taken on by the Public Accounts Committee to inquire into those reports, look at the recommendations and bring to the floor of this House for debate. I think it is a very important committee that must be set up. If we are serious about scrutiny and if we are serious about oversight, we must establish this committee.

The other committee recommended by the House Committee under this motion was a public estimates committee, separating basically the role that the Public Accounts Committee is holding. At present or up to now, the PAC basically meets when a budget is prepared or a supplementary before it comes to the floor. However, as was rightly pointed out by the Prime Minister, it is the ongoing scrutiny of the budget and implementation of the budget that must also fall within the purview of Parliament. Even when Parliament is not in session, it ought to be incumbent on the committee, the public estimates committee of Parliament to actually call in managers and say, 'how are you implementing this, why is this changed or the Cabinet changed this' and so forth; the dynamics of government will come through but it will enhance the people's view of how the government works. This will certainly uphold independence and strengthen the independence and oversight function of Parliament. And so we in the House

Committee think these are two very good recommendations made on very good basis and is something that will overall benefit, not only our Parliament but I think the way our people see Parliament working and the way people relate to Parliament, not just when Parliament sits but right throughout a meeting or right throughout a term of Parliament. We, therefore, were a bit disappointed that those recommendations were not taken on board and may be because time is short and so we understand that, but we strongly recommend to the Prime Minister to consider those and to support them if they are brought in by the House Committee on a set of reforms on changes to the Standing Orders that the Chairman talked about today.

All our standing committees, the ones that are currently standing and the three new ones that will come in, they will be only effective if we give them the power to initiate proceedings. Currently, they only deal on referral powers. A motion comes on the floor then a set of recommendations refer this motion to the standing committee to look at or the government writes and tells them it wants them to inquire into a matter. When there are no referrals, which is most of the time, the committees are just sitting down wasting time.

The former chairman of the Constitution Review Committee is here; the current Leader of Opposition has been sitting down wasting time in the committee. And I am sure the same for other committees. Sorry the new Chairman of the Constitution Review Committee is smiling because he thinks it will be the same for him. But apart from the PAC, I think most other committees would find that they are a little bit out in deep waters because no referrals are given to them. Because they only kick in their function when Parliament by way of motion refers matters to them for scrutiny or the government, the executive refers tasks to them. This is a terrible weakness in our system.

To really strengthen the independence of Parliament, to really strengthen the scrutiny function of Parliament and overall strengthen the independence of the people's Parliament, it is really important that these committees have power to initiate proceedings and have power to initiate actions so that on an ongoing basis they are able to look into issues, issues that ought to come on the floor of Parliament via the committees. I think this is a grave weakness that we must strengthen in the Standing Orders that gives powers and functions of all of our Standing Committees.

Because Parliament does not have this initiative, the power to initiate action or proceedings within the committees, it is also to an extent a constraint or limitation on the power of Parliament itself to initiate. Of course, in the absolute that is not true, in the absolute a member can come here, propose a motion and we move, and that is true. But a committee has much more capacity to be able to call in witnesses, stakeholders, listen to technical and expert evidences and then present those on the floor.

There is a more informed process and because of that it is the front end of the loader; it is the front end loader into Parliament bringing appropriate technical expert advice and information onto the floor, thereby permitting Parliament to then consider issues on the balance of probabilities and on the balance of information; the best information that is before it as opposed to ad hoc, arbitrary and perhaps not quite the best information. It is important that these functions must be looked into. And so the annexure that is in the motion still follows the old tradition of referrals and still does not come close to giving the initiative to the committees. This is in the interest of this country; it is in the interest of this country that the independence of

Parliament be projected, be accentuated, be enhanced, be improved, and so it is in all our interest to make sure that that is given to Parliament.

Fundamental reforms as has been regularly talked about by the Prime Minister which our country really needs is very important. All the reforms, if we are not careful, will make the executive even much stronger, it will become unbridle power. The executive will become far too strong than parliament and the executive could also become far too strong than the judiciary.

Our constitution is very clear explicitly but also implicitly that the spirit our founding fathers have given to our constitution is clearly the separation of power and the balance of powers between the three arms of government. It is important that we must try and balance these three arms of government, and therefore this motion is important in that regard. Although it falls short a bit, but I see the honourable Prime Minister taking some notes with a very good heart. As we know, the honourable Prime Minister has been in parliament 16 years before and I think what I am sharing now is resonating with him.

This is the way forward for this country; more reforms that gives more power to the executive is running the risk of the canoe laying on one side. It must be balanced. The independence of Parliament must be given much greater recognition and the actual powers to make that independence work so that the greater reforms, the greater powers given by reforms to the executive will be well within the capacity of Parliament to check on them, to keep them on account.

By way of process, the asking of questions is seen by the person to whom the question is asked as that person hating him or he is his enemy. No, that is not so. Nothing inside this House is personal to you and me. These things are done on behalf of our people for the welfare and the wellbeing of our beloved country in these beautiful Islands. It is done for the sake of the future generations, it is for the betterment of our society, and so none of it is personal. If we start to personalize and individualize these things, we only betray our own immaturity in our understanding of these matters.

I do not want to be talking too much otherwise I would start to tell lies to my brothers on the other side. But these are few of my thoughts which are burning inside me that I have to clear it out from my mind, and I think they are good ones as well and so I am happy if the Prime Minister takes them on board to further look into them if we come back later. With those few remarks I support the motion.

Mr HANARIA: I too would like to contribute to this motion moved by the Prime Minister. I would like to thank the Prime Minister for moving this motion to seek amendment to the Standing Order of the National Parliament of Solomon Islands for the establishment of three standing select committees.

I see this from another perspective; I put myself in the shoes as a committee member. With the experience I had with the PAC as a member, it gives me great experience in the role of how this specific committee helps in the foresight Parliament wishes in scrutinizing the budget which we have done. What I want to say is that if you are part of such a committee, you will be gaining experience in your role as a Member of Parliament in such a committee.

Secondly, as a Member of Parliament you would be getting a bit busier and doing nothing if you are not a minister but just an ordinary member. So you would have extra work to do and within the period of four years which lapses so quickly, you would at least have some experience in doing something rather than running around paying roofing iron or things like that for the constituency every day. What I am saying here is being in such a committee would help us to have exposure and experience in the work of Parliament as a parliamentarian. Also, you would be training yourself by way of exposing yourself, thus the feeling of being embarrassed to talk in Parliament is reduced because you would be talking in the committee. So try to come up and talk so that when you come to contribute in Parliament, like what I am doing now, the feeling of embarrassment will come out; you sort of get into the exposure and experience to speak in Parliament without shame.

These committees, I believe, will help to develop our parliamentary system. I think it is important to have these committees but at the same time we must also look at their functions that they must be specific and complementary, not duplication. Let us avoid doing the same thing that another committee is doing. The functions of the committees must be specific and be complimentary. We help what other committees are doing so that everything works together for the betterment of our parliamentary system.

On the question of human resource capacity as expressed by the Clerk of National Parliament, I am pleased that the Secretary to Prime Minister has assured the Committee and also the Ministry of Public Service has also assured the Committee that they will look for people to work in those committees. That is good, and I am also very happy to hear affirmation from the Minister of Public Service in his contribution and also the Secretary to Prime Minister.

The question of funding support has also been assured by the Public Service Ministry too. The Secretary to Prime Minister has assured us that funding will be made from the Ministry of Finance to help the committees. I see this as an opportunity that we would want to make and make it better, so that all of us in Parliament are involved in the committees. If you are a member of one of the committees, be a member of another committee too so that you have the experience I was talking about earlier on. I am talking to you here from experience because that is what happened to me as a new Member of Parliament. With the exposure and experience I got from PAC, I am happy to be a member of another committee as well.

With those few remarks I am happy that we are having additional committees in Parliament and hopefully some of us from both sides of the House will be members of these committees to gain a bit of experience in our work as parliamentarians. With that short contribution I support the motion.

Hon MAELANGA: First of all I would like to thank the Prime Minister for moving this motion as we all know it is very important to have standing committees within Parliament.

I want to just point out one point and I will sit down as to why I am in support of this motion, looking at these three sectors/ministries, especially the Ministry of Police and Justice, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services. These are three of our main ministries.

These committees, if set up will support these three ministries in looking at areas that need improvement within those ministries. That is why I really support this motion. As others have said, I think everybody that contributed to this motion have already raised everything.

The standing committees will have their own terms of references and so it will be hard for them to be involved in the ministries. There are ways they can look into what that ministry really needs to move into, improves on certain areas in the ministry. I think that is the only thing I see about this motion and that is why I am really happy and I support this motion for these three new standing committees.

I would like to comment on what the Member for Aoke/Langalanga has said, which I am not really satisfied with. All the standing committees of Parliament are doing a good and tremendous work, and so I do not see why the Member has to make that sort of comment. The Leader of Opposition once used to be the Chairman of the Constitutional Review Unit and I know when he was chairman he did a very good job, and the same can be said about the other chairmen. I do not see the reason why that Member said that they have not been doing anything at all and all the committees of Parliament are just useless. Sorry to use that word but I have to mention it. I think all the committees are doing a good work and that is why we can see the operations of Parliament working very effectively. That is why we are seeing constitutional reviews happening; it is because of these committees making sure work is done.

Also, these committees are going to be bipartisan. They would not comprise only those in the Opposition or only those in the Government side, but everyone will be involved, all of us will be involved in those committees. I also see that the selection of the chairmanships of these committees will be at your discretion, Mr Speaker. You are the one who will be selecting the chairmen of these committees. I also do not think there will be any political influences on the committees. I presume there will be equal distribution of members to these committees.

I think the main point that I would like to share here in this motion is that it will enable our ministries to improve on certain areas that needs improvement. Without taking more time, once again I wish to thank the Prime Minister for moving this motion and I support the motion.

Mr SANDAKABATU: Thank you Prime Minister for bringing this Bill to the floor of Parliament and also the parliamentary House Committee for having this Bill before us. First of all, seeing the three ministries that will be directly affected by these standing committees; the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and also the Ministry of Police and Justice, the size of the ministries and the staff that are involved in these ministries and the magnitude of the job that they are tasked to do is quite huge.

I have also noted that this motion comes at the right time, and also perhaps we can go a little further when this motion is passed, which I am assured will be today that we will also look at these ministries again. Take, for instance, the Ministry of Education; it would be nicer if they can have two permanent secretaries, even the Ministry of Health. Perhaps these are some of the things that these standing committees may have to look at later on. But coming back to the motion, it is clear and has a genuine intention and for that I fully support. However, the concern that was alluded to by others who have spoken is, will those committees produce the goods? Putting the right people in the right place, I am sure will produce the goods that will help this Parliament. Of course, as alluded to by other members, we are all elected members to

this House and it would be unfair for those only in the government perhaps or those supporting the government perhaps to be looked after by the state. It would be nicer that everybody is also looked after by the state. What I mean is we also can have all members involved in committees for which the state can also look after them. For instance, my little experience in the Opposition and Independent, I was not looked after but fend myself. I am sure with the creation of these new committees, we can better look after our MPs and also our MPs can better or improve the functions and the wishes of the Government of the day.

Finally, I thank the Prime Minister for this motion which came out with good clear intentions. With that, I support the motion.

Hon. Philip: I would like to say just a few words and remarks. I have the feeling the House has overwhelmingly supported the motion with all good things that have been mentioned about the importance of parliamentary oversight are well commended.

There are just a few things that I want to clarify and then we will put the motion to the vote. The first is a matter of importance relating to our role as Members of Parliament. I think the MP for East Choiseul has articulated and spent quite a bit of time on it today in his opening remarks to the motion that I think the first and foremost important role is to become members of Parliament, and not to be ministers of a government. No, to become members of Parliament and that is why we went to the polls for election. The first and foremost is to become a member of Parliament.

I think for so many years now, much too long we have not been able to improve our role as parliamentarians. I think the parliamentary oversight, in relation to the other two arms of the constitution - the executive and the judiciary, the Parliament has an overarching role to play in the administration of the two other arms.

One of the questions I kept to myself for a very long time is how best Parliament could exercise that oversight role in as far as the judiciary is concerned. Does it have that extra power to look at the judiciary's operations or is it not allowed? We will have an answer to that question sometimes after we have done some legal engineering. While the independence of the three arms of government or the constitution remains, each of them should be able to check each other on how they run the affairs of this country. And I would like to appreciate the Member for East Choiseul for coming up with that important point. Therefore, because of that particular aspect of our naivety, I suppose, on the roles we have as parliamentarians, it is becoming an element of instability on the executive because we think that coming to Parliament is a job. No, I think it is a life of self denial. If you have two or three other thoughts of becoming a member of Parliament then I think we forget them now because you have to die to yourself and leave all other commitments to become a parliamentarian. I think those are just extra thoughts to help portray the importance of becoming a member of Parliament.

This motion is basically to increase the capacity of the role parliamentarians should play once they become members of Parliament. Therefore, we should be now thinking about how best to promote and enhance the effective oversight role. The first is also as the Member of North Vella has mentioned to capacitate Parliament, in terms of resources both human and financial to be able to deliver and to reflect the parliamentary oversight that we know about already.

I think it remains quite dormant when the work of the parliamentary committees is waiting for referrals only. That is very true, I think that particular aspect is being expressed by one or two speakers until Parliament or the Speaker or the Government tells them to look at this particular area then they start to work. I think there is also need with some research to be able to have parliamentary oversight committees to exercise its oversight role of the executive as it wishes. I think that will become a good thing for committees to do.

One of the things that the Member for Aoke/Langalanga mentioned is in relation to the fundamental reforms as opposed to parliamentary roles that will promote too strong a government or governments. I do not see it that way. I think that is completely an unrelated matter. The fundamental reforms that the NCRA Government is promoting now is not to give more powers to the executive, to the contrary it will give more power to the people of this country in giving ownership of governance because they assume the responsibility of ownership on this country. It will give the people extra oversight into how the executive works. If they do not want it then they will use other institutions to make sure that the government they want remains and the government they do not want they will make it known too through the electoral process rather than what is happening in the Middle East right now, which we must at all cost avoid so that in the future we leave this country in the hands of good leadership, good laws, good constitutions so that we sustain this country for many, many more years to come. I do not think it will leave the executive with unbridle powers; I do not think so.

With those few remarks because of our overwhelming support, I beg to move.

Mr Speaker: Before I put the question I would like to thank many of you as part of parliamentarian oversight. If you could refer to my statement at the opening of Parliament, and I bet you get a copy of that, it will put you in the picture that we have just a new Project Manager for the secretariat. We are going to open the new office complex for new members of Parliament, which will give more rooms for these committees. The Standing Orders are now before the House Committee, which is part and partial of this important motion. This is for the information of members of Parliament.

The motion agreed to.

Mr Speaker: I now call on the Prime Minister to move Motion No.6 on the Order Paper for today.

Hon Sikua: Point of order. Under Standing Order 34(1)(a), I would like to bring to notice and submit to you, Mr Speaker, for a decision on the notice I have submitted on the 13th March 2011 on Motion No. 4, which is the Motion of No Confidence. As you would have known, under Notice Paper No. 6 on the 13th March 2011, I noticed the Motion of No Confidence and after seven clear days, the Notice has matured on Wednesday, the 6th April 2011.

Under Standing Order 26(1) with your permission, Mr Speaker, on grounds of public urgency I would like to bring to you for your decision my desire as the Leader of the Opposition to move this motion under Standing Order 26(1).

As I have mentioned under Standing Order 34, I would like to bring this to your notice and submit to you, Mr Speaker, for a decision that I would like under Order 26(2)(b) if you could give a decision also to dispense with the notice of amendment because if this motion of No Confidence is allowed then we will have to amend the part of this particular motion that would like us to adjourn on Wednesday, 13th of April 2011, which is just tomorrow. Thank you.

Mr Speaker: In fact, the issue was brought before me yesterday and I have already made my decision on it. The situation at hand and also the time given by the Office for the motion last Friday, I have already made my decision yesterday that I do not allow that motion, and as stated in the Government Business it will conclude tomorrow. I have already made my decision and I do not allow that to go ahead. I now call upon the Prime Minister to move the motion of sine die...

SINE DIE MOTION

Hon. PHILIP: Mr Speaker, I thank you for your intervention and ruling on this particular matter. I thank you that Parliament must not be held at ransom because we have other business to do. If there are questions to be asked then the questioners must be here and if there are motions to be made then those who are responsible must adhere to Parliament. Thank you for your ruling, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, with that I rise to move that at the adjournment of Parliament on Wednesday, 13th April 2011, the present meeting shall be concluded and Parliament shall then stand adjourned sine die. In doing so, I must say that there is much I wish to thank you personally for. First, is of course the fact that in the generation of leaders that we were part of like yourself, the member for North New Georgia and myself, you remained resolute and defiant to be part of this current generation of leaders. I am heartened and encouraged and I salute you for remaining when many have already given up. You have given us, Mr Speaker, especially at this Ninth Parliament that leadership, the mentorship and the maturity.

Sir, your new role as Speaker and making yourself to be the chief moderator of parliamentary proceedings of those who were before is therefore appropriate. Your leadership remains contemporary and I appreciate that very much, and I hope it is with the rest of us here. We must be reminded ever that we are only here where we are today because of those who went before us. This is what life is all about. Unfortunately, some of us think that we just happen to be here somehow and from somewhere is futile thinking.

We must give glory and praise where it is due is what a preacher said on a telecasted sermon last week. I believe that statement to be absolutely true, not only in the religious or spiritual sense, but also in our social and hierarchical living in the society. It is important to give respect to our seniors, our chiefs and elders, our church and community leaders, whether they be men or women, young or old, pretty or ugly; it is a basic precept of human living given to us not by instinct but by God Almighty.

Times have changed and so are the people of this country. I can remember when I used to take the bus from King George VI School to downtown Honiara for only 10 cents, and so was the cost of a packet of biscuit and a can of orange because those were my favourite shopping

items. Going down town for a packet of biscuit and a can of orange, it sounds silly but it is true. I can go on comparing what life then was like and how it is for us today. By using so many comparisons just to portray what and how we have been, we have changed as a people and therefore as a country. But change is only relative in so far as human beings of this country are concerned. If we have not benefited from that change then there is little meaning to the process itself. If we have not benefited from change, then the question is should we shun and reject change.

Some people say physical change is important because it conditions the way we think, behave and relate to the environment we live in and towards our fellow human beings. For far too long we have not been relating ourselves to change, let alone living a changed life. Change is not only a metaphor transition but a stark reality in our present lives. Some people call that process change; I call it reform to be more objective.

I am going to digress a little now just to drive that point home by taking us to the wisdom of Saint Paul when he said "Be ye not conformed but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind". How true this is not only in the spiritual sense but also in the circular sense that for any form of change or reform to occur and become sustainable, it has to start with our mental faculties; the way we think and behave towards any form of reform.

As I mentioned in my last sine die speech that the reason for my return to Parliament is to be part of the authorship of a new reform agenda aimed at working towards creating a new Solomon Islands society. Any reform agenda promoted by any political government must entrench a new thinking process, a new way of doing things. Reform must inevitably break the status quo, break the routine, reset the mindset and have a completely new perception within society. The National Coalition for Reform and Advancement Government has been conceived out of that philosophy. It is an agenda for peace, national unity and social cohesion for the future sustenance of the Solomon Islands nation state. As we work towards that noble objective, I appeal to both sides of this House to work together to achieve this goal. I must reiterate that we all, both government and opposition members of Parliament are altogether in this.

In working towards social unity and sustainable statehood in our reform agenda, we need to see the world around us, how it is developing and behaving, we must see how we can relate ourselves to that changing world. There cannot be any meaningful change if it does not support our survival in a world of indifference and hostility. The reform that we, as a government, is envisaging are aimed at sustaining our long term survival as a people.

I have taken the liberty to move this motion today amidst strong expressions of disagreement in some quarters. My intentions are clear and hold no malaise against anyone. The Government or more correctly Parliament had passed the 2011 budget yesterday, and like the Ministry of Finance I would also like to share my vote of thanks to all members of Parliament who have contributed so well. I also appreciate the practical criticisms expressed by both the Opposition and members of the Independent Group.

The job of a Prime Minister, as you know very well yourself, Mr Speaker, is not an easy one. When I was voted in as Prime Minister on the 25th of August last year 2010, I knew exactly what I was in for. Trying to organise and operate a government with seven different political

factions made the job even more cumbersome. Despite of that I did enjoy a lot of goodwill and support from MPs, Ministers as well as from the general public at large.

I wish to say that I do appreciate the patience and forbearance of the people of Solomon Islands for waiting for seven months for the Government to come to this stage. For reasons that I have expressed earlier on, during the period we did encounter numerous challenges and dissents. I am, however, grateful that none of these have been able to disintegrate the NCRA boat to its detriment. May I at this juncture express my personally gratitude to the six members of Parliament from the Opposition who moved to the government in the recent past, led by the member of Parliament for Fataleka. This gratitude goes also to the member of Parliament for Small Malaita, the member of Parliament for West Kwaio, the member of Parliament for North East Choiseul, the member for Temotu Vattu and the member of Parliament for East Are Are. [Do we have a gecko in the House?], and very soon the member for Renbel. These are all great men of honour and contrary to criticisms from some sectors, the decision to leave the Opposition to the Government was mandated by the people and their constituencies. I am confident of their intentions and purpose at heart to contribute and participate meaningful to the stable and effective dissemination of real tangibles to the people of Solomon Islands. I can therefore assure the people of the various constituencies represented by the members of Parliament that they will not be disappointed for the decisions taken by their members of Parliament.

Let me now get into some of the observations of this meeting myself. This meeting, as honourable members of Parliament are well aware is the second of the Ninth Parliament and quite an interesting one. It is interesting because a lot has transpired since the meeting began only three short weeks ago. We began our business on the 28th of March 2011 with an obituary for the late MP for Mbaegu/ Asifola. On the second day on the 29th of March, your good self, Mr. Speaker, clarified that the member of Parliament for North Malaita is still a Member of Parliament and is therefore entitled to represent his constituents in this honourable House. It is my hope that your timely and welcomed intervention on this matter has laid to rest any dissenting views.

As everyone knows the single most important item on the parliamentary calendar for this meeting is the 2011 Appropriation Bill, which the Minister of Finance has delivered on behalf of the NCRA government. Parliament, on Friday the 4th of April had an opportunity to express its sympathy on behalf of the people of Solomon Islands to the people of Japan at the suffering and destruction caused by the tsunami generated by an earthquake which struck that country on the 11th of March. We also expressed similar sentiments to the people of Christchurch, New Zealand for the suffering and destruction caused by the earthquake which hit the south island of New Zealand in February this year. I would like to thank the MP for Aoke/Langalanga for spearheading this opportunity for us to express our heartfelt sympathies to our friends in both Japan and New Zealand. May I add that our sympathy goes to the people in Australia who have also suffered as a result of the massive floods in Queensland recently.

During this meeting we were able to welcome two new members of Parliament to this honourable Chamber; the member of Parliament for Shortlands and the member of Parliament for Mbaegu/Asifola. On behalf of the NCRA Government I want to congratulate your respective constituencies for voting you into this House. Let me extend warm welcome to both

of you. We hope that you will discharge your national responsibilities with tact and in forthright manner.

I have observed that attendance at this meeting has been very good at between 93 to 96 percent. For example, according to the brief minutes of the meetings for each day released by your good office, 43 MPs were present on the 28th of March and 46 attended on the 29th of March. This is out of 48 Members. Attendance was never below 38 MPs present at any one time in the House. While there are rooms for improvement, and I wish to thank all Honourable Members for your seriousness in attending Parliament meetings which should be our highest national responsibility. It is my hope that we can keep up with this good track record in our future meetings. I wish to challenge each member of Parliament to beat the record set by the MP for East Choiseul for his personal parliamentary attendance record. I think the House should give him a good round of applause.

(applause)

Let me now turn to the second part of my brief remarks. As everyone knows the main business of this meeting is the 2011 budget. I do not intend to repeat what the Minister for Finance has eloquently stated when he presented the budget in this Honourable Chamber, but let me just refer to a few policy initiatives that have now been supported by allocations in the 2011 Budget.

First, the 2011 clearly portrays how the NCRA Government will deliver on the major aspects of its policy platform. On that score, I am pleased to say that the Government will provide \$417.7million in new funding for new development projects, an increase of \$122.7m over the 2010 budget in the next eight months. In addition, there is extra \$120million in additional funding to enable the NCRA Government provide services to our people and lay a firm foundation for future economic growth.

The idea of growth centres which is a centrepiece of the NCRA Government's policy is but one of the many initiatives we are undertaking to broaden the economic base and to encourage sustainable economic growth. Our people in the rural areas will be given the opportunity to participate in economic activities in their own localities, and not to be misguided by the assumption that economic activity occurs only in Honiara or in the urban centres. The Minister of Finance has already highlighted that the 2011 Budget will deliver a \$24million surplus and shall require no additional borrowings by the Government. We shall aspire to fulfil this pledge, but the need may arise to review this commitment down the line. This is the first NCRA Government budget and the first to have a surplus. I wish to thank the 30 Members of Parliament including some of my ministers who have contributed to the debate of the 2011 budget.

Here are my concluding remarks; on behalf of all members of Parliament let me congratulate and thank you, Mr Speaker, for your superb handling of the proceedings of Parliament. This has made possible only because of your wide experience as a former member of Parliament and Prime Minister. As is customary, I also wish to thank the Clerk to Parliament and her staff for ably attending to the meetings and business of Parliament and members of Parliament during the meeting. I also thank all members of Parliament, my ministers,

Government backbenchers as well as members of the Opposition and the Leader of Independent for your constructive contributions during this meeting. At this juncture, let me offer my congratulations to the new Leader of Opposition on his appointment to that high office.

I would like to remind members of Parliament that now Parliament is in recess, please go out and visit your constituencies and explain issues to your people. Many may have listened to the live coverage of the proceedings of Parliament on the SIBC, but still many more others have missed hearing the good things you as their member of Parliament intend to deliver this year.

The role of the Public Accounts Committee in scrutinizing the 2011 Budget must be acknowledged. Assistance offered by permanent secretaries during the course of this meeting is also acknowledged. An important stakeholder worthy of congratulations is the media. At this juncture, I would like to thank in particular the national broadcaster, the SIBC and One News Television for their dedicatory approach in ensuring live coverage of parliamentary proceedings. I hope you have not caught an MP sleeping during the proceedings but thank you all the same. I acknowledge the role of newspapers too in disseminating information about Parliament to the public. As a government we will continue to provide an absolutely friendly and free corridor for a free and fair media in Solomon Islands.

There are many more that I wish to thank for their dedication and commitment to their duty in the course of this Parliament meeting. I would like to make mention of the Royal Solomon Islands Police, RAMSI and members of the Parliament security here, and more especially I would like to afford my appreciation to members of my Close Protection Unit.

Finally, I feel duty bound to now thank the Churches and people of Solomon Islands for their support, commitment and for their avid stand in prayers for the NCRA Government and the Parliament of Solomon Islands. Their support underlines a fundamental principle that a nation that works together stays together. We can never advance the course of development for the people of this country unless we are seen pulling in one direction. To the Church Leaders, may I say, thank you and may God bless you for your faithfulness in this endeavour. With these remarks, I beg to move.

Mr Speaker: Honourable Members it has been proposed that at the adjournment of Parliament on Wednesday 13th April 2011, the present meeting shall conclude and Parliament shall then stand adjourned sine die. As members are aware, by tradition of this House, a sine die motion allows a broader range of debate. The rules relating to the relevance of the House are considered relaxed for the debate by members of Parliament. Therefore, honourable members we only have today and tomorrow for this motion because of time factor. There is rather one note that came past my eyes this afternoon, and so I will respectfully ask the mover of the motion, the Prime Minister, to consider adjourning the debate to the next sitting day.

Hon. Philip: I move that the debate on the motion be now adjourned until the next sitting day.

Debate on the motion adjourned to the next sitting day agreed to.

The House adjourned at 5.35 p.m.