

TUESDAY 1ST NOVEMBER 2016

The Honourable Speaker, Mr Ajilon Nasiu took the Chair at 9.56am.

Prayers.

ATTENDANCE

All Members of Parliament were present with the exception of the Deputy Prime Minister; the Ministers for Public Service; Fisheries & Marine Resources; Environment, Conservation, Disaster Management & Climate Change; Commerce, Industries & Labour; Provincial Government & Institutional Strengthening and the Members for Malaita Outer Islands; North West Guadalcanal; East Are Are and South Vella Lavella

SPEAKER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable Members, welcome to the 5th Meeting for this year. As you are well aware, this will be the last meeting for this year, and there a lot of businesses that are before the House so I remind all Members to make all efforts to attend all sittings of Parliament and to contribute effectively so that we can dispose of some, if not all businesses by the end of this meeting.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

- Annual Report of Solomon Islands Electricity Authority 2015
- (National Parliament Paper No.17 of 2016)

- 2015 Annual Report of Solomon Islands Water Authority (National Parliament Paper No.25 of 2016).
- Health and Medical Services Committee Report on the Inquiry into the implementations of the recommendations made in the 2009 Report by the 'Special Select Committee inquiry into the quality of medical services provided at the National Referral Hospital'. (National Parliament Paper No.21 of 2016).
- 2015 Final Budget Outcome (National Parliament Paper No.22 of 2016).
- 2016 Mid-Year Budget Review (National Parliament Paper No.24 of 2016)

STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Bills – First Reading

The Town and Country Planning (Amendment) Bill 2016

The Land Surveyors Bill 2016

The Child and Family Welfare Bill 2016

The Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2016

The Pacific Games 2023 Bill 2016

The Solomon Islands Tertiary Education and Skills Authority Bill 2016

MOTIONS

Motion on Special Adjournment

Hon MANASSEH SOGAVARE (Prime Minister): I beg to move that at the adjournment of Parliament on Tuesday, 1st November 2016, the present meeting shall stand adjourned to Monday 14th November 2016.

The reason for this adjournment is a number of bills have been presented to Parliament and the Bills and Legislation Committee will need to work on them, get them cleared and

ready for us to look at them next week when we resume. Also, this is to give time to the Government to look at the budget as it will be presented to Cabinet for consideration. There are also other bills that still need to come up, one of them is the Dual Citizenship Bill, which we need time to look at so that it comes to Parliament. We need that space of time to allow those work to be completed so that we can resume Parliament next week to continue with the businesses presented to Parliament. With that I beg to move.

Hon JEREMIAH MANELE (Leader of Opposition): First of all, let me on behalf of the Parliamentary Opposition Group thank the Honourable Prime Minister for moving this adjournment motion that at the adjournment of Parliament today, the present meeting shall stand adjourned to Monday 14th November 2016.

This side of the House does support the motion, but let me make a few comments or remarks on it. I take note of the reasons outlined by the honourable Prime Minister behind this special motion, but we are also wary, as you have said in your opening statement that there is a lot of business that is before the House so when adjourning the meeting to the 14th of November, we also have to take into account the number of bills that are coming. We have already heard the six bills that have gone through first reading this morning and a few more that are yet to come as alluded to by the Prime Minister, but also more importantly the appropriation bill which has some time limits as to how much time Parliament is to look into it. That must be always be in mind when looking at parliament business.

I guess part of the reason why we find ourselves in this situation hence this special adjournment is because bills are coming late to Parliament and so the Bills Committee needs the time to look at the bills. These are important pieces of legislation and certainly I do concur that the Bills Committee needs time so that there is proper scrutiny of the bills before the House.

Let me also remind the Government that in terms of the 2017 Annual budget preparation, the Government is actually behind schedule of the times the Public Financial Management Act stipulate. Part 6 of the Act on the preparation of the annual budget, clause 48 requires the Minister for Finance and Treasury to lay the national budget before Parliament at least two months before the commencement of its financial year. That is the 2017 annual budget should have been laid by 31st October, which was yesterday, unfortunately it is not yet ready - it is yet to come to Parliament and so the PAC is yet to look into it. We have been informed by officials that it could be ready, probably around mid-November, if we are lucky.

Furthermore, Part 6, clause 45 of the same Act also requires the Minister of Development Planning and Aid Coordination to table in the National Parliament and officially

publish the prescribed details with respect to the Government's Medium Term Development Plan at least three (3) months before the start of the financial year. That should have been done by 30th September 2016, but I have not seen such a document unless you failed to furnish us with a copy.

Similarly, clause 52 of the PFM Act also requires the Minister or the Government not later than seven months of the start of the financial year, the 2016 Mid-year Budget Review, which has just been tabled today. Therefore, the Government is behind schedule. Even the 2015 final budget outcome, which has just appeared here should have been brought to Parliament four months after the end of the financial year, that is 2015. It should have been here May, June or July.

I am basically reminding the government to take note of the important times that are prescribed in terms of the budget process in the Public Finance Management Act that we passed in 2013. These are important requirements. When we pass laws, we have to ensure that we do comply with the provisions of the acts or the laws.

Certainly, as the Prime Minister said, this adjournment will enable the Bills and Legislation Committee to complete its hearings on the six bills that are now before the Committee and also a few more that will come, including the Dual Citizen Bill which the Prime Minister alluded to. We also heard that maybe another supplementary is going to come. Again, that will also need its own hearings so that could eat into the time of the committee and parliament to dispense with these businesses. These are important pieces of legislation, as I have said, for our country and the Bills and Legislation Committee. It needs ample time to properly scrutinise the bills and also prepare and complete its report so that we can debate and deliberate these important bills.

I would also like take the opportunity to ask the Government to remind its permanent secretaries and senior officials of the sponsoring ministries that are sponsoring the bills to turn up to the Bills and Legislation Committee on time and as scheduled. On a number of occasions they did not turn up on time or as scheduled hence the Committee has to postpone the hearings. It is critical that the permanent secretaries of ministries do turn up on time and on schedule. Do not send them overseas or to the provinces because we all know when Parliament is in session, permanent secretaries should be at post to attend to Parliament.

These are reminders I believe will facilitate our work given the amount of task that this Parliament being the last meeting for this year has to complete. Take into account that we are going to adjourn until 14th November 2016, it looks like only four weeks are left for those bills and especially the Appropriation Bill so we could be spending Christmas here in the Chamber. Of course, it's our duty but a part of this could probably be delays in the

preparations on the part of Government to ensure bills do end up here on time, including the Appropriation Bill, which is key.

Finally, I think this Special Adjournment will also enable the Chairman and members of the Bills Committee to attend a meeting. There is a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, I understand, hosted by our National Parliament called Pacific Public Accounts Committee from the 7th to the 9th November, which is next week. Certainly, this adjournment will also enable the Chairman who is the host and a number of chair persons of Public Accounts Committees in the region will be here in Honiara next week to exchange views, lessons and experiences on the work of Public Accounts Committee. I guess it is an important opportunity for our PAC to also exchange some lessons and experiences with our colleagues from other countries in the region.

With these remarks, as I have said, the Parliamentary Opposition group supports the motion moved by the Honourable Prime Minister, but it is equally important for us to take note of the amount of task in terms of bills that are before us and the time limits that do apply to some of these bills, especially the Appropriation Bill. I thank you.

Hon DEREK SIKUA (Leader of the Independent group): Before I talk on this motion I would like to join you Mr Speaker in reiterating to all honourable colleagues your sentiment to us attending all the meetings and contributing fully in these meetings. Also, I noted, today is one of those very first times that we really started on time at 10 o'clock. I think that is a very good start of this meeting. Of course, Standing Orders state that we should start at 9.30 am, so any other meetings at any other days we must start at 9.30am sharp because as the Honourable Leader of Opposition has mentioned, we have a lot of business to get through at this meeting.

On this Special Adjournment Motion that at the adjournment of Parliament on Tuesday 1st November 2016, the present meeting shall stand adjourned to Monday 14th November 2016, I subscribe to the comments made by the Honourable Leader of Opposition in reminding us of the particular requirements of the Public Finance and Management Act 2014 on when certain things should reach Parliament.

As was also mentioned by the Honourable Leader of Opposition, we are envisaging the 2016 Appropriation Bill, I am not sure at what stage it is in terms of the government but the Public Accounts Committee stage, we are expecting it around the middle of this month. And that, I would like to signal, would require the Public Accounts Committee to deliberate on it for two weeks. Past practices always gave the Committee three to four days for the PAC to scrutinize the Appropriation Bill. That is something we must try to avoid by all means. The

PAC will need two full weeks to deliberate on the Appropriation Bill 2016. With that period of time, I am seeing the next special adjournment to the 30th November. So by the time we start debate on the Bill, we will only have December and so it is up to the government on how it wants to handle its business, but I am seeing that the PAC would need as much time as possible to properly scrutinize the 2016 Appropriation Bill 2017.

With those comments I do not have any problem supporting this motion and thank you.

Hon Manasseh Sogavare: I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Independent Group for commenting on this motion, which is straightforward as it is just asking Parliament to adjourn to the 14th of November to allow those outstanding work to be dealt with so that Parliament can start to meet on the 14th November undisturbed.

We take serious note of the concerns raised by the Leader of the Opposition and precisely the reason why and I hope that those documents should be ready this week. I will be calling up the appropriate ministries to make sure those documents are presented to Parliament this week. I take serious note of that comment that was also supported by the Leader of the Independent Group.

The budget, from the tentative table, should come to Cabinet at the end of this week where hopefully Cabinet should be able to finalize that for onward submission to the PAC to start its inquiry. In my discussions with the Chairman of the PAC, the PAC would need about seven days to inquire into the Budget so we will give him those seven days, and that is what makes up these two weeks. They will start looking into this Bill this week and as from next week, the PAC should start looking into the budget.

Yes, we would probably be pressured by time here, but day does not end until 12am at night. We have rested for a long time now and so we will take this Parliament up to 10pm, 11pm or 12 am at night so be prepared for that if we want to complete all these businesses before Christmas. Let us be ready to come and meet those times.

Also, the permanent secretaries not turning up during bills hearings, I take serious note of that. If that has been happening then that is not right. We will get that message to the permanent secretaries of the various ministries, especially ministries that are sponsoring bills to Parliament must always attend at that level – the permanent secretaries and officers that deal directly with bills. We will pass that message down to the permanent secretaries to attend meetings.

In saying that, I take serious note of the concerns raised by the Leader of the Opposition which is also supported by the Leader of the Independent Group. In saying that I beg to move.

The motion is passed

Hon Manasseh Sogavare (Prime Minister): I beg to move that this House do now adjourn.

The House adjourned at 10.22am